

Welcome back from what I hope was a wonderful, relaxing summer vacation.

In June, I commented about coaches not being experts but having lots of expertise. I wonder if the same is true for principals. We'd like to think that principals are experts in organization, curricula, instruction, and research. But, is that a reality and is it fair for us to expect one person to "do" everything in the school? In actuality, principals do not have the time to do all of these things.

In the March 2014 Education Week article, *Principals Pressed for Time to Lead Instructional Change*, principals remarked about the insufficient time available to observe teachers and help them transform their instructional practices. *"... principals' time is too often strained by other requirements of the job to make room for substantive instructional coaching ... And on top of that, there is scant evidence to show that the more time principals spend inside classrooms, the better student achievement will be."*

We know that theoretically, principals should be the instructional leaders in their schools but practicality rules; they cannot do this alone. We know that time devoted to teacher coaching, teacher evaluation, and school wide improvement plans are critical for school success. So, what does this mean for instructional coaches and the goal of school improvement?

Instructional coaches are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional practices. This is not a deficit model; coaches need the autonomy to work with all teachers, not just new ones and certainly not just those who are "targeted" as needing support. They need to make deliberate plans to work one-on-one and in small groups; both venues are needed to foster collaboration, critical thinking, and collective problem-solving. They need to work with teachers to "unpack" the educator effectiveness rubric that schools use to evaluate teachers; they need to work with teachers to understand PA core and to develop their school's plan for achievement. They need to do what they are hired to do... work with teachers to collect, analyze and use data that helps teachers make appropriate instructional decisions in a trusting, non-evaluative environment. They need to help teachers become reflective practitioners who focus on the needs of a diverse population. They need to reinforce the importance of evidence-based literacy practices across all content areas and plan ongoing appropriate professional development that results in professional learning for teachers and administrators.

In a 2013 study on *Effective Instructional Time Use for School Leaders: Longitudinal Evidence from Observations of Principals* (Grissom, Loeb and Master), found that “...strong instructional leaders are hands-on leaders, engaged with curriculum and instruction issues, unafraid to work directly with teachers, and often present in classrooms” (Hornig & Loeb, 2010). Funny, this sounds exactly like what instructional coaches are tasked to do.

Although building principals may engage in regular walk throughs and have the occasional debriefing session after a formal observation to talk about a particular class session, these are few and far between. Not because they don't want to do more of these but because they do not have the time to do these things on a regular basis which is needed in order for transformation to occur. This is not enough to make changes in instructional practice and classroom decisions. Coaches help to make those changes possible.

Instructional coaches need to spend their time on tasks related to instruction. That means they need to follow the B (*before*), D (*during*), and A (*after*) process of the instructional coaching cycle with the teachers they coach. They need to regularly work with teachers and listen to the teachers' voices, not distribute books, plan and administer testing cycles, or become substitute teachers. Together they determine the individual and collective needs of the school. They need to ensure that the school's vision for improvement and the coaching role are aligned and transparent. Everyone must be a member in a community of learning and a community of practice where the team mentality is advocated and strengthened.

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