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PEER COACHING FOR HISTORY TEACHERS
AT OAKCREST HIGH SCHOOL

by
James M. Reina

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 2005

Approved by _____
Professor

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ABSTRACT

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Peer Coaching for History Teachers at Oakcrest High School

2004/05

Dr Dennis A. Hurley

Master of Arts in School Administration

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the utilization of Peer Coaching as a tool for increasing teacher communication and promoting the sharing of methodology and content knowledge. Within a high-school setting, scheduling and multiple course-loads kept teachers from capitalizing on the greatest resource that surrounded them; each-other. This program allowed teachers to observe and be observed in a non-threatening, supportive environment outside the domain of supervisors and administrators. Originally designed to focus solely on the History Department, the study came to also include members of the English and Special Education Departments, who work with the history teachers through inclusion and cohort settings. Participating teachers were involved in pre-observation conferences, observations not lasting longer than one teaching period, and post-observation conferences to share their remarks and discuss their findings. Involved parties then completed a survey assessing the value of the process, made recommendations, and identified their desire for a personal interview. The process was consistently identified by participants as a positive step in evaluating performance and increasing communication among the staff. The next step would be to build a peer coaching model into the new-teacher development program and, with the assistance of supervisors, its inclusion as a best-practice tool throughout all departments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

This research centered on the relationships that exist between teachers within a given department and those with whom they have professional collaboration with. The program involved staff in observation and post-observation conference discussions to promote a dialogue with the end goal of increased teacher utilization of each other as resource. Within a high-school environment, departmentalization leads to multiple teachers handling the same course in any given year, and though teachers follow identical curriculum, teaching and life experiences tint the class differently by individual. The inclusion of teachers from other departments, whom may have had relationships with some of the same students, allows for the inclusion of a further varying perspective. Peer coaching would serve to allow these individuals to share their own perspectives with their counterparts in a non-threatening, supportive and open manner. The information gained from this study served to allow the building administration to ponder a move to a building-wide peer coaching system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create a peer coaching program centered on the Social Studies Department using surveys and interviews to judge its impact on increasing communication among staff. The effectiveness of the study was dictated by evaluating

the data regarding the teacher belief in its merits in completing this task. Success served not only the teachers who participated, but also created an opportunity to springboard this program into other departments.

Definitions

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

ISLLC: Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium

Limitations of the Study

Any study possesses potential areas of weakness or suspect. All attempts have been made to minimize this potentiality, though total removal is unrealistic. Of primary concern was the limiting of this study to one department, so voluntary participants from the English and Special Education Departments who work with Social Studies teachers were also included. Social studies is a subject that inherently is about perspective, and without question variations exist among staff, and are depended on for the study's success. It is wholly possible the exact nature of math and/or science would create less information to be shared among peers when the program is jumped to a building-wide initiative. Additionally, the information utilized for reporting on this study will omit any final, end of the year data that will be collected after the study has been documented for purposes of this project.

Setting of the Study

The Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District (GEHRHSD) is a large regional comprehensive high school serving the grades 9-12. The District is made up of two high schools: Oakcrest High School serves the constituent communities of Hamilton

Township and Mullica Township as well as the sending districts of Port Republic and Washington Township while Absegami serves the constituent towns of Galloway Township and Egg Harbor City.

Oakcrest High School, located in Mays Landing, New Jersey was built in 1960 and is located on a 110-acre wooded tract in Hamilton Township surrounded by grassy areas and athletic fields. Absegami High School, located in Galloway, New Jersey was built in 1982 and is situated on a 114-acre wooded site in Galloway Township also surrounded by grassy areas and athletic fields. The school community covers 273 square miles, an area of geographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic diversity. Over 95% of the students are bused to school, and 32% of the students travel in excess of 21 miles, one way, in their daily commute to school.

The district had an enrollment of approximately 3,800 students and 300 teaching faculty during the 2004-2005 school year. After a 6-year period of flat growth, enrollment had increased by almost 1400 students between 1996 and 2004. The last five academic years had seen enrollment growth of over 30%, and predictions for the next five years placed continual growth at approximately 20% (Center for Regional and Business Research Report, May 26, 2004, as cited Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District QAAR).

The school district is located in a middle class, rural-suburban community 10 miles from Atlantic City and 50 miles from Philadelphia. Major highways, such as the Garden State Parkway and the Atlantic City Expressway make it convenient to access these metropolitan areas. The economic base of the community is primarily small industry, trades, agriculture, and tourism. Most of the taxpayers are blue-collar workers

and laborers. The advent of the casino industry and the construction of three large retail shopping districts have contributed to the economic development and revenue of the community, and consequently, the rapid population growth in the high schools.

Besides the regional district, this growing economic base supports an extensive educational system consisting of several kindergarten through 8th grade school districts. Within the regional school district, there are two educational facilities of higher learning. The first educational facility, Atlantic Cape Community College, is located in Mays Landing adjacent to Oakcrest High School. This community college offers a wide range of two-year degree programs, casino and culinary arts programs, and continuing education professional development and training. The second educational facility, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, is located in Galloway Township and within three miles of Absegami High School. The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is the only four-year college in the area. It offers a variety of undergraduate programs and a limited number of graduate programs. Since it lies within the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District, the college had enabled both Absegami and Oakcrest High School students to take advantage of its facilities and to participate in its cultural events. Another educational facility, the Atlantic County Vocational Technical School (ACVTS), located in Mays Landing is located only a few minutes from Oakcrest High School. Although it is not considered a facility of higher learning, ACTVS provided vocational and school-to-work programs to assist students in preparing for the transition from school to employment.

District students had come under increasing risk factors because of the social and economic changes in the community. Both schools are less than 10 miles from Atlantic

City where the casino industry is a constant source of instability in the community. Farmers in the community were selling their land to developers due to the expanding casino trade and its need for increased housing, resulting in an increase in low-income housing developments and apartment complexes. Some students live in waterfronts homes worth more than \$1 million dollars, while almost one third come from areas best described as rural poverty. The 2002 per capita income for Atlantic County was \$31,702 which reflected the average of the upper and lower economic levels in the school's community.

Since the 1995-1996 school year, six budgets had passed and four had failed, with the last two years budgets being passed for the district. Even when the budget passes, there were always one or two sending districts who voted down the budget (Steve Ciccariello, personal communication, September 9, 2004). This reluctance to pass the budget was most likely a result of GEHRHSD being a regional school district. Each of the encompassing towns had its own K-8 budget. In addition, these towns contributed to the regional high school budget adding to increased property taxes. The towns involved were very diverse in size, amount of ratables, and socioeconomic status. This led to a diverse local tax impact within the school district.

The demographics illustrated that the GEHRHSD had a 12-15% mobility rate, a number that has been moving steadily down over the last four years. The October 2003 ASSA report listed 546 students (15%) received free lunches on the federally funded school lunch program with minorities representing a significantly higher percentage of this grouping than they do in the general population (Dominica Campanaro, personal communication, September 12, 2004). This number of the federally funded school-lunch

program had been increasing at an average rate of 2% per year for the past 5 years. Of the school population in September 2004, 62% were Caucasian, 18% were African American, 11% were Hispanic, and 9% were recorded as other. Approximately 15% of the student population was classified as needing special education services, and this number was projected to increase upon the arrival of the next freshman class.

