Pennsylvania’s Barrow School District Seeks Improved Instruction

A CASE STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING
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Introduction
As the largest and most urban district in its immediate region, Barrow School District educates over 10,000 students in more than a dozen schools. In the early 2000s, changing demographics in the surrounding community presented Barrow with an increasingly racially, economically, and linguistically diverse student population: the district serves a student body that is over half Hispanic, almost 20 percent African American, just over 10 percent Caucasian, and nearly 10 percent Asian/other. Nearly three-quarters of its students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

Test scores in the 2000s, meanwhile, were stagnating in the high stakes era of No Child Left Behind. Barrow’s scores on statewide high stakes tests have been among the lowest in the state in recent years, with the district facing school improvement or corrective action under Adequate Yearly Progress status going back to 2004. District leadership recognized that meeting the diverse needs of their changing student population—and addressing sinking test scores—would demand an enhanced focus on improving instruction in the classroom. Seeking new avenues to improve instruction, in the early years of the millennium Barrow’s superintendent made the decision to implement instructional coaching throughout the district with dedicated funding and vocal support. Instructional coaches were to provide on-site support to teachers for implementing best practice in the classroom.

Instructional coaching is a professional development strategy in which practiced educators bring the benefit of their own experience, reflection, and evidence-based practices to classroom teachers and other school leaders. After decades of isolation and autonomy in the classroom for many American teachers, the education profession is now adopting instructional coaching as one promising strategy for improving instruction, engaging students in their learning, and ultimately raising student achievement. Many districts in Pennsylvania, Barrow among them, have leaned on a coaching model promoted by the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC), which encourages one-on-one and small group support for teachers, coaches, and school leaders around evidenced-based literacy strategies and coaching practice.

In Barrow, instructional coaching was instituted in every school in the district with funding from federal Title I funds. Most schools had both a math coach and a literacy coach in the early years of the instructional coaching initiative. Although the superintendent who first instituted and championed instructional coaching is no longer with the district, Barrow continues to support instructional coaching with a dedicated funding stream at the district level. When the program was cut for one year under a new superintendent, outcry from district principals brought it back in the next school year. As school funding has dwindled and the ranks of school staffs shrank in recent years, the two coaching positions were collapsed into a single coaching position in each school who works across content areas.

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1 Names and identifying details of the district and individual respondents have been changed to protect their anonymity.
2 http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/national_school_lunch/7487
While PIIC is an instructional coaching model designed for teachers working in grades four and above, because coaching in Barrow was a district-wide initiative coaches also worked with teachers in earlier elementary grades. In this case study we conducted interviews with instructional coaches who were coaching both secondary and elementary teachers. Therefore this report includes data on coaches who worked with elementary teachers as well as those who worked with middle school and high school teachers.

Coaches in Barrow were supported by an instructional coaching mentor through the local Intermediate Unit (IU). The instructional coaching mentor met monthly with coaches throughout the IU and conducted regular visits to schools in the region to support instructional coaches and the teachers they served.

Coaches’ primary responsibility, as defined by the district, was to provide school-level training and coaching while promoting consistency in district-level curricula and professional development. Ensuring high quality instruction and increasing the retention of effective teachers were additional goals. One-on-one work with teachers in their classrooms was but one small piece of the coaches’ district-level job description.

In practice, though, it was the focus on high quality classroom instruction, working with individuals and groups of teachers, that coaches ultimately settled on as their most important function. Principals, too, saw coaches’ work around instructional practice as the most valuable contribution to their schools. Karen Robinson, principal at Madison Elementary School in Barrow, described what she hoped coaching would achieve in her school: “Through coaching, teachers will improve their practice and deliver more effective instruction…teachers can be more reflective in their practice as they are learning from the coach. And there, in turn, the best thing that happens is student achievement goes up,” she reflected. On his goal for coaching, Paul Harris, principal at Roosevelt Middle School, declared simply, “great teaching.” The coach was to offer embedded, contextual ongoing professional development for teachers open to taking the help. More specifically, according to principals, coaches were a go-to in-house resource for teachers looking to advance their practice, offering resources and assistance just around the corner or an email away.

This case study explores the day to day experiences of three instructional coaches—two at the elementary level and one at the secondary level—in one Pennsylvania school district during the 2013-2014 school year: what they do, how they do it, and how they believe their work helps teachers even in the face of some persistent challenges.

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4 School districts in Pennsylvania can access professional development services through one of 29 Intermediate Units, entrepreneurial service agencies established by the Pennsylvania General Assembly to meet regional educational needs.

5 Data for this case study were drawn primarily from interviews conducted over the course of two site visits to Barrow School District during the 2013-2014 academic year. Researchers interviewed three instructional coaches, three school administrators, eight teachers, and the Intermediate Unit coaching mentor to gather information and perspectives on the coaching role in Barrow. Researchers also conducted direct observations of four instructional coaching sessions.
Coaching in Action: The Coach in the School

Coaching in Barrow was meant, in large part, to support consistent implementation of district curricula. Though coaching is supported by district-level funds, and codified in a common district-wide job description, in practice coaching also reflected the very specific context of the school in which each coach worked. This was, explained Robinson, exactly as it should be: “As we’ve developed a deeper understanding of curriculum... getting to know our staff so well and knowing what they need ...It’s been an evolution of sorts because we both [Robinson and her coach] have grown a lot... we’re now figuring this out. We know the teachers need this. Then how do we strategically get that out to the teachers?” Specific coaching duties could and did shift over time as the needs of the school shifted.

Administrators sought out coaches with clear understanding of pedagogy and curriculum design as well as the “non-teachable skills” of trustworthiness and a faith that all students can learn. Flexibility, multi-tasking, and a strong ability to prioritize were also important coaching skills. This mix of skills would allow coaches to develop a sort of symbiosis with the needs of the school—its teachers and students — and the coaching vision of its administrators.

Jennifer Baker, a coach new to her school, described how she had worked with her principal to develop a shared understanding of how she should prioritize her time. Each of them listed coaching responsibilities and the proportion of time that should be spent on each; then they sat down to reach consensus on any disagreements and to organize Baker’s time around these mutual priorities. Even in schools with a long history of coaching, veteran coaches continued to refine and update their roles and responsibilities as evolving needs dictated. Coach Joanne Young, with ten years of tenure in her school building, still met with administrators at the beginning of each school year to define specific responsibilities of the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach for the year in instructional coaching. Paloma Hernandez, the coach at Roosevelt, meanwhile, had “reframed” her position in the last several years in response to the needs of teachers in her building. Sometimes these conversations led to distinct changes in coaching practice. Where once she met with teachers mostly in groups, she had moved toward more one-on-one meetings.

