English Language & Literature Teaching, Vol. *15*, No. 2 Summer 2009

EFL Teachers' Professional Development: Peer Coaching

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Bang, Young-joo. (2009). EFL teachers' professional development: Peer coaching. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 15*(2), 1-25.

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of peer coaching for EFL teachers' professional development. For this study, 12 college teachers in Korea participated in a 10-week program. They were 7 males and 5 females, ranging in age from 24 to 37 years. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Reflective analysis was used to analyze individual interview data. From the findings, two significant categories of peer coaching were identified: positive and negative responses to peer coaching experience. However, the overriding themes that emerged from the data were the benefits of peer coaching. The participants were almost unanimous in their acknowledgement of the advantages of peer coaching, such as reflective support through other's eyes, improved working environments, greater teaching strategies, higher professional self-esteem, and awareness of self-directed learning. Negative responses also appeared, mostly in regard to the working principles of implementation; the major issues of difficulties were time management, complexities of implementation procedure, stress and personal vulnerability, and relative lack of reflection and feedback skills. Demonstrating the participants' experiences towards the peer coaching program, this study provides EFL teachers with useful insights into peer coaching as an effective tool of their professional development.

[teacher education/teacher development/reflective teaching/peer coaching]

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades there has been a marked shift in our understanding of teacher education in the field of ESL/EFL learning and teaching. In the earlier period, "teacher training" was a dominant concept, but since the beginning of 1990s "teacher development" has gained a new currency. Traditional teacher training can be useful for preparation to

take on new teaching assignments or new responsibilities and is typically aimed at short-term and immediate goals. The last two decades, however, has seen a growing recognition that teachers' professional development should focus on self-awareness of the individual teacher — on the process of reflection, exploration, and change for personal and professional growth (Farrell, 2007; Jeon, Chang & Park, 2004; Kim, Kahng, & Song, 2007; Lange, 1990; Pennington, 1990; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Richards and Farrell (2005) define teacher development as a longer-term goal and an on-going process throughout the entire career of a teacher. Such a long-term and on-going development enhances teachers' awareness of themselves as a teacher and facilitates their continual growth through an understanding of their own teaching practices. Accordingly, it involves examining different dimensions of one's own practice as a basis for reflective teaching.

The resurgence of interest in professional development in this regard may be due in part to the prevailing educational philosophy of constructivism which is currently popular in language teaching and learning; that is, knowledge is not passively accepted and received but actively constructed. In other words, learners take an active role in their learning, shaping their own realities and ways of knowing (Ferrell, 2007). Likewise, the emphasis on reflection and self-inquiry in teachers' professional development is based on the belief that teachers can improve their teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting upon their teaching experience (Farrell, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Richards, 1998).

Richards (1998) maintains that self-inquiry and critical reflection can "help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse or intuition to one where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking" (pp. 23-24). In this light, a variety of approaches have been created for teachers to undertake as part of professional development, such as journal writing, action research, teaching portfolios, mentoring, peer coaching, teachers support groups, and peer observation (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Jeon, Chang, & Park, 2004; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Among these tools of teachers' professional development, some can be utilized individually; others collectively or collaboratively. Widely in use in various educational fields is collaborative professional development, which has recently begun to attract a new attention from language teachers, too. The implementation of collaborative development draws on a process in which small teams of teachers work together and utilize a variety of individual tools to meet the specific needs of the teachers in collaboration.

Peer Coaching (PC hereafter) is one of the most effective tools of collaborative professional development. With two teachers working in pair, PC promotes reflective inquiry into teaching practices and provides a potential solution for facilitating teacher growth and development both in pre-service and in-service teacher programs (Chase & Wolfe, 1989; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Goker, 2006; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Skinner &

Welch, 1996). Although much attention has been paid to the usefulness of PC in teacher education in general, there has been little attempt to propose an effective model of PC in ESL/EFL contexts. And research that deals with its effects in pre-service or in-service teacher development programs still has to be done. The purpose of the present study was to explore the model of PC processing and investigate its effects with a specific focus on teachers' perceptions towards the PC experiences they implemented.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Critical Reflection and Collaborative Professional Development

The term of reflection, or critical reflection, has been much discussed since Dewey (1933)'s original conception of the term, which signifies "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). Many theorists of education further developed Dewey's notion into a series of concepts, such as 'reflection-in-action' (observation and mental processing of actions as they occur), 'reflection-on-action' (reflection as we examine both before and after practices), and 'reflection-for-action' (generation or clarification of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable new action in our work) (Schön, 1983). Modification of the term was also proposed, such as 'creative reflection,' since it requires "examining and assessing of our own values and beliefs in the light of the theories and practice of others" (Calderhead & Gates, 1993). Nonetheless, 'critical reflection' remains preferred by many.

