

Ah, April showers bring May flowers... and with the spring-like atmosphere, many students are ready for school to end and their summer vacations to begin. Right along with them are their teachers who need to bring the focus back on content as they begin the testing cycle in schools.

Student engagement and what happens in classrooms really tell the tale. As Robert Marzano states in the March 2013 *Educational Leadership* journal, "Student engagement is strongly influenced by what teachers do in class. With preparation and planning, every teacher can use [these] techniques to heighten student engagement." And, at this time of the year, keeping students focused on meaningful instruction is center stage, even with testing that so consumes our energies.

Instructional coaches need to maintain their support, continue being good listeners, provide timely feedback, encourage the use of evidence-based literacy practices, and focus on collecting, analyzing, and using data in ways that are tied to teacher practices and improved student outcomes. They need to persist in asking questions that yield changes in instructional practice that supports reflection, metacognition, and clarity. They need to repeatedly challenge and engage teachers in professional conversations and yet maintain objectivity while working one-on-one and in small groups with their cohort groups of practitioners.

In the *EL* journal, Marzano suggests four questions that teachers must ask themselves. They are the same four questions that coaches need to answer about their work with teachers:

- 1) Is the environment safe, caring and energetic;
- 2) are things interesting;
- 3) is the content important;
- 4) is there an awareness that personal effort is critical to success?

Instructional coaches must continue to build relationships and collaborate with teachers in ways that support learning, encourage innovation and collective problem solving, honor content knowledge, and promote critical thinking skills. The coaching conversations must be confidential, ongoing, results oriented, and non-threatening. They must be relevant and specific, helpful and stimulating at the same time. These conversations must address the needs of the student population as well as nourish the professional growth of the teachers. As coaches support teachers, they must take into account the strategic plans of the school and the varied

initiatives that are undertaken in the school, maintaining a positive attitude and offering a multitude of opportunities for teachers to share their learnings with each other through intentional and deliberate planning sessions. Teachers must be valued and respected for the skills, the wisdom, the experience, and the competencies they bring to the classroom. They must be admired and honored for taking care of the most precious of all commodities, our youth.

Unfortunately, not every teacher will be able to meet with his/her coach using the three cycles of the B,D, A process every time they work together. They will, however, be able to work together in deliberate and intentional ways to ensure that while the students are the beneficiaries of improved instructional practices, the teachers are the catalysts that make that learning come alive in classrooms. They influence the learning in the classroom and create an environment conducive to learning, supportive for all learners, and focused on building a community of practice. Coaches are resourceful and creatively schedule time to meet with the teachers in ways that strengthen and reinforce student learning. They are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional practices that build teacher capacity, increase student engagement and improve student outcomes.

Sounds like a place where ideas bloom and learning is shared... bring those April showers on!

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