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Improving Delivery of Instruction Through Peer Coaching

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IMPROVING DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION THROUGH PEER COACHING

A Project Report

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

School Administration

by

James John Buckwalter

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ABSTRACT

IMPROVING DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION THROUGH PEER COACHING

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Peer coaching models were studied to see if they improved teachers' delivery of instruction, and if they had a significant impact on student achievement. The research showed that peer coaching programs were successful when they were tied to a school's overall vision and mission, led by a strong principal, and kept separate from evaluation. Peer coaching was found to increase the accurate use of skills that teachers learned through professional development; however there was no evidence to show that peer coaching alone significantly effects student achievement.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

One of the keys to improving instruction in schools is successful collaboration among teachers. Almost everyone agrees that when teachers work together to solve problems, they benefit from one another's expertise and years of experience. One way to achieve this collaboration is through collegial peer coaching. "Collegial peer coaching is a simple, non-threatening structure designed for peers to help each other improve instruction or learning situations" (Gottesman, 2000, p.5).

Statement of the Problem

One problem in education today is the successful "transfer of training" from professional development experiences to the classroom. Teachers often attend terrific professional development sessions and learn new innovations that could result in improved instruction, but when they return to their classrooms, the information just sits on the shelf next to last year's innovations. There is often no way to follow-up the professional development sessions with observation, feedback and reflection. The new strategies do not transfer to classroom practice; the time and money spent on professional development is lost. Collegial peer coaching can help teachers to extend and refine the strategies they learn through professional development.

The research of Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (*The Coaching of Teaching*, 1993) shows that when teacher training addresses theory, knowledge, modeling and practice, 90% of teachers develop the necessary skills, but only 5% of teachers accurately

use these skills in the classroom. However, when collegial peer coaching is added to teacher training, the percentage of teachers using the skills accurately jumps to 75-90%. This study demonstrates the potential power of collegial peer coaching. Another study by Bowman and McCormick (2000) found that “following peer coaching, teachers reported a substantial increase in the use of skills and strategies to support instructional change.” According to Garet (2000), “Teachers need time to see new strategies modeled during the school day and opportunities to use new skills in developing and implementing learning activities.” With peer coaching, teachers have an opportunity to model new skills in a collegial environment without the fear of reprisal that is sometimes felt during formal observations and evaluations by administrators.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the project will be kindergarten through grade five. A possible limitation to the project is that there is not a great deal of evidence yet to show that peer coaching effects academic achievement. The project will show that for peer coaching to be successful it must be aligned with a school’s educational goals and be part of an overall professional learning community. The Strategic Action Plan may have some limitations since research indicates that peer coaching models are successful only when teachers are willing participants. Therefore, administrators in peer coaching schools need to believe strongly in shared leadership, and be able to relate peer coaching to their school’s overall mission.

Definition of Terms

- **Transfer of training:** This occurs whenever a teacher participates in some type of professional development and then takes what she has learned into her classroom and practices it over time in a positive manner.
- **Collegial peer coaching:** A team of teachers is given time and support to think meta-cognitively about its work in a safe atmosphere. The intent is to improve teaching practices, enhance relationships with colleagues, and increase professional communication about teaching.
- **Reflective peer coaching:** A form of coaching involving three teachers who alternate roles as teacher, coach and observer. Unlike most other models, there is no classroom observation. The emphasis is on reflection by the teacher.
- **Technical coaching:** This type of coaching follows staff development workshops on specific teaching methods, such as learning styles or cooperative learning, and it does involve a teaching observation.
- **Challenge coaching:** this type of coaching involves a team of teachers committed to resolving specific and ongoing problems. This model differs from most other types because it involves a team of teachers working together to deal with a problem.
- **Collaborative peer coaching:** this type of coaching typically involves two teachers who take turns observing one another teach. The focus of the observation is decided by the teacher being observed, and the feedback offered during the post-conference is limited to that focus.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers first advanced the idea of “coaching” (1980) when they studied different training models to see which model resulted in greater implementation in the classroom. They found that when educators were attempting to think about and refine their current practice, “modeling, practice under simulated conditions, and practice in the classroom, combined with feedback was the most productive training design” (1996, p.13). In a related study, Showers found that “members of peer coaching groups exhibited greater long-term retention of new strategies and more appropriate use of new teaching models over time” (1996, p.14). Peer coaching is one of many coaching models currently in use, but it is the model this paper will focus on the most. Barbara Gottesman in her book *Peer Coaching for Educators* defined peer coaching as “a simple, nonthreatening structure designed for peers to help each other improve instruction or learning situations. The most common use is teacher-to-teacher peers working together on an almost daily basis to solve their own classroom problems” (2000, p.5).

Studies That Support Peer Coaching

Kohler (1997) studied the effects of peer coaching on teacher and student outcomes. In this study, four teachers planned and conducted a new approach to teaching by themselves during an initial baseline phase, with an experienced peer coach during a second phase, and alone again in a final phase. Kohler examined the way the teachers

organized their activities, the types of academic materials and tasks employed, and the directions provided for students. Kohler found that “all four teachers expanded or refined their procedures after collaborating with the coach (1997, p.6).” More changes occurred during the peer coaching phase than when the teachers were alone. In those areas of teaching not discussed with the coach, there was little or no refinement. Kohler’s study indicates that a peer coaching relationship can enable teachers to improve and refine their teaching strategies to better address the needs of their students.

Bowman and McCormick (2000) compared peer coaching to traditional university supervision.

