

# Embedded Coaching:

**H**ow are you leveraging the expertise and passion in your building? How do you inspire enthusiasm in your teachers and improve student achievement? How do you act as an agent for change? Those are the tasks we are given as instructional coaches.

In the beginning, we were unsure how to tackle those tasks—or even if it was possible to accomplish them. The position of an instructional coach was new to Barberton City (OH) School District, its staff members, the local teachers' union, and us. After only a couple of years, however, we see a new dynamic that is focused on buildingwide change. Teachers are committed to structured professional development and growth, professional reading, collegial discussion, student achievement, and best practices. Teachers are seeking out and trying new strategies and tools in their classrooms, collaborating with colleagues, creating lessons as a team, analyzing student data, and generating interventions as a team. Not surprisingly, student achievement scores are improving. It is obvious that *somewhere along this journey*, we have stumbled on professional development that works.

## The Coaching Model

Many school districts are beginning to embrace the coaching model. Instructional coaching reflects the growing consensus about what constitutes

high-quality professional development for teachers: job-embedded, ongoing training that addresses the issues teachers face daily in their classrooms and is aligned to state standards, curricula, and assessments. No matter where instructional coaching takes place, at its core, it involves two people: the classroom teacher and the coach. Coaches work one-on-one with teachers in their classrooms, providing guidance, training, new ideas, and other resources as needed. Together, they focus on practical strategies for engaging students and improving their learning.

The key to a successful coaching program is building a trusting relationship between the teacher and the coach. Coaching is confidential, nonevaluative, and supportive. The *essential* professional trust between the teacher and the coach enables them to have productive conversations about specific teaching strategies or problems, highlighting practical changes that the teacher can make in his or her classroom. Therefore, to take advantage of the expertise of instructional coaches, teachers must feel comfortable enough to discuss not only their successes in the classroom but also their limitations.

We find that nurturing trust and defining the coaching position is best thought of as a series of small steps. At first we spent most of our time helping teachers whenever and however possible (e.g., making copies, attending team meetings, and

# Instructional WHAT Works

Two instructional coaches share ideas for creating professional development that works in every school.

developing common assessments) and observing many classrooms. Now, we develop personalized professional development goals and action plans for each teacher, finding grant opportunities to fund teacher projects, assisting on building and district projects, and conducting professional development sessions. This process has shown us that effective professional development must be structured to leverage the desires and continued growth of all staff members, not just the enthusiastic.

## Professional Development Framework

Teachers need more than a few inservice days during the calendar year to make changes in their practice. Principals must give teachers time to collaborate, learn new instructional strategies and tools, and function as a professional learning community. Many teachers can and want to improve and refine their knowledge of effective teaching and learning but lack the structure they need to do so.

### FINDING TIME

At the middle school level, it is a known best practice to have teachers teach in teams and meet as teams to plan activities and lessons and to monitor student achievement. This team time can be used to embed professional development into the normal school day on a weekly basis by designating one day a week as a professional development

day in lieu of a normal team meeting.

Administrators and teachers must keep professional development time sacred and not use it for other meetings or activities or to grade papers or complete lesson plans. If interruptions and other events take priority over the professional development time, its importance is compromised. This time is designated for teachers to focus with their colleagues on their instruction and effectiveness in the classroom. That collaboration is where true change cultivates and grows—it must be allowed the time it needs to flourish.

### CREATE STRUCTURE

Teachers' time is precious, and it is disrespectful to ask them to spend their time in professional development that is frivolous. Professional development must be meaningful, well-planned, and focused on the goals of the district and the school. For example, our first year of professional development was structured around *Classroom Instruction That Works* by Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock (ASCD, 2001). The goal was for teachers to analyze their own teaching techniques, make informed changes within their classrooms, and refine those changes through a reflective process in an effort to increase student performance.

