

Coaching: a Tool for Teachers

Margot Phaneuf, RN, PhD

Introduction

When we consider some of the difficulties our students have to face, we wonder what could possibly be done to help them out of this predicament. Indeed, it distresses us to see some of

COACHING

Definition

The application, in the context of academic difficulties, of communication strategies and behavioural management, with a view to accompanying students in developing their potential, their know-how and their self-management skills, all within the framework of their professional objectives.

them working so hard without succeeding as they ought to, or when we realize that a good number of the others drop out with indifferent or reckless attitudes towards failure. Whether this is due to learning disorders – for we find these even at college level – or whether it is due to a disorganization of their existential perspectives, some of our students stumble over problems that, if left unsolved, could lead to setbacks in their career, or even their life, objectives. These difficulties can be attributed to the lack of seriousness ascribable to youth, conditions at home, and perhaps also the need or

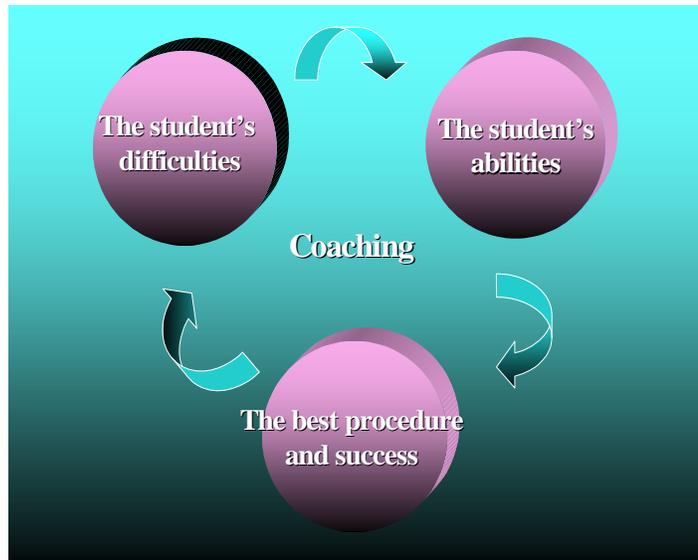
the desire to work to earn money while studying.

But, whatever the causes, these are serious difficulties, owing to their consequences. First of all, consequences for these young people themselves, but perhaps also for the profession, which thus loses members who could probably have constituted a positive asset if we had managed to help them get well and truly back in the saddle. The shortage of nurses in our health-care system should also prompt us to rescue such worthwhile candidates. It's not a matter here of lowering our standards, but simply of identifying subjects who deserve to succeed and helping them in their professional projects. Aware of what can be done, we now need to give ourselves the means to help these students.



