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Doorways and walls: Peer coaching as a means to change instructional practice

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University of Northern Iowa

DOORWAYS AND WALLS:

PEER COACHING AS A MEANS TO CHANGE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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ABSTRACT

Joyce and Showers (1980) described the impact that a peer coaching relationship can have on teachers as they work to transfer learning that occurs during professional learning opportunities to the classroom. Theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback are critical elements of professional development, yet, according to some research, only when the support of a peer coaching practice is provided, will significant numbers of teachers (as many as 90%) implement new strategies into the classroom. The purpose of this study was to determine if the presence of a peer coaching relationship impacts the instructional practice of high school English teachers.

This qualitative study focused on four high school English teachers in a rural Iowa high school. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document review. This case study focused on the potential change in instructional practice as a result of peer coaching, as well as areas of practice most likely to change, barriers to implementation, and support for implementation.

The practice of peer coaching in this school district was modeled, loosely, after the peer coaching protocol as described by Gottesman (2000), though it appeared that observation of a peer was the central focus, rather than the provision of feedback and the development of a professional relationship. Themes that appeared throughout the course of the case study included a lack of a sense of urgency to observe peers, or perception that the practice was less likely to impact the classroom than other collaborative structures like the PLC or team.

With pressures to increase student performance, and the role of the classroom teacher clearly a dominant force for student learning, strategies to strengthen teachers and build professional capacity are imperative. With time at a premium, school systems need to ensure that structures are in place to foster continuous learning and growth among teachers.

Implications include the implementation of peer review as an element of teacher evaluation protocols. Similarly, systems that are fostering collaborative networks among teachers will need to develop new skills appropriate for this practice, including building trust, providing feedback to peers, and objectively observing the practice of a fellow colleague.

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INTRODUCTION

Educators can read reams of paper about improving instructional practice. Politicians, pundits, and parents are quick to disparage the public school system, and teacher performance is often at the forefront of public debates by all stakeholders, including teachers and administrators. We ask, and are asked, how we can improve our schools, and our teaching practice, and how we can better prepare students to participate as global citizens in a changing marketplace. And when those questions about our school systems become so pointed, and the responses so defensive, we sometimes forget that, at the core of our work as a school system is a teacher, surrounded by students, and that the work that occurs in that classroom can forever shape the academic, social, and emotional futures of our students. A second-grade student today may be in charge of our city government in 20 years. A high school sophomore may be fixing my car, my computer, or my cat before I'm 10 years older. No conversation can be more critical than identifying means to improve the instructional practice of our teaching staff in education because the work of our teachers today shapes the work of our students tomorrow.

However, with that said, we struggle to find common instructional ground and we make educational decisions based on political affiliation rather than research and philosophy. We hold tight to past practices, individuality, and teaching in isolation. Yet, the practice of peer coaching is purported to be a cornerstone of changing instruction,

empowering teachers, and establishing teaching environments that are evolving, responsive, collaborative, and focused on better teaching. Peer coaching may be a practice that can change the course of our own teaching, of our students' learning, and of our own professional development as educators. But does the practice, in a 21st-century classroom, truly alter the capacity of a teacher to lead the learning of their students? It might.

New Teacher, Seeking Professional Growth

Nearly 20 years ago, I was a young high school English teacher in a rural, northeast Iowa community. I spent my day teaching Composition I to sophomores, English III to juniors, advanced composition and literature to seniors, and mass media to any student who was willing to take the class. I had graduated from a liberal arts college in northwest Iowa with a major in English, an emphasis in secondary education, and a minor in coaching. I had a new job, a new school, and was voraciously trying to improve my professional practice. Interestingly enough, the person most interested in improving my teaching practice was me. The person most impacted by my growth as an educator—or so I thought—was me. And in my mind, the greatest resource for improved instructional practice was . . . me.

I taught across the hall from a veteran English teacher, Mr. B. He had been a member of the profession for more than 25 years, and he had been in the district nearly that long. Students loved his class, he connected with kids, and he really knew his content. He was a master of the craft of teaching. Also a member of our department was another veteran teacher, Mr. W. He had been in the field for at least 25 years, he taught

English and chorus, and he was known as a teacher who had high expectations for students, was very bright, loved his work, and challenged our kids to think, to read, and to write. He was a pillar of the faculty, but especially of our department.

My building principal was a former English teacher. He viewed English/language arts as a cornerstone of learning and culture. He demanded orderly and challenging courses for our students, he knew the content of the courses as well as anyone on our staff, and he expected his teachers to deliver high-quality instruction and respectful, responsible students.

It would seem, as I think back to my earliest teaching days, I was surrounded by colleagues in the English department with experience in the classroom, with a passion for kids and for learning, and who had high expectations for themselves as professionals. To be sure, I was surrounded by a host of other teachers, in other content areas, who also had a wealth of experience. They were, in my estimation, very good teachers. Yet, my recollections of my time there focus squarely on my own classroom work, culture-building experiences for our students, and stories that told the history of the school and the district. What I do not remember is dialogue or conversation between my colleagues and me that focused on instruction. In fact, I can remember standing in the hallway next to Mr. B. discussing anything but instruction. We talked about my hatred of his favorite football team, a legendary basketball coach in his hometown, and community adult league volleyball. I remember, on a few occasions, he would tell me, “Garber, I hear you’ve really got some good things going on in that classroom of yours...kids are really

excited." And that would be it. The bell would ring, we would retire to our various classrooms, a mere 25 feet apart, and go about the work of teaching English.

On even fewer occasions, I interacted with Mr. W. We both taught advanced composition and literature, along with Composition I, and yet I remember even fewer conversations about instructional practices appropriate for the class. I could not tell you what materials he used, what writing he required, or what an "A" paper looked like to him. I do know that he required kids to diagram sentences, and since I did not know how to do that, I was distinctly opposed to that notion. In fact, I was afraid that if we visited much at all, he might try to "convert me," and I, too, would then require students to master the jigsaw puzzle of a diagrammed sentence.

No Doors, But Lots of Walls

Interestingly enough, our classrooms in that part of the school building did not have doors. They had doorways, of course, but no doors, and yet the walls that existed between practitioners and our practice were seemingly impassable. And I was a young teacher, with a genuine interest in becoming a master teacher. I was surrounded by outstanding teachers in my department and others, in a school with no doors on classrooms. But as I reflect on my professional growth, I remember few conversations that focused on instruction, and was never observed, nor did I observe, a single other teacher in the midst of the craft of teaching.

Was I observed by my building principal, who, as I said, was a former English teacher? Of course I was. But the observation that I remember most was when he stopped in to my class, noticed that I was on my computer while the students were

watching Channel 1, and promptly returned to his office and sent an e-mail reminding me to model for my students an attention to the morning newscast. His evaluatory observations, indicated by the presence of an orange clipboard that he used during staff evaluations, were incredibly unnerving. I never knew when he might come to my classroom, and my heart rate rose dramatically when I found him to be standing in the back of my class. I remember, in those post-evaluation conversations, that I learned that I dressed well, and that he was impressed that I stood to shake the hand of every parent at parent-teacher conferences.

And again, how is it that in a school in which I seemed to be surrounded by teachers and leaders who were experts in the craft of teaching, I was not connecting with them professionally to better myself as a teacher? No doors on my classroom, but walls all around.

Coaching the Coach

I was a high school basketball coach early in my career as an educator, and like my work as a teacher, I was surrounded by more experienced professionals who had coached for years. At one point, I was approached by our activities director, Mr. H., and he encouraged me to seek out the expertise of a mentor. In fact, he noted, I should talk with Mr. S., who had a wealth of knowledge about basketball, experience in the coaching field, and who could become a valuable resource to me as a young coach.

And I was immediately resentful.

In fact, I remember quite clearly sitting down with Mr. S. behind the scorer's table in our little gymnasium, the smell of popcorn and sweat hanging heavy in the air, and in that moment, I started to build my relationship with my mentor.

"They said I need a mentor. They said I need to talk to you about what I should be doing." Resentful.

I remember little about that conversation that night other than hearing that I needed to "separate the wheat from the chafe." In an instance when a leader in my building attempted to connect me with a valuable resource, I quickly tasted the bitterness of doubt, anger, and distrust. I rebelled against the relationship, closed myself off from any insight, and wondered why I needed to be coached.

After years in the profession, as a teacher, principal, and superintendent, I think back to those early years, almost embarrassed to recount them, and wonder why I could not figure out that I was not the best resource for my own professional growth—my peers were. And when Mr. B. told me that I had good things happening in my classroom, I have to question why I did not want to share some of that with him, rather than protect the secrecy of what I was doing, and refused to probe more about what he was hearing and observing.

No doors. But lots of walls. And I was a professional who was convinced that the key to professional improvement was not the capacity around my classroom, but the capacity inside my classroom.

Building Capacity of Teachers as a Leader

Years later, as a building leader, I looked around and saw many strong teachers, yet few of them had any sort of vehicle to prompt professional conversations beyond what occurred at the cafeteria table during a 22-minute flourish of eating lunch and supervising students, or the scheduled professional development that was occurring within the district. And with that problem in mind, I began to investigate this practice of peer coaching in hopes that it would connect my staff with resident experts, provide them an ear—in addition to mine—to share and question strategies, to shape and fashion instruction, and to build the efficacy and belief that our system could change the lives of our kids. We held a day of training where the peer coaching practice was modeled. I developed guide sheets to provide direction to the practice, encouraged teachers to select a partner, and offered time to cover classes if anyone needed that support. And even then, if I did not require the observations to occur, they did not. If I was unable to build momentum and encourage my staff to continue with the practice, they did not. I did not find the practice to be staff- engaging, staff-sustaining, or staff-enriching as I had rolled it out. It was, as I remember it, "one more thing to do," and hardly a practice staff members wanted to do. As a teacher, I had not thought to engage my peers as coaches. As a building leader, I had not found a way to engage my staff members in the practice of peer coaching. While my perspective as a building leader had changed since leaving the classroom, the people whose practices and professional sense of well-being could most be impacted, were seemingly disinterested, as I had been. I had failed as a peer coach, both as a teacher and leader.

Those experiences have not diminished my interest in peer coaching, but I have to wonder if that practice of utilizing peers as a resource for professional improvement is currently utilized to its fullest elsewhere. And if it is not, why is that the case? Do we trust the impact that peer coaching can have on our practice?

Elements of Professional Development for Teachers

The Iowa Professional Development Model outlines the elements of quality professional development practices for Iowa schools, and while each element is critical, the greatest impact on teaching and learning is seen when the individual components work in concert with the other. Collecting and analyzing student data leads to goal setting. Goal setting is then followed by selecting professional development content that will address the identified goals. The process through which the professional learning will be delivered is then established and learning opportunities for staff are provided. As the strategy is implemented, collaboration among staff members, along with data collection, leads to an eventual evaluation of the program, which leads to a collection of data regarding student needs. The process, then, begins anew.

Embedding each element of the Iowa Professional Development Model in the practice of districts, buildings, teams, and classrooms presents a unique set of challenges, and particularly, the element of collaboration among teachers can sometimes be impeded by significant barriers. However, Joyce and Showers (1980) note in their study of peer coaching that collaboration is crucial to the success of any professional development initiative. Without it, new strategies rarely see the classroom, and are left neatly filed in a hanging folder in green cabinets at the back of the classroom, resulting in little or no

instructional change. Joyce and Showers note the probability of implementation of a new strategy as dependent on the varying levels of support provided to teachers:

- Five percent of teachers will implement a new strategy into their classroom as a result of being given the underlying theory of the strategy;
- Ten percent of teachers will implement a new strategy into their classroom as a result of being given the underlying theory and seeing the strategy demonstrated;
- Twenty percent of teachers will implement a new strategy into their classroom as a result of being given the underlying theory of the strategy, seeing the strategy demonstrated, and practicing the strategy;
- Twenty-five percent of teachers will implement a new strategy into their classroom as a result of being given the underlying theory, seeing a demonstration, practicing the strategy, and receiving feedback; and
- Ninety percent of teachers will implement a new strategy into their classroom as a result of being given the theory, seeing a demonstration, practicing, receiving feedback, and being involved in a peer coaching relationship to support the use of the new strategy.

Legislative Mandates to Spark Peer Coaching/Review

Some would argue that *time* is the most important resource school district leaders can provide to teachers; of course, money and materials are vital—and costly—resources as well. As a building and district leader, it is important to use these resources efficiently and effectively; time, money, and materials that are spent on initiatives that will not be implemented in a fashion that will allow them to impact instructional practice and result

in increased student achievement are a waste of resources and an opportunity missed for students. Recent emphasis has once again brought to light the potential power of peer coaching. During the 2012 Iowa Legislative session, House File 2284 established several priorities for expansion of teacher leadership in the state. Specifically, the Legislature outlined the following charge for a task force on the topic:

> The task force shall also propose a peer coaching pilot project to expand excellence in the teaching profession. The proposal shall include recommendations for peer coaching criteria goals, strategies, documentation of progress, incentives for participation, and program evaluation (Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

The task force responded with the following recommendations for the Department of Education and the Iowa Legislature: Collaborate with districts implementing a mechanism for piloting peer assistance and coaching programs. That recommendation came to fruition one year later in 2013.

Recently, the Iowa Legislature mandated implementation of a peer review element of Iowa teachers' evaluation cycle.

> Under Iowa Code section 284.8(1), school districts are required to conduct annual, rather than every third year, review of non-probationary teacher performance. The first and second years of such reviews will be "conducted by a peer group of teachers." The Iowa General Assembly specifically prohibited peer reviews from being used as the basis for recommending that a teacher be placed in an intensive assistance program. As such, the peer review is intended for the purposes of coaching and improvement (Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

In fact, the Iowa Department of Education developed a theory of action that specifically outlined the expectations and expected results from a peer review practice that is implemented with fidelity.

If peer reviews are conducted by a peer group of teachers who:

- incorporate continuous feedback loops focused on improving instructional practices;
- focus on individualized coaching and support;
- engage teachers in self- and peer-reflections;

  And

- teachers and peers know what information is expected of them and how the information will be used;
- receive adequate training on the peer review process that is fair, linked to the Iowa Teaching Standards (or subsequently developed standards), and involves authentic and open discussions about the teaching practice;
- confidentiality is maintained between the reviewer, the teacher, and the administrator;
- peer review involves multiple authentic sources of data—classroom visits, review of course materials, and a balanced inclusion of student outcomes;
- engages the teacher and the reviewer in an individualized discourse about the practice;
- incorporates the teacher's professional development for edits, revisions, or updates;

Then teachers will openly examine their teaching practices for the purpose of self-improvement and to improve their teaching effectiveness (Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

The Department further outlined high-quality peer reviews and described such reviews as an opportunity for practitioners to develop ownership of their practice while analyzing, reflecting upon, and talking about their profession. The guidance issued also alerted practitioners to the importance of developing both the art and craft of instruction, and encouraged partnerships to openly share strengths, limitations, and observations with one another. With this guidance, the Department began to build the case for peer review as a valuable—and mandated—element of formal staff evaluation effective July 1, 2013. With that said, a difference between earlier research and the Department of Education's approach was the role the peer coaching relationship served as part of the evaluation process. Much research has been noted that specifically depicts a peer relationship as non-evaluative. While the State's purpose is to develop peer coaching practices, it has done so through the context of teacher evaluation.

Statement of the Problem

With the Iowa Professional Development Model's call for collaboration, a recent recommendation and later mandate in the state to expand peer coaching opportunities for teachers, and Joyce and Showers' research in mind (1980), peer coaching relationships may be an important component in improving student learning, fostering an environment where teachers build professional capacity through relationships with peers, and enhancing the culture and climate of schools.

> With the professional growth of teaching staff becoming more and more critical, peer coaching may be a high-leverage, yet sparingly utilized, practice to positively impact the teaching practice of high school English teachers.

In this study, I will investigate the impact that a peer coaching relationship has on the instructional practice of high school English teachers. To be sure, research would indicate that such a collegial, professional relationship is imperative to the transfer of a practice learned as part of professional growth, yet, when, as a potential researcher, I asked various leaders at the local and state level where I might find peer coaching implemented in a regular, systematic fashion, few people could identify school districts in my state where the practice was a critical, embedded element of professional practice and growth. Prior to recent mandates by the Legislature, in an effort to identify school districts that were engaged in the practice, I spoke with leaders in the state, including Bonnie Boothroy, former associate executive director of School Administrators of Iowa. Boothroy noted that she was unaware of districts that practiced the peer coaching protocol in a systematic, consistent manner, and Jason Glass, former director of the Iowa Department of Education, corroborated Boothroy's assessment. While there were a few schools in the state engaging in the practice, it was far from common and widespread. Districts were showing some interest in TAP (Teacher Advancement Program), and others were investigating teacher leadership in other ways, through the Professional Learning Community and data team.

And further, when I asked two local leaders if they were interested in implementing a peer coaching model, responses were consistent: We do not have time to add that to what we are already doing. If research indicates a peer coaching practice is important to the transfer of a skill or strategy from professional development to the classroom, why might the practice be so sparingly implemented? Zwart, Wubbels,

Bergen, and Bolhuis (2009) noted in their research that in digital diaries collected from participants in their study on reciprocal peer coaching, only 33% of those diary entries submitted explicitly mentioned a connection between their own personal learning and the peer coaching relationship of which they were a part. Or, perhaps, the value of peer coaching in shaping practice here in Iowa has yet to be realized. Or, perhaps, the value of an individual relationship with another colleague has been replaced with the "collaborative team" or professional learning community approach that seems to be gaining momentum as a critical structure in improving student achievement.

The challenge, then, is this: Collaboration, and specifically peer coaching, is purported to be an important element in the professional growth of teachers; research, including our own Department of Education in their development and promotion of the Iowa Professional Development Model, and a peer review protocol, recount the impact of such a relationship. However, the practice is failing to be consistently implemented in Iowa schools. With that said, does the presence of a peer coaching relationship impact the instructional practice of high school English teachers?

