Coaching Internship

Mentoring Fellow Teachers on Use of Technology

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**Introduction**

The use of technology in our schools is on the rise and will continue to be on the rise for years to come. This increases the need for educators to have the 21st century skills necessary to meet the needs of today’s students. With new technologies being introduced daily, from web tools, tablets, teaching technologies, and more, it is no wonder why some teachers feel extremely overwhelmed, especially if they were initially trained to teach using very “old-school” methods.

One way to assist teachers with integrating technology into their teaching and everyday use is to allow a peer to coach or mentor them one-on-one. This technique has been proven to enhance not only the teachers’ knowledge of technology but also their confidence in using it in front of and with their students. “Teachers who learned to integrate technology with a mentor more easily overcame barriers such as finding time to integrate technology, learning to troubleshoot problems with technology, and learning to integrate technology into an actual classroom setting” (Kopcha, 2008). Trying to stay on top of all the duties that come with being a teacher can be difficult enough, but having to learn new technologies that seem foreign at first can be even more daunting. Providing a mentor can bridge that “I can’t, don’t want to” attitude to an “I can, want to” attitude for a teacher who is inexperienced when it comes to technology.

One thing to take into account when implementing a mentoring program is the different teachers’ various approaches to teaching and learning. It is important for personalities of mentor and mentee to gel, so that mentees feel comfortable with being vulnerable and honest about what their fears and concerns are as well as what areas they feel confident in.

**Literature Review**

**Benefits of Peer Coaching**

There is an endless amount of research that shows how teachers benefit through peer coaching. Even more specifically, when learning to use technology, is it not enough to just be told; learning by doing is critical in order to hold on to the new skills and be able to execute them soon after in your own classroom. In the 2011 ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) Conference Release, authors discuss the importance of having coaches to train other teachers, especially in technology use. Handing a new piece of technology to a teacher and telling them to use it in their teaching rarely does any good without any practice or training. That part of the puzzle is critical. “Just giving a teacher a technology tool and expecting him or her to maximize its learning potential is a strategy destined for failure… Research has shown that educators are more likely to incorporate technology into their instruction when they have access to coaching and mentoring” (Beglau, et al., 2011).

Teachers having access to a peer mentor or coach offers invaluable benefits to their teaching. “Coaching is one model of Professional Development that has shown the potential to improve the knowledge, skill, and practice of teachers, thus enhancing student achievement”(Beglau, et al., 2011). What better way to learn than to watch another colleague show and/or train one on how to do something. Not only does it better the teacher in his/her knowledge of the content and how to present it, but it has a domino effect and greatly benefits the students as well.

**Barriers in Implementing New Technology**

Not only can a peer coach help with the technical *how* in using new tools and technology in the classroom, but he/she can also help with some of the other barriers that may hold teachers back from actually implementing the new ideas. In a 2008 journal article written by the Department of Educational Technology at San Diego State University, author Theodore Kopcha discusses the biggest obstacles for teachers being able to implement technology into their teaching. “[Teachers typically lack] *time* to learn new technology and prepare instruction that integrates technology into the curriculum, *beliefs* that support the use of technology for teaching, *access* to current and functional technology, professional development that goes beyond skill building with technology such as mentoring, peer collaboration, and lesson design, and *culture* that promotes technology use and the adoption of new teaching practices” (Kopcha, 2008). Mentors can help brainstorm ways to combat these blockades while also providing help for teachers. For example, less time will be needed by the teacher to learn when trained by someone else who knows the tool well as opposed to having to learn something on his/her own, and one can’t get much better professional development than a one-on-one mentor.

**Necessities to Successful Coaching**

The approach and personality of a mentor coach is also very important to successfully training and teaching another individual. A coach must remember that his/her approach to mentoring will determine how well the process goes for the both the mentor and mentee. In the 2009 Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse journal, the author writes that, “[the best ways] to support and maximize the use of technological tools [is] by starting out small and in stages, taking risks, being proactive, encouraging sharing of expertise, collaborating, and emphasizing authentic learning opportunities” (Moran, 2009). All of these ideas are beneficial in maintaining a healthy and successful mentee and mentor relationship.

**Role of Administrator**

Another critical component in a peer mentorship on a school campus is the role of the administrator. If a school’s administrator is supportive of the coaching process and encouraging in using new tools and integrating technology into the classroom, it will set the stage for a successful experience. On the contrary, if he/she is not a proponent of change and implementing new technologies within student learning at the school, the technology coaching process and carving out special time for that may be more difficult to do. A principal’s attitude can mean everything to a teacher who is unsure about learning and adopting new changes in technology on a school’s campus. The Education World article from 2009 states it well when the author writes, “Principals play a big role in setting the climate of a building. Teachers who are on the fence – or think they don’t have time to get involved with technology – think twice when they sense a positive attitude on the part of the administration” (Starr, 2009).

