

In the recent report, “[*Coaching for Impact: Six pillars to create coaching roles that achieve their potential to improve teaching and learning*](#)”, instructional coaching is described as a vehicle to help all teachers plan more effectively, collaborate with colleagues about their practices, identify the strengths and areas of practice that need more support, and analyze student performance. This is and has always been PIIC’s message about the power of instructional coaching.

Six fundamentals are suggested as critical components of a professional learning model that are needed change the culture of a school and build teacher capacity. All the components speak to the necessity and merit of creating a systems approach to school wide improvement. Sure, the conversations may occur one at a time but the true transformation, not reformation, happens when the school community is willing to change the culture and climate of the school. This takes patience, practice, persistence, and perseverance.

The six components: *System Vision and Commitment; Recruitment and Selectivity; Shared Responsibility; Development and Support; Role Clarity, Time, and Culture; Compensation and Sustainability* are the “pillars” that are vital to creating a shared vision for whole school support and change. While I’m not convinced that the thinking and explanations provided in each section are aligned with our vision, they expound on the central items that should be considered when implementing a job-embedded teacher/school wide professional development plan that focuses on professional learning for all. Remember, it’s not only about the instructional coach; it’s about a model that encompasses all the critical elements of school wide change: organization, curriculum, instruction, research, data, ongoing support, reflection, building literacy skills, collaboration, transparency, and a host of other factors that help create a shared vision of how to effectively help the school community reach the highest levels of success for all learners.

The report also indicates three levels of coaching: *peer coaching, school wide coaching, and accountable team leadership*. As instructional coaches, you routinely work with your teaching colleagues to discuss, plan, “rehearse,” deliver instruction in supportive ways, and provide feedback. So, you are peer coaching because you are working with your peers. One critical element is that our model provides ongoing professional development with follow up support that leads to deep professional learning. That makes a huge difference in peer coaching. Not every teacher can be expected to coach a colleague. In fact, not every great teacher automatically becomes a great coach. Effective coaching is a skill that requires nourishment, experience, practice, and support.

School wide coaching is the way to go. Every teacher wants to go from good to great and refine his/her instructional practice. Coaches are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional techniques and strategies. PIIC coaches are “content neutral.” That is, they work with teachers across all content areas and are knowledgeable about adult learning theory and practice. They follow the “*before, during, and after*” cycle of consultation and work with teachers one-on-one and in small groups. This is a commitment and investment to school wide improvement.

Accountable team leadership is an interesting thought... coaches are accountable for their work with colleagues and they are team leaders. This term, however, sounds so evaluative to me. Yes, we are all accountable both individually and collectively for our work. But, are coaches responsible for the students’ achievement and performance of the teachers they coach? I think coaches are responsible for providing teachers with relevant instructional practices that are tied to student data, research, curriculum, and teacher practice. They are responsible for providing teachers with ongoing support that fosters collaboration, collective problem-solving, and critical thinking. They are responsible for providing ongoing professional development that evolves into effective professional learning but are they responsible for each student’s growth when they are not the ones with the daily face-to-face hands on interactions with them?

My tip for the month... continue to bring your teaching colleagues together to talk about practice. As cited in the report (and our own research), “*Recent studies of literacy coaching efforts have found significant student learning gains when teachers received one-on-one support from well-trained coaches*” (Medrich, Fitzgerald, & Skomsvold, 2013, Instructional coaching and student outcomes; Biancarosa, Byrk, & Dexter, 2010, Assessing the value-added effects of literacy collaborative professional development). Honor the teachers’ voices and help them dig deeper into adolescent learning by digging deeper into their own learning. Help your colleagues understand how their preconceived notions about learning can either enhance or inhibit their teaching and their students’ learning. Understand that coaching is messy but that’s okay. It’s that very disruption that stimulates questioning and creates the thinking that elicits changes in practice.

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