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Peer Coaching and Student Teaching: Meeting the Invisible Needs

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Abstract

Student teaching is a typical and often required of preservice teachers for completion of professional teacher preparation programs and ultimately licensure. However, the quality of the experiences varies and often places preservice teachers in stressful situations that prevents true growth and learning opportunities and also strips them of autonomy and voice. This study investigates the potential benefits of peer coaching to remedy these concerns. We found that peer coaching benefitted preservice teachers in the areas of self-efficacy, confidence, and reflective teaching.

Keywords: self-efficacy, teacher preparation, peer coaching, instructional coaching, teacher confidence, teacher voice

Peer Coaching and Student Teaching: Meeting the Invisible Needs

Introduction

Student teaching is often a difficult endeavor for preservice teachers. It is intended to be a culminating opportunity to fully practice learned skills and behaviors gained through a professional teaching education program, however, this is not always realized. Mentor teachers are often inconsistently trained or are otherwise reluctant to embrace their role, and university supervisors are often unavailable due to other demands. This can leave the preservice teacher in a precarious position, one that is not necessarily beneficial, voiceless and one that can challenge their sense of self-efficacy. Nonetheless, this cumulative practice experience is a critical step toward teaching as a professional. Maximizing the experience while minimizing the factors that do not offer sufficient value is the focus of this study. Peer coaching among preservice teachers during student teaching is a promising endeavor that can do just that.

Instructional coaching can function in a way to address these common student teaching issues, however it is most often employed in schools with inservice teachers due to training expectations, and it is seldom utilized in teacher preparation programs. Peer coaching, which is a form of instructional coaching, has shown promise in professional teacher education programs because it relies less on university supervisors and mentor teachers and capitalizes on preservice teacher strengths.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of a variety of potentially beneficial factors of peer coaching during student teaching by student teachers in a traditional teacher education program. Findings include a greater sense of self-efficacy, confidence, and reflective teaching.

The research question that guided this study is:
In which elements of the peer coaching protocol did student teachers find benefit?

- Personal support / morale
- Reflective teaching
- Lesson Design
- Classroom Management
- Video
- Data Analysis

Student Teaching

Student teaching is a traditional end-of-program experience for many preservice teachers (PTs) completing a formal professional teacher education program (PTEP). Typically, PTs are placed with a local cooperating teacher who acts as a mentor and evaluator. Additionally, PTs are often also assigned one or more university supervisors. Though this may be a common practice, it is not necessarily beneficial to the preservice teachers. Zeichner (1980) asserted that field-based experiences are over-emphasized and "serve merely to socialize prospective teachers into established patterns of school practice" (p. 45) which does little to actually provide the opportunity for practice of newly acquired teaching methods. Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2010) stated,

It is impractical to expect to prepare teachers for schools as they should be if teachers are constrained to learn in settings that typify the problems of schools as they have been—where isolated teachers provide examples of idiosyncratic, usually atheoretical practice that rarely exhibits a diagnostic approach and infrequently offers access to carefully selected strategies designed to teach a wide range of learners well (p. 42).

Others have also noted that student teaching quality varies considerably and may even have a negative effect on the preservice teacher in the areas of self-efficacy, feelings of inadequacy, and negative attitudes which are known to affect performance (Aydin & Woolfolk Hoy, 2005; Bandura, 1994; Fallin & Royse, 2000; Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

The value of socialization during student teaching should likewise be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of peer coaching. Norms appropriated over the course of a preservice teachers' educational career bear a strong influence on their teaching practice. In the space of student teaching, preservice teachers may rely on their fellow peers to safely explore and choose when and how to apply newly learned practices and develop self-efficacy with these practices (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Bandura, 1994; Cornett & Knight, 2009; Guskey, 1986) .

