



Peer Coaching and Research

Santa Ana College School of Continuing Education
BSI Initiative Professional Development Phase 3
Fall 2010

Goal: Analyze our teaching related to best practices through peer coaching with a goal of becoming more effective instructors in order to better meet our students' needs and influence improved student outcomes.

Peer Coaching Defined for Our Purposes

Our peer coaching is defined as observing a partner and annotating what we see in the class without judgment. As we observe, we relate what we see to the perception we have of our own teaching, looking to ourselves as if looking in a mirror. Our goal is **not** to evaluate our partner's skills but to observe and supply factual information so our partner can come to his or her own conclusions, set goals, and develop teaching skills. Peer conferences further solidify our goals and help us be accountable for our practices.

"Here I am with my lens to look at you and your actions. But as I look at you with my lens, I consider you a mirror. I hope to see myself in you and through my teaching. Seeing you, allows me to see myself differently and to explore the variables we both use."
(Fanselow 1990)



What is the end product of teaching when you are in a rut?

"...teaching that is unthinking that is ...divorced from the principles that lie behind it; it is...either purely imitative or...set into patterns that no longer reveal awareness on the teacher's part of why he or she should be teaching in a particular way." (Maingay 1988)

Task-based Experiences

Active engagement can take many forms: doing, thinking, reacting, absorbing, observing, reflecting, preparing, considering, applying, analyzing, listing, selecting, prioritizing, ranking, interpreting, completing, comparing, re-arranging, evaluating, etc. (Ellis 1990)



Reflective Teaching

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Reflecting on what we do as teachers has many benefits. It helps us . . .

- identify our personal teaching style.
- recognize what we do well and what we can improve on.
- evaluate our approach to teaching, and determine how well our approach matches our teaching philosophy.
- increase our knowledge about teaching, and refine our skills.
- adjust our approach to instruction to better meet our students' needs.
continue to grow and evolve as educators and professionals.

Jenkins, Robert, Practical Ideas for the Adult
ESL/EFL Classroom, Lesson 12 Chapter 4.
www.ed2go.com

Evaluating Your Performance

How do you go about evaluating your performance as a teacher? Well, there are several approaches you can take that range from the less formal to the more formal:

- **Teacher research:** This is a more informal approach that involves you collecting input on your approach to teaching and considering the teaching environment.
- **Classroom research:** This also involves you gathering information with a special focus on what effect the classroom environment has on instruction.
- **Action research:** This is a more formal approach of analyzing your teaching and the teaching environment, as well as developing plans to improve performance. It essentially describes specific steps you can take to collect data on your teaching approach, identify any problem areas, and create a plan for making any changes. Sometimes the steps will look like this:

1. Plan an action to address a perceived problem or issue.
2. Teach or act.
3. Observe and collect data.
4. Analyze data or reflect and make new plans.

Collecting Data

1. Self-Generated Data. You have several ways for gathering information about your teaching approach: you can videotape yourself teaching, you can keep a teaching journal or log, and you can examine your own lesson plans. Let's have a look at each of these.

2. Videotaping. A few years back, I was videotaped teaching a class for an instructional video. I had never seen myself teaching before, and I noticed several things that I wanted to change. For example, I was surprised that I favored certain students over others. Also, though I thought that I spoke in class in an authentic manner, I noticed on the video that my pace was adequate, but I tended to exaggerate my pronunciation.

I've come to the conclusion that the best way to observe yourself is to videotape! Bear in mind, though, that your students will probably react differently when you're recording them. Also, make sure that they don't object to being filmed. Often, when students understand that the taping is for your professional growth only, they'll want to help you out.

It's best to set up a schedule to tape yourself once a month or so. That way, you can compare one effort with the next and see what progress you're making. And you don't have to hire anyone to film you. It's very easy to just set up the camera in the back of the room on a tripod, turn it on, and let it go on its own.