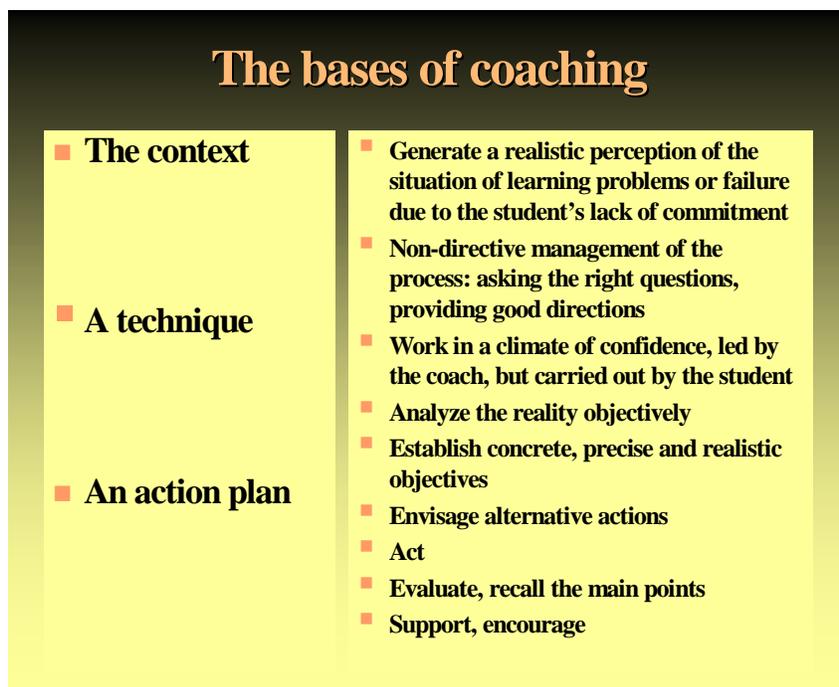
Coaching: a means within our reach

Over the past few years, pedagogy has been enriched by a very valuable new tool: “coaching”, which can help us to alleviate, if not resolve, these types of problems. This strategy is based on the principle that performance can always be improved, that in a given context a human being can always learn to excel or to blossom more fully. Which means that anybody could potentially resort to the use of a coach, and not only when faced with difficulties, although the need is greater when this is the case. In the field of education, the term “coaching” covers different forms of assistance and stimulation used to help students who experience problems with their educational programmes so they can give of their best. The term derives from the world of sport, which is obsessed with performance. And in pedagogy, as in the demanding sporting milieu, it aims to increase the student’s competence and to allow her to attain a high level of performance.



Applying coaching in practical settings

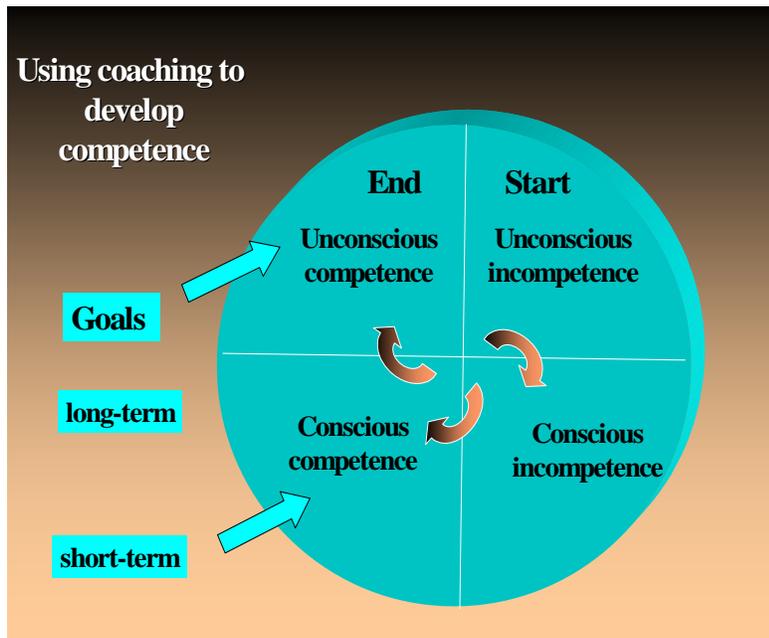
Ideally, coaching as it is currently practised involves individual appointments. But, as in the world of business, it can also be applied to groups. In our college environment, where time is



limited, a classical application, with a series of one-to-one sessions, is perhaps not easy to do. But this strategy can very well be applied in informal small-group sessions of four or five students who are experiencing difficulties with their studies. Coaching is practical in that a limited number of sessions may be enough. If there are not too many students and the coaching is properly handled, three or four initial meetings of around one hour and then the occasional follow-up to support them along the way

could be sufficient. This follow-up reinforces the efforts already made and facilitates the evaluation of the student's progress. For these meetings, it is also necessary to provide a suitable venue and timetable, as well as the requisite materials: flip charts or PowerPoint presentation, a computer, Internet connection, etc.

