Implementing Peer Coaching: A Self-Study as a Reading Specialist and the 
Motivation and Satisfaction of Elementary Teachers

By

Ashley Zierl

A Master’s Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Education-Reading

University of Wisconsin-River Falls
2016
Abstract

Peer coaching has become a popular initiative in the area of teacher-directed professional development. The purpose of this action research was to provide teachers with opportunities for collaboration, professional development, data collection, and relationship building that were not provided in the district in which I work. Through the use of self-study, the research will explore the changes and impacts implementing peer coaching had on the researchers’ role and the professional development changes. The study followed six volunteer participants over a two month period as they participated in peer coaching and met with others teachers to work towards a common goal. The success and failure of the groups were linked to the trust or lack thereof between the participants. At the conclusion of the study, staff motivation stayed the same; however, the satisfaction with preparation and planning time, collaboration time with staff members, and getting support when needed, increased.

Keywords: reading specialist, peer coaching
Introduction

In 2001 President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, targeting schools with Title 1 programs and other federally funded programs aimed at helping low performing reading students. This legislation has had an impact on school districts as it mandates “the hiring of literacy coaches to work with classroom teachers as they implement best practice in relations to the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary” (Quatrocke & Wepner, 2008, p. 99). School districts developed new roles for reading specialists in the wake of NCLB and also had to focus on ensuring all staff, teachers and paraprofessionals alike, met the highly qualified parameters, and that professional development was increasing teacher effectiveness that impacted student growth (Cobb, 2005b). Furthermore, the state of Wisconsin began the Educator Effectiveness System. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2015) defines the educator effectiveness system as a performance-based evaluation system designed to improve the education of all students in the state of Wisconsin by supporting guided, individualized, self-determined professional growth and development of educators. As a part of the system, teachers and administrators are required to create a Student Learning Outcome (SLO) and Professional Practice Goal (PPG); both focus on teacher and student growth through the effective use of professional development (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction).

Now, as I prepare for my new role as our district reading specialist, I am overwhelmed by the many state and federal requirements and district responsibilities. The umbrella of duties required within my school district as the reading specialist includes Title 1 coordinator, Title 1 teacher, 2nd grade English language arts teacher, and 3rd grade English language arts teacher. Our district is also implementing changes in professional development by considering teacher input
for meetings and activities to meet their specific needs for more relevance. The goal of this study is to better understand my role as the reading specialist specific to my district and to explore how implementing peer coaching impacts my role and the professional development changes.

**Review of the literature**

**Role of the Reading Specialist**

Across the nation in the 1960s, reading difficulties in students prompted school districts to create the reading specialist title and role to work with students achieving low reading scores (Bean, Swan, and Knaub, 2003). Fast-forward roughly 40 years, with the implementation of NCLB (2002) and the need to hire more reading specialists in order to meet students’ literacy needs (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). However, when the new hires began, new duties were also added to the job description; reading specialists were expected to be a resource to teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and the community to provide professional development and advocate for all students (Quatrocke and Wepner, 2008).

Reading specialists, in the role of instructor, work either with individual students or small groups, usually identified as struggling readers; both are done as either a pull-out program or within the regular classroom. Instruction is three fourths of reading specialists duties; other duties include daily teacher resource, daily interventionist, regular leadership roles and professional development coordinator; to cover the cost of hiring reading specialists, most are paid through the federally funded Title 1 monies (Bean, R., Swan, A., & Knaub, R., 2003).

According to Bean et al., 2003 “Demand for congruency between classroom and specialized instruction lead reading specialists to work alongside teachers in the classroom” (p. 446). As a teacher resource, the reading specialist is responsible for improving the quality of classroom teaching in regards to literacy and literacy integration (Bean et al., 2003). To ensure
successful teamwork and establish credibility with teachers, reading specialists need to have a true understanding of what each teacher faces within the walls of his/her classroom (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, and Wallis, 2002). Bean et al. (2003) describe the collaborative role; using data collected the reading specialist shares materials and ideas to enhance instruction and then works collaboratively with the classroom teacher to plan and develop lessons. They continue by describing the varying collaboration teams as working together regularly, on the fly, leading study groups, or mentoring new teachers through a coaching model.