Definition of Terms

Peer coaching: "A simple, non-threatening structure designed for peers to help each other improve instruction or learning situations" (Gottesman, 2000). The process has five steps:

1. The teacher requests a visit. The teacher requests a visit from a peer on a particular problem or area of focus, determined by the teacher who is requesting the visit.

2. The visit. During the visit, data on the singular topic or area of focus is collected by the observing teacher. The visit is not evaluative in nature, and the observing teacher is a peer, not a supervisor. The observing partner does not praise or blame the observed teacher. Rather, the observer records what is seen.
3. The coach reviews the notes and lists some possibilities. The coach focuses on the area that was requested. In the early stages of the relationship, the coach will simply report back what was observed. If the observed coach requests feedback or suggestions, the coach can plan to provide that as well.
4. The talk after the visit. The purpose of this conference between two peers is to review the data collected and allow the observed partner to reflect on the reported data, or ask for suggestions or insight on the observation focus. The observed teacher is not a passive recipient of criticism or evaluation; rather, this individual is the proactive participant leading the coaching session.
5. The process review. In this element of the process, both peers simply review the process, and build cohesion and trust for the next visit.

Transfer: The influence of prior learning upon later learning (Klausmeier & Davis, 1969, as cited in Joyce & Showers, 1985).

Instructional practice: For the purpose of this discussion, instructional practice includes any practice that positively reflects one or more of the knowledge or skills representative of quality teaching identified by the eight Iowa teaching standards and 42 subsequent criteria.

Assumptions

Several assumptions have been made and are important to the overarching questions that are addressed in this dissertation.

1. Teachers are genuinely interested in improving their instruction for their students as long as they are supported and provided with necessary resources.
2. Staff members oftentimes are limited in the number of opportunities or in the time allowed to collaborate professionally with colleagues.

Limitations

1. This study does not reflect the impact of peer coaching on student achievement and does not attempt to do so. Rather, the purpose is to outline the impact the relationship has on an English teacher's classroom practice.
2. The study will focus on a unit of secondary-level English teachers and their peer coaching partners. The culture and structure of a secondary school, in many cases, differs from that of an elementary school setting. Similarly, the practice of an English teacher may have several caveats that differ from the practice of other secondary-content-area teachers. However, the case study approach will serve to answer the research question at hand, and provide a framework in which other cases may be examined as well.
3. The study will take place over a period of time measured in months, not years. While I will attempt to determine the impact of the relationship on instructional practice in the short term, this study will not provide insight into a change in practice that is measureable and sustained over a period of years.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that a peer coaching relationship among secondary school English teachers has on professional practice. As a school leader, a paramount responsibility is providing the support and instructional leadership needed by classroom teachers to help each child learn and grow. With resources like time and money at a premium, it is important that we learn how best to maximize them, while building the professional capacity of individual teachers and our systems as a whole. What components are most critical to improved professional development? How can we best ensure that our teachers are learning and growing at a rate that will best support the ever-changing needs of our students? Establishing a peer coaching relationship may be a critical element in the development of professional capital, and I intend to observe that relationship, and the potential resulting instructional changes, firsthand.

Professional Learning Communities, an increasingly common structure and philosophy in our schools, are just one example of a multitude of learning structures that predict improved teacher performance and increased student achievement, and as I consider the most effective configurations, and balance my available time and resources with the needs of a staff, it will be imperative that I know which strategies I believe can lead to the greatest impact on teaching and learning. Observing secondary English teachers and their peer coaching relationships will help me to evaluate the effectiveness of the practice, but also potentially identify further questions for investigation in my own work to provide leadership in the professional growth of my staff.

Research Questions

This case study is guided by several questions, the most important of which is whether or not the existence of a peer coaching relationship impacts the professional practice of high school English teachers. Several other questions will flank the research problem and help to enlighten my own perspective of the practice.

- How has peer coaching changed the practice of members of a high school English department?
- In what areas are the changes in professional practice most likely to occur? Instructional? Management? Professional behavior? Content knowledge?
- For which member of a peer coaching team is change most likely to occur as a result of an observation? The peer coach or the observed teacher?
- If peer coaching is not occurring, what barriers prevent its implementation? If it is occurring, what practices or protocols are in place that foster the relationships?

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transfer of Learning

The transfer of learning for teachers, from the in-service or professional development setting to the classroom setting, is the focus of peer coaching research. Joyce and Showers (1980) established three beliefs from their early research. First, nearly all teachers can learn new skills, whether that be to "fine tune," as they say, skills they already possess, or to add completely new skills to their teaching and instructional repertoire. Secondly, according to their research, certain conditions need to exist in order for that learning to occur. They argue that those conditions are the following: theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and classroom application with coaching. Research suggests that each of these components are important to the transfer of a teaching skill to the classroom; however, to achieve optimal implementation among most staff members (as much as 90%), all elements must be present in the professional development experience (Joyce & Showers, 1980, pp. 382-384).

Joyce and Showers (1985) elaborated on their analysis of several studies regarding transfer—applying learning in one situation to learning in another situation—in 1982. Based on the "disappointing history of education innovations and the role in-service education is believed to play in implementation," they reassert that the coaching element is of great importance in the transfer of new teaching skills into the classroom. Ellis' (1965) work in this area provides some insight regarding the transfer of skills learned in professional development to the classroom. First, the task that teachers

are trained in must be similar to the task in which the success of implementation will be tested. In other words, teachers should be given an opportunity to practice the skill in an environment that is similar to the environment in which they will apply the learned skill. Secondly, Ellis posits that if teachers are regularly given an opportunity to acquire new learnings, they will learn at a more efficient rate. Further, if a new skill requires several steps, transfer is more likely if the earliest steps in the process are learned well. Naturally, if a significant amount of time is spent learning those initial steps, positive transfer is more likely to occur. Ellis offered two more considerations in order to increase transfer: If the new strategy being learned is flexible enough to be applied in a multitude of situations, teachers are more likely to put the strategy into practice, and further, if teachers have a thorough understanding of the underlying principles of the new strategy, they will be better able to solve problems with implementation, and therefore, implement with greater fidelity. Based on these principles developed by Ellis (1965), Joyce and Showers (1981) argue that implementation becomes more difficult if *coaching* is not a part of the professional development process.

Five Functions of Peer Coaching

Along with its impact on transfer and professional development, Joyce and Showers (1985) built much of the foundation for the research surrounding the peer coaching process. In 1985, they began to explain in more detail the actual practice of coaching. Joyce and Showers established five important functions of the coaching process: providing companionship, providing technical feedback, analyzing application, adapting to students, and personal facilitation.

Providing Companionship

Companionship is described as an opportunity to interact and dialogue with another person regarding a task that is difficult. Teachers may share frustrations, reflect with one another, and check perceptions. Oftentimes, teaching can be a solitary engagement, as can trying something new and difficult. Having a companion to join in that experience can make the task a bit more engaging, and the end result far more successful.

Barbknecht and Kieffer (2001) see this connection between peers as an important vehicle for organizational change. This collegial relationship increases communication and the possibility of curriculum integration. It increases teachers' knowledge and the opportunities they have to share that knowledge. The coaching relationship promotes a caring environment. In that caring environment, morale improves, risk-taking is more likely to occur, and teachers become emotionally attached—or reattached—to their work. Finally, the coaching process increases teachers' ability to empathize with each other, which, again, helps to break down the walls of isolation.

Barkley (2005) would attribute this element of companionship and goodwill to celebrations—yet another benefit of a coaching relationship. Celebrations are opportunities to give colleagues praise and congratulations for a job well done. In the case of coaching, the celebration is shared between colleagues and is a source of energy and satisfaction for the teacher who has been coached. That celebration cements the companionship that Joyce and Showers (1985) noted as one outcome of the peer coaching practice.

Barkley (2005) further describes coaching as a relationship between two equals; one member of the relationship must express a sincere desire for professional improvement. Rather than having shortcomings and professional growth prescribed to the person being coached, that individual takes the initiative to determine which areas should be addressed.

Providing Technical Feedback

Just as coaching can provide companionship, a second function of the coaching process is the provision of technical feedback. While teachers need to learn this skill, once mastered, it benefits them, according to Joyce and Showers (1985), in a multitude of ways. By having a peer observe them, teachers can gain valuable feedback about the technical aspects of an identified strategy. Oftentimes, the teacher giving the lesson focuses more on the students, or on the content, and loses sight of the technical components of the strategy. Not only does the feedback benefit the teacher who gives the lesson, but it also serves as yet another demonstration for the teacher observing, refreshing that individual's own recollection of each element of the strategy, and possibly, bringing to light deficiencies—or strengths—in that person's implementation. Barkley (2005) discusses the conscious practice that results from coaching relationships. If the relationship is based on trust and professionalism, the teacher who is being coached can expect honest, accurate feedback, and will more consciously work to address the area identified for improvement or polish.

In order for the peer coaches to reap these benefits, several components must be present. Barbknecht and Kieffer (2001) discuss those cultural elements of a peer

coaching program. The peer coaching program must be collaborative, and it must allow everyone involved to receive the benefits of the program. In much of the research available regarding peer coaching, the practice is described as the antithesis of isolation. Barbknecht and Kieffer discuss the power of "teachers talking to teachers about teaching," and the enormous impact those conversations can have on student learning and building culture. The authors go on to argue that the peer coaching program must center around the teacher's professional goals. With the infusion of a coaching program, teachers can then more easily identify and work toward a personal and professional vision, knowing they will have the support and guidance of a colleague. As with any initiative, success hinges upon participants setting aside time to work with and for one another.

The coaching initiative also needs someone to establish and cultivate the program; in many cases that responsibility rests with the building leader. This may include training opportunities, modeling conversations, and mentorship of the coaching partners.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Barbknecht and Kiefer (2001) contend that the coaching program must allow for reflection. After the observation and conversation with a peer, the teacher must be willing to consider the available options, consider any advice received, and move forward, thoughtfully accepting or disregarding the knowledge gained during the experience.

Analyzing Application

A third function, according to Joyce and Showers (1985), of the coaching process is the analysis of application. The coach is an important part of the technical feedback as

well as an important mechanism in the "extension of executive control." Rather than simply providing feedback regarding the effectiveness of the new strategy, advice may also be provided regarding when it is best to use the new strategy. It is important to implement the strategy correctly, but it is equally important to implement the strategy appropriately, or in the right time and place. The coach not only provides feedback for the "how" of the implementation, but also the "when and where."

Adapting to Students

Yet another element of the coaching process that is important is providing feedback regarding the adaptation of the students to the strategy. Oftentimes, a teacher who implements a new strategy may have some difficulty focusing on the reaction of the students because of a preoccupation with the technical components of the strategy itself. As the coach, helping the teacher assess the reaction of the students is yet another important role. Barkley (2005) describes this as providing *options* for colleagues. It is no secret that a significant portion of the practice of teaching is done in isolation, with a single teacher relying on personal experience to guide minute-by-minute instructional decision-making. With the existence of a trusting coaching relationship, the experience of the teacher doubles, and more options, appropriate settings, or teaching opportunities can be considered.

Teachers Providing Feedback to One Another

Ash and D'Auria (2013) conclude that, for systems to learn, "non-defensive reflection" on failure is critical. However, for that to occur, just as others have noted, trust is critical, and more specifically, a willingness to be vulnerable with a partner is

imperative. Sharing those vulnerabilities can be difficult, but the authors contend that sharing is vital, along with a willingness to receive constructive feedback. How might that contradict current practices in our systems? Perkins (2003) notes that providing feedback, especially unwanted feedback, can be interpreted as a sign of an authority or supervisory relationship. Oftentimes, the tone or purpose of feedback colleagues expect from one another is supportive or reaffirming. Rather, though, the feedback should be honest and critical (in the critiquing sense of the word).

Hattie (2012), focuses most often on feedback provided by teachers to students, but draws some parallels for teachers receiving feedback as well. Feedback, he notes, should flourish on errors that are observed, and the recognition of those errors should not be reserved for new or poorly performing students, and, I would argue, teachers. No teacher always succeeds in delivery of lesson, or knows where to move students in their learning, but Hattie is clear: that lack of perfection is far from a deficit. Rather, when we realize and recognize errors, we find potential opportunities.

> Failure, or learning from errors is critical also in the staffroom. A school needs to have a culture of no blame, a willingness to investigate what is not working (or what is not working with which students). Care and analysis is needed to correctly attribute failure to the right reasons; clearly, the one reason that is within our powers to fix is our own teaching and mindsets (Hattie, 2012, p. 140).

Similarly, he argues that students and teachers most often seek evidence that confirms current practice, beliefs, or understandings, and choose to disregard feedback that contradicts current practice, beliefs, or understandings. Feedback that disconfirms current practice, he contends, is feedback more likely to bring about change.

Developing Professional Capital

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also describe in detail the importance of a collegial relationship to combat the very notion of a single teacher, solely responsible for making all instructional decisions regarding content, strategy, innovation, and effectiveness. Their focus, the development of professional capital, provides a framework that the concept of peer coaching fits within quite satisfactorily. Professional capital is a combination of human, social, and decisional capital. Human capital might also be considered "talent," and perhaps more specifically, individual talent. However, Hargreaves and Fullan continue to contend that "groups, teams, and communities are far more powerful than individuals when it comes to developing human capital." Social capital, though, is described by Leana (2011) as an "interaction among teachers and between teachers and administrators that are focused on student learning." These interactions, she contends, make a significant contribution to the improved achievement of students, and the ability of a school building to sustain positive change. Leana's (2011) measurement of social capital further supports the concept of peer coaching: The frequency and focus of conversations and interactions with peers that centered on instruction and was based on feelings of trust and closeness between teachers. The third and final component of professional capital, as defined by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), is decisional capital: making decisions in complex situations. Peer coaching offers opportunities for colleagues to discuss and reflect, consider and conference, and ultimately, use the professional wisdom and experience of two staff members to make a

decision. Peer coaching, it would seem, is a natural support of the professional capital framework.

Personal Facilitation

The final role of the peer coach is that of facilitation (Joyce & Showers, 1985). Implementation of a new strategy requires practice, and in order to practice, one needs to feel supported. Teachers working with teachers are in an excellent position to provide encouragement to practice; thus, the coach is able to help facilitate the implementation process for the colleague, overcoming the often lonely or isolated status of the individual classroom teacher. Vacilotto and Cummings (2007), in a study that focused on peer coaching relationships among ESL/EFL teachers, found that teaching skills developed as a result of peer interactions. Specifically, pre-service teachers were more likely to implement strategies learned in their program, examine their own practice, and adjust instruction in the classroom, when they were supported by a teaching peer in those practices. Similarly, the experience of peer coaching occurs, partially, in the context of one's own classroom, further aiding the facilitation of reflection and changing practice. Schon (1987) asserts that "professional performance may not be taught through direct instruction, but can be learned through experience…we study the experience of learning by doing and the artistry of good teaching." The coaching relationship has the potential to facilitate greater professional learning by engaging teachers in authentic conversations about authentic practices, rather than contrived vignettes that attempt to replicate the complexity and intricacy of a classroom.

Building communities of teachers. As interest in coaching has become more and more prevalent, Showers (1985) began to elaborate on the initial research on transfer. In her article "Teachers Coaching Teachers" (1985), Showers further delineates the purpose of coaching beyond the improved implementation of new teaching strategies or curriculum, and fine-tuning the existing instructional skills that teachers possess. As time progressed, coaching became seen as a tool to build "communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft" (p. 43). That community-building is in direct contrast to the traditional isolated nature of teachers working separately within their classrooms. While Showers (1985) admitted that the evidence that supports this belief is somewhat less concrete than the evidence to support its importance to transfer—applying learning in one situation to learning in another situation—it is equally as important to the culture and climate of a school building. Secondly, coaching helps to develop an environment in which teachers can collegially study new skills and strategies, while using a technical language common to all. Coaching, as has been established in much of the earlier writing, is also a means of providing support to teachers who are implementing new strategies or curriculum into their classrooms. According to Showers (1985), "coached" teachers typically practice new strategies more often, and use the strategies in a way that has greater impact on their instructional goals. Especially important, they are able to retain the knowledge of the principles of the instructional strategy for an extended period of time, as well as retain the skill that they developed in implementing the strategy. While they retain the skill for a longer period of time, coached teachers also tend to teach the strategy to their students; with this background,

students understand the instructional strategy more clearly and are able to make better use of it in the classroom. And finally, they seem to have a deeper, clearer understanding of the purpose and use of the strategy as a whole and how it impacts their building.

Characteristics of Effective Peer Coaching Practices

By this time in the research, as studies have been done to determine the effectiveness of coaching, clear recommendations have come from those studies in terms of what works . . . and what does not. Barbknecht and Kieffer (2001) recommend the peer coaching relationship for experienced teachers only. Rather than burdening young teachers with yet another initiative—and one whose purpose may be duplicated by mentoring—this relationship is one that best fits the established teacher. As school systems and students change, so must instruction and teachers. Rather than a top-down hierarchical model for decision-making in schools that was prevalent some years ago, teachers are now more empowered to shape their classroom to meet student needs. This empowerment will only fade if teachers are left in isolation to make decisions, change and adapt instruction, and integrate curriculum into other content areas. Showers (1985) recommended early in her research that teachers should coach each other. In order for that to be feasible, teachers need to be familiar with the new skill or strategy that the building is attempting to implement. Further, teachers must be able to access other teachers' classrooms in order to observe them and conference. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, teachers need to be open to experimentation and willing to look at new and varied roles for themselves as professionals.

A Culture for Peer Coaching

Carr, Herman, and Harris (2005) further outline the philosophical and cultural necessities of a peer coaching relationship. Aside from accessibility, teachers must ask themselves the following questions:

- Would I or do I trust this person?
- Can I and do I want to build a professional relationship with this person?
- Do we both have a willingness to look at our teaching practices?
- Are we both willing to take risks, expose ourselves to mistakes, and learn from them?
- Are we both willing to find time in our already filled days to devote to peer coaching?
- Are we both willing to learn and apply the coaching process with integrity?

