

# *Diving In: Focusing on Effective Early Literacy instructional and Intervention Strategies*

**Name of School:** Batesville Primary School

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# Background Leading to My Inquiry

- Burning Question - “How do I impact instruction...?”
- The Challenge - Transitioning from high school to primary school
  - Becoming a highly effective early literacy instructional leader



## Purpose of My Inquiry

- “Do I impact the instruction of teachers and the learning of students through my position as an educational leader?”
- Vulnerable as a leader
- *“Diving In”*

## My Wondering

- “How will my leadership capacity expand if I become more focused on instruction and learning versus management?”
  - “How can I increase my own professional development to enhance my role as an early literacy instructional leader?”

# My Actions

- My fears
- Overcoming the fears
  - Step 1: Assessment training and administration; literature on early literacy instruction and intervention
  - Step 2: Getting into classrooms

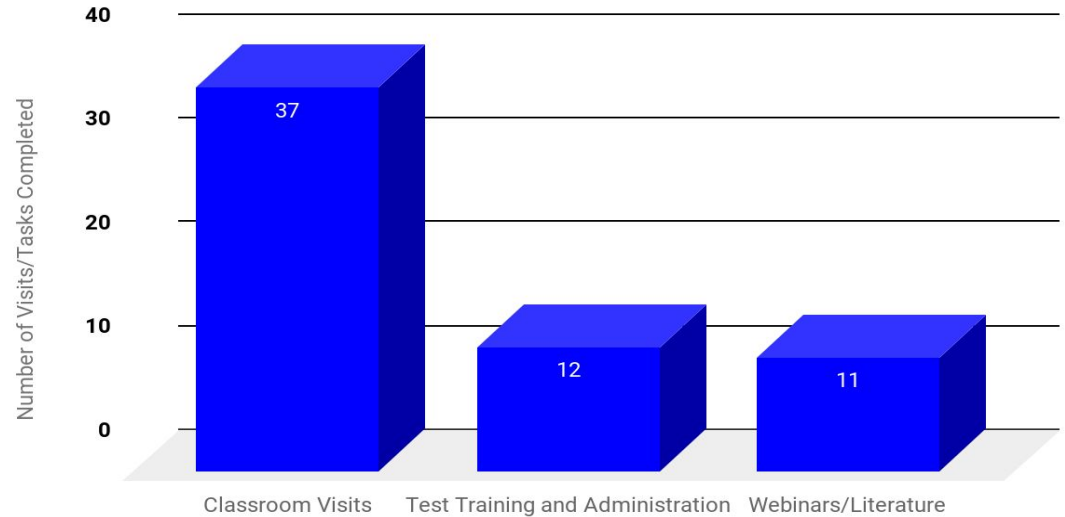
# Data Collection

- Quantitative
  - Number of classroom visits
    - Number of webinars and literature read
- Qualitative
  - Teacher and staff feedback
    - Quotes, notes, and feedback
      - Serving as an assistant (More than just a walk-through)

# My Data

- Quantitative
  - Classroom visits
  - Test training and administration
  - Webinars/literature

## Quantitative Data



# My Data Continued...

## ➤ Qualitative Data

- Quotes
- Notes
- Feedback

### \*Notes\*

- Leadership capacity expanded
- Vulnerability increased respect of staff and knowledge of early literacy instruction/intervention

*"Visibility creates a better culture"*

*"Oh boy...what's this all about?"*

*"Created a focus on learning"*

*"We Need Someone in the Office; We've Got This"*

### \*Notes\*

- Culture has holes
- Must continue to develop a better relationship between administration and teachers

### \*Notes\*

- Teachers wanted to run class independently
- Teachers wanted to know the real reason for being in classrooms
- Still more positive than negative



## My Discoveries

- Leadership capacity expansion
  - Focus on teaching, learning, and a commitment to instruction
- Teachers becoming curious, but gaining respect and trust
- A hole in the culture
  - Administration-to-teachers

## Where Am I Heading Next?

- School-based initiative from this inquiry
- Continued focus on visits, coaching, modeling
- Focusing on the overall culture
  - What does it really mean when the administration wants to visit and assist in classrooms?



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### **Background Leading to My Inquiry:**

The burning question that I have had for the past six (6) years has been, "Do I impact the instruction of teachers and the learning of students through my position as an educational leader?". It should be a simple "yes", but with the constant management demands it just seems that I am not focused on instruction and learning. It is important to sit back and focus on the tasks that will help establish me as an instructional leader within my building. It is also important to try to simplify the best ways to influence instruction and the overall learning process for each student.

