

PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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Coaching as a Constant: Supporting Change in Schools

By Jaime Marshall, Susquehanna Township SD Instructional Coach

Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, said, "The only thing that is constant is change." Nowhere is this truer than in the field of education. Changes in administration, teachers, curriculum, and programs are not uncommon in our districts and schools and can even happen annually, and in some cases, more frequently than that. In some cases, changes in a current system may be needed, but not taking place.

Instructional coaches can play a crucial role in both of these scenarios. Instructional coaches can be a support system to help teachers and administrators navigate new systems as well as bringing about change where it is needed.

Change can be hard, but in most situations (both professionally and personally), having a support system can make it seem less daunting. Coaching teachers using the PIIC Four Quadrant Framework can help teachers to implement new curriculum, programs, and strategies with more confidence. The one-on-one or small group support using the Before, During, and After (BDA) Cycle allows coaches to help teachers plan content and instructional strategies, collect data relevant to student achievement, implement evidence-based literacy practices and reflect on his or her teaching. This is especially helpful when teachers have experienced a change in curriculum or programs to be used.

On the other hand, coaches can use the four quadrant framework and BDA process to initiate changes when needed. Elena Aguilar, author of *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation*

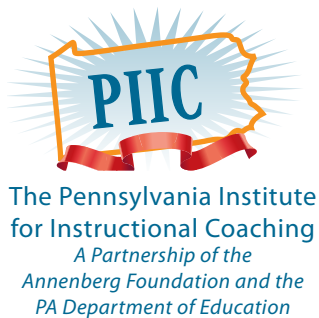
(2013), states, "I coach for transformation – transformation of the adults with whom I work, the institutions in which they work, the lives of the children and communities they serve, and our society as a whole." When change is deemed necessary, the coach can meet with the teacher or administrator to analyze

the current need and collaborate to implement evidence-based strategies that would help to transform the current

practice and facilitate positive change in the system as well as in the behaviors and beliefs of teachers and administrators.

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"Coaching teachers using the PIIC Four Quadrant Framework can help teachers implement new curriculum, programs, and strategies with more confidence."



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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

Changing the culture of a school takes much more than just talking about it. Everyone wants change... you go first! In fact, those who are most interested in school change want just that... hurry up and let's change the school. Maybe they are talking about painting the classrooms; maybe putting more bulletin boards around the halls to highlight student work; maybe they are even talking about changing the reading series or curriculums for each grade. Unfortunately, those modifications just scratch the surface of school change.

In the NAESP March/April 2008 issue of *Principal*, the article entitled, "School Culture, School Climate: They are Not the Same," author Steve Gruenert discusses the difference between culture and climate. While the article may seem outdated, the message is not. One impacts the other and both must be addressed in order to transform schools.

Many educators and policy makers alike think school improvement means to change the way a teacher teaches. That is, if we give teachers a variety of instructional strategies they can use in each class every day, that will magically change the way students learn. Teachers have a list and systematically check off each strategy they use to teach some specific content to their students. Unfortunately, just because a strategy was used, doesn't mean it was the appropriate strategy to accomplish the instructional goal. Maybe using a plethora of strategies and other tools reforms the way a teacher teaches but it doesn't transform

the school and how students learn.

In order to address school culture and climate, we need to change the cultural conditions that affect teaching and learning. Mr. Gruenert suggests that school climate is the way we feel and is the collective attitude of the school, e.g., the morale of a group. School culture represents the collective expectations of the school community, e.g., the way we do things. So, if the answer is, "... because we always do it that way," that's what the group believes is how an issue must be addressed.

A school's culture is certainly shaped by school leaders. In fact, a leader's influence over behaviors, beliefs, and relationships in the school is exactly what contributes to the development of the professional community, the collective learning, and the trust that are all necessary to have a positive school climate. Beliefs and assumptions dictate practice; change beliefs and practice changes.

Individually and collectively, all members of the school contribute to the shared vision for school wide improvement. But the beliefs that determine practice must be in sync with a vision that says all students and teachers can learn. That philosophy must permeate the school so that it becomes the culture of the school... we feel that all students and teachers can learn and so we do things that create an atmosphere of shared learning for the individual, the team, and the school.

