

Peer coaching that works

The power of reflection and feedback in teacher triad teams

By Robin Jarvis, Kathleen Dempsey, Grace Gutierrez, Dale Lewis, Kris Rouleau, and Bj Stone





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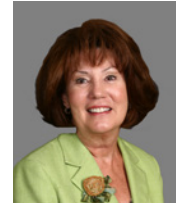
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About the Authors

The co-authors of this McREL white paper bring a wealth of public education experience to the work they do to transform teaching, learning, and leading. All have served as K–12 public school teachers and leaders. Jarvis was a teacher, principal, and state education department administrator, and was an acting superintendent of the Recovery School District in New Orleans. Dempsey, Lewis, and Stone have supported mathematics, special education, and curriculum/professional learning, respectively, as a central office coordinator, director, and assistant superintendent. Rouleau is a former elementary principal and language arts curriculum specialist, and Gutierrez, previously a middle school assistant principal, has worked as a school improvement consultant and leadership coach in rural and urban settings. Their diverse perspectives and experiences have led them all to recognize the value and importance of high quality professional learning and the power of teacher collaboration to grow professional practice and enhance learning outcomes for all students to flourish.



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About McREL

McREL International is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to improving education outcomes for all students through applied research, product development, and professional service to teachers and education leaders. We collaborate with schools and school systems across the country and worldwide to help educators think differently about their challenges, offering research-based solutions and guidance that help students flourish.



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Much has been written over the past two decades about the value of coaching to teachers' professional growth. Many authors recommend specific coaching models while others primarily make recommendations for building strong, trusting coaching relationships (Knight, 2007, 2009; Hirsh & Killion, 2007; Hall & Simeral, 2008, 2015; Aguilar, 2013; Kise, 2006; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Killion, Knight, & Barkley, 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Showers, 1985; Shalaway, 1985). However, many of these models assume a deficit-based approach to teacher development that relies on an expert coach to address a teacher's identified areas for improvement. At McREL, we believe that this deficit-based approach to teacher development, coupled with the recent push to use teacher evaluation to make high-stakes employment decisions rather than as a tool for growing teacher professional practice, is leading to increasing teacher burnout and shortages as more and more teachers leave the field under the constant pressures to improve.

While we agree that teachers, like all professionals, should continuously grow and learn by developing new knowledge, skills, and abilities that benefit their students academically, we do not believe that a deficit-based approach to coaching is the way to get there. Instead, we believe a more effective approach to instructional coaching is one that is focused on "inside-out," strengths-based peer coaching that brings small teams of teachers together, building on the bright spots while learning and growing as peers and professionals. The foundation of this inside-out instructional coaching model rests on premises identified by our McREL colleague Bryan Goodwin (2015):

- *Belief that personal and collective growth are possible.* Optimism and a collective "can-do" spirit guide collaborative work and future-oriented planning, creating a constant striving

to appreciate successes and challenges, remain curious, and maintain willingness to learn and grow for the betterment of self and others.

- *Knowing what coaching is and why the coaching teams exist.* Team members build a shared moral purpose about coaching that reflects outcomes that matter to all. Members agree on how coaches and coachees will work together, sharing values that reflect a commitment to the outcomes and to professional excellence.
- *Using data to drive decisions.* Instructional decisions made through analysis of data have positive effects on the outcomes that matter to all. Coaching teams use data from multiple sources to inform next steps, guide long-range planning, and validate current thinking and approaches. Coaches and coachees are encouraged to ask questions to stimulate open discourse that includes multiple perspectives.
- *Building on the existing bright spots.* Using an asset-based approach instead of a deficit model builds hope and coherence.

At McREL, we believe that this deficit-based approach to teacher development, coupled with the recent push to use teacher evaluation to make high-stakes employment decisions rather than as a tool for growing teacher professional practice, is leading to increasing teacher burnout and shortages as more and more teachers leave the field under the constant pressures to improve.

Based on the work of Joyce and Showers (2002) and Hopkins, Munro, and Craig (2011), McREL has begun to introduce schools and districts to a peer coaching model using teacher triads. It is grounded in the belief that teacher-led teams are best prepared to respond to the instructional needs of their students, and that teachers using this approach will be more motivated and supported to strengthen their instructional practice. As noted by Joyce and Showers (2002), only in education is consulting with peers on using a new strategy viewed as a sign of weakness or lack of professional expertise. Doctors consult with their colleagues on treatment plans for their patients, attorneys work together on legal cases, and engineers work in teams to design the best new processes and products. Curiosity, inquiry, and innovation are brought to the surface as these professionals engage in lively discourse and idea generation while seeking to solve a real problem of practice. At McREL, we believe that through a triad model of peer coaching, schools can re-empower teachers to select and lead their own learning and create a culture of professionalism and continuous improvement.

