Appendix B

To be handed out at
Meeting One of the Mentor Teacher Group

Handouts and Articles
on Classroom Observation,
Peer Coaching, and Mentoring

Handouts

(from *Peer Coaching,* National Staff Development Council)

"A Comparison of Peer Coaching and Evaluation"

"Principles of Coaching"

"Peer Coaching Cycle"

"'Rules' for Peer Coaching"

"Pre-Observation Questions"

"Post-Observation Questions"

(from *Observation Guide,* NCSALL)

"Focus Areas and Sample Questions"

(from *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group on Learner Motivation, Retention, and Persistence,* NCSALL)

"Ways to Gather Information During Class Observations"

Articles

"Teachers as Learners," from *Rethinking Schools*
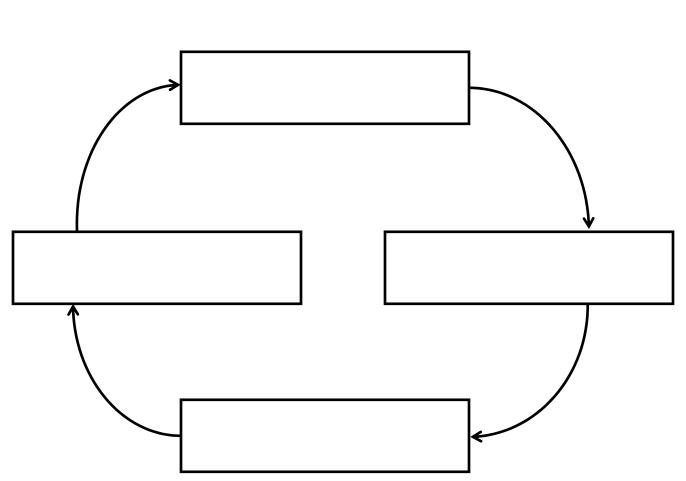
"When Good Intentions Go Awry," from *Rethinking Schools*

"The Hows and Whys of Peer Mentoring," from *Rethinking Schools*

A Comparison of Peer Coaching and Evaluation[*]

PEER COACHING	EVALUATION
trial and error approach	"best foot forward"
give-and-take; sharing both ways	one way learning
non-threatening (peers)	sometimes threatening (supervisor)
forward-looking: improvement-oriented	looking backward: what has happened
coach is invested in teacher's success	administrator may or may not gain if teacher is successful
targets specific areas	general review, global
ongoing	often one-shot
data: given to teacher	data: personnel file
teacher being observed does the evaluation	administrator evaluates
focus is on "What I saw."	focus often on "What I didn't see."
FORMATIVE	**SUMMATIVE**

PRINCIPLES OF COACHING

Common language

Focus

Hard Evidence

Interaction

Predictability/reliability

Reciprocity

PEER COACHING CYCLE

"RULES" FOR PEER COACHING

THE STANCE

1. We're engaging in **exploration,** not **criticism.** We're unraveling a mystery (teaching and learning) together, not monitoring each other.

2. An observed lesson is a **shared resource;** both teacher and coach should take something of value away from any discussion of it.

3. Look for, describe, and assess the **practice** and **its results,** not the person's competence.

THE TALK

1. **Describe first, discuss details later.** First describe what happened, using your data. The teacher can take or leave that. Only then discuss what the results were, and only if the teacher initiates the discussion.

2. Talk **specifically** and **concretely.** ("You called on Will three times," rather than "You tend to call on boys a lot.")

3. Talk about things which can be changed and which are **worth changing.** (*e.g.,* Ignore personal mannerisms, unless they are interfering with student learning.)

4. Remember to comment on **strengths.** Important learning comes from building on our strengths as well as from addressing areas of weakness.

5. **Check to insure clear communication.** Paraphrase a lot: "Are you saying that…?" "Let me see if I understand you…"

6. **Interact.** The basic human interaction skills of attending, listening, responding, and acknowledging are important for both the coach and the teacher.

