Supporting Coaches to Lead Change Efforts at Their Schools

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As part of the Networks for School Improvement (NSI) work, I’ve been working directly with 8th grade coaches and their grade-level professional learning community (PLC) teams in the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) to understand and use two protocols that first work to honor the knowledge and day-to-day lived experiences that teachers bring with them to their PLCs, and then ask teachers to critically reflect on classroom experiences and student work to increase professional knowledge and enhance student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The facilitator’s guides explain why each step in the protocol is necessary to build teacher capacity to design high-level tasks and sequence student-centered routines that provide students pathways to sharing their thinking about challenging (and gristy) texts, so that students are asked to do the heavy cognitive lifting in class.

These facilitator’s guides have also become my own test of change; in much the same way teachers in the NSI middle schools are trying out and adapting the student-facing tasks sheets based on teachers’ classroom observations and student work, I am trying out and adapting the facilitator’s guides and Planning Forward and Looking Back protocols based on the needs of the coaches and the PLCs. During monthly meetings with the coaches, we debrief the use of the PLC documents, discuss successes and challenges, and share next steps. This process allows coaches to network across schools and learn from each other; it also provides me with information on how to revise and refine the work coaches are being asked to lead.

Bibliography