



Toilet paper and pennies kick off communication and reflection

As told to Valerie von Frank

In Duval County (Fla.) Public Schools, we use a districtwide, eight-week coaching cycle. We use lesson study, where teachers create a shared lesson and go into a classroom to watch one teacher demonstrate it. The observers use a note-taking guide that we plan together. Then we debrief and tweak the lesson before they all teach it. Afterward, they come back together to reflect and examine student work. Each district coach is assigned two specific schools to work with one day a week. In addition, we provide districtwide professional development.

When I work with a school staff, I always begin with icebreakers. I have three favorites. I pass around a roll of bathroom tissue and ask each person to take as many squares as needed for the whole day. That gets everyone laughing. Then, I ask each person to tear off one square and share

something about themselves, either personal or professional. We do that for each square. When the exercise is completed, I know who they are and they all know more about each other.

Another icebreaker I use is to have each person pull out a penny, look at the date on it, and share something that happened to them that year. For some younger teachers, it can be amazing to hear what happened before they were born. Also, I sometimes ask: If you were a household appliance, which would you be and why?

At schools, I often find teachers do not take time to talk to each other. The icebreakers get teachers communicating with each other, which makes it easier to jump into the work, look at the data, analyze data, and come up with solutions and strategies to help students.

After the icebreaker, teachers and the coach review student assessment data to determine a focus for the lesson study. Teachers decide on student

and teacher learning goals and develop up to four lessons over the eight-week cycle. Each lesson starts with pre-conference in the morning, followed by a teacher demonstrating the lesson in a host classroom. The other teachers observe and take notes. We debrief, examine student work, and tweak the lesson before having all teachers use the lesson in their classrooms.

To coach effectively, it is important to develop the atmosphere that we are all in this together and keep the focus on the process. Cognitive coaching skills, such as paraphrasing and collaborative dialogue, are helpful in working with teachers and fellow coaches.

Beverly Chavis (chavisb@duvalschools.org) is a district coach for the Duval County Public Schools (Fla.).

•
Valerie von Frank (valerievonfrank@aol.com) is an education writer and editor of Learning Forward's books. ●



Develop systems to improve educator practice and results for all students!

Join Learning Forward's Academy Class of 2014

- Participate in 12 face-to-face team-based sessions (July 2012 – Dec. 2014);
- Deepen knowledge and understanding virtually through the Academy Learning Exchange; and
- Work with an experienced coach who is also an Academy graduate.

Learn more, see scholarship information, and apply at www.learningforward.org/academy.

Application Deadline: March 15, 2012