**Role of District/School**

As our culture continues to jump on the band wagon of peer coaching in technology training, it may be important to note that having a district or school-wide approach to that training could be very beneficial. One possible framework mentioned in an article written by two assistant-professors in Illinois is, “one that is adjustable…has four components that include: mentor selection, mentor and novice teacher preparation, support team, and accountability” (Steinke and Putnam, 2008).

**Methods**

I am a fourth grade math and social studies teacher at a private school in Houston, Texas. I am currently in my seventh year of teaching as well as a graduate student pursuing a degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in instructional technology. As part of my semester long coaching internship, I mentored three other teachers on my school campus in their personal and educational technology use. Each teacher teaches a different subject and all three of them range in their technology knowledge and abilities.

The first teacher, Participant A, teaches second grade and is in her twelfth year of teaching. At the beginning of this process, she rated her technology confidence as a six, because although she knows a good bit, she feels that she has a hard time making time to learn more and in turn use it in her classroom. Participant B teaches Lower School Bible to grades K-4 and has taught for 20+ years but is currently in her 4th year of teaching after returning from a long break to stay home with her children. She rated her technology confidence as a five, because she feels she knows enough to get by but still has so much to learn. Participant C teaches fourth grade and is in her 24th year of teaching. She rated her technology confidence as a two-three, because she can manage some technology use, but there is a great deal that she still has to learn.

Participant A and B were both very eager to get started, and after some discussion on what sort of things we would work on together and how we would find the time to meet, participant C was also willing. I met with them on a weekly basis, most of the time during the school day. There were some occasions when I met with them before or after school as well. Time per meeting varied a lot and depended on time available and the time needed for what we were working on. In the beginning, I did meet a little bit of resistance from one of the participants due to the fact that teachers at my school can sometimes get easily frustrated with the number of meetings they have on their plates. Initially, I think this assignment/internship may have been perceived as another avenue to take up their time and not what it was really meant to be which is help them better their technology skills and integration within their teaching. A few other hesitancies that came to light were the fact the participants may have been intimidated by what they didn’t yet know and/or what they thought they should know at this point.

Participant A was very optimistic about me working with her. She honestly has a good amount of knowledge already when it comes to technology, so I was a little nervous about being able to teach her new things. She commented that although she has a lot of head knowledge about technology, she “isn’t using it much in her classroom because of the time it takes to practice and feel confident about actually using those tools within your teaching.” She really wanted new ideas for web 2.0 tools to use within her classroom that are second grade appropriate and that can be used in her teaching. Learning new tools in past technology trainings taught her a lot, but not spending the extra time practicing or using them with her students directly afterward, she found she could lose the skills quickly or needed help coming up with ways to include them in her teaching.

Participant B had a great attitude from the beginning and was ready to learn and practice together. She was so pleasant to work with and was so appreciative of the extra help. She wanted extra help with Microsoft Outlook, creating labels using Microsoft Word, incorporating more interactive tools with the Activ Board such as the Activ Votes, and learning how to use specific web tools in her teaching that are geared towards elementary age kids learning the bible. She shared with me that she has learned some of these things before but has forgotten how to do some of them since she hasn’t frequently been using them.

Participant C has been the most hesitant out of the three mentees about adopting technology use within her teaching. With so many years of experience in teaching and teaching her own specific way, being told to use more technology in her teaching seems intimidating and something she’s not totally on board with. Something that was quickly observed when working with her was the more she practices using it and gets more experience, she more excited and onboard with the idea she is. She was looking for tutorials on how to use Microsoft Outlook (calendar, meetings, etc.) as well as gaining more understanding in using Power Point. She also wanted to become better at organizing her desktop, especially where her photos are kept, and she was interested in learning about possible web tools that she could use in her teaching that her students could interact with.

