



[Home](#) » [Education Canada](#) » [Off the Menu: Gulf Islands' Leadership "Special"](#)

[RSS Feed](#)

**Education** **Current Issue**  
 Summer 2011  
 Volume 51 Issue 3

[Table of Contents](#)

[End Notes](#)

[Features](#)

[To The Editor](#)

[Notre Monde Aujourd'hui](#)

[From The Editor](#)

[Promising Practices](#)

[At Issue](#)

[Book Review](#)



## Off the Menu: Gulf Islands' Leadership "Special"

[Subscribe](#)

[Sign Up to Bulletin](#)

[Issue Archive](#)



Commandité par : **Education**

From August 2009 to January 2010, fourteen educational leaders in B.C.'s School district #64 chose to participate in an individualized educational leadership coaching initiative. These participants were coached to develop and focus on specific goals and objectives of their own choosing, often related to school goals or, in some cases, personal development goals. In addition, participants identified their own critical leadership and team behaviours, which were then used to help realize their goals. Overall, they noted that the three aspects of coaching that made the biggest difference were enhancing their communication skills, discussing issues with a supportive outside person, and affirming their professional efforts.

### Got a query?

[FAQs](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Editorial Guidelines](#)

[Editorial Board](#)

[Call For Authors](#)

[Advertising Enquiries](#)

*Debbie Magnusson: Our first coaching session took place on a picnic bench across the road from the School Board Office. I was coaching Jeff Hopkins, Superintendent for the Gulf Islands School District. A lively conversation in this quiet setting marked the beginning of 12 coaching sessions through the fall of 2008. We invited Lizzy Rowe to join us in developing a proposal for a system-wide coaching initiative that is currently in Phase 2.*

From August 2009 to January 2010, all educational leaders (principals, vice-principals, and directors) in School District #64 were invited to

### Article tags

[accountability](#)  
[policymakers](#)  
[school boards](#)  
[teacher education](#)  
[transformation](#)

### Related articles

### [Become a Coach](#)

Become Internationally Accredited. Calgary Course Commences Soon!  
[www.workplacecoaching.com](http://www.workplacecoaching.com)

### [Victoria Coupons](#)

1 ridiculously huge coupon a day. It's like doing Victoria @ 90% off!  
[www.Groupon.com/Victoria](http://www.Groupon.com/Victoria)

### [Coaching & Mentoring](#)

Supervisor training materials to teach Coaching & Mentoring skills.  
[CorporateTrainingMaterials.co](http://CorporateTrainingMaterials.co)

### [Coaching made me broke](#)

5 Critical Questions to ask before you start your own coach practice.  
[www.TrainingtoBeALifeCoach.](http://www.TrainingtoBeALifeCoach.)

### [Executive Coaching](#)

Train to be an Executive Coach. ICF Certified Courses. Learn Online  
[RoyalRoads.ca/ExecutiveCoac](http://RoyalRoads.ca/ExecutiveCoac)

AdChoices 

participate in an educational leadership coaching initiative. Fourteen chose to engage with a coach for ten individual sessions. These participants were coached to develop and focus on specific goals and objectives of their own choosing, often related to school goals or, in some cases, personal development goals. In addition, participants identified their own critical leadership and team behaviours, which were then used to help realize the goals.

For educational leaders, the opportunity to participate in the coaching process – where individualized professional development occurs – is a unique event, often available only to corporate executives.

We define leadership coaching as the art of enabling leaders to identify and achieve what matters most for them in their professional lives. Coaching is *not* a casual conversation, therapy, or consultation with an expert who provides answers. A coach brings her presence, deep listening skills, powerful questions, and relevant tools and resources to support the individuals and challenge them to clarify and realize their goals.

