



BEYOND MY OFFICE WALLS

INCREASING CAPACITY THROUGH VISIBILITY

North Elementary
Karen Perkins

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Background Leading to this Inquiry

The addition of an assistant principal to our building for the 2018-19 school year brought many positive changes to my role. It allowed me to step away from some of the daily student and staff support duties and freed up my time to focus on bigger picture projects. What I found, however, is that I was getting out into the building less, connecting with staff and students less, and not taking advantage of the opportunity to grow professionally. This resulted in a disconnect that was compounded when we were forced to adapt our practices due to a global pandemic, and I entered the 2021-22 school year on a mission to be more present and engaged with adults and children.



Purpose of this Inquiry

The purpose of my inquiry is to become more visible in the building as a means to build my leadership capacity.



My Wondering

- I wonder what kind of effect being out in the building in a non-evaluative role on a regular basis will have on my confidence as an instructional leader?
- I also wonder (unofficially)
 - What effect will this have on staff morale?
 - What effect will this have on staff communication with me?
 - What effect will this have on my confidence as an evaluator?



My Actions

- **Daily Connections:**
 - I will change my morning routine to make rounds to each classroom immediately following car duty.
- **Intentional Planning:**
 - I will spend time each Friday afternoon to plan for the week ahead, making sure to schedule at least 5 one-hour blocks of time for visible work
- **Visible Work:**
 - I will complete non-sensitive tasks that I would typically work on in my office while using a mobile desk in various areas of the building. During this time, I will encourage interactions with staff and students



Data Collection

I WILL

- Track the number hours spent working outside my office weekly
- Summarize my work at the end of each window of time focusing on
 - Things I noticed (that I wouldn't have noticed in my office)
 - Questions that came to mind
 - What work I completed
 - Conversations I had
- Reflect on my confidence in my leadership skills every two weeks including a self rating scale
- Seek feedback from staff at the end of the project

DATA - First 4 Weeks

Week Of	Total Hours Spent	Highlights from Notes	Highlights from Two Week Reflection	Two Week Self Rating
January 24	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sounds from the computer lab would drive me crazy. - Teacher A uses the transition/bathroom time to prepare her class for what to do when they return and for very small mini-lessons/reviews - This hall (2nd grade) is really quiet and calm (after being in the kindergarten hall the day before) 	<p>What a great start! It's still super awkward tooling down the hall with my mobile desk and stool, but totally worth it. I'm surprised at how much work I can get done, but I'm even more surprised at how much I hear/see/learn in an hour without an official duty.</p>	<p>Productivity: 8 Confidence: 6</p>
January 31	6.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher tone in xxx was harsh (not typical). Check in with that teacher at the end of the day to be sure she's ok and drop a reminder - Working on observation feedback, and I find myself less distracted than I would be in my office and therefore being more thoughtful of the feedback I am giving 		
February 7	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is the first time that the kids have asked me what I'm doing in the hall. One student asked, "What, don't you have a room to work in?" I've adapted the response, "I love doing my work where I get to see you guys more often." - I was able to complete some big communications that had to go out this week - New Teacher could use some strategies for engaging kids while they are at the restrooms. 	<p>Teachers are finally getting comfortable enough with the idea of me being near but not evaluating to stop and talk, to ask questions, to point out things they want me to notice.</p>	<p>Productivity: 8 Confidence: 8</p>
February 14	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IA supporting xxx had such great interactions to deescalate the behavior, gave good options for xxx to choose - IAs conducting small groups in the hall are killing it! - Nice of two staff to ask about my visit to MN 		

