

Peer Coaching: A More Beneficial and Responsive Inquiry-Based Means of Reflective Practice

Mansoor Fahim

Department of English Language, University of Allameh Tabatabaie,
Tehran, Iran

Sepideh Mirzaee (Corresponding author)

Department of English Language, Mashhad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran
Tel: 98-915-519-9378 E-mail: spdmirzaee@gmail.com

Received: July 8, 2012 Accepted: July 29, 2012 Published: June 28, 2013

doi:10.5296/ijl.v5i3.3935 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v5i3.3935>

Abstract

The aim of this study is to consider a way of developing and enhancing the process of reflective teaching. It is worth mentioning here that there are various ways of promoting reflective teaching in a teacher development program like journal writing, action research, diary writing, teacher development groups, class observations, and critical friendships. But since all of these procedures treat reflective practice largely as an individual, introspective process; peer coaching as a way of collaborative thinking as well as bilateral coaching with its dynamic nature allowing its participants high degrees of dialogical negotiation, therefore it seems to outweigh the aforementioned inquiry-based model of reflective practice. As a result, the present paper both argues and illustrates that how engaging reflective practice in such a model leads to more fruitful and beneficial insights due to the fact that new insights are constructed as a result of dialogical inquiry.

Keywords: Peer coaching, Reflective practice, Bilateral coaching

1. Introduction

As a matter of fact, teacher critical friendship requires entering into a collaborative understanding with another teacher, “in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, and even confronting, the trusted other, in order to examine planning for teaching, implementation, and its evaluation” (Huttson & Smith, 1995, cited in Farrell, 2007, p. 149). Peer coaching is considered as one subcategory of critical friendship.

It is worth highlighting that Farrell (2007) believes that critical friends can give voice to a teacher’s thinking like looking into a mirror, while simultaneously being heard in a sympathetic but beneficially critical way. In addition, Farrell, (2001, cited in Farrell, 2007, p.149) reminds teachers that “the word critical in such a collaborative friendship arrangement doesn’t and shouldn’t connote any negativity, as the word tends to do in everyday conversation”.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Different Definitions of Peer Coaching & Some Related Issues

Farrell (2007) argues that basically, peer coaching was claimed as a follow-up to traditional training, and had three different stages: a scientific assessment of a teacher’s skill and his readiness level, preparation in a specific method that he should relate in classes, and classroom observations to establish that the teacher is utilizing the model into his lessons.

On the other hand, Díaz-Maggioli (2004, p. 79) suggests “a departure from the conventional approach to peer coaching, which reinforces an outmoded view of supervision and professional development by adhering to a transmission model. In the traditional view, the coach is the expert who “transmits” expertise to the novice while at the same time evaluating the novice’s performance on prescribed skills”. What’s more is that it further supports the idea that teachers should be fixed, and nothing is remained for a modality of teacher growth focused on teachers’ needs.

But in a more updated view towards peer coaching and as the name indicates according to (Valencia & Killion, 1988, cited in Johnson, 2009) it is a process where groups of teachers usually scrutinize one another and give support, companionship, feedback, and help. Johnson (2009) believes that such teaching observations can result in positive teacher growth and improved instructional practice.

In the same vein Vidmar (2005) proposes another definition for peer coaching. He claims that Reflective peer coaching is kind of a formative model to make the teaching and learning better by means of determining intentions before teaching, then thinking upon the experience. Based on this definition, the aim of reflective peer coaching can be regarded as supporting self-assessment and collaboration for better teaching and eventually improved learning can be the result of this process.

Moreover, Bell (2002, cited in Carolan & Wang, 2011) states that Peer review of teaching can be used in order to develop teaching and learning-as kind of a learning activity for teachers as well as a way to extend collegiality and contributes developing teacher skills.

Furthermore, Moore et al., (2007, cited in Carolan & Wang, 2011) astutely declare that new directions on teaching can be emerged by peer coaching, that teachers might be otherwise unacquainted with.

Harris et al., (2008, cited in Carolan & Wang, 2011) also emphasizes that peer coaching admits and capitalizes on educative capacity gives feedback that confirms good account of practice and recommends some areas in teaching in which advancement would be beneficial . . . makes out the authority of teaching and learning practices, and by that means tries to strengthen the teaching culture of an institution.