A critical reflective approach to teaching, in turn, is a method of improving classroom practice by a process in which the teachers become more aware of their own attitudes, knowledge, strategies, and styles. It goes beyond simply mirroring the external content of their instruction and aims at gaining a full understanding, and creating new meaning, of one's teaching practice. Therefore, a reflective teacher critically examines his/her teaching practices, comes up with some ideas as to how to improve his/her performance to enhance students' learning, and puts those ideas into practices (Bartlett, 1990). It is through reflections, after all, that teachers can gain deeper awareness of their own teaching as a whole and empower themselves to know how to make the right decisions in teaching (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Farrell, 2007; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

For the critical reflective teaching to be successful, teachers are confronted with new tasks. Rather than simply following prescriptions, they are required to produce and collect descriptions of teaching practices to start with. If teachers can get a detailed description of

their own practices, they can analyze what takes place in the classroom, give interpretations about its instructive or educational value, and generate alternative ways in which they teach specific aspects of the lesson. However, objective descriptions are hard to obtain and reflections tend to be enclosed within the subjectivity of the teacher. There may be a wide gap between what actually happens in the classroom and the teacher's perception of it. To close the gap, the individual teacher finds it necessary to bring in a detached observer to his/her classroom, or to the process of his/her reflection. And one may find the ideal observer among one's colleagues, who can serve to function simultaneously as a mirror image and an observer, mutually supporting each other's process of reflection.

Generally, professional development of teacher and teaching practices has been left to individual teachers working in isolation, occasionally coming together for workshops, seminars, or lecture-based training sessions. The recent re-conceptualization of teacher development characterizes professional development as a systemic and intentional process, involving colleague members of the educational community (Cooper & Boyd, 1998; Ferguson & Donno, 2003; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Grant, 1996; Kim, 2008). Professional development efforts have thus shifted from teaching skill training to an emphasis on self-awareness of teacher, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the "establishment of new norms of collegiality, experimentation, and risk-taking by promoting open discussion of issues, shared understandings, and a common vocabulary" (Grant, 1996, p. 22).

This shift towards collaborative teacher development is based on the assumption that teachers are productive and responsible members of a professional community, who become researchers of their own teaching and are more positively challenged to reflect on their practices within the circle of peer teachers. In this sense, the goal of collaborative professional development is to encourage teachers to work together, bring in greater interaction among them, share general and specific information and knowledge, cooperate in developing teaching strategies and techniques, and seek solutions to the problems in various aspects of teaching. Thus, collaborative teacher development enhances peer-based learning by allowing tasks and responsibilities to be shared among teachers. In this common task, collegiality creates new roles for teachers - such as guide, coach, mentor, and critical friend (Barnett & Bayne, 1992; Glatthorn, 1987).

Successful collaborative teacher development cannot be taken for granted, however, and must be carefully planned and monitored (Cooper & Boyd, 1998; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Robbins, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Robbins (1995) stresses that active collaboration leads to mutual reconstruction, which, first of all, should be agreed upon among teachers. In this regard, 'culture of collaboration' is essential. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) point out the significance of building a cooperative environment, in which teachers provide each other with assistance as they work together toward common goals, expand

their current knowledge and strategies, and eventually change their teaching practice. Therefore, by viewing teacher development as an evolving process from the first day in a professional development throughout one's teaching career and as a carefully coordinated effort among the teachers, we can expect teachers to take a full responsibility for their actions in the classroom, try to achieve a higher self-efficacy, and continue to improve their teaching practices.

2. Peer Coaching

The concept of coaching as it relates to teaching was introduced by Joyce and Showers (1982). Peer coaching is a process of teacher collaboration in which one teacher coaches a peer teacher in performing teaching practices for professional growth. It is not carried out in order to evaluate the teaching of peer teacher, but to encourage self-reflection and self-awareness about his/her own teaching. Thus, PC provides teachers with the opportunities to explore instructional alternatives, reflect on their effectiveness, make adjustments when necessary, and then investigate again (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Kovic, 1996; Robbins, 1995). Robbins (1995) defines peer coaching as following:

> confidential process through which two or more colleagues work together to reflect upon current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; conduct action research; teach one another; or problem solve within the workplace (p. 206).

In PC, pairs of teachers plan a series of opportunities to explore their teaching collaboratively. They watch each other's classes, develop support materials, and provide each other with insight and advice on their teaching. PC excludes the evaluative component of observation characteristic of the usual top-down, hierarchical, supervisory model, in which professional development is seen as something that is evaluated, with little attention paid to the ways in which teachers evolve expertise in the practice of teaching (Chase & Wolfe, 1989). In PC, teachers by turns take the roles of a coach teacher and a (coached) teacher. The coach teacher encourages a systematic reflection on the teacher's part, and they engage in critical yet constructive discussion of the issues raised by the coach teacher (Farrell, 2007). The relationship of the coach teacher and the teacher thus becomes that of 'critical friends' (Coasta & Kallick, 1993).

As a critical friend, the coach teacher offers another lens through which the teacher can obtain a clearer understanding of his/her own teaching, asks meaningful questions and provides classroom data as examined through a different perspective, and gives a nonjudgmental feedback on the teacher's practices. However, the critical friendship does not confer an absolute authority to exercise direct input and evaluative feedback upon the