The academic offerings, as listed in the Course Selection Booklets, provided for five distinct academic tracks that included AP, honors, college-preparatory, non-college-preparatory, and remedial programs. The New Jersey School Report Card (New Jersey State Department of Education, 2003) showed that 46 % of Absegami High School graduates and 36% of Oakcrest High School graduates attended a 4-year college after graduation and 32% and 29% respectively of the graduates attended a 2-year community college. The average total SAT scores for 2002-2003 school year were 990 for Absegami High School and 995 for Oakcrest High School. The March 2003 HSPA results showed that 80.5% of 11th graders were either proficient or advanced in the language arts literacy test and 66.1% were either proficient or advanced in the mathematics test.

There were 300 faculty members in the District to start the 2004-2005 school year, including 14 guidance counselors and 10 members of the schools Adolescent Study Teams. The faculty continued to demonstrate commitment to professional development with over 32% having earned master's degrees. A faculty attendance rate of 96.9% during the 2003-2004 school year was another example of a commitment to excellence. Additionally, almost a quarter of the faculty enjoyed a tenure in excess of 20 years. The schools were departmentalized in structure and included 7 department supervisors in addition to the principal and 3 vice principals in each.

Although almost 25% of the teachers in the district enjoyed tenure in excess of 20 years, this number had been decreasing each year since 1995 as a result of retirements. The remaining experienced staff members had seen the school community and the student body undergo significant racial and socioeconomic changes. Many resented these changes because it was clear that the diversity of the student body presented a demanding challenge for both the school and the faculty. For the most part, these experienced staff members influenced the school setting by their desire to maintain the status quo. They could be best described as the faculty members who were most resistant to change although numerous curricular and procedural changes had taken place over the past ten years.

The largest growth in faculty members over the past 5 years had been teachers who were hired with less than 1 year of experience. These new teachers and teachers in the mid-career stage could be best described as the "movers and shakers" in the building. They represented the staff members in the school who were implementing innovative teaching strategies and programs in their classes; serving on committees; becoming involved in meaningful professional development activities; coaching sports or serving as advisors to activity programs; and, in general, supporting school programs for the benefit of the students.

The majority of these staff members were not resistant to change. In fact, they welcomed it and had been major influences in numerous change efforts that had occurred during the past 3-5 years. Specifically, these changes included the interdisciplinary curricular programs linking English with social studies and science with mathematics that were previously mentioned and the new inclusion program. The influence of the majority

of the new and mid-career teachers to the setting was considered a positive, and fostered a creative, student centered environment.

The administrative team of each school, consisting of 7 department supervisors, 3 vice principals, and the principal, had undergone significant changes during the past ten years. Since 1992, the number of department supervisors per school had decreased from 10 to 7, and the number of vice principals had increased from 2 to 3. As of September 2004, 6 supervisors possessed less than 3 years of experience in their positions. Additionally, four of the six vice principals possessed less than three years experience. Both the Absegami and Oakcrest High School's principals have been in the district for over 20 years, with their tenures as principal began in August 2003. The remaining administrators ranged in experience in their positions from 8 to 20 years.

The high school administrative team members worked very closely with one another in the process of running the school. The working relationship between and among members of the administrative team was extremely positive. The teams met formally twice per month to discuss relevant issues at the school. The exchange of dialogue in this setting was open and honest. Administrative team members met informally throughout the period of time between formal meetings. The administrative team had served as leaders in the implementation of numerous curricular and procedural changes in the district over the past 3 years.

The superintendent of the GEHRHSD was completing his 9th year in the district. The board of education, consisting of nine members, had recently experienced turnover which had not been the case going back to 1992. Three members had served on the board for over 6 years. The remaining members, however, have been on the Board for three or

less years. The superintendent and board of education were fiscally conservative but were extremely supportive of programs that serviced students. The board of education consistently required presentations by administrative personnel when new programs were being proposed.

Significance of the Study

Any study regarding teaching practices and involving the staff creates great potential for gain as well as expected challenges. Ultimately, this project served to create a greater connection between staff at a professional level that not only lessens some of their burden, but also increases their effectiveness, ending in higher student involvement and achievement. It would have been naïve to not have foreseen potential “blocking” from some members of the department. A variety of excuses were experienced, including but not limited to complaints about a lack of time, failure to see a benefit, or a belief in “their system”. The intern believed the potential gain so outweighed any of these hurdles, the study was without question one that must be attempted.

Relationship of the Study to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium

The following ISLLC standards will be satisfied through this study:

Standard 2: Focus on student learning and staff professional growth, the direct goal of this study. By opening staff to alternative methods and perspectives, they continue to evolve as teachers, and increase their ability to effectively assist their students.

- 2.a.4
- 2.b.3

- 2.c.3

Standard 6: Recognition and inclusion of social and cultural contexts on teaching. By promoting teacher communication to highlight their personal influences amongst each other, the staff increases awareness of varying perspectives and influences on teaching and learning.

- 6.a.4
- 6.b.2
- 6.c.2

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study was organized in the following manner: chapter two is a review of the literature, chapter three presents the design of the study, chapter four is a presentation of research findings, and chapter five includes conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Peer review has become an increasingly popular method of assessment both within and outside of the educational profession. As its popularity has grown so to have its formats of application. Peer Coaching is but one term applied to a specific technique of peer utilization with regard to review, and at times, assessment. Peer Coaching as a process provides teachers with a singular program that can share knowledge, provide feedback, offer support, and either enhance existing or offer new knowledge (Gailbraith, 1995).

Within the educational field, Peer Coaching has become a part of the techniques available in the training, mentoring, and observing of staff. The model has been adapted at levels of education to suit specific needs, from tenured university professors to grade school students assisting younger children. Because of the many benefits available, Peer Coaching has traditionally been positively received within the educational community by teachers (Neubert, 1994).

The flexibility in its application to varying levels of the educational profession is due in part to the inherent flexibility in the technique itself. Those involved have the ability to customize the process in degree of structure, numbers involved, desired results, and relationships between participants. Despite these variations, four essential steps are generally involved: pre-conference; observation; data analysis; and post-conference (Robbins, 1995).

As a process, Peer Coaching depends on collegiality and willing participation. As important as the teacher seeking assistance is the coach and how they will provide that feedback. The coach must promote self-analysis on the part of the inviting teacher, and not become an evaluator or appear to be analyzing (Oneil, 2000). The amount of direct verbal feedback to occur between participants will vary according to model. In some applications, such as those advanced by Showers and Joyce (1996), it is suggested the amount be kept to a minimum to avoid a relational deterioration. On the contrary, other forms depend on open, frank discussion of what has been observed.

It should be stressed the inviting, or host teacher does not receive the only benefit from the process. Two of the most common and accepted paths to learning are observing and teaching. The step of observing can provide insight, introduce new knowledge, and promote self-reflection. Raney and Robbins (1986) reported of a teacher who “learned more from her observations of others than she did from being observed and receiving feedback” (as cited, Oneil, 2000).

Multiple forms of the process exist, and at times multiple names exist for similar or alike strategies, while some research omits particular references altogether. In its most wisely utilized form, cognitive coaching, the focus is self-modification (Costa & Garmston, 2004). Costa and Garmston define the process according to the following four assumptions: 1. thought and perception produce all behavior; 2. teaching is constant decision-making; 3. to learn something new requires engagement and alteration in thought; 4. humans continue to grow cognitively. The coach in this scenario acts as a moderator for the other’s self-analysis.

In collegial coaching, the focus is removed from an individual's potential shortfalls, and placed on the act of instruction (Dantonio, 1995). Galbraith and Anstrom (1995) describe the long range goal of this model as self-perpetuating improvement, similar in idea to cognitive coaching. One aspect of the collegial setting is a more informal, brainstorming approach. Out of this format, comes a greater knowledge of and acceptance of new strategies, shared materials, and newly obtained skills, (Dantonio, 1998).