Two groups of undergraduate students participating in a field experience as part of their teacher education program were compared in regard to their development of clarity skills, pedagogical reasoning and actions, and attitudes toward several aspects of the field experience. The experimental group was trained in peer coaching techniques, while the control group experienced more traditional university supervision. (p. 1)

The students in the peer coaching group observed one another teaching lessons and provided feedback during a post-conference. With regard to clarity, pedagogical reasoning, and attitude the study showed significant differences in favor of this group. The researchers found that “assistance from peers who have been trained to provide support can be extremely productive in achieving field experience goals” (Bowman, 2000, p.6). The study also showed that adding peer coaching to the field experience led to

increased instructional effectiveness. In just seven weeks, peer coaching improved the teaching skills of these students.

Jenkins (2002) studied the effects of peer coaching among pre-service teachers during an eight week methods course at the elementary level.

The purpose of the study was to describe the kinds of knowledge exhibited by eight pre-service teachers during coaching activities, and how the roles of teacher and coach contributed to knowledge development during an elementary physical education field-based methods course. (2002, p.49)

All fourteen pre-service teachers involved in the study were trained in peer coaching activities. The pre-service teachers were assessed and graded using an adaptation of Rink and Werner's Qualitative Measures of Teaching Performance Scale. As part of the peer coaching model, pre-service teachers observed one another teach a number of lessons, took notes during the observations, and then met for private conferences. The peer coach started with a praise statement, and then asked questions for clarification and to aid teacher reflection. Researchers analyzed data from transcriptions of lessons and peer conferences. There were five important findings. First of all, it's vital that pre-service teachers have opportunities to learn about and engage in both the teacher and the coach roles. Teacher educators should include both subject matter and classroom discipline in discussions about field experiences. The benefits of peer coaching far outweigh the time invested. Pre-service teachers can be trained to collect data and provide data-related feedback in just a short time. And finally, the peer coaching

conferences gave pre-service teachers time to discuss and identify problems and come up with options for solving them. Jenkins (2002) corroborates the findings in Bowman and McCormick (2000) that teachers can be trained to give useful feedback to their peers.

Stephen P. Gordon (2008) reports on a comparison of four schools that centered their supervision programs on dialogic reflective inquiry. All of the schools in the study integrated a variety of processes within instructional supervision, including study groups, professional development, curriculum development, peer observation, peer coaching and action research. Participants in the study included principals, assistant principals, and teachers. Gordon writes that when educators are engaged in reflective inquiry they “ask meaningful questions, gather data concerning those questions, thoroughly examine those data, and frame and test hypotheses to improve teaching and learning” (2004, p.2). He identified a number of themes cutting across the four supervision programs, including a shared vision, multiple supervision processes, ongoing inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and other common effects, which included a collegial culture. This study differs from the five previous studies in this paper because Gordon considers peer coaching to be part of the supervision process. Lam (2002), as well as other researchers, took great pains to try and separate peer coaching from supervision, citing the psychological pressure many teachers feel when a peer coaching relationship is part of a school’s supervision model. Gordon’s study confirms that in order to successfully use peer coaching to improve student learning, a principal needs to create and nurture a collegial culture in the school.

Rudd (2009) observed twelve early childhood educators to see if their use of mathematical language in the classroom increased following professional development

and a side-by-side coaching phase. He found that implementation of teaching strategies presented in trainings were enhanced when teachers were coached in the use of the strategies, a finding consistent with the work of Joyce and Showers (1984). All of the participants were females, and 33 percent of them had earned graduate level hours. Rudd reports that there was “a 56 percent increase of math mediated language following the professional development; however, the greatest increase (39 percent increase over the professional development condition) occurred during the side-by-side coaching phase” (2009, p. 1). In a follow-up two to four weeks after the coaching phase, there was a 39.5 percent decrease in mathematical language used by teachers. This suggests that although side-by-side coaching enhanced use of mathematical language during that particular phase, teachers did not continue with the practice at the same level after the coaching was over. This finding lends support to the idea that peer coaching needs to be on-going and sustained in order to be effective.

Studies Critical of Peer Coaching

There are a number of studies that point out potential problems, limitations, or cautions associated with peer coaching. Neufeld and Roper (2003) studied the work of school coaches, a type of coaching that differs from peer coaching in that one person acts as an instructional coach who works with many teachers. However, some of their findings apply to peer coaching. The researchers conducted interviews with coaches, teachers, principals, and central office administrators over six years to learn about coaching. They found that “coaching has the potential to contribute to teacher learning, to enhance the extent to which teachers use what they learn in their professional

development” while also cautioning that “coaching is not a gimmick; it is not something to be added onto a district’s repertoire of professional development offerings. It must be integral to a larger instructional improvement plan” (2003, p.26). In their study of coaching, Neufeld found that most teachers had some initial nervousness at the beginning of a coaching relationship, but that they came to value their work with coaches and colleagues.

Lam (2002) examined two common problems associated with peer coaching models: contrived collegiality and mistakenly confusing peer coaching with teacher appraisal. This Hong Kong-based study involved one primary school and one secondary school, both of which served students primarily of lower-middle-class background. Lam’s project was divided into three phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. Three staff development workshops were held among the teachers and the researchers so that consensus could be reached about the form and purpose of peer coaching. According to Lam, “research data were collected through regular meetings, staff development workshops, semi-structured interviews, questionnaire surveys and observation” (2002, p.185). The Research Lesson Format, popularized in Japan, was adopted by the teachers at both schools as a model for peer coaching. It consists of a preparation meeting, a classroom observation, and a discussion. Two barriers to successful implementation of peer coaching were identified in the study. Time constraints, caused mostly by other imposed educational reforms or innovations, and psychological pressure related to performance appraisal. The project participants took steps to address these barriers by keeping principals from participating in observations,

preventing any documents related to peer coaching from going into teachers' personnel files, and by not using a standard rating scale during observations. The focus was on the students and how they could learn better. A major finding of the study was that without the right school culture in place, the practice of peer coaching will not generate genuine collaboration. In this case, collegiality evolved slowly through continuous consultation and collaboration among all parties. This study is important because it shows that a school leader will not see long-lasting results if a peer coaching model is imposed on teachers without adequate buy-in.

