

PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

Inside...

- Letter from the Executive Director, p. 2
- Book Review: Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help, p. 2
- Reflection Drives Direction, p. 3
- A Reflection on Reflection, p. 4

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Tips to Encourage Critical Reflection

By Jana A. DelMarcelle, Elizabethtown Area SD Instructional Coach

"Reflective practice... is the idea that we can stand outside of ourselves and come to a clearer understanding of what we do and who we are by freeing ourselves of distorted ways of reasoning and acting" (Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, Brookfield, p. 214).

While many educators would most likely agree with this quote and extol the benefits of reflection as a professional practice, they may also assume that

it is a thinking process that occurs naturally. However, critical reflection is purposeful

thought about an event that challenges beliefs and assumptions that we currently hold.

Teachers are often asked to reflect on an experience with little additional prompting or facilitation. Research has shown that critical reflection is more effective when it is facilitated or guided by an experienced professional. As coaches, we have opportunities throughout the **Before-During-After (BDA)** cycle to provide the social context to encourage critical reflection. In order to help push our teachers to a level of critical reflection, it is our responsibility as coaches to first develop an understanding of it and its proper facilitation.

The fourth quadrant of the PIIC framework is "support reflective and non-evaluative practice." With careful planning, the types of questions coaches ask can encourage critical reflection without turning the conversation to an evaluative nature.

1. *Rely on data to serve as a catalyst for the reflection.* Often, we will remember an event the way we think it went or wanted it to go, which could possibly taint the picture of what actually occurred. Relying on data will remove the bias from the memory of the event and give both the coach and the teacher a starting point.

2. *Ask questions that probe to discover rationale for an event.* Ask questions that seek to understand why, how and what decisions were made, based on what evidence. This will help the teacher move beyond a description of events to access their belief system about learning.

3. *Ask questions that draw conclusions.* This helps the teacher come up with

generalizations that seek to clarify or challenge existing belief systems held about teaching and learning.

"As coaches, we have opportunities throughout the Before-During-After (BDA) cycle to provide the social context to encourage critical reflection."

4. *Ask questions that allow the learner to consider the event from various perspectives.* Considering the event from the perspective of a student, community member, parent, etc. often helps the teacher uncover details they may have not realized before.

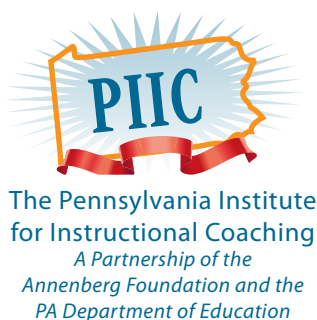
5. *Ask questions that allow the learner to consider different contexts.* Help the teacher to test their new theories in various settings, with different students to determine future actions.

Critical reflection has the potential to be an extremely powerful form of professional learning, and as coaches, we must be sure to have the knowledge of how to unlock it for teachers.

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**HAVE A GREAT
SUMMER!**



Professional Learning Opportunity Dates

October 24-26, 2016
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

January 4-6, 2017
Penn Stater
Conference Center
State College, PA

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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

Teaching students is complex. And, teaching the teachers is incredibly complex, complicated, challenging, and confusing. We know that coaches are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional practices, but do we really know how to do that without examining our own practices?

One of the most critical aspects of effective instructional coaching is the process of reflection and the ability to dissect one's own thinking and reduce it to the most fundamental question: why did I do/say that? It means looking at what happens in the classroom, determining if the instructional techniques are appropriate, and if the implementation of those techniques is effective. It is a process of self-scrutiny and self-assessment, not a knee-jerk reaction to something that has happened in the classroom. The exploration of our own practices and beliefs, and the recognition of what works in the classroom, create the environment for change and improvement.

Reflection is a cyclical process. The more you ponder, plan, probe, and practice, the more likely you are to engage in reflective teaching. The same is true with instructional coaching... the more often and regularly a coach and teacher(s) participate in ongoing collaboration, communication, collective problem-solving, and critical thinking, the more likely both are to engage in reflective

practice. That stands to reason... the more often two (or more colleagues) talk about *practice*, the more likely beliefs, questions, and instructional habits that affect student learning will emerge and result in the kinds of conversations that change practice.

Looking inward to reflect on what happens outward shouldn't be revolutionary.

Teaching at any level is challenging. And, with adults, the challenge is even greater. As instructional coaches trade ideas and share practices, there is no room for fear of failure. That's what makes instructional coaching such a respected and invaluable job-embedded teacher professional development model... there is no fear of negative evaluations. Coaches and their teaching colleagues talk about practice in ways that motivate, stimulate, energize, and create the emotional *stampede* or "rush" of innovative ideas that can be rehearsed without hesitation or doubt. It creates a "place" where colleagues can practice together and establish a life-long learning environment.