Coaches in Barrow wore many hats in the school building. Coaches ran weekly or monthly whole school professional development sessions. Coaches met individually with teachers and with teachers in grade-level or cross-content groups. They collected and analyzed student data and managed student information systems. Coaches served as curriculum specialists across content areas. Coaches acted as members of school leadership teams, sometimes de facto and sometimes officially. They organized and distributed materials to classrooms. They coordinated administration of statewide tests. Recognizing that it needed to be done and no one else had volunteered for the task, one coach took on the task of restructuring her school’s master schedule.

Coaches highlighted the difficulty of finding time for coaching among all these other duties as perhaps their biggest challenge. “I would say really balancing it all [is my biggest challenge],” Young explained. “I could literally sit at my desk and do emails all day. I could
spend all my time on assessments... [I try to make sure] I’m in the classroom and working with teachers at least 50 percent of the time rather than doing administrative, behind the scenes pieces.” Hernandez concurred that her position demanded “managing so many things at once and deciding what’s really important. Then advocating for what’s really important and not letting other people’s agendas overtake that.”

Coaches’ varied work meant that they interacted on a daily basis with teachers, school leaders, and even students. Their ubiquity made them very visible figures in the school and a natural fit for advancing new school-wide initiatives. By leading whole-school professional development sessions, and in one-on-one and group meetings with teachers, these coaches played major roles in putting into place new initiatives or programs at the school-wide level: initiatives like updated math assessments, a new reading curriculum across several grades, or tiered reading interventions.

Some of the coaches’ duties were more directly related to their charge of influencing instruction than others. Principals asked or coaches volunteered to take on these additional duties partly because, with shrinking school staffs, there was no one else in the building to do them. Coaches could sometimes feel the need to defend their position against encroaching other duties; Hernandez, for example, asked her school administrator to assign collection and analysis of student data to another staff member to allow her more time in classrooms. He obliged, but in other instances, like administering assessments, there was little he could do. “I’m wasting a resource [in the coach] and I know I am,” explained Harris. But these tasks needed to get done and somebody needed to do them.

Coaches did their best to manage their time and other responsibilities to set protective boundaries around their coaching work, but it was not easy. Hernandez described how she had “let things fall through the cracks that aren’t my responsibility, and it’s been painful to experience that.” The challenge of balancing other responsibilities with coaching was especially acute in the spring semester when administering statewide assessments ate up valuable coaching time to a frustrating degree. Hernandez explained how difficult the spring semester had been when “[testing] really impacted things. I’ve had a handful of teachers come to me and say, ‘I need, I need. I need. This is happening; I need to talk about this.’ I found myself working a lot outside of school.” She was trying to address the challenge with school administrators: “I’ve talked to my principal a lot about all of the clerical work, and you know, if you think my job is valuable, we need to figure out a way to take some of that off so I can refocus on the coaching,” she recalled. Robinson, a school principal, also recognized that “when assessments are happening she’s [the coach] not in classrooms.”

Although finding time could be a challenge, coaches in Barrow insisted that working directly with teachers to improve instruction and student achievement was, in their eyes, the most important part of their complex job. “First and foremost,” explained Baker, “[I focus on] raising student achievement. [I’m] doing that by empowering teachers to be able to make some strong instructional decisions based on data, based on their strengths, [and] based on the needs of their students.” The latter piece of this equation, student achievement, was ultimately where coaches hoped to see their impact even though they
worked directly with the teachers. It could take some time for coaches to arrive at this understanding, explained Young. After focusing more on how she influenced teachers through her early years of coaching, she now understood that “My job is to increase student achievement. And I do that through helping the teachers... [Now] it's less about making the teachers happy and more about making the students successful” (see the “Coaching Outcomes” section for discussion of the impact of coaching). Coaches also hoped to promote a vision of teaching and learning in Barrow that was more collaborative, even “grassroots.”

Despite their own focus on working with teachers to meet student needs, coaches might spend well over half their time on duties outside of meeting with teachers. These tasks could sometimes distract from working directly with teachers on instructional practice. In what Hernandez called a “pure example” of how outside duties could infringe on her work with teachers, she explained that over the course of the 2013-2014 school year testing administration had increasingly taken more and more of her time. By the spring, when statewide testing was at its heaviest, testing administration was taking more than two thirds of her time and preventing her from meeting with teachers as often as she hoped: “On our district level job description, it says ‘assessment’ under minimal tasks... Assessment has become 65 percent of my job, 70, maybe 75 percent since February. So pretty much most of what I do when I’m here has to do with assessment. And that’s a huge shift from the beginning of the year...I was meeting with 50 teachers once a month and now I’m not. I haven’t been able to.” Teachers also recognized these other demands on their coach’s time. “I am so grateful to have her...I feel like she’s here for us, the teachers,” reflected Kasey Thatcher, a secondary language arts teacher. “I hope she’s not weighed down by all the other stuff.”

In other instances, coaches were better able to integrate their other responsibilities with their one-on-one work directly with teachers. “[I] try to focus on how can I fit coaching into the other pieces [of my position] because there’s always too much to do and not enough people to do it,” explained Young. Coaches were sometimes able to parley informal conversations and relationships developed through whole-school professional development sessions into more intensive coaching meetings with individual teachers. Their responsibilities for collecting and analyzing student data, meanwhile, could translate directly into topics for future meetings with teachers. In one instance, described Young, her role as curriculum specialist in introducing a new reading program in whole-school professional development was also helping in her work with individual teachers: “I know what [teachers] have, I know what resources there are...I know what questions to ask to push them...But you need to know the curriculum to be able to have that conversation.”

What does it look like when instructional coaches do have the opportunity to work directly with teachers? They do so in groups large and small, in one-on-one meetings, and with different topics, strategies, and goals depending on when, where, and why they meet.
Working with Teachers in the Whole School

The coaches in Barrow met often with the teachers in their schools during regular whole-school professional development sessions. Planning for and running these meetings was a major piece of coaches’ day to day work, and principals relied on coaches as the primary source of job-embedded professional development for their teachers. Coaches focused on topics like writing across the curriculum, reading comprehension strategies, or using data to improve instruction. Through their broader role in the district and IU, coaches were also able to serve as a resource to teachers on larger trends or movements in education in the state. In the 2013-2014 academic year, those conversations were focused largely on implementing the Common Core State Standards and Pennsylvania’s new educator effectiveness system, set to take effect in the 2014-2015 school year.

