

Professional Learning and the Role of the Coach in the new Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL)

This paper sets out 4 draft principles for professional learning in MTL contexts and a series of principles/key characteristics of coaching organised around these principles. It does so in the context of a short summary of the outcomes of an analysis of the evidence about professional learning and co-coaching and key issues highlighted at two consultation symposia. Whilst it attends seriously to the evidence in a policy context it does not pretend to offer an academic treatise or a systematic review. Its aim is to support research and evidence informed policy by making plain the evidential underpinnings for important aspects of policy development - in a way that enables policy makers, including school leaders on the ground, to adapt and interpret the implications of the research for context. The technical summary of the evidence underpinning this phase of the policy development summarised briefly in this report is also set out in more detail in the appendices.

Background

The TDA is developing a programme for a new Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) to meet the government's stated ambitions in the *Children's Plan* (2007) and *Being the best for our children* (2008) to raise teaching to a masters level profession. The starting point for this paper is the MTL requirement (set out in the policy documents) for work based professional learning to be supported by school based coaching. The evidence summarised draws on the following sources in particular:

- the research base behind The National Framework for Mentoring and Evidence (DfES, 2005), including both systematic reviews of the evidence and consultation, development and research by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE);
- an analysis of the evidence from CUREE in support of the development of the coaching element for MTL, and the development of a set of basic principles for professional learning. The latter are based on evidence about:
 - professional learning in the MTL context, that highlights the difference between professional *learning* and professional *development*;
 - work-based and other types of professional learning, learning contexts, and differences between formal and non-formal learning;
 - models for progression in professional learning and development;
 - identity, dispositions, commitment and growing independence in professional learners; and
 - characteristics of professional learners and what they do.

The evidence has been tested and interpreted by stakeholders, as far as the very tight timetable allowed. In particular, extensive comments from our Advisory Board ¹and from two symposia² convened by TDA have been invaluable in refining and distilling the analysis.

¹ The advisory board members are Sean Cavan, Hazel Hagger and David Leat.

² Attendees at the private symposia included representatives from SS&AT, NCSL, DCSF, CfSA, London Deanery, QCA, GTC, QIA and Sharnbrook Upper School as well as TDA staff and board members.

Professional Learning in the MTL Context

Research background

A year ago the McKinsey Report (2007) highlighted the placement of coaches in schools to support teachers as one of a series of key factors in developing excellence in teaching and learning. In the same year as the McKinsey report, new large scale and systematic reviews of research (Cordingley *et al*, 2007; Timperley, 2007) both reported in some depth on the processes involved in supporting professional learning in contexts where there was evidence of the positive impact of such learning on student achievement. This evidence seems to have formed part of the context for the development of MTL.

To complement the evidence that had informed policy development a review of the relevant literature on the nature of work based professional learning and of the coaching processes most likely to support it was carried out between July and October 2008. The majority of research papers fell into one of three categories:

- one viewed professional learning as synonymous with professional development;
- one focused on what others do to professional learners and/or the conditions in which professional learning flourishes; and
- one, rather smaller, group explored the types of learning activities, the dispositions and the skills of professional learners.

Some working definitions

The evidence trail supports the proposition that teachers' professional learning is focused on and determined by their teaching practice and experience:

- Timperley's (2007) best evidence synthesis helps us understand this by contrasting professional learning and development. *Professional development* refers to "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students", ... whereas *professional learning* implies an internal process through which individuals create professional knowledge; an umbrella term under which professional development of the 'delivery' kind is just one part.
- Mutton *et al* (in press) also emphasise the role of experience in professional learning: "experience is vital since it is in the processes of planning, teaching and evaluation that all the other sources of knowledge on which one might draw come together in action and acquire meaning".
- The GTC professional learning framework (2003) defines professional learning as a "wide range of learning experiences, deepening and revitalizing teachers' skills, abilities, values and knowledge".

For the purposes of developing a specification for the role and training of MTL coaches we recommend, in this context, defining teachers' professional learning as "a process of developing knowledge, skills, abilities and values and actions that is embedded in teachers' practice and experience and aimed primarily at developing and improving children and young people's learning".

