The Potential of eCoaching and eMentoring: Making a Case for the Introduction of Sustainable eCoaching and eMentoring Programmes in New Zealand Schools

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ABSTRACT

eCoaching and eMentoring have the potential to build, capture, and share knowledge in a knowledge society. In educational contexts the potential of eCoaching and eMentoring as a means of encouraging purposeful professional development in their organisations is just beginning to be investigated. It is our belief that these would be a timely addition to existing coaching and mentoring programmes in New Zealand schools. In this paper we examine the literature and existing eCoaching and eMentoring programmes to make a case for their implementation in schools to support the professional learning of New Zealand teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Face-to-face coaching and mentoring is not always practical in a knowledge society where communication is frequently instantaneous, computer-mediated and global (Leppisaari & Tenhunen, 2009). Hence, coaching and mentoring online have become more popular in the delivering of professional development in the business world as a result of constantly changing skill requirements which require flexible, responsive, innovative models and solutions (Bierema & Hill, 2005). Subsequently, this has seen an increase in eMentoring and eCoaching as a means of professional development and supports Bierema and Hill's (2005) assertion that eMentoring and eCoaching has the potential to build, capture, and share knowledge in a knowledge society. In educational contexts, however, the potential for eCoaching and eMentoring to be an effective means for purposeful professional development is just beginning to be investigated.

It is our belief that such an approach would be a timely addition to coaching and mentoring practices and programmes in New Zealand (NZ) schools. In this paper we discuss whether and how eCoaching and eMentoring could be implemented to support the professional learning of NZ school teachers through the provision of sustainable professional development (PD) programmes. First, we offer some definitions of eCoaching and eMentoring and

examine the current literature. Second, the elements we believe are important for eCoaching and eMentoring programmes to be successful, effective and sustainable are critically discussed in light of the literature. Third, we review two eCoaching and eMentoring programmes currently implemented in the NZ context: the First-time Principals' Programme and MentorNet. Both programmes use eCoaching and eMentoring to provide professional development in their respective educational contexts. Our discussion of these programmes aims to offer some insight into the key elements of eCoaching and eMentoring and examine whether they might be transferable to other settings. These include: constructing a programme; having a clear purpose; participant selection; the relationship and roles; how the online relationship is established; mixed media approaches; and, the critical nature of reflection and evaluation in an online coaching/mentoring programme. Finally, we come to some conclusions about whether such programmes have the capacity to provide worthwhile and authentic professional growth for the participants, and how they might inform the development of eCoaching and eMentoring programmes in NZ schools.

ECOACHING AND EMENTORING: DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES

eCoaching has a strong element of performance management where specific goals are created between the coach and coachee in a computer-assisted environment (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). As the relationship evolves, the coach works with the coachee to measure the goals and then the coach determines whether the coachee is competent based on the outcomes. In addition, Bierema and Merriam (2002) suggest that eCoaching can take the form of formal or informal conversations, dialogue, goal setting and online observations using multi-media tools. These authors and others suggest it is a process that can be either short- or long-term, and is based on performance and results (Rurac, 2009). Male and Pattinson (2011) also point out that the primary purpose of eCoaching is for a more experienced coach to assist a less experienced coachee towards achieving learning goals by establishing an online relationship with them. Overall, then, it would seem that the aim of eCoaching is to develop a relationship by identifying needs according to organisational objectives.

By comparison, Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) argue that eMentoring has a more holistic purpose. It is typically a longer-term partnership and is formed as a means to develop the capacity of both mentor and mentee (Harris, 2007). Interestingly, some of the identified functions of eMentoring are not apparent among the eCoaching functions and processes. eMentors, for instance, help individuals increase their professional networks and improve their career prospects. This would have no direct benefit for the organisation and is not considered a significant characteristic of an eCoaching partnership (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). As such, Single and Muller (2001) define eMentoring as a relationship established through electronic communication between a more senior and less experienced individual. Formal eMentoring programmes appear to provide flexibility in scheduling and transcending geographical barriers that would otherwise prove prohibitive to traditional mentoring opportunities (Kasprisin, Single, Single & Muller, 2003). In addition, Bierema and Merriam (2002) describe eMentoring as a computer-mediated, mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and protégé. Their research

suggests that it provides learning, advise, encouragement, promotes and models opportunities, and allows for a relationship to form across time, geography, and culture. These authors also suggest that eMentoring is capable of solving difficulties posed by race, gender, age and hierarchy.

