Embracing the Rebel: Finding Joy and Productivity in Work

Principal Name:
School Name:
Principal's Email Contact:

Background Leading to My Inquiry (Slide 2)

Context:
As a principal navigating the balance between formal leadership responsibilities and school culture-building, I recognized a personal desire to lead with more authenticity, curiosity, and playfulness.

The Issue/Tension/Dilemma/Problem:
I often felt uncertain about whether my leadership was making a meaningful impact on school culture. I wanted to shift away from authority-driven leadership tools and explore whether connection and joy could be just as powerful. I was also navigating the internal challenge of increasing my own confidence as a leader without relying solely on formal validation.

The Purpose of My Inquiry (Slide 3)

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to use informal, authentic dialogue with trusted coworkers to boost my confidence as a leader and deepen school culture through shared joy, connection, and responsiveness.

My Wondering (Slide 4)

With this purpose, we wondered:
"I wonder if asking two close coworkers for their honest opinions about school events will increase my confidence in earning respect—not through control or authority, but through genuine connection, creativity, and shared laughter."

Sub-Questions:

- What common themes emerge from feedback shared by staff and students?
- What impact does this approach have on how I lead?
- Will this feedback influence the way I plan or respond to future events?

My Actions (Slide 5)

- Weekly feedback from two coworkers based on events (e.g., House Days, Reading Challenges, Attendance Incentives)

- Informal notes and mental reflections on emotional tone and key takeaways

- Observations of student excitement, staff morale, and event engagement

Data Collection (Slide 6)

- Weekly feedback from two coworkers based on events (e.g., House Days, Reading Challenges, Attendance Incentives)

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- Observations of student excitement, staff morale, and event engagement

My Data (Slides 7-8)

Quantitative Data:

- Increased participation in school events (e.g., more students engaged in Reading Challenges after incorporating playful incentives)
- Notable uptick in positive comments about leadership during informal staff conversations

Qualitative Data:

- "That surprise dance party in the hallway made my whole week!" — Staff member
- "I love when the principal does silly things. It makes school fun!" — Student
- "You seem more relaxed lately. It's helping us all stay upbeat." — Colleague

Data Analysis:

- Repeated themes: Joy, connection, feeling seen/heard, creativity
- Staff responses varied by personality: introverts appreciated quiet affirmations; extroverts thrived on shared public moments
- Rebel-phase behaviors (PCM) such as humor and spontaneity created ripple effects of energy and participation across the school

My Discoveries (Slide 9)

Learning Statement One:
Playfulness and genuine conversation built stronger trust than formality.

Staff and students were more receptive when leadership felt approachable, humorous, and heartfelt.

Learning Statement Two:
Feedback from trusted colleagues gave me timely insight that boosted my confidence.

Hearing honest, reflective feedback after events helped me recognize strengths I wasn't always aware of.

Learning Statement Three:
Joy-driven leadership increased engagement in schoolwide culture.

Events that involved laughter or surprise (e.g., "Kiss the Pig," hallway parades) saw higher student participation and stronger staff morale.

Where I Am Heading Next (Slide 10)

Reflections:
This inquiry helped me learn that leadership doesn't have to be rooted in control to be effective. My confidence as a leader grew when I leaned into connection and creativity. I also discovered that joy is a powerful driver of school culture and staff motivation.

Future Directions:

- Continue seeking regular, informal feedback from trusted colleagues
- Consider starting a broader "Culture Crew" to co-plan joyful experiences
- Explore how Rebel-phase leadership tools (humor, playfulness, spontaneity) can support staff morale during challenging seasons
- New Wondering: *What happens when this approach is scaled to include student leadership and voice?*

Bibliography (Slide 11)

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2002). *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High.* McGraw-Hill.

Kahane, A. (2004). *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities.* Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Kahler, T. (2008). *The Process Communication Model: Understanding Personality Structure.* Kahler Communications.

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Jeremy Shireman, Parkwood Elementary – IPLI Action Research 2025

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Purpose of This Inquiry

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to use informal, authentic dialogue with trusted coworkers to boost my confidence as a leader and deepen school culture through shared joy, connection, and responsiveness.

My Wonderings

With this purpose, we wondered:

"I wonder if asking two close coworkers for their honest opinions about school events will increase my confidence in earning respect—not through control or authority, but through genuine connection, creativity, and shared laughter."

Sub-Questions:

- What common themes emerge from feedback shared by staff and students?
- What impact does this approach have on how I lead?
- Will this feedback influence the way I plan or respond to future events?

My Actions

Step 1: Identified two trusted coworkers to serve as my reflective partners throughout the action research process.

Step 2: Began weekly check-ins with both coworkers. During each check-in, I asked:

- What have staff said about the most recent event?
- What have students said about the most recent event?

Step 3: Reflected on these conversations mentally, focusing on tone, energy, and recurring themes. No formal notes were taken.

Step 4: Observed changes in my own confidence and noted when staff and students responded positively to being heard or when events sparked genuine excitement.

Data Collection

- Weekly feedback from two coworkers based on events (e.g., House Days, Reading Challenges, Attendance Incentives)
- Informal notes and mental reflections on emotional tone and key takeaways
- Observations of student excitement, staff morale, and event engagement

My Data

- **Increased participation in school events (e.g., more students engaged in Reading Challenges after incorporating playful incentives)**
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My Data

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