Donald Schön talks about reflection in action (reflection on behavior as it happens, i.e., thinking on our feet), and reflection on action (reflection on an event after it happens, i.e., thinking about why we acted as we did). He talks about the significance of a practitioner's

experience versus the tacit knowledge of content. When looking at a situation we are influenced by our previous experiences, predictions about the future, our own toolkit of instructional resources, and frame of reference. As we work, we can bring fragments of our past experiences and begin to build theories and responses that fit the new situation. That is, we take our new situations and try to make decisions based on our past experiences which, in effect, combine both "in action" and "about action" simultaneously.

So, what does this mean for instructional coaches? Everything we think, everything we say, and everything we do is influenced, either positively or negatively, by our experiences and knowledge base. Our assumptions and beliefs determine our behaviors. As coaches, we must help ourselves and our colleagues explore those beliefs, challenge them, and re-frame our thinking so that minds and practices of all can be without bias and preconceived notions about teaching and learning.

As M. K Smith said, "*Reflection requires space in the present and the promise of space in the future*" (Smith, M. K 1994). Let's make our future reflective and responsive.

Sincerely,

Galen B. Eisenberg

24 of 29 Intermediate Units across the state were PIIC-participating IUs for the 2015-16 school year!
Go to www.pacoaching.org to read more!

Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help

Book Review by Kriston Appleton, Southeastern Greene SD Instructional Coach and Breanne Scears, IU 1 PIIC Mentor

Help... what comes to mind when we hear this word? Giving or getting assistance when it is needed? The term "help" seems like quite a simple concept at first glance. However, in the book *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help*, author Edgar Schein asks his audience to consider the term "help" as a relationship which inevitably engages people in a "game of one-upmanship." After introducing this notion, Schein explores the various types of situations that require help as well as the do's and don'ts of establishing and

maintaining balance and trust within the helping relationship.

When I began reading this book, I was in disbelief that someone would take such an in depth approach to explaining the topic of help. The terms "helper" and "helpee," the psychology of interpersonal relationships, and the plethora of situational examples seemed a bit much. However, the deeper I delved into the book, the more I began to realize how applicable this information was to the role coaching!

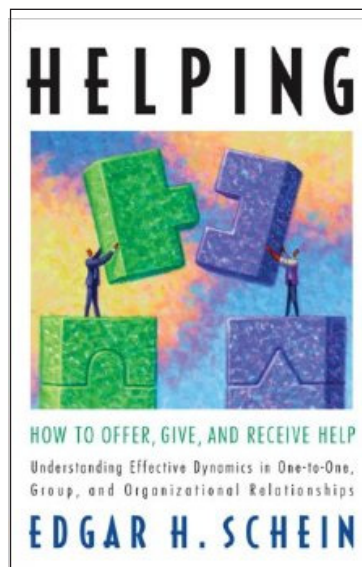
"How does a coach offer help without automatically causing the other person to feel inferior in their teaching ability?"

Continued on page 3, [Helping](#)

With this being my first year as coach, I felt this book had so much to offer. The further I read, the more trouble I had putting my highlighter down. Every other sentence was a valuable piece of advice that I wanted to integrate into my coaching experience and pass along to others.

The most prominent issue laid out in this book is a direct parallel to the main issue of coaching which was discussed at a PIIC Professional Learning Opportunity (PLO) session I attended earlier this year. How does a coach offer help without automatically causing the other person to feel inferior in their teaching ability? Because nearly “all human relationships are about status positioning,” a coach must establish trust and collaboratively set goals with their colleagues. “Ideally those goals involve some gain for everyone in the situation.” The **Before-During-After (BDA)** cycle, as we know, plays a great part in this process. In the chapter “Humble Inquiry,” Schein describes a method called “pure inquiry” which struck me as nearly identical to questioning techniques used in the **B** and the **A**. Schein states that pure inquiry is used to “build a client’s status and confidence; to create a situation for the client in which it is safe to reveal anxiety, information and feelings; to gather as much information as possible about the situation; and to involve the client in the process of diagnosis and action planning.”

In short, I think Schein must have been a coach in another life, because his book could serve as a valuable tool for new coaches, veteran coaches, and those who mentor. I highly recommend putting on your reading list if you’re interested in examining the term “help” from a new perspective.



