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Teachers Helping Teachers: The Case for Peer Consultation

> *The nonparticipation of teachers in decisions that bear directly on their daily work environment leads both to a decline in self-esteem and to strong feelings of external control by others. Over time, these effects take their toll, manifesting themselves first in terms of job stress and ultimately in perceptions of diminished personal accomplishment.*
>
> —Byrne, 1994, p. 665

> *Enormous risks and frequent costs are associated with observation, communication, mutual visibility, sharing knowledge, and talking openly about the work teachers do. Collegiality requires that everyone be willing to give up something without knowing in advance just what that may be. But the risks and costs of interdependence are nothing next to the risks and costs of sustaining a climate of emotional toxicity, of working in isolation.*
>
> —Barth, 1990, p. 31

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many American school administrators have realized that the work of school improvement is best accomplished when shared with teachers. These educational leaders have wisely empowered teachers to collaborate in a variety of joint endeavors, including peer coaching, mentoring, collegial investigations using action research, explorations into instructional challenges, study teams, and problem solving. Clearly, promoting teacher collegiality has been one leadership approach that has yielded answers to teaching and learning problems, enabling teachers to effectively work together to develop instructional alternatives and processes that lead to the development of a community of learners engaged in professional service to children.

Unfortunately, collaborative approaches to educators' work have often been associated with confusion about teachers' professional role definitions, human and financial costs, and lack of time for professional talk. And, teachers' work experience continues to be predominantly an individual and isolated practice of teaching. In spite of such difficulties, many teachers not otherwise engaged in peer coaching, mentoring, or similar formal programs appear to have gained substantial knowledge and support from *informal peer consultation* with colleagues and have skillfully applied this knowledge to their daily classroom work with students. Interestingly, however, *there are no published comprehensive descriptions of the content, process, and context of spontaneous, naturally occurring peer consultation among teachers.* Therefore, we initiated a study to illuminate this important but heretofore hidden (at least in terms of the research literature) phenomenon.

The purpose of this book is to describe the results of our study of peer consultation. Derived directly from our study data, our concept of peer consultation refers to teacher-to-teacher consultation; specifically, it involves spontaneous, timely, and unstructured patterns of behavior of teachers helping teachers. This, we discovered, is a world of informal and yet profound discovery, career-changing encounters, and mutual spiritual growth between and among teachers. It is a world in which teachers intuitively reach out to each other to talk about and reflect on their work, to make use of their knowledge, to collectively plan and organize for teaching, to share with and show each other valuable resources, and to guide each other in managing the complexities of student learning and behavior. In addition, although in many cases the practical implications of our findings are obvious, we include questions and actionable steps professional educators should consider when implementing efforts to develop or improve peer consultation in their school. As the reader will see at the end of this chapter, five primary skills comprise peer consultation; and each is explicated in succeeding chapters replete with teacher quotes, examples, and suggestions.

We introduce our journey into this hidden world of peer consultation with a look at what we know about teacher learning, followed by brief descriptions of three primary sources of teacher-to-teacher assistance for learning discussed in the professional literature:

1. Administrators who engage in instructional supervision
2. Lead teachers who fulfill formal and/or emergent roles in assisting teachers
3. Teachers as peer consultants who spontaneously assist their colleagues

In addition, we present our Peer Consultation Model (PCM)—consisting of five key elements—derived directly from the study that serves as the basis for this book. Finally, we briefly describe the research method and procedures used to conduct the study that is the basis of this book, and we highlight some of our most important findings about peer consultation.

HOW TEACHERS LEARN TO TEACH

Although it is a widely accepted premise that each teacher is unique, the conceptual work necessary to differentiate programs for individual teachers' professional growth is unavailable (Burden, 1990). Nevertheless, extant knowledge about individual development characteristics and phases of adult life informs our efforts to adapt teachers' learning opportunities to their needs; for example, research has focused on adults' cognitive development (Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1980), developmental ages and cycles (Erikson, 1959; Gould, 1972), and developmental stages (including cognitive, moral, ego, conceptual, ethical, and interpersonal development; e.g., Piaget, 1963; Kohlberg, 1969). This research has also illuminated teachers' developmental concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975) and patterns of career development (Gregorc, 1979). Furthermore, it is generally accepted that principles of adult learning should be considered in creating opportunities for teacher growth. Learning is life centered and based on adult interests and prior experience; learning is self-directed and includes a process of inquiry with others; and individual differences, which increase with age, are addressed (see Knowles, 1978).

In light of these principles, what defines the best form of professional development for teachers? The most concise statement of standards for teachers' professional development, drawn from research on staff and teacher development and student learning, is the National Staff Development Council's 12 Standards (National Staff Development Council [NSDC], 2001). These standards address the context, process, and content of staff development and teacher learning:

1. Teachers form learning communities whose goals match those of the school and district.
2. Leaders provide guidance for continuous school improvement.
3. Resources for adult learning and collaboration are provided for professional development programs.

4. Professional development programs are data based.
5. Assessment of student learning is continuous.
6. Professional development programs are research based.
7. Professional development programs match school goals.
8. Professional development programs adhere to adult learning principles.
9. Professional development programs enable teacher collaboration.
10. Professional development programs reflect high expectations for all students.
11. Professional development programs deepen teachers' content knowledge, teaching strategies, and assessment ability.
12. Professional development programs encourage family involvement.

Given what we know about professional development—including knowledge of teacher development, adult learning, staff development, and related impacts on student learning—we posit that any *one* of the three sources of teacher assistance described in the table that follows is inadequate for effective teacher growth and that the enhancement of *peer consultation* (the third source of teacher assistance) with its inherent timeliness, individualization, contextualization, and use of teacher expertise is vital. The remaining chapters of this book include a deep exploration into this third source of teacher assistance, peer consultation.

Three Sources of Teacher Assistance

1. Principals
2. Lead Teachers
3. Peer Consultants

THE FIRST SOURCE OF TEACHER HELP: PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISORS

Throughout the last 150 years, instructional supervision of teachers by principals has been viewed in both dark side (negative) and bright side (positive) terms, particularly with regard to practice. On the dark side, instructional supervision has been referred to as *inspection*, *snooper-vision*, and a *nonevent* (Figure 1.1). Guthrie and Willower (1973) concluded that the ritual (of supervision, the sporadic observation of teaching for the purpose of rating general competence) is a harmless and often useless exercise, a *ceremonial congratulation.* At its worst, principals' instructional supervision has been linked to maintaining excessive control over teachers, interrupting teaching, abandoning teachers, and destructively criticizing teachers (Figure 1.2) (Blase & Blase, 2004a).

