



Strengthening Staff Development through Peer Coaching

Our Lady of Mount Carmel School
Doylestown, PA

Ms. Elizabeth Barry, Principal

Mrs. Alice Graziano, Honors Math Teacher

School Facts

- elementary school of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- 400 students in Kindergarten through Grade Eight
- suburb of Philadelphia, PA
- professional staff of 33; support staff of 11
- auxiliary staff of 4; federal and state programs
- *Terra Nova* (The Second Edition) administered in Grades Two, Three, Four, Six and Eight

Definition

Peer Coaching

- is a professional dialogue
- happens when teachers learn from and affirm one another
- has two common elements: insight and encouragement

Purpose

Peer Coaching is built on collegial relationships in which

- adults talk about practice
- adults observe each other
- adults engage in work on curriculum
- adults teach each other

Synergy

Peer Coaching

- celebrates the spirit of creativity, imagining, and intellectual networking
- stresses interdependence
- uses the paradigm of “we”

Process

Peer Coaching is a process which includes

- co-planning
- co-implementation
- co-evaluation

Principles of Effective Conferencing

Peer Coaching emphasizes

- use of a common language
- use of a specific focus
- hard evidence
- reciprocity

Examples of Our Work



Advantages

Peer Coaching

- energizes and sustains school improvement
- empowers innovation
- transforms decision making
- supports adult learning

Supportive Research

Peer Coaching incorporates

- Gregorc's Stages of Teacher Development (Gregorc, A.)
- adult learning styles
- concepts affirmed in "Start Here for Improving Teaching and Learning" (Schmoker, M.)
- characteristics of adult learning communities

Faculty Reflections

- “Peer coaching has enabled me to work with other teachers to make better choices about instruction, curriculum and assessment. It has been helpful in eliminating the isolation that one often feels as a teacher.”
Carolyn Kerns, Grade One Teacher
- “Peer coaching provided me with a forum in which I could plan effective teaching strategies, and learn how well my teaching goals were being met.”
Dawn Brooks, Grade Four Teacher
- “I would recommend peer coaching as an extraordinarily successful means to strengthen collegiality.”
Cindy Harris, P.E. Teacher

Summary Points

Key Learnings

- commitment to collegiality to introduce and sustain program
- formal record keeping and reflection to institutionalize program

Ongoing Challenges

- inclusion of teachers new to the faculty
- adoption of focus that includes all teachers
- investment of adequate professional time

Peer Coaching

In his book *Improving Schools from Within* (1990), Ronald Barth suggests that the secret of a good school setting is collegiality. He defines this as the presence of four specific behaviors on the part of adults who work in schools. First, these adults talk about practice. These conversations about teaching and learning are frequent, continuous, concrete, and precise. Second, adults in schools observe each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become practice to reflect on and talk about. Third, adults engage together in work on curriculum. Finally, adults in schools teach each other what they know about teaching, learning, and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated, and shared.

Those who take part in these efforts seem to value and honor learning, participation, and cooperation. In short, they become a community of learners who use the power of collective inquiry to improve their teaching and administration, and a community of leaders who accept the responsibility for competent decision-making and the articulation of personal and collective visions of the school.

The administrator and faculty members of OLMC School share both Barth's enthusiasm for collegiality and his conviction that such collaborative relationships are effective in improving the quality of the school. They have a long tradition of participating in cooperative work. They have shared in decisions concerning curriculum issues, have engaged in standing and ad hoc committee work, have served as mentors for teachers new to the profession or school, have collaborated in presenting case scenarios, and have supported one another in developing joint activities and lessons.

Through these experiences, they have come to possess: (1) an enhanced level of trust among themselves; (2) a perception of themselves as "good, but wanting to learn and to grow"; (3) a sense of caring and respect for one another and a willingness to help each other; and (4) a commitment to the norms of collaborative work. Based on these understandings, and in an effort to further strengthen their collegial relationships and to facilitate the transfer of new skill and strategy knowledge into practice, they engage in a formal program of peer coaching experiences on an ongoing basis.

Peer Coaching Process

The following process is repeated formally in the fall, winter and spring trimesters.

Co-planning Experience

A pair or team of teachers meets to brainstorm, and agree to a course of action (e.g., unit theme, alternative assessment, discipline procedure) that will be implemented by one, two, or more of them.

Participating teachers complete their individual *Trimester Peer Coaching Reporting Sheet* describing this portion of the process.

Co-implementation Experience

The same pair or team of teachers observes each other or one other colleague as they implement the course of action developed in the co-planning portion of the experience.

Participating teachers complete their individual *Trimester Peer Coaching Reporting Sheet* describing this portion of the process.

Co-evaluating Experience

The same pair or team of teachers meets to determine the success of the course of action that was planned and implemented. They decide to reuse or enhance the course of action at a future time based on its success, or to redesign the course of action based on its challenges.

Participating teachers complete their individual *Trimester Peer Coaching Reporting Sheet* describing this portion of the process.

At the conclusion of the cycle, participating teachers complete their individual *Trimester Peer Coaching Reporting Sheet* describing the successes and challenges of the course of action.

Annually, each teacher also completes the *Annual Peer Coaching Reflection Sheet* describing the benefits and concerns connected with the peer coaching process.

**OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL SCHOOL
2006-2007**

Trimester Peer Coaching Reporting Sheet

Trimester I _____ II _____ III _____

Teacher's Name

List of Colleagues

Co-planning Experience

Date of Experience

Description of Experience

Comments

Co-implementation Experience

Date of Experience

Description of Experience

Comments

(over)

Co-evaluation Experience

Date of Experience

Description of Experience

Comments

What parts of the course of action that was selected went well?

What parts of the course of action that was selected need to be changed?

Why? How?

**OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL SCHOOL
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Annual Peer Coaching Reflection Sheet

Teacher's Name _____ Date _____

Describe the benefits that have emerged from peer coaching this year.

Describe the concerns that have developed from peer coaching this year.

What changes can you suggest for peer coaching for next year?

Works Consulted

Barbknecht, Arnold. Peer Coaching: The Learning Team Approach. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Professional Development, 2001.

- Barth, Ronald. Improving Schools from Within. San Francisco: Jossey Boss, 1990.
- Covey, Stephen R. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change. New York: Fireside Books, 1989.
- Ewert, D. M. "Teachers Helping Teachers." Adult Learning. 5(3): 26-28.
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- Gregorc, A. F. "Developing Plans for Professional Growth." NASSP Bulletin. Dec, 1973: 1-8.
- McEwan, Elaine K., 10 Traits of Highly Effective Principals: From Good to Great Performance. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc., 2003.
- Robbins, Pa. How to Plan and Implement a Peer Coaching Program. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1991.
- Scalzo, Mary Jo. "Peer Coaching, Lessons Learned Along the Way." Today's School. Jan/Feb, 2005: 30.
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