

Welcome back to the school year 2015-2016. What a wonderful year this will be. First of all, you will be able to forge ahead and pick up where you left in June. How amazing to start the year with knowing more than you did the year before! Think of all the lessons you learned throughout the year, identifying which practices need to be strengthened and which practices need you to go back to the drawing board. Remember, reflection means revision. That's a good thing and an effective habit to model.

Here are some of the lessons we learned. Take a few minutes to review and plan the start of your year:

- Coaching is collaborative; everyone is a member in a community of practice and learning
- Coaching is not a deficit model... highlight the benefits of collegial sharing
- Coaching is a three-pronged process: *before*, *during*, and *after* are part of an effective instructional coaching model
- Focus on student engagement, student achievement, and building teacher capacity
- Build relationships based on honesty, integrity, and confidentiality
- Start coaching after you develop a strong relationship with teachers
- Be knowledgeable, a great listener, and a resource for teachers
- Co-construct the purpose and goals of each coaching session
- Nag and nurture, pat and push to further the learning process
- Lose the ego!

There is a reason why I listed collaboration as #1. Collaboration and collective responsibility are essential for successful student learning and for adult learning. In fact, Learning Forward includes Learning Communities as the first *Standard for Professional Learning*. Stephanie Hirsh clearly states that collaboration between and among colleagues is central to Learning Forward's definition of professional learning and that it must be embedded in the vision and values of a comprehensive professional learning system (JSD, June 2015 Vol. 36 No. 3).

Think for a moment about the impact and influence of instructional coaches. They work side by side and give real time support to teachers and other teacher leaders. They plan in very deliberate ways (*before*), visit classrooms with clear goals and purpose (*during*), and debrief (*after*)

) in ways that engage the teacher and coach in reflective conversations that yields action and change. As Stephanie says,

*"When educators work together deeply, with trust, over time, with sufficient resources and*

*guided by data about what students need most, they can adapt their skills, change their practices, and create ever-improving learning experiences so that every student learns at high levels."*

Instructional coaching is all about helping teachers reach their fullest potential so that their students can reach their fullest potential. And, this is accomplished in a no-risk environment. That means that each "investor" in the process has a shared vision that speaks to building teacher capacity, increasing student engagement, and improving student learning. There is no fear of failure because in a non-threatening environment, everyone learns from their mistakes, discusses how to improve practice, and makes adjustments so that effective classroom rituals are implemented with integrity, fidelity, and ubiquity.

Collaboration is not easy. As former Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders said, "It is the unnatural act of non-consenting adults." As coaches, please do everything you can to foster collaboration and community. It's worth the effort.

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