

# PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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December 2017  
Volume 8 - Issue 2



The Pennsylvania Institute  
for Instructional Coaching  
A Partnership of the  
Annenberg Foundation and the  
PA Department of Education

## Professional Learning Opportunity Dates

January 8-10, 2018  
Penn Stater  
Conference Center  
State College, PA

May 14-16, 2018  
Penn Stater  
Conference Center  
State College, PA

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## Data-Driven Decision Making: Getting a Foot In The Door Proves to be Difficult

By Stacy Ricciotti and Greg Hubler, West Branch SD Instructional Coaches

For four years, our team of two instructional coaches has used our available school-wide data, as well as classroom and survey data, to make decisions regarding who to support for BDA cycles of effective coaching through our work in PIIC. While we've both experienced pockets of success, we continue to struggle, literally, with getting our foot in the door of some classrooms districtwide.

Through reflection and our daily collaboration, we have identified some causes that have contributed to the challenges of working with our colleagues. For example, curriculum and instruction need to be aligned with the expectations required for the state assessments. Many classrooms still focus on the "covering of content" instead of the learning that is actually taking place.

Some departments have adopted new software, textbooks,

or eTextbooks--and that's in addition to multiple district initiatives. Finally, some barriers still remain in terms of resistance in working through a BDA cycle, with an instructional coach, despite participation in many ongoing study groups and multiple offerings for one-on-one work. While some of these factors are outside of our control, as instructional coaches, we always need to search for what we CAN control--a new route.

Adult learners mostly want to know, "What's in it for me?" If we can grapple with answers to that question and drill down to the specificity of each teacher, one-on-one coaching may be our answer. That's how we will differentiate our support to teachers.

Reflection is key. What has worked with that department? What hasn't worked? What are they using in terms of software, hardware, textbooks,

eTextbooks, articles, and materials? What has been communicated by administration in terms of expectations and goals for the year? How can we support teachers using these resources?

We don't have all of the answers, but we are spending time reflecting to see where we can make an entry point into some of the "hot spots" where we see a district level need. That's how we can be the most impactful as instructional coaches. We think our work and the answers to our own questions rest heavily in the data and reflection quadrants, working one-on-one with teachers, and focusing on evidence based literacy practices.

As we've seen time and time again, one foot in the door can lead to many more steps down the road to BDA cycles of effective coaching. Once teachers can see the individual benefits to working with a coach, it can lead to

longstanding peer coaching relationships. This leads teachers to strengthen their practices, increase student engagement, and improve student learning--which is truly PIIC's mission.

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*"We think our work and the answers to our own questions rest heavily in the data and reflection quadrants, working one-on-one with teachers, and focusing on evidence-based literacy practices."*

PIIC would like to  
wish everyone a  
very happy and  
healthy New Year!

**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

*"No problem can withstand the assault of sustained thinking" (Voltaire).*

At first glance, that almost sounds intimidating! It is, however, the mantra of instructional coaches, mentors, and other school leaders. Bringing teachers together to discuss issues of concern and collectively problem-solving is how change takes place. When collaboration is the norm and talking about practice is routine, teachers and students thrive. It takes multiple opportunities and deliberate, intentional planning to talk about practice in a non-evaluative environment that honors the teachers' voices and respects the partnerships between and among teaching colleagues. As learning and thought partners, working together to resolve challenges and encouraging risk-taking is quite an effective way to ensure that conversation is ongoing and factors that prohibit learning are addressed.

In various publications, Elizabeth City and Richard Elmore mention common features that help define problems of practice. Coaches need to work with teachers to determine if the issue is a collective one or an individual one, a resolvable condition, or a problem of practice that needs to engage others for an outcome to be found. With limited time for instructional coaches to meet with their teaching colleagues, it is imperative that the "problem of practice" is something that will make a difference in student and teacher learning.

1. Does the "problem" focus on instruction and issues? Instructional

or systemic issues are problems that involve the interactions of teachers, students, system leaders, schools, and communities.

2. Is the "problem" observable? A problem of practice must be practical and not theoretical. While theory may be used to support the examination of the problem, the problem itself must be directly observable.
3. Is there reason to take action? In other words, is this an issue we can control or have influence in making changes?
4. Is there a broader strategy of a collective school wide improvement plan or a school wide action plan where this "problem" can be discussed and goals identified to help address the issue?
5. Is the problem high stakes? Solving a problem of practice would make a significant difference for improving student learning or building teacher capacity.

