

TPIIC News

Letter from the Executive Director, p. 2
Building Relationships Through Books
Cont., pg. 3
Staying Connected During the Pandemic, p. 4

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TPIIC is a 501 (c) 3 supporting a multi-level system of educator-centered instructional coaching that builds teacher capacity and improves student outcomes.

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Building Relationships Through Books

By Sarah Rodgers, Reading Specialist; and Jackie Wynkoop, Instructional Coach, Bellefonte Area SD

The world is a pretty tough place to live in right now. Around every corner, there's a different struggle facing society. Whether it's racism, transphobia, poverty, or the countless other important issues, as educators, it's critical that students leave our classrooms with an empathetic and inclusive mindset. One way we can ensure this is by cultivating a classroom environment that fosters a life-long love of reading.

A few years ago, we came to the realization that our students were aliterate; they could read but they were unwilling to do so. Concerned, we dove head-first into the latest research on independent reading, flooding our shelves with professional resources and engaging in intense conversations with our colleagues. The research spoke loud and clear: students need visible reading role models; dedicated time for independent reading during the school day (that is not tied to an assessment); and access to high-quality, diverse books within the classroom. Most importantly, as discussed in her prolific article, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop advocates that students need to not only see themselves in books, but they also need books that allow them to develop empathy for the experiences of others. Upon reflection, we recognized that we had much work to do in this area, so we immediately shifted our priorities to build a school-wide culture of literacy.

The first step was to start with the high school staff. We facilitated a session with the entire building about the importance of fostering a love of reading in adolescents, sharing how critical literacy is to one's future

success, and how important it is for students to be surrounded by reading role models. As a group, we brainstormed ideas for making our own reading lives more visible to students. One solution we came up with was to encourage all professional and support staff members to display signs (and update them regularly) outside of their classrooms that highlight what they're currently reading. Some teachers just write the title, others post the book cover. The signs continue to spark literacy conversations between staff, and most importantly, with students. Other ways we promote reading among our staff is by delivering book talks at monthly staff meetings, hosting book tastings, and offering lunchtime book clubs.

"...students need to not only see themselves in books, but they also need books that allow them to develop empathy for the experiences of others."

Our next step paved the way from developing our own reading identities to helping

students form their own. We started by facilitating a variety of professional learning sessions with the English department. Sessions focused on best practices for independent reading, and how to effectively implement them in the secondary classroom. As this was a new philosophy for many, we also met monthly via our district's Bellefonte Learning Community structure. These teacher-led, action-research team meetings allowed us to guide each other as we took the necessary steps to help students reawaken their love of books.

The two most meaningful changes we made were providing dedicated time for self-selected, independent reading during the school day and curating classroom libraries that provided students with access to diverse books -- ones that allowed them to not only see themselves, but to also see the world by stepping into someone else's shoes.

Continued on pg. 3

TPIIC's vision is to support effective instructional practices that increase student engagement and improve student learning.

Letter from TPIIC's Executive Director

In our Educator-Centered Instructional Coaching framework and throughout our PAHSCI (for those of you who remember) and PIIC work, we focused on working one-on-one and in small groups to support teachers, instructional coaches, and other school leaders. We recognized the importance and impact of establishing solid working relationships with our colleagues. And, we knew that large groups, e.g., workshop environments, could not always yield the connections needed to grow practice. At the heart of our work is this... building relationships makes a difference in every interaction, not just with instructional coaching. But, it doesn't stop at that... we need to ensure we are cultivating and nourishing those relationships by providing deliberate support and then reflecting on that support to ensure sustainability. That's community building that strengthens everyone.

Chief Justice Sonia Sotomayor said, *"As you discover what strength you can draw from your community in this world from which it stands apart, look outward as well as inward. Build bridges instead of walls."*

Instructional coaches build bridges and help teachers become the architects of their own learning; they help create space for teacher agency. They help teachers become more reflective practitioners and turn meaningless professional development into effective, valuable professional learning to improve their craft. They build awareness that learning is social and create multiple opportunities for collaboration, ensuring that colleagues learn and practice together without fear of any negative evaluation. Or, for that matter, any evaluation!

None of this can occur, however, without a strong sense of what healthy relationships look, sound, and feel like. And, given the challenges of the last two school years, relationship building and making

connections may not have been priorities. We need to move our thinking forward and remind ourselves how to strengthen relationships that may have been neglected for some time.