Generally, according to Nolan & Hoover (2004, cited in Carolan & Wang, 2011), the non-hierarchical social relationships and structural arrangement of Peer Coaching increase opportunities for teachers to guide their own learning and growth while challenging with goal-directed dialogic negotiation with a non-evaluative and trusted peer. Engaging in peer coaching programs, teachers have been found to expand strong interpersonal relationships within their school community, to be more probable to take risks, to be aware of more support by their peers, and to regard themselves as parts of a learning community.

Interestingly Gottesman (2000, as cited in Farrel, 2007) considers some crucial role for the teacher in a peer coaching relationship:

Consider themselves as dedicated to peer coaching in order to improve instruction.

Try to expand and use a regular language of collaboration in order to talk about the teaching act without praise or blame totally.

Try to ask for entering into a peer coaching relationship (e.g., by requesting a classroom observation visit).

Be unbiased and make an attempt to look for better ways of doing classroom business.

Be active as a peer and as an expert.

Importantly he also claims that classroom observation can be divided into four steps sequence of: re observation discussion, actual classroom visit, discussion and general review of the process. Requesting a visit from a more experienced or knowledgeable peer to come to his class for a limited period of time, the teacher can take the first in a peer coaching situation. It is worthy of note that at this re observation stage and based on Gottesman (2000, as cited in Farrel, 2007) both the teacher and the peer coach should set up some common ground rules about the process during this stage hence misunderstandings are avoided. For instance, the teacher and the coach should be in agreement with the kind of feedback the teacher will receive after the classroom visit. Thus where a peer coach is present but does not get involved in any way the teacher teaches a class. Depending on the issue of investigation the classroom visit may be audio-recorded and/ or video-recorded. Additionally, if both teacher and coach think it useful for their purposes a lesson transcript may be prepared for later discussion what was written and what was achieved will be discussed later by the two teachers. The focus of this discussion was at first the information that the coach gathered as was agreed to in the pre observation meeting. The teacher can ask the peer coach to make specific suggestions for

further development of the issue scrutiny After the information has been shared, therefore, another cycle of observation can be opened for them after this to check if the recent recommendations have had the influence on the teacher's teaching. After all, Teacher and coach can review the whole process particularly if they would like to switch roles- the teacher becomes the coach for his fellow teacher.

2.2 Peer Coaching

2.2.1 Features

Following different definitions of peer coaching and based on (Aukland, 1991, cited in Johnson, 2009, pp. 101- 102) it can be concluded that Peer coaching has two distinct features. First, "it focuses on the activity of coaching as a mechanism for teacher growth and professional development. Second, it is performed by teachers who view themselves and each other as peers, rather than by supervisors or persons who hold positions of power over other teachers. In separating themselves from assessment or evaluation, Peer Coaching programs are designed to create non-evaluative, safe learning environments in which teachers can experiment new instructional strategies and techniques, while at the same time reflecting deeply on the quality and impact of their instructional decisions and actions".

2.2.2 Three Specific Goals of Peer Coaching

If the peer coaching has the above mentioned features based on Costa and Garmston, (n. d), three specific goals can be determined. Trust, learning, and autonomy are three major goals of peer coaching.

Trust: as Costa and Garmston, (n. d) eloquently highlighted, the first goal is trust. This Trust should be in the process, in each other, and in the environment. In fact, both parties in this relationship should trust and respect each other. Coaches believe in order to achieve excellence teachers should have the inner resources. Therefore, progressively, they put their trust in the coaching process. working together in a non-threatening relationship, the coach and teacher realize the intent of this process that is to grow mentally, to learn more about learning, and to increase their capacity for self-improvement reciprocally. The sheer truth is that Cognitive coaches work toward long-range gains rather than fixing a lesson instantly. Sporadically, it may be necessary to save the lesson with a new teacher, but that is not generally what we are after. the school environment can be regarded as another aspect of trust. The workplace culture often indicates norms and values which may be more powerful on teacher performance than is teacher training, staff development, or coaching. Consequently, the effective coach is concerned about creating, monitoring, and maintaining a stimulating educational and cooperative setting purposely planned to increase persistent intellectual development.

