

CASE STUDY

Building a Positive Peer Coaching Culture at the American International School of Guangzhou

Nurturing trust, leveraging strengths, and fostering collaboration

SITUATION

Leaders at the American International School of Guangzhou (AISG) were seeking sustainable support for their vision of peer-based professional development within an environment that helps all staff members thrive.

SOLUTION

AISG Administrators began building a Positive Peer Coaching Program in 2020. Each year faculty and staff in each division complete the Positive Peer Coach Training program, which combines the International Coaching Federation's Core Coaching Competencies with tools and perspectives from the science of Positive Psychology Coaching. Graduates of this program support colleagues every year with 1:1 coaching, hosting group coaching sessions, and bringing strengths-based, solution-focused tools and perspectives to regular meetings, special events, and informal conversations.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

1. A Supportive and Uplifting Working Environment

AISG colleagues have established trust, highlighted each other's strengths, and created a connected work culture where they can openly share their professional and personal learning.

2. Reframing Challenges and Focusing on Solutions

The program provides a foundation of research-based positive psychology tools and principles which have led to more authentic, optimistic, and productive meetings and discussions.

3. Positive Interactions with Students and Parents

The staff's positive ways-of-being are flowing into into the classroom culture, creating a strengths-based, solution-focused learning environment for students and the parent community.



AT A GLANCE

OBJECTIVES

- Peer-led professional development
- Sustainable staff wellbeing support
- Effective teamwork and collaboration
- An atmosphere of trust and safety

OUTCOMES

- A cross-divisional peer coaching team
- Regular 1:1 and group coaching
- Innovation in PD and wellbeing support



JAMIE ROBB

Deputy Director
and Program Sponsor

"Positive Peer Coaching overlaps in many aspects of what we do as educators, whether it's working with colleagues, students, or parents.

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What were your initial thoughts about the Positive Peer Coaching program when it was introduced to you?

Jamie: I believed that the program would link up with what we were doing across the school, developing our teacher-leaders to provide feedback through coaching within our teams and increasing the number of people across the school to be using the same language with respect to supporting one another.

Joshua: My initial thoughts about the program were, "This is fantastic - a program that supports adult social-emotional learning!" I've always been passionate about fostering an environment for students to develop SEL, and it's my belief that there are so many possibilities for adults to learn even more in this area. As an adult learner, it was an opportunity to look within and build my social-emotional literacy.

What was your motivation behind launching a Positive Peer Coaching program within the school?

Jamie: Positive Peer Coaching overlaps in many aspects of what we do as educators, whether it's working with adults, or working with students, or working with parents. It aligns well with the coaching that we're doing within the school. Each of our professional community leads is responsible for providing coaching within their teams. And part of that coaching is that the individual teacher identifies the area they want to be coached in. The focus is to guide the individual in finding solutions on their own. Through our coaching we're actively listening, questioning, and approaching problems from a strengths-based perspective.

Joshua: Our school had been exploring a professional development model where teachers provide feedback to their peers. It aligns well with a culture that supports distributed leadership and wants to build a positive work environment and empower teachers, among teachers. The Positive Peer Coaching program seemed like a quality training opportunity that could help support teachers' development and contribute to a positive work environment in our school.



JOSHUA NEUFELD

Primary School Teacher
and Program Coordinator

"A school that prioritizes the wellbeing and support of its teachers creates an environment where teachers feel safe, trusted, and connected to their team. This fosters a sense of belonging and a desire to continue working together."



Has the Positive Peer Coaching program delivered to your expectations?



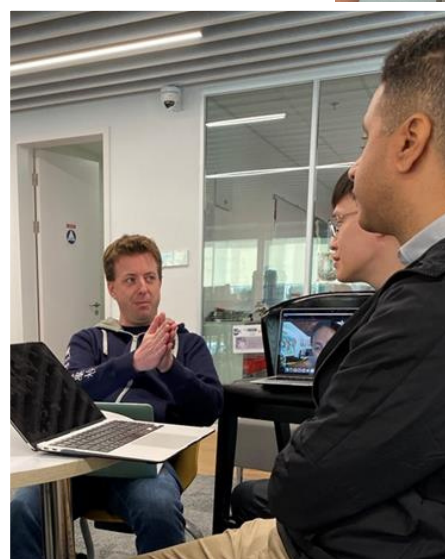
Jamie: We're really happy with it. The more people we've had take the course and talk about it, the more people wanted to get involved. It is a great learning experience from a professional development point of view, but also on a personal level. It really gets people to think about how we can look at things differently, how we can approach things from a solution-oriented perspective. We can really see the change across the school with the language people are using.

Joshua: The program has exceeded my expectations. It has provided an incredible wealth of knowledge and challenged me to put that knowledge into practice through Positive Peer Coaching. I can confidently say that the entire cohort, including our director, deputy director, principals, teachers, teaching assistants, and office support staff, feel the same way. The program has been transformative in helping us develop our strengths, understand and work around our weaknesses, and create a more positive work environment.