Let's think for a moment about the business world... how are transactions made, nurtured, and expanded? What relationships are needed to "stay in business"?

According to <https://simplicable.com/new/relationship-building>, there are seven types of relationships that are necessary for a thriving business. Some will sound very familiar to educators!

Expanding **social connections** is critical for success. Instructional coaches engage with their colleagues F2F and virtually. They extended their outreach by networking with others, in spite of the pandemic to ensure that everyone was socially connected and heard while being physically distanced. They encouraged teachers to connect with their students daily and at the same time, they connected with the teachers they coached.

In the face of the pandemic uncertainty, instructional coaches provide stability and **leadership**. They provide a sounding board for venting, a repository of resources, and dissemination process for information. They "uncomplicate" things and enable teachers to collectively problem-solve and share learning.

But not everything runs smoothly.

When instructional coaches share ideas in ways that encourage and motivate others to try them, the coaches become **influencers** and impact outcomes.

Instructional coaches are trustworthy partners. In some ways, they must **sell** some ideas that may not come naturally to their teaching colleagues.

However, when the relationship is a trusting one and the coach is genuine,

the conversations reflect positive thinking and teachers are more likely to try something new.

Trust...the key to any respected relationship. When instructional coaching interactions are viewed as **partner relationships** and everyone is a member in a community of learning and practice, the result is a growth model, not a negative one.

Although I don't consider teachers a coach's customers, some may. In business, that **customer relationship** means recognizing customer satisfaction, e.g., giving and getting feedback. This, of course, is essential to any growth model and something instructional coaches practice routinely.

And, of course, there is the idea of **public relations** which many have said is the face of instructional coaching; that is, instructional coaching relationships must be supported and maintained in order to be successful. Public, or in this case, schoolwide, acceptance is vital.

Whether it's business or education, developing healthy relationships is just as important in a face-to-face environment as a virtual one. We all need to nag and nurture with a pat and push and keep the continuity of learning front and center for all.

Sincerely,

Allen B. Eisenberg

Summer is coming... relax, rejuvenate, and replenish your heart and soul... be safe!



"Reading is an opportunity for you to know that you're not alone and you don't have to be ashamed about who you are, and if you're reading a book outside of yourself, you also know that you don't have to be afraid of who you're not" (Jason Reynolds).

Fortunately, our district shared our vision, and has financially supported the growth of our classroom libraries. Whether you're starting a library from scratch or finding the right books to add to your shelves can be a daunting task.

We often turn to teacher Pernille Ripp, the Project Lit Community, and Bookstagram (Instagram for bibliophiles) for recommendations. It is paramount that our classroom libraries be filled with stories from around the world as told through the eyes of characters that not only affirm students' identities, but also illuminate unfamiliar perspectives.

You might be wondering how the information we've shared connects to this issue's topic of relationship-building. As all coaches know, establishing trust with teachers is critical to affecting real change. Without trust, our staff would have struggled to embrace this progressive literacy shift. With their

newly gained knowledge, teachers have been able to forge stronger relationships with students in many ways, but most importantly, those relationships are centered around books. As students are bombarded with information from countless sources, the relationships they build between the pages of a book can allow them to relate to experiences that differ from their own. How better to build their empathy than with a book?

"Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books."

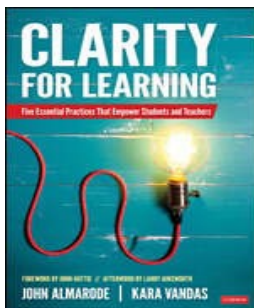
(Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop)

A note about Jackie and Sarah: Teaching can feel very isolating. As an instructional coach with a focus on literacy, Jackie has worked tirelessly with all secondary staff to affect change and promote professional growth in this area. Jackie's passion motivated Sarah, a high school reading specialist, to join her efforts to promote a school-wide culture of literacy. Together, they're making a difference at Bellefonte Area High School, one book at a time.

For more information, please contact: srodgers@basd.net or jwynkoop@basd.net

The Book Nook: By Jackie Wynkoop and Nicole Kohlhepp, Bellefonte Area School District, Instructional Coaches; and Melissa Duckworth, Curriculum Consultant, CIU 10.

Clarity for Learning: Five Essential Practices that Empower Students and Teachers by John Almarode and Kara Vandas.



In all of the research on what helps students learn, the key for many studies is providing clarity on what students are expected to learn. For students to be highly successful, they

should be able to describe what must be learned, why they are learning it, and how they can be successful. This book shows how to develop that clarity with your students by offering powerful practices and examples from teachers and leaders across the country who have implemented these practices.

