Peer Coaching for Effective Professional Learning

In this mini-course we will look at what peer coaching is and how it would look in action at school. To achieve this we will look at some research and explore the peer coaching cycle. We will also look at the roles coaches play and the attributes of successful coaches in developing a plan to implement quality 21st Century pedagogy.

Activity 1 - Professional Learning in your school

1. Read the notes below,
2. Study the table and then discuss the implications and what this means for professional learning in your school.
3. Read the rest of the notes and discuss or reflect ‘How does peer coaching differ from supervision?’

Why peer coaching?

The relationship between three types of professional learning or training and their impact on teachers is shown in the following table. According to this data, peer coaching is among the types of training activity that have by far the greatest impact on what happens in classrooms. The data in the table was adapted from the research of Joyce and Showers, who are leading researchers in the area of peer coaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>Knowledge Mastery</th>
<th>Skill Acquisition</th>
<th>Classroom Application</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
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Peer coaching is an effective professional learning strategy. It is:

- Is focused on our core work of improving student outcomes
- Offers a significant degree of challenge
- Is informed by the best available research on effective learning and teaching
- Is embedded in teacher practice and analysis
- Is a strategy that provides constructive feedback about performance
- Is collaborative and reflective uses evidence based problem solving
- Is an ongoing, supported element within the school culture
How does Peer Coaching work?

Peer coaching is a process by which teachers work with one another to share expertise and provide feedback, support and assistance. The peer coach does not advise or tell. He or she asks questions and supports the learning partner to find their own answers.

Peer coaching also:

• provides job-embedded professional feedback and support
• promotes active learning by offering teachers opportunities to become involved in meaningful discussion and planning, observe other teachers, be observed, and receive feedback
• offers teachers opportunities to link the ideas learned in professional learning sessions to their teaching context
• is a collaborative partnership between peer coach and learning partner and not a mentor-novice relationship

*Peer coaching is not supervision.*

Activity 2 - Effective Professional Learning

Let’s reflect on our own Professional Learning experiences in order to consider our roles as coaches.

1. Think of a time when you learned something from a professional learning experience that changed your practice as a teacher or leader.
2. What made this experience so effective?
3. Share your thinking so that the group can develop a list of the characteristics of effective learning
4. What are the implications for you as a coach?
Activity 3 - The Coaching Cycle

Part 1 - Coaching Activities

Read the examples of Coach Activities and how they align with the stages of the Coaching Cycle. A detailed description of the cycle can be found in the following pages.

Peer Coaching Cycle

- **Assess**
  - determine teacher preparation
  - Set Goals
  - Using classroom data to help teachers determine an area of the curriculum that needs innovation.

- **Identify school goals**
  - determine classroom goals
  - identify activity project
  - determine required skills

- **Prepare**
  - set model for learning activities
  - plan activity/project
  - share lessons / resources
  - create / adapt materials
  - review / learn tech skills

- **Implement**
  - Model/team teach
  - apply/adjust
  - assess learning
  - Co-planning a learning activity or lesson that integrates technology into active, engaging learning activities

- **Reflect/Debrief**
  - Determine effectiveness
  - Plan future activities
  - After Observation, discussing, with participating teacher, what worked, what didn’t and how a lesson or activity might be modified in the future to be more effective

The Coaching Cycle - Discussion Questions

- What does it remind participants of?
- Have they ever worked like this before?
- In which step would they feel most comfortable working?
- Which step will they have to work hard to develop?
Coaching Cycle Stages

**Assess**
The first stage in helping a teacher develop and implement a project is to use classroom data to determine learning areas that need improvement. Another aspect of this process is to gain a clear understanding of the teacher’s technology skills and instructional strategies. This information helps the coach and teacher define a lesson or project the teacher can successfully implement or to identify the kind of coaching, resources, or skills the teacher might need to carry out the project.

**Set goals**
Setting reasonable and realistic goals that are linked to the school’s educational goals and curricular standards is a critical first step towards establishing a solid coaching relationship and helping teachers integrate information and communication technology into classroom activities that will help students develop skills needed for further education and careers.

