

October 2012  
Volume 3 - Issue 1

## 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*

## Literacy Strategies for Learning, Not Testing

By Karen Macartney, Bradford Area School District Instructional Coach

Literacy based strategies take on more significance in 2012-13 as rigor increases with the implementation of new Common Core Standards. Schools this year are wrestling with increased expectations, knowing that the official adoption of the PA Common Core Standards happens July 2013. The Keystones and Common Core make it essential that every content area address literacy. Though fraught with imperfections, we can use the increased expectations as an opportunity to advance the evolution of what we now know about student learning.

*"...it's important we let students know that what we mostly care about their ability to be literate, not their ability to pass a test."*

As an instructional coach in a PIIC participating district, I always remind myself that we are not teaching test-takers. We are teaching students, and though every school needs to 'win the game' to avoid undesirable consequences, it is not all about "The Test." I remind teachers and students that literacy-based strategies are about ensuring that children construct the learning, think critically, and make relevant connections of material to real life. It's about graduating students who are truly career, college\*, and citizen ready. I think it's important we let students know that what we mostly care about is their ability to be literate, not their ability to pass a test.

Additionally, I think it's important we remember not to complicate what it means to have students reading, writing, and discussing in order to learn. Having students complete a Please Do Now/John Collins activity provides access to their background knowledge, as well as a quick formative assessment for the teacher. And I always like the side effect of reluctant writers actually writing something! A Collins Type 1

Writing takes 5 minutes, yet yields so much. In my experience, the writing makes apparent all that students already know, and often exposes some real wisdom, like a jewel that was hidden under some dust. Uncovering this can be priceless, providing resources previously unknown. And I've seen teachers use this as that critical motivator for struggling learners. "You mean I already

know something about this topic? I didn't realize it!" This self-knowledge and motivation provide stamina to stick with it through the difficulties.

Collin's Type 2 Writing is another wonderful way to check for understanding and help guarantee student accountability. These are literacy based strategies that pack a big bang for the buck. And as a coach, my role is to work with teachers to help implement these literacy strategies across all content areas.

All learning is language based, so using literacy strategies is simply the best vehicle we have to help students succeed. If that is our focus, we will win it all!

\*College or other post-secondary learning



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A Partnership of the Annenberg Foundation and the PA Department of Education

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## Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

The beginning of every school year brings the excitement of sharing new learning, building and strengthening relationships, and expanding your responsibilities as instructional coaches and school leaders. I'm sure your thoughts are encumbered with the plethora of responsibilities you have acquired this year as well as revisiting those on which you and your colleagues collaborated last year. Try to think of each school year as a "works in progress" as you resume, refine, and re-establish the various ways that your work as a coach-leader helps build capacity and promotes continuous learning. Think also how your work as a leader allows you to explore your own professional growth while you help others maximize their own learning.

In our work with instructional coaches, we have learned that building strong, solid, trusting relationships with colleagues is critical for looking at student work and collaborating about ways to improve student learning. Especially in these challenging times, release time to work with teachers is not automatic. Coaches must make time to meet with colleagues and collaborate in ways that contribute to changing the climate of the school environment. This means that focused conversations organized around a shared vision and mutual goals are essential to creating an atmosphere where effective

implementation of effective practice is central to the learning environment.

Think for a moment about the difference between a neighborhood basketball game and the Philadelphia 76ers. In one game, there is no coach, no bench, and no organized time outs to discuss strategy. Whatever happens, happens with luck being the operative word. In the other game, each player's ability is analyzed and everyone is assigned to the position that aligns with a specific skill set. The discussion of the action is deliberate, structured, and well executed with time allotted before, during and after the game for planning, studying, and reflecting. Winning is clearly the desired outcome and everyone collaborates and cooperates to make that happen. While a player may want the thrill of making the winning basket, the individual recognizes that several individuals together worked to make all the baskets that contributed to winning the game. Players understand that no one individual can score all the winning points.

So, as Ellen Guiney from the Boston Plan for Excellence says, "Coaching is not just for athletes." It's time for us to think about instructional coaching as a team sport. All school staff are team members, focused on improving classroom practice, student engagement, and student learning.

Everyone works together in a systems approach that encourages peer-to-peer support and works towards a common goal; that is, everyone works towards helping teachers implement effective instructional practices that yield positive student outcomes.

