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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

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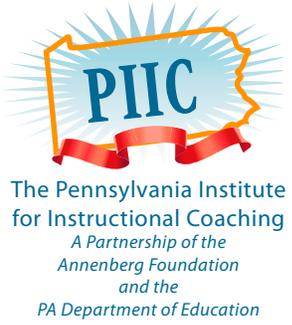
Success through Teamwork, Trust, and Administrative Support

By Crestwood School District Instructional Coaches: Bill Heckman, Betsy Morris, Rebecca Drazdowski, Jerry Marley, Amy Nixon, and Darren Testa

It's Friday afternoon, and the students have been dismissed early. In an overheated auditorium, a district-wide professional development is about to take place. "What's the training about?" someone asks. "Nanotechnology," someone else replies. An hour into the presentation, half the staff is grading papers, texting, or even dozing. Ten math and science teachers are listening because this particular presentation is pertinent only to them.

Consistent unproductive use of faculty in-service time can lead to teacher frustration and a general distrust of administrative goals. Conversely, solid professional development (PD) provided at a district level can foster a sense of purpose and unity among teachers. With administrative support and guidance, the instructional coaches in the Crestwood School District have had success with changing the face of whole school professional learning. We feel the positive influence we have had on district-wide PD is rooted in the support of administration, an establishment of teacher trust, and coaching teamwork.

> " ...solid professional development (PD) provided at a district level can foster a sense of purpose and unity among teachers. "

To say that our district moved from irrelevant PDs to effective, sought-after trainings overnight would be untrue. Our evolution as coaches paralleled a district-wide evolution in approaching staff development. We started as coaches under the Classrooms for the Future (CFF) initiative. Our administration put an instructional technology coach in every building and made our roles clear to all faculty. From the start, the administration worked with us to gauge both what teachers needed and what we needed to effectively help teachers.

The initial professional development sessions we offered were based in technology. Such trainings are fundamentally less threatening than those based in instructional practices: the technology is new, teachers are not supposed to know how to use it, and so its imposition poses no judgment. Obviously, there will always be resistance to change. However, our presence as technology coaches helped us build trust and establish the non-evaluative relationship that effective coaches must have with teachers.

Through two, three-day summer academies and various other professional development offerings, we have developed a system of planning, facilitating, and evaluating our professional development that follows PIIC's Before, During, and After (BDA) process. We conduct needs assessments throughout the year and take these into consideration when planning what to offer. With the guidance of administration, we create thorough lesson plans for all trainings. After each PD, we ask for teacher feedback, and based on the feedback, we plan for future PDs. Teachers recognize the degree to which their input is valued in this process, and it makes them more receptive to the coaching opportunities we offer.

By no means do we believe that we have mastered the art of coaching. However, we do feel that any success we have had establishing ourselves as coaches is directly related to the professional development opportunities we have offered. The humble advice we could provide, based on our experience, is to follow PIIC's BDA model, use any classroom "hook" available (as we used technology) to build teacher comfort and trust, and secure the visible support of administrators so that teachers recognize the coaches as the facilitators rather than the drivers of change.

Featuring:

Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

Ever wonder why school reform takes so long to root? Ask your colleagues. The answer will probably confirm what Stephen Barkley discovered and reported in the Fall 1999 *Journal of Staff Development*; that is, there is no time allotted for professional development in the course of the day. If there are no blocks of time devoted to professional learning, if there are no areas within the school day measured and marked off for deliberate and thoughtful planning around students' needs, and if there is no time set aside to collaborate about those needs, then teachers, administrators, and other staff developers will surely not be able to find the time. As Barkley clearly states in his article, "… they [staff] need instead to make time."

In order to transform schools, a great deal of creative thinking around scheduling needs to be uppermost in the minds of school and district administrators. The most critical thing about this kind of thinking, however, is that the schools and districts believe in the importance of implementing a schedule that will allow all staff members, including administrators, to meet regularly, to work together, and to act as a team. A collegial community is more than the friendly "Hello" or personable "Good morning" we offer as we pass one another signing in, picking up mail, or running to the restroom. There must be a willingness to take risks and to effect the necessary coordination with all stakeholders in a district, including school board members and teachers' union officials, to address the issue of making time for professional learning.

Establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) is the ideal way to start. Unfortunately, not every school has the enabling conditions to make that happen. Perhaps another place to start is to organize groups within a school to visit other schools that have alternative schedules. Or, in these times of economic stress, organize groups that can use Skype to make calls to colleagues in other schools. That process does not require any costly hardware or software to engage teachers, coaches, and administrators in a professional dialogue. It does, however, take communication and planning so that staff members can coordinate their schedules to participate in the calls. Using Googledocs is another way to foster communication and collaboration both within and across schools and districts as a means to gather data and make shared suggestions about student growth.

In-person visits can be scheduled throughout the year with reporting out occurring at regular staff meetings. Of course, if your district does not have regular staff meetings or calendar days devoted to professional learning, it is at this point where growth must begin. Instructional coaches and their mentors can be instrumental in initiating conversations where scheduling professional learning is at the top of the agenda.

Recognizing the importance of thinking, planning, talking, and reflecting establishes the environment necessary for transformation to root and sends a clear message about teaching and learning. This collaboration and collegial sharing becomes "on the job" professional learning that helps build the capacity to improve or change instructional practice. Without this, progress is certainly threatened.

Sincerely,

Ellen B. Eisenberg

Powerful Professional Development: Building Expertise within the Four Walls of Your School

Book Review by Justin Arthur, Altoona School District Instructional Coach

Powerful Professional Development: Building Expertise within the Four Walls of Your School by Diane Yendol-Hoppey and Nancy Fightman-Dana is a practical, yet intuitive guide to creating meaningful job-embedded professional development. This relatively short read will inspire you to harness the hidden talent that already exists in your school while developing cost-effective ways to promote ongoing professional learning.

The book is organized into three distinct sections that coincide nicely with the PIIC Before, During, and After (BDA) model. Part 1, "What is Powerful Job-Embedded Professional Development, and How Can You Make it Happen?" clearly defines and examines the critical elements to consider when planning job-embedded professional development (**B**efore). The authors identify the complexity involved in cultivating PD from inside one's school and help us understand our own professional development experiences by completing a reflective activity. Roles of teacher leaders are clearly outlined, and building principals are interestingly tagged the "head learners." Hoppey and Dana's creativity shine as they outline PD opportunities that are, "outside the clock and inside the budget."

The strongest attributes of the book can be found in the second section, "The Professional Development Toolbox: Strategies to Actualize Powerful Professional Development." The authors do an outstanding job of defining, illustrating, and reflecting on over 6 different styles of professional development (**D**uring). Each style is complete with clearly defined activities and example implementation strategies. I must stress the word powerful

> *" We are in an era where teacher leaders need to step up and save our students by proactively embedding lifelong learning strategies in our teachers. "*

in the section title as these very practical and research-based strategies are not your once-and-done activities, nor are they concepts that can be implemented overnight.

Part 3, "Using Your Toolbox: Tips for Developing a Successful Job-Embedded Professional Development Program" stresses the importance of collecting and aligning data (**A**fter). These are the factors one must consider when "making connections between professional development tools and a school's professional development needs."

Hoppey and Dana do an outstanding job of incorporating the human lens consistently throughout the book through the use of reflective tools, meaningful metaphors, and anecdotal accounts from fellow teacher leaders and principals. We are in an era where teacher leaders need to step up and save our students by proactively embedding lifelong learning strategies in our teachers. Rethinking education must begin with rethinking teacher professional development.
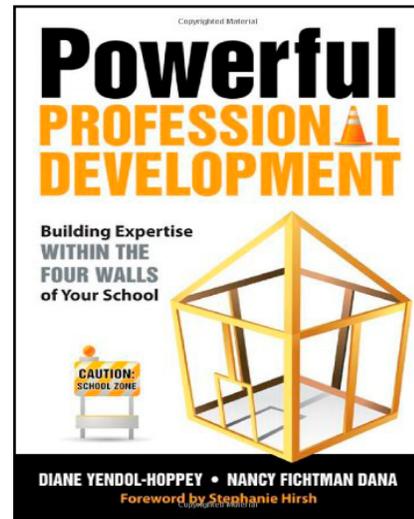
"When choosing research-in-action or co-teaching as a professional development tool, you are recognizing that other teachers possess important knowledge that can improve other teachers' instruction."
-Powerful Professional Development

