

Team Coaching: Staff Development Side by Side

A successful variation on peer coaching involves visiting resource teachers who, rather than observing classroom teachers, teach alongside them.

Teacher A: Today we are going to take the information from the webs we made yesterday and put it into a contrasting paragraph so someone can understand what you think the main differences are between an apple and an orange. There are ways to do that, and today we are going to help you with some techniques to write a well-organized, contrasting paragraph.

Teacher B: Did you find it easier to compare or contrast?

Student: Contrast

Teacher B: Did you? Why?

Student: Because there are really big differences between an apple and an orange.

Teacher B: So you could more easily see the differences between the two. Okay. Did these webs help you to organize your thinking?

Student: Yes.

Teacher A: Why?

To the casual observer, this class of 22 students seems like any other third-grade classroom, except that it has two teachers instead of one. Both teachers stand at or near the front of the room, and both interact with the students. Both give directions, ask questions, and praise students.

What is occurring, however, in addition to instruction is staff development. Teacher A, the regular classroom teacher, is being coached in the teaching of writing by Teacher B, the language arts coordinator.

After reviewing the research on transfer of new methods into an active teaching repertoire, Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1980) concluded that the most effective training included:

- study of the theory underlying the method,
- observation of the method as demonstrated by "experts,"
- practice of the method (in protected situations) with feedback, and
- coaching in the real teaching situation.

"Coaching" has been operationally defined as "the provision of on-site, personal support and technical assistance for teachers" (Baker and Showers 1984, p. 1). Recent implementations of coaching have often taken the

form of *peer coaching*: that is, two classroom teachers attend the same inservice training, collaborate on lesson development, observe one another in their classrooms as a lesson is taught, and then offer constructive criticism about the lesson.

In our staff development work, teaching schedule conflicts have made peer coaching difficult, if not impossible. As one teacher reported, "We coached during planning and debriefing, and we *were* observing. It was wonderful! But then our schedules changed. Now we can't observe while the lesson is being taught—a real loss!"

We chose, therefore, to try an alternative form of coaching. We selected as coaches two school-based language arts coordinators (resource teachers) who had flexible schedules and could arrange to be in the teachers' classrooms for lesson execution. They had also had previous training in the teaching methods the teachers were to

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learn; therefore, they were relative experts in the methodology.

Our coaching model differs from previous coaching models (e.g., Servatius and Young 1985, Showers 1985) in that the coach does not observe the teachers, but *team teaches* the lesson with them. We call our model “team coaching” because it resembles team teaching. That is, the coach and the teacher together plan, execute, and evaluate the lessons.

Our purpose in implementing this two-year team coaching model was to evaluate its success and to determine what characteristics make a team coach effective.

Background

Our staff development program began in August 1984 with a three-day inservice course in the teaching of writing conducted by the Maryland Writing Project. Twenty teachers from the Calverton School in Maryland, representing all areas of the curriculum and grades K-12, learned new approaches to the teaching of writing, observed teacher-consultants model strategies for teaching writing, developed their own lessons, and received feedback

on their lesson plans. The two language arts coordinators also attended the sessions.

Coaching began at the start of the 1984 school year. The team coaches visited each classroom approximately twice a week for at least three months, or at most, for an entire school year. Together the team coach and the teacher planned, taught, and evaluated the lesson.

For two years we collected qualitative and quantitative data from coaches, teachers, students, and observers.

Quantitative data. After each year of coaching, teachers completed a questionnaire based on Joyce and Showers' (1982) five functions of a coach. Teachers rated their coach on each of the five functions using a 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale. Table 1 shows the questions, the function related to the question, and the average of the responses. It is notable that 12 of the 20 teachers rated all questions a 5 and that the averages for all five coaching functions were 4.6 and above.

Qualitative data. To evaluate the project, we videotaped, audiotaped, and observed the team coaching model in action. We interviewed teachers individually and in groups, studied the

**Table 1
Teachers Rate Their Coaches**

Question	Coaching Function (Joyce and Showers 1982)	Average 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale
1. How successful has the coaching been in providing for professional companionship (sharing with your coach, discussing problems and successes)?	Provision of companionship	5.
2. How helpful has the technical feedback from your coach been on your lesson plans?	Giving of technical feedback	4.8
3. How helpful has the technical feedback from your coach been on in-class visits?		
4. To what extent do you feel you have integrated the process approach to writing as a standard part of your teaching repertoire?	Analysis of application: extending executive control	4.6
5. To what extent has your partnership with your coach helped to adapt the writing process to your own particular situation?	Adaptation to the students	4.8
6. How much assistance have you gotten from your coach in helping you to feel good about yourself as you have tried new strategies?	Personal facilitation	5.



Teacher and coach are partners in lesson execution, whether at the board or (below) on the floor.

teacher-coach dialogue journals, and examined teachers' comments on the questionnaire. We interviewed students as well.

Analysis of our data revealed five characteristics of the coaches that promote an effective team coaching partnership. Quotes from teachers, students, and coaches illustrate their interpretations of each characteristic.

1. Knowledge. A team coach needs to know more than the classroom teacher about the method being learned; however, the coach does not need to know "everything."

Teacher: "I don't think the inservice would have been as beneficial to us had we not had a coach. A coach is our expert, our connection. She gives us the information we need to take us from the inservice to the classroom."

Student: "The coach doesn't know everything, but she discusses ideas and shares her thoughts with our teacher. I like the old saying, 'Two heads are better than one.'"

Coach: "The more sophisticated the teachers become, the more difficult their questions become. A coach has to be able to keep ahead of their knowledge base or at least help them to perfect their own teaching styles."

2. Credibility. A team coach must demonstrate success in the classroom, not as an observer but as a participating teacher. When the coach works side by side with the teacher, the

teacher realizes that the coach has usable ideas and can execute them in the classroom.

