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# 6 ways to ignite teachers, coaches

Teaching is hard work and depends on both craft and science. Coaches and teacher leaders work closely with teachers to refine the craft of teaching and deepen teachers' understanding of pedagogical science. Working collaboratively with their peers, coaches and teacher leaders have multiple strategies for supporting teachers as they refine their content knowledge, implement research-based instructional strategies, and use multiple methods of assessment. Strategies such as lesson study, examining student work, peer coaching, and demonstration lessons are familiar to many teacher leaders. Several strategies might add some spark to the joint work between teachers and coaches.

## 1. CA<sup>2</sup>I

One powerful way to engage teachers in refining their teaching expertise is to collaborate on unit and lesson planning. The process follows the CA<sup>2</sup>I process:

- **Curriculum:** Study the curriculum to determine the next key concept to teach, and specify student learning targets.
- **Analysis:** Analyze student data to determine what students know in relation to the identified learning targets.
- **Assessment:** Develop the assessment that will provide information for both students and teachers about their learning; plan adjustments for individual or small groups of students with specific learning needs.
- **Instruction:** Select the appropriate instructional strategies.

When teachers gather, curriculum guides in hand, with data from common assessments and other measures to investigate what and how to teach the next key concepts, they engage in joint work that reaches beyond what any one teacher

knows and reflects the shared expertise of all teachers on the team. Once teachers confirm their learning targets and what their students already know relative to those targets, they can discuss how to determine if students meet those targets.

Together, their conversations foster calibration of their expectations so there is consistency in their expectations across classrooms. They examine high-yield instructional strategies to determine which is most appropriate to use for each learning target. Teachers' conversations will enrich their decision making by allowing them to consider different perspectives, options, and approaches, energize their planning, and allow them to meet the learning needs of all students.

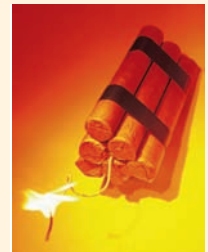
## 2. Grand rounds

Walk-throughs are prevalent practices in schools today. In most schools, the principal conducts the walk-through. One strategy to promote more collaboration around quality teaching is grand rounds. Grand rounds, drawn from the medical practice of residents presenting patient cases and observing a physician in practice, promote interaction among more staff so more benefit from their peers' expertise.

To deprivatize practice in schools, teacher leaders and coaches lead small groups of teachers to visit classrooms, followed by opportunities for visiting teachers to talk with the host teacher about his or her instructional practice, decisions,

### TEACHER LEARNING

Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.



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and student learning. When small groups of teachers rather than a single teacher observe in a classroom, the richness of the opportunity to observe professional practice is expanded because observers perceive different aspects of the teaching. The teacher observing gains the most from the partnership. To make the most of grand rounds, the coach might facilitate a brief meeting prior to the visit between visiting teachers and the host teacher to learn what the host has planned for the lesson and about previous and subsequent lessons. The coach then facilitates the debriefing session following the visit that centers around understanding the teaching and learning observed.

Alternatively, the host teacher may request that visitors observe specific students in the classroom to provide information to the host teacher about how the students performed in the lesson. Close observation of students, their work, their questions, and their behavior can reveal to the host teacher how to reach the designated students more effectively. In student-focused observations, the conversation between the visiting teachers and the host teacher concentrates on what the students did in the lesson rather than the teacher's behaviors.

### 3. Instructional dialogue

Instructional dialogues between the coach and one teacher or among a small group of teachers facilitated by the coach help teachers connect research about effective teaching to their practice. The practice, drawn from The Learning Network, engages teachers in describing their practice and linking it to the research, principles, or theories about teaching that inform their practice. Many teachers are skillful and have a repertoire of effective instructional practices, yet they are not always well versed in the supporting research. The instructional dialogue engages teachers in explaining the principles, theories, and research with which they are familiar and how it influences their practice. Instructional dialogue also gives coaches opportunities to share research with teachers to help them become more familiar with the studies that support the effects of particular instructional practices.

A masterful teacher understands the multitude of instructional decisions he or she makes

each day. To make considered decisions about instruction, teachers know not only how to implement specific strategies, but also when to use those strategies. They can explain their decisions and support them with evidence of effectiveness drawn from research or successful practice. Engaging teachers in understanding why effective instruction works helps them refine their practice.

### 4. Hypothesis testing

Teaching involves both science and art. Hypothesis testing is one way to increase teaching effectiveness. Like action research, yet more immediate, hypothesis testing includes forming a hypothesis about the effects of a particular practice and noting its effects. This form of contextual analysis allows teachers to more deeply understand research and their own practice. Teachers might try to stand at different places in their classrooms during a lesson and note the impact that each position has on students. These short, observed practices encourage the teacher to maintain a heightened degree of observation related to their practice. Teachers can form hypotheses when they observe something that surprises or troubles them or something that piques their curiosity. When teachers share their hypotheses and observed effects regularly with their peers in team meetings, they enhance others' expertise.

### 5. Assessment writing

Teachers use assessment to support student learning and to gather information about what students learn. Assessments tell both students and teachers where students are in relationship to the learning targets. Developing assessments requires skill. When teachers work collaboratively to discuss how they will know whether students have achieved the learning targets, they clarify their individual understanding about what the learning target means and develop a common and consistent expectation for student learning that ensures that students, regardless of whose classroom they are in, are meeting the same learning target. Teachers collectively develop a common perspective of what it means to achieve the learning target, how students will demonstrate that expectation, and what is considered acceptable work.

When teachers share assessments with one

**To make considered decisions about instruction, teachers know not only how to implement specific strategies, but also when to use those strategies and when they are not appropriate.**

another and even share in analyzing student assessments, they support each other in exploring different ways to intervene if students' work falls short of the expectation. When teachers have opportunities to engage in professional dialogue about student learning expectations and what quality student work looks like, students and teachers benefit. Coaches have an important role in facilitating the dialogue and ensuring that each teacher's views are heard, that student learning is the central issue, and that teacher reflection about their practice is included.

### 6. Content-focused conversations

Teachers working together have opportunities to clarify the content they teach. Not all teachers share the same level of understanding of the curriculum they teach. At the elementary grades, some teachers may have more preparation in some content areas while others have a greater depth of knowledge in other areas. At the secondary level, the same is true. Among teachers within a discipline, they may each have had a particular specialty in the distinct aspects of the discipline. Depending on the teachers' academic

preparation, their content expertise may vary.

Together, teachers with diverse or similar content backgrounds can explore the knowledge and skills embedded in content standards. Teachers can explore how the concepts reach across content areas, as well. They can examine the breadth and depth of key concepts or principles within the curriculum to clarify what is developmentally appropriate for students and decide how to build on what students have learned previously and what follows. Teachers can examine practical applications of the content to link school learning with authentic application of the learning. Teachers can share their own understanding of the standards with one another and examine the structure of the discipline that underlies the construction of the curriculum they teach.

Coaches and teacher leaders have multiple strategies to deepen teachers' content knowledge, expand teachers' instructional strategies, and increase the effectiveness of teachers' approaches to assessment. To continually refine teaching, teachers work collaboratively, facilitated by skillful teacher leaders, to share expertise to improve student learning. ♦

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