Poglinco and Bach (2004) spent a year researching coaching as a vehicle for professional development in school reform models, and found reasons for leaders to exercise caution when trying out such a model. Poglinco found that "although teachers meet regularly, these group meetings do not translate into the creation of professional learning communities or changes in instructional practice" (2004, p. 399). This finding is consistent with the work of Lam (2002) and Neufeld (2003), who warn that coaching is not be a panacea for reform, and that it may prove unsuccessful unless a collaborative culture already exists within the school. In Poglinco's research of coaching models, she found that coaches did not emphasize performance standards (p.399). "All effective professional development," maintains Poglinco, "should bring the standards to life for teachers and, in turn, for students" (2003, p. 399).

Murray (2009) studied the effects of peer coaching on teachers' collaborative interactions and students' mathematics achievement. Unlike most researchers, Murray looked at student achievement in math using pre-test and post-test scores on an existing

skill-based mathematics achievement test called the *Programme for International Student Achievement* or PISA. The fourteen teachers involved in the study attended one or more of the summer institutes, where they were trained in coaching and mentoring a peer partner for one to two week sessions. Peer partners observed and coached one another a minimum of two times throughout the school year. To measure teachers' collaborative interactions, Murray used a short perception survey. Teachers were questioned about their perceptions of the program, as well as the perceived benefits and barriers to peer coaching. Murray found that "teachers considered peer coaching a positive experience," while at the same time "identified scheduling and distance as roadblocks" (Murray, 2009, p.203). It was not surprising that distance was a roadblock; the study was conducted in a rural area, making it more challenging for some peer partners to collaborate or discuss observed lessons in a timely manner. Murray also found that the post-observation conferences lacked reflective comments. Perhaps most notably, "peer coaching was not associated with any significant improvement in mathematics achievement of students" (Murray, 2009, p.203). This study shows that peer coaching did provide teachers with opportunities to share ideas, techniques and strategies. However, there was no significant effect on student achievement. The physical distance between teachers participating in the program, and the expectation that peers observe one another just twice in one school year are two factors that could have limited the effect of peer coaching on students' math achievement.

Latz (2009) conducted a study of Indianapolis public school teachers participating in Project CLUE (Clustering Learners Unlocks Equity). The study "sought to understand

how a peer coach for teachers might influence teachers' understandings and abilities to facilitate differentiated lessons for high-ability students" (Latz, 2009, p.27). Teachers in the project were paired with a mentor teacher who observed them three times a year in the spring of 2004, 2005, and 2006. The feedback from the mentor teachers was non-evaluative, but was not always perceived as such by the teachers. The results were mixed. First of all, scheduling and logistics were a challenge; increasing demands on teachers' time hindered the scheduling of mentor observations (p. 32). Communication was a problem between teachers and peer coaches mostly because teachers perceived feedback to be evaluative (p.32). All but three of the teachers said the program motivated them to develop differentiation practices and heightened their confidence (p.33). Latz found that for coaching to be successful, ample time must be given to the processes of correspondence, observations, and meetings (p.35). Latz reported that "six of the nine peer mentors in the study reported too little differentiation happening in the classrooms they observed" (p. 33). Overall, this study highlights some of the limitations of peer coaching that administrators need to be aware of before adopting such a model.

The Role of Peer Coaching in Professional Development

In their article about the evolution of peer coaching, Beverly Showers and Bruce Joyce (1996) write about how the purpose of peer coaching has changed since the late seventies and early eighties. Back then, peer coaching was a way to break down some of the isolation from other adults that teachers experience when they spend all day behind closed doors, as well as a way for teachers to be supported by like-minded colleagues trying to implement new strategies. Although those are still admirable goals, now the

focus shifts to teams of teachers planning and working together, supporting one another in a wider process tied directly to their school's improvement goals. One of Joyce and Showers' principles is that "all teachers must agree to be members of peer coaching study teams" (1996, p. 4). These small peer coaching study teams share the learning process and offer support to one another. In this way, staff development has a better chance of directly affecting student learning. Joyce and Showers found that successful study teams "developed skills in collaboration and enjoyed the experience so much that they wanted to continue their collegial partnerships even after they accomplished their initial goals" (1996, p.1). One of the most surprising breaks with existing peer coaching models is Joyce and Shower's suggestion to "omit verbal feedback as a coaching component" (1996, p.5). Joyce and Showers found that "when teachers try to give one another feedback, collaborative activity tends to disintegrate" (1996, p.5). The researchers believe that the person teaching is the "coach" and the person observing is the "coached". Joyce and Showers maintain:

The collaborative work of peer coaching teams is much broader than observations and conferences. Many believe that the essence of the coaching transaction is to offer advice to teachers following observations. Not so. Rather, teachers learn from one another while planning instruction, developing support materials, watching one another work with students, and thinking together about the impact of their behavior on the students' learning (1996, p.5).

In their book, *Student Achievement through Staff Development* (2002), Joyce and Showers reiterate several of their earlier findings about peer coaching, but add some new

findings as well. In speaking about the successful transfer of training, they found that “the more complex the skill and the farther away it is from the teacher’s existing repertoire, the more key peer coaching will be” (2002, p.71). As noted earlier, the research supports the fact that without coaching, new skills do not transfer effectively to classroom use. When training includes information, demonstration, and practice under simulated circumstances, there was an effect size of 0.00. The effect size when coaching was added jumped to 1.42 (2002, p.77). The research shows that coached teachers use newly-learned strategies more appropriately, have greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill with strategies, are more likely to explain new models of teaching to their students, and exhibit a clearer understanding of the purpose of new strategies. When schools begin professional development sessions, peer coaching teams should be formed on the first day, examples of formats and structures for collaborative planning should be explained, and peer coaching study teams should be given the time and resources to plan how they will monitor their own implementation of the new strategies or innovations.