Carr et al. (2005) state simply that assigning and pairing teachers to participate in the peer coaching process "dooms" the process itself. The choice of a partner is a powerful factor in allowing teachers to control their own learning. However, the process cannot be so loosely governed that peer coaching is only a suggestion. Support must be given to staff through training, quality professional development, and allocation of resources like time and money.

Training is Critical

In order for the peer coaching experience to be a positive one, Carr et al. (2005) discuss the most important elements of sound professional development and training. These include a trainer who has experience, as well as access to videos and

demonstrations. Not only are these tools important, but simulating and modeling the practice to new learners is also an integral part of training. Typically, the training should include the initial days of learning, with at least three follow-up days, consisting of no less than two hours. The training components recommended by Carr et al. (2005) include the following: listening without judgment, giving and receiving feedback, questioning techniques, using data-collection techniques to focus observations, working with conflict, working with different learning styles, knowledge of a developmental approach to adult learning, and using the peer coaching cycle. Finally, Carr et al. (2005) offer a planning list for the support of peer coaches. Again, simply offering the program is not enough. Providing the training to teachers is also not enough. A structure must be in place to allow for the collaborative relationships to grow and flourish. The following are considerations for providing that structure:

- Is there weekly time built into peer coaching for the specific participating team?
- Are their opportunities for colleagues to communicate electronically?
- Does each colleague have access to a working computer during the day?
- Is there a space, such as a team planning room, where collaboration and discussions about education can occur?
- Is there sanctioned release time during school when colleagues can work together or observe each other?
- Are policies and procedures in place to support learning communities?

Coaching is Not Evaluation

Showers (1985) also laid the groundwork for a discussion of coaching versus evaluation and supervision. Coaching, as it is intended here, does not have as one of its purposes to judge the effectiveness of the teacher. Coaching, though, is intended to support a person through the acquiring of a new skill. The two, coaching and evaluation, according to Showers (1985), should not be confused. Further, if teachers are encouraged within a school building to work together to study instruction, supervision of coaching practices may help to cultivate that environment. However, in buildings where teachers are not in a position to cooperatively study instruction, supervision of coaching practices may be mistaken for evaluation. Again, that is a critical distinction. "Where there has been a failure to separate evaluation and the status and power differences from supervision, it is improbable that the process will create a climate conducive to learning and growing on the part of the teachers" (Showers, 1985, p. 47). In short, coaching should provide a safe haven for professional reflection, risk-taking, experimentation, and professional growth. Allen and LeBlanc (2005) outline similar differences between coaching practices and more traditional performance evaluation as completed by a supervisor. Traditional performance evaluation:

- is time-consuming for both supervisor and teacher;
- provides infrequent feedback;
- may negatively affect morale;
- frequently causes anxiety;
- is useful only for teachers with severe weaknesses;

- has neither consequences nor rewards for competent teachers;
- does not provide for follow-up;
- cannot be objective;
- provides no link to staff development;
- is usually not an instrument of professional growth;
- is often not taken seriously by the administrator or the teacher.

Allan and LeBlanc (2005) provide some fairly frank indictments of the supervisor-teacher traditional evaluation plan. However, the coaching relationship among peer teachers can combat the shortcomings of the traditional performance evaluation cycle. True, coaching can be considered time consuming as well; however, it provides timely feedback, a direct link to staff development, a vehicle to approach professional improvement, and can be enlightening and invigorating for competent teachers, all shortcomings of the traditional evaluation system.

The Role of the Principal

Not only does Showers (1985) talk about the role of teachers in peer coaching, she also begins to discuss the role of the principal. Principals are able to support coaching within the building logistically by arranging for substitutes or allocating needed resources to coaches; however, the principal plays an even greater role in establishing a climate that supports and encourages collegial, professional relationships, feedback, and experimentation. While those norms do not exist in some school buildings, it is the responsibility of the principal to cultivate those conditions for coaches. Showers (1985) goes on to note that, in her own experience, creating those conditions has been

difficult. The professional development program must be strong, and support systems for teachers within the building must be revised to allow collegial teams to meet and study. Teams of teachers that are chosen to teach the innovation to the staff must be allowed time to prepare so that the initial work is well-thought-out and organized. These considerations parallel the recommendations of Gottesman (2000) who outlines the role of the principal in implementing peer coaching:

- Be committed to the concept of peer coaching.
- Establish new norms. The teachers are accustomed to being alone in their classrooms. The principal must sell the faculty on the benefits of visiting and observing in classrooms for the improvement of instruction.
- Provide structure during the early stages of peer coaching, at least for the first two months.
- Identify exactly what support the principal will give to teachers who use peer coaching.
- Provide time in the schedule and coverage so that peer coaching can occur.
- Generate outside support for peer coaching.
- Provide staff development for peer coaching and other training areas that may result from concerns in peer coaching.
- Validate the use of peer coaching in teaching portfolios.

District Support Needed?

However, Zwart et al. (2009) refute the notion that teachers need scheduled time to participate in peer coaching and a commitment from the district in order to benefit

from the partnership. In fact, their research would suggest that teachers who have less time and perceive less system support for the work actually learn more than teachers who are in a system with regularly scheduled time to participate in a perception of strong administrative support. Zwart et al. (2009) attribute that success to strong intrinsic motivation of individual teachers, along with factors including peer relationship, that are able to overcome the limitations of scheduling and support.

Adult Learning Style Considerations

While transfer from professional development opportunity to classroom, along with the benefits of peer coaching, are important elements of fostering these collaborative relationships, yet another consideration must be the unique considerations that abound as we provide learning opportunities to adults. Brookfield (1986) discussed six characteristics that must be present in adult learning opportunities in order to ensure a positive outcome: "Voluntary participation, participant respect for one another, collaboration, an atmosphere of critical reflection, and facilitation of learning that promotes self-directed, proactive learning opportunities." Arnau, Kahrs, and Kruskamp (2004) combine the considerations of adult learning with the elements of a peer coaching program when they studied the implementation of a voluntary peer coaching program at Shiloh (GA) High School. Five themes presented themselves to researchers as they analyzed the motivation of veteran teachers (teachers with 20+ years of experience) to participate in the peer coaching program: a desire to learn, experience with "informal" peer coaching, a need for meaningful feedback, opportunities to make choices throughout the program, and finally, a dissatisfaction with traditional observations. Again, the

motivation of the individual teacher must be a key consideration as school districts consider implementing a peer coaching program.

That same case study (Arnau et al., 2004) found that five themes emerged among most of the veteran teachers surveyed following their peer coaching experience: an appreciation for meaningful feedback, an opportunity for self-directed learning, trust among peer coaches, increased morale among peer coaches, and anticipated gains that coaches anticipated from the experience. Again, not only are the elements of transfer, along with benefits of peer coaching, important considerations, but the needs of the adult learner must be considered as well.

Zwart et al. (2009) studied the practice they defined as reciprocal peer coaching, noting, too, that the adult learner must be a carefully measured component of such a practice. Noting that professional learning is a social experience, and one that should occur in the context of where it will be applied, reciprocal peer coaching focuses on teachers working together to support each other's teaching. Key in their description is the term "reciprocal." Their research uncovered an interesting connection between teaching and learning philosophies: "The more emphasis the teacher placed upon the social nature of [student] learning (e.g., collaboration increases student learning), the more he or she reported learning from the reciprocal peer coaching trajectory" (Zwart et al., 2009). In other words, if teachers valued collaboration in the learning of their students, they were more likely to value collaboration in their own personal learning as well. Other critical characteristics of the partnership included the assurance of a safe environment; however, different from other researchers, Zwart et al. (2009) noted an

environment that was open to disagreement was also imperative. If teachers thought of themselves as good teachers, they learned more, and similarly, if they thought of their peer as a good coach, they learned more as well. Zwart et al. (2009) also noted other factors that seemed to encourage or motivate members of a coaching dyad to participate, experiment, and share their thoughts with a partner. The pressure of knowing a peer was planning to observe—though not judge—a given classroom lesson was noted in their research as a significant motivating factor; whether it motivated a team member to prepare an outstanding lesson to be observed (for the sake of the observing teacher), or to consider how students might perceive and learn from the lesson, the presence—or expectation of an observing partner—was significantly motivating for teachers.

System Improvement Through Collaboration

Richard Elmore's research has focused, while not specifically on the practice of peer coaching, on the practice of developing school systems that reflect on teaching and learning, intentionally question their own work, and embrace an atmosphere and culture where learning is at the fore of every conversation. City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) outline five principles that are critical to such a system's improvement, and they apply aptly to the practice of peer coaching.

1. We learn to do the work by doing the work, reflecting on the work, and critiquing the work.
2. Separate the person from the practice.
3. Learning is an individual and collective activity.
4. Trust enhances individual and collective learning.

5. Learning enhances individual and collective efficacy.

Significant research has noted the importance of trust in collaborative relationships, as City et al. (2009) has, but his description of doing the work, reflecting on the work, and critiquing the work closely describe the overarching elements of a peer coaching relationship. Similarly, his call to separate the person from the practice equally applies to multiple studies that document the importance of a peer-to-peer relationship. Just as trust is important, honest feedback is critical as well. And finally, his assertion that learning is an individual and collective activity closely relate to the peer coaching practice. City et al.'s (2009) research in the area of the importance of collaborative learning bolsters even the earliest (and aforementioned) research of Joyce and Showers that noted the importance of peer support for transfer of learning. Joyce and Showers (1980) note the importance of support for improved teaching. City et al. note a similar importance for an improved system.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact that a peer coaching relationship has on the instructional practice of high school English teachers. Many, many elements can impact the complex practice of teaching, and clearly establishing which factors affect a teacher's work in the classroom can be a difficult task. While some studies seek to understand a co-relational connection between clearly defined variables, the nature of the practice of teaching, when coupled with the complexities of developing professional relationships with colleagues to change teaching practices, makes the proposed research question a challenging one. The environment in which teaching and learning occurs varies widely, and while efforts are being made to make the learning experience—and most importantly the learning—of each child more consistent, the multiplicity of influential factors makes a high level of learning delivered consistently across environments challenging, but not impossible.

The goal of this particular study was to share the peer coaching experience of one group of teachers, in one school district, in an effort to expand the body of observations and patterns—research—in this area, and to determine the impact of a peer coaching relationship on the practice of high school English teachers. Then, other practitioners may be able to use the patterns detailed in this study to shape their own thinking, decisions, or practices in their school setting. This study certainly does not seek widespread generalization to other settings, but if the experiences from this study are

described in such a way that others may recognize situational similarities or differences, greater understanding of the practice may occur.

The Qualitative Approach

Several tenets of qualitative research lended themselves to this particular question and bounded case study. Merriam (2009) identifies four characteristics of qualitative research, and each quality soundly supports the needs of the question at hand:

1. The focus is on understanding and meaning.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument.
3. The process is inductive.
4. The product is richly descriptive.

As educators seek to find philosophies, strategies, and practices that result in better teaching and greater student learning, more and more attention has been given to the impact that a skilled teacher can have on student achievement. With that in mind, what can schools do to support teachers, to help them continue to develop skills learned as part of their own professional preparation, their own personal qualities, and the capacity of the school building to learn and teach together? Peer coaching may provide that support, but it is a complex practice that combines elements of professional development, collegial relationships, transfer of learning, and professional reflection.

Deeper Understanding

Merriam's call for deeper understanding of a practice through qualitative research fits well here. How do teachers feel about the practice? Are they willing to share with a peer a perceived weakness? Are they willing to ask for help? Will they take feedback

and then make a change in their practice? With all of these complex interrelated components, peer coaching is a practice that calls for more understanding, and qualitative research lends itself to that level of deeper understanding.

Researcher as Primary Instrument

In this study, as Merriam (2009) described, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Reviewing primary documents that provide a framework for their interactions and asking questions of the subjects all helped to elicit sample members' own thinking about why the professional relationship with a peer coach does or does not encourage a change in a teacher's professional practice; that question was a critical consideration of the study. Because the practice of teaching is so personal—it is people working with people, all of whom can be influenced by countless other factors—it was imperative that the researcher serve as a probing gatherer of data, a flexible filter, and a thoughtful analyst. Patton (2002), too, describes the researcher as the instrument; the success of the project relies, in large part, "on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork." The complex nature of teaching and teachers suited the qualitative approach very well.

An Inductive Approach

Bernard and Ryan (2010) describe inductive research as "the search for patterns from observation and the development of explanations—theories—for those patterns through a series of hypotheses." Patton (2002) further describes the importance of an inductive approach. He concludes that an inductive approach does not "pre-suppose" the

variables and most important relationships in a given problem. Rather an inductive approach allows the researcher to identify those influences most important to the research question, along with the relationships between those factors as the research progresses. With that said, the researcher's work has the potential to find new, alternative theories about what is happening, based completely on the responses and observations of members of the sample, rather than on a pre-determined set of most probable outcomes. In this study, the search for a pattern of teacher behaviors that ultimately lead to a positive change in practice was critical. While theories exist that the peer coaching practice leads to a change in teaching practice, it is a tool that is implemented sparingly across our state, across districts, and even within districts. Seemingly, the theories currently in place are providing little or no assurance to teachers and educational leaders that peer coaching is indeed a high-leverage strategy. This qualitative study, though, combined a series of attempted observations, interviews, and document reviews to reveal a pattern of behavior that may serve to further enlighten teachers and leaders, and the researcher, about the potential impact of peer coaching.

Rich Description

Merriam (2009) also described rich description as critical to the qualitative approach, and this case study provided the researcher with opportunities to carefully and craftfully describe the experiences of a core group of teachers, in hopes that other practitioners will be able to glean elements that may lead to greater understanding, deeper questioning, and further analysis of the peer coaching practice. Eisner (1998) uses the term "thick description" and notes qualitative research's motive for "accounting for what

they have given an account of" (p. 35). Why did it happen? What was the motive? What influenced the decision?

Understanding the Behavior

Similar to Merriam's call for rich description in qualitative research, Eisner (1998) encourages an understanding of the behavior, rather than simply reporting the behavior. What is the "meaning of the events to those who experience them?" Certainly, an understanding of the "thinking behind the thinking" of teachers who participate in a professional relationship like peer coaching is critical to the continued understanding of its potential impact on instruction. In the complex field of teaching, seeing what happens is one layer of understanding; however, describing why it happens is a critical step in this project, and a critical component of both Eisner's and Merriam's description of qualitative research.

Field Focused

Eisner (1998) further describes qualities that define qualitative research, and he identifies "field focused" as a critical component. Not only did this study observe teachers in the environment in which they teach and interact, but the documents that were reviewed have been developed by educators in the school system and were authentic representations of the professional growth intentions of the district. Further, as Eisner describes a qualitative study as being non-manipulative, the multiple components that exist in the teachers' relationships and their classrooms were studied as a whole, "intact" as Eisner says, without an attempt to separate one element of the practice of professional growth from another.

The Case Study Approach

Merriam describes the case study as "a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (2009, p. 50). To be sure, the factors associated with the instruction of high school students are equaled only by the complexities of such a task, and part of that practice of instruction is the professional growth of each individual staff member. Eisner notes that in the fields of medicine and engineering, the knowledge base is far less context-specific than in the field of teaching (1998). Relationships between teacher and student are critical, but the relationship between teacher and teacher is also a critical element in understanding how instructors best develop as professionals. Surely, more than one isolated influence contributes to a change in professional practice among teachers; thus, the nature of the problem that was studied fit nicely into the framework of a case study described by Merriam.

Bromley (1986) defines the case study as "the description and analysis of a particular entity (object, person, group, event, state, condition, process, or whatever). Such singular entities are usually natural occurrences with definable boundaries, although they exist and function within a context of surrounding circumstances." He further notes that the case study is often a method that provides insight into a given question, rather than confirmation of a particular solution or result. Bromley (1986) further describes the case study as a method that "gets as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires). Also, case studies tend to spread the

net for evidence widely" (p. 23). Bromley's most convincing argument for the utilization of a case study? "Failure to carry out detailed case studies may result in failure to realize what is really happening (to persons in a school, prison, factory, or home)" (p. 23).

Experience Shapes the Observer

Case study served the researcher, and hopefully the reader, well as we work to more clearly understand the impact of close, professional peer relationships in the professional development of our teaching staff. As the researcher, my goal in studying these relationships was two-fold. First, I hoped to expand my own understanding of the impact peer coaching relationships have on teacher learning and practice. The experiences I observed in my bounded case shed some insight into the experience of teachers with whom I may have an opportunity to work. My own attempts at embedding the peer coaching practice into districts in which I have worked have found only meager success, and that experience served me well—and certainly shaped my own observations—as I interpreted the experience of another group of teachers. Based on my experience in the classroom as a high school English teacher, later experience as a building-level administrator who sought to implement peer coaching in a secondary school setting, and now, as a district-level administrator who is searching for the most effective means to enhance teachers' learning, instruction, and most importantly, student learning, the case study methodology lended itself to interpreting the experience of teachers in a peer coaching relationship.

Naturalistic Generalization

A second goal in developing this project is described by Staker. Merriam (2009) notes Staker's description of "naturalistic generalization": "A case study provides vicarious instances and episodes that merge with existing icons of experience.…" Not only did my experience serve as a filter or lens through which I observed the peer coaching relationship, but the case study will allow the reader to do the same. Teaching and learning does not occur in a sterile laboratory, void of conflicting components; rather, teaching and learning occurs in an ever-changing, multi-faceted classroom, and the case study method allowed the researcher to, not just tolerate those facets and their ebb and flow of influence, but to embrace them. As Eisner described, the conditions of the classroom, of teaching, and of learning vary because teachers "give their distinctive stamp to what they teach" (1998).

