Peer Coaching and Self-efficacy: Research in Action

Deborah Scigliano, Amy Dellapenna

Duquesne University, USA

McKeesport Area School District, USA

Abstract

Peer coaching promotes reflection that has been shown to enhance teaching practice. In particular, the reflective model of peer coaching has shown, in research and in practice, the capacity to build teacher self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can or cannot accomplish a task or set of actions. When someone has high self-efficacy, one sets higher goals, persists in pursuing those goals and will ultimately achieve. Working with a peer to gather evidence of improved student learning can lead to improved teacher efficacy, resulting in setting new goals and persisting to meet those goals. The reflective model of peer coaching is another set of eyes and ears in the classroom to gather data to inform and refine teaching. The data gathered becomes the basis for self-reflection. One particular research study which will be detailed in this article found that peer coaching improved teacher self-efficacy, enhanced collective efficacy, and improved teaching and learning. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of peer coaching on teachers' self-efficacy for teaching literacy. Self-efficacy is more predictive when it is specific. The study also examined the teachers' collective efficacy. Participation in peer coaching cycles was found to provide sources of efficacy information that influence teachers' assessment of their self-efficacy and build the perceived collective efficacy of teachers in the school. Peer coaching improves teaching self-efficacy and influences collective teacher efficacy. Studies have shown that efficacious teachers have efficacious students. By engaging in the professional reflective practice of peer coaching, one can imagine a school filled with efficacious teachers and students!

Keywords: *Peer coaching, self-efficacy, professional development, reflective coaching, mirror model coaching*

Introduction

Peer coaching is an empowering practice that can build teacher self-efficacy. It provides a means of personal ongoing professional development and builds collective efficacy within a school's learning environment. Coaching can be transformative to education [1].

As teachers gain in self-efficacy, their students reap the benefits. Efficacious teachers have efficacious students and efficacious individuals make efficacious groups. We will discuss the exciting insights about teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy that we have gathered from our collective four decades of research and practice with peer coaching.

Self-efficacy

There is a connection between self-efficacy and achievement. Self-efficacy is one's belief in the ability to accomplish a particular action. Those who have high self-efficacy beliefs will set higher goals, are more motivated to persist despite obstacles, and will ultimately achieve [3].

There are four influences on self-efficacy. These are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state [2]. Mastery experience provides one of the strongest influences. Self-efficacy is enhanced when a teacher experiences successful teaching and learning as a result of peer coaching.

Peer coaching can improve teacher and student learning and address problems that teachers face in the classroom [8]. The importance of continued professional learning for educators has never been clearer as the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the world of education. The shift to online

teaching and learning has created both new challenges and new opportunities for professional learning. Peer coaching provides the opportunity to support teachers in this new learning.

Collective Efficacy

A school's culture of perceived collective efficacy may exert a strong influence on individual teacher's sense of efficacy for instruction. Collective teacher efficacy is the collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively impact student learning. Where there is a high sense of collective efficacy, teachers are more likely to put forth greater effort as they strive to meet expectations for successful teaching [5].

Collective teacher efficacy is currently at the top of the list of factors that influence student achievement [7].   It also has a strong influence on school culture and school improvement efforts.

Peer coaching can be a powerful professional learning opportunity that creates an improvement culture within a school. Participation in peer coaching cycles provides sources of efficacy information that influence teachers' assessment of their self-efficacy and perceived collective efficacy of teachers in the school.

Getting Started: The Peer Coaching Process

The coaching process consists of (a) the pre-visit conference, (b) the visit, (c) the post-visit conference [6]. The coachee is the driver of the reflective model peer coaching process. The focus is on the coachee's teaching

During the pre-visit conference, the coachee decides the focus of the teaching visit, the date and length of the visit, and the data to be collected. During the visit, the coach collects only the data that the coachee decided. During the post-visit conference, the coach shares the data with the coachee. The coach may share some guiding questions; however, no evaluative statements are made by the coach.

After the post-visit conference and reflection on the data, the coachee decides the focus of the next visit and communicates with the coach to establish the next pre-visit conference. This process is on-going and dynamic.

