



IT WORKED!

Coaching the Best to Be Better than the Best

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Entering my 5th year as a Math Facilitator, I had planned over summer to focus my work in the coming year on 3rd grade teachers. I knew this group of students was a handful, and third grade was such an important year for math content--fractions and multiplication--that I thought would have the greatest impact on student achievement not only for the next year, but in the long run.

I was quite surprised when, on the first day back to school, the District Math Program Administrator announced to all classroom teachers that Math Facilitators would be in 4th and 5th grade math classrooms every week in order to support differentiation through the math workshop model. I questioned whether this was the best use of my time because my 4th and 5th grade math teachers were seasoned veterans. They knew the content, had great classroom management, and already had plans to set up a math workshop for the coming year.

However, we all learned to be flexible. For an hour a week, I faithfully appeared on schedule in each teacher's classroom--one hour for each block of math instruction. I started with a list of students given to me by the teacher, and an assignment to help them complete. One teacher was very structured in her management, and procedural in her teaching. The other was very focused on classroom discourse and concepts. We each found a way to work together and communicate what our students needed to be more successful. As the year progressed, each teacher became more collaborative as we planned hands-on lessons. Students called me out if I was absent on Mondays, their day for small groups. They asked if I would have them in group, or called me aside to ask for help with a homework problem. The teachers supported each other more in planning, and began to appreciate each other's teaching strengths.

As testing season begins, I notice that these 4th and 5th grade teachers are not stressed and overwhelmed because they feel supported. They are not alone in this difficult work of getting 10 year olds to love math and think deeply. Students have learned that if they don't understand the first time, they can grasp the concept with time and effort. Knowing that a colleague will be there to work with that small group that is still struggling, that they can ask a question, share a success, or ask "what else can I do?" has helped these experienced teachers achieve longevity.

What I learned from this experience is that we can't forget our seasoned teachers when it comes to coaching. All teachers need support to continue to learn and grow, and they also need to know someone is there to share the load in this demanding profession.

When it comes to coaching, don't ignore your veteran teachers.

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