“My first instincts, after being asked to participate in a classroom coaching project, were to panic and say no. As a veteran teacher of 14 years, the thought of having two other teachers come into my room and watch me teach made me feel insecure. I wasn’t sure about the impact or the results.”

— Mindy Capp

But Mindy Capp changed her mind. She and four other middle school math teachers in Spearfish, S.D., decided to embark on an adventure in teaching that allowed them to see not only themselves, but their students, in fresh ways.
Through a coaching model that kept them in their own classrooms, the teachers were able to see their students interact with different teachers and teaching styles. They observed lessons presented in new ways, and because of their familiarity with both the students and the curriculum, their observations led to a deeper understanding of how they could improve their own practices.

“This was the first time in 14 years of teaching that I ever had someone come and critique for my benefit, not to evaluate me as an administrator would. I had the best time watching you two teach my class because I got to see how my kids interact with somebody else.”
— Mindy Capp

COACHING’S VALUE

Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1980) were among the first to propose coaching as a valuable tool for staff development. Joyce and Showers said coaching’s purpose was twofold: to enhance teachers’ learning after seminars and to refine classroom teaching strategies and practices. Showers also noted (1985) that coaching does more than meld teaching strategies and practices. It also enhances teachers’ new knowledge to old to help them master skills. It also enhances the culture and can lead to schoolwide change.

Coaching positively affects teachers’ work environment, self-concept, and professional commitment, and it is a valuable strategy for staff development (Garmston, 1987). There are several coaching models, including peer, collegial, challenge, cognitive, and technical (see box, page 65), but all share similar formats, goals, and results. All foster teacher growth in professional dialogue, greater teaching collegiality, refined teaching strategies and practices, and greater teacher reflection (Ackland, 1991).

On-site coaching helps teachers specifically address issues in their own instruction and refine their teaching strategies. On-site coaching in a teacher’s classroom can be shared by teachers within the same grade level or discipline, or can work across grade levels and disciplines. Visiting teachers/coaches can be classroom teachers, administrators, special education teachers, school counselors, curriculum supervisors, or college professors (Showers, 1985).

“It was cool to sit and watch things and see things that I normally wouldn’t see and how the students interacted.”
— Mindy Capp

ORIGINS OF AN IDEA

The Spearfish on-site coaching model began in spring 2000. When Ben Sayler, one of the authors, came to Black Hills State University (Spearfish, S.D.) in 1999, he brought a professional development grant with him. The National Science Foundation grant was specifically to improve math and science education. At the time, the Spearfish School District was phasing in new instructional materials for math at the middle grades, and teachers were eager for support. Collaboration made sense.

“I noticed that you two have very different teaching approaches from each other. But very good teaching approaches. I got from you how to keep stressing the mathematics. You just kept pushing, and pushing, and pushing, and inquiring, and it made them keep thinking mathematically. Where you (the second coach) were very observant and very cautious of who was getting along, who wasn’t, who was working, who wasn’t — more of the social structure. And even though you still had them doing the mathematics, you were looking for the other components, too, of group work. Not just the mathematics, but behavior.”
— Mindy Capp

Initially, the plan called for two visiting teachers from the university’s Center for the Advancement of Math and Science Education to offer the 6th-grade teachers in particular technical, content-related support in the new program, which emphasized concepts and student inquiry. New instructional materials required the teachers to teach quite differently from how they had in the past, and the teachers were eager for help learning to use these materials. Neither of the center’s staff members who would coach had experience with the particular materials the district adopted, and before the planning process ended, the coaching shifted from content to instruction.

“Seeing things from back here made me realize I have to do some
things differently. Like Ray. He just doesn’t want to do any more than you make him do. You got him excited, letting him be the leader of the group. You helped me get an idea on how to pursue certain kids in here now. I started thinking of methods I can use to get Ray to settle down, to be more part of a group, to be more of a leader than a follower. It’s a huge insight. I am excited for tomorrow.”

— Mindy Capp

THE COACHING MODEL

The coaching program started with an orientation/planning meeting in which the teachers and coaches watched and discussed several short videos of classroom instruction. The discussion helped create a collaborative, collegial atmosphere and was practice for the in-class coaching sessions.

The coaching cycles were each three days with each teacher participating in two cycles over the course of a semester. The classroom teacher taught the first day, and each of the visiting teachers taught one of the following two days. All three were in the classroom each day. Each coaching session included instructional time (typically two math lessons of about 45 minutes each) and a 45-minute debriefing session during the teacher’s planning period with both visiting coaches and the host teacher. The discussions began with the teacher’s thoughts on how that day’s lesson went and how the students related to the teacher, topic, and each other. The two coaches then talked about their view of the lesson, the teaching, and the students based on their field notes. The discussions focused on positive practices and providing support. The teachers talked about instructional styles, class climate, curriculum, student behavior and interactions, and learning. Three teachers were coached over a semester in spring 2000, and two additional teachers chose to be involved the following fall.

The two coaches and all of the participating teachers met as a group twice each semester, once at the beginning to watch and discuss video segments and once at the end to debrief the coaching experience.

“Elizabeth was very impressive today. Maybe I haven’t been giving her the full credit that she deserves. I’ve been on her because she can be off task. Today she was fantastic. She really held that group together. I saw a side of her that I haven’t seen before.”

— Mindy Capp

The coaches and teachers worked as equals in planning, teaching, observing, and discussing the lessons. The classroom teachers led the discussions so they could address issues important to them and their profes-
The coaching sessions were as nondisruptive to students and the school staff as possible. The sequence of lessons and the class schedule were not changed. Because the professional learning was job-embedded and the teacher was never out of the classroom, the school did not have to shift teacher schedules, find substitute teachers, or incur additional costs.

The coaching gave the participating teachers opportunities to be observed, to discuss their teaching practices, and to observe and discuss the coaches’ styles and practices. Most important was that the coaching and observation occurred in each teacher’s own classroom. Because they knew the students, the teachers had more intimate and powerful insights on particular students, the grouping of students, student interactions, and students’ behavior, learning styles, and abilities.

“You asked Louise to read out loud. She’d told me the first day of school, ‘Please don’t ask me to read out loud,’ and I never have. And she was delighted to get to read, and she did a fine job. It gave some kids a chance to show somebody that they weren’t still that quiet little kid. I hadn’t given them a chance to show me that.”

— Darlene Thompson

The process itself led to a culture of collegiality, dialogue, and reflection among the participants that centered on real classroom issues and the classroom teachers’ individual concerns.

**BENEFITS**

Each participating teacher was involved with the coaching program during one semester, either in the spring or fall of 2000. At the close of each semester, all participants met to
Coaching models

- **Peer coaching** typically involves two or more teachers observing in each other’s classrooms to hone their instructional skills.

- **Collegial coaching** involves two or more teachers collaborating to enhance an area of instruction that the observed teacher wishes to study.

- **Challenge coaching** focuses on resolving a persistent instructional problem.

- **Cognitive coaching** supports a teacher’s own reflection on his or her instruction.

- **Technical coaching** helps teachers transfer ideas from a professional development session into classroom practice.

### REFERENCES