Helping teachers identify the goals for the learning and making them visible are the keys to growth.

For more information, please contact mduckworth@ciu10.org or nkohlhepp@basd.net

The Educator-Centered Instructional Coaching (ECIC) Framework	
ECIC advocates one-on-one and small group support for teachers, coaches, and school leaders using the BDA cycle of consultation	ECIC focuses on collecting, analyzing, and using data to identify student needs, assess changes in classroom instructional practice, and measure student progress
ECIC emphasizes using evidence-based literacy practices across all content areas to help students process information	ECIC supports reflective, confidential, and non-evaluative practices

Staying Connected During the Pandemic

By Amanda Funk, Assistant Principal, Southeast Middle School, School District of Lancaster

Maya Angelou said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” No words have ever been truer than educating through a pandemic. Teachers are amazing. There was no doubt in my mind, however, that when faced with a new challenge, teachers would rise to the challenge and shatter the expectations.

As administrators, we knew we needed to stay connected to our staff and make sure they were connected to one another so they could feel supported and encouraged and do the same for our students. But how do we make relationships and stay connected while being virtual? Here were a few things we implemented in order to come together while being apart.

Weekly Zoom Faculty Meetings

Standing faculty meeting every week; music playing as they entered the meeting; started off with an ice breaker (insert eye roll)! I promise they were fun and got everyone talking! This was a time for everyone to hear updates, get consistent messaging, and get answers. Many times, many stayed to talk.

Check-ins - Sending a note through the mail or sending a quick check-in text is meaningful. In a personal note, staff are more likely to engage and truly say how they were doing. Normalizing that it was okay not to be okay was important, too.

Family Games - Teachers would take turns hosting a zoom game night on Saturday nights. Our favorite game was Kahoot! We even sent BINGO cards to every staff member and pulled numbers every day for a week, complete with prizes! It was a chance to get together and not talk about school!

As far as connecting with students, our teachers knocked it out of the park! At every turn, they connected with students. Students trust teachers who show respect and hold space for them in some form or another. Here a few ways our teachers connected with students while we were virtual:

Morning Announcements - While in school, two teachers provided daily morning announcements from the office. This helped replicate some consistency and

normalcy for our students. Announcements included important updates, reminders on how to access the technology needed to log on every day, weekly birthdays, weekly Flipgrid challenges, etc. They would record the next day’s “show” and we would share out at 7:45am (just like we were in school) on all our social media outlets, Schoology, and teachers would start off homeroom playing them. Again, it brought us together through consistent messaging and a little bit of normalcy. It was also something that was predictable when we were never sure what our day would bring.

Student of Month Yard Signs - We celebrated students and created monthly “Student of the Month”

yard signs to deliver to students. Students were nominated through a variety of criteria and not just for high grades. Teachers and students benefited from some safe, socially distanced, mask wearing face to face interaction! Instant relationship

builder and mood booster!

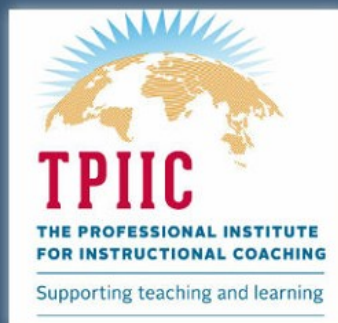
Zoom Assemblies - Before Thanksgiving and Winter Break, our two amazing morning announcement hosts, hosted a school wide zoom assembly! They celebrated students, had trivia games, and created breakout rooms for every teacher to do an activity and students could choose where they wanted to go. These assemblies lasted over an hour or so and were widely attended! At one time, we had 300 students on zoom! We joked, laughed, sang, listened to music, and just came together. After the assembly was over, zoom stayed open for anyone who wanted to hang out longer.

Creating safe spaces or brave spaces allows staff and students to acknowledge the big feelings they have. It creates an awareness that they are not alone and allows them to reach out if needed. Staff and students won’t always remember everything you say but they will remember how you made them feel. Keep those connections fluid, transparent, and authentic. As we learn and grow and figure out how to navigate this ever-changing pandemic, we know better and we must do better.

For more information, please contact akfunk@sdlancaster.org

“Creating safe spaces or brave spaces allows staff and students to acknowledge the big feelings they have...they are not alone.”

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