

PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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The Instructional Coach: Agent of Change

By Alicia Hull, IU 11 PIIC Mentor, and Lisa Drake and Heather Border, Hunt SD Instructional Coaches

"Instructional coaching is intended to reinforce teachers' and administrators' practices in ways that support schools so that instruction is rigorous, delivery is effective, and assessment is appropriate for student learning to improve." (*Instructional Coaching in Action*, 2017) These beliefs have persuaded districts to implement instructional coaching to close the student achievement gap and accelerate learning by building teacher capacity through implementation of effective instructional practices.

Facilitating quality-increasing change of instruction requires a safe environment. The non-evaluative support provided by coaches enables collaboration that leads to change. The BDA coaching cycle catalyzes this work. Throughout the cycle, coaches reference effective, evidence-based instructional strategies and materials related to content being taught. Engaging teachers in reflective, data-based conversations initiates instructional decisions that will improve student learning. As teachers and coaches work through BDA cycles, teacher capacity is built, as these practices become the norm.

Effective instructional coaches have the innate ability to accomplish this, as they play the professional learning facilitator role, designing authentic opportunities for teachers. Through this process, teachers benefit from the follow through of practices experienced in these sessions. The goal of instructional coaching is not to promote compliance, but to promote sustainable change. Instructional coaches generate shared responsibility for student learning, promoting a positive cultural change. An important aspect of instructional coaching is that, through side-by-side guidance, they release teachers' potential. When there is mutual

respect between coaches, administrators, and teachers, positive transformation develops.

Instructional coaching is a partnership approach to improving instruction, involving not only teachers, but also community stakeholders. Along with assisting in the development of curriculum, they strive to support district initiatives and goals. Schools are hosting community nights to showcase what actions teachers and students are taking to create the ideal learning environment. These nights showcase how teachers are restructuring the learning environment to individualize instruction. Students are showcasing projects created and illustrating how technology can be infused to enhance learning.

This effort connects community stakeholders by sharing instructional practices that impact learners. Instructional coaches are the hidden force driving this shift in education. The goal of instructional coaches is to act as strong advocates for student learning and acquaint the community with the instructional shift and district's vision for educational change.

Without instructional coaching, what other framework would offer educators this level of support? Instructional coaches are internal resources who strive to support teachers to further develop their practice and improve their pedagogy. They assist in teacher, student, and district transformation. Instructional coaches are responsible for carrying out the district's vision, asking tough questions, being knowledgeable, leading by example, and creating strong relationships built on trust. These are all just daily functions for the instructional coach: agent of change.

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**"The goal of instructional coaching
is not to promote compliance, but
to promote sustainable change"**

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

In 2012, Christian van Nieuwerburgh said that *"Coaching is a conversational activity that aims to support people to learn and develop, therefore enhancing their ability to achieve more of their untapped potential. This way of understanding coaching highlights how it is perfectly aligned with the purpose of educational organizations."*

Instructional coaching is a deliberate and planned conversation between two people with the goal of the participants to identify and self-assess areas of strength and need so that adjustments in teaching can be made where appropriate. It is a structured conversation that focuses on beliefs, philosophies, evidence-based decisions, goals and objectives. The intended outcomes always include ways to improve and refine instructional delivery and how that delivery influences growth.

Van Nieuwerburgh further suggests that effective coaching requires specific skills like understanding the process of conversation, e.g., being a good listener, asking the right kind of questions, supporting reflection, and giving and receiving feedback. Coaches must also model the process and practice reflection... that is, be a learner who engages in the same kind of practice as s/he is asking others to demonstrate.

Reading what Nieuwerburgh has said about coaching, reinforces our commitment and respect for the coach's

role in education. We have emphasized PIIC's four quadrants as a way to interconnect learning at every level. Coaches working one-on-one and in small groups to support teachers, coach colleagues, and other school leaders; focusing on collecting, analyzing, and using/applying data to assess student needs; using evidence-based literacy practices across all content areas; and supporting reflective and non-evaluative practice create a climate and culture where teachers collaborate for the purpose of developing their practices and helping to improve learning. The fact that coaches strengthen their own skills at the same time enriches the transformational journey that occurs when coaches collaborate with colleagues and work towards school wide improvement.