Often whole-school professional development was related to district curricula, but just as often it might focus on priorities in the school building. The topics for whole-school professional development shifted from year to year as district and school priorities changed. Whole-school professional development sessions offered by the coaches included:

At Madison Elementary, Young met regularly with the whole staff to conduct trainings on emerging best practices or using new materials. In the 2012-2013 school year, the school as a whole was placing a premium on understanding how to better engage students. Young, in her capacity as coach, led teachers and school leaders through a protracted book study on total participation during regular professional development sessions. In the 2013-2014 school year, the whole-school book study focused on strategies for guided math lessons. Building off the shared reading material, Young visited math lessons in classrooms throughout the school then convened teachers to discuss instructional time management.

Baker facilitated regular sessions during whole-school faculty meetings. These meetings concentrated on implementing school-wide initiatives, sharing resources, or introducing new instructional techniques. Baker had co-led three of these sessions with the IU PIIC mentor.

Hernandez led whole-school professional development sessions during monthly early dismissal days. She focused on visions for whole-school initiatives during these sessions and, through these trainings, she had “been able to really impact a lot of building wide decisions.” With professional development from Hernandez, Roosevelt had implemented a whole-school vocabulary program, literacy programs, tiered intervention groups, and close reading across the curriculum. Hernandez worked with the IU PIIC mentor to co-plan and co-facilitate some of these sessions.

Coaches were sometimes challenged to ensure that the strategies and resources introduced in whole-school sessions were actually implemented in classrooms. “I still struggle with that as a coach,” Hernandez explained, “to know how to inspire and encourage and get people to get on board with some of our whole-school initiatives without having that leverage of accountability as a boss.” She relied on her principal to step in when necessary to encourage teachers to participate in such initiatives: “I feel like there’s an open enough
relationship between my principal and me that I can have those conversations if I muster up the guts,” she reflected.

**Working with Teachers in Small Groups**

The coaches also had regularly-scheduled meetings with smaller groups of teachers. These meetings often focused on specific resources or strategies and on student data. When possible, the coaches sought to form teachers into groups that would help them work with new colleagues by mixing grade levels or content areas. The coach’s own role in small group meetings depended on the topic and teacher needs. As Thatcher explained, “Sometimes [my coach] is the person sitting next to you learning with you and sometimes then she is the one teaching you how to do things.” Small group sessions offered by the coaches included:

- At Madison, Young met in daily 30-minute morning sessions with grade level teams, focusing on different content areas or topics depending on the day. One weekly meeting focused on data; in these meetings, Young was working intensely with one grade-level team on using Excel to manipulate and understand student data for making instructional decisions. Young tried to promote a reliance on data and a sense of collaboration in her morning small-group sessions, she explained: “[I’m] trying to really get them talking about what they’re doing...We do a lot of team talking...I [sometimes] hear them asking each other the same questions I would have asked them. So through coaching and PD [professional development] they've adapted that into their team.”

- Baker, along with her school administrators, met each Friday with one grade level team, including special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, to analyze student data for the grade and make instructional decisions. Baker also held weekly collaborative planning meetings with third, fourth, and fifth grade teams. The coach circulated between the three teams during their collaborative time to help plan lessons or arrange for modeling or co-teaching lessons.

- Hernandez met monthly with each of the content area teams in her school to discuss curriculum. She had also formed a small work group to act as a Literacy Design Collaborative focused on integrating reading and writing across content areas. She was seeing “a lot of enthusiasm about that...I have teachers that it’s the first time they’re saying, ‘Oh wait, I have to model this with my kids...’ We’re getting there. It’s a work in progress.” As part of an effort to differentiate professional learning for her teachers, Hernandez implemented professional learning communities in the 2013-2014 school year for the first time. She facilitated self-selected, cross-grade level book study groups on topics related to implementing the Common Core State Standards. Each group conducted research and discussed results on its own before presenting findings to the whole school staff.

Working with small groups presented its own challenges for coaches. Some teams worked together better than others, demanding that coaches deploy facilitation strategies calibrated to the unique dynamics of each group. Simply maintaining the complex
scheduling required could be time consuming for coaches. At times, said Hernandez, it could feel hectically like “spinning plates.”

**Addressing New Math Assessments**

In one of her daily morning professional development sessions with teachers, Young met with grade-level teams to talk through a new set of assessments that accompanied the new math curriculum being introduced in the school. After opening the meeting by asking each teacher to complete a reflection sheet with examples of how they had used formative and summative assessments in the new curriculum, Young circulated through the room answering individual questions. First in grade-level teams, and later in groups reshuffled across grade levels, the teachers quietly discussed their own experiences with various assessments and asked questions of one another in small groups of two to five. After decamping back into their grade-level teams, the teachers discussed what they had heard in their vertical teams. Young closed the meeting by sharing a list of common questions she had heard in circulating through the groups, such as the best way to conduct fluency checks with students on the new math curriculum. After promising to return from her monthly coaches meeting with additional answers to teachers’ questions, Young closed the meeting by sharing her attitude on assessments: “My philosophy is, if they can think then they can take a test.”

**Working with Teachers One-on-One**

Whole-school and small group professional development offered by coaches was typically regularly scheduled and required for teachers. Coaches faced a much tougher challenge, however, when it came to working intensively with their teachers one-on-one. In rare instances, an administrator directed a coach to work with specific teachers. More often, administrators and coaches might have “candid conversations” about the needs of particular teachers, but encouraged teachers to seek out assistance from the coach of their own accord. Coaching relationships initiated by the teacher, explained Harris, led to more authentic, grassroots change in instruction: “As a supervisor, it gets very gray. I can tell you to do it because it’s going to matter in your evaluation, but to make it really authentic, to have that colleague-to-colleague relationship from somebody that you value and trust and respect...that will be so much more meaningful.”

Ideally, coaches and administrators worked closely enough that they were in agreement on the professional development needs in their school and for individual teachers. As Robinson described it, “It’s really a partnership. [The coach] and I have a great relationship, but I don’t really cross the lines of explaining what I saw in an observation, where she doesn’t cross the lines of saying how terrible something might be when she’s in the classroom. But we know that we’re talking about the same thing.” Coaches and administrators emphasized that the coach’s role with teachers was not evaluative; coaches were meant to work with teachers in a supportive but not supervisory capacity. Baker sometimes worried that she was seen by teachers as “an extension of the administration, when I don’t have those administrative powers or duties.” Consequently, coaches worked hard to overcome any perception that they worked only with struggling teachers or that
their conversations with administrators violated teachers’ trust. Baker made sure to tell teachers, “If we talk about something...I’m not going to run to the administration and pass that on...I am kind of relentless about that because I’m so cognizant of the frailty of coming into this position.”

