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Demonstrating opens doors

Q What's the most valuable tool you use as a coach?

For me, it's demonstrating lessons. I observe teachers and see where things are not going just right for them. I give them feedback, and sometimes they ask me to observe again. Or it may be that they need to observe me teaching a lesson. Feedback and demonstration lessons are very powerful.

I was the new kid on the block (at College Lakes), and I had to build relationships — being supportive, just standing back, not too pushy. There were teachers who were National Board Certified who thought they knew — and they probably did — as much or more about literacy than I did, so I had to prove myself and start slowly, asking them, "May I teach a lesson?" It wasn't really demonstrating at first. I'd go into a class and make sure I had strategies, make sure the kids were actively involved, where they could tell their friends on the bus, "Boy, we have a good time when Mrs. Brown comes." As the

kids started talking, that made kids in other classrooms ask why couldn't I come and teach in their classrooms. So that's what I started doing, asking, "May I teach a lesson?"

When I'd go into a classroom where the teacher was a little skeptical, I made sure the kids were actively learning and were having a good time doing it. Before I knew it, the teachers were sitting down watching; they weren't just checking papers — they were watching me teach! And then they would start talking: "Oh, my kids really enjoyed Mrs. Brown when she was in our class last week." "When are you coming back?" Then they told other teachers on their grade level about me, and those teachers would ask me to do a lesson, or I'd ask them and they'd say, "Yes, I heard the kids really enjoyed your lesson across the hallway yesterday."

It was really building relationships and demonstrating meaningful lessons with rigor to let teachers know that I wasn't just telling them, but was using some of the strategies I was sharing with them. ♦



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