The third responsibility for reading specialists is to be a literacy leader for the community and the school because they have the specialized training to focus on literacy development (Quatrocke and Wepner, 2008). As a community resource, reading specialists arrange volunteers and tutors, work with preschool parents to encourage early literacy at home, and hold workshops for parents to attend to learn how to work best with their child at home. The school responsibilities are described as vast but vital (Bean et al., 2003). Reading specialists are responsible for the entire reading program: writing or selecting curriculum, coordinating schedules for reading specialists, Title 1, and classrooms, and maintaining a literacy location for collective materials. They are also responsible for implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) to prevent reading failure and reduce the special education referrals. To support RtI, reading specialists are often leaders of long-term staff development by creating long-term plans to provide necessary professional development (Vogt and Shearer, 2011).

Reading specialists don’t work alone as leaders, but in congruence with other staff members whom come together and form a literacy leadership team. There is no one correct way to develop a literacy leadership team; however, essential members could include: principal, reading specialist, primary teacher, intermediate teacher, and other resource teachers who work
closely with students. The principal is the supporter of the leadership team and needs to be central to help teachers be successful and have strong student outcomes. The greatest change in growth comes once a commitment from all staff members, including the custodian and office staff, is set in place (Cobb, 2005a). In another work, Cobb (2005b) states, “It’s difficult to become invested in something to which you feel you have not input” (p. 388). Once the reading specialist gets to know each teacher and the workings of their classrooms, professional development can become personalized and provided through informal conversations and study groups or more formal settings in workshops, conferences, and professional meetings to plan effective lessons and provide feedback (Vogt and Shearer, 2011).

Peer Coaching

Teaching is an isolated profession, and peer coaching is changing that by creating small teams of teachers and requiring them to collaborate. When isolated in their classrooms, teachers often wonder what the teacher across the hall is doing to teach children. To keep teachers talking with their colleagues, working together, and trying new things within their classrooms, schools have begun to adopt peer coaching. Peer coaching involves voluntary forms of professional development designed to focus on developing a shared vision of purposeful instruction, common language, and to foster learning for every teacher and student. Teachers collaborate to share a knowledge base accessible to novices and veterans. Teachers can’t do it alone and need each other; the use of peer coaching allows teachers to help sharpen each other’s skills (Robbins, 2015).

Along with isolation, teachers often lack choice in their own professional development activities. Lack of teacher input reduces the value of professional development and fails to address the true everyday struggles teachers are facing. This disconnect adds to the struggle to
transfer learning from training back to the classroom, because the professional development fails to meet the needs of the teachers (Grimm, Kaufman, and Doty, 2014). Professional development is designed to improve staff competencies, meet state and local standards, and produce outstanding student academic achievement (Murray et. al, 2009). The problem of detachment of professional development and teacher implementation is the core of why peer coaching has been introduced. Peer coaching is needed because teacher accountability and evaluations are more highly scrutinized by state requirements than previous centuries as a daunting list of initiatives, such as common core standards, benchmark performances, 21st century technology skills, and career readiness for students, are imposed on classrooms (Robbins, 2015).

Peer coaching is as individual and unique as the teachers participating, and can result in greater achievement of classroom implementation of their training (Murray et. al, 2009). And, although it is best achieved as a voluntary commitment, teachers need to be sold on the concept of peer coaching by members of the leadership team: administration, reading specialists, and teacher leaders. Selling peer coaching is important since teachers need to commit to an additional weekly expectation and be committed to the goal of the partnership. Throughout the process the leadership team is responsible for training teachers how to coach with objective feedback free of judgmental comments (Showers, 1985).