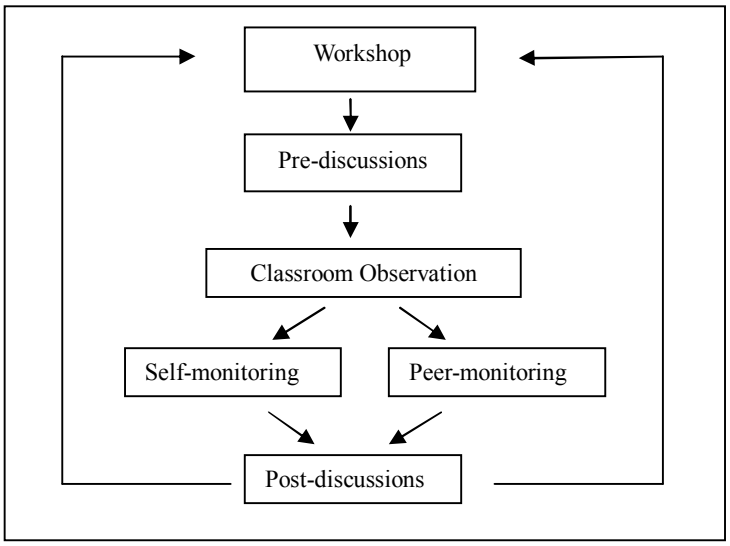
coach teacher but gives voice to a peer's thinking, which is essentially sympathetic and constructively critical at the same time. It is entirely up to the teacher's decision whether to accept or refuse the insights and advices from the coach teacher. In PC, the individual teacher remains the decision-maker with a peer's supportive criticism as an opportunity of changing and improving his teaching practices (Gottesman, 2000; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Skinner & Welch, 1996).

Moreover, PC can encourage a sense of professionalism that may not have existed prior to the collaboration, fostering incentive for joint-projects of classroom research, conference presentations, and even publications. As a result, it can help a teacher break out of the shells of isolation and separation from their colleagues, generating camaraderie among teachers and building a community of teachers as learners (Benedetti, 1997; Chase & Wolfe, 1989; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999).

3. Peer Coaching Model

Based on the discussions on peer coaching, this section proposes a Peer Coaching Model (PCM) geared towards professional development. It deals with theoretical assumptions that underlie the model. Figure 1 shows the flows of five phases comprising the PCM: workshop, pre-observation discussions, classroom observation, self- and peer-reflections, and post-observation discussions.

FIGURE 1
A Cycle of Peer Coaching Model



1) Workshop

PCM requires workshop session for the purpose of introducing and identifying procedures, necessary conditions, and the skills of observation and feedback. First, detailed explanation on PC (the concept of PC and its effectiveness, problems, and expectations), process and procedures, and technical support should be taken into account. Also, the participants should be informed of peer observation skills and objective and factual feedback technique. It is important to realize that, even when the emphasis has decidedly shifted to self-development, many teachers may still feel nervous about being observed and feel anxious that implicit judgments are being made about their teaching. It is, therefore, very important to reassure the participants, along with an emphasis on the confidentiality of observation records, of self-determination and mutuality that makes PC possible in the first place. They should be reassured, most of all, that they control and conduct the entire process with their own consent.

2) Pre-observation discussions

This discussion sets up a detailed planning for observations, including setting the date, time, place, role of coach, focus of observation, and so forth. In addition, the participants can discuss the nature of the class to be observed, the kind of materials being taught, the teacher's approach to teaching, the styles or types of students in the class, typical patterns of interaction and class participation, and so on. It is also necessary for the participants to decide jointly on such factors as how often the coach teacher should observe, possibly who (teacher or students) he/she should observe, what arrangements should be made for the observer, and what should be observed specifically.

3) Classroom observation

The participants observe each other's classrooms. Classroom observation can be focused on almost every aspect of the class, including both its teacher and students. To record information obtained from the observation, a variety of techniques — such as field notes, written narrative or checklist of critical incidents — may be used. In addition to these basic arrangements, a set of deliberate arrangements for the observer should be made so that the classroom observation may be non-threatening to the observed teacher on the one hand and genuinely productive on the other. In this regard, Richards (1998) stresses that it is essential "to establish a non-evaluative role for observers through giving them tasks to complete that involve collecting information rather than evaluating performance, and having the cooperating teacher determine what these tasks are … cooperating teachers need to have a clearer understanding of the role of observation and its potential for helping develop a reflective orientation to their own teaching" (p. 144).

4) Reflection through self- and peer-monitoring

Before the post-observation discussions, both teachers are provided with opportunities to engage in reflection on the classroom through self- and peer-monitoring. The coach teacher reviews observation notes, mentally replays the classroom, and formulates open-ended probing questions in preparation of the discussion. The observed teacher is also engaged in self-reflection by, if it was arranged, viewing the video-taped lessons. Both the coach teacher and the teacher are required to carry out the reflection through peer- and self-monitoring very intensively, since the scope of the post-observation discussions is likely to be confined within the issues that the two teachers bring on from their reflections. It is important to keep in mind that the coach teacher in this procedure, too, acts as a source of objective-descriptive information about the teacher's practices rather than as a judge or evaluator, in order to promote self-reflection on the part of the teacher and thus reinforces the teacher's learning process.

5) Post-observation discussions

The post-observation discussions, facilitated by the critical friend, can help the teacher to reflect in depth over the results of classroom observation in order to develop better practice. The discussions should be critical and constructive at the same time, making continual movements in search of questions and answers, problems and solutions. In other words, both teachers scaffold conversations so they move beyond discussions of procedures to clarifying issues, verbalizing teaching objectives, and reflecting on their choices of materials, their strength and strategies, and classroom organization and management. As a consequence, these discussions lead teachers to envision their future practices and consider the changes they would have to make in their current practices.