As Vygotsky (1978) showed, learning is socially constructed. For this reason, preparation programs would be wise to construct experiences that maximize the value of social learning to address known issues with student teaching and to empower the preservice teacher to construct their own learning through practice and reflection. Zeichner (1980) stated, "Neophytes must be viewed as "active agents" in their own professional development, not passive recipients of institutional values" (p. 52). Knight (2009) refers to this as "voice" and "praxis" (pgs. 42-48). When preservice teachers are not empowered during student teaching to learn and grow in the experience, then it indeed is little more than acculturating them into the norms of their placement which is missing a tremendous learning opportunity.

All too often, the mentor teacher and university supervisors evaluate the PT's performance. This places the pre-service teacher in the "hot seat." It is expected that PTs will rely on their mentor teacher and university supervisor for advice and support, yet that puts them in a difficult position as they may be reluctant to seek such support out of concern that they will look incapable which may thus negatively affect their evaluations which simultaneously limits opportunities to learn through practice (Caires & Almeida, 2007; Lu, 2009). The stakes are too high. This may result in a very isolated, stressful survival experience and quite contrary to what Darling-Hammond (2010) has noted regarding the "most powerful programs" (p. 40). To address the reality of coursework that is often disconnected from reality, Darling-Hammond (2010) calls for more "practice in practice" (p. 40) which would give PTs greater opportunities to connect their new learning with opportunities to practice under the guidance of professionals. While this desire for frequent practice under skilled guidance is generally accepted, time and resources are a real barrier to its realization in many PTEPs.

Many have noted the constraints that prevent such realization (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Dodds, 1979; Englert et al., 1983; Hagen et al., 2017, Joyce & Showers, 1980; Lu, 2020; Ludlow et al., 1989; Morgan et al., 1994; Topping, 1996; Zeichner, 2010). Because the ideal may be out of reach for many programs, might there be a way to bridge the gap?

For student teaching to be a truly beneficial opportunity to practice, receive feedback, reflect and practice again, then something must change. For these and many other reasons, we have been interested in the perceptions of preservice teachers during student teaching, but simultaneously seeking solutions to long-discussed issues with teacher preparation programs (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Ashton & Crocker, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Zeichner & Liston, 1990).

My own findings (2020) found that instructional coaching has the potential to add support to preservice teachers during student teaching and to provide space for practice in a way that traditional student teaching usually does not. The benefits of instructional coaching, by a trained instructional coach during student teaching were an increase in self-efficacy, reflective teaching, pedagogical support, morale support, and non-evaluative advice. However, as I also found, time would not permit a widespread integration of coaching by a PTEP supervisor. Morgan et al., (1994) concurs; "Peer coaches may be a valuable resource who can relieve some of the burden from university supervisors (p. 60). Peer coaching has the potential to provide some of the same benefits of instructional coaching plus offers some benefits of its own.

Instructional Coaching

There is often a lack of clarity when discussing the many forms of coaching (Alsaleh et al., 2017; Costa & Garmston, 2002; D'Abate et al., 2003; Donegan et al., 2000; Hagen et al., 2017b; Knight, 2006, 2009; Lu, 2020; Showers, 1985). The terms "coaching" and "mentor" are often used interchangeably. And indeed, there is much overlap in the way in which these two roles are performed. In many PTEPs the mentor teacher is also tasked with evaluating the performance of the preservice teacher, the evaluation component is a primary flaw and erodes the relationship which can simultaneously stunt the growth and learning. Knight (2006) defines coaching as, "a non-evaluative, learning relationship between a professional developer and a teacher, both of who share the expressed goal of learning together, thereby improving student achievement" (p. 2). Coaching is dependent on a strong relationship and a formal evaluation component to the relationship can negatively affect that relationship. Hagen (2017) notes that "the greatest agreement appears to consider peer coaching a *process*" (p. 547), and Lu (2020) pulling from Neubert and McAllister (1993) states, "peer coaching…generally involves two colleagues engaged in a mutually supportive relationship" (p. 748). For the purposes of this study, we have utilized a definition developed from research on the topic by Hagen (2017) Knight (2006), and Lu (2020): Peer coaching is a process in which two or more individuals engage in a mutually supportive, non-evaluative relationship toward clear and specific goals. It is under this premise that this study was conducted.

