

Teachers Coaching Teachers

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The Purposes of Coaching

Coaching has several purposes. The first is to build communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft. Coaching is as much a communal activity, a relationship among seeking professionals, as it is the exercise of a set of skills and a vital component of training.

Second, coaching develops the shared language and set of common understandings necessary for the collegial study of new knowledge and skills. Especially important is the agreement that curriculum and instruction need constant improvement and that expanding our repertoire of teaching skills requires hard work, in which the help of our colleagues is indispensable.

Third, coaching provides a structure for the follow up to training that is essential for acquiring new teaching skills and strategies. Researchers on teacher training (Joyce and Showers, 1983), curriculum implementation (Fulani and Pamphlet, 1977), and curriculum reform (Shaver, Davis, and Helium, 197:3; Weiss, 1978) agree that transfer of skills and strategies foreign to the teacher's existing repertoire requires more substantial training than the training we typically allot to such enterprises. Coaching appears to be most appropriate when teachers wish to acquire unique configurations of teaching patterns and to master strategies that require new ways of thinking about learning objectives and the processes by which students achieve them. Minor changes, which constitute the "fine tuning" of existing skills, can be achieved more easily by teachers themselves. Good and Grouws (1977), Stallings (1979), and Slavin (1983) have developed programs that help teachers firm up and improve their teaching repertoires.

The Process of Coaching

In most settings coaching teams are organized during training designed to enhance the understanding and use of a teaching strategy or curriculum innovation. The teams study the rationale of the new skills, see them demonstrated, practice them, and learn to provide feedback to one another as they experiment with the skills.

From that point on, coaching is a cyclical process designed as an extension of training. The first steps are structured to increase skill with a new teaching strategy through observation and feedback. These early sessions provide opportunities for checking performance against expert models of behavior. In our practice and study of coaching, teachers use Clinical Assessment Forms to record the presence or absence of specific behaviors and the degree of thoroughness with which they are performed. Since all the teachers learn to use the forms during initial training sessions and are provided practice by checking their own and each other's performance with these forms, they are prepared to provide feedback to each other during the coaching phase. Whether teachers are studying new models of teaching, implementing a new curriculum or management system, or exploring new forms of

collective decision making or team teaching, feedback must be accurate, specific, and non-evaluative.

As skill develops and solidifies, coaching moves into a more complex stage—mutual examination of appropriate use of a new teaching strategy. The cognitive aspects of transferring new behaviors into effective classroom practice are more difficult than the interactive moves of teaching. While all teachers can develop skill in performing a new teaching strategy fairly readily, the harder tasks come as the skill is applied in the classroom. For example, when teachers master inductive teaching strategies, such as concept attainment and inductive teaching, they have little difficulty learning the pattern of the models and carrying them out with materials provided to them. However, many teachers have difficulty selecting concepts to teach, reorganizing materials, teaching their students to respond to the new strategies, and creating lessons in areas in which they have not seen demonstrated directly. Generally, these are the kinds of tasks that become the substance of coaching. Each model of teaching and each curriculum generate similar problems that must be solved if transfer to the classroom is to be achieved.

As the process shifts to this second set of emphasis, coaching conferences take on the character of collaborative problem-solving sessions, which often conclude with joint planning of lessons the team will experiment with. Team members (note that all members are both coaches and students) begin to operate in a spirit of exploration. They search for and analyze curriculum materials for appropriate use of strategies, hypothesize student responses and learning outcomes for specific strategies, and design lessons. The "teacher" experiments with a new lesson while the "coach" observes, and the experimentation continues with a new cycle of analysis, study, hypothesis forming, and testing.

Length of Coaching

Ideally, coaching is a continuing process firmly embedded in the ethos and organizational context of the school. The teaching teams I have worked with have become increasingly effective both at helping one another and inducting new teachers into the process. However, as a new strategy is introduced we begin another two-to three-month process during which the intellectual demands of learning to use the model create the cycle of intensive interaction anew. Most of our information from these early tests of coaching to determine its effects on transfer of training was gained in these experimental periods (following initial skills training). In some of these studies I have served as coach merely to learn more about the needs teachers express as they work through the transfer problem. I do not recommend that a trainer serve as the coach except to gain information. In other cases teachers have coached one another while I tried to learn what help they needed to work comfortably as peer coaches. Both the experimenter who served as a consultant/coach and the teachers who acted as peer coaches felt the time to master a model is longer than the three to four months we had originally anticipated. We are currently experimenting with long-term, institutionalized forms of coaching as a means of establishing continuous school improvement and self-help groups within schools.