Post-observation discussions, as well as pre-observation discussions, involve 'reflective coaching,' in which, through on-going conversations about classroom practices, the teachers explore their meanings. In this context, the discussions are non-directive, exploratory talk of an open-ended, interactive nature (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Gottesman, 2000). Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) highlight the importance of reflective discussions, stating that "the co-construction of meaning through reflective discussions is helpful for teachers to flesh out and clarify what they are thinking about, and uncover something entirely new, such as undirected exploratory category of talk. At times, the building of meanings goes beyond communicative co-construction to purposeful action" (p. 168).

III. METHOD

1. Participants

The study was conducted in the fall semester of the 2008 school year. In this study, fourteen teachers – 7 pairs from 4 different universities in Korea – volunteered to participate, who were teaching English reading and/or conversation classes. In the middle of the research period, however, 1 out of the 7 pairs decided not to participate further. A total of 12 participants remained to the end and completed the program. They were 7 males and 5 females, ranging in age from 24 to 37 years. Participants' teaching experiences were various from 1 to 13 years of teaching. Their nationalities were also diverse: 4 Koreans, 4 Canadians, 3 Americans, and 1 Korean-Canadian.

It was a qualitative study, which aimed to explore the participants' experiences and perceptions of the PC program. Each of the 6 pairs met approximately once a week over a 10-week period. Some of the pairs met more frequently, but their informal meetings or talks did not count for this study. Each pair consisted of two peer teachers of the same professional status, since in a pair of different statuses it would be inevitably difficult for the superior to avoid adopting an evaluative attitude towards the other teacher.

Prior to this study, any of the participants had not received any formal training or experience in PC. None of them were aware of the practice of PC as a method of professional development. At the beginning of this study they had a 5-hour workshop session on PC, including an overview of PC with a detailed introduction to the five phases of a PC cycle. To keep the participants' confidentiality, it was decided that they would use their pseudonyms. Table 1 shows the participants' personal information (except the two participants who withdrew).

TABLE 1
Background of Participants (N=12)

Group	Pseudo	Gender	Age	Teaching Ex.	Nationality
A	Mr. B	M	30	3 years	Canadian
A	Ms. J	F	27	2. 5 years	Korean-Canadian
B	Mr. T	M	30	3 years	Korean
B	Mr. O	M	33	5 years	Korean
C	Ms. C	F	31	7 years	American
C	Ms. L	F	28	4 years	Canadian
D	Mr. M	M	30	2 years	Korean
D	Ms. K	F	35	4 years	Korean

E	Mr. G	M	29	3 years	Canadian
E	Ms. S	F	37	13 years	Canadian
F	Mr. P	M	33	6 years	American
F	Mr. R	M	24	1 year	American

2. Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the research period. The researcher interviewed with each of the twelve participants for 20-30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Korean with the Korean teachers and in English with the native speakers of English. The interviews were recorded and transcribed from the audio tapes for detailed analysis. The Korean teachers' interviews were translated into English. Collected through the interview were the data concerning about the participants' experiences of and perceptions towards PC (see Appendix for semi-interview questions).

A qualitative approach used to analyze the data in this study was reflective analysis adopted from Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). Reflective analysis involves a decision by the researcher, relying on his/her own intuition and personal judgment in analyzing and classifying the data rather than on technical procedures involving an explicit category classification system. For reflective analysis, the researcher carefully examined and then reexamined all the data collected.

As this process of analysis continued, some features became salient and the researcher began to develop an understanding of these features by themselves and in relation to one another. Relevant excerpts from the interview transcriptions were then classified by the salient factors, as the participants' perceptions towards PC diverged into positive and negative perspectives in general and further into specific attentions to various aspects of their PC experience. In order to check the reliability of the data, a second researcher coded the data according to the given by the researcher. The interrater reliability coefficients ranged from .796 to .913.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the results of the study, two main categories were identified as the focus of an in-depth analysis: positive and negative responses to PC experience. In positive feedbacks, the overriding themes that emerged from the data were the benefits of PC, as listed below under five headings: Reflective support through other's eyes; Improved working environments; Greater teaching strategies; Higher professional self-esteem; Awareness of self-directed learning. Negative feedbacks were made particularly in regard to the working

principles of implementation, listed below under four headings: Time management; Complexities of implementation procedure; Stress and personal vulnerability; Lack of reflection and feedback skills.

1. Positive Feedback

Five issues emerged as most importantly related to the benefits of PC: reflective support through other's eyes, improved working environments, greater teaching strategies, higher professional self-esteem, and awareness of self-directed learning.

1) Reflective support through other's eyes

A significant benefit figured all across the collected data was that the PC program implemented for this study provided the participants with opportunities to see their own teaching through another person's perspective, which in turn gave them a fresh take on it. Some of the participants highlighted the discrepancy between his/her view of what happened in their classrooms and the coacher teacher's view emerged from observation notes. It was often the case that the teacher found his/her own perception of what he/she was doing in the class to be widely different from what it actually was. The coach's alternative view enabled the teacher to pursue a more objective view and more rigorous reflection upon his/her own teaching practice. Provided with several perspectives from which to view and discuss what occurs in a classroom, the teachers could open themselves up to multiple interpretations of what was seen and heard, what was taught and learned. In that aspect, it can be maintained that PC contributed to the teacher's perceptual modification and behavioral adjustment.

It was also noticeable that novice teachers, paired with more experienced ones, acknowledged the desirability of PC as well as expressed indebtedness to their coach. The more experienced coach teachers were likely to offer more productive feedbacks; in certain cases, they served to function as a role model for the less experienced.