To summarize the work of Joyce and Showers (1996), there are two major ways to tie peer coaching more directly to overall school improvement. The first involves the whole faculty forming small peer coaching study teams, and the second is to shift the emphasis away from evaluative comments following peer observations and towards team planning. These changes are significantly different from other peer coaching models that emphasize a cycle of short pre-conferences, observations, and reflective post conferences between pairs of educators.

In a 1996 report, Louis, Marks and Kruse examined the organizational factors within a school that facilitate professional community, and its consequences for teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning. Five elements of school-wide professional community were identified, and peer coaching relates to four of the five (1996, p. 760). One element is a collective focus on student learning (teachers discussing instruction that promotes intellectual growth and development). Another element is collaborative sharing of expertise. A third element is de-privatized practice in which teachers go into colleagues' rooms, trading roles as mentor or advisor. A final element of professional community related to peer coaching is reflective dialogue, or in-depth conversations about teaching and learning. However, as Murray (2009) pointed out in his study, peer coaching does not always produce the kind of dialogue that leads to depth and understanding. However, the potential does exist. Louis (1996) reports that professional community is enhanced by the following 4 conditions: openness to innovation, respect for the expertise of others, feedback on instructional performance, and coordinated, school-focused professional development (1996, p. 763).

Pre-Conditions for Successful Peer Coaching

The research suggests that peer coaching is more likely to be successful in schools with certain pre-conditions. According to Robbins (1991), a good school that wants to become a great school is the perfect place for peer coaching. Pre-conditions for success include a reasonable level of trust among staff, an existing degree of collegiality, provisions of time and money for training, norms that encourage risk-taking, and supportive leadership (1991, p.19). A school with several new interventions already

under way may have difficulty successfully bringing peer coaching into the mix (1991, p. 48). According to Robbins,

Peer coaching thrives in cultures that revere and respect lifelong learning, creativity, and working together for improved teaching and learning. Identifying the values at your school and determining how they came to be will help you decide if they will support a peer coaching program or if they need to be transformed (1991, p. 47).

Peer coaching is not a quick fix, and it will not be successful unless it is related to the overall values of the school; values that encourage teachers to work together to solve problems and improve learning.

According to McQueen (2001) most teachers are still isolated in their classrooms. Teachers, McQueen believes, “give daily performances with no practice, no feedback other than test scores, and no coach or teammates to give adequate and timely evaluations” (2001, p.1). “If you can imagine doctors not consulting one another, a surgeon never being observed, or a professional athlete without a coach, then you can begin to see the bubble that most teachers operate in-and its potential consequences” (2000, p.1). According to McQueen, many schools across the nation offer professional development that includes training sessions, conferences and workshops given out of context, with little practice, and with no follow-up. Schools spend money on staff development that never reaches students because many teachers feel inadequately prepared or too insecure with the presented strategies to implement them in the class

(2001, p.1). Peer coaching, according to McQueen, provides companionship, interchange of ideas, and time for reflection. Teachers learn how to give and receive constructive feedback, and they have the opportunity to conduct action research by testing hypotheses with their peer coach. She recommends videotaping as an extension of peer coaching because it gives colleagues a product on which they can reflect together.

Little (2005) advocates peer coaching as a support for collaborative teachers because peer coaching gives teachers a chance to refine their skills through immediate feedback. Little defines collaborative teaching as two educators who plan together, teach side-by-side and evaluate one another. Little points out that existing evaluations “which delve into instructional organization and development, subject matter, communication, and conduct management leave little room for the observer to take narrative notes or make comments” (p. 86). Sometimes these evaluations are conducted only once a year by an administrator who otherwise never observes the teacher. These evaluations do not give teachers a chance to improve their teaching. Peer coaching, on the other hand, builds community and gives participants a chance to “explore new concepts and strategies within the comfort of friends, an important factor when attempting new endeavors” (Pierce and Hunsaker, 1996, p. 104).

Types of Peer Coaching

There are several different types of peer coaching, including reflective peer coaching (Vidmar, 2005), technical coaching, challenge coaching, collegial coaching (Barkley, 2004), and collaborative peer coaching (Allen, 2005). Reflective peer coaching

(Vidmar, 2005) is different from most other formats because it does not involve an actual observation. Instead, there are two ten-minute meetings; a planning conference and a reflective conference. To be effective, it should happen continuously over time between the same two or three people who alternate roles of teacher, coach, and observer. The coach and third person observer do not actually observe the teacher in the classroom. Instead the relationship centers on reflective dialogue before and after teaching. It is a formative process, unlike the once-a-year summative evaluations that teachers are used to. The teacher sets the agenda and comes to the initial planning conference with a teaching plan ready. The plan typically includes the lesson goals, the strategies he or she will employ, what the students will do to indicate success, and what student data will support self-assessment. After teaching the lesson, the three reconvene for a short conference. The teacher reflects on the lesson and shares student data to support his or her self-assessment. The coach needs to refrain from evaluating verbally or using negative non-verbal cues, solving problems, or taking over. The third person observes the process to make sure it is not evaluative in nature.