On the bright side, theoretically at least, instructional supervision has been oriented to collaboration between teachers and supervisors and the development of teacher reflection on practice; in fact, it has been described as a *collegial and transformational event* (Blase & Blase, 2001). Figure 1.3 describes the bright side of instructional supervision by principals, as reported in our earlier study (Blase & Blase, 2001). In that study more than 800 teachers across the United States described the basic elements of effective instructional supervision (i.e., instructional leadership) and its dramatic effects on teaching and student learning. From these data we developed a holistic model—the TiGeR model of principals' instructional supervision—based on three powerful principal strategies: *T*alking with teachers, promoting teachers' professional *G*rowth, and fostering teacher *R*eflection. The specific principle behaviors associated with these strategies include, for example, building trust, applying principles of adult growth and development, and developing teachers' reflection skills.

We found that these strategies contributed to the development of a school culture of collaboration, equality, inquiry, and the lifelong study of teaching and learning. Positive impacts on teacher reflection, creativity, innovation, experimentation, and risk taking as well as impacts on teachers' self-esteem, motivation, and confidence were also evident. Clearly, a supervisory approach such as the TiGeR model enables a principal to be a facilitator of teacher growth rather than an inspector of teacher competence (Poole, 1995), a colleague in discussing alternatives rather than directives or criticisms (Blase & Blase, 2001), and a developer of collaborative inquiry rather than a unilateral purveyor of standards (Reitzug, 1997).

In recent years, approaches to instructional supervision that increase teacher control and responsibility for professional growth and instructional improvement, such as collegial supervision, individually planned professional development, standards-based supervision, reflective supervision, and collegial supervision have gained acceptance among principals and teachers (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004; Sullivan & Glanz, 2004). The collegial supervision approach includes a *collegial*—not hierarchical—relationship between teachers and supervisors; the *involvement* of teachers in peer supervision and growth; a *focus on growth,* not compliance; teacher *collaboration;* and ongoing *reflective inquiry* by teachers (Gordon, 1997). In essence, collegial supervision is status free, and the underlying spirit is one of expansion and alternatives rather than directives or criticisms; it is a type of peer collaboration in which a community of teacher learners performs professional and moral services to students.

Figure 1.1 The Instructional Supervision Legacy: Control or Collaboration?

In 1993 Cogan, Anderson, and Krajewski classified [principals'] supervision approaches that have appeared in the professional literature between 1850 and 1990:

1. Scientific management
2. Democratic interaction approach
3. Cooperative supervision
4. Supervision as curriculum development
5. Clinical supervision
6. Group dynamics and peer emphasis
7. Coaching and instructional supervision

Krajewski (1996) described contemporary approaches to supervision as *almost collaborative*—almost, but not truly collaborative—the author suggests, because power differentials still exist between principals and teachers, given the principals' evaluation responsibilities (power to judge) and change-agent role. Krajewski predicts that by the year 2015 supervision will consist of *structured options* (i.e., based on some standards and expectations but also based on teachers' individual needs and goals, much like a student's individual educational plan [IEP]).

However, the array of approaches to supervision noted previously indicates that substantial disagreement about its essential nature has existed for more than 140 years. The *practice* of supervision is another matter. Despite the fact that many approaches to supervision are collaborative in nature, the practice of supervision has often been one of inspection, oversight, and judgment. Glanz (1995) concluded that today's supervision is nothing better than a "bureaucratic legacy of fault finding, inspectional supervision" and used terms like "snoopervision," "protective political behavior," and "a private cold war" (p. 107) to characterize the field. Sergiovanni (1992) referred to supervision as a "nonevent—a ritual they [supervisors and teachers] participate in according to well-established scripts without much consequence" (p. 203). More recently, Gordon (1997) stated, "In the present, control supervision [not collegiality and empowerment] still dominates professional practice" (p. 117).

We believe that although the idea of collegial supervision, in various forms, has existed for most of this century, advanced forms of collegiality are rarely found in practice. Indeed, democratic, cooperative, clinical, human resource–based, developmental, and transformational supervision, among others, have been widely advocated (Gordon, 1997) based on the principles of equality (not hierarchy), reflection, and growth (not compliance). For instance, Pajak (1993) noted that the goal (and, at times, the *emerging* practice) of supervision focuses on "helping teachers discover and construct professional knowledge and skills," in contrast to the established practice of "reinforcing specific prescribed teacher behavior and skills" (p. 318). He also noted that in much contemporary thinking, learning is viewed as contextual and complex, teaching is based on reflective judgment, and schools are seen as democratic teaching and learning communities.

Likewise, Schön's (1988) definition of instructional supervision emphasizes collegial supervision and specifically focuses on support, guidance, and encouragement of *reflective teaching*; and Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995) described ideal supervision as a *collaborative* endeavor enacted in a supportive environment that leads to an all-school action plan. To promote collegial forms of supervision, McBride and Skau(1995) have proposed that practitioners develop a *supervisory platform*—a combination of supervisory beliefs and educational philosophy—which includes building *trust, empowering* teachers, and fostering *reflection.* They note, "The process of reflection, undertaken in an environment based on trust and seeking the empowerment of participants, constitutes a powerful potential for improved [supervisory and teaching] practice" (p. 277).

Relatedly, Reitzug and Cross (1993) have discussed an *inquiry-oriented* practice of supervision (*critical collaboration*) that encourages teacher voice and acknowledges the contextuality and complexity of teaching. Here, the principal's role is one of facilitating a teacher's thinking about practice. More broadly, Smyth (1997) has suggested that supervision advance a discursive, collaborative, and critical study of the *micropolitics of the classroom* interaction; relinquish its technocratic surveillance of teachers; and work toward a just and democratic world. He recommends giving teachers more, rather than less, control over their teaching.

SOURCE: Blase & Blase (2004a).

Figure 1.2 The Dark Side of Instructional Supervision: Effects of Selected Principal Behaviors

Interrupting and abandoning teachers' classroom instruction results in:

Anger

Low motivation

Psychic pain

Feelings of abandonment

Loss of respect for principal

Poor performance

Criticizing teachers results in:

Anger

Low motivation

Damaged self-esteem

Fear

Confusion

Loss of respect and trust for principal

Appearing to comply, ignoring, avoiding the principal

Resistance and rebellion

Cautiousness

Excessive control of teachers' professional work results in:

Limited involvement in decision making
A false image of governance (if the principal's rhetoric and participatory structures suggest *collegiality*)

A sense of being manipulated

Feeling abused (when the principal's rhetoric and practice contradict supposed *collegial* governance structures)

SOURCE: Adapted from Blase & Blase (2004a).