The aims of coaching

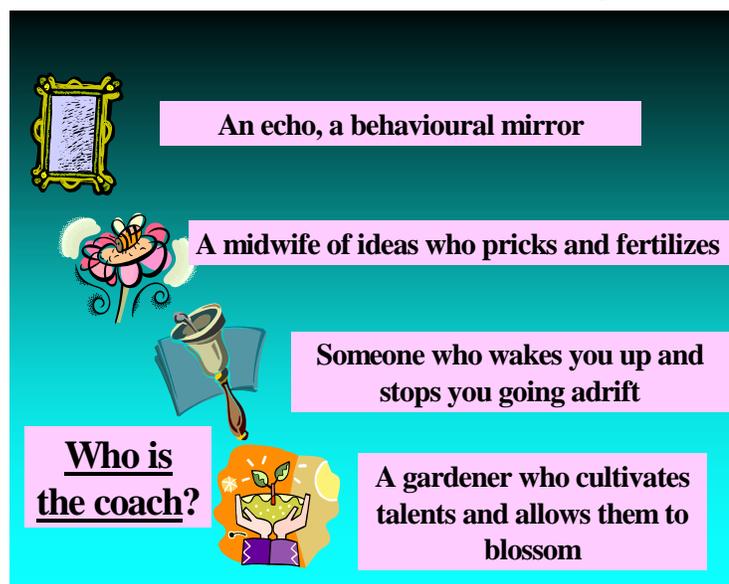


Developed by Timothy Gallwey in the 1980s, the strategy of coaching is based on non-directive intervention and is grounded on confidence in human potential. It is an approach to the management of the student's skills that aspires essentially to achieving change through the clarification of her life objectives and educational aspirations, and through the optimization of her potential. The dominant attitude within coaching is anti-authoritarian and strives towards the self-evident aim of helping the student sharpen her self-awareness, to build the self-confidence needed for the

development of any skill, and, finally, to construct her own life. The most immediate aim is to lead her gradually to become aware of her abilities (conscious competence), and to put them into effect in the real-life context when working with patients, and go on to succeed in internalizing them (unconscious competence), which will come with experience. In short, the coach facilitates her passage towards mastering her personal abilities, which will later be accompanied by expertise.

But who is the coach?

The coach is someone who wishes to help another person to improve and develop their potential, to achieve their personal and professional targets, to become more self aware, and to become successful in their chosen field or simply in their life. The coach may be a professional in the discipline, a resource person or even a colleague, but in our case, it is above all a question of teachers.



There are various ways to define the coach. She can be described as an observer, a communicator, a developer of talents, a spiritual groundbreaker, and a midwife to ideas and knowledge. Rather like a gardener who enriches the soil and cultivates its fruits, the coach helps the pupil to avail herself of the means of growth. The coach cultivates the blossoming of personal abilities that allow the coachee – the person being coached – to attain the goals that have been set. Within this relationship of growth, she serves as an echo for the intentions of the coachee, and as a mirror that enables her to become aware of the ways and means of blossoming and surpassing herself. The coach is not a guru exercising mental control over the coachee, her approach is rather one of freedom and personal growth.

What coaching is and what it is not

Comparison between different approaches			
Teaching	Psychotherapy	The helping relationship	Coaching
↓	↓	↓	↓
Transmission of information	Curing, modifying behaviours, becoming normal again	Understanding the other, support	Developing self-confidence and competence

The philosophy at the heart of coaching is the Socratic method, which dates back to the 5th century BC and is often seen as a way of creating ideas and knowledge. There are those who nevertheless maintain that the word “coach” stems from the French term “*coche*”, from the coachman who, in days gone by, used to drive or accompany, people in carriages. It is true that the term conjures up a strong image.

The strategy of coaching lies between teaching – from which it is not necessarily separate – and the helping relationship that serves as a

motivating and reinforcing element together with its emphasis on positive regard, empathy, and confrontation. Teaching can serve to provide students with a few particularly necessary isolated explanations, but the communication of knowledge is not the real aim of this strategy. Positive regard helps the student to discover her own abilities and unknown or as-yet-unexploited personal resources. Its influence is of major importance in coaching. As for empathy, this communicates to the student the teacher’s sympathetic understanding of her educational and personal

- Coaching is first understanding how the other person perceives reality.
- A person’s representation of reality is not reality itself (the map is not the country - Korzybski).
- We have to recall the notion of divergence: the other person has the right to be different.
- We have to understand her values, her ambitions, her fears.
- We have to know how the student processes information.

difficulties, but without ever sliding into pity. Regarding confrontation, this becomes the point of contact with reality and of “setting the record straight”. Excuses are never pretexts for slackening at work. In this way, the helping relationship, with its climate of acceptance and respect, and its focus directed towards confidence in human beings, always serves as a backcloth to these meetings.