### **Coaching is *not* a casual conversation, therapy, or consultation with an expert who provides answers.**

After consultation with the coaches, the Superintendent set the following goals for the system-wide coaching initiative:

1. To provide educational leaders with an individualized coaching experience.
2. To develop the leadership capacity of educational leaders through setting and achieving their educational goals.
3. To assist educational leaders to become more aligned as a team.
4. To further the district's initiative of a constructivist approach to learning.

Although one-on-one coaching sessions were the foundation of the initiative, all participants also met with the Superintendent and their coaches to review their coaching goals as a strategy for building district-wide alignment. This provided one more avenue for the Superintendent to be aware of professional growth objectives of the system's educational leaders and to shed light on where to lend his support. In addition, the entire cohort met once in a World Café format to discuss their coaching experiences, and the two coaches met with the Superintendent on a monthly basis to reflect on the initiative's progress, report on common themes, and sustain the Superintendent's support of district leaders.

*Lizzy Rowe: The organizational strategies we used in addition to one-on-one coaching provided a wonderful opportunity to accelerate the achievement of School District goals. They gave the necessary time and framework for team development and goal acquisition.*

Before beginning Phase I, all fourteen participants agreed to provide feedback via an online survey at two time points: prior to their first coaching session and after their last coaching session. Having external evaluator Denise Buote (of Arbor Educational and Clinical Consulting) compile the data was critical for determining the value of the initiative. Almost all participants in the coaching responded positively to the experience. Specifically they noted the following key benefits:

- Increased level of confidence in their skills
- Formulated goals and actions
- Enhanced clarity of work priorities
- Increased self-reflection
- Increased awareness of communication
- A greater sense of support

[Teaching in a Participatory Digital World](#)

[The Big Ideas Behind Whole System Reform](#)

[Research, Practice and Policy](#)

[Exploring Ethical Leadership: A Superintendents' Professional Learning Project](#)

[Formative Assessment: Bridging the Research - Practice Divide](#)

---

### About the author(s)

#### Debbie Magnusson

Debbie Magnusson started ALLIES - Coaching, Counselling & Consulting in 1989. She had a 34-year teaching career in the U.S. and Canada. Coaching educational leaders is an outcome of her interest in promoting life-long learning and development. [magnussonallies@shaw.ca](mailto:magnussonallies@shaw.ca)

#### Jeff Hopkins

Jeff Hopkins is Superintendent of British Columbia's Gulf Islands School District 64. As teacher, counsellor, businessperson, Ministry of Education Safe School Coordinator, school-based administrator, and Superintendent, he has developed many specialized programs. He is currently focusing on personalized learning. [jhopkins@sd64.bc.ca](mailto:jhopkins@sd64.bc.ca)

---

### Contact us

If you want to contact the editor of Education Canada, or the author of this piece, [click here](#).

---

In turn, these benefits impacted their professional lives by increasing their overall engagement in professional development, helping them focus on topics of interest, increasing reflective practice, and providing them with new skills.

Overall, they noted that the three aspects of coaching that made the biggest difference were enhancing their communication skills, discussing issues with a supportive outside person, and affirming their professional efforts. From their interactions with their coaches, participants acquired new or enhanced communication skills that they were implementing with their staff, such as asking questions in a more effective manner, setting goals, and using more strategic thinking. In addition to changes in interaction style, individuals also noted that they were more focused on increased accountability, management and organizational skill development, and actively identifying areas for professional growth.

A key component of the success of this initiative was the relationship of the educational leaders with their coaches. Participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the relationship, the coach's ability to adapt to changing needs, and the guidance offered by the coach. All participants rated the overall coaching experience as "very good" or "excellent". (The full evaluative report is available at

[www.sd64.bc.ca/dist\\_downloads/lci-eval.pdf](http://www.sd64.bc.ca/dist_downloads/lci-eval.pdf))

*Debbie Magnusson: It's both a privilege and a pleasure to do this work. I love talking with people and, being a retired teacher, I care deeply about education. This work helps me stay involved by helping the educational leaders. Sometimes I am simply a sounding-board, but I also give support for developing communication skills and setting goals for growth and change within their schools.*

