Gaining Teaching Options

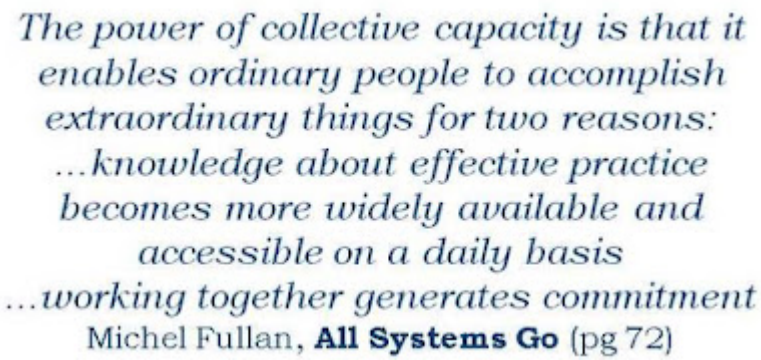
My first travels in South America had me spend two days exploring peer coaching with the staff of The British Schools in Montevideo, Uruguay. It's fall there and they are preparing for students' arrival in a few days. Peer coaching was selected as a focus for the coming year and having everyone trained together set the stage for coaching to occur as school opens.
After connecting coaching to student achievement, we identified other REWARDS from peer coaching. I focused on:

Celebrations: The chance for teacher successes (magical moments) to be seen by a colleague. Peer coaching breaks the isolation and opens the door to celebrations that build team work and perseverance. Today's celebrated successes provide strength during challenging times.

Gaining Options: Great teachers have an endless list of options. They succeed not so much by knowing "what to do" but by always having another strategy to try. Their lists of options outlast the student's difficulty understanding or the student's resistance to engaging. Peer coaching has teachers see, hear, and create more options through observation, conferencing and reflection.
Conscious practice: Much of our teaching decision making, by necessity, occurs unconsciously. Because of the reflection generated by a peer coach's questions and her presence during an observation, a teacher becomes much more aware of her decisions. These conscious moments provide the fertile ground for discovery, change, and growth. (One teacher at The British Schools who pre-conferenced with me and then shared her video with the group began the post conference with an idea of flipping the order of the instructional activities, starting with the most complex student centered component. The thinking she did in the pre and her consciousness watching the video led to her insight.)
As we discussed the value of gaining options, Clive Swale, the director of learning and a teacher of English, Form 6 classes (Clive recently came to The British Schools from an

international school in Vietnam.) shared the following example:

While working at the schools in Dunedin, Port Charles, New Zealand, he took part in a program set up for a cluster of schools. Each term, outside of school hours and combined as a social activity, teachers in a cluster would travel to a selected school where you could visit with teachers in their classrooms. As teachers shared their learnings and tools the colleagues armed with cameras and note pads asked questions and gained understanding and directions. We could “steal” and take it back to our classrooms.

Clive added that he learned he needed to use “what he stole” quickly in order to keep it.

I think that’s a great example for a district to use between its schools, I could see principals having the same opportunity. I love the cell phone cameras, Ipads, and notes being expected. This is sharing and taking time! I believe the same activity could be done in a single school: half the staff observing the first hour and the other half the second. Each teacher hosts in her classroom for half an hour.