We often create an opportunity for teachers to meet together but not an opportunity to change the personal beliefs that drive professional practice. We've managed to provide "research-based" professional development but once back in the classrooms, practice has not changed enough to transform the culture of the school.

Change happens with the ongoing support and follow up that is provided by one-on-one and small group instructional coaching. While there may be multiple leaders in a school, an instructional coach takes the lead by ensuring that beliefs and behaviors around student and teacher learning are discussed, embraced, and sometimes even challenged. They serve as the constant reminder that a sense of community among staff members, improved student engagement, increased motivation, and enhanced opportunities for professional learning will make a difference in both school climate and culture. It takes the community to decide that they will influence the organization through the collective engagement of the entire staff... the way they feel equals the way they do things... we feel all students and teachers can learn and we will do all the things we can to make that our reality.

Changing professional practice demands changing beliefs. That's the role of an instructional coach.

Sincerely,



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

Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction

Book Review by Jami Renfro, Boyertown Area SD Instructional Coach

Another year of adventures as an instructional coach has begun! There have been hiccups along the way but with the help of my team and connections made through PIIC, I've found my stride. I took time this summer for my own professional learning starting with *Instructional Coaching* by

Jim Knight. As I read, jotted ideas in margins and sticky noted pages, I couldn't help but wonder if he had been in some of the sessions that I attended at the PIIC conferences last year! The text focuses on "A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction" and is a veritable how-to for new and

"Working with a coach should be collaborative, encouraging dialogue that motivates parties to reflect, experiment, learn and grow."

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seasoned coaches. In the preface, he explains the goals of his book; to promote healthier, more respectful conversations and how to improve instruction and school culture.

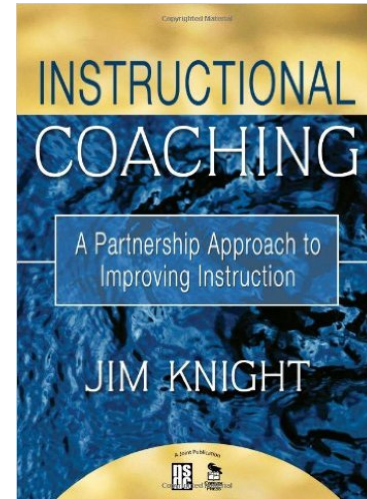
PIIC's BDA process of coaching is mirrored in his cognitive coaching approach encouraging a planning conversation, an event, and a reflecting conversation. Our roles as instructional coaches is to "enable teachers to implement scientifically proven instructional practices that respond directly to teachers' burning issues" (17). This reinforces how instructional coaches are there to help with ongoing concerns and embedded practices, not as one hit wonders to advise about district goals at the start and close of a school year.

According to Knight, there are four issues on which coaches can focus with teachers as a starting point to improve instruction: behavior, content knowledge, direct instruction, and formative assessment. These focus areas help create the topics for ongoing conversation between teachers and coaches. He explores the big issues in chapter 2 and goes more in depth in chapters 5 and 7. Included are questions, forms, and organizers to use and adapt when meeting with teachers. These helpful tools gave me some knock on the noggin, "why didn't I think of that?" moments.

Most importantly, we are spinning our wheels if we're not building relationships along the way. The Partnership Principles he promotes can be easily summed up by Ellen Eisenberg's witty phrase, "God gave you two ears

and one mouth for a reason; listen twice as much as you speak." Working with a coach should be collaborative, encouraging dialogue that motivates parties to reflect, experiment, learn, and grow. If coaches are not listening, change is unlikely to happen, nor will we be invited back.

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"The Instructional Coach, in other words, collaborates with teachers so they can choose and implement research-based interventions to help students learn more effectively."

Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction

Coaching to Encourage a Culture of Change

By Justin Rodrigues, Woodland Hills SD Instructional Coach

As fall begins to sweep in, we are reminded that in nature, change is both natural and inevitable. It is evident in how the landscape becomes transformed with the beautiful autumn colors and clear, crisp nights. However, all those leaves will stay steady and green until the sun begins to fade and the temperature begins to drop. Nature provides its own catalyst for change.