Stephen G. Barkley writes about another type of peer coaching called technical coaching in his book *Quality Teaching in a Culture of Coaching* (2005). This type of coaching follows staff development workshops on specific teaching methods, such as learning styles or cooperative learning. The best part about it is that the teacher can immediately apply a specific strategy in the classroom and receive objective feedback from a colleague. But this approach also has a few problems. According to Barkley, there is a “perception among those being coached that this process is more like an evaluation

than a coaching session” (2005, p. 16). This happens when the coach uses an assessment form to judge if the practice occurred at all, and to what degree the practice occurred. Sometimes unsolicited advice is slipped in as well and that leads to defensiveness on the part of the teacher. “To succeed,” Barkley maintains, “technical coaching requires accurate, specific feedback about the technical strategy being coached” but only on that particular strategy. The problems that Barkley finds with technical peer coaching can also occur during other kinds of peer coaching if they include observations. The potential problem of peer coaching becoming evaluative has been addressed by Vidmar (2005) and Joyce and Showers (1996, p.5). Vidmar’s reflective peer coaching does not involve an actual classroom observation, and Joyce and Showers recommend that peer coaches eliminate verbal feedback following an observation.

Another type of peer coaching is called challenge coaching (Barkley 2005). According to Barkley, challenge coaching involves a team of teachers that form to resolve specific and ongoing problems (2005, p.17). “This team approach in a coaching environment requires mutual trust among colleagues as they focus on solving the problem together. The problems addressed by the team could involve curriculum, instructional techniques, logistics, school culture, classroom management, or any other pertinent issue” (2005, p.17). This type of coaching is different from most other types because it involves a team of teachers working together to deal with a problem.

Collegial peer coaching, according to Barkley, gives teachers “time and support to think meta-cognitively about their work in a safe atmosphere with plenty of support” (2005, p. 17). It is one of the most common forms of peer coaching. It typically involves

two teachers who take turns observing one another teach. The focus of the observation is decided by the teacher being observed, and the feedback offered during the post-conference is limited to that focus. It has been found to improve teacher practices, enhance collegiality, and increase professional communication among teachers.

According to Barkley,

The underlying notion—backed by research—is that a teacher will acquire and deepen teaching strategies, habits, and reflection about his or her teaching when given an opportunity to develop and practice these skills with feedback from peers (2005, p.17).

Putting Peer Coaching into Practice

Dwight Allen and Alyce C. LeBlanc in their book *Collaborative Peer Coaching That Improves Instruction* (2005) propose a form of peer coaching known as the 2 + 2 model. In this model, teachers visit each other's classroom routinely and frequently. Two compliments and two suggestions in written form are the result of each visit (2005, p. 22). According to the authors, the rationale is that positive feedback is just as important as corrective feedback, and the most useful feedback of all is specific and timely. The 2 + 2 model adds up to 4 in two different ways. First of all, it promotes four characteristics of effective teaching staffs: feedback, growth, joy, and trust. In addition, it remedies four problems that often limit staff effectiveness: isolation, stagnation, discouragement, and uncertainty (2005, p. 23). One of the benefits of this model is that it is simple to communicate, and, at least on the surface, seems relatively simple to get started.

However, there are some potential problems too. If a principal tried to start this particular model in a school without a collaborative culture, it might be doomed because a certain level of trust among peers is required to make this work. The authors make the point that participation should be voluntary and that administrators have to support it completely. Factors that could affect the 2 + 2 suggestions that peers make to one another include a hesitation to point out an area for improvement to a colleague, and the inexperience of some teachers in identifying specific areas of the teaching act and making focused comments (2005, p.110). Allen and LeBlanc suggest that a specific area of focus, perhaps one tied to the school's improvement plan, could make the 2 + 2 model more systematic.

Barbara Gottesman in her book *Peer Coaching for Educators* suggests three phases to the peer coaching model: peer watching, peer feedback, and peer coaching (Gottesman, 2000, p.32). The purpose of the peer watching phase is to increase the comfort zone between peers and to decide on a weekly focus. The purpose of the peer feedback phase is to provide a transition between watching and coaching. There is a short classroom visit (the length of time is agreed upon ahead of time) and a meeting afterwards to present any data gathered. During the peer coaching phase there is a post-conference. At the post-conference, the coach shares data from the classroom visit and (if the teacher asks) offers one to three possibilities for improvement. The coach needs to write down these possibilities for improvement prior to the post-conference even though she may never share them with the teacher. Gottesman believes in a gradual approach, with each phase lasting for two months. Among the positive outcomes of this model are the establishment of communication between faculty members in a safe framework, a

chance for teachers to think and talk in detail about their lessons, the expansion of teaching skills, adult companionship, and feedback from respected peers (Gottesman, 2000, p. 38). The administrator, according to Gottesman, plays an important part in the success of peer coaching. For example, the administrator must be committed to the concept, must lead the staff in establishing norms for visiting and observing classrooms, provide time in the schedule and coverage so that coaching can occur, and provide staff development in peer coaching. However the principal should never engage in peer coaching with a teacher because that would likely make the process more evaluative or summative than formative.

A Summary

Peer coaching needs to be approached with caution. It is not a panacea for every problem faced in education today, and there are no studies yet showing that coaching alone significantly impacts student achievement.

However, the research does show that peer coaching helps teachers achieve goals, improve strategies, and make a difference for students (Barkley, 2005). Peer coaching gives teachers an opportunity to reflect on their practice, and offers direct feedback about interactions with students. Under the umbrella of peer coaching, teams of teachers can collaboratively design lessons that focus on specific strategies to reach all students. Most importantly, school-wide collegial support is possible with peer coaching.

Peer coaching puts teachers in the driver's seat, giving them ownership over the work they do. It can eliminate the dependence on outside people to maintain innovations.

Unlike coaching by district experts, or once-a-year “showcase” lessons evaluated by an administrator, peer coaching gives teachers a unique opportunity to solve problems alongside like-minded colleagues, enhance their teaching repertoires over time, and most importantly, increase their own and their students’ love of learning.