PRE-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. How can I be of help to you?

2. What specifically do you wish me to look for?

3. What specifically do you wish me to know?

4. Is there a particular student you would like me to watch?

5. What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson?

6. How long would you like me to observe?

7. When can we get together after the lesson?

POST-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the lesson went?

2. Can you recall what the students were doing that made you feel this way?

3. What do you remember about what you did or the strategies you used?

4. How does this compare with what you expected would happen?

5. What could be some reasons it happened this way?

6. Would you like me to share what I observed?

Focus Areas and Sample Questions[*]
Page 1

CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT

- What is the set-up of the desks and chairs?

- How far do students sit from each other? From the teacher? Are students clustered in some way?

- What does the classroom look like? What things are on the wall? What resources (i.e., technological, books) are available in the room?

- Is there a lot of noise in the room? Are there interruptions from outside the classroom?

- Are the chairs comfortable? Is there enough lighting and work space in the classroom?

- Where do people choose to sit? (Does it change over time?)

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT / AUTHORITY

- What is the classroom agenda? Who sets it, and how is it?

- Is the agenda flexible? When a question is asked or a topic raised which diverges from the agenda, what it the response (by teachers, by students)?

- What is the daily routine (e.g., signing in, signing out)?

- What are the classroom rules? Who decides them? How are they communicated?

- How do participants call each other (by name, by title)?

- In what configurations do students work – individually, in a large group, or in small groups?

- What evidence reflects issues of authority in this classroom?

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[*] Excerpted from *Observation Guide,* National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Revised March 24, 1998.

Focus Areas and Sample Questions
Page 2

CLASSROOM TALK

- Who talks? To whom, and for how long?

- What is the interaction pattern – one person talking at a time, many people at one time, or a mix? Who regulates this pattern? How is turn-taking managed?

- How do participants talk to one another (active listening, interrupting, building on what another says)?

- What do participants talk about (lesson activities, personal experiences, etc.)?

- How often are there silences and how are they handled?

- How are multiple perspectives handled?

- How often are there disagreements? What are they about? How do instructors handle disagreement?

TEACHER TALK

- How does the teacher greet students?

- What kinds of questions does the teacher ask (e.g., yes/no questions, questions with one right answer, open-ended probing questions)?

- To whom does the teacher direct questions?

- What kind of feedback does the teacher give to questions?

- How does the teacher show s/he is listening?

- How does the teacher giver directions? (What kind?)

- How does the teacher encourage discussion?

Focus Areas and Sample Questions
Page 3

LEARNER TALK

- What kinds of questions does the student ask? How often?

- What kinds of answers do the learners give? How long are their responses?

- How often do learners initiate new topics/offer opinions? What topics/opinions? How do they make connections?

- Who's talking, and how often?

- Are there differences in the amount of learner talk across these variables: male/female, native/non-native, age, etc.?

- How do learners respond to teacher feedback?

LEARNER ENGAGEMENT / SENSE OF COMMUNITY

- How do learners interact with each other?

- How much movement is there in the classroom? What kind?

- What is the affect of the students?

- How busy are students and what are they doing?

- Do learners receive equal amounts of contact with the teacher?

- How do learners elicit help? By asking another student, raising their hand, waiting for the teacher to circulate?

- Does the learner help make decisions about the class activities and lesson topics?

WAYS TO GATHER INFORMATION DURING CLASS OBSERVATIONS[*]

‣ **Selective Verbatim:**
Word-for-word record of what individual learners and/or the teacher say about a particular issue or some other are of focus (e.g., the observer records the exact wording of how the teacher asks questions and how a particular learner responds, keeps note of the questions that learners ask, records the exact conversation between specific learners, etc.).

‣ **Anecdotal Record:**
Description of events or episodes that occur during the class (e.g., the observer records the story of what happens among learners when the teacher leaves the classroom, or records the behaviors and conversation between learners as they negotiate how to work in small groups).