**Prepare**
Participants use the 21st Century Learning Design Rubrics to evaluate the strength of a proposed lesson, project, or unit. Coaches ask probing questions designed to help colleagues make their learning activities more innovative. This part of the cycle depends on “best teaching practices” and coaches might provide learning activity models, resources, or teach technology skills that help teachers prepare to implement technology-rich, engaging learning activities. Coaches also help teachers develop plans to gather classroom data that can be used to assess how the learning activity is meeting student needs.

Teachers often report that a key part in preparing a learning activity is the opportunity to watch their coach model a technology-rich lesson or team teach a lesson or project with their coach. In either case the discussions after observing or team teaching are critical to get deeper insights that shape teaching practice.

**Implement activities**
At this stage collaborating teachers are ready to implement the learning activity that their coach helped them plan.

**Reflect, debrief**
After teachers have implemented a learning activity it is critical to learn from that experience. Part of that process is to explore evidence of student learning. Teachers may also ask their coach to observe part of a learning activity as part of this process. Whether observation is part of the process of reflection or not, a debrief is critical. One of the strengths of peer coaching is that it helps coaches learn to use protocols and other structured opportunities for reflection that help teachers improve their instruction. Coaches report that one of their most valuable learning opportunities is when they use these protocols to collaborate with other peer coaches on common problems and common solutions.

- Demonstrating lessons that integrate technology effectively.
  After observation, discussing, with the participating teacher, what worked, what didn’t and how a lesson or activity might be modified in the future to be more effective
Activity 4 - Coaching Roles and Attributes

Coach Roles - What are some roles coaches play?

Consider the 4 roles of a coach as listed below. From reading the information above, are there any other roles you could add to this list?

- Using classroom data, to help teachers determine an area of the curriculum that needs innovation.
- Co-planning a learning activity or lesson that integrates technology into active, engaging learning activities.
- Demonstrating lessons that integrate technology effectively.
- After observation, discussing, with the participating teacher, what worked, what didn’t and how a lesson or activity might be modified in the future to be more effective.

A whole school approach to Peer Coaching:

1. View the Dallas Public School, Victoria Australia video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o36yCg75aHs
2. What roles did you see coaches playing? List as you view. Share with your group.
3. Develop a list of coaching roles.
4. What roles could you play in your school?
5. Update your role list.

Activity 5 – So What?

Focus on the learning from this course. Reflect and commit to a change of practice in your school. Consider the following three questions and share with your pair:

- What is one thing you can do in your school to ensure better professional learning opportunities for staff or to work towards a coaching environment?
- Choose one of the 2 categories and commit to something you will do
- Share this with the group

End of Peer Coaching for Effective Professional Learning
Peer Coaching Overview

“It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do—continually, collaboratively, and on the job—to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work.” Former North Carolina Governor James Hunt (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 2)

Business, government, and education leaders believe that technology is a powerful learning tool, and that technology literacy is one key skill students must have for success in college and their careers. They also agree that educators play a critical role in helping students to use technology in learning and to develop technology literacy. While these may be commonly held expectations, there is a distressing gap between these assumptions and what happens in classrooms. In the United States all educators have some access to computers and the Internet, yet only about half feel adequately prepared to integrate technology into instruction. Only a third of US educators ask students to use technology in problem solving and research even a few times a week (NEA, 2008. p. 17-18). Overall, most US educators neither use technology in ways that enrich and enhance instruction, nor do they help students develop technology literacy.

Why?

Teachers cite time pressure, insufficient technology access, inadequate technical support, and the lack of meaningful professional development as common barriers that keep them from integrating technology into student learning. Former Governor Hunt’s insistent demand that educators adopt a new model of professional learning suggests the importance of focusing on the one issue in this list that can drive innovation: professional development. His scorching observations on the current professional development system should be reason enough for us to change. “Teachers lack time and opportunities to view each other’s classrooms, learn from mentors, and work collaboratively,” Hunt notes. “The support and training they receive is episodic, myopic, and often meaningless” (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 2).

