

PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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Making Connections Between Literacy and Digital Tools

By Virginia Glatzer, PIIC Regional Mentor Coordinator (RMC)

Instructional coaches are often part of lesson design. In the "Before," coaches may ask questions to get the teacher thinking about the use of language:

- How does this lesson create a rich language environment that integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening about content?
- How are the students forming questions about the content?
- How are they reflecting on the content?

Using digital tools addresses all of these questions.

Text is no longer simply defined as words on paper. It is communication that is oral, electronic, or on film. Although creating digital text can be effective, it is not always done well. Through the *BDA process, the instructional coach can work with teachers to ensure that students are going through a critical thought process that involves effective research skills, storyboarding, script-writing, tier 3 vocabulary usage, fluency checks, returning to the text, and publishing. Teacher and coach consider the voice and choice, hard work (by students), possibilities for an authentic audience, and the strategic and extended thinking used when students create digital texts in blogs, podcasts, movies, and digital stories.

Students can use digital tools to build relevance and prior knowledge around a text. These tools can help them to build connections, so that they can connect the new to the known through tools such as Fakebook character sketches, student-created surveys, and RSS readers. Students can make meaning before, during, and after learning, so that it feels relevant to them and helps them get a sense of where they are headed and generate questions along the way.

Hard conversations are often necessary. It's

important for a coach to help a teacher consider whether students are over-using technology or using it well. Although using digital tools can address the need for students to work together and to socialize, it's not easy. Learning in a social context is all about collaboration. It includes creating communication rules, giving and receiving feedback, a mutual exchange of ideas, and emphasis on effective communication. The coach's thoughtful questioning in the "Before" and encouraging of reflection in the "After" can be key to digital tools being used for collaboration and to give students

the opportunity to respond in a way that will be unique to him/her. Given the wide range of digital tools, students can develop their own style, voice, and strategies for learning by using tools that allow for comments, collaboration, and responses in multiple ways via text, audio, and video.

Exploring digital tools takes on new meaning for coach and teacher as they consider how these tools can be used to effectively enhance student literacy learning.

**Before, During, After process of instructional coaching*

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"Although using digital tools can address the need for students to work together and socialize, it's not easy. Learning in a social context is all about collaboration."



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September 29-
October 1, 2014

Penn Stater
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State College, PA

January 12-14, 2015

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

Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

This time of year is always one of reflection and projection. We think about our many accomplishments and worry about what we did or didn't achieve. That leads us to propose our goals for the next school year and hope that they are realistic and attainable with just the right mix of problem-solving, critical thinking, and innovation.

As PIIC continues to explore ways to reflect new technologies and integrate literacy learning skills into teaching and learning across all content areas, we are reminded that perceptions become realities. One reality we want to ensure is that the link between professional learning and what happens in classrooms is continually revisited and supported. Providing ongoing professional learning opportunities so teachers can nurture their own professional growth is not an option. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that students are in classrooms with highly effective teachers. It is also our responsibility to ensure that teachers are given the support, tools, and resources to make that happen.

Some schools, however, struggle with sustaining the persistent support of teacher professional development. Some have added instructional coaches by reassigning roles, i.e., a librarian who becomes a part-time coach; some

schools have reduced their instructional coaching schedules to part-time in order to maintain onsite support to teachers and not lose the capacity and continuity they have built. Some schools are blending virtual support with face-to-face support to ensure regular communication, collaboration, and feedback. It is clear that many schools recognize the impact of instructional coaching and that their coaches help teachers implement effective instructional practices.

We know the value of face-to-face support and ongoing collaboration. At the same time, we are aware of the necessity for instructional coaches to juggle face-to-face support with technology supported professional learning. So, how is that reached?

The April 2014 issue of JSD suggests that technology-supported professional learning is one way to blend instructional support to teachers. They caution us, however, with three myths about technology supported professional learning and how they influence current practice: 1) Access equals learning; 2) Knowledge improves practice; and 3) Individualized learning alone transforms schools. Understanding these myths and how adult learning is impacted by them is essential. Providing professional learning opportunities to teachers,

coaches, mentors, administrators, and other school leaders dispelling these myths is critical for a successful blended approach to improve student learning. We must ensure that professional learning is relevant, tied to teacher practice, is collaborative, literacy-based across all content areas, and is standards and data driven in order for practice to be transformative.