‣ **Verbal Flow:**
A written or visual description of who talks with whom (e.g., the observer maps who initiates the conversation, who responds, who follows, who is silent, who is addressed, who is left out, etc.).

‣ **Class Traffic:**
A written record of who moves inside the room at what times (e.g., who enters and exits, movement from large group to small groups, who goes where). This description can include the rationale for the traffic (if provided) and how learners and the teacher respond to the traffic.

‣ **Event Count:**
A record of the number of times something in particular occurs (e.g., the number of times the teacher interrupts a learner, the number of times learners interrupt one another, the number of times learners initiate a discussion, the number of times there are periods of silence, etc.).

‣ **Duration:**
A record of how much time is spent on a particular event or activity (e.g., the amount of time learners talk informally versus "on task," the amount of time the teacher speaks versus learners, the amount of time learners have to quietly reflect, the amount of time learners have to work with one another, etc.).

‣ **Time Sample:**
A record of what occurs at specific intervals of time (e.g., a record of what learners are doing every five minutes, or what is happening in the classroom every five minutes).

‣ **Physical Map:**
A drawing or map of where tables and chairs are located and the activities that happen there.

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[*] Excerpted from *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group on Learner Motivation, Retention, and Persistence,* NCSALL.

Teachers As Learners [*]

How Peer Mentoring Can Improve Teaching
By Marc Osten and Eric Gidseg

The separation of a school into clearly defined classrooms creates a culture that reinforces isolation. Teachers tend to teach in ways that they have found successful, with little feedback from others. We generally do what we think is best and silently bear our own feelings of superiority or inferiority.

It doesn't have to be this way. The two of us, along with several other colleagues from our K-3 public school in upstate New York, have embarked on a peer-observation and mentoring process that has radically changed how we teach.

One of the key issues facing the teaching profession is how best to improve the quality of teaching and to provide ways for ongoing professional development. Debate has been particularly strong within the National Education Association over the issue of peer evaluation. While our process did not replace the traditional evaluation process in our school or district, we believe that it nonetheless offers insight into the potentials of peer evaluation.

Following are two separate essays on how the peer observation/mentoring process helped each of us with a specific problem we were having in the classroom. For more on the structure and philosophy of our peer observation and mentoring, see the article "The Hows and Whys of Peer Mentoring."

When Quiet Children Get Lost
By Mark Osten

The children in my second grade classroom work together in cooperative groups. My goal is to ensure that each student pulls their weight in the group, but in a way that still nurtures the enhanced creativity and energy that can come from working together. One of the struggles in cooperative learning is finding a way to engage quiet students so that they are not overwhelmed by more dominant personalities. It takes time to teach the students the necessary group skills and social skills that are needed for cooperative learning.

Sounds nice in theory. In practice though, last year I found myself succumbing to the growing pressures to make sure the kids scored well on standardized testing. I started cutting time from things that I knew were central to my classroom, but which weren't essential to higher test scores.

On one level, I might have been considered a success. The reading scores in my classroom went up. But the overall social and academic environment suffered.

Even though I had not put as much time into teaching students necessary group skills, I still thrust them into cooperative groups. In essence, without ever realizing it I set them up for failure. There was more bickering at team tables. Students were less engaged in projects than in the past. Dominant students like Emma and Matt (the names of the children have been changed) often took control of their group, were becoming impatient and bossy. Quieter students like Brian or Marion were uninvolved. My assumption – that quieter students would be better off in small groups – was out of synch with reality.

I went to my peer mentoring team for help. I asked that the next time they came to observe my class, they focus on two things: how the groups seemed to work overall, and specifically how my two quiet students, Brian and Marion, seemed to fare. (The three observers came while their own classes were at an activity such as gym or music or lunch. They each came once a week, at different times, for 30-45 minutes.)

