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PEER COACHING : A NEW APPROACH IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS
AKRAN EĞİTİMİ : ÖĞRETMENLERİN MESLEKİ EĞİTİMİNDE YENİ BİR YAKLAŞIM

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Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Anabilim Dalı

ABSTRACT

This paper is a review of literature on the analysis of peer coaching, as a way of teacher development. All teachers need to grow. However, they cannot grow in a private isolated environment where they are cut off from intellectual stimulation, exchange, and help from their colleagues. They need an environment where they can feel free to take risks, ask questions, and where there is evaluative problem-solving time to reflect on their practice and to receive supportive, helpful feedback in a non-judgemental environment.

Peer coaching is one of the most powerful helping relationships for teachers. It helps teachers to deepen collegiality, increase professional dialogue, and gives them a shared vocabulary to talk about their craft. In peer coaching, the key to teacher satisfaction and learning, and to program success is teacher ownership of the process.

Keywords: Teaching, professional development, improving teaching, teachers' loneliness, coaching, teachers helping teachers

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, bir personel geliştirme yolu olan akran eğitimi ile ilgili bir alan taramasıdır. Bütün öğretmenlerin gelişmeye ihtiyaçları vardır. Ancak öğretmenler, sadece kendilerine ait olan, çevrelerinden kopuk, değiş tokuşun yapılmadığı, entelektüel uyarıcıların bulunmadığı, birbirine yardımın olmadığı bir ortamda kendilerini geliştiremezler. Öğretmenler, özgürce risk alabilecekleri, soru sorabilecekleri, kendi öğretmenlikleriyle ilgili olarak destekleyici ve yararlı geri bildirimler alabilecekleri değerlendirmeden uzak bir ortama ihtiyaç duymaktadırlar.

Akran eğitimi, öğretmenlerin yardım alma-verme ilişkisi içine girebilecekleri güçlü bir eğitim sistemidir. Bu sistem öğretmenler arasında, mesleki dayanışmayı geliştirmekte, mesleki iletişimi artırmakta ve onlara sanatları ile ilgili olarak aynı dili konuştukları ortak bir yaşantı alanı kazandırmaktadır. Akran eğitimi sisteminde, sistemin başarılı olmasının ve öğretmenlerin doyuma ulaşarak öğrenmelerinin sırrı, onların bizzat o süreci sahiplenmelerinde yatmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğretme, mesleki gelişim, öğretimi geliştirme, öğretmenlerin yalnızlığı, yetiştirme, öğretmenin öğretmene yardımı.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes staff development activities, specifically peer coaching activities. First a definition of peer coaching will be given. Then, different peer coaching styles, and the benefits of the peer coaching technique will be explored. Finally the multiple roles of coaches and peer coaching vs. evaluation, will be discussed.

Studies have shown that not only new teachers but also experienced teachers may have difficulties with some of the several identified problems of beginning teachers, such as classes that are too large, lack of interest from parents, hidden negative educational influences, discipline problems, inadequate teaching materials, extra non-teaching obligations, an unsatisfying social position, not being treated as a professional, and limited involvement in decision-making processes (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Veenman, 1984). All teachers need to grow. However, they cannot grow in a private isolated environment where they are cut off from intellectual stimulation, exchange, and help from their colleagues. They need an environment where they can feel free to take risks, ask questions, and where there is evaluative problem-solving time to reflect on their practice and to receive supportive, helpful feedback in a non-judgemental environment (Seferoğlu, 1999).

Peer coaching is one of the most powerful helping relationships for teachers. It helps teachers to deepen

collegiality, increase professional dialogue, and gives them a shared vocabulary to talk about their craft. It is assumed that objective feedback given in a non-threatening and supportive climate can improve teaching performance.

Definition of Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is one teacher helping another teacher improve his/her instructional skills or develop a new teaching practice. It is not an evaluative, judgmental procedure, but instead a non-threatening, positive experience designed to help teachers become more effective at what they do.

