

Developing Teacher Leadership Through Gaming

By: Matt Ridenour, Burnett Creek Elementary

Contact: mrridenour@tsc.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

I had the unique opportunity this year to lead two different buildings. I started out the school year in a small building that had served as my first venture in to the principalship. At semester's end, I transitioned to become the principal at a larger building in a different town. A very unique experience, but one I signed up for. Like anything that you get a second chance at, I learned from my successes and failures in my first principalship. I was determined to be more diligent about how I increased my leadership capacity. To say it was a unique school year would be an understatement.

I have always felt inadequate in how to develop teacher leadership. As a leader, I feel that teacher leadership is vital in creating a collaborative school culture. I know there are great teacher leaders out there, but they are not always willing to help lead others. I also know that the most vocal teachers are not always the ones with the best ideas. How do I develop teacher leadership where I am new to the building and coming in at semester? Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to create a way to find out who was collaborating the most often in my building.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how I could make an impact as a new administrator, create a fun way to promote collaboration, and find out who what teachers were the most collaborative within our building.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I scoured resources all over the internet. I found my "aha" moment on my Twitter feed. Someone I follow on Twitter had retweeted an article about a high school who had used badging to increase collaboration among academic departments. Badging is a concept known all over whether it be video gamers or Boy Scouts. The concept is simple - complete an activity and receive a badge. The more badges you earn presents the opportunity to "level up". I also wanted to make a new professional development idea a success - a pineapple chart. A lightbulb immediately went off in my head. This would be the perfect concept to excite a new staff and develop teacher leadership.

I then created and modeled my own website after the high school that had come up with the idea. This newly created site would serve as the hub for teachers to access ideas and criteria for badges. I also created a Google Form for teachers to fill out as they completed each activity. This step was crucial in gathering evidence of collaboration. Teachers could earn badges for the following categories: Administration Collaboration, Instructional Coach Collaboration, Blogs, Podcasts and Professional Books, Pineapple Chart Usage, Student Collaboration, and Special Services Collaboration. Teachers could choose to have their badges issued electronically or in the form of a static cling sticker. Once I had my badges printed and the website created, I walked teachers through the criteria for each category. I then sat back and observed for the next four months providing the staff with updates every few weeks.

I collected data from the beginning of January until the beginning of May. Every time that a teacher turned in a reflection via the Google Form I received an email. I would then edit the website to let teachers know how many badges were awarded for each category. I would also be able to convert all of the Google Form reflections on to a spreadsheet. This was very helpful in allowing me to document who was collaborating frequently and the quality of the reflection. The Google Form also gave me an indication as to what badge categories teachers were frequenting the most/least. This was an unexpected positive as it gave me a direction in how to modify the website for future years.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data I learned who the most collaborative teachers are in my building or better yet, the ones who are the most willing to collaborate. I also learned what areas of collaboration are successes in my building and what areas need improvement. One of the best takeaways from my data was that teachers are incredibly hungry for new ideas and ways to improve. I emphasized over and over to my staff that the best professional development is right under our own roof.

Over 260 badges of collaboration were turned in by my staff from January to May. I was simply blown away by the enthusiasm. I had one teacher who had earned over 40 badges from a broad range of categories. I also had several teachers who earned over 20. As an administrator, I feel confident going to these teachers for thoughts and ideas because they have a great picture of the real positives/challenges of our building.

I also found out that some badge categories were overwhelmingly more popular than others. Thirty eight percent of the total badges turned in were reflections regarding Blogs, Professional Books, and Podcasts. Some of that I attribute to the ease and comfort in completing those tasks on the teachers' own time. One thing that I look to improve upon is the use of our school's pineapple chart. This was the category that had the least participation, but was perhaps the most worthwhile venture in my opinion. Only ten badges were documented for the pineapple chart.

A pineapple chart is a very simple idea. A pineapple is a universal sign of welcome. Teachers are encouraged to place an activity that they are conducting in the classroom on the chart. Once an activity is placed on the chart, a teacher is essentially welcoming other teachers to come observe that lesson. Some of the feedback I got from teachers was that they wanted to take more time to put their lessons on the chart.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

The action research journey for me was a great one for a couple of reasons. I changed buildings mid-year, so I was able to create a non-intrusive, organic way of promoting collaboration through my project. I was also able to identify the most collaborative teachers in my new building. Being an administrator in a new building often brings about vocal teachers quickly looking to make you aware of the changes they would like to see. These changes are often for their own personal benefit and not the building's.

I have also learned that you can develop a leadership team through teacher actions. Teachers can prove that they are leaders - you just have to know how to have them prove that they are worthy. I felt like my project was a step towards accomplishing that task. I had an experience, as a teacher, where the principal hand picked his leadership team and his selections divided the staff. I never forgot that feeling as a teacher. As an administrator I was bound and determined to not make that mistake.

References:

Gonzalez, Jennifer. (September 25, 2016). How Pineapple Charts Revolutionize Professional Development. Retrieved from <http://www.cultofpedagogy.com/pineapple-charts/>.