CHAPTER III

THE PROCEDURE

The first step was to critically review the existing literature related to peer coaching. After analyzing the research, a number of components common to most successful peer coaching programs emerged. When these core components were present, peer coaching led to improved delivery of instruction. Next, a Strategic Action Plan was designed. The purpose of the plan was to lay out specific steps a school would take in order to phase in a peer coaching program. This program would help teachers extend and refine teaching strategies learned through professional development. The action plan would be in three phases: an information-gathering phase, an implementation phase, and a transfer phase. The type of school leadership needed to make peer coaching work is included in the plan.

CHAPTER IV

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PEER COACHING

The Necessary Leadership

If peer coaching is to be successful, the principal needs to be committed to shared leadership and collaboration, believe that teachers can learn from one another, and understand the non-evaluative nature of peer coaching. In addition, the principal must be willing to devote time and money to training, support teachers by providing substitutes or covering classes, and put other major institutional changes on hold long enough to see peer coaching take a firm hold.

Collaboration needs to be the norm if peer coaching is to succeed. Collaboration means that teachers regularly plan instruction together, share resources and materials, look at student data together in order to make decisions about teaching, and trust one another's strengths. The school's schedule, professional development approach, and faculty meeting structure must encourage and revolve around this collaborative approach. The decision-making process at the school needs to be clearly defined and honored, and it needs to be collaborative in nature. Even when the school has a collaborative culture such as the one just described, a peer coaching program still needs to happen in three phases: an information phase that lays the groundwork for success and buy-in, an implementation phase that starts with simple observations and gradually builds to true coaching, and a transfer phase in which peer coaching becomes part of the way the school operates from day to day. If collaboration is not part of the culture to begin with, then it needs to be

built over time prior to beginning a peer coaching program. Launching a peer coaching program will not build collaboration in a school where it doesn't already exist. Instead it will be seen as one more thing on the teachers' plates.

Peer coaching makes certain assumptions and one of them is that teachers have the expertise to solve their own problems through consultation with other professionals. This means not relying solely on outside experts to coach teachers. Instead teachers learn by watching one another work out problems and try new strategies and innovations in the classroom. Peer coaching both expands leadership in the school to the entire staff, and increases the responsibility teachers have for the success of their students.

The purpose of peer coaching is to help teachers extend and refine the strategies they learn through professional development. The purpose is not to evaluate teacher performance. Therefore, the relationship between the observer coach and the teacher should remain confidential. The data collected by the observer coach should be free of praise or blame. The data requested, and only that data, should be shared with the teacher so that she can use it to make decisions about her teaching, or to determine whether or not students are meeting expectations. The principal should not serve in the role of coach because she is responsible for evaluating that teacher. The evaluation process in the school has to be completely separated from the peer coaching program.

Time, money and resources will be needed to support and maintain an effective peer coaching program. When peer coaching eventually becomes part of the institution, it will require less money. Money is needed so that teachers can be released to visit schools

where peer-coaching already takes place, and to enable teachers to observe one another. Money can also pay for copies of a book on peer-coaching that the whole staff agrees to read and discuss. Time will have to be set aside for both initial and follow-up trainings, regular team meetings, and regular pre-conferences and post-conferences between teachers and peer coaches. Time should be set aside to publicly recognize the achievements of peer coaching teams, to celebrate progress with the entire staff, and to hold question and answer sessions about the program. It will be important for the principal to think ahead about all of these aspects during the spring as she leads the staff through the school improvement process and the budget process.

Total support for peer-coaching will be imperative because anything less could mean failure. An effective leader will not be distracted by the constant flood of new innovations, approaches and programs. A school where peer coaching becomes the accepted norm is one in which the principal puts other major institutional changes aside, especially during the first year or two of implementation. A peer coaching program has to be sold as a means of achieving the school's overall mission, not as the latest in an effort to improve the teaching happening in the school. It should be seen as a non-threatening way to make an already strong school even better.

A Strategic Plan for Peer Coaching

Information Phase (February-June)

- The staff will identify the values at the school and how they came to be; the school's vision statement will be revised if needed.

- Form a small planning committee which includes the principal, a union representative, a parent representative, and interested teachers with informal power in the school (a young teacher open to new innovations, and an experienced teacher whose opinion is respected by others on the staff). The committee will visit schools with peer coaching programs, discuss possible models, list goals and activities, set benchmarks for implementation, and develop a draft peer coaching program to share with the staff.
- The principal will write a projected budget to pay for committee members' time, substitute teachers, copier costs, ordering the staff a book on peer coaching, and possibly video-taping equipment.
- The committee will look for grant opportunities to help meet the cost of implementing the program.
- During a staff meeting, the committee will show a video of teachers meeting, observing, and coaching one another in a school with similar demographics. The staff will discuss the video, and how peer coaching might look in their own classrooms.
- The principal will begin selling a peer coaching program to the staff as a non-threatening way to expand everyone's teaching repertoire.
- A scheduling committee (with representatives from each grade level) will propose a school schedule that provides teams with regular common planning time each week.

- The staff will ultimately make the decision whether or not to phase in a peer coaching program.

Implementation Phase (August-June)

- The first professional development session on peer coaching will be conducted. Morning topics include research on the effectiveness of peer coaching, and a look at different types of peer coaching. Afternoon topics include defining what peer coaching might look like at our school, defining the purpose of the program, and setting school-wide goals.
- The principal will lead the staff in developing norms for visiting and observing classrooms. The non-evaluative nature of collecting feedback and sharing observations will be emphasized. Gottesman (2000, p.5) offers several norms for classroom visits. Coaches should try to be as invisible as possible and not exchange comments with students. They should focus their attention on the requested concern and bring a data gathering form and pen. The coach should gather data only on the information requested by the teacher.
- The principal's supervisor or other district personnel will be invited to sit in on a peer coaching staff development session to show support for the program.
- Once a month, the principal will highlight the accomplishments of a collaborative team at a staff meeting.
- Teams of teachers will be given release time (1/2 day per team) to plan how they will monitor their own implementation of a new strategy or innovation.

