

Closing the Gap on Principal Absenteeism in the Classroom

By Dr. Holly Arnold, Principal

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Background Leading to My Inquiry

- I spent many years working in a large high school where the only true principal classroom visits were the required observations for evaluation. My primary focus as assistant principal was on discipline. When I became principal at a small elementary, the expectations changed. I was expected to be much more involved in curriculum, data, and school improvement initiatives, with less need for time spent on student discipline. My focus needed to change from managing the logistics of the school to enhancing the instruction in the classroom.

The Purpose of My Inquiry

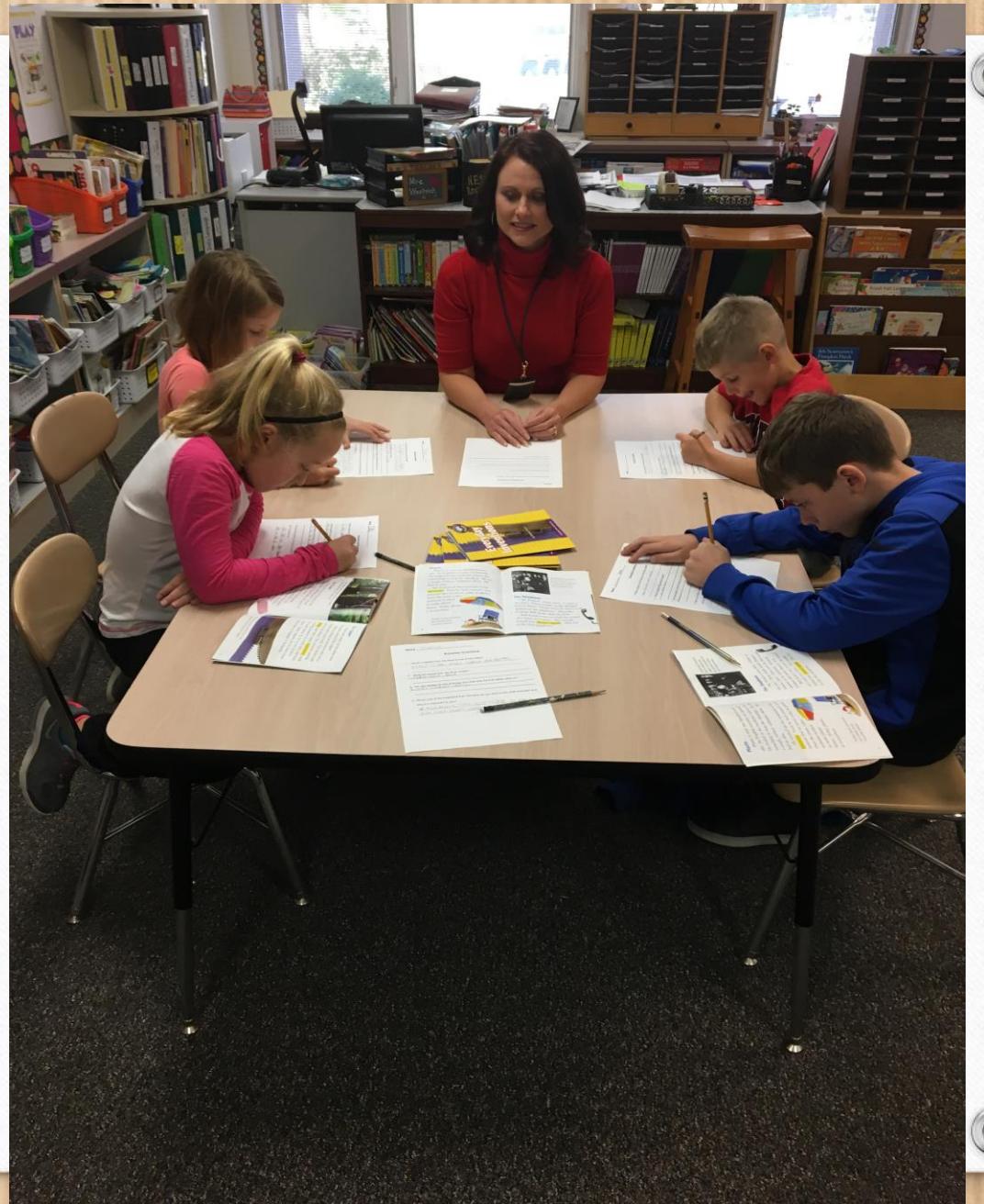
- Therefore the purpose of my action inquiry was to collect data to see if my teachers and I felt that my spending more time in the classroom made me a more effective building leader.