Also similar in its design to teacher-centered is the reflective model. Two common attributes exist here, the first being the utilization of teachers from common disciplines, possibly departmental at the secondary school level. Secondly, all teachers are recognized to exist "on the same professional plane" (Oneil, 2000). When executed properly, a coach provides only feedback, not direction in reflective coaching.

Lastly, the clinical supervision model focuses on a more structured, directed approach. Here, a specific aspect of instruction is identified during a pre-conference for the coach to focus on and thus discussed in the post-conference. Because the expected outcome is identified in the pre-conference, the process is viewed as a more calculated course of action, though observer benefit still applies.

Education has been the focal point of a large number of organizations, watchdog groups, and committees whose goals have been to assess the achievement of the institution as a whole and generate suggestions and models for moving forward. A common product generated by these movements was the recognition that roles, responsibilities, and relationships within education must change for education to improve (Anderson & Pellicer, 2001). Peer Coaching seeks to redefine the traditional role of

teachers, and utilize the knowledge, experience, and expertise they possess to benefit not only students, but each other.

In outlining how education must respond to achieve in the future, The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education published *Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning: Transforming Professional Development for Student Success* (1996). Five recommendations were created by this work, including, "...reinvent teacher preparation and professional development, overhaul teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom, and encourage and reward teaching knowledge and skill", each of which can be assisted or improved by Peer Coaching (Becker, 2004).

Recently, many states and districts have sought to improve teacher performance through an increase in continuing education and professional development. Peer Coaching benefits teachers not only as instructors, but also supports adult learning and ongoing development (Zepeda, 2003, as cited Arnau et al.). The notion of open-mindedness and adult learning depends on teachers viewing themselves as researchers, an outcome of Peer Coaching programs (Robbins, 1995). Teachers also need to be receptive to professional development if they are to glean its potential rewards. An increased atmosphere of collegiality, a byproduct of Peer Coaching, has been shown to increase the effectiveness of professional development (Little, 1982).

In addition to its usage as a tool of review, Peer Coaching has the added benefit of increasing teacher contact with their in-school neighbors and decreasing the common isolation felt by many within the profession, a scenario repeatedly identified as one that the field must address (Hall & McKeen, 1991). Few other mediums within the profession

offer teachers opportunities to reflect on and share with, and learn from, their colleagues (Becker, 2004).

Linked to this approach of connecting with one's peers is the benefit of reducing the appearance of strata within the school, moving teachers towards a common plane without levels of power and status (Ackland, 1991). Administrators could expect out of this process a more unified staff, where true bonds exist that promote professional growth. This unified staff would assist in the promotion of a more positive school environment (Robbins, 1995), also conducive to improved student achievement.

In Peer Coaching, it is teachers, not supervisors or administrators, directing the observation. The teachers have control over the observation, its content, its duration, its format, and its focus (Oneil, 2000). This feeling of control and responsibility leads to another advantage Peer Coaching holds over supervisor or administrator observation: involvement in professional development, both their own and that of their peers. The sporadic visits under the traditional method only serve to further isolate and may in fact reduce development (Allen & Le Blanc,).

One underlying benefit of Peer Coaching is the degree to which comments and suggestions are heard and accepted. Of the three possible sources for a teacher to receive feedback regarding their execution within the classroom, students, peers, and supervisors / administrators, Peer Coaches carry by far the most weight. Spencer and Flyr (1992) reported that teachers will only enact change roughly twenty-five percent of the time in response to student feedback, and that comments by supervisors and administrators carry even less weight, somewhere around ten percent. On the opposite end of the spectrum,

Peer Coaching can produce change in a teacher's approach approximately eighty percent of the time (Millis, 1994, as cited Meyer and Gray).

This data was supported by findings of Gottesman and Jennings (1994) who added that coaching, when combined with lessons in theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback, result in ninety percent of teacher-gained information being transferred into the classroom. The components of Peer Coaching, namely reflection, analysis, and problem solving, increase teacher acceptance and utilization of other forms of staff development as well (Wineburg, 1995).

Another common notion advanced by many supervisors and administrators is the idea that teachers need to be in control of their own rooms, possess the ability to "handle it themselves." An unfortunate effect of this mantra is a perpetuation of the isolation that teachers experience, further reducing the practice of peer collaboration (Christen & Hasbrouck, 1995). In effect, this atmosphere would in turn create more work by and responsibility on supervisors, since teachers turn to them for assistance and / or guidance instead of each other.

Joyce and Showers (2002) speak of the importance of any training as being able to satisfy the desired outcomes, and this fact should not be lost with Peer Coaching. The end result of any teacher training or assistance program should be increased student performance. For students to learn, teachers must be motivated and display an interest in learning, benefits documented within Peer Coaching programs (Menges, 1987, as cited Meyer and Gray). The role of coach also permits teachers to observe new instructional techniques and realize new resources, broadening the experience for their students.

Collaboration, feedback, and pedagogical assistance are all benefits of Peer Coaching that create the “optimal situations for learning, achievement, and success in schools” (Becker, 2004). The collaborative nature of Peer Coaching itself can have another positive impact on teachers and how they instruct. Cooperative teaching has become recognized as a technique with profound student benefits, and an increase in this method of instruction has been noted as a result of involvement in a Peer Coaching program (Grimmett & Nuefield, 1994). Ostensibly, a teacher open to sharing their methods and knowledge with a fellow teacher, would likewise open their students to the same experience.

Motivation for affirmation of the quality of work teachers were accomplishing in their classrooms served as a driving force, as well (Arnau, 2004). This behavior should not be surprising, as teachers are well aware students seek feedback on their work. Just as positive reinforcement can drive students to continue striving for achievement, the feedback produced through a Peer Coaching relationship can boost the confidence of teachers. This enhancement would not only reinforce existing positives in teachers, but promote the engagement of additional instructional techniques (Ackland, 1991).

Dantonio (1995) identified three goals Peer Coaching satisfies for increased teacher performance: 1. teachers engaging in study of their own craft; 2. teachers developing a shared language and understandings; 3. providing a framework for follow-up training. Adding to this list, Blasé (1998) included self-confidence and self-esteem, hallmarks of successful people in any vocation.

Support for the notion of peer involvement has also come from the nation’s two largest teachers unions. Both the NEA and AFT have included resolutions supporting

peer assessment and review programs within the profession (Anderson & Pellicer, 2001). It should be noted however, that a strong distinction is made by these governing bodies concerning the definitions and roles of peer assessment and peer review. Both entities identify assessment as a formative process centered on quality assurance, while review is defined as summative and dealing with quality control (AFT/NEA, 1998).

The latter would fall closer to the traditional roles of supervisors and administrators with regards to clinical observations, and step beyond the accepted role of Peer Coaching. It is this perception that could become a hindrance to the implementation of a Peer Coaching program. It may be expected that some members of unions will reject the process out of a fear that coaching may in fact be “disguised evaluative practices” (Oneil, 2000). Peer review has become in some districts a component of the supervisory process, and a more widely regarded reform initiative in the 1990s (Lieberman, 1998).

An additional reservation is the time commitment required to properly participate in a Peer Coaching program. The excuse of time would provide a credible reason for teachers to avoid participation. Following the accepted protocols of conducting both pre- and post-observation conferences, teachers must be prepared to make a commitment to the process that may include their own time, without which the process will produce minimal if noticeable results (Perkins, 1998). Administratively-approved leave time would negate this hindrance, but that is an option not available to many teachers. However, if Peer Coaching is to be an accepted form of professional development, districts should recognize the potential benefits and provide teachers release time, pay, and credit for participation in a program (Becker, 2004).