Developing 21st Century Skills Requires 21st Century Professional Learning

The current professional development model may be broken, but research and experience is giving us a clearer picture of what makes professional learning effective. Peer coaching is clearly at the center of that picture. A recent study of professional learning argues that effective professional learning is intensive, ongoing, focused on the classroom and occurs during the teachers’ workday (Darling-Hammond, 2009, emphasis added). Context is critical. Learning in context means learning in the classrooms where teachers practice their craft and focusing on classroom activities that will help these educators meet their students’ needs (Elmore, 2004, emphasis added). Michael Fullan’s work on educational change makes it crystal clear that we need to “connect peers with purpose,” if we want to see systemic improvement in student learning (Fullan, 2008, emphasis added). Linda Darling-Hammond, the lead author of a powerful study on the state of professional learning, agrees with this conclusion. “Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond individual classrooms,” she notes. “When all teachers in a school learn together, all students in the school benefit” (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009, p. 5). Governor Hunt’s summary of this research and points the way towards improved professional development, and thus teaching: professional learning is most effective when educators routinely collaborate with trusted colleagues to solve problems they face in their classrooms.
This is furthermore supported by the 2011 Findings of the Microsoft Innovative Teaching and Learning Research project that state “Innovative teaching practices are more likely to flourish when particular supportive conditions are in place. These conditions include:

- Teacher collaboration that focuses on peer support and the sharing of teaching practices
- Professional development that involves the active and direct engagement of teachers, particularly in practicing and researching new teaching methods
- A school culture that offers a common vision of innovation as well as consistent support that encourages new types of teaching.” (Microsoft 2011, p.12)

Why Peer Coaching?

The world’s top-performing school systems already understand that context and collaboration are critical keys to effective professional learning, and they are putting these ideas into practice. A study of these highly effective schools found that they all enabled teachers to learn from one another by providing time and support for educators to co-plan learning activities, observe each other teach, and reflect on what they saw. They also recognized that effective collaboration requires a catalyst. All the top school systems, “… recognize that if you want good teachers, you need to have good teachers train them, and this requires focused one-on-one coaching in the classroom” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 28).

What is required to put these principles of effective professional development into practice? Collaborating with a peer to focus on classroom needs sounds like a pretty daunting task to educators who are not part of a school culture that emphasizes collaboration. It is even more foreign to educators who have no real experience collaborating on issues that are at the heart of improving teaching and learning. In America, and many other most countries around the world, most teachers work in isolation and do not have meaningful experiences with collaboration. Putting these principles of professional development intro practice in this environment means educators need:

- A catalyst to encourage collaboration to improve student learning
- Structures--scaffolding--that make collaboration effective, and;
- A successful experience collaborating with a colleague that encourages continued collaboration.

As the study of the world’s best school systems notes, Peer Coaches can play a critical role in meeting these needs. They play the role of catalyst and they have the skills to provide the structure for successful collaboration.

History

The Peer Coaching program, sponsored by Microsoft, assists teacher leaders to develop the coaching skills essential to help their colleagues learn the necessary technology skills and instructional strategies needed to integrate technology into active, engaging learning activities. Coaches help colleagues in their schools by providing timely training or resources, co-planning learning activities, modeling effective teaching, observing colleagues and reflecting on what they observed. Coaches encourage ongoing educator collaboration focused on improving student learning and help schools to develop the capacity to meet their professional learning needs.

Peer-Ed team members created Peer Coaching in 2001 using a US Department of Education Technology Innovation Challenge Grant. Microsoft adopted the program as part of its worldwide Partners in Learning program in 2004, and has provided critical assistance in implementing Peer Coaching since that date.
Training

Peer Coaching uses a train-the-trainer model. Peer-Ed has trained approximately 1,000 facilitators in more than forty countries and 250 facilitators in six US states. Peer Coaching Facilitators experience a five-day workshop that closely tracks the Peer Coaching curriculum experienced by coaches. The Facilitator Training focuses on four key sets of skills:

1. Peer Coaching;
2. Content mastery;
3. Facilitation skills and Online facilitation skills, and
4. Content design.

During their training facilitators also develop plans for program implementation. After training facilitators begin working with their local administrator(s) to implement a local Peer Coaching program. Facilitator Training can be delivered in a face-to-face, online or in a blended format with part of the training online and the balance in face-to-face settings.