Why peer coaching?

In their work, Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (2002) focused on identifying what components a professional development (PD) program must have for it to impact student achievement. Looking at three potential outcomes of PD—knowledge, skill, and transfer—they concluded that transfer is required for the PD to truly impact student learning. In their efforts to determine what components of PD were essential to achieve this transfer of learning to the classroom, Joyce and Showers found that PD must include four components—study of theory, demonstration, practice, and peer coaching—for teachers to actually impact student achievement by implementing what they have learned in the classroom. Moreover, Joyce and Showers emphasized that peer coaching is about the collaborative work of teachers as they solve the problems and answer the questions that arise as they implement the new strategies, interventions, and content that they are learning. In fact, Joyce and Showers found an effect size of 1.42 (equivalent to an improvement of 42 percentile points) when all four components of PD were included in a program, and

noted that while coaching provided by trainers or experts on the content or strategy will give the same effects, it is not practical in most settings (p. 77).

To provide a more concrete representation of the impact of PD on participants, Joyce and Showers estimated the percentage of participants who would be able to demonstrate knowledge, skill, or transfer following their PD (Table 1). Their estimates suggest that with the addition of peer coaching, 95 of 100 teachers can be expected to apply the PD in their classrooms where it can impact student performance. If we were to include every component *but* peer coaching, the best we can expect is that 5 of those 100 participating teachers will transfer their learning to their classrooms and students.

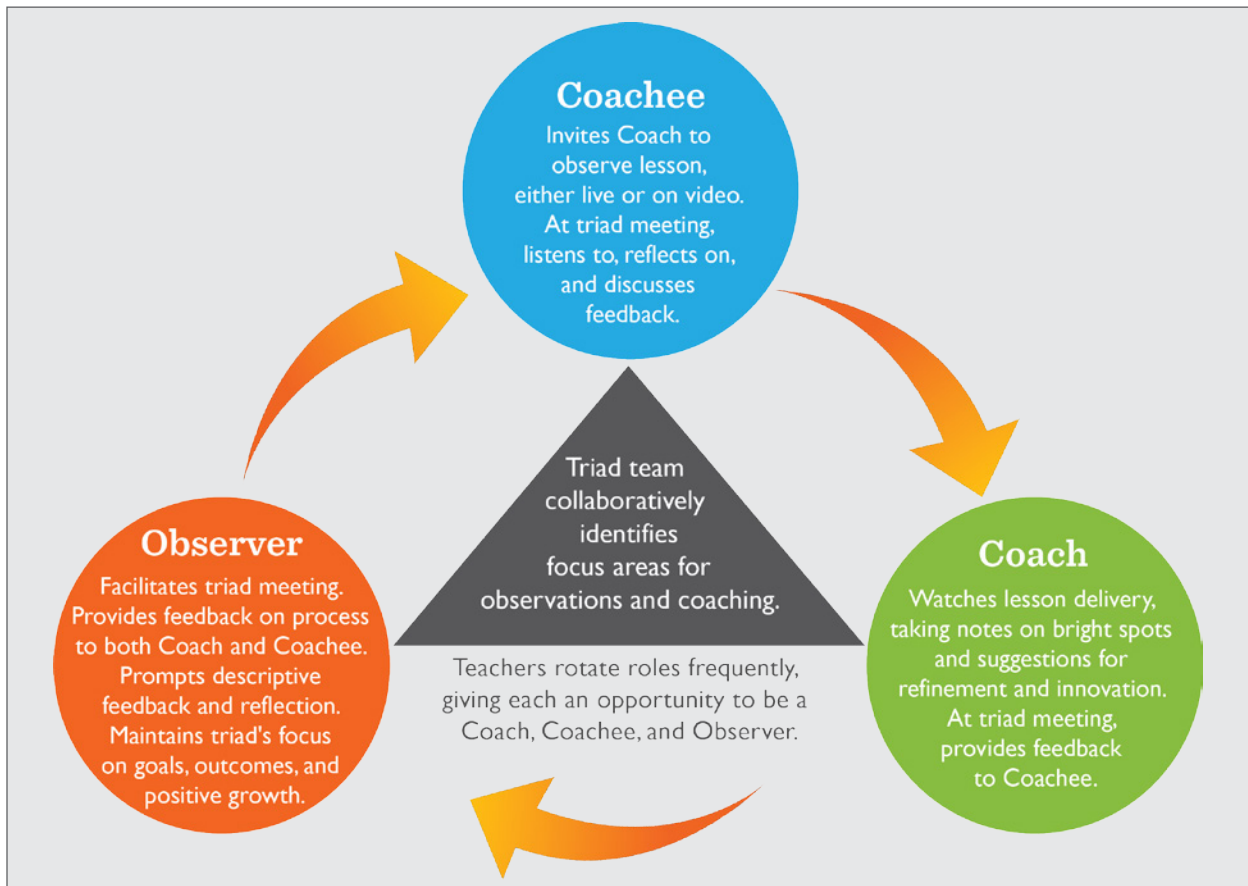
Table 1. Percent of participants achieving specific outcomes by PD component

