Unleash the Power of Collaboration With Peer Coaching

An orientation to the power of Peer Coaching and how it can help participants to collaborate with colleagues to infuse technology into engaging teaching and learning.

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# Attributes of Effective Professional Development

The following chart synthesizes national research findings about effective professional development from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), Michael Fullan, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Effective Professional Development</th>
<th>Less Effective Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job-embedded, occurs during teachers’ workdays</td>
<td>After school or Saturday workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term, ongoing study of selected topics</td>
<td>Insufficient time to sustain study of a given topic; isolated incidences of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly related to teachers' classroom activities; driven by school performance data</td>
<td>Topics and approaches not driven by shared goals and evidence of need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly collaborative professional learning, utilizing teacher leaders to whom colleagues look for assistance</td>
<td>Teachers learn and practice in isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides structured opportunities for feedback and reflection</td>
<td>Insufficient opportunity for reflection and feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Positive Impact of Peer Coaching

The following table summarizes Showers’ and Joyce’s research on increasing the positive impact of professional development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>Knowledge Mastery</th>
<th>Skill Acquisition</th>
<th>Classroom Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLUS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLUS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Coaching</strong></td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80-90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows the impact on classroom application when three methods of professional development are applied. When professional development focuses only on learning the theory of good instructional practice the result is a 5-10% rate of classroom application. The rate of classroom application increases slightly, to 10-15%, when the professional development experience includes opportunity to practice as well as learning about theory. Significant increase in classroom application occurs only when coaching, study teams, and/or peer visits are included with learning about theory and opportunity to practice.
Attributes of a Successful Peer Coach

Teachers say a successful peer coach:

- Is able to build trust with peers.
- Builds on what a teacher needs.
- Is a team player.
- Communicates well and listens to teachers.
- Knows what teachers are doing in their classrooms.
- Can show teachers how to replace what they are doing with something better, not just present technology as an add-on.
- Is highly organized and plans well in advance with teachers.
- Provides a safe, risk-taking environment and is non-threatening, non-judgmental, and accepting.
- Is flexible.
- Has enough depth and breadth of knowledge to help teachers who are at various stages of technology integration, including knowledge of appropriate instructional strategies.
- Knows how to organize and structure a technology-rich classroom.
- Is recognized by staff as a strong/outstanding teacher.

Characteristics of School Readiness for Peer Coaching

Teachers and coaches say success characteristics of a school include:

- A "tight" staff with a "help each other" ethic.
- A school culture that encourages teachers to ask for help.
- A school culture that is open to project-based learning.
- Teachers who see themselves as lifelong learners and who seek out new teaching strategies.
- Alignment of coaching with school/district goals, initiatives, and priorities.
- Clear school/district expectations and accountability measures for coaches and collaborating teachers.
- An invested principal who will ensure that coaching is supported as part of the school's educational plan.
- Time provided by the school/district for coaches and teachers to collaborate.
- Opportunities for flexible teacher scheduling.
## Communication Skills for Coaches

### Active Listening
- Is focused on the speaker.
- Is blocking out all competing thoughts.
- Is leaning forward and nodding.

### Paraphrasing
- Is restating what was stated.
- Is used to check for understanding.
- Clarifies what was heard by summarizing.
- Indicates acceptance and encouragement.
- Establishes relationship between speakers.
  - **So...**
  - **So what you are wondering is...**
  - **As you...**
  - **So your hunch is...**
  - **You're thinking...**

### Clarifying Questions
- Lead to a clear picture or understanding of a topic or idea.
- Are factual.
- Are answered quickly.
- Are used to gather information.
  - **How did you...?**
  - **What...?**
  - **How did...?**

### Probing Questions
- Are thought provoking and encourage deeper thinking.
- Usually start with a paraphrase.
- Are often open-ended.
  - **You said... , have you ever thought about...?**
  - **Why...?**
  - **What might the next step be?**
  - **What did you learn from that?**
  - **Are there other strategies that you could use to...?**
Probing Question Exercise

SESSION 2
ACTIVITY 2

Introduction
A skillful coach uses communication skills to encourage a collaborating teacher to think more deeply about a topic or to help the teacher reflect during a planning conference. The goal of this exercise is to help the group gain expertise in using these important coaching skills by using a protocol.

