

# PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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## Instructional Coaches as Change Agents

By Dr. Charles F. Greevy, IV, Principal, Loyalsock Township Middle School

Two years ago, I became the Loyalsock Township Middle School principal. The school scored 70.3 SPP, but had the potential for higher performance. I had ideas and plans, but needed to build a team to support the teachers and help with messaging. I was ready to do the things that change leaders are taught—have an entry plan, listen to all stakeholders, and find quick wins quickly.

The biggest quick win was for me to partner with the building coaches. I

collaborated with the coaches who attended PIIC conferences, the PIIC-PLN course, and were supported by their IU PIIC mentor. My goal was that the coaches would help me roll out the plans and communicate with the staff. Education guru Dr. Todd Whitaker explains that “informal leaders” like an instructional coach can influence the culture and staff members positively. Our coaches worked hard to gain our trust.

Whitaker (p. 17) explains that “The key for implementing change and growth in a building is to work with the superstar teachers in the school. If the superstars (the informal leaders) move forward, then the entire building has the opportunity to go with them.”

After talking with teachers, staff, and parents, concerns about common team time being too scripted and the need for a consistent writing program took priority. I collaborated with TEAM leaders and created more team meeting flexibility; we put the current writing program on hold as staff explored other options. This translated into a quick win with staff. Instructional coaches Becky Leid and Vicky Krout spoke to the staff, had informal conversations, and developed ways to support teachers. My job is to set the course for the direction

of the school; that is, set the parameters and remove those load bearing walls for teachers. Our instructional coaches bring their unique abilities to help teachers be successful within those parameters.

Initially, the coaches looked to increase building morale. They built relationships and set up

creative surprises, had individual meetings with faculty, and hosted Lunch-and-Learn mini-PD.

These coaching opportunities only cost me a few gallons of soup, a bag of chocolates and some colored computer paper, but moved our building’s culture forward.

**As a side note and a true byproduct of the efforts of our instructional coaches, teachers, staff and students:** our building’s PVASS data showed growth in every grade, tested area, and quintile range in last year’s PSSAs. We had ZERO Below Basics in 7th grade ELA PSSA scores and our SPP score rose to 77.9. We continue to reach towards larger goals and recognitions.

Our coaches continue supporting teachers and providing PD. We’re on the same page and that’s why I trust them. Together, we’re making a difference. We’re moving forward. I can’t imagine progressing without them.

For more information, please contact:  
Dr. Charles Greevy, [cgreevy@ltsd.k12.pa.us](mailto:cgreevy@ltsd.k12.pa.us)

***“Our instructional coaches bring unique abilities to help teachers be successful within those parameters.”***



The Pennsylvania Institute  
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A Partnership of the  
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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

Linda Darling-Hammond once said that "We cannot make major headway in raising student performance and closing the achievement gap until we make progress in closing the teaching gap" (Huffington Post, August 2014, *The blog*). If we want to impact student achievement, we have a responsibility and an obligation to create change on the level where it matters... the classroom.

In 1993, Michael Fullan suggested that *"teachers must combine the mantle of moral purpose with the skills of change agency"* (Educational Leadership, March 1993, Vol 50). The teachers I know believe they can and do make a difference in their students' lives. They began their journeys with a heart full of passion and commitment to helping students rise to their fullest potential. Most felt, and still feel, that they have a moral obligation to teach every student who crosses their classroom threshold. (Remember the Blueberry Story?) But, unfortunately, some of the passion with which they started their careers has dissipated in the face of increasing demands of the profession. Fullan further states that *"the inevitable difficulties of teaching... personal issues and vulnerabilities, as well as social pressure and values, to engender a sense of frustration and force a reassessment of the possibilities of the job and the investment one wants to make in it"* have caused the disillusionment and disenchantment that have occurred throughout their teaching experiences. That was back in 1993 and yet some conditions still exist that cause the frustration and dissatisfaction that school communities endure today.

While Fullan's words may sound bleak, think about the impact of instructional coaching on the climate and culture of a school and how his 1993 words were more prophetic than we may have thought. His words were a message to educators...schools must change. Think about how instructional coaches are the change agents who keep the momentum going, push forward with school renewal, help develop teacher capacity, encourage communication, engage in accountable talk, and disrupt the status quo so that inquiry, collaboration, and collective problem-solving become the norm. Changing the environment changes the nature of teaching and learning. Coaches help everyone become a member in a community of practice and learning.

*"Moral purpose keeps teachers close to the needs of children and youth; change agency causes them to develop better strategies for accomplishing their moral goals"* (EL, March 1993, Vol 50). Moral purpose keeps us in teaching; change agency helps us navigate the system so that our goals can be recognized.