| Components | Outcomes | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|----------|
| | Knowledge | Skill | Transfer |
| Study of Theory | 10 | 5 | 0 |
| Demonstrations | 30 | 20 | 0 |
| Practice | 60 | 60 | 5 |
| Peer Coaching | 95 | 95 | 95 |

(Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 78)

The power of three: Peer coaching in triad teams

Drawing from their experiences leading the Action Improvement Zone (AIZ) initiative in the Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR) of Melbourne, Australia, our colleagues David Hopkins and Wayne Craig (2015) advocate for a peer observation and coaching model that uses a triad of teachers who collaborate regularly, learning and embracing the four phases of Joyce and Showers' PD model—theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching—to plan and monitor their professional learning work. (Hopkins and Craig also added a fifth phase: feedback.) Teachers worked in assigned or self-selected groups of three and took turns participating in three distinct roles: coach, coachee, and observer.



The role of observer added perspective that might be lost if teachers worked solely in pairs. The observer provided descriptive feedback on the process for the coach and coachee, asking skillful questions that encouraged more reflective processing and helped each team member to learn and grow from the experience. The triad format required active involvement of all participants as roles were highly participatory rather than passive. Additionally, serving in each role allowed teachers to experience giving and receiving feedback as well as to observe the coaching process in action. This process provided perspectives that few individual coaches or coachees experience.

Teachers in peer coaching teams draw on their own training, experience, and the knowledge they gain through study and reflection as they share the coaching role with their colleagues. This work is grounded in the core features of their practice—curriculum, instruction, and assessment—and supported with protocols and guidance to scaffold their work as their new collaborative behaviors gain strength. Peer coaching teams reflect on and continuously refine their practice by posing

questions about how their work affects student learning, exploring research for insights and evidence-based approaches, applying those in their classrooms, and collaboratively evaluating and acting on evidence of student learning.

For the past decade, schools across the 75,000-student NMR have used peer coaching as part of the AIZ initiative to achieve gains in student learning and engagement, and teacher practice. Australia's national achievement test, the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), is administered annually to students in years (grades) 3, 5, 7, and 9, capturing their achievement as they progress in their education. Scores are reported on a scale of 0 to 1,000, divided into 10 bands, allowing comparisons over time. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of tested students in the region scoring in the bottom two bands of the NAPLAN test in literacy decreased slightly more than 3 percent while the number of students scoring in the top two bands increased by 3.5 percent—significant changes for a large system with a prior history of chronic low performance (Hopkins, Munro, & Craig, 2011).

Six essential components of peer coaching

Inside-out peer coaching engages individuals in a triad-team partnership to initiate and maintain a strong professional relationship built on trust, examine and calibrate the existing realities, and work collaboratively to bring about transformational and positive results based on a set of goals or outcomes. When coaching is at its ideal level, the partnership created among individuals on the team is viewed as a positive way to heighten professional performance and enhance the personal satisfaction in those involved—with the *ultimate goal* of increasing student performance.