Teacher Empowerment and School Improvement Related to Principals' Supervision

Educational scholars have studied the effects of instructional supervision and instructional leadership on teacher empowerment and school improvement. To illustrate from a case study of instructional leadership,

Figure 1.3 The Bright Side of Instructional Supervision: How Principals Build a Culture of Collaboration, Equality, and Lifelong Study of Teaching and Learning

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What characteristics (strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and goals) of school principals positively influence teachers' classroom instruction? What is it about supervisor–teacher interaction—with a specific emphasis on the talk that occurs in instructional supervisory conferences—that enables teachers to learn and apply such learnings to classroom instruction? How do principals develop a specialized form of teacher thinking—reflection—that arises from a teacher's questions about perplexing classroom experiences and leads to purposeful inquiry and problem resolution (Dewey, 1933)? Our study of positive forms of principals' instructional supervision vis-à-vis teachers sheds light on these and other critical questions thus far unaddressed by empirical research.

We found that in effective principal–teacher interaction about instruction, processes such as inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation prevail; teachers build repertoires of flexible alternatives rather than collecting rigid teaching procedures and methods (Schön, 1987). Principals who are effective instructional supervisors develop a reflective, collaborative, problem-solving context for dialog about instruction by doing the following:

They *Talk* With Teachers

Build trust
Develop the group
Foster collaboration and collegiality
Support peer coaching
Observe in classrooms
Confer with teachers about teaching and learning
Empower teachers
Maintain visibility

They Promote Teachers' *Professional Growth*

Study literature and proven programs
Support practice of new skills, risk-taking, innovation, and creativity
Provide effective staff development programs
Apply principles of adult growth and development
Praise, support, and facilitate teachers' work
Provide resources and time
Give feedback and suggestions

They Foster Teacher *Reflection*

Develop teachers' reflection skills in order to construct professional knowledge and develop sociopolitical insights
Model and develop teachers' critical study (action research) skill
Become inquiry oriented
Use data to question, evaluate, and critique teaching and learning
Extend autonomy to teachers

SOURCE: Adapted from Blase & Blase (2001).

Reitzug (1994) constructed a taxonomy of empowering principal behaviors that includes *support,* creating a supportive environment in which teachers can critique instruction; *facilitation,* stimulating critique of instruction by teachers; and *possibility,* giving teachers voice by publishing and acting on the results of critique.

This study was based on Prawat's (1991) framework for epistemological and political empowerment and consists of two categories—"conversations with self" and "conversations with settings" (p. 738)—wherein teachers develop inquiry skills, critical reflection skills, and even sociopolitical insights through alternative modes of professional interaction important to empowerment and school improvement. Reitzug demonstrated that principal leadership—providing meaningful staff development, modeling inquiry, asking questions, encouraging risk taking, requiring justification of practices, and critique by wandering around—led to greater levels of teacher empowerment and school improvement. These instructional supervision behaviors are similar to those we identified in research on empowering instructional principals (Blase & Blase, 1994, 1997; Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan, 1995) and effective instructional leaders (Blase & Blase, 2004a).

THE SECOND SOURCE OF TEACHER HELP: LEAD TEACHERS AND THE MOVE AWAY FROM TOP-DOWN ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

The second wave of educational reform efforts in the United States was prompted by high-profile reports from The Carnegie Foundation (1986), the Holmes Group (1986), and the National Governors' Association (1986). All three reports recommended a move away from top-down approaches to school improvement; consequently, second wave–reform efforts initially emphasized the creation of career ladders for teachers and lead teacher positions, the second source of teacher help.

Formal Teacher Leadership

Early efforts to develop teachers' leadership roles emphasized creating *formal* positions such as lead teachers, instructional leaders, mentors, team leaders, and curriculum leaders in which teacher leaders were appointed by administrators and given formal authority to enact their roles ("appoint and anoint"; Smylie, 1995). This approach has been hindered by obstacles such as teachers' reluctance to consider themselves leaders and relate as equals to administrators; teachers' working norms including equality, autonomy, independence, and privacy; the nature of teachers' work, such as isolation and lack of time to collaborate; the ambiguity of the lead teacher's role; and the lack of training for the lead teacher's role (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). *Generally, educational researchers have concluded that because of such obstacles, promoting teacher leadership through formal roles has been unsuccessful in achieving desired goals.* Formal mentoring programs, for example, have provided teachers with some emotional and technical support but have not prepared them for standards-based reform (Wang & Odell, 2002); and the strongest effects (although inconsistent) of teacher leadership have been on teacher leaders themselves, not their peers (e.g., reduced isolation, increased reflection, and intellectual stimulation) (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In addition, we now understand that life in schools is complex, dynamic, and profoundly political (Blase, 1991; Blase & Blase, 2002), as is the role of teacher leader. For example, teacher leaders are in a delicate relationship with school principals, a relationship often dominated by the principals' sense of accountability and control, as principals work to protect their authority and status. Additionally, to maintain relationships with other teachers, teacher leaders tend to avoid conflict and *play it safe,* rather than violate egalitarian cultural norms (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Indeed, formal teacher leadership is an organizational phenomenon rife with issues that complicate the teacher leader's work with teachers.

Informal (Emergent, Naturally Occurring) Teacher Leadership

Recently, educational scholars have called for a broader view of teacher leadership including *informal teacher leadership roles* (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; Odell, 1997; Smylie, 1995; Wasley, 1991). They have discussed the potential of less-structured, *emergent* forms of teacher leadership such as career lattices (Howey, 1988), collaborative leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995), and constructivist leadership (Lambert et al., 1995); all forms of collaborative leadership based on experience, interest, expertise, and fluid and flexible relationships; they can be initiated by any teacher and become an integral part of the teacher's role and the school culture. From his study of teacher leadership, Odell (1997) concluded that when schools as a whole are "professionalized and better organized for teaching, teacher leaders will emerge as a matter of course in informally structured positions" (p. 121).

Emergent teacher leadership is best described by three concepts: career lattices, the Professional Development Schools approach, and constructivist leadership theory (Sabatini, 2002). First, in contrast to career ladders (a hierarchical approach in which teachers are given varying pay, status, and responsibility), the *career lattices* approach refers to a type of collaborative leadership in which all personnel in the educational enterprise work together. Career lattices empower teachers to engage in leadership opportunities, which vary by school needs and include, for example, planning and improving curriculum, developing instructional skills and strategies, and conducting action research. The career lattice approach allows for any and all teachers to be involved in roles that are fluid and flexible, and it implicitly acknowledges that teachers possess great expertise and knowledge that should be tapped to redesign and improve schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995).