- The second professional development session on peer coaching will be conducted. At this session, peer coaching teams are finalized. Teams will use student data, the school improvement plan, and the Seattle School District High Leverage Teaching Moves document (see Table One) to help them pick a common focus for their peer coaching. The High Leverage Teaching Moves document (Seattle Public Schools, 2008) is a list of best practices that teachers can use with any lesson they teach regardless of content. Peer coaching teams can use the document as a resource for choosing a particular focus for their observations.
- The third professional development session on peer coaching includes demonstration and practice in simulated conditions. Staff members form small groups of five and take on the following roles: teacher, coach, process observer, and students. Group members rotate until everyone has had a chance to experience each role.
- Between September and December, the staff will begin a *peer watching phase* (Gottesman, 2000, p.32) in which team members observe one another teaching at least twice. Teachers hone their observation skills during this phase, which does not include any sharing of classroom observations. Observations are for 10 minutes or less, and are tied to the team's common focus area.
- Between January and March, most teams will move into to a *peer coaching phase* (Gottesman, 2000, p.32). Team members will observe one another teaching at least twice. This phase will include a short pre-conference, an observation during which data is collected, and a post-conference during which the observer coach

shares the data collected. The coach will act as a mirror, sharing the data, but making no evaluative comments whatsoever.

- A follow-up professional development session will be conducted in the spring. Teachers will be trained in various ways to collect data during observations.
- Between April and June, most teams will move into a *peer feedback phase* (Gottesman, 2000, p.32). In this phase the observer coach will prepare a limited number of suggestions to share with the observed teacher during the post-conference. These suggestions will be shared only if the observed teacher asks for them. Team members will observe one another teaching twice during this phase.

TABLE ONE

SEATTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT HIGH LEVERAGE TEACHING MOVES

Strategy	Definition	Purpose
1. Clear Teaching Point	<p>The teacher has carefully planned daily lessons within a unit plan.</p> <p>The teacher has a daily goal, connected to the standards, that is written and clearly posted so that students can see it and understand what they are going to learn and why.</p>	<p>Lessons are more focused when you set a goal for what you want students to learn.</p> <p>Students need to be able to see the goal of the lesson so that they can more readily own and be empowered by their learning.</p>

2. Modeling	<p>Teachers model the processes they use as an example of what they are teaching.</p> <p>Teachers voice their thinking aloud, for example:</p> <p>“I chose to do this because...”</p> <p>“I wonder why...”</p>	<p>Modeling your thinking is a way for students to recognize that learning is not “magic,” that there are steps you take to arrive at a solution or a product.</p> <p>Seeing and hearing a teacher work through their questions and ideas helps students internalize that they can do the same.</p>
3. Use of Vocabulary	<p>The teacher teaches the particular words that students need to know or be familiar with.</p> <p>These words should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content terms • Process terms <p>The teacher provides verbal and visible synonyms or short, friendly definitions for these vocabulary terms.</p> <p>A few key terms are purposefully posted daily.</p>	<p>Making vocabulary available and usable for students is essential.</p> <p>The vocabulary has to be purposefully used and referred to regularly to help students build a bank of terms and words they can properly or artfully use.</p> <p>e.g. word walls or pocket charts</p>

<p>4. Look for Justification or Reasoning</p>	<p>Teachers use thoughtful questioning strategies so that students can state why and how they solved a problem, or made a decision in their process to solve or create.</p> <p>Students are given private think time to consider their response.</p> <p>When a student struggles, teachers scaffold to provide opportunities for the student to reach the intended cognitive demand. The teacher is encouraging.</p>	<p>Students show a higher level of content and process retention when they explain their reasoning for methods they used.</p> <p>Slowing down explanations gives students access to the thinking of their peers and provides them with the opportunity to reflect on their own choices.</p>
<p>5. Promote Rich and Engaging Discourse</p>	<p>Teachers use accountable talk strategies to engage all students.</p> <p>Teachers establish an effective classroom culture in which students have opportunities to listen to one another, ask each other questions, and share their thinking and learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn & Talk • A/B Partners <p>The teacher teaches students how to listen to each other, and encourages the sharing of thinking and ideas.</p> <p>The teacher teaches students how to use private think time to process and formulate ideas.</p>	<p>By working in pairs, students can share their thinking and begin to formulate & develop ideas.</p> <p>During a Turn & Talk, a teacher can listen in to A/B partners in order to gauge the level of understanding.</p>

6. Public Records	<p>Teachers effectively choose when work will be shared using a document camera and when it should be a part of the public record in the classroom.</p> <p>This might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchor charts created when modeling a lesson concept or process • Records of student work or instructional methods used to support students during lesson(s), including student-generated anchor charts • Honoring of student work 	<p>Public records provide students with a resource, an opportunity to reconnect to skills and processes they've learned, or to apply learning in a new way.</p> <p>Displaying student work honors the product they've created and the process they've undergone. Students, like most people, want their work to mean something.</p>
7. Notebooks	<p>Teachers use student writing in notebooks as a record for both the student and the teacher of a student's development.</p> <p>The notebook is a regularly used tool.</p>	<p>Teachers can use notebooks as a way to cohesively record student growth.</p> <p>Students need opportunities to reflect in writing about their work in the content area and to record why they chose a certain strategy or how they moved through their process.</p>

8. Ongoing Formative Assessment	<p>Teachers regularly measure student learning and plan next instructional moves.</p> <p>This might be in the form of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exit tickets or tasks • Writing notebooks/sketch books • Post-its from reading work 	<p>Teachers need a way to gauge student learning and to share this assessment with their colleagues as a part of a professional learning community.</p> <p>Constant checks of student learning help teachers plan instructional moves responsively.</p>
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Transfer Phase (Year Three and Beyond)

- The principal will appoint an on-site facilitator who can arrange for release time, find space for meetings, and make copies of observation instruments for peer coaches.
- Teachers will be encouraged to network (informally or formally) with other schools involved in peer coaching.
- The principal will continue to build support for the peer coaching program by promoting the success of the school at district, state and national levels.
- The principal will regularly recognize and celebrate the work of teams engaged in peer coaching at weekly staff meetings, in school or community newsletters, and on the school district website.

