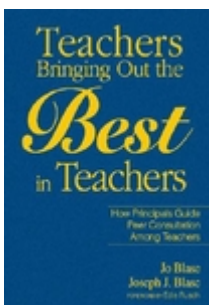


Promoting Peer Consultation in Schools

A review of



Teachers Bringing Out the Best in Teachers: A Guide to Peer Consultation for Administrators and Teachers

by Jo Blase and Joseph J. Blase

Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006. 146 pp. ISBN

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Reviewed by

[Stephanie L. Brooke](#)

Identifying the developmental needs of teachers through mentoring and collaboration is not a new practice. Most teachers have experienced professional development through mentoring or induction programs. What these programs do not traditionally cover is the day-to-day interaction between teachers—teacher-to-teacher collaboration—that is based on trust and instructional collaboration. “The most reliable, useful, proximate, and professional help [for teachers] resides under the roof of the schoolhouse with the teaching staff itself” (p. xi). This new book claims to promote and boost teacher-to-teacher collaboration and learning as a method building professional development.

Blase and Blase conducted a study of 300 teachers from public elementary, middle, and high schools located in the southeastern United States. The teachers were interviewed with respect to their experiences with peer consultation. The research was descriptive, based

on the interviews, and the book does not include an empirical analysis. Based on these interviews, the following five teacher behaviors are identified:

1. Building healthy relationships by communicating, caring, and developing trust
2. Using five guiding principles for structuring learning experiences
3. Planning and organizing for learning
4. Showing and sharing
5. Guiding for classroom management

These five factors are thought to positively influence teachers' morale and teaching skills, as well as professional growth. The authors distinguish between mentoring, coaching, and peer consultation:

Peer consultation refers to two or more teachers engaging in dialogue about the idiosyncratic teaching context and teachers' concerns... Thus, peer consultants are nonthreatening partners who facilitate a teacher's reflection on teaching-learning issues, assessment of progress, and instructional improvement. (p. xi)

Mentors, on the other hand, act on established standards and limited preparation and time, whereas peer consultants are not bound by predetermined standards. Coaches have special preparation for work with teachers and transfer prescribed approaches or processes to teachers. Peer consultants, in contrast, “who may not have expertise specific to a given teacher's work or a specific focus for dialogue other than that selected by the teacher, naturally observed and conferred with teachers in a consultative, facilitative, and nonthreatening manner” (p. 18).

Skill 1, building healthy relationships by communicating, caring, and developing trust, is accomplished through four types of peer consultation:

1. Type 1: Peer coaching that focuses on the principles of teaching effectiveness
2. Type 2: Peer coaching that focuses on models of teaching
3. Type 3: Peer consultation that focuses on instructional fine tuning, reflective practice, and innovation

4. Type 4: Peer consultation that focuses on organizational development and change processes

Skill 2, using the five guiding principles for structuring student learning experiences, contains several comments by educators: “Teachers know that there is much more to their knowledge than knowing the subject matter to be taught” and “To the extent that you can open your students' eyes to wonder, you will be successful in the classroom” (p. 42). Skill 3 is planning and organizing for learning: “She helped me organize my lessons—what to teach, when to teach it, when to test, and what materials to use” and “She taught me how to do team planning, differentiated units, and interdisciplinary curriculum as well as thematic units” (p. 67).

Skill 4 is showing and sharing. Three types of lessons are part of the showing: conceptual lessons, content lessons, and strategy lessons. Sharing includes such comments as “She opened her files, let me go through them, and told me to take whatever I wanted and make copies of it” and “A teacher shared comprehension questions that she had compiled to accompany grade-level reading work” (p. 93). Finally, Skill 5 entails guiding for classroom management. It is based on several principles: Match academics to student needs; take a love (constructivist) approach; insist on student responsibility and invoke natural consequences; remain calm and composed; don't take it personally; be consistent; consider students' misguided goals when they misbehave; be proactive; and don't overdo it.

This book can be used as a resource by teachers and administrators alike. School leaders can use it as a tool to promote a culture that encourages professional growth and development. The chapters present concepts and strategies that are practical. Overall, the chapters are well organized. They contain several figures, summaries at the end of each chapter, questions to consider, and resources for further learning. Additionally, educators share specific experiences, in and out of the classroom, illustrating examples of the five factors in practice. I highly recommend this book as a resource to build collaboration among teachers and administrators.