In the September 26, 2012 Learning Forward's PD Watch blog, Joellen Killion analyzes a recent loss in football in spite of two talented teams. Her realization – "... no one player is fully responsible for a win or a loss. There are 11 players on the field, each with a role and responsibility to contribute to achieving the win. Each must understand the overall vision, know which plays to use, know how to adapt as a play unfolds on the field, and be accountable for what happens." I'd say this explanation fits the description of how instructional coaches and school staff should collaborate every day and take collective responsibility for student growth. Instructional coaches help create the environment for open communication and ensure that professional learning is high quality, ongoing, focused, and natural – like the expectations of a winning team. They need to help "... prepare the entire team for their individual and collective roles."

Have a wonderful school year,



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

## Write Like This

Book Review by Tom Sebastian, Regional Mentor Coordinator

Kelly Gallagher has written a number of books that have been well received by teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, and mentors. These books include

Readicide, Reading Reasons, Deeper Reading, and Teaching Adolescent Writers. In Write Like This, Kelly Gallagher has once again written a book that can be a valuable resource for educators involved in

improving adolescent literacy. In this book he shares two main premises for building real-world writers:

(1) If we are to build students who grow up to write in the

real world, we must move our writing instruction beyond a "cover the state standards" mind-set by introducing our young writers to additional real-world discourses.

***"Content area teachers would be particularly interested in this book because of the wealth of ideas and activities that are easily understood and replicated."***

(2) In teaching our students how to write, we must provide them with authentic modeling – modeling that comes from both the teacher and from real world texts.

He emphasizes that "Writing well does not begin with teaching students *how* to write; it begins with teaching students *why* they should write. Students who are taught

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how to write without being taught the real-world purposes behind authentic writing are much more likely to end up seeing writing as nothing more than a school activity—nothing more than a series of obstacles to overcome in order to pass a state test or get to graduation.”

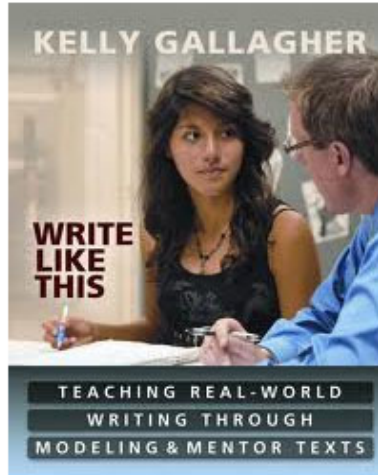
Gallagher helps his students understand the real-world writing purposes by providing them with a chart adapted from Bean, Chappell, and Gillam (2003) that lists six purposes for writing and gives an explanation for each. The purposes listed are: express and reflect; inform and explain; evaluate and judge; inquire and explore; analyze and interpret; and take a stand/propose a solution.

Students authenticate this chart by reviewing newspaper articles that have been written for each of these purposes. In addition, the chart is incorporated in a brainstorming tool that students use to identify multiple topics for each of the six purposes.

The author provides examples of numerous authentic models that he shares with students. Some of these are from other writers, but most of them have been developed by him over time. In each chapter, Gallagher offers many specific field-tested strategies that are designed to make writing purposeful and engaging. Content area teachers would be particularly interested in this book because of the wealth of ideas and

activities that are easily understood and replicated.

In *Write Like This*, the author shares his ten core beliefs about the teaching of writing and how he often revisits these beliefs to reenergize his writing instruction. These beliefs offer an inside view of Gallagher’s thought processes and provide the reader a deeper understanding of why the *Write Like This* approach to writing instruction works. PIIC participating districts, coaches, and mentors can use the wealth of knowledge in this book to improve classroom practice, student engagement, and student learning in their work.



*“...writing - arguably one of the most important skills students will need upon entering adulthood, a basic requirement for participation in civic life - is getting placed on the back burner.”*

*-Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing through Modeling and Mentor Texts*

## Literacy Driven Coaching

By Betsy Morris, Instructional Coach, Crestwood School District

The instructional coaches in the Crestwood School District in Mountaintop, PA have been heavily influenced by the PIIC model of coaching. We see significant value in incorporating all four of the PIIC elements. Even as we have watched our coaching staff shrink from five full-time coaches to two part-timers, we still strive to address the four quadrants in our day-to-day interaction with teachers. However, the one element on which we have been able to most consistently and significantly base our coaching practices is Element Three: evidence-based literacy practices and research-based instructional techniques to improve adolescent literacy across the content areas.