- Decision-making and problem-solving processes in the building will be structured to reflect peer coaching practices.
- The principal and hiring committee will make peer coaching practices part of the job description when there are openings in the school. The committee will formulate interview questions designed to surface how the candidate has worked collaboratively with peers.
- Allocations of time and money needed to support the peer coaching program will be routinely made.

Challenges to Successful Implementation

It will be challenging to find a stable source of income to continue the peer coaching program. Money obtained through grants can run out after an allotted time, and sometimes school budgets are severely limited by cuts in funding at the district, state or national levels. So it will be important to find a stable source of income to support the program over the long run.

It will be a particular challenge to keep staff members from judging one another too harshly, and from giving one another unnecessary praise. Both of these can lead to distrust among teachers participating in the program. Observations need to have a pre-identified focus and data should be collected only pertaining to that focus. When a peer coach praises what they saw their colleague do instead of just sharing observations, the process can quickly become contrived.

One of the biggest challenges will be finding time for teachers to observe one another and to regularly conduct conferences before and after those observations. There is a limited amount of time during a typical work day for teachers. They are already expected to plan, teach, assess, communicate with parents, pursue (and fund) their own professional development, prepare classroom materials, collaborate with teachers and instructional assistants, and serve on school committees. This is why finding the time for peer coaching observations and conferences will be a challenge. One way to meet this challenge is to build in regular common planning times for grade level teams to meet and plan. Teachers engaged in peer coaching can use this time to confer with one another, set up observations, and problem-solve. The other way to meet this challenge is to write a projected budget to pay for substitute teachers to cover the classrooms of observer coaches.

One way the principal can overcome some of these challenges is by developing and nurturing long term buy-in for the program. This can be accomplished by phasing in the program rather than mandating it, by continuously relating peer coaching to the school's overall mission, and by involving the staff in the development of the program from the start. If the staff sees value in the peer coaching program, then it can start to run itself and become part of the school's culture.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the Peer Coaching Program

Evidence of positive change at the school will determine if the peer coaching program was successful. The first way to collect this evidence is to compare student

achievement data at the school before the onset of the peer coaching program with data collected after the program has been up and running for at least one year. It may take three years to get an accurate picture of the impact on student achievement. A second way to measure the effectiveness of the program would be to survey the teachers involved in the program about their comfort level with being observed, their comfort level as a coach, and whether they feel their teaching has changed due to their involvement in the program. A third way to measure the effectiveness of the program would be to have teachers involved in peer coaching keep reflection and meeting logs. These logs could help track and recognize change in teacher attitudes and skill levels.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to find out if peer coaching improved teachers' delivery of instruction, and if it significantly impacted student achievement. Peer coaching was found to increase the accurate use of skills that teachers learned through professional development; however there was no evidence to show that peer coaching alone significantly effects student achievement.

A Strategic Action Plan for elementary principals was developed for principals interested in using peer coaching to help teachers extend and refine teaching strategies learned through professional development. The plan incorporated many of the components from successful peer coaching programs gleaned from the research.

Conclusions

After thoroughly reviewing the literature, it can be stated that successful peer coaching programs share these eleven characteristics:

1. The program is part of a long-term, on-going approach to professional development.
2. The program is tied to the school's overall vision and mission.
3. Participation in the program is voluntary.

4. The program is led by a strong principal, committed to collaboration and shared decision-making.
5. The staff is involved in designing how the program will look at their school.
6. The school schedule provides common planning time for peer coaching teams.
7. On-going professional development helps teachers learn to observe and coach one another.
8. The program is separated from evaluation procedures.
9. Money is allocated in the school's budget to support the program.
10. The program is supported by the school district.
11. The successful work of peer coaching teams is publicly recognized by the principal.

The research shows that peer coaching does improve teachers' delivery of instruction. When peer coaching was part of the follow-up to professional development sessions, seventy-five to ninety percent of teachers accurately used the new skills in the classroom. When peer coaching was not part of the follow-up, the number of teachers using the new skills accurately fell to five percent (*The Coaching of Teaching*, 1993).

Recommendations

There have not been enough studies conducted to show the extent to which peer coaching impacts student achievement. Only one researcher, Murray (2009), studied the effects of peer coaching on student achievement. Murray found that although peer coaching did provide teachers with opportunities to share ideas, techniques and strategies,

there was no significant effect on student achievement. Future research needs to be done to measure the impact of peer coaching on student achievement. More long-term studies are needed as well. It would be unrealistic to expect peer coaching programs to produce dramatic, measureable results in student achievement after only one year. Researchers need to study schools in which peer coaching programs have been in place at least three years.

There should also be more studies conducted in schools among teachers already in the field. Too many of the existing studies have been conducted among pre-service teachers. Studies have shown that providing pre-service teachers opportunities to observe one another teach will lead to increased instructional effectiveness, but this finding cannot easily be generalized to teachers currently in the profession.

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