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4 pillars support coaching

PENNSYLVANIA MODEL BRINGS NEW CONSISTENCY TO INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

By Ellen B. Eisenberg

As part of a whole-school improvement strategy, instructional coaching fosters collective problem solving and offers targeted professional development embedded in teachers' daily work. It is a structure designed to improve individual and collective performance as it validates practices, builds collaborative cultures, and improves student engagement and learning.

In Pennsylvania, a partnership between the state department of education and the Annenberg Foundation has developed and implemented a particularly effective model of instructional coaching throughout the state known as the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC). Designed to provide the uniform and consistent delivery of professional development around instructional coaching, the PIIC model is based on four core elements:

1. Coaches work one-on-one with teachers and school leaders;
2. Coaches collect and analyze data to assess student needs and measure student progress;
3. Coaches advocate for evidence-based literacy instructional strategies; and
4. Coaches support reflective and non-evaluative practices.

Before, during, and after

In PIIC, coaches practice their craft through the four core elements described above using a defined process —

the BDA (before, during, and after) cycle of consultation, collaboration, collective problem solving, and confiden-

THEORY OF CHANGE Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

Organizational supports	Coaching and professional development	Enhanced teacher quality and classroom instruction	
• PIIC instructional mentors • District and school leaders • PIIC trainings • Professional development • Continuous support and improvement	• The use of evidence-based literacy strategies and research-based instructional techniques • Collection and analysis of data • One-on-one support • Reflective and non-evaluative practices	• Teachers skilled in diverse instructional and classroom management strategies • High-quality instruction across content areas • Actively engaged students	**Improved student outcomes**

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tiality, always providing feedback in non-evaluative ways. Coaches record and review their work documented on their reflection sheets (see the tool on p. 7), a process focusing on analyzing actions, identifying needs, and planning next steps necessary to achieve their goals. In brief, this is how it works.

• Before meeting with teachers, coaches review school improvement plans and reflect on ways they can honor the teachers' skill sets and work with them to improve student achievement. They co-create goals, determine strategies, and identify materials and resources to use.

• During visits with the teachers, coaches: 1) focus on the co-constructed goals for a particular lesson; 2) assist teachers in facilitating a specific literacy-based instructional approach; and 3) ensure that teachers recognize that they, too, are learners. They work one-on-one with teachers to focus on student needs in real-time.

• After the visitation, coaches meet one-on-one with teachers to discuss what goals were met and what worked well, focusing on their next steps to improve student performance. This is a non-evaluative process that encourages teachers to try innovative ways to increase student engagement in a risk-free environment.

Coaches also work with small teams and whole school faculties, providing ongoing professional development aligned with the school improvement plan and other district initiatives. They provide professional development for teachers and school leaders with immediate support as they build partnerships with colleagues and focus on changing practice, increasing student engagement, and improving student achievement. Coaches offer professional learning opportunities addressing content and process, and they play a broader role: nurturing a learning community in their

schools to ensure that teaching improvements are shared, ongoing, and focused directly on identified needs in that school. Instructional coaches create a culture of change, collaboration, consultation, and constructive feedback based on inquiry, reflection, and collective problem solving.

Mentors for coaches

The PIIC model of instructional coaching is implemented through regional education agencies, the Pennsylvania Intermediate Units (IUs). The IUs provide mentors for instructional coaches. The mentors are, in effect, the "coach's coach." Mentors model the coach-teacher interaction. Mentors help coaches identify teachers' strengths and collectively problem solve in non-evaluative ways, and prepare coaches with tools that build their repertoire of evidence-based literacy strategies and research-based instructional techniques. Mentors understand the connection between research and practice and support coaches in building partnerships with teachers and administrators. As they encourage coaches to think about their coaching practices, they collaborate with other mentors and reflect upon their own practices. They are resource providers and help coaches navigate both the state initiatives and school/district initiatives.

State partnership

The adoption of the PIIC instructional coaching model in the Pennsylvania Intermediate Units' member districts establishes a common ground for school improvement. Best practices are shared between and among districts through one-on-one support, monthly meetings co-facilitated by mentors and coaches, and during four statewide professional learning conferences designed and co-facilitated

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by the PIIC leadership team, the Penn Literacy Network (PLN), mentors, and coaches. Teachers, coaches, mentors, and other school leaders have an opportunity to learn and network with each other. They have learned that instructional coaching can be implemented in a variety of ways to enhance any school's professional development efforts.