Second, in *Professional Development Schools (PDSs),* teacher leadership "is potentially more than a role; it is a *stance,* a mind-set, a way of being, acting, and thinking as a learner within a community of learners, and as a *professional* teacher" (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995, p. 95).

Teachers in PDSs are also actively involved in the redesign and improvement of schools. In such schools, as in career lattices, leadership opportunities are available to all teachers (indeed, leading and learning are embedded aspects of a teacher's role) and are based on experience and expertise (i.e., leadership is not formally assigned). Specifically, teachers are extensively involved in the preparation of preservice teachers and new teachers such as mentoring or teaching at colleges of education. Further, teachers in PDSs work on their own professional development by peer coaching, visiting other schools, or presenting at workshops; collaborate to develop a high-quality education for all through designing instruction to meet diverse learners' needs, creating new assessments, or reviewing new instructional methods; and become involved in continuous inquiry by conducting research with peers and university colleagues, presenting at professional conferences (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Teitel, 1997).

Finally, *constructivist leadership* in schools focuses on people collaborating to share ideas and concerns, construct meaning, make sense of their work, and grow together. Action research teams, special working places such as a professional library, and special events like group conversations are structures associated with this approach. Based on constructivist learning theory, such as notions from the works of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Schon, and Gardner—which posits that learners construct knowledge through social interaction, reflect on these learning experiences, and thus make meaning of their learning—constructivist leadership allows teachers' roles to change and different leaders to emerge according to interest, expertise, the overriding purpose of schooling, and the needs of children, adults, and the community (Lambert et al., 1995).

Emergent teacher leadership has been defined as "Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, influence others toward improved educational practice, and identify with and contribute to a community of leaders" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996, p. 6). To date, only a handful of studies exist that focus on emergent teacher leadership: Corallo, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Heller and Firestone, 1995; Lieberman, 1992; Miller, 1992; Odell, 1997; Phillips, 2004; Stone, Horejs, and Lomas, 1997; Sabatini, 2002; Smylie, 1995; and Teitel, 1997 (Figure 1.4). These studies indicate the following:

- The roles for emergent teacher leaders evolve in natural ways, based on individual school needs.
- These roles are available to all teachers.
- Emergent teacher leaders confront fewer obstacles than teacher leaders holding formal positions, primarily because teachers have more control over relationships with emergent teacher leaders as compared to relationships with administrators or formally appointed teacher leaders.
- The use of select strategies by teacher leaders has the potential to significantly contribute to improvements in teaching and learning.

Figure 1.4 Findings from Research Studies on Emergent Teacher Leadership

Date	Researcher	Focus of Study	Findings
1992	Miller	Development of teacher leadership in a restructured school	• Inquiry, dialogue, reflection, invention, action, and trust became school norms. • Teacher leadership became a school norm. • Classroom teachers, not the formally designated team leaders, initiated most improvement efforts. • Supporting factors included superintendent's and principal's interest, support, and advocacy.
1995	Corallo	Informal teacher leaders who had the ability to influence others	• Factors that influenced the development of informal teacher leaders included family background, success in early leadership experiences, mentor teachers, professional growth activities, and administrative support.
1995	Darling-Hammond et al.	Teacher leadership in Professional Development Schools (PDSs)	• PDSs provided opportunities for all teachers to lead in their areas of expertise and interest (mentors, teacher educators, curriculum developers, decision makers, problem solvers, change agents, researchers). • Teacher leadership was inclusive, not exclusive. • Teacher leadership was not artificial or imposed. • Teacher leadership roles were available to all teachers. • Teacher leadership emerged as a normal role for teachers.
1995	Heller & Firestone	Schools that had successfully institutionalized a problem-solving program	• Principals were not the key leaders for change. • Teachers performed critical leadership functions, including encouraging, reinforcing, monitoring, and educating each other.
1997	Stone et al.	Similarities and differences in teacher leadership at elementary, middle, and high school levels	• In middle schools, teacher leadership was informal, emergent, and voluntary. • Middle school teacher leaders considered themselves catalysts and facilitators. • Teacher leadership improved collaboration, school improvement, and personal and professional growth. • Teacher leadership in a shared decision-making setting formed the basis of collective leadership. • Elementary and high school teacher leaders were formally designated by administrators.
2002	Sabatini	Teachers' perspectives of emergent teacher leadership in an elementary school	• Teachers who were empowered to lead felt trusted, valued, and validated. • Emergent teacher leaders and other teachers interacted in meaningful ways, including sharing, coaching, problem solving, and inquiry (i.e., the focus was on instructional improvement and school improvement). • Teachers identified improved instruction, increased leadership capacity, increased stability, and improved morale as outcomes of experiences with emergent teacher leaders.

Figure 1.4 (Continued)

Date	Researcher	Focus of Study	Findings
2004	Phillips	Emergent teacher leaders' and principals' perspectives of instructional leadership in a successful shared governance elementary school	• Outcomes of collaborative instructional leadership included development of norms of collaboration and collegiality, emergence of teacher leaders, greater accomplishment toward the common purpose, delivery of more effective instructional leadership, strengthening of trust and respect, creation of a positive learning environment, an increase in the sense of ownership and responsibility for outcomes of instructional leaders, and positive impact on instruction.

Before 2002, the work of emergent teacher leaders had not been scientifically linked to classroom or school-level benefits (Smylie & Denny, 1990; Trachtman, 1991; Wasley, 1991). In that year Sabatini (2002) found that interactions between emergent teacher leaders and teachers resulted in improved instruction. However, Sabatini's research was limited to one elementary school that recognized teacher leaders, albeit unofficially, and formally encouraged collaborative inquiry, problem solving, and shared decision making. In another study Phillips (2004) demonstrated that collaborative instructional leadership initiated by emerging teacher leaders and principals yielded norms of collaboration and collegiality, the emergence of teacher leaders, greater progress toward a common purpose, delivery of more effective instructional leadership, strengthening of trust and respect, creation of a positive learning environment, and positive impacts on instruction. Despite promising work, literature that focuses on the nature of emergent teacher leadership is largely exploratory.

