

PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

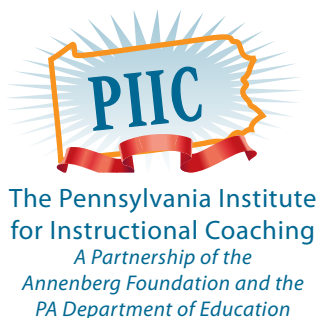
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October 2013
Volume 4 - Issue 1

How Administrators Support Instructional Visits

By Alan N. Johnson, Woodland Hills School District Acting Superintendent



Professional Development Dates

October 29-31, 2013
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

January 8-10, 2013
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

More information
available on our
websites:
www.pacoaching.org

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The range of services provided by instructional coaches is broad. They are truly emerging as key leaders in our schools' efforts to significantly improve the quality of instruction at all levels. That's a significant statement given that five or six years ago, many schools—and school leaders—were eschewing the need and even the value of instructional coaching. That debate, fortunately, is over but the discussion on how best to use and support instructional coaches is still a lively one. In particular, the question of how to

create a framework for instructional visits is one that can present special challenges

for the principal or superintendent who is working to successfully implement coaching. The classroom has always been a private realm. Teachers have always wanted and expected to be given the autonomy of managing their learning environs on their own. Visits by principals, assistant principals and other administrators have always been understood to be a necessary function but just as clearly these were understood to be supervisory in nature.

So how then do we, as the leaders of our schools or districts, establish an environment where classroom visits by instructional coaches are not only accepted but welcomed? There is no single strategy that will achieve this. But there are some easy and common sense strategies you can implement to make this necessary condition a reality. Most importantly, it is critical that there is an understanding by all administrators that we will not violate the sanctity of the teacher-coach relationship. When we say that we will not use feedback and observations made by coaches as any part of our teacher evaluation system, we must mean it and we must reinforce

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that principle regularly. When developing and implementing teacher improvement plans it is important that coaching be offered or suggested but not mandated. Improvement plans are meant to benefit a struggling teacher and they should be cooperatively developed, not imposed. This principle extends to the use of coaches within the general faculty as well. Requiring an arbitrary number of visits by an instructional coach to any or all classrooms effectively makes the coach—intentionally or unintentionally—an instrument of

the building administration and nothing is more certain of engendering resistance and resentment amongst the teaching staff. Just as importantly, it is critical that coaches be included as part

of any building leadership committee. The administrator who consistently shows respect for the coach-teacher relationship and who also includes the instructional coach as part of his/her building leadership team will be taking the two most important steps in building a culture where coaches are not only welcome but invited into the classroom.

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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 many school districts believe that offering professional development to staff members is an effective strategy to strengthen classroom practice, unless the professional development is tied to standards, practice, research, and needs, the endeavor is empty. Since the most important factor contributing to a student's success is the quality of teaching, schools have a responsibility to provide ongoing professional learning that nourishes each teacher's professional growth. This cannot be a once and done/drop-in professional development session. Educators are not professionally "developed." They are professionals who need dedicated time to collaborate, collectively problem-solve, and communicate openly in a no-risk environment that honors each teacher's voice and choice.

I think all educators would agree with the purpose of professional learning... to improve learning for all educators and their students. But, just because a teacher went to college does not mean that s/he doesn't need and want opportunities to continue his/her learning. In fact, that's one of my priorities when I engage in a professional service – the person with whom I am contracting must have evidence of continued learning and experience. That's the

most basic prerequisite I require.

What better way to ensure that professional learning is consistent, effective, relevant, and useful than to support instructional coaches and their work with colleagues?

As an instructional coach educated in the PIIC 4 quadrant framework and working with an IU mentor, your role is to help build capacity in schools, help teachers increase student engagement and share a variety of ways to improve student learning. Coaches are great listeners, skillful questioners, supportive problem-solvers, reflective practitioners, and trusted confidants. Although their major role is to help teachers implement effective instructional practices, they really do much more than what is evaluated by test scores and school wide data.

Coaches really help teachers focus on metacognition, reflective practices, and critical thinking skills. They help teachers reach their full potential by encouraging behavior that grants "permission" to think aloud, practice aloud, and reflect aloud. Where else can teachers practice on each other and elicit feedback from knowledgeable colleagues who are not evaluators, administrators or district staff? How

enlightening it is for teachers to ask questions about practice without feeling uncomfortable or fearful. And, they are being helped to overcome those fears and discomforts in an environment that is collaborative, consultative, and communal.