The definitions provided here are limited to the existing literature about online coaching and mentoring. Many more similarities and differences could be added by drawing from the literature about face-to-face coaching and mentoring. Numerous researchers propose that traditional coaching and mentoring definitions can also apply to their virtual counterparts (Bierema & Merriam, 2002; Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010; Ensher, Heun, & Blanchard, 2003; Harris, 2007; Single & Muller, 1999). We concur with Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) who believe that these definitions have only begun to touch upon the true definition of an online coaching and mentoring relationship. Moreover, they are far too limiting in regards to the nature of the relationship and its potential for mutual understanding. Both processes require reflection and in their non-directive form, provide powerful opportunities for mutual learning. Regardless of whether it is an eCoaching or eMentoring partnership, we believe that aspects of each process could be used in one programme as it depends on the purpose and on-going nature of the relationship and the outcomes required. For the purpose of this paper, a programme that encompasses both eCoaching and eMentoring practices will be considered as a means of encouraging professional learning, reflection and growth.

ELEMENTS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMME

Figure 1 below gives an overview of the different elements that we believe are needed in a sustainable online coaching and mentoring programme, and are examined in the discussion that follows.
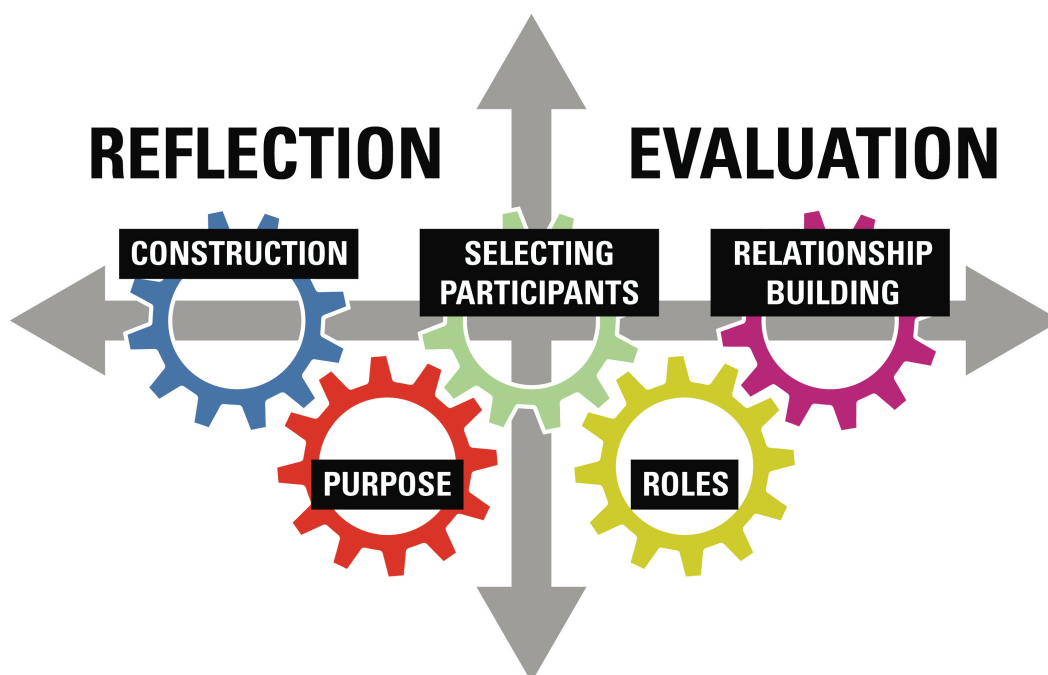
Figure 1. Elements for the development of eCoaching and eMentoring programmes