In addition to the willing participation of both parties, the caliber of the “coach” is imperative also. If the observer is to provide feedback, as they are responsible to in some forms of the process, they must have an understanding of the elements of a good observation. With little or no training, there can be concern over the ability of teachers to fulfill this role (Lieberman, 1998). Supervisors and administrators receive training to this end, while many teachers do not, so even if a minimal session occurs, teachers do not possess the experience. This notion would appear to give a nod to the programs that promote reflection and self-analysis.

An accommodation to the issue of teacher control verse administrative oversight could be the utilization of a coaching coordinator. A coordinator can ensure the program is performing optimally in planning, implementation, and benefit, all critical components (Sweeney, 1993). Sweeney further identifies the specific tasks a coordinator could fulfill to reduce the strain on all involved teachers: scheduling, training, “coaching” of coaches, and monitoring of application. If no experienced personnel exist within the building, it may be necessary to solicit the assistance of an outside source in program creation and implementation (Joyce and Showers, 2002).

Peer Coaching represents an opportunity for a school to accomplish many tasks with one instrument. Its benefits can provide gains to administrative staff, teachers, and students alike. For students, it offers diversity and improved modeling and for administrators it can reduce time spent on training and evaluating. Teachers, the direct recipient, gain collegial connections, self- and peer-respect, and shared knowledge and abilities. Peer Coaching represents an opportunity for teachers to function as life-long learners, and embrace their career. The industry needs to recognize the benefits inherent

in the process, and capitalize on them utilizing Peer Coaching as a manner to produce a successful educational future (Oneil, 2000).

Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

Description of the Research Design

Oakcrest High School had lacked any format of structured peer review or coaching. The state required mentoring existed, as did an in-house mentoring program for new teachers, but no apparatus was in place to promote or utilize peer assistance throughout the entirety of one's professional career. The Peer Coaching program was completed in an attempt to increase staff awareness of the potential benefits, and assess staff desire to further develop and implement such a program.

As is common throughout our nation's educational system, Oakcrest High School utilized a departmental system, grouping teachers by discipline. Within this grouping there existed further stratification by subject or content, for example world history teachers within the history department. While this format allows for some level of specialization over time, it can also be isolating. Additionally, because of the New Jersey licensing format, a history teacher could have a degree in a variety of the social sciences, creating teachers who possess divergent backgrounds and influences. These variations in perspective should be embraced as an opportunity for educators to gain knowledge, both curricular and pedagogical. Peer Coaching was presented as a system that could increase the communication between these teachers, and improve on the professional relationships among peers. Teachers were offered three methods that could be utilized to accomplish these results: 1. observe a fellow teacher to increase your awareness of a specific,

curricular topic; 2. observe a teacher to study a non-curricular strength of theirs, such as classroom management or oral presentation; 3. ask a peer to observe you and assess your achievement in an area you identified during a pre-observation conference.

Teachers involved in the project completed a process consisting of four main steps. After selection of a partner, although their own decision some sought the advice of others based upon their specific goal, participants convened a short pre-observation conference. Within this setting, the information sought was identified and goals of the participants articulated. Next, the classroom observation occurred, lasting no longer than one, forty-five minute period. The next step, arguably the most important, was a post-observation conference allowing for a dialogue between participants. It was this phase that was the ultimate goal of the project; to promote professional dialogue among peers in a focused, supportive manner. Lastly, all participants completed the survey critiquing the process and some provided textual reviews to provide further feedback.

Information gleaned from the project was provided to all departmental supervisors, as well the building principal. This data served to assess the staff's response to a Peer Coaching program in an effort to begin the process of creating a building wide, voluntary program.

Focus on Research Instruments

The main research instrument utilized for this project was surveys to be completed by participating staff upon completion of Peer Coaching observations. The instrument was designed to not only ascertain staff response to the process, but also the level to which they were involved. The second portion was extremely critical in ensuring

that the participatory staff had entered the program with honest and measurable intentions.

The instrument provided opportunity for those involved to identify how they selected their partner, the type of response or assistance they were seeking from their partner, the degree to which the process met their needs, and any recommendations they could offer for improvement of the process. The last portion was seen as essential if the program was to be expanded within the participating department, or ultimately jumped to a building-wide program.

In addition to the surveys, a limited number of interviews were completed to provide more specific data than available through a questionnaire. The interviews served to balance some of the inherent weaknesses of surveys as instruments of data collection such as respondent truthfulness and data synthesis. The responses were documented, and information reviewed to verify the trends purported by the surveys.

Sample and Sample Technique

The teaching staff at Oakcrest High School was broken into six departments (English and foreign language, history and performing arts, science and related arts, math and business, health and physical education, and special education) under the direction of independent supervisors. Because of the size of the school, approximately 1700 students and 150 teaching staff, a decision was made to conduct the research with a focus in one department. The focus sample for this project was the history department at Oakcrest High School, though through partnerships and observations, members of the English and special education departments were also involved.

Within the history department, complete participation was unavailable. The district had just completed a protracted and rather acrimonious contract negotiation that ended with an increased school day, an event that prompted some within the department to refuse to participate in any program not required by their contract. The supervisor was supportive of the project, and thus directed all non-tenured teachers that as one of their three observations, she was supervising for the implementation of knowledge gained through a Peer Coaching experience. Additionally, some tenured staff participated voluntarily, and as previously mentioned, members of other departments were included through their involvement with department members.

Data Analysis Plan

With two sources of data, surveys and interviews, analysis was split in approach but uniformed in objective, to ascertain teacher belief in Peer Coaching as a technique for increasing the quantity and quality of professional relationships. The surveys provided empirical data regarding the contact between involved parties, specifically the amount of time dedicated to the project, the identification of goals and objectives, and the manner through which observers gathered their information. Additionally, the surveys required the participants to identify the success of the Peer Coaching format used in satisfying their goals and meeting their objectives. Each respondent was also given the opportunity to interject additional feelings and / or findings in the form of open ended questions seeking their feedback and suggestions for future applications.

The interview process was included to provide those involved a forum through which they could disseminate additional insights regarding the process. Because of the directed and specific approach of the surveys, the interviews were conducted in a semi-

structured format, with some retrospective element. Interviews were not based directly on the specific surveys of a given participant, but rather from a cross-section of participants with regard to tenure, gender, and department. This approach was utilized to ensure a random sampling and avoid selection based upon data derived from any given survey.

Impact of Project

The end objective of this project was to determine if Peer Coaching was a process that could be utilized within Oakcrest High School to improve the caliber of professional relationships and ultimately advance the level of instruction. Structured questions from the survey were targeted at teacher appraisal of the system, as well as free response questions and interview discussions to determine if the project was something the participating staff would support. The idea of implementing such a program was highly backed by the supervisory and administrative staff, but because of the nature of union / administrative relations at that time was not an avenue they were willing to openly advance.

Teachers who participated in the project, and reaped its benefits, were recognized as a resource who could promote the technique to the additional staff. Under the existing contract of the time, there was no means to implement such a program from a mandatory perspective, but success within one department could lead to volunteer participation throughout the building. Additionally, feedback from the sample could be utilized to refine the project and make it more appealing and applicable to a larger portion of the teaching staff. Included in these modifications were increased training of the supervisory staff in explaining and educating the staff of the uses and benefits of the program.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Research Findings

The promises of peer coaching include increased teacher communication, self-awareness, and enhanced methodology all leading to improved student achievement. The primary focus of this research was not the end goal of student achievement, but rather to judge how Peer Coaching was accepted by the staff and if the program would provide a means to complete the primary objectives. The initial focus group was to be the social studies department, though members of other departments became involved as the individuals selected by social studies teachers to work with. This occurrence gave the result of displaying some of the strengths of Peer Coaching, namely its ability to maximize on teacher comfort and afford teachers the ability to increase their knowledge on subjects and pedagogical approaches outside of their own domain.