Protocols are guidelines for conversations, and we use them in the coaching program to keep discussions focused. We also use protocols because they provide a structure for collaborative work and help build trust. As coaches become knowledgeable about the use of protocols they may use them with groups of collaborating teachers.

This entire exercise should take no longer than 20 minutes for one speaker. Prior to moving into a circle, the participants should get out a pencil, sticky notes and the Coaching Skills Cue Card.

Directions:
1. Move into groups of four to six participants.
2. Identify the following roles:
   • A facilitator to walk the group step by step through the protocol and keep everyone focused during the activity. The facilitator helps the participants follow the protocol by redirecting participants as needed.
   • A timekeeper to move the discussion along.
   • A speaker who talks about one of the following challenges:
     • The challenge of integrating technology into regular classroom activities
     • The challenge of finding time to collaborate with colleagues about teaching and learning
3. The speaker describes their challenge, including background information, and how it would look if the challenge did not exist (the ideal situation).
4. Three people take turns paraphrasing the speaker.
5. Three people ask clarifying questions. The speaker answers these questions.
6. The group takes a few minutes to write down a probing question on a sticky note. Participants may refer to the Coaching Skills Cue Card to develop the probing question.
7. Each person in the group reads their probing question aloud, then hands the speaker the sticky note. The speaker does not respond.
8. The speaker considers all the questions and then tells the group which probing question caused him or her to think the most deeply about his or her dilemma.
9. If time allows, another participant becomes the speaker and the process is repeated.

Communication Skills Exercise Debrief
How do you think communication skills build trust?
Was it easy or hard to follow the protocol’s directions? Why?
How can you use these skills with another teacher or students?

Adapted from the Probing Question Exercise and used with the permission of the National School Reform Faculty.
Peer Coaching Program at a Glance

Session 1
Principals and participants work through a series of exercises to help them define what peer coaching might look like in their school. They focus on the following questions:

• How will coaching support the school’s educational goals?
• What activities are teachers pursuing that support these goals?
• Which of these activities could be enriched through the use of technology?
• Who will be coached and when will coaching occur?
• What roles and responsibilities will coaches adopt?

Session 2
Session 2 helps participants complete their vision for coaching and begin to turn that vision into a concrete plan of action. Participants create products they could use to explain their coaching programs, practice communication and collaboration skills in planning meetings, and create Coaching Portfolios they can use with their collaborating teachers.

Sessions 3, 4, and 5
In Sessions 3–5, participants focus on lesson design and coaching skills as they work through a series of activities that require them to cooperatively rework a lesson so that it is more engaging and integrates technology. Key activities include, identifying what makes an effective learning activity, and applying the lesson improvement process in a collaborative work environment.

Session 6
Participants integrate new skills and knowledge gained during Sessions 1–5 by focusing on implementing coaching. Key activities include:

• Discussing and reflecting on ways coaches have worked with collaborating teachers by using a reflection protocol.
• Exploring the Web resources and updating Portfolio tools.
• Setting goals and action steps and updating Coaching Plans.

Session 7
In the first part of Session 7, participants and their principal (or designee) participate in activities related to how to improve staff development throughout a school. Key activities include:

• Reviewing research.
• Looking at characteristics of effective professional development.
• Setting new goals for their coaching programs.

The second part of the session is spent on:

• Reflection and sharing of “best coaching practices.”
• Exploration of online professional development resources.

Session 8
Session 8 is designed to help participants reflect on their coaching work as they explore resources related to collaborating with local and global communities. Participants will:

• Write a Coaching Chronicles article featuring examples of collaboration, success stories, tips, and resources
• Celebrate their work as coaches.
• Set new coaching goals.