Construction

For an eCoaching or eMentoring programme to be sustainable and successful, there must first be consideration of the systems required prior to forming relationships and before coaching or mentoring begin (Bierema & Hill, 2005). While Williams and Kim (2011) claim there is little evidence-based discussion on the core structural components of systems, there are a number of studies about specific systems that offer sound guidance for programme development. These authors suggest that their own research about an eMentoring programme could 'serve as a benchmark for future eMentoring designs in online learning environments and in other electronic educational settings' (p. 83). Other studies which have investigated online systems for specific eMentoring programmes are, for instance, O'Neill, Weiler and Sha's (2005) research about software support for online mentoring programmes, and Santos, Couchet and Boticario's (2009) work on personalised eLearning and eMentoring through user modelling. In their study, Headlam-Wells, Gosland, and Craig (2006) evaluated the process of building and managing systems for eMentoring programmes. This led to the recognition of the importance of combining the 'principles of social interaction with those of human-computer interaction to create and maintain an effective online mentoring community' (p. 372). Once systems are in place, Headlam-Wells et al. (2006) and Perren (2003) emphasise that training must be given on the use of technical equipment, and that participants must take part in programme induction to be able to engage effectively with the interpersonal elements as well as become cognisant of the level of commitment required (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010).

There is a need, therefore, to establish an underlying framework for a programme. Organisations embarking on eCoaching or eMentoring programmes must educate all participants about the process and provide a structure that supports the relationship (Bierema & Hill, 2005; Perren, 2003). This requires: targeting participants; deciding on technology options; setting specific goals; agreeing on a realistic programme duration; designing eCoaching and eMentoring activities; having flexibility if a mentoring pair or other configurations need to be realigned; creating a plan for a programme's conclusion; and, setting up ways to reflect on and evaluate it. Inevitably, there are factors that can limit the success of eCoaching and eMentoring programmes. A lack of regular online interaction can have a significant impact on the sustainability of a programme, therefore a consistent focus on maintaining a clear sense of direction and purpose within a programme is vital. In addition, if personal, relevant and meaningful feedback is minimal or non-existent, the quality of the mentoring or coaching and the relationship itself are affected. Hence, ways of providing multiple means of asynchronous and synchronous communication must be a key consideration (Stein & Wanstreet, 2011).

Additionally, Perren (2003) argues for a cooperative learning approach to be adopted in the development of eCoaching and eMentoring programmes. For such an approach to be effective certain key ingredients must be present: a clear statement of purpose that is shared among the participants; learning goals that are understood by all; and, a desire by all participants to be involved (Akin & Hilbun, 2007; Shrestha, May, Edirisingha, Burke, & Linsey, 2009). A critical ingredient is the establishment of trusting mutual relationships. According to Wong and Premkumar (2007) this is especially important for online mentoring

and coaching. Effective relationships tend to generate on-going reflection and lead to the formation of more tangible outcomes that are essential to motivate participants, sustain their commitment to the relationship, and celebrate their successes (Stokes, Garrett-Harris, & Hunt, 2003). In this next part of the paper, a number of the elements we consider critical for the development, quality and sustainability of eCoaching and eMentoring programmes are discussed in greater detail.

Purpose

It is essential to clearly state the intention of any programme and this should include who it is aimed at and what specific changes the process is intended to bring about. Furthermore, these wider benefits should be shared with the participants so that they understand how they will benefit from the relationship (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). We are of the view that participants would be more committed if aware of the reasons why eCoaching and eMentoring would be beneficial and what they will gain as a result.

Kasprisin et al. (2003) hold the firm view that the purpose needs to be flexible and multi-dimensional and that participants can adjust the parameters to meet their individual needs as necessary. Although we agree with these authors, their research is based on eMentoring relationships between two experienced colleagues hence the purpose depends on what is required from the partnership. In some cases, the process needs to have clear guidelines and outcomes while in others it could be more fluid and flexible. Therefore, it is important to understand the wider organisational or societal objectives underpinning a programme and how they influence the quality of the participants' experiences and outcomes (Beddoes-Jones & Miller, 2006). Overall, it seems that goals or objectives are foremost in the creation of eCoaching and eMentoring relationships. The goals are in some cases aligned with the objectives of the organisation and in others determined by the participants in the early stages of the relationship (Single & Muller, 2001).

