

Coaching is untidy, somewhat cluttered, and oftentimes complicated. That's the good news. Want to know why? Because when coaches challenge the status quo, questions are asked and conversations explode. That's what happens with effective coaching interactions. What is not so useful is when conversations are limited to the moment with no opportunity to explore the "what ifs."

In our May 2016 PLO, I shared the definition of teacher agency from the white paper, *"Moving from Compliance to Agency"*

jointed published by the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future and Learning Forward. They define the term as

*"... the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues."*

But, act with caution... teachers must be the vendors for their own learning but it's more than just providing professional development for each other. In fact, the professional development is what creates a false sense of security... the school offers professional development so why aren't teachers using what they learned and student outcomes improving? Because professional development by itself does not translate into action. Professional development with no follow-up conversation is ineffective in changing practice and stimulating growth.

Conversations are not just words; conversations are the words that are the consequences of healthy relationships where discussions are open, honest, and welcomed. You've heard the adage, "Talk is cheap when your words have no value" (Habeeb Akande). An instructional coach ensures that talk is not cheap; the words come from a reliable, experienced colleague who is a trusted confidante and a great listener. Their words have incredible value because they come from a place of commitment and a mutual desire for individual and school wide improvement.

Instructional coaches and their teaching colleagues are extraordinary resources. They are collaborative partners in a process that fosters growth, independence, collegiality, collective problem-sharing, and institutional learning. They are members of a community dedicated to the theory and practice of school wide improvement. Both want to be engineers of their own learning and help each other move practice forward. Yes, teachers are concerned with their students' performance but more importantly, they are concerned with how they can advance their own learning so that their students are the ultimate beneficiaries, the center of their experiences.

Through these ongoing conversations, coaches and their teaching colleagues make deliberate use of their time to reflect on their work and to reconsider the outcomes. They engage in “teacher talk” where they scrutinize what happened in class and appreciate the opportunity to do “it” again, this time in another way and no doubt, more effectively than the previous time. It is where they both answer the questions, “Did I achieve my goals and what will I do differently the next time I teach this content?” Coaches engage in professional conversations with the teachers and give the scaffolded assistance needed to build teacher capacity.

So, as the new school year begins, remember these things: 1) every coaching interaction begins with a healthy relationship, i.e., remember that confidentiality is key; 2) acknowledge the teachers’ voices and respect their expertise, i.e., you are not the expert; 3) differentiate your support through the BDA cycle of consultation, i.e., coaching is not a cookie cutter model; 4) engage in reflective practice, e.g., make your thinking visible so others can model; 5) focus on evidence-based literacy practices and involve all teachers, i.e., literacy is a process, not a content area.

Although coaches wear many hats and have many responsibilities, the most important one is to offer daily job-embedded professional learning opportunities that improves practice.

Click [here](#) to return to [Coaching Tips of the Month](#)