Coaches work one-on-one and in small groups to help staff develop the knowledge and skills necessary to influence learning. They are insightful practitioners who help staff make data-driven instructional decisions that impact learning. Using evidence-based literacy practices, they ensure that reading, writing, listening, and speaking occur every day in every class with every teacher. They help staff become reflective professionals who want and need feedback in order to make adjustments in teaching. They are "transformers" and engage in a continual cycle of learning and improvement and know that conversations about teaching and learning with students at the center is how effective change takes place. Coaches promote this practice of working, learning, and thinking together. Best wishes for a great coaching year!

Sincerely,

Glen B. Eisenberg

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Talk About Teaching! Leading Professional Conversations

Book Review by Terri Lewis, IU 13 PIIC Mentor

Talk About Teaching! Leading Professional Conversations is a valuable resource for administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers. As most teachers in Pennsylvania transition to a new system of teacher evaluation, questions abound about how to improve instruction and increase student achievement. In order to reach these goals, as teaching is such a complex process, teachers must engage in ongoing professional growth opportunities. This book describes the strong influence of professional conversations in promoting teacher growth.

Although *Talk About Teaching!* is primarily designed to help administrators guide productive conversations around the 22 components of the Framework for Teaching, which will contribute to at least half of each teacher's final evaluation

beginning this year, the book emphasizes the power of professional conversations between not just administrators and teachers, but also between instructional coaches and teachers, and even teachers and peers.

"...we know effective questioning skills are the key to keeping this process collaborative, rather than judgmental."

To ensure conversations are meaningful, Danielson suggests that a shared understanding of the big ideas that constitute effective teaching and promote student learning is critical. The four big ideas she describes in depth are:

- What constitutes important learning?
- What causes learning?
- How are students motivated?
- What is intelligence, and how do students' views influence their actions?

Continued on page 3, Teaching!

If these questions are explored and answered collectively by the school staff, and based on current research, these big ideas can guide professional conversations in a non-threatening manner. Based on these big ideas, topics of conversation could include:

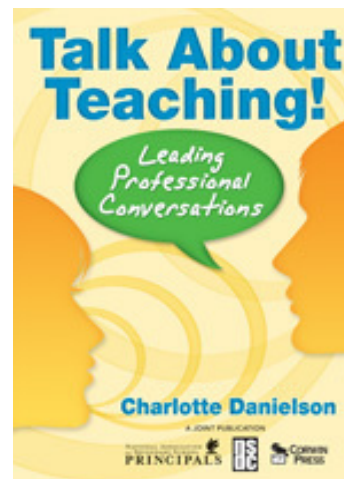
- Clarity of purpose
- Rigorous learning tasks and assignments
- High levels of energy and student engagement
- A safe and challenging environment
- Implementation of school or district initiatives

After a brief classroom visit, an administrator, coach, or colleague can guide the teacher in reflecting on the lesson related to one or several of these topics during an informal professional conversation. As instructional coaches, we know effective questioning skills are the key to keeping this process collaborative, rather than judgmental. *Talk About Teaching!* describes techniques for leading conversations such as promoting thinking, probing, and paraphrasing, as well as suggests guiding questions for each of these topics. The book wraps up with sample activities for schools to start conversations about building trust and the big ideas of teaching and learning.

Coaches, administrators, and teachers alike would benefit from reading this book. *Talk about Teaching!* reminds us

all of the leverage of the professional conversations to push thinking and learning. Regardless of our position in the building, we can all contribute to the growth of students and colleagues. So, let's start talking!

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"Through focused and occasionally structured conversation, teachers are encouraged to think deeply about their work, to reflect on their approaches and student responses."
Talk About Teaching! Leading Professional Conversations

Opening Closed Doors: Partners in Learning

By Cathy S. Groller, Milton Area School District Superintendent

The only profession which still closes its doors and remains in isolation is teaching. How do we effectively and positively change that practice? We know that coaching powerfully impacts teaching and opens those closed doors. In order for this change to occur within our schools, building administrators must willingly commit to learn about the PIIC coaching model, create coach-friendly schedules, and team with the coach to support the coaching process. Once this happens, closed doors will begin to open and instructional change will follow. The principal and the coach become partners in learning.

