



With a wardrobe of strategies, we can select one that fits

By Valerie von Frank

Q What coaching strategies work best for you?

What's helped the most is having a variety of strategies. You have to pick the right one for the right moment with the right person. Knowing which is based on building relationships.

I spent the whole first year building relationships. Getting into the classroom is a huge accomplishment. At first, I would go in with any excuse related to instruction. We'd just had a social studies curriculum adoption, so I would tell them I would deliver materials to them rather than have them wait for the custodial staff to do it. I would listen and watch, then later compliment the teacher on something she was doing. In the second year, teachers started coming to me.

The principal and I now do daily walk-throughs using forms we created specifically related to our school improvement plan. The form focuses on objectives, such as whether students are engaged, objectives posted, and whether the teacher is differentiating instruction. We watch and take notes, and then we both go out of the class and fill out the form together. We always offer two positives and an idea or a question. Next, one of us goes in and takes over the class and the teacher comes to talk to the other in the hallway, getting immediate feedback. Then we both go back in the classroom, and the person who's taken over is implementing the idea so the teacher can see it in action. We make it a goal to see each teacher once a week.

At first, some teachers did not want their instruction interrupted, so we picked four teachers and asked if they would help us learn this process.

Within two months, other teachers we said wouldn't want to do in-out coaching asked why we hadn't come to their classrooms.

It's not always the right time to do in-out coaching, so sometimes we might leave a note, catch a teacher after school, or whisper coach while the teacher is teaching. We have teachers observe one another if the principal or coach is there to whisper to them throughout about what they are seeing. A lot of coaching is just asking questions.

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