Building this level of trust with teachers took time, dependability, and patience on the part of coaches, especially with teachers resistant to the idea of coaching. Coaches speculated that teachers reluctant to participate in coaching were not confident in their skills and not comfortable allowing the coach into their classroom or that they had come from other schools with more punitive professional cultures. In recruiting these teachers into coaching, coaches took great care to emphasize that their role was non-evaluative. They found that word of mouth about the success of coaching from other teachers could help win over reluctant teachers. Baker fought the perception that teachers who received coaching were struggling; she overcame it by making sure to work with accomplished as well as new teachers to demonstrate that teachers were not being targeted for poor performance. In early meetings with resistant teachers, coaches took whatever chance they could to enter the classroom, even if it meant making copies or helping with other administrative tasks; Hernandez described this process as building “relational collateral” with her teachers in a progression that ultimately would lead to more meaningful coaching conversations down the road. In all cases, coaches found that dependability was crucial to establishing their trustworthiness: “I think that the best way to build trust is to say what you are going to do and do what you say,” Baker explained.
Despite the challenges, coaches and teachers alike explained that their on-one-one time together was perhaps their most valuable. It was her intensive work with teachers, Hernandez explained, that kept her in the coaching job. Teachers valued their coaches’ experience as classroom teachers, curriculum expertise, and approach to student engagement. Thatcher appreciated that when her coach brought ideas to their meetings, “It wasn’t just something that she read in a book. It was something that she had real experience with.”

Coaches often acted as a sort of “counselor” for teachers’ concerns or “cheerleader” for teachers’ successes. Coaches suggested that this aspect of the working relationship was important in itself, but that helping teachers feel comfortable and valued was also critical to teachers’ openness to coaching. “It’s about being really, really there when there’s a big struggle,” explained Hernandez. “Just going alongside that person, because if a teacher comes to you, if they reach outside of themselves, it’s usually pretty big. They’re really struggling with something that’s going on, whether its classroom management or feeling totally overwhelmed. Just being there with them and listening. That opens up the ability for me to come in and fill that need if I can.”

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**Getting Students into Groups**

At Roosevelt, teachers established a professional learning goal at the beginning of the school year and met with their coach at regular intervals to develop their skills in this area. Recognizing that she was struggling with effectively differentiating her seventh grade language arts students into groups, Grace Nelson went to Hernandez for help. She turned to the coach because, she explained, “I really take it seriously because I have seen firsthand what she does in the classroom and how effective it is.” Having met in a ‘Before’ session to review her lesson plan and set goals for a classroom ‘During’ session, Nelson invited Hernandez into her classroom to co-teach a lesson on identifying information in texts and making connections between historical events. Nelson and Hernandez agreed that the coach would watch for and collect notes on student discussion, questioning, and engagement in the texts; Hernandez told the students that she would be taking notes on their comprehension. Before breaking the students into groups, Nelson modeled note taking on a template projected onto the room’s Smart Board as Hernandez watched the lesson. As the students, now split into two groups, read aloud in turn to their groups, Hernandez circled the room taking notes on what she heard and asking questions of individual students. As they read, students took notes on a close-reading template Nelson had shared. In their ‘After’ debrief, Hernandez came prepared with some challenging questions like, “What do the students’ connections and questions tell you about the success of this lesson? What indicators did you see of deep comprehension? Did all or most of the students have their needs met?” After a few sessions working with Hernandez, Nelson was slowly moving on from her anxiety about differentiating groups and toward a feeling of, “Ok, I can do this. I can use my resources and even when it’s just me I can purposefully group these kids so that they’re all working and they are all engaged and I have done it.”
Most intensive coaching conversations were structured, more or less formally and explicitly, around a cyclical “Before-During-After” or BDA process. For Young and Hernandez, who had been able to attend three of PIIC’s statewide professional learning opportunities, PIIC’s focus on the process of coaching had helped them grasp a streamlined approach for communicating with teachers and effecting change. While the coaches had already more or less followed a version of the BDA cycle, PIIC allowed them to be more explicit in defining and following the steps. Attending PIIC’s statewide conference, reflected Hernandez, and had “probably been one of the most beneficial things the last couple of years. It’s really forced me to be much more structured about how I meet with teachers and intentional about our meeting times.” For Hernandez, PIIC also encouraged her to do more individual work with teachers rather than working with them primarily in groups. PIIC, Hernandez reflected, “got me really inspired about this job and what it could be; not just what it is, because that can be different from what it can be. It’s allowed me to push through some of that and really define it and make it what I want it to be.”

In the ‘Before’ pre-conference, coaches and teachers met to determine the topic on which they would focus, establish clear goals for the coaching cycle, and discuss roles and responsibilities for each in the ‘During” classroom visit. Hernandez came to each ‘Before’ session with a list of questions prepared in advance specific to individual teacher’s professional learning goals. They might agree to test out a specific literacy strategy, co-teach a lesson, have the coach model a lesson while the teacher watched, or vice versa. Coaches encouraged teachers to select the topic on which they wished to focus in each cycle. Teachers in Barrow focused on topics like “comprehension and analysis of texts in guided reading groups” or “implementing close reading techniques in an ESL class” in their BDA cycles.

Often, coaches assured teachers that their focus in the classroom would be on collecting behavioral data on what students were doing and saying during the lesson, rather than on what the teacher was doing and saying in front of the class. “[A teacher might] say, ‘I want to know what kind of conversations they are having in their small groups,’” Hernandez offered as an example. “Then [during the lesson] I’m running around... when the kids are talking trying to write down what they are saying in their small group. Or... I ask a question [and] a kid answers, I ask a question [and] another kid answers, I ask a question and another kid answers, or [I’m looking for], is it conversation between kids in the classroom?” Young concurred: “One of the questions that I love...I roll it into everything is, ‘If you had a magic wand and...put it on a student’s head, what would you want to hear them thinking?’” This focus not only kept the emphasis where it should be, on student learning, but also made teachers more comfortable with inviting the coach into the classroom for watching, modeling, or co-teaching lessons. Coaches’ emphasis on student behavior even helped some teachers shift their own outlook, as Thatcher described: “[My coach has] helped me look at [the classroom] from a different point of view, from a kid’s perspective, where [before] I was always looking at it from a teacher’s perspective.”

