

Professional Learning Design Plan:

Effective Peer Coaching and Follow-up

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Goals

Berkeley High School (BHS) is a diverse, urban high school working with an inconsistent implementation and enforcement of professional learning standards. Although there seem to be productive sessions in some departments on the designated days, there seems to be a general consensus among some department members that learning opportunities are limited and ineffective in certain areas.

A goal at BHS (S1) is to provide “academic support and professional development for Math 1,2, and 3” (BHS, 2024). Another goal (S2) is to achieve a “level of sitewide cohesiveness that visibly unifies the efforts of each department, program, and team across the site to serve students and meet their unique needs” (BHS, 2024). A final relevant goal (S3) of the school is to “improve student engagement and achievement through innovative, standards-based curriculum that addresses the range of students’ needs.” (BHS, 2024).

Personally, a goal (P1) is to be able to engage in more collaboration with other math teachers outside of my informal collaboration group. An additional goal (P2) will be to engage in meaningful and efficacious peer coaching to gain more insights and feedback on my teaching strategies. Lastly, it (P3) would be to effectively follow-up on school-wide PD goals within the math department.

Goal Alignment of the Professional Learning Design

To meet S1, S3, P1, and P3, my profession learning design focuses on content-focused collaborative groups with reciprocal coaching. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) suggests that a content focus in professional learning allows teachers to be more job-embedded. My design has a strong focus on using professional learning principles in a formally assigned group within the math department. Donegan et al. (2000) says that there are two models of peer coaching: expert and reciprocal. Because of the possible strain on staffing, it may be interesting to see how a mix of these models will fare at the school. To achieve this, this design will try a similar strategy to how Slater & Simmons (2001)

provided a booklet to teachers centered on information on peer coaching. My design attempts to train all members in peer coaching to help me achieve S1, P2, and P3. Lack of follow-through or motivation from teachers has been a problem and hopefully an attempt to train members will be effective in bolstering the collaborative spirit and tighten the expectation on the insights that all teachers gain from their peer coaching experiences.

Overall, the design choices hope to drive success in goal S2, through a strong focus on structured professional collaborativeness among colleagues. Muijs & Harris (2003) suggest that structured collaboration needs to be set up for truly transformative teacher leadership and that teacher leadership is greatly enhanced when opportunities like mentoring and collaboration are introduced, bolstering effectiveness, collegiality, and improved practices. A design choice that is embedded is also reflection. Costa & Garmston (2002) suggest that it's easy to discard single occurrences when reflection is not being done. The design hopes to have individuals think more about their peer coaching process through guided reflection.

Preparation for Peer Coaching

Teachers will engage in a training session at the start of the year on peer coaching. The goal of this preparation will be to have teachers familiarize themselves with the expectations and norms surrounding peer coaching as well as to gain experience in a mock situation. At the end of the session, teachers will have seen or experienced a model of peer coaching and have information that they can refer back to in their actual peer coaching experience.

Before the session, a booklet on information centered around peer coaching, strategies, examples of dialogue, and a role playing exercise will be prepared for distribution during the session. During the session, teachers will be instructed to review the booklet and orient themselves to the role playing exercise. After reviewing the booklet, they will engage in the role playing exercise with a trusted peer. The role playing exercise will involve a guided, semi-scripted peer coaching process. Teacher A will

be the observee and Teacher B will be the coach. Both teachers will have scripts to start the conversation and then the conversation will lead to be more open ended, with hints and ideas on how to approach the conversation on both ends. Neither party should spoil the scripts or any prompts that they are given. To end the exercise, they will first read through the other teacher's part and self-reflect on how the conversation went. Lastly, they will share with a group about what they experienced during the exercise and how they might approach it differently in actual coaching.

Collaborative Groupings

Teachers in the math department will be grouped into groups of 2-3; teachers will be grouped by teaching content area. The goal of this will be to establish groupings where individuals will have more rapport opportunities with each other and to be able to reach common goals based on their interest.

Prior to the start of the school year or new semester, teachers in the math department will be sent a survey to assess their professional development needs and interests. Questions revolving around content of interest and pedagogical interests will be present for teachers to provide a sense of where they should be placed. The teacher leaders in charge will form the groups based on the survey results, making sure to also ensure that groups have varying experience and expertise in teaching, pedagogical strategies, and content area.

