As Good as We Are, We Can Always Get Better: Growth through Conversation

Principal Name: Casey Stansifer
School Name: Huntertown Elementary
Principal's Email Contact: casey.stansifer@nacs.k12.in.us

Background Leading to My Inquiry (Slide 2)

- Context – Building trust with a new staff while, at the same time, using the district's required teacher evaluation model. As a new administrator to the building, I found some tension with the evaluation model because I did not approach the process in the same way as the previous principal.

- The Issue/Tension/Dilemma – Collaboration & Trust. The IPLI year 1 survey showed the question with the highest variance (SD 1.37) focused on trust and growth. "Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations." I entered this AR project with a mission to improve my relationships with staff while also becoming better at engaging in the evaluation process.

The Purpose of My Inquiry (Slide 3)

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to determine how I could improve my ability to use the teacher evaluation process in a meaningful way while, at the same time, building positive relationships with my staff so that they have a voice in the change process.

My Wondering (Slide 4)

With this purpose, I wondered how I could involve teachers in conversations about how they want to grow so that I could focus my feedback on their areas of interest.
Sub-questions:
- How can I get better at involving staff members in their own professional growth?
- How can I use conversations and questions to build trust with staff in the growth process?

My Actions (Slide 5-6)

- September: Meet with each teacher prior to the first observation of the school year to discuss their goals and their desired areas of professional growth (September).
- October – January: Check-in with teachers at the end of the school day after any short evaluation and verbally praise one aspect of the lesson observed.

- November – March: Meet with teachers in their own classroom for a pre-observation meeting prior to an extended observation to ask:
  - What do you do better than most teachers in your grade level? What areas of the rubric would you like to showcase in this lesson?
  - What subtleties or nuances might I miss?
  - What areas would you like feedback on?
- November – March: Meet with teachers in their own classroom for a post-observation meeting after an extended observation to ask:
  - What aspect of the lesson went particularly well?
  - What aspect of the lesson (if any) took you by surprise?
  - How well did you address the goal you set for yourself at the beginning of the school year?
- April: Send a survey to staff that includes the same questions as the initial IPLI survey to compare the question relating to trust from the Spring of 2019 to the Spring of 2020.

Data Collection (Slide 7)

For my data collection piece, I chose to keep track of each conversation I had with teachers regarding their professional growth. I collected:
- Teacher
- Date of Meeting
- Grade Level
- Whether pre or post observation meeting
- Focus or Conversation

I also sent a survey to staff toward the end of the school year that included the same questions as the initial IPLI survey. I then compared the question relating to trust from the Spring of 2019 to the Spring of 2020.

My Data (Slides 8)   *Figure 1*

Date	Teacher	Grade	Checkpoint	Focus
10/25/2019	Ruich	K	Discussion	Learning Goals
11/5/2019	Garman	1	Pre-Observation Meeting	Lesson design / seamlessly weaving variety into the lesson without losing continuity
11/5/2019	Halter	4	Post-Observation Meeting	problem-based learning approach
11/6/2019	Gongwer	K	Pre-Observation Meeting	Phonics instruction
11/7/2019	Garman	1	Post-Observation Meeting	Lesson design / seamlessly weaving variety into the lesson without losing continuity
12/5/2020	Gerig	5	Pre-Observation Meeting	instruction: moving from lecture to problem-based skills application
1/10/2020	Riesen	3	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: "workshop" model
1/23/2020	Meyers	SPED	Post-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: scaffolding activities in terms of complexity and student interest
1/23/2020	Murphy	2	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: differentiated instruction / "guided math" instruction
1/27/2020	Shoda	SPED	Post-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: interdisciplinary connections
1/28/2020	Myers	SPED	Post-Observation Meeting	Phonics instruction via Orton-Gillingham
1/31/2020	Hans	2	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: relevance / personal connections
2/4/2020	Kohlhoff	5	Post-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: backward design to make learning goals meaningful
2/5/2020	Chaffee	K	Post-Observation Meeting	Differentiated instruction in the kindergarten classroom
2/12/2020	Coil	1	Pre-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: inquiry-driven learning in the primary classroom
2/14/2020	Winchester	2	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: differentiated, guided math groups
2/25/2020	Brinneman	K	Post-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: interdisciplinary connections
2/26/2020	Owen	3	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: "I do / we do / you do" to develop independance
3/4/2020	Shoaff	1	Pre-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: depth through game-based learning
3/4/2020	Ruich	K	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: writing through repetition
3/5/2020	Greenlee	Literacy	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: relevance / personal connections
3/5/2020	Sullivan	5	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: PBL in the Science classroom
3/6/2020	Alday	K	Post-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: backward design to make learning goals meaningful
3/12/2020	Weber	3	Pre-Observation Meeting	Lesson Design: incorporating SEL into academic curriculum
3/13/2020	Kruse	5	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: differentiated, guided math groups
3/26/2020	Charlton	3	Post-Observation Meeting	Instruction: "workshop" model