Everyone involved agrees that the Superintendent must be the first client in any district-wide initiative, because his or her involvement leads to shared experience, strong sponsorship, and modelling professional growth as a leader. In addition, documenting the success of Phase I gave the district's trustees a clear signal that their financial investment in Administrative Professional Development was well spent. Now in Phase II, five additional clients have been added to the initiative. Options to further personalize the coaching now include the client determining the number of sessions (up to 10), the frequency of sessions, and the duration over which they occur. Phase II clients have contracted to develop a feedback survey to learn how their "stakeholders" view their goal achievement, a strategy that proves to augment the leaders' self-reflection.

**It is very easy to be caught in your own little world sometimes...it can be a bit frightening when you don't know if you have reflected on something in every way, if you have measured all the potential for unintended consequences.**

*Jeff Hopkins: The coaching initiative went beyond my expectations for the following reasons. I was amazed at the depth at which people were willing to work in such a new initiative. The clients were more open than I thought they might be at first, contributing to a culture of overt change. Clients made personal shifts. Much of what they worked on had to do with plugging into a bigger, district-wide picture, not just their own school or setting. I was 100 percent impressed with the choices people made about what to work on. Sometimes I would hear from teachers about something happening in the schools that told me clients must be sharing their coaching goals with their staff.*

Other districts in B.C. have employed coaches to work with individual principals in their district, but we are unaware of any other district that has structured a coaching experience that synergistically impacts the multi-levels that influence educational growth and change.

In an attempt to give a glimpse into the coaching experience from both angles, we share the following exchange.

**JH: Why did you propose to coach a cohort of people in school and district leadership positions?**

DM: It's funny, because I didn't originally think of coaching a cohort; I thought of just coaching you as the Superintendent because I'm aware that the person who is overseeing an organization really needs to understand what the coaching experience is. I felt that I could be of service to someone who not only had to manage an administrative team, but had to interact with the parents, the community, and the students. You work with a very broad base of people.

**DM: Even before this district initiative, you already were thinking about being coached; it was something that was already in your mind. Looking back, can you describe how your leadership was altered by that coaching experience?**

JH: I think it gave me a great deal, including a place to think outside of my own head, which I didn't realize I needed and didn't have a way of doing by myself. So, it was like reflecting and having someone help me unpack some of that, helping me ask myself some questions that I might not have asked otherwise. It is very easy to be caught in your own little world sometimes. When you are making decisions that affect so many people, it can be a bit frightening when you don't know if you have reflected on something in every way, if you have measured all the potential for unintended consequences. I think because of the way you coach, some of your hard "cognitive dissonance" kinds of questions not only helped me reframe things, but also modeled for me the way I might ask questions of other people. So there is sort of a domino affect here as well.

**DM: Can you remember a question I'd asked?**

JH: Well, while I might often ask myself, "How would an action you're planning to implement look from my point of view?" you would ask, "What would person X think if you did this?" Those questions are powerful and simple. After you've tried thinking that way, you wonder why you haven't always thought that way.

**DM: Do you think that opportunity for your own personal reflection came about because there is an external person asking questions?**

JH: That's an interesting question. Why can't people engage in that kind of reflection anyway without the external person? But it's important that the coach is external to the changing organization so that the leader feels like he or she can talk to a person who is not being swept along in the changes as well. A coach is almost as close as you can get to an objective observer, asking questions that can sort of snap you out of your context every once in a while, and look at things from someone else's point of view – allowing you to get your bearings before you step back into your own context again.

**JH: Were you at all surprised at how easy it was for people to allow you to coach them?**

DM: I think there were some people who were nervous at the beginning. You never

know what will happen when you enter a new relationship with someone; especially

when you've known them in a different context. Even if they are people we already know while in a previous role, it can take some time. But forming those relationships as quickly as we did was a positive experience. I felt trusted.

