

Walkthroughs - Keys to Quality Feedback & Teacher Growth

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Seven years ago during our district adoption of Madelyn Hunter's Lesson Design and Instructional Sequence for lesson planning I created a walkthrough form to be used at my current building (Ben Davis Ninth Grade Center) which incorporated lesson design as well as adult action and student response to align with our new evaluation data goals required by the state. NGC had a much larger staff so I needed an accountability tool which tracked the completion of a monthly walkthrough on each of the 76 certified staff members by one of the three administrators. In my transition to Ben Davis University High School I brought with me the same walkthrough form as there had been no walkthrough form or process in place by the prior principal. The staff seemed to enjoy the opportunity to receive written feedback and I again implemented the accountability model of alternating monthly walkthroughs by the two administrators for the 18 certified staff members. In my fourth year I felt that not only was the feedback stagnant, but I had no system in place where me and my assistant principal reflected on the feedback that we recorded on the forms and staff never had access to that feedback with the exception of their own. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to use staff input to create a new walkthrough form to improve the consistency and quality of our instructional feedback so that it was not only valuable, but also fostered professional growth outside of the formal observation process.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how I could revitalize our walkthrough process to create quality feedback and promote professional growth for teachers.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I started the process by gathering input from my fellow secondary principals in the district on the form and process they used for classroom walkthroughs in their buildings. I was very surprised to see that besides the form and process I had created at my prior building which was still in place the majority of the buildings had no forms or process in place for formal walkthroughs. I expanded my search to gain insight by questioning the elementary principals and found that again several had no formal process and form and those that did utilized a form and process that aligned with their school improvement plan model which involved the work of a learning coach for guidance. Therefore my next steps to gain insight was to utilize a book that happened to come at the perfect time through ASCD which was titled "Engaging Teachers in Classroom Walkthroughs."

Through the assistance of two teacher leaders who were incorporated into the planning and implementation of my action-research project, we completed a book study on "Engaging Teachers in Classroom Walkthroughs." Based on the book which had many great ideas for walkthrough forms and models which were very much focused on quality feedback that teachers actually utilized to improve their instruction, the teachers moved forward with a staff survey which they created in Nearpod a great technology resource that

allowed the survey to be completed while also engaging teachers in discussion and dialogue. The three of us met after the discussion and survey, which was completed together as a group (with individual input) which also provided some immediate feedback to the teachers relative to the topic and survey questions. We processed the dialogue and analyzed the input which I then put together in a presentation to share with the staff as we revised our current walkthrough form and process.

After sharing the feedback with the staff through my presentation, we created a new form and process and then together with the teacher leaders we created a schedule of peer observations so that teachers could not only get into their colleagues classrooms (a need that came out of our staff survey) but also provide authentic input on the form after using it themselves to complete their peer observations. We then met as a staff again and reviewed the data from the walkthrough form and discussed further needs, input, and changes that needed to occur to either the form or process as we moved forward with formal implementation at the start of the next year. This process was started in November and ran through May.

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

As a result of analyzing my data I learned that:

- The staff valued quality feedback over the quantity or frequency of feedback.
- Staff development including the teachers reviewing the data as a group twice a year could serve as the administrative accountability piece.
- Student interaction by the observer was something teacher's valued greatly.
- Written feedback rather than just multiple choice and numeric data was wanted by almost all staff.
- The teachers wanted to not only be a part of the walkthrough process through continued peer observations, but also look at that data as a group at least twice a year.
- Sharing of best instructional practices as a result of peer observations was a key point of their interest.

My first discovery was that the staff valued the quality of feedback over the quantity of feedback. Based on the survey and discussion, the teachers felt that monthly walkthroughs were more frequent than they needed recognizing that they preferred more quality feedback and connected review of data and discussions as a staff versus a monthly form dropped off in their mailbox following a quick visit by an administrator. They not only valued the time of administrators, but also recognized that looking at feedback collectively was the ultimate goal which connects to sharing of best instructional practices. As part of the new form, they created a list of best instructional practices to track the implementation of as well as monthly themes which connected to our school improvement process through our mission, vision, and improvement goals. In fact over 50% of the staff wanted to use walkthrough data to promote collegial conversations that become part of the school's professional learning culture and 45% of the staff wanted to use data to increase reflection on best practices to increase student achievement.

My second discovery was that they still valued the instructional sequence and lesson design model as 50% of the staff wanted the feedback provided to be on teacher instructional practices (adult action) and 23% of the staff wanted the feedback to be on student learning activities (student response.) Through discussion, the teachers all agreed that student interaction such as asking students what they were learning today to check the lesson objections and learning goals communicated to the students as well as their engagement in the lesson was very important to them and something they wanted an outside observer to verify and provide feedback on. This also aligned the type of feedback that staff wanted as 90% of those surveyed felt that the observer should not only interact with the student but also provide written feedback on the response they received in interacting with the student. We dug into the type of feedback further through the survey and discussion which resulted in 71% of the staff wanting feedback in the form of both a checklist and notes and

the incorporation of a short list of instructional components as well as a longer list of instructional strategies. The monthly themes they selected which tied to our school improvement focus as well as our mission and goals were the following: learning environment, relationships, rigor & relevance, engagement, student collaboration, as well as technology & resources. These are the areas the staff valued and agreed upon as a focus through the walkthrough process.

My final discovery was that the staff wanted to be a part of the feedback process and continue the practice of peer observations using the form throughout the year. They also wanted to reflect on the data as a group with a focus on teacher action and student response and then connect the results to professional development focused on the areas of instruction and best practice in our monthly themes. This was an awesome discovery as it provided a new type of accountability that resulted in authentic feedback that was actually used for individual teacher as well as school improvement!

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

My journey through this action research project was very positive. In my position as a building level principal with over 10 years experience in two different buildings, I constantly reflect on my practices to ensure that I am not only doing what is required but actually fostering growth and change by my staff. I was very impressed by the fact that the teachers felt very much the same in their quest for growth and not only wanted processes in place to ensure that their use of quality instructional practices was monitored and reviewed in some fashion, but also wanted to learn from each other through connected professional development. I was not only impressed by their ownership of the walkthrough model and connected feedback, but also surprised at their choice as a staff to continue utilizing peer observations to learn from each other which is truly a growth model that building-level administrators strive to attain and sustain.

In our final discussion to reflect on our data and the form and resulting feedback after their actual use through peer observations we had some very deep discussions that led us to look at the next school year in terms of instructional trends and needs. Through that process the staff decided that more resources would be highly valued on the monthly themes. Therefore, we decided to have small group book studies next year on those monthly themes with a focus on best and research-based instructional practices. Once again, I was very impressed by my staff at their engagement in a model of growth and reflection which was on a much higher level than I ever expected. As an administrator, I feel that this was such a positive process through the work that I was able to complete with teachers leaders to not only plan the process, but led it which in my opinion created a greater sense of ownership and engagement in the process by the staff. I am looking forward to the implementation of the new walkthrough form and process this next school year and my wonderings are definitely connected to how this will work out and if our goals for teacher growth and reