

A Teachers' Coaching Approach to Sustainable Professional Development

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Abstract

The value of coaching teachers by professional coaches in their school context is recognized to provide them with sustainable professional development (SPD). However, little is known about the coaching process promoting SPD and the variables that can explain its quality. Three objectives were pursued: 1) to describe the quality of the coaching process; 2) to determine the characteristics of the coach, and 3) to identify the characteristics of the school context that can explain quality to promote SPD. An Embedded Multiple-Case Study Design was conducted at two different schools. Results describe that the quality of the coaching process was clear in its orientation to precise goals, its complexity, and its dynamism. The coaches' characteristics that can explain the quality of the coaching process to promote SPD are their perceptions of the context and their conceptions. The most important characteristic of the context that can reveal the quality of coaching enacted is the leadership of the school principal and the teachers' culture of collaboration.

Keywords: Coaching teachers, leadership, qualitative data analysis, self-regulated learning, teachers' sustainable professional development.

Introduction

One of the keys to ensuring changes in formal education is teachers' professional development (Jermolajeva & Trusina, 2022). To advance their skills, teachers need support (Salite et al., 2023) that can be provided by professional coaches who are not supervisors. This situated education can promote sustainability because it is relevant to the life experiences of learners (Bedford, 2022). The value of coaching teachers by

professional coaches in their school context is recognized to provide them with sustainable professional development (SPD). Coached teachers adopted a role conception more centered on supporting the students' learning process (Teemant, 2014) and meeting students' needs (Stephens et al., 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Their practices have improved compared to non-coached teachers (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Sailors & Price, 2015; Stephens et al., 2011; Teemant et al., 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Some maintained changes over time even after coaching was finished (Sutherland et al., 2015; Teemant, 2014). Their students' outcomes are better in literacy in general (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Matsumura et al., 2010) and specifically in reading (Sailors & Price, 2015; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011).

However, little is known about the coaching process promoting SPD and the variables that can explain its quality. Research on coaching has considered only the "coaching practices" without consideration of the complex, dynamic, precise, and oriented quality of this process. Most of this research has focused on studying the effects of coaching practices on teachers (e.g., Bean et al., 2010; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Research that has examined the effect of some contextual characteristics on coaching practices has focused more on the organizational context (Camburn et al., 2008; Mangin, 2009). The research of Lowenhaupt et al. (2013) confirms that the characteristics of the school context affect coaching practices. However, this research focused only on one characteristic of the school context, which is the teachers' culture of collaboration. The research of Atteberry and Bryk (2011), confirms that both the characteristics of the school context and the coach affect coaching practices. Yet, this research focused only on the frequency (quantity) of coaching practices and not on their quality. Thus, we put forward the following question: *Which characteristics of the coach and the school context can explain the quality of the teachers' coaching process promoting sustainable professional development?*

Conceptual Framework

To promote teachers' SPD, the coaching process should support their characteristics (e.g., agency, self-efficacy) and their learning and teaching process. Therefore, the orientation of coaching should be clear in the mind of the coach. Yet, the definitions of coaching that exist in literature do not emphasize the importance of goals. In the absence of a satisfying definition, we apply models of the concept of teachers' professional development (Butler et al., 2015) and self-regulated learning (e.g., Cartier & Butler, 2016; Cartier, 2007, 2008; Zimmerman, 1989) to our concept. They all agree that there is a complex, iterative, and dynamic process influenced by interactions between personal and contextual factors. Coaching teachers in their school context promoting SPD is, thus, a complex and dynamic process of thoughts and practices oriented towards the achievement of precise goals, supporting the teachers' learning and teaching process, and mutually influenced by the characteristics of the coach and the school context. This definition highlights three concepts: the coaching process, the characteristics of the coach, and the characteristics of the school context.

Coaching Process

The coaching process consists of the coach's five phases (identification, planning, enacting, monitoring, and adjusting) of thoughts and practices – adopted from the

model by Butler et al. (2015) – that can be qualified by four criteria: orientation, precision, complexity, and dynamism. The coaching goal identification phase occurs when the coach identifies targets to be achieved. According to Wolters et al. (1996), “goals represent the very specific purposes that individuals are striving for in a specific setting” (p. 212). They may be based on identified problems or stated expectations (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Research has documented how coaches value identifying attainable goals (Duchesne & Gagnon, 2014), targeting teachers’ learning (Cartier et al., 2014), and changing teachers’ practices (Cartier et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2008). The planning phase takes place when the coach plans the practices to be taken and their order of execution. Research has documented that the coaches’ planning focuses mainly on coaching practices (Cartier, 2009) and professional development situations (Bean et al., 2010). The enacting phase takes place during the execution of coaching practices. Research has documented that the practices enacted are wide-ranging: e.g., observation, modeling of teaching practice, feedback from teacher observation, etc. (Bean et al., 2010; Chien, 2013; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Duchesne & Gagnon, 2014; Lowenhaupt et al., 2013; Scott et al., 2012). The monitoring phase takes place at the same time as the enacting phase and serves to analytically observe the practices enacted and the results achieved. Monitoring allows “generating internal feedback about the success of their efforts” (Butler, 1998, p. 682). The adjusting phase occurs when the coach decides to modify the goals originally set and the coaching practices enacted after analyzing the results. The research by Cartier et al. (2014) showed that the quality of monitoring and adjusting varied across contexts.

The orientation of the coaching process can be seen first in the coherence of the goal with the identified problem or the desired ideal situation and then in the coherence of planning, enacting, monitoring, and adjusting practices. The precision can be evidenced in the formulation of clear and attainable goals in the short or medium term. This definition is present in the work of Bandura (1991), Butler and Schnellert (2012), and Cartier et al. (2010). The complexity can be seen in the variety of goals pursued and practices, the prioritization of goals into sub-goals, the number of targeted components related to the teacher (e.g., the number of phases of the teaching process), the variety of resources mobilized, and the number of goals whose achievement is monitored. According to Bandura (1991), for achievement to occur, goals must be prioritized as short-term goals not only to serve broader goals, but they must be meaningful and demanding to generate effort. The dynamism is the presence of various cycles of action in the same situation and in the continuity or change that can exist between different situations (Cartier & Butler, 2016).

Characteristics of the Coach

The characteristics of the coaches (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010) are their previous training and experiences, knowledge, conceptions (of coaching, professional development, teaching and learning, the role of the coach, and the role of the school principal), and their perceptions of themselves (as a coach, their coaching, their self-agency, their self-efficacy) and their perceptions of the school context (teachers, the education program, the proposed professional development situation, and the principal's leadership). The distinction between conception and perception depends on the focus. While the conception is more related to the beliefs and theories that the person adopts (Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Loiola & Tardif, 2001), the perception is about the person's actual environment (Legendre, 2005). For example, coaches believe that teachers should (conception of teaching) support the student

learning process while they think that teachers (perception of teacher's teaching) provide little support to the student's learning process.

Research findings on the characteristics of the coaches have shown that they have a variety of knowledge (Lessard, 2008; Verdy, 2005), there is a variety of role perceptions (Camburn et al., 2008; Cartier & Belanger, 2012; Hathaway et al., 2015; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Walpole & Blamey, 2008), and their perception of self-efficacy originates from their prior experiences, verbal persuasion in the form of encouragement from superiors and coached teachers, and vicarious experiences through observation of other coaches deemed "effective" (Duchesne & Gagnon, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Regarding their perception of the context, some coaches have positive perceptions of teachers' agency (Butler et al., 2015), and a perception of the school principal's leadership that varies from positive (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010) to not always positive (Hathaway et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2012).

School Context Characteristics

School context characteristics (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Butler et al., 2015) bring together the characteristics of the school principal and the collective characteristics of the coached teachers. The characteristics of the school principal are mechanisms adopted in managing professional development activities and supervising teachers' work, the school principal's leadership, their conceptions (of teacher professional development, the school principal's role, the role of the coach), their self-perceptions (of self-agency and self-efficacy), and their perception of teachers (their teaching and collective self-efficacy), and their perception of the coach, and the proposed professional development situation. The teachers' collective characteristics are the teachers' culture of collaboration, professional development, and change, their conceptions (of professional development, of the school principal's and the coach's role in their professional development), their self-perceptions (their collective agency, their collective efficacy as a team), their perception of the school principal's leadership, the proposed professional development situation, and their perception of the coach.

Research findings on school context characteristics identify the important role of the school principal's leadership in coaching implementation (Butler et al., 2015; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Mangin, 2007; Steiner & Kowal, 2007; Yirci et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2008), the presence of varied perceptions of the role of the coach (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Walpole & Blamey, 2008), and a positive teachers' perception of the value of coaching (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Bean et al., 2010; Butler et al., 2004; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Scott et al., 2012; Teemant, 2014). In some cases, the negative perception of the value of coaching may manifest itself in the rejection of targeted practices (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012).

Research Objectives and Method

Based on the conceptual framework of the study, three research objectives were pursued: 1) to describe the quality of the coaching process; 2) to determine the characteristics of the coach, and 3) to identify the characteristics of the school context that can explain the quality of promoting SPD. To achieve these objectives, a case study design (Butler, 2011; Butler & Cartier, 2018; Cartier & Butler, 2016; Yin, 2003; 2014) and, more specifically, the Embedded Multiple-Case Study Design was used. Yin (1984) defines the case study as "an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon

and context are not evident; and multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984, p. 23). An ethics certificate was obtained from the multi-faculty research ethics board of the University of Montreal and a commitment to abide by the three guiding principles of research ethics involving humans was made (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2014).

Participants (all females) were recruited using the reasoned choice method. It consists of recruiting participants based on pre-established criteria (Fortin, 2010). The coaches in the two cases under study are elementary French coaches at the same school board in Quebec and they have Bachelor's degrees in preschool and elementary education and have experience in teaching and coaching. Sophie, the coach in the first case, has a Master's degree in language teaching. Joëlle, the coach in the second case, has a graduate microprogram on academic achievement. At the school "Case 1", one school principal, 6 first (N=2), second (N=2), and third (N=2) grade elementary teachers, and one remedial teacher (N=1) participated in the study. The study took place over five months from February to June 2017 with a total of four coaching meetings. At the school "Case 2", one school principal, and five teachers of fifth (N=2) and sixth (N=3) elementary school grades participated in the study. The study took place over three months from April to June 2017 with a single coaching meeting.

Qualitative data were collected by interviews, audio taping, and observation. As Briede and Drelinga (2023) note, qualitative data are essential to understanding the complexity of sustainability. The questions in the interviews conducted were varied and targeted to document the characteristics of the coach, the coaching process (before, and after each coaching meeting), and the characteristics of the school context. Based on Van Der Maren's (1996) classification, the information obtained from the "pre-" and "post-" interviews provides provoked data as both participants were put in a reflective situation on goal identification and planning (for the "pre-" interview) and monitoring and adjusting (for the "post-" interview).

The data collected were first analyzed using QDA-Miner qualitative data analysis software based on an initial coding grid developed from the conceptual framework of the study. Next, the coaching process codebook was reorganized into three emergent categories: teacher learning process, teacher teaching process, teacher characteristics, and inquiring when the coders confirmed that the goals, thoughts, and practices follow a line of consistency and thus, they were divided according to their focus. This coding process led to an update of the initial coding grid (e.g., excerpts coded as "ask a question" were divided according to the content of the question using the codes: "ask a question about the content of the documents" and "ask a question about the practice"). To ensure the rigor of this analysis, the quotes from one meeting were validated with the coach, and inter-judge agreements between two coders were conducted until an 80 % agreement was reached.

To achieve the first research objective, the alignment of each goal with the identified problem or the desired ideal situation, and the alignment of the planning, enacting, monitoring, and adjusting to this goal were analyzed using a grid. The column "teacher-related components" was added to analyze the complexity by identifying the number of components that each goal and phase of the process seemed to aim at. The analysis of the dynamism of the coaching process was carried out by observing the pursuit of goals through the meetings, their modification or abandonment along the way, and the emergence of new goals. The precision of the coaching process was

verified in the clarity of the formulation of the goals and their achievability in the short or medium term.

To achieve the second and the third research objectives, the results of the coaching process were described first. Then, using matrices presenting the phases of the coaching process in the ordinate and the characteristics in the abscissa, the analysis included examining whether there was coherence between each characteristic targeted by the analysis and the phases of the coaching process and then describing it. This method, inspired by Miles and Huberman (1994), facilitates the analysis of the relationship between several components, as is the case in this research.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research showed that the quality of the coaching process could only partially promote teachers' SPD. Many characteristics of the coach and the school context can explain this quality.

The Quality of the Coaching Process to Promote Teachers' SPD

The coaching process documented was oriented to precise goals, and was quite complex and dynamic, but was not always promoting teachers' SPD.

The Orientation and Precision of the Coaching Process

The coaching process of the two coaches was oriented towards the achievement of specific and almost precise goals, and all the practices identified were consistent with at least one goal. For example, when Sophie identified the goal of "teachers having a better understanding of assessment", she planned, enacted, and monitored practices and resources (texts and material) on assessment. The role that goals play in guiding the coaching process of the coach confirms the contribution of the conceptual framework adopted. As Butler (2005) mentioned, goals play a central role in self-regulatory models of learning given that the entire process is oriented toward achieving specific goals. According to Cosnefroy (2009), "[the] goal focuses attention on activities that are relevant to the achievement of the set goals and, as a result, allows one to distinguish priority behaviors from parasitic behaviors by which one should not be distracted" (Cosnefroy, 2009, p. 99). However, teachers' SPD was not explicitly targeted. This can affect the quality of their teaching which can affect their students' learning. As attested by Timoštšuk and Lumi (2022), primary teachers have a significant role to play in their pupils' learning and understanding of sustainability.

The Complexity of the Coaching Process

The coaching observed was a complex process with varied targets, pursuing various goals, and mobilizing several practices and resources. In both cases, the targets were to support the learning process, the teaching process, and the characteristics of the teachers and, in the first case only, to learn about the teachers' practices; thus, forming four coaching cycles with different targets occurring at the same time. This complexity of coaching may explain why, as Cornett and Knight (2009) noted, many education systems recruit a professional to take on this task. The professional spends the majority of his or her time in this role to better support teachers' professional development and therefore offer better support to students' learning (Knight, 2009).

The presence of coaching cycles that are distinctly oriented to the teachers' learning and teaching processes supports the conceptual framework of the study. This shows the quality of coaching given since teachers' learning is enhanced when it is connected to their practice (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). This result is in line with the research by Cartier et al. (2014) stating that the coaches have the goal of coaching teachers in the appropriation and implementation of practices. While past research (e.g., Bean et al., 2010) has described the complexity of coaching as general practice (e.g., conducting workshops), this research suggests more specific practices (e.g., asking questions about the practice; explaining the content of a document). It is not enough to target teachers' learning and teaching, it must be done through the lens of a complex process of thoughts and actions (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). The results show a lack of systematic support for all phases of teachers' learning and teaching processes. The coaching of the two coaches seems to support especially the enaction of learning strategies such as reading a document, listening to explanations, asking questions, etc. The absence of support for planning learning before reading, for example, risks diminishing their cognitive engagement and, thus, learning little. Regarding the teaching process, the coaching practices of the two coaches can support mainly the monitoring and the adjustment of teaching practices since the teachers presented their practices and were led to reflect on these practices to decide on adjustments. More quality support would have focused on identifying goals, planning, and enacting practices. As Butler et al. (2013) mention, it is important to consider all phases of the teacher learning and teaching process for meaningful professional development to occur. According to Butler (2005), particular importance must be given to goals as they play a primary role in the quality of one's engagement in the learning and teaching process. The finding on the lack of support for goal identification is in line with the research findings by Butler and Schnellert (2012) who found that teachers in their research needed more support in identifying goals and aligning learning and teaching strategies to those goals. An explicit goal of SPD can be discussed.

The two other targets (learning about the teachers' practices, and supporting the characteristics of the teachers) reveal the presence of two new cycles of thought and action that have not been considered in the reference model. One cycle of coaching found only in the first case can be considered a personal goal and can be explained by the coaches' working conditions. As Stephens et al. (2011) note, the coaches had only one day of availability per school for about 25 teachers each, which did not allow them to coach everyone. This leads us to hypothesize that the coaches engage in coaching not only to support teachers but also for goals that will serve them and their work (in this case, learning about teachers allows her to adapt her coaching as she said). Furthermore, the absence of avoidance goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000) such as putting in little effort or avoiding teachers may explain the high level of engagement of both coaches in their coaching.

The other cycle of coaching focuses on teacher characteristics and appears to target teachers' engagement in coaching. Coaches encounter resistance from teachers (Draelants, 2007) and a culture of isolation exists in some schools (Savoie-Zajc et al., 2011). In both cases, the coach targeted, either through goals or practices, teachers' perceptions of self-agency, self-efficacy, the perceived professional development situation, and the role of the coach, teachers' conceptions, and teachers' culture of collaboration (only in the first case). These goals can promote SPD because they can help them be more autonomous in the future. Theoretically, conceptions have been considered before, but often as part of the learning process. This research has found

that the learning process is linked to specific knowledge (e.g., learning about assessment) while at the same time, the coach supports the teachers' conception of learning to convince them of the importance of the intended learning. This suggests that changing conceptions is a level higher than learning about the intended subject. Targeting teachers' conceptions can promote their SPD because they are their theoretical reference in action. A greater variety of practices was observed linked to this target, which reminds the research findings of Lowenhaupt et al. (2013) who found that coaches used peripheral relational practices to circumvent teacher resistance. Similar findings about support for certain teacher characteristics have been found in other studies. Duchesne and Gagnon (2014) observed also that coaches supported teachers' perception of self-agency by listening to teachers. Lowenhaupt et al. (2013) documented how coaches supported teachers' perception of the coach's role by showing their availability. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) found also that they supported teachers' perception of self-efficacy by encouraging them to take risks and try new teaching practices. Targeting perceived self-agency and self-efficacy is a testament to the quality of coaching that occurs as individuals' engagement in change initiatives depends on these perceptions (Butler et al., 2015). The presence of a collective characteristic (professional development culture) also attests to the quality of coaching offered as teachers embracing this culture become active agents who play an important role in developing strategies for the development of their school (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011).

The complexity of the coaching process is also seen in the prioritization of goals into sub-goals. A lack of prioritization of goals related to the teacher's learning process in both cases was found. This result can be explained by the fact that schools' expectations of the coach focus primarily on supporting practice (Duchesne & Gagnon, 2014). Yet, teachers' theoretical knowledge is as important as their practical knowledge (Butler, 2005). Prioritizing goals in sub-goals facilitates their achievement (Bandura, 1991).

The complexity of the coaching process can also be seen in the variety of resources mobilized related to each objective. Several resources were used and they differed according to whether they supported the learning process, the teaching process, or the teachers' characteristics. For example, in both cases, theoretical documents were suggested to teachers to support their learning process while practical websites were suggested to support their teaching process. Resources mobilized in the context of teaching are more meaningful and then can have more chance to inspire practice change (Butler & Schnellert, 2012).

The complexity of the coaching process is also seen in the monitoring of the identified goals. Both coaches were not satisfied with the results and wanted to continue to pursue certain goals for the following year. This result can be explained by several factors, including a lack of time during the year (Lessard & Des Ruisseaux, 2004).