Bromley (1986) cited six rules for psychological case studies.

1. The investigator must report truthfully on the person, his life and circumstances, and must be particularly accurate in matters of detail.
2. The objectives of the case study should be stated explicitly and unambiguously.
3. The case study should contain an assessment of the extent to which the stated aims and objectives have been achieved.
4. The case study should be carried out by someone trained to establish and manage a close, fairly long, and possibly difficult personal relationship.
5. A full account must be given to the objects, persons, and events in his or her physical, social, and symbolic environment.

6. The case-report should be written in good plain English in a direct, objective way without, however, losing its human interest as a story.

While each of Bromley's basic rules apply to this study, rules three and five are most pertinent to this particular problem and resulting research. For example, certain elements of the intended research plan—including direct observation (see below) were never available to the researcher as a result of choices made by consenting members of the sample. While this presented a difficulty in collecting data, as Bromley would encourage, the results reflect the exclusion of this intended data collection method, and through their exclusion, reveal something about the problem statement at hand. Similarly, Bromley (1986) argues for case study research to occur in "ecological context"; to be sure, the value of the case study is working with a sample group in the environment in which they teach, learn, and collaborate.

Data Collection: Observation, Document Review, and Semi-structured Interviews

Patton (2002) described the collection of qualitative data as the result of three practices.

- Direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge obtained through interviews (my emphasis)
- Detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, and actions recorded in observations
- Excerpts, quotations, or entire passages extracted from various types of documents

Patton (2002) goes on to describe the importance of open-ended responses that can be generated through semi-structured interviews. Rather than restricting the perspective or response of a sample member to a pre-determined collection of responses established by the researcher, the interview allows for data collected to truly and accurately describe the specific experience of the sample member. He goes on to describe the qualitative tool of direct observation as the "eyes, ears, and perceptual senses for the reader." A balance between the critical details of an experience and the over-examined and described elements that are of little import to the reader is imperative. Rich description, without the overwhelming regurgitation of non-essential details characterize the sound utilization of direct observation.

Observation of Teachers

In this case, I intended to observe the interactions of pairs of teachers as they participated in a peer coaching relationship. Observations of said teachers occurred in varying ways. The foremost opportunity to observe occurred during teachers' pre-observation and post-observation conferences. However, this method of data collection was omitted; members of the sample did not participate in such conferences during the school year in which the study occurred. Had these interactions occurred, records were to be audio-recorded, transcribed by the primary investigator, and data coded thematically in several different areas: management skills, instructional skills, collegial relationships, professional development, transfer of learning, and change in practice.

Document Review

Further insight was gained by examining the documents developed by the district to guide these conferences, as well as the responses to those documents provided by the participating teachers. Both the structure of the document provided by the district (blank template) and documents completed by teachers were of value to the study. Similar to the observation notes, the responses of teachers to these documents were also reviewed for thematic patterns using the same codes. These documents are to be completed by teachers as part of the peer coaching process, and the responses indicated the thinking of the teacher and partner prior to an observation and following an observation. Key words and phrases were coded under similar thematic headings, just as the transcripts of the pre- and post-conferences were.

Interviews

Finally, interviews of teachers and their peer coaching partners provided a third source of perspective on the impact that the peer coaching relationship has on classroom teachers and their professional growth. A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized; initial questions included the following:

- Discuss with me the kinds of learning you are engaged in as a teacher as part of your school's professional development initiatives.
- As you work with your peer coach, about what kinds of practices are you asking them for input?
- What qualities do you find most important in a peer coach? Why are those qualities important to you?

- Discuss something that is different about your classroom now that is a result of the peer coaching experience. Talk about the impetus for that change.
- Is it easy and natural to participate in a peer coaching relationship? If it is easy, what qualities or characteristics make it so? If it is more difficult, what makes it so?

The interviews were audio-recorded, and reviewed at a later time, but memoing immediately following the interview session was an important way to identify themes that I expected to present themselves, but also to determine if themes I was not expecting had begun to emerge as well. Key words and phrases were identified, coded, and categorized to determine if change is occurring in the teaching practice.

Theories Relevant to Data Analysis

These experiences were interpreted through a series of lenses, including, but not limited to, the following: my own experience teaching high school English, my own work to implement peer coaching in a secondary school and later across a school district, the Iowa Professional Development Model, the eight Iowa teaching standards, and relevant philosophical foundations and theories about data collection and changing teacher performance.

These relevant theories range from a framework that guides thinking and expectations about qualitative research to overarching means of explaining relationships between teachers and their peers, and teachers and their learning.

- Merriam (2009) describes constructivism as a philosophy that assumes multiple interpretations of a socially constructed reality. According to Merriam,

"Researchers do not 'find' knowledge, they construct it." This constructivist approach was a guidepost as the data was analyzed; the potential multiple interpretations of data as it was analyzed was important to consider as I developed my own interpretations of the data, and as I share those interpretations within my field.

- Grbich (2007) describes grounded theory as the "observation of minutiae of interaction." This observation yields a greater understanding of social interactions, structures, processes, and behaviors. While the sole purpose of this study was not to interpret the social interaction of teachers, but rather the change in practice of teachers, those interactions were still a critical layer of investigation, interwoven with the transfer of learning, collegiality and professional capital, and the benefits of peer input/coaching.
- Ellis (1965) theorized the key components necessary for teachers to transfer new learning into practice in the classroom. Ellis' research helped to shape the expectations that I had about the conditions that need to be present in order for teachers to transfer what they have learned into their own practice in the classroom.
- Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe the importance of building professional capital in school buildings and in teacher teams. Their theories about building the capacity of teachers to make decisions, shape their practice, and change their instruction as a result of capable, thoughtful guidance from a peer was a cornerstone of the researcher's considerations as the data was analyzed.

- Ellis (1965) described elements critical to the transfer of learning in a professional development experience to the practice in a classroom. Transfer of learning is imperative to professional growth of teachers, and professional growth could equate to a change in practice, an element central to the problem statement.
- Ash and D'Auria (2013) argue that, for systems to learn, they must willingly and nondefensively discuss failure. Within that discussion of failure, feedback provided by teaching colleagues for teaching colleagues is critical. Similarly, Hattie (2012) notes the importance of feedback in changing the practice of teachers in their classroom. The coaching process is designed to provide that feedback, and without feedback, change in practice is difficult to experience.
- Carr et al. (2005) describe the cultural necessities and system support that are so critical to the development and implementation of a successful peer coaching protocol. As the sample member's environment and experiences were described through interviews and document review, this research provided a framework from which I could compare the sample members' experience to that describe by Carr et al. (2005).
- City et al. (2009) describe the importance of building professional capital and an interconnected network of professionals. This collaborative culture, they say, is imperative for system-wide improvement. In a comparison of professional learning communities, teaming, and peer coaching, the framework of the collaborative culture helped to shape the interpretation of sample members' responses about teachers working with teachers.

- Finally, Joyce and Showers' (1985) theories regarding the importance of peer input and coaching in facilitating a change in instructional practice, along with a distinction between coaching and evaluation, was also critical to the development of the research questions and process, but also to the interpretation of the data as it was collected. Data was analyzed through the lens of a Joyce and Showers-developed and inspired practice—peer coaching. Their research continued to uncover the difference between coaching and evaluation, a distinction that was not readily prominent in peer coaching models in the state.

Data Analysis

Arnau et al. (2004) utilized the constant comparative method of data analysis in their research of peer coaching, and this practice fit nicely with this case study as well. The interview responses, data collected during observations, and the review of documents provided the opportunity to code—or categorize—each of these records. As the study progressed, categories—or patterns—began to evolve or become more apparent in addition to those initially identified. These developing categories or themes were shaped by the data collection, but also by critical components of the research questions: changing practice of teachers, areas of professional development, and the characteristics of the most significantly impacted teachers. It was with the research questions in mind, along with the data collected, that the course of the study was established. The analysis was ongoing and simultaneous with collection of the data; after an initial interview, data was coded, and themes or categories were established. As the study continued, the number of potential categories grew, but as the course of the interaction with this

bounded sample began to conclude, the most significant themes emerged. From these categories or themes, conclusions, additional research questions, or theories about future implementation of peer coaching that focus on the initial research questions will be drawn.

In short, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, and while collection occurred, the data was coded, and categorized. From these data categories, theories or additional research questions were, and will continue to be, developed. This practice of "constantly comparing" the collected data to new data shaped the eventual conclusions of the case study.

Selecting Members of the Sample: Criterion-based Selection and a Bounded System

The study employed criterion-based selection to establish the members of the sample. By establishing criteria essential to data collection and to completion of the study, districts were identified that would allow for a fruitful interpretation of the observation. Essential criteria facilitated a more calculated selection of a potential school district, and guided the screening of districts that would not lend themselves to a study of this nature. The bounded system that served as my case study for this project was selected as a result of three important criteria:

1. Existence of the practice of peer coaching
2. Defining characteristics of the district
3. A willingness to participate

Existence of the Practice of Peer Coaching

As I sought districts to participate in this study, I searched for schools that had already implemented peer coaching in a way that closely followed the structure and guidelines established by Joyce and Showers in their early research, or who would be interested in implementing the initiative with a reasonable amount of training and support in those protocols. Jackson Community School District (the name of the district has been changed in an effort to protect the confidentiality of the participants) indicated that they met this criterion when district leadership was contacted. The district has in place an expectation that teachers will establish a peer coaching relationship and engage in observations at least once per semester, and to utilize that relationship for improved instruction. This practice had been in place for at least two years.

Defining Characteristics of the District

Secondly, as I searched for a district that might fit the questions I hoped to consider as part of the case study, I sought a district that exhibited common qualities to my own district, or other districts that I may have an opportunity to lead in Iowa at some point. These qualities include comparable traits among the student population, staff qualities, available resources, community demographics, geographic location, and leadership structure.

A Willingness to Participate

And finally, I sought a district that was willing to participate in the study. Without these three characteristics, the bounded case may not have been suited to

the work I plan to engage in as part of this project. Jackson Community Schools seems to exhibit each of these three characteristics.

Community and District Demographics

Jackson, Iowa (the name of the community has been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants), home district of the members of my sample, had a population in 2012 of 7,855 according to data collected in the 2010 U.S. Census. Of these residents, 24.5% were under 18, and 19.3% of all residents were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 38.0 years. Within the community, 90.8% of the residents were White, .4% were Black, .2% were American Indian, 3.4% were Asian, and 7.4% were Hispanic or Latino. Of these individuals, 85.6% had attained at least a high school diploma, 14.5% had attained a bachelor's degree, and 2.8% had completed a graduate or professional degree. Additionally, 68.7% of residents owned a home, and the median income for the community was $38,220. The percentage of households that secured an income of $10,000 or less was 9.0%, while 1.3% of the households secured an income of $200,000 or more. All told, 15.2% of Jackson's residents lived below the poverty level. According to data collected in the 2010 Census, 7.6% of Jackson's residents were unemployed.

The community is host to several large manufacturing, food processing, and health care-related employers according to a local economic development website. The largest employer manufactures and distributes fertilizer and agricultural chemicals to farmers. However, recent closures of some local business and industry employers in the area have impacted the community. A decline in enrollment, and an increasing

percentage of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunches, along with the need for increased support as English language learners, has impacted the school and community. A local hospital also provides a significant number of employment opportunities for the Jackson area, as do two meat processing companies. A nearby foundry and hatchery also provide employment to Jackson residents and members of the surrounding communities.

Main Street is a busy, several-block-long chain of restaurants, banks, clothing stores, pet stores, and home and hardware shops. Gas stations, a public library, fast food chains, and the local fairgrounds complete this traditionally rural community. A community college center provides learning opportunities to local residents and high school students. According to district leaders, the community places a high priority on collaborative problem solving, including regular meetings of key stakeholders and service providers in the community; school district leadership, local law enforcement, county supervisors, chamber of commerce representatives, hospital leadership, and community recreation center leadership all participate.

According to the 2012-2013 Iowa Basic Education Data Survey (BEDS), the Jackson School District had a certified enrollment in 2012-2013 of 1,572.6 students, and a student-to-teacher ratio, across the district, of 13:1. Two district-level administrators serve Jackson, and six building-level administrators provide support for two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The average teacher salary in Jackson was $49,927, and across the district, teachers hold 12 years of total teaching experience, on average, and about nine years of teaching experience in the district. The average age

of the teachers in the district was 39.4 years of age, and 2.6% of all teachers held an advanced degree of some sort.

According to Jackson's 2010-2011 Annual Progress Report, Jackson High School had an enrollment of 526 students. Of those students, 32.5% qualified for free or reduced lunch, 12.9% were eligible for special education services, and 2.2% were designated as English Language Learners. The high school was predominantly White (88.7%); 6.6% of the students were Hispanic, 2.8% were of Asian descent, and less than 1% were Black. In 2010, the district had a daily attendance rate of 95.71% and a district dropout rate of .0279. Regarding graduation, 94.62% of students graduated on time with their cohort class in 2010, and 91% of all Jackson graduates intend to pursue education beyond high school. A score of 20 on the ACT was achieved by 80% of high school seniors. Across the district, 97 teachers worked in four district buildings. More than a quarter of all teachers, 26%, held a master's degree.

Table 1 describes Jackson High School's performance on the Iowa Test of Education Development (ITED) in 2010.

Table 1

Iowa Assessment Results, Jackson High School

Iowa Assessment Results (2010)	% Proficient Grade 9	% Proficient Grade 10	% Proficient Grade 11
Reading	71.3%	72.2%	75.4%
Math	83.2%	78.5%	76.3%
Science	74.3%	80.0%	77.1%

District Professional Development

Most recently, the district, including the high school, has engaged in professional learning that focuses on the Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework. Approximately 98% of all staff have attended professional learning opportunities in this area, and teams of grade-alike or content-alike teachers meet regularly, some even twice per week. Professional learning that focuses on formative and summative assessment has also been a prominent component of district learning. Changes to expectations for students, including a revised report card and summative end-of-year testing for students, has been a part of ongoing work in the District. Professional learning that focuses on a 1:1 device was prevalent last year, and is continuing this year as well.

Identifying Members of the Study Sample and Securing Consent

On October 9, 2013, an e-mail was sent to potential members of the sample group at Jackson High School. The e-mail introduced the project, and requested an opportunity to meet with potential members of the sample (Appendix G).

On October 22, 2013, I met with potential members of my sample, English teachers at Jackson High School to review my project and request their consent to participate in the project. Three of the four members of the sample attended a face-to-face meeting. A fourth member of the sample was later secured via a meeting over the phone. Potential members of the sample were provided several key points as a means to describe the project, including an introduction of the researcher and research question, a description of the methodology to be employed, efforts that would be taken to protect sample members' privacy, and how the collection of data could be scheduled. Further description of potential benefits to members of the sample were described (i.e. contribution to the practice of teaching), as well as how members could opt out of the study. A written consent form and contact information were also provided to potential members (Appendix H).

At the time of this initial meeting, I attempted to determine when potential opportunities to observe pre- or post-observation conversations may occur, and members of the sample agreed to contact me when an observation had been scheduled. Over the course of the next several weeks, I contacted members of the sample to remind them to contact me prior to a pre- or post-observation conference.

Initiating Data Collection

(Sample members):

I hope you're staying warm and out of the wind this afternoon. I wanted to check in with you on a couple things. First, if you're thinking about observing a peer, I'd love to be able to listen in on your conversation with your partner before your visit, and/or after your visit. Let me know when those conversations will be occurring and I'll work to stop over to listen in.

Secondly, another part of my research collection is a semi-structured interview. I've got a few questions that I'd like to ask you individually about your practice of peers observing peers in order to help me better understand how that works for you as teachers. I'd like to "budget" 40-50 minutes for each interview. I could do them before or after school if that works for you, or if there is another time that works better for you, let me know that and I'll make it work. Again, my goal is to take as little time as I can from you while still getting my research data collected to get my dissertation complete. You can respond individually to this e-mail about potential times for a short interview, or if you'd rather, I can give you a call and we can compare schedules.

Thanks for your help on my project. My wife Carrie is tired of me talking about the project so she sends her sincere thanks for the help as well. Stay warm, and I hope all is well in Jackson.

Sample Member Demographic Data

Three of the four consenting members of the study sample provided descriptive demographic data as part of the study. Members of the sample ranged in total teaching experience from one year to 22 years, and had worked in the district from one year to 19 years. Experience in districts outside of Jackson Community Schools ranged from zero—Jackson was the only district they had taught in—to seven districts, including community college teaching. Teaching endorsements for members of the sample included bachelor's degrees in English, Spanish, and history, and two members held Master's Degrees. Courses taught by teachers included U.S. history, modern world

studies, college preparatory English, English 9, English 10, English 11, and reading applications. One member of the sample held careers outside of the area of secondary teaching (sales, pre-school teacher, waitress), while two remaining members had worked solely as teachers.

Research Procedure Summary

1. Written consent from all Jackson High School English teachers—and their peer coaching partners—to participate in the study was obtained. A description of the study, along with data collections methods to be utilized, was included.
2. Documents utilized by the district to guide the peer coaching experience were reviewed. These documents included the peer observation reflection form (Appendix B), along with the district-described peer observation requirements. The "Peer Learning/Observation" document (Appendix D) outlined for staff elements such as who was to be involved in the process, the purpose of the peer coaching relationship, the process to be followed, and potential observation locations. The initial review of the documents focused on the template used by the district. Words or phrases that indicated a district focus in the practice on management skills, instructional skills, collegial relationships, professional development, transfer of learning, and change in practice were identified. Other themes or areas of importance became apparent as the review of this template occurs. During this portion of the research, the central focus of the researcher's review was the following: What does this document tell me about peer coaching's utility in changing the practice of high school English

teachers? Through inclusion in the template, repetition, and/or placement, how does this document encourage change in teaching practice through the peer coaching practice? Does it? Have any themes, categories of professional conversation, or patterns presented themselves that I was not expecting?