Benefits of Peer Coaching

Peer coaching was first included in the literature in the early 1980's by Joyce and Showers (Joyce & Showers, 1980; Showers, 1984a, 1984b, 1985). They found that peer coaching could be a useful tool in teacher development for both preservice and inservice teacher training. Their research has been foundational for numerous studies on the effectiveness of peer coaching in a variety of settings (Alsaleh et al., 2017; Arsal, 2014; Cornett & Knight, 2009; Hasbrouck, 1997; Hooker, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2005; Trautwein & Ammerman, 2010). Alsaleh et. al., (2017) succinctly synthesizes this wealth of information:

The peer coaching strategy fostered teachers' professional growth based on teaching practices, teacher learning, team cooperation, and teachers' self-confidence, enthusiasm, and autonomy as well as the application's obstacles…Overall, the data demonstrated that the peer coaching strategy fostered changes in professional growth for pre-service teachers based on the following aspects: classroom teaching practices, teacher learning, team cooperation, teacher self-confidence, teaching enthusiasm, fostering of teachers' autonomy, and the application's obstacles. (pgs. 36,40)

Cornett and Knight (2009) summarized numerous studies on peer coaching and found that peer coaching improved knowledge transfer when compared to knowledge transfer by those who did not participate in peer coaching, and Alsaleh, et. al., (2017) found that peer coaching benefited self-efficacy, team cooperation, enthusiasm and more.

The unique dynamic between peers provides a foundation for peer support that is otherwise difficult to establish with mentors or university supervisors. “Unlike other assistants, peer coaches have firsthand knowledge of practicum expectations and stresses, so they may be especially supportive and empathetic (Morgan et al., 1994, p. 60).

Recent research on peer coaching during student teaching has shown benefits but have also shown some concerns. Lu (2010) cautioned that removing university supervisor’s input would in effect remove a critical component of the student teaching “triad” (p. 749) which also includes, student teacher and mentor teacher. But ultimately concluded that peer coaching is “evidentially profitable” (p. 752). Peer coaching can improve self-efficacy, collaboration, collegiality, and active learning.

Self-efficacy

The power of a positive sense of self-efficacy has been well documented by Bandura (1977, 1994, 1997). Bandura (1977) states, “Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (p. 194). Student teaching is an important yet fraught endeavor that requires significant support, both technical and emotional (Anderson & Stillman, 2013). The stress inherent with teaching has been associated with high attrition and burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Herman et al., 2018; Yilmaz, 2011). This is cause for concern and may relate to the poor teacher retention (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Graziano, 2005; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) of new teachers.

Related, the quality of student teaching placements and cooperating teachers, mentors and supervisors have also have a negative effect on preservice teachers in regard to the emotional factors of teaching such as self-efficacy, feelings of inadequacy, and negative attitudes (Aydin & Woolfolk Hoy, 2005; Bandura, 1994; Fallin & Royse, 2000; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Importantly, Alsaleh, et. al., (2017) found that peer coaching benefited self-efficacy, team cooperation, enthusiasm and more. Supportive relationships are key to providing encouragement and feedback that not only facilitates the integration of newly learned skills, but also generates the necessary self-efficacy to positive affect teaching performance (Arsal, 2014; Bandura, 1994; Brown et al., 2015; Dweck, 2015; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Knight, 2007; Lortie, 1975; Meisner, 2020; Walsh, 2013).

Bandura (1977) stated, “Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences (p. 194). Peer coaching provides supports to pre-service teachers that can affect the overall experience which in turn may benefit retention and student performance.

Methodology

Setting

Participants (preservice teachers and PT’s henceforth) in this study were enrolled in a professional teacher preparation program (PTEP) in a Southwestern state in the United States. All had successfully completed all prior content and pedagogical coursework as required by the PTEP and had advanced to the final portion of their preparation which is a minimum of ten weeks of student teaching and as many as sixteen weeks of a preservice teacher is also seeking special education certification. Student teaching placements are facilitated by the field services director in collaboration with local school administrators. All preservice teachers were placed with trained mentor (cooperating) teachers in local elementary (K-5) or secondary (6-12) public schools.