Learning: it is asserted that all learning requires mind engagement and transformation. It means that in order To learn anything well all require thought. Thus, those who are expert in engaging the teacher's mental power, in maintaining the teacher's access to his higher cognitive functions, and in utilizing tools and strategies which will make teachers' perceptions better and enhance their frames of reference are coaches.

The third, and the most thoughtful of the goals, is that of increasing cognitive *autonomy*. A mental coaching map i.e. a protocol of detailed and definite objectives for the pre-conference and post-conference is given to coaches and teachers. Having internalized that map, they can be entirely present with each other. Perceiving that trust in the relationship is utmost if the teacher is to be able to think Coaches can subsequently use their relationship skills. result of cognitive coaching over time, is to develop teachers' capability to self-monitor, to self-analyze, and to self-evaluate. unquestionably, the ultimate aim of Coaching is to regulate teachers' capabilities to alter themselves.

It has to be mentioned that Costa and Garmston, (n. d), assert that the coach must remain unbiased during the coaching process in order that people can think without fear of being judged and by doing that they can achieve their goals. This is a fact that when people feel judged, their thinking shuts down.

2.2.3 Types of Peer Coaching

Considering different features and goals of peer coaching, Joyce and Showers (1995) and Garmston et al. (1993, cited in Joyce & Showers, 1996) consider two main types for that.

- 1) Technical coaching
- 2) Collegial coaching

According to Joyce and Showers (1995) the first one is *technical coaching*. the goal of technical coaching is to support teachers when they try to apply instructional novelties or alternative practices into their classrooms. In this regard, an understanding of the changes is shared among peers when they are attempting to implement. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that the focus of their pre-conference, observation, and post-conference discourse is on the extent to which they are capable of efficiently realize the instructional novelties or alternative practices.

Garmston et al. (cited in Joyce & Showers,1996) state that the second type of Peer Coaching *collegial coaching*,. in this type of coaching, peer teachers may ask questions about their own practice, that determine the the pre-conference, observation, and post-conference discourse focus.

2.2.4 Peer Coaching Stages

By taking into consideration the different types of PC, now let's see what PC stages are. Showers (1985, cited in Johnson, 2009) puts forward that there should be three stages to apply peer coaching:

- 1) Preconference stage
- 2) Observation /conference stage
- 3) Post conference stage

Paraphrasing and asking questions, are the definite cognitive strategies, in the preconference stage. To Help the teacher maintain goals. during the observation stage, the coach records

those parts of the lesson that concentrate on those explicit goals, and afterward through the post-conference stage presents them to the teacher. Then the records are scrutinized by the coach and teacher. They talk about their observations of the lesson and willingly decide **on** about an action plan for their future coaching.

Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that the feedback provided must be accurate, exact, and non-evaluative as well.

2.2.5 Coach's Roles and Types of Feedbacks

As Costa and Garmston (2002, cited in Diaz, 2004) put it following the observation, the coach and coached teacher should get together to reflect on the data gathered. As Costa and Garmston (2002, cited in Diaz, 2004, p. 41) note, reflection helps teachers “to maximize the construction of significant meanings from the experience and to apply those insights to other settings and events”. Heron (1990, cited in Diaz, 2004, p. 94) also suggests that there are two basic types of reflection—authoritative and facilitative—with three subcategories each. His model of intervention helps outline the coach's role in developing this reflection.

a. Authoritative Reflection can be

- **Prescriptive.** The coach tells the coached teacher what to do.
- **Informative.** The coach provides the coached teacher with new knowledge.
- **Confronting.** The coach tries to raise the coached teacher's consciousness by challenging her on problematic areas that she may not have noticed.

b. On the other hand Facilitative Reflection can be

- **Cathartic.** The coach draws feelings and emotions from the coached teacher.
- **Catalytic.** Questioning her on critical areas the coach encourages the coached teacher's self-discovery while the reliable coach overtly stipulates the areas in order to focus on in the confronting phase; discussing her feelings about the lesson, the facilitative coach supported the teacher to determine these areas herself.
- **Supportive.** Praising her accomplishments the coach confirms the coached teacher's merit. Authoritative reflection can become authoritarian, and facilitative reflection abdicating if the session revolves around the coach's rather than the coached teacher's map, (p. 94).