DATA - Second 4 Weeks

Week Of	Total Hours Spent	Highlights from Notes	Highlights from Two Week Reflection	Two Week Self Rating
February 21	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Red Hall Team B stopped after taking kids to lunch to talk about a math review activity that they were trying (I could hear the kids in the classrooms having a good time) - Teacher admitted to being self conscious when I was working in the hall, worried about me judging her (joking but some truth in there?) 	As I've become more comfortable being present in classrooms and hallways, I've found it easier to drift into other spaces to observe (unofficial capacity), and that has led to decrease of my work productivity at my mobile desk. Fair tradeoff, I think.	Productivity: 7 Confidence: 9
February 28	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher left student in the hallway for a long time without checking on him or giving any prompts for what he could do to return to the classroom. I spoke to him eventually and sent him back in, but he couldn't hold it together long. Did I set him up for failure? - Two inclusion IAs are amazing and need to get shout outs in the next newsletter - Didn't get much work done due to behavior needs 		
March 7	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Question: How do I, in the days of no substitutes, help teachers get into one another's classrooms? - It is clear each time I'm out in the hallways which classrooms have good procedures and which ones don't 	Behaviors in the school are really picking up, and all of us are on our toes responding to needs. Now that I've been out in the building so regularly, I don't like having to miss out on those times. I wonder if staff notice this sudden drop in my time available, and I wonder if they recognize a correlation to the sudden increase in student social/emotional/mental health needs?	Productivity: 6 Confidence: 7
March 14	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I wasn't able to work consistently because I was responding to behaviors. My response time was quick, though! 		

DATA - Feedback

“It took me awhile to get over seeing you in this context, but I think it helped us to connect to you in a different way.”
-Classroom Teacher

“I’m still not sure I’m ready for you to come into my classroom to work.”
- Classroom Teacher

Worth noting: Our Assistant Principal started setting up out in the hallways too.

“I noticed that your conversations on our walks were more about kids, staff, and what everyone was doing and less about things that frustrated you.”
-Husband

“When you’re in the office, there are so many disruptions. I think being ‘unavailable’ to anyone who drops by has helped you stay on track.”
-Office staff

“I appreciate your effort to be more aware of what goes on daily.”
-Instructional Assistant



My Discoveries

- I had allowed myself to become more isolated over the last 3 years by spending more time in my office and similar settings, and it was refreshing, inspiring and helpful to spend more time in the instructional settings of the building. Increasing my time in spaces where I interacted with staff and students helped my overall mood and confidence.
- I found that I was usually more productive doing work in a more public setting.
- It is still really easy to let to-do lists and interruptions take over my schedule.



Next Steps

- I plan to continue my weekly hours using my mobile desk in academic areas of the building.
- I plan to continue the practice of planning my week ahead on Friday afternoons. It helped me to be more intentional with my time.
- I plan to seek input from staff for other ways that I can increase my interactions with them and their students.



Beyond My Office Walls: Increasing Capacity Through Visibility

Principal Name: Karen Perkins

School Name: Danville North Elementary

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Background Leading to My Inquiry (Slide 2)

The addition of an assistant principal to our building for the 2018-19 school year brought many positive changes to my role. It allowed me to step away from some of the daily student and staff support duties and freed up my time to focus on bigger picture projects. What I found, however, is that I was getting out into the building less, connecting with staff and students less, and not taking advantage of the opportunity to grow professionally. This resulted in a disconnect that was compounded when we were forced to adapt our practices due to a global pandemic, and I entered the 2021-22 school year on a mission to be more present and engaged with adults and children.

The Purpose of My Inquiry (Slide 3)

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to become more visible in the building as a means to build my leadership capacity.

My Wondering (Slide 4)

With this purpose, I wondered what kind of effect being out in the building in a non-evaluative role on a regular basis would have on my confidence as an instructional leader. I also wondered what kind of effect it would have on staff morale, on staff communication with me, and on my confidence as an evaluator.

My Actions (Slide 5)

I began by intentionally planning blocks of time to take my mobile desk and stool out into the building to work. Each Friday afternoon, I looked at my calendar for the upcoming week and scheduled 5 one-hour times. I did my best to have one hour each day, and on weeks that were less meeting heavy, I scheduled more than 5 hours.

Before my first venture out, I communicated to staff what I was doing and why. It was my goal to discourage any mistrust about my intentions and to encourage staff and students to interact with me as they walked by.

