



Anne Swant is an instructional coach at Walla Walla High School in Walla Walla, Wash.

Investment in time pays off

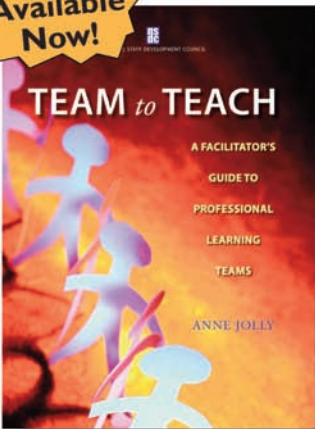
Q What have you learned about coaching specifically for the high school level?

In the high school, it's all about the content. Teachers feel they're being held accountable for a really high volume of information. The coaching is more about having conversations together, problem solving, figuring out how we can get kids engaged and to be successful. I spend a lot of time having conversations with teachers. The teachers have such a high confidence level in their content. I may know their content isn't exactly where they think it is, but there's no way I can go in and "fix" their content. I have to go at it in a different way, do things like having deep conversations as a horizontal, subject-specific team and looking at student work.

So time is the thing that I learned — the value of the time to sit down, plan lessons together, think deeply, ask hard questions, not critical questions, but questions I don't really have the answer for, and then to trust the process.

Teachers get great insight by taking the time to look at student work, at lessons, at content. For example, I could have said to this one particular group of math teachers, "You just need to know that kids don't have to solve systems of equations in one certain way." But I said, "What are the things that you're thinking about?" We planned a lesson together. I just shut up, listened, and let them do it. After each period that we taught the lesson and debriefed, the lesson changed, and at the end, they realized that there's not one way to do things. And the impact was not just one teacher, it was a team of teachers. I was facilitating, but it was the conversations they were having together and the insights they got from that that were so valuable.

I can confidently talk to teachers now and tell them our time together is a big time investment, but you get a big bang for your buck. Because you're going to learn something, and I don't know what it's going to be, but you're going to walk away from this saying, "This was a good use of my time." ♦



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