Participants

Prior to the start of student teaching preservice teachers were arranged in peer coaching groups of three members based on grade level and content area. As part of their regular student teaching induction requirements, preservice teachers were expected to participate in regular peer coaching meetings, and complete post-meeting surveys. These requirements were facilitated and supervised by the PTEP field services director. Principal investigator has no authority over student teaching or students' completion.

Preservice teachers were asked to permit their survey responses to be used in this research. They were informed that the purpose of these surveys was to collect feedback related to specific elements of peer coaching as they related to student teaching for the purposes of student teaching program evaluation. They understood that no personal information would be used in any dissemination or publication.

Twenty-six (26) gave formal consent and only their data have been included in this study. Of the 26, 10 were placed in an elementary school, and 16 were placed in a secondary school. PTs who completed the survey with the SPED designation were in either a secondary or elementary placement.

Peer Coaching Training

As part of their orientation to student teaching, preservice teachers were trained on the peer coaching protocol. This included an overview of peer coaching, and how to engage with each other as a peer coach. This protocol was based on Knight's (2007) "Partnership Principles" and adapted for peer coaching during student teaching. PTs were familiar with the use of video from their experiences in the preparation program, and a state-required performance assessment requires the use of video. PTs used their own devices or devices provided by the preparation program. PTs were encouraged to share their videos during their peer coaching meetings.

Preservice teachers' progress was monitored and guided by the university's field services coordinator and any questions related to peer coaching were addressed by the researcher.

Peer Coaching Protocol

Knights (2007) "Partnership Principles" guided the design and implementation of peer coaching. These principles are equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (see table 1 in appendix for extended definitions). Based on these principles, peer coaching groups were established, meeting arrangements were made, and meeting conversation prompts were designed. A learning management system was utilized for dissemination of information related to student teaching and peer coaching. This system also housed the peer coaching meeting prompts and the link to the online survey tool.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A survey was developed to collect preservice teachers' responses at designated points during student teaching. Participants completed the surveys a total of four times. Survey items were designed to elicit responses that directly related to key components of student teaching and peer coaching.

Participant Survey Questions: (strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree)

1. I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group.
2. I am a more reflective teacher because of my work with my peer coaching group.
3. My lesson planning has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.
4. My classroom management has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.
5. My ability to analyze assessment data has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.
6. I benefited from the use of video in my peer coaching group.
7. I feel that I am a more confident teacher because of my peer coaching group.

Data Analysis

Once all data were collected, any data from preservice teachers who did not complete the formal consent agreement were filtered out. Statistical analysis was conducted using Qualtrics "StatsIQ" which is a feature of the Qualtrics survey platform for descriptive statistics and item interactions.

Results

A total of 40 survey responses were received from those in elementary placements, 100 responses from those in secondary placements and 8 from special education. As previously noted, those in special education were either in an elementary or secondary setting and they reported on special education separately due to the nature of their work for that period of time. Though there may be some overlap in the data, it is included because the results were notable.