The challenge that led to my inquiry was the transition from high school administration to primary school administration. Of course, with this transition, came criticism and staff concerns. Before stepping into the first day as principal, I was already not given a chance due to being a high school teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Therefore, I knew I had to overcome these concerns by being the best leader first, then by learning how to be a great primary school educator.

### **The Purpose of My inquiry:**

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to investigate the question, "Do I impact the instruction of teachers and the learning of students through my position as an educational leader?" The sole purpose was to make myself vulnerable by getting into classrooms, instructing students, and "diving in" as an early literacy instructor and interventionist.

### **My Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered, "How will my leadership capacity expand if I become more focused on instruction and learning versus management?" Also, "How can I increase my own professional development to enhance my role as an early literacy instructional leader?"

### **My Actions:**

During this process, I will share how I became a better instructional leader, and how my fears of transitioning from a high school principal to a primary school principal pushed me to be better. I will share the steps of how I created time to be in classrooms assisting teachers, learning from their instructional approaches, and in turn, modeling effective instructional and intervention strategies for teachers and staff.

My first step was to become more focused on assessments administered at the primary level. I received necessary training on the administration of NWEA and DIBELS/TRC. I became trained at not only administering the assessment, but breaking down the data to improve instruction. This is the time where I also started to read more literature on early literacy instruction and intervention.

Secondly, I started increasing the number of classroom visits where I was more involved in the instructional process compared to recent years. These visits were not formal, but involved more hands-on support for the classroom teacher. I wanted to see if increased interactive visibility enhances increased instructional awareness. I knew that I needed to become a better instructional leader to increase my leadership capacity. The overall method was to increase all aspects of my role relating to instruction and curriculum. During my visits I served more as a teaching assistant for the teacher versus an observer/evaluator.

I followed a monthly calendar of stated expectations:

November 2018

I attended an Amplify Early Literacy webinar on Tuesday, November 13

I attended an IASP Early Literacy Assessment webinar on Wednesday, November 14

December 2018

Received DIBELS and TRC training the week of December 17

Planned co-teaching and teacher assistant visits with grade level teachers

January 2019 and February 2019 - Data collection

During January and February I started to focus on:

- Administration on DIBELS and TRC - Understanding of literacy assessment
- Supporting classroom instruction
  - Co-teaching lessons
  - Serving as a grade level teacher assistant during reading blocks

March - Finalized data collection and create the action research project presentation

**Data Collection:**

My quantitative data was based more around the number of classroom visits. I wanted to see a comparison of my visibility within classroom versus my visibility in my recent years as a school leader. I also tracked the number of times I read literature on early literacy intervention and instruction. Finally, I pulled data from when I received training on specific formative assessments.

The qualitative data received during this process was the most beneficial. Qualitative data was collected from informal conversations with teachers and staff. Specific notes and quotes were logged based on feedback from teachers.

**My Data:**

During my collection process, I tracked data on a spreadsheet indicating how often I visited and assisted in classrooms. I also tracked the times I read literature or watched instructional videos based on early literacy instruction and intervention.

Data was logged showing the number of visits where I assisted the teacher with instruction. We are required to complete four (4) observations on each certified teacher. How am I affecting instruction outside of these required visits? It was a stated goal to visit classrooms more often each day that I am in the building. During January and February I also logged qualitative data via teacher feedback, notes, and quotes.

Quantitative Data:

Out of 39 school days in the months of January and February, I was able to visit at least one (1) classroom fifteen of those days or 38.5%. During those fifteen days of visits, I was able to visit 2-4 classrooms eight (8) times. The percentages were lower than I had wished for, but during this time I was able to gain much more data on my leadership, the school, and the teachers. Note, all data is based on informal classroom visits as I also conducted my formal observations during this time.

Qualitative Data:

The qualitative data derived from the above visits was so much more than simple walk-throughs. During these visits I had the opportunity to actually serve as an assistant within classrooms. The overall focus on my action research was to increase my leadership capacity as an early literacy instructional leader. The "diving in" approach was utilized to simply make myself vulnerable in a world of education in which I was not experienced. Classroom management, instruction, and curriculum development in a primary school environment is much different than that of a high school environment. Of course, I was criticised before I ever stepped into this leadership role considering my teaching and administrative experience all fell in the secondary level. I was able to push-in with classroom teachers to support instruction, intervention, and the overall learning process of students. I took a lead role in multiple lessons learning the "trial by fire" way. This increased my capabilities of an instructional leader and an evaluator at the primary school level. Although certain teachers preferred to not have administration in their classrooms, they could see the willingness to learn through my focus on self-improvement.