Each of these facilitators assists Peer Coaches to develop the skills they need to collaborate with colleagues in their schools. Peer Coaching training focuses on three pillars:

- Utilizing the communication and collaboration skills needed to build trust and effective collaboration. Peer Coaching activities that develop communication and collaboration skills draw on the work of other successful programs like Cognitive Coaching, Atlas Communities and the National School Reform Faculty.
- Strengthening coaches’ lesson design skills to help colleagues to improve learning activities so they reflect 21st Century learning. For many teachers around the world, successful integration of technology means learning to use active, engaging instructional strategies. Peer Coaching’s focus on lesson design relies on the work of Bransford, et al, How People Learn, and the instructional strategies used in constructivism or Project-Based Learning.
- And understanding best practices in technology integration so coaches can assist teachers use technology to enrich and enhance student learning. The partnership with Microsoft brings participants in Peer Coaching a variety of incredible examples of technology integration from the thousands of participants in Microsoft’s Innovative Educator Forums which are held annually in more than 70 countries around the world. Recently the Microsoft developed 21st Century Learning Design Program which was created as a result of the Innovative Teaching and Learning Research project has become the focus of Technology integration and student engagement in contemporary education settings.

The training facilitators offer to coaches is intensive, sustained, and shaped in a way that coaches learn and practice skills in each of these three areas in the context they will use the skills as they collaborate with peers. The training coaches experience is:

- Hands on and highly collaborative

In addition, the training for coaches offers them:

- Time to learn and apply theory in coaches context
- Opportunities to take risks and learn from successes and failures
• Use of protocols to develop professional learning discussions
• After gaining coaching experience, structured opportunities to reflect with peers on:
  o What’s working and why
  o Roadblocks and a process to develop potential solutions.

Peer Coaching Facilitators and the coaches they trained have helped shape classroom activities for hundreds of thousands of teachers.

Coaches Roles and Relationships

Well prepared coaches undergo significant, ongoing professional learning to develop the range of coaching skills essential for successful coaching, and they continue to collaborate with other coaches to reflect on their coaching practice and further develop their skills as peer coaches. As a result of this training and experience, coaches have a different knowledge base than many teachers, and their knowledge helps them facilitate and structure collaboration aimed at improving student learning. Coaches learn and use communications skills that play a critical role in building trust and promoting collaboration. They can teach their colleagues how to use these skills when collaborating with other educators. Coaches might also encourage educators to teach these skills to their students so they can use these same communications skills in discussing learning in the classroom. Coaches learn to create and utilize group norms and can assist other educators to adopt norms which improve collaboration among teachers. And coaches learn how to use protocols that provide a safe, structured environment for discussing classroom learning activities.

In schools, collaboration may seem like a vague, almost foreign concept to many teachers. Yet a peer coach serves as a concrete, focused catalyst who structures collaboration in ways that meet the specific classroom needs of individual teachers. One of the first stages in coaching is a discussion between coaches and their colleagues to understand their needs and the focus of collaboration. These needs may center on content, instructional strategies, assessment, or how to enhance learning by integrating technology into active, engaging learning activities. Once they understand these needs, coaches help colleagues in their schools by providing timely training or resources, co-planning learning activities, modeling effective teaching, or observing colleagues and reflecting on what they have observed. In each and every case it is the teacher’s needs that drive and shape the collaboration between teacher and coach. The coach’s response to those felt needs is what makes coaching so precise, valuable, and likely to lead to improved teaching and learning.

The roles Peer Coaches play matter. But coaches’ success stems directly from how they play these roles. Before they begin to learn about coaching, many Peer Coaches assume that they need to be the “expert” - the person who has the answer colleagues need. Coaches may be experts at times, but they are also collaborators and facilitators. They are often co-learners, learning as much from their colleagues as they teach them. Coaches don’t need to have “the answer” to be effective. To be successful, coaches cannot be perceived by colleagues as judgmental, “know it all” experts. Rather, teachers have to see the coach as someone who is there to support them and help them improve in ways the teachers are ready to accept. One key strategy coaches use to build this sense of support is their reliance on questions rather than answers. Australian Peer coaches insist that “powerful questions” encourage teachers to think more deeply about the issues they face in practicing their craft, and this reflective strategy is the key to improving learning activities and student learning.

Linda King, a peer coach from Yakima, Washington give us insight into the critical importance of the perceived relationship between a coach and a peer in determining the impact of coaching. With the trust of their peers,
she concluded, “Successful coaches encourage teachers to share what they do know—and to share what they do not know.” Having a coach - a trusted, skilled colleague who is down the hall when needed—provides teachers with the kind of safety net that encourages them to take risks to improve learning.