After a week of observing my class, the team confirmed my worst fears. They noticed that quieter children like Brian were totally uninvolved. In one instance Brian was seen playing with a pencil in his desk for eight minutes and Marion fell asleep for a minute on her desk. Two of the three observing teachers noted the lack of verbal contact at several groups. All three remarked that most students were focused on their individual work but rarely came together to share ideas or get help. When I asked student teams to put their "heads together" to discuss each person's progress on a task, one observer remarked that the children became very frustrated with Brian's silence.

I was surprised and upset – and a little embarrassed – by what my colleagues had seen. As I listened to all the vignettes, I wondered to myself: "Where was I when this was all going on?" I had prided myself on my use of cooperative groups only to find the process in disarray.

Fortunately, our peer process involves not just observation but mentoring. As a result, our "debriefing" session moved from observer reports to suggestions. I started to feel better.

One team member suggested I revisit my cooperative group project plans. Another reminded me to carefully structure cooperative work so kids had individual tasks but also had to collaborate. One teacher advised me to help the quieter children by giving them specific language to use with their groups. Specifically, the teacher suggested I tape an index card to their desk that had sentence starts such as, "I think that...," "My opinion is...," or "I need...."

The various suggestions stimulated a discussion that led to other ideas. One colleague mentioned that the index card idea would also be helpful with more dominant children. Sentence starts for these students might be, "What do you think. ...?" or "Do you have an opinion?" In this way, the more dominant children could help inspire discussion rather than close off conversations. Another idea was to develop specific, nonverbal team roles that would help quieter students stay involved.

I returned to my classroom invigorated. I led mini-lessons and role plays so students could work with the index cards. I went back to regularly using a routine called "pairs check" in which I give each student time to ask questions and share their progress and knowledge with a teammate. I started to assign one student in each cooperative group as a "checker." This person would make sure every team is involved by confirming that each member has completed their work or

has had a chance to share ideas. Finally, I started to watch things more carefully. I decided to do more direct intervention to help individuals, pairs, or teams stuck "in process."

Things improved immediately. During the role plays, students perked up and became more animated. During one role play, Brian asked, "Can I bring this index card to recess and use it on the playground?"

During a study of plants I noticed several positive outcomes. In one experiment, I observed Marion look at the index card taped to her desk and say to her partner, "I think that the seed will sprout in ten days." Months earlier she would have quietly mumbled a few words that her partner might or might not hear.

At another table, a heated discussion was taking place about what order in which to share predictions. One student yelled at another, "I want to go first." Brian, meanwhile, had been given the nonverbal team job of "quiet captain." (In this nonverbal role, the student slowly raises, then brings his or her two hands together to show teammates that they need to speak in more respectful and quieter voices.) After the student's complaint, Brian became involved and showed how he was an important member of the team by giving the non-verbal signal for quiet voices and more respect.

Matt, a verbal and often bossy student, was also finding more productive ways to work in groups. During an art project about plants, Matt's team of four students each had a very specific task: Matt was responsible for the roots while the other three students worked on the stem, leaves, and flower parts. Because each student had a very specific topic, it was virtually impossible for Matt to be domineering.

After completing their drawings, I put Matt and Brian together for "pairs check." This gave Brian a chance to gain confidence in his verbal presentation before sharing his drawing with the whole class.

Early in the school year, it had been unimaginable for Brian to stand up in front of the class and present work he completed by himself. On this special day, he sat excitedly and waited patiently for Matt to finish explaining how his sunflower roots draw water from the ground. Brian then got up and in a proud and clear voice made his presentation about a sunflower's stem. It was a breakthrough moment for him.

During the year, the team helped me improve my teaching in other areas beyond cooperative groups. For example, I received specific suggestions on improving my technique with small reading groups. The team also helped me increase my use of open-ended questions and gave specific recommendations about handling a student with discipline problems.

The bottom line was that my students benefited. By becoming a learner, I had become a better teacher.

Marc Osten has taught 2nd and 3rd grade for several years. Previous to working in education, he worked on consumer and environmental protection concerns for national and international organizations.

When Good Intentions Go Awry

By Eric Gidseg

Peer observations often provide insights that are quite painful to hear but which can improve our teaching. I learned this the hard way.