A total of ten teachers ultimately participated (survey with numbers of responses available at end of this chapter) with five coming from the focal department. Also included were three English teachers, a math teacher, and one special education teacher. Those involved varied in experience from third year to a veteran of over twenty years. The very inclusion of teachers outside of the original selected group display a desire among staff to seek out knowledge from those they view as being the best source. The math teacher was selected to satisfy a history teacher's desires to better present percentages and relate partial to whole relationships when teaching about population segments. The special education teacher allowed a newer teacher to observe a veteran

and their approach to dealing with special education students in an inclusion setting. Oakcrest High School utilized a cohort approach to English and social studies, where the curriculums are related and teachers have the ability to focus on common timeframes or themes simultaneously to increase student understanding and recognition.

Of the data collected clear approval of and support for the project was given through the responses addressing their satisfaction with the Peer Coaching process. Given three choices when asked simply “would you participate again?” respondents chose “absolutely” eight times and “with changes” twice. The other option, “not possible”, failed to receive even one selection. The same choice was also never selected when participants were asked “would you recommend this process to a fellow teacher who is seeking assistance?” In this context, “absolutely” received nine votes while “with reservation” was selected once. A participant who took the time to craft a free write response directly addressed this question with the statement, “the peer coaching paradigm is a great opportunity for fellow teachers to work with each other in fine tuning their teaching skills.”

Beyond the observation itself, the pre-and post conferences both contain specific goals and importance. The pre-observation meeting affords teachers the ability to outline their desired results and clearly state their goals. The recommended time allotment for this meeting was identified to participants as 15-30 minutes, though they were free to adjust based upon their own requirements. Seventy-percent of the participants did stay within this recommendation, though two participants indicated they needed “less than 15 minutes,” and one utilized “more than 30 minutes.” When asked to evaluate the role of the pre-conference and critique its importance, the survey provided participants with four

choices: 1. very important; 2. moderately important; 3. little importance; and 4. no importance. Neither of the last two options were selected, while “very important” received six tallies and “moderately important” two.

The post-conference, where information learned was to be shared and the true “peer coaching” occurred, was also a focal point of the survey for respondents to judge. Again, the time recommended for participants was 15-30 minutes, but a change occurred as compared to the pre-conference, where a majority stayed within that the guidelines. With regards to this issue, the same number of participants, four, selected “more than 30 minutes” as “between 15 and 30 minutes” and two people chose the third option, “less than 15 minutes.” When asked to evaluate the importance of the post-conference to the process, its role is clearly recognized. Nine respondents chose “very important” and one selected “moderately important.” The definitive selection of “very important” and total absence of “little of importance” or “no importance” depicts a group that understood the importance of communication and utilized the process to its utmost potential.

One essential element of the pre- and post-conferences was to identify and address specifically desired results. When asked how Peer Coaching satisfied those desires, respondents again gave affirmation of the success of the process. Given three choices on their survey, “very much so”, “somewhat so”, and “little or no assistance”, six selected the highest qualifier, “very much so.” Three people selected “somewhat so”, one individual left it blank, and “little or no assistance” failed to be recognized. It may be theorized that since the responses to the issue of recommending the process to a friend and participating again both elicited higher marks than satisfying identified results, participants also benefited from unanticipated results.

A free write section was provided under this question to allow teachers to identify the types of information they were seeking from the process. Though not all respondents chose to list the results they sought, a variety of responses existed. Some type of involvement with students was recognized on multiple forms, varying from the handling of at-risk students to general classroom management. Two additional related responses centered on receiving a perspective other than a supervisor, an idea also submitted in a separate response. Here, the participant responded “the peer coaching process is beneficial in that it allows teachers to address their own concerns about their skills and procedures from a peer who is faced with the same challenges on a daily basis.”

With regards to the observation itself, the survey contained two questions, one addressing duration and one by what means the guest recorded observations. The recommended time-frame was 45 minutes, the length of one class period at Oakcrest High School. The class period length was recommended for two reasons; first it allowed the observer to witness all aspects of a lesson from introduction to closure, and secondly because it allowed the guest the greatest opportunity to avoid disturbance of the classroom, something that could happen if arrival or departure occurred during the lesson. Two respondents still identified “less than 30 minutes” as their selection, indicating they failed to observe an entire period. The possibility exists however that this does not indicate a lack of information, but rather that the individual satisfied the identified goals before the entire class period had completed, and left satisfied. One respondent selected “more than 45 minutes”, indicating their observation occurred across multiple periods, and because Oakcrest does not utilize block scheduling, presumably across multiple days.

The other respondents all selected the choice of “30-45 minutes”, that would indicate most if not all of a period.

When asked to identify how they were recording their observations, participants were given the choices of listening, note taking, and recording. No individual chose the last selection, and it should be noted it is not part of the procedure for observations with Oakcrest high School. While one individual failed to respond o this section, one individual also selected both, an entry that while counted for each should be recognized more with the “taking notes” option. Beyond this double selection, “listening only” received only three votes to “take notes” five.

Peer Coaching was clearly viewed by those who participated as a process that can assist teachers. On average, the time commitment for involvement was less than two class period for each episode, or between three and four period for a complete cycle with a partner. The idea of sacrificing three to four periods for the participating group was clearly a worthwhile tradeoff, though to some that would undoubtedly appear an inconvenience. The respondents have provided the impetus and groundwork to increase the size and scope of Peer Coaching at Oakcrest High School in the future.

PEER COACHING

PLEASE TAKE A FEW MOMENTS AND COMPLETE THIS SURVEY. THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND INVOLVEMENT.

CIRCLE THE MOST APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

1. The person you worked with was
 - a. From your department, but teaches a different course **3 RESPONSES**
 - b. Teaches the same course/subject as you **2 RESPONSES**
 - c. From a different department **5 RESPONSES**If you selected "C", please select one of the following as reason
 1. personal friend **2 / 5**
 2. professional reputation **2 / 5**
 3. recommendation **1 / 5**

2. How much time, approximately, did you spend in a pre-conference
 - a. Less than 15 minutes **2 RESPONSES**
 - b. Between 15 and 30 minutes **7 RESPONSES**
 - c. More than 30 minutes **1 RESPONSE**

3. How would you rate the importance of the pre-conference in the success of the cooperation
 - a. Very important **6 RESPONSES**
 - b. Moderately important **4 RESPONSES**
 - c. Little importance
 - d. No importance

4. How many targets/goals were identified during the pre-conference
 - a. 1 or 3 **9 RESPONSES**
 - b. 3 to 5 **1 RESPONSE**
 - c. More than 5

5. How much time was spent on the observation
 - a. Less than 30 minutes **2 RESPONSES**
 - b. 30 to 45 minutes **7 RESPONSES**
 - c. More than 45 minutes **1 RESPONSE**

6. During the observation, did you **1 BLANK, 1 BOTH "A" + "B"**
 - a. Listen only **4 RESPONSES**
 - b. Take notes **6 RESPONSES**
 - c. Record the lesson