Instructional coaches help teachers develop the skills they need to reach a diverse population. They work with teachers to identify the gaps in their students' educational repertoire and build capacity so that the teachers accumulate the skills and knowledge base they need to help their students move forward in the learning process. Coaches are change agents who help teachers think critically, employ flexible problem-solving strategies, and apply learned skills and knowledge to new

situations. They help institutionalize the importance and practice of embedded professional learning every day, all day.

We need to take his prophetic words (or warning) to heart... we need to transform, not reform, the culture and climate of our schools and ensure that teachers have the skills they need to make the changes in teaching and learning necessary for a global society. We need to ensure that our communities of learning honor the time and commitment for learning to take place, not just for students but for their teachers, administrators, coaches and mentors as well and not just on certain days of the week. Instructional coaches are the catalysts for change and share five common characteristics: 1) they can set a clear vision for change and communicate that vision to others; 2) they nag and nurture with patience and persistence; 3) they disrupt the status quo by asking probing questions that are not always the popular questions to ask; 4) they are skilled, knowledgeable practitioners who are not experts but can lead by example; and 5) they know how to collaborate and build strong, trusting relationships.

Instructional coaches are indeed change agents, always asking themselves the questions, "What am I doing as a coach to help teachers change and improve their practice" and "What am I doing as a coach to help teacher improve student engagement and student outcomes?"

Sincerely,



PIIC is published by ASCD! ***Instructional Coaching in Action: An Integrated Approach That Transforms Thinking, Practice, and Schools.*** Available in May!

## The Book Whisperer

Book Review by Deb Goff, IU 17 PIIC Mentor and RaeAnn Crispell, IU 16 Curriculum Services Coordinator

WAKE UP CALL TO COACHES! When you know things are not working, how long do you continue on the same path? When your schools' reading data are not showing improvement, where do you turn to help your teachers?

***"Are you, as a coach, ready to support teachers in making the cultural shift from traditional scripted programs to a literature circle format?"***

Reading instruction is about one thing – READING. A best

practice in reading instruction is literature circles. "All of the skill based reading instruction in the world will not stick with students if they are never expected or allowed to practice reading with books" (Miller, 2009, p.232). "The institutional focus on testing and canned programs drains every ounce of joy from reading that students have and will have in the future" (p.169). Are you, as a coach,

*Continued on page 3, The Book Whisperer*



ready to support teachers in making the cultural shift from traditional scripted programs to a literature circle format?

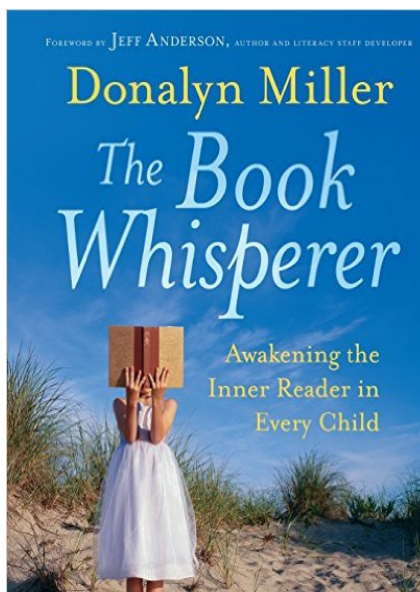
*The Book Whisperer* (2009) by Donalyn Miller offers coaches a place to begin this work, a targeted focus on literacy for coaches involved with the PA Institute for Instructional Coaching. This book is the personal journey of a 6th grade teacher who makes the cultural shift from the traditional teaching of reading to literature circle based teaching. The choices she makes on her path are a result of research from literacy gurus such as Lucy Calkins and Richard Allington, to name a few. While describing her journey, she provides tips and resources as a map to implement this change in reading instruction. Her book includes a list of “Conditions for Learning” (p. 60) that demonstrates that relinquishing control to student choice creates high motivation and engagement allowing the teacher to regain control of the many facets of reading that will be tested.

It is our suggestion that this book, as a coaching tool, should be used in its entirety. Each chapter builds on the next and will only provide the total picture if used sequentially. Miller has chunked the book for you by pairing chapters together; 1 & 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6, and finally 7 with a “whisper” or strategy to implement after each chunk. The book ends with appendices on classroom library suggestions, book lists, and graphic organizers to support the ideas she suggested throughout the book. The conversations around this book are a great

way to engage teachers in the BDA cycle of consultation.

Reading is a complicated process to teach and to coach. This book provides a step-by-step approach to encourage (the learning process) without squeezing out every drop of joy (Miller, 2009, p. 15).

For more information, please contact:  
RaeAnn Crispell, [rcrispell@csiu.org](mailto:rcrispell@csiu.org)



*“I am convinced that if we show students how to embrace reading as a life long pursuit and not just a collection of skills for school performance, we will be doing what I believe we have been charged to do: create readers.”*  
*The Book Whisperer*

## PIIC Instructional Coaches: Collaborators, Innovators, Change Agents

By Diane Hubona, IU 10 PIIC Mentor

As part of the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC), instructional coaches and mentors are at the forefront of a new era for professional learning, leading the way as change agents.