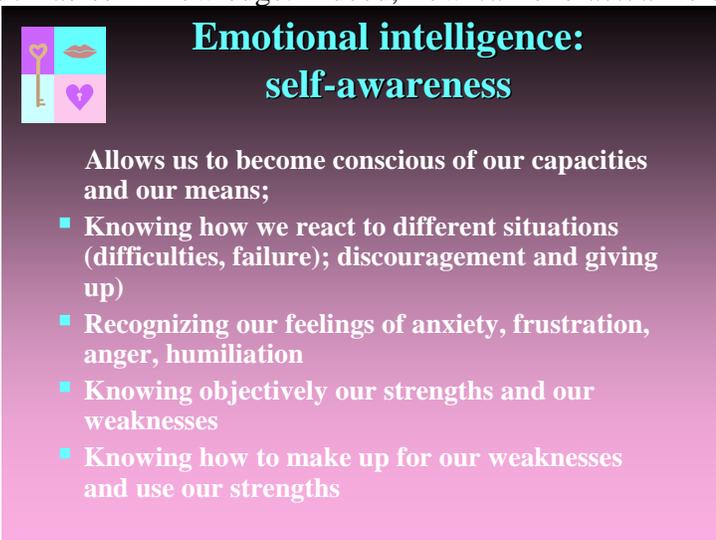
Coaching is not a therapy for healing spiritual wounds: it is an essentially pragmatic tool, which appraises and helps, but is not a substitute for the student’s own efforts. It aims simply to make her give her utmost, by creating a particularly warm and fertile relationship with her. Essentially optimistic, coaching is concerned with future possibilities rather than past mistakes. It provides a positive vision of the situation and of the student’s capabilities of success, but without ever letting her entertain false hopes. The coach “works” with the student’s motivation, one of the components of emotional intelligence, which is the key to our experiences of success since it helps us develop essential capabilities such as self-knowledge. Indeed, how can one actualize a capacity if one is unaware of possessing it? Emotional intelligence also includes self-confidence and self esteem, other qualities that are indispensable to success.

The diagnostic phase

Once the details of the meeting are fixed, the phase of diagnosing the student’s difficulties and her ability to resolve them begins. But this is also the stage of evaluation of the overall situation. The coach’s attention cannot focus only on organizational or learning difficulties, but must widen to take into account every aspect of the student’s life, in order to be able to provide her with the appropriate help. The subject’s economic, family and psychological conditions, as well as her health, intellectual ability, and needs on a variety of levels, must also, if necessary, be taken into account in order not to give inappropriate guidance.