THE THIRD SOURCE OF TEACHER HELP: NATURALLY OCCURRING INFORMAL PEER CONSULTATION

> *There is relatively little empirical evidence concerning the particular characteristics and qualities of relations among teachers . . . that are most conducive to teacher learning and change.*
>
> —Smylie & Hart, 1999, p. 425

There is little doubt that formal and quasi-formal approaches to teacher leadership (as discussed earlier) encourage collaborative work and may have some positive effects on teachers and their instruction; this notwithstanding, such approaches can be problematic and costly. Thus *naturally occurring peer consultation,* the third source of teacher help, is potentially efficacious; but it is the least researched source of help for teachers. *This source of teacher support includes informal and emergent interactions and relationships among teachers that significantly facilitate and influence teachers' classroom instruction across school levels and across different governance structures. The teacher is neither designated a* teacher leader, *nor is the teacher given a formal leadership role of any kind.*

We investigated naturally occurring peer consultation among teachers to determine if this form of consultation, reinforced by the social relationships among teachers, actually created and sustained teachers' professional learning and development. (In fact, one major implication of our findings is that teacher learning should address both *what* is learned and *how* it is learned [Carter, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1985], particularly with regard to peer consultation, which we will discuss later.) Chapters 2 through 6 describe in detail the intriguing results of our study of *naturally occurring peer consultation.*

Our Study of Peer Consultation Among Teachers

The study that forms the basis of this book focused on teachers' perspectives on naturally occurring teacher-to-teacher consultation. We examined the actions of peer consultants that teachers indicated directly or indirectly influenced their teaching positively, and specifically, the effects of such actions on teachers' reflection, instruction, and feelings. (Please see Resource: Research Method and Procedures at the end of this book for protocol details.)

We designed the Inventory of Teacher Actions that Positively Influence Your Teaching (ITAPIYT), an open-ended questionnaire, to collect personal meanings about the study topic. The ITAPIYT was administered to 297 elementary, middle, and high school teachers in the southeastern United States. The following instruction appeared on each page of the questionnaire: "Describe in detail *one action* on each of the following pages (what another teacher did) that directly or indirectly helped you teach more effectively. Please give examples to clarify what you mean." In addition, we asked teachers to describe the exact effects of the teacher's action identified above on their thinking, teaching, and feelings. The survey included five pages with the same question; thus a teacher had the opportunity to describe, in detail, up to five actions.

We coded data from the study respondents according to principles for inductive research and comparative analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This form of analysis required a comparison of each new unit of data to those coded previously for emergent categories and subcategories. Display matrixes were used to identify and refine conceptual and theoretical ideas derived from the data. This protocol also permitted comparisons of the descriptive and theoretical ideas produced by the study with the relevant extant literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

All descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical ideas produced from our study are based on the teachers' perspectives. Because of space limitations, quotes drawn directly from our study data have been used to illustrate select ideas.

The Importance of this Study

This study of peer consultation behaviors that influence teachers' reflection, teaching, and feelings has generated new descriptive, conceptual, and theoretical knowledge in an important area of public education. It also expands the well-established school reform literature by, for example, discussing the effects of informal, emergent, naturally occurring forms of teacher-to-teacher consultation on teachers and their work with students. (Recent studies such as that by Leithwood & Jantzi [2000] have found that formalizing teacher leadership in schools attempting reform along collegial–democratic lines has, at times, actually undermined such efforts.) In addition, such knowledge contributes directly to teacher development by providing detailed descriptions of the nature and effects of peer consultation on teachers. Suggesting pathways to overcome the problem of time for formal teacher collaboration (an example of a critical obstacle to shared leadership and decision making not discussed in the teacher development literature), is one such contribution. Finally, this study is timely in educational leadership given recent research on schools as *caring* and *just* communities in which educators develop mutual trust and respect while working collaboratively toward common goals (Enomoto, 1997) and transformational forms of leadership that promote teacher empowerment for school improvement (Blase & Blase, 2001).

Practically speaking, knowledge about peer consultation and its positive effects on teachers and their work in the classroom can be applied in staff development and university-based programs to sensitize practicing and prospective teachers and administrators to the need to cultivate the development of groups that support peer consultation (Lambert et al., 1995); enhance professional school communities by granting autonomy and providing staff development, time, place, activities, and recognition, for instance (Blase & Blase, 1999); and open communication and positive environment in schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996).