Instructional coaching is not a cookie-cutter model; it is a job-embedded differentiated approach that is individual, personal, and confidential. It underscores the importance that learning takes place every day, all day for every student, teacher, administrator, and coach. An effective model focuses on transferring the professional development that teachers receive to professional learning so that more effective practices can be "embedded" in daily practice with the support that is needed to sustain these practices. Remember, coaching is a promising practice when the entire environment is organized around student and teacher

learning... everyone is a member in a community of learning and practice.

Linda-Darling Hammond and her research show that better prepared teachers are more likely to stay in teaching. That means that we need teacher preparation programs that are effective, relevant, comprehensive, and tied to research. But that's just the start of the process. We need instructional coaches to be the side-by-side practitioner, supporting teachers "on the ground" and where it matters most... in the classroom. We need to make sure that when Jane Hannaway of the Urban Institute says that teachers hit a plateau around four years into teaching and do not get any considerable way to boost their learning after that, that we honor our teachers and reinforce their importance by providing instructional coaches who are prepared, supported, and skilled professionals. Effective coaching models offer recurrent, consistent, and persistent professional development and shift that professional development to professional learning in an environment that values teacher collaboration, shared learning, and ongoing support in a no-risk environment conducive to continuous learning and improvement. That's the coach's role in education.

Sincerely,



PIIC is published by ASCD! ***Instructional Coaching in Action: An Integrated Approach That Transforms Thinking, Practice, and Schools.*** Now available on ASCD.org and Amazon.com!

Lead Like a Pirate

Book Review by Scott Snyder, IU PIIC Mentor, and Sharon Deiling, Dauphin County Technical School Instructional Coach

Coaches lead? Coaches lead like a pirate? Maybe this is not something you would have considered before, but coaches can and do lead in their roles while facilitating change in a building. Most coaches dream of working "to create the kinds of schools where teachers are encouraged and supported to design the

amazing learning experiences kids deserve - experiences that are both rich in content and wildly engaging." There are many lessons coaches can take from *Lead Like a Pirate* by Shelley Burgess and Beth Houf.

"In the final section, 'Be a Better Captain,' Burgess and Houf highlight the need for organizations such as PIIC in the chapter on Professional Learning Networks (PLN)."

Like its companion book, *Teach Like a Pirate*, *Lead Like a Pirate* begins by defining a PIRATE, an acronym for the essential characteristics needed to take

Continued on page 3, Lead Like a Pirate

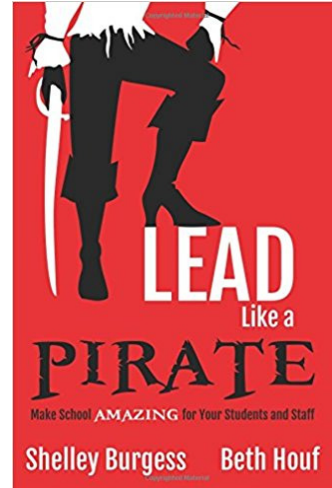
a successful leadership role in education. Burgess and Houf describe ways to find and use our passions, both in and out of school; discuss the need to immerse ourselves in our positions, working side-by-side with teachers; and explain the demand for rapport and trust with our teachers. They acknowledge that the questions we ask and analyze have the ability to lead to the transformation of our schools. None of this can be accomplished without our complete enthusiasm, which can be contagious to our teachers and students.

Burgess and Houf continue their pirate references by discussing “the things we treasure as leaders.” Many of these are not new; they are great reminders of basic ideas which help to move a school forward. From creating a vision, to remembering that “programs don’t teach kids, teachers do; and teachers are capable of making magic happen for kids,” to reminding us to prioritize, these treasures are valuable resources.

Lead Like a Pirate includes a section entitled, “Coach Like a Pirate.” Although intended for principals and other administrators, we can find tips and tricks to improve our coaching conversations. In the final section, “Be a Better Captain,” Burgess and Houf highlight the need for organizations such as PIIC in the chapter on Professional Learning Networks

(PLN). “A PLN is one of the most powerful resources you can build for yourself.” (And, it is one of the cornerstones that makes PIIC so successful!) While there are many insights to be gained throughout, this is potentially the most important lesson for coaches presented in *Lead Like a Pirate*.

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*“A professional learning network (PLN) is one of the most powerful resources you can build for yourself.”
Lead Like a Pirate*

The Critical Role of the Coach In Moving Teacher Practice Forward: A Mentor’s Perspective

By Terri Lewis, IU 13 PIIC Mentor

Teachers often work in isolation. Remember closing your doors and doing your own thing? An administrator may have popped in weekly or monthly but mostly, we were alone. Sure, we had adult conversations at lunch and, if we were lucky, in the hall or at bus duty, but those conversations were more about survival and sanity, not professional growth.