In addition to working in triads, McREL proposes six essential components that form the core of an inside-out, strengths-based model of peer coaching:

1. Establishing and maintaining trust
2. Designing differentiated professional learning for all
3. Establishing coaching configurations to maximize learning
4. Calibrating individuals' skills and needs
5. Using reflection as an integral part of coaching
6. Providing descriptive feedback

Component 1: Establishing and maintaining trust

Trust is critical. At the heart of any successful peer coaching program is a strong sense of trust. Leaders have a significant influence on the culture of a school and whether it promotes or hinders the building of trusting relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Following a review of 40 years of articles on trust, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) identified five conditions of trust that accompany an individual's willingness to risk vulnerability: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. They then developed a measure of the levels of trust teachers had in their principal, colleagues, and clients (i.e., students and parents) which served to validate the five conditions and provide a reliable measure for use in the field. Leaders who acknowledge, monitor, and work to honor these conditions cultivate a culture supportive of collective learning and shared practice.

In addition to the five conditions of trust that affect people's willingness to place themselves in vulnerable situations, the formation of trust has been found to be influenced by three needs: bonding or closeness with others based on shared values, confidentiality within the close relationship, and the ability of peers to make themselves vulnerable to others (Cox, 2012). Building and maintaining trusting relationships within a peer coaching program takes time, but can be helped along by starting with clear norms for behavior and clear boundaries and expectations (Cox). These might include consideration of such factors as time, confidentiality, decision-making processes, participation requirements, and the granting of permission to inquire deeply, take risks, and experiment with an eye toward continuous improvement and learning for all participants. Another potential method to begin building trust and collegiality is focusing the work of teacher teams on collaborative planning and problem solving, Joyce and Showers (2002) suggest. By working to foster a trusting climate and culture for peer collaboration and coaching, the ability to begin at a stage that matches the readiness of teachers to peer-coach is crucial to gaining the initial traction necessary to generate momentum toward deeper and more sophisticated practice.

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Component 2: Designing differentiated professional learning for all

Peer coaching, as a professional learning model for school improvement and innovation, provides all teachers with relevant, meaningful learning opportunities. Because our approach to peer coaching emphasizes teacher teams selecting and personalizing an area of study, teachers who might feel that typical PD lacks relevance to their specific contexts can fully engage in learning that

matches their needs as professionals to meet the learning needs of their students. For example, high school electives teachers and elementary specialist teachers may be trying to apply schoolwide PD about literacy to their classes, without specific examples or strategies for how to do so. In a peer coaching model, these same teachers may still focus on improving student literacy, but through the lens of research and best practice as it applies to the courses they teach. In this way, peer coaching provides professional learning for all teachers, regardless of the students or subjects they teach.

Likewise, a peer coaching approach assumes that all teachers—novices and veterans alike—have room to grow and improve their practice. With an expectation that teachers collaboratively study and learn from current research and applied practice, our peer coaching approach celebrates the knowledge, skill, and experience of all teachers, and pushes them to go beyond what is currently known to develop a more precise instructional practice or practices that answer the relevant problems of practice. All teachers—from beginners to master practitioners—benefit from this approach, which recognizes and captures what each member of the triad has experienced, and moves them beyond experience to study, implement, and sustain new practices to meet the unique needs of the learners in their classrooms.

Component 3: Establishing coaching configurations to maximize learning

To maintain the “inside-out” approach to teacher development and peer coaching, it is critical that the participating teachers are involved in the decisions about how the coaching teams will be organized, when they will meet, and what the focus of their work will be. Engaging teachers in these decisions will help them better understand how their learning *and* the learning of their team members contribute to the school’s overall goals for improvement and learning.

Frequently when assigning coaches, mentors, or professional learning community members, school leaders have tended to keep these assignments within the same grade level or content area. However, within a school setting, peer-to-peer coaching configurations need not always be confined to grade level or content area teams. Teacher teams

Six essential components of the peer coaching process

1. Establishing and maintaining trust

Trust is at the heart of any successful peer coaching program, and school leaders can promote a trusting school culture.

2. Designing differentiated professional learning for all

Assume that all teachers—novices and veterans alike—have room to grow and improve their practice.

3. Establishing coaching configurations to maximize learning

Teachers must be involved in creating the teams, which need not be constrained by grade level or content area.

4. Calibrating individuals’ skills and needs

Aim for the team’s zone of proximal development to keep your learning attainable.

5. Using reflection as an integral part of coaching

Reflection can aid communication, critical thinking, and commitment to the goal and the process.

6. Providing descriptive feedback

Adults often hesitate to provide descriptive feedback, but it’s one of the most important gifts one educator can give another.

from varying grade levels and content areas, but with common goals or needs, are equally desirable and effective. For example, teachers from a span of grade levels focused on understanding the vertical alignment of a specific content area will be able to contribute greatly to the school as a whole gaining a better understanding of and appreciation for the need for content to be aligned across grade levels and scaffolded to support student learning.