The balance is delicate... what happens if a coach thinks a problem of practice is minor while the teacher thinks the problem is almost insurmountable? That's where meeting in the "before" is critical. This is a time where the coach and teacher can discuss the issues that are facing the teacher and engage in ongoing conversations that uncover the root causes and issues that are preventing the teacher's practice from moving forward. It is a time when a coach and teacher discuss beliefs, student outcomes, teacher practices, data collection and use, and student engagement. It is a time for

individual reflection, collective thinking, and collaborative partnerships that promote the notion of colleagues working together towards a common goal.

To help unravel and resolve problems of practice, coaches share appropriate protocols that focus on issues, encourage discussion, promote questioning, and determine actions that will ultimately help those involved come to a workable conclusion. These protocols are, "... structured processes and guidelines to promote meaningful, efficient communication, problem solving, and learning. Protocols give time for active listening and reflection, and ensure that all voices in the group are heard and honored" (National School Reform Faculty) and promote collaboration and open communication necessary for addressing problems of practice.

In a safe environment, teachers are more likely to discuss promising practices and potential pitfalls. They are more likely to share their thoughts, fears, hopes, goals, and expectations when they feel their voices are respected and issues recognized. This, of course, happens without the coach offering advice and solutions; this happens when the coach asks relevant, specific, timely, and non-judgmental questions that result in the teacher becoming more metacognitive about implementing effective instructional practices.

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!

## ***Instructional Coaching in Action: An Integrated Approach that Transforms Thinking, Practice, and Schools***

Book Review by Sondra Humenansky and Melissa Petrilak, IU PIIC Mentors

Productive and successful educator-centered instructional coaching programs are not designed and implemented overnight. It is a process that involves finding the right people, resources, and time to devote to this educational endeavor. Additionally, the school

***"The book is carefully crafted to provide both a balance of theory and practicality..."***

climate and culture must be ready to embrace a philosophy that targets change and promising ongoing teacher professional development. To ease with the transition into coaching and help schools implement an effective instructional coaching model, the book, *Instructional Coaching in Action: An Integrated*

*Continued on page 3, Instructional Coaching in Action*

*Approach That Transforms Thinking, Practice, and Schools*, is a must-read for individuals and schools making this decision. The book relates decades of experiences and promising practices around instructional coaching. *Instructional Coaching in Action* highlights twelve years of principles, pragmatics, and praxis fostered by the work of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI), the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC), and the educational research compiled by two researchers who co-authored the book.

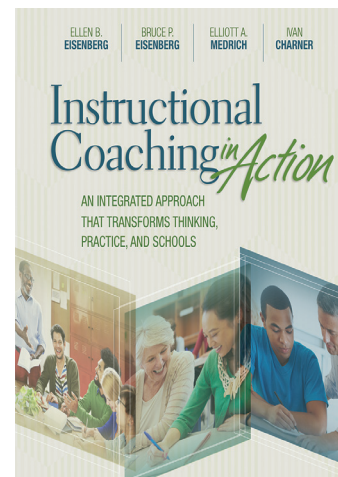
*Instructional Coaching in Action* is a plethora of valuable resources and insights designed for those schools interested in implementing an educator-centered instructional coaching program. The book is carefully crafted to provide both a balance of theory and practicality as one of its authors, Ellen Eisenberg, shares her trials and tribulations as an instructional coach. There are many tips for schools starting their journey as well as for those schools growing an existing model of instructional coaching.

Both coaches and administrators will appreciate the detailed information contained in the first four chapters of the book related to both the key elements of instructional coaching model and the Before-During-After (BDA) coaching cycle.

School stakeholders will also find the ten key conditions for implementing a successful instructional coaching program in chapter five most beneficial as it addresses the common areas that can often derail an effective rollout of an initiative. How an instructional mentor, the coach's coach, helps support instructional coaching is a valuable component of the support system included in the book.

Co-author Ellen Eisenberg cites, "Coaching is like an arranged marriage; teachers cannot choose coaches and vice-versa." This book should be in all professional libraries to help in the process and provide guidance in the transition, tailoring instructional coaching to serve the professional needs of educators.

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## Patience and Data: Keys to Being Non-Evaluative!