In this chart (Figure 1), I collected the types of conversations I had with each staff member as well as when these dissuasions took place. This allowed me to:

1. remember how and when to follow-up with each teacher. If it had been a few weeks since we talked about instruction I could ask, "So how is it going with differentiated instruction? Have you tried some of the ideas we talked about?"
2. send professional articles to specific teachers as I read them. If I read a great article from *Educational Leadership* on educational technology, for example, I could use this chart to see which teachers that article might apply to.
3. connect our conversation to future short observations or walk-throughs. I might say, "When we talked in January, you thought about some ideas as to how you could make learning goals more student-friendly. I like how you put that plan into action by…"
4. focus my work in PLC's by looking at the focus of my conversations within a particular grade-level.

Figure 2

Checkpoint

Pre-Observation…
26.9%

Post-Observation…
73.1%

Conversation Focus

Lesson Design
42.3%
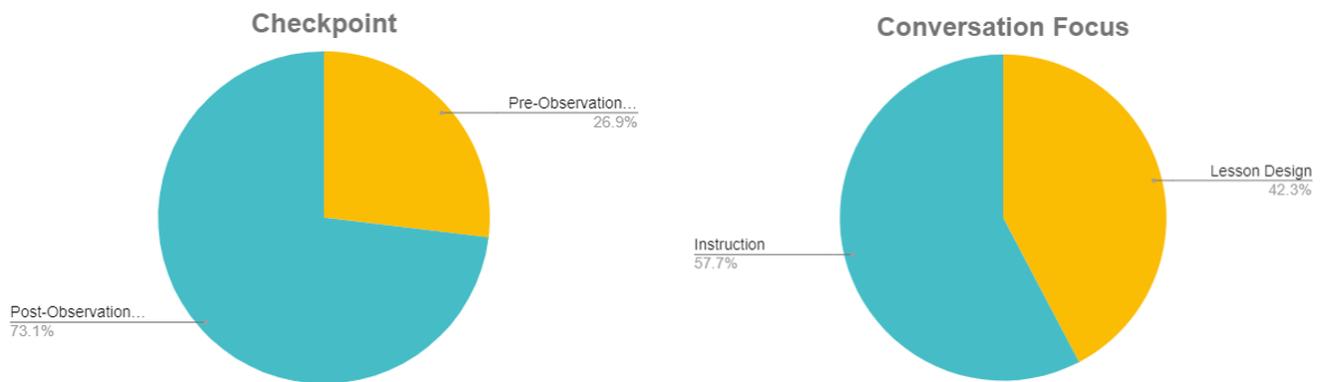
Instruction
57.7%

In this chart (Figure 2), I tracked the kinds of conversations I had with teacher (focused either on instruction or lesson design) as well as when these conversations occurred (as part of a pre-observation meeting or a post-observation meeting). This allowed me to see where I spent my time as well. Because the results of this AR Project had a positive effect on culture (see Figure 3),

Figure 3

Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations.					
Spring 2019			**Spring 2020**		
Responses	**Mean**	**SD**	**Responses**	**Mean**	**SD**
35	3.63	1.37	31	4.44	1.16

This chart (Figure 3) illustrates my survey results to the question "Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations" from the Spring of 2019 to the Spring of 2020. I compared the mean and the standard deviation of both surveys while also accounting for the number of responses in each survey. I found that while the number of teachers who responded were similar in both surveys, both the mean and the standard deviation improved a great deal from 2019 to 2020. Not only did more teachers respond favorably in this category, but there was less of a divide between those who felt there was a culture of trust and those who did not. This data suggests that my efforts in investing time in meaningful conversations with teachers improved feelings of trust amongst my staff.