Jewett and MacPhee (2012) did a study to discover if adding peer coaching to a teacher’s identity would increase their collaboration time, solve problems, and improve teaching practice. The study followed a group of teachers who found a way to make peer coaching work. When peer coaching was first presented teachers were dismayed with being faced with finding a coaching partner. In the United States teachers don’t often work closely together. It was difficult to reach out and ask for help from another teacher. Trust became central to their collaboration;
trust has the ability to make or break collaboration among teachers and must be present in order to have meaningful conversations and sustain the relationship over time (Jewett and MacPhee, 2012).

When coaches are choosing a topic they need to keep in mind the trust they have among themselves. Topics, decided upon by each partnership, range from teaching strategies, curriculum mapping, classroom management, but are not limited. If trust is just starting to develop, teachers should start by selecting a topic that isn’t closely related to one’s teaching; this helps create an atmosphere of nonjudgmental discussions and begins building a foundation of trust (Robbins, 2015). It also helps, when building trust, to not have one teacher seen as an expert over the other thus creating an equal partnership allowing teachers to support and learn together (Murry et. al, 2009). As trust develops, or if it is already developed upon starting the partnership, teachers can create lesson plans together and incorporate them into their teaching. Trust also allows partners to have nonjudgmental conversations about an individual’s teaching techniques and strategies. The final step in a trusting partnership is having the courage to open the doors to their classrooms and observe one another’s actual teaching. Then, a follow up meeting takes place to discuss the observation and offer support to make any necessary changes. (Jewett and MacPhee, 2012)

Self Study

The birth of self-study research in teacher education is rooted back to the 1950s (Lunenberg et al., 2010). During this time teachers devoted their careers to give self-study credibility in the research world; however, not until the 1980s, did self-study begin to gain credibility. At this time a transition from teaching through traditional approaches to a more practice-based approach occurred. This change in teaching also required a change in research,
and reflection became the forefront, evoking thirty years’ worth of self-study research (Lunenberg et al., 2010).

The definition for self-study research has many variations depending on the field in which the study is taking place. Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) describe self-studies as “the study of one’s self, one’s actions, and one’s ideas” (p. 20). The use of a self-study helps teachers inquire into their own practice and show a reflective response to changes.

In the field of teacher education, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) define self-study as a way to look at the problems and issues that make someone an educator. They go on to outline the various areas used within these issues for teacher educators to focus their study. For example, a teacher may look at what teaching is and the complexity he or she faces in taking on the task of teaching (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Hamilton et al. (2008) added, “Self-study is a focal point for those pursuing a better knowledge of their practice” (p. 20).

Dinkelman (2003) adds how changes in a teacher’s pedagogy, through self-study, become regular teacher conversation and extend to collaborative meetings with peers. “Every time a teacher employs genuine self-study, program change happens” (Dinkelman, 2003, p. 13). Teachers begin to open up and discuss their teaching, allowing others to try new ideas in their own rooms, thus creating partnerships (Lunenberg et al., 2010).

Self-study written research is specifically chosen and created to examine a teacher’s personal self and setting (Dinkelman, 2003). The main elements of self-study research are that these studies are self-initiated and self-focused to enhance and improve teaching (Hamilton et al., 2008). Teachers using a self-study approach are often experienced professionally, yet novices in the field of research. To begin their research, the teacher begins questioning an area of their personal practice.
Teacher educators starting a self-study have the courage to expose themselves and become vulnerable. The important characteristics of their self-studies are that the problem under investigation develops, shifts, and changes in response to the continuous shifts in education (Lunenberg et al., 2010, p. 1286).

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) explain the quality of self-study research and the requirements to keep a balance between the research quality and the self. They go on to discuss how a self-study doesn’t focus on the self per se, but on the strategies engaged in throughout the teacher’s practice. Teacher educators need to focus on their insights and interpretations to create a powerful and meaningful self-study. The power comes from the voices of teacher educators and the portrayal of their professional lives; honesty is central to this connection (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

When writing an autobiographical research study, there is the possibility that it can lose professionalism; the loss of credibility follows suit when there are signs of narcissistic tendencies and generalizations. To ensure the study stays credible Lunenberg et al. (2010) state:

…I[t became apparent that in order for a professional’s reflections to be relevant to the broader community, more systematic study of one’s own practices is needed, and certain methodological guidelines, [qualitative methods] should be followed in order to safeguard the quality of the research into one’s own practices (p. 1281).