Michael Fullan, author of *Change Leader: Learning to Do What Matters Most*, states “*The effective change leader actively participates as a learner in helping the organization improve.*”

PIIC coaches embrace and navigate this challenging and uncharted territory on a daily basis. Instructional coaches face a daunting task as they work with teachers to improve instructional practice while nurturing collaborative partnerships. So how does this change occur?

PIIC’s goal is institutionalizing consistent coaching practices, while utilizing a framework that yields growth in student engagement,

ultimately benefitting students and teachers. PIIC’s laser-like focus on embedded professional learning and the use of the Before, During, After (BDA) coaching model catapult both the teacher’s and coach’s efforts.

“Doing” is the crucible of change, and when a teacher and coach collaboratively plan, implement, and

***“PIIC’s goal is institutionalizing consistent coaching practices, while utilizing a framework that yields growth in student engagement, ultimately benefitting students and teachers.”***

debrief lessons, the change process becomes cyclical, rather than a one and done checklist approach to teacher growth. This coaching interaction changes classroom practice and is at the heart of the PIIC coaching model.

Instructional coaches who assume the change catalyst role need to feel secure

in their own work and have a strong commitment to continual improvement for themselves as well as their peers. They pose questions and act as a sounding board to generate analysis of student learning when conducting the BDA cycle with their teachers. PIIC’s unique mentor/coach support affords coaches the opportunity to learn and grow while encouraging the same

with their teachers. Fostering this reflective process is certainly not a simple task, but seeing the change in classroom practice continues to nourish and encourage instructional coaches. Coaches facilitate various roles in their day as change agents, but the most powerful, innovative impact occurs with changes at the classroom level, and this is accomplished through PIIC’s collaborative BDA coaching cycle.

For more information, please contact:  
Diane Hubona, [dhubona@ciu10.org](mailto:dhubona@ciu10.org)

# Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

By Rebecca Leid, Loyalsock Township SD Instructional Coach

## Rewind five years ago.

I am a rookie teacher in the small city of Williamsport, Pennsylvania at Loyalsock Township Middle School and I sit, frantically checking my email to catch up on the busy day. Daily bulletin...athletic eligibility...and then, an opportunity to become an instructional coach! A what? Like most young teachers, I jumped at any opportunity to get my feet in the door. I quickly learned what it meant to be a teacher leader through instructional coaching.

I was determined to change lunch room talk into teacher talk. I wanted to transform traditional learning experiences into 21st century learning opportunities. I wanted to reach every student in every classroom. I wanted to affect change.

## Fast-forward to today.

John Hattie (2009) mentions that one must believe with the *"mindset that we can affect change"* (p. 6). As a young teacher, I walked into this opportunity wanting to be part of something bigger. The only problem: I didn't know where to begin. After building relationships, working with my PIIC mentor and attending numerous PIIC workshops and even the statewide PLO, it's evident that I am part of something bigger. I was given an inch, but I've gone a mile. I'm affecting change within the classroom, the building, and the district.

John Hattie challenges my thinking with three simple words: know thy impact. Being an instructional coach has taught me my impact. I went into this position expecting to lead change. Yet, teachers are impacting my coaching daily. I've learned that being a change agent is not just about a coach leading change, but rather, sometimes true coaching takes place leading from behind the scenes. It's a reciprocal effect—a true coaching model.

I have chosen to become a change agent. It's in the way I walk; it's in the way I talk, it's in the way I teach. A coach is a coach in everything he or she does.

I coach through my teaching failures and humilities. I coach thinking outside-the-box. I coach with a growth mindset. I coach for change.

As the coaching culture grows in our building, change is inevitable. Positive change is occurring in our building—teachers and students. As a collaborative team (administrators, instructional coach and teachers), we work together to build a scaffold approach to our Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). As a team, we create individualized learning plans for students based off of classroom data. As a team, we are transforming education for our students. We are leading from within.

Five years ago I accepted the role as an instructional coach not knowing what to expect. Today, I am an instructional coach. I am a teacher leader. I am a change agent. Tomorrow, we all grow!

Zegarac, G. (2013). Know Thy Impact: Teaching, Learning and Leading.

*In Conversation, IV* (2), 18.

For more information, please contact:  
Rebecca Leid, rleid@ltsd.k12.pa.us

***"I coach through my teaching failures and humilities. I coach thinking outside-the-box. I coach with a growth mindset. I coach for change."***

## 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  
Suites 21-24  
Narberth, PA 19072  
484-278-4147 (O)  
484-278-4148 (F)  
info@pacoaching.org  
www.pacoaching.org  
www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org



The Pennsylvania Institute  
for  
Instructional Coaching

**Staff**  
**Executive Director**  
Ellen Eisenberg  
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