My Discoveries (Slide 11-14)

- Learning Statement One: Teachers felt they had little voice in the evaluation process.
- Learning Statement Two: The first conversation leads to the next.
- Learning Statement Three: Continual conversations that encourage and celebrate growth lead to a culture of trust.

Learning Statement One: Teachers felt they had little voice in the evaluation process.
> A high variance in my initial IPLI survey results relating to trust led me to conclude that I needed to develop stronger relationships through focused conversations. I learned through these conversations that teachers felt the evaluation process was one-sided. I also learned to include teachers in conversations and allow them to self-advocate through pre-observation meetings, follow-up discussions, and self-evaluations.

Learning Statement Two: The first conversation leads to the next.
> I was able to establish trust with teachers through the conversations we had about instruction (as reflected in the survey data). I also found that teachers began coming to me periodically throughout the year to ask questions and elicit feedback without my prompting. They would ask follow-up questions to topics we had discussed previously, and they sought my input in changes they were making in their classrooms. Overall, I was happy with the growth I saw in myself as an instructional leader.

Learning Statement Three: Continual conversations that encourage and celebrate growth lead to a culture of trust.
> I learned that trust is established through give-and-take dialogue rather than through feedback alone. I also just *enjoyed* the process of thinking through ideas with teachers and asking them about their own thoughts rather than simply providing feedback (judgement) alone. I also found that trust is established through multiple conservations centered on growth. These conversations began to happen organically as that trust was established. Finally, the results of the follow-up survey show that these conversations have helped me develop a good rapport with staff as well as an improved culture of

trust. Overall, I feel more confident in my role as instructional leader, and I am happy with the outcome of the project.

Where I Am Heading Next (Slide 15-16)

Through this process of action research, I have learned that data is important in providing the evidence of what is and what is not working. Without evidence, we are relying solely on assumptions to guide our work. I also learned that data does not have to be strictly numbers; qualitative data can be effective in determining efficacy.

I also learned to be more apt to reach out to teachers in their journey toward growth. Engaging in those meaningful conversations will help establish a culture of continual growth as well as trust.

Bibliography (Slide 17)

Bell, S. (2020). A principal's playbook for two-way feedback. *Education Update*, 62(2), 1;4.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2012). Teacher evaluation: What's fair? What's effective? *Educational Leadership*,   70(3), 88-89.

Wiggins, G. (2012). Seven keys to effective feedback. *Educational Leadership*, 70(1), 10-16.

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We Can Always Get Better:
Growth through Conversation

Huntertown Elementary

Casey Stansifer, Principal
casey.Stansifer@nacs.k12.in.us

Background Leading to this Inquiry

- **Context** – Building trust with a new staff while, at the same time, using the district's required teacher evaluation model.

- **Issue/Tension/Dilemma** – Collaboration & Trust IPLI year 1 survey showed the question with the highest variance(SD 1.37) focused on trust and growth.

  "Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations."

Purpose of this Inquiry

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to determine how I could improve my ability to use the teacher evaluation process in a meaningful way while, at the same time, building positive relationships with my staff so that they have a voice in the change process.

My Wondering

- With this purpose, I wondered how I could involve teachers in conversations about how *they* want to grow so that I could focus my feedback on their areas of interest.

  - Sub-questions:

    - How can I get better at involving staff members in their own professional growth?

    - How can I use conversations and questions to build trust with staff in the growth process?

My Actions

- Meet with each teacher prior to the first observation of the school year to discuss their goals and their desired areas of professional growth (September).