**Technology’s Role**

Technology is a key tool that coaches use to develop collaborative skills. Peer Coaches use the Partners in Learning Network website to learn how to become effective coaches, and to collaborate and share their successes and challenges with other coaches. Recently, for example, three teams of coaches from Milwaukee chronicled what they had learned in their first year as coaches on the Partners in Learning Network. Because they used this network, they were sharing their ideas with coaches around the world, and 1.5 million educators in 59 countries. Using the Partners in Learning Network also gives coaches access to a wider variety of resources, and a global community of educators, both of which are greater than our coaching community alone could provide. Facilitators and coaches also use a variety of other technology like wikis and blogs, SMS and Office 365 to develop coaching skills, foster collaboration, and to build and sustain coaching communities.

Our experience has shown us that there needs to be a variety of methods available to train coaches, and technology plays a critical role here. For example, in the last year Peer-Ed has successfully trained coaches in Montana using a hybrid program that blends face-to-face and online training. Peer-Ed has also trained a sizeable number of facilitators using a blended delivery model with some training occurring face-to-face, and the balance of the training occurring online. Moving forward, Microsoft, through the Microsoft in Education Trainer Network ([www.piltrainer.com](http://www.piltrainer.com)) will also deliver training through online and blended methodology.

**Scalable and Sustainable**

Peer Coaching relies on a train-the-trainer model. Teams from Peer Ed, Microsoft Partners in Learning Program, and the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities in Australia would train educators to become facilitators, or the trainers who help coaches develop the skills they need. These educators may come from the staff development or technology teams in some of the larger school districts, or be exemplar leaders in the area of educational technology integration. Since these educators are already accounted for in district budgets and committed to training, repurposing them to train coaches adds no financial burden to a district. Our experiences in Washington, Arizona, Montana and Australia have demonstrated that smaller districts usually do not have the staff that can be devoted to become facilitators. These districts need a different model for training their coaches. They could look to facilitators who come from a regional service district to train their coaches.

Once trained, these facilitators would work with school districts to identify and recruit teacher leaders and train them as coaches. These teacher leaders would participate in a program that consists of a number of training sessions and practicum sessions. The practicum sessions draw heavily on the experiences of coaches, and they are scheduled the first few months that a coach is collaborating with other teachers at their schools. Hands on work is combined with self-reflection and competency based assessment before final coaching accreditation is given.

Our implementation model is based on the belief that ownership of Peer Coaching resides with the educators we work beside. These educators have the capability of training coaches when and where they are needed, on
an ongoing basis. They can also continue to provide the training and support the coaches need to be successful.

As an example of a recent implementation program, several years ago one district in Arizona adopted coaching. Shortly thereafter Arizona’s Department of Education offered districts that chance to participate in coaching as part of a federal grant program. Each district had a menu of professional development alternatives to choose from. At the end of the first year of the grant, 67% of the participating districts reported the Peer Coaching program was the preferred professional development format for their grant activities (Poplin, 2011). When that grant funding expired the state used additional federal funds to help additional districts participate in Peer Coaching. Today the grant funds are gone but districts are using local resources to support their peer coaches and expand the program. Other districts are using their funds to join Peer Coaching. Cathy Poplin, (2010) the state’s educational technology director described this process.

"What started as a one-year project in a Flagstaff district has spread across many Arizona districts as a recognized 'program that works' and has created a culture of collaborative impact on classroom practice. The Peer Coaching program is helping to sustain the large investments made in educational technology and teacher training in the past three years and to assure our children receive a first-class 21st Century education."

The diagram below outlines how Arizona scaled Peer Coaching in those three years.

Peer Coaching Program impact

Peer Coaching is designed to assist educators to develop the capacity to implement Peer Coaching. Most of these educators have chosen to use evaluation tools that emphasize qualitative assessment and we have a wealth of anecdotal evidence about the success of the program.