Peer Coaching: Research in Action

One of the authors examined the benefits of peer coaching in a 2017 study. The study involved a professional learning series on peer coaching. Teachers were invited to learn about and participate in voluntary peer coaching cycles as part of a research study. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of peer coaching on teachers' self-efficacy for teaching literacy and their collective efficacy as well as to gather data about teacher beliefs and attitudes about peer coaching as a form of professional learning [10].

Six sessions were held with eight participants over two months. Four participants were teachers of grades K-2 and four were teachers of grades 3-5. During the course of the study, these teachers learned about and practiced peer coaching.

Data were collected through pre- and post-surveys titled "Teacher Self-Efficacy for Literacy Instruction" and "Collective Efficacy for Literacy Instruction." These instruments were created by adapting some items from the *Teacher Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI)* developed by Tschannen-Moran and Johnson [11] and the *Collective Efficacy Scale* developed by Goddard et al. [5]. A focus group session was conducted after the study to gather data about teachers' beliefs and attitudes about peer coaching.

The data collected from this study gave the indication of the benefits of peer coaching on teachers' self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and professional learning. The major themes that emerged from a study of participant responses during the focus group session showed that peer coaching: (a) increased teacher reflection, (b) supported teacher learning, (c) provided teachers with new teaching ideas, (d) improved teacher collaboration, and (e) helped teachers to improve instruction.

The teachers' reflections during the focus group session, along with some increases in the self-efficacy survey data, revealed that peer coaching cycles provided teachers with vicarious and mastery experiences which are sources of efficacy information that may have influenced their assessment of their teaching and competence [12]. A participant's comment highlighted this finding when they noted that watching another teacher teach and having that teacher watch me teach helped me to think about my teaching. It gave me new insights and ideas.

The study also provided insights about teachers' collective efficacy. When teachers believe their actions impact student learning, they are more likely to persist to improve teaching and learning [4]. Peer

coaching's impact was reflected in one participant's response that engaging in peer coaching helped to improve planning and encouraged thinking about what you want your students to learn. Regarding the improvement of instruction, another participant noted that peer coaching gave them ideas about little things to change and helped them to pay attention to what the students were learning.

Making Peer Coaching Successful

There are a number of elements to keep in mind as you engage in peer coaching. These guides for successful peer coaching are research-based and supported by the authors' professional practice. Both coach and coachee should discuss these points prior to engaging in the coaching process. Following these elements can keep your peer coaching partnerships vibrant and sustainable.

- Trust is the first and most important element. There is a professional trust that the coaching partner will maintain confidentiality, will act in a professional manner, and has the skills and abilities to be an effective coaching partner. Find a peer coaching partner whom you trust.
- Keep in mind that peer coaching is professional. The pre-visits and post-visits are not opportunities to socialize. There is an important reason to stick to the business at hand. If these valuable visits become too much socializing and too little coaching, over time this could lead to a decision to stop engaging in coaching.
- Focus on specific skills. Each coaching cycle needs to explore skills that need that 'extra set of eyes and ears' in the classroom. These skills can be part of a new school initiative, new instructional practices, or well-developed instructional practices.
- The mirror model is reflective. The coachee uses the data to reflect upon teaching practices. The coach does not tell the coachee what to do. The coach can ask guiding questions or provide resources that will help the coachee's reflection process.
- Stay away from evaluative language. Even a well-intentioned "That was a great lesson!" could lead to repercussions that could end a coaching relationship. In future conferences, if the coach does not say that a lesson was great, the coachee could begin to have doubts and may eventually decide to stop engaging in peer coaching. Stick with the data and you will do fine!

Your Turn!

Our personal experience has shown first-hand how valuable this reflective process is to improving practice and encouraging colleagiality. Having that other set of eyes and ears in the classroom giving us a look in the mirror at our practice has been beneficial to reflecting on and improving practice.

The research shows the benefits of peer coaching. These include improved teacher self-efficacy, enhanced collective efficacy, and improved teaching and learning [9, 10].

As you engage in peer coaching, please find lessons learned along the way and share them with your colleagues. Peer coaching improves teaching self-efficacy and influences collective teacher efficacy. An efficacious teacher has efficacious students. Imagine an entire school filled with efficacious teachers and students!

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