

PIIC News

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Professional Development Dates:

October 29-31, 2012
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

January 7-9, 2013
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

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Instructional coaches provide professional development for teachers and school leaders focused on classroom practices to increase student engagement and improve student learning



The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching
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Reflection Between an RMC and a Mentor

By Kathy Gori, Regional Mentor Coordinator (RMC), and Jeremy Gabborin, IU 28 PIIC Mentor

One of the benefits of the PIIC model is that the RMC or mentor can help to deepen the reflection of the practitioner through a series of probing questions. The following is an excerpt from a reflective conversation between an RMC and a PIIC mentor:

RMC: When you think about the coaches you work with and the teachers they support, what practices have changed as a result of instructional coaching throughout the course of the 2011-2012 school year?

Mentor: The biggest change I've seen has been to the level of confidence my coaches have in their own abilities to affect change. Over the course of the year, they have found that not only are they equipped to work with other teachers, but that other teachers are welcoming the opportunity.

"Teachers are realizing that coaching can have a genuine benefit for their students without being a threat to the teachers..."

RMC: How do you see the confidence of the coaches and the willingness of the teachers to work with them relating a change in the school culture?

Mentor: I think it has to do with two things. One: Teachers are realizing that coaching can have a genuine benefit for their students without being a threat to the teachers; and Two: We have worked hard to present coaching as a "sharing" opportunity between equals.

RMC: It sounds like the teachers are seeing the benefits of instructional coaching. Tell me more about what you've seen with administrators and with students.

Mentor: I think the same cultural changes are happening across the board. The administrators are also starting to see where the benefits lie in

instructional coaching. They are learning to utilize their coaches as teacher leaders, and to depend on them to turn around what they are learning to provide professional development within the school. For the students, I think they appreciate the benefit of having new ideas and new methods of engaging in learning. Overall, the responses I've seen have been positive. During classroom visits, I've seen students being very actively engaged.

RMC: What will be your next steps as we transition into next school year?

Mentor: Getting ready for next year, we are utilizing our time at our monthly coaches' meetings to plan where we go from here. Two of the ideas we are working on are having the coaches take a lead in bringing PLCs to their schools and working to implement Learning Walks as a way of, as I said before, sharing between equals.

RMC: How can I support you?

Mentor: I think the things you can do to help me moving forward would be to help me find and develop resources, suggest strategies, advise me on what you have seen work in other schools, and together, meet with administrators to continue building deeper support for PIIC in these schools.

The PIIC model provides a bridge to deeper reflective practice. Through the nonjudgmental support of the RMC and mentor, the practitioner feels comfortable enough to genuinely examine his/her experiences and practices, moving past "safe" surface-level responses.

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Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

The May issue of *Educational Leadership* (Vol.68 No. 8) is devoted to supporting, sustaining and helping new teachers become effective practitioners. Three areas mentioned in the issue that are critical for teacher development are providing effective teacher preparation programs, supporting teachers with coaching, and creating a collaborative culture of teaching. As Linda Darling-Hammond suggests (EL, p. 18), "... teaching well not only requires subject matter expertise, pedagogical skills, and an understanding of student psychology, but it also demands the ability to keenly observe and respond to what each of 30 students is doing, saying, and meaning - individually and collectively." New teachers cannot be expected to manage and lead as they step into their own classrooms for the first time alone; veterans, too, benefit from working with colleagues in ways that help them become more effective educators in a non-threatening environment. Coaches are the perfect catalysts to help teachers "tweak" their performance and improve their instructional habits.

Schools and districts must recognize and emphasize the importance of continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning. Teachers must

have "on the job" learning that helps them improve their practices, increase their knowledge, and augment their skill set. They must be given multiple opportunities to think about their own practices and collaborate with their colleagues. Graduating from college with a teaching degree is not enough to ensure that teachers are meeting the needs of a diverse population. We need to engage teachers in a systemic approach to improve student learning and provide ample time for teachers to learn and practice together.

One essential element for improved teacher practice is the ability for teachers to think about their own teaching and to discuss their instructional routines with other colleagues. As defined by Schön, "...reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline (1996)." It means that teachers working with instructional coaches have a wonderful opportunity to make their practice visible to a non-evaluative colleague who has experience and skill in the same working environment. It means coaches and teachers collaborating and working together to demonstrate

how their teaching relates to student learning in a no-risk setting. It means coaches helping teachers really become reflective practitioners who practice with each other and enlist colleagues in professional conversations around improving student learning, refining instructional practices, and increasing student engagement.

