

Making Connections: From Model of Instruction to Best Instructional Practice

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

The Level 2 survey from the Marzano Institute revealed a significant disconnect between administration and teachers concerning the existing model of instruction. Administration viewed the current teacher evaluation document as the key resource to define expectations in the classroom, and have used the evaluation document as springboard for multiple conversations and professional development activities. However, both the survey and ensuing conversation with teachers revealed the evaluation instrument does not resonate with the teachers in the same way when it comes to defining best instructional practice in the classroom. Therefore, by collectively creating a document that outlines our model for instruction, it is my hope that we can better articulate and align our initiatives to improve instruction in the classroom.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

How will creating a document outlining our school-wide model of instruction have a positive impact on the implementation of best practices in the classroom?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering, we began with a candid conversation about our Level 2 survey data and the practices surrounding our evaluation model as it related to the model of instruction. It was quite evident a disconnect existed between administration and teachers regarding the overall impact our evaluation practices had on improving instruction in the classroom. While evaluation is important and critical to our organization, we concluded there was opportunity to develop a document that clearly defined best practice within the classroom.

As principal I made the decision to remove myself from the early stages of development. I felt it was important to involve the teachers from the outset to minimize the risk of any feelings of separation from the document, as this was a criticism of our evaluation model. Our technology integrationist led the teachers through the use of a digital tool (GroupMap) where small groups, after discussion of best practice, could post their thoughts and ideas. After additional rounds of discussion in various groups and settings, the document was finalized.

With the completed document in place, several initiatives began to take shape. Our technology integrationist saw an opportunity to create a hyperlinked version of the Model of Instruction that linked each best practice to a number of helpful resources. Administration developed a walkthrough instrument to gauge the frequency best practice was observed in the classroom. Teachers video recorded a lesson and self-reflection of their own practice. This was followed by visiting and observing colleagues to view best practice.

At the end of the year, a survey was administered to teachers to provide feedback on the various initiatives resulting from the developed model of instruction. Overwhelmingly, the survey results showed that the staff

was in strong favor of both the model of instruction and the various initiatives. An open-ended item was also provided for teachers to recommend changes, of which there were several small recommendations to improve the initiatives overall.

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

As a result of analyzing our data, two important things I learned were: 1) Data plays a critical role in informing decisions regarding all aspects of the organization, 2) our evaluation process has limited impact on staff development, and 3) shared leadership is vital to organizational growth and success.

1. Data plays a critical role in informing decisions regarding all aspects of the organization.

While our district prides itself on making data-driven decisions, the overwhelming majority of the time this is in reference to student performance data. The High Reliability Schools surveys provided by the Marzano Institute provided a much more intensive view of our organization. While the surveys reinforced that we were on the right path with current initiatives, they also revealed additional factors that A) contribute to our challenges and B) may prevent us from maximizing our potential. It was this data that revealed the need to develop a document clearly outlining our model of instruction. It also served as a clear reminder to continue to take a look at all aspects of our school community.

2. Our evaluation process has limited impact on staff development.

As principal this was the most surprising revelation from our action research project. While administration leaned on the evaluation process to drive teacher growth and professional development, teachers felt detached and in some cases resented the process. Veterans spoke to the heavy handed implementation of years past (we are a RISE school), while universally the process was described in terms of indifference. It was not so much that there wasn't any value to be found, it was simply viewed more akin to the ISTEP+ assessment coming after the fact. It was not viewed as something that drove professional growth throughout the academic year.

3. Shared leadership is vital to organizational growth and success.

It was both humbling and a joy to watch the staff take ownership of the development of our model of instruction. Additionally, several resulting initiatives were conceptualized and pursued by staff once our model was finalized. Feelings of resentment were completely avoided as teacher input served as the developmental guide from the outset. Ultimately, the end product of our model of instruction and the various initiatives were made better by taking in multiple viewpoints. David Weinberger's claim that "the smartest person in the room is the room" was most certainly proven true with this project.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

The revelation of the limitations of our evaluation process will have a far reaching impact. While the process was never completed in a vacuum, professional development initiatives based on the results of the evaluation process were negatively affected by the relationship. Moving forward it will be critically important for administration to emphasize growth and improvement while working through teacher perception of losing points for doing things "wrong". It will be a challenge at times, but having a document that exists outside of the evaluation process detailing best classroom practice will better position administration to facilitate dialogue on that topic.

With the inclusion of a strong teacher voice in the development of the model of instruction, the willingness to critique and guide all resulting initiatives was greater in frequency. Feedback from our project survey was both positive and constructive. This will produce better future implementation and more impactful learning opportunities. Chief among these will be an expansion of our classroom visits/instructional rounds. Survey data revealed that teachers found value in getting into one another's classroom to seek out best practice in action. While it was beneficial working independently, we believe there is greater potential to work the rounds in groups. This will create opportunity for further learning and deeper discussion on best classroom practices. Additionally, we concluded we need to be more intentional with what classrooms teachers should visit. Identifying classrooms that better match strengths to challenges will produce more impactful results.

References:

N/A