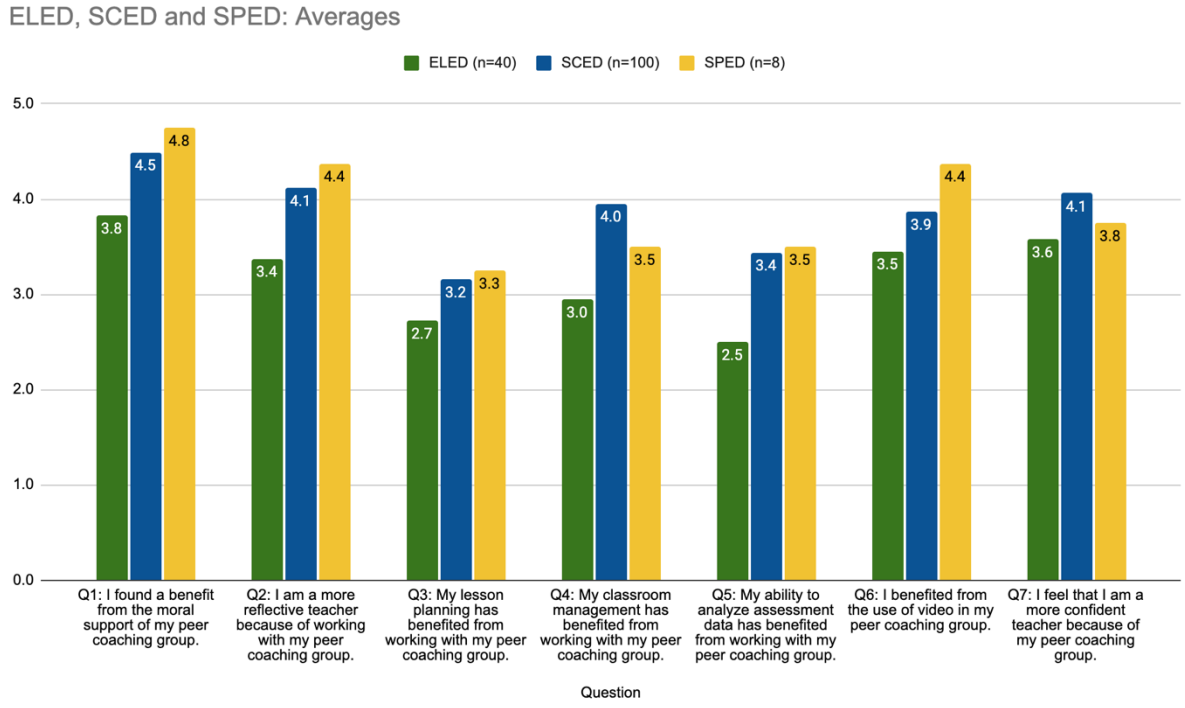
Survey Summary of Results

Table 1: Mean averages of survey results (n=148)

Question	ELED	SCED	SPED
Averages	3.2	3.9	3.9
I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group.	3.8	4.5	4.8
I am a more reflective teacher because of working with my peer coaching group.	3.4	4.1	4.4
My lesson planning has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.	2.7	3.2	3.3
My classroom management has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.	3.0	4.0	3.5
My ability to analyze assessment data has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.	2.5	3.4	3.5
I benefited from the use of video in my peer coaching group.	3.5	3.9	4.4
I feel that I am a more confident teacher because of my peer coaching group.	3.6	4.1	3.8
AVERAGE	3.2	3.9	3.9

(Mean average of responses on scale of 1 – 5. Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5)

Chart 1: Graph of survey responses (n = 148)



After reviewing the data in the table and graph above some themes emerge. Preservice teachers in secondary education placements found greater benefit than those in an elementary education placement with nearly all items reaching an average of 4 or higher indicating "agree" or "strongly agree." The two notable exceptions relate to lesson planning and assessment data which similarly were the lowest scored by elementary education PTs. Across all three placements the item related to moral support within the peer coaching group received the highest average, and the second highest average relates to confidence with the exception of those in special education who placed use of video in the second place and confidence in third.

And across all three placements, the items related to lesson planning and assessment received the lowest two averages.

The results from those in a special education placement are included here, but caution must be used when comparing elementary and secondary results because the number of responses were so few. However, they are included for reference because we feel that the information adds additional detail and contrast to the results.

When the mean averages are reviewed from a per-group (i.e., ELED, SCED, SPED) perspective, those who participated in a special education placement found the most benefit in the areas of moral support, reflective teaching, use of video and confidence. Secondary education preservice teachers found benefit in the same areas but also included classroom management. Elementary education preservice teachers indicated lower levels of benefit across all items. In rank order, elementary PTs showed the most benefit in the areas of moral support, confidence, use of video, reflective teaching leaving the lowest benefit in the areas of classroom management, lesson planning and assessment analysis.

The following data are presented where relationships between items were notable and appropriate statistical tests were used. Results are summaries of all groups (ELED, SCED and SPED).

