



KEEP GROWING

Jim Knight

Coaches empower teachers to see the reality of their classroom by video recording teachers' lessons, interviewing their students, reviewing student work with teachers, or gathering observation data.

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REAL LEARNING HAPPENS IN REAL LIFE

When talking about instructional coaching, I find it helpful to divide professional learning into two different models: **outside-in** and **inside-out**. The outside-in model involves leaders identifying effective teaching practices for teachers, then providing learning experiences designed to help them learn those practices. The thinking behind this approach makes sense. These are research-based, proven strategies, so teachers should implement them.

Unfortunately, the outside-in model frequently encounters problems. Teachers can find it difficult to fit the new strategy into their existing way of teaching, but they are expected to implement it even if they don't like it. If teachers explain that they don't think a strategy is appropriate for their students, or that it is a bad fit for their approach to teaching, they often are labeled as resistant.

The argument goes that the strategy is proven, so teachers need to implement it whether they like it or not. Not surprisingly, the outside-in model often has little impact on what really happens in classrooms.

Research suggests that the inside-out model is more likely to lead to real change (see, for example, Ibarra, 2015). For this model, teachers identify students' needs, then identify a strategy to address those needs. Following this, teachers learn the strategy and adapt it until students' needs are met.

Teachers still implement proven teaching strategies, but rather than trying to implement a strategy they didn't choose and might not value, they implement a strategy they chose to address important student needs. Simply put, with the inside-out model, real learning happens in real life.

With this model, instructional coaches help make the learning real. Coaches empower teachers to see the reality of their classroom by video recording teachers' lessons, interviewing their students, reviewing student work with teachers, or gathering observation data. Then they help teachers identify clearly defined, achievable, student-focused goals that are deeply important to teachers and will have an unmistakably positive impact on student learning or well-being.

Coaches also draw on a deep understanding of effective teaching practices to help teachers pick the teaching strategies they will use to try to hit those goals. Finally, coaches partner with teachers to adapt those strategies so that they are most effective.

Theoretically, teachers could do inside-out professional learning on their own. They could get their own clear picture of reality and identify their own goals, do the research to identify and learn teaching strategies, and make adaptations to those strategies until the goals are achieved. But, in reality, this is too much without the support of an expert partner whose job is to think through these steps.

Teaching in and of itself makes significant cognitive demands, and there are few teachers who can do all of the knowledge work that teaching entails plus the complex work involved in learning and implementing new strategies. To do the work of the inside-out model, teachers need a partner: an instructional coach.

In the next issue, I'll explore how the inside-out approach applies to schoolwide change and the role coaches play in that process.

REFERENCE

Ibarra, H. (2015). *Act like a leader, think like a leader*. Harvard Business Review Press. ■