The article clearly expresses that *"...individual and collaborative online models, combined in an effective balance, enable new models of professional learning that address a continuum of ongoing learning that educators need, both formal and informal, both individually and collaboratively driven."*

It's not so much one way or another, one model or another... it's all about how ongoing teacher professional learning is valued in schools that make a commitment to promote student and teacher learning in order to change the landscape of teaching and learning. Have a safe and relaxing summer. See you in September!

Sincerely,



Please access PIIC's online resource, ***The Instructional Coaching Resource Guide***:
www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org

Becoming a Great High School: 6 Strategies and 1 Attitude that Make a Difference

Book Review by Christina Cheffo, Hermitage School District Instructional Coach

In his book, *Becoming a Great High School: 6 Strategies and 1 Attitude That Make a Difference*, Tim R. Westerberg, illustrates the major changes taking place in education. First and foremost, there has been a great deal of research over the past 35 years regarding how students learn, how effective schools and teachers work, as well as what good leadership looks like in school organizations. Dr. Westerberg, a 26 year veteran of the high school principalship and a nationally known high school reform activist, insists that if educators truly want to take

their schools from good to great, they can make their schools highly effective by embarking on professional development based on brain research. For years, we have been teaching

with blinders on—for the first time in education, we now have solid research showing us the best practices, strategies and beliefs most likely to produce results.

"...for the first time in education, we now have solid research showing us best practices, strategies and beliefs most likely to produce results."

The book highlights the one attitude that can bring our schools from good to great—a "we expect success" attitude. Westerberg points out that the attitudes of all stakeholders must change to a growth

*Continued on page 3, *Becoming a Great High School**

mindset. This means moving the organization away from being satisfied with the status quo and toward expecting success from every stakeholder in the district. As educators, we need to build habits in our students; one of the most important is the habit of achieving and putting forth as much effort as we can. Our schools need to embody the attitude of “Stretch” learning. That is, stretching our mind-sets, our attitudes and our efforts. Instructional coaches can help teachers to reflect upon their work to better stretch their minds. We need to present our students and teachers with rigorous curriculum, multiple pathways and a “we expect success mentality.” The text explains the various ways in which schools can achieve this mind-set change.

Also emphasized in the Westerberg text is the idea that changing the odds for student success does not require us to reinvent the system, but rather to have a clear focus on simply doing what we have learned matters most in raising student achievement. Westerberg outlines a framework of six strategies, that, when addressed the right way, can have positive effects on student success. These strategies can be a high-payoff area for school systems. They include 1) Developing clear instructional goals; 2) Developing a common vision of effective instruction; 3) Using frequent formative assessment; 4) Tracking student progress; 5) Providing timely intervention for struggling students; and 6) Celebrating student success. To be successful in implementing this framework of strategies requires changes at all levels of the school system. Schools will need to do the following -- stay focused on simple changes, and build on these changes; get everyone on the same page;

encourage innovation among the staff; and embrace a culture of teamwork. Schools can use instructional coaches to engage in these activities within the BDA cycle to increase the likelihood of success. The text also examines how different organizations went from good to great using research-based strategies. Hopefully, this text can lead other school districts in the same direction.

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“...all schools are now being asked to rise to a level of productivity obtained by only a few. All schools are being asked to go from somewhere to great.”
-Becoming a Great High School: 6 Strategies and 1 Attitude that Make a Difference

Effectively Implementing Technology to Enhance Literacy

By Cathy Dowd, Shamokin Area School District Instructional Coach

Technology can be very effective in enhancing student learning if used properly. In fact, many students can't even remember a time when technology was not at their fingertips. Our students know how to use a wide array of technology but at times have difficulty transitioning it to the educational venue -- until we give them a relevant and authentic way to incorporate technology and literacy learning.

Students are required to use a wide-range of competencies to meet 21st century reading and writing skills. The use of technology can enhance student learning when used as a tool to accomplish a given task. Instructional coaches can work with teachers to embed tools through the BDA cycle for students to successfully complete an assignment. Using technology in the classroom can help students become proficient users, problem

solvers, researchers, organizers, and creators of original work. Using the Internet for data collection, investigations, analysis of information, as well as communication with other students or even experts in the field, brings a level of higher order thinking skills to the classroom.