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

Eight Things a School Administrator Can Do to Support Instructional Coaching
By Dr. Charles J. Territo, PIIC Regional Mentor Coordinator

The literature of school change often highlights the importance of educational administrators in the successful implementation of any change initiative. Our experience at the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC) confirms the critical need for administrative support if instructional coaching is to reach its potential. Below are some strategies administrators can implement to support an effective instructional coaching model:

Give legitimacy to the coaching role. Legitimatize the coach's role by providing tangible commodities such as office space, supplies, and professional development resources. Provide time for coaches to meet individually with teachers, collaborate with coaches to plan and facilitate ongoing professional development and faculty meeting agendas, support the implementation of instructional strategies adopted by the staff; and co-facilitate learning walks with teachers and coaches.
Assure district level support.

Identify a central office "champion" to provide guidance in designing and implementing an effective instructional coaching model.

Provide appropriate evaluation and feedback to instructional coaches. Use standards-based performance evaluations that help identify effective skills for coaches and teachers.

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Ensure training to improve instructional coaches' skills. Provide opportunities for ongoing professional learning designed to strengthen skills and build capacity.

Develop instructional coaches as leaders in the school environment. Establish a role for coaches on the

school leadership team and provide opportunities for coach input about improving instruction.

Preserve the integrity of the instructional coaching role. Understand the role of the coach and ensure fidelity to the role.

Protect the relationships of instructional coaches with their peer group. Respect the confidentiality between coach and teacher.

Integrate instructional coaching into the school environment. Include instructional coaching in the school improvement plan to help build teacher capacity and advance student achievement.

Although there are no silver bullets in school transformation, implementing these small steps help support a structure for improving instructional practices and student learning.

Designing Professional Development: Before, During, After
By Christina Steinbacher-Reed, IU 17 PIIC Mentor

In response to the growing demands being placed on educators, Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) has revised their standards for professional learning. These standards represent a new kind of professional learning where educators assume an active role in, "determining the focus of their learning, how their learning occurs, and how they evaluate their effectiveness" (Learning Forward, 2011, p.13). In order to meet these *Standards for Professional Learning* (2011), staff-developers may need to rethink how they design professional learning opportunities. Coaches from the Williamsport Area School District consider PIIC's Before, During, and After approach when designing professional learning opportunities for their staff.

Before
Identifying learners' needs is a critical first step in designing effective professional learning experiences. In the beginning of the school year, Williamsport's coaching team developed a needs assessment survey framed around the school's improvement goals. The team also recognized the need to gather formative assessment through their coaching conversations with staff. Using the results for the staff survey and teacher feedback, the coaching team was able to be strategic in planning both short-term and long-term professional learning experiences to meet their staff's needs.

" ...when it comes to building teacher capacity, what happens after and in between workshops matters most!"

In the "Before" component of designing professional learning opportunities, coaches may want to ask themselves:

• What is the purpose of this experience?
• What do our learners need to know, understand, and do regarding this concept?
• How do I know if this topic is meeting their needs?
• What challenges do I anticipate?
• How will I know if we're successful?

During
While the planning piece is critical to designing effective professional learning, the "During" piece is where coaches make the learning real. Whether leading books studies, analyzing lesson plans, or conducting a whole group workshop, effective coaches utilize specific strategies to facilitate adult learning. Learning Forward (2011) advocates for professional learning designs that integrate theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcome.

As coaches envision the "During" component of their professional learning design, they may want to ask themselves:

• How will I balance unanticipated needs of my learners with the agenda?
• How will I promote active engagement from all participants?
• How will I honor the unique needs of adult learners?
• How will I respond to resistive learners?

After
School reform expert Michael Fullan (2010) notes that when it comes to building teacher capacity, what happens after and in between workshops matters most! Kristin Takach, a second year coach at Williamsport Area High School, provides coaching support as a critical "After" strategy in supporting teachers in implementing a new skill or concept. "The professional development opens a door for coaching conversations," says Takach.

In the "After" component of designing professional learning opportunities, coaches may want to ask themselves:

• How can I support teachers in transferring this learning to practice?
• How will my coaching align with teachers' new learning?
• How will teachers be provided with feedback?

Using PIIC's "Before-During-After" strategies provides coaches with a framework in which to implement coherent systems of support for professional learning.

Resources:
Fullan, M. (2010). *Motion Leadership*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.