



Asking why can guide teachers to deeper learning

By Valerie von Frank

Q How do you as a coach help teachers become independent learners?


Teachers who can teach kids to learn how to learn have the most success. They just have to find different ways to get their message across. As a coach, you have to do the same thing.

You begin by asking teachers those tough questions. I start out asking them to tell me two things that went well today in their classroom. Then I ask them, "Why?" I keep asking, "Why?" And their answers keep getting fuller. They see how simple it is to get some rigor into their classroom with this simple strategy.

For example, when a student replies to a question with the answer, "George Washington," and the teacher just moves on, the teachers begin to understand there's no rigor there. They learn to say, "Why did you say, 'George Washington?'" The student will say, "Is it wrong?" The teacher then says, "No, just explain why you said that based on the evidence." Then the students start to own it and understand that they know the reason why. That's where you want both teachers and students to be, to be able to support with facts and evidence.

The coaches do curriculum mapping with teachers. We meet with them regularly to review the curriculum maps. For example, at our next meeting, they will have maps for the

first marking term so we can all take a look and they can explain what they are doing, the skills and strategies, how it is aligned with the pacing guide, and which standard they're using. We're having them immerse themselves in what their practice is, and it's more than if we just came in to tell them what to do.

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