Other important issues relating to professional learning in the context of coaching for the MTL include:

- understanding the needs of professional learners in the context of their day to day concerns and aspirations of practitioners and organisations they work in;
- the importance of creating opportunities for drawing on a wide range of sources of knowledge to develop understanding of the thinking that underpins new practice;

- conceiving progression in different ways and as an iterative rather than a linear process;
- the importance of focussing on the identity of professional learners and their dispositions towards and commitment to learning and growing independence; and
- the skills, actions and behaviours that experienced and confident professional learners deploy to take increasing control of their own learning from and with others.

Work-based and other types of professional learning

The introduction of a structured masters-level early professional development programme (MTL) is part of a strategy to maintain the momentum of professional learning and development once teachers become fully qualified. The programme is expected to be rooted in practice to benefit from teachers' work-based learning. Many researchers (see technical report) concur with Eraut's (2000b) findings that the development of professional knowledge for practice "arises naturally out of the demands and challenges of work-solving problems, improving quality and/or productivity, or coping with change – and out of social interactions in the workplace". Learning at the workplace involves a combination of "thinking, trying things out and talking to other people".

Recent research into learning at work suggests that it "should not be seen as an inferior or limited form of participation" (Fuller, 2006). Situated, work-based experience is an important part of learning and, in particular, skills formation. But it is evidence too that the opportunities and challenges of crossing the boundaries between the workplace and other sites for learning and sources of knowledge and expertise (e.g. HEIs in the case of MTL) can provide a broader range of learning opportunities and stimulate the *depth in learning* that enables teachers to respond thoughtfully to the wide variations between needs, skills, contexts and practices that form the context for teaching and learning in schools and which characterises the criteria for Masters level learning.

In particular the evidence suggests that, far from being 'inferior' or 'limited', workplace learning provides important opportunities for the implementation of the kinds of ongoing professional support for learning, including coaching, which has demonstrated a positive impact both on practice and on pupil outcomes.

Progression in professional learning and development

Models for progression in professional learning in teaching have been evolving over time but, as the existence of a variety of models suggests, the evidence is open to interpretation. Although earlier models tend to emphasise a linear progression path, later models are more complex. They are organized around, for example:

- Levels of competencies as a practitioner
- The depth of analysis / or extent to which teaching and learning challenges are analysed and understood (problematization)
- The breadth of the spheres of attention/focus

In the context of MTL, Eraut's (2000) ideas about advancement from novice through to expert are helpful. Recent research on the development of teachers from their initial training through their first two years of practice (Burn *et al*, 2008) reveals some common progressive patterns but other aspects of professional learning remained a constant focus over the three years. Management of lessons and behaviour management, for example, remained a focus for learning for the majority of teachers over the time of the research.

Overall the research suggests that progression for the professional learner may be seen as an iterative process of dealing with new knowledge and contexts against a growing capacity for self-regulation, commitment to and skills in professional learning. Clearly, agreeing and clarifying progression in the context of the MTL programmes will be an important part of the role of the coach.

Professional learners and their identity, dispositions, commitment to learning and growing independence

One of the givens for the development of MTL is that professional learners should take an active role in their own learning and that progression through MTL should be negotiated by a partnership between professional learners, their coaches and their HE tutors. Another is “the development of a learning mindset”. This represents a shift of power and responsibilities towards the professional learner.

Teachers’ dispositions and commitment to continued learning are emphasised as important factors to be taken into account in planning for professional learning. (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005; Burn *et al*, 2008). Amongst the factors that could have an impact on teachers’ commitment to learning, Day *et al* (2006) pointed out *personal factors* (values, beliefs, life events and circumstances), *situated factors* (school leadership, culture, colleagues, working conditions and pupils) and *professional factors* (roles, CPD, external policies). Research shows that they are also important *outcomes* of collaborative CPD (EPPI 2005).