Applying this idea of natural and transformative change in our schools can be both challenging and elusive. Our schools can be giant machines that are neither responsive nor tolerant of change. For both teachers and administrators, changing professional practice in meaningful ways is difficult. Yet, the pressure on schools to change has reached a rallying cry. Even going beyond implementing Common Core Standards and ever-present high-stakes testing, it is evident that change is necessary in our schools. As educators, we understand

the need to build 21st century learners.

Fortunately schools have a catalyst of their own: the instructional coach. Quality instructional coaching can be one of the most naturally transformative initiatives that a school can deploy. Instructional coaches can exist at a level where they can influence instructional practice at district and classroom

"Quality instructional coaching can be one of the most naturally transformative initiatives that a school can deploy."

level. We have a road map for how this is done; it is the BDA model of instructional coaching. Change occurs one conversation at a time, through one-on-one and small group coaching. Refinement of instructional practice can be driven by gathering, organizing and using multiple measures of student data. As instructional coaches, we need to be responsive to the specific

needs of the teachers and students in our individual districts. This can be done naturally with on-going, job-embedded professional development and with building positive, non-evaluative relationships with colleagues.

Developing a culture of change is not for the faint of heart. Change inevitably meets resistance and is often very difficult to quantify and evaluate. That is when coaches need to remain persistent in what they are trying to do, while remaining patient for the results. Often times the biggest changes we make are the ones we never see. As we begin a new school year, let nature remind us about the natural occurrence of change and keep us mindful how to embrace, accept and channel it to make our schools stronger.

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Building a Shared Definition of Coaching with Administrators and Instructional Coaches

By Heather Moschetta, IU 3 PIIC Mentor

A common theme we hear among coaches is a lack of clarification of their role. Lacking a clear description of what instructional coaches do often leads to difficulty building a culture of coaching and ultimately an underutilization of coaches. We often say “Teachers don’t know what they don’t know”; they don’t understand how a coach can support them if the role of the coach has not been clearly defined and introduced to the faculty.

This exact problem led to frustration of the coaches in one PIIC-participating school district. The B-D-A process detailed below explains the steps the coaches and PIIC IU mentor followed to clarify the role of the coaches with the administrators. There were two goals of this process: (a) to create a consistency of coaching role and practice across buildings, and (b) to build an understanding of the role of coaches among four administrators in the buildings that the coaches serve so that the coaches and administrators can collaborate to develop a culture of coaching in the district.

Before: First, the coaches and the IU mentor met several times to determine the root cause of the misuse of coaches. When they determined that the cause was a lack of clear understanding among principals, they started to sketch out the coaches’ ideal roles and responsibilities. They looked at several documents for help in this step: PIIC’s definition of instructional coaching, the PDE coach job description, and the original coach job posting from the school district. The team was able to secure a spot on the agenda of the next principals’ meeting and planned the discussion with the principals.

During: Three questions guided the discussion during the principals’ meeting:

1. What are your expected outcomes from coaching?
2. What role should administrators play in reaching these outcomes?
3. What role should coaches play in reaching these outcomes?

The IU mentor facilitated discussion among the coaches and principals for each question. The questions raised important

misconceptions about what coaching is and is not, and it started a dialogue that had not previously taken place about consistency in coaching practices across all buildings in the district. During these discussions, the principals were presented with a draft of a document to help define the role of the coach and the role of the teacher when working with the coach. The document also contained a space for the role of the administrator, which the team left blank to allow the principals to complete as a result of the ensuing conversation. Principal feedback on the role of the coach and the role of the teacher shaped the document into a more consistent description of coaching in the school district. Once the document is finalized, principals and coaches will use it to introduce a clear definition of coaching for the teachers.

After: There is still more work to be done to build a consistency of expectations among all principals. Once the coaches and principals reach a consensus, the principals and coaches will present the newly defined coaches’ role to the staff at each building. Continuing the dialogue and keeping open communication will be crucial in ensuring that positive, supportive relationships exist among coaches, teachers, and principals.

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“Lacking a clear description of what instructional coaches do often leads to difficulty building a culture of coaching and an underutilization of coaches.”

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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