Mr. B: From my coach teacher, with whom I shared a cooperative and mutual interest in PC, I could gain both peer-caring and insightful feedback. Above all, she gave me an alternative and highly constructive view of my teaching, which helped me a lot to set a new goal for higher qualities of my teaching practice. It also strengthened my motivation to shift the perspectives I had held on to and move on to new ones that I did not realize there were.

Mr. M: *With the help of my coach teacher, I could understand more fully the strengths and weaknesses of my own teaching practices. And the insights, knowledge, and advice of the coach provided me with practical choices to make as well as basic issues to reflect on.*

Ms. L: Peer coaching provided me with a great opportunity to observe objectively and reflect intensely upon my teaching styles and strategies, because my coach's note showed me how wrong I was in my belief of what I was doing. The whole process was not only enjoyable but also rather exciting. It was exciting to see through another person's eyes how I actually teach, and it gave me a lot of fresh ideas.

Mr. O: It was a great experience. The process helped me, in particular, to clarify my thinking about teaching, to analyze myself as a teacher. The fact is that my coach teacher had a shorter teaching experience than me, but he was far more thoughtful and able to see what I was doing in my classroom. I learned a lot about myself through his observation of my class and honest discussion about it.

Ms. S: Participation in peer coaching helped me understand my practice better. At first, it was a totally devastating experience for me, because I discovered for the first time in my teaching career, which is quite long I guess, this huge gap between what I thought I was doing and what my coach told me what he saw . . . I think I acquired the ability. I learned not to take certain things and situations for granted but to scrutinize them critically. That's what my coach did for his class. I do not accept anymore whatever happens in my practice without re-thinking it, and I try to investigate it in depth.

Mr. R: PC provided me the support I badly needed. I am a new teacher. I am pretty confident with my knowledge of the material I use for the class. But I still need a lot of training in teaching strategies and methods. During the whole period of this peer coaching I had a very strong support in this aspect. My coach was much more experienced and I had a lot to learn from him. Even when I was not engaged in PC activities, I felt more or less supported. To know that I had a colleague to discuss any problem I face in my teaching was a kind of security lock to me.

Mr. G: I feel that I had a genuine support during this entire period. After the first class observation session, whenever I had something I was preoccupied with in terms of techniques or strategies of teaching, I felt free to meet and discuss with my coach teacher. The fact that she was far more experienced than me gave me a sense of security; that I had someone to trust. The talks we had became very important for me because it gave me a sort of self-confidence. During my 3 years of teaching experience, I had never felt this kind of strong support from any previous head teachers or colleagues.

Ms. L: My collaboration with a colleague, who has been in this profession for a long time, was a strongly positive experience for me. I now feel that through peer coaching I learned so many things that are helpful and that can be used in the classroom without modifying at all. Trying to adopt my coach's working principles and borrow her sense of herself as a teacher, I believe I learned to think differently about teaching and about myself.

2) Improved working environments

For many of the participants, the PC program created a positive learning climate. The personal contacts, the cross-observations of each other's class, and the open-minded discussions contributed to reducing the sense of isolation on the part of individual teachers and making a densely collaborative working environment possible. Although the participants were intellectually curious about the PC program to be implemented at the beginning stage, it was in the phase of post-observation discussions that the two teachers in a pair developed into a genuinely collaborative relationship.

While some of them went through difficulties in communicating with each other during the discussion sessions, many overcame the initial difficulties and established a psychological climate in which PC activities were facilitated by interpersonal caring, understanding, and trust, along with a shared commitment to professional development. In the process, the participants fostered more negotiable strategies of communication and came to feel less anxious and more confident when interacting with peers. Such an atmosphere helped them feel secure enough to be more honest with themselves and with others. Finally, this supportive and caring atmosphere encouraged them to take risks in trying to extend and deepen their awareness and to do so with curiosity and excitement rather than with defensiveness and anxiety.

Mr. G: I believe I got a tremendous help from my coach. And it was not only about the techniques or know-hows of teaching but about the kind of atmosphere we two were in. Yes, the process of collaboration itself, if you please. I think this whole process of working together for a common goal reinforced my need for learning as a teacher.

Ms. K: I think peer coaching is especially pertinent to our setting because at any given time there are a certain number of part-time and new teachers who do not know each other very well and therefore do not know whom to consult or with whom to work on teaching materials and strategies. But this experience [in peer coaching] opened up new possibilities, a great potential to build up a working environment where you could find 'the' helper in your colleague sitting right next to your desk.

Mr. P: The tight structure of my school day does not allow us [teachers] to discuss our teaching critically. Sometimes I used to feel lonely and was captivated by a desperate sense of isolation. Most of the time I used to be left alone with inner monologues, so to speak, regarding the mistakes I made in the classroom and the decisions I have to make for tomorrow's class, until I started working together with Mr. R. I would say, 'The dialogue has finally begun.'

Mr. R: I have developed a rather cohesive relationship with my partner because of constant co-ordination and collaboration for this 'peer coaching.' In fact, no one coached no one. We were buddies who could talk about anything, anytime, anywhere, if it was related to our teaching.

Mr. B: The observations, both of my class and of hers were a little scary. Well, being observed is a scary experience, of course. So is an act of observation, when you have to write down what you see and show it to the observed person. I felt very much tense at the beginning of our post-discussion meetings, because I was scared of what I was going to hear from her about my class and because I did not want her to take any of my notes on her teaching, especially critical ones, personal. To my surprise, it went all right! As the discussions went on, both of us got relaxed and found ourselves freely criticize each other without being offended at all. I guess we instantly made an agreement without saying it that this is all for our benefit, for our future as great teachers.

