



Coaching across subjects at the secondary level

As told to Valerie von Frank

Our school began focusing on reading strategies for at-risk high school students as part of a Response to Intervention approach. Now with the Common Core State Standards requiring that all subject-area teachers teach reading and literacy, we need these literacy strategies to support all teachers.

Every year we take one teacher from each content area — foreign language, math, science, English, social studies, physical education — onto a literacy committee during their planning period once a week to team with the three literacy coaches.

In the literacy committee meetings, we talk about how to support students with the reading demands that those content areas require. The content teachers set goals, work to implement the instruction, and then we examine the data. If things are working, we move to a new goal. If things don't appear to work, we partner in thinking of new instructional strategies.

Teachers volunteer for the committee and we cycle through a group each year. We've reached about 45 of the 200 teachers so far, and those teachers take their learning back to their professional learning communities, which meet every other Wednesday.

We've seen a lot of success. I worked with an AP social studies

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teacher on a sophomore class on teaching specific questioning strategies to maneuver the college-level textbook. We also revamped her study guides to help students formulate their own questions so they became independent and could create their own study tools. Her pass rate was the highest since she began teaching the class — 83% making 3s, 4s, and 5s.

Another social studies teacher had 11 kids fail her first quiz. We teamed up to think of some strategies, such as three-column notes (in the first column, kids write main ideas; in the second, definitions; and in the third, a memory cue such as a drawing or example), more guided study guides, and a reading process. Her last quiz had only three fails.

One of the most effective strategies I've found is Robert Marzano's six-step vocabulary process. Most of our science teachers now use that process because the liaisons to the committee shared successes. Math teachers have found it successful, as well. We use Jim Burke's reading process for its very structured approach to reading. It's good because it can be adapted to specific content areas. Planning writing, drafting, and revising can be applied in any content area. Having

the teacher analyze samples and having peer review are also helpful.

We always rely on the teachers' expertise, because they know what their content demands. Coaches share the strategy, and the discipline teacher knows how to apply it, or we work together to figure it out.

The teacher liaisons also present some of the strategies they've tried in class to teachers during literacy lunches. A lot of people like to hear from content teachers, and then they take away ideas and also may join the committee. This year, we switched to an open-house format during planning periods. When content area teachers



share successes, other teachers start to buy in and then more step up and join the committee.

The beauty of coaching is we can develop ideas with the content teachers, because it's two brains together. I offer my knowledge, they offer their knowledge, and we come together — and the kids benefit.

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