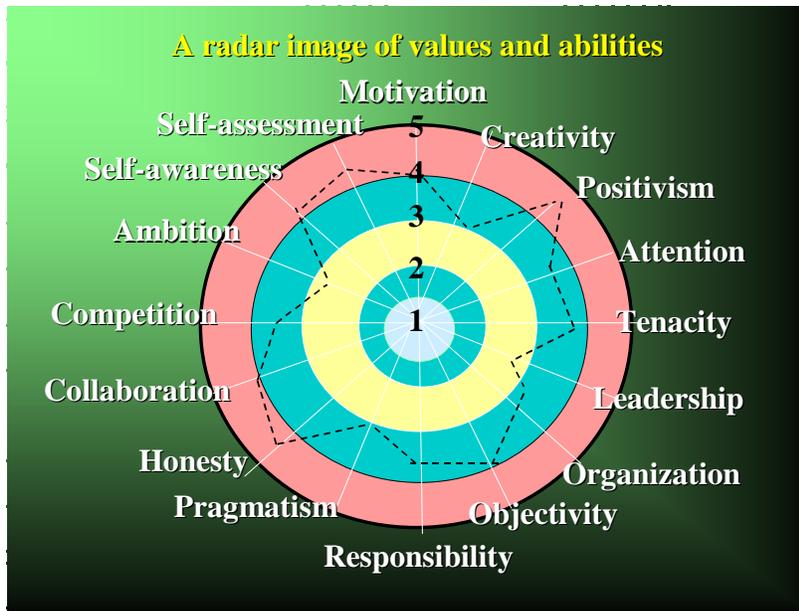
Getting to know the student

Before being able to start coaching, we first need to know the people with whom we have to work. We need to know how they react, their values towards work, success, and preparing for their future, but it is just as useful to know – at least minimally – about how they process information: is the student’s thinking organized or divergent? How capable is she of abstraction or pragmatism, and what are her strengths and weaknesses in terms of memory, organization and psychomotor skills? In other words, to help the student, we must be able to position ourselves in relation to her possibilities and limitations. It is this knowledge that enables the coach to personalize her intervention. To facilitate this reciprocal knowledge, the student can be asked to carry out a “radar profile” of her abilities and limitations. These can be discussed with her as a



**Emotional intelligence:
self-awareness**

- Allows us to become conscious of our capacities and our means;
- Knowing how we react to different situations (difficulties, failure); discouragement and giving up)
- Recognizing our feelings of anxiety, frustration, anger, humiliation
- Knowing objectively our strengths and our weaknesses
- Knowing how to make up for our weaknesses and use our strengths



means of testing her realism, and leading her to become aware of her strengths, and to overcome her limitations.

Coaching strategies

The most commonly used coaching strategy is questioning, which could almost be considered Socratic, since it constantly leads the “coachee” to examine the pertinence of her judgements and investments she is willing to make, as well as the orientation that she applies to

her efforts. The questions asked should instigate reflection, self-evaluation, and projection into the future. For example, the coach might ask: “What things do you feel strongly about? What is your view of your situation? What do you think could be done? How do you rate your chances of success? What do you think of your time management? What do you feel are your greatest strengths? What is holding you back? How could you improve your division of time between work and study? Do you feel motivated to embark on a process of change?”

These questions, coupled with observation, help the coach get to know the student. They permit the measurement of the difficulties that confront her as well as her capacity for change. This questioning also helps to highlight the student’s strengths through asking her, for example, to talk about previous successes, and – through analysing them with her – discovering their determining factors, and pointing out the strengths behind these successes, and of which she can still make use.

Types of activity

The questions that are useful:

- Is there anything to be added?
- It seems to me that you haven’t spoken about ...
Is there a reason why you didn’t mention this?
- What criteria do you use for judging ...?
- What is the most difficult thing for you?
- What would you gain or lose by doing that?
- How do you judge your own way of studying?



More generally, the coach’s know-how is applied by means that can be divided into two opposing categories: “pushing” and “pulling”. In coaching terms, the first is supposed to be rather more directive, with incentives and suggestions, whilst the second is non-directive and always steers the student towards her own decisions and abilities. The choice between “pushing” and “pulling” often depends on the coach’s intervention style, but also on the student’s personality and on the timing of the coaching session – whether this is a first or a subsequent meeting. We must

COACHING STYLE

- To pull or to push the student
- The style has to be adapted to the needs

Pushing

- This is more directive
- may be useful at the start when the student lacks confidence
- is more effective, gets results faster
- but risk of the student becoming, to some extent, dependent

Pulling

- This is a non-directive form of stimulation
- that acts as a catalyst
- that gives confidence
- that allows the student to develop her own answers and to take responsibility

57

nevertheless be aware that, in order to be an effective, and more long-term, element in the learning process, coaching should be as non-directive as possible. Each of these methods has its disadvantages and risks. The ideal, therefore, is a well thought-out and relevant alternation of these two approaches.

Since students' motivation and willingness to change is being put into question, coaching can become more effective by analyzing the real context, with its advantages and difficulties for the student. This analysis must be conducted systematically with a rigorous

study of how the student manages her time, how she actually does her studying, writes her assignments and the difficulties she encounters.

Once the student's motivation and desire for change have been explored, the coaching then benefits from an analysis of the reality, along with its advantages and difficulties. This analysis need to be conducted systematically including a rigorous study of the student's time management, methods of studying, how she does her written assignments and the difficulties she encounters.

