

Coaching in Education

Introduction

Very recently, a much loved colleague and friend - and coach - passed away. She had been my Supervisor at one time and we shared a fascination with the creative, unorthodox and looking for fresh connections to increase our understanding of the power of coaching. One of her especial fascinations was a decades-long conviction that coaching and teaching were siblings, co-workers in the world of supporting human development, courage and the release of transformational brilliance. An ex-school teacher, she had worked as a University lecturer for some time and completed some qualitative inquiry into the electricity that is produced when connections are - and must be - made in the relational. What those sparks illuminated for her included helping couples to live well and families to find each other alongside therapists and education professionals. I miss her, as many do, but her legacy is one of family, the family within which exist teachers, coaches, supervisors and others who, together and against bewildering odds, keep on striving together for a better, always learning world.

UCA Cymru were delighted and excited when a Welsh academic and coach, Dr Laura Rees-Davies wrote in *The Conversation* that coaching could help solve the UK's teacher crisis (<https://theconversation.com/how-coaching-could-help-solve-the-uks-teacher-crisis-266112>). Dr Laura's research complemented our experiences which, in short, agreed with her conclusion that, *'With the right investment and commitment, coaching could become more than another buzzword. It could help teachers stay in the classroom. And it could help pupils, schools and communities to thrive.'* It was all there, serious coaching for professional, social and ethical support and for real, palpable thriving of our society so bringing in strategic thoughts on policy making too.

As a small community of coaches and supervisors, UCA Cymru Ambassadors have notched up some time and effort as part of the teaching-coaching relationship. This is why Dr Laura's work was so happily received. Of course we are not unique in that and the messages arrive constantly from all over the coaching world about just how **not** on our own we are. Messages about the extreme challenges that society projects into the complexity that is education and how that plays out for all of us in our work to, in the end, help people improve that society. Not just the challenges for pupils and students, for the welfare and confidence of teachers of all sorts and the dilemmas of policy makers, but existential issues of what and who it is all for anyway. Our work in Wales has included support alongside career development pathways for school teachers, support for further and higher education professionals whose working lives have been relegated to potential redundancy lists and those who, by virtue of who they are, cannot fit with the drive for qualifications and the equation of 'growth' with financial investment over knowledge. We see school pupil attendance rates dropping, university lecturers exhausted by truly huge numbers of students to manage, the incursion of AI into what passes as 'learning', kids wielding weapons in schools and the sharp decline of Wales' heartland, the Arts.

We would love to think that UCA can bring its own electricity into all this and, with that energy, illuminate new relationships, inspiring real help for an incredibly important groups of professionals, our vibrant communities and our future generations (some of the present ones too). In this space it is OK to dream. Dreams that are based on our certainty that the arts and sciences around reflective practice are central to better human life and this means our work as coaches. John Dewey, the American philosopher to whom education was so precious once said:

"We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience."

And through our great skill in the realms of the dialogic; this is what Marshak and Bushe say about the dialogic:

'Coaches and consultants with dialogic mindsets conceive of organisations less as machines or organisms or whatever, and more like ongoing conversations that can reinforce or re-shape implicit perceptions, possibilities, and patterns of behaviour.'

(<https://b-m-institute.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Dialogic-Meaning-Making-in-Action.pdf>)

But first, UCA needs to talk about this family and its impact. UCA's emphasis on discussion has brought about so much clarity in other ways already; in languages, in neurodivergence and in supervision - for starters. Education is such a substantial piece of work, life and human existence for us, let's get talking.

As my dear ex-colleague and our own Dr Laura point out, if we get our picture straight, we'll know what we are seeing, what we understand and so where to begin.

The Substance

This is an evolving record of planning and outcomes from this short series of events. This piece of writing will grow and, it is hoped, record the thinking and changes in thinking that UCA Members bring. Each entry will be dated and unedited, allowing the evolution to be seen. Although this document will be updated by UCA Cymru (who started the series) comments are welcome. The point is to record challenges, further thinking etc making a live script but not a corrected one (the odd typo excluded!)

In early 2027, we intend to invite as many as are interested to attend a scrutiny of this development in the shape of a discussion session, one that may indicate what we do next, who does it and how.

Alongside this, on the UCA Website is a place where useful reference documents can be placed and, eventually cross-referenced. There is much to draw on in so many places - not all academic, some opinion pieces, some articles and perhaps there may be visuals. Members are very welcome to submit items for inclusion, just send them to info@universalcoachingalliance.org

So, welcome all who come here and know you are part of something important.

