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Reaching, Sustaining, and Supporting Teachers

By Jodi Houseknecht, Instructional Coach and Technology Teacher, Millville Area SD



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After 23 years of teaching, I have learned the *secret*... there is ALWAYS something else I can learn! Sorry to spoil it for you. Honestly, as I sit here and write this article, I say **reflection** is the key to it ALL! Teachers have moments when we wing it, try it, plan it, and over plan it, but if you think about it, without reflection what have we really learned?

We all have district goals to help the teachers achieve; at the same time, our teachers have their own personal goals of improvement and we can't lose sight of these. In my coaching reflections, it has become apparent that a **positive force** and making sure our teachers feel supported, heard, encouraged, motivated, and helped should be our focus as coaches, and will better allow us all to achieve the bigger goals. The goals are important, but the plan to achieve and sustain those goals are critical for success.

One way I have found to spread positivity to all my teachers is to incorporate fun into my coaching methods. Gamifying is my tool. My first year with PIIC, I decided to attend their Professional Learning Opportunity (PLO). It was one of the best things I ever did for my own professional growth. Attending the PLO really inspired me to be a better coach and gave me tools and new ideas to build teacher capacity and sustain teacher support.

One session that "upped" my coaching game was Rebecca Gibboney's Gamification session. I took what I heard and made it *mine*. This new tool flipped a switch in so many of my teachers. While it began as a painful introductory roll out, it became an amazing process and made a huge difference in my district.

From that point on, I was able to better connect with teachers for BDA's. The competitions I developed gave them proof that they could trust me and gave me that foot in the door. They see now I am their biggest cheerleader and supporter.

As I continue to grow and reflect on my coaching, I look forward to future PLOs to help inspire and provide new tools to enhance my positive attitude in coaching. These are all factors that will help keep our district strong and healthy. I can count on my teachers asking what

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the next challenge will be! (They especially enjoyed the mindfulness activity we implemented around the holidays.) It will be important to keep my eyes and ears open in the halls, faculty room, and meetings to add positivity and support. Additionally, I will continue reaching, sustaining, and supporting teachers with a positive attitude.

For more information, please contact Jodi Houseknecht, housekj@millisd.us.

Coaching Tip of the Month... Winter blues got you down? Want to help teachers and other school leaders stimulate thought, motivate students, increase student engagement, and build teacher capacity. How can coaches help? Read the February Coaching Tip of the Month, <https://tpiic.org/category/coaching-tip-of-the-month/> for ideas.

Don't forget to check out our blogs at www.cultureofcoaching.blogspot.com.

PIIC'S MISSION: To support instructional coaching which helps teachers strengthen instructional practice, increase student engagement, and improve student learning

Letter from TPIIC's Executive Director

Students at the center... yes, but how do we ensure that they are being educated by highly effective educators who continually refine and improve their craft? How do we sustain and support continued, relevant, and effective professional learning?

One way to sustain effective schoolwide improvement efforts is to establish professional learning communities (PLCs). However, assigning teachers to groups and expecting them to promote the school's improvement strategies is ill-advised. The right formula is needed to establish a community that shares a vision for improvement, receives the needed support, and sustains efforts to actualize the goals for effective implementation. The conceptualization of the community is one thing; embedding the concepts into everyday life is another. And, until these efforts become automatic and the "norm" for practice, the reality of sustaining teacher professional learning is unlikely.

According to Learning Forward, there are three considerations for learning communities to best impact student learning. They need to remain focused on a continuous cycle of improvement; they need to work to ensure the responsibility of student learning is shared collectively amongst teachers, support staff, school system staff, and administrators, and most importantly, their efforts need to align to school improvement plans to diminish the possibilities of fragmentation (Learning Forward,

2019).

No longer are the *drive by, spray and pray, sit and get* kinds of pretend discussions effective... were they ever? We want to ensure that students and their teachers are lifelong learners, not turnkey models without intentional planning or collecting data without a purpose. Data cannot be given to teachers or students as if that's the key to unlock strategies for effective teaching and learning. Data is a complicated and integrated process... collective problem solving and making collaborative decisions about what data to collect, what the data mean, and how to use that data are critical for change to occur. Ongoing conversations about that data, identifying ways to address gaps, and reflecting on the effectiveness of those strategies in changing practice and outcomes make a difference. We must think about establishing a permanent culture of learning, building teacher capacity to create that culture, and supporting students and teachers to ensure that culture is sustained. But first, we need to address the adult learners who will make this happen.

As reported in "Effective Teacher Professional Development" (Linda Darling-Hammond, et al, Learning Policy Institute, June 2017): "*Effective professional development [learning] provides teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice.*"

As a result, strong PD initiatives typically engage teachers in learning over weeks, months, or even academic years, rather than in short, one-off workshops." The traditional "drop-in" or "drive by" professional development is ineffective and frustrating!