3. Teaching journals and logs. Teaching journals can also be productive tools. These help you increase your awareness of what's going well and what isn't in your classroom by writing down your feelings, observations, and thoughts. Keeping a journal is also a great way to record all those thoughts and ideas that too often just stay in your head.

However, some teachers (including me) find it hard to sit down and write in a journal after performing in the classroom for two or three hours. For us, it's more helpful to keep a log of each class and note what went well and what needs improvement. In her article "Reflective Teaching: Exploring Our Own Classroom Practice," Julie Tice suggests that we come up with a short list of questions that we respond to at the end of each class. These can be about the lesson objectives (what they were and if you met them), specific activities, students' performance, and classroom and time management. Your responses can be brief, but they'll provide you with an ongoing record of what and how you're doing in the classroom.

4. The lesson plan. Keeping a notebook of your lesson plans is a great habit to get into. Not only can you refer to them for years, but they're a good record of your teaching approach. They'll also help you see how your approach compares with your overall teaching philosophy.

5. Student Feedback. Another valuable source for evaluating your teaching approach is your students. To learn more about what your students feel is working in class and what their concerns are, you can create surveys and questionnaires, as well as use student-teacher dialogue journals. These are very much like the ones you'd use to discover your students' needs so you can shape your instruction to meet them. Only now, the focus is more on your approach and teaching.

Since students are on the receiving end of your efforts, it's always good to see how things look through their eyes.

6. Peer Feedback. Peer feedback is feedback that comes from your teaching colleagues. It's also very useful in helping you evaluate your effectiveness as a teacher, because having a colleague observe one of your classes can give you a completely different perspective. You'll want to structure peer observations in a way that makes sure you can easily understand and interpret the feedback they give you. One way to do this is to have certain questions you want the observer to answer when he or she visits your classroom. And remember, you don't want to ask judgmental questions; instead, focus your questions specifically on things that happen in class. Make sure they're objective.

Setting Goals

You want to create very specific goals and write them down. They should include the following:

- What the problem or issue is
- What you hope to accomplish
- How you hope to accomplish it
- How long you think it will take to do

You may also find it helpful to work with a peer on your goals, and you can do this in several ways. After a fellow teacher has observed you, you could ask if you might visit him or her to talk over your goals. Also, you could form an action research group with fellow teachers to focus on the issues you've discovered and to offer each other support.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is similar to mentoring, except that both you and your fellow teacher work together to develop new practices. In other words, one person doesn't have more experience in the target behavior or practice than the other.

Peer coaches learn mutually from each other.

Stephanie Dalton and Ellen Moir, in their paper "Evaluating Limited English Proficient (LEP) Teacher Training and In-Service Programs," define peer coaching as a confidential process through which teachers share their expertise and provide one another with feedback, support, and assistance for the purpose of refining present skills, learning new skills, and/or solving classroom-related problems.

Peer coaching, as you can see, is a very supportive, collaborative effort to teaching. It often helps to know that you're not alone but that you have someone encouraging you to make the changes you want to make. And it allows you to encourage someone else too. With your colleagues' help, you'll be able to make the changes you want more quickly and accurately.

Jenkins, Robert, Practical Ideas for the Adult ESL/EFL Classroom, Lesson 12, www.ed2go.com

Guiding Principles for Observations

Source: Classroom Observation Tasks: a resource book for language teachers and trainers by Ruth Rajnryb, Cambridge University Press