Similarly, bringing together teams of teachers interested in improving reading in the content areas or building more project-based STEM experiences into their instruction, regardless of grade level or content area taught, will allow them to focus on areas of personal interest while also pursuing learning to support both their students' learning and the school's improvement more broadly. The exchange of ideas, discoveries, materials, questions, and results maximizes the large group's learning and leads to deeper understanding and use of content and pedagogy.

Component 4: Calibrating individuals' skills and needs

As with students, learning for adults is maximized when individuals have just enough background knowledge to be ready for new learning, but need guidance and support to integrate new knowledge, engage in new behaviors, and apply new skills. This zone of proximal development, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), identifies the current knowledge and next level of learning that is attainable with modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching.

After a focus for their learning has been determined, one of the first steps for members of a peer coaching team is to assess their current skills and needs

relative to this focus. A district's implementation of a new teacher-evaluation system that emphasizes professional growth might prompt peer coaching teams to focus their study on key components of the evaluation framework linked to classroom instruction and student outcomes. Using the rubric associated with one component—classroom culture, for example—team members may assess and discuss their understanding of the levels of performance and what their own learning needs and next steps in their learning might be. The elements and descriptors within each level of a well-crafted performance rubric can be used to help identify *each individual's* ZPD and next steps for learning.

For classroom culture, imagine a team member determines that while the current classroom environment and routines engage most students, not all appear interested. The teacher and team reflect on and discuss this problem of practice, referring to the evaluation rubric for classroom environment to help determine a next logical step in the progression to engage all students in their learning. Settling on a strategy to leverage student interests and abilities, the teacher decides to conduct an interest inventory with the students, intending to bring this information back to the team. As a team, teachers discuss and identify ways to better tailor instruction

to student interests that can be implemented in a subsequent lesson and studied through a reflective, peer-supported approach involving observation, data collection, reflection, feedback, and coaching.

Component 5: Using reflection as an integral part of coaching

Peer-to-peer coaching encourages teachers to work together by observing one another during instruction, assessing and reflecting on what was observed, and then deciding what questions can be asked or what information should be shared to move the members of their triad forward. Friedman (2015) found that non-directive peer-to-peer coaching can accelerate the team's learning through skillful questioning. While working in peer teams, teachers focus on important questions about agreed-upon criteria or goals, the effects of decisions made, PD needs, steps to be taken, anticipated outcomes, and strategies for implementing and sustaining a new process, product, or initiative.

Knight (2009) considers reflection an integral part of professional learning. He emphasizes the importance of creating equality among partners and establishing low-risk environments where all involved can speak freely about successes and failures. He also reveals that intentionally empowering each member as a critical thinker and reflective practitioner strengthens team interaction and commitment to an agreed-upon goal and to the coaching process.

In their book *Teach, Reflect, Learn* (2015), Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral emphasize the importance of helping teachers engage in high-quality reflection about their lesson design and delivery, in tandem with the desired student outcomes. For example, in a conversation of a triad of teachers working to improve their rudimentary understanding of how setting objectives would enhance student learning, the triad member taking on the role of the coach might ask the following questions to stimulate reflection and discourse:

1. How challenging are the objectives being written—does the level of rigor in the objectives meet the rigor stated in the standards/curriculum?
2. How consistent are you in using challenging objectives daily?

3. What have you observed happens to student learning when you post and explain the challenging objectives?
4. What do you do to engage students with the challenging objectives to help them “own” their learning?
5. What evidence do you have that your strategy is working?

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These types of focused questions provide a backdrop for higher-level discussions and serve as a formative assessment to uncover areas of need. Questions can also serve as a tool for vetting pedagogical approaches, materials, and beliefs about student learning.

Component 6: Providing descriptive feedback

Descriptive feedback is one of the most important gifts one educator can give to another. It can be the driver for initiating reflection, discourse, and positive change—tightly reflecting those criteria against which the appraisals were made. Feedback helps teachers grow by knowing exactly what they are doing effectively, and how they should refine, alter, add to, or adjust their instruction in a quest to improve.

Adults often hesitate to provide descriptive feedback for fear of hurt feelings, defensive responses, or stagnated progress. If trust, the first component discussed, is in place, then a natural course unfolds and sets into motion the desire, among all involved, to actively seek and genuinely appreciate feedback that elaborates on what is being done effectively and offers next steps for improvement.

In addition, the types of words used while providing feedback can solidify the trusting relationship. For example, replacing the word “but” with “and” can markedly promote a positive belief that the person receiving the feedback is capable of making the adjustments or changes. Consider this scenario: A peer coach tells a coachee, “I like how you posted the learning objectives in a central location for all students to see and you discussed the objectives prior to beginning your lesson. *But*, next time you may want to reference the objectives more often during your lesson.” Put yourself in the coachee’s shoes and reflect on how you would receive this feedback. Now, reread the last sentence, substituting the word “and” for “but,” noting the change in tone and mindset. This example reinforces the importance of providing straightforward instruction for teachers participating in peer coaching teams on the structures and strategies for successfully providing descriptive feedback to their peers.

Supporting a peer coaching approach in your school

We believe there are several important steps a school should take when starting with a triad approach to peer coaching. Firstly, the way in which the leader or leaders introduce the idea of a peer coaching model is of critical importance to helping teachers to feel comfortable with the idea and to take ownership of it. Secondly, as teachers begin a peer coaching process, they may be uncertain about how to get

started or what should be discussed, so providing some sample protocols and processes is helpful at this stage. And finally, we know that all schools face scheduling challenges when trying to find time for teacher PD, so we provide some suggestions for overcoming these challenges and using technology to help with peer observations and building trust.

Leadership matters

As with much that occurs in schools—good and bad—leaders create and support the conditions that engender the outcomes we observe. This is true for professional learning and is reflected in the value leaders place on continuous improvement. According to Elmore (2000), our current educational system does little to make continuous improvement and learning the responsibility of every system member. Stressing that leaders must work to create a culture and environment in which we expect to share and have our practice scrutinized for continuous improvement, Elmore provides us with a profound corollary: “Privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement” (p. 20).

To foster a culture of continuous improvement, leaders may begin by setting parameters and expectations for professional learning. Our Australian colleagues set forth six principles for professional learning design (Table 2) they viewed as necessary for professional learning to result in changed practice and improved student achievement. Working to ensure and support these

Table 2. Professional learning design principles to foster continuous improvement culture

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Design Principle 1 | Allocate dedicated time and space to enhance teacher inquiry and create a professional practice. |
| Design Principle 2 | Use evidence from research and practice to develop teaching models that impact student learning. |
| Design Principle 3 | Study the impact of teaching models on student learning—use collected data formatively and habitually. |
| Design Principle 4 | Invest in school-based processes, both deductive and inductive, that extend teachers’ repertoires of high-value teaching practices. |
| Design Principle 5 | Link classroom focus with whole-school development, and embed pedagogic innovation in curriculum plans. |
| Design Principle 6 | Use emerging professional practice as a basis for networking and system-wide capacity building. |



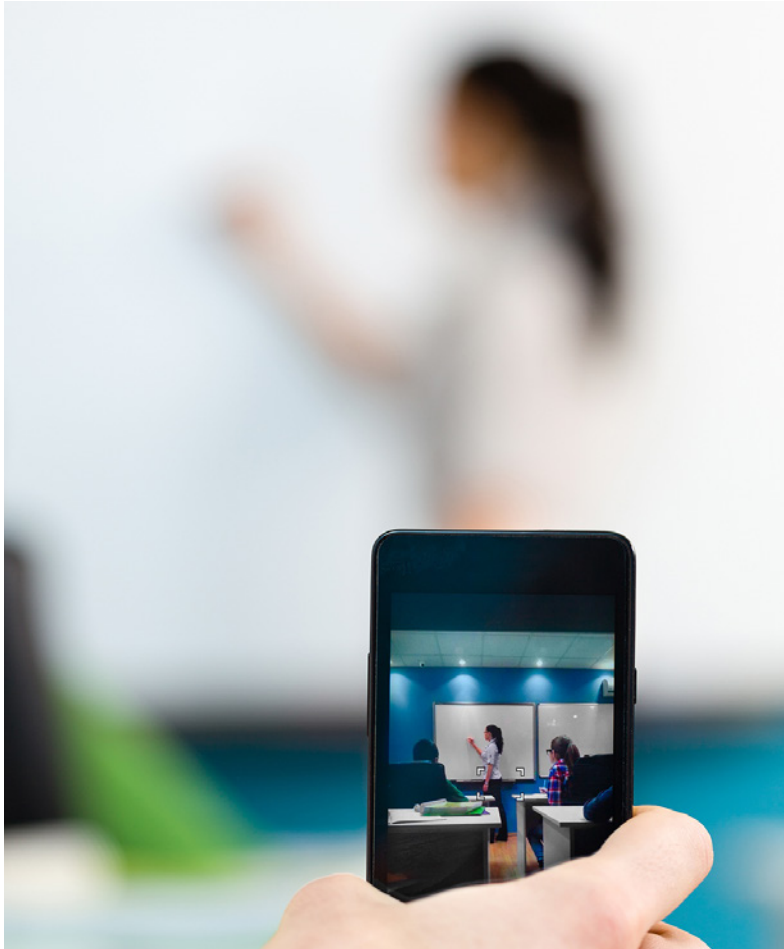
principles, leaders can positively influence the professional learning structures in their schools and systems, and set the stage for powerful learning among collaborative peer teams.