The formed groups will meet regularly every 1-2 weeks for 30 minutes each time during the weekly dedicated professional development session. The following sections describe events and protocols for the groups to participate in and discuss.

Outline of Groups

Each group will engage in at least one cycle of observation per semester, occurring near the beginning of each semester if possible. Peer coaching will involve observation of lessons, taking notes, providing feedback, and collaborating on modifications to strategies. Teachers in pairs will

observe reciprocally, and teachers in groups of three will form non-reciprocal pairs. Peer coaching will involve the following events: pre-observation meeting, observation, self-reflection on observation, and post-observation meeting. All meetings for peer coaching can occur during or outside of the regular required department meeting. Teachers engaging with peer coaching are expected to gain insight on other teachers' practices, their own practice, and peer advice for how to better approach their classroom and content area.

Peer Coaching in Groups

The paired teachers will participate in a pre-observation meeting to learn more about each other's professional learning goals and pedagogical strategies. The pre-observation meeting will have three parts:

1. The observee will be responsible for explaining the lesson's student learning outcomes, specific areas of improvement that they want to know about, and the ideal classroom engagement will look like. The observer will be responsible for listening carefully to the other teacher, asking for clarification and thinking about the direction or alternate directions that the peer coaching could take.
2. Both teachers will be responsible for formulating at least 2 guiding questions to answer or discuss in the post-observation meeting. The guiding questions should be goal-oriented based on the direction that the two want to take.
3. In addition, there will be multiple possible templates and prompts for the observer to take notes with, each with different focuses on pedagogy and classroom practice. The pair will decide together which tool will be ideal for the observer to take notes with.

At the time of observation, the observer will be present in the classroom to take notes using their selected template. The observer will use the selected note-taking tool from the pre-observation

meeting to keep note of the desired focal points. They will also keep in mind specific classroom management strategies, student behavior, and student engagement during the observation.

Both teachers will engage in self-reflection on the observation independently. A dedicated template will be provided for them to complete. It will have questions surrounding:

- What did you feel about the lesson?
- What contributed to those feelings?
- What were some indicators of success in student learning outcomes?
- How might this data inform us about next steps and future lessons?

They will also each focus on the guiding questions from the pre-observation meeting to write about what they see about their progress in being able to answer their questions and what kind of guidance they want to receive (or provide) to the peer.

In the post observation meeting, the teachers will touch point. The conversation will center on the observee learning about their strengths, areas for growth, and specific strategies that may improve their own practice. The post observation meeting will follow three stages:

1. Individually, the receiving peer will share what they wrote for their self-reflection and the peer coach will then share what they wrote.
2. They will have guided conversation similar to the mock coaching that they did in the training. Teachers will have access to prompting questions and hints that they can use to inspire the direction of their conversations, as well as common strategies that more experienced peer coaches have used or suggested in a similar classroom.
3. They will collaboratively summarize what they saw out of the lesson. They will list out: strengths, areas for growth, and specific strategies to improve the receiving peer's practice.

Effective Follow-through with PD

Guskey and Yoon (2009) suggests that “structured and sustained follow-up” is key to school-wide PD development goals. To motivate colleagues in engaging in the activities, a few extra activities will be implemented into department PD sessions. The goal of all activities is to enable effective inter-group learning and sharing of pedagogical knowledge.

Lessons for peer observations should also be aligned with the rotating school PD goal. This year, it was “Constructing Meaning” (CM). It is unsure what the next year’s focus will be. However, lessons that peers observe should also be aligned with the material that is being shared with the whole school. For example, CM stresses implementing tools in the classroom to help students deconstruct wording and to iteratively construct sentences or dialogue about problems. This would be an effective opportunity for teachers to see how to apply the rotating school PD goal in their content area. This is ever more so important when there is a topic like CM which is not that applicable or clear in a technical subject like math.

All teachers will be expected—at least once per school year—to briefly present the observation that they did to the math department. The teacher leaders will be among the first to present to provide a model for the other teachers to follow suit. All presentations will share the lesson objective (including materials that they used), the classroom practices that they saw during the lesson, and any other interesting ways that the teacher approached their classroom. They will also discuss any focal discussion that they had in their post-observation meeting—surrounding what they collaboratively summarized along with any dialogue that they had because of previous training and what specifically helped them be more effective as a peer coach.

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