The First Event

The first event is a ninety-minute Talking Space on 10th September 2026, starting at 3.30pm.

You can register [here](#) (if you haven't already)

Like all UCA Talking Spaces, this is a lightly facilitated time with no agenda but a guiding theme. It is and must be kept a safe space without prejudice, judgement or any sense of governing thinking. All are welcome and all are equal in the gifts they bring and the questions they give each other. Curiosity is celebrated. The point is to talk, to enter truly into the dialogic.*

Written before the event this piece is in the realm of suggestion and invitation. The premise is that those who attend will have much more to share than ninety minutes allows but some sense of what we have done, found out, are interested in, want to think about and evolve is possible. The guiding question for this space is, therefore:

What is Coaching in Education as we see it, understand it and experience it through our diverse and unique individuality? What then is generated from a shared discussion?

So, what do we, as a community, understand by, 'Coaching in Education'? The early hints are that this may be formed from a multiplicity of engagements and drivers, motivations and passions and so sharing with each other will be fascinating. As we stand together on that balcony looking down at the complexity below this view may resolve into stories.

Stories of coaching Education Professionals as part of career development programmes and all that says about the systems, the career structures, the morale, the dedication, the sheer brilliance of those who educate but also about exactly where and how coaching is deemed to fit in all that.

Stories of the Education professions and their attrition rates, their severely tested levels of wellbeing and the weights they carry for so much and many besides the work they signed up to do in the first place. Our guest (on the panel on October 8th), Dr Laura Rees-Davies of Cardiff Metropolitan University has researched this area and is so very interesting about how coaching can really help retain and motivate school teachers.

Stories of educating people in specialist areas and disciplines; in public services, in the arts, in the legal profession etc and what coaching's relationship with all that is. Is the coaching approach, methodology and philosophical foundation ever different - if so how?.

Stories about specialist coaching for specialist support in the glorious diversity of us all - coach and client. I hear of so many worlds: neurodivergent; cultural and linguistic identities; trauma and more. What are we learning and from whom is that learning coming? We are blessed to have our fellow UCA Member, Saleh Uddin and his insights as part of the panel in October and he is joining us for some to the talking spaces too.

Stories of the P/politics behind Education. Why is our society so keen on education and why is it always struggling to deliver it well? When has our work as coaches (maybe some have broader consultant experience) meant we find ourselves a fly on the wall and needing to make sense of what we see, but cannot speak of (the fly's only public response is a buzz...)?

Stories about research, formal and informal, qualitative and quantitative, forgotten and not yet proposed. What studies have we done, what ideas flow from those studies? How is this woven into a bigger fabric?

Stories about what good work we can design together and how we explain that to another Profession so that Coaching in Education can become a growing, vibrant part of delivering for a greater good - what tells us we have reached somewhere greater and what says our reach has increased good? Two teachers (one a Head Teacher) from Wales will be with us at the panel event.

There will be much more but that is why the next thing to do is have a Talking Space.

So what?

Any results must be completely dependent on the talk that has not yet happened at the time of writing. No-one can be in the future and prophecy is not a coaching skill! However, potentially nothing ethical and useful is proscribed so let's imagine that we might suggest to one another:

- That we share reading.
- That we invite someone interesting to a next event.
- That we spot a possible gap in underpinning work and want to share a search to fill it.
- That we have current work we need support with.
- That we have unprocessed thinking and experience to process and how others can help.
- That we just want to go away to think and reflect.
- That we have something urgent and need to work with someone right now on it.

Perhaps. Perhaps not. We need to get going.

To end

No one can build you the bridge on which you, and only you, must cross the river of life. There may be countless trails and bridges and demigods who would gladly carry you across; but only at the price of pawning and forgoing yourself. There is one path in the world that none can walk but you. Where does it lead? Don't ask, walk!

(Friederich Nietzsche)

Mary Hughes
UCA Cymru August 2026

* Makoto Nagaishi (drawing on Marshak and Bushe in *The Journal of Behavioural Science* 2024. Vol. 60(4) 701-720 sagepub.com/journals-permissions) says dialogic key beliefs include:

- Reality as a socially constructed process
- Social networks as meaning-making
- What people are saying is possible
- Change is a bottom-up and adaptive process
- Change processes are inherently complex and adaptive, and no one knows the correct answer in advance. Thus the answer is to use emergence and generative change processes.