Students are often unrealistic about their commitments regarding motivation and the amount of time spent working and about distractions that disturb their concentration. They underestimate the fatigue caused by late nights or part-time work. Their assessment of the time lost sometimes comes closer to illusion than to reality. A realistic appraisal of these elements with their positive and negative repercussions on their educational progress is essential in order to reach insightful conclusions before proceeding to subsequent stages of the coaching.

Limits and applications

Pushing

- Can put off autonomous students and be seen as a form of pressure and provoke defensive reactions
- does not foster self-confidence
- is done by giving orders, through advice, by talking a lot, by proposing ready-made solutions, by showing how to carry out a task and by being critical

Pulling

- Can put off more dependent students
- needs more time
- requires more competence
- is done by asking questions, by listening, by asking the opinion of students, by proposing new challenges, through encouragement
- pulling by associating different elements of what is understood is very effective

59

What happens during a coaching session

The first coaching session should set the tone of non-directivity and willingness to help. The intended objectives and methods of these sessions are then explained to the students, who are invited to present a simplified description of their difficulties. Are they based on their practical training, involving aspects of how to provide care, how they organize their work or their interpersonal relationships with the teachers, colleagues, or the nurses where they are doing their practical training? Do they involve their theoretical learning, in certain subject areas? Or is it more a matter of having to deal with an overloaded timetable, with the demands of their family or other things.



A coaching session

The start

- . Identify the aims of the meeting and explain why these must be followed
- . present the problems or ask the students to identify them
- . clarify the needs of each person
- . take into account the worries and hesitations,, provide reassurances, when necessary
- . explain the proposed methodology
- . encourage reactions. Ask: *What do you think of ... ? , How could we ...*
- . give your own points of view, without imposing these as the only solution.

Throughout these sessions, the coach also has to monitor the psychological climate within the group. She must reassure the participants about the demands of this strategy and must allow them to discuss the strategy amongst themselves; this will facilitate debate and, often, generates a new awareness stemming from the comments of others. The coach also sets out the sequence of the sessions, and what is expected of them. The “SMART” method can serve as a guideline.



A coaching session

Getting going

- . Establish a way of functioning, with the group
- . use the method *SMART*
- . terms to be defined
- . current reality to focus on
- . clear objectives and options for the group to envisage
- . an action plan
- . **action strategies** : listening, looking for possible options, helping to see things differently, encouraging passing as soon as possible to the item solutions.

Coaching is action-oriented: realistic objectives

The coaching process passes not only through an analytical and diagnostic phase, but it must also lead to the following stages: establishing objectives, elaborating scenarios, and organizing their application. It aims to increase the awareness of resources available, but also the means and strategies

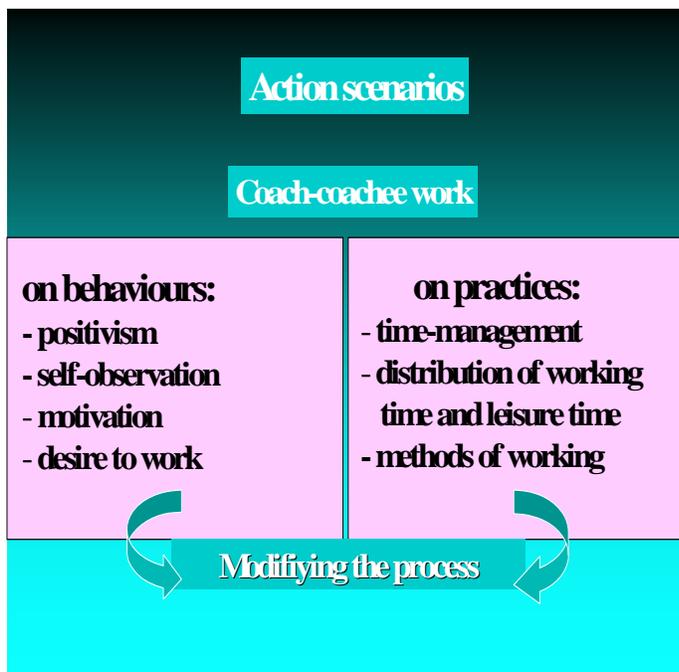
for mobilizing these. At the start, the coach needs to direct her intervention towards action by setting out concrete, attainable objectives, action alternatives, logical scenarios, and a precise plan of action created by the student herself, albeit with the support of the coach. Nothing must be left to chance. One must nevertheless recognize that gradual changes have a better chance of

succeeding, and that, in order for this success to last, the modifications should be spaced out over a period of time. With education as with feeding, too big a “mouthful” is hard to digest.

