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Help them draw from inside

Q As a five-year veteran coach, what strategies have you found most effective?

We do a lot of cognitive coaching where we try to get the teacher or principal to use their inner resources to figure out the answers for themselves. We try not to be prescriptive, but to be supportive and take them through a cognitive coaching conversation so that they come up with the answer which they always really had in their head — they just needed some thinking/processing time.

Sometimes, even in cognitive coaching, you can do a menu of options and step out of a coaching conversation and say, “Can I offer you a menu of options of what other schools (teachers) are doing and see if any of these things might work for you?” Usually, they’re very happy to know what others are doing.

We also try to facilitate at our district meetings time for them to talk among themselves

about what’s working in the different buildings.

To be an effective coach, you have to be a great listener, an insightful listener, so that you’re listening not only for what is being said, but how it’s being said. You also have to be very nonjudgmental, because it may not be the way that you would do the activity or strategy, but you have to let the principal or teacher establish their own personality within the culture of that building.

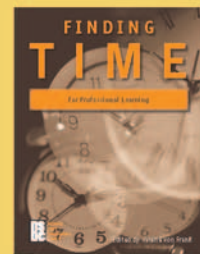
And you have to let them try things and fail, and try things and succeed, because those are the best teachers. Sometimes, the best teacher is where someone was just determined this was going to work, and you talked to them in terms of all the ins and outs, but still let them try. And then when it wasn’t as successful as they hoped it would be, that’s where the cognitive coaching comes in to get them to walk back through and reflect on how it could have been better, what really did work, and how we could improve it the next time. ♦



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