*Table 1: Coachee Information: Subject Area, Years of Experience, Integration Pieces Attempted, Time Coach Spent with Coachee, Starting & Ending Journal Notes*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Coachee | Subject Taught | Years Teaching | Integration Pieces Attempted | Time Spent with Mentee | Starting Journal | Ending Journal |
| A | 2nd Grade | 12 | Fun Brain as an interactive web tool for her students to practice math skills through interactive games  IXL – an additional tool to practice math skills; students complete specific modules geared toward individual math objectives  Scholastic Story Starter – Students were able to practice writing different stories during their fantasy unit with the help of prompting through the tool  Learned about other various web 2.0 tools that can be used within teaching  Reviewed google docs (excel spreadsheets and various formulas)  QR code tutorial, how to use and when | 13.5 hrs | Hoped to become more comfortable & confident w/ technology  Has a hard time making time to learn & use more technology in the classroom  Hoped to find more things developmentally appropriate for my students to learn & grow | Favorite integration piece was Scholastic Story Starter – kids loved it  Pleased with the coaching process, learned a lot  Realize now that integrating technology into teaching is doable  Looking forward to using Google Docs & Easy Test Maker with next year’s students (moving to an older grade) |
| B | Lower School Bible | 14 | Creating student labels through Microsoft Word  Explored different bible websites for kids and brainstorm ways they could be used  Introduced the concept of ActivVotes and how they can be used (set up additional tutorial times in the future to keep practicing)  Explored Microsoft Outlook more in depth  Discussed and practiced use of google docs  Safari Montage Use within Curriculum  New Activ Inspire tools | 16.5 hrs | Would like to be more proficient with technology  Knows enough to get work done, but still has lots to learn  Would like to be more knowledgeable regarding Promethium Board as well as what she can do on the computer | Coaching experience was a very positive one  Enjoyed Outlook Refresher & Label Making tutorial  Learned a few new tools on Activ Inspire – have been using them within flipcharts  More confident with using bible websites for student activities  Looking forward to using Safari Montage for videos that align with curriculum |
| C | 4th  Grade Math & Social Studies | 24 | Outlook calendar practice  Power Point practice  Easy Test Maker to create new social studies tests  Organized pictures and other files on desktop into folders  Implemented Create A Graph tool to use with students during graphing math unit  Socrative & Quizlet tutorial | 15 hrs | One area of concern is lack of time  A bit hesitant to moving over to student use of technology  Would like to be more confident in use of my own computer when it comes to saving and finding files  Open to learning about tools if it truly makes my teaching more effective | Excited about new study tools for student use like Quizlet & Socrative  More confident about managing desktop and file saving/finding on own computer  Looking forward to teaming up & working more next year on new technology to use within the classroom  Enjoyed working with Powerpoint & Easy Test Maker |

If I could go back and do things again, I would plan out the coaching process a little differently. I would take the time to type out directions to tools/skills we went over during the coaching process and have them ready to give the mentee while walking through the steps. They would then have access to them to refer to them whenever needed once that specific session was over. I don’t consider anything we spent time doing as a failure, because even if they don’t use every tool we practiced in their teaching, they were constantly learning new things and practicing their skills.

**Findings or Results**

All three participants grew in their technology abilities and skills. Although much was learned and practiced with them, this is only one step in ultimately bringing them closer to meeting their professional technology goals. Now moving forward, each mentees plans on practicing these newly acquired skills, and I plan on checking in with them periodically to answer any questions or concerns they may have.

Participant A’s technology confidence grew to an 8, and she feels more confident about finding web tools that exist and actually trying them with her students now. She will be transitioning to a new grade level next school year and plans to use some of the web 2.0 tools such as Google Docs, Socrative, and IXL with her students as well as using Easy Test Maker to create new tests.

Participant B would now describe herself as a 6, because she feels she has a better grasp on some of the technology skills that some may feel are basic and everyday type skills. She is committed to practicing and continuing to grow in her abilities and skills and looks forward to using her newly gained knowledge of Kid-friendly Bible websites, Safari Montage use, and Activ Inspire tools to integrate into her teaching.

Participant C now describes herself as a 6 as well. She is much more open to integrating technology into her teaching and plans on practicing the skills she learned to keep herself organized and more likely to use the skills when teaching and with her students. She is enthusiastic about using Socrative and Quizlet in the classroom with her students as well as some new math tools. Finally, she is thrilled about her better organized desktop and is excited about knowing how to keep it that way.

**Conclusion**

I have learned a lot from this coaching experience and truly believe in the benefits that one-on-one mentoring provides. This 45-hour mentorship proved to be a successful way for me to attend to the technology needs of my colleagues. Had all of us had more time to devote to practicing, I feel it could have been even more beneficial for all of us. Fortunately, on my campus we have the resources to hire coaches and have them there ready to answer questions and provide tutorials and help to any teachers that want or need technology assistance. Small group or one-on-one mentoring is very different from traditional professional development, because it is geared specifically to what the mentee wants to work on or better him/herself on.

One of the biggest things I’ve learned during this process is how much a coach’s personality and teaching style are significant when it comes to success in a mentor/mentee working relationship. Knowing your mentees and how they receive constructive criticism and assistance is one of the keys to success in an experience like this. Additionally, when your campus principal is supportive of your efforts as well as the vision to grow a faculty who are well versed in technology use and instruction, it sets everyone up for success. I am fortunate enough to work in an environment where I have just that. When all persons are working together for the greater good of the teachers and students, teachers are provided with the training that is necessary for them to be the best they can be at their profession and students are the beneficiaries of what’s hoped to be excellent, effective teaching.

To conclude, this model of one-on-one peer mentoring in technology is a positive and effective way to help teachers meet their 21st century students where they are and continue taking them to new heights. I look forward to continue meeting with my mentees over the next school year and working together to continue learning and growing with and from one another.

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