The use of self-study allows one to explore and reflect on personal development, sometimes including disappointment and prejudice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). By conducting a self-study, teacher educators gain an immense amount of learning and growth to improve the quality of their teaching, their schools’ educational programs, and extends to other educators’
practices (Zeichner, 2007). Dinkelman (2003) documents the researchers’ reporting of development of new knowledge about the beginning question that framed the study.

Teacher education in the 21st century is complex and evolving faster than it ever has. The quickly evolving culture is one of the greatest challenges teacher educators face in their research endeavors. The use of self-study is even more imperative to teacher education than ever before, because the use of reflection is central to meeting student needs and keeping up with the rapidly changing field (Lunenberg et al., 2010). In order for students’ needs to be met, teachers must be willing to construct and examine their teaching in careful and constructive ways. Self-study is a way to evaluate practices, understand teaching better, and respond to the needs of students, as well as change teacher practices without waiting for someone else to come out with new research, professional development, or technology (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2000).

The Study

My study was designed to implement peer coaching as a professional development option for my colleagues while reflecting on my role as the district reading specialist. The purpose of this project is to provide teachers the opportunities for collaboration, professional development, data collection, and relationship building time and reflect on how this has an impact on me as a reading specialist.

The research was conducted from the first week of September through the first week of November. The methodology of data collection was through qualitative pre and post surveys of motivation and satisfaction (Appendix A), peer coaching documentations (Appendixes B-D), and journal entries. The journal was used primarily to reflect weekly on the week’s duties and document my self-study. At times I would add to the journal when I felt something was important and I wanted to remember it later. There were also times I’d jot down quotes from
staff members that were relevant to my role as reading specialist and researcher. The journal was also used to record interviews at the conclusion of the study.

The district in which the study takes place is a small rural school district in the upper Midwest. The district is 4K-12, and all grades are housed within the same building, employing 22 teachers and educating just over 300 students. At the elementary level there are eight teachers and three paraprofessionals educating roughly 150 students. Class sizes range from ten to thirteen students in lower elementary to 25-30 in upper elementary. The students served are 94% white, 4% Hispanic, and 0.6% black, and 38% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch.

The participants volunteered for this study and are elementary teachers teaching grades 4-year-old kindergarten through fifth grade. Each peer coaching partnership chose their own goal and fell into one of two grouping categories: expert/novice or common ground. A participant’s role was decided based on the selected goals. A teacher wanting to learn from another teacher becomes a novice in the partnership while the other is the expert and uses his or her knowledge to coach. The other role, common ground, is when both or all members of the partnership choose a goal that all want to learn and work together to learn, plan, implement, and discuss these changes. Table 1 shows each participant’s pseudonym and group information.
Table 1

*Participant Pseudonym and Group Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>Participant’s Group Identification and Role</th>
<th>Participant’s Peer Coaching Goal</th>
<th>Peer Coaching Meeting Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letti</td>
<td>Group 1: Novice Guided Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>Group 1: Expert Guided Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kali</td>
<td>Group 2: Common Responsive Classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Group 2: Common Responsive Classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Group 2: Common Responsive Classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Group 3: Novice Reading Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Group 3: Expert Reading Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Currently, professional development is selected and mandated by administration three times during the school year. It is expected that all elementary teachers attend all trainings regardless of goals, needs, or expectations. During the school year there are minimal staff meetings or time set aside for collaboration among staff. Half the teachers teach the only class at their grade level, and the other half has a partner teacher teaching the same grade level. Any collaboration among teachers is done during district given preparation times which happen on a rotation schedule. Administration has discussed the desire and need to create more teacher directed professional development but feel more need to direct trainings to ensure teachers meet the new requirements on educator effectiveness.

