

June 2011  
Volume 1 - Issue 3

Professional Development Dates:

July 25-27, 2011  
Penn Stater Conference Center  
State College, PA

October 17-19, 2011  
Penn Stater Conference Center  
State College, PA

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*Instructional coaches provide professional development for teachers and school leaders focused on refining classroom practices, increasing student engagement, and improving student achievement.*



Connecting Students with Relevant Literacy Projects: a 21st Century Approach

By Chris Caton, IU 3 PIIC Mentor

When I was a student in junior high school, a science teacher began a program with my class that required each of us to write a letter to another student across the state to discuss current events in science. We hoped that another letter would come in reply to ours. After a few weeks, letters began to arrive. Most of us received a reply to that first letter, and many even received a reply on the second round. But, very soon, the letters stopped coming and the project fizzled. As I look back now, I think of all of the things that were right about this project. Yet in some ways, it failed to gain traction. While the project’s concept wasn’t the problem, perhaps the only real issue was the century in which it was taught. Could such a project be more successful in developing literacy skills by using the technology available today?

*“Increased student interaction and engagement in well-designed literacy activities can be the key to unlock student achievement.”*

My childhood science teacher focused on literacy across the curriculum, relevance, and social interaction, but his downfall turned out to be “snail mail.” 21st century teaching tools should inspire us as educators to look back at the fantastic ideas that fell short and realize their potential through the technology available today. Two coaches with whom I am currently working are helping to move this effort forward in their districts with projects that build social bridges through technology while cultivating literacy and increasing student achievement.

At Allegheny Valley School District, third grade students composed letters to pen pals in North Dakota. With the support of the school’s coach, Megan Cicconi, they continued their

conversation through Edublogs, an online tool that allowed students to blog with their pen pals across the United States. Finally, the pen pals ‘met’ one another through an interactive videoconference where they read their favorite poems to their new-found friends face-to-face. Within the few periods spent on this project, students mastered letter writing formats, improved grammar, practiced peer review editing, discussed author’s purpose, identified point of view, and engaged in public speaking to an audience of 50. While improving literacy skills was the purpose of this activity, students also gained an increase in self confidence and enthusiasm for the subject.

The coach at Penn Hills School District, Brian Brown, is leading his school in a project called “The Irish Book

Club.” This is a video conference that puts a class of students in Northern Ireland face-to-face with students from Pittsburgh to discuss Irish Literature. The motivation for learning grows from the interaction and collaboration that is created through the video conference format. Discussing books becomes the real life social experience that it should be and a culture that exists an ocean away becomes real to students.

Reading doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It works best when it is a social endeavor, and the use of technology allows real time interaction in new and different ways within the classroom and around the world. Increased student interaction and engagement in well-designed literacy activities can be the key to unlock student achievement. Technology can be one way to break down the barriers and link students together in real time, doing real reading.

Featuring:

Letter from PIIC’s Executive Director .....	p. 2
Professional Development...What a Novel Thought!.....	p. 2
Book Review- Literacy, Technology, and Diversity: Teaching for Success in Changing Times.....	p. 3
Literacy in Today’s Classrooms.....	p. 4

## Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

How learning has changed; my parents thought that color television was a miracle! With only one television, we all crowded around to see our favorite shows. Heaven help us if we argued about which show to watch. We thought we had finally “arrived” when my mother brought home an LP album by a Beatles look alike/sound alike group. What would she say about today’s more efficient technology?

Certainly technology has changed our world and our understanding of modernization. Textbooks, cassette recorders, and record players have been supplemented by e-books, MP3 players, the Internet, and iPads...all tools for the progressive thinkers among us. In fact, our definition of literacy has evolved... *“Our concept of literacy has been based on the assumption that print is the primary carrier of information in our culture and that the most important skills are those that enable students to understand and express themselves in text. The new definition of literacy is based on a different assumption: that digital technology is rapidly becoming a primary carrier of information and that the broader means of expression this technology makes possible are*

*now critical for education. Text literacy is necessary and valuable, but no longer sufficient.”* (Meyer, A., & Rose, D. H., (2000). Learning to read in the computer age [Online]).

So, how does digital technology fit into our world? Many years ago, introducing the computer in schools promised that student achievement would improve. Of course, test scores were not the barometer of student (or teacher) success. There was even a threat that computers would someday take over a teacher’s role in the classroom, leaving very little face-to-face interaction between students and their teachers. Happily, that scenario never became a reality.

Educators have learned a great deal about technology and the electronic communities of learning. We are beginning to understand the nuances of differentiated learning for both students and their teachers and the support that digital learning provides. We are moving in the direction that connecting to the Internet and collaborating with classrooms across the sphere is the educational revolution we have been waiting to embrace. The transformation, however, is not complete.