In her how-to guide for peer coaching, Pam Robbins (2015) describes a set of guidelines that begins with the understanding that planning, implementing, and sustaining a peer coaching program so it becomes an integral part of school culture takes persistence. Next, leaders must clarify the vision of peer coaching for staff by identifying what peer coaching is, and what it is not. For example, its non-evaluative, confidential, supportive nature; its emphasis on collegiality; and choices regarding participation should each be clearly communicated to all staff, preferably in written guidance materials and resources. Ensure that time and space are made available for staff to ask questions and discuss concerns, eliciting input from teachers on aspects that can be tailored for individual school sites. Finally, appropriate support for peer coaching must be marshaled if it is to be both successful and sustainable. This support includes responding to the emotional side of change (individuals experience disruptions in past practices as new expectations are shared), and to the behavioral side of change

(new individual and interpersonal behaviors are needed to successfully grow in a new way of working collaboratively and collegially). With organizational transparency and consistent non-interfering behavior—all responsibilities of school and district leaders, and ones that help foster the trusting climate necessary for productive collegial discourse and inquiry—peer coaching will have the foundation needed for its success.

Developing consistent protocols and practices

School faculty who are interested in embarking on an inside-out journey to school improvement, but who lack established routines or structures for teacher collaboration, may need to begin with a more traditional professional learning community structure to introduce protocols for working together. Teacher teams develop routine behaviors that over time become part of the collaborative fabric of the school by using a plan-do-study-act cycle to collaboratively identify and analyze key instructional standards; by planning, developing, and implementing common lessons aligned to the standards; by reconvening to study student work samples and determine how well they demonstrated success with the standards; and by reflecting on



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this experience to determine their next course of action to continuously improve. Shared structures and protocols for school staffs just beginning with teacher collaboration help set them on a course for more consistent practices across teachers, teams, and the school itself, and toward increasingly sophisticated forms of peer collaboration and coaching. Moreover, these experiences help teachers develop skills in instructionally-focused dialogue and reflection. This cultivates trusting relationships and helps them transition to deeper forms of collaboration and coaching. Teachers and teacher teams who have refined their collaborative inquiry skills and seek to go deeper in their exploration of practice may be interested in opening their classrooms to others so that reflection and coaching can move beyond student work samples removed from the instructional process, to the observation and study of teaching and learning “in the moment.”

As peer coaching team relationships evolve and as trust grows, the types of issues and the depth of reflection among team members should expand, as should their capacity to demonstrate increased vulnerability. For instance, teachers in strong, trusting collaborative relationships are more likely to share concerns about deeply held beliefs that may be impacting their instruction, or to engage in productive discussions on emerging or sensitive issues in education such as supports for transgender youth, or the manifestations and effects of implicit bias. The emergence and spread of conversations such as these are clear signs that an inside-out culture is growing, bolstered by shared expertise and professional entrepreneurship. High-functioning peer coaching teams demonstrating these qualities may benefit from a deeper look at their own feedback and coaching approaches.

A teacher triad may begin a coaching cycle with one individual identifying a “bright spot” in their instruction that is ripe for innovation and has potential to deepen student learning. Then, working with the team, questions for inquiry into how the bright spot could be leveraged for better outcomes would be developed. This process of developing questions may also involve a dive into the research to help the team develop theories about how the effects of the bright spot could be amplified to meet the needs of more students. This approach differs from that which would prescribe a specific solution to test, and recognizes the role of context in influencing implementation and outcomes. New or modified instructional practice(s) selected to unpack the inquiry question(s) are then tested by the teacher during a lesson observed by his or her peers and informed by the data the team determined would be helpful to collect. Following the observed lesson, feedback is shared with the teacher to facilitate reflection, and coaching is provided to help the teacher deepen practice.