Ms. J: I was not really easy about openly discussing the strengths or the weaknesses of each other's class. I would have preferred simply exchanging each other's notes and reading them alone, which I believed was more effective because you don't have to be defensive and therefore you can focus better. But I was wrong. In fact, it was fun either trying to convey the meaning of my notes precisely or being persuaded of the points that my coach tried to make. I think I really had a terrific experience with my coach teacher, whom I totally trust now.

3) Greater teaching strategies

Many participants stated that through the process of the PC program their ability to conceptualize their teaching improved and became more orderly and systemic, which in turn enabled their ideas to be carried forward more logically and productively. PC provided a repository of valuable information and knowledge, from which a teacher, experienced or inexperienced, obtained various conceptual or technical supports. On the conceptual level, teachers could newly understand their current practice in terms of teaching methodology

and educational philosophy. On the technical level, they were provided with advices, suggestions, or self-discovery in regard to every practical aspects of their teaching.

Self- and peer-monitoring followed by post-observation discussions were most productive in this aspect. While reflecting upon the observation notes for each other and upon his/her own teaching with a video-record replaying, many participants discovered gaps to fill and spots to clear, especially in terms of teaching strategies. And some of the participants spent hours clarifying what they had observed and trying to come up with solutions or alternatives to suggest. The areas of teaching strategies identified for improvement were so diverse that they cannot be listed individually. But the acts of reflection and discovery were tangible in the collected data. As a consequence, some participants acknowledged that their current practice in teaching strategy was much less effective than they had thought, and that they were determined to bring in significant changes and innovations.

Ms. C: *I was so used to the classes I had taught for the last 5 years or so that I rarely looked back at them. I just believed that I was teaching all right. This was my first time videotaping my class, and it was horrible. I tried to find out what was wrong, but I could not point out what was missing, until my coach teacher suggested that I kept talking without grabbing students' attention.*

Mr. M: *It was written on my coach's note that the overall impression of my class management was a little monotonous. At my request, he explained that the supporting materials I used may have been too close in content to the textbook. I have never thought it would be appropriate to bring in 'irrelevant' material to the class. But why not? The point is to get attention and interest from the students first, isn't it? I did not find enough time to prepare a new material this semester, but I surely will be prepared for the next.*

Mr. T: Let alone the need to develop new materials and activities for an enhanced teaching and learning, peer coaching gave me an opportunity to go beyond the traditional way of teaching that most of us in this profession stick to. I was really impressed at my coach's notes for post-observation discussion, which was very much like a chapter in a textbook of language teaching methodology. He must have spent hours and hours on thinking and writing it.

Ms. S: I was pretty confident about what I had been doing in terms of teaching, and I was also confident about myself as an experienced teacher, who could give out useful information or practical knowledge to those in need of them. But this experience in peer coaching was never easy. It was very hard, in fact. I had to spend a lot of time, a great

much more than I expected. It was all right with my video; I knew what I was doing and I wasn't surprised at anything that happened in my classroom. It was the preparation of the post-discussion for Mr. G that took me a lot of time and a lot of pain. I knew what was wrong and what was missing in his class, but I did not have the exact words for it. To explain what I knew, or rather what I felt, I struggled for hours before the discussion. In the process, I think I learned al lot. We take too much for granted, as we are used to what we do. But we should be knowledgeable enough to talk about it critically.

4) Higher professional self-esteem

Many participants acknowledged that their experience in the PC program helped them to build confidence and develop a greater awareness of their own capabilities and responsibilities as a teacher. Critical reflection upon themselves and their practices, reinforced and supported by peer assistance, contributed to the technical improvement in teaching and, more importantly, to an increased feeling of professional self concepts.

Mr. T: To me, overall professional growth is something to be accomplished thorough the effectiveness of instructional skills and self-confidence built on the technical achievements. My experience of the peer coaching program helped me a lot in that aspect, and in such a short period.

Mr. G: For the last ten weeks I kept trying to modify the lessons and activities in the textbook to make them more interesting and instructive. And I kept on with dry-runs or road-tests each of them before I had my class observed. I'm not sure if this constant effort worked out successfully to my students or to my coach, both of whom showed a positive response, though. It certainly worked out for me. I feel I have reached a point, a hill, from which I can see where I am supposed to go now; I mean, in terms of my teaching career.

Ms. J: Peer coaching offered me an opportunity to observe peer teacher's classes and teaching skills other than my own. I think I learned to see classroom dynamics more objectively. Now I try to look at my class in a critical distance, even when I am engaged in teaching the class. I did not know where I stood in the middle of a class. But I now can see where I am, what I am doing, how the students are responding. It makes me so sure of myself. The fact is, after the ten-week 'hard training' I became more confident.

Mr. M: As the program went on, I somehow felt that this was not just about teaching techniques or teacher collaboration, that it had something to do with 'becoming' a teacher. I mean, the entire process was geared up to the awareness of teaching as a profession: highly respectable profession as well as highly technical. All the phases of the program

were helpful, of course, to a great extent. I feel more confident about myself as an instructor, thanks to my coach whose suggestions in terms of methods and strategies I adopted eagerly. In retrospect, however, it is surprising to find that she was not just offering tips for effective teaching but she showed me how respectable a teacher could be.