The idea of peer coaching was chosen to help with the notion of teacher directed professional development and as a way to encourage and support teacher collaboration to
enhance themselves as educators. The goals teachers selected were to be selected from the district goals to improve literacy outcomes. As an elementary school, a S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely) goal was chosen by administration and teaching staff to increase the elementary literacy scores on the school wide summative assessment. This goal was then used as a guide for teachers as they set their own personal goal pertaining to their classrooms. Both of these goals are required by the state of Wisconsin, somewhat contradictory to Robbins’ assertion that for it to be most effective, peer coaching participants need to be on a voluntary basis (2015). The process of peer coaching was introduced to teachers during teacher in-service before the start of the school year. I presented a description of peer coaching, the research supporting peer coaching, and the process. The teachers who were interested in participating signed a consent form and were asked to fill out a motivation and satisfaction survey prior to the start of the study. They were also asked to brainstorm areas of need and with whom they would partner.

Procedure

Before the peer coaching sessions began, participants completed a motivation and satisfaction survey which I created to measure motivation and satisfaction. The questions focused on personal motivation participants have in different areas of their career and how satisfied participants are with specific areas of their career. The survey was done online and sent to participants via email. Two weeks later, six volunteer participants were brought together for a meeting describing the planning phase and how to begin their peer coaching sessions. The planning phase consisted of stating their area of focus, their learning goals, their learning approach, and choosing a meeting schedule. Coaches were then provided with forms to record meeting notes and classroom observations. Following the meeting, participants were encouraged
to begin their sessions and proceed as needed. At the completion of the two month research period, the same motivation and satisfaction survey was given and all participants were interviewed about their experience.

**Findings**

**Survey Results**

At the beginning of the study, before participants began their peer coaching partnerships their surveys showed an overall high motivation rate for learning new things in their career (see Figure 1), working on their own (see Figure 2), and working with a coworker (see Figure 3). When compared to their motivation at the completion of the study, teachers’ motivation stayed the same or increased. This is consistent with the rationale of the volunteers for peer coaching; 75% of the teaching staff chose to participate in a new program to improve themselves as educators.

![Figure 1: How motivated are participants to learn new things in their career?](image-url)
IMPLEMENTING PEER COACHING

Figure 2: How motivated are participants when working on their own?

Figure 3: How motivated are participants when working with a coworker?

The satisfaction survey showed that initially 50% of teachers were unsatisfied with planning time (see Figure 4), collaboration time with other staff members (see Figure 5), and getting support when needed (see Figure 6). At the end of the study, the survey shows five of the
six participants (83%) are now satisfied in all three areas. The only major decline in satisfaction was in the area of getting support when needed; Fred’s satisfaction decreased putting him in the extremely unsatisfied category.

**Figure 4:** How satisfied are participants with planning time?

**Figure 5:** How satisfied are participants with collaboration time with other staff members?
Figure 6: How satisfied are participants with getting support when needed?

Trust. The interviews conducted individually with the participants showed a common theme of trust either in the beginning or developing as a result of their partnership. Letti explained, “I chose Gwen without hesitating because I trust her. I knew she had a lot to offer me about guided reading and I trusted her to be honest and respectful. Throughout the past few months she has held me accountable to attend our meetings every week. Gwen has been exactly what I need to grow in this area.” Having trust already developed between them, they were able to start meeting and coaching right at the start. Gwen said it didn’t take much effort; once they found a common meeting time and discussed their goals, everything else fell into place. “It was natural to work together and Letti was so full of questions and eager to learn,” Gwen added.

Group Two had a different experience with their groupings and meetings. Eli said, “We formed our group because the three of us wanted to participate but didn’t know what we wanted to focus on. When we set up our goals we looked for things we all had in common and settled on responsive classroom.” Kali added, “We’d all attended a conference over the summer and
wanted to actually implement the ideas we’d learned.” All three said they were comfortable working together; however, trust was not immediate.

