

Making Classroom Walkthroughs a Top Priority

By: Jill Vlcan, Poston Road Elementary

Contact: jill.vlcan@msdmartinsville.org

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Aside from all of the formal observations I have to complete each school year for the RISE evaluation, I also like to do informal walkthroughs as a way to get into the classrooms for short 5-10 minute periods of time. However, because it is not a requirement, I often put these walkthroughs on the “back burner” due to so many other requirements that take more priority or include deadlines for completion.

Currently, we do not have a formal walkthrough process in my district. Therefore, the purpose of my action research project was to create a process that would motivate me to make informal walkthroughs a bigger priority.

Statement of Your Wondering:

If my walkthroughs had a clearer focus, I wonder if I would make them more of a priority.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insight into my wondering, I began by getting my staff involved by creating an Instructional Framework. At a staff meeting, I placed three pieces of chart paper up on the walls. They read: Should See Daily, Should See Often, and Should Never See. The teachers formed groups and discussed what instructional strategies someone should see in their classrooms on a daily basis, often, and what they should never see happening in the classroom. They placed post-its on the chart paper.

Next, I took the chart papers and created an Instructional Framework poster with all of their ideas. I made two large posters for the teachers workroom and the lounge. I also posted one in my office and gave each staff member a copy of the Instructional Framework that was created.

Then, the walkthroughs began. For the months of January - March, I made small copies of the framework and used those to collect data when I went into classrooms. I put a grade level next to each category when I saw it take place. On the poster in the lounge, I began placing tally marks next to each item I saw when I went into classrooms. This gave the staff members an overview of how the building was doing with the Instructional Framework. So, not only was I collecting my own data but I was also sharing that data with the staff.

Finally, I analyzed my data and determined that I increased the time I was in classrooms each week from one hour to around two hours a week.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, I learned that through this process I increased my time in the classrooms from one hour a week to two hours a week. I also learned that I need to plan out time in my schedule for walkthroughs. Finally, I discovered some next steps I would like to do to continue the process.

1. I increased my time in the classroom for informal walkthroughs. I was averaging about one hour a week before I began my research project. Between the months of January - March I increased my time to around two hours a week.
2. Although I increased my time, it was very difficult to find time in the week to do the walkthroughs. I have discovered that I need to schedule time into my week for walkthroughs and stick with it. So often, there are distractions (phone calls, email, discipline, parents concern, etc) that I found to be a priority over the walkthroughs.
3. When I look back at the process, I would like to continue with the walkthroughs using our Instructional Framework. However, I would like to take it a step further and have the teachers begin video taping themselves teaching and use the Instructional Framework as a tool to help them self-evaluate themselves. Like Jim Knight said, "You don't know what you are doing when you are doing what you do."

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

This action research project was a great way of getting me motivated to work on a weakness I knew was there but didn't prioritize at the top of my list of things to get done. Through this process, I now have a better process in place for conducting classroom walkthroughs. My current method gives the walkthroughs much more meaning to both myself and my staff.

With the concept of the teachers creating the Instructional Framework, they have buy-in to this process. They are the ones that chose what I would be looking for when I entered their classrooms each week. So, posting the data in the lounge gives the staff members insight into how our building is doing as a whole. I was very impressed with the framework the teachers created. It aligned very well to what good teaching looks like. In the future, I plan to continue the walkthrough process that was created during my action research project. I will block out specific times on my weekly calendar for walkthroughs so that they will become a top priority. I will also create a spreadsheet to log the walkthroughs on which will include the date and the teacher's name. That will ensure that I am equally distributing my time to all classrooms in the building.

References:

Jim Knight, Guest Speaker during IPLI Cohort #4