Explicit scenarios

Once the objectives have been decided on, the next step to cross is the elaboration of scenarios of change. Overall, they must cover two spheres: that of the student’s behaviours and that of her work strategies. Involving oneself in the behaviours of the student requires a great deal of tact on the part of the coach, for which empathy and positive regard are particularly helpful.

Regarding the elaboration either of objectives or of scenarios, it is always the student who plays the lead, but with the coach in a supporting role. Coaching is in actual fact a partnership directed at change.



Concrete means

To these scenarios there must be added concrete aids to success such as the elaboration of a portfolio, a journal, concept maps, a calendar of activities the student allows herself to do, use of the “*circept*” method with support to help understanding or intervening with a patient, training in self-esteem, in autosuggestion for self-motivation, in visualization to relieve pre-exam stress and to stimulate creativity, and in Taoist or transcendental meditation to help with concentration and



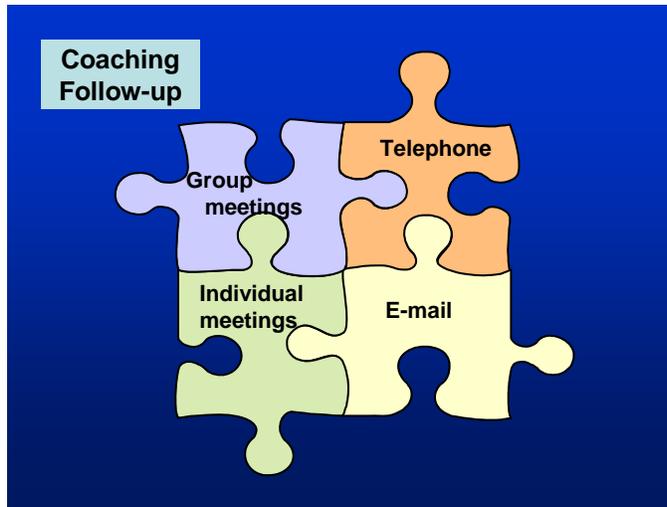
The objectives

- . Fixing overall objectives and those of each meeting
- . Using the “**SMART**” method
 - S** for **specific**
 - M** for **measurable**
 - A** for **anticipation** of the means to attain the objectives and to make them one’s own, to **appropriate** them
 - R** for **realistic** and for a close **relationship** between the objective and the task to be accomplished and the needs of the situation or of the students
 - T** for **time**, dates, amount of time.

sleep, relaxation, and cardiac coherence* for better stress management. One could also suggest to students that they make audio or video recordings to use autoscopically during simulated techniques and interactions, as well as using the Internet to widen their network of resources.

Support, evaluation and follow-up

What remains then is for the coach to support and encourage the student. This aspect of coaching is amongst the most important as, without it, the coachee often finds it difficult to maintain her efforts. Warm, friendly communication and a helping relationship are invaluable here.



Next comes the evaluation phase, when the coach casts a retrospective look over the ground covered and considers the results obtained. This stage allows the coach to positively reinforce the student and for the student to make any necessary adjustments. The coach and coachee are like explorers. The coach uses her experience and judgement as a compass. The coachee decides on her objectives, but it is the coach who remains at the helm. Their combined efforts enable the orientations and methods to be refined over the course of the experience, but, in the end, it is the coachee who decides whether or not to

make the best use of them, or even to put a stop to the coaching.

Coaching is in itself a strategy of brief duration, which is over in a few sessions, but it is useful to prolong these with a follow-up that is not too demanding. The significance of results that can be expected from this is a good indication of its usefulness.