Eli and Aaron both agreed that as their meetings progressed they began to be more comfortable with each other. Trust was formed quickly once they realized no one was criticizing them for their ideas. Kali said she was surprised at how quickly trust was formed and she is excited about the new professional relationship she had created with Eli.

Fred approached me to form a peer coaching partnership to help him with his literacy block. Fred and I found that trust should be central to our group; however, trust was lacking and thought to be the cause of our lack of success. We created goals and met three times before things began to fade out. Fred said, “Things got busy and I knew what I needed to work on, but it was hard to hold myself accountable.” I, too, got busy and due to other job requirements changed my schedule, causing me to lose my common prep time with Fred. I also feel that our goals were too ambitious, and I may have put too much responsibility on Fred. We both felt trust wasn’t central to our partnership and that may have needed to be our first focus. We have never worked together and didn’t understand how one another works. Fred added, “I still need help with my literacy block; however, I feel there is no support for me to gain that help. We use our prep times to talk, but it isn’t practical with what I need.”

**Growth and collaboration.** At the completion of the research timeframe, two of the three groups were still meeting weekly. Group One (Letti and Gwen) felt their partnership was nearing the end and would either become more casual for check-ins or they would dissolve the partnership. Letti had begun her partnership with Gwen because the curriculum was new to her and she’d struggled with implementing guided reading. Lettie added, “I chose Gwen because I knew she was successful with the implementation of guided reading within her own classroom
and I wanted to learn from her success." She continued by discussing how she now values
regular partnerships with coworkers and the amount of learning one can have within the
building. “I am the only teacher for my section and it is nice to collaborate with someone else.”
Gwen and Letti agreed that their partnership was nearing the end and would either become more
casual for check-ins or they would dissolve the partnership.

Group Two (Kali, Aaron, and Eli) was originally more hesitant than Group One when
volunteering to participate. All three felt they had enough on their plates and hadn’t planned on
taking on any new initiatives this school year. However, upon hearing the presentation and
discussing options privately with me, they saw value in the idea of peer coaching and decided to
give it a try. Aaron said, “At first, it was about helping you out and finding a topic that interested
the three of us. As we went along, I started to see this as a great opportunity for my teaching.”
While Kali has chosen to stop participating in regular meetings after the conclusion of the study
to focus on other things, Aaron and Eli plan to continue. Both are currently using their peer
coaching as their Personalized Professional Goal, PPG, as required through the state of
Wisconsin. Eli explained, “Already, our discussions have helped me and my students. I find I get
stuck in a rut and they help remind me of new ideas to try. It is important to keep things fresh
and positive. By using peer coaching as my PPG, I will be held more accountable to keep myself
from falling into my old habits.”

Self-study Reflection

When my current position of reading specialist was offered to me at the end of last school
year I was excited for the new role and a change in responsibility; for the past five years I have
worked as the four-year-old kindergarten and kindergarten teacher. As the reading specialist I
was faced with multiple job responsibilities: Title 1 teacher and coordinator, teacher resource,
and 2nd and 3rd grade language arts teacher. As a member of the school district for what is now my sixth year, I have a strong support system with my colleagues and was eager to transition into this leadership role. A colleague of mine had come to me and said how excited she was to have me in this position because I understood our district and what our reality is as classroom teachers. This comment has stayed with me and sparked my desire to use my new leadership role in a positive way; I found peer coaching to be the missing link in our building. We all spend the majority of our time working alone, having no other grade level teacher to regularly collaborate with. I wanted to provide more meaningful professional development and give my colleagues a chance to improve their teaching with support. As my research showed, I had six teachers volunteer to participate and one asked me to be his partner. Once the school year began, I realized how demanding my job was on my time and how difficult it was to balance everything, and my self-study journals document this.