Who Should Coach?

Teachers should coach each other. To do so, teaching teams need (1) familiarity with the new skill or strategy to be mastered and transferred into the teacher's active repertoire; (2) access to other teachers in their classrooms for purposes of observation, feedback, and conferences; and (3) openness to experimentation and willingness to persist and refine skills. Clearly no single role group possesses these attributes to the exclusion of others (supervisors and principals can coach effectively). However, the logistics involved in a continuous growing and learning process favor peer coaches, and teams can be built and learn the skills during training.

Training of Coaches

If peers are the most logical choice as coaches, it follows that the training of coaches most sensibly occurs during the training of the skills and behaviors that require coaching. As we teach a new strategy, we instruct all teachers in the use of Clinical Assessment Forms and model how to give feedback in the training sessions. After viewing and participating in multiple demonstrations of the strategy and the feedback process, teachers prepare lessons for their peers and present them to a partner. Then three pairs of partners (six teachers) form a peer-teaching group, with partners providing feedback on each other's lessons. Trainers monitor the teaching and feedback process during peer teaching and provide additional demonstrations. Thus, training of coaches for the initial observation and feedback process is naturally incorporated into initial skills training.

Training for the second phase of coaching occurs during follow-up sessions, usually three to six weeks after introduction of a new teaching strategy. Teachers reassemble as a large group to discuss progress in their mastery of the moves of a model and any problems they are experiencing. Instruction now focuses on appropriate use of the strategy. Teachers bring examples of curriculum materials, texts, lesson plans, and instructional objectives to training sessions. At this point, trainers model a collegial dialog aimed at clarifying the instructional aims of the teachers, reexamining the theories of various instructional strategies and the purposes for which they were developed, and matching the two. Peer teaching in this phase of training focuses on the appropriate use of newly mastered teaching strategies rather than on the interactive skills required to execute the strategies. The training of coaches is a continuing activity, as is coaching itself. The training component, however, becomes less prominent than the coaching process as teachers develop skill in coaching each other. Nevertheless, periodic sessions in which coaches review their self-help strategies are useful.

Effects of Coaching Programs

Results of coaching programs have been reported in detail elsewhere (Baker and Showers, 1984; Showers, 1983a, 1983b, 1984). The brief summary here merely reviews those results. Coaching effects fall into two broad categories: facilitation of

transfer of training and development of norms of collegiality and experimentation. Coaching appears to contribute to transfer of training in five ways.

Coached teachers:

1. Generally (though not always) practice new strategies more frequently and develop greater skill in the actual moves of a new teaching strategy than do uncoached teachers who have experienced identical initial training.
2. Use the new strategies more appropriately in terms of their own instructional objectives and the theories of specific models of teaching (Showers, 1982; 1984).
3. Exhibit greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill with strategies in which they have been coached and, as a group, increase the appropriateness of use of new teaching models over time (Baker, 1983).
4. Are much more likely than uncoached teachers to teach the new strategies to their students, ensuring that students understand the purpose of the strategy and the behaviors expected of them when using the strategy (Showers, 1984).
5. Exhibit clearer cognitions with regard to the purposes and uses of the new strategies, as revealed through interviews, lesson plans, and classroom performance than do uncoached teachers (Showers, 1982; 1984). We are currently examining more closely teachers' progression of thinking as they learn and apply new models. We would like to accelerate the speed with which teachers can "learn how to learn" new strategies.

Coaching also appears to facilitate the professional and collegial relationships discussed by Little (1982); for example, development of a shared language and norms of experimentation. Our data about this process are somewhat less formal than our data on skill acquisition and transfer. However, both anecdotal and interview data indicate that the effects of coaching are much more far-reaching than the mastery and integration of new knowledge and skills by individual teachers. The development of school norms that support the continuous study and improvement of teaching apparently build capability for other kinds of change, whether it is adoption of a new curriculum, a school wide discipline policy, or the building of teaching repertoires. By building permanent structures for collegial relationships, schools organize themselves for improvement in multiple areas. We suspect that the practice of public teaching; focus on the clinical acts of teaching; development of common language and understandings; and sharing of lesson plans, materials, and problems contribute to school norms of collegiality and experimentation. However, we don't know exactly how coaching programs function to create such norms or if existing norms create favorable climates for coaching programs. We are currently studying the formation and effects of coaching in districts and schools having different antecedent organizational climates and leadership patterns. We are also

studying ways to prepare people to initiate the coaching process in their districts and schools.