Instructional coaching is not just being a resource provider or being a data analyst. It's all about understanding both student and adult learning strategies and communicating with colleagues. It's about reflecting on one's own classroom customs and routines, identifying effective instructional habits, and making changes based on what worked well in the classroom. Instructional coaches build trust with their ongoing, one-on-one support to teachers in all content areas with the primary goal of helping teachers examine their actions and making adjustments where needed. Thank you, coaches, for all you do to help change the landscape of teaching and learning.

Have a great summer! See you in September.

Allen B. Eisenberg

Please access PIIC's online resource, *The Instructional Coaching Resource Guide*:
www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org

My Reflection on Change

By Tara Young, Sun Valley High School Instructional Coach

Last spring, I found out that I would be going back into the classroom part time because my district had lost funding. At that time, I reflected on my work as a full-time secondary instructional coach and tried to envision what the world of part-time coaching would entail. I am a "planner," so I felt that as long as I had a plan, I would be successful. I prioritized my coaching responsibilities and made a plan outlining my goals for coaching for the 2011-12 school year. My plan, it turns out, was too ambitious.

Part-time coaching has been one of the most difficult

professional changes that I have experienced over my twelve-year career in education. As a full-time coach, I was very busy, but I had the time and flexibility to plan, implement, and reflect carefully for each of the coaching opportunities with teachers. One of the reasons the transition has been a difficult one is because I had to learn how to coach in the **B, D, A** cycle all over again. The **Before** became a quick conversation in the faculty room

during lunch. The **During** became, "Stop by my room first period; I'm using that strategy." And the **After** became a quick email checking back to make sure the teacher "got it." I no longer had the luxury to work around a teacher's

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schedule because I had one of my own—preparing lessons, grading papers, etc. I could not always be there when a teacher wanted or needed to work with me. Needless to say, I realized that no matter what my plan was or what goals I set, part-time coaching was an entirely different ballgame.

Through my own reflection, I chalked this year up to a learning experience that will make me a more successful part-time coach next year. My goals and my measure of “successful coaching” that were set this year were unrealistic and were still based on a full-time model. It has taken me the whole year to create a workable vision for my job as a part-time coach. I now know how to schedule conversations with teachers to benefit from the **B, D, A** cycle in a part-time environment. I also know alternate ways to share learning among teachers. As an agent of change, this experience reminded me that change is sometimes uncomfortable but necessary. Reflection is vital in recognizing what is working and what needs to be revisited to bring about success.

Where Am I Losing Them?

By Jeremy Gabborin
IU 28 PIIC Mentor

Taking a reflective look at the root causes of low engagement can bring your students back to a place where they can effectively learn.

•**Is it real?** Does this content matter to my students?

•**Is it accessible?** Do my students have prior knowledge and skill needed to make sense of this material?

•**Am I providing positive feedback?** Is my feedback constructive?

•**Am I motivating them?** What am I doing to help my students want to get involved in their own learning?

•**Can they succeed?** How am I giving my students opportunities for success?

•**What’s the big picture?** Is my class an inviting place?

Focus Beyond Pretty Good

Book Review by Brandy Sheneman, IU 9 PIIC Mentor

As a new mentor, I reflect upon how I can grow and learn within my role; how I can better assist coaches in their daily responsibilities; and how I can help coaches provide teachers with meaningful job embedded professional development. The following poem by Charles Osgood helped me become a more reflective practitioner:

Pretty Good

There once was a pretty good student, who sat in a pretty good class; who was taught by a pretty good teacher, who always let pretty good pass –

He wasn’t terrific at reading. He wasn’t a whiz bang at math; but for him education was leading straight down a pretty good path.

He didn’t find school too exciting, but he wanted to do pretty well; and he did have some trouble with writing, and no one had taught him to spell.

When doing arithmetic problems, pretty good was regarded as fine –

5 plus 5 needn’t always add up to be 10, a pretty good answer was 9. The pretty good class that he sat in was part of a pretty good school; and

the student was not the exception; on the contrary, he was the rule.

The pretty good student, in fact, was part of a pretty good mob; and the first time he knew that he lacked was when he looked for a pretty good job. It was then, when he sought a position, he discovered that life could be tough –

And he soon had a sneaking suspicion;

“...Schmoker emphasizes that we, as professionals, learn and retain information best when we have a chance to evaluate or think about it... Students also deserve the same opportunity; however, they need to see analysis, evaluation and reflection modeled by teachers within all content areas.”

pretty good might not be good enough.

