

Coffee, Tea, & PD

By: Angela Girgis, Lincoln Elementary

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Instructional leadership has been one of the components of being a building administrator that I love the most. Before becoming a principal, I experienced many opportunities that allowed me to instruct and teach educators. Each opportunity brought great fulfillment in seeing educators grow as well as my own personal growth.

After becoming an administrator, I realized very quickly that I did not have the time I needed to continue my personal professional development to be the instructional leader that my students and staff needed. I truly believe that I lead by example, and my instructional practices should always be stretching to new heights. I had great intentions, but little to no time to develop my personal professional development.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to be intentional on how my instructional leadership would change as I became more intentional on discovering new understandings.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how I could facilitate the professional growth of my teachers and staff within my building by taking the time to invest in my own professional development. I wanted to consider how personal PD would also keep me fresh and encouraged in my journey as an administrator.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering(s), I purposefully made a goal of setting aside time once a week to either read a chapter from *Teaching With Poverty in Mind* by Eric Jensen, watching an educational TED talk, and/or reading an Edutopia article. To make this time a little more engaging, I decided to either have coffee or tea to go along with the PD.

I kept a small journal on my office desk where I made notations each time that I engaged in this purposeful PD. I also began to get so excited with what I was learning that I created a binder where I kept the PD that I printed off. This binder grew quickly as it became my educational compass for growth and insight. This binder of information grew from December through February as I committed to my action plan.

I did not plan to immediately use what I was learning, but found myself creating mini-PD staff meetings to educate my teachers. A theme of brain-based learning, executive brain functioning, and researched backed strategies on how our brains are wired to learn became our focus. The teachers demonstrated great interest which fueled my personal weekly coffee/tea and PD time.

I also prepared a lesson that I taught to my 3rd, 4th, & 5th grade students on how their brain is wired to respond both academically and behaviorally. I loved teaching again, and it was well received by the students.

To gain even greater insight into how this action research proved beneficial to my staff, I created a brief Google survey that I asked all my teachers to complete. I felt that this would be the final data analysis piece to complete the picture of effectiveness or ineffectiveness of my action research.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data...

- 1) My staff demonstrated they gained new knowledge from my PD/handouts/discussions.
- 2) My staff felt that our students benefited from my instruction that I provided to our 3rd, 4th, & 5th grade students.
- 3) I was given written feedback from my staff as to what they felt they had learned from the PD that I had given them.

My data demonstrated that out of (18) staff members taking the Google survey, (16) felt that they had gained new knowledge from the PD that I had shared with them over the three month period. Two staff members felt that they had not gained new knowledge.

Data also demonstrated that (17) staff members felt that the students had gained beneficial knowledge and new information from the lesson that I taught. One staff member noted that she did feel it was not beneficial and was for the older students.

I learned the most from the responses of my staff from question three of the survey. Some examples were, "I learned that we can reteach the brain, and I look at students in a different light now." Another noted, "It has helped me to better understand where the child's behavior is coming from."

All together, this survey validated that this journey of personal inquiry was well worth the time and effort.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

As I reflect on my action research, I began the journey thinking it was just one more thing to do on a checklist. As I look back, it has been the transformation highlight of this past school year. Taking the time to be intentional to an educational commitment not only has changed my professional development growth, but also that of my staff and students. Our year took on a whole new direction as we all became intrigued and interested on the initial seed that I planted on learning more about brain-based research and how the brain is wired to learn and behave.

We often feel that effective professional development takes big budgets and a lot of money. My staff and I found that it just takes commitment to a purpose and cause. I did not spend a dime in this journey that has refocused our attention on best practices and strategies of brain-based research and learning. This professional development grew from within my building to also encompassing other staff within my corporation. I was asked to present at an end-of-the-year workshop for instructional aides on what I had learned and shared with my staff this past year. It was so exciting to share this meaningful and useful information with other inquiring minds.

A new commitment to professional development for the upcoming 2018-19 school year has come into existence due to my action research for this past year. My staff has agreed to further our research and inquiry in becoming a Trauma Responsive School. As we grew together in understanding the brain, we came to realize that many of our students have been affected by many traumas and how this affects the brain (learning & behavior). We will begin a year-long professional development as we start the inquiry process all over again for the betterment of our students and school.

I would have never dreamed that my personal commitment to an action research inquiry would have ended with such success, growth, and new vision. I am thankful for this experience and experiencing yet another teachable moment as an administrator. I highly recommend this journey to any administrator that wants to grow personally with professional development without having to expend any financial resources.

References:

Jensen, Eric (2009). Teaching With Poverty in Mind.