7. How much time was spent on the post-conference
 - a. Less than 15 minutes **2 RESPONSES**
 - b. Between 15 and 30 minutes **4 RESPONSES**
 - c. More than 30 minutes **4 RESPONSES**

8. How would you rate the importance of the post-conference in the success of the cooperation

- a. Very important **9 RESPONSES**
- b. Moderately important **1 RESPONSES**
- c. Little importance
- d. No importance

9. Overall, how did peer-observation satisfy your desired results **1 BLANK**

- a. Very much so **6 RESPONSES**
- b. Somewhat so **3 RESPONSES**
- c. Little or no assistance

Please briefly describe the type of information you were seeking (content, organization, discipline, etc.) and how it was satisfied through the observation

10. Would you participate again

- a. Absolutely **8 RESPONSES**
- b. With changes **2 RESPONSES**
- c. Not possible

11. Would you recommend this process to a fellow teacher who is seeking assistance

- a. Absolutely **9 RESPONSES**
- b. With reservation **1 RESPONSES**
- c. Not possible

12. What changes would you suggest to improve the program or increase participation

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. COMPLETED SURVEYS
MAY BE PLACED IN EITHER MY DEPARTMENTAL OR FRONT OFFICE
MAILBOX.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Conclusions and Implications

Peer Coaching was clearly viewed a positive step by those who participated in the project. Collected data as well as free write response indicate the program provided staff with a means of increasing communication and promoting self awareness and reflection. A larger number of participants would have been preferred to ensure validity, but because of the consistency of responses the data should prove reliable.

Because participants stepped outside of their department, greater participation and gain occurred. The freedom of allowing teachers to seek their own partners for their own goals was also recognized as a plus. While requiring Peer Coaching to a group would obviously have increased the numbers, it is reasonable to believe some involved would have failed to recognize any benefit, and could cause potential harm through negative participation. If the program is to be jumpstarted to other areas, as advanced later in this paper, the lessons regarding participation and affiliation among staff must not be forgotten.

It should also be recognized the respondents have indicated the program was beneficial because of the process: any attempt to avoid or minimize pre- and post-conferences risks weakening the effectiveness of Peer Coaching. While information beyond that which was identified was gleaned and shared, it comes from the context and format established in the pre-conference, and is disseminated in the post-conference.

Though it was only a slightly larger number that identified themselves as taking notes during the observation, in hindsight that step shows a greater commitment to the process and would in future endeavors be a requested action. The possibility exists that the observer could enter with a list created by the host, and “complete” the notes right next to the host’s desired results. This format would also simplify the post-conference and ensure no information of observation was lost.

ISLLC Standards and Leadership Growth

The role of the ISLLC standards is to encapsulate the expectations and requirements of school administrators who will provide leadership and success within their educational environments. For this project, specific ISLLC standards were identified as being directly relatable. Standard two reads “a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth,” clearly seeking the exact results Peer Coaching had continuously shown to deliver. Within the context of this project, the program facilitator satisfied ISLLC 2 on many levels. While the end goal of increased student achievement was not measured, and thus could not be verified, participating teachers saw themselves as “assisted” by the process and recognized the benefits of increased communication. These achievements demonstrate the creation of an environment conducive to professional growth and a culture where learning is seen not solely as the role of a student, but as an accessible gain for all.

Standard six seeks to hold administrators accountable for the recognition of influencing factors on education in general and their respective spheres of control.

Specifically, the contexts of political, economic, legal, social, and cultural are identified as forces that will effect education, both from the teacher and student perspective. Peer Coaching reduces potential differentiations that may exist between teacher and student by offering teachers an opportunity to observe and learn from their counterparts who may hail from differing economic or cultural backgrounds, in addition to variations in education, training, and experience. A leader who seeks to increase the communication amongst his staff is ultimately educating his staff to the many perspectives and views that walk through a school building every morning. In this application, Peer Coaching offered a history teacher the opportunity to view a math teacher work with fractions, knowledge that was then taken to the history room and utilized in lessons regarding segments of populations and their relationships to each other. An additional example of a lesson meeting ISLLC Standard 6 was the regular education teacher who observed a special education teacher out of fear their pacing was too quick within an inclusion setting. Peer Coaching by definition is about teachers sharing with other teachers for the benefit of all students, a direct fit for the aforementioned ISLLC standard.

Organizational Change

A lesson that must be learned by any intern, or new hire, is that of the local “politics” and the personalities they are interacting with. Change is not something most people seek, and within any environment some who are outright resistant may also be identified. Lasting change is rarely forced upon any group, but rather embraced in steps, and often manipulated by those involved for maximization of their own needs. It is with this recognition in mind that this project, and any educational growth, must be appraised. Peer Coaching at Oakcrest High School saw its introduction in this project. Positive

feedback from the participants was utilized to foster discussions with non-participants, both teachers and administrators. Lasting change will come from building upon the success achieved with the limited number of those involved.

As a setting, Oakcrest had many factors that limited its immediate acceptance of and utilization of this process. The building was coming off a rather contentious labor negotiation that saw some teaching staff deny involvement based upon the time commitment required for proper application of Peer Coaching. Further, there existed a resistance from some supervisors and those involved with new teacher training who saw the program as “too much” for people to be involved with. Utilizing the acclamations of the program participants would permit an increased involvement in subsequent years, along with modifications in approach and introduction by the intern.

Areas of success for the program, and thus “institutional change”, did occur in the area of increased communication beyond department walls. While it is customary for veteran teachers to offer ideas and tools to new teachers who they may share subjects and courses with, multiple models within the project illustrate the benefits available by looking outside one’s own department. Cross-curricular education has become a popular and promoted approach within education, and Peer Coaching offers a path for structured dialogue among teachers who may share students, or are focusing on a given theme, albeit within varying disciplines. Oakcrest High School made a commitment to increase HSPA math scores during the school year 2004-2005, and this goal saw math teachers spending time with members of other departments to increase staff awareness of the design, scope, and style of the assessment. That process served to introduce the idea, and

in one instance foster a Peer Coaching experience, of a history teacher seeking a math teacher for the purpose of teacher education in an otherwise unknown content area.

Organization change was also prepared by the evolution of the project. As participants began to talk about their experience, others showed interest and shared ideas for future evolutions. Among these were an administrator and multiple teachers who expressed interest for the future. This step, while appearing small, offered a crucial step to lasting change, a desire among those involved for participation. The desire to involve oneself or one's staff illustrates change in the view of organization members from a "top-down" requirement to a collaborative effort.

Further Study

There are two directions this project could move in the future. The initial, in terms of research, would be to track the end goal of any educational program, student achievement, by comparing student accomplishment of those who participate in a Peer Coaching program with those who do not. For this research to take place, a baseline of student achievement would have to be determined before a program was initialized, two groups created, participating and non-participating teachers, and then a comparison of student achievement within each group after teacher completion of the program. The complexity and time commitment of this project, in addition to the many factors that could shade results, move this outside the realm of possible achievement for many administrators in a public school setting who also hold a litany of other job responsibilities.

A next step that could be undertaken from this research would be to jumpstart the program to additional groups over a given timeline. Two clusters come to mind as

potential targets: new teachers and those identified by supervisors as lacking in areas that Peer Coaching can assist in. As discussed in the previous section, the organizational change to permit this growth has begun. It is not believed to be realistic that in only its second year, the project could be launched school wide. There exist individuals, who through comments made, will never participate but a limited number of vocal detractors should impede the progress of those seeking involvement. The idea was advanced that this program violates the contract, and thus should not be participated in, but voluntary interaction among staff for the betterment of themselves and the students will always find participants.

