

Navigating a New Role: From Teacher to Coach*

Ms. Almeida has always enjoyed teaching English Learners. For over ten years, she worked as an ELD teacher in a high school with a large number of Newcomers. At first, she struggled to engage students with both content and language, but after years of practice, she developed a way of engaging students as they appropriated the disciplinary practices of language arts, which included understanding key concepts, analyzing them, and using the language required to express their thoughts.

Recently, her principal came to her with a proposition. She asked Ms. Almeida to leave teaching to instead support other teachers in the school who were struggling to give their Newcomer students the kind of support they needed. This new “Reading Coach” position entails working alongside teachers from different grade levels to plan and implement classes that the principal wants to be “rigorous” while at the same time “engaging” for students. While she knew she would miss her students and her classroom, Ms. Almeida was glad for the opportunity to share what she learned over the years and accepted the new position.

Ms. Almeida began (perhaps in the past tense?) her new work by meeting with the teachers she would be supporting. Although she knew some of them from before, she noticed that not all of them seem happy that she would be visiting her classroom. However, she assured them that she was not there to evaluate their teaching but to help them in any way possible and made a schedule to come and visit their classes for observations. The first day she began her classroom observations, she was shocked at what she found. Many teachers struggled to engage the Newcomer students; they lectured for long periods of time while students were off task or not listening; and many of them didn’t even have their objectives posted on the board.

Ms. Almeida wrote down her notes during these observations and then scheduled debrief conversations during the teachers’ planning period. As she prepared for these conversations she made a list of all the things she observed that were not helpful for supporting Newcomer students such as: students were not seated in small groups, the PPTs teachers use didn’t include steps for activities or pictures to help students figure out what to do, teachers talked too much without structuring interactions among students, and the objectives and teachers’ lesson plans did not align with the standards they were supposed to be teaching. Armed with her list of topics to address, she scheduled debrief conversations (also during teacher planning periods).

Beginning with her first conversation, Ms. Almeida was surprised to find how defensive her colleague, Mr. Beaux, became. When she merely pointed out that he should change his

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arrangement of student seating and make sure that his activities align with his stated objectives and standards, Mr. Beaux replied that he had to plan for 5 different classes, and that 10 of his students had IEPs that he had to account for. He simply didn't have the time to do the things she mentioned. Another teacher, Ms. Jasper, responded differently to the laundry list of things that needed to be done in her class. She apologized profusely and told Ms. Alameida that she knew she needed to change, but every time she tried, things fell apart and she didn't know how to make it better. A third teacher, Ms. Nguyen, assured Ms. Alameida that what she observed was an anomaly and that normally her students do all the things Ms. Alameida was looking for.

Ms. Alameida imparted her "wisdom" and even sent email reminders to teachers about what they should be doing. However, she was taken aback once again when she found, during her next visit, that things remained the same. Mr. Beaux still complained that what she asked was impossible; Ms. Jasper couldn't quite figure out how to make her class the way she knows it should be; and Ms. Nguyen expressed her frustration that Ms. Alameida had come in, once again, on an "off day."

Ms. Alameida is dismayed and doesn't know what to do. Why won't her colleagues listen to her advice? She has pointed out for them what needs to be changed and even told them exactly how to change it. She shrugs her shoulders and resigns to try again next time.

What could she have done to make this coaching situation a productive one?