Timestamp	Have you gained any new knowledge from Mrs. Girgis' PD/handouts/discussions on the Executive Functioning of the brain and how it affects behavior and academics?	Do you feel the information that Mrs. Girgis has shared with students has been helpful?	What do you feel has been the most helpful information that you have learned from our discussions on Executive Brain Functioning and how it affects behavior and academics?
3/8/2018 10:24:28	4	4	The difference between using your SMART Brain and IMPULSIVE Brain.
3/8/2018 10:25:54	5	5	How any brain can be changed. It may take a little longer or even be taught differently, but a child can better their brain power.
3/8/2018 10:34:19	5	5	How to stimulate the brain in order for the student to complete the task with more confidence as well as the calming exercises to relax.
3/8/2018 10:36:03	5	5	I have kept all of the information and can read it anytime. Just now, scientists are finding out much more about the brain than we knew before. To be on the receiving end of all this new information is exciting. The brain, and the entire body is a miracle of workmanship which most take for granted. The better we understand how "we" work, the better we can inform the next generation. Thank you.
3/8/2018 10:48:46	4	4	You can train the brain to learn.
3/8/2018 10:42:03	4	4	It just gives me more information on how our brain influences everything.
3/8/2018 10:58:06	2	4	Much of this I already knew due to my own research. I did like the square breathing strategy.
3/8/2018 10:58:36	5	4	I have learned that we can reteach the brain. I look at many of my students in a different light. I have enjoyed learning more about how the brain works.
3/8/2018 11:16:19	4	4	What has been helpful for me is being made aware of strategies for strengthening the brain's executive functions. Knowing these strategies can help me teach more effectively, and I can also help the students understand how their brain works.
3/8/2018 11:20:57	2	1	I feel it has value for students who are old enough to make the types of connections she discussed. I'm not exactly on board with how this knowledge will actually affect a student's behavior.
3/8/2018 11:23:04	4	4	I frequently remind my class to do the square breathing to get their prefrontal cortex back in control.
3/8/2018 11:36:32	5	5	The most helpful information I have learned is on how the brain is affected when the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system are not working together.

3/8/2018 11:59:24	5	5	Understanding how you lose oxygen to your brain when you are angry and how breathing can help calm you down, because it puts the oxygen back into your brain so it will function in a different way.
3/8/2018 13:10:02	4	4	It has been interesting to learn that the environment is not the only determining factor.
3/8/2018 14:12:59	5	5	It has helped me to better understand where the child's behavior is coming from.
3/8/2018 14:36:29	4	4	The most helpful information for me has been the visual animation video of the staircase where interference between the lower area of the brain and the higher area of the brain hampers learning.
3/9/2018 12:24:21	4	4	The information that has helped me the most is the 5 Teacher Strategies by Youki Terada on helping children retain what they have learned.
3/9/2018 13:18:12	4	4	I find the relationship to behavior makes it easier for me to "discipline" a student that I know has a difficult home environment.



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What Led to My Inquiry Question?

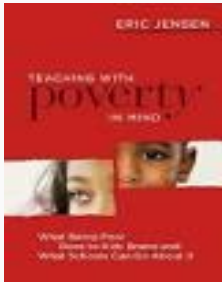


- What does research say about poverty and how poverty changes the brain?
- What can I do as a leader to improve the academic achievement and behavior of my economically disadvantaged students?

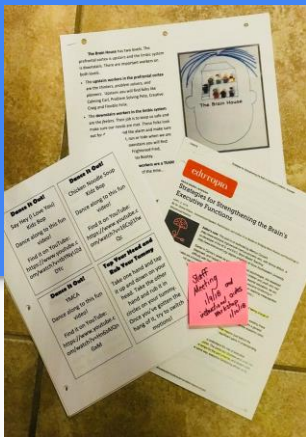
Wondering...



What happens when I commit 30 minutes a week to enjoy a cup of coffee or hot tea and view a web PD or read a chapter of a book that increases and strengthens my instructional leadership abilities?



What did I do?

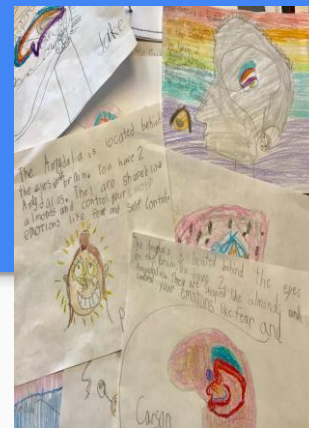


Staff & Support Staff Meetings...

Brain Research Handouts...



Instructed 3rd, 4th, & 5th Grades...



Principal's Homework...