Table 2 indicates the categories that were used to initially begin coding and organizing data from this document:

Table 2

Coding and Organizing the Data

Source	Element	Change In Practice	Reinforced Practice
Management	Instruction	Professional Behavior	Content Knowledge
Other	Observer/ Observed	Barrier Present	Support Present
Interpersonal Qualities	Observation Feedback	Personal Reflection	

Source: What document or interview did this piece of data originate from?

Element: What is the text or location of the text that is to be coded? What was said or written?

Change in Practice: Does this piece of data indicate a change in practice? Yes or No?

Reinforced Practice: Does this piece of data indicate that a teacher's current practice was reinforced as a result of a peer coaching experience/partnership? Yes or No?

Management: Does this piece of data reflect a change in practice that would be considered classroom management?

Instruction: Does this piece of data reflect a change in practice that would be considered directly related to teaching and learning?

Professional Behavior: Does this piece of data reflect a change in practice that is related to professional behavior (i.e., appropriate responses to students, appropriate dress, etc.)?

Content Knowledge: Does this piece of data reflect a change in practice that is related to knowledge of the content of the class?

Other: Does this piece of data reflect a change in practice that is related to another area? If so, categorize that piece of data.

Observer/Observed: Does this piece of data reflect a change in practice as a result of observing another teacher or being observed by another teacher?

Barrier Present: Does this piece of data indicate the subject's perception of a barrier that inhibits the practice of peer coaching?

Support Present: Does this piece of data indicate the subject's perception of a support that encourages the practice of the peer coaching?

Interpersonal Qualities: Does this piece of data describe a peer's personal qualities that promote a collegial relationship as part of a peer coaching partnership?

Feedback Observation: Does this piece of data indicate that the reported change was the result of feedback that they received from a peer as part of the formal observation?

Personal Reflection: Does this piece of data indicate that the reported change was the result of personal reflection stemming from the peer coaching experience?

3. If pre-observation conferences occurred between peer coaching partners, these were to be observed and recorded. In narrative notes, words, phrases, or statements that immediately appeared to align with the themes identified in the initial codebook, or themes that appear to be a diversion from those initial themes were recorded, and identified for later reflection. These interactions never occurred during the school year in which the sample participated in the study.
4. The study intended to compare the data collected through the document review to the data collected as part of the pre-conference. Were the data consistent? Did they contradict one another?
5. Additional themes related to the research questions that have become apparent were identified.
6. Any post-observation conferences that occurred between peer coaching partners were observed and recorded. In written notes, any words, phrases, or statements that immediately appeared to be a diversion from those initial themes were identified. Indicate these for later reflection. These conferences did not occur during the school year in which the sample participated in the study.

7. The study intended to compare the data collected through the document review and pre-observation conference transcripts to the data collected in the post-observation conference transcripts. Were the data consistent? Did they contradict one another? However, these conferences did not occur during the school year in which the sample participated in the study.
8. Any additional themes related to the research questions that became apparent were identified.
9. Interviews, through a semi-structured interview protocol, were conducted with members of the English department and their peer coaching partners on February 11, 2014 and February 13, 2014. Interview questions included the following:
    - Discuss with me the kinds of learning you are engaged in as a teacher as part of your school's professional development initiatives.
    - As you work with your peer coach, about what kinds of practices are you asking them for input?
    - What qualities do you find most important in a peer coach? Why are those qualities important to you?
    - Discuss something that is different about your classroom now that is a result of the peer coaching experience. Talk about the impetus for that change.
    - Is it easy and natural to participate in a peer coaching relationship? If it is easy, what qualities or characteristics make it so? If it is more difficult, what makes it so?

These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

10. Using the codebook categories, thematic codes that appeared in the interview transcription were identified. This coding sheet provided the researcher a framework within which the data could be tagged; for example, data could be identified as relating to confirming a practice or changing a practice, whether the data related to a management, instructional, content-related or professional behavior skill, and whether the data regarded a change in the observer or the observed. Further data could be coded to take into account barriers to the practice that were present, supports that were evident, and interpersonal qualities members of the sample sought in likely partners.
11. The data collected through the document review, pre-observation conference transcripts, and post-observation transcripts (which did not occur during the school year in which the sample participated in the study) were compared to the data collected in the individual interviews. Were the data consistent? Did the data contradict one another? The resulting comparison focused on data collected through a review of document templates utilized by the district and the semi-structured interviews.
12. Follow-up interviews were conducted on March 10, 2014. Those questions included the following:
    - What motivates you to engage in the peer observation process?
    - Describe the impact that peer observations have had on your practice. (Or the impact that it will have.) Talk about the value you see in peer observation.

- As a teacher, what are the most powerful ways to change instruction?
- Talk to me about the role of the district-supplied documents.
- What do you see as the central purpose of peer observations?
- Describe conversations that you have with your colleagues about teaching and learning. When do they occur? Are the formal or informal? Where do they occur? What usually prompts them? What are the subjects of those conversations? Instructional? Management? Professional behavior? Content knowledge?

13. Based on the data collected, a determination was made regarding the impact of the relationship described and experienced by members of the bounded sample on their instructional practice.

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 included an overview of this study as well as the definition of terms, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter 2 consisted of a summary of related literature. Chapter 3 detailed the organization and methodology of the study along with the description and reflection upon the events that led up to my work with peer coaching. The fourth chapter will detail my findings in this study, including the observations of teachers within the peer coaching context (which did not occur during the school year in which the sample participated in the study), relevant documents that accompany the peer coaching framework in the district, and interviews with teachers who are engaged in a peer coaching partnership as I seek to measure my observational experience against my past experience with the practice, and broaden my understanding

of how peer coaching has impacted a select group of staff members in the district. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will offer recommendations for future study, both personally and for my colleagues as building and district leaders.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact that a peer coaching relationship has on the instructional practice of a sample group of secondary school English teachers. Collaboration and building professional relationships is fast becoming a critical component of the work to build the capacity of teachers to meet the demands of leading the learning of all students. By identifying the most effective strategies to improve instructional practice, systems will be better equipped to utilize limited resources in the most impactful ways. Some research lauds the practice of peer coaching as effective in supporting teachers in the implementation of new strategies, as well as in creating cohesive, collaborative units within which teachers can learn and grow in their practice. However, it seems to be inconsistently and sparingly implemented. Can a close professional relationship, guided by a peer coaching protocol change the practice of a high school English teacher? And if so, in what areas might that change occur? Instructional practices? Management of a classroom? Content knowledge? Professional behavior? If the practice is occurring, what elements make its implementation successful? But if it is not occurring, what barriers prevent it from successful utilization?

The Practice Within the District

Members of the sample were asked to discuss the training that they had experienced in preparation to participate in what the district described as peer observations. Descriptions of that training varied, but responses centered on a mentor/mentee experience for one staff member. This training was described as

something that most likely was provided by the state and focused on how a mentor teacher and mentee teacher could best utilize that partnership. Other responses included a description of the district's professional development experience. In this case, no specific training was provided to engage in peer observations. Rather, the member viewed the district's provision of professional learning in areas of instruction as a means to define to staff members' expected focus during an observation. Other members recalled no specific training that focused on the practice of peer observations.

The district had provided a description of the peer learning/observation process in documentation provided to staff members in prior years (Appendix D). A brief description of the vision and professional expectations for the process head the document:

> The Jackson School District would like to once again extend to teachers the opportunity to collaborate and learn alongside their peers. Research has shown that schools are more effective when teachers have opportunities for observing their peers, helping one another, etc. The overall goal is to establish a culture of self-study that stimulates continuous inquiry, reflection, information sharing, and improvement. Through the peer observation process, teachers can periodically examine and reflect on where they stand in relation to their goals for improving student learning.

The document notes that ALL teachers in the district are to be involved, with the purpose of observations "to enhance the professional growth of each teacher" and "to improve student learning." Further direction included completing a form—the scheduling information sheet—that described the grade level, building, subject, specific instructional strategies, and if the staff member planned to observe a classroom outside of the district (Appendix A). Staff members were to note their intended area of focus for the observation on the scheduling information sheet. Suggested areas of observation included engagement/learning of students, processes and/or procedures of students in

class, students doing bell-ringer work and/or other assigned tasks, classroom management and transitions, or other areas of focus. This document was to be returned to the building principal.

Observing staff members were given a document to provide some guidance during the observation (Appendix B). Areas of possible observation were included, as they were noted on the introductory document. An area to record notes and observations was included as well.

Members of the sample described a slightly less formal process in which teachers could choose a colleague to observe, no matter the grade level, subject area, building, or even district. The process begins with identification of a colleague to observe, and verification with that colleague of the willingness to allow that to occur. No pre-conference is required by the district, though an informal meeting to verify the topic of the day or the strategy to be employed typically occurs. After the observation, the observing teacher completes a form provided by the district and submits it to the building principal. No post-conference is required, though members of the sample reported that they may take the time to visit with the person who they observed or who observed them. They may do so to share what they saw, but also noted their desire to hear about something positive they had seen or that had been seen in their classroom, or hear something or share something observed that they may do a bit differently.

The peer observation reflection document focused on two topics: formative and summative assessment and technology use. Observing staff members report one of the following:

- Teacher did not use formative or summative assessments during observation.
- Teacher used formative or summative assessments but did not adjust instruction.
- Teacher used formative or summative assessment to adjust instruction during class.

Secondly, observing teachers note the kind of assessment observed: graphic organizers, cooperative learning, tiered assignments/assessments, differentiated instruction, modeling, guided practice, independent practice, summarizing activities, activities to activate background knowledge, class polls, ticket out the door, learning log, student record keeping, or other. Observing teachers then describe narratively one formative and summative assessment suggestion, followed by answering the following question: What did I learn about formative and summative assessment that I can use in my classroom?

A similar data collection was called for on the peer observation reflection document in the area of technology. In the area of technology integration, staff were asked to report what was observed:

- Teacher did not use technology during instruction.
- Teacher used technology to enhance instruction.
- Students used technology to enhance learning.

The observing teacher then reports on various technology that was observed being implemented in the classroom: iPads, cell phones, smartboards, computers, YouTube, Google docs, SlideRocket or PowerPoint, QR codes, Moodle, online blogs, Wikispaces, or Other. To complete the form, the observing teacher wrote narratively “one technology

suggestion," and then answered the following question: What did I learn about technology that I can use in my classroom? This form was then submitted to the building principal.

Members were not required to schedule a post-conference with their peer, but some noted they would have a conversation about what was observed. Traditionally, the district requires two observations per year, though in the past year, that was reduced to one observation. Members attributed that reduction in required observations to a recent rollout of a 1:1 device in the fall. With focus on that implementation, the expectation for observations was either decreased or incidentally overlooked. Members of the sample did not note an intentional decision to reduce the number of observations.

Professional Learning in the District

Members of the sample described various professional learning opportunities for teachers in the district. The district provided learning opportunities for staff in areas such as safety, technology implementation, identifying learning targets, classroom transitions, and using quadrants. Each member of the sample discussed at length the importance of "team time" or the professional learning community as a critical element of their professional learning. Teachers in the district engage in professional conversations as part of a content-alike or grade-alike team that meets at least once per week. The focus of the "team time" is most often lesson planning and the material to be taught, rather than a discussion of specific instructional strategies. One member noted that the team time was an opportunity to plan and prepare what was going to happen in class, with less

emphasis on what happened in a class. Some reflection was a part of the teaming process, but the resulting work of team time was planning for lessons and units to come.

How has Peer Coaching Changed the Practice of Members of a High School English Department?

Data collected from semi-structured interviews and document reviews was coded in several ways in an attempt to illuminate a pattern or theme within the data. Data was categorized if it demonstrated a change in practice, or a reinforcement of current practice. Further, data was coded to disaggregate a change in practice that focused on management-related skills or practices, instructional-related skills or practices, professional behavior, or content knowledge. For example, the data point documenting a member of the sample who reported that they had implemented a new vocabulary strategy would be coded as a "change in practice" and "instructional."

Changes in Practice as a Result of Observing a Partner

When asked to discuss a specific practice or behavior that was implemented or changed as a result of a peer coaching relationship or peer observation, members most often reported the areas in which they had observed, but less about what was different about their own classroom as a result of the experience. Members of the sample reported technology as an area that was a significant focus of the peer observation practice, and one teacher noted that she would attribute to peer observation a change in her classroom that focused on technology, though she was unable to pinpoint what that change might be; her assumption, though, was that if a change had occurred, it was most likely related to technology implementation. Similarly, another staff member noted that he had

observed a science teacher, who was integrating technology into his classroom, and noted the observed teacher was able to implement technology into the classroom with seeming relative ease. This teacher, then, discussed his attempts to utilize YouTube clips, for example, as a way of supplementing the material or engaging students.

Classroom management, engagement, student motivation, were all noted as areas of focus during observations, yet a conclusion that change had occurred in the classroom as a result of that experience could not be drawn. However, one member of the sample was able to clearly depict a change in her classroom from a resulting observation.

> I went in to watch Mrs. X teach, and she always had students act out vocabulary words when she introduced it . . . and I always thought "I'm not going to act out vocabulary," so I went into her room to observe them doing that, and I realized that the students—the majority of the students—enjoyed that, and that was really cementing it, not just for them, but for their peers. And so, I don't do it every time I introduce vocabulary, but I did incorporate that activity in my curriculum."

This particular strategy, implemented in the classroom of one teacher, was directly attributed to the peer observation.

<u>No Changes Occurred as a Result of Being Observed</u>

No teacher noted a change in practice that was the result of being observed by another peer. Any change in practice, or interest in changing practice, was the result of a sample member observing a peer.

As the district defined the practice for the teachers, an attempt was made to make explicit the concept of using the practice of peer observations to change instruction. In years prior to the school year in which the study focuses, based on documents provided by the district, reflection sheets provided to staff members asked them to make "one

technology suggestion" or "one formative and summative assessment suggestion" (Appendix F). However it was not clear if that data was ever provided to the observed teacher. No teacher reported ever receiving such direction. In documents that were designed to facilitate reflection on the observation in 2013-2014, the section of the document that provided for a suggestion based on the observation was not available (Appendix B). Similarly, reflection sheets called for teachers to report "What did I learn about technology *that I can use in my classroom*" (my emphasis) or "What did I learn about formative and summative assessment *that I can use in my classroom*?" (my emphasis). Another reflection document, utilized by the district during a prior school year (2011-2012) called for the teacher to recount the following: What are some of your learnings from this experience? From these learnings, *what are a couple things you can apply to your classroom/with your students/etc*.? (my emphasis). (Appendix C.) It appears the district has attempted to leverage the peer observation protocol into a potentially classroom-altering experience through the reflection sheets.

<u>District Purpose and Staff Purpose</u>

With that said, the following e-mail, sent from one member of the sample, demonstrates that the practice may not be viewed as a potentially powerful element of classroom practice change.

> I'm going to be looking into this a bit more, but I was thinking of observing either someone in the middle school (since my oldest will be going there next year) or at the Catholic school where they are currently going. Will that throw off your project? Would it be better for me to observe someone here at the high school? I don't want to make things more difficult for you. As far as the interviews are concerned, after school works better for me.

Changes occur in what areas? While members of the sample reported few changes in instruction as a result of the process, during interviews, teachers recounted several areas of interest related to their work as teachers on which they focused. Document review and interview data were categorized based on a perceived change in instruction, management, content knowledge, or professional behavior.

Observation Focus on Style, Students, Relationships, and Overall Effectiveness

> Last year, when I did that, it was another English instructor, and since we already have teams and stuff you already kind of know what you want to look for, and different teaching styles and different things. I just looked at it as "okay, how did they start their class, how did they interact with kids, how did they end their class?" That was really important to me, more so than sometimes just the lesson itself.

During interviews, it was uncommon for teachers to discuss specific instructional strategies that they intended to or had observed in the past. Rather, the focus was more often on the mechanics of the classroom, such as classroom management and transitions, while the most common element that teachers addressed, both from an observer's perspective and the perspective of being observed, was student engagement and motivation.

> If somebody comes in to observe me, I'll ask them, "Do you think that went smoothly or do you think I was losing the kids when I was talking about that or do you think there was a better way I could have done that?

Similarly, two teachers noted relationships with students as a common question they had about their own practice.

> What am I missing? These kids have so much that they bring into the classroom that I am not aware of . . . baggage . . . or good or bad...all kinds of things. Am I missing that connection with them? When I observed Teacher Y's class last year, she has such a natural, nice style that she relates with the kids, and they go back and forth...and it was so cool to see, and sometimes you get so wrapped up

> in the content or material and covering in 42 minutes . . . and it's nice to see . . . we have relationships. That's one thing that I would have people [look for]. Am I connecting with kids? Are they engaged? Am I missing something? Am I too focused on something? Do I not see the whole picture? And a lot of times, I would like to have that feedback. Because you think you know what you're doing and you think it's working...but you gotta have that other set of eyes . . . people telling you things...well, this is what is really happening . . . or, maybe, I was right.

Another staff member recounted her interest in observing another teacher develop students' relationships. Rather than receiving that insight through being observed, this teacher wanted to observe someone who she considered to be an exemplar in developing relationships in a classroom setting.

> I observed the art teacher one day . . . just because I really liked the relationship that he had with the students. He was very positive. And I wanted to see that in action, in a classroom. You know, I'd see him in the halls, and look at some of the work the kids had done, but I just wanted to see how he was building that relationship in his classroom with the kids.

While respondents did not note specifically resulting changes in practice, their interest in these areas would indicate that they are potential areas of change.

