As a coach, adjusting to not having your own classroom or your own students was probably challenging at first but now that school has been in session since late August, you are finding your way and strengthening the process of coaching. I am sure, however, you initially engaged in conversations with your colleagues and offered to demonstrate or co-teach some lessons to those teachers willing to share their students with you so that you could demonstrate your street "cred." (This is especially true if you are new to the school; coaching in a school where you previously taught, however, comes with a different kind of street "cred" issue.)

Although alien at first, I'll bet it was very rewarding to work with students again and feel that great "high" that a teacher feels when the lesson worked well. In fact, I bet it worked so well that you offered to teach regularly in some teacher's classroom, basking in the knowledge that "you still had it" when connecting with students. If the teacher needed to leave for a moment (or longer), you were in the classroom and had no qualms about continuing the lesson while the teacher needed to go to the office to deliver some paperwork, duplicate some materials, call students' homes, or investigate some resources in the library. You were there already so why not become an extra pair of hands for the teacher who is working diligently to focus on TDAs, common core, differentiating instruction, test prep, and a host of other equally demanding district requirements?

Here's the danger… as a coach, you are not a lone ranger; you are not a substitute teacher or coverage "attendant." You are modeling effective instructional practices but that's only part of the picture. You must help your colleagues "reimagine" literacy and what that means in every classroom. You must help your colleagues reach their fullest potential and help them support their students so they can reach their fullest potential as learners. They need to be present "fully" with you just as you are with them throughout the coaching interactions. That means throughout the BDA cycle of consultation, you and the teachers plan together, deliver instruction together, and debrief together.

You are working with teachers providing helpful "side by side" assistance and engaging them in new instructional practices that enhance student learning. You are helping teachers become more reflective practitioners who practice together and learn together in a risk-free environment. If the teachers are not with you in the classroom, how will they understand the nuances of collaboration, consultation, and collective problem solving in a non-evaluative way? You can't do "it" for them; you must do "it" with them. In fact, you cannot do "it" at all unless your colleagues have a voice, choice, and are part of everything you do to support effective instruction. You are learning partners who do not fear being evaluated or making mistakes. You will help them understand that making mistakes is what generates learning.

You must build the gradual release of responsibility and help teachers recognize their own potential. Your role is to work one-on-one and in small groups with teachers *before* the class and collaborate about the goals, materials, resources, instructional practices, etc., of the day's lesson prior to the actual class period. Identifying both the teacher's role and your role helps to ensure that the teacher has an important responsibility in the class, too.
During
the class, both the teacher and coach need to focus on what the two of you decided was important to accomplish that day. This is the data collection process as determined by the discussion in the "before" planning session. The coach may model the evidence-based literacy practices and other instructional techniques for the teacher which helps the teacher recognize how these practices become the norm for instruction. Or, a coach and teacher may co-teach and provide a seamless integration of two teaching styles, keeping the lesson goals front and center.
After
the class, the two of you reflect on the goals and data collected as agreed upon in the "before" and each offer feedback focusing on reflective questions like, "What worked well; Did we meet our goals for the lesson; and How do we know that student learning occurred?"

Working with teachers in classrooms is a wonderful opportunity for coaches to model what the feedback cycle of instruction looks like and to give teachers an opportunity to gain valuable experience in providing feedback to their own students. Remember, feedback is reflective and reflection results in growth.

Ultimately, teachers working with each other and visiting one another's classrooms is the desired long-range goal. As teachers take ownership of their own learning and seek out one another as trusted colleagues and experienced "shareholders" in the process, this becomes the norm and the school culture changes. Teachers become more confident and willing to share what they've learned. This is how coaching becomes institutionalized in your building. Coaches need to work towards that goal and provide ample opportunities for teachers to collaborate. They need to reinforce the importance of shared learning every day, all year long. So this month, make a plan to start small and encourage teachers to try coach-led classroom visitations*. Share the planning, share the visits, and share the debriefing. That's what we called "shared learning!"

(*For more information about coach-led classroom visitations, contact Bruce Eisenberg, beisenberg@pacoaching.org
) to discuss PIIC's
Instructional Learning Visits

(ILV).