As districts begin to include coaching as a pan of their staff development programs, a variety of questions arise about coaching's relationship to different aspects of educational practice and roles played by various staff members. Questions often center on the relationship of coaching to teacher evaluation, distinctions between coaching and existing forms of supervision, and the roles of principals and central office staff.

Coaching and Evaluation

Coaching is a process in which education professionals assist each other in negotiating the distance between acquiring new skills or teaching strategies and applying them skillfully and effectively for instruction. The evaluation of teachers typically implies judgment about the adequacy of the person, whereas coaching implies assistance in a learning process. As we practice coaching, every aspect of the training process is carefully studied. Coaching teams measure their transfer of skills into the workplace and study the effectiveness of teaching skills and strategies with their students. In this sense, everything is evaluated. However, nothing could be farther from the atmosphere of coaching than is the practice of traditional evaluation. The norms of coaching and evaluation practice are antithetical and should be separated in our thinking as well as in practice. By definition, evaluation should not be undertaken concurrently with coaching, whereas the analysis of skills and their use is an inherent pan of it

After coaching has brought a teacher to a level of transfer in which newly learned behaviors are skillfully and appropriately applied, that teacher should study the effects on children as a means of improving performance. Teachers need sufficient time to learn and master new skills before they are evaluated on the adequacy of their performance of the new skills or the effects of those skills on student learning. We understand and argue for children's needs to acquire component skills of complex behaviors and, through practice, successive approximations of expert performance. Thus, we applaud their efforts in first recitals, junior sports, primitive essays, and early attempts at cooking. Likewise, we argue for development time for teachers in safe environments separate from evaluation as it is usually carried out.

Coaching and Supervision

What is the difference between coaching and supervision? This is a complicated question because of the many forms and different understandings of supervision.

The relationship between coaching and supervision in a district depends on the power of relationships between supervisors and teachers. Where teachers work in teams to study instruction and their relationships are balanced, coaching is compatible with supervision. Where there is an imbalance and where teachers are not organized for the mutual study of teaching, coaching and supervision are incompatible. The development of common languages for the study of teaching, the organization of inquiring teams, and the objective analysis of teaching are compatible.

However, supervision in many districts maintains the imbalance of power by placing administrators and other nonteaching personnel in supervisory roles and by combining evaluation with supervision. Decision-making authority for the most part remains in the hands of the superiors, with teachers the recipients of the process.

Where there has been a failure to separate evaluation and the status and power differences from supervision, it is improbable that the process will create a climate conducive to learning and growing on the part of the teachers. Certainly it is possible to imagine climates where status relationships operate productively, but they do not appear to do so in education. One example of counter-productivity in another area is the extremely hierarchical structure of the military, which tends to prevent promotion of the leadership attributes most needed in times of war. The initiative required in effective teaching is incompatible with hierarchical dependency relationships as well.

Alone, the power differential operating in supervision is insufficient to impede learning-most of us seek expert help when we attempt to master a new skill, such as skiing, cooking, or writing. It is more likely that the evaluative component of supervision prevents the very climate essential for learning, that of experimentation and permission to fail, revision and trying again while continuously practicing new but still awkward skills and procedures. When evaluation is the end product of supervision, those being evaluated will generally put their best foot forward, demonstrate only those well-tested procedures that have been perfected over long periods of use and with which both they and their students are completely familiar. Even if these procedures are patently flawed, they are safer than attempting something new and experimental'

In divorcing itself from evaluation, coaching provides a safe environment in which to learn and perfect new teaching behaviors, experiment with variations of strategies, teach students new skills and expectations inherent in new strategies and thoughtfully examine the results. By placing the major responsibility for coaching with peers, status and power differentials are minimized. Of course, coaching draws on many of the elements of better supervisory programs - observation, feedback, cooperative planning, extended time frames. However, the elimination of evaluation and power inequities makes possible a learning environment that is unlikely in traditional supervisory systems. Furthermore, coaching has the added practical advantage of a wide-scale implementation for lengthy periods of time. Even exceptionally conscientious principals with superb interpersonal staff relationships have difficulty providing clinical supervision to more than a fraction of their teachers on a continuing basis.

Coaching and the Role of the Principal

Establishing a coaching program requires strong leadership from principals as well as support from central administrative staff. The leadership is manifested in priority setting, resource allocation, and logistics on the one hand and substantive and social leadership on the other. Principals must work to establish new norms that reward collegial planning, public teaching, constructive feedback, and experimentation.