The concept of coaching is an idea closely related to mentoring. Showers (1984, 1983) proposes coaching to determine if intensive collaborative planning with support for teachers after initial skills training would facilitate the transfer of complex models of teaching into their active teaching repertoires. According to Showers (1985), who has spent years researching coaching, there are several purposes for coaching:

> The first is to build communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft.
> Second, coaching develops the shared language and set of common understandings necessary for the collegial study of new knowledge and skills.
> Third, coaching provides a structure for the follow up to training that is essential for acquiring new teaching skills and strategies. (p. 43-44)

In peer coaching, teachers will not only be working in a collegial setting, sharing knowledge, observing and learning from each other and improving their quality of teaching, but they will also be enabled to assume leadership roles in the school providing for continuous learning and support, and directing greater attention to the quality of teaching.

In this approach, it is believed that teachers are their own best resource. In his extensive research, Lortie (1975) found that when teachers get help, the most effective source tends to be fellow teachers, and secondly administrators and specialists. One of the reasons why peer coaching programs are effective in terms of eliminating isolation among teachers is that, by placing the major responsibility for coaching with peers, status and power differentials are minimized (Showers, 1985). Furthermore, communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft help diminish the isolation that exists in many schools.

Some believe that teachers who have developed to greater levels of expertise than others will need to have those differences acknowledged through different roles and responsibilities (Shanker, 1985). Those teachers should invite other teachers to observe them teach and to comment on their observations. They could learn not only from observing but from being observed. This would also help to replace norms of isolation with collaboration.

The process of coaching involves five major functions (Joyce & Showers, 1982): provision of companionship, giving of technical feedback, analysis of application, adaptation to the students, and personal facilitation. Joyce and Showers, who have long promoted coaching as a means of insuring transfer of learning, recommend the development of a coaching environment in which all personnel see themselves as one another's coaches. The primary function of coaching, they claim, is "to assist the acquisition of new elements of repertoire" (p. 6).

Peer coaching can be especially helpful for beginning teachers who are struggling at the survival stage (Fuller & Bown, 1975), and who have more concerns and more uncertainty (Lieberman & Miller, 1984a) about what they have been doing in the classroom. It can help teachers develop a sense of commitment and ownership. In peer coaching, in fact, the key to teacher satisfaction and learning, and to program success, is teacher ownership of the process. This is supported by research on schooling which found that teachers maintained positive attitudes when they were free to be creative, innovative, had opportunities for feedback, recognition, support and the chance to share with their peers (Lieberman & Miller 1984b).

Wildman and Niles (1987) suggest that there are three conditions under which teachers learn about and from their teaching: autonomy, collaboration, and time. Learning to teach is a complex, time-consuming, and difficult process, and complex learnings demand that learners have substantial freedom to direct their own growth. Wildman and Niles state that positive self-concepts, and a feeling of power over one's learning are expected outcomes when learners exercise responsibility for their own growth.

In peer coaching programs, establishing a coaching program requires strong leadership from principals as well as support from central administrative staff (Showers, 1985). Administrators must work to establish new norms that reward collegial planning, constructive feedback, and experimentation.

Joyce and Showers (1987) propose that after teachers observe each other and learn new techniques through peer coaching, they need extensive practice in the class-

room, in order to transfer the new techniques they have learned into their teaching repertoire.

Different Peer Coaching Styles

Garmston (1987) proposes three different types of coaching: technical coaching, collegial coaching, and challenge coaching. In some school settings, he suggests, technical coaching and collegial coaching could be the two ways of coaching that teachers might prefer to practice.

Technical coaching enhances collegiality, and creates occasions for professional dialogue. In technical coaching, constructive criticism and evaluation are involved to a high degree. The assumption in this type of coaching is that objective feedback given in a non-threatening and supportive climate can improve teaching. However, if there is a big difference in the experience of the peers, the less experienced ones may be reluctant in evaluating their partners, (which is a common behavior among so many teachers), and giving them the criticism they need. In such cases, they may choose collegial coaching which concentrates mainly on areas-subjects the observed teacher wishes to learn more about.

Collegial coaching leads teachers to reflect together on general issues of teaching and learning, creates open professional dialogue, refines teaching skills, and helps teachers feel effective as individuals. This is important because the freedom to direct one's own learning is a vital aspect of collaboration (Wildman & Niles, 1987), and it should be teachers who decide on the specifics of their collaboration. On the other hand, since the key to teacher satisfaction and learning and to program success is teacher ownership of the process, teachers will choose the model they feel comfortable with, or a model which is a mixture, or a completely new model developed by them.