Selecting participants

Numerous researchers suggest that the selection of suitable participants is one of the most significant aspects of establishing an online programme. Initially, it does seem quite simple to select participants using electronic means because one simply locates experienced coaches/mentors and pair them up with less experienced protégés. However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that choosing participants in an online environment is more important than face-to-face contexts(Harris, 2007). A number of authors substantiate this claim by suggesting that it is essential to pair individuals who have similar interests, goals and sound interpersonal and ICT skills (Single & Muller, 2001; Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010; Shrestha et al., 2009). It may also be important to look for volunteers who show interest in wanting to participate in a pilot scheme before making it a requirement for all.

An idea proposed by Single and Muller (2001) could potentially solve a number of selection issues. Getting participants to post biographies online and allowing participants to select who they would like to work with could provide the much needed ownership that many eMentoring or eCoaching programmes lack (Single & Muller, 2001; Shrestha et al., 2009). On the other hand, this process could also come with its own dilemmas, namely participants making selections

based on personal characteristics, friendship or keeping within one's comfort zone. While we consider that Single and Muller's (2001) proposition could work, we also think that having a clear purpose for the relationship is essential. The goals, expectations and criteria must be clearly stated from the beginning (Shrestha et al., 2009).

Roles

A unique feature of an eCoaching and eMentoring relationship is the environment in which the coaching and mentoring takes place. Generally, in a face-to-face relationship one member is either more experienced or of a higher status than the protégé. As Male and Pattinson (2011) point out, in an online environment the mentor/coach must be comfortable being on an even playing field with their protégé. The same status stereotypes are less visible and do not have the same impact as in a face-to-face relationship (Sinclair, 2003).

It is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities that the mentor/coach and protégé will take on so that each participant knows what is expected of them (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to ensure all participants have a sense that they are bringing value to the relationship so that an authentic reciprocal relationship can be established (Single & Muller, 1999). Ideally, in time, our view is that the roles participants take on in an online programme have the potential to become interchangeable. Leppisaari and Tenhunen (2009) describe a process that involves empowering learners to create their own learning experiences and paths by using technology to collaborate in an online environment that is personal, easily accessible, and related to their own role and the roles of others.

Relationship building

The ability to develop an authentic relationship could be considered one of the most important aspects of any coaching and mentoring programme (Cravens, 2001). Developing one in an online environment, however, comes with its challenges. Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) and Stokes et al. (2003) have found that participants have to make a concerted effort to maintain a relationship as there seems to be less commitment in an online environment. What's more, this type of environment does not allow for the study of non-verbal communication such as facial expression, intonation in a person's voice or other physical signs that give an indication of a person's thoughts and feelings (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). To overcome these issues, it is vital for coach/mentor and protégé to take mutual responsibility for making the programme successful, as well as having a commitment to their own reflective practice and personal growth. It is possible that a participant could easily say one thing online but continue to teach or lead without any effort to adjust his or her practice in the real world due to having no direct accountability or responsibility to make a change.

Sinclair (2003) proposes that programmes need to focus on developing trusting relationships that encourage open communication and honesty. As a means of establishing this relationship, Stein and Wanstreet (2011) suggest that the coach/mentor should encourage learner-lead discussion to promote critical thinking and reflection. This, in turn, will also provide an insight into the assumptions that a protégé may hold (Stein & Wanstreet, 2011). Although, ensuring that a participant's confidentiality is protected is equally important – the

programme must guarantee that online information cannot be used for another purpose. Without participants having this knowledge an authentic relationship would be very difficult to establish or maintain (Stokes et al, 2003). To combat this issue, it would be essential to create a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of the relationship so both coach/mentor and protégé know that conversations are private and only what is mutually agreed upon can be shared.

An obstacle that Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) found problematic is how to develop the rapport and trust needed in a relationship. During face-to-face coaching and mentoring, rapport and trust is developed through the conversations the participants have. They are not always based around coaching and mentoring, and some conversations provide personal insights into the experiences that they bring to the relationship. Nevertheless, the word-based nature of online interaction can be very impersonal and sterile (Perren, 2003), therefore, it is important that opportunities are provided for participants to share a little about themselves whether face-to-face (Single & Muller, 2001; Shrestha et al., 2009) or using multi-media tools such as Skype, online chatting or voice thread (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). Such a simple process tends to show a significant increase in the longevity of the relationships developed in their mentoring programmes.