In the ‘During’ classroom visit, teachers and coaches implemented the strategy or technique they discussed in the ‘Before’ conference and looked for evidence of student engagement and learning. Coaches were careful to emphasize that collecting data on
student responses to lessons during the classroom visit was critical to the BDA cycle and instructional decisions made by teachers. When coaches visited teachers delivering lessons, they collected this information and asked teachers to do the same during coach-led lessons.

In the ‘After’ debrief, teachers and coaches revisited their goals established in the ‘Before’ conference, reflected on evidence collected in the ‘During’ classroom visit, and established next steps for their work together. Young shared her data with her teachers in advance of each ‘After’ session to allow them to prepare for the conversation. Her teachers, Young explained, “Come back in and it’s either, ‘yes the students were doing what I wanted them to do.’ Then the conversation goes, ‘Ok what did you have in place so that they could do that? ... But then the conversation can also go, ‘The kids weren’t doing what I wanted them to do.’ So then it backs up into, ‘What could you have in place to get them there?’”

Hernandez posited that the ‘After’ was perhaps the most intimidating, but the most important, step in the BDA learning process for both coaches and teachers; the ‘After’ session is “the place where reflection influences the practice, the application, or it goes further than just this moment with this group of kids. But it hopefully is able to transport into future practice.” In the best cases, one BDA cycle would lead directly into the next in what Young called a “roll of [BDA] cycles.” In these instances the ‘After’ debrief lead directly into establishing goals for the next ‘Before’ pre-conference.

Coaches used a variety of techniques to encourage teachers to work with them in these intensive one-on-one coaching sessions. They might parley topics discussed in school-wide or small group meetings into one-on-one meetings. Baker, for example, followed a whole-school professional development session on close reading with a series of demonstration lessons in classrooms and then turned to visiting teachers as they delivered lessons themselves. Young offered a more specific example: “I get the [teachers] to do a lot of reflection in PD [professional development]... One of my...teachers said to me, ‘I’m not comfortable scoring writing.’ So...I put out the feeler walking down the hall, ‘Hey, sometime do you want to sit down and score writing together?’ That would be the foot in the door to being able to get in there and do some coaching with writing instruction.” Robinson described how whole-school professional development could lead directly into a one-on-one coaching interaction: “It’s through the professional development role that the teachers are getting what they need. So then in the immediate before of a coaching cycle, [Young has] already set up that knowledge base and she can go back [to a teacher] and say, ‘We talked about this... What’s that look like for you? What questions do you have?’” Sometimes quick, informal “hallway conversations” were the coaches’ avenue into working with a teacher. To make teachers more at ease with having the coach in their classroom, coaches positioned themselves as “experimenters” looking to try a new instructional strategy with students. Teachers were more comfortable with the coach focusing on the students rather than on them. As Hernandez explained, “I’ve found that [what works is] going in... and making myself really transparent and humble, and saying ‘I want to figure this out. Can we figure this out together?’”

Coaches’ described a deepening scale of coaching intensity over time as their working relationships with teachers developed. “In the beginning your challenge is establishing your credibility and your relationships,” explained Young; simply getting into teachers’
classrooms was perhaps her biggest challenge as a novice coach. Once “in” with their teachers one-on-one, coaches pursued their coaching goals in a number of ways. They might start by serving as a sort of resource provider, preparing classroom materials, sharing fresh research, or introducing new texts for students. John King, a social studies teacher, recalled when he approached his coach and said, “I think my students are really struggling with nonfiction texts, like biographies and primary sources. Then two days later she shows up at my door with huge stacks of books and she just goes through them with me.” Eventually, the coaches hoped, these early coaching conversations would build into deeper working relationships that allowed for co-planning, modeling or co-teaching lessons, and collaborative reflection. Coaching conversations at this later stage presented their own challenges: “It is less about building relationships and credibility; I’ve built that. Now it’s about getting in their heads and really making changes...Coaching strategies and coaching content is easy, but trying to coach somebody to change their style is hard. I think that’s where we are [at this stage]...It’s heavy stuff,” Young reflected.

Coaching Close Reading and Conversation in an ESL Class
Michelle Moore decided early in the year that she wanted to focus her work with Hernandez on having her students write more often. But because she taught ESL students, she knew that regular opportunities for conversation in class were also important for her students. She invited Hernandez into her seven-person class to help her implement close reading as a strategy to get at both goals. By May of the school year, she had already made good progress. She told Hernandez when she shared a student essay, “This is how I know it’s working.” In a ‘Before’ session, Hernandez helped Moore restructure a lesson on Bridge to Terabithia to encourage students to forge connections between their own experiences and the text they had read and then make connections between texts. When Hernandez visited her classroom, Moore was prepared with close reading note-taking guides for her students and a lesson plan freshly revised after her ‘Before’ session. Early in the year, Hernandez had prepared “Tag Your Text” bookmarks for all the students in the school with note-taking symbols for flagging important ideas, questions, and surprising information in texts. Now, at this later point in the year, Hernandez prompted Moore to encourage the students to generate their own symbols for “tagging” connections to their own experiences in the text. During the lesson, as students read aloud to the group and then briefly on their own, Hernandez circulated the room taking notes on students’ responses to Moore’s questions and even taking photos of the symbols they generated in their notes in the margins of their texts. Following the lesson in their ‘After’ session, Hernandez shared specific examples of student responses to the text and the close reading strategies from the data she collected. In this late-in-the-year lesson, Hernandez reflected on the growth in Moore’s students, they were “desperate to share their learning,” more willing to speak out loud, and very evidently had spent a lot of time in conversation. Moore explained that she hoped to build on her own growth in the next year by assigning her students longer and more varied texts for reading.

Coaches in Barrow estimated that at least half of their one-on-one sessions with teachers entailed a formal ‘Before,’ ‘During,’ or ‘After’ meeting, though some coaches were more
formal and explicit about this distinction than others. For much of the 2013-2014 school year, Hernandez met formally with each of the more than 40 teachers in the school — in a scheduled ‘Before,’ ‘During,’ or ‘After’ session — once every six weeks. She set up and shared the calendar for her regular visits with teachers well in advance and kept a comprehensive collection of questions and classroom data for each teacher. These meetings could range from as short as 10 minutes to as long as a full day of modeling lessons in a teacher’s classroom. The number of teachers she was able to meet with regularly declined sharply as administering assessments took up more of her time in the spring semester. Young, with a decade as coach under her belt in a school with little staff turnover, felt comfortable holding these conversations in a less structured fashion, but still sought to establish clear goals and debrief with teachers before and after every classroom visit.

