



Little by little, classroom doors become revolving doors

As told to Valerie von Frank

When my colleague and I began four years ago, this was a newly created position. The first year, we tried to develop a rapport with as many people as we could in as low-risk a way as possible. We developed a cohort for teachers to voluntarily meet together to work to integrate our multiple district initiatives into a seamless, integrated effort. The cohort was a way for us to start working with people and facilitate conversations, to have everyone get to know us in our new role since we had been staff in the building, and to start to share some common language.

We embedded opportunities for peer coaching, pairing people within the cohort to go into each other's classrooms. That gave us an opportunity to get into teachers' classrooms so we could talk about things to focus on and data we could collect, and begin to build coaching relationships.

Going into the classrooms was risky since the teachers were used to having people in their classrooms only for evaluation. It wasn't part of the school culture to be in and out of each other's classrooms. The other coach and I were committed to making classroom doors in our school revolving doors instead of open and shut doors.

I'm a science teacher and still teach

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two classes, so we regularly invited people to come into our classes to collect data using a framework to get used to what to look for and listen to. We also felt we were taking a risk inviting people in, but asked people to come in with a purpose and were candid, saying, "This is something new I'm trying and it would be helpful if you could watch for this while I'm teaching because I can't do all of this at the same time."

Modeling that our classrooms were open was essential for us. We wanted to say, "You can come in and see how this works before I as a coach suggest that I come into your classroom."

We then have brief conversations to share what they saw or the data they collected, so that we can model that it's not me as the coach making judgment calls about what happened in their classrooms; instead, we collect unbiased information and the teachers make use of it in an appropriate way.

Being as present as possible has been a very effective strategy. We went to every staff development training in the district, whether we were involved or not, so people saw us and knew we were getting the same message.

Time has been important. We had big aspirations that first year. We read Jim Knight's coaching book and

thought, "This is what we should be doing right now." It wasn't like that the first year, and it wasn't like that the second year — and I still don't think we're there yet. But there were baby steps we've taken that couldn't have happened any faster. Perseverance was important, as was being flexible with our original goals. We didn't drop any goals, but the timeframe changed a little because we realized it was going to take more time.



Although it was challenging to make the leap to a totally different role when we had been viewed so long as classroom teachers, it was nice because we knew our colleagues so well, knew the overall school climate, knew what would be seen as comfortable, and knew what would be seen as risky. Knowing that helped us pace how we were going to get to the point where we start to look more like coaches than professional developers.

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