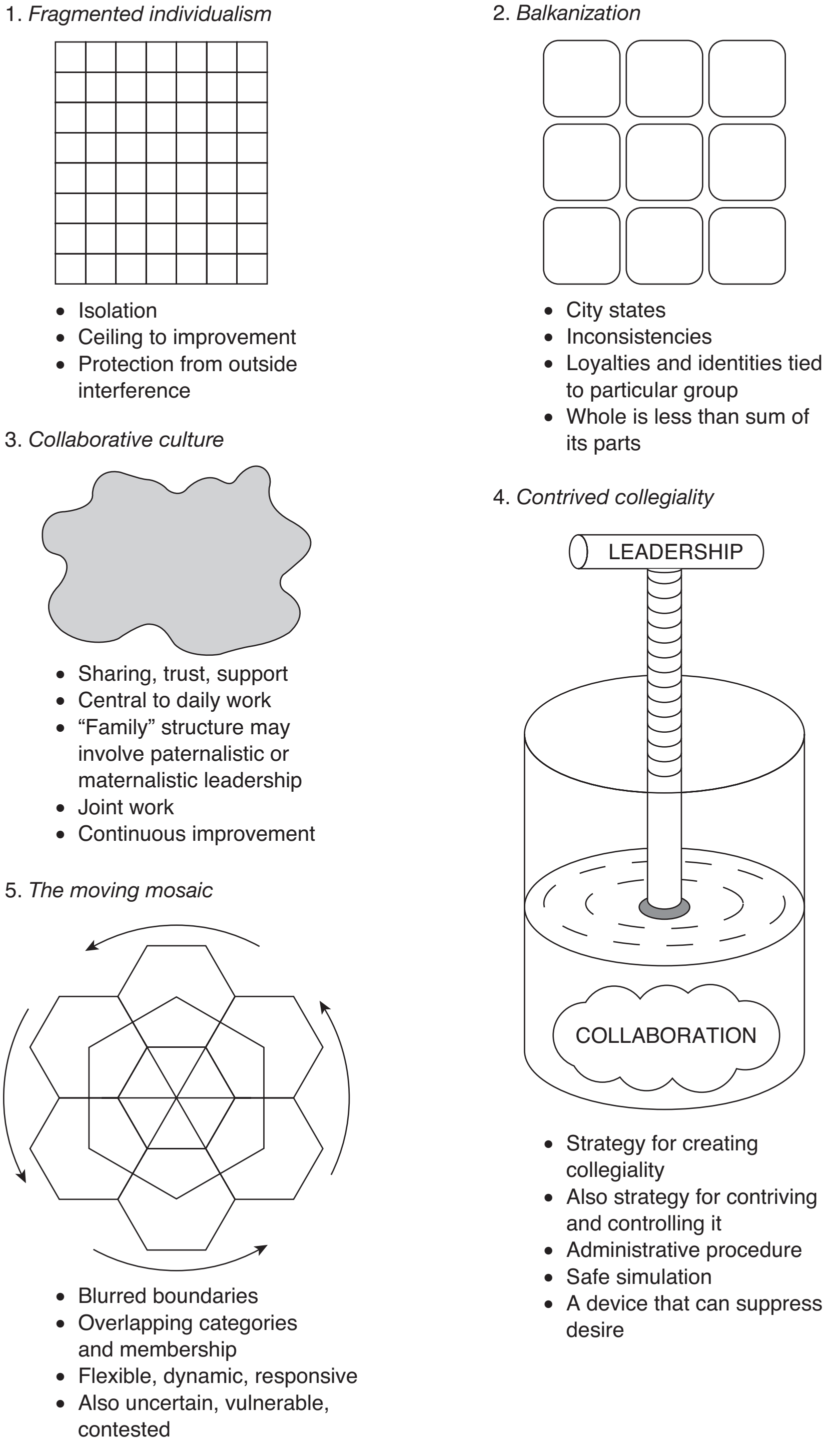
The results of our study, as presented in this book, will also be a valuable resource for central office personnel and boards of education throughout the United States. Individuals in these positions are legally, professionally, and ethically responsible for school improvement, including student achievement. Unfortunately, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and state mandates have decreased control at the level of the individual school; frequently, the result has been distrust and poor morale among teachers, a state of affairs that must be overcome by capitalizing on teachers' expertise and providing opportunities for collaborative learning. Specifically, our study has implications for the preparation, professional development, and support of teachers and school-level administrators and for developing viable district policies, such as including teachers in decision-making processes, which affects the degree of teacher autonomy and teacher involvement in decisions important to their work, and providing flexible development opportunities. The role of central office personnel and boards of education are especially important in light of related reform efforts that mandate standards, high-stakes testing, and consequences for schools that *fail* because such factors effectively limit teachers' roles in school improvement.

A Portrait of Peer Consultation

> *The purpose of consultation is to stimulate self-evaluation and critical thinking.*
>
> —Holt, 1992, p.3

In general we found that from the teachers' perspectives, peer consultation builds school-based teacher cultures characterized by robust forms of teacher collaboration and collegiality and results in teacher development, teacher confidence, and school effectiveness and improvement, the advantages of which have been described by several researchers (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988). Hargreaves (1994), for example, reported that effective collaborative school cultures among teachers tended to be spontaneous, voluntary, development oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable; such cultures included principals who created a sense of school unity, modeled expectations for teachers, valued teachers, adjusted schedules to facilitate shared planning time, and encouraged experimentation. This, in turn, helped teachers break down barriers, work closely together, and learn from each other while participating on externally and internally initiated projects. Hargreaves, however, has noted that attempts to create *formal* collaborative cultures, in reality, frequently produced cultures of congeniality, complacency, and comfort. Said differently, truly *collaborative cultures* can be contrasted with other forms of teacher culture, including fragmented individualism, balkanization, contrived collegiality, and a moving mosaic (Figure 1.5). Perhaps the best example of effective collaboration among teachers is that of *lesson study* among Japanese teachers, wherein teachers collectively observe and study each other's lessons to develop instructional expertise and build the capacity for collegial learning; yet such collaboration occurs in a culture imbued with the notion of improvement through collective effort and critical self-reflection (Lewis, Perry, & Murata, 2003).

Figure 1.5 Forms of Teacher Culture



1. *Fragmented individualism*

- Isolation
- Ceiling to improvement
- Protection from outside interference

2. *Balkanization*

- City states
- Inconsistencies
- Loyalties and identities tied to particular group
- Whole is less than sum of its parts

3. *Collaborative culture*

- Sharing, trust, support
- Central to daily work
- "Family" structure may involve paternalistic or maternalistic leadership
- Joint work
- Continuous improvement

4. *Contrived collegiality*

- Strategy for creating collegiality
- Also strategy for contriving and controlling it
- Administrative procedure
- Safe simulation
- A device that can suppress desire

5. *The moving mosaic*

- Blurred boundaries
- Overlapping categories and membership
- Flexible, dynamic, responsive
- Also uncertain, vulnerable, contested

SOURCE: A. Hargreaves (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age,* p. 238. New York: Teachers College Press. Used with permission.

Is a Peer Consultant a Supervisor, a Mentor, or a Coach?

We found that the natural, spontaneous, facilitative, collaborative encounters between peer consultants and teachers defied description as supervision, mentoring, or coaching. Therefore we refer to teachers' work with colleagues as peer consultation. What are the differences? First, *supervisors* are judges with the power to direct teachers' behaviors, whereas peer consultants respect teachers' autonomy. (This is certainly not to say that, on occasion, weak teachers must be directly supervised by administrators.) Second, *mentors* act on established standards and often work under constraints of limited preparation and time, whereas peer consultants are not bound by predetermined standards that may be irrelevant to a particular teacher's classroom context and student needs; further, peer consultants share their expertise, availing themselves of whatever opportunities for consulting that arise. Third, *coaches* have special preparation for work with colleagues and transfer prescribed approaches or processes to teachers. In contrast, we found that peer consultants—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. In essence, the focus for the peer consultant is idiosyncratic to the teaching context and the teacher's concerns; the peer consultant helped the teacher identify a relevant focus, assess progress, and improve teaching in a timely manner. Peer consultants were not *neutral observers* who withheld their judgments and suggestions; they were *full partners* in a peer dialogue and often revealed their opinions and encouraged teachers to confront differing perceptions and perspectives through constructive-reflective dialogue (Goldsberry, 1998).

Discussing teachers' craft knowledge, Grimmett and MacKinnon (1992) point out that such knowledge "represents teachers' judgment in apprehending the events of practice from their own perspectives as students of teaching and learning, much as a 'glue' that brings all of the knowledge bases to bear on the act of teaching" (p. 387), and this knowledge is a "construction of situated, learner-focused, procedural and content-related pedagogical knowledge" (p. 393). Thus, peer consultants could be considered *knowers* of the craft of teaching.