The following school-based examples demonstrate how PIIC's four core elements are implemented.

Element 1: ONE-ON-ONE COACHING

Tara Young, an instructional coach from the Penn Delco School District (Aston, Pa.), begins one-on-one coaching as a "resource provider" offering materials and resources to teachers, helping them collaborate across and within content areas. Her return visits often included a quick question or two about the teachers' needs and interests, and frequently led to a follow-up conversation.

What helped Young develop the ongoing relationships with teachers was the support from her site administrator who provided time for her to work in the BDA model. She was able to utilize building substitutes to cover teachers' classes during the before and after segments of the coaching process. In addition, a private "coaching corner" was available so that teachers could meet with her without distractions. They could discuss what worked well in classrooms without interruptions and had resources nearby from Young's professional development lending library.

One-on-one coaching enables collaboration and change. For example, Young and a science teacher worked together co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflecting regularly for several months last school year. They discussed various literacy strategies and designs for grouping students effectively. They followed the BDA process each time they met. This year, that initial one-on-one with that one teacher evolved into a broader implementation in the professional learning community involving several teachers who have modeled strategies for each other and are now using common assessments and common literacy strategies.

Element 2: DATA ANALYSIS

"Data takes the guesswork out of what needs to be improved," said Michael Reed, former principal of Sci-Tech High School in Harrisburg, and current principal of Williamsport High School in the Williamsport School District. Using the school's performance data and supported by the coach, Reed and his staff focused on identifying subject matter where students were struggling. They used their data to determine areas of need, define each teacher's performance goals, and plan ongoing professional development that would expand each teacher's skill set and enhance student achievement. Giving teachers tools to maximize student learning and reinforcing their instructional practices

LESSONS LEARNED

- Coaching is collaborative; everyone is a member in a community of practice and learning.
- Coaching is not a deficit model; highlight the benefits of collegial sharing.
- Coaching is a three-pronged process: before, during, and after process is part of any instructional coaching model.
- Set the date for your debriefing during the "before" meeting.
- Focus on student engagement, student achievement, and building teacher capacity.
- Build relationships based on honesty, integrity, and confidentiality.
- Start coaching after you develop a strong relationship with teachers.
- Co-construct the purpose and goals of each coaching session.
- Nag and nurture, pat and push to further the learning process.
- Lose the ego.

with an instructional coach created an environment conducive to student and teacher success.

Data analysis helped teachers clarify what worked well in classrooms. Using these data, the instructional coach differentiated teacher support through individualized learning plans designed to address student needs. Teachers collaborated daily to maintain their focus on improved student learning and together with the instructional coach, met with every student three times per year to review achievement data so that students could set their own academic goals.

Within five years, SciTech's standardized test reading scores moved from 49% to 78% proficiency and above, and math scores went from 31% to 80% proficiency and above. Writing scores grew from 50% to 100% proficiency. SciTech was the only high school in Pennsylvania to earn the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Distinguished School Award and the National Superintendents Roundtable's School of the Year Award.

Element 3: EVIDENCE-BASED LITERACY STRATEGIES

Implementing evidence-based literacy strategies across all content areas provides a consistency in language and practice in classrooms. Principal Patty Burlingame from Altoona Area High School brought the school together as a community targeting literacy as the guiding principle across all content areas. With the literacy goal in all classrooms, Burlingame saw students making connections across their classes, collaborating on their work, and fulfilling higher

expectations set by their teachers.

Diane Hubona, instructional mentor supporting the Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8, and Mike Baker, instructional coach from Altoona Area High School, work together co-facilitating onsite professional development to ensure school wide implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies. With the support of their administrators, coaches provide ongoing professional development to ensure consistency and integrity of implementation. With a focus on literacy across all content areas, both Pennsylvania System of School Assessment reading and math, advanced and proficiency, scores have increased. Over a three-year period, the percentage of students reading at advanced and proficient levels grew from 73% to 77%, and the percentage of students scoring at advanced and proficient levels in math increased from 59% to74%. The Individualized Education Program subgroup moved from 28% to 39% proficient in reading and from 11% to 36% proficient in math.