Encouraging new teachers to experiment in their own teaching and to take risks could “build secure foundations for their life long learning and professional development” as well as help them become competent classroom practitioners (Hagger *et al* 2008). Experimenting, taking risks and making decisions in the classroom are inevitably connected with teachers’ feelings and emotions, which need to be considered and taken into account along with their knowledge and behaviour when discussing issues of teacher competence and its development (Leat, 1993).

Teachers’ growing responsibility for and ability to control their own learning is important. They need to be offered the opportunity to take increasing control of their own professional development. We believe the CPD evidence and the responses at consultation symposia both point strongly towards understanding this process as involving an explicit process of helping teachers to learn how to take expert control of their own collaborative work based learning.

Characteristics of professional learning: what do professional learners do?

There is an emerging body of evidence about the skills, actions and characteristics of professional learners that are linked to benefits to them and to their pupils.

The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching identified five core skills for professional learners:

- understanding their own learning needs and goals;
- observing, analysing and reflecting upon their own and the coach’s practice;
- discussing practice and core concepts professionally with a coach;
- thinking and acting honestly on developing skills; and
- responding proactively to specialist expertise to acquire and adapt new knowledge .

Subsequent research and development work offers a more detailed picture of what these skills look like in practice and this evidence, alongside case study work for this project has contributed to the illustrative examples set alongside the draft principles for professional learning.

We know from the work of many researchers and systematic reviews of CPD that reflecting critically on evidence from teaching and learning practice and theory is an important source of and goal for professional learning. Day (1993) and more recently Leat (2008) and Lofthouse (2008), emphasise how working with colleagues, coaches and mentors, and using various tools, particularly video, can ensure the quality of professional learning and provide opportunities to develop educational theory rooted in practice. Eraut (2001) also stressed the importance of developing self-awareness through collecting evidence from others on the effects of their actions.

There is also robust evidence that collaboration is a powerful tool in promoting, sustaining and supporting professional learning (See technical report). Specialist input is also an important part of the mix. Both Timperley and Cordingley *et al* (2007) emphasised the importance of teacher learning that draws down specialist support as being important in securing benefits for pupils. By drawing on specialist help, teacher learners can engage with the relevant theoretical and practical knowledge base, take increasing responsibility for and control of workshops, learn from observing both expert and emerging practice (when coupled with debriefing) and root reflection in evidence from experiments with new approaches.

Context for work based professional learning

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are seen by many researchers and practitioners as the ideal context for teacher learning. Bolam *et al* 2005 argued with some evidence that PLCs can make a difference both to teacher and student learning and a range of materials and tools has been created to promote the development of PLCs in the UK.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) suggest that two contextual dimensions to teacher learning (in addition to teacher disposition) are: “the practices and cultures of the school or departments; and the management and regulatory frameworks, at school and national policy levels”. The evidence exploring the impact of regulatory frameworks and standards on professional learning is, at present, rather limited. However, the evidence there is suggests that the way in which frameworks, (e.g. performance management) are used and interpreted can set the context for professional learning and may have the effect of increasing or decreasing PLs’ sense of agency, self-regulation and accountability. On the other hand there is also evidence to suggest that, with the development of a learning mind set, access to collaborative learning experiences and an ability to process the emotional content of learning experiences positively, teacher learning can flourish however well developed the overall learning environment may be.

In terms of management and culture, a major systematic review (Robinson, 2007) of the types of school leadership which improved student learning outcomes found that the single most effective action leaders could take was to promote and participate in professional learning themselves. They organized resources and structures to facilitate professional learning and evaluated and sustained professional learning within the school.

Principles for acting as a confident professional learner

From the evidence about professional learning, we have extrapolated four key features. These have been used as the basis for the development of a set of principles for acting as confident professional learners, which are encapsulated in Figure 1. The principles are set out in the inner circle and illustrated in the outer circle in relation to the evidence about coaching which is set out in the next section of this summary. These principles, taken together start to build a map of the skills involved in learning how to learn about teaching and learning and offer the foundation for organising the role of and training for MTL coaches.