We also found that peer consultants often engaged in reciprocal observation. Garmston (1987) aptly described this as collegial coaching, which is contextualized and focused on self-reflection and professional dialogue and, as Hargreaves & Dawe (1990) have stated, "the focus for improvement is not determined externally" (p. 231). See Figure 1.6 for Goldsberry's (1998) description of the types of helping roles discussed previously, which are listed according to the degree of teacher involvement.

Figure 1.6 Helping Roles

Supervisor

- Sets boundaries for teacher autonomy
- Has authority to *remediate* if teacher crosses spoken (or even unspoken) boundaries
- Has organizational blessing to direct teaching behavior using own experience and preferences as a guide

Mentor

- Advises teacher of established (by policy or norm) boundaries
- Advises according to established standards if teacher crosses spoken (or unspoken) boundaries
- Informs supervisor if actions outside of boundaries continue

Coach

- Advises teacher of boundaries inherent in skill or approach being coached
- Uses coach's understandings of the proper application of the method as the standards
- Determines *rightness* of teaching method
- Reports teacher's proficiency if necessary with method to supervisor or to mentor

Consultant

- Serves at request of teacher
- Advises teacher regarding *goodness* of practice
- Accords teacher the liberty to act upon or to ignore advice
- Accords teacher the liberty to determine standards
- Challenges teacher's reasoning when appropriate, but (barring malpractice) allows teacher's reasoning to prevail

SOURCE: Adapted from "Teacher involvement in supervision" (p. 432), by L.F. Goldsberry, 1998, in *Handbook of Research on School Supervision*, G.R. Firth & E.F. Pajak (Eds.) (pp. 428–462). New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.

What Happens During Peer Consultation?

Good teaching looks effortless because a teacher's knowledge and experience are invisible! We all know, however, that teaching is a tricky blend of knowledge and action, a way of contextualizing knowledge. Good teaching is, in fact, complex and challenging, and even the best teachers face difficulties translating formal knowledge into effective practice. To use Schön's (1987) metaphor, teachers face the challenge of fusing the hard ground of scientific methodology with the swamp of messy problems of practice.

We found that peer consultants became the *other,* helping a teacher use research and practice reflectively (Fenstermacher & Richardson (1993); the peer consultant frequently became the critical friend (Kroath, 1990), whose dialogue with the teacher

- supported and confirmed the reality of classroom experience,
- challenged assumptions about practice,
- encouraged the teacher to elaborate on her/his practical reasoning that undergirds action,
- tapped teachers' knowledge, and
- ensured that practice is contextualized and justified.

Peer consultation was effective because both consultants and teachers brought their experiential knowledge as well as their ability to acquire new knowledge to bear on the classroom teaching being examined. In effect, they used their collective knowledge to gain new knowledge. Munby, Russell, and Martin (2001) described teachers' experiential knowledge as a rich amalgam of constructs including situated knowledge, event-structured knowledge, personal practical knowledge, images, and knowing-in-action. Teachers acquire experiential knowledge constructs through tacit understandings, reflection, authority of experience, nested knowing, reframing, and developed expertise; this is demonstrated in the differences among preservice, neophyte, and experienced teachers. This is further enhanced by the metaphors, voice, and, in particular, the craft knowledge teachers bring to the dialogue. See Figure 1.7 for a description of teachers' rationales for peer consultation, which suggests that practical reasoning—coupled with experiential knowledge and adapted to context by dialogue among teachers—results in shared learning for innovation and improvement.

What are the Metagoals of Peer Consultation?

Our study of teachers demonstrates that peer consultation is critical to school innovation and improvement because

- teaching is dynamic, situated, complex, contextualized work;
- teachers flourish in a culture of shared learning;
- teachers learn from each other's expertise and knowledge; and
- teachers spontaneously consult with each other to solve the immediate problems of teaching and learning.

Further, we found that the critical process factors in peer consultation included

- developing a positive, collegial relationship among peers,
- using frequent (if possible) and usually casual contact,
- using contemporaneous data from classroom teaching and learning,
- implementing teacher reflection, and
- using teacher control of decisions and implementation.

Figure 1.7 Teachers' Rationales for Peer Consultation

Because teaching . . .

- Is dynamic, situated, complex, contextualized work
- Is about working with diverse learners
- Unfolds in practice
- Requires continuous decision making and problem solving

We must . . .

- Develop trust
- Create opportunities to discuss experiences and knowledge
- Foster dialogic discourse
- Develop a culture of shared learning rather than a culture of isolation
- Engage in continuous learning from each other
- Engage in critical collaborative processes
- Engage in social sharing
- Nurture sharing
- Develop a recursive, problem-based, collaboration of practitioners
- Become an interdependent learning community of informal, self-constituting, naturally occurring, spontaneous relationships among practitioners
- Help each other fill the unfilled gaps in knowledge
- Not be discounted, diminished, inhibited, or marginalized by others

So we can . . .

- Access teachers' expertise
- Access unarticulated knowledge learned in work
- Move from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge
- Generate improvisational knowledge
- Adapt knowledge
- Mobilize knowledge
- Amplify knowledge throughout our school
- Solve problems of teaching and learning
- Ask new questions
- Search for new perspectives
- Craft new explanations
- Cobble together innovative solutions
- Spontaneously solve problems
- Do what works

Thus, spontaneous collaborations among teachers . . .

- Contain innovative knowledge
- Are critical to school innovation and improvement
- Influence the way work progresses

SOURCE: Blase & Blase, 2004b. For further study see Brown & Duguid, 1991; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daft & Weick, 1984; Fullan, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nonaka, 1994; Shellard, 2003.

Given the importance of spontaneous processes embedded in peer consultation, we recommend the following as the natural metagoals of peer consultation:

- heighten job performance,
- refine skills,
- provide opportunities for meaningful discussion about teaching practices, and
- provide mutual benefit.

In the broadest sense, we found that peer consultation enhanced teachers' self-efficacy (teachers' belief in their own abilities and capacity to successfully solve teaching and learning problems) as they reflected on practice and grew together, and it also encouraged a bias for action (improvement through collaboration) on the part of teachers.

What Do Peer Consultants Do? The Five Skills of Our Peer Consultation Model

From our analyses of naturally occurring peer consultation, we developed the PCM; this model depicts the five major elements of peer consultants' work with teachers described in subsequent chapters of this book. Generally speaking, this type of collaborative work resulted in substantial learning and improvement for both teachers and peer consultants, a phenomenon also described by Joyce & Showers (2002). We learned that the collective work of peer colleagues frequently included effective communication, caring, and developing trust (Chapter 2) and knowledge of and ability to use teaching strategies that, according to the professional literature, promote student achievement (Chapters 3 and 4). Additional skills derived from our study data—showing and sharing (Chapter 5) and guiding for classroom management (Chapter 6)—complete our model. In Chapter 7 we discuss ways educators can capitalize on the power of peer consultation.