Intended Practice vs. Actual Implementation

Documents provided by the district to guide peer observations established the practice as one that should be part of the professional repertoire of all teachers (Appendix C). These descriptions were identified as specific to the professional behavior of teachers. Introductory documents provided to teachers noted research that demonstrated the increased effect of a school when teachers are provided opportunities to observe students and teachers in other classrooms. Reflection documents asked teachers to document "a couple things you can apply to your classroom/with your students." Categories of potential areas included engagement/learning (instruction),

processes and/or procedures (management), bell-ringer work and/or other assigned tasks (instructional or management), and classroom management and transitions (management). Another reflection document utilized by the district focused on assessment and technology, but a portion of the reflection centered on reporting what had been observed, along with a suggestion, probably for improvement. Teachers were asked to reflect on an assessment that they could use in their classroom, along with technology that they could use in their classroom, both which would indicate a focus on instruction. However, data collected indicated that this practice, while outlined by the district through reflection documents, wasn't implemented fully in the way it had been intended.

For Whom do Changes Occur?

Documents and interview data were also coded to indicate which member of the peer team would more likely experience a change in practice as a result of an observation.

Little Change as a Result of Being Observed

In interviews, members of the sample never reported any change in practice that was a result of them being observed. Members did discuss that they would appreciate feedback from peer observers; however, none noted specific feedback that they had ever gotten from an observer. Rather, members reported wondering what the observer thought of the lesson.

> If somebody observes me, I'll ask them, "Did you think that went smoothly or do you think I was losing the kids when I was talking about that, or do think there is a better way I could have done that?"

Looking forward to the next observation, another member of the sample noted the areas in which feedback would be requested. Again, this was an area in which this individual planned to ask for feedback, but not an area in which feedback had been received.

> Classroom management is a huge thing, especially for a first-year teacher, but engagement and motivation . . . what can I do, what should I be doing more of as far as getting students involved and motivated to do the work. If there is anything that they notice . . . if certain students work better certain ways . . . or just general ideas about what I can do better.

One member of the sample noted that, as a result of getting feedback from peers, she had begun to survey students to gather feedback on her own performance. This practice seemed to be the most significant change in practice that was the result of being observed. However, it would seem that the practice of surveying students for feedback was a result of an increasing level of comfort with receiving feedback, and a thirst for more perspective on professional practice, but not the result of a specific peer coaching relationship or suggestion from a peer. Another teacher noted the most important contribution made to her practice through the peer observation process was feeling a greater sense of connectedness to colleagues, while another reported learning more about making connections with students as his most impactful experience related to peer observation.

The process of reporting feedback to the observed teacher was described as something that most teachers would do, but weren't required to do so by the district's protocol. In discussions about providing feedback to peers, members of the sample

shared in a way that described what the staff members would do, rather than what they had done.

> I would probably approach it with an experience of my own. "Boy, I remember when something like that was happening to me." 'Cause you always want to put them at ease and not have them feel that they are the only ones . . . even if you have to make it up. Just so that you can make them feel like they are not the only ones. And then maybe try to brainstorm with them to get through that.

Does the Practice Actually Generate Feedback?

Teachers reported that no follow-up conference was required, but that most do engage in such a conversation.

More commonly, teachers recounted their experience of observing someone else rather than being observed. The feedback forms that were developed by the district as a means to guide the peer observation experience requested data about practices that were observed, and one even asked for suggestions for the observed teacher. However, no teacher noted that classroom changes had been made as a result of feedback received from an observation reflection document. In fact, no teacher noted ever receiving that feedback. Rather, the focus of the practice was on the observation, and teachers described what they would look for in an observation, along with reasons they had observed certain colleagues in the past.

The concept of learning as the observer rather than the observed was reported by multiple members of the sample. Observations were determined by individual teachers. The initiative was more about observing an area of interest than building a personal, professional relationship with one other colleague. Teachers described choosing whom they would observe by "hearing through the grapevine" who might be

quite skilled in a given area, or through more casual observations of other teachers interacting with students in the hallway, for example. It was through these means that teachers secured whom they should visit. Teachers referred to the practice as a way to see examples, and as a way to "get better" without having to tell someone what they are doing wrong. Being observed was even referred to as a compliment; teachers viewed that request as an indication that they must be doing something well. The crux of the relationship is evident in the title of the district's initiative: peer observation. The focus is on the teacher observing the practice, with less emphasis on providing feedback or providing some reflective questions following the observation. The value of the observation was made especially evident in the remarks by one member of the sample:

> I'll learn more by observing someone else. They have different ways of doing things, and I will be able to look at things from a student's perspective rather than always from the teacher's perspective.

Minimal data was collected that indicated change was occurring in the professional practice of members of the sample. However, the practice requires two roles: the observer and the observed. And the data suggested that of those two roles, teachers utilized the observer role more often to learn about—or at least think about—what they might do differently in their classroom, or what practices were validated and should be continued. Multiple members of the sample reported thinking of an observation as an opportunity to "steal ideas," or potentially, even identify classroom practices that they would not utilize in their own classroom.

Barriers and District Support

Members were quick to point out several qualities of both the building and system culture, and individual colleagues who foster a greater willingness to observe or to be observed. The district encouraged members of the staff, according to all members of the sample, to choose whom they wanted to observe, even if that meant observing in another building or in another district. Members viewed that as a high level of support from the district. Similarly, multiple members of the sample reported that their building has a culture where colleagues question, professionally, colleagues about practices in their classroom, and those conversations may take place in a more structured setting like a team meeting or in a more informal setting, such as the teachers' lounge. The high school building was described as a place where staff members had good relationships. In fact, one member of the sample noted that she felt as though, if she had an issue with her practice, she could ask her colleagues, and that was largely related to the trust she had in teachers within the building. She described the building as a "safe place" for teachers, while another noted the high level of communication within the building as a key component of growing the practice of peer observation.

Personal Qualities Sought in a Partner

As members considered the personal qualities they sought in a partner that would encourage the practice, it became clear that personal characteristics of the partner were very important. Members described a partner who was honest, who could communicate in a motivating and positive way, and who could be critical, yet do so in a kind way. Members sought partners who were competent in their own classrooms, could

listen carefully, and had an interest in collaboration. It was identifying such a partner that seemed to increase the likelihood that the observations would occur, and staff members indicated that the relationship was far more successful when a partner with these qualities was available to them.

The district's presentation of the concept of peer observations helped to alleviate concerns about the practice in its early stages, and setting a positive tone was described by one member of the sample.

> It wasn't [easy] at first. When they told us "you will be going into somebody else's classroom . . ., we all felt . . . everybody felt a little bit reluctant because I think they thought it would be kind of negative and critical. But again, the way it was laid out and the way it was explained . . . I think the administration set the tone for what we were supposed to get out of it. It was for our own benefit to become better teachers and coach each other . . . not to look for flaws in anybody else's teaching and point it out. But it took a while . . . for us to realize "that was kind of fun." I got something out of that. It was fun to watch somebody else do what I do, and know how I can do it better. It's like watching a cooking show on TV if you like to cook.

Yet another member focused on the culture that exists district-wide. The goal, she understood, was to improve student learning. To do that, though, a positive peer relationship needed to extend beyond the relationship between two teachers who were observing one another; rather, establishing and maintaining a culture where the practice is accepted and encouraged was pivotal to its success.

Getting on "The Wheel"

However, members of the sample equally described barriers to implementation, the greatest of which was time. One member described the position of teacher as "getting on the wheel." As responsibilities grow, and expectations increase, it can become easier for the peer observation practice to recede to a less important priority. While the district

was supportive of providing time to do the observations, one member of the sample conveyed that, by taking time to make an observation, time was lost on other responsibilities, whether that be writing lesson plans or checking papers. For example, one member of the sample described the lesson plans as something that needs to be done, and those kinds of responsibilities take priority over the practice of observing peers.

Just as personality was noted as a key contributor to developing the practice, one member described his personality as a trait that made the practice of peer observation more difficult. Describing himself as more "quiet," he agreed that peer observation and collaboration would make him a better teacher; yet, he was, by a nature, a listener first, and this particular teacher believed that made the work a bit more difficult. Another member described the practice as one that can challenge the professional efficacy of the observed teacher. "You know what you're doing, and you're confident, but then when somebody comes in to observe you . . ." His response indicated that another adult in the classroom potentially changed the dynamic that existed within the classroom setting.

Culture of Openness

Just as most noted the high level of communication within the building, members of the sample conveyed that some teachers may not be open to collaborating, sharing ideas, or communicating well with their colleagues. These staff members presented a barrier to the practice simply because the conversation between two peers would be limited. Similarly, members of the staff who would "pounce" on a colleague during an observation were described as a barrier to full implementation of the practice. No members of the sample reported experiencing that "pouncing" staff member, but when

barriers to the practice were described in the interview, members noted that that would negatively impact their work in peer observation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Results

Data was collected through a review of documents and semi-structured interviews, and following that data collection, responses were coded and examined for themes and patterns as part of this case study. English teachers at Jackson High School engaged in a practice that is more accurately described as peer observation, rather than peer coaching. Typically, teachers choose to observe one other peer during a single class period, and have been expected to do so once per semester. However, during the course of the study, teachers did not participate in an observation during the fall or spring semester, citing busy schedules and implementation of a 1:1 device during the fall as reasons for not observing a peer during that time. Teachers could choose to observe a colleague in their subject area, in their building, in another building in the district, or in a school district outside of the one in which they work. In most cases—though not all—members of the sample group chose to observe teachers within their own building during years prior to the school year in which this study focused. Teachers requested permission from colleagues to observe their classroom, and chose the focal point of their observation. The district provided documents to help teachers schedule the observation, and then follow up with the visit. Follow-up documentation included what was observed, and a reflection on how it could impact the observing teacher's practice; a suggestion for improvement that might lead to a change in the observed teacher's classroom was included in preceding years' district documentation, but was not included in the

documents of the school year in which this study occurred. Teachers were allowed to engage in a post-conference, or follow-up conference, though it was not required by the district. Some members of the sample reported following up with those who were observed during prior years' observations. No protocol was established by the district for the follow-up conversation. Training for teachers to participate in peer observation was limited. No members of the sample recalled any training specific to the practice of observing peers. Teachers reported most commonly planned observations that focused on technology, teacher-student relationships, and specific teaching activities or strategies. Specific examples of a change in practice as a result of an observation were very few. Requests for feedback from observed teachers typically were described by asking general reaffirming questions of the observing teacher: "So how do you think that went?" Teachers reported that colleagues in the building had a relatively high level of trust and willingness to communicate with their teaching peers, and membership in content teams or professional learning communities were examples of collaboration that teachers participated in at Jackson High School.

No Observations Occurred During Study

Perhaps the most striking and curious development to occur during the study was the lack of observations that occurred. While members of the sample readily discussed observations that had occurred during previous school years, no observations took place during the course of the study to the knowledge of the researcher. District leadership had confirmed the practice was occurring in the district, and members of the sample were able to share experiences from prior years, or in the case of a first-year teacher in the

district, an understanding of what was to occur. Responses during semi-structured interviews were consistent with expected responses from professionals who had some level of experience with a peers-observing-peers practice. Yet, after e-mail, phone, and face-to-face reminders to invite me to observe pre- and/or post-conferences, no such invitations from members of the sample were extended. Instead, I was informed that a busy fall semester had simply lessened the priority of the observations, but that the district had distributed the observation expectations. Even late into the spring, no contact from the sample members was made regarding their peer observations. Perhaps the foremost question regarding the practice is not if it is impactful; rather, the question for further discussion may be why it does not seem to be implemented consistently.

Barbknecht and Kieffer (2001) note the importance of peer coaching for more experienced teachers rather than new professionals, yet the intention to participate did seem to be influenced by years of service. Showers (1985) noted a potential stumbling block in implementation if members of the team are unfamiliar with the strategy or practice being implemented. In the case of this study, the district identified technology and assessment as potential focus areas, yet sample members seemed to have a much wider range of potential observation topics, and while technology was a topic mentioned as a past observation focus, few specific details surfaced about a consistent expectation of what successful technology implementation should look like. Rather than inviting a coach in for feedback, the relationship really focused on the learning of the observing teacher.

Was the district supportive of the practice? It would seem so. Did they have some expectation that it would occur? Yes. But here, the expectation did not seem to rise to the level of nonnegotiable practice, similar to the team time that was described by members of the study. Philosophical support for teachers observing teachers was evident in district documents, and some level of guidance—though it appeared to be a low level—was provided by the system as well. Interviews with building leadership was not included in data collection, though leadership did invite me to study there, knowing full well that for which I was observing. Perhaps the distinction here is that the district hoped the observations would occur, rather than expected that they would occur. No sample member relayed concern about administrative consequence if they did not participate in the observation.

A Culture Conducive to Coaching

Carr et al. (2005) discussed the importance of a culture conducive to peer coaching.

- Would I or do I trust this person?
- Can I and do I want to build a professional relationship with this person?
- Do we both have a willingness to look at our teaching practices?
- Are we both willing to take risks, expose ourselves to mistakes, and learn from them?
- Are we both willing to find time in our already filled days to devote to peer coaching?
- Are we both willing to learn and apply the coaching process with integrity?

In interviews across the sample, members readily described colleagues who were open to feedback and who were professionally trustworthy. Indicators of professional relationships such as collaboration, consistent time with one another, interdependent relationships, and professional conversations seemed to be incubated through the team time, while the practice of peer coaching/observation did not seem to be fostering professional relationships. Members of the sample sought out observations, but the expectation that a relationship existed or would develop as a result of the practice of observing and discussing was not evident, nor did that seem to be a priority for members of the sample. While both members of the observation practice may have had a willingness to look at teaching practices, no mechanism to ensure that such a discussion should occur seemed to exist. Teachers could follow up . . . or they may not. The relationship could continue with another observation later in the year . . . or it may not. In fact, no member of the sample discussed continued observations with a single partner, or multiple observations in the same classroom over time. A willingness to "expose ourselves to mistakes," also identified as key by Carr et al. (2005), was also difficult to identify within the culture of Jackson High School and the members of this study sample. Members who were observed were often thought of as "experts," or as individuals who were "good" at something, and the observing teacher was never required to share any sort of shortcoming with a partner. Ash and D'Auria (2013) note the willingness to nondefensively reflect on failure as critical. And yet, there appears to be very little incentive, motivation, or direction to reflect on failure or what Hattie (2012) would describe as "error."

The final two essential elements of culture as described by Carr et al. (2005) are time and implementation of the process with fidelity. Certainly, these two elements have yet to be fully developed within the system, or at least within the members of the sample. Time has not been set aside for the practice, and while members of the sample are observing, they have yet to commit to a protocol that truly generates reflective practice and rich, professional engagement.

No Formal Training

Carr et al. (2005) also note the importance of training for staff members in order for the peer coaching practice to be most effective. Members of the sample recalled no training to introduce them to the peer coaching. Rather, a recollection of a simple direction—we will observe each other—seemed to be the introduction provided by the district to all staff. The skills required of such a relationship, as defined by Carr et al. (2005), included listening without judgment, giving and receiving feedback, questioning techniques, using data collection techniques to focus observations, working with conflict, working with different learning styles, knowledge of adult learning, and using the peer coaching cycle. It should come as no surprise that several of these elements were missing in descriptions of the peer coaching practice shared by members of the sample. The most apparent absences were the need to give and receive feedback, questioning colleagues, and utilizing the peer coaching cycle. The process currently in place had some *similarities* to the practice defined by Gottesman (2000), but failed to follow the protocol as it was defined. Perhaps the practice in place was what the district had hoped would

develop, but members of the sample had little training in the skills identified in the research as critical to a successful peer coaching practice.

Lack of a Sense of Urgency/Motivation

Arnau et al. (2004) noted that the motivation of individual teachers to participate in a peer coaching relationship was critical to the success of the peer coaching practice in schools. They noted that motivating factors for teachers to participate included a desire to learn, experience with informal peer coaching, a need for meaningful feedback, opportunities to make choices throughout the program, and a dissatisfaction with traditional observations. However, one theme that quickly rose to the fore of the research of this project was a lack of urgency for members of the sample to observe a peer. In fact, initial contact with the sample group was made in October, and ultimately, no observation occurred during the fall or spring semester. Through descriptions of the protocol from members of the sample, it was clear that in the past, the district had requested an observation at least once per semester. However, that expectation did not hold true over the course of this study. Members of the sample were far more apologetic to me for not scheduling an observation than being eager to observe a peer for their own professional betterment. Peer coaching (or in this case, observation) seemed to be more of a required practice than a respected practice among members of the sample. Members described the core purpose of the observations as helping them become better teachers, yet time constraints, and a profession that was described as "getting on the wheel," alluding to the never-ending demands of the work, seemed to diminish the drive or ability of these professionals to make an observation of a peer. It is no secret that teachers have

many, many responsibilities, and those responsibilities must be prioritized. It seemed that while teachers spoke of appreciating the practice, it simply did not rise to the level of a high-priority task for members of the sample group.

Members indicated a desire to learn, and they had experienced the peer "observations" in the past. They had opportunities to make choices in who they observed, and when, and for what purpose. No data was collected regarding their dissatisfaction of traditional evaluation observations. However, the key to this particular sample of teachers may be in Arnau et al.'s (2004) belief that "a need for meaningful feedback" was a strong motivating factor in teachers' participation in the practice. It would seem that this practice focused far more on observing, rather than on providing feedback. Observed teachers did not see district feedback sheets offering suggestions to observed teachers, and a post-conference or "a talk after the visit" was not required as Gottesman's (2000) definition of the practice prescribed; members noted that they probably would engage in some sort of follow-up, especially out of a curiosity about "how it went." A protocol for generating practice-specific feedback was not in place. The practice, then, seemed to be more about observing than coaching, lacking the "meaningful feedback" that could result from a coaching relationship.