What has been the overall impact of the Positive Peer Coaching program for your school?

Jamie: I think it's had a big impact on individuals, teams and across the school - how we look at and approach things. The more Certified Positive Peer Coaches that we get across the school, the larger an impact it's having on the culture. We're slowly becoming a coaching culture with regards to wellness, and also it links nicely to the coaching that we're doing within our professional learning communities.

Joshua: In our school, the Positive Peer Coaching program has had a significant impact on our team dynamics and adult social-emotional development. The program has transformed our school culture by promoting trust, vulnerability, and a strength-focused approach.



What changes have you noticed in staff wellbeing and working relationships since implementing the Positive Peer Coaching program?

Jamie: I think that the Positive Peer Coaching program has improved wellbeing and will continue to as we expand. It improves outlook, for sure. There's been a positive impact on interactions with others within the school, whether teachers are working with administrators, other teachers, students, or caregivers.

It has impacted the way we do things at school. It's the approach and the skills you pick up during the course, how you listen to people. I do think it's impacted individuals for sure. But also teams. It's brought us closer together as a faculty and connected us.

I also think it will have an impact on retention. The Positive Peer Coaching program provides opportunities for faculty and staff to grow. When people are engaging in similar professional development over the school, they're excited, they're talking about it, and they're building a culture together.



Joshua: The coaching program has had a profound impact on our school culture and team dynamics. We have embraced the idea of fostering a connected community where teachers feel safe, supported, and motivated to bring their best to work.

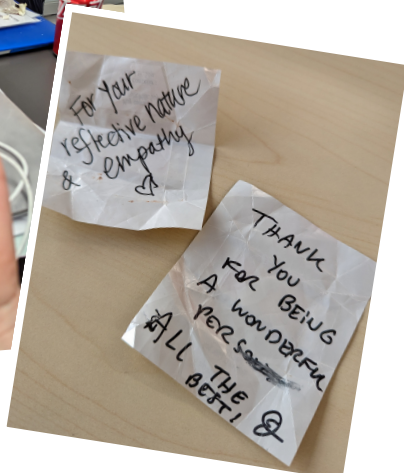
The program has helped us recognize and leverage our strengths, build trust, and openly address challenges. It has created spaces for positive conversations, mental health support, and wellbeing, ultimately empowering all stakeholders to work together towards a better world.

The shift in our team's culture is evident, with a stronger sense of trust, belonging, authenticity, mutual support, and a shared commitment to creating a positive learning environment for our students.

What benefits do you believe the school will have from building a Positive Peer Coaching Team at AISG?

Jamie: I think collaboration amongst teams is a big one. Faculty works so closely in various teams throughout the school, whether it's their grade level team, their department, or an action committee. I would say the coaching skills and strategies you pick up, and how you approach things will have huge benefits on how you work with others within a school.

I think it's good to have to have those deep level discussions where people reflect on how they can be part of the solution, rather than just coming in trying to find the answer to a problem... getting them to look at the issue and really think about how might they work through the problem. So I think faculty is presented with a lot of opportunities for growth through that process.



Joshua: As teachers gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their strengths, weaknesses, and what energizes or de-energizes them, it fosters open sharing and creates a sense of belonging within our teams.

We have established trust, highlighted each other's strengths, and created an atmosphere where we can openly share what we've learned. This has not only improved our team's performance but also enhanced our students' learning experience by creating a positive and supportive environment.

By participating in the coach-training program and implementing peer coaching practices, our school has experienced a growth in self-efficacy among teachers, increased collaboration, and a distributed leadership approach. The program has been instrumental in building a positive work culture that empowers teachers and supports their professional growth.

What strategies have you used to gain buy-in from faculty and staff?

Jamie: It started with one or two faculty enrolling in the coaching program. Then it evolved with the different activities the coaches are doing within the school, whether they're at faculty meetings, or having gatherings during lunchtime where we bring people together.

And it kind of took off from there. Every year when I offer seats across the school, I have no problem getting enough people to participate. We don't really push the coaching. Instead we focus on the content that is learned within the coach-training program. We call it a "soft-serve" approach, just introducing it to people, letting them ask questions, and go on from there.

The people who have taken the course - you can just see the energy when they're talking about it. At the end of each term, we have faculty who have taken the course introduce it. Just the way they speak about it and the excitement in their voice...it makes people want to get involved in and do it.

I think just the positive energy coming from from that, and the way we just introduced it slowly over time, and it wasn't forced, we didn't tell people that had to do it. I think coming from more of a volunteer approach was the way to go for us and, and it's really taken off within our within our school across both of our campuses.



Creating opportunities for positive interaction and wellbeing is an essential part of our efforts. We have established a weekly teatime for teachers called "Positivi-TEA," where we gather to slow down, share positive experiences, and encourage each other. This dedicated time allows us to regulate and reset, fostering a positive mindset for the rest of the day.

