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Each class visit needs one focus

Q What has experience taught you as a beginning coach?

There needs to be a point of focus every time you walk in the room. In the beginning, I was looking for things I think are important for a well-functioning classroom. That didn't work so well because I'd be on one page and the teacher might be on a totally different page. I could miss something that the teacher thought was really good because I was stuck on another component.

Now I let teachers know I'm going to be coming in and looking at this only and oftentimes let the teacher dictate what that is: "What do you want to get better on?" That's something I now do all the time.

Another thing is listening. Teachers often respond to how I listen to them first before I speak. When I do speak, I talk about lessons that I've learned and things that I've tried in the classroom that worked really well and those that did not. I talk about my thinking and the reflection, and I ask the teachers what they would do differently. It is always about bringing it back to lessons learned and telling them, "I don't have all the answers. I have six years of teaching experience, and here's what I've figured out and here's what I'm still trying to figure out." I felt like I had answers — really just tip of the iceberg. There are pieces I can bring in as a coach that can help the work we're doing here. I give them the big picture and then help them translate that into their classrooms. ♦

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