Furthermore, the teacher's choice framework can use any type of Uzat (1998)'s interventions such as:

1. **Mirroring Coaching.** In this type of coaching the coach gives the observation data to the coached teacher. The data is analyzed away from the coach.
2. **Expert Coaching.** In this type the observation data is analyzed and suggestions are offered.
3. **Collaborative Coaching.** Giving the observation data to the coached teacher, the coach helps her to reflect on them. The coached teacher is in charge of controlling the program at all times, and the coach will not make suggestions unless the coached teacher asks for it. Since

both the coach and the coached teacher require time to consider the observation before thinking about the data collected, they should allocate the time instantly following the lesson in order to complete a post-observation reflection protocol.

Finally and at the end of this part it is worth noting that according to Vacilotto and Cummings (2007), some participants think that when it pointed out negative aspects of their teaching feedback was particularly practical whereas others put emphasis on the consequence of providing regular positive feedback in amalgamation with negative information.

2.2.6 Peer Coaching Principles

Based on their experiences Joyce and Showers (1996) consider the following principles for PC.

- 1) When we work with entire faculties all teachers must agree to be members of peer coaching study teams, support one another in the change process including sharing planning of instructional objectives and developing materials and lessons: and collect data about the implementation process and the effects on students relative to the school's goals.
- 2) It would be better to omit verbal feedback as a coaching component. The primary activity of peer coaching study teams is planning and developing curriculum and instruction in pursuit of shared goals.
- 3) The collaborative work of peer coaching teams is much broader than observations and conferences. Many believe that the essence of the coaching transaction is to offer advice to teachers following observations. Not so. Rather, teachers learn from one another while planning instruction, developing support materials, watching one another work with students, and thinking together about the impact of their behavior on their students' learning.

2.3 Interaction in Peer Coaching

2.3.1 Effectiveness of interaction

Regardless of all the benefits and contributions, the success of the peer coach communication is based on a number of factors. Showers and Joyce (1996) highlight that these embrace how alert of their actions teachers can become, how evidently they can depict those actions, and how eager they are to discuss them.

More importantly, Cosh (1999) and Farrell (2001) hypothesize that special attention should be given to the practice of providing feedback if the peer coaching model is to be effective. Having given feedback without previous training, teachers run the risk of giving offence, instead of supporting their peers.

2.3.2 The Nature of Interaction

The next issue which is of paramount importance according to Cosh (1999) is that successful peer communications require a high level of care and personal speculation in one another to

be successful. Peers should cautiously reveal the level of interest, willingness to participate, and ability to receive criticism.

Additionally, he argues that to keep away from embarrassment, it is crucial that peers use cautious wording in their critical remarks. In particular, criticisms tend to be presented as questions rather than statements.

Disagreement may occur in the peer coaching communications as well.

However, Cosh (1999) mentions that some scholars claim that disagreement leads to personal development and positive endings. Lastly, students teachers highly merit the flexibility and open mindedness.

2.3.3 Application and Implications

Regarding the aforementioned explanations about peer coaching it can be inferred that there are several positive applications within the context of language teaching.

First, and according to the ideas of Showers and Joyce (1996) peer coaching might provide teachers with the occasions to trial and put into practice new ideas and activities in their classes by distributing responsibilities with peers of the same rank. The helpful character of such association might encourage much less demanding and more energizing engaging each other in conversations about their practice and sharing their individual perceptions teachers might feel more comfortable.

In addition, Schon (1987) states that since peer coaching occupies teachers in reciprocal observation of actions, reflection on the observed actions, and explanation of the tacit knowledge implicit in these actions, teachers will be given the chance to ‘construct their own knowledge, by observing others gain self-knowledge and self-insight’.

Encouraging teachers with varying degrees of skills to contribute to the professional development of one another can be regarded as another application. (Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007).

Furthermore, Cosh (1999) and Farrel (2001) emphasize that enabling teachers to establish associations between the situations presented in training sessions and those they face in actual classrooms, peer coaching might be used to add to the number of hours that traditional in-service training programs deal out for observation and practice of new methods, approaches, and techniques, Therefore, teachers might constantly reprocess and improve their active repertoire of teaching skills.

Also based on Wallace (1991), during peer observation session, observers may have the chance to become aware of discrepancies in their practice.

What’s more, Pennington (1990, cited in Vacilotto, & Cummings, 2007) also argue that , if constant and continuous, such reflective exercises might endorse teachers’ competence in making informed decisions and after that evaluating how those decisions influence their students’ learning. The reflective exercise also might promote teachers’ analytical skills, enabling them to critically evaluate educational theory and research.

