

## Peer Coaching – Principles, Practices and Processes

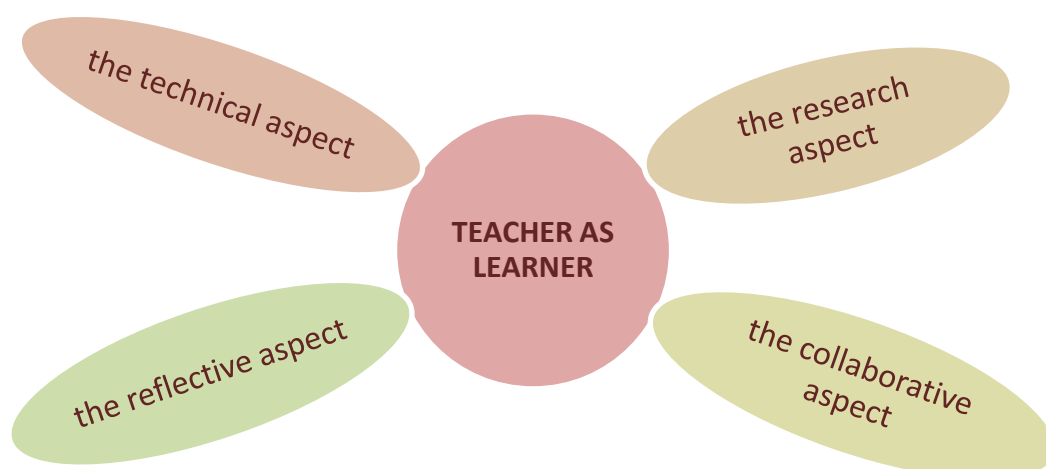
**Peer coaching** is a voluntary, collaborative process in which two or more professional colleagues explore and reflect on their teaching practice, and refine, expand, and enhance their knowledge about the teaching profession.

There is a variety of approaches to peer coaching. One type is designed to help teachers transfer into classroom practice new skills they have learned in a workshop or training session. This type of coaching usually follows training in specific strategies or methods, and is directly related to the workshop or training content. Other approaches to peer coaching involve colleagues working collaboratively around issues unrelated to a specific training. This type of peer coaching relies on a teacher-specified focus. Here the approach is intended to increase professional sharing, to refine teaching practices, and to enhance teacher reflection.

The choice of the focus of peer coaching is limitless. It may include instructional strategies, curriculum content, classroom management practices, specific students, particular problems, or instructional skills such as questioning techniques or process skills to generate higher-order thinking.

Peer coaching process is often used when conducting an action research. In this situation, a teacher formulates a hypothesis about one or other aspect of his/her classroom practice and develops a plan to test it, among other things by asking a colleague to observe and take notes. Later, the colleagues discuss and analyze the data.

In peer coaching, the focus is on the **teacher as learner**. Fullan, Bennett, and Rolheiser-Bennett (1990) describe four aspects of the teacher as learner—the technical, the reflective, the research, and the collaborative—which are played out in a variety of coaching experiences. The mastery of a technical repertoire increases instructional certainty; reflective practice enhances clarity, meaning and coherence; research fosters investigation and exploration; collaboration enables one to receive and give ideas and assistance.



Peer coaching has nothing to do with evaluation. It is not intended as a remedial activity or strategy. One teacher, reflecting on the support that peer coaching offers before the formal evaluation process, described it as “a dress rehearsal before the final performance.” Another spoke of peer coaching as “a time when you can take risks and try out new ideas, instructional strategies, or different approaches to the curriculum and discuss the results with a trusted colleague.”

### The principles of peer coaching

Peer coaching	Evaluation
voluntary	obligatory
confidential	public
reciprocal	non-reciprocal
continuous	singular
formative	summative
non-hierarchical	hierarchical
non-judgmental	judgmental
forward looking	backward looking

### The process of peer coaching

The peer coaching process begins with setting up a coaching team of colleagues and determining the purpose – which aspect of the teaching and learning process will be in the focus. The next step is agreeing on a specific plan and timeframe. The pre-observation discussion is the following step for refining the specific aspect to be observed, and identifying the expectations of the teacher who will be observed. Then follows the observation itself and the post-observation discussion aimed at reflecting on what was being observed.

The observer’s role is neither to criticize, nor to pat the colleague’s back and praise him/her. The role of the observer is to **describe** what he/she noticed, to support the colleague’s learning by **guiding questions**, giving his/her insight on the specific aspect that was in the focus, helping the colleague reach his/her own conclusions, and decide what to do with them. In the process of peer coaching it is very useful to keep a reflective journal of the findings from observations over time, and record the feedback from colleagues and students after introducing changes to any aspect of the teaching and learning process.