Principles for acting as a confident professional learner

Confident professional learners:

Collaborate with others - make their beliefs and values, their knowledge and practice and their plans and ideas explicit and available for shared scrutiny and development. For example they will:

- take part in structured dialogue, rooted in evidence from their practice, which articulates existing beliefs and practices enabling PLs to reflect on them;
- build professional and thoughtful relationship with their coach, their tutor and with other colleagues in order to grow the trust they need to think and act honestly as they develop their knowledge and skills; and
- seek out opportunities to observe and work with experts, specialists and other professional learners to extend their knowledge and skills and embed new learning and practice.

Take and manage risks - explore the costs and benefits of changes to practice and make informed judgments before taking action. For example they will:

- suggest and uphold ground rules that address power and accountability in their relationships;
- seek out learning environments that encourage risk-taking and innovation and where they can experiment to gather evidence from practice; and
- understand and articulate how their learning will contribute to improved learning outcomes for children and young people in their context.

Grow in independence - take increasing responsibility for their own learning and reflection. For example they will:

- develop their understanding of a range of theory that underpins and explains new practice so they can adapt and interpret it for different contexts;
- find and use time and other resources to protect and sustain their learning on a day-to-day basis; and
- take increasing control over their learning as their knowledge, skills and self-awareness grow.

Critically analyse and evaluate evidence – collect and analyse evidence of and feedback on their practice and their students' learning. For example they will:

- identify aspirational goals for themselves and their students that build on existing knowledge and skills and align with relevant evaluation frameworks in their context;
- use evidence based models and protocols and draw on a wide range of sources of knowledge and evidence, including research and scholarship to reflect on their own context and thinking and provide a range of possible explanations for the outcomes of developing practice; and

- use successes and mistakes, planned and unplanned events and formal and informal meetings for gathering evidence for their learning.

These principles and the relationships between them are represented graphically at Figure 2 in appendix A.

Coaching for MTL: Updating the evidence since the publication of the National Framework

In 2005 the National Framework for Coaching and Mentoring was published by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in partnership with NCSL, TDA, GTC, The National Strategies and QCA, following a year long period of consultation, development and research by the Centre for the use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE). The framework had been commissioned by the then DfES to build upon the outcomes of three large scale systematic reviews of the impact of CPD on students and on their teachers (Cordingley *et al*, 2003; 2005; 2005) and to contextualise the outcomes of these reviews in the context of coaching and mentoring practice in England. Although the Framework was built from the foundations of the evidence from these reviews, a range of research, evaluations of national programmes and consultations with national agencies was also brought to bear.

The analysis of evidence for MTL set out to update the evidence collected and analysed for the development of the framework in the context of the policy parameters for MTL. These were that the MTL will be practice-based and:

- modular, progressively building on ITT and induction to develop higher levels of professional skills;
- focused on developing practice through enquiry and the use of evidence;
- personalised to meet participants' learning needs;
- validated by HEIs;
- primarily school-based;
- jointly delivered by HEIs and schools;
- by trained coaches and tutors provided for all participants; and
- through participants undertaking some study in their own time.

Updating the evidence on coaching

The important role that coaching plays in supporting the achievement of diverse improvement goals has been underlined both by the initial framework and by more recent research including further systematic reviews. Collectively, this more recent evidence highlights structural factors, including the:

- importance of the relationship of the coach with SMT;
- recruitment of the right people;
- importance of leadership and modeling of professional learning and the creation of a positive learning environment in which teachers can work through the powerful feelings involved in professional learning effectively;
- need to align school, departmental and individual staff priorities and set them in the context of national and local priorities and resources; and
- importance of networks in securing access to specialists.

Recent studies have also added to our knowledge of the *processes* involved in supporting professional learning, including the:

- role which the use of coaching tools (such as video and analytic review frameworks) can play;

- benefits for the coaches themselves in learning and practising coaching skills;
- ways of combining specialist expertise and collaborative coaching between non specialist colleagues;
- need for ‘experts’ to know how to make content meaningful to teachers and manageable within the context of teaching practice;
- need to support professional learners in processing new understandings and their implications for teaching; and
- persistence of teacher concerns over time.