Individual BDA cycles ranged in duration and intensity. Cycles might last anywhere from one week up to a few months depending on the needs of the individual teacher. The level of time invested by coaches in a single BDA cycle could range from one or two hours up to several days depending on the complexity of the topic at hand. The number of teachers coaches worked with one-on-one at any given time also varied widely. Hernandez, for example, sought to meet on a regularly scheduled basis with all the teachers in her secondary school. Baker and Young focused intensively on working with just a few teachers at a time, working one-on-one with perhaps 10 to 20 teachers total throughout the academic year. One-on-one BDA cycles offered by the coaches included:

Young met with a new teacher to talk about his challenges with teaching reading lessons. The coach and the teacher agreed that she would model teach his reading block for a week so that he was able to see a whole sequence of lessons. When they met to debrief, Young asked the teacher, “What did you get out of that?” The teacher reflected on how Young had kept students’ attention during the lessons and realized that he needed to focus on classroom management. “It was interesting in that I was teaching reading, but really what I was coaching was the classroom management pieces and organizing the lessons and flow,” Young remembered.

Sharon Freeman, a first-year teacher, was also having trouble with classroom management. As described by the teacher and coach, in the ‘Before’ session, Freeman asked Young to visit her classroom during whole group reading instruction to collect information on how her students were engaging with the lesson and how she could keep the classroom under better control. Young would videotape the lesson and help Freeman reflect later on her own practice. When the students split into 10 small groups to rotate between several stations in the classroom, the coach turned off the camera and circulated the room asking students questions like, “What station are you at? How do you know where you’re supposed to go? Can you show me what you’re supposed to be doing?” Later on she prompted Freeman to reflect on the lesson by asking, “What do you want students to get out of each activity?”

Thatcher, a language arts teacher, was having trouble coming up with ideas for running small group stations in her class. “In the math class and a science class I could see how stations worked. But I didn’t really understand how I could make them effective
in a [language arts] classroom,” she recalled. Hernandez worked with her to plan and run small group stations by helping her realize that “they don’t all have to revolve around the same topic. You could be introducing a new topic in one [station] and could have a vocabulary station, a station where they are just reading, and a homework help station.” Thatcher was now more comfortable running stations on her own in the classroom. Hernandez sometimes videotaped small groups in ‘During’ sessions as a source for reflection with her teachers in subsequent ‘After’ sessions.

**Figuring out Math Instruction**

When Susan Lee started as a new teacher at Madison, she found in her inbox an email from Young inviting her to ask for any help she needed. Realizing that she needed assistance on how to collect and report on student data, Lee asked the coach to meet after school one day to review the school’s data policies. After this first meeting, Lee saw the potential of working with her coach and sought out assistance on what she saw as her greatest need: teaching math. Beginning with student data and moving through lesson planning, modeling lessons, co-teaching, classroom visits, and reflective debriefs, Lee and Young worked through an entire unit of math instruction over the course of several weeks. The two worked through several BDA cycles, nested within a larger coaching cycle, during this time. After co-planning each lesson, the teacher and coach took turns teaching lessons, one teaching and the other watching and taking notes on student behavior. Alternately, they might split the students into groups and co-teach during the class period. Watching Young teach a math lesson, remembered Lee, “I was just in awe of the way that she did it. She taught a day and then I observed and took notes on things that I particularly wanted to incorporate and use myself in my teaching. I just felt that I learned so much from watching her and from talking with her about it.” With the coach’s help, Lee was able to improve on the pacing of her math lessons to engage students more effectively. More broadly, working with Young helped Lee change how she thought about balancing work in her classroom. “[Young] was saying, ‘You’re working hard. You’re up there giving out all the information,’” she recalled. “‘They’re [the students] the ones that should go home tired at the end of the day, not you.’”

**Working with School Administrators**

Coaches’ relationships with school administrators were equally critical as their relationships with teachers. Coaches worked closely with administrators as members of the school leadership team and on implementing whole-school initiatives. Coaches and administrators collaborated to identify the professional development needs of the school as a whole and of individual teachers. “Both my principal and assistant principal also step out of the role of evaluator to... help teachers along too. So it’s not just me on my own. They are also helping,” Young reflected. Coaches and administrators identified teachers needing help with issues like consistently low test scores, integrating classroom management with instruction, reaching struggling learners, specific content areas in elementary classrooms, and adapting to the school as a new teacher.

Having a go-to professional development resource was vital to achieving school goals. As Harris explained “Providing resources to enhance teachers’ professional practice is
paramount to what we do.” Principals respected this facet of the coaches’ job, and explained that they would have tried to maintain a coaching position in their schools even without budget support for the position from the district. Robinson described how important it was that coaches and principals be on the same page: “It’s definitely a partnership and the coach and the principal have to be in sync.”

As with teachers, the coach-principal relationship could take time and patience to build. “A good way to put it,” reflected Robinson, “would be a trajectory from direction to collaboration. At first you think you’re going to direct [the coach] what to do. And then it evolves into collaboration. With trust and support being the key thread that makes it happen.” This level of collaboration could be slow in coming, but once it did develop was important to the role of the coach as a job-embedded support system for ongoing, consistent school transformation. Early on in the implementation of instructional coaching, administrators were sometimes unfamiliar with instructional coaching, explained the IU mentor: “A lot of the administrators don’t know much about coaching at all. So it’s really up to the coach and me to help them understand what coaching really is.” Administrators and coaches tried to maintain semi-regular check-ins about the role of the coach in the school and how it could or should change in response to building needs and the needs of the coach. Hectic schedules and everyday demands on coaches’ and administrators’ time could, at times, derail these regular conversations. Nonetheless, these meetings could lead to real changes in coaches’ day to day work. Hernandez approached her principal to explain that data collection and analysis was taking too much of her time away from working directly with teachers; through that conversation, she was able to hand off responsibility for facilitating data meetings to focus on “what’s really important: coaching and being in classes.”

