

## Book Review



### **Coaching Educational Leadership: Building Leadership Capacity through Partnership**

by Jan Robertson

London: Sage Publications (2008).

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Review by **Rasmus Bentsen**

Coaching Educational Leadership provides a pedagogical awareness of a complex and transformative sector and position: Educational Leadership, through bridging theory and practice within the discipline of coaching. It is a supportive resource detailing how to facilitate learning and is aimed to assist individual leaders in their professional self-reflection about their leadership role. The book presents samples of Robertson's own practical and longitudinal research of leadership and coaching, as well as a theoretical conception on the discipline of coaching.

The book is divided into three sections covering: (i) theory, (ii) practice and (iii) a final note section. First Robertson introduces her motivation, purpose and the significance of her research: Leadership and the discipline of coaching. She then describes the structure of the book and how the discipline of coaching has relevance for a current transformative educational sector. She highlights the importance of dialectical interaction between professionals and how a professional relationship must embed competent sparring and aim towards sparring partnerships.

Before each chapter Robertson provides a chapter overview, with a short précis of what she will cover and at the end of each chapter Robertson concludes with a summary of the main points, which are important key issues and listed as bullet points. The language throughout the book is uncomplicated and very accessible. Robertson manages to write in an easy and descriptive manner, yet produces a constructive account of the discipline of coaching. One does not need to be an advanced coaching specialist in order to comprehend the significance of educational coaching. She introduces the discipline of coaching as a pedagogical tool in which collectiveness and reciprocation facilitates professional growth and the perception of the educational subject, which she believes improves practice. Throughout the book, Robertson uses case studies and real life examples from her own research and thus the reader gets a sense of practice, in which the coaching phenomenon is set. For an educationalist this supports an understanding of the discipline and how a practical tool is able to assist professional growth.

In the first section, covering the theoretical issues, Robertson discusses how the coaching term is relevant in an educational setting, by emphasising the importance of critical reflection and ownership of one's own professional practice. She describes how educational leadership often meets limitations in time, management structure and critical reflection. Robertson describes the discipline of coaching as a tool to enhance a self-evaluative approach of these professional limitations. As such, the personal-professional role in which intervention takes place requires critical examination of the reality in which their leadership is taking place.

Robertson defines the discipline of coaching as a reciprocal learning relationship, where co-constructed knowledge and co-produced goal planning are taking place between two or more people. She defines coaching as a structured conversation that keeps the person being coached focussed on professional issues and moves systematically ahead to achieve goals. Robertson describes coaching as a participatory, collaborative and reflective discourse where the person being coached is able to elicit needs, thoughts and ideas. Through coaching the professional becomes transformative in their professional development rather than merely a reproductive agent of existing social patterns.

The second section begins with a practical approach to the discipline of coaching. This section includes guides and suggestions for the practical employment of coaching. Robertson elucidates how to establish and commence the coaching process and partnership between educational leaders. She introduces important elements of coaching and presents reflective activities. Her practical introduction of the coaching phenomenon is very constructive and useful and she introduces a coaching model which can be transferred to the educational and practical setting in which one operates.

Overall Coaching Educational Leadership is a unique and impressive book that employs a critical approach and an opportunity for not only educational leaders but practitioners to utilise coaching to improve the quality of their professional life through effective communication skills. The skills of leadership, using self-reflection as a tool for developing goals and action plans, and noting the value of current successes in professional lives are all presented clearly. I do recommend the book as it not only introduces the coaching phenomenon, but also provides a precept of theory informing practice and practice informing theory.