**Instructor.** Once the school year started I was quickly bombarded with the various expectations and responsibilities my job included. During the day, six hours are spent as an instructional teacher. One of my instructional responsibilities during my day is as a classroom teacher. To keep class sizes small during instruction, the 2nd and 3rd graders are split between their classroom teacher and me for language arts, and another teacher for math. For 75 minutes per grade level every day I teach reading skills, vocabulary, grammar, phonics, and writing. My other instructional role is as the Title 1 teacher and coordinator. I had to create Title 1 groups for reading and math to include the specific needs of all 23 students who qualify for Title 1 services, their classroom teacher’s availability, and my two aides’ availability along with my own. It was an overwhelming challenge as I juggled twelve schedules and thirteen different Title 1 groups. I
wasn’t able to get groups scheduled in all the teachers’ preferred times and struggled with the disappointing comments. An excerpt from my journal on August 27 read:

“I couldn’t give a teacher her preferred Title 1 time and she came in to ask why. ‘I have always had Title at 2:30, why did you have to change it?’ I told her none of us were available at that time this year because another grade level needs two groups and 2:30 is the only time I have that works. That grade level has propriety based on the Title 1 required ranking system. She said, ‘Groups have never been done like that before and you can’t come in here and change things’. That comment hit me hard, I don’t like upsetting people but I have no other choice.”

On September 28, I met with administration to discuss my struggle with the schedule and my lack of contact with Title 1 students, and we devised a new plan. Together we decided Title 1 needed to take priority with scheduling, and I was to create a schedule that accommodated my time so I could instruct the majority of the groups and have the availability to regularly collaborate with my aides who were teaching the other groups. This change in schedule allowed me to teach all 20 reading students, one math student, and oversee the lesson plans for the other seven math students. The change in schedule ended up taking away or changing my collaboration time.

During the week I have specific time set aside to plan lessons, discuss techniques, and monitor student learning with my each of my two Title 1 aides as well as the 2nd and 3rd grade classroom teachers. These meetings are done during my preparation times and after school. I also discuss Title 1 student goals and progress with their classroom teacher. This is usually done spontaneously when we catch each other in the hallways or during our lunch break. These
discussions can be at very inopportune times and they use up any work time I have. An entry in my journal from October 12 describes an incident:

“On my way to make copies last week I ran into Eli in the hallway and we began talking about difficulties one of his Title 1 students is having. It was a great conversation and we agreed on a new strategy to try. Upon completion of the conversation I noted the time and realized I needed to head back to my room for class. I hadn’t thought about it at the time but today Aaron asked if I forgot to give him his half of the copies for today’s activity. I quickly realized I hadn’t even made the copies because I ran into Eli in the hallway on my way and never went back to get them done.”

This journal entry was just one of six that discusses my forgetfulness to get tasks done because I feel so stretched and needed. I tried three different ways to keep myself organized but none of them seemed to help. The first attempt was to use the traditional planner I’d used every year prior, but I’d write in it and not reference it. I tried keeping everything on my iPad calendar which included a to-do list, scheduler, and notes about the day’s lessons. On October 5th I wrote in my journal that I can’t keep track of my iPad or remember to take it with me when I leave. I tried setting up a file system to help with copies and reminders and found my papers stacked up on my desk and I hadn’t found time to organize and file them correctly. On November 1st, a Sunday, I wrote in my journal that I had come into school to finalize peer coaching paperwork and was so overwhelmed with the stacks of other papers, to do lists forgotten about, and papers to grade, I didn’t know where to begin.

**Teacher resource.** Another smaller role I hold is as a teacher resource for data within the elementary building. I am responsible for administering the state test three times a year. So far I
have only had to do it once during the second week of school. After each test is completed I create a spreadsheet for each grade with their students’ scores. Then I have to break down each test and find the state norm which shows the average score received to meet grade level requirements. Then each test is also assigned a standard deviation of the mean score, which creates a range of scores acceptable to the specific grade level. An excerpt from my journal on September 21 shows the amount of time used to compute the data:

“I cannot believe how consumed I have been with testing data! There are six grade levels and nineteen different tests, all with different norms and standard deviations. I then had to go through all 150 students and color code their score to show above level, on level, below level, and at risk for intervention. I dream about numbers and colors! Then today administration asked if I could create a graph showing each grade levels data with percentage for each of the four areas we are tracking. I had one hour to compute this data and then had to present them at our staff meeting. I had a few numbers wrong but overall it went well. We are well above our district goal and will be raising it for this school year.”