Teacher: "When I am observed, I feel that I am on show and every little step I take is being watched. It bothers me. However, if my coach and I are teaching together, it doesn't bother me. When the person is actually in there—dealing with the *Justins* on the one hand and the *Marks* on the other hand, and says, 'I see what you mean; this is exhausting. What are we going to do?'—then I think an hour in the classroom can be better than listening to the best person for five hours. Even the nonbelievers and doubters can't be skeptical if the coach is going to take the challenges right along with you."



Student: "If the coach sat in the back of the room, it would look like Mrs. T. was being evaluated. The coach isn't contributing then; it just wouldn't do any good. Plus, Mrs. T. would be nervous, and she'd think the coach wasn't really helping her, so she wouldn't listen to the coach anyhow."

Coach: "The teachers believe me because I go into the classroom and show that I can do what I'm asking them to do. If I didn't take the risks with them, I don't think they would let me back into their classrooms. I've had many teachers say to me, 'I'm not afraid of making mistakes in front of you because I have seen you make mistakes and it's okay.' In our school, I haven't had anybody ask me to just come and watch."

3. Support. A team coach must encourage the teacher's efforts and couch even constructive criticism with praise. Changing a behavior and implementing a new idea are difficult at best. A team coach has to be ready to praise the teacher's efforts, step by step.

Teacher: "I guess the number one difference for me is moral support. We all need somebody to say we're doing it correctly and that we should be proud of ourselves."

Student: "Not all teachers work together so well. Some teachers might fight and argue. The coach must be cooperative. If the coach and the teacher work together, the teacher will learn to trust the coach and start to listen."

Coach: "I have to be supportive and give praise. All the journals have entries noting, 'You've given me praise, you've given me confidence.' Let's face it, most teachers are doing lots of good things and trying their best; they need to hear the good things first before they can start making changes."

"Analysis of our data revealed five characteristics of the coaches that promote an effective team coaching partnership. . . . knowledge, teaching credibility, support, facilitation, and availability."

4. *Facilitation.* A team coach is a "tenant" in another teacher's classroom, and it is essential that the teacher maintain ownership of the lesson, students, and classroom. The tenant is responsible for what occurs in the apartment, but the owner is the final authority. The coach is there to facilitate, not dictate.

Teacher: "The coach never takes the classroom away from me. The children don't treat me any differently. We're there together, and I think even an insecure teacher wouldn't feel threatened by her presence in the classroom. She is flexible and willing to have her ideas talked over and changed. We don't always go with her plan; we don't always go with mine. Sometimes she models a technique for me. I've watched and watched and find myself, when she is not there, running a writing workshop or whatever, using her exact words. But this is how I learned, and now it works for me."

Student: "When the coach is in my classroom, Mrs. J. is still the boss. The coach backs up and helps Mrs. J. We are all important in the classroom. The kids are the writers, so we're important. The coach and Mrs. J. are important because they make decisions about how to teach us better. They each have ideas, and we see them make decisions right in front of the class."

Coach: "From planning the lesson through discussing how the lesson went, the teacher must take ownership. I must respect the teacher's ideas, feelings, and

reactions at all times. If I have an idea in class, I talk it over with the teacher and we come to a joint decision. Teachers want constructive criticism and help, but they need to have the authority to determine what occurs with their students."

5. *Availability.* A team coach must be accessible to the teacher for planning, team teaching, and conferencing. Because the coaches in this study were language arts coordinators, they had flexible schedules and were readily available to the teachers.

Teacher: "I don't have time to share ideas with other teachers and, even if I did, I'm not sure it would work quite as well. My coach takes time to plan with me, schedule herself into my classroom, and also debrief at the end of the lesson. We've gotten it down to 45 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It works, but I could easily use her every day."

Student: "The coach and Mrs. P. plan before class, and sometimes during class. If they have another idea, they talk about it with each other and make a decision. Many times, when they get stuck making a decision, they ask us for our ideas and we help them out. After the lesson, they always take a few minutes to talk about the lesson and what to do next."

Coach: "Because I don't have a regularly assigned class, I'm able to schedule myself into classrooms on a regular basis. The teachers know when I'm coming, and they plan on me. Planning for the lesson and debriefing after the lesson are difficult, but we talk whenever we can. Sometimes we schedule meetings during planning periods, but more often we talk in the hallways, during recess, and on the way to the car after school. I have to be available to share the unexpected thrills as well as the unavoidable defeats."

Conclusions and Considerations

The success of team coaching supports Joyce and Showers' (1982) view that people other than regular classroom teachers can be coaches. Thus, the role of another group of professionals, resource teachers, can be defined to include the important responsibility of coaching.

Our results also suggest several issues for consideration. First, our teachers are strongly opposed to having a coach who is not a peer, and not experiencing what they view as the realities of teaching, sitting in their room "observing" them, even for coaching purposes. This they perceive as evaluation, not coaching. Thus a nonclassroom teacher coach would be well advised not to observe but to team teach.

Second, teachers, coaches, and students emphasize the importance of support and facilitation during coaching. This advice applies to all coaches—peer or team.

Third, teachers and coaches stress that the coach should be more knowledgeable than the teacher about the method being learned. This point should cause us to look carefully at peer coaching models in which two teachers who are in the skill acquisition stage are expected to coach one another.

Fourth, the team coaching model might be appropriately transferred to the preservice education program for student teaching experiences. Team coaching might be an appropriate scaffolding phase between the time student teachers observe classroom teachers (the coaches) and the time the student teachers solo teach.

Coaching has been shown to be a necessary ingredient for the most effective teacher training. This team coaching model—teacher and coach planning, executing, and evaluating side by side—is a realistic way to bring coaching into the schools. □

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