Washington State does use a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools in its evaluation of Peer Coaching, and its program evaluation provides quantitative evidence that teachers who collaborate with coaches are much more likely to routinely integrate technology into standards based learning activities than colleagues who do not collaborate with coaches. Teachers who collaborated with coaches reported that they were more willing to take risks and try out innovative approaches to learning because they had a trusted peer who was just down the hall when needed. In 2009 95% of teachers beginning their work with coaches reported technology use for personal productivity. After one year of coaching 25% had moved from using technology as a productivity tool, to using it to support active engaging student learning (Liston, & Ragan,
2009). Teachers were doing more than using technology to enrich and enhance learning, they were beginning to change the way they taught and students learned. As one teacher noted, “The students’ learning has been affected positively with the work I have done with my peer coach. Learning has become more engaged and fun for the students. The instruction has become more student-centered and less teacher-centered” (Liston, & Ragan, 2009, p.81). The principal of a school using coaches noted the same sort of transformation when he insisted, “I truly believe that student achievement increases through this program [Peer Coaching]...especially in the area of critical thinking and problem solving” (Liston & Ragan, 2009, p. 85).

Program evaluators in Wisconsin saw some of the same positive results from Peer Coaching. Seventy one percent of participants in Wisconsin’s coaching program felt coaching made a significant impact on their ability to use technology to promote critical thinking and problem solving, engage students in learning, and improve academic curricula (Ley, 2011). The evidence that coaching was improving learning went far beyond feelings. Program staff gathered samples of classroom learning activities from teachers who worked with coaches before they had any significant experience collaborating with their coach. More than 70% of the learning activities collected scored at a “low level” when examined for cognitive challenge, inquiry, collaboration and the level of technology use. After one year working with a coach evaluators found that nearly 60% of these educators’ learning activities were “High Quality” (Ley, 2011).

Our partners’ ownership of Peer Coaching, and their willingness to build the capacity necessary to implement coaching, is one of the clearest indications of the impact of Peer Coaching. Like our partners in Arizona, Broward County School District in Florida has continued its support for coaching over several years and expanded the scope of the program. In 2005 Broward County began training classroom teachers and librarians as coaches. More recently they began to train every Library Media specialist in the district to become a coach. And more recently still they have begun training all school improvement specialists to become coaches. More distant partners like those in Argentina, Sweden and Vietnam have taken ownership of coaching, aligned it with local goals, and have expanded and sustained the program over the last several years.

In 2010 a handful of schools across New South Wales, Australia, began to pilot Peer Coaching. The results were so impressive that by 2011 all public and private schools in New South Wales now have the opportunity to participate in coaching as part of the $5.4 million PLANE program sponsored by the state. The commitment of these partners, and many others, to continue to provide training and resources for coaches and to expand the program to meet local needs, is solid evidence that they feel Peer Coaching is meeting the needs of their students and teachers.

Coaching has met local needs because it rests on three core ideas that all emphasize the importance of collaboration among educators in the environment where teachers work, their classrooms:

1. We are all learners and we will be for life.
2. All educators are likely to need support if we want to help every child succeed.
3. Educators all have different skill sets that complement those of other teachers, and together these complementary sets of skills will help all educators succeed.

In providing support for colleagues and bringing new skills to their schools, Peer Coaches can play a critical role facilitating collaboration aimed at improving student learning.
The precisely focused collaboration Peer Coaches offer produces results. As Tran Duc Thinh, a high school teacher in Ho Chi Minh City, who collaborated with a coach, observed, “Using the Peer Coaching model my colleagues were ready to take me step by step through a project and answer all my questions. Gradually, I became able to organize… a project so that every student is involved in learning and sees how to explore that knowledge by themselves.”

Mary Knight, Flagstaff’s Director of Technology, agrees with Thinh that coaching works because it focuses on the needs of teachers. “Finding time for sustained professional development is always a challenge. The job-embedded nature of Peer Coaching helps. Also, we align Peer Coaching with other instructional goals so coaches and collaborating teachers don’t see Peer Coaching as a separate goal. Finally, we believe Peer Coaching is the best way to move towards 21st Century Skills development, particularly because of the Peer Coaching focus on lesson improvement” (Huston & King-George, 2010).