What has not come a long way is our failing test scores and the opportunity for teachers to work together in meaningful ways. Drop-in professional development, insufficient teacher resources, out-of-date teacher preparation programs, and unenlightened policy makers have negatively impacted schools and school funding. How can we prepare students with 21st century skills and prepare them for a competitive, global, literate society if funding for programs is not available?

Online learning, synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, and teleconferencing are technological advancements and investments for our country’s future. Let’s ensure that every student and teacher has access to a variety of tools, literacy and technology based, that will allow them to become competitive in their work, school, and lives.

Best wishes for a wonderful summer.

Sincerely,



## Professional Development for All... What a Novel Thought!

By Joe Ginotti, Director, Penn Literacy Network

Last week, my daughter – an eighth grader at a well-respected middle school in New Jersey – informed me that she had three days off for state testing.

“Who’s testing?” I asked. “Juniors.” “So you’re off, why?” “Teacher in-service.”

I was relieved. I’m not sure why grades 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12 were off for juniors testing three hours a day, but for three days dedicated to teacher professional development, I was on-board. “Yeah,” she laughed. “Mr. J., my science teacher, said he was practicing his thumb-twiddling. He said these days are always a total waste.”

My heart sank – for Mr. J. (by all accounts, a truly beloved teacher), for the school, for my daughter, and...for me! I thought my giggling daughter knew what I did for a living – provide professional development for teachers. But should I really be surprised? The explosion in brain research in the last twenty years has informed our practice more than anything developed in the past two hundred, but do

educators know it, apply it, embrace it? Teacher surveys have consistently answered *some*, *a little*, and *not really*. What’s “new” has seldom been popular in our profession; “this, too, shall pass,” an oft used refutation. The result – schools that continue to fail or underperform, a system consistently savaged by media and politicians – is hardly surprising. No, the status quo is really no longer an option: if we know how kids learn best and methods that match, teachers must be informed and practice must change.

What does the research say works?

- *Student-centered classrooms* where literacy builds engagement central to learning all content. Where students read, write, talk, collaborate and reflect on facts, concepts, and applications.
- *Knowledge-centered classrooms* where students understand not only what is being taught, but why. Where teachers deliberately build on prior knowledge and strive to help students understand the connections of content to their world and their lives.
- *Assessment-centered classrooms* built around on-

*Continued on page 3, PD*

going formative assessment that informs instructional practice, guides student learning, and is strongly linked to pre-designed summative assessments.

- *Reflection-centered classrooms* where research-based literacy skills and study skills are explicitly taught, nurtured, and held accountable as students learn how to learn in all content areas.

The key to implementation is also clear:

- *Long-term, focused professional development in literacy and learning* that builds common language, teacher collaboration and a focus on the consistent practice and refinement of research-based instructional strategies in all content areas.
- *Instructional coaching* that nurtures practice, builds community, encourages reflection, and embeds professional development to foster long-term success.
- *Informed, inspired and distributed leadership* to guide, support, and celebrate exemplary instruction and student achievement.

It seems simple, practical even, yet not easy. Knowing what works is only the beginning: commitment, energy, foresight, funding, and community-building are essential. So, too, is a renewed understanding that even the best teachers can improve; that all teachers require continued professional learning to reflect on practice, collaborate with peers and refine our craft. It has been my pleasure to see first-hand what such an enterprise can accomplish. The partnership of the Penn Literacy Network (PLN), the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI), and, now, the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC) has positively touched the practice of hundreds of educators across the Commonwealth to the benefit of thousands of students. Embracing the importance of literacy as a foundation, of collaboration as necessity, of leadership as vital, the creative forces of these organizations have helped keep the focus on what matters most: quality instruction for all children. It's the one factor on which all educators, parents and students can agree – even thumb-twiddler extraordinaire, Mr. J.

Please access PIIC's newest online resource, ***The Instructional Coaching Resource Guide:***  
[www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org](http://www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org)

## Literacy, Technology and Diversity: Teaching for Success in Changing Times

Book Review By Tammy Miller, Chestnut Ridge High School Coach

Aligning technology and literacy to improve student achievement is a hot topic for 21st century educators, particularly for instructional coaches who support all 21st century educators. *Literacy, Technology and Diversity: Teaching for Success in Changing Times* is a book well worth the read. Co-authored by respected researchers Jim Cummins, Kristen Brown, and Dennis Sayers, the book offers pedagogy for implementing literacy instruction appropriate for an increasingly diverse 21st century society. The authors' perspective on technology use in schools is that without a strong emphasis on both content and cognition, the potential power of technology tools is trivialized and does not evoke higher-order thinking and critical literacy.