This relationship too presented its additional challenges, perhaps chief among them that coaches straddled a fine line between teachers and administrators. Nonetheless, instructional coaches were bound by their job description to maintain a level of confidentiality around their coaching conversations with teachers. PIIC also emphasized this fact as crucial to effective coaching interactions. Robinson described the difficult position her coach could sometimes find herself in: “You have to have a level of trust that kind of goes both ways. You have to be able to trust the relationship between the coach and the principal, and between the coach and the teacher.” At Madison, Young, Robinson, and their assistant principal rotated through a series of informal classroom visits throughout the year, circulating through classrooms so that each teacher in the school was seen nearly weekly by some member of the school leadership team. These regular check-ins helped ensure that the coach and administrators were “on the same page” about the needs of teachers in the school without explicitly discussing specific conversations between Young and the teachers.

While not consistent with the PIIC model, principals were often aware of the specific teachers a coach was working with, and sometimes of the topics they discussed and even when they met. Still, administrators tried to be conscientious about preserving coaches’
trusting relationships with teachers and were careful not to include any feedback from coaches in formal teacher evaluations. Harris explained, “It takes forever [for the coach] to build trust [with teachers] and it takes about a second to lose it.”

The Coach in the District and IU
While the majority of their time was spent on school-level duties, officially coaches also devoted some time to district-level initiatives. Much of this work was through their school-embedded professional development to support district priorities. Coaches in the district also attended twice monthly coaches meetings where they received training and networked with their peers.

Barrow has also opted to join PIIC, a professional network for coaches across the state. PIIC offers coaching resources and tips through an online resource guide as well as quarterly in-person professional learning opportunities. Perhaps most crucially, PIIC supported a part-time coaching mentor position at the regional IU. This mentor worked with coaches to develop their coaching practice, focusing on clearly defining their role in the school and maintaining emphasis on collaborating with teachers. She was the main source of professional development on coaching for many coaches in the IU. “My role,” explained Linda Davis, the IU mentor, “is to help the administrators understand [coaching], support the coaches with problem solving, [and] reflecting, or just what it means to be a coach. Because they really don’t have any training, many of them, into what coaching even is.” The mentor ran kickoff meetings with administrators and coaches in schools at the start of each school year. She also led one of the twice monthly coaches meetings at the IU. Otherwise, in-person meetings were rare because of the size of the IU and its large number of coaches.

Nonetheless, the mentor was on-call for support and always a phone call or email away. Time permitting, she was available to coaches to co-plan or co-lead professional development sessions, meet with administrators, or, most often, “troubleshoot” challenges around balancing coaches’ responsibilities and managing their time as they arose. Davis did this “troubleshooting” by meeting with coaches and administrators and helping them think together through contextual questions like “What do I do [as the administrator]? How do I use this coach? What’s appropriate and what’s not?” Davis saw her responsibility to firmly establish the parameters of the coaching role with administrators as especially important. This topic was a frequent frustration among her coaches. “Even with returning coaches,” Davis explained, “we constantly talk about the importance of collaborating with their administrator and setting those roles and parameters up front.” Hernandez reached out to Davis for exactly this type of support, she recalled: “I’ve met with [Davis] a couple of times in the last several months. She’s helped me to process some of this stuff with my principal and my job. Sort of talking with me about next steps. So I definitely sought that out. I really needed her as that kind of support person.”

Through the mentor position, PIIC created a direct conduit between coaches and the IU. Coaches received information about state-level developments through this channel that they felt otherwise might have passed them by. “[Davis] has given me a lot of support around Core Standards for PA,” recalled Hernandez. “Because that wasn’t something that
came down from the district. We’ve kind of had to search for those things on our own. The IU has been invaluable as a resource for development around Core Standards and instructional shifts that are coming.” Pennsylvania’s new teacher evaluation system was another topic on which coaches looked to the IU and the mentor for resources.

The monthly coaches meetings offered opportunities for coaches to network with their peers in nearby schools. For some, PIIC also opened the doors to a broader professional network in the state through its professional learning opportunities. Both Young and Hernandez had attended PIIC’s conferences with Davis in the 2012-2013 school year. There they not only built stronger bonds with their mentor but also with coaching peers from other IUs. Young had continued these conversations with colleagues in other IUs through online video conferences.

Coaches also drew on the PIIC online resource guide, largely for its material on questioning techniques and templates for coaching conversations. The district had also provided some professional development for coaches outside of PIIC, including consultation from specialists at outside contractors. Perhaps because of these district-level trainings and because coaching was well-established in Barrow before the district became involved in PIIC, the coaches seemed to view PIIC as just one among several resources on instructional coaching. Young for example, with 10 years as a coach, had only been engaged with PIIC and its resources for two years. “We’ve had a lot of coaching training,” she explained. “To be able to take all of those pieces of coaching training and then [think] ok, how does this fit in? This person’s saying it should look like this, this person’s saying it should look like this. How do I roll all of that in?” Coaches were blending insights from these various resources into their own unique coaching styles. Baker was able to take the “strategies and techniques and philosophy of PIIC and [other training]…” to “just pick the best of everything and fit it in to what I thought and what the principal and assistant principal thought were the needs of the teachers and students in the building.”

Young, a veteran coach, recalled that these district-level training opportunities had declined over time, but with the resources that were available she had put together a version of coaching that worked for her and her school. She treated the various elements of training she had received as a sort of “toolkit” from which she could select the best tool for the task at hand. Hernandez described a similar process of drawing on a variety of resources to create a vision of coaching that was “an amalgamation of things.”

**Coaching Outcomes**

Coaches and administrators highlighted the challenge of parsing the coach’s influence on student achievement scores among many other factors. With so much else going on in schools, it was hard to tell where the impact of coaching began and ended and where it overlapped with other efforts in the school. On how he knew coaching was working in his school, Harris was candid that, “I don’t. I’ll be honest...The answer would be student achievement but that’s a poor answer at best. There [are] too many layers in between to be able to say that it’s truly effective.” Robinson was equally blunt about the relationship between coaching and student test scores: “I can’t say that our achievement is skyrocketing
because there [are] so many other factors. If she [the coach] was the only variable, we would be like school of the year."

Coaches were similarly confounded about how to measure their impact in concrete terms. Young was forthright about assessing the outcomes of her work: "How do we collect the evidence that coaching is making a difference? It is a tough question and there’s no answer. There’s no good answer for it yet...It was a really hard pill for me to swallow." Baker reflected that her own evidence for the impact of coaching was “unscientific” at best. In rare cases, though, schools were starting to see measurable results in student achievement that they attributed, at least in part, to instructional coaching. At Roosevelt, Hernandez had worked closely with a team of literacy specialists to implement a tiered Response to Instruction and Intervention model in the school. Three years in and the school was seeing Lexile reading scores for the students who worked with literacy specialists go up nearly two grade levels over the course of the year. “We just got that data and I had a major freak-out because it was so exciting,” remembered Hernandez. “We’re doing that work and it’s one of the most exciting things I’ve ever been part of.”

