

The Balancing Act of a Principal: Increasing my Presence in the Building

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Many days I feel like I am performing a balancing act as principal. Between the obligations that keep me in my office and teacher evaluations I feel like I'm balancing two spinning plates. The two plates seem to consume my day. My problem is I need to add a third plate to complete my act. I need to be intentional about scheduling time to interact with my students and teachers. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to increase my presence in my building. I wanted to improve my student/teacher relationship. I wanted to be able to encourage both in what they are doing as teachers and students each day.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered "How can I improve as a leader through active, engaged presence in my building?"

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering I made an intentional effort to be present in my building by blocking off time each day to interact with students and staff throughout my day. To help organize my day I taught my staff to use youcanbookme.com so that planned observations and meetings could be scheduled and would automatically block that time off of my calendar. I was able to block off my intentional time so that the observations did not overlap.

This intentional time consisted of blocking out times each day to do unannounced classroom visits that were not linked to the teacher evaluation, I scheduled time to walk the hallways and greet each classroom everyday before announcements, also I made intentional visits during lunch and recess.

I first began by discussing this with my Leadership Team to see what they felt about my plan. I then sent out a pre survey to see where the staff felt my presence was needed. As I made this intentional interaction with teachers and students I kept a reflective journal. Also, I researched articles showing the importance of the principal's presence in the classroom and building. I ended this process by sending a post survey to see if the staff noticed an improvement in my presence.

As I analyzed my data I was enlightened that the pre survey showed that teachers wanted me in their classrooms. By intentionally making an effort to block out time to randomly visit classrooms improved my relationship with both teachers and students. I personally felt a greater connection and this created a personal excitement that motivated me to continue my daily visits.

Through research I found that being out and about is important for a productive learning environment. Also to be more of an instructional leader, you have to learn what the kids are learning. The research also showed that high levels of teacher-principal trust are dominant in the top achieving schools. Teachers in high

achieving schools find their principal accessible, open to new ideas, and supportive of their practices in the classroom.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data two important things I learned include: 1.) Teachers wanted me to increase my time in their classroom.; 2.) Personally I felt a greater connection with my teachers and students.;

1.) Teachers wanted me to increase my time in their classrooms.

Through the pre survey, I was pleasantly surprised that teachers wanted me to increase my time in their classrooms. I honestly didn't know that this was something they wanted. Through conversations they shared that they wanted me to see what they were doing. This opened up an experience I will always cherish and continue. I feel that through this process they know that I am seeing the great things they are doing daily. It helped increase the trust between my teachers and myself. Also, I was able to talk with students about what they were learning.

2.) I felt a greater connection with my staff and students.

Through research I know that schools where the principal is visible helps increase the productive learning environment. Great leaders take responsibility for creating a positive learning environment. It is important to know what the students are learning to become an Instructional Leader. Building the trust between teachers and the principal is important. This trust is dominant in the top achieving schools. Teachers in high achieving schools find their principal accessible, open to new ideas, and supportive to their practices in the classroom. Through my experience I felt a closer bond with my teachers and students. I also could see that teachers were not as defensive once I began visiting their classrooms without the evaluation piece. This allowed for growth through conversations. Also, it allowed for truly authentic teaching to take place while I was in the classroom.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

My action research taught me many things about myself and my staff. First of all, through the surveys I noticed that teachers wanted me in their classrooms. Honestly I did not feel this would be the number one place they would want me to be present. I feel that by being seen and participating in the classrooms without the cloud of evaluations hanging over our heads, that teachers became more comfortable with me being in the classroom. This allowed for authentic teaching to continue and for me to see what our students were learning.

Also, I feel that by building these connections with the students helped me to relate to our students when they were having a bad day. It is all about relationships. By being intentional in taking time to visit with our students in the lunchroom, the hallways, recess, and in the classrooms I feel that I was able to make connections with all students whereas before I didn't feel like I had that personal connection with all of my students. Having a building with close to 650 students impeded on that relationship. This allowed me to make connections with students that I may not have had the opportunity to experience before making this intentional choice to be present.

Personally I felt a greater connection with my teachers and students. This created a personal excitement that motivated me to continue to visit the classrooms. This is something I plan to continue from now on beginning at the beginning of the year. I want it to become my new normal.

References:

Delisio, Education World, "Principals Classroom Visits Help Build Better Readers" June, 2010
Hall, AIR "Voices from the Field: The Principal's Presence and Supervision to Improve Teaching", Published in SEDL Letter Volume XVII, Number 2, Leadership for Learning