Administrators need to examine carefully their priorities for staff development and their allocation of funds. Few staff development budgets can sustain both intensive, ongoing training and the numerous one-shot activities that dominate most programs. Decisions must be made regarding the outcomes expected of a staff development program. When the desired outcome is simply increased awareness of a subject, funding might legitimately support the occasional two-hour speaker. However, when the expected outcome of staff development is change in the instruction students receive, funding will probably have to be focused to support the magnitude of training necessary to bring about that change.

Organization of peer-coaching systems will need to be arranged cooperatively between district administrators and school site personnel. In schools where teachers already have preparation periods scheduled into their own work days, coaching teams can be organized for observation, feedback, and planning within existing structures. Some schools have used specialist teachers to release teachers for observation periods, and some principals regularly assume classes to provide observation time for teachers. In other cases, teachers have access to videotaped lessons for sharing at a later time when live observations could not be arranged. Substitute teachers can be provided for peer coaches one day per week in order for them to complete their observations and conferences (Showers, 1984). Creative problem solving by teachers and principals will result in solutions to the time demands of the continuous study and analysis of teaching. Without the active support and involvement of building principals, however, few teachers are able to establish such systems for themselves.

Principals must do more than assist with the logistics of peer-coaching systems if coaching is to become institutionalized. Teachers have so long worked in isolation that long term collegial working relationships with their peers may be uncomfortable.

Principals must work to establish new norms that reward collegial planning, public teaching, constructive feedback, and experimentation. Professional growth must be seen as valuable and expected. Where coaching has flourished best, principals have taken very active roles in helping teams form, supporting them, providing times in meetings for sharing of teaching and planning, and providing help for team leaders.

Not only are principals in a unique position to influence building norms, they are also perfectly situated to facilitate the implementation of peer coaching systems through collaborative problem solving with their teachers. Principals can design flexible scheduling for training, observation, feedback, and planning to meet the needs of individual faculties; offer rewards and incentives to encourage developing norms of collegiality; and solicit support from parents and community members by explaining the purpose and expected outcomes of intensive training programs embedded in larger school improvement efforts.

Implementation of Coaching

To be implemented successfully, coaching must overcome some obstacles. The social changes required by coaching in the workplace represent a major departure

from the traditional school organization. The building of collegial teams that study teaching on a continuing basis forces the restructuring of administrators and supervisory staff. If the norms of the learning laboratory are to be established, a scientific rather than hierarchical spirit must prevail. Implementation of coaching requires an increase in objective feedback and evaluation of process and a reduction of judgmental pronouncements about teaching. A coaching system builds a community of teachers that inquires into teaching with the assistance of support personnel rather than teachers who work as isolated individuals and are judged by supervisors and administrators who visit and observe.

Coaching is inseparable from an intensive training program. The serious and continuing study of teaching in schools requires challenging substance, for which theory is thoroughly explicated and understood, demonstrations are provided, and opportunities for practice with feedback allow development of skill as well as knowledge. Without fully elaborated training programs, coaching has nothing upon which to build. Whenever districts ask us to help them design coaching programs, we first examine their training programs for both content and process.

Furthermore, support systems in many districts must be remolded to permit the meeting of collegial teams for study, observations, feedback, discussion and planning. And the activities of coaching teams must be encouraged and supported by norms, rewards, and incentives in the school structure. The invaluable role of principals in facilitating coaching programs cannot be too strongly emphasized.

The cooperation between central office administrators and building principals can be most clearly seen in the development of cadres of teachers and supervisors who are organized to deliver training. The cadres have to be selected, freed to receive and later to give training, and given access to teams within the schools to engage in training and help the teams develop. Without such cadres of trainers and the change of relationship that occurs when teachers and supervisors work together as trainers, coaching cannot be implemented.

At this stage, coaching is an innovation, subject to the same laws that govern any other change in an educational setting. It is also a community of learners engaged in the study of teaching, a set of technical moves embodied in training and follow-up to that training, and a support system that creates and sustains the learning community and enables it to function. Hence, coaching is not a simple additive that can be tacked on to the school with a "business as usual" attitude, but rather represents a change in the conduct of business. Some of these changes are social and some are technical. On the surface it should be simple to implement - what could be more natural than teams of professional teachers working on content and skills with the facilitation of building principals and administrators? It is a complex innovation only because that scene requires a radical change in relationships between teachers and between teachers and administrative personnel.

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