It is vital to maintain an online presence, for without this, as Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) maintain, the relationship can break down very quickly. They add that dialogue needs to be frequent, questioning has to be reflective and feedback succinct in order to lead to more engagement and satisfaction in the process. We agree with Bierema and Hill (2005) who state that participants need to understand what it means to participate in an online environment and how this is fundamentally different from a face-to-face relationship. It is our belief that eCoaching and eMentoring have the potential to provide opportunities for reflective practice and to maintain a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship in which the communication obstacles that participants will face are acknowledged, identified and discussed at the start of the relationship (Bierema & Hill, 2005; Kasprisin et al., 2003).

Resources and training

The resources and training that online coaching and mentoring require can often be underestimated (Clutterbuck & Hussain, 2010). A number of questions need to be considered in the initial stages of programme development. How much time and money would be needed to invest in the programme? Whose expertise is needed? What ICT and technical support is required and how will the interface be presented so it is functional and easy to use? While online coaching and mentoring in its simplistic form could be a series of emails, a well-constructed environment could potentially increase the engagement and satisfaction of the participants (Kasprisin et al., 2003). The use of both synchronous and asynchronous communication tools is recommended for effective dialogue because the richness associated with face-to-face conversations is known to diminish with the use of electronic media (Akin & Hilbun, 2007; Brennan & Lockridge, 2006). What's more, it is important to assist coaches or mentors with prepared templates, email replies, activity sheets, and a set of general guidelines so they have a starting point on which to expand. Coaches and mentors and their protégés are already busy people and time is precious. Therefore, if online resources were readily available this would

potentially lessen the workload of those involved and subsequently help support the relationship.

We hold the view that training is an integral part of establishing any sustainable online programme. Training must focus on the relevant issues of the target group and provide suggestions on how to initiate and develop an authentic relationship. Kasprisin et al. (2003) suggest that the expectations and parameters of an online programme be shared with all participants so that everyone can be exposed to the issues that may arise as a result. It is the goal of eTraining, therefore, to increase involvement, satisfaction and value (Williams, Sunderman & Kim, 2012). A well-designed programme should address the expectations, be domain specific, and focused on the skills needed to avoid potential road-blocks (Goldsmith & Kraiger, 1997; Single & Muller, 2001).

When reflecting on what is important in regards to resources and training, having an easy interface to use would be important. Providing training on how to use the technology would also be essential as without this knowledge the relationship would not be established. We think that trying to make the process as easy as possible by providing prepared resources would be beneficial, however, we would also like to think that the coach or mentor would adjust these to suit the individual needs of their protégé. Moreover, our assumption is that participants would take the lessons learned from face-to-face mentoring and coaching to investigate their further application in an online environment.

Reflection and evaluation

The use of reflection and evaluation is an important part of any online coaching and mentoring process. All participants would need to commit to their own personal reflection and be willing to become critical of their own practice. A potential problem of allowing participants to do this alone is their inability to be objective enough to admit when progress is not being made and to seek help and guidance. Without the face-to-face interaction that comes with traditional coaching and mentoring these difficult questions and situations may not be dealt with or even considered (Stokes et al., 2003). It is the coach's or mentor's ability to pose poignant questions and to pick up on the little nuances in their protégé's dialogue which will provide ways for the protégé to challenge their own thinking (Shrestha et al., 2009). This is not an easy task. Moreover, the coach/mentor also has the task of adjusting the reflection tasks according to the needs of the learner. If the coach/mentor does not actively reflect on their role as a facilitator of reflection, hence professional growth, it will potentially allow for miscommunication and a lack of understanding and trust in the relationship (Sinclair, 2003). With this in mind, it would also be important to continue to reflect on the purpose for the relationship from the onset. During these regular 'health checks' the coach/mentor and protégé should be asking: Is the programme achieving what it set out to achieve?; Are the desired outcomes manifesting themselves?; Is the relationship safe yet challenging?; and so on. If the answers to any of these and other questions is no, serious consideration about the worth of the programme would be needed.