**Coaching and Systemic Improvement**

Coaches who encourage ongoing collaboration focused on improving student learning can have a broader systemic impact. They can play a key role in helping schools to develop the capacity to meet their professional learning needs. Schools that have embraced coaching have seen peer coaches have an impact throughout their schools. “In my first year of coaching,” says Maureen McCauley, a coach in Flagstaff, Arizona, “I was meeting formally with one second-grade teacher, who was sharing our conversations and ideas with another, nearby second-grade teacher… In my second year of coaching, I continued to work with the original two collaborating teachers and added grade-level teams that I helped coach. Both of the original collaborating teachers have gone on to become Peer Coaches…” This story from Flagstaff is far from an isolated example. Principals in Washington State schools involved in coaching reported the ripple effect from coaching. In program evaluations in 2008 and 2009 80% of principals reported coaching increased collaboration school wide. As one principal observed, “This was a model for other grade level teams on the benefits of collaboration and peer coaching” A second principal told program evaluators, “The collaborating teachers have also become extremely knowledgeable and share that expertise with other staff members” (Liston, et al., 2008, p. 51).

In the early stages of any school’s coaching program the pattern of collaboration largely was between coaches and the teachers they worked with. But over time the schools in the study began to see the development of a network of collaborative relationships. The diagram of these collaborative relationships changed over time. Initially the diagram was a series of unconnected lines that reflected the one-to-one relationship the coach had with individual teachers. As coaching relationships grew and matured, the image that portrayed these relationships began to look like an intricate spider web of collaborative relationships among teachers throughout the school. This complex diagram reflected the growth of a professional learning community or network.

Peer coaches can be a powerful methodology for professional learning. Coaching can be a cost effective form of professional development. But to be successful coaches need two things. Coaches need careful preparation and ongoing professional learning opportunities. They also need support and resources from their school and school district.

For more information: [www.piltrainer.com](http://www.piltrainer.com)
References


Poplin, C. (2010). Email correspondence with the author.

The Peer Coaching Cycle

Assess
- Determine teacher preparation
- Set Goals

Identify school goals
- Determine classroom goals
- Identify activity project
- Determine required skills

Prepare
- Set model for learning activities
- Plan activity/project
- Share lessons / resources
- Create / adapt materials
- Review / learn tech skills

Implement
- Model/team teach
- Apply/adjust
- Assess learning

Reflect/Debrief
- Determine effectiveness
- Plan future activities

Co-planning a learning activity or lesson that integrates technology into active, engaging learning activities

Using classroom data, to help teachers determine an area of the curriculum that needs innovation.

After Observation, discussing, with participating teacher, what worked, what didn’t and how a lesson or activity might be modified in the future to be more effective

Demonstrate lessons that integrate technology effectively

The Coaching Cycle
Assess

The first stage in helping a teacher develop and implement a project is to use classroom data to determine learning areas that need improvement. Another aspect of this process is to gain a clear understanding of the teacher's technology skills and instructional strategies. This information helps the coach and teacher define a lesson or project the teacher can successfully implement or to identify the kind of coaching, resources, or skills the teacher might need to carry out the project.

Set goals

Setting reasonable and realistic goals that are linked to the school's educational goals and curricular standards is a critical first step towards establishing a solid coaching relationship and helping teachers integrate information and communication technology into classroom activities that will help students develop skills needed for further education and careers.

Prepare

Participants use the 21st Century Learning Design Rubrics to evaluate the strength of a proposed lesson, project, or unit. Coaches ask probing questions designed to help colleagues make their learning activities more innovative. This part of the cycle depends on “best teaching practices” and coaches might provide learning activity models, resources, or teach technology skills that help teachers prepare to implement technology-rich, engaging learning activities. Coaches also help teachers develop plans to gather classroom data that can be used to assess how the learning activity is meeting student needs.

Teachers often report that a key part in preparing a learning activity is the opportunity to watch their coach model a technology-rich lesson or team teach a lesson or project with their coach. In either case the discussions after observing or team teaching are critical to get deeper insights that shape teaching practice.

Implement activities

At this stage collaborating teachers are ready to implement the learning activity that their coach helped them plan.

Reflect, debrief

After teachers have implemented a learning activity it is critical to learn from that experience. Part of that process is to explore evidence of student learning. Teachers may also ask their coach to observe part of a learning activity as part of this process. Whether observation is part of the process of reflection or not, a debrief is critical. One of the strengths of peer coaching is that it helps coaches learn to use protocols and other structured opportunities for reflection that help teachers improve their instruction. Coaches report that one of their most valuable learning opportunities is when they use these protocols to collaborate with other peer coaches on common problems and common solutions.

- Demonstrating lessons that integrate technology effectively.
- After observation, discussing, with the participating teacher, what worked, what didn’t and how a lesson or activity might be modified in the future to be more effective.