Overcoming scheduling challenges

In some cases, school schedules and duties may prevent teacher triads from regularly observing each other’s lessons in person. Fortunately, the near ubiquitous presence of smart phones and tablets in our lives, with their ability to capture high-quality video and audio, can make the classrooms and lessons of colleagues available almost anywhere at any time. Additionally, tools like McREL’s EmpowerEd Suite allow teachers to upload recorded video and share it with their peers for feedback. Other software solutions allow for real-time viewing of instruction by triad team members from a secondary location. Charteris and Smardon (2013) found that when peer coaching teams used video from their previous peer coaching sessions to take a second look at their own coaching of each other, the dialogue was extended and deepened. Insights that may have otherwise escaped reflection were unveiled.

The use of video in this way helps peer coaching teams take greater ownership of their inquiry, enhance their peer coaching skills, and become more innovative in their teaching practice.

Opening your head and your heart to inside-out coaching with peers

Peer coaching is accepted as an essential element of skill-building and career growth in many professions, and teaching should be no different. There simply is no reason to “go it alone” when the expertise we need to advance and excel exists all around us—and within us—if only we will reach out to give and receive inspiration and advice. Effective peer coaching involves the head and the heart, requiring both a solid understanding of research-based practices and a firm foundation of interpersonal trust. To invest in your and your teaching partners’ growth by forming a triad that capitalizes on strengths is to commit to student success in the most collegial and powerful way. By focusing on your and your colleagues’ needs as classroom teachers, then seeking to adapt solid, research-based best practices to your own contexts, you can begin this “inside out” journey to professional learning. ●

For detailed guidance, support, and tips for creating or strengthening a peer coaching system in your school or district, contact McREL at info@mcrel.org or 800.858.6830.

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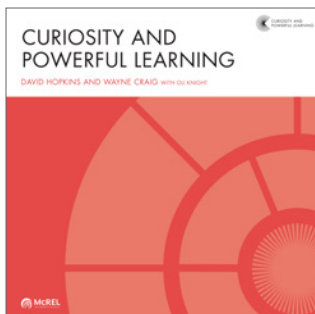
Get support from McREL for your instructional coaching needs

McREL helps educators flourish by turning research into solutions that transform teaching, learning, and leading.

This includes instructional coaching, which can create a unified, collegial, and supportive environment for teachers to collaboratively learn with, and from, each other. If you are interested in harnessing the power of peer coaching in your school or district, McREL can help you create effective teacher teams that use peer observations and feedback to address specific instructional goals and spark innovative practices to support better classroom learning and management.

For more information about our consulting services, PD and training options, and customized solutions for systemic planning and leadership development, contact us today at 800.858.6830 or info@mcrel.org, or visit www.mcrel.org/contact.

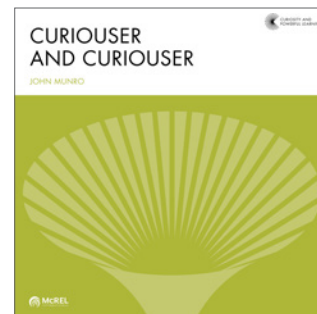
Suggested additional reading from McREL:



Curiosity and Powerful Learning

Lifting student learning is a collaborative endeavor and relies on an implicit agreement that students, teachers, and school leaders will work together toward a common goal. However, a school's culture greatly influences our ability to collaborate. Our shared practices, language and beliefs, mutually reinforced values and expectations, and accountability and responsibilities all play a part, and are all at stake. This manual introduces four Whole School Theories of Action that create and maintain the conditions in which teachers can flourish and six Teacher Theories of Action that link specific teaching strategies with curiosity-driven learning.

Available at <https://store.mcrel.org>.



Curiouser and Curiouser

What drives learning? Curiosity. This manual introduces practical ways that teachers can harness the power of curiosity in the classroom, first by understanding how it works and then by identifying ways to nurture and cultivate it as a lifelong resource for growth. Organized by 12 leading questions, the manual takes teachers on a journey that defines curiosity and its role in the classroom, identifies what drives it and what it drives, and demonstrates how classroom dialogue and attitudes can support it. The manual offers specific guidance on how to organize lesson plans and ask thought-provoking questions that boost curiosity, and energize and direct learning.

Available at <https://store.mcrel.org>.



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