As per the report, the following elements are critical for effective professional development: *the PD is content focused; incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory; supports collaboration in job-embedded contexts; uses models and modeling of effective practice; provides coaching and expert support; offers opportunities for feedback and reflection; is of sustained duration.* These are standard operating procedures for instructional coaches!

We know that the focus must be on the learning... the learning for students and their teachers. We know that we need to think about what the learners need to learn and what the learners need the practitioners to learn. We know that we want an environment that inspires, motivates, and creates a culture of respect. We know that our skills, strengths, and styles impact how and what we learn and teach to others. We know the "plan" is not the learning; the deliberate conversations that inform the plan creates the learning.

Sincerely,

Galen B. Eisenberg

Look for *Instructional Coaching in Action: An Integrated Approach That Transforms Thinking, Practice, and Schools*. Available on ASCD.org and Amazon.com!

"Anyone Know What This Is? Colleagues? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone Seen This Before?"

By Kelli Livermore, Altoona Area SD Instructional Coach and Jen Herncane, IU 8 PIIC Mentor

“Anyone?” “Anyone?”
Has your **Professional Development** resembled the classroom scene from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*?

Ever facilitated professional development workshops that were forgotten ten minutes after ending? Past professional development practices have often included the “pray and spray model.” This model usually involves new

"This is critical for instructional coaches to remember—a one-shot session will result in a 90% loss in learning."

information rushed into your colleague's brain only to be forgotten a few days or minutes later.

One of the roles of an instructional coach is to help shift professional development to professional learning. **Professional Learning** is NOT simply a “sit and get” learning approach. Professional learning is learning that becomes embedded in a teacher's practice. The ultimate goal of professional learning is to support teachers in strengthening practice that impacts student

Continued on p. 3, Anyone?

growth. It should be researched based, focused, and sustainable.

In his study, *Curve of Forgetting* and the *Spacing Effect*, German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus found that providing multiple opportunities to review and practice through spaced intervals is crucial for retention of new learning. People usually forgot 90% of what they learned within 30 days. And, the study showed that most forgetting occurs within the first few hours of learning. That means 90% of what we share in a professional development session is forgotten within the first hours after the session! Understandably, instructional coaches need to provide multiple exposure to new learnings.

Understanding the *Curve of Forgetting* can be a game changer for instructional coaches. When we revisit or retrieve information in spaced intervals, it strengthens the connections, increases retention, and embeds the practice into a teacher's craft. This is critical for instructional coaches to remember—a one-shot session will result in a 90% loss in learning. According to research, if you revisit or review new learning four times in spaced intervals, you have increased the retention of the new learning by 90%. You can reverse the 90% loss to a 90% gain.

Another great resource for instructional coaches is John Hattie's work on *Visible Learning*. It is important for instructional coaches to view **professional learning as a process and not an event**. This process usually begins with surface learning. Once the surface learning has been achieved, the coach facilitates multiple opportunities of how to relate, extend, and align this practice to teachers' content areas, thus enabling deeper learning. When a teacher applies or transfers this new practice, it becomes part of his/her craft. The role of the instructional coach is to provide multiple opportunities to move from surface learning to deeper learning and transfer this learning to the classroom. It is worth an instructional coach's time to dig into the *Curve of Forgetting* and John Hattie's, *Visible Learning for Literacy*.

The quality of a teacher's practice is one of the greatest effects on the quality of a student's education. It is the job of an instructional coach to support high-quality professional learning.

For more information, please contact:

Kelli Livermore, klivermore@altoonasd.com and
Jen Herncane, Jherncane@iu08.org

Professional Learning: Transforming the Team

By Lisa Drake and Heather Boarder

When recently asked, "Does your district support or lack teacher agency," we found we were in the minority with a supportive district. It was not, however, always this way. There was a time when we were herded into one room to have an expert deliver all the "need to know" information! But we've built a team to transform Professional Learning into a collaborative effort among coaches, administrators, and teachers.

To build that collaboration, clear and frequent communication is key. We started hosting Principal & Coaches' Monthly Meetings. We discuss needs and ideas for upcoming professional learning opportunities, keep notes, and assign tasks in a shared Google Doc. Focused walkthroughs are planned 2-3 times a year to assess needs and collect data for future PL topics, followed by meetings with our Superintendent to ensure consistency across the district. We are also co-representatives on the district's Professional Development Committee maintaining confidentiality while serving as liaisons to communicate teacher needs.

Restructuring our weekly teacher meetings followed. Faculty meetings are facilitated by the principal covering new information, changes, or a brief training. Although PLCs are teacher-led and are grade level or departmentalized, teachers may form another PLC if preferred. Teachers also select a yearly committee that helps support school events (SWPBS, school spirit, social, care team). Seminars are our most recent

"If you're stuck in a professional development rut, we encourage you to just start somewhere."

addition and are teacher-led promoting collaboration and idea sharing. We poll teachers on topics they'd like to discuss and facilitate, and coaches coordinate the schedule. There is one seminar a day for a week so teachers can choose to attend more than one.