(Timperley, 2007; Cordingley *et al*, 2007; Burn, Mutton and Hagger, 2008; Day *et al*, 2006; Ofsted, 2006; Bolam and Weindling, 2006; Leat *et al*, 2008; Lofthouse and Wright, 2008; Fogelman, 2006)

The systematic reviews, in particular (Timperley, 2007 and Cordingley *et al*, 2007,) offer us some detailed, practical insights into the key elements of the coaching process. In effective CPD, specialists both introduced new knowledge and/or skill *and* they employed a repertoire of support mechanisms to help embed learning and bring about changes in teachers’ practice. Coaching techniques and strategies for supporting teachers’ learning included the use of modeling, workshops, observation and debriefing – plus strategies for introducing and supporting peer learning, usually in the teachers’ own schools and classrooms. These featured, in particular, as important strategies for motivating teachers in making changes and building ownership. The reviews highlighted the following strategies used by professionals in coaching contexts (whether or not that is what they were called) for supporting teacher learning:

- support for engaging with underpinning rationale;
- activities that structure and sustain discussion about experiments with new approaches;
- an environment for exploring and refining beliefs in light of evidence;
- a mix of content, process, theoretical, practical and evaluative skills;
- an ability to tailor processes and the rhythm of development and learning activities to school working patterns;
- scaffolding growing independence;
- encouraging, enabling and structuring peer support;
- focusing professional learning through the lens of needs of specific pupils;
- building skills in evaluating impact; and
- enabling alignment with other priorities.

Timperley’s (2007) systematic review identified seven elements as important for promoting professional learning in ways that impacted positively and substantively on a range of student outcomes:

- providing sufficient time for extended opportunities to learn and using the time effectively;
- engaging external expertise;
- focusing on engaging teachers in the learning process rather than being concerned about whether they volunteered or not;
- challenging problematic discourses;
- providing opportunities to interact in a community of professionals;
- ensuring content was consistent with wider policy trends; and
- in school-based initiatives, having leaders actively leading the professional learning opportunities.

Of particular relevance for MTL coaching purposes, the review found that external experts who expected teachers to implement pre-specified practices were typically less effective than those who worked with

teachers in more iterative ways, involving them in discussion, diagnostic evaluation and the development of approaches that were meaningful in their classroom contexts. “Expecting teachers to act as technicians and to implement a set of ‘behaviours’ belies the complexity of teaching, the embeddedness of individual acts of teaching, and the need to be responsive to the learning needs of students”.

Leadership of professional learning was a strong feature of the Timperley review findings. The importance of school leadership teams taking an active interest in their colleagues’ professional learning and modeling it is emphasised by Viviane Robinson’s (2007) review of the leadership strategies that make most difference to pupils. It is clear from the literature that coaches will need to have strong school support and be able to link effectively with school leadership teams. Bolam and Weindling (2006) identify the key role of heads and senior staff in promoting and supporting CPD. Ofsted (2006) found that resource allocation, performance management, balancing between national and school priorities and treating workforce development as CPD should be integrally planned. According to Ofsted CPD should have clearly specified outcomes, based on student learning and assessment mechanisms and schools should recognise the need for specialist subject development. The provision of coaches and mentors, and tailoring development to the best possible sources (including in-school training) were all highlighted in the report.

What is clear from this most recent research evidence is that the TDA’s specified ‘givens’ in relation to the design and delivery of the MTL are consistent with the evidence. From this updated evidence we have been able to check the validity of the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching for MTL. Our conclusion is that the Framework and the evidence underpinning it is consistent with MTL Givens. It also relates closely to the four principles for professional learning. But the updating of the evidence has also identified two key issues for coaching in the context of MTL. The graphic at figure 1 appendix A illustrates the relationship between professional learning and coaching and includes two new principles for coaching in the context of MTL.