For the next 8 weeks, I did my best to adhere to the schedule that I set. I took my laptop, my agenda, and something to write with, and set up in one of the hallways. At first, I positioned myself at the entrance to a hall because I wanted everyone to be comfortable with my presence before setting up too close to a classroom door. As the weeks went along, I moved to where I could listen in on the activity in 4 to 6 classrooms at once. Before I packed up at the end of a block of time, I wrote a quick reflection and focused on the following areas: random new things that I noticed, questions that came to mind, what work I was able to complete and any conversations that I had and with whom.

Every other week, I took time to reflect on my personal perspective of the project and how it was affecting my mood, confidence and productivity. I also rated myself in the areas of productivity (while working out of my office) and confidence (of my leadership capacity) on a scale of 1-10.

Data Collection (Slide 6)

My data collection came from the reflections I recorded at the end of each work window and at the end of every other week as well as my bi-weekly ratings. Finally, I gave staff the opportunity to give me anonymous feedback on the effect that my project had on my leadership and/or the culture of our building.

My Data (Slides 7-9)

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February 14	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IA supporting xxx had such great interactions to deescalate the behavior, gave good options for xxx to choose - IAs conducting small groups in the hall are killing it! - Nice of two staff to ask about my visit to MN 		
February 21	3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Red Hall Team B stopped after taking kids to lunch to talk about a math review activity that they were trying (I could hear the kids in the classrooms having a good time) - Teacher admitted to being self conscious when I was working in the hall, worried about me judging her (joking but some truth in there?) 	As I've become more comfortable being present in classrooms and hallways, I've found it easier to drift into other spaces to observe (unofficial capacity)., and that has led to decrease of my work productivity at my mobile desk. Fair tradeoff, I think.	Productivity: 7 Confidence: 9
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March 7	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Question: How do I, in the days of no substitutes, help teachers get into one another's classrooms? - It is clear each time I'm out in the hallways which classrooms have good procedures and which ones don't 	Behaviors in the school are really picking up, and all of us are on our toes responding to needs. Now that I've been out in the building so regularly, I don't like having to miss out on those times. I wonder if staff notice this sudden drop in my time available, and I wonder if they recognize a correlation to the sudden increase in student social/emotional/mental health needs?	Productivity: 6 Confidence: 7
March 14	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I wasn't able to work consistently because I was responding to behaviors. My response time was quick, though! 		

Excerpts of feedback:

- It took me a while to get over seeing you in this context, but I think that it helped us connect to you in a different way. – Classroom Teacher
- When you're in the office, there are so many disruptions. I think that being "unavailable" to anyone who drops by has helped you stay on track. – Office Staff
- I am still not sure I'm ready for you to come into my classroom to work. – Classroom Teacher
- I appreciate your effort to be more aware of what goes on daily. – Instructional Assistant
- I noticed that your conversations on our walks were more about kids, staff, and what everyone was doing and less about things that frustrated you. – Husband

My Discoveries (Slide 10)

- I had allowed myself to become more isolated over the last 3 years by spending more time in my office and similar settings, and it was refreshing, inspiring and helpful to spend more time in the instructional settings of the building. Increasing my time in spaces where I interacted with staff and students helped my overall mood and outlook.

- I found that I was usually more productive doing work in a more public setting.
- It is still really easy to let to-do lists and interruptions take over my schedule.

Through my action research, I have been found that being in the instructional areas of the building has been beneficial to my mood and my confidence. Because my Phase is Harmonizer, I feed off of the energy of my peers and am revitalized with positive interactions.

I would not have predicted it, but I found that I could be more productive completing work in a more public setting because I had a finite set of things that I could work on and couldn't be distracted by the ever present to-do list and because I wasn't being interrupted by staff or parents who stopped by and "just needed a moment to ask something".

Finally, this project reminded me that it is vitally important to stick to a schedule and to be proactive with my time instead of reactive.

Where I Am Heading Next (Slide 11)

Moving forward with the knowledge that I've gained through this project, I look forward to continuing to be intentional with my schedule and my time, to take my mobile desk out into the academic areas of the building, and to find ways to connect with staff and students as they go about their daily routines. I also plan to seek input from staff on ways that I could adjust my work habits that would be beneficial to them, their students and our building culture with the intention of implementing one of their suggestions each year.