On October 21, we had an early release and needed to work on our educator effectiveness goals. These require that a student learning outcome and professional practice goal be written following specific criteria. Teachers needed help interpreting the criteria and then understanding how that interpreted into their specific goal.

“Teachers needed help today with their SLO and PPG. I spent all my time defining the different types of assessments and reassuring teachers they do it every day, they just don’t use the academic language for it. I helped all eight define and write their goals. I may not have gotten my own written, but it was a
great opportunity to work with my colleagues and show my value to them in more than just data.”

**Conclusion**

Overall, the implementation of peer coaching was a success with improving job satisfaction of the teachers who participated. Four of the six participants improved an area of their teaching and were successful reaching the goal they set at the beginning of the study. Although three volunteered originally as a favor to me, they found the value in peer coaching and are continuing the process long past the research timeframe. This action research project showed the success of peer coaching to be central to trust between the coaches which was a continual theme described by Robbins (2015), Jewett and MacPhee (2012), and Murry et. al (2009). My self-study, as documented in my journal, reveals that the real struggle I had was balancing all my responsibilities and finding time to offer support and training to the teachers in my school. As the rest of the school year progresses, I plan to settle into my new role and make it my own.

I have begun to slowly incorporate other ways to be a resource for teachers, primarily related to our literacy curriculum. I have found our school, like many others, may have multiple teachers in one building; however, we all teach in isolation and do things very differently from one another. I have begun to have conversations with each grade level teacher to build an understanding of their interpretations of the curriculum as well as strategies they use. I share ideas and suggestions among the group and plan to bring everyone together to discuss gaps and make decisions to keep consistency from kindergarten through fifth grade.

My district role of a reading specialist is complex and has a multitude of responsibilities. Now that I have discovered and experienced what those are I am prepared to organize myself and
become a true leader. With a deeper knowledge and the already successful implementation of peer coaching, next school year will offer other opportunities to improve our teaching techniques, offer peer coaching as a permanent professional development option, and ultimately improve student learning.
References


Appendix A
Motivation and Satisfaction Survey Questions

How motivated are you to learn new things in your career?

1 2 3 4 5 6
not motivated highly motivated

How motivated are you when working on your own?

1 2 3 4 5 6
not motivated highly motivated

How motivated are you when working with a coworker?

1 2 3 4 5 6
not motivated highly motivated

How satisfied are you with your planning/prep time?

1 2 3 4 5 6
unsatisfied highly satisfied

How satisfied are you with collaboration time with other staff members?

1 2 3 4 5 6
unsatisfied highly satisfied

How satisfied are you with getting support when needed?

1 2 3 4 5 6
unsatisfied highly satisfied
Appendix B
Peer Coaching Planning Form

Coach 1 Pseudonym ________________________ Topic ________________________ Coach 2 Pseudonym ________________

Team’s Learning Goals

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Learning Approach (select all that apply)

Book Study     Research     Data Talks     Differentiation     Coplanning

Meeting Schedule

Day of the week: ____________________________

Time of the day: ____________________________

Frequency: _________________________________

Do one of you need someone to cover your class at this time?

Yes  No

Please Return Before First Meeting
### Appendix C
Peer Coaching Meeting Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Discussion Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Next Meeting...</th>
<th>Coach 1 To Do List</th>
<th>Coach 2 To Do List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D
Peer Coaching Observation Form

Coach 1: Teacher or Observer
Coach 2: Teacher or Observer

Date       Time       Subject       Main ‘Look For’

What I saw:
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What I enjoyed:
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Questions I have:
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Planned follow up meeting:       Date       Location