* “Cardiac Coherence first appeared in the United States around ten years ago, thanks to neuro-science and neuro-cardiology research scientists. Since then, its beneficial effects on the health and its efficiency at preventing cardiovascular diseases have needed no further demonstration. This stress-management technique consists of working on the cardiac rhythm until a state of equilibrium is reached which enables the body to release anti-stress hormones capable of combating cortisol – the stress hormone. The advantage of the method lies in being able to manage one’s stress in action and without meditation.

The method of regaining cardiac coherence is both simple and rapid. It consists of 4 stages:

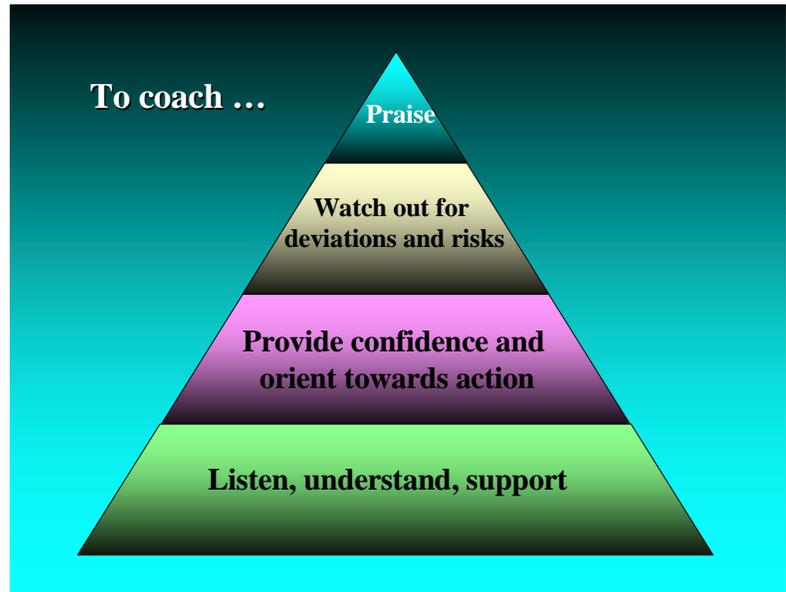
1. **Identify your ‘stress symptoms’**, such as irritability, tics, agitation, talking to yourself...
2. **Engage the heart**, by focussing your attention on the surrounding area or by placing your hand over your heart, if this helps.
3. **Breathe ‘through’ the heart**, by adopting a regular respiratory rhythm and imagining your heart inflating as you breathe in, and deflating as you breathe out.
4. **Think of a positive memory**, which creates a pleasant and strong emotion in you (a ‘surge of happiness’) and relive it in your imagination as intensely as possible.”

These stages help generate a coherent cardiac rhythm, which can be used to modify our reaction to stress.
(Capitecorpus: <http://www.capitecorpus.com/outils-et-methodes/coherence-cardiaque.html>)

Conclusion

With a little knowledge, coaching is within the scope of any teacher who has her students' success on their difficult journey at heart. It is simple to carry out and its diverse methods make it readily accessible.

It not only brings certain success, but sometimes achieves a specific awakening to the world of knowledge and, for a future caregiver, to the beauty of "caring". It is sufficient, in brief, to listen, to understand, to support confidence building, and to orient students towards action, whilst keeping on the lookout for possible drifting, and providing one's positive reinforcement.



Bibliography

- Eaton, John and Roy Johnson, *Coaching Successfully* (London: Mango Pratique, ed. Dorling Kindersley, 2002)
- Fourès, Éléna, *Comment coacher* (Paris: Éditions d'Organisation, 2003)
- Lenhardt, V., *Les responsables porteurs de sens* (Paris: INSEP Éditions, 1995)
- Phaneuf, Margot, *Communication, entretien, relation d'aide et validation* (Montréal : Chenelière/McGraw-Hill, 2002)
- Phaneuf, Margot, 'Santé mentale et communication', *Le circept, moyen d'enrichissement de l'entretien auprès des malades*. Infiresources (Carrefour clinique, 2006)
- Whitmore, John, ed. by Laurent du Mesnil, *Le guide du coaching* (Paris : Maxima, 2003)