When I first became a literacy coach, I knew nothing about coaching; I never had one myself. I had been an elementary building reading specialist until I was asked to serve as a coach in my building and one other. After a few training days, I was set! The transition in my current building was seamless. Although I wasn’t a coach previously, I knew the teachers and we immediately began to co-plan, co-teach, and model. They made sure I wasn’t giving the new school more days than I was giving them! The other building was different! The teachers there just weren’t really “into it.” I wandered around from classroom to classroom, helped out here

and there, and eventually, we engaged in meaningful, collaborative work.

I believe teachers yearn for adult conversation and true collaboration. Instructional coaching is the perfect opportunity to provide this collaborative environment, IF the conditions are right and there is trust and credibility. These traits must be earned, and that

“Coaches break down the doors of isolation. Changing practice is hard and we cannot do it alone.”

takes time! Trying coaching for a year or judging the “success” of a coaching program after one year is pointless.

As a PIIC coach mentor for the last six years, I’ve worked with new and experienced coaches, those new to their buildings, and those with changed roles. For a few coaches, transitions were seamless; for some, it took months or even a year because it takes time to establish trusting relationships

and build credibility with teachers.

Coaches break down the doors of isolation. Changing practice is hard and we cannot do it alone. With a coach, teachers are not alone when implementing administrative mandates, when trying new strategies, or when struggling with students who seem “stuck.” But, coaching can also be very isolating. In many cases, there is one coach in a school or district. They yearn for collaboration and chances to problem-solve. As a PIIC mentor, I am that collaborator for my coaches, both within and across districts, helping them enhance their practice and ensuring that teachers and coaches are well supported.

In the words of Charles Darwin, *“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.”*

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A Coaching Conversation: The Coach's Role in Education

By Lori McDowell and Justin Rodrigues, Woodland Hills SD Instructional Coaches

As instructional coaches, we have all heard the idea that change happens one conversation at a time.

One afternoon, in a rare opportunity for two coaches from our district to sit down together, we began to reflect on our experiences over the past eight years as coaches in an ever-changing public school system. One of us coaches at an intermediate school while the other coaches at our high school. Although we are in two different buildings, our roles within the school system are very similar.

As coaches, we promote the practice of self-reflection with our colleagues, but often we lack the opportunity to do this ourselves. Our conversation that afternoon immediately took us back to where it all began,

when the concept of coaching was novel to us as well as to the teaching staffs in our schools. We reflected on not only how much our schools have changed, but how we have changed. We also began discussing the big question, "After eight years, what is the coaches' role in our district?"

Our conversation soon ended, as there is always much to do, but the question lingered for us over the days and weeks that followed. When we talked again we both had come to the following conclusions:

- After eight years, coaching is no longer novel; rather it has become a pivotal component of our schools. Teachers have come to rely on the support of instructional coaches as their main source of job-embedded and on-demand professional learning. In our conversation, we realized it is our role as 'data leaders' that have developed most significantly.
- We have grown in our use of one of the key elements of the PIIC Model of Effective Coaching. Instructional coaches play a vital part in collecting, analyzing, and using data to identify student needs and assess changes needed in the classroom.

External pressures have demanded that schools become far more data centered, and we have more data than ever before. However, data collection and analysis do not necessarily translate to effectively educating students. Instructional

coaching is critical because it promotes collaboration between administration and teachers to make informed decisions about instruction based on the collected data.

In the past, data analysis was often viewed as a one-dimensional, odious process that yielded few rewards. Today, instructional coaches use data to determine where to leverage both heavy and light coaching opportunities. The collaborative analysis of multiple sources of data helps both teacher and coach identify the unique needs of individual students and classrooms, opening doors for the BDA cycle. Data-driven decisions include

curriculum pacing, identifying skills and content needs, and creating flexible instructional groups. These decisions start with coaching conversations, which initiate the process of building classrooms that are centered on student needs and teachers

who are equipped to educate effectively and efficiently.

In the end, our own reflective conversation helped reaffirm what we knew, while making us more aware of how we have changed. Ultimately, the coach's role in education is flexible, unique to each situation, and always transformative.

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"Instructional coaching is critical because it promotes collaboration between administration and teachers to make informed decisions about instruction based on the collected data."

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.

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