

How many times during the day do you hear the words, "I don't have time to talk"? As an instructional coach, those words can determine the direction for effective instructional planning and reflective practice. Co-planning and co-constructing meaningful instructional practice with instructional coaches encourages teachers to think aloud and talk about their plans in a no-risk environment. In many ways, these discussions are the rehearsals with an opportunity for teachers to ask questions in real time. These rehearsals help the teacher and coach collaborate, communicate and collectively problem solve so the performance can be less stressful, especially if new content or new skills building is involved. It is the process where the coaches help teachers implement effective evidence-based instructional practices and then talk about what worked well in the classroom without fear of being evaluated.

This sounds like such a reasonable process to follow. Plan with coaches (*before*), watch the "dry run" (*during*) and then meet together to discuss how well the goals for that day were met (*after*). Unfortunately, besides the collaboration that must take place for this process to be successful, coaches and teachers must be able to communicate effectively. The teacher and coach must have a trusting relationship; that is, the teacher must be receptive to the planning and willing to share ideas. The coach must be a good listener and offer "side by side" support while encouraging the teacher to think "out of the box" and maximize his/her own learning.

Not all communication results in successful collaboration. Not all communication results in effective listening. As George Bernard Shaw said, "The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place." Instructional coaches must promote healthy conversations that are deliberate and intentional. Coaches must listen with the intent to understand the teacher's goals and to help the teacher align the goals with the desired outcomes. The trick is to ask the right questions about the intended goals, refrain from answering the questions for the teacher, and recognize that your perspectives are not as central as the teacher's perspectives. Then, both parties must deconstruct the conversation to ensure a shared understanding. Coaches need to "nag and nurture" in ways that promote collaborative conversations and "collective" coaching. Coaches must really listen to what the teachers say and help them become reflective practitioners who think about their own practices, not just if they "covered" the content of the academic discipline. The coach doesn't need to hear his/her own voice; it's the teacher's voice that needs to be heard.

Instructional coaching is not about preparing students for test taking; instructional coaching is about facilitating the process that enables practitioners to think about their own actions and

instructional decisions. It's about knowing how to help teachers recognize their own voices and to work together to ensure that those voices are heard in every classroom. It is making sure every student has the opportunity to work with teachers who collaborate, communicate, collectively problem solve, and engage in critical thinking that generates positive student outcomes and effective instructional practice.