

PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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Knock, Knock

By Donna Waleski, IU 11 PIIC Mentor

Schools have opened their doors for the new academic year. When the familiar words “Knock, knock” are heard, a teacher may be hesitant to respond with, “Who’s there?” Those two words can evoke wariness, unsure of what is to follow. With the unknown, teachers might be cautious or even suspicious of opening their doors to the instructional coach. Past practices of showing, telling and even selling teachers on how to do things better in their classroom have not proven effective in instigating instructional change. It is likely that the consequences from these practices have helped to create the barrier of fear and hesitancy teachers feel toward instructional coaches.

“A coach will make no judgments. Instead, instructional coaching creates a no-fault learning experience with the teacher.”

How can an instructional coach circumvent this barrier and build the trust needed for an effective working relationship? First, there can be no surprises. Coaching must be voluntary and confidential. Outside input from anybody is most helpful when it is really desired. Still, teachers need to know that coaching is not about evaluation. PIIC emphasizes the importance of reflective and non-evaluative practices to truly create a culture of learning without the fear of making a mistake. A coach will make no judgments. Instead, instructional coaching creates a no-fault learning experience with the teacher. Only agreed upon data collected with a tool chosen by the teacher will tell the story.

Coaching is an on-going conversation between the teacher and coach. This dialogue can only be successful if a coach has learned to really listen to the needs and concerns of the teacher. If a coach asks the right questions and reflects with teachers, it is the teacher who is able to come to their own conclusion and answers. Teachers are more willing to

support the changes and commitments that they create, not the ones forced on them.

When teachers understand that the heart of coaching occurs when coaches are listening more than talking, asking more than telling, and reflecting more than commenting, a different scenario occurs.

“Knock, Knock.”
“Who’s there?”
“Your PIIC coach.”
“Please come in!”

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Resources:

Crane, T.G. (2012). *The Heart of Coaching*. San Diego, CA: FTA Press

Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., Clifton, H., (2012). *Coaching Matters*. United States of America: Leaning Forward



The Pennsylvania Institute
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Annenberg Foundation and the
PA Department of Education

Professional Learning Opportunity Dates

September 29-
October 1, 2014
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

January 12-14, 2015
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

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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

Although it sounds so easy to approach colleagues and offer help, coaches must understand how the recipients might feel. Questions like, "Why is the coach offering help? Am I perceived to have marginal skills or that I am needy? Am I in danger of receiving an unsatisfactory rating?" will no doubt surface. Their teaching colleagues may feel offended and "targeted" that their skill set is deficient. Coaches need to understand adult learning theories and how that influences actions, responses, and ongoing relationships.

Relationships are the building blocks for any endeavor. We don't work in isolation. Coaches work to ensure collaboration, enhance critical thinking, and promote collective problem-solving. But, that doesn't occur overnight or without serious thought about building a team. Coaching is a team sport and winning means helping teachers recognize which instructional practices are effective and which need to be strengthened. The community of practitioners must work together to get the job done.

Coaches need to build relationships with their teaching colleagues one-on-one. In many cases, because a coach has a great relationship with someone, the willingness to work together is immediate. It's a trust factor that has been strengthened through the relationship. If the coach is new to a

building, however, h/she must begin slowly and work towards building trust and credibility by being a good listener, acknowledging the teacher's voice, and valuing the teacher's experience. Remember, in order to be effective, coaches need to build a community of learners who share a vision about school improvement and their collective responsibility in that venture.

Do you remember when you were taking an educational methods course in college? Probably the first thing you were told was to establish relationships with every staff member; no person was insignificant or irrelevant to a school setting. That's the mantra of a coach... every person is a member in a community of learning and practice. You must establish relationships and sustain them through ongoing communication, collaboration, confidentiality, and consistency.

When a former teacher becomes a coach in the same building, those relationships may need to be renegotiated. Yesterday, the coach was asking for advice and today, the coach is giving advice. Some colleagues may feel like the coach is now a senior among peers and that can get messy and uncomfortable. But, since coaches are not experts, they rely on their colleagues to help them grow as well. Learning goes both ways! Unfortunately, that process is not always automatic or

instantaneous so coaches must take the time to rebuild the relationship and focus on the elements that made the previous relationship so healthy – integrity, respect, common goals, and appreciating one's differences.