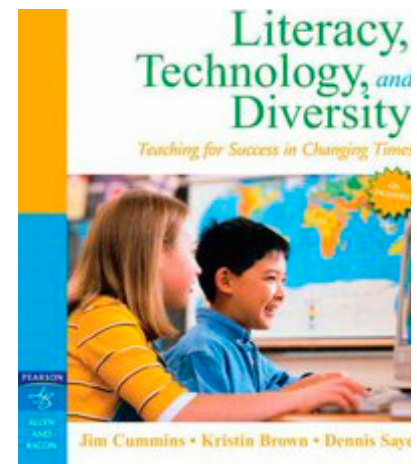
The book is organized into three sections; Changing Times, Changing Schools; From Literacy to Multiliteracies; and Imagining Educational Futures. Part I, Changing Times, Changing Schools examines the actual scientific basis, or lack thereof, for literacy policies which currently exist in schools throughout the United States. The authors examine the impact of poverty on school achievement, the

pedagogical challenges being created by globalization and technological change, how high-stake tests are insensitive to the outcomes of powerful pedagogy, and how, thus far, technology has done little to result in improved student achievement.

In my opinion, the book's major strength is contained in the second section, From Literacy to Multiliteracies. This segment contains vignettes from classes in global learning networks in which teachers and students employed technology as an integral part of collaborative learning opportunities over long distances. The projects reviewed document how technology integrated classroom practices can address and resolve the pedagogical challenges previously outlined. The chapters in this portion of the book highlight the experiences of teachers and student, and often their families and communities, engaged in educational projects in which technology served as a powerful amplifier for student achievement.

In the final section, the authors move beyond a discussion of the limitations of the current educational system

and provide thought provoking arguments for rethinking how literacy and technology can align to increase student achievement. Discussion questions for study groups are provided to continue the conversation, a great tool for an instructional coach!



*"We have moved from an era where print dominated the literacy landscape to one where multiple forms of electronic communication are inseparable from literacy development."*

*-Literacy, Technology, and Diversity: Teaching for Success in Changing Times*



# Literacy in Today's Classrooms

By Cheryl Capozzoli, Educational Consultant/Instructional Technology Specialist

If someone asked you to define literacy and if you recognized it, how would you respond? Traditionally, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), defines literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. A level at which a person speaks, shares, interprets, and makes meaningful connections to learning content is one who demonstrates various forms of literacy development.

In today's growing technologically enhanced world, we digitally consume much of what we learn as it becomes the norm in how we interact with content. One might assume that increased interaction with digital content will lead to guaranteed heightened levels of relevant student engagement, meaningful learning progression, and increased depths of knowledge, understanding, competency and skill. Taking for granted the digital skill sets of the so-called "Digital Natives" have proven to be inaccurate and costly for many institutions. Although students' social aptitudes are heightened, they are often unable to rely solely on those skills to produce quality levels of skill competency and content mastery artifacts. Educators must help bridge social digital skills and core literacy skills by learning how to relevantly link familiar tools to meaningful learning experiences.

When deciding what digital tools to use, purpose and goal are critical. Simply using a digital tool because it's "cool" serves no relevant purpose. How and when to use this tool effectively is equally as important. Teachers must identify the essential learning progressions and outcomes for all student learning activities. Content should be supported and enhanced by the instructional technology approaches and resources and not disrupted by a distracting bell or whistle. Many reliable online Web 2.0 resources can offer students extended learning opportunities outside of the

brick and mortar classrooms, and offer 24/7 access to collaborative learning experiences. Many of these resources are shared below, but again, they are just resources and will not change practice if not used appropriately.

**Reading** - Resources like *CK12 FlexBooks*, *Project Gutenberg*, *Lit2Go*, *BookGlutton*, *Epub Books*, and *Meegenius* provide interactive online learning content as well as ways for students to interact with text in more socially dynamic and collaborative ways. *Visuwords* and *Eyeplorer* offer quality interactive online dictionaries.

**Writing** – Going beyond Blogs, Wikis and Google Docs. *Mixbook* and *Kerpoof* offer creative ways to build fun authentic writing artifacts. Others include: *Zotero*, a free browser add on that's an easy-to-use tool to help students collect, organize, cite, and share research sources; *Scribd* and *Calameo* to create writing work and library for any device with amazing options for written and audio text; and *Flashcard Exchange*, students can create and share study notes and partners for tough topics.

**"Educators must help bridge social digital skills and core literacy skills by learning how to relevantly link familiar tools to meaningful learning experiences."**

**Speaking and Listening** – Podcasts are great for allowing students time to listen to or create course content. *Audacity* provides a great way for students and teachers to record audio and share the results in many formats. *Jing* is another tool that allows for computer screencasts accompanied by voiceovers. With *Voxopop*, students can create audio based online discussion forums. *Audiotool* can create original sound clips like a professional. *iTunesU* has an amazing collection of free online podcasts for tough topics and college level educational lectures and demonstrations.

Remember, educational technology resources must support the ongoing development of "LITERACY" in all contexts. We must strengthen literacy through multiple means and increased levels of quality access to technology.

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