We continue to look for embedded professional learning opportunities. Each building budget allows 3-4 catered *Lunch and Learn* presentations per year with topics based on data collected. Teachers can also visit our Coaches'

Corner to chat or request a professional learning day with a coach to visit other classrooms, plan, and reflect.

Coaching is also built into our new teacher induction program. We host 3 of the 9 induction meetings for new teachers. Our topics include instructional strategies, classroom management, and technology integration. We've also added virtual meetings, allowing for more teacher agency! In addition, new teachers must complete two full BDA cycles with a coach throughout the year.

We've come a long way in our professional learning transformation. While it hasn't always been easy, the journey is worthwhile. If you're stuck in a professional development rut, we encourage you to *just start somewhere*. Gather ideas and present them to your leadership team; revise where necessary and try again! Don't give up, start small, and share results.

For more information, please contact
ldrake@huntsd.org and
hborder@huntsd.org

Shifting from Professional Development to Professional Learning: How One District Made the Transition

By Jackie Wynkoop and Melissa Duckworth, Bellefonte Area School District Instructional Coaches

In 2016, the Bellefonte Area School District instructional coaches recognized that in-service day teacher morale was low and action was needed.

With administrator support, coaches recruited a diverse group of teachers to form a district-wide planning committee. They researched best practices for educators and learned they needed to make major shifts in their practices and needed to banish the term professional development - shifting to *professional learning* instead.

Why might such a slight difference in name matter? According to *Learning Forward*, use of the term professional development implies “*Trainings that teachers receive,*” and is often associated with one-time presentations or workshops with little or no follow up. On the other hand, the term professional learning “*recognizes teachers as agents of their own growth and emphasizes that learning is an experience driven largely by the learner.*” This distinction helped the BASD Professional Learning Committee shift the focus and build teacher agency.

The days of monotonous, full-day presentations planned by administration and led by outside presenters vanished! Teachers now plan and facilitate the professional learning. Sessions are needs-based and interest-driven. Various types of professional learning experiences are also offered. From “Reflection Roundtable” discussions to Trade Time to Twitter Chats, the district has moved beyond the traditional *sit-and-get* culture. This year, the Professional Learning Committee facilitated the implementation of *Bellefonte Learning Communities*, also known as BLCs. These small district-wide teams meet regularly and engage in action research to identify, apply, evaluate, and refine best practices.

Bellefonte’s transition to professional learning was not easy and is still a “work in progress.” Their team, however, is dedicated to making learning “stick.” Interested in shifting to professional learning in your district? The BASD coaches recommend 5 critical steps:

1. Find your tribe. Develop a tenacious team of dedicated individuals willing to do this work;
2. Create a vision and goal. Review and stay true to Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning. Focus on one small step at a time to improve learning experiences for all teachers;
3. Roll out your vision. Guide staff to set personal goals and take charge of their learning to accelerate professional growth;
4. Seek and learn from feedback. Regularly survey the staff to ensure the goals are appropriate and positively impact student achievement. Adjust where needed;

“It’s your role to advocate for and support a professional learning model that builds teacher agency.”

Keep things fresh! Do a yearly “pulse check” to see where you are. Does your original vision still meet the needs of the district? What areas do you still need to grow to make progress toward the

Professional Learning Standards?

As a coach, you are an instructional leader in the building. It’s your role to advocate for and support a professional learning model that builds teacher agency. If not you, then who?

For information, please contact jwynkoop@basd.net and mduckwor@basd.net

The PIIC 4-Quadrant Framework

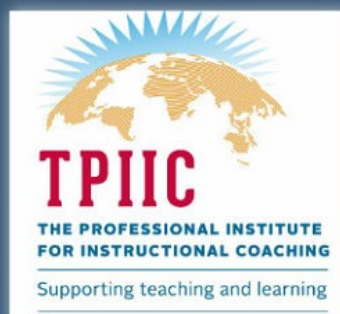
PIIC advocates **one-on-one and small group support** for teachers, coaches, and school leaders using the **BDA cycle of consultation**

PIIC focuses on **collecting, analyzing, and using data** to identify student needs, assess changes in classroom instructional practice and measure student progress.

PIIC emphasizes the use of **evidence-based literacy practices**.

PIIC supports **reflective and non-evaluative** practices.

The Holly Building
104 1/2 Forrest Avenue
2nd Floor
Narberth, PA 19072
484-278-4147 (O)
484-278-4148 (F)
info@tpiic.org
www.tpiic.org
www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org



Staff
Executive Director, TPIIC
Ellen Eisenberg
Associate Director, TPIIC
Bruce Eisenberg
Editor
Erin Saunders