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“Trust is needed for the client to reveal what is the real problem, to be able to accept what is offered, and to implement whatever resolution might come out of the conversation with the helper.”
[Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help](#)

Reflection Drives Direction

By Shelly Mrozek, Laurel SD Instructional Coach

“We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.” -John Dewey

When I was eight years old, I wrote in a diary. After school, I sat at my small wooden desk recording the events of the day. At night, I reread my diary. In essence, I was documenting my thoughts and adjusting my actions. Reflecting on this experience, I was beginning my journey as a reflective practitioner.

Reflective practitioners carve out time to think about daily events. They ask pertinent questions in deliberate and systematic ways. They write answers as a guide to alter future actions. Reflective practitioners reread reflections to glean insights about their experiences.

In fact, one of the core elements of PIIC’s model of effective coaching is dedicated to reflective and non-evaluative practices. Therefore, it is vital for instructional coaches to incorporate reflective practices into their daily lives. Coaches, teachers, and students benefit from reflection in multiple ways.

Reflection fosters learning and impacts instructional practices. Coaches must model these practices to support teachers as they move through the reflective process. When coaches and teachers embrace reflection, their discussions and interactions become more powerful.

Instructional coaches need time and structure for reflection. At the end of each school day, I take fifteen minutes to reflect on the experiences I had throughout the day. As I reflect, I move

“When coaches and teachers embrace reflection, their discussions and interactions become more powerful.”

through three stages. In the first stage, I ask myself questions such as: What could I do differently next time? Sometimes I use reflection starters such as: I was surprised that . . . in order to write with a specific purpose. Analysis is the second phase of my reflective process. As I grapple with these questions, I analyze them to make connections between my experiences and professional knowledge.

During the final stage of reflection, I reread my entry and think about the adjustments necessary to make my educational practices more effective.

It is essential for coaches to tap their resources and refine their reflective process. One of the best resources is the PIIC Instructional Coaching Resource Guide at <http://www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org>. Articles, tools, and resources can be found on this site. I also read professional books, journal articles, and talk with other educators about how they incorporate reflection into their professional lives. Ultimately, instructional coaches must support teachers as they use reflective practices to impact student learning and achievement. Reflection will change how you see things and has the power to drive you in new directions. How does reflection enhance your interactions with teachers?

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A Reflection on Reflection

By Vickie Feinstein, Lower Dauphin SD Instructional Coach

If you ask me to describe myself in three words or less, one of the adjectives I would most definitely use is “reflective.” I cannot imagine functioning as a professional without this very useful tool. Perhaps the best part of reflection is the flexibility it offers. As a person who strives to manage time effectively, multi-tasking is a necessary evil. Luckily reflection combines beautifully with jogging or exercise; waiting in line at the grocery store; or even driving in my car (keeping my eyes on the road at all times, of course – and never texting while driving).

“One of the best features of the BDA cycle of coaching is that it naturally invites me to use reflection as a way to gauge my professional effectiveness on different levels.”

One of the best features of the BDA cycle of coaching is that it naturally invites me to use reflection as a way to gauge my professional effectiveness on different levels. I can reflect on the value I provide on the human level. Have I made a lasting connection with the teacher? Am I taking into account the specific strengths of this teacher? How can I get a foot in the door to work with a specific teacher?

I also reflect on the tools I’m providing, suggesting, or developing for teachers or students. I question whether I’ve provided a range of tools so we can address choice (the #1 motivator). Did I cover everything ...or more likely, what did I forget? Is there another tool that I should have suggested?

When I’m in the zone, I question whether I spent enough time in the B part of the cycle. Sometimes I beat myself up (figuratively, not literally!) about times that the B cycle doesn’t get the justice it deserves (i.e. when it’s a chat on the fly in the hallway). While I know it’s not always best practice, it is sometimes the best I can do on a practical level – and reflection allows me to accept that. When I think about the D part of the coaching cycle, I wonder if I’ve said too much. Should I have asked more questions and offered fewer “suggestions”? Am I being as non-judgmental as possible? Were there better questions I could have used to help this teacher arrive at a solution? When I think about the A cycle, I wonder if I’ve spent enough time there. Did I

“plant the seed” well enough to produce another BDA cycle?

While nothing thrills me more than finishing out a jam packed day of nonstop coaching; I know that my day isn’t quite over – and, in fact, the best is yet to come. Reflection is my “go to” tool for determining next steps. I’d be quite lost without it. If you’re not a believer, it’s time to give it some “serious thought or consideration.” (Thanks to dictionary.com for that “official” definition of the word “reflection.”)

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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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