The pretty good town in our story was part of a pretty good state, which had pretty good aspirations, and prayed for a pretty good fate.

There once was a pretty good nation, pretty proud of the greatness it had, which learned much too late, if you want to be great, pretty good is, in fact, pretty bad.

Wow! The poem forced me to reflect upon my teaching career. Was I just a pretty good teacher in a pretty good school? Was I a fool who thought “pretty good was enough”? I hope and pray that I was the exception and not the rule. In the moments where I felt like an exceptional teacher, I know that I took time to reflect upon lessons, questioning techniques, and students’ responses and suggestions.

To prevent falling into the “pretty good” trap, Mike Schmoker’s book, *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*, forces educators to honestly reflect upon three elements.

1. What We Teach. This is a set of “power standards” that is selected by a team within a district that is actually taught. Teaching to the set of “power standards” allows educators to teach with sufficient depth and adequate time for deep reading, writing, and talking.

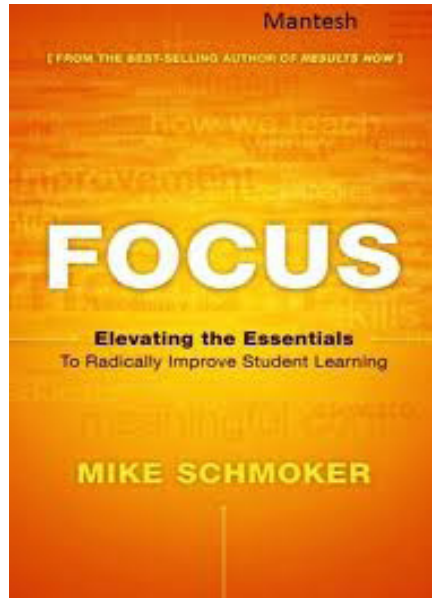
2. How We Teach. This is preparing and employing structurally sound lessons that ensure all students are learning each segment of the lesson before moving onto the next step.

3. Authentic Literacy. Simply, this is purposeful and/or argumentative reading, writing, and talking in all subject areas.

According to Schmoker, implementing the three elements is most effective when teachers work in teams. Teachers must be members of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) where curriculum and lessons are continuously developed, tested, and refined based on summative and formative assessment results (p. 11). To be productive valuable members of Professional Learning Communities, teachers must first be reflective practitioners. They must hold fierce conversations with themselves addressing: what they teach; how they teach; and if they are providing authentic literacy opportunities. Teachers who attend PLC meetings prepared to honestly discuss their strengths and weaknesses will lead the PLC into deep meaningful conversations where “power standards” can be identified and where curriculum and lessons can be reviewed objectively. Becoming a reflective practitioner prevents ego and resistance from entering a Professional Learning Community.

Throughout *Focus*, Schmoker emphasizes that we, as professionals, learn and retain information best when we have a chance to evaluate or think about it. We need time to process information and to reflect upon it in order to devise next steps or to construct an action plan. Students also deserve the same opportunity; however, they need to see analysis, evaluation and reflection modeled by teachers within all content areas. Schmoker suggests “teachers give students ‘simple tasks’ that allow them to intellectually engage with the content they are learning” (p. 32). It is very important that teachers model how

to interact with text and use literacy strategies to aid in comprehension and retention of information.



“If we understand and embrace the concept of simplicity, which starts with a recognition that ‘less is more,’ then our schools will achieve what previous generations never thought possible.”
-Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning

Lastly, Schmoker challenges all educators. He claims proficient and distinguished American teachers know what a powerful, sound curriculum is. Schmoker challenges us to build a strong curriculum for every course and ensure that it is being taught! He claims proficient and distinguished teachers know that structurally sound lessons will ensure students have the skills needed to be college and career ready. Schmoker challenges us to teach vocabulary, to establish a purpose for reading, to model higher order thinking, reasoning and analysis, and to provide time for student reflection! He claims teachers know that students need to read and write often. Schmoker challenges us to stop making excuses for not doing it! We know our

success in meeting Schmoker’s challenges relies upon the support, commitment, and work of teachers in teams willing to assess, refine, and implement focused curriculum and lessons. It is that simple! Schmoker’s last challenge – “Let’s all of us actually do it. Right now” (p. 21).

Like Schmoker, I challenge you to make time for reflection. Focus on improving your practices to become more than a pretty good teacher or instructional coach. Students are relying on you to show them how to progress from good to GREAT!

Works Cited

Schmoker, Mike (2011). *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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