Professional development also must be presented systematically. (See figure 1 for an example of how a systematic framework for professional



Figure 1

### Cycle #3 Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition

<b>Week One</b>	Face-to-face professional development	Coaches introduce the new strategy and present research, show video of classroom footage of the strategy being used, and introduce effort and achievement rubric. Teachers discuss current classroom use and give personal examples of using it.
<b>Week Two</b>	Independent professional reading	Teachers read chapter 4 from <i>What Works in Classroom Instruction</i> (R. Marzano, B. B. Gady, & C. Dean), "Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition"; available at <a href="http://www.paec.org">www.paec.org</a> .
<b>Week Three</b>	Face-to-face professional development	Teachers react to the <i>previous week's reading</i> , discuss their impressions of it, and formulate a plan to incorporate this new knowledge in their own setting. The expectation is at least one new idea is tried in each teacher's classroom.
<b>Week Four</b>	Response to prompt on grade-level blog	Teachers respond to the prompt, Discuss your attempt to incorporate the concept of "reinforcing effort" into your classroom.

development might look.) In our school, each chunk of material is presented in a four-week cycle (i.e., four sessions of once-a-week professional development). Each cycle includes:

- A face-to-face session to introduce a *targeted technique*
- Independent time to read professional literature that directly relates to the topic
- Time to construct learning tools for the classroom
- A forum to engage in collegial discussions about the implementation of the specific techniques
- An intradistrict blog that facilitates thoughtful peer discussion among colleagues in the district.

#### Looking for Evidence

It is important to be able to know whether an initiative is working. Many behaviors indicate success. Every time we walk the halls, we are greeted by teachers who want to share what they have done recently in their classrooms, discuss stories about their students' successes, or ask specific questions. The culture has shifted; students are no longer the only ones learning and improving.

Teachers relate the success of professional development through their words, actions, and questions. They appreciate meaningful profession-

al development that is presented in manageable segments that are relevant to their content area and grade level. We explore different concepts and strategies and generate ideas as a team. Knowing they have the help and support of colleagues and an instructional coach makes the experience even more empowering and fruitful.

Teachers talk about how they use the strategies they have learned. For example, when discussing chapter 4 of *What Works in Classroom Instruction* (R. Marzano, B. Gaddy, & C. Dean; McRel; 2000), "Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition," teachers discussed different way to help students understand the connection between effort and achievement. Effort charts and bulletin boards were emerging from numerous classrooms on which students listed not only their achievement grades but also a rating of their level of effort. Students also offered ideas on how their effort could be increased.

Another teacher showed a four-minute movie clip from the film *Facing the Giants* (2006). The teacher said, "You could hear a pin drop when the clip was played, the students were so enthralled to the scene. Every class [talked about how] the football player accomplished the task because he did not give up—he went beyond even what he thought he could. He would not allow for failure." After watching the clip, a student quietly

approached the teacher and said, "I am going to go the whole 100 yards." Immediately after the teacher showed the clip, the students earned their highest test scores in that class. Students began charting their effort and achievement, setting personal and classroom goals, and helping one another reach their goals. It is amazing what can happen when you allow teachers' creativity to flow.

When professional development is successful, teachers ask for more. As a result of the weekly sessions, the teachers have engaged in action research plans within their own classrooms and received graduate credit for them (at least 40 different plans have been completed), observed colleagues' classrooms to gain instructional insight, wrote grants to support grade-level and cross-curricular projects (more than 12 grants have been funded), incorporated technology into their teaching styles, and participated in additional professional development after school to cover specific topics in greater depth.

As a result of teachers' actions, student achievement is increasing. The students and teach-

ers deserve the credit for this accomplishment, but leveraging the teachers' talent through purposeful, embedded professional development also plays a role in students' success. Our school district has moved from a state designation of "Continuous Improvement" to "Excellent."

### Conclusion

This system of leveraging teachers' talent and passion is working for our building, but we are continually refining it. The foundation for our success is the relationship fostered between teacher and coach. It is this relationship that drives the entire process. I encourage you to explore all channels to harness the full potential of your staff. **PL**

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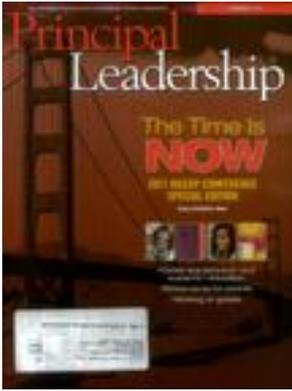
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