As you begin the 2014-2015 school year, I'm sure thoughts about the PA core, teacher evaluation, standardized testing, and financial challenges are pervasive. Understand the difference between a condition that exists and an issue that can be resolved. Focus on building strong relationships with your teaching colleagues and not let ego lead the way. Remember, it's not about who is right or who talks the most; it's about how colleagues work together to accomplish a common goal, i.e., school wide improvement, that will help the members of the team sustain collaboration, cooperation, and cohesiveness that yield positive student outcomes and continue to build teacher capacity.

In the words of Larry King, "I remind myself every morning: nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do so by listening." Be a great listener and develop strong relationships. That's the key to problem-solving and accomplishing the collective goals.

Sincerely,

Allen B. Eisenberg

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

The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core

Book Review by Amy Wall, Penn Manor School District Instructional Coach

The Core Six provides teachers and coaches practical strategies they can use to help their students meet the demands of the PA Core or Common Core State Standards. These research-based strategies consist of Reading for Meaning, Compare and Contrast, Inductive Learning, Circle of Knowledge, Write to Learn, and Vocabulary's CODE.

"As teachers strive to implement the PA or Common Core Standards for ELA/Literacy, instructional coaches working through the PIIC BDA model can be a welcome support."

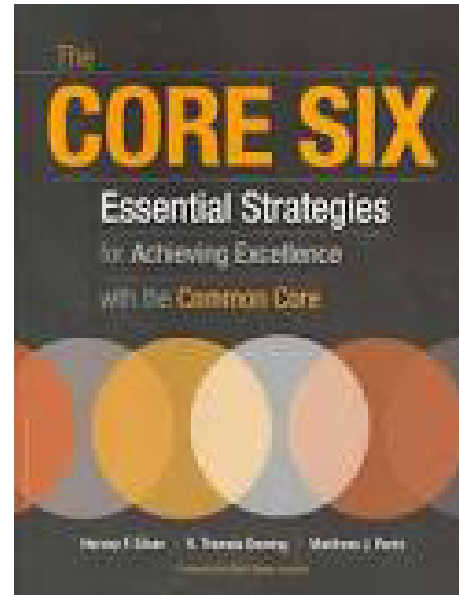
Reading for Meaning helps readers build skills necessary to comprehend challenging text. It focuses on what to do before, during, and after reading to help students understand complex texts. **Compare and Contrast** is a critical thinking strategy that helps students understand important similarities and differences in what they are reading. Students organize their thinking by going through a four-phase learning

Continued on page 3, The Core Six

process (describe each item, record critical similarities and differences, draw conclusions, and complete an application task). **Inductive Learning** helps students develop their inference and evidence gathering skills. Students gather evidence and examine, group, and label the information to find patterns. **Circle of Knowledge** helps teachers conduct classroom discussions where students are active participants and critical thinkers/learners. **Write to Learn** gives teachers tools to help their students write in all content areas without burdening teachers with paperwork. The three types of classroom writing are provisional, readable, and polished writing. Finally, **Vocabulary's CODE** helps students retain and possess a more in-depth understanding of content vocabulary through learning activities.

As teachers strive to implement the PA or Common Core Standards for ELA/Literacy, instructional coaches working through the PIIC **Before, During, After (BDA)** model can be a welcome support. This book provides practical strategies and sample lesson plans that coaches could use to model or collaborate with the teachers in their buildings. This resource could serve as a "way in" with teachers as coaches work to develop trusting and credible relationships. *The Core Six* strategies make implementing the Common Core State Standards in any content area more manageable and enjoyable. In addition, they capture students' interest and encourage them to synthesize their own learning, which will benefit teachers evaluated as part of the Educator Effectiveness model. Coaches and teachers will love working through this book together!