Joshua: We, as leaders for this initiative at our school, serve it as an invitation to look within, understanding ourselves as learners and as a learning community. I think that's been part of the success of this program at our school so far, because we're inviting others in. Interested and passionate educators naturally move towards the things they're curious about.

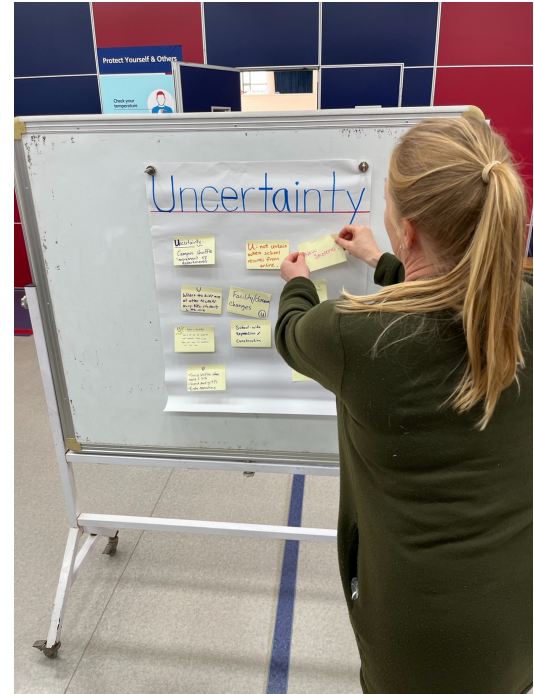
Graduates of this program are motivated and inspired to share out and be part of something bigger within the school. As the program Coordinator, I get to talk to all those interested and ask how they might want to share a piece of their learning with colleagues, students, and the greater learning community. This has led to fun opportunities for teachers to take action.

What is your biggest achievement in leading the Positive Peer Coaching program at AISG?

Jamie: At our school we're starting a Positive Peer Coaching action team, and we're going to pull together our coaches to work with Kristin Lowe and develop a strategic plan to launch more more initiatives across the school with regards to coaching and/or positive psychology activities within classrooms. So I think I think it's had a large impact that our school is working directly with Kristin.

I think one aspect for us is that - although we've had many individuals go through the Positive Peer Coach training - it's the the ongoing work that Kristin does with the school that connects it all.

I think there would be a big difference between individuals signing up on their own out of a school rather than being a Member School where you have Kristin's support through the process and working with with faculty. I think that's a benefit of being a Member School, kind of tying it all together.



Joshua: One of the joys of being the Positive Peer Coaching Program Coordinator is understanding the change process within our school. We have anchored the program to our school's mission and vision, connecting it to our strategic goals.

By building awareness, celebrating success, and inviting others to join, we have fostered engagement and motivated others to take action. This has resulted in various initiatives driven by the teachers themselves, demonstrating their ownership and commitment to the program.

As an IB school, we believe in having voice, choice and ownership in what we do for student and adult learners in our buildings. This has led to different initiatives led by our coaches, for example: our weekly primary school Positivi-TEA gathering, a 14-week gratitude journey for high school teachers, regular appreciative strengthspotting in team meetings, and facilitating 3-minute faculty meeting warm-ups to help the staff move into a solution-focused mindset.



Would you recommend the Positive Peer Coaching program to other schools?

Jamie: Absolutely. I think it's a wonderful program. I would say it has a positive benefit on the entire school community, even the parents. It's creating that common language across the school, an opportunity to connect people no matter what their job is. Positive Peer Coaching can be used in many different ways, because the skills that you pick up during the training transfer to many aspects of the job.

I also think it's a way to connect the whole school. The professional development, collaboration, and learning that you do with other educators across the world is incredible. It's not like a course you take on your own, just listening to the instructor the whole time. It's very action oriented, which is wonderful. You're always practicing, and you're constantly coaching.

Joshua: I highly recommend this coaching program to other schools as it helps foster a positive work environment where people can leverage their strengths to work towards goals - not only within their personal lives and within the teams they may be part of - but also for the overall school organization, which then of course, supports what's most important to us as educators: our students.

Implementing this program can address challenges that schools may be facing by providing a foundation of positive psychology principles that helps teachers overcome negative self-talk and perceive challenges in new ways. This program offers valuable insights and tools for navigating daily stress and improving overall wellbeing in the school community.

As educators, we know that when students feel calm, alert and ready to learn, when they feel safe and connected, when they're having fun...there's a foundation in place that allows them to make academic gains. We must not forget as educators that adults also need to feel safe, connected, and have fun in their work environments, to do their best to support the learners in our classrooms. A school that invests resources, time and energy into understanding this and equipping their staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to bring this into the workplace is a school that I want to be part of.

Explore how to bring
Positive Peer Coaching
to your school...

Get in touch with Solros Founder Kristin Lowe

[Click to schedule a 30-minute call](#)

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