

Peer Coaching

Unlocking the Power of Collaboration

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BOOK AT A GLANCE

Chapter 1 explains the roles Peer Coaches assume and how they play these roles to create a relationship based on respect and trust. It also explores strategies coaches can use to build this kind of relationship with their collaborating teachers.

Chapter 2 examines the research about the strategies that are most likely to improve student learning, research on effective professional learning and how Peer Coaching aligns with both fields of research.

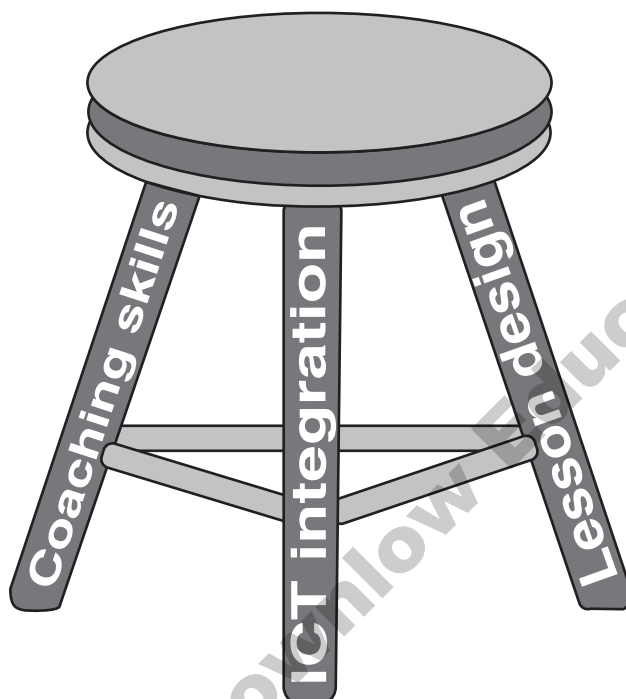
Chapter 3 defines three critical coaching skills, communication and collaboration skills, lesson-design skills and technology integration, and outlines why these skills are essential to build the coach's capacity to assist other teachers to improve instruction.

Chapter 4 outlines a step-by-step look at the elements of a Coaching Plan designed to align coaching with the school's goals and make Peer Coaching effective. It also explores how school leaders can use the planning process as part of their overall strategy to build their schools' collective capacity to improve teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 offers insight into communication and collaboration skills Peer Coaches need to be successful. It also provides insights into how Peer Coaches use these skills to create a safety net that encourages their collaborating teachers to take risks and improve teaching and learning.

Chapter 6 examines the importance of creating a norm for effective learning for successful Peer Coaching and the broader success of school-wide improvement of teaching and learning. It also provides practical insights into how Peer Coaches can use this norm to assist peers in the ongoing process of improving teaching and learning.

Figure 3.1 Key Coaching Skills



Source: Meyer et al. (2011t).

collaborate by forging a relationship with her or his learning partner that is based on respect and trust. What a coach says and does defines the coaching relationship and determines whether a peer trusts her coach. We also learned that a coach's success relies on his or her ability to create a safety net that encourages the learning partner to take risks to improve teaching and learning. Both communication and collaboration skills are essential to build trust, respect and the safety net.

A quick look at three sets of communication and collaboration skills should demonstrate their critical importance. First, if coaches want to avoid taking on the role of expert, they need to emphasise inquiry over advocacy. This means a coach needs to listen carefully, to raise questions that

their commitment to one another to reach their common goals is a much more effective type of accountability (Elmore, 2004; Mourshed, Chinezi & Barber, 2010). My experience suggests this form of accountability is more likely to develop if coaching pairs explicitly commit to norms that define their individual and collective responsibilities for learning as they work together to improve student learning. Collaborative norms are part of the equation that builds a teacher's capacity to improve.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The list of communication skills effective peer coaches should master seems a bit overwhelming. It could include tone of voice, negotiating skills, choosing the right words to empower and motivate, facial expression, body language and other dialogue skills. While the list of skills is lengthy, there is a very clear starting point for the development of these skills, and for Peer Coaches, that is the development of a handful of communication skills. Peer Coach training focuses on four key skills, three of which come from Garmston and Wellman's (1999) norms of collaboration and the last from other related resources. Prospective coaches get repeated practice using these four skills in a variety of settings like those the coaches will find in their schools. In addition to repeated practice, experience has proven that coaches develop these skills more effectively if the learning exercises include opportunities for participants to provide feedback to their peers, feedback that is designed to help coaches be more effective at using these communication skills.

Active Listening

If a coaching relationship is going to be personalised, coaches have to understand their learning partner's needs, interests, experiences and perceptions. Active listening is one skill that promotes this kind of understanding. Active listeners are focused on what the speaker is saying. They

changes so quickly that a coach can't possibly know how to use all of the available software. Coaches don't need to; they just need to know where to find tutorials that they and their peers can use. Internet4classrooms.com, Microsoft, Google and Apple's tutorials for educators are great starting places for commonly used software.

This strategy of identifying common tasks in the learning activity focuses on the core of teaching: How will the students

When coaches ask if the task requires students to gather information, collaborate with others, present their findings and get feedback, they are asking teachers to work in a realm they know and understand.

learn and demonstrate what they have learned? When coaches ask if the task requires students to gather information, collaborate with others, present their findings and get feedback, they are asking teachers to work in a realm they know and understand. With teaching and learning as starting points, coaches can emphasise how a specific piece of technology

might help students to reach the goals and perform the tasks that the teacher has defined. Coaches who play this role help us meet another valuable – and largely unmet – need, encouraging teachers to use technology routinely.

As technology was introduced into classrooms more than 25 years ago, many leaders held the belief that it had the power to transform learning. Technology held a power that many leaders and prophets said couldn't be denied. I remember listening to recognised leaders in the early 1990s telling us that technology was like a steamroller headed down the street, aimed right at educators. Educators had two choices: jump on the steamroller or become part of the pavement. Apparently, they overlooked a third option: Educators could step aside. And in many cases they did. Here is a test you can try to see if the situation has changed. The next time you visit a school, ask anyone you meet who is doing a great job of using technology to support 21st-century