- Check-in with teachers at the end of the school day after any short evaluation and verbally praise one aspect of the lesson observed (October – January)

- Meet with teachers in their own classroom for a **pre-observation meeting** prior to an extended observation to ask
  - What do you do better than most teachers in your grade level?
  - What areas of the rubric would you like to showcase in this lesson?
  - What subtleties or nuances might I miss?
  - What areas would you like feedback on?

November – March

My Actions

- Meet with teachers in their own classroom for a **post-observation meeting** after an extended observation to ask
  - What aspect of the lesson went particularly well?
  - What aspect of the lesson (if any) took you by surprise?
  - How well did you address the goal you set for yourself at the beginning of the school year?

- Send a survey to staff that includes the same questions as the initial IPLI survey to compare the question relating to trust from the Spring of 2019 to the Spring of 2020 (April).

Data Collection

For my data collection piece, I chose to keep track of each conversation I had with teachers regarding their professional growth. I collected:

- Grade Level
- Focus of Conversation
- Whether pre or post observation meeting
- Date of Meeting
- Name of Teacher

I also sent a survey to staff toward the end of the school year that included the same questions as the initial IPLI survey. I then compared the question relating to trust from the spring of 2019 to the spring of 2020.

My Data

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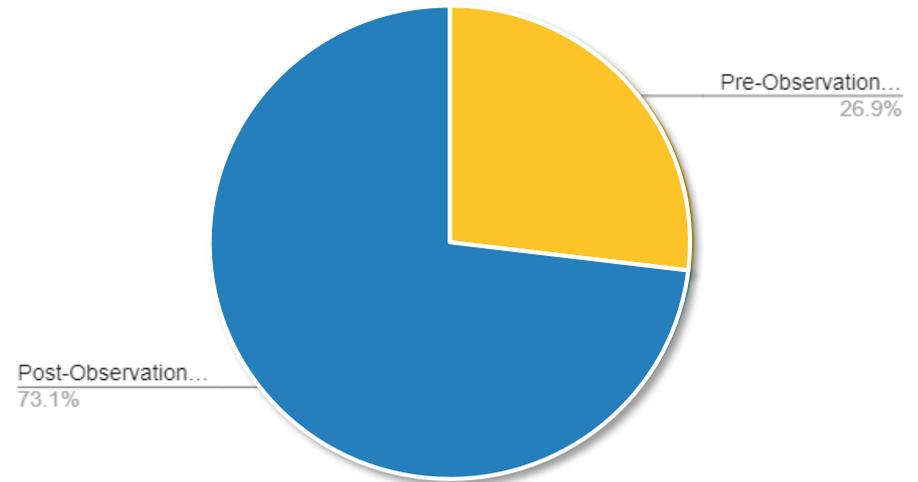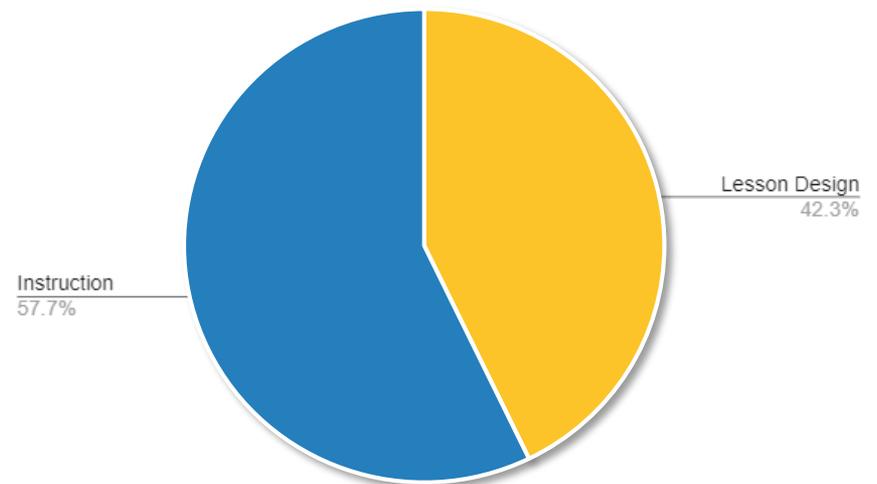
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Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations.					
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Standard #2

Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations

32 responses
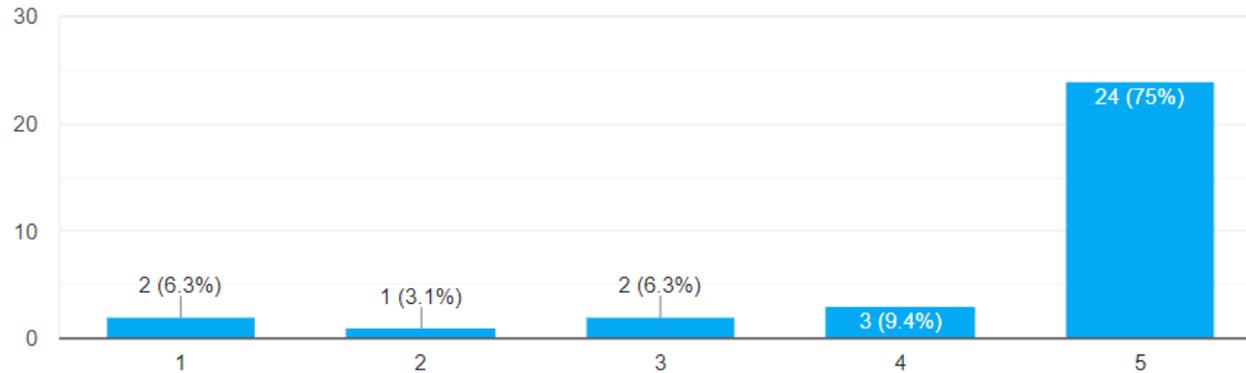
My Discoveries

- **Learning Statement One:**

  Teachers felt they had little voice in the evaluation process.

- **Learning Statement Two:**

  The first conversation leads to the next.

- **Learning Statement Three:**

  Continual conversations that encourage and celebrate growth lead to a culture of trust.

Learning Statement One:
Teachers felt they had little voice in the evaluation process.

- A high variance in my initial IPLI survey results relating to trust led me to conclude that I needed to develop stronger relationships through focused conversations.

- I learned through these conversations that teachers felt the evaluation process was one-sided.

- I learned to include teachers in conversations and allow them to self-advocate through pre-observation meetings, follow-up discussions, and self-evaluations.

Learning Statement Two:
The first conversation leads to the next.

- I was able to establish trust with teachers through the conversations we had about instruction (as reflected in the survey data).

- Teachers began coming to me periodically throughout the year to ask questions and elicit feedback without my prompting.

Learning Statement Three:

Continual conversations that encourage and celebrate growth lead to a culture of trust.

- Trust is established through give-and-take dialogue rather than through feedback alone.

- Trust is established through <u>multiple</u> conservations centered on growth.

- The results of the follow-up survey show that these conversations have helped me develop a good rapport with staff as well as an improved culture of trust.

Where Am I Heading Next

- Through this process of action research, I have learned that data is important in providing the evidence of what is and what is not working. I also learned that data does not have to be strictly numbers; qualitative data can be effective in determining efficacy.

- I also learned to be more apt to reach out to teachers in their journey toward growth. Engaging in those meaningful conversations will help establish a culture of continual growth as well as trust.

Where Am I Heading Next

In conclusion, we as administrators should involve staff in the evaluation process. Doing so will help the administrator develop a healthy culture that appreciates growth, and it will help teachers take ownership in their own progress as professionals. When the evaluation process becomes a conversation rather than a bubble on a rubric, relationships blossom along with teacher efficacy.

Bibliography

Bell, S. (2020). A principal's playbook for two-way feedback. *Education Update*, 62(2), 1;4.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2012). Teacher evaluation: What's fair? What's effective? *Educational Leadership*, 70(3), 88-89.

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