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ABSTRACT

Peer coaching has been identified as a methodology for increasing teacher effectiveness. This paper discusses the topic of peer coaching in three parts. First, a review of current literature on peer coaching defines the types of peer coaching and discusses their multiple benefits. The second section considers the factors influencing successful implementation of peer coaching programs. The final section of the paper shows the role of peer coaching in three, long term, staff development programs conducted by the authors. A matrix of the programs and an accompanying checklist identify the key factors in program design and implementation, thereby providing data for potential replication of the peer coaching methodology. (Author)

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Peer Coaching in Collaborative Programs:

From Theory to Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Peer coaching has been identified as a methodology for increasing teacher effectiveness. This paper discusses the topic of peer coaching in three parts. First, a review of the current literature on peer coaching defines the types of coaching and discusses their multiple benefits. The second section considers the factors influencing successful implementation of peer coaching programs. The final section shows the role of peer coaching in three, long term, staff development programs conducted by the authors. A matrix of the programs and an accompanying checklist identify the key factors in program design and implementation, thereby providing data for potential replication of the peer coaching methodology.

SECTION I

Definition of Peer Coaching.

The operational definition of coaching proposed by Baker and Showers (1984) is "the provision of on-site, personal support and technical assistance for teachers."

Types of Coaching.

Garmston (1987) identifies three types of peer coaching, classifying them according to purposes.

Technical coaching, from the work of Joyce and Showers (1983), helps teachers transfer training into practice. Teachers provide objective feedback for each other, giving it in a nonthreatening and supportive climate.

Collegial coaching assumes that teachers acquire self-initiated reflection about their teaching for self-improvement. Collegial

coaching provides the opportunity to develop and practice this skill with peer assistance in analyzing and interpreting observation data. Cognitive coaching is an example of collegial coaching. Cognitive coaching was developed for use with administrators, but has been adopted by teachers (Costa and Garmston, 1985). Coaches are trained to facilitate the thinking process underlying the judgements made by teachers in the application of teaching techniques.

Challenge coaching is similar to an ad-hoc problem solving team, as described by Peters and Waterman (1982). It is a small group process for planning and implementing solutions to identified problems.

The authors view peer coaching as a process or action plan for problem solving using self-analysis and creative thinking processes for the development of a specific skill. Teachers provide each other with observational data in a supportive environment, working together in diads or small groups to enhance thinking and self-analysis around the application of newly learned skills.

Benefits of Coaching.

Coaching provides opportunities to increase teacher effectiveness. Garmston's (1987) review of the literature identified the following benefits: 1) the transfer of teacher training into classroom practice, 2) the facilitation of teacher reflective thinking processes and self-analysis, and 3) the enhancement of teacher problem solving through teaming.

In addition, other researchers have identified secondary benefits. Cooperative collegial groups supply a source of

intellectual provocation (Little 1982, Schulman and Carey 1984, LeBlanc 1987). Collaboration also breaks through the psychological isolation from other adults that teachers often experience (Sarason 1971) by providing teachers with a forum to exchange new ideas about teaching (Lortie 1975). Peer coaching also provides teachers with the emotional support and encouragement needed for growth and change (Nemser 1983 and LeBlanc and Zide 1986).

Given the authors' definition of peer coaching, other potential benefits arise. Visible products of increased teacher effectiveness attained through peer coaching include improvements in the curricula and improvements in students' growth. In addition, a non-tangible benefit results: the introduction of a process for teacher change. Therefore, peer coaching can be viewed as a process that continuously feeds into the cycle for school improvement.

SECTION II

Factors Influencing Peer Coaching.

Two major areas which effect the implementation of peer coaching as a methodology for increased teacher effectiveness are: 1) conditions for teacher growth, and 2) administrative support. Current literature in the areas of teacher supervision and evaluation, staff development, and educational leadership identify specific factors within the broad areas. These factors are described here, with specific citations from the successful staff development programs as illustrations.

Conditions for Teacher Growth.

Sparks (1983) review of the research on staff development suggests that there are two factors influencing teachers' adoption of techniques. "The techniques need to be clear and explicit and teachers need to become convinced (a) that the practice is worthwhile (in terms of teacher or student outcomes) and (b) that the change can be made without too much work or disruption." The staff development programs cited in the matrix (see Appendix A) addressed these issues. Scenarios were developed in which outcomes for teachers and students were clearly defined, with teacher incentives providing the impetus for change. The peer coaching components of these programs were reported by teachers as being worthwhile (Cook 1987 and Vaughan 1987).

Current research on learning theory recognizes that "complex learning demands that learners have substantial freedom to direct their own growth" (Wildman and Niles 1987). Peer coaching provides an opportunity for such learner directed growth as teachers target their own individual areas for coaching. For example, in the authors' program "Behavior Management Strategies for Mainstreamed SPED Students," teachers selected a new technique to use within the classroom setting. They then formed diads and observed each other, providing observational data on the employment of the self-selected techniques. This technique provided the practice and feedback necessary for integration of the new technique into each teacher's repetoire, increasing overall teacher effectiveness.

