The POWER of Lab Classrooms

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

As we continue our Nora journey to grow learners and teachers each day, we have identified specific instructional practices in the area of math, reading, and writing that should be observable in every Nora classroom. We wonder if having teachers complete instructional rounds in collaboration with our Math and Literacy coaches, would this help the teachers to see/hear these specific practices in action and in turn implement these practices in their own classrooms each day at Nora?

Nora staff works collaboratively each year to develop an Action Plan for our School Improvement Plan. As a part of this tedious process, we plan for specific professional development for all staff to grow as teachers. However, we haven't seen the practices from the professional development sessions in the area of math and writing translating back to classroom instruction. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to ensure our staff were employing their new learning (best practices) back in their classrooms in writing and math.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, we wondered in what ways will having teachers complete instructional rounds/ participate in lab classroom experiences, ensure lasting change in daily teaching and learning at Nora?

Additional wonderings:

In what way will working together to explicitly identify what we should hear/see in classrooms collectively as a staff, guide us to ensuring effective practices and strategies are being facilitated daily in all classrooms?

In what way will working to complete instructional rounds ensure that there is effective teaching in every classroom?

In what way will teachers engaging in instructional rounds/ lab classrooms help us to establish individual teacher goals to ensure all teachers are growing?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wonderings we followed these important steps:

1. Identify how Lab Classroom experiences supports our School Improvement Plan work. What did we want our specific area of focus for math & writing to be?

2. Identify specific focus/teaching point for each instructional round. This varied based on individual grade level needs.

3. Plan for Pre-brief. Questions we considered during planning included- - What are we looking for? - Establish purpose for our instructional rounds - Establish norms for Lab Classroom work

4. Plan for Lab Classroom experience at each grade level. Who will be doing the teaching? Develop a schedule for class coverage. Develop a field guide to use during the pre-brief, lab classroom observations, and reflection

5. Pre-Brief meeting with each grade level team During the pre-brief, we completed a complete pre-observation form. We then took time to reflect on current practice & what we want to observe/ look for.

6. Complete Lab Classroom experiences. Each group of teachers will spend 15 to 20 minutes observing. During the observation we completed a field guide. After completing the learning lab observations, it is important to take time to reflection while in other classrooms. Finally, each group came back together for a De-brief meeting. Some questions we used to guide our reflections included: What did we see? What did we notice? What are our take-a-ways? What will we take back and put into action in our own classrooms?

This entire process was time consuming, but worth each minute. Our literacy and math coaches worked hard to develop field guides for each grade level team that were focused around specific teaching points that were specific for the learning and growth needs of each team of teachers. Our data collection was more qualitative vs quantitative. The level of collaboration we saw amongst our teachers and the dialogue each engaged in throughout this process was empowering for all. The solid data we were able to collect was the carry over of the best practices our teachers observed during the lab classroom experience and then took back to their classrooms to apply in their own teaching. The coaches followed up with every teacher over the course of the few weeks following the lab classrooms to check in, reflect and discuss with each teacher what they have implemented, deeper level reflections, etc. Lab Classrooms have been a truly effective way to differentiate for our staff and to provide powerful professional development for staff that occurred under our own roof and free of charge.

Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing our data, 2 important things we learned: First, our teachers are risk takers and want to implement best practice each day, but often don't see how it can translate back to their classroom only by hearing someone talk about it. Our teachers needed the lab classroom experience to see it led by experts and in action. Second, there is true power in pre-briefs and de-briefs as you set the stage, identify questions and look fors before the learning lab experience, as well as reflecting and collaborating after the experience. Our staff was highly engaged in both the pre-brief and de-briefs for each learning lab. It was empowering to observe our staff sharing what they saw, what they wanted to give a go, and follow up with to identify the impact the experience is having in their classrooms. During each debrief we focused started by responding to these reflective questions: What did we see? What did we notice? What are our take-a-ways? What will we take back and put into action in our own classrooms? At the conclusion of each debrief, teachers completed exit tickets. Exit tickets were reviewed by math/ literacy coaches. Our literacy and math coaches sent follow up emails with teachers with additional writing resources. Since our learning labs, teams have embraced and engaged in ongoing collaboration and reflection about transfer of practice in classroom. Each week grade levels are working closely and sharing ideas during planning sessions. In the end, teachers enjoyed observing colleagues in action working with our kids. Teachers were engaged and eager to share and take their new

learning back to their own classroom. Learning Labs were an effective, outside of the box way to provide purposeful professional development. Learning Labs truly opened doors to one-on-one coaching cycles with teachers.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Throughout this process, our school has grown together in helping one another grow stronger in our craft of teaching. Our literacy and math coaches have been very intentional in the planning and facilitation of learning labs. They have worked to ensure that each learning lab was differentiated to meet the individual teacher and grade level team needs. The process was long and involved, but the outcome was worth each and every minute. Our teachers have grown into stronger teachers of writing and working hard to ensure we have less teacher talk and more student discourse in math. The follow up and de-brief sessions were imperative to the process, as it allowed teachers to come back and share what they noticed throughout each lab experience. This in turn opened doors for coaching cycles with individual teachers and sharing of additional resources across all teachers and grade levels.

As we continue our work, we would like to shift our work to learning walks. This process is not as planned for, but really focuses on identifying on look fors and going in to classrooms that are specifically successful in that area. Again, we will work to remain intentional about the reflection and de-brief process that must occur after each learning walk to ensure we are taking away new learning and new ideas to take back into our classrooms. We have many highly effective practices occurring each day in every classroom at Nora and we want to continue to utilize our own teachers to share these best practices with other teachers in the building. We want to celebrate the great work occurring at Nora and continue to learn and grow from one another and our students. Furthermore, we hope that the learning walks and lab classrooms provide further opportunities to grow our teachers' excitement of walking alongside our literacy and math coaches through coaching cycles. We will embed learning walks and learning labs into our School Improvement Plan and Action Plan as a professional development need to continue to improve student achievement.

References:

Learning Walk article: http://www.scsk12.org/memo/files/files/learning%20walk2.pdf