“Technology can be very effective in enhancing student learning if used properly.”

As an instructional coach, many technology projects that I facilitate/co-teach with teachers help students stay engaged, require more student decision-making activities, and allow students to work collaboratively. Many project-based lessons are cross-curricular as well. I see a cross over of skills from history, math, English, the arts, science, and technology. An added advantage is that as students stay engaged and on

task, we see less behavioral problems in the classroom. Planning with teachers on a regular basis helps them integrate technology across all content areas.

Another advantage of technology in the classroom is that teachers are able to publish student projects and open up the communication lines. By publishing student work, we give their work authenticity and take literacy levels up a notch. One of our instructional coaches at our high school confided in me a similar thought: “What we sometimes forget is that students like to feel ownership of their work, and publishing it gives them that sense of accomplishment.” As with any other literacy strategy, coaches and teachers must work together to properly plan, embed and implement the use of technology in the classroom.

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The Power of Language through Technology

By Tanya Dynda, IU 9 PIIC Mentor

“Any growth requires a temporary loss of security.” ~ Madeline Hunter

I came across this quote the other day and it caused me to pause a moment. In IU 9, I wear many hats, including IU PIIC Mentor and an instructional technology specialist. In my role as an instructional technology specialist, my vision is to encourage teachers and other coaches to embrace the power of technology – to challenge students’ thinking, provide new methods of communication, and access people, ideas, and media. As an IU PIIC mentor, I encourage coaches to work with teachers and help them integrate a variety of tools to help deliver effective instruction. As the quote clearly states, teachers and coaches need to move beyond their comfort zone to experience learning growth and promote that same growth within their students.

If the use of technology is tied to learning objectives, its power to enhance and extend the use of language is captured.

A learning support teacher approached me with a challenge – one of her students needed to create and deliver a presentation on a specific penguin. This student struggles to recall facts she recently experienced, so asking her to present her learning was challenging. My mind immediately connected to using technology to enhance her literacy, and through the cycle of consultation and instructional coaching, I suggested trying Little Bird Tales, a user-friendly web-based option for storytelling. A few weeks later, this teacher invited me back so that I could witness the impact using this tool had on the student.

I walked into the classroom and the student was asked if she was ready to share her presentation. She eagerly jumped into the presenter’s chair and was soon surrounded by her classmates. In five minutes, this student, with the aid of her crafted Little Bird tale, shared the knowledge she absorbed on her chosen penguin. It was evident that the use of this technology I shared had enabled the teacher to use a tool she may not have automatically chosen and indeed allowed the student to comprehend and explain new knowledge – a task she seldom achieved. What was it about the technology that enhanced her literacy acquisition? I strongly feel the ability this tool had to incorporate visual stimulation, and audio

where she recorded her voice to explain what she had written on the page, encouraged her to interact with the research and built her capacity for learning language. As a coach, it also gave the teacher another avenue to support student learning.

While the value of technology on literacy debate persists, my experience continues to illustrate new impacts for literacy. Technology, if used in conjunction with planned objectives, can support writing through outlining (Bubbl.us), publishing (blogs, Tikatok.com) and collaborative writing (wikis). Coaches should work with teachers on embedding the technology to enhance learning, not simply because it’s a “cool tool.” The audience for writing can now be more global, a concept which ultimately encourages students to be more conscious of their writing and actually refine it with multiple drafts!

“...teachers and coaches need to move beyond their comfort zone to experience learning growth and promote the same growth within their students.”

I’ve shared my small insight into how technology enhances literacy, but don’t take my word for it – experience it! Remember, “Any growth requires a temporary loss of security.” You cannot open the world of language for your students unless you’re willing to try strategies that encourages interaction with the language in all forms – this now includes technology. Talk to your coach and experience your own professional growth!

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The PIIC 4 Quadrant Framework

PIIC advocates **one-on-one and small group support** for teachers, coaches, and school leaders.

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

PIIC emphasizes the use of **evidence-based literacy practices** and research-based instructional techniques.

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

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