A snapshot of the work of the national agencies

As we found during the research and development work prior to building the original National Framework, practice on the ground is sometimes ahead of, or at least progressing in a different direction to, the research. We therefore also consulted many of the national agencies, which have been using approaches to coaching in their work with teachers, and had valuable insights to offer on successes and challenges.

TDA is seeking to focus coaching for MTL around the emerging evidence base about the nature of professional learning. To date, it is fair to say, from our consultations, that the coaching efforts of national agencies are focused on the transfer of new knowledge and skills and the contributions of coaches - more than the ways in which professional learners act to secure and take increasing control over the resulting opportunities. Nonetheless, colleagues from National Agencies were keen to explore the issue of professional learning and the role of coaching in supporting it. Their intention is to explore this together in general, as well as in the context of MTL. They highlighted through their discussions:

- an interest in increasing the ways in which agencies work together in supporting CPD to create a shared approach to supporting professional learning that is coherent from the school perspective;
- the importance of linking individual learning and development goals with organisational and national priorities, and of the role SLTs need to play enabling this coherence;

- the need for coaching to be tailored to the individual’s needs and development agenda rather than the coach’s;
- the importance of designing coaching approaches to increase practitioners’ ownership of their own professional learning and the potential role of peer support/co-coaching in securing this;
- the need to link professional learning with students’ learning;
- the need to share responsibility for managing risk and developing appropriate ways of approaching and managing risk in learning between national agencies, SLTs, coaches and practitioners;
- the need to ensure that professional learning and development are seen as a positive experience, and that the connections with and buffer zones between professional learning and management are important but can be problematic and so need handling carefully;
- the need to work together to ensure that professional learning and development become an integral, non-elective part of teaching;
- a recognition of the benefits of the coaching process not only for the professional learner but also for the coach due to the opportunities to develop their own learning and practice via observing others, reflecting on the practice with them, engaging with multiple sources of knowledge and evidence, etc.
- understanding that a coach should be seen as a professional learner as well, both in terms of the initial requirements to them and the acceptance that they would continue developing and learning when coaching and the benefits they would get from participating in MTL programme;
- the need for protocols, tools and engagement with evidence to help ensure that the quality of dialogue in professional learning is probing and challenging;
- in terms of creating capacity/making the most of resources:
 - professional learners need to develop skills which mean they can
 - co-coach each other and so use peer support to extend and embed specialist contributions, and;
 - be proactive in get the most from their coach;
 - coaches still need to understand when specialist input is necessary and how to access this;
 - leaders need to exploit the potential of networks; and
 - national agencies need to understand existing coaching provision across the piece and work together to create capacity.

Principles for Coaching in the context of MTL

In summary the evidence trawl and the consultation mechanisms have both reinforced and complemented the evidence on which the original framework was built. However, the specific context of MTL calls for an emphasis on *advanced* professional learning. We are aware that local interpretations of the National Framework for different contexts have involved a degree of selective emphasis. By contrast we want to argue that coaching for *advanced* professional learning generates a need for a strong emphasis on *all* of the principles from the perspective of the coach. From the perspective of the professional learner we suggest that there needs to be a particular emphasis on the principles relating to evidence, theory, experimenting and use of specialist expertise and taking an active role in goal setting. We have, therefore, used the evidence about professional learning and the expanded evidence base about coaching, to develop the original national framework coaching principles and to align them with the needs and aspirations of the professional learner and the school. See figure 1.

Next steps

We believe that we have taken the contribution of the evidence base as far as it can go within the timescale and keeping pace with the rhythm of policy development for MTL. MTL is attempting to change things; to create a new future. The evidence base does not therefore speak comprehensively to every goal and parameter. What is more, as MTL is implemented it *will* change things, including practice, and therefore the evidence base about how things work. We want to make it clear that we think the evidence has much to offer in the shape of the content of this summary – and just as much to gain from research into the progress of MTL as the programme unfolds and the underpinning principles are expanded, tested and illustrated in schools and colleges across the country.

