

# Improving Teacher Performance Through Reflective Practice

By: Tina Noe, Danville South Elementary

Team Members Names: Tammy McDugle, Becky Foltz

Contact: [tnoe@danville.k12.in.us](mailto:tnoe@danville.k12.in.us)

## **Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:**

Using feedback from the High Reliability School Survey from level 2, our team wanted to address indicator 2.4; "Teachers are provided with clear, ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses that are based on multiple sources of data and are consistent with student achievement data." In the book, "A Handbook for High Reliability Schools," Marzano, Warrick and Simms state that "a teacher evaluation system that focuses on teacher development can be highly instrumental," and that "acknowledging and supporting growth naturally leads to a school providing job-embedded professional development and proves opportunities for teachers to observe and discuss effective teaching."

Teachers had reported that they felt feedback was only occurring during very formalized times throughout the year and linked to evaluations only. Our team wanted to implement strategies to create a more relaxed, growth oriented format. We found opportunities to formalize already existing practices, as well as implement self-reflective practices and teacher to teacher observations, so that teachers could identify opportunities for improvement, as well as opportunities to see instructional practices so that growth and improvement could positively impact student achievement .

Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to create opportunities for staff to identify other ways in which they could receive feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. One key avenue we pursued was for teachers to evaluate themselves on the evaluation rubric. Teachers then created a goal based on an area they have identified as needing improvement. This goal gave way for opportunities for aligned professional development as well as meaningful dialogue with colleagues and evaluators. Teachers also observed their colleagues teach as another avenue for professional development and self-reflection.

## **Statement of Your Team's Wondering:**

With this purpose, we wondered, what impact will reflective practice, observing colleagues and targeted professional development have on improving instruction at South Elementary?

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into our wondering, we incorporated our existing evaluation software for teachers to review and score themselves on the RISE rubric. This self-reflection was shared with the building principal and then discussed in the Fall S2S (system to system) meeting. During this meeting, the building principal asked the teacher to highlight one area of the rubric that they would like to concentrate on improving for the 2017-18 school year. Teachers were also requested to seek out two colleagues that they could observe during the year. During the observations, teachers were asked to specifically look for the area in which they were focused on based on the rubric. Our team also utilized the book, Teach Like a Champion, for our professional

development sessions. The topics of each session linked directly to our areas our teachers identified as wanting to improve. Throughout the year, we continued to implement our traditional evaluation process, which included several walkthroughs.

Our team collected data by recording each targeted area the teachers chose to focus on during the year. This was collected during the Fall S2S meeting. We also sent out a "mid-year" check to all teachers. We asked teachers to re-evaluate themselves so far based on the work they had done to improve that area. At the end of the year, we sent a survey to all teachers to collect data regarding the self evaluation, the colleague observations and our Teach Like a Champion Strategies.

To analyze the data, we first reviewed the notes from the system to system meeting, making a tally chart of each domain that was represented by a teacher. We then highlighted specific strategies in the Teach Like a Champion book so that we could map out our professional development sessions for the year. Our Mid-Year Check up was collected in December so that we could tally the number of teachers who felt they were making progress on their goal, and the number of teachers who weren't making progress. We cross referenced this with our professional development list to make sure we had adequate time to cover strategies that would help our teachers. In April, we sent a survey to teachers requesting feedback on how helpful these strategies were in regards to improving their overall teaching performance.

### **Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing our data, three important things we learned included; Awareness of rubric indicators increased, the practice of self reflection gave way to more meaningful evaluation feedback (which is the overall goal of Indicator 2.4 from the HRS survey), and teachers appreciate the opportunity to learn from other teachers in action.

Increasing awareness of the RISE rubric was a valuable practice according to our survey results. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree and 5 being "strongly agree," 15/16 teachers ranked a 3 or higher on this survey, with the majority, 11/16, scoring a 4 or 5. During our S2S conversations, I often found that the teachers were harder on themselves then I would have been doing an actual evaluation. I feel the feedback the teachers shared during the S2S was genuine and allowed them to focus on an area in which they wanted to improve.

The self-reflection process also gave way to more meaningful evaluation feedback and dialogue. Knowing the area of focus for all teachers, the building principal was able to look for genuine coaching opportunities when making walkthroughs as well as short and long observations. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree and 5 being "strongly agree," 16/16 teachers ranked a 3 or higher on this survey, with the majority,15/16, scoring a 4 or 5. One teacher noted that the multiple walkthroughs became less intimidating, especially when the principal came into the room without a device. This allowed her to "blend" more into the classroom. Our team believes that creating opportunities, such as these, helps build trust and primes the teachers for accepting feedback and constructive criticism.

Another valuable learning outcome was the feedback we received from our survey regarding teachers being able to observe other teachers. Again, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree and 5 being "strongly agree," 16/16 teachers ranked a 3 or higher on this survey, with the majority,14/16, scoring a 4 or 5. Each teacher was required to make note of the learning objective being covered in the classroom they were observing, make notes, then state what they plan to take back to their own classroom to try to implement.

## **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

Our team felt the action research project helped us unify our efforts toward helping our teachers become better at their craft. We felt the processes we added, helped balance our traditional evaluation system to be less intimidating and push it in the direction of "coaching" our teachers rather than "catching" our teachers. This process helped give us a framework to work within and structure our efforts so that we could yield results, analyze and make improvements for the future.

Just by creating a few simple processes, such as the self-reflection process, we helped teachers become more aware of the criteria needed to score highly effective for a specific and targeted indicator. Creating a goal based on a self-perceived weak area can help teachers stay intentional toward improvement. A blog from Bright Hub Education, written by Lady Lit, shares "If a teacher does not take time to evaluate his/her performance, a teacher will have a tendency to do the same things in the same way, to teach the same concepts the same way, and to use the same exercises again and again. Guess what? If a teacher does the same things the same way he or she has always done them, the results are going to be the same that they have always been in the past." Our team felt our action research helped formalized this process.

Another benefit to our action research journey was shifting the culture regarding teacher evaluation. In the past, teachers have reported the process too formal and intimidating. Giving the teacher an avenue to share his/her voice regarding their performance, as well as offering targeted feedback helped shift our school to more of a coaching approach to improving our instructional methods. The authors from "The Coach Approach to School Leadership" highlight one of our key takeaways. "There are ways to move away from functioning primarily as a judge and toward making the evaluation process an opportunity for reflection and learning. Doing so will require leaders to find new ways to fulfill mandated procedures while either weaving them into a more reflective process or coordinating a parallel process of supportive feedback for growth. We feel our team accomplished both of these through our action research process.

Based on our processes this year, and the feedback we received from our teachers, we plan to continue the process of the RISE Rubric self reflection. We do plan to make a slight change and ask teachers to primarily focus on Domain 2, effective instruction, so that we can ensure we can adequately align our professional development sessions to their needs, and feedback during walkthroughs can be easily given.

## **References:**

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