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"Whether designing curriculum units or laying out instructional plans, teachers make decisions about what to emphasize and what must sit by the wayside. How do we make cogent and meaningful choices about what is core for our learnings?"
The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core

Instructional Coaching: It's All About the Words

By Dan Grejda, East Pennsboro School District Instructional Coach

The professional responsibilities of instructional coaches are unique within the sphere of public education. Teachers and administrators are often at a loss when asked to classify an instructional coach's position; it is not a classroom teaching position, nor is it an administrative/supervisory position. Instructional coaches swim in murky waters as they seek to build bridges among students, teachers, and administrators. Effective and thoughtfully worded communication is the essence of a successful instructional coaching program. All communication, both verbal and written, needs to be carefully constructed so as not to create an atmosphere of distrust and estrangement. Instructional coaches act as relationship builders, sensitive to the personalities and professional responsibilities of their educational colleagues. Once relationships are developed, it is important for coaches to work diligently to maintain cooperative and

supportive professional environments.

When communicating with teachers, coaches should avoid words that imply their position is administrative in nature. For example, the word "observe" can be interpreted as an administrative function when working with a classroom teacher. The simple misuse

"Effective and thoughtfully worded communication is the essence of a successful instructional coaching program."

of words can unintentionally damage established working relationships with teachers and their colleagues. This is why quadrant four of the PIIC model emphasizes the use of reflective and non-evaluative practices by instructional coaches. Evaluative language implies the instructional coach's position is superior to that of the classroom teacher and should be avoided.

Effective communication between

an instructional coach and the school administration is equally important. Instructional coaches must strive to establish open and honest dialogue with administrators in order to achieve a successful collaborative approach to coaching. Preserving confidentiality in professional conversations with administrators is essential to keeping a trusting relationship between the instructional coach and the teachers with whom they work. Maintaining a relationship with teachers built on trust requires coaches to be aware of the divergent roles inherent in their unique position. Regular communication between instructional coaches and administrators will not only help develop a safe and open environment for all, but will also help create mutual respect for the different roles and responsibilities of the instructional coach, teachers, and administrators.

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Technology-Infused Literacy Strategies Encourage

Student Achievement, Engagement

By Mike Baker, Altoona Area School District Instructional Coach

School districts across Pennsylvania have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on classroom technology, equipping classrooms with myriad devices, gadgets and doohickeys. While district technology coordinators and superintendents use spreadsheets to measure return on investment, PIIC coaches know that the most important currency is student achievement. They know that working one-on-one and in small groups of teachers, coaches can impact how teachers teach so student engagement and student learning are influenced.

Achievement is linked to literacy. In order to maximize technology's impact on student achievement, coaches must find a way to align technology and literacy. The best way to make this happen is to consider how technology can enhance traditional paradigms. It is not the tool that makes the difference alone; it's helping teachers understand which tools can make a difference in what and how teachers teach. This support comes from the ongoing collaboration of the teacher and coach in a non-evaluative setting.

Text rendering

Consider working with teachers to move reading selections online. Using a web-based service like Google Docs, students can highlight passages and attach notes. Once rendering is completed, students can share notes with each other.

Collins writing

Can a blog replace a written assignment? Absolutely. Free blogging sites like Edublogs allow teachers to setup private blogs for their students. Teachers provide a prompt and students respond with a blog entry. Using a blog in class gives them an opportunity to express themselves in a relevant medium. Furthermore, other students can read and respond to the blog posts, adding a rich social layer to writing.

Please Do Now/Ticket Out the Door

Rather than using reams of paper each year, important strategies like Please Do Nows and Tickets Out the Door can be streamlined with technology. Coaches

can model using a Google Form to collect information from a 3-2-1. The students' responses can be instantly displayed on a whiteboard. Results are archived, allowing teachers and students to measure growth.

Pair / share

Nearly all Web 2.0 tools (those web sites that allow users to create content) feature social collaboration tools. These

tools give students the ability to share and discuss using text, images and video. Furthermore, publishable work is already in a medium that allows others to see and discuss the work.

Coaches need not reinvent the wheel when it comes to literacy. Traditional methods – pen and paper – are still

very effective. However, it is unwise to ignore the needs of today's learner. The new media is digital. Through Facebook, instant messages, Twitter and texting, students broadcast their ideas with one simple click. This is not technology for technology's sake. As technology is aligned to literacy, student engagement increases. Achievement follows.

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"It is not the tool that makes the difference alone; it's helping teachers understand which tools can make a difference in what and how teachers teach."

The PIIC 4 Quadrant Framework

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

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*** and research-based instructional techniques.

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

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