

Gaining access to classrooms is not as easy as it sounds. For some, inviting anyone, especially coaches, into their classrooms is a risky venture. Of course, from a coaches' point of view, learning together with teachers is a collaborative endeavor, one that emphasizes collective problem solving and mutually respectful sharing. This is not a natural process for most; after all, teachers are practitioners who do not always practice with each other. So, coaches have a triple process to navigate: they need to develop relationships with teachers; they need to demonstrate their content knowledge; and they need to create a non-threatening environment conducive to sharing and learning instructional practices that help improve student learning.

With the help of their mentors, coaches need to build awareness of PIIC's BDA cycle of coaching. It is a course of action designed to differentiate the support given to teachers through one-on-one and small group work and is a wonderful access point to start the discussion about how instructional coaching can help to improve schools. It is an approach that helps build trust as coaches partner with teachers and foster ongoing communication. In the "B" or before meeting time, teachers and coaches work together to discuss student learning and how to help students reach their full potential. This is done "outside" of the classroom with the focus on students and what they need in order to become successful. The rush to get into the classroom is delayed until the teacher feels comfortable with the emerging teacher-coach relationship. Planning takes place in a no-risk setting where goals and ideas are shared and discussed. These shared visions set the tone for determining which instructional practices are appropriate for meeting those goals.

Once this scaffolding is in place, the "D" or during session provides the opportunity for classroom visitations. Coaches work with teachers and may co-teach, model, or gather mutually agreed upon data about instructional practices to be reviewed during the debriefing session. Mentors need to help coaches move from providing resources and having thoughtful discussions before visitations to collecting and analyzing data during classroom visitations and then using these data to identify strengths and areas of need essential to developing effective teaching practices.

The most important component of the BDA process is the "A" or after session. This debriefing is the time where having difficult conversations about instructional techniques helps make the reality of change visible. Coaches and teachers must make time, not find it, to experience thoughtful reflection in order to identify the appropriate classroom strategies that were aligned with the classroom goals and were met during the lesson. This can be a challenging session because it is actually a self-assessment focusing on the teacher's lesson design, content and decision-making.

The BDA sequence of consultation, collaboration, confidentiality, and collective problem-solving enables coaches to help teachers become more effective practitioners, increase student engagement, and improve student learning in sustainable ways. It creates an atmosphere where professional conversations become the norm in an environment that values professional learning and “doing.”