All in all, Farrell (2007) argues that peer coaching might be considered for implementation as an extra module within present teacher development programs.

And at the end of this part, it is worth mentioning to indicate the various roles of teachers in the process of peer coaching.

Gottesman (2000, cited in Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007) considers the teacher roles in a peer coaching relationship as follow:

- ✓ Be committed to peer coaching to analyze and improve instruction.
- ✓ Be willing to develop and use a common language of collaboration in order to discuss the total teaching act without praise or blame.
- ✓ To request to enter into a peer coaching relationship (e.g., by requesting a classroom observation visit and to observe a coach if so asked).
- ✓ Be open- minded and willing to look for better ways of conducting classroom business.
- ✓ Act as a colleague and as a professional.

3. Conclusion

By considering all of the issues so far and based on Cosh (1999) it can be seen that language teachers know that there is a great deal to be learnt by reassessing their teaching in the light of other teaching styles. This arouses awareness and reflection and supports experiment; it may also draw their attentions regarding techniques. This approach guarantees the observation of good practice, which is probable to be more creative than obvious or even hidden criticism. There would seem to be little chance of any approach helping them to become a good teacher, if the teacher is completely lacking in self-awareness and self-criticism.

Also, Cosh (1999) believes, it is important that teachers should be talked to, and let to feel that they keep an element of control and possession of the process. Consequently, observation is not utilized for the judgment of others based on our own postulations, but rather an evaluation of those postulations based on their teaching.

In sum, the present paper suggests that engaging in a reflective process in peer coaching will result in a better understanding of the teachers' career since new insights and understanding are achieved as a result of collaborative thinking as well as bilateral coaching.

Furthermore, the roles of both teachers as critical friends should be considered as centrifugal (which constitute voices that attempt to question, challenge, or rebel against the authoritative voice) not centripetal (that contains an authoritative voice that usually necessitates people to obey or at least attend to), as in Bakhtinian words.

In fact, Bakhtinian dialogue is a multiplicity and diversity of voices and a relationship of collaboration among participants in dialogic discourse. This dialogical rhetoric is not only a multiplicity and diversity of voices, but an act of (listening to each voice from the perspective of the others (Bakhtin, 1981).

This entails reflectivity and critical appraisal on the part of teachers. Its purpose is to test our own and others ideas and ourselves and thus to determine together what we should think. Therefore, it can be concluded that the voices of all teachers engaging in the coaching process should be taken into account. In other words it can be said that the coaches' voice should be additive to the process of coaching and for the coached one not subtractive.

References

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Carolan, L., & Wang, L. (2011). Reflections on a transnational peer review of teaching. *ELT Journal*, 66(1), 71- 81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr023>
- Cosh, J. (1999). Peer observation: A reflective model. *ELT Journal*, 53(1), 22-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/53.1.22>
- Costa, A., & Garmston, R. (n. d). Cognitive coaching: A strategy for reflective teaching. *Teacher support specialist instructional handbook*. Winterville, GA: Northeast Georgia RESA, pp. 91-96. Retrieved from <http://www.gapsc.com/>
- D áz-Maggioli, G. (2004). *Teacher-centered professional development*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Farrel, T. S. C. (2001). Critical friendships: Colleagues helping each other develop. *ELT Journal*, 55(4), 369-74. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.4.368>
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2007). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. New York: Continuum.
- Johnson, K. E. (2009). *Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995). *Student achievement through staff development: Fundamentals of school renewal*. New York: Longman Publishers USA.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1996). The evolution of peer coaching. *Educational Leadership*, 53(6), 12-16.
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schon, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.
- Uzat, S. L. (1998). *Cognitive coaching and self-reflection: Looking in the mirror while looking through the window*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Education Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Vacilotto, S., & Cummings, R. (2007). Peer coaching in TEFL/TESL programmes. *ELT Journal*, 61(2), 153- 160. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm008>
- Vidmar, D. J. (2005). Reflective peer coaching: Crafting collaborative self-assessment in teaching. *Research Strategies*, 20(3), 135-148. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.resstr.2006.06.002>
- Wallace, M. J. (1991). *Training foreign language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.