5) Awareness of self-directed learning

For many of the participants, PC promoted autonomy and self-directed learning. It did not make them solely dependent on their peers nor constricted under a mandatory 'training' program but encouraged them to explore their own contexts, construct individual-based knowledge, and understanding of their own teaching. In other words, it gave the teachers opportunities to take the initiative to identify and solve their own problems, thinking flexibly and creatively about teaching materials, time management, types of classroom activities, student responses and interactions, and so forth. In self-directed learning, teachers assume responsibility for setting goals for self-development and for managing and controlling their own teaching. In this sense, it encompasses Underhill's (1992) ideas of self-direction within a process of collaboration: "Teacher development is no different from personal development, and as such can only be self-initiated, self-directed and self-evaluated. No one else can do it for us, though other people can be indispensible in helping us to do it" (p. 79).

Ms. S: Self-observation experiences had a great impact on my perception of my own teaching practice. By video-taping and then describing my class objectively, I learned to see my teaching from different angles and noticed what I could not see while in the act of teaching.

Mr. P: The experience of managing my own learning gave me an excellent lesson in learning how to better promote other people's learning. In addition to the benefits from its collaborative process, peer coaching opened up the ways in which I continue to be aware of my own responsibility for myself as a learner, prior to myself as a teacher.

Ms. C: Different and alternative interpretations of my teaching practice enabled me to question my beliefs about teaching and learning. This peer coaching program completed, I will nonetheless continue with self-monitoring and reflective teaching.

Mr. B: I volunteered for this program, because 'peer coaching' sounded interesting and seemed to promise a team work that I always enjoyed. In the process, however, I realized that team work cannot work out, unless each individual is totally committed to his own

portion of the task. In this program, my portion was none other than myself as a teacher. I now understand that it's all up to me, whether supported by a team mate or not.

Taken as a whole, these findings under 5 headings show that the benefits of PC have actually gone much further than simply helping the teachers to apply appropriate and effective teaching techniques to mend specific problems in teaching and learning. The participants' responses on a more fundamental level indicate that their PC experience had a positive impact upon their general capacity as a teacher, who could envision a community of teachers, open-minded to constructive criticisms, exploring new possibilities, willing to make a change, and eager to learn about themselves.

2. Negative Feedback

The participants also responded to the difficulties in implementing a PC program, though such difficulties did not override nor counterpoint the advantages of PC. The major issues of difficulties were time management, complexities of implementation procedure, stress and personal vulnerability, and relative lack of reflection and feedback skills.

1) Time management

Some of the participants stated that one of the significant difficulties was time. Although most of the participants seemed to wish to spend more time for the PC related activities, they claimed that their teaching duties did not allow for sufficient time.

Mr. B: I was much interested in the program from the beginning and got more so as it proceeded. I'd like to engage in the activities more often and longer. But due to the pressure of teaching load, I could not.

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Ms. K: I wish this program had been organized or sponsored by my school, so that the participants in peer coaching were given a reduced teaching hours. The fact is that once you are involved in peer coaching, there are so many thing to do that you cannot carry it out with 12 hours of teaching.

Mr. O: Working together with another teacher takes extra time, even if it is a part of your preparation for the class you teach. It was simply impossible for me to find time to do it as much as I wanted. It was the same with my coach teacher, who I believe had a stronger interest in the peer coaching program.

Ms. C: It wasn't easy for me to find time slots for this extra activity. I worked for almost the whole evening to prepare the post-observation discussion, and I had to get ready for the class in the morning at the same time. I once wondered if I'd better drop out of the program.

2) Complexities of implementation procedure

Some of the participants had difficulties understanding the specifics of collaborative process. It became apparent that the 5-hour introductory workshop was not sufficient to make them aware of every procedure to the detail. Some pairs made a phone call to or send e-mail messages to the researcher. With or without subsequent directions or explanations from the researcher, most of the participants gradually worked out the necessary procedures, including what to discuss in the pre-observation discussion, how to take notes in the observation, and how give feedbacks in the post-observation discussion.

Mr. T: The workshop session was great and I couldn't wait to start the practice. But as soon as it started, we were at loss at how to proceed.

Ms. L: We could not determine what to focus in class observation. My coach and I did not know each other very well before we came together in this program. So we didn't have the faintest idea of what our teaching styles were like. We needed a starting point to launch this collaboration project.

Mr. P: Post-observation session was the most difficult to handle properly. I couldn't decide what to comment on and what not. My partner had the same problem. We decided to e-mail [the researcher] for more information.

3) Stress and personal vulnerability

The PC implemented for this study seemed to have created considerable stress for a few participants. This was a factor which was partially predicted and for which in the introductory workshop certain measures were taken to minimize. Nonetheless, some of the participants experienced stress. In particular, class observation and post-observation discussion were the focal points of generating stress and impinging on personal vulnerability.

Ms. J: I felt uneasy about classroom observation, although I understood it was a necessary step and would be beneficial eventually. In fact, I became overly self-conscious during the observation session. I could not get focused on the classroom activities and from time to time my attention distracted from the class to my coach teacher, who were taking notes.

Mr. M: The night before classroom observation I became restless and was much worried about what my coach would think of my teaching. I knew it had nothing to do with evaluation. Still, I could not stop wondering if I would be able to teach my class well enough to make a good impression on my coach.

