

Sure, coaches work with colleagues in confidential, non-evaluative ways. But, what does that really mean? How do I approach teachers with whom I have not worked previously and automatically expect them to welcome me with open arms, especially if I haven't taken time to share any thinking about instructional coaching and how coaches support teaching and learning?

Instructional coaching is not a deficit model. It is not an opportunity for administrators to "assign" teachers to work with their instructional coach. It is not a "fix-it" or medical model. That assumes that the coaches are better than the teachers...definitely not the broadcast message coaches want to send.

Several of the coaches who work with PIIC mentors follow a 3-prong process using a needs assessment: 1) they take a sample of questions to various staff members and ask the staff members to expand the list and to prioritize their needs; 2) once they get a healthy list of needs, they generate the survey and send it electronically to the whole staff; 3) then they prioritize the suggestions and make a yearlong professional learning plan that includes these needs, offering the times and locations where these professional learning sessions may take place. The coaches work together with their colleagues to co-plan and then co-facilitate small group mini professional learning. These sessions occur before, during, and after the school day. Some schools offer either Act 48 credit for participating in these sessions and some schools offer alternative compensation, e.g., part of the evaluation cycle, stipends, subscriptions to professional journals, excused faculty meeting session, etc. The point here is that the coaches work together with the school staff to identify goals and needs and then provide ample opportunities for collaborative coaching and facilitation. It is also a way to encourage teachers to take a more active role in the school's professional learning plan. Teachers are more likely to participate in ongoing learning and practice what they've learned when their needs are considered in planning professional learning.

Some coaches use these small group mini professional learning sessions to foster shared learning and then focus in on a more defined area of need. Oftentimes, teachers will use these opportunities to ask more specific questions about their individual practices. That's when coaching becomes a differentiated approach to individualized learning. The groups may meet together to plan, discuss and share ideas and a variety of effective instructional techniques and strategies. Then, individually, the coach and teacher meet together to discuss the data gathered on using some of these instructional strategies and plan the most effective ways to increase student engagement and improve student learning. Although the design may be discussed through the PLC, discussing an individual's response or instructional delivery may be best shared as a confidential, one-on-one conversation. To maintain confidentiality, talking about an

individual's practice is private unless the individuals are implementing a lesson study type of professional learning experience. This kind of reflection is wonderful and usually takes a more seasoned group of teachers who have trusting relationships already established and are comfortable with the feedback process.

Give yourself time to establish the kinds of relationships that follow the **B**efore, **D**uring, and **A**fter cycle of consultation. Just remember, even the most experienced practitioners need time to think, process, deliver, discuss and adjust their thinking about what worked well in the classroom. Instructional coaches need to reinforce this process in their one-on-one coaching interactions and with their small group coaching relationships.

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