The relationships below indicate strong correlations between items and interactions are statistically significant. We use Cohen's (1988) guidelines, $f^2 \geq 0.02$, $f^2 \geq 0.15$, and $f^2 \geq 0.35$ to represent small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Selya et al., 2012). All of the following have P-Values less than 0.05 indicating that differences between groups are statistically significant, and consistent enough that they are unlikely to be a coincidence.

Chart 2: Survey item correlations across all placements using Cohen's f to evaluate items relationship with survey question 1

Moderate and strong effects are in **bold**.

	Summary		ELED		SCED		SPED	
	P-Value	Effect Size	P-Value	Effect Size	P-Value	Effect Size	P-Value	Effect Size
There is a strong statistically significant relationship between Q1: I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group. and Q3: My lesson planning has benefited from working with my peer coaching group	0.00361	**0.484**	0.0352	**0.877**	0.0454	0.262	n/a	n/a
There is a strong statistically significant relationship between Q1: I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group. and Q5: My ability to analyze assessment data has benefited from working with my peer coaching group.	0.00001	**0.485**	0.155	**0.582**	0.0276	**0.399**	n/a	n/a
At least one group from Q1: I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group. tends to have higher values for Q4: My classroom management has benefited from working with my peer coaching group. than another group	0.0524	**0.509**	0.0775	**0.88**	0.13	**0.24**	n/a	n/a
There is a strong statistically significant relationship between Q1: I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group. and Q6: I benefited from the use of video in my peer coaching group.	0.00082	**0.755**	0.00001	**1.67**	0.0171	**0.377**	n/a	n/a
There is a strong statistically significant relationship between Q1: I found a benefit from the moral support of my peer coaching group. and Q13: I feel that I am a more confident teacher because of my peer coaching group.	0.000717	**0.895**	0.00285	**1.5**	0.0117	**0.45**	n/a	n/a

The data above shows interactions between question 1 (benefit from the moral support of the peer coaching group) and other questions. Not all interactions between question 1 and the other items were notable and thus were not included, and the low number of responses from those in the special education placement were not sufficient to utilize in these analyses. Between question 1 and questions, 3,4,5, 6, and 13 all revealed strong effects, except for the secondary education interaction between question 1 and 3 which was a moderate effect size (.262).

In order of highest effect to lowest effect size across all placements, the single highest effect of .895 resulted from the interaction between question 1 (moral support) and question 13 (confidence). The second highest effect size of .755 related to question 1 (moral support) and question 6 (use of video).

The remaining three interactions were relatively close in effect size, .509, .485, and .484 respectively, and related to classroom management, assessment analysis, and lesson planning.

Utilizing Pearson's r (below) to measure effect size and applying Akoglu's (2018) definitions of strength derived from Dancey and Reidy (2007) (< .4 weak, <.6 moderate, and < .9 strong) we see that all except Q4 range from moderate to strong effect sizes and all have high statistical significance. The P-values of less than 0.05 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant, and consistent enough that they are unlikely to be a coincidence.

Chart 3: Survey item correlations across all placements using Pearson's r. Moderate and strong effects are in bold.

	Summary		ELED		SCED		SPED	
	P-value	Effect Size	P-value	Effect Size	P-value	Effect Size	P-value	Effect Size
Q4: My classroom management has benefited from working with my peer coaching group. is positively correlated with Q6: I benefited from the use of video in my peer coaching group.	0.00001	0.362	0.0000384	**0.603**	0.0477	0.198	**0.762**	-0.129
Q4: My classroom management has benefited from working with my peer coaching group. is strongly positively correlated with Q2: I am a more reflective teacher because of working with my peer coaching group.	0.00001	**0.588**	0.00001	**0.684**	0.0000217	**0.411**	**0.411**	0.339
Q2: I am a more reflective teacher because of working with my peer coaching group. is strongly positively correlated with Q6: I benefited from the use of video in my peer coaching group.	0.00001	**0.613**	0.00001	**0.796**	0.0000314	**0.404**	0.0453	**0.717**
Q5: My ability to analyze assessment data has benefited from working with my peer coaching group. is strongly positively correlated with Q2: I am a more reflective teacher because of working with my peer coaching group.	0.00001	**0.617**	0.0000307	**0.609**	0.00001	**0.529**	0.193	**0.513**
Q3: My lesson planning has benefited from working with my peer coaching group. is strongly positively correlated with Q2: I am a more reflective teacher because of working with my peer coaching group	0.00001	**0.621**	0.00001	**0.713**	0.00001	**0.472**	0.151	**0.557**

