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Has anyone ever stopped you in the hall, engaged you in a casual conversation over lunch or appeared at your door with a 'quick question' that really wasn't all that quick to answer? Clare Landrigan and Tammy Mulligan, in their article "Ways to Avoid Coaching Traps," say that answering a teacher's question immediately can 'make the question seem trivial and the teacher feel stupid.' In an effort to be truly helpful we often fall into the trap of giving a quick response. This action does not always encourage the collaboration so vital to a trusting, reciprocal relationship instructional coaches work so hard to establish.

So how should you react in such a situation? The authors suggest that you ask for clarification by probing for more information and specific details. Saying to teachers that the question requires more thought and time than the situation provides honors the complexity of the question and the teacher asking it. The need to determine a time to sit and discuss the answer to the question is a good way to start the B-D-A cycle of coaching, especially if the teacher asking the question is one who depends on you for resources but is reluctant to get fully involved in the one-on-one coaching cycle. The cycle can be extended into the During phase by saying to the teacher that you are available to visit the classroom and experience the situation that triggered the question. Then you can transition into the After phase by talking and brainstorming together an answer to the question, reflecting on the class and identifying strategies to try. And the cycle of coaching has begun! The teacher is hooked because you have worked together to find an appropriate answer to his or her initial question.

Of course, there are times when the question is actually a 'quick question.' Initiating the cycle isn't always necessary. But if you really listen to the question and take time when the question demands time, you have avoided the trap of being just an 'Advice Giver' and have moved toward deepening your relationships with teachers.