Effective coaching involves:

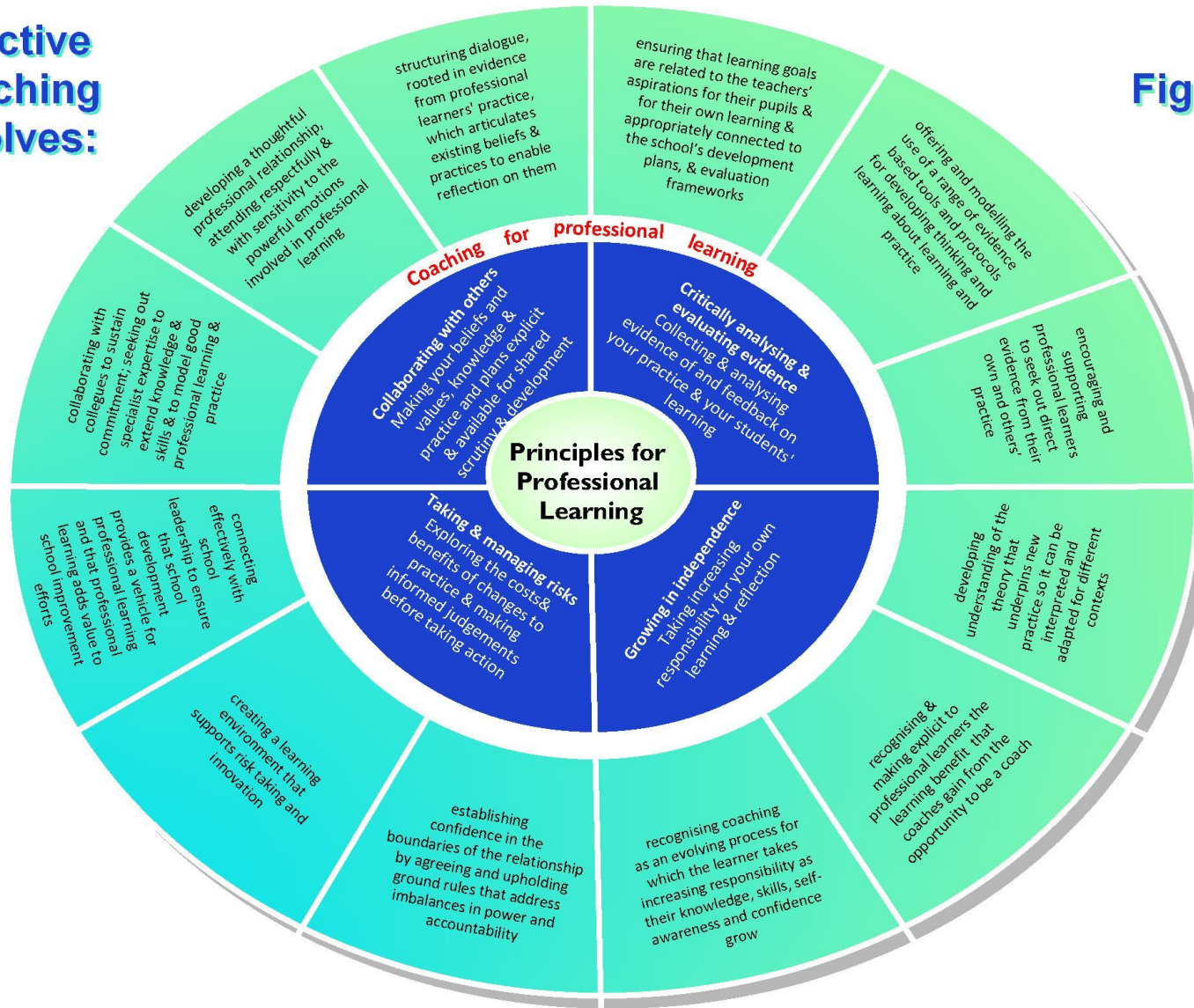


Fig 1

Fig 2