Our focus on this quadrant has not been the result of a coaching group composed predominantly of language arts teachers. Rather, an administrative decision to commit to incorporating reading and writing across the curriculum

(specifically following the Penn Literacy Network, or PLN, philosophy) created a need for us as coaches to provide professional development in literacy awareness and instructional strategies. These professional development offerings, in turn, gave us a talking point with individual teachers.

***“Open administrative endorsement of such teaching practices has given credibility and some immediacy to the assistance we, as coaches, offer.”***

Since all faculty have been trained in the basic philosophies of PLN (the four lenses of learning, Collins writing, and the five reading/writing/talking processes), we are able to start conversations with any teacher about how a particular lesson could be enhanced through the inclusion of literacy-based strategies. Open administrative endorsement of such teaching practices has given credibility

and some immediacy to the assistance we, as coaches, offer. We try to relate every strategy we share with teachers to literacy, and we encourage all teachers to refer to Collins’ Five Types of Writing when assigning writing tasks. Another resource we created (in response to teacher requests) is an “at-a-glance” learning strategies document. It is available to teachers via our coaching website, and it serves as an archive/cheat sheet of all the strategies we’ve shared in professional development offerings.

Any success we’ve had with incorporating PIIC’s third quadrant into our coaching practices is due to our on-board and supportive administration. Because of their commitment to building literacy into all content areas, we have been able to train our entire faculty in effective teaching practices and to help create an educational environment in which the value of literacy is recognized.

# Reflections about the Human Lens of Learning

By Wendy Salvatore, Clearfield Area School District Instructional Coach

As educators, we are constantly reflecting. This process is crucial in guiding us to make wise decisions every day about our instructional practices. Reflection also happens to be one of PIIC's 4 Quadrants.

Using The Penn Literacy Network as one form of evidence-based literacy practices (another quadrant in the PIIC 4 Quadrant framework), I attended my first PLN 1 course. When the first class was over, I found myself to be especially reflective. It was during this session that I became familiar with Morton Botel's Four Lenses of Learning. In [The Plainer Truths of Reading/Writing/Talking Across the Curriculum](#), Botel describes these perspectives or lenses of learning as: Meaning-Centered, Language-Based, Social, and Human.

I think we often view learning as meaning-centered, and yes, language-centered as well. We seem to forget about the social and human side of teaching. Far too often, I have noticed teachers (including myself, at times) forgetting to keep learning stress-free. We do not realize that learning cannot happen if our students are stressed, worried, or uncomfortable in their learning environment. As coaches, we must help teachers encourage active student participation and help them understand a variety of ways to increase student engagement. But first, we must help teachers feel comfortable with what they are teaching and share best practices about how to effectively reach students. Reflecting about the human lens has really made me think about teaching and learning.

I truly believe that if we want students to be able to grapple with text and really engage in trying to understand and contemplate information, then we absolutely must provide them with environments that make them feel safe and valued as learners. Our students need an environment where they can express their thoughts openly.

It is imperative that we make sure we not only provide successful opportunities for every student, but are even more aware of those lower performing students who will need that extra reinforcement and promise of success. That is why

giving positive reinforcement to those students who may only get to write 3 lines on a writing assessment, instead of 5 lines, is so important. As an instructional coach, I work with teachers and help them recognize when to use these literacy strategies and how to reflect on what worked well.

In my work as a coach, I constantly look for ways to help teachers through the reflection process. I try to focus on my own reflection as I help them. I have questions that I ask myself... "How can I help teachers provide more successful situations in the classroom? How do I approach these topics with teachers?" I try to help teachers reflect on what they say and also on what they do with students, trying to make them more aware of their actions. A teacher's decision certainly impacts student behavior. Helping teachers become more reflective is one of my goals. I do not think it will be an easy endeavor; yet what a difference reflection can make!

*"As an instructional coach, I work with teachers and help them recognize when to use appropriate literacy strategies and how to reflect on what worked well."*

## The PIIC 4 Quadrant Framework

PIIC advocates **one-on-one and small group support** for teachers, coaches, and school leaders.

PIIC focuses on **collecting and analyzing data** to identify student needs, assess changes in classroom instructional practice and measure student progress.

PIIC emphasizes the use of **evidence-based literacy practices** and research-based instructional techniques.

PIIC supports **reflective and non-evaluative** practices.

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