Peer Consultation Model: Five Skills

1. Building healthy relationships by communicating, caring, and developing trust
2. Exploiting the knowledge base
3. Planning and organizing for learning
4. Showing and sharing
5. Guiding for classroom management

A Call to Action

A decade ago Lieberman (1995) lamented the limitations of traditional approaches to teacher development and argued the following:

> - Teachers' professional development has been limited by lack of knowledge about how teachers learn.
> - Teaching has been described as a set of technical skills, leaving little room for invention and the building of craft knowledge.
> - Professional development opportunities have often ignored the critical importance of the context within which teachers work.
> - Teachers' definitions of the problems of practice have often been ignored.
> - Strategies for change have often not considered the importance of support mechanisms and the necessity of learning over time.
> - Time and the necessary mechanisms for inventing, as well as consuming, new knowledge have often been absent from schools.
> - The move from *direct teaching* to facilitating *in-school learning* has not been linked to longer-term strategies aimed at both changing teaching practice and changing school culture.
> - There has been a lack of networks, collaboratives, and partnerships that provide teachers with professional learning communities that support changes in teaching practices.
> - The agenda for reform involves teachers in practices that have not been part of the accepted view of teachers' professional learning. (Lieberman, 1995, pp. 595–596)

Lieberman (1995) further noted that successful educational reform requires that teachers have "opportunities to discuss, think about, try out, and hone new practices"; she called for continuous learning among teachers in the context of the school and classroom, and she suggested that teachers can learn about teaching and learning by

> - building new roles—teacher leader, peer coach, or teacher researcher, for example;
> - creating new structures such as problem-solving groups or decision-making teams;
> - working on new tasks including journal and proposal writing, learning about assessment, creating standards, and analyzing or writing case studies of practice; and
> - creating a culture of inquiry, wherein professional learning is expected, sought after, and an ongoing part of teaching and school life. (Lieberman, 1995, p. 593)

In the past 10 years, Lieberman's concerns and suggestions have not been widely heeded; nevertheless, a shift in the dialogic plates of teacher development and reflection on teaching appears to be under way. The third source of teacher help, peer consultation, shows potential for great school improvement. Indeed, the study described in this book makes clear that teachers find peer consultation among colleagues to be the crux, indeed, the very heart of school improvement. In peer consultation, teachers spontaneously, gently, and skillfully help each other; teachers teach teachers about teaching and teachers collaboratively solve the complex problems of teaching in today's schools. This is a natural marriage of self-help and spirit among teachers whose time has come. This book is an exploration into that world, the world of peer consultation.

SUMMARY

This chapter first presented our concept of peer consultation drawn directly from our study data. Discussions of three primary sources of teacher assistance—principals, lead teachers, and peer consultants—was followed by a very brief outline of the research method and procedures used to conduct our study of peer consultation. Some of our most important findings were highlighted in the first pages of this chapter. Peer consultation skill #1, building healthy relationships by communicating, caring, and developing trust, is the focus of Chapter 2.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are teachers in your school at different developmental stages, ages, and points in their careers? How do these differences impact their professional development needs? What can be done to create relevant professional development opportunities for all of your teachers?

2. In what ways do professional staff development programs in your school adhere to the principles of adult development and to the National Staff Development Council's 12 Standards? What can you do to ensure that such programs reflect these principles and standards?

3. Which of the three sources of teacher assistance discussed in this chapter are used in your school? What can you do to extend peer consultation as a form of teacher assistance?

4. Do teachers in your school have meaningful discussions about lessons and problems of teaching? If not, what can you do to create such opportunities?

SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER LEARNING

Group Development

Wheelan, S. (2004). *Faculty groups: From frustration to collaboration.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This discusses how to help faculty groups become productive.]

Martinez, M. C. (2004) *Teachers working together for school success.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This discusses how teachers can influence each other, handle conflict, and work together to build a stronger school community.]

Professional Learning Communities

DuFour, R. (2003). *Building a professional learning community.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators. [This discusses roles and strategies for principals, teachers, parents, and professional developers.]

Martin-Kniep, G. (2004). *Developing learning communities through teacher expertise.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This outlines how to build a reflective, collaborative environment and develop standards-based curriculum and assessment.]

Roberts, S. M., & Pruitt, E. Z. (2003). *Schools as professional learning communities: Collaborative activities and strategies for professional development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This is a primer on how to work with teachers, parents, and administrators to build a learning community.]

Beginning Teacher Assistance

Gordon, P., & Maxey, S. (2000). *How to help beginning teachers succeed.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development. [This presents a design of a beginning teacher assistance program]

Mentoring

Daresh, J. C. (2003). *Teachers mentoring teachers: A practical approach to helping new and experienced staff.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This deals with how to plan, implement, and evaluate mentor programs.]

Jonson, K. F. (2002). *Being an effective mentor: How to help beginning teachers succeed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This is comprehensive and practical handbook for teachers and administrators.]

Instructional Leadership and Teacher Empowerment

Blase, J. & Blase, J. (2004). *Handbook of instructional leadership: How successful principals promote teaching and learning* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This details how to effectively promote teaching and school improvement.]

Blase, J., & Blase, J. (2001). *Empowering teachers: What successful principals do* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This discusses how to promote teacher empowerment and to enhance teaching and learning.]

Teachers' Work

Lieberman, A., & Miller, J. (1999). *Teachers—Transforming their world and their work.* New York: Teachers College. [This addresses the realities of schools and teaching and focuses on constraints and possibilities in teachers' work.]

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age.* New York: Teachers College Press. [This identifies the complexity and dilemmas of teaching and posits the need to change the structures and cultures of teaching.]

Teacher Leadership

Crowther, F., Kaagan, S. S., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2002). *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school success.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This discusses how to redefine and elevate teachers' roles.]

Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (2001). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop as leaders* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This discusses how to develop teacher leaders who lead within and beyond the classroom.]

Peer Coaching

Allen, D. W., & LeBlanc, A. C. (2004). *Collaborative peer coaching that improves instruction: The 2+2 performance appraisal model.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. [This presents a method in which teachers visit each other's classrooms and provide two compliments and two suggestions for improvement to each other.]