

*"In 1970, the top three skills required by Fortune 500 companies were the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic. In 1999, the top three skills in demand were teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. We need schools that are developing these skills"* (Linda Darling-Hammond).

I would add soft skills to the above list including demonstrating strong communication skills, being a good listener, understanding the difference between cooperation and collaboration, motivating and encouraging the sharing of ideas, showing humility and respect, and understanding how reflection and self-assessment are critical for successful implementation in any workplace environment.

While these soft skills may seem like "add-ons" to a coach's job description, they are actually more important than the hard skills like content proficiency. After all, one can browse the internet and locate a plethora of open source materials for classroom use and build that needed content knowledge. Can one browse that same internet for the abovementioned soft skills needed to establish a working relationship that is non-evaluative and risk free?

Interesting that Linda Darling-Hammond suggested that schools build those soft skills back in 1970. We still need to build those skills for students and for their teachers as well. But, we can't expect students to know and be able to master those skills if their teachers are not given ample opportunities to grow those skills too.

Effective instructional coaching creates an environment that focuses on what Donohoo and Katz (The Learning Professional, Dec. 2017) indicate is "collective efficacy," a term that means educators can *"... organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students"* (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). And, this collective efficacy is at the top of Hattie's list for what matters most in improving student learning.

So, what does this mean for instructional coaches? It means that instructional coaches have to be highly skilled and experienced practitioners in curating an environment that recognizes the value of "on-the-job" shared learning as a viable teacher support system. It means that coaches are front and center, reinforcing the notion that every staff member is a member in a community of learning and practice. It means that highly skilled teachers implementing effective instructional practices will yield student growth AND teacher growth. After all, the coaches help

nourish the professional development of all teachers; they help all teachers go from good to great while enhancing their own practice as well.

We know that the most important contributing factor of student growth and achievement is the teacher. We also know that teachers reach their performance plateau after 3-5 years teaching (TNTP 2012) and Bill Gates thinks that teaching quality does not change after three years of teaching (2009). However, working with instructional coaches changes that paradigm. In 2016, the PIIC survey conducted by fhi360 found that 89% of teachers surveyed indicated they changed their practices as a result of the coaching they received. We also know that the rate of implementation for newly learned instructional strategies with the support of an instructional coach is 95% (Bush, 1984; Truesdale, 2003). We know that coached teachers also practice these new strategies more often and with greater skill than uncoached teachers with the same initial training. And, 50-80 hours of instruction, practice, and coaching are needed before teachers master that skill (French, 1997; Banilower, 2002; Yoon et al, 2007).

On average, it takes 20 separate instances of practice before a teacher has mastered a new skill (Joyce and Showers, 2002) and longer depending on the complexity of the skill. With instructional coaches providing that support, teachers have the opportunity not only to learn the skill but practice and debrief the instructional delivery of that skill. It's like a dress rehearsal to work out all the kinks before working with students.

Instructional coaches work with teachers on the specific goals they want to accomplish; it is personalized support designed to help teachers meet the needs of their diverse classroom population. Remember these tips:

1. Build strong professional communities with individual and collective responsibility;
2. Foster collaboration and collegial sharing;
3. Provide ample opportunities for colleagues to plan and debrief together;
4. Practice, practice, practice;
5. Listen more than you speak!