

Using Technology to Provide Meaningful Instructional Feedback to Teachers

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

After reviewing the data packet of results from the IPLI leadership survey of my school staff, I learned that the staff who responded perceived that I had little impact upon their classroom instruction. I do not like this perception. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to increase my personal ability to positively impact instruction through timely, actionable feedback.

Statement of Your Wondering:

In what ways can using Voxer (or another similar technology application) to give teachers immediate feedback, inform my practice and improve my ability to improve classroom instruction and give better actionable feedback.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I simply began by downloading the Voxer application to my cell phone, carrying my cell phone to every classroom observation, and then accessing the application immediately after leaving the teacher's classroom to record my thoughts, praises, and suggestions for teachers. After making each recording, I shared the Vox via email to the teacher. An email with a link to the Voxer voice recording was sent to the teacher for him or her to listen to when convenient.

Typically recordings ranged from 45 seconds to 90 seconds in length. At the start of my research I provided Voxer feedback to 100% of the teachers I observed 100% of the time. Teachers did not respond every time to the feedback that I gave, but all teachers stated that the Voxer messages were positive, helpful, and allowed them to make adjustments to instruction quickly - even for the next class period when applicable.

As time went on, I became very aware during each observation that I was crafting feedback and intentionally looking for positives as well as searching for growth areas all while visiting a classroom for ten minutes or less. I found that Voxer gave me the opportunity to reinforce recently learned professional development and to find staff who can act as experts for certain teaching techniques. Over time, I learned that it was not feasible for me to give Voxer feedback for every observation as our district requires we complete 20 observations per teacher per school year. Providing Voxer feedback adds approximately five additional minutes to each observation.

Data was collected by archiving the actual Voxer messages that I sent as well as saving any written response provided by the teachers throughout the school year. To analyze the data I reviewed the feedback that I gave to teachers looking for not only what was specifically said but, I also listened carefully for unspoken feedback such as tone and word emphasis.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, four important things I learned include:

1. Using Voxer along with a tool like Teach Like a Champion created a clear, natural pathway to emphasize a common instructional language and recent professional development.
2. Using Voxer required me to be a more thoughtful observer to be able to give both a praise and constructive feedback.
3. Using Voxer required me to carefully craft my feedback in terms of tone and emphasis in order to send the intended message of praise, feedback, correction, urgency, etc.
4. Teachers found the Voxer feedback to be helpful and meaningful in terms of allowing them to make timely instructional adjustments.

Personal Reflection:

1. I found myself reflecting on what I value and believe to be the most important teacher and student actions/interactions and what evidence of those actions looks like done right.
2. I found myself looking for ways to connect teachers who consistently perform an action/interaction well with those who need to grow.
3. Contemplating how to convey my thoughts and emphasize the most important feedback elements in a manner that would be accepted and embraced by the teacher became important manner (tone and word choice).

Sample Teacher Responses:

1. "Thank you for the always quick and productive feedback. To be honest, I haven't made it to Chapter 3 yet in Teach Like a Champion.....still plowing through Chapter 2 and keeping my head above water in class prep. A great book that has massive amounts of things to try and think about. The No Opt Out is certainly one to use.....especially the circling back around aspect. I can't say that I have needed these nuts and bolts or teaching the past five years with working on CPF plans. I do think I have shaken the cobwebs off and ready to get back to fine tuning the art of teaching."
2. "It is quite valuable to hear your reactions so quickly. It does add confidence that I hear the kudos about the lesson, but even more so when you give me constructive criticism and offer some tools to help."
3. "Thank you! This is a smart system to use to get feedback to teachers. I appreciate all the positive feedback and will have students repeat answers. Great idea!"
4. "Thank you! I will add that in to my lesson to get more participation among the students."
5. "I really liked the message. It gives me a better idea of how things went."

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Using Voxer successfully informed my practice and improved my ability to positively impact classroom instruction and give better actionable feedback. I learned that when I expect myself to give feedback immediately following an observation that I am a more focused observer. As well, I was better able to support the use professional development that was provided to all teachers using this process.

Using technology to give teachers immediate voice feedback proved to be more efficient and well-received by teachers as opposed to just using written feedback. Teachers stated that hearing my tone, excitement, and emphasis on certain words helped them to more clearly understand what I viewed as important and successful in terms of technique and instructional practice.

I plan to continue using Voxer with my teachers well into the future to hone both my craft as an observer and their craft of teaching students. The extra time spent in sharing voice feedback is well worth building teacher confidence in their practice, reducing observation anxiety, and providing them an avenue to improve instruction immediately. As well, I enjoyed that the voice feedback allowed me to clearly communicating what this administrator deems to be most important.

References:

N/A