While it is acknowledged that personal reflection is required, reflection and evaluation of the actual programme would also be needed. Consideration needs to be given to whether it is making a difference and whether the online

environment is helping or hindering the development of the relationship (Shrestha et al., 2009). Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) highlight that evaluation can be easier in an online environment due to the written nature of responses, however, it is essential to have clear goals to measure progress against. Without clear goals the worth of the programme could be difficult to ascertain when it is evaluated at the end (Single & Muller, 2001). Using this knowledge we chose not to include reflection and evaluation as a separate cog in Figure 1 because we believe this process needs to happen throughout the process rather than in isolation at the end. Difficulty comes, however, with how and when to review so that there is evaluation and reflection without affecting the authenticity of the relationship where it becomes intrusive.

We agree that evaluation helps to measure the value associated with the programme as it can identify best practices and should be on-going throughout the programme. Furthermore, we understand the difficulty of encouraging participants to become critically reflective about their own practice but with time the coach/mentor's support can see that powerful learning could be achieved as a result. We also believe there is a need for both formative and summative evaluation of any online programme. The formative assessment must be protégé-centred and the programme adjusted according to the needs of the learner. In addition, there needs to be some form of summative assessment which focuses on the worth of the programme and the goals achieved by the protégé. Such an assessment should identify best practices and draw on these for future learning but it should also identify roadblocks and work towards minimising them by reflecting on the decisions made throughout the process, and adjusting the programme as a result. Overall, we think it comes down to the nature of the relationship. If it were organisationally driven then summative evaluation would be needed to ensure the objectives of the organisation were being met. If the individual drives the purpose then the nature of the reflection would be fundamentally different and determined by the mutual understanding gained by the participants involved.

PERSPECTIVES ON ECOACHING AND EMENTORING: CURRENT PROGRAMMES

In this final section of the paper, two successful programmes from the New Zealand context are examined. The First-time Principals' Programme and MentorNet offer sound examples of the ways in which the elements identified above – construction, purpose, selection of participants, roles, relationship building, resources and training, and reflection and evaluation – have led to their success.

First-time Principals' Programme

The NZ Ministry of Education (2012) defines the First-time Principals' Programme as an induction programme designed to meet the individual needs of first-time principals. It seeks to develop the professional and personal skills and capabilities of new school leaders in their school context so that they can work effectively with their colleagues and communities to further improve teaching and learning in New Zealand's schools. The programme is in four phases: getting started, leading learning, school organisation and development, and future direction. Each phase has a series of learning objectives and

includes developing action plans, portfolios and assessment objectives based on the needs of the individual principal (Martin & Robertson, 2003). The process is conducted through face-to-face meetings, email, Skype and other digital technologies. It also includes participation in professional learning groups, online discussion with mentors and other first-time principals (Martin & Robertson, 2003).

What is interesting about this programme is that it comprises a number of aspects of a sustainable programme as discussed above. Importantly, it has a clear and defined purpose. First-time principals are required to progress through a number of phases which have clearly defined objectives. A careful process is used to select participants, and first time principals need to show an interest to be considered for the programme. This is similar to the views of Single and Muller (2001), Shrestha et al. (2009) and Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010), all of whom have suggested the importance of having volunteers who show interest in wanting to participate, as it ensures increased commitment to the programme. First-time principals are mentored by experienced principals. Notably, the Ministry of Education (2012) points out that all mentors are given on-going professional development and training on how to be an effective mentor. They also state that all mentoring is individualised, needs-based and provides the first-time principal with the ability to negotiate and set their own learning goals. These features also ring true with the elements needed to sustain a successful eCoaching and eMentoring programme.

It is important to note that the programme does not solely use online communication as a means of delivering this programme. There are opportunities for face-to-face interaction with mentors as well as other first-time principals. The Ministry's main means of delivering learning, however, is through the First-time Principals' Programme website (www.firstprincipals.ac.nz) which provides access to a wide range of multimedia resources, including powerpoints, documents, 10-minute video highlights, modules and smart tools designed to build professional capability. Principals are expected to engage with Skype, Twitter and/or Facebook as well as other web-based tools (Ministry of Education, 2012). What makes this programme so successful? It uses ICT and eCoaching and eMentoring as key methods for delivering professional development, it involves the protégé in the decision-making and provides opportunities for them to lead their own learning. It also has a clear direction and purpose and participants are clear about the expectations. There is on-going professional development and training for the mentors, and according to the website the project team is committed to continuous improvement through identifying the strengths and areas for improvement in the programme.

