By IU PIIC Mentor Heather Moschetta

Ah, February. The month when love is in the air. You may appreciate or despise or even be indifferent towards Valentine's Day, but there is no denying that our society makes February synonymous with the four-letter "L" word.

Classical mythology blames love on Cupid, the winged child armed with bow and arrows, who mischievously casts his arrows to make people fall in love. In the world of the instructional coach, though, there is no Cupid to make teachers fall in love with instructional coaching. That job falls on coaches and their mentors, who often find themselves in a marketing role, selling teachers and administrators on the benefits that instructional coaching can have on teaching and learning.

When I was a classroom teacher, I would have loved to have a colleague to support me as I tried out something new with my students. Someone to help me brainstorm ideas and co-plan, co-teach or maybe collect data on my students, and then reflect after the experience? Yes, please!

Unfortunately, not all teachers are quite so enthusiastic. In order to have teachers fall in love with instructional coaching, coaches need to play Cupid for themselves and market their coaching offerings. It all starts with creating a clear understanding of the role of the instructional coach. Just like in any relationship, both partners need to get comfortable with each other while they learn what the other has to offer.

Coaches can fulfill many different supportive roles as they build relationships with teachers, but the highest impact coaches have on teaching and learning is by working side-by-side with teachers in a before-during-after cycle.

By building positive, supportive relationships with colleagues, instructional coaches can invite teachers into the BDA cycle without coming off as pushy or evaluative. In fact, remaining non-evaluative is a must. Simply using terminology such as "strengthen your students' performance" instead of "improve your teaching" helps a coach build comfort by keeping the focus on student learning.

Coaches can use a number of “Cupid arrows” to get teachers to fall in love with the BDA cycle. Needs assessment surveys, exit tickets following a professional development workshop, data meetings, providing resources, and offering to model or co-teach can all be low-pressure entry points to invite teachers into the BDA cycle.

The very best way to ensure that teachers keep coming back is to make their BDA cycle experience positive. Deliberate planning on the part of the coach for each phase in the cycle is essential so that you exude the characteristics of someone with whom teachers want to collaborate. Perhaps the most essential characteristic is to be a good listener. If all relationships had partners who REALLY listened to one another, wouldn’t it make the relationship even stronger?

Once enough teachers have fallen in love with instructional coaching, it becomes an indispensable part of the culture of the school. By working to establish, grow, and strengthen professional working relationships with teachers, coaches can be their own Cupid. No bow and arrow necessary!