1. Observers need to maintain a sensitive awareness of the potential for vulnerability that inevitably accompanies any observation of teaching. When a teacher opens the classroom door and extends a welcome to a visitor, a basic trust in motive and professional ethic accompanies that welcome. This must be respected.
2. The presence of a visitor inevitably affects the classroom dynamics. Observers should take every care to minimize the intrusion and allow for this factor in drawing conclusions from the data.
3. Observers need to realize that the samples of data brought from the classroom are inevitably limited, and that sweeping generalizations should be avoided. *We need to talk about what happened in the lesson* (a particular observed lesson), and refrain from making the unwarranted leap to *what happens in lessons* (generally).
4. Sometimes the task will entail some preliminary collaboration and co-operation with the teacher who is going to be observed. For example, Task 5.4, *giving Instructions*, you will need to see in advance the lesson plan the teacher intends to follow. ...
5. While the above precautions are necessary for methodological validity, it is as important on the human and professional side, to be sure to share with the observed teacher any follow-up discussions about the lesson. The question of 'ownership of the experience' is an important one and requires sensitive awareness. We need to remember that the experience has to be meaningful, rewarding and non-threatening to all involved: teacher, observer, learners, colleagues, tutors, etc.

Blog Report

Report Overview

The reports do not have to be extensive, two or three paragraphs are sufficient although you should feel free to do more if you would like.

Blogs should be about what you want to learn and what you learned and not a play-by-play of all that you or your partner did in the classroom. The report should be about you and your class and not your partner's class. It should not be a critique the peer coaching (this is later evaluated). For example:



Your goal or what you are trying to learn about.

I teach Beginning ESL 3 and have been working to improve the participation in my classroom. My partner and I agreed that it would be a good idea to try calling on people even though I have read that this might intimidate students. I also planned to try to be more involved when my students are working in groups. I want to see if my presence is helping in the discussion or distracting from it. My partner agreed to observe these things and see what kind of student reaction there is.

Brief description and what you learned.

My partner recorded that students helped one another more and I noticed it too when I asked questions to students who I wasn't confident would be able to answer. I tried a technique where in any one activity I never called on any student more than once. I told students what I was doing so they wouldn't be upset when I didn't call on them a second time even though it was obvious that they knew the answer. I also noticed that after doing this for the class when my partner observed, that in subsequent classes, students were more prepared to answer. I learned that if I asked them to prepare an answer because I might be asking them, most if not all students seemed more engaged.

I also participated with groups more, but I learned that just my presence changed the discussion. It feels better to me to spend only a short amount of time (maybe 20 seconds) with any one group at any one time unless I am teaching a concept they are having trouble with. In this way, they seem to develop more independence which is one of my goals and follows the principles I learned about student-centered instruction.

www.instructordevelopment.wordpress.com

Accountability Report

Name: _____

Partner's Name: _____

Meeting 1 (General Instruction and Orientation) (1 hour)

Journal 2-4 lessons. Briefly write observations about your teaching related to focus. (15 minutes)

Pre-observation Conference – set goals and discuss project (30 minute).

Date: _____ Partner's Signature: _____

Observe Partner (1 hour...minimum)

Date: _____ Partner's Signature: _____

Post-observation Conference (30 minutes)

Date: _____ Partner's Signature: _____

Blog on website (www.instructordevelopment.wordpress.com) (15 minutes)

www.instructordevelopment.wordpress.com

My Journal #1

Name: _____

Date: _____

Level: _____

Reasearch Issue: _____

Lesson Topic: _____



Briefly and broadly summarize the classroom activities:

Things I did well:

Things I want to work on in the future:

Other Concerns:

Positive and Negative Trends:

My Journal #2

Name: _____

Date: _____

Level: _____

Reasearch Issue: _____

Lesson Topic: _____



Briefly and broadly summarize the classroom activities:

Things I did well:

Things I want to work on in the future:

Other Concerns:

Positive and Negative Trends:

My Journal #3

Name: _____

Date: _____

Level: _____

Reasearch Issue: _____

Lesson Topic: _____



Briefly and broadly summarize the classroom activities:

Things I did well:

Things I want to work on in the future:

Other Concerns:

Positive and Negative Trends:

My Journal #4

Name: _____

Date: _____

Level: _____

Reasearch Issue: _____

Lesson Topic: _____



Briefly and broadly summarize the classroom activities:

Things I did well:

Things I want to work on in the future:

Other Concerns:

Positive and Negative Trends:
