



IT WORKED!

Focusing on Student Work Opens Door to Coaching

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I was in my third year of coaching 5th and 6th grade math teachers at 4 different schools. I had spent a lot of time the first year visiting team planning meetings and building relationships with teachers. The second year was spent engaging with individual teachers or teams of teachers in formal coaching cycles where we would look at student work, plan discussions, and co-teach lessons together.

I had been able to use this coaching approach with every team except one. During a planning meeting, I approached the team of 3 teachers and asked if they would be interested in doing a team coaching cycle. I explained what that would entail and was met with resistance. The teachers were very apprehensive about the possibility of my being in their classrooms. You could tell they were fearful of making themselves vulnerable, but said they would think about it.

During prep that day I decided to go visit with the team leader and see if there was anything I might help her with. As we chatted, I noticed that she had given a task to her students and the student work was sitting on her desk. I told her that I was really curious about what the students had done with the task and asked if she would mind if I took the papers to look at. She said she didn't mind.

I took the papers back to my office and sorted them by strategy and jotted down a few things about what I noticed and about what questions I might ask the students. After school, I took the papers back to her. We chatted about what she had noticed in class and about what I had noticed in the student work. We also talked about what she planned to do next. At the end of our informal conversation, I just casually mentioned to her that the conversation we just had is what a coaching cycle is....just the two of us collaborating together to talk about student work and planning student discussions. The teacher said, "Ohhhhh, is that all? I can do that!"

She told her team about our conversation, and the next day they asked if I wanted to try a team coaching cycle with them. I was thrilled that this informal conversation with a teacher led to a more formal coaching cycle with 3 teachers. By focusing on student work, it made the coaching process seem less daunting to the teachers. The conversation had not been planned, but because it was so successful, it will definitely be a move I will use in the future.

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