By Andy Gavalis, IU 29 PIIC Mentor, and Heather Frank, North Schuylkill SD Instructional Coach

Being non-evaluative is difficult! When we witness positive changes in practice, it is difficult to hold back the praise. It is also difficult to be non-evaluative when teachers are looking for reassurance in situations where the change is not immediate. Heather Frank has expressed this when she coached teachers as they created differentiated groups in their classrooms. She honed in on two key aspects of coaching that help to overcome this problem of practice—collecting data and being patient.

### Heather's story:

With a focus on differentiated flexible grouping, many teachers seek coaching when developing groups and differentiating activities. Coaching around grouping techniques is a positive coaching interaction; a coach shows teachers where to get the data and through the BDA cycle, discusses how to use it. Once a teacher has the data and understands how to read it, the grouping process follows. The difficulty comes when teachers need to design differentiated activities to meet the needs of the groups. Teachers seek praise and acknowledgement that what

they're doing is "right" and want to know immediately if their grouping is effective. The effects of the groupings, however, are not immediate. As a coach, we want to validate teachers so they continue moving forward. But, as we in PIIC know, we must remain non-evaluative, explaining what we notice through collected classroom data that has been decided upon in the "before" conversation. The data need to do the "talking."

***"Developing and using strong data tools may give the teachers and students a sense that they are making progress toward achieving their goals."***

Developing and using strong data tools may give teachers and students a sense that they are making progress toward achieving their goals. For instance, record-keeping assessing student progress in groups is imperative. As a coach, we can utilize tools that have been discussed in the "before" that help students achieve the goals of the lesson. Those conversations are what

drives changes in classroom practice. In addition, a coach can also provide a second set of eyes to help the teachers determine if the class goals were met, especially since group work requires teachers to move around the room constantly; the coach and teacher discuss how each can facilitate the group progress. This data collection is non-evaluative and the coach must remind the teacher that differentiation does not show an impact overnight. Grouping students does not automatically translate into improved achievement. The long-term effects are what matter most.

As we can see from Heather's story, being non-evaluative is imperative. Showing patience is necessary when being non-evaluative. Additionally, data collection over multiple BDA cycles becomes necessary for facilitating deep reflection, which is the best way to remain non-evaluative while still showing the impact of new instructional practices.

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# Problem of Practice: Instructional Coaching and TDA Prompts

By Teri Everett, IU 9 PIIC Mentor

One problem for instructional coaches (IC) is making the implicit explicit. What is obvious to the instructional coach may not be so obvious to the teacher. When an implicit issue arises, how does the instructional coach turn that issue into an explicit or obvious issue to be addressed?

The BDA cycle of coaching is an effective way to begin the coaching interaction. In the *before* session the teacher and coach discuss the intended outcomes, roles, and data collection for the *during* and the date of the *after*.

The visit occurs and they meet for their *after* conversation. The teacher was unsatisfied with the student responses, realizing that the responses were a summary with subtle inferences, not reaching the intended outcomes. The IC questioned the teacher, *"What changes in the instruction would assist in teaching students to analyze rather than summarize?"* The answer was clear to the IC but not to the teacher; however, the IC cannot give the answer. The two decided that the IC would visit the class during the lesson on TDA prompt responses and make notes on their agreed upon data collection goal.

The IC discovered that the teacher's modeling did not address how to analyze a piece of text nor teach the difference between explicit and implicit details. **PROBLEM ALERT!!!** *How does the IC change the thought process of this teacher's instruction without telling the teacher what to do?*

Fortunately, the IC knew how to question the teacher to reflect on the instructional practice and establish what needed to be adjusted to improve the student responses. Then, the IC modeled how to align the instruction highlighting the difference between explicit and implicit details by taking the teacher through a TDA prompt using a close read of a picture. The teacher discovered that the instruction given during the initial lesson did not truly include enough explanation around analysis to enable the students to move beyond inferencing and summarizing. This AHA moment

turned into the next BDA cycle for the IC and teacher.

The IC should not just make the obvious stand out without the teacher's awareness of the problem. The IC needs to be able to question in a non-evaluative manner. The teacher, through the reflection of the lesson, should discover the issue and discuss how to resolve the problem. After all, if instructional coaching is the way to make change to improve instruction, what better way to do so than by modeling the desired outcome and mirroring the student experience as a learner?

***"After all, if instructional coaching is the way to make change to improve instruction, what better way to do so than by modeling the desired outcome and mirror the student experience as a learner?"***

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## 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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