Hershey and Blanchard (1982) discuss maturity as a key factor related to job performance. Maturity is composed of knowledge and

skill plus confidence and commitment. The process of peer coaching allows for development of all four of these areas. New knowledge and skill is applied; feedback on application is provided through peer coaching allowing for fine tuning of the skill. Confidence is enhanced through the facilitation of the self-analysis process. Commitment is enhanced via the emotional support and encouragement provided by peer coaching. This was particularly evident in the "Collaborative Computer Technology Project" conducted by the authors. Teachers' growth in knowledge and skill related to integrating computer technology in the curricula increased dramatically. The enthusiasm generated created incentive for a successful peer coaching program, which resulted in a school-wide computer trained teacher population.

Peters and Waterman (1982) build a strong case to support that the most successful business corporations create a culture supportive of individual experimentation and problem solving. The supportive culture described can be likened to the supportive climate created by the process of peer coaching, thus producing an environment in which the individual can experiment and solve problems. In "The Circle Collabortive," cluster level teams address specific issues related to the assessment, enhancement and implementation of curricula in the area of language arts. Thinking skills and creative problem solving are integrated into the newly revised curricula, as well as being methods for teacher interaction around issues addressed by the teams.

Administrative Support.

Berman and McLauglin (1978) studied hundreds of federally funded programs. The results of their research concluded that administrative support was a major factor affecting the success of these programs. Little (1981) found that staff development was most successful where there was a "norm of collegiality and experimentation". These studies identified the need for administrative support for successful staff development, of which peer coaching is a methodology.

Garmston (1987) identifies five ways in which administrators develop and maintain peer coaching within their schools. These include: 1) selecting a model tied to expected outcomes, 2) demonstrating the value, 3) providing the topic for coaching, 4) providing training, and 5) exemplifying positive coaching behaviors.

Specific factors which the authors found to influence their successful staff development programs are listed in the checklist in the final section of this paper. By addressing each of these areas, an overall supportive environment was created and maintained.

SECTION III

The Role of Peer Coaching.

In each of the programs identified in this paper, program development was brought about via a system identified need. The need assesment process included input from multiple sources: superintendents, principals, teachers, parents and school committee members. Program development and implementation reflected this multiple input, involving members from each group in planning and information exchange thoughout the life of each program. In this way,

administrative support and teacher direction was garnered from the beginning.

Peer coaching provided the process for continuing support and direction, allowing for the open flow of communication. An environment which supported open exchange of ideas and change was fostered. Cross membership in cooperative collegial groups insured a wholistic approach to school improvement.

In addition, peer coaching provided the mechanism for teacher application of newly learned knowledge. Self-reflection and improvement of teaching skills enhanced teacher effectiveness. Program evaluations have documented this teacher growth (Cook 1987 and Vaughan 1987).

The top row of the matrix (see Appendix A) identifies three staff development programs implemented by the authors, in which peer coaching is a major methodology. The factors and processes identified as affecting peer coaching are listed along the left side of the matrix in order of implementation. In addition, the factors are also presented again in checklist form. The checklist can be used as a tool for replication of the peer coaching process.

CONCLUSION

This paper presented the authors' definition of peer coaching as a process or action plan for problem solving using self-analysis and creative processes. Teachers provide each other with observational data in a supportive environment, working together in small groups to enhance thinking and self-analysis around the application of newly learned skills.

Coaching was a component of successful staff development programs conducted by the authors. The factors which influenced the implementation of peer coaching were defined, with examples of mechanisms used to address these factors. The matrix and the checklist provide comparative data and a format for program replication.

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APPENDIX A

A STAFF DEVELOPMENT MATRIX

	Behavior Management Strategies for Mainstreamed Students (k-8) Fitchburg State College and Shirley Public Schools	Integrating Computer Technology in the Curriculum (k-8) Fitchburg State College and Shirley and Lunenburg Public Schools	"Circle Collaborative" Integration of Thinking Skills Across the Curriculum (K-8) Fitchburg State College and Lunenburg Public Schools
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT			
Identify need/goal collaboratively: administration, teachers, consultants		X	X
Define instructional area tied to goal	X	X	X
Provide incentives, space, release time	X	X	X
Delegate responsibility/authority for coordination to program directors	X	X	X
Attend collaborative planning and training sessions	X	X	X
Express value of and commitment to program	X	X	X
TEACHER INVOLVEMENT - GROWTH			
Support experimentation and problem solving		X	X
Collaborate in goal setting, program implementation monitoring, and evaluation		X	X
Choose incentive option: graduate credit	X	X	X
in-service credit	X	X	X
open session participation		X	X
Participate in Staff Development program process: Information	X	X	X
Demonstration	X	X	X
Critique and selection of techniques	X	X	X
Practice	X	X	X
Peer Observation	X	X	X
Feedback	X	X	X
Peer Coaching		X	X
Team Work	X	X	X
Product Development		X	X

APPENDIX B

A CHECKLIST
KEY FACTORS IN PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Identify need/goal collaboratively:
administration, teachers, consultants

Define instructional area tied to goal

Provide incentives, space, release time

Delegate responsibility/authority for
coordination to program directors

Attend collaborative planning and training sessions

Express value of and commitment to program

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT - GROWTH

Support experimentation and problem solving

Collaborate in goal setting, program implementation
monitoring, and evaluation

Choose incentive option:
- graduate credit
- in-service credit
- open session participation

Participate in Staff Development program process:
- Information
- Demonstration
- Critique and selection of techniques
- Practice
- Peer Observation
- Feedback
- Peer Coaching
- Team Work
- Product Development