In my class of 21 kindergartners, there was a child whom I felt was unreachable in the context of whole class or group activities. I asked the team to help me out.

I use a large group setting, what I call my morning circle, as the primary teaching modality in my classroom. After the large group, the children go to "center" activities which provide an opportunity for practice and exploration. Since this child was apparently getting little from our morning circle, her entire morning was affected. She moved through centers with little understanding or direction.

As we sat together on the rug each day to hear stories and discuss current explorations, this little girl (whom I will call Jennifer), often sat on the periphery. She would look down at her hands and generally appeared lost in her own inner world.

Jennifer was a child who carried a lot of emotional baggage, and her home life was troubled and unstable. She was generally unable or unwilling to participate in classroom activities, especially verbal ones. When things became stressful for her, she would "act in," crossing her arms across her chest and making a sour face.

I felt on the verge of giving up with Jennifer. All my attempts to get her to participate had failed. To some extent, I had allowed myself to give less thought to her. Just as she had banished herself from the center of the class, so had I pushed her to the periphery of my awareness.

I knew I needed help. I hoped that my peers had experience with children who were as reticent as Jennifer and could offer concrete suggestions. What I received from my team was quite shocking and caused me to look at my own failures and to re-examine my teaching.

During the observations, my peers noted that although Jennifer was passive and seemingly inattentive for much of the time, there were several brief moments where Jennifer had tried to make contact. But I had failed to recognize her attempts. For example, at one point I had been reading a book to the class. One peer observer later reported that Jennifer quietly said during the reading, "Guess what, Mr. Gidseg?" But I apparently didn't hear her, or at least didn't respond.

I asked myself, "How could I have missed such an event?" Jennifer had made a significant step outwards and I had failed to recognize it. I then asked myself, "How long had she been reaching out only to find herself ignored by me?" The peer observer went on to report that Jennifer approached me later, apparently to ask me something. I did not recognize this and instead I spoke to her. I asked her to be my special helper at our listening center. She crossed her arms and moved angrily away from me. I remembered the incident. At the time, I was mystified by Jennifer's behavior.

At the debriefing, my reaction was visceral. I buried my head in my hands and said, "This is like a knife in my heart." It's still painful for me to watch the tape of my debriefing. My colleagues were tremendously supportive, as always. My teammate who watched me miss opportunities

with Jennifer told me that as he watched these events, he knew that they would be painful for me to hear. Another observer expressed that Jennifer was careful not to let even her reaching out become too obvious.

I received many ideas from my peers about how to help Jennifer. These ranged from being sure that she sat in front of me during our morning circle time to privately meeting with Jennifer before or after our circle to be sure that she received enough direction to do productive work for the day.

As I had time to process the feelings, observations, and ideas that were generated from my debriefing, I realized that the significant information that I received was the recognition that Jennifer was, in fact, reaching out. It was now up to me to be attentive to her as much as possible.

I resolved to have her near me as much as possible, to not allow her to become part of the periphery. I created small time frames where she and I could chat, in private, about the work for the day. The changes were remarkable in a short period of time. Not only was I giving more attention to the details of her behavior, I also found more room in my heart for her. The team had helped me to see her in a new light.

There was a lot going on inside of Jennifer and I was determined to reach her. As she became more tuned in to the workings of the class, she began to make friends. She suddenly found herself to be fairly popular. Her self esteem was given quite a boost.

Jennifer's relationship with me also improved. She began talking to me each morning, little bits at first. She spoke about her family and her friends. On one occasion she brought pictures for me that she made at home. She quickly started to ask questions and enjoyed reading books with me. She had begun to learn. She was able, for the first time, to write her name correctly. Jennifer maintained her reticence towards "performing" in front of the class, but she was no longer afraid to speak.

As a veteran teacher with 20 years of early childhood experience, I was humbled by the effect that the team had on my awareness and teaching. Through their supportive critique, my eyes were opened to some of my own blind spots. And Jennifer was the fortunate recipient of a more enlightened approach from a newly revitalized teacher.