The last type of coaching Garmston (1987) proposed is challenge coaching which helps teams of teachers solve problems they are experiencing in their classrooms. Challenge coaching process starts with the identification of persistent instructional problems or with a desired goal, and aims at developing solutions. This type of coaching differs from the other two in that it is done in small groups not in pairs. Sometimes nonteachers such as teacher aides, librarians, or administrators are included in challenge groups.

The basic philosophy of all different types of peer coaching styles is that they are carried out in a non-threatening, non-judgmental environment, in which teachers help other teachers to grow and improve.

According to Batesky (1991), regardless of the peer coaching model selected, a peer coaching arrangement should include the following:

- a pre-conference before the observation to determine what the teacher wants observed;
- a lesson observation in which data collected is relevant to the lesson focus; and
- a post-observation conference providing either information or opportunities for discussion, analysis, and strategy development. (p. 17)

Benefits of Peer Coaching

As a staff development tool, when peer coaching programs are conducted properly, Batesky (1991) claimed, teachers feel less isolated, have a positive attitude toward educational reflection and experimentation, utilize educational practices more effectively, and develop a sense of professional collegiality. By having coaching teams at school, teachers become more aware of their common resources and problems (Garmston, 1987).

Showers (1985) put the effects of coaching into two categories; facilitation of transfer of training and development of norms of collegiality and experimentation. There are different ways in which coaching contributes to transfer of training. The coached teachers generally practice new strategies more frequently, and more appropriately than uncoached teachers. They also exhibit greater long-term retention of the knowledge and skills they have been coached in. They are also much more likely to teach the new strategies in their classrooms than uncoached teachers.

Since status and power differentials are minimized in peer coaching, it could be beneficial to the "new to system" teachers as well. With peer coaching teachers can be provided with feedback they need about their performance. It also alleviates the sense of isolation that solo teaching can generate.

Peer coaching helps teachers to improve themselves not only professionally, but personally as well. In fact, personal development, as Fuller and Bown (1975) claimed, is an essential part of teachers' preparation, and teachers who are offered resources for development and chang can be happier, more effective, and more creative. Peer coaching creates a positive teaching and learning environment for teachers to accomplish their aims.

Basic Characteristics of Peer Coaching

Although the main goal of most developmental approaches is the same (helping teachers to increase their professional dialogue, to share ideas and problems, and to

develop new strategies and skills for their professional growth), the implementation of the programs can be different.

- In peer coaching, regardless of the number of years they have been teaching, one teacher can help another teacher to acquire a new technique or strategy,

- Coaching also implies equal relationships of two or more individuals helping each other,

- This strategy gives teachers opportunities to realize their leadership capabilities and their potentials, and to obtain the satisfaction of helping another individual who needs their help,

- This approach gives teachers a chance to see the information and the knowledge that they lack, and to use that information to be better teachers. As in other developmental approaches, training is needed in peer coaching as well.

- The person(s) involved in helping others need to be trained to do their job properly.

Most peer coaching programs are directed toward experienced teachers. However, their aim is helping teachers to increase their expertise, and, thus, obtaining improvements in the quality of education. The main goals of peer coaching can be listed as follows (Seferoğlu, 1996):

- To improve communication and collaboration among teachers,

- To assess teachers' professional needs and concerns,

- To improve teachers' awareness of professional development,

- To break down the psychological walls between classrooms, and give teachers an opportunity to share their experiences,

- To facilitate teacher learning,

- To create an environment of trust and respect.

Multiple Roles of Coaches: Peer Coaching vs. Evaluation

Some research suggests that combining the functions of assistance and evaluation in one role is likely to diminish the effectiveness of the assistance function (Stroble & Cooper, 1988). The openness and trust created by successful staff development programs will not be possible when coaches are also asked to serve as evaluators. Stroble and Cooper claimed that assisting and assessing roles can cause confusion to both the one who assists and the one who is helped—colleague teacher, novice teacher etc. A confusion of helping and evaluating roles places disparate demands on the coaches.

Showers (1985) also emphasized the wrongness of combining the two roles of assisting and evaluating, and stated that "The evaluation [of teachers] typically implies judgment about the adequacy of the person, whereas coaching implies assistance in a learning process" (p. 45).