MentorNet

MentorNet is a web-based programme that provides professional development for women and others underrepresented in the scientific, technical and engineering field of the workforce through the use of dynamic, technology-supported networks (MentorNet, 2012). The email-based mentoring relationship runs for one academic year and provides a structured eMentoring programme where modules of learning are worked through alongside an experienced coach or mentor (Cravens, 2001). In MentorNet, participants are carefully matched based on their academic and professional interests. MentorNet staff also give training and on-going support, which includes consulting, troubleshooting, and

rematching when necessary (Cravens, 2001). In addition, there is extensive online training for all participants about effective coaching and mentoring and how to interact successfully in an online environment (Kasprisin et al., 2003). Through their research on MentorNet, Kasprisin et al. (2003) identified that the provision of eTraining in a programme is vital for its sustainability as it facilitates the early development of an eMentoring relationship and therefore allows for greater frequency of email exchange. As Clutterbuck and Hussain (2010) have found, the increase of online discussion and dialogue can only enhance the quality of the relationship.

As with the First-time Principals' Programme, MentorNet has a particular purpose. It works to partner undergraduate and graduate females with industry professionals in maths, science and engineering as a way to increase female representations in these professions. It began in 1997 and has been running successfully for more than 15 years. Ensher, Heun, and Blanchard (2003) suggest that MentorNet's well-designed programme allows participants to understand the expectations place upon them as they enter a mentoring relationship. The technical support and eTraining form the foundations of the relationship and the on-going evaluation of the programme allows for personal growth and critical reflection on the programme itself. It seems that MentorNet has sound construction, a clear purpose and that the selection of participants is specific and clear. While there is little research about how the relationships are built, MentorNet's success does suggest that the training provided must be relevant and meaningful for its participants (Ensher, Heun & Blanchard, 2003).

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have endeavoured to give some insight into the potential of eCoaching and eMentoring programmes and how they can promote and sustain professional learning, reflection and action. For a programme to be effective, however, careful consideration is needed to ensure it is authentic and sustainable, especially as the construction of an online programme poses a number of challenges. Hence, we endorse the views of others and propose that eCoaching and eMentoring programmes need a clear purpose where the goals and objectives are determined by the aspirations of the organisation or the individuals involved. Furthermore, the participants need to be carefully selected to ensure that they are committed to the programme and that there is a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of the mentor/coach and protégé. The process of building an authentic online relationship is a difficult task. Participants need to have the skills to take ownership of their own reflective practice, their privacy must be protected, and an online presence must be maintained by all parties. In addition, resources and training need to be readily available and must alleviate some of the potential road-blocks that participants may encounter.

As alluded to earlier, Figure 1 does not include reflection and evaluation but surrounds all of the other elements. We believe that reflection and evaluation should happen throughout the process rather than in isolation. Without personal reflection there is little chance of a shift in practice or constructing new knowledge. In the same way, if the programme itself isn't analysed in terms of its effectiveness, the chance of it becoming sustainable is doubtful.

While the elements discussed in this paper are based on a summary of the existing literature about online coaching and mentoring, we think more research is needed to ascertain those aspects of eCoaching and eMentoring that can hinder as well as cultivate sustainable relationships in an educational context (Bierema & Hill, 2005). It will also be important to determine what situations and which groups of people are most suited to eCoaching and eMentoring programmes. Our firm belief is that a well-constructed programme has the potential to provide powerful professional development when supported by the training, resources and most importantly, people.

The continued evaluation of educational eCoaching and eMentoring programmes is necessary. The changing nature of ICT and educational initiatives means that eCoaching and eMentoring will continue to evolve and change as the needs of an organisation change. As with the First-time Principals' Programme, the future of eCoaching and eMentoring may see a closer bond with traditional modes of coaching and mentoring. Potentially both face-to-face and electronic forms of communication could be used interchangeably as part of a blended programme (Williams & Kim, 2011). Ultimately, however, personal professional development is achieved through an authentic relationship between the participants.

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