



Work smarter, not harder, by focusing on student work

As told to Valerie von Frank

It was difficult when I started working as a building coach because I was working with teachers I had taught next to. I had relationships and good friends, and now I was coaching.

At first, I was trying to fix everybody. When I changed my approach to talking about student work, it was a different ballgame. I saw a lot more growth, buy in, and acceptance of my work.

We began writing content and language objectives together. It became clear working through the process whether students were learning what they needed to by the end of the lesson. As a coach, I was responsible for helping teachers implement those plans and making sure those plans supported the school's mission and vision. Making student work the focus of the conversation built a bridge to getting into classrooms and moving

student achievement ahead.

By having teachers bring student work to the table and then talking about it, I built new relationships. Everybody was taking a risk opening up, and it wasn't about whether one person was a good teacher, but about looking at a student's work and then discussing what to do to get that student to understand what he's supposed to learn.

I had to make sure I had the right attitude. At first, my mouth said that we were looking at student work, but my mind was saying to hold teachers accountable. I had to make sure I sent the message that I want teachers to feel what they do is valued, and that they have ideas of value to offer their colleagues. Now, we're trying to say to teachers that you don't have to work harder — work smarter. Shift to doing the work that matters and delve deeper into the content of what we want kids to know and be able to do. Having that focus on student work

takes the professional learning to a different level.

With more emphasis and focus on student work, we are able to see how using data drives instruction. By then talking in the school leadership team and planning professional development for teacher leaders to use and take back to their teams, we build sustainable structures so teachers become the leaders. As a coach, you really have to build a team of teacher leaders. The work becomes much easier when it is more than just the coach. Coaches are responsible for building sustainable practice in teachers — the idea is to work ourselves out of a job.

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