



Peer Coaching

The Benefits for Teacher Classroom Effectiveness and Learning Outcomes

by Trent Ray, ICT Education Specialist & Group Manager, ELH

There is extensive research into the role of peer coaching for teachers – including in the area of integrating technology into the classroom and learning process.

Educational, political and economic leaders are continually calling on schools to help students develop new skills and competencies for the modern world. If we want students to be prepared for their future, a future in the knowledge economy, these leaders argue it is critical that education focus on critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration and technology literacy.

However, while the focus is on meeting the needs of students for a 21st Century education, we must not overlook the needs of teachers. Good teachers are those who see themselves as ‘life-long learners’ who constantly reflect on their teaching and reinvent teaching methods as educational trends and the needs of students change. So, if we want our educators to have the skills to teach 21st Century learning ‘skills’, we need to offer them effective Professional Learning (PL).

Research by Michael Fullan and others makes it clear that teachers need the opportunity to learn from one another on a sustained, ongoing basis. Fullan insists education leaders will not see systemic change and student achievement gains unless they provide educators with structured opportunities to learn from one another.

Traditional Professional Learning with ICT

One of the traditional challenges in terms of ICT use in school is that Professional Learning opportunities largely happen after school, at the end of the day.

The 4:00-5:00pm Professional Learning model in many schools, where teachers meet in large groups, makes it very difficult to contextualise what every teacher in the room needs. Personalising learning for teachers is very hard to do when there are 30-40 people with a variety of needs to be met. ICT Peer Coaching provides ongoing, individualised Professional Learning for all teachers.

“ If we want all young people to possess the higher-order thinking skills they need to succeed in the 21st century, we need educators who possess higher-order teaching skills and deep content knowledge. ”

“ It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do — continually, collaboratively, and on the job — to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work. ”

James Hunt, US politician quoted by
Linda Darling-Hammond, 2009

The proof is in

A recent article by Les Foltos provides a useful short overview of the extensive body of research into peer coaching.¹

“Research indicates that peer coaching can play an effective role in helping teachers integrate technology into their classrooms in ways that encourage active learning by their students...

“In studies of several schools that adopted a peer coaching model, researchers found that when teachers combined participation in typical workshops with peer coaching for sharing and observation, 88% of teachers were using new strategies in their classrooms effectively...”

“A significant number of other researchers in the field of professional development agree that peer coaching and study groups which provide opportunities for ongoing discussion and reflection change teaching practice.”

Peer coaching as a methodology has proven very successful not just in the area of ICT, but in literacy, numeracy and many other curriculum areas.

The idea of making PL meaningful through real tasks means that the relevance is 100% clear: teachers can see just how what they’re doing is applicable to what they could do in their classroom, this week, next week or the week after. Not just something they will use ‘someday’ – but ideas, techniques and practices they’ll use on Monday!

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

Peer coaching and classroom effectiveness

Education researchers Beverly Showers and Bruce Joyce have looked at the effectiveness of professional development approaches over the past 25 years. They determined that the time for short, afterschool and weekend workshops and seminars is in the past – especially those devoted to theory. They have proved totally ineffective, changing teacher classroom behaviour less than 15% of the time, as shown in this table.

Type of Training	Knowledge Mastery	Skill Acquisition	Classroom Application
Theory	85%	15%	5-10%
Practice	85%	80%	10-15%
Coaching, Study Teams, Peer Visits	90%	90%	80-90%

Source: Joyce, Murphy & Showers, “The River City Program: Staff development becomes school improvement” published in Joyce & Calhoun (Eds) *Learning experiences in school renewal: An exploration of five successful programs, 1996*

“ The time for short, afterschool and weekend workshops and seminars is in the past – especially those devoted to theory. They have proved totally ineffective, changing teacher classroom behaviour less than 15% of the time. ”

¹ Les Foltos, Puget Sound Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, *Peer Coaching’s Role in Integrating Technology to Enhance Student Achievement*



Expanding Learning Horizons

Approaches such as peer coaching, study teams and peer visits were discovered to have a deep impact on a teacher's performance in the classroom – which, after all, is where the 'rubber hits the road'! The authors put this massive difference down to the opportunities for collaboration, feedback and reflection that learning with peers offers.

So, what do peer coaches do?

Peer coaching is not mentoring; it is an approach to professional learning involving ongoing systematic support. It's important to note that peer coaches are not part of the process of evaluating teachers. But they can and do play a number of other roles including:

- Delivering job-embedded professional feedback and support
- Providing just-in-time, just-enough advice or training
- Planning learning activities with teachers
- Modelling or team teaching
- Offering teachers opportunities to link the ideas learned in professional learning sessions to their teaching context
- Encouraging reflection on learning activities and providing feedback
- Creating a collaborative partnership between peer coach and coachee, rather than a mentor-novice relationship

“ For teachers to improve their practice they learn best from other teachers provided that these teachers are also working on improvement. These exchanges are thus purposeful, and based on evidence. ”

Michael Fullan, *Learning is the Work*,
May 2011.

About the author

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Trent Ray is an ICT Education Specialist and Group Manager of Expanding Learning Horizons (ELH), a division of Computelec. ELH was built around what current educational research tells us about effective Professional Learning in integrating ICT within the classroom. It delivers consulting for schools embarking on or in the process of embedding technology into their curricula, conducts ICT Professional Learning, 21st Century Learning Design and peer coaching workshops for teachers, as well as online and face-to-face assistance with curriculum design.

