Refocusing the Lens: Using Video Observations to Build Effective Instructional Leadership

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Teacher quality is the one of the most significant factors in student learning and achievement. As instructional leaders, we are often overwhelmed with the task of observing teachers frequently and to provide meaningful feedback. As a K-8 administrator, I was tasked with observing over thirty instructional staff weekly alongside the dean for that particular grade level wing using our newly developed evaluation rubric. Often times as we compare observational notes, I would notice that one would capture an instructional strategy or occurrence that I would've missed or vice-versa. Based on this information, I knew there was a need to calibrate often with each other and align with our evaluations so that we could accelerate the growth of our novice teaching staff.

As the instructional leader, I remember the angst I would feel when being observed by multiple administrators during one observational cycle. As we began our rounds, I could see the frustration or anxiety on our teacher's faces despite many of them being prepared and sometimes over-prepared for their lesson. I knew that in order to utilize video coaching to improve instructional quality, building trust with our staff would be necessary for this initiative to work. In addition to building trust, I knew that my leadership team and I would need to develop inter-rater reliability when using our current evaluation tool and growing teachers' instructional practice. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to determine if we could enhance student learning by leveraging the use of observational videos to improve instructional quality and practice.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered on how to best use video technology to improve instructional quality and practice in developing teachers.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I began my research in January and ended the second week of March. I began by reviewing videos on the Teacher Channel and using Marzano's iOberservation website and resource library to develop my ability to identify when instructional strategies are being used and to provide accurate feedback for coaching conversations by reviewing our school's evaluation rubric (which list teacher performance from ineffective, developing, effective, and highly effective). When using Marzano's iObervation video resources, Dr. Marzano provides commentary on instructional strategies to identify in the video and to determine the level of use of the strategy by the teacher. In addition, I used different live video observation webinars to continue my development of my observational skill set and to collaborate and ask additional questions when needed.

Secondly, to growing my professional practice and the practice of our Instructional Deans, we committed to utilizing the Teacher Channel videos and other resources to calibrate and view and rank teachers on chosen elements from our evaluation system weekly during our hour long leadership meetings. We then used our notes to participated in discussions about the evidence we collected as well as why teachers were rated at a

certain level on the scale. As a practice for continued improvement, the Deans and I use non-video instructional rounds to grow and increase our inter-rater reliability.

As our leadership team began to grow and collaborate on evaluating teachers, we wanted to share this process with our teacher teams. Each Dean selected teacher volunteers that would be video taped for our professional development use. We were clear with our teacher teams that the videos would not be used for evaluative purposes but would only be used to gain inter-rater reliability and to develop instructional coaching feedback and strategies. As a team, we selected three videos to use and provide feedback to grow our teachers. After each session, I would journal my notes on our my observational feedback that was shared and the team's collaborative conversations.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data two important things that I learned include:

1) building trust is imperative for any initiative to become effective and 2) using video technology to enhance coaching conversations and instructional quality takes time and should be focused on specific areas to aid in teacher growth.

I was able to establish trust within our leadership team by sharing and collaborating my thought process and feedback when using videos to evaluate teachers. This move from "something else on their plate" to an opportunity for us to grow and learn our new evaluation system to better support our teachers.This initiative allowed me to become focused on consistent, purposeful, and accurate feedback to grow our teachers and instructional leaders. As I became more proficient in my professional practice in providing accurate and concise feedback to our team by using the videos, we were able to calibrate and create coaching strategies for our teachers.

Here is an excerpt from one of my journal entries:

Journal Entry 2/3/17
    "...Today I signed up for a webinar from the Marzano's resource center. I was a little apprehensive because it is a live video chat with 20 other administrators online. I noticed during this webinar I am more involved--participating and asking questions to better understand how to share this with my leadership team."

Journal Entry 2/17/17
    "... The team seems open to the process and I can see areas where I need to coach and develop them more using our evaluation tool. They appear to be honest but a little apprehensive with their coaching needs--but I am resigned to build better relationships with them to develop their leadership abilities. I am excited about our progress as a team and their willingness to learn this tool. During our review of today's video, we were able to systematically rate the teacher with similar scores using our rubric. We had a robust conversation regarding how the teacher exhibited "instructional rigor" in the video. Good discussion...I think we are slowly getting on the same page"

I used my reflections and journal entries during my action research cycle as a way to document my own learning and professional growth and to continue to support my leadership team in understanding our new evaluation tool to better to support teachers' growth and instructional practices.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

This action research cycle has been extremely beneficial to my professional growth. This project allowed me to develop my skill set to support the learning of   other instructional leaders in my building and our teaching staff. While developing my professional practice, I was able to share my journey with my Deans to assist them in increasing teacher instructional practices.

According to Holland (2011), "observation systems themselves are part of a plan for systematic teacher improvement, there are interconnecting processes that should also be improving systematically. The more observers work through these processes, the more accurate the feedback they can provide to teachers. And if all observers at a site are able to talk through the processes together, the better their inter-rater reliability will be. Teachers need observers to have high levels of both to get the most out of their systems of improvement."

Future direction of this research would be to continue using this collaborative efforts to calibrate our evaluation feedback for teachers and develop stronger coaching conversations, but, to also develop our teachers to understand this evaluative tool through collaboration and video sharing. My goal is to establish a video library that would be used as professional development resources for teachers' growth and development. According to the article Leveraging Video for Learning, when establishing a video library you should first find technology platforms that would allow you to develop this resource. Also you should determine the purpose of the video library (organize according to content or instructional practice. Ask observers and teachers who watch in-district video to nominate great teachers and exemplar video clips. Also consider creating incentives for video sharing, including publicly recognizing teachers who are willing to open up their classroom for the betterment of all district teachers. Lastly, build capacity to master-code filmed instruction to your observational tool and curricular standards.

References:

Holland, S. (2011). Building Inter-rater Reliability and Accuracy into a System of Teacher Observation. Retrieved June 7, 2017, from http://www.marzanoevaluation.com/news/building-inter-rater-reliability-and-accuracy-into-a-system-of-teacher-obse/
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