Element 4: REFLECTION

Being a reflective practitioner makes a difference in teaching and learning. Lynne Fedorcha, instructional mentor in the Carbon Lehigh Intermediate Unit 21, believes that if we want to change practice, we need to ask questions that get teachers thinking about why they do what they do, how they believe it impacts student learning, if there are students who still don't "get it" and, if so, how can they ensure that all students can learn and succeed in classrooms. Before meeting with a coach, Fedorcha considers how the coach practices his or her craft and how to debrief effectively with the coach. She reviews her notes from previous meetings and looks for patterns of practice. Meetings begin with "visible" reflections, external reflections that are shared. The nature of this initial reflection is to revisit past procedures, revise the thinking, reform practices, and plan important next steps. The coach and mentor reflect together, sharing concerns, successes, and improvement strategies.

Dennine Leschinsky, a middle school instructional coach from the East Penn School District, recently met with Fedorcha and discussed how she and the teachers could collaborate and engage in a meaningful planning session that would scaffold learning and sustain improved instructional practices. Leschinsky wanted to be sure that as a coach, she was providing a balance between direction and teacher autonomy. Fedorcha was a silent partner and scripted what transpired between the coach and a teacher during the planning session. At the mentor/coach debriefing, both agreed that the coach's questioning techniques and her guidance to this seasoned teacher demonstrated the collaboration and collective problem solving that helped both teacher and coach gain insight about improving practices.

The purpose of reflecting and debriefing builds a teacher's awareness of his or her effectiveness. (See reflection starters at left.) Teachers initiate classroom activities with the intent of optimizing student learning. Over the years, however, the reason for the activity often fades and the activity itself becomes embedded in the curriculum. Fedorcha believes that every teacher's decision must be made with an awareness about how it affects student engagement and achievement; this process is achieved through reflection.

The PIIC's four core elements help coaches, mentors, teachers, and administrators focus on instructional practices that are critical for increasing student engagement, improving student achievement, and building teacher capacity. Importantly, the partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education has elevated acceptance levels in districts and schools through the state. With instructional coaching, the culture of a school can change, one conversation at a time in ways that honor learning, innovation, and teacher professional development.

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REFLECTION STARTERS

- I think …
- I wonder …
- What's hard about this is …
- I am unsure about …
- What's interesting is …
- One area that I need further practice is …
- A strength for me is …
- I was surprised that …
- I already know about … but learned that …
- It's okay that …
- I am concerned that …
- I think what will happen is …
- This is different because …
- I feel confident about …
- It made me think of …
- I figured out …
- I could visualize …

Source: Kathy Schick, instructional coach, Lehigh Career and Technical Center

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Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

WEB SITES

Innovative Education Forum

Get inspired and share your teaching innovations at the 2011 U.S. Innovative Education Forum (IEF), an initiative of Microsoft Partners in Learning. IEF celebrates outstanding educators and schools using technology to positively impact student learning by recognizing projects that incorporate 21st-century technology into the classroom. Deadline to apply is May 15, 2011.
www.microsoft.com/education/USIEF

Teaching success stories

"Need to Know," a news and public affairs show on PBS, presents an hour devoted to success stories in teaching. The program highlights three dramatic stories of academic transformation, focusing on literacy, physical education, and science education, including a panel discussion. "Need to Know" is requesting that educators send in videos of their best ideas for improving public education.
www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/uncategorized/need-to-know-february-11-2011-an-education-hour-preview/6949/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Explore other coaching models and additional information for teacher leaders.

BOOKS

Mentoring and Coaching:
A Lifeline for Teachers in a Multicultural Setting
Corwin, 2009

Filled with reproducible resources and real-life vignettes, this book focuses on mentoring new teachers.
www.learningforwardstore.org

Evocative Coaching:
Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time
Jossey-Bass, 2010

By taking a teacher-centered, strengths-based approach to performance improvement, the Evocative Coaching model aims to "generate the motivation and movement that enables teachers and schools to achieve desired outcomes and enhance quality of life."
www.learningforwardstore.org

ARTICLES/REPORTS

Take a closer look:
Reflection gives educators the chance to tap into what they've learned
Tools for Schools, April/May, 2002

This issue of *Tools for Schools* focuses on the reflective process, examining personal and group reflection through author interviews and four tools that help guide a variety of reflective processes.
www.learningforward.org/members/getDocument.cfm?issueID=129

See me, hear me, coach me
JSD, Summer, 2009

Virtual bug-in-ear technology brings immediacy to professional development. Technology tools make on-the-spot classroom coaching a reality for teachers in Alabama and Pennsylvania.
www.learningforward.org/news/articleDetails.cfm?articleID=1902

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