Ms. C: I was very nervous at the beginning of the post-observation discussion. My coach seemed to have prepared a lot of comments and I suddenly got afraid of being criticized. I was also afraid that I was not fully prepared to give her any meaningful comments or to make sense with my recommendations for her teaching.

4) Lack of reflection and feedback skills

Some participants were dissatisfied with the nature of the feedback received from the coach and/or the ways in which feedback was delivered. In fact, giving constructive feedback is an essential part of PC and requires a very demanding skill. In the opening workshop it was repeatedly emphasized that PC should not be a tool for the judgment of others on the basis of our own beliefs and assumptions. However, some of the participants were not skillful at communicating their views sufficiently to make them sound a constructive criticism.

Ms. L: I think my coach and I had exchanged a lot of enlightening comments about strengths and weaknesses of each other's teaching practices. It was a pleasant experience for the most part. But there were awkward moments, too, when we felt that something had been said that had better remain unspoken.

Mr. G: We were informed that feedback in peer coaching should be nonjudgmental and constructive. Sometimes, however, I could not help feeling that my coach teacher tried to find my weaknesses only, while I tried to balance criticism with more positive comments.

Mr. R: It was not easy for me to give meaningful feedbacks. I had a very short teaching experience and I never had participated in this professional development activity. I think I need to train my feedback skill.

Taken as a whole, these findings under 4 headings show that some of the difficulties in implementing a PC program derives from the inadequacy ascribed to the teachers at work; others from the lack of institutional support. However, an apparently individual inadequacy can be alleviated by a support from an educational institution. For instance, appropriate skills in reflection and feedback can be fostered in more frequent and intensive workshops

if the PC program were administered at the level of the institution that the teachers worked at.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Teacher 'development' assumes that teaching is a constantly evolving process of growth and change. It is a process of expanding instructional skills and self-understanding of the teacher, one in which the teacher is responsible for the entire process, in much the same way their students are in learning a language. Effective professional development calls for adequate support structures and opportunities for teachers to select, plan, carry out, and evaluate the professional development activities in which they are engaged. When teachers participate collaboratively in the creation and implementation of professional development activities, they develop ownership over the learning process, and their learning is more likely to promote student success.

This study offers some insights into peer coaching as an effective tool of professional development. Peer coaching makes a decided shift towards self-directed approaches in teacher development, a move away from an authoritarian and organizational structure of teacher training towards a more participatory form of teacher development. It is especially notable that the type of collaboration engendered in peer coaching contributes to the concomitant development of two colleagues to their mutual benefit. The systemic arrangements of PC cycles, with formal and/or informal personal contacts with a peer teacher, cross-observations and reflections on each other's teaching practice, and open-minded discussions for constructive criticism, are most likely to optimize the working relationship between the teachers and reinforce their potential for growth.

Although peer coaching is a very important component of teacher development, it is not sufficient in and of itself; there are a set of pre-conditions for a successful PC program. This study demonstrated both the positive effects of PC perceived by the participants and certain limitations in implementing the program for this study, which was an individual researcher-initiated and volunteer-based. From the participants' response to such limitations it is inferred that PC can be optimized for teacher development when it is organized or administered at the level of an educational institution.

First of all, it is desirable to have a supervisor who plans the overall procedure and schedule to implement the program as a whole. The supervisor can provide an introductory workshop intensive enough for a full orientation to PC. Additional workshops may be warranted to promote effective observation and discussion skills. The supervisor can also intervene in the PC process when problems develop and can take into account each teacher's particular needs in grouping a pair, as teachers may have different teaching styles,

educational beliefs and philosophy, and concerns and levels of expertise. However, these tasks should be carried out with an utmost caution, because it is essential to foster an atmosphere of trust, collegiality, autonomy, and self-directed learning must be fostered among teachers, so that they are willing to take risks as they learn new ways of teaching and develop a deeper awareness of themselves as teacher.

It is no less important to provide tangible administrative support for teacher development in general and PC program in particular. Teachers may balk at spending time to develop peer-coaching relationships, because peer coaching relationships can quickly come to be seen as unwanted additional work. Time must be provided, preferably during the school day, for teachers to observe each other's teaching, to reflect together after observations, and to engage in other related activities.

Recommendations being made, it should be acknowledged that this study involves some limitations, too. Above all, a relatively small number of participants were selected for this study in examining teachers' reactions towards PC. Related to this is the fact that, in a strict sense, the participants were not chosen randomly; they were volunteer participants, which may imply that they were likely to have a stronger interest in their professional development, if not in PC itself. Furthermore, some of the important issues that seemed to emerge from the data were left uninvestigated, such as correlation of differences in age, sex, length of teaching experience, or nationality and optimal conditions of a PC pair. Future studies are anticipated in this regard.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions

I. Personal information

1. What do you teach now?
2. How long have you taught English as a second or foreign language?
3. What is your nationality?

II. Your experience in this project

1. Have you ever experienced any kind of professional development before you join this project? If so, what was that?
2. What motivated you to involve in this project?

3. How do you think it help you in your professional development?
4. What were the benefits you have experienced while you involved in this project?
5. What were the difficulties you have experienced while you involved in this project?
6. Do you intend to go on peer coaching for your professional growth as it is implemented in this project? Why or Why not?

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary

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Received in April, 2009
Reviewed in May, 2009
Revised version received in June, 2009