Teachability. To lead, you must be willing to learn. For the chain of isolation to be broken, the principal must be motivated to seek knowledge about coaching collaboratively with the coach. While the coach and principal travel together on this course of continuous learning, they will develop a shared understanding about coaching. Because of their new learnings, this path will produce

partners who are committed to a unified approach to coaching.

Time. Scheduling the coach is critical. The coach's schedule needs to reflect time to work with teachers, do data analysis, attend data team meetings, and meet regularly with the building administrator. This type of coach's schedule will allow for

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teacher visitation, collaboration, modeling and support. The coach will also be able to disaggregate data to analyze student performance, recommend student interventions and instructional strategies for teachers. The opportunity to meet regularly with the principal ensures a shared understanding about the coach's role and the confidential coaching process.

Team. It is recognized that the principal is the primary instructional leader,

however meaningful support of the coach and the coaching process is necessary for a successful instructional team. The principal and coach need to work in partnership and harmony. When the principal and coach share the school wide vision for improvement, teachers will see that coaching is a focus of importance. This overtly demonstrated behavior by the principal paves the way for positive teacher and coach relationships.

School buildings are complex systems. Coaching in a school building is one of its intricate processes.

Implementing coaching requires a thoughtful and systematic leader who realizes its profound and powerful impact on quality teaching. With the support of the building administrator, coaching eliminates isolation and creates an open environment conducive to learning for all. Opening those closed doors can happen when the principal and coach partner together!

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A Cross-IU Learning Walk

By Missy Petrilak, Evelyn Wassel, Mike Derman, IU PIIC Mentors, and Gen Battisto, Regional Mentor Coordinator (RMC)

As the PIIC mentors advance in their work with instructional coaches, they become a more cohesive team looking to each other for support and solutions. Such was the case when Monroe Career & Technical Institute (MCTI) coaches shared a desire to learn more about Collins Writing with their IU 20 PIIC Mentor. The interest was based on the observation that students from a particular sending school demonstrated superior writing skills when compared with students from other schools which implemented Collins Writing. When efforts to collaborate with that school needed some support, the PIIC mentor team stepped in to fill the void.

Saint Clair School in IU 29 has implemented Collins writing over a three year period. One of their coaches graciously agreed to host a Collins learning walk with her mentor. On May 13, 2013, coaches and teachers from IUs 16 and 20 visited St. Clair School accompanied by their respective mentors and Regional Mentor Coordinator (RMC). The coordinated communications established a clear purpose for the visit. The preparation by the host coach resulted in a schedule which allowed visitors to view Collins writing experiences across grade levels, content areas, and types and purposes of writing. Additionally, the host teachers were receptive to answer visitor questions even though they were sitting in on a live class. For their part, the students exhibited a remarkable focus on their writing, even with the presence of unfamiliar visitors, and responded readily when teachers offered that visitors may question students. The abundance of student work exhibited in classrooms gave glimpses of writing beyond what was currently taking place.

Students were given a prompt for informational writing; in another classroom, students were given a predictive prompt venture about how a story would end, thus making strong connections between their classroom reading and writing. Still another class was asked to compare and contrast the attributes of the heroines in two different books they had read.

Upon reflecting on the effectiveness of a learning walk, consideration should be given to meaningful purpose, planning, orientation, access to information and record of

learning activities. The learning walk was successful across all criteria: the purpose of learning more about Collins writing was clearly formed and communicated to the host; the visit had a defined schedule which was followed and provided the appropriate range of writing experiences; an orientation was provided as the group gathered prior to the visit; and the host provided background on the origin and progress of the program and the accompanying professional development.

Visitors were able to question teachers and students and took notes and photographs to supplement their observations.

An important next step is the follow up of mentors with coaches. Some of this interaction has already begun and will be continued during monthly coach-mentor meetings.

This learning walk is just one example of the power of PIIC to transform various aspects of instruction across the state and that an impetus for advancing instructional improvement is communication and coordination among mentors across IUs.

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"Upon reflecting on the effectiveness of a learning walk, consideration should be given to meaningful purpose, planning, orientation, access to information and record of learning activities."

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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