Peer Observation, not Peer Coaching

Initial contact with the district indicated that they were actively participating in a peer coaching protocol. However, over the course of interviews, and document reviews, it became apparent that a more accurate description of their practice was that of peer *observation*. Gottesman (2000) describes "peer watching" as a natural transition to peer

coaching. In this practice, teachers merely observe each other without any expectation or call for feedback. However, the practice described by members of the sample was a deeper review of professional practice than simple observation. Gottesman also describes a secondary transition stage in the development of a peer coaching protocol, a stage she defines as peer feedback. In this stage, teachers report what was observed during the observation without any coaching. The practice described by these teachers fell somewhere in-between. To be sure, members of this case study had, in years past, more than simply watched other teachers teach; however, the means to provide feedback—or observation notes—to the partner was not evident. Teachers noted that they sometimes met following a visit, though it was not required, and the feedback generally focused on the guiding question "So . . . how'd it go?" Lack of a prescribed means to share what was observed diminished the teachers' ability to gather or provide focused, objective feedback. As Hattie (2012) noted as well, there is a certain propensity to seek feedback that confirms a practice or belief, and if the guiding question "So . . . how'd it go?" is a widely used prompt to initiate feedback, additional structure may need to be added in order to ensure the motivation for the request seeks confirming, as well as disconfirming, feedback at least equally. No data was collected that would indicate the motivation of that follow-up question.

Similarly, an approach used by the district, and members of the sample, to determine the partner of the observation, was not in keeping with the definition of peer coaching utilized for the purpose of this study. Teachers chose whom they would like to observe, rather than allowing a teacher to invite a peer into the classroom. This variation

in protocol was widely accepted by members of the sample, yet this simple practice changed the dynamics of the relationship. In Gottesman's (2000) description of the practice, it was important that the coached teacher be in control of the observation; it was the coached teacher—or observed teacher—who determined what the peer would look for or report on. It was the coached teacher who would determine when that observation or visit would take place. In the case of this sample, the control for the visit was nearly solely on the shoulders of the observing teacher. To be sure, the teacher whose classroom would be visited had some input into when the visit might occur, but what was to be observed was largely determined by the visiting staff member. Again, as we consider the role of the peer coaching relationship, this seems to undermine the potential to empower the peer coaching partnership to take control of their own professional improvement. It would seem that, while in a pure peer coaching relationship, the greater purpose is to improve the practice of the observed teacher, members of this study's sample focused more squarely on using the observation to improve their own practice (e.g., to see examples of strategies or teacher practices). At Jackson High School, the member of the peer group that was most likely to experience a change to their practice was the teacher who was observing, and little instructional impact was noted by teachers as the result of being observed. One member of the sample noted that, to be asked to be observed, was really seen as a compliment. That sort of reinforcement can help to affirm a given practice, though it really does not serve to support the improvement of that practice.

The Role of Teams, PLCs, and Peer Coaches

Showers noted in her research (1985) that peer coaching relationships can help to build communities of teachers, just as they can provide a structure to improve specific instructional practices. The members of the sample saw value in these relationships, yet found a satisfying means to foster that need in other frameworks established by the district. Through the course of semi-structured interviews, much conversation focused on supporting teachers in their work with students. While members of the sample noted the value of observing peers, they seemed more engaged in the support that was provided through teaming or through their Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework. Nearly all staff members were trained in the PLC framework, and those new to the district were expected to attend institutes or workshops to become more familiar with the philosophies and practices that support a PLC school. It was evident in conversations, both with district leadership and with staff, that significant emphasis was placed on the PLC framework. All members of the sample noted either "team time" or PLC time in their interview, and district leadership noted a commitment to that learning as well. The district had, in several cases, allocated time during the day on a weekly basis to support team learning, and members of the sample noted that, if time was not provided during the course of the regular school day for teaming or PLCs, members of that team typically found another time to meet. Team time was described as an opportunity to plan together, share ideas, and agree upon how to approach a given topic, lesson, or unit.

> I think here, at Jackson High School, one of the best things we've done is teaming. Because you're bouncing those ideas off of each other. And, you know,

> sometimes you think this is a great idea, and then you bounce it off of somebody, and they start thinking of everything that maybe wouldn't work that you didn't think of, and I think that's really good that you can use . . . or maybe they've had experiences with it or something . . . so I think our teaming is probably our best thing [to change instruction].

Later in the interview, the teacher noted that, in courses where she does not have a team to work with, she has found another staff member, who teaches a similar course, and they use one another like a teammate. This relationship seems to focus very little on observation of classroom experiences; rather, the relationship seems to focus on planning and choosing content. This structure certainly verifies that teachers at Jackson High School, in the English department, are open to collaboration and see the value of peer-to-peer conversations about teaching and learning, but they do not seem to take the next step toward observation of the practice of teaching in a classroom setting, and then providing or asking for feedback on the application of the strategies or the delivery of content that was discussed in a teaming setting. The culture that exists—the willingness to work with peers—sets the stage for more structured peer observations and coaching relationships, but that next step will be a definite change in current practice.

It would seem that the role of teams within the sample group has something in common with the functions of a peer coaching relationship. However, potentially three of the five functions described by Joyce and Showers (1985) are not met through this relationship. The teams do provide a certain level of companionship and personal facilitation (support), but they lack a formal mechanism to provide technical feedback, analysis of the application, or an avenue to determine how best to adapt a strategy to students.

City et al.'s (2009) focus on improving the collaborative culture and efficacy of school districts is a critical consideration of this theme as well. She identifies learning as an individual and collective activity, and truly, members of the sample would hold that same belief; they learn as individuals, and as members of a team. Her team's call for building trust to enhance the learning was echoed by members of the sample. Across all interviews, responses noting the level of trust in their colleagues were common. But City et al. (2009) also call for a practice of doing the work, reflecting on the work, and critiquing the work, and it is in the call for critiquing the work that members of the sample have yet to realize. Teams and PLCs provide that vehicle, but coaching relationships would more clearly recognize the power of collaboration that City et al. (2009) define.

Reasons to Observe

The district noted, on documents designed to help members of the sample reflect on the observation, specific areas of focus for teachers to consider, and these areas of focus—formative and summative assessment along with technology use—were both noted by district leadership as areas of focus for the system. However, the focus of observations identified by teachers was less about the prescribed topics of the district. To be sure, members of the sample noted technology on multiple occasions as the focus of their observation, but others mentioned teacher style, teacher-to-student relationships, and other strategies that they would like to observe. This practice soundly supports the peer coaching model of teacher-defined areas of focus noted by Gottesman (2000), but typically, the areas of focus described by members of the sample were quite

broad. Oftentimes, sample members noted hearing that a colleague was particularly "good" at something, and a desire to see how that teacher presented in class or to see a strategy being implemented. With that said, one member of the sample found a completely different focus for their upcoming observation:

> I'm going to be looking into this a bit more, but I was thinking of observing either someone in the middle school (since my oldest will be going there next year) or at the Catholic school where they are currently going. Will that throw off your project? Would it be better for me to observe someone here at the high school?

My response followed:

> That's no trouble at all, (teacher name). Wherever you'd like to do your observation is fine with me. If I observe your pre- or post-conference, I'll ask your partner if they are willing to allow me to be a part of that portion of the observation. If they aren't, that's okay. Let me know when you've decided, and I can reach out to them.

Again, the e-mail exchange indicates a potentially non-instructional reason for observation that most likely would not meet the district's expectation for increasing collaboration among teachers.

With that said, it is interesting to compare the district's stated intention or overall goal—"to establish a culture of self-study that stimulates continuous inquiry, reflection, information sharing, and improvement"—with sample members' intentions. Many sample members noted observation as a means to confirm their own practice, but by and large, most responses about reasoning for observations held true to the district's intention. Continuous inquiry was demonstrated by sample members who talked about hearing about someone who was skilled in a given area; their interest was piqued in learning from an expert. The practice also seemed to spark some level of personal reflection; that reflection was driven, in most cases, by the observing teacher, but still, it

did seem to foster some reflection. Information sharing was also evident; staff members could learn from others who were willing to be observed. And finally, improvement. Each teacher demonstrated a willingness to improve, and coaching could potentially provide that individual a means to help the improvement occur.

Table 3

Comparison of Coaching Objectives

Jackson High School	Joyce and Showers
Stimulating continuous inquiry	Providing technical feedback
Reflection	Analyzing application
Information sharing	Personal facilitation
Improvement	Adapting to students
	Companionship

The goals of the peer observation protocol practiced by members of the sample are somewhat more general than those defined by Joyce and Showers (1985), or at the very least, less clearly defined in materials that I reviewed as part of the study. However, I believe three of the four stated goals of the district are occurring; no evidence was found that teachers' instruction or professional capacity improved as a result of their observations, and part of that could be attributed to a less formal structure for the practice and no formal training for staff. However, it could be argued that the district is getting

mostly what it intended out of the current peer observation system. To what level those four intentions are occurring is most definitely debatable.

Time

It is no secret that time is a resource that is extremely valuable in the teaching practice. Members of the sample group continually referenced the need for more time. More time to grade papers. More time to work with students. More team time. More time to plan. More time to learn about technology. However, even with conversations about finding time with the team, time to observe colleagues did not seem to be a sought-after resource. The district was supportive of teachers' efforts, up to and including covering classes during observations, but through conversations with teachers, teachers most commonly commented that they did not have time for observations, rather than that teachers were looking for more time to do the observations. The difference is critical.

Planning Versus Reflecting

As was noted, team time seemed to be a model that was widely accepted as the most important means to improve or change teaching practice. Throughout the course of interviews, members of the sample talked about the importance of team time for the purpose of making decisions about future practice, ranging from who would teach a given class to what content would be used for a given lesson. It would seem that planning—in a teaming atmosphere—was of greater value to teachers in terms of impact on practice than was reflecting on the work that was done in a coaching setting. That bears consideration. Does that indicate that teachers—at least those in this sample—believe

that they can do the work currently, as long as they have an opportunity to plan, but have a lesser need to directly reflect on their practice? Joyce and Showers (1985) note several functions of peer coaching, including provision of technical feedback and analyzing application of a teaching strategy. Seemingly, the peer coaching model as it is currently implemented does not provide such opportunities. Potential conclusions include the following: Members of the sample believe that, given time to plan, their instruction is at a level where improvement, progress, or change is less imperative. All members of the sample agreed that they are interested in improving their practice, but their use of time would indicate that it is more important to plan—with their existing professional capacity—than it is to reflect on possible areas that they would like to improve upon. As we consider possible means to motivate teachers to participate in the practice, I believe the motivation to survive "on the wheel" outweighs the motivation to "build a better wheel." We may be satisfied, or simply not have the energy or expertise to improve.

Implications for Future Study

Is this Evaluation?

Earlier, it was noted that I attempted to establish a peer coaching protocol as a building principal, and recently, as a result of the Iowa Legislature's mandate to establish a peer review protocol as part of a three-year cycle of teacher evaluation, we developed a process in our own district to facilitate teachers observing other teachers. In preparing staff for the practice, three key words were central to the work: trust, reflection, and collective capacity. Because the practice was linked by Iowa Code to teacher evaluation,

the district included language in our master agreement to give some guidance to the practice.

> Peer Review:
>
> Peer review is a confidential process between the peer group of teachers through which peer collaborate, in and out of the classroom, with a focus on developing skills that will enable them to enrich their professional work lives and increase student learning.
>
> Peer review will be conducted by non-probationary teachers during those years they are not on cycle for administrative evaluation by a peer group of teachers.
>
> - Teachers shall self-select their peer reviewer or group of peer reviewers. All eligible teachers must be a part of a peer group. In the event that a teacher is unable to find a reviewer they will be assigned to a group by the building administrator.
> - Peer groups may consist of departments, grade level, teaming, curriculum groups, or any other group that is agreed upon by the group and building administrator.
> - At the request of a peer group member, a provision for mediation will allow the relationship to be modified or dissolved. All teachers impacted by the dissolution of a peer group must join or re-form a new group to complete the peer review process.
> - The peer group shall review all of the peer group members.
> - Peer group reviews shall be formative and shall be conducted on an informal, collaborative, and supportive basis that is focused on assisting each peer group member in achieving a component(s) of the teacher's individual professional development plan.
> - Peer group reviews shall not be the basis for recommending that the teacher participate in an intensive assistance program, and shall not be used to determine the compensation, promotion, layoff, or termination of a teacher, or any other determination affecting a teacher's employment status.
> - Documentation of meeting times shall be provided to building administrator.
>
> Teachers will receive adequate training prior to conducting a peer review and shall receive release time if required. In the event that teachers are asked to work beyond the hours defined by the collective bargaining agreement, teachers shall be paid at their per diem rate (Wapsie Valley Schools, 2013, pp. 10-11).

Allan and LeBlanc (2005) note the differences between traditional performance evaluations and peer coaching, and the blending of the philosophical tenets of coaching with the cultural implications of evaluation in the state of Iowa will be important to monitor.

Peer Coaching + Evaluation = Peer Review?

This process, while similar to the peer coaching practice described earlier by Gottesman, blends the concept of peer coaching with the concept of evaluation, yielding the title "peer review." Common contract language seeks to remove the practice from events often associated with evaluation, including promotion or intensive assistance programs. Similarly, it does encourage teachers to self-select partners, as was practiced at Jackson High School by members of the sample, and the intention of the practice is that peer coaches' relationships are similar to that of a team, rather than that of a passing, one-time observation.

Key to continued work with this practice in Iowa will be the balance between the concept and philosophy of peer coaching—which is to be non-evaluative—and the practice of evaluation, to which peer review is partially connected. Perhaps the practice was mandated as an element of teacher evaluation because that was a portion of Iowa Code over which legislators had control, but there is a certain philosophical dissonance between the two practices that should be carefully monitored. Can the growth-driven, intrinsically motivating practice of peer coaching, implemented with a high degree of fidelity, flourish under the banner (and contract language) of formal teacher evaluation? This bears observing. Will teachers be given the freedom to build

relationships with a peer to the extent that they will trust one another not to evaluate in a practice that is couched with the purpose of evaluation? Again, this "balancing act" will be critical to monitor.

Guiding Principles of a New Practice

In a sense, this practice of peer review introduced in my own school district more closely resembles peer coaching, and considerations for future research are abundant in a practice our own district is attempting to facilitate. Critical to the process was encouraging members of the staff to build trust in their peers through the practice. Several other guiding principles were important to this as well.

- Begin with a pre-conference, and end with a post-conference.
- Ask questions that foster reflection.
- Observe what is there. If you don't see it, it isn't there.
- Don't praise or scold your partner. Provide objective, non-evaluative feedback.
- Challenge your partner's thinking, and expect your peer to do the same of your thinking.
- Think about who is doing the most talking and listening and different points during the post-observation.
- Don't expect to hear that your lesson was poorly done . . . or well done. Expect to hear what was observed.

Asking reflective questions. An important element of our peer review process was the practice of asking reflective questions of our peers (Appendix E). It will be imperative for educators to be able to engage in critical conversations about their

teaching practice without the sense that one member of the team has somehow assumed a supervisory role. Ash and D'Auria (2013) clearly identify that potential pitfall. Time must be spent determining the role of the observation. Is the purpose to provide documentation of what was observed? Is the role to generate reflection through reflective questioning? Or is the partnership designed to elicit critical feedback—a more direct assessment of the observed lesson—from the observing partner? Simply put, our educational system has not prepared teachers to be willing recipients of such feedback, especially from peers; perhaps a stepped approach, which involves simply observing as an initial step, with observing with questioning as a logical second step, and eventually, developing a relationship in which teachers challenge each other in a search for the best possible practice is a safe, nonthreatening means to cultivate that practice. Further study into teacher requests for feedback, and their desire to utilize feedback as a means to support existing practices, rather than utilizing feedback to challenge existing practices, may be a critical distinction to establish as part of the learning associated with giving and receiving feedback.

PLCs are designed to foster conversations that produce the best possible strategies, and peer coaching can generate similar conversations, but much preparation needs to occur prior to teachers engaging in the process. Teachers are adept at asking questions of students, but less comfortable challenging or asking questions of colleagues.

Focus on students. Another important consideration in the practice of peer coaching has its roots in Richard Elmore's instructional rounds practice (City et al.,

2009). These researchers insist that the instructional rounds process focus on the task in which the student is engaged. Could it be that peer coaching is a vehicle that provides teachers an opportunity to more squarely focus on student tasks, as much as it focuses on the practice of the teacher? Oftentimes, as a classroom teacher, I delivered a lesson that was outstanding in my own mind, yet I am far less certain that the students were engaged in the task I was attempting to facilitate at a level that fostered deep thinking or learning. As teachers, we get "wrapped up in the delivery" at times, and miss the impact we have had on a student. When a member of my team or my partner observes me, can I ask them to focus solely on the task I have provided? Most certainly so, but I believe that at times, we have become so focused on the delivery that we are missing an opportunity to evaluate the learning that results from the lesson or teaching. A peer partner, reviewer, or coach can be the critical eye on the task and the student to provide feedback to an observed teacher. One member of the sample group at Jackson High School said this well. She noted that she believed she would learn more from observing someone else, rather than being observed, because "they have different ways of doing things, and I'm able to look more from the students' perspective to what they are doing as opposed to always seeing it from the teacher's side of it." This insight can be a critical addition to the research and practice of peer coaching. To be able to view teaching—and learning—from the perspective of a student may be a valuable tool in motivating teachers to engage in the process.

Motivating Teachers to Participate

The concept of collaboration is becoming more acceptable among classroom teachers, as was evidenced by members of the sample group's praise for team time and PLC time. However, the practice of observing a peer has yet to reach that level. Could it be that teachers are able to talk about their own practice, and share that in a safe, team setting, without really revealing what is happening inside the classroom? To be sure, it is difficult to objectively observe the skill or effectiveness of a lesson when that description is provided from the perspective of the teacher who delivered said lesson. When meeting in a classroom after school, with the lesson aside, the conversations become far less personal, and the real events can become blurred. Only student assessment data can tell the story of performance. I wonder if team time is a safe way for teachers to collaborate, without requiring them to make themselves—or their practice, more appropriately—totally transparent. With that in mind, I wonder if the PLC is a gateway to peer observations, rather than the other way around. It would seem that teachers may be more receptive to a discussion of a summary of their work, or a description of their work, rather than an actual observation of it in real time.