Although they faced a challenge in attributing student scores on statewide assessments to coaching, coaches promoted a broader understanding of data and evidence that relied heavily on the observational data on students they collected in ‘During’ sessions. Administrators, coaches, and teachers were seeing anecdotal and observational evidence that coaching had some effect on teaching practices and student engagement. From conversations with teachers and word of mouth among teachers, Young explained, “I know that the teachers appreciate what I do, because I hear it from them all the time.” Baker relied on the increasing number of teachers approaching her for help over the course of the school year as a barometer for her success.

Coaches also sought evidence for their impact on instruction during their regular classroom visits looking for whether instructional strategies they discussed with teachers were actually being implemented. Often, they did see these changes: “When I look around a classroom, I know we have talked about guided math,” explained Young. “When I go in the classroom and I see there is small group instruction happening in math, I can see what I have done has made a difference.” In other cases, they did not see changes in instructional practice and used this as a basis for reflecting on how to improve their own practice. “If we have a strategy that’s come out and we want the teachers to use it... I need to get the teachers to trust it and try it. So if I’m not doing everything that I can do to help them do that then that’s kind of where my evaluation comes in,” Young reflected. Hernandez looked not just at instructional practice but also at student behaviors in the classroom as evidence for enhanced student engagement, and increasingly so over time. “I think a lot of times with coaching, and in my first couple of years, I was still at the teacher level where I wanted to change teacher behavior through the conversations that we had,” she remembered. “Now I’m very much at the place where that’s trickling down and I’m having way more conversations with teachers about student behavior. And that’s really where we see the application. If the work that I did made an impact, that’s where we’ll see it. We’ll see it in student behavior.”
Administrators also saw classroom observations as the best way—currently, at least—to assess the impact of instructional coaching. They were able to see changes in instructional techniques from teachers who had worked with their coaches. These teachers, administrators posited, were more willing to take risks and try new techniques after coaching sessions. Teachers were also assigning more writing across the curriculum, explained Harris: “Social studies teachers have the kids writing five paragraph essays. Some of them have had no idea how to do it and...[they have] invited me in to do either an informal or a formal observation on them while they’re working through this because they’re so excited about the resources that have been provided and how they’re working the students through it.” Administrators also saw changes in student engagement during their walkthroughs. Young had run a book study on total participation techniques in the classroom. Robinson described her approach: “The way she outlined it for everybody was...‘Here are the strategies, here’s your homework, and we’re going to come back and you will be accountable to talk about what happened.’ And that was one that really made a huge difference.” Robert Wright, an assistant principal at Roosevelt, saw changes in “the whole active learning when the teachers are listening, when they are paying attention, when they are taking in everything they hear...And the students know that too. They can tell and they can see. They know a lot of the [instructional] strategies by name.”

Some teachers, meanwhile, saw changes in their own practice and in student engagement after working with the coach. Lee, after working through an entire unit of math curriculum with Young, not only felt more comfortable with the math content but more confident in her classroom. She switched up her lesson plans and saw her students become more engaged as a result: “I found that I was doing a lot of regular, traditional, at your desk teaching. And in watching [Young], she moved them around a lot during her lesson. And I started doing that. They don’t know where they’re going next, first of all. And second of all, they look forward to those times.” Coaches highlighted student engagement in their ‘After’ sessions with teachers, Thatcher explained: “I know if I’m down reading the play with the kids, I don’t always get to see how the other kids are sitting on the edge of their seat.” Through engagement strategies she worked through with Hernandez, Thatcher saw her students “actually enjoy what they are doing. And some of them [the strategies] are just so simple I would have never even thought of them. Like using a picture for them to look at, to realize why they have to look at things more than once...Each time they looked at it they found something new and [then] applying that same idea to a text and reading it more than once...Those small little things get kids to realize why they are learning and that it’s important.” Nelson also felt more comfortable taking risks in the classroom knowing that she had the backing of her coach. “It’s one of those things that I’m scared to take the risk but I’m just going to do it and it’s gone well about 99% of the time,” she reflected.

**Lessons Learned**

The process of seeding deep seated change in instructional practices and attitudes was complex, ever evolving, and, according to coaches, at times frustratingly slow. With experience, coaches were adjusting their expectations for how rapid the pace of change might be. “Change can happen quickly, but it’s not effective or lasting if it happens too quickly,” Hernandez reflected. “It takes time to just build the foundation for those things to
be supported.” Over time, coaches had amassed a compendium of knowledge about how coaching worked in Barrow School District:

- Although there was a uniform, district-wide job description, in practice coaching looked slightly different in different school contexts. Coaches, along with their administrators, described an ever-evolving role for the coach depending on the shifting needs of teachers and students in the school. Their stance “close to the ground” of school needs also positioned them to play a major part in implementing whole school initiatives.

- Other needs in the school, especially administering statewide assessments in the spring semester, could pressure coaches away from their coaching duties. The coaches had learned over time to set firmer boundaries around their role as coach and turn down other administrative duties whenever possible. Still, coaches were not always successful at protecting their coaching time from other encroaching demands.

- Coaches’ ability to instill trust and build strong working relationships with both teachers and administrators was crucial to success in their delicate position. These “non-teachable, relational” skills were equally important to their pedagogical expertise.

- Coaches had to work with administrators to fine tune a balance between confidentiality with teachers and accountability. Doing so required a constant focus on maintaining confidentiality while ensuring that both coaches and administrators were closely in tune with the needs of the school.

- Although the coaches had little formal training in adult education, they recognized that giving teachers choice and influence over their own professional learning was vital to prompting engagement in coaching.

- PIIC’s focus on the process of coaching, through formal BDA cycles, helped the coaches build stronger working relationships with their teachers and focus on the substantive work of coaching.

- Over time, coaches developed a broader understanding of their role in the classroom, shifting from a focus only on instructional practice to also incorporate student behavior. They focused much of their time in the classroom on looking for student responses to changes in instructional practice.

Over time coaches moved deeper into their own reflective practice to focus on the bigger picture of coaching and how they were impacting their schools. Despite their challenges and their different experiences, instructional coaches in Barrow remained intent on their vision of improving student achievement through working with teachers to change instructional practice. “It’s that deeper reflection of, am I making a difference?” explained Young. “Not just, what did I get done today and did it make people happy? ...What am I really doing that’s impacting [students]?”