**DM: You were very transparent. You spoke about being coached to the principals and vice-principals right at the beginning of our coaching sessions. You would bring things to the team meetings and talk about what you were working on in your coaching.**

JH: I wanted people to know about my own coaching, so they would see that I

viewed it as a good thing to do and not something you do only when you are in trouble

or when something is going wrong. And then, I could let people know that some of my actions and ideas came from my coaching conversations.

**JH: How significant was it that we didn't set the coaching goals for others – that they weren't subject to approval or even looked at individually, but rather in a thematic, general way?**

DM: To establish a trusting relationship, it's up to the coach and the individual client to set the goals. In fairness to boards or districts that might be footing the bill, I think there could be a place to set an overarching goal. That might be disruptive; I don't know. But I think our decision was a good one. We told people up front that if we saw a goal that was common to three or more people, we would let you know what it was, but not who the goal-setters were.

**JH: Did you find yourself adapting your coaching in any way as people took on more challenging pieces and as your relationships grew?**

DM: Absolutely. We started with a pretty clear format of setting goals in advance and working toward those goals, but much of it ended up being based on individual need. For one person, every session would flow from just writing down what was at the top of his thinking list. It had nothing to do with long-term goals. It was always in the moment. And I think that was the best support I could have offered that person. So letting go and just being with the clients where they need support really turned out to be the right thing. Leadership is really the common thread, regardless of what size or type of school district, or even what kind of business you are leading.

**DM: How do you feel now, about the progress you've made – both personally and as a system?**

JH: You probably remember that personalized yet systemized learning was the primary goal I set at my first coaching session. I think this coaching experience has given the educational leaders in our district an experiential replica of this goal. They have been free to progress in directions that suit them individually – so the school and staff each leads, yet each is able to feel connections to the entire organization and its various parts.

***EN BREF - D'août 2009 à janvier 2010, quatorze chefs de file en éducation du School district #64 de la Colombie-Britannique ont participé à une initiative d'encadrement individualisé du leadership en éducation. Ces pédagogues ont été conseillés en vue d'élaborer***

*et de privilégier des buts et objectifs précis de leur choix touchant souvent leurs objectifs scolaires et, parfois, leurs objectifs de développement personnel. Ils ont également dégagé leurs propres comportements critiques de leadership et d'équipe, qui ont ensuite contribué à atteindre leurs objectifs. Dans l'ensemble, il a été noté que les trois aspects d'encadrement les plus utiles ont concerné l'amélioration des compétences en communication, la discussion de problèmes avec une personne extérieure avertie et l'affirmation de leurs efforts professionnels.*

[Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments



## new ways of thinking and doing education

### Transforming Education

---

[A Case for Transformation](#)

[What Does Transformation Look Like?](#)

[What Others are Saying about Transformation](#)

### Programs & Initiatives

---

[Engaging Teaching](#)

[What Did You Do In School Today?](#)

[Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future](#)

### Research & Publications

---

[Education Canada](#)

[Other](#)

[Policy Papers](#)

[Reports / Articles](#)

### Get Involved

---

[Become a Member](#)

[Donate](#)

[Follow Our Blog](#)

[Sign Up for Bulletin eNewsletter](#)

[Subscribe to Education Canada](#)

[Tell Us About Your Project](#)

[Tell Us What You Think](#)

### Resources

---

[Media Centre](#)

[FAQs](#)

[School Calendar](#)

[KI-ES-KI Handbook](#)

### Contact Us

---

Canadian Education Association  
119 Spadina Avenue, Suite 705  
Toronto, ON, M5V 2L1

**Tel:** 416-591-6300

**Fax:** 416-591-5345

**Toll Free:** 1-866-803-9549

**Email:** [info@cea-ace.ca](mailto:info@cea-ace.ca)

### Follow Us

---

### Share

---



We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Magazine Fund (CMF) of the Department of Canadian Heritage towards our project costs.