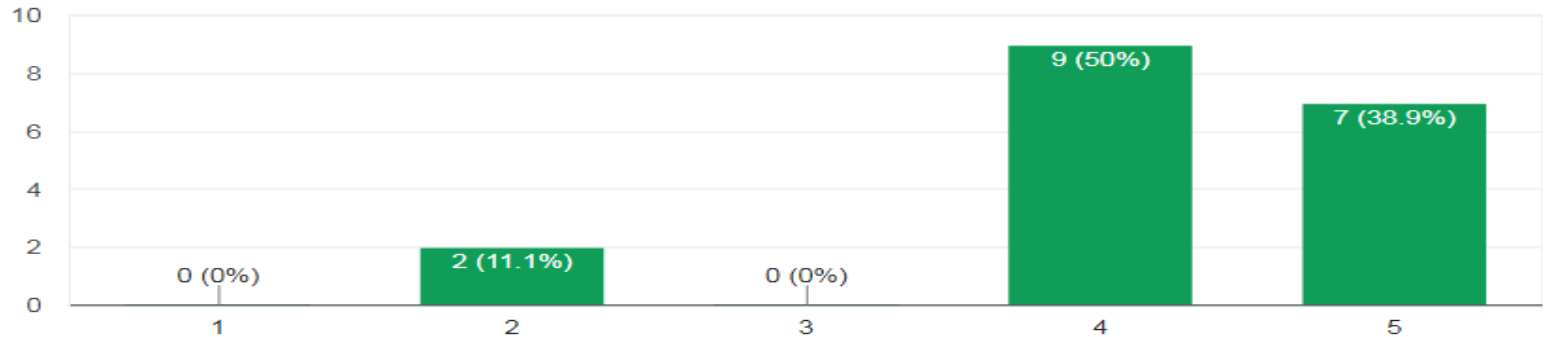


What Did I Learn from Collected Data?



Have you gained any new knowledge from Mrs. Girgis' PD/handouts/discussions on the Executive Functioning of the brain and how it affects behavior and academics?

18 responses

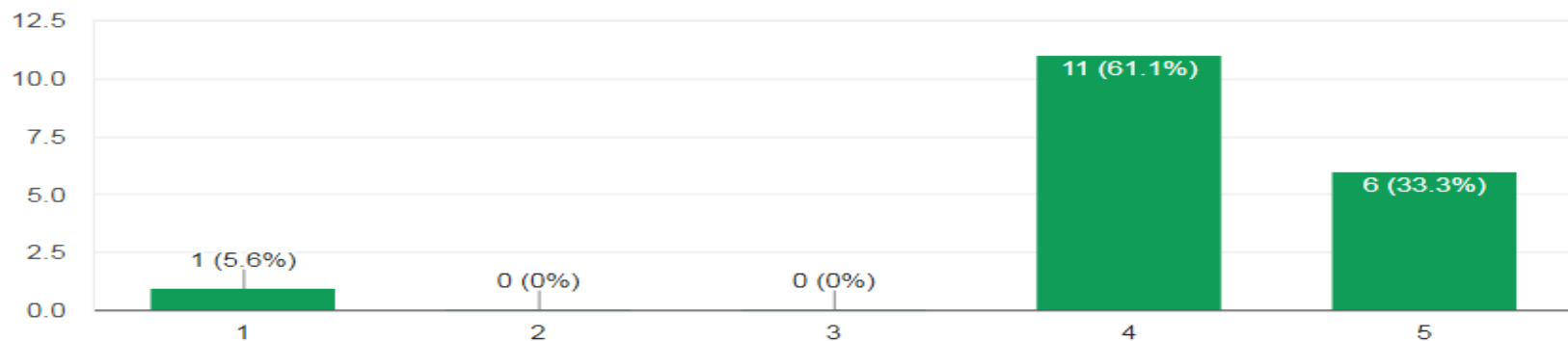




Do you feel the information that Mrs. Girgis has shared with students has been helpful?



18 responses



Teacher Comments...

- The difference between using your SMART Brain and IMPULSIVE Brain.
- How any brain can be changed. It may take a little longer or even be taught differently, but a child can better their brain power.
- How to stimulate the brain in order for the student to complete the task with more confidence as well as the calming exercises to relax.
- I have kept all of the information and can read it anytime. Just now, scientists are finding out much more about the brain than we knew before. To be on the receiving end of all this new information is exciting. The brain, and the entire body is a miracle of workmanship which most take for granted. The better we understand how "we" work, the better we can inform the next generation. Thank you.
- It just gives me more information on how our brain influences everything.
- You can train the brain to learn.
- Much of this I already knew due to my own research. I did like the square breathing strategy.
- I have learned that we can retrain the brain. I look at many of my students in a different light. I have enjoyed learning more about how the brain works.

Teacher Comments...

- What has been helpful for me is being made aware of strategies for strengthening the brain's executive functions. Knowing these strategies can help me teach more effectively, and I can also help the students understand how their brain works.
- I feel it has value for students who are old enough to make the types of connections she discussed. I'm not exactly on board with how this knowledge will actually affect a student's behavior.
- I frequently remind my class to do the square breathing to get their prefrontal cortexes back in control.
- The most helpful information I have learned is on how the brain is affected when the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system are not working together.
- Understanding how you lose oxygen to your brain when you are angry and how breathing can help calm you down, because it puts the oxygen back into your brain so it will function in a different way.
- It has been interesting to learn that the environment is not the only determining factor.
- It has helped me to better understand where the child's behavior is coming from.
- The most helpful information for me has been the visual animation video of the staircase where interference between the lower area of the brain and the higher area of the brain hampers learning.

What Did I Learn?



Never underestimate what a brief 30 minutes a week of personal PD can create!



Teacher Newsletter



Student Art

Where Am I Headed in the Future?



- A new interest has grown from our current PD in Executive Brain Functioning to ***Trauma Based Care.***
- I am working to bring in outside presenters for the 2018-19 school year that will address Trauma Based Care.



For more information....

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