English teachers at Jackson High School believe in the power of teaming; that was clear to me. However, they did not seem to find value in observing. Perhaps that was due to a schedule that fostered a team meeting once per week, which provided ample ground for building trust among teammates, yet the observation was to occur only once per semester, or less. To build a trusting relationship in what could be a single visit is nearly impossible, and so it seems that the structure or frequency of an observation versus

a team meeting may be negatively impacting teachers' willingness or interest in participating. With trust comes a sense of accountability to one another, a sense that someone else is relying on me to be at my best for them, and I am not sure as adult learners we can manufacture that kind of bond in a single experience. In a love story, produced for the silver screen, main characters can form an inseparable bond as a result of a single traumatic experience, and yet, I do not believe that a single observation can yield such powerful results.

Blending Peer Observation and Teams/PLCs

The PLC is designed as a process or framework through which, in part, the practices that are achieving the best possible results with students are shared and implemented by teachers across the collaborative team. This is a difficult level at which teams can learn to function, though completely possible. This study was not designed to, nor did it spend a great deal of time, investigating the practices, efficiency, and effectiveness of teams or the PLC among sample members. However, cursory conversations, as was mentioned earlier, led me to believe that PLCs or team time was focused more squarely on planning than reviewing practices and data. I believe a call for greater, more focused reflection may be critical to the work of teachers; peer coaching is a practice that cultivates, naturally, reflection. For example, if two or three teachers plan together once per week about what is *going* to happen in their classroom, rather than reflect on what *has* happened in their classroom, there is strong potential for the team's performance—and students' performance—to plateau. If we do what we've always done, we should have no expectation that we'll get results any different than what we

always have. The danger with a consistent reliance on teaming is that there may not be enough reflection, and rather than challenging teachers to improve, we are fostering an approach that allows hard-working teachers to simply "simmer in their own practice" without providing opportunities for measured change in practice that ultimately leads to progress. That distinction is critical. Learning by doing is important. Learning by reflecting is imperative. Educators should continually seek to ensure that time for thoughtful reflection on practice is included in whatever collaborative structure is implemented. Coaching nurtures more reflection—thinking about what has happened—than does planning—thinking about what will happen.

Beginning with the work of Joyce and Showers, proponents of peer coaching herald the practice as critical in the implementation of new strategies, imperative in the refinement of existing practices, and an invaluable resource to provide teachers support. However, the practice is used sparingly at best, and not at all in many districts. Continued discussion of the value of teacher-to-teacher feedback, collaborative cultures, and the protocol of peer coaching will continue to inform districts seeking to facilitate professional capacity among their teaching staff.

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APPENDIX A

PEER OBSERVATION SCHEDULING SHEET 2013-2014

Peer Observation Scheduling Sheet 2013-2014

Please complete the form to schedule your Peer Observation.
* Required

School Year *
2013-2014

Observer's Name *

Peer Observation *
Observation 1

Grade Level/ Building *

Subject and/ or Specific Teacher *

Areas of Possible Observation *
- Engagement/ learning of students
- Processes and / or procedures of the students in class
- Kids doing bell work and/ or other assigned task
- Classroom Management and transitions
- Other:

Sub needed *
Yes

Submit

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APPENDIX B

PEER OBSERVATION REFLECTION 2013-2014

PEER OBSERVATION REFLECTION 2013-2014

* Required

OBSERVER *

DATE OF OBSERVATION *

TEACHER OBSERVED *

CLASS OBSERVED *

OBSERVATION NUMBER *

- [ ] First
- [ ] Second

FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT OBSERVED *
CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

- [ ] GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS
- [ ] COOPERATIVE LEARNING
- [ ] TIERED ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENTS
- [ ] DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION
- [ ] MODELING
- [ ] GUIDED PRACTICE
- [ ] INDEPENDENT PRACTICE
- [ ] SUMMARIZING ACTIVITIES
- [ ] ACTIVITIES TO ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE AND MAKE CONNECTIONS TO NEW LEARNING.

- [ ] CLASS POLLS
- [ ] TICKET OUT THE DOOR
- [ ] LEARNING LOG
- [ ] STUDENT RECORD KEEPING
- [ ] Other:

FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE OBSERVATION *

	TEACHER DID NOT USE FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS DURING OBSERVATION	TEACHER USED FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS BUT DID NOT ADJUST INSTRUCTION	TEACHER USED FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TO ADJUST INSTRUCTION DURING CLASS
MARK WHAT WAS OBSERVED	○	○	○

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT THAT I CAN USE IN MY CLASSROOM *

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION *

	TEACHER DID NOT USE TECHNOLOGY DURING INSTRUCTION	TEACHER USED TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE INSTRUCTION	STUDENTS USED TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE LEARNING
MARK WHAT WAS OBSERVED	○	○	○

TECHNOLOGY USED IN THE CLASSROOM *

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

- [ ] iPADS
- [ ] CELL PHONES
- [ ] SMARTBOARDS
- [ ] COMPUTER
- [ ] YOUTUBE
- [ ] GOOGLE DOCS
- [ ] SLIDEROCKET OR POWERPOINT
- [ ] QR CODES
- [ ] MOODLE
- [ ] ONLINE BLOGS
- [ ] WIKISPACES
- [ ] Other:

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT TECHNOLOGY THAT I CAN USE IN MY CLASSROOM *

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APPENDIX C

PEER LEARNING/CLASSROOM OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITY

Peer Learning/Classroom Observation Opportunity

Introduction: Professional development is best promoted by giving teachers the opportunity to collaborate at the building level. Research has shown that schools are more effective when teachers have opportunities for observing students and teachers in other classrooms. This experience provides us opportunities to discuss ideas, challenges, and implementation of strategies that improve student learning. The Jackson School District would like to provide you with this opportunity.

District Goal:

1. To provide this learning opportunity to every teacher at least once each semester during the 2011-2012 school year

Purpose:

2. To enhance the professional growth of each teacher
- To improve student learning

Who is involved:

3. All teachers who are employed by the Jackson School District

Areas you <u>may</u> want to observe:

1. Engagement/Learning of students
2. Processes and/or Procedures of students in class
3. Students doing bell-ringer work and/or other assigned tasks
4. Classroom Management and Transitions
5. Other areas of focus: _____

The Process:

- Complete the "Peer Learning/Classroom Observation Scheduling Information Sheet" and <u>return a copy to your building principal for discussion</u>.
- Contact the teacher of the classroom you would like to observe and set a time and date for the observation.
- Complete the observation which should last 30 – 45 minutes.

- During the observation, fill out the "Peer Learning/Classroom Observation Form".
- After the observation, take time to reflect and fill out the "Peer Learning/Classroom Observation Reflection Sheet" and return a copy to your building principal.
- Implement what you have learned.

Peer Learning/Classroom Observation

Scheduling Information Sheet

Observer's
Name_____

Please list below what grade level, subject, specific teacher and/or area of focus for your observation:

Grade
Level/Building_____

Subject and/or Specific
Teacher_____

Areas of Possible Observation with the Focus on Student Learning … Engagement/learning of students, Processes and/or Procedures of students in class, Kids doing bell work and/or other assigned tasks, Classroom Management and Transitions, Other areas of focus centered on student learning _____

Area(s) of Focus:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Will you need a sub? _____Yes _____No

Please return a copy of this form to your building principal

Peer Learning/Classroom Observation Form

Observer'sName _____

Teacher's Classroom Being Observed

_____

Date, Time/Period of
Observation_____

Grade Level/Curriculum Area
Observed_____

Areas of Possible Observation…

- Engagement/Learning of students
- Processes and/or Procedures of students in class
- Students doing bell-ringer work and/or other assigned tasks
- Classroom Management and Transitions
- Other areas of focus:

  _____

Notes and Observations

Peer Learning/Classroom Observation Reflection Sheet

Observer's Name _____

Teacher's Classroom that was Observed _____

Date, Time/Period of Observation_____

Grade Level/Curriculum Area Observed_____

Areas of Possible Observation…

- Engagement/Learning of students
- Processes and/or Procedures of students in class
- Students doing bell-ringer work and/or other assigned tasks
- Classroom Management and Transitions
- Other areas of focus: _____

What are some of your learnings from this experience? From these learning's, what are a couple things you can apply to your classroom/with your students/etc.?

After completing this reflection sheet please return a copy of it to your building principal

APPENDIX D

PEER LEARNING/OBSERVATIONS

Peer Learning/Observation

The Webster City School District would like to once again extend to teachers the opportunity to collaborate and learn alongside their peers. Research has shown that schools are more effective when teachers have opportunities for observing their peers, helping one another, etc… The overall goal is to establish a culture of self-study that stimulates continuous inquiry, reflection, information sharing, and improvement. Through the peer observation process, teachers can periodically examine and reflect on where they stand in relation to their goals for improving student learning.

Who is involved:

- All teachers who are employed by the Webster City School District

Purpose:

- To enhance the professional growth of each teacher (focusing on technology integration/instructional strategies that align with Common Core Standards/Next Generation Assessments, etc…)
- To improve student learning

Process:

- Please complete the attached form to provide the scheduling committee information on what grade level, building, subject, specific instructional strategies, and/or another school district you are interested in observing.
- Observations will take place during the month of April.
- Return completed form back by Friday, March 8, 2013.

You may observe in the following locations:

---

*Within our building

---

*Within our district (elementary or high school)

---

*Within a school district outside of Webster City (within an hour or so of Webster City)

APPENDIX E

WAPSIE VALLEY SCHOOLS PEER REVIEW PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Wapsie Valley Schools' Peer Review Planning Documents

District Mission Statement
Guaranteed Learning for Every Student.

Core Instructional Values	**Professional Learning Community Guiding Questions**
Through a collaborative environment we: • Focus on learning. • Communicate clear learning targets. • Provide timely feedback based on evidence o learning. • Ensure a responsive system based on results.	• What is it we expect them to learn? • How will I know when they have learned it? • How will we respond when they don't learn? • What will we respond when they already know it?

Individual Career Development Plan Goal

What do I want my peer reviewer to observe in my classroom?
(Written in the form of a question. This should be a question that you, as the teacher, don't know the answ to. Are my students…? Can my students communicate…? When I use this strategy…?)

As you describe what you'd like your peer to observe, consider the following:
1. How does this observation inform my practice and progress toward my ICDP?
2. Is my description clear enough that someone else could read the question, come to my classroom, observe me, and give me feedback?
3. Where is the focus of the observation? On the students or the teacher?
4. Will the observation data be recorded through a checklist or a series of tally marks? If it is, will that data inform my practice in a way that can result in thoughtful reflection about my practice?

Date/Time of Pre-observation Conference:
Date/Time of Observation:
Date/Time of Post-observation Conference:

Address the following topics during the pre-observation conference.
What will be observed? What question are you asking of the peer coach?
What will be happening in the classroom when the peer coach arrives in the classroom?
What is the learning target/expectation/standard for the day's lesson?
What kinds of evidence might the peer coach see that provides insight into the observed teacher's question?
How will you be assessing the students' progress toward the learning target or expectation?
Post-Observation Conference

Post-Observation Conference

The *observed teacher* should bring the following artifacts to the post-observation conference:

1. A copy of an assessment you will or did use to assess the students' progress toward the learning target/expectation/standard for the observed lesson.
2. A copy of student work samples/products from the lesson that was observed.

The peer coach should bring the following to the post-observation conference:

1. Bring a copy of the data that you collected. Be prepared to report what you saw as it applies to the question your partner asked of you.
2. Prior to the post-observation conference, prepare a list of probing questions for your partner.

The following **questions are required** as part of the post-observation conference:

1. What was the learning target for this lesson?
2. How did students perform on the assessment of the learning target for this lesson? If you have yet to assess them, how do you think they'll perform, and on what do you base your prediction?
3. What feedback did you provide to your students about their progress during or after the lesson?
4. Talk about how your next lesson on this learning target looked and sounded based on student progress during this lesson.
5. Describe the level of learning required of students to complete the work that you asked of them during the lesson.

For the peer coach (observer): What non-evaluative data was collected by the peer coach that focused on the question asked by the observed teacher? (The peer coach should share their observations. The observed teacher is asked to listen carefully--without denying, confirming, or questioning what the peer coach is sharing.)

The peer coach should script a series of probing questions based on the data collected, while maintaining focus on the question asked by the observed teacher. The purpose of these questions is to create a dialogue between peers.

Final questions: What is one critical insight you've gained as part of this conversation, and what will you change, seek additional support in, or continue in your instructional practice as a result of this experience? Commit to your partner and discuss potential sources of support for the observed teacher.

APPENDIX F

PEER OBSERVATION REFLECTION

PEER OBSERVATION REFLECTION

UPDATED 11/8/11
* Required

OBSERVER*

DATE OF OBSERVATION*

TEACHER OBSERVED *

CLASS OBSERVED *

FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE OBSERVATION*

	TEACHER DID NOT USE FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS DURING OBSERVATION	TEACHER USED FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS BUT DID NOT ADJUST INSTRUCTION	TEACHER USED FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TO ADJUST INSTRUCTION DURING CLASS
MARK WHAT WAS OBSERVED	○	○	○

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT OBSERVED*
CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

- [ ] GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS
- [ ] COOPERATIVE LEARNING
- [ ] TIERED ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENTS
- [ ] DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

- [ ] MODELING
- [ ] GUIDED PRACTICE
- [ ] INDEPENDENT PRACTICE
- [ ] SUMMARIZING ACTIVITIES
- [ ] ACTIVITIES TO ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE AND MAKE CONNECTIONS TO NEW LEARNING.
- [ ] CLASS POLLS
- [ ] TICKET OUT THE DOOR
- [ ] LEARNING LOG
- [ ] STUDENT RECORD KEEPING
- [ ] Other: _____

ONE FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION*

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT THAT I CAN USE IN MY CLASSROOM*

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION*

	TEACHER DID NOT USE TECHNOLOGY DURING INSTRUCTION	TEACHER USED TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE INSTRUCTION	STUDENTS USED TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE LEARNING
MARK WHAT WAS OBSERVED	○	○	○

TECHNOLOGY USED IN THE CLASSROOM*
CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

- [x] IPADS
- [x] CELL PHONES
- [ ] SMARTBOARDS
- [ ] COMPUTER
- [ ] YOUTUBE
- [ ] GOOGLE DOCS
- [ ] SLIDEROCKET OR POWERPOINT
- [ ] QR CODES
- [ ] MOODLE
- [ ] ONLINE BLOGS
- [ ] WIKISPACES
- [ ] Other:

ONE TECHNOLOGY SUGGESTION*

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT TECHNOLOGY THAT I CAN USE IN MY CLASSROOM*

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APPENDIX G

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Jackson High School English Teachers:

My name is Chad Garber, and I'm currently working on my Ed.D. at the University of Northern Iowa. As I work toward completion of that degree, I've designed a research project for my dissertation, and I'd like your help. The title of my project is "Does the presence of a peer coaching relationship impact the instructional practice of high school English teachers?"

I was a high school English teacher in northeast Iowa for eight years before beginning work as a 7-12 principal, and now am a superintendent at Wapsie Valley Schools in Fairbank, Iowa. I'm interested in how peer coaching changes the practice of educators, and I'd like to focus on English teachers, specifically.

In order to answer my research question, I'd like to work with you as members of your secondary school language arts department, if you are willing to participate. As part of the research, I'd interview you regarding your peer coaching experience, both as coach and as the observed, look at documents that you utilize to facilitate the process, and observe peer coaching conferences of the teams that involve one or more secondary English/language arts teacher, again, with your permission.

I'd like to meet with your team personally, for a few minutes, at the high school in Jackson to share my project with you. At that time, I would review the consent documentation as well. Later this week, or early next week, I'll follow up with a phone call to you to see if you're willing to sit down with me to talk about the project.

The research is set to occur this fall, 2013. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you will have an opportunity to remove yourself from the study at any time, should you so choose.

If you have any questions, please let me know and I'll do my best to answer them; you can reach me on my cell phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or via e-mail at

cgarber@wapsievalleyschools.org. I look forward to visiting with you in person, and at that time, you can determine if my research into peer coaching is something in which you're interested in participating.

Kind regards,

Chad Garber

APPENDIX H

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR POTENTIAL SAMPLE MEMBERS

Chad Garber
Dissertation Research Recruitment Talking Points
UNI Student #: xxxxxx

The following are key talking points I'll employ in conversations to recruit participants for my study:

- Introduction of myself
  - Chad Garber
  - Formerly a high school English teacher, 7-12 principal, and currently a superintendent in Iowa
- Introduction of research question
  - Does the presence of a peer coaching relationship impact the instructional practice of high school English teachers?
- Methodology: How will I answer the question?
  - Review of peer coaching documents that participants use to facilitate the process
  - Observation of peer coaching pre- and post-conferences
  - Interview of peer coaches and partners
- Protecting your privacy
  - No personally identifiable information will be published
  - Observations and interviews will be recorded, but I (the principal investigator) will be the only person to review those recordings
  - You can always opt out of a recorded observation or interview
- Scheduling
  - 1st semester peer coaching experience
  - Interviews after school
  - Pre- and post-conference observations at your convenience
- Benefits to you
  - Contribution to literature regarding peer coaching and collaboration
  - No participant will be paid or receive any compensation
- Opting Out
  - At any time, you may choose to "opt out" of the project

- Providing your consent to participate
    - Completion of consent form
    - Do you have any questions?
- Contact me with any questions
    - Chad Garber
        - xxx-xxx-xxxx (cell)
        - xxx-xxx-xxxx (home)
        - xxx-xxx-xxxx (office)
        - cgarber@wapsievalleyschools.org