During this span of two months, I was able to gain great insight of the culture of my building. Some examples of the qualitative data that was collected was based on quotes from teachers:

"Visibility creates a better culture"

"Created a focus on learning"

"We need someone in the office; we've got this"

"Is there a more specific reason that you want to be in the classrooms?"

When receiving feedback, it was not all positive. I could see that many of my teachers, specifically those who have been teaching for ten (10) or more years, made statements showing me that they prefer to run and operate their classrooms without administrators. Certain teachers indicated that they believe the administration should only visit classrooms when doing formalized evaluations. Other teachers truly appreciated the presence of a leader.

### **My Discoveries:**

During this action research, I discovered that I can expand my overall leadership capacity by making myself vulnerable in areas where I am definitely not an expert. My overall capacity as an early literacy instructional leader expanded as I was able to learn how to effectively instruct primary school students while becoming a better educator following a “trial by fire” approach. This is the most exciting part of my action research. I really wanted to gain knowledge and feedback that would further develop me as a leader for many years to come. Generally speaking, I believe my research proved to me that I am prepared and adequately equipped to lead a primary school. I am now more knowledgeable regarding literacy instruction and intervention. Through my action research, I increased my confidence as an instructional leader and as an evaluator of teachers at the primary level.

During this action research, I discovered that many teachers do not want administrators consistently in their rooms. Teachers want to run and operate their classrooms solely, and really only prefer the administration to do visit to complete formal observations. I truly gained insight as to how certain teachers view administrators visiting classrooms. Upon receiving both positive and negative feedback, I continued to ask the most important question, “why do certain teachers really not want me in their rooms?” This was so beneficial for me as I accepted both positive and negative feedback. This inquiry was to increase my leadership capacity, not the teachers, so I believe each piece of qualitative data logged proved as a benefit to my research.

As stated in my first discovery, my leadership capacity has expanded. I was able to gain valuable feedback about my leadership capacity, my school, and many classrooms in which I assisted. I was able to visit and assist in almost 40 additional classrooms on top of the normally required four (4) formal teacher observations.

### **Where I Am Heading Next:**

From my school and teachers, I learned a great deal about the culture between classroom teachers and the administrative staff. With my action research, I received both positive and negative feedback. The negative comments or statements were more of a sense of concern or worry from teachers. Many wanted to know why I wanted to be in classrooms more often. That was quite interesting to me as I believe the instructional leader should be in classrooms as often as possible, both formally and informally. This is where I knew that I needed to ask more questions. When receiving negative feedback, I was able to dig deeper in early March to find out why certain individuals were so concerned about additional classroom visits. I think I gained valuable culture inquiry during this project. I am in the middle of my second year, and I confirmed to myself that I have to continue to change the culture of the administration to the teachers and staff. The culture between administration and teachers was not constructive or positive in recent years. Changing that culture is vital to the success of Batesville Primary School as we move forward.



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More importantly, I received great feedback on my willingness to learn. I believe I gained much more respect from many of the teachers and staff who questioned my transition in the first place when I was hired as principal. Teachers were very open and honest when speaking to me about their thoughts surrounding my action research. When teachers and staff know that you can see what they go through on a day-to-day basis, they respect and trust you more as leader. This project was strictly for me to gain more knowledge as an instructional leader centered around early literacy instruction and intervention.

The goal is to take what I have learned and continue to focus on early literacy instruction and intervention while serving more like a coach versus a manager. During year two of IPLI we will begin to focus on Batesville Primary School. We are going to move into a major initiative with Lindamood-Bell. Upon the implementation of this major investment, I plan to become trained like a teacher. I also plan to model lessons and strategies with my two teacher leaders. My two teacher leaders and I will create a Lindamood-Bell focus task force to implement continuous training among our staff. I want to “dive in” on this very important initiative with my staff while creating a collaborative and trustworthy culture with the intention of improving early literacy instruction and intervention. If that can be accomplished, our students will score above grade level standards and will be more than ready to “read to learn” at our intermediate school.