The Dynamism of the Coaching Process

The results obtained in the first case (which was documented over a longer period) showed the dynamic aspect of the coaching process that presented itself over several coaching cycles with the emergence of new goals (e.g., supporting the culture of collaboration when she found that they were not working together) and the continuation of some (e.g., the goal of supporting the learning process that was identified in the first meeting and continued in the other meetings). According to Cartier

and Butler (2016), a dynamic process manifests itself through various cycles of actions that evolve and change within and across situations.

Characteristics of the Coach That Can Explain the Quality of Coaching to Promote Teachers' SPD

The results of this study show that several coaches' characteristics can explain the quality of their coaching to promote teachers' SPD. It is the coaches' previous training and experience, prior knowledge, conceptions, and perceptions of themselves and the context.

Previous Training and Experience, Prior Knowledge, and Conceptions

First, the subject area (assessment, reading strategies) of learning goals identified in both cases was consistent with the previous training, experience, and knowledge of the coaches. This result may lead us to hypothesize that the coaches are targeting the areas they master the most. As attested by Atteberry and Bryk (2011), the coaching offered by coaches reflects their expertise. According to Lessard (2008) and Verdy (2005), this expertise is often very varied in nature (field knowledge, theoretical knowledge, and mentoring knowledge).

Second, the coaches' conceptions seem to guide their choices. The complexity of coaching focusing on the teachers' teaching process and the presence of cycles of coaching "the learning process" and "the characteristics of the teachers" that were not identified by the school principals are consistent with the conceptions of coaching of the two coaches. Both coaches conceive coaching as a complex act whose goal is the improvement of teachers' practices and knowledge while maintaining a good relationship with them. In this sense, Sophie says, "But there is a smaller success that we are looking at. In this coaching, we succeed in doing two contradictory things: preserving the teachers' sense of self-efficacy and destabilizing them enough to learn" (Sophie, Interview 1). Furthermore, the presence, in the first case, of several coaching cycles and the greater involvement of the coach noted are consistent with her conception of the role of the coach and the school principal. Sophie thinks that the school principal must be mainly concerned with classroom practices to achieve results, whereas Joëlle, who was less involved in the meetings, considers that her role is rather to support the principal's leadership. She says, "Instructional leadership belongs to the principal. [...]. She must take her place and then I must be in the background" (Joëlle, Interview 3). In addition, we noted that Sophie added a coaching session to address a subject unrelated to the school principal's request (assessment). It is about teaching with children's books and it is consistent with her conception of teaching and learning. For her, there must be a pleasure and a link with reality for learning to occur. For example, she says, "If I look at the French instruction, what we teach students is skills [...] in reading and writing for life and there is pleasure in this learning [...] there are goals that are greater than just an exam" (Sophie, Interview 1). This leads us to the following hypothesis: the coaches support teachers in the teaching approaches in line with their conception of learning and teaching. This confirms the importance given by Lafortune and Martin (2004) to these conceptions. The theoretical contribution of our research is the consideration of new conceptions: the conception of coaching, the role of the coach, and the school principal in teachers' professional development.

To promote teachers' SPD, coaches need a conception coherent with sustainability to support their actions.

Self-Perceptions

The commitment of the two coaches to the coaching process despite the reported difficulties can be linked to the positive perception of their self-efficacy and self-agency. As Butler et al. (2015) state, people's engagement in change initiatives depends on their perception of having a voice and their perception of competence in achieving expected outcomes. For example, Sophie says, "I am very hard to discourage because of the assumption of educability. [...] It is not sure that there will not be some unexplored way to succeed where all else has failed" (Sophie, Interview 1). In terms of a positive self-agency perception, she said, "Here I am lucky to be in a school board where we have a high vision [...]. I am not often doing things I do not believe in" (Sophie, Interview 1). Much broader self-perceptions are also to be considered since they are directly related to the complexity of the coaching process: perception of oneself as a coach and one's coaching. The coaches had a positive perception of their work performed. For example, Sophie thinks that her coaching is focused on the student's learning process rather than on outcomes and this was seen in the variety of components targeted and in her feedback. She says, "In my coaching choices, I am very much about learning, much less about assessment. We say let us start by teaching correctly so that we have adequate records and then we can make our judgments" (Sophie, Interview 1). In addition, a blurred perception was not observed in these two coaches. This leads us to hypothesize that coaches with a clear and positive perception of themselves as coaches and of their coaching engage in a more complex coaching process. The identification of these two perceptions is a contribution to the field of self-regulation learning since such a perception, present only in the work-in-place learning area, has not been considered before.

Perceptions of the Context

Several perceptions of the context can explain the quality of coaching: the perception of the proposed professional development situation, the role of the coach in it, the perception of teachers, and the perception of the school principal's leadership. First, even though the request came from the principal, a positive perception of the value of the professional development situation was noted. For example, Sophie said, "...So, yes, I think it is important to say, 'We're working on this order,' but underneath, they are expressing real needs. Those are more interesting. But again, I am so glad the principal asked for this because I would not have all the information I have" (Sophie, Interview 4). This aligns with Atteberry and Bryk's (2011) findings that coaches demonstrate engagement based on their adherence to the vision of the professional development situation. Furthermore, she identified a goal addressing teacher self-efficacy, while she described the professional development situation as challenging for teachers.

Second, it seems that coaching practices vary according to the coach's perception of teachers. Sophie asked many more questions at the beginning when she did not know the teachers and towards the end, she gave much more feedback. She used practices to raise teachers' awareness of current evaluation methods through explanation and feedback, whereas she felt that teachers in general had difficulty making professional judgments. She intervened in their conceptions by presenting, among other things, the role of the teacher while she perceived that some teachers in the coached group did not have the necessary open-mindedness to consider themselves responsible for learning especially for students in difficulty. She gave a lot of feedback on the teachers' practices when she perceived that their teaching needed to be improved. She let them talk

together when she saw them as a nascent collaborative team (just beginning to work together).

The positive perception of the leadership of the school principal is consistent with the fact that both coaches accepted her request and planned, enacted, and monitored coaching practices consistent with that request. Joëlle, for example, was confident that the principal "would follow through. Especially her, she is going to be helpful. Then she will motivate them, then she will find ways to make them laugh. It should be good. So, she is helpful" (Joëlle, Interview 2). The coaches' perceptions of the context have not been considered in existing models of coaching, which is a contribution to the field. In the perspective of self-regulated learning, context is already considered important, these findings help highlight the importance of the perception of the context.

Characteristics of the School Context That Can Explain the Quality of Coaching to Promote Teachers' SPD

In addition to the influences of the coach's perception of the coaching context, real contextual factors can explain the quality of the coaching process. They include the leadership of the school principal and teachers' culture of collaboration, professional development, and change. Other school context characteristics are related indirectly to the coaching process (e.g., teachers' perceptions influence their learning process). The teachers' learning and teaching process was not the focus of this study.

The School Principal's Leadership

The orientation and the complexity of the coaching process were influenced by the leadership of the two principals. In both cases, the school principals were the ones who requested coaching from the coaches, reported the information they observed about the problematic situation identified, and shared with them their goals, which were adopted by both coaches. In terms of complexity, the presence of the principal seems to affect the frequency and the variety of coaching practices, since the principal (in the second case) spoke often. This frequency also varies according to the coaching opportunities offered. A higher frequency was observed in the first case where the principal offered two consecutive half-days and an additional day of coaching, while a lower frequency was observed in the second case where the principal offered only one hour of work. This finding is consistent with Lessard and Des Ruisseaux (2004) who attested that in some school boards, the principal is not only consulted but "he or she defines the needs of his or her school and directs the coach to meet them" (p. 151). The difference in the leadership of the two principals in terms of the coaching opportunities offered can be explained by the variation in contexts. From one context to another, meetings with the coach can range from weekly to no meetings at all (Mangin, 2007). To promote teachers' SPD, principals need to orient their leadership to this goal.

