

As we embrace the new school year, clearly much has changed resulting from the stressed fiscal conditions that currently exist. The one thing, however, that has not changed is the determination and dedication that instructional coaches have to ensure that teaching and learning continue to be priorities across all content areas.

So, what does that mean? These challenging times may include either part-time coaching or time after school to work with teachers. Coaches need to identify the teachers with whom they are working. If they are the same teachers as last year, that's a great beginning. If the coaching contacts have expanded to include additional content areas and the scheduled time to work with those teachers has decreased, the coach's creativity will surely be tested!

For starters, coaches need to identify the roles they are expected to pursue as part-time coaches. Remember, you cannot do all the same things you did when you were full time. Part time coaches need to be deliberate in their support to teachers, i.e., what part of the BDA cycle of consultation works for which teachers. Here's my caution... planning is really important to help teachers understand lesson design; modeling and co-teaching feel great to keep the coach connected to the students; debriefing, however, is where the strengths and areas of weakness are recognized, discussed and future action planned... which stage of the cycle can be omitted? Please do not omit the debriefing session. That is the one time/place where actions and results are discussed; it's the time for reflection and thought-provoking conversations designed to make changes in instruction.

Part-time coaches need to implement new strategies for supporting teachers. They may need to coordinate their support in a cohort model, working with a small group of teachers implementing the full BDA process for a specific cycle of time and then moving onto another cohort of teachers. Even within the cohort system, remember to differentiate who needs what which may help you decide which teachers are organized into which cohort.

Another way to provide ongoing support to all teachers is to arrange weekly or monthly study groups with peers. That way, teachers can continue to engage in professional conversations in small groups and one-on-one, look at student work and collected data, share resources and evidence-based literacy practices that work well, and reflect about the kinds of improvements they'd like to make in their instructional strategies, all in a non-evaluative environment.

They keys are to recognize the limited roles of part-time coaches, determine the amount of time needed to provide effective support to accomplish the tasks, problem solve with your mentor to discuss the barriers to effective implementation, and collaborate on ways to help teachers and administrators continue to make the changes that influence student learning.