My Wondering

- With this purpose, I wondered how I could establish and maintain a regular schedule of being in the classrooms in my building each week offering meaningful insight, assistance, and/or feedback.

My Actions

- I explained to my teachers that based on their feedback, I was going to try something new this year. I told each of them that I would be spending 30 minutes per week in each of their classrooms. I shared that I would not be evaluating their performance, but instead offering assistance in the way they felt they could best utilize my help. I allowed the teachers to choose their time and I sent out a schedule letting everyone know that they would be a priority on my calendar.

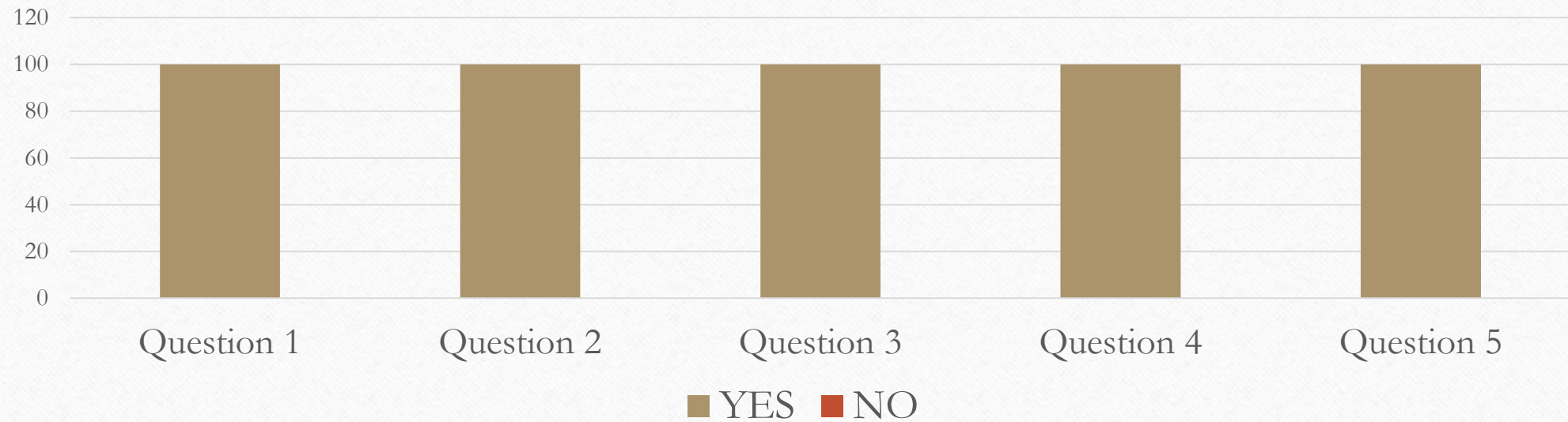


Data Collection

- The ten general education classroom teachers were sent a Google survey with the following five questions (all ten teachers submitted a response):
 1. Have the classroom visits positively influenced Dr. Arnold's ability to lead?
 2. Have the visits provided Dr. Arnold with more knowledge in elementary curriculum and instruction?
 3. Has spending more time in the classrooms strengthened Dr. Arnold's relationship with staff and students?
 4. Does being in the classroom give Dr. Arnold a greater understanding of classroom responsibilities?
 5. Do you feel this experience has provided Dr. Arnold with a clearer vision of expectations and goals for future implementation?

My Data

Teacher Survey Data



My Discoveries

- **Learning Statement One:** Leading is not only being in charge of a building, but being in the trenches with those that you wish to lead.
 - My teachers feel that I am a more effective leader when I am visiting classrooms.
- **Learning Statement Two:** Knowledge of curriculum is best obtained by seeing it taught in the classroom.
 - 100% of my teachers felt that time in the classrooms made me more knowledgeable of elementary curriculum.
- **Learning Statement Three:** Morale is cultivated through strengthened relationships.
 - Staff morale has increased throughout the building. Closer relationships have been formed.