The Teachers' Culture of Collaboration, Professional Development, and Change

The low level of collaboration in teaching and professional development observed among the teachers in the first case and the presence of collaboration only at the level of lesson planning observed in the second case seem to influence the presence of goals and practices that promote teachers' teamwork. While Sophie wanted teachers to develop a culture of collaboration, Joëlle's primary goal was the implementation of common teaching practices. Here is an excerpt that attests to the low level of

collaboration present in the first case: "Well, I'm a girl who is on Facebook and the Internet a lot, who looks for new activities. I bring a lot of new ideas to Lucy. She follows. But for me, it is something I like, to have new readings from Chenelière. When they come out with new books, when there are books that interest me, I go to the principal to have them bought" (Teacher, Interview 2, School 1). Yet, it is the culture where there is collaboration in teaching and student learning that facilitates coaching (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Lowenhaupt et al., 2013). The low level of collaboration, present to varying degrees in both schools, echoes the findings of Savoie-Zajc et al. (2011) who attest that work remains to be done to get teachers to collaborate more together.

The presence of goals and coaching practices oriented to motivating teachers in both cases seems to be related to the rather timid culture of change observed in both schools. Teachers had a positive perception of change but did not adhere to the unilateral way the principals made the change. One teacher in Case 1 said, "This year we're going through big changes and then it doesn't work for us all the time so that's why, our [resistance]". (Teacher, Interview 2, School 1). A teacher in Case 2 said, "Because I don't believe in the decompartmentalization [proposed by the principal], I said it yesterday, I've already experienced it about ten or fifteen years ago. Taking students out, taking other students from other classes who are weaker, we work for an hour on a notion and then they leave. In that time, you do not make any progress in your class" (Teacher, Interview, School 2). This observed resistance is consistent with Draelants (2007) who noticed that it is often the coach "who embodies the change imposed 'from above' and perceived in a very negative way" (p. 165). To adopt an SPD, teachers need to be more involved in their professional development process and not perceive it as an obligation.

Conclusion

Our research described how the quality of the process of coaching teachers is contextualized, oriented, precise, complex, and dynamic. It suggests thus how a coach can achieve coaching quality to promote teachers' SPD by first setting varied goals, planning, enacting, and monitoring varied practices, mobilizing varied resources while considering the teacher's characteristics, and revising his or her perceptions and conceptions.

The first conclusion drawn is that the perspective of "self-regulated learning" is relevant to describe the concept of teachers' coaching for SPD, which has been studied to date from perspectives that do not give importance to coaching goals and context. Moreover, it allows us to broaden the field of research on self-regulated learning, which has studied the learning process of pupils, students, teachers, and coaches up to now, by studying a new phenomenon, which is teachers' coaching. Otherwise, if learning is self-regulated, then so is the coaching of learning. A limitation of this study is that it did not consider the teacher's sustainable professional development process components. In the future, we can study how the coaching process leads to better professional development. Furthermore, emotions were not considered in this study while the study of this variable might explain the involvement of teachers in their coaching. Hai et al. (2023) have shown the importance of emotions in the daily lives of teachers.

The second conclusion drawn is that quality depends on several personal characteristics of the coach including his or her perceptions of the context. While past studies did not distinguish between context and perception of context, this study showed how the coaching process was influenced by the coach's perception of context

regardless of the reality of that context. This is important because the coach may have a perception of the context that is not always accurate. In this case, the monitoring must also focus on perceptions and not only on practices.

The third conclusion is that coaching depends on the characteristics of the coaching context, including the leadership of the school principal and the teachers' culture. This result raises the issue of role conflict between the principal and the coach. How to promote the leadership of the school principal without affecting the agency of the teachers and the coach? A question that deserves to be studied. The present research provides a considerable contribution to the comprehension of coaching promoting teachers' SPD. It is a support to sustainable competencies enabling teachers to become autonomous and capable of dealing with emerging issues.

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