Eric Gidseg has taught kindergarten and first grade for 20 years. For 11 years he taught kindergarten in faculty administered Waldorf schools, where he first discovered the potential of professional development.

The Hows and Whys of Peer Mentoring

Our peer observations were organized in a simple fashion. Every week the person being observed informed the team of what to look for when visiting. Sometimes we wanted a certain child observed. Sometimes the focus was on a curriculum matter. Other times we wanted to address issues such as methods of class management.

During the week, the three observers would separately come to the observee's classroom and take careful notes for 30 minutes. At the beginning of the following week, the team held a "debriefing" meeting and each observer recounted what they had seen. We rotated the process so that each team member was observed every month or so.

Scheduling was one of our first obstacles. We each looked carefully at our "specials" such as music, at our teaching assistant times and at lunch schedules to determine when it would be possible to leave the classroom. During a mid-winter team evaluation, we decided that 30 minutes was not enough time to observe. We solved this problem with two major adjustments: We increased our observations to 45 minutes and we chose a focus topic that the other teachers would watch for throughout the rest of the year.

Scheduling became a bit trickier but we carefully calculated ways to cover for one another. Sometimes we swapped teaching assistants, covered each others' classes at recess, or ate our lunches during observations. The administration has been supportive, although all the work to organize and institutionalize the process has fallen on our team. Our union (we are members of the American Federation of Teachers) has not really been aware of the project.

Benefits of Peer Mentoring

The primary goal of the peer observation project is to rethink the way we do things and adapt to changing times, students, and circumstances. The benefits of observing went both ways. Not only did observed teachers get specific feedback but those doing the observing were exposed to an increased number of children of varying ages, learning styles, and academic, developmental, and emotional levels. All of us have benefited from seeing a variety of teaching methods and all have enhanced our "bag of tricks," so to speak.

There have also been what one might call "hidden benefits."

After a few months of observing each other, we recognized that we tended to over-prepare for the time we were observed. We wanted to impress each other and keep our "warts" hidden. As trust built, this need to appear perfect dissipated and we became more comfortable with letting down our defenses. This led to an unexpected development: Team members found that while teaching unobserved, they helped maintain their focus by pretending that someone was observing them.

Another interesting benefit was how our colleagues acted as a "reality check." For example, one teacher said she felt as if she were always yelling at her students. The observers reported something very different. They saw a teacher who appeared to be patient and tolerant. Clearly, her own thoughts and frustration had shaded her view of her teaching. The team discussed this further and helped the teacher to focus on the reasons for her frustrations.

A third hidden benefit is that the children see their teachers practicing what they preach. We make it a point to be very open with the students about our observations and our team mentoring. In essence, we are modeling important lessons such as teamwork and learning through observation. These are the same skills we want our students to learn. Seeing their teachers struggle to improve and work with their peers is a powerful example.

New Challenges

We are now ending our second year of peer observation and mentoring. Our peer observation work has led us to look at many issues in a new light. How, for example, might we use our experience with peer mentoring to help effect reform throughout the school and district? How do we help other teachers question their teaching practices and place learning and self-reflection at the top of their priority list? Do we simply model what we believe the role of teachers should be or do we become assertive advocates of change?

Peer mentoring has also raised broader social and political issues. Poverty, child abuse, and other societal problems constantly surface and relate to the stresses that our children face. We constantly grapple with what to do with these understandings. Do we simply concentrate on our own little classroom or do we work more aggressively with parents, health practitioners, and government officials to take a holistic view of the needs of children? What role should we play in social change movements to improve the lives of our children out of the classroom?

As we reinvent and grow as learners and teachers, we find it increasingly difficult to ignore this most critical of questions. Are teachers passive observers of the world beyond our schools, or should we work to improve the overall lives of the children we serve? And how best do we do so?

— Marc Osten and Eric Gidseg