Where I Am Heading Next

- I plan to continue my weekly visits. I have had positive feedback from my teachers and students. It is clear to me that this was an area of weakness for me prior to the action research.
- My leadership will continue to grow and improve because of the insight I have gained into the importance of taking time to be hands-on in the classroom. In the future, I plan to add visits to the resource room.
- I agree with Neila Connors, author of the book, “If You Don’t Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students,” that when leaders take the time to communicate, collaborate, and are visible amazing results occur.

Bibliography

- Connors, N. A. (2000). *If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students!*
Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications.



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Background Leading to My Inquiry

I spent many years working in a large high school where the only true principal classroom visits were the required observations for evaluation. My primary focus as assistant principal was on discipline. When I became principal at a small elementary, the expectations changed. I was expected to be much more involved in curriculum, data, and school improvement initiatives, with less need for time spent on student discipline. My focus needed to change from managing the logistics of the school to enhancing the instruction in the classroom.

The Purpose of My Inquiry

Therefore the purpose of my action inquiry was to collect data to see if my teachers and I felt that my spending more time in the classroom made me a more effective building leader.

My Wondering

With this purpose, I wondered how I could establish and maintain a regular schedule of being in the classrooms in my building each week offering meaningful insight, assistance, and/or feedback. Would my classroom visits influence my ability to lead? Provide me with more knowledge in curriculum and instruction? Strengthen my relationship with staff and students? Improve the morale in the building?

My Actions

To gain insight into my wondering, I decided that I would devote five hours a week to being directly in the classrooms. I explained to my teachers that based on their feedback, I was going to try something new this year. I told each of them that I would be spending 30 minutes per week in each of their classrooms. I shared that I would not be evaluating their performance, but instead offering assistance in the way they felt they could best utilize my help. I allowed the teachers to choose their time and I sent out a schedule letting everyone know that they would be a priority on my calendar. I went to each classroom at the scheduled time and had a variety of tasks as each teacher had different wants and needs. I worked with small groups, with individual students, and with whole class.

Data Collection

The ten general education classroom teachers were sent a Google survey with the following five questions (all ten teachers submitted a response):

- *Have the classroom visits positively influenced Dr. Arnold's ability to lead?
- *Have the visits provided Dr. Arnold with more knowledge in elementary curriculum and instruction?
- *Has spending more time in the classrooms strengthened Dr. Arnold's relationship with staff and students?
- *Does being in the classroom give Dr. Arnold a greater understanding of classroom responsibilities?
- *Do you feel this experience has provided Dr. Arnold with a clearer vision of expectations and goals for future implementation?

My Data

The data that I received from the Google survey indicated with 100% assurance that the teachers felt the classroom visits influenced my ability to lead, provided me with more knowledge in elementary curriculum and instruction, strengthened my relationship with staff and students, gave me a greater understanding of classroom responsibilities, and provided a clearer vision of expectations and goals for future implementation.

I have also received verbal acknowledgement from teachers and students of the impact of my presence in the classrooms and the desire for continual and/or additional visits.

My Discoveries

Learning Statement One: Leading is not only being in charge of a building, but being in the trenches with those that you wish to lead.

My teachers feel that I am a more effective leader when I am visiting classrooms. They welcome the interaction with students and value the resource I can be as an additional set of hands in the classroom.

Learning Statement Two: Knowledge of curriculum is best obtained by seeing it taught in the classroom.

100% of my teachers felt that time in the classrooms made me more knowledgeable of elementary curriculum. The teachers appreciate that I see the curriculum being presented and that they are able to reference it in our discussions with me having greater familiarity.

Learning Statement Three: Morale is cultivated through strengthened relationships. Staff morale has increased throughout the building. Closer relationships have been formed. Through this experience my teachers find me more approachable and the collegiality among staff members has grown. Students also see me as more of the instructional team instead of just the school principal.

Where I Am Heading Next

I plan to continue my weekly visits. I have had positive feedback from my teachers and students. It is clear to me that this was an area of weakness for me prior to the action research.

My leadership will continue to grow and improve because of the insight I have gained into the importance of taking time to be hands-on in the classroom. In the future, I plan to add visits to the resource room.

I have also started having lunch with three students each day. This has given me the opportunity to get to know our students on a more personal level. The students have loved the opportunity to eat with the principal, and I have found this to be one of the most rewarding parts of my day.

I agree with Neila Connors, author of the book, "If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students," that when leaders take the time to communicate, collaborate, and are visible amazing results occur.

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