The first group identified as future potential participants are the new teachers. Oakcrest High School conducts a formal new teacher training program that begins with summer work session (a natural location for introduction to the process) and follows the new hires throughout their first year. This process includes a mentor, typically an individual within the department who may or may not also teach some of the same courses. The mentor is identified and accepted by the supervisor as a teacher worthy of “guiding” the new teacher through their first year. This relationship is a natural for the Peer Coaching process. The relationship could be easily extended to include the formal observations on both ends this Peer Coaching project required. Ideally, the leader would require the new teacher to also solicit a second Peer Coaching experience, with an individual other than their mentor, to broaden both their educational exposure and promote relationships to reduce teacher isolation. The collaborative work would also serve to provide veteran teachers with the opportunity to reinforce subject matter knowledge and possibly introduce new pedagogical methods.

Not all teachers grasp all aspect of the vocation in their first years. The second group identified, those selected by their supervisors, could likely be represented by this statement and benefit from Peer Coaching. Assuming the process was begun with first year teachers, individuals identified by their supervisors would have knowledge of the process and possess the ability to enter into a Peer Coaching experience with minimal further introduction. This relationship would present two choices for the supervisors in establishing the links. The simple and obvious choice would be to connect the teacher in need with a veteran teacher who supposedly is "complete" in their teaching. A requirement here would be for a veteran teacher who believes in the process and is willing to give of themselves for the betterment of a peer. A second choice, and one that could also serve to build moral and confidence in a teacher who may need assistance in a an area, is for the supervisor to attempt to link teachers in need of improvement with each other based upon a link in strengths and weaknesses. In this scenario, a teacher who displays strong classroom management but lacks methodology could be connected to a teacher who holds the opposite descriptors. Beyond just addressing the direct needs, this relationship would create a bond among staff who may be doubting themselves or their profession.

Peer Coaching holds the potential to improve the level of teaching within a school. At Oakcrest High School, the idea has been launched, and though on a limited scale, it has been well received. This positive first step opens the way for an evolution in the program to increase involvement which would lead to increased teacher communication and proficiency, and should culminate in increases student performance. Additionally, if the program can diminish the number of teachers leaving the building or

profession, it serves to enhance the consistently within, improve the overall educational environment, and reduce the stresses upon all levels of administration.

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ISOLATED SURVEY RESPONSES

3. How would you rate the importance of the pre-conference in the success of the cooperation?

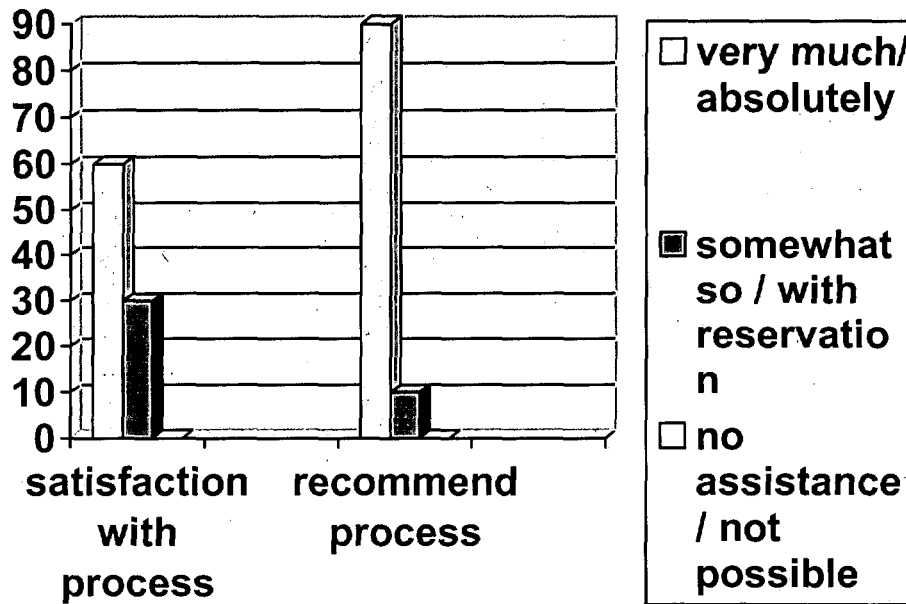
Very Important	Moderately Important	Little Importance	No Importance
60 %	40 %	0 %	0 %

8. How would you rate the importance of the post-conference in the success of the cooperation?

Very Important	Moderately Important	Little Importance	No Importance
90 %	10 %	0 %	0 %

10. Would you participate again?

Absolutely	With Changes	Not Possible
80 %	20 %	0 %



PEER COACHING

Components

What is peer coaching? Peer coaching is a process in which two or more professional colleagues work together for a specific, predetermined purpose in order that teaching performance can be improved as well as validated. The purpose may be to reflect on current practices or to expand, to refine, and build new skills. Peer coaching can be utilized to share new ideas; to teach one another; to conduct classroom observations; or to solve problems in the workplace. Peer coaching is non judgmental, and non evaluative. Peer coaching focuses on the collaborative development, refinement and sharing of professional knowledge and skills.

There are a variety of peer coaching terms and models: technical coaching, collegial coaching, team coaching, cognitive coaching, and challenge coaching are a few of the more common types of coaching used by schools.

Each model is slightly different but all have the same end goal-*to improve teaching and learning*-and all involve the use of peers/colleagues to achieve this goal. Choosing appropriately which model for a situation is key, as is having all models available for use.

Why Peer Coaching?

Statistical support for peer coaching comes from many sources. Perhaps the most easily understood data follows:

- 5% of learners will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory
- 10% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration
- 20% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration, and practice within the training
- 25% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration, and practice within the training, and feedback
- 90% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration, and practice within the training, feedback, and coaching

Dr. Bruce Joyce, "Staff Development Awareness Conference," Columbia, SC, January 1987.

Purposes which have been indicated to reinforce use of peer coaching include:

- increase of student learning
- facilitate/increase discussion between/among colleagues of professional topics/research
- sharing of successful practices through collaboration

- encouragement of and provisions for reflective practice
- use as a problem-solving vehicle
- reduce isolation among teachers
- promote teacher as researcher
- create a forum for addressing instructional problems
- support and assist new and beginning teachers in their practice
- build collaborative norms to enable teachers to give and receive ideas and receive assistance

Benefits

Some of the benefits reported by professionals who have been involved in peer coaching are:

- improved student achievement
- enhanced student progress
- enhanced sense of professional skill
- increased ability to analyze their own lessons
- better understanding of what we know about best practices in teaching and learning
- wider repertoire of instructional strategies/resources
- deeper sense of efficacy
- stronger professional ties with colleagues
- improved teaching performance
- a better articulated curriculum
- more cohesive school culture
- positive school climate

Support

A program like this needs certain supports in place in order to be successful. Commonly mentioned criteria are:

- trusting relationships among all participants
- administrative support (emotional, organizational, financial)
- faculty/staff recognition of the need for improvement and formal ongoing learning
- clear expectations for engagement
- assessment methods for measuring the difference and outcomes for the experience
- release time for peer coaches
- funds to pay for training and personnel

credit to:

Peer Coaching for Improvement of Teaching and Learning, by Jean M. Becker

PEER COACHING

GOALS

Thank you in advance for your interest in this project, and the time to read this introduction. *Peer Coaching* presents many opportunities for teachers to elevate themselves and their profession. Through the process, you can expect improvements in your communication with your colleagues, curricular application, and student achievement. Some of the benefits cited by other participants include:

1. reduced isolation among teachers / strengthened professional relationships
2. promotion of the teacher as a researcher, in and out of the classroom
3. support and assistance of new teachers in recognizing and utilizing resources
4. increased self-analysis, including lesson awareness

EXPECTATIONS

For the process to be maximized, there are some components of the program we must remember:

1. *Peer Coaching* is non judgmental and non evaluative
2. participants must be open to the idea of *Peer Coaching*
3. each individual should be expressive, and honest in doing so
4. participants must be receptive to the feedback they receive form the process
5. for maximization of the process, you must utilize the information you receive

GUIDELINES

As I have previously identified, there are numerous formats the relationship can take, but for organizational reasons, we will focus on the following three:

1. *Curricular*: in this model, one teacher is looking to increase their familiarity with a specific topic or theme by observing a teacher who represents a resource in this area. This may include information, how it is presented, and formats or models utilized.
2. *External-Observance*: in this model a teacher is seeking to again observe a peer, for the purpose of gaining insight into a non-curricular strength the teacher possesses. This may include classroom management, student involvement, or any number of other pedagogical and/or technique issues.
3. *Internal-Observance*: here, a teacher requests to have one of their peers observe them for a specified reason. The topics can be similar to External, though here the teacher making the request is the focus, and seeking the professional feedback of their peer.

The expectations / outline for the project are as follows:

1. each peer interaction will contain the following components:
 - a. a pre-conference in which expectations and desires are identified
 - b. the peer observation not lasting more than one class period in length
 - c. a post-conference in which participants share insights and knowledge gained
 - d. a self-evaluation concerning utilization of feedback and knowledge gained
2. participants will be asked to complete short-surveys regarding the process, not concerning the specific issues addressed, but rather:
 - a. the format / goal of the process
 - b. the time committed
 - c. the relationship of the participants (i.e. cohort, same course / department,...)
 - d. feedback concerning what is or is not working
 - e. suggestions for improvement

At this time I would ask that you return the second page of this packet upon completion to myself. You may either place it in my mailbox in the front office or in the Social Studies office. Thank you again for your participation, and hopefully working together we can create a process that benefits us all here at Oakcrest High School. I will be in contact again shortly.

James M Reina

PEER COACHING

TO BE RETURNED TO JAMES M REINA

NAME _____

DEPARTMENT _____

YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE _____

PREVIOUS PEER COACHING EXPERIENCE? YES ____ NO ____

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE OHS *ITIP* PEER COACHING INITIATIVE?
YES ____ NO ____

HAVE YOU ALREADY CHOSEN A PARTNER? YES ____ NO ____
(YOU MAY CHOSE ANY TEACHER, REGARDLESS OF DEPARTMENT OR GROUP)

IF SO, PLEASE LIST THEIR NAME HERE _____

PLEASE LET ME KNOW NOW IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.

PEER COACHING

PLEASE TAKE A FEW MOMENTS AND COMPLETE THIS SURVEY. THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR COOPERATION AND INVOLVEMENT.

CIRCLE THE MOST APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

1. The person you worked with was
 - a. From your department, but teaches a different course
 - b. Teaches the same course/subject as you
 - c. From a different departmentIf you selected "C", please select one of the following as reason
 1. personal friend
 2. professional reputation
 3. recommendation
2. How much time, approximately, did you spend in a pre-conference
 - d. Less than 15 minutes
 - e. Between 15 and 30 minutes
 - f. More than 30 minutes
3. How would you rate the importance of the pre-conference in the success of the cooperation
 - g. Very important
 - h. Moderately important
 - i. Little importance
 - j. No importance
4. How many targets/goals were identified during the pre-conference
 - k. 1 or 3
 - l. 3 to 5
 - m. More than 5
5. How much time was spent on the observation
 - n. Less than 30 minutes
 - o. 30 to 45 minutes
 - p. More than 45 minutes
6. During the observation, did you
 - q. Listen only
 - r. Take notes
 - s. Record the lesson
7. How much time was spent on the post-conference
 - d. Less than 15 minutes
 - e. Between 15 and 30 minutes
 - f. More than 30 minutes

8. How would you rate the importance of the post-conference in the success of the cooperation

- t. Very important
- u. Moderately important
- v. Little importance
- w. No importance

9. Overall, how did peer-observation satisfy your desired results

- x. Very much so
- y. Somewhat so
- z. Little or no assistance

Please briefly describe the type of information you were seeking (content, organization, discipline, etc.) and how it was satisfied through the observation

10. Would you participate again

- aa. Absolutely
- bb. With changes
- cc. Not possible

11. Would you recommend this process to a fellow teacher who is seeking assistance

- dd. Absolutely
- ee. With reservation
- ff. Not possible

12. What changes would you suggest to improve the program or increase participation

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. COMPLETED SURVEYS MAY BE PLACED IN EITHER MY DEPARTMENTAL OR FRONT OFFICE MAILBOX.

*PEER COACHING FOR
OAKCREST HIGH SCHOOL*

By James M Reina, History teacher

This year members of Oakcrest High School's faculty have begun participation in a voluntary process called Peer Coaching. Peer Coaching is a practice in which two teachers visit each other's classes and later meet to discuss their observations and provide feedback on what they have witnessed. It is not judgmental or evaluative, but rather a forum for professional growth. The procedure is extremely popular at the collegiate level, in addition to the business world, and has begun to be commonly utilized within high schools across the nation. The program was begun at Oakcrest with a focus on the history department, but has grown to include members of English, math, and special education as well.

The end goal is an increase in student achievement, though many other benefits exist. To the students' advantage, they are exposed to a greater variety of instructional methods and can receive a better articulated curriculum. The relationship between teachers permits growth into curricular collaboration, such as cohorting, and can more clearly unify the transition from year to year. Students also benefit from teachers who will gain knowledge outside of their own expertise within a given discipline, such as a history teacher who may possess an economic background as compared to a peer whose focus was sociology. The process also permits a teacher to increase their awareness of the varying learning styles students display and approaches to satisfy all students' needs.

Research at all levels has continually indicated participating teachers increase self awareness and analysis, indicators of lifelong learning. Moreover, the process allows teachers to observe the skills their colleagues possess, share instructional techniques, curricular knowledge, and increase professional communication. The last point leads to a host of advantages for the entire school, including a more positive school climate, a more cohesive school culture, and increased staff involvement.

The relationship between participating teachers can take many forms, depending on the results sought by those involved. Those conducting the observation can enter focusing on a given topic or issue as requested by the host teacher, or provide general feedback on what they have observed. It is this flexibility that our participants have responded to, allowing them to mold the idea to their personal needs, regardless of whether the pair share a common course, teach in the same department, or share the same students in different classes.

Regardless of the information sought, Peer Coaching comprises four steps. First, the collaborating teachers meet in a pre-conference to outline their desires and establish expectations. Next, the peer observation occurs, usually comprising one period, allowing the observer to not only witness, but take notes. In the post-conference, the two teachers discuss the observations in a multitude of formats. The host teachers can assume the lead and share their self-evaluation, seeking their peer's input, or the observer can lead the discussion outlining what they have witnessed. Lastly, Peer Coaching necessitates teachers to utilize the feedback they have received and continually evaluate their growth.

In its first year, the program has been well received by all participants. Those involved have not only demonstrated a desire for self-improvement, but also a commitment to their fellow staff members, and ultimately the students. In the future, the voluntary program can be grown to include members from all departments, with a potential focus on newer teachers. For this group, Peer Coaching holds countless benefits including an immediate increase in lesson choices and an enhanced relationship with their colleagues.