In the "Entry Year Assistance Program" of Oklahoma, Friske and Combs (1986) found that the role that caused most concern for novices and consultants was that of evaluator. In the evaluation report of the program, it was concluded that observations of the beginning teachers by the consultants were insufficient and the evaluations were incomplete. It was also noted that the evaluations by teacher consultants were perceived as inconsistent support for the entry year teachers. Godley et al. (1986-87) had similar observations. They claimed that the teacher consultants expressed some discomfort when required to make formal, written evaluations of the beginning teachers' pedagogical abilities. They further added that teachers were more comfortable with informal discussions of teaching behaviors following beginners' request for assistance.

Conclusions

Peer coaching is investigated in this review of the literature. There are reasons for selecting/emphasizing this technique. One of the reasons is that this approach seems feasible for use in Turkish elementary school teachers' professional development because there are not many other opportunities and resources available to them (Seferoğlu, 1996; Kaya, 1992; Açıkalın, 1991). In this program, teachers would not depend on administrators and/or supervisors, or other financial resources, but would get help from other teachers. Since the financial and human resources are not widely available for teachers, this type of program might provide feasible opportunities for Turkish elementary school teachers' professional growth.

Seferoğlu (1996) who studied Turkish elementary school teachers' perceptions of professional development activities offered to them, found that teachers feel that they need opportunities to improve their teaching skills and knowledge. Teachers said that "interaction among teachers and exploration of ideas, assigning mentor teachers to beginning teachers, working with another colleague, observing each other in classroom teaching, and giving each other constructive feedback are useful for teachers' professional and personal development"

(Seferoğlu, 1996: 148). This tells us that they are open to peer coaching type activities. It also sends a message to the policy makers that Turkish teachers who feel that they need opportunities to improve their teaching skills and knowledge to become better teachers do not receive the professional help they need. Since in-service training activities offered by the Ministry of Education are not widely available to teachers, peer coaching professional development type activities should be made available and be part of ongoing professional life at schools.

There are other methods similar to those mentioned above, such as clinical supervision, peer supervision, or advising teaching etc. which may produce similar results. However, these techniques either include the supervisors or the supervision process, which might make the elementary school teachers stay away, and not be involved in the programs. The teachers may not want to get help from a person who also evaluates them. Thus, teachers may be their own best resource in their professional development.

One of the conclusions which can be drawn from the review of the literature and discussions is that the professional development of teachers through peer coaching holds a potential for making the school a learning place for all teachers - novice and master teachers, coaches, and other teachers who are in some way involved in that process. The literature indicates that teachers who go through formal peer coaching experiences can gain a better understanding of the teaching-learning process, self analysis skills, improved teaching performance, and a more positive attitude toward instructional support.

Nobody is perfect, and this can be applied to teachers too. Professional development is a continuous process. It can be said that the process of professional growth and development of teachers is a lifelong process. Thus, promoting instructional practice through peer assistance must become a career-long process.

The isolation and loneliness of teachers undermines the collegiality crucial to effective schools. Schools can be effective when there is collaboration among teachers, where cooperation is the norm, and where responsibility is shared collectively by all teachers. School effectiveness could be at its highest level when schools create working environments that facilitate teacher interaction and promote the sharing of ideas. Peer coaching programs could serve as the foundation for systematic school-wide programs in which all teachers help all teachers (Futrell, 1988).

Another conclusion which can be reached through the discussions is that the programs which require teachers both to assist and to evaluate fellow teachers are more likely to experience problems. It is suggested that combining the functions of assistance and evaluation in one role decreases the effectiveness of the assistance function (Stroble & Cooper, 1988; Godley, Wilson, & Klug, 1986-87; Showers, 1985). Even though this may be a result of ill defined or ambiguous evaluation procedures rather than a result of the idea of being evaluated by someone who helps, assigning the assisting and evaluating functions to different persons might work better to develop better professional relationships among teachers who are involved in relationships such as mentor-protégé or peer coaches, which eventually improve their professional growth.

If we can create an environment where teachers share and exchange ideas, we can begin to improve the quality of teaching. Interaction is a key to empowering teachers as professionals. When teachers have the opportunity to analyze their work under supportive conditions, they find such reviews to be productive and rewarding. Finally, "when teachers help teachers to increase their effectiveness, everyone wins, most of all, the students" (Batesky, 1991, p. 19).

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