

## Professional Development and Coaching: The One-Two Punch

In this *Principal Leadership* article, professional development expert Mark Driscoll examines the symbiosis between traditional professional development and instructional coaching. Traditional PD activities, he says, “typically reside just outside the actual work of teaching. So although professional development may help teachers understand and even embrace research-based instructional strategies, it usually stops short of actual practice of those strategies in the classroom.”

What’s needed to close the loop, Driscoll believes, is instructional coaching. Coaching helps teachers actually implement effective practices. For example, an effective math coach working with a teacher on a particular kind of mathematics problem can help the teacher understand:

- The key mathematics ideas involved in solving the problem;
- The connection to relevant standards;
- Background knowledge student need to be successful;
- Common errors and misconceptions;
- Academic language that ELLs may need to be taught;
- How to make the problem accessible to all students;
- Questions to assess understanding and push students’ thinking.

“All in all,” says Driscoll, “the integration of knowledge and skills with the effective work of teaching can be very complicated.” Coaches can help by providing another set of eyes on student interactions, as well as content knowledge and expertise. They can be especially helpful with:

- The role of specialized or academic language in learning – For example, in math problems, the word *any* can take on a special meaning (*Will your method allow you to transform any parallelogram into a rectangle?*).
- The development of understanding in adolescents – It takes some sophistication to know the different levels of mathematical understanding of different students.
- *Generalizing a big idea* – Deep engagement with big math ideas is the heart of teacher professional development.

Coaches can also help teams of teachers plan curriculum units, engage in lesson study, provide materials, and watch videotapes of students struggling with particularly challenging concepts. A key coaching function, concludes Driscoll, is to “increase teachers’ ability to identify the limits of student understanding and address their learning needs. Further, with a coach seeing first hand what teachers need to enhance their content and pedagogical knowledge, group professional development can target areas of need and make professional learning more meaningful and productive.”

“Embracing Coaching as Professional Development” by Mark Driscoll in *Principal Leadership*, October 2008 (Vol. 9, #2, p. 40-44), no e-link available