The data above gives further insight through key item interactions. All interactions resulted in strong correlations with a single exception of Q4 (classroom management) and Q6 (use of video), which resulted in a weak correlation. When taken as a whole, PTs indicated that they were more reflective in the areas of classroom management, lesson planning, use of video, and assessment analysis.

The data presented indicate that preservice teachers across all three placements found benefit from their peer coaching groups primarily in the areas of moral support, confidence, reflective teaching.

Discussion

The results from this study indicate that peer coaching can be a valuable tool to benefit preservice teachers during student teaching primarily in the areas of morale, confidence and reflective teaching but had lesser benefit in the areas of lesson planning, assessment analysis and classroom management. We can roughly draw a line in benefit between the emotional and the academic groups of results. Peer coaching had a

stronger effect on the emotional needs of PTs, and a lesser effect on the academic or performative sides. We can make some assumptions about this. PTs likely had a lesser need in the areas of lesson planning, assessment analysis and classroom management as these are a primary focus of the preparation program. Additionally, these are areas in which mentor teachers and university supervisors excel. For the elements of student teaching that take the greatest emotional toll, peers helping peers showed a greater benefit.

As we know, student teaching is a difficult and stressful endeavor (Aydin & Woolfolk Hoy, 2005; Bandura, 1994; Fallin & Royse, 2000; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). These difficulties are represented in poor self-efficacy, feelings of inadequacy and negative attitudes which all affect teaching performance which in turn affect student learning. Though mentor teachers and university supervisors may attempt to address the non-academic needs of their PTs, time is often not available, and the evaluative nature of those relationships are an additional barrier (Caires & Almeida, 2007; Lu, 2009). When these results are compared against the importance of strong self-efficacy, enthusiasm and strong morale (Bandura, 1994; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Herman et al., 2018; Yilmaz, 2011) we can see that peer coaching can provide support in ways that are otherwise difficult to achieve. Zeichner (1980) insisted that "Neophytes must be viewed as "active agents" in their own professional development, not passive recipients of institutional values" (p. 52) and when viewed through the lens of peer coaching, this can be achieved. Within the peer coaching dynamic, PTs are in complete control and are working from within to meet their own needs. This is a distinct power shift that deserves to be investigated further, and calls to mind a notable quote delivered by Brené Brown during the 2013 Adobe 99U conference when she stated, "If you're not in the arena also getting your ass kicked, I'm not interested in your feedback." Student teachers receive copious feedback and are obligated to receive the feedback and adjust as intended. Instructional coaching, as designed by Knight (2007) demands voice and praxis. Peer coaching adds those to the areas of student teaching that are perennially challenging.

Further Recommendations

We believe that the value of peer coaching is such that it is worth including and studying at earlier stages of traditional teacher education programs. As such, grouping structures could be created by content area, and grade level, or could be strategically created to give preservice teachers experiences outside their familiar grade level and content area. Additionally, formal evaluation requirements of student teachers could be redesigned to be accomplished by professional evaluators (perhaps university supervisors) thus freeing mentor teachers of that burden and permitting the mentor teachers to be part of the peer coaching groups.

Conclusion

This study sought to identify potential benefits of adding peer coaching into a traditional student teaching experience. We found that peer coaching did indeed offer support in areas which are typically under addressed. Considering the power of a strong sense of self-efficacy, confidence and mutual support and the perpetual concerns of burnout and attrition, we believe that peer coaching deserves consideration in teacher education programs.

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