

Taking Time to Observe and Converse can Lead to School Improvement- It Starts with ME!!

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As I started my administrative career, I had practically no experience in the elementary setting. My first position of assistant principal in an elementary was a learning experience. Not only did I learn new things, I learned that elementary is very different than high school.

As I moved into a principal role, I realized that I needed to understand elementary curriculum better. I have learned as the years have passed by but there is still more that I think I need to know. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to learn from those in the trenches and gain more knowledge of elementary curriculum.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how more frequent visits in the classrooms (beyond evaluations) and conversations with teachers would affect my leadership capacity.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insight into my wondering, I visited classrooms on a more consistent basis, beyond required observations/evaluations. I made a more conscious effort of being present in areas where instruction was taking place. I charted these visits for 6 weeks. At least once during the week I would journal about my visits.

Going along with the visits, I read more articles that dealt with elementary education/curriculum. I looked specifically at articles that talked about leadership and what things I could change or do differently to get a better understanding about the curriculum. I analyzed these articles as I read to learn new facts.

Also during the project I had more educational conversations with staff members. During my journaling time, I would also talk about the conversations of the week. I was able to see my knowledge grow just by discussing things with teachers.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, two important things I learned included my apprehension to suggest or comment on curriculum was holding me back as an instructional leader and more frequent visits allowed me to get to know and understand each teacher and her style of teaching better.

The first realization of my apprehension to suggest or comment on curriculum was holding me back as an instructional leader came about through my reflections on my journal. As I analyzed my journal, it was clear that the 2+ visits per week in each classroom helped my anxiety about suggesting and commenting on what was going on in the classrooms. I could see that my conversations with teachers were more about curriculum

than discipline or other facets of the building. We had more meaningful dialogue about what was going on in their classroom.

As the 6 weeks progressed, my journal showed that I had more teacher initiated conversations about curriculum issues. This was evident in the last few weeks of the process. These were not conversations that dealt with logistics (textbooks, website problems...) but also challenges they were facing. As I went through the journal, I saw a pattern of my suggesting more solutions. The appreciation of the teachers was evident, they appreciated someone taking time to sit and think with them to come up with solutions to issues that they were facing.

Probably the most interesting and meaningful realization I made during the 6 week process was to see that the more frequent visits allowed me to get to know and understand each teacher and her style of teaching better. I knew that all of the teachers in my building had a passion for teaching and helping students reach their potential but I didn't realize the differences in how they reached that goal. As I looked through the notes I collected, I could see a definite change in how I "saw" each teacher.

My vision of each teacher helped me to see them for their true strengths and passions as well as the areas that they were working to improve. The journal showed that this helped make the conversations I was having with the teachers more meaningful for both myself and them. We were talking about things that dealt with real teaching and learning- things that would really impact the learning of our students. I realized that this insight would help me in decision making for the future of Fillmore Elementary.

**Fillmore Elementary
Visit Schedule**

* BEFORE CHRISTMAS BREAK - THEMED ACTIVITIES NWEA TESTING WITH (2-5)

Week of: DECEMBER 11-15 ← (NWEA (2-5)) →

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00:00 AM				OUT FOR MTS.	
8:10:00 AM		Dinner-Time			
8:20:00 AM	RENNON				AMES - PK
8:30:00 AM	↓ Morning voice + RENNON				↓ LITTLEST BIRDS
8:40:00 AM			CASH		
8:50:00 AM			↓ RENNON		
9:00:00 AM	MCCANNON		Dinner-Time		
9:10:00 AM	↓ RENNON				
9:20:00 AM					
9:30:00 AM		CAROL			BALLOON
9:40:00 AM	PROBERT - AIT	↓ RENNON	PETTS - PE		↓ MATH
9:50:00 AM	LUTES - SE		↓		
10:00:00 AM					
10:10:00 AM					
10:20:00 AM		RENNON	BRENNAN		
10:30:00 AM		↓ ACTIVITY	↓ FORTSM RENNON		
10:40:00 AM					
10:50:00 AM					
11:00:00 AM					

** I WAS NOT AS BUSY THIS WK. I WAS ABLE TO SEE ALL PERS FOR GOOD TIME - RENNON ENJOYED THE WEEK!

11:10:00 AM		BRICKEL			
11:20:00 AM		↓ READING			
11:30:00 AM					LUTES - SE
11:40:00 AM	BRINKMAN				
11:50:00 AM	↓ MATH			CLARK	
12:00:00 PM				↓ MATH	
12:10:00 PM					
12:20:00 PM					
12:30:00 PM				PERATT - ART	
12:40:00 PM					
12:50:00 PM		AMES - PK			M. McCAMMACK
1:00:00 PM		↓ NUMBERS			↓ SOCIAL STUDIES
1:10:00 PM				CASH	
1:20:00 PM				↓ SCIENCE	
1:30:00 PM					
1:40:00 PM			CLARK		RICHMOND
1:50:00 PM			↓ SCIENCE		↓ DEBATE

**Fillmore Elementary
Total Visits During AR Project**

Name	#
Cash- K	14
Clark- 1	14
Brinkman- 2	14
Richmond- 3	15
Baker- 4	16
McCammack-	14
Ames- PK	14

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

During this process, I learned that I was apprehensive to make suggestions on curriculum concerns/issues. I felt that my background limited my knowledge and that the teachers would not take my suggestions seriously. I found that especially with helping in the rooms and talking to them about curricular concerns, they appreciated my comments and insights. I feel that it will increase my capacity to be an instructional leader and help them better do their job.

As I look forward, I plan to continue to visit classrooms more often. I enjoyed my time working with students and engaging with them in their work in the classroom. I gained valuable insight into student strengths and weaknesses that I feel have helped and will continue to help in curriculum decision making.

I look forward to continuing my conversations with the teachers. It was very enlightening to hear their opinions and ideas about areas that we had not touched on before. These conversations were a way to understand their methods and why they chose the method that they did. Many admitted that the method stays constant from year to year but with adaptations due to student make up of their class. This was very refreshing to hear.

My biggest goal is to continue using my background as a coach to make daily "adjustments" to do things differently in order to make a difference in my building for my teachers and students. Data must be collected

from a variety of sources and use to make real school improvements (King, 2002). In order for real changes to happen, it starts with ME!!!

References:

King, D. (2002). Beyond Instructional Leadership (8th ed., Vol. 59) [Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)]. Alexandria, VA: ACSD. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may02/vol59/num08/The-Changing-Shape-of-Leadership.aspx>

West- Burnham, J. (2004). Building leadership capacity- helping leaders learn. National College for School Leadership,1-6. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from [http://www.learnersfirst.net/private/wp-](http://www.learnersfirst.net/private/wp-content/uploads/Resource-building-leadership-capacity-John-West-Burnham.pdf)

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