

Please note! This is a self-archived version of the original article.

Huom! Tämä on rinnakkaistalenne.

To cite this Article / Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

Heinonen, L. & Ahtiainen, H. 2017. Teaching or coaching. Teoksessa Saraketo, H & Nevalainen, T (toim.) Theories and experiences on team learning – Academic adventures in Proakatemia. Tampere: TAMK University of Applied Sciences, 42-48.

URL: <http://julkaisut.tamk.fi/PDF-tiedostot-web/B/90-Theories-and-experiences-on-team-learning-Academic-adventures-in-Proakatemia.pdf>

Theories and Experiences on Team Learning



TEACHING OR COACHING?





Liisa Heinonen, Coach
Hermann Ahtiainen, Teampreneur
Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Proakatemia
liisa.heinonen@tamk.fi

What changes when you switch from teaching to coaching? Who is responsible for the students learning process?

These questions were the baseline for the Teaching vs. Coaching workshop at the Academic Adventures International Week of Proakatemia. They were approached from multiple angles: through our experiences in Proakatemia, participants' experiences in their working environments, and by having an open dialogue. Instead of giving a lecture on our opinion of how coaching should be done, the goal of the workshop was for participants to reflect on their role as the teacher in the classical lecture hall-setting versus the role the coaches have in Proakatemia.

FROM TEACHER TO A COACH

The workshop was structured to be almost identical to the weekly training sessions, in which the students of Proakatemia share their knowledge with their teammates,

to demonstrate a practical way of how we have moved from teachers giving lectures to these student-focused sessions. The workshop, as well as all the others held during the Academic Adventures, was facilitated by a student and a coach working as peers, to bring in experiences from both sides of the coaching process.

This kind of collaboration as peers between the coaches and students is common at Proakatemia and it is made possible by the coaches letting go of the idea that they always know best. When the students aren't limited by the teacher telling them the "correct answer", it guides them to find it on their own terms. Instead of getting the knowledge in a pre-packaged form, the students have to connect the dots themselves. This not only teaches students how to find information but establishes a setting in which new knowledge can be brought forth: without imposing the limitations the teacher believes in, the students look at the knowledge in a different way.

The idea of not giving straight answers is one of the core principles of coaching in Proakatemia and has been put into words well by a French philosopher Jacques Rancière: "To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself." (Rancière, 1991) It means that by telling the answer you deny the recipient of the process of understanding why it is the answer. Giving up trying to control the learning process requires a lot of trust from the coach towards the students. That trust along with openness and mutual respect are essential building blocks of a coaching relationship. Coaching requires the teacher to move his focus from the whole process of learning to the outcomes of the process. (Flaherty, 2004)

Focusing on the outcome rather than the process allows students to utilize the studying techniques they find best suited for themselves to reach the same outcome. It doesn't matter if the knowledge is acquired by reading books, watching cartoons or experimenting if the outcome of the process is the same. Giving and receiving feedback based on the results, rather than being judged by the capability to follow a path you as the teacher have laid out in front of him, allows for a much more wholesome learning experience for all parties involved. When the teacher allows the student to shape the learning process to his own needs and the student gives feedback on the input of the teacher, the system works both ways. (Flaherty, 2004)

Just as for the learning process previously described, there is no simple one-size-fits-for-all solutions in coaching. Every coach, every coachee and every coaching relationship is unique and therefore stating that a single technique or pattern would fit every situation is impossible. However, alongside with the principles of coaching, there are other guidelines, such as a Push-Pull-model of coaching a learning process. In the model coaches should keep to the following actions 80% of the time: Listening, Reflecting, Repeating what has been already said, Making summaries and Asking questions. On the other ends of the spectrum as the things to avoid are: Giving answers, Giving instructions and Giving own ideas as tips. (Downey, 2003)

MOTIVATING THE STUDENT

The second baseline question that was presented at the start of the workshop was about who's responsible for the students' learning. When posed with the question, many of

the participants from different corners of the earth had a similar answer: “As a teacher, I am responsible to the school system that my students learn the things stated in the curriculum. If a student is not motivated to receive the knowledge I am giving him, the problem must be in the student.” This seems odd from the student’s perspective; it isn’t the Ministry of Education that knows what it takes for the student to learn a certain thing, it is the student that decides whether he has learned something or not.

After the student facilitating the workshop shared his personal story of how he had always been great at school but getting bored and frustrated at the heavily generalized guidelines of the curriculum the teachers so eagerly followed, it was brought up to discussion that it is in fact the student that is responsible for his own learning. It is the student’s job to study and the teachers job is to help him to do that. In the regular lecturer-model teaching, the teacher tells you every answer you will need. He’ll tell you what books to read, what questions to ask, who to believe and who to disagree with, when to be present and in the end, he’ll give you grade based on how well you did your followed his orders. This posed the question of:

“Are you teaching your students to study and learn new things or are you teaching them how to please you?”

One of the core techniques of motivating students in the coaching method is setting goals. These goals are not set by the system nor the coach but rather by the student himself. When the participants were asked if they asked their students why are they here, it was obvious that such a practice is

almost non-existent all around the world. However, in almost every single job interview in the world one of the first questions is, “Why do you want to work for us?” If such an important question is overlooked by the school system, whose most important function is to prepare the students for work life, is it fulfilling its role?

That question was also approached in a discussion about the changing world. The structures of our societies are changing rapidly through the political and economic events happening around the world. Globalization, digitalization and robotics are shaping the skills and knowledge required in the work places in the future. Kondratieff’s wave theory suggests that the future will include shortening and spalling of careers. (Kondratieff, 1925) To prepare the students for an ever-changing working environment, the school system should adapt as well.

In such of an uncertain future, it is difficult to predict the kind of knowledge the students will need in 5 or 15 years after their graduation. Therefore, it is more important to focus on preparing them for those situations of not having the answers and to focus on providing them with a wide selection of tools and methods to find those answers themselves. Lecturing allows the student to be passive and wait for the teacher to give the right answers or a book to study them from. Students being coached are forced to be active in all parts of the process. The biggest difference between students that have been lectured to and students that have been coached is manifested when they are put into a spot where they don’t know what the goal is or how to get there. The lecture-students are used to getting outside guidance whereas the coaches understand that not knowing is the starting place of the learning process.

One of the most profound fundamental differences between the learning environments of lecture-based studies and the coaching-based studies is asking questions. In the coaching environment, the students are encouraged to question what the coaches tell them and the coaches question what the students share as knowledge. It teaches both parties to be open for new sources of information. This isn't a new way of thinking. Even Socrates stated:

“The only wisdom is in knowing you know nothing”

Bibliography:

Rancière, J. 1991.

Le Maître ignorant, translated, with an introduction, by Kristin Ross, The Ignorant Schoolmaster.
Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Flaherty, J. 2006.

Coaching: Evoking Excellence In Others, 2nd edition, Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal, Vol 20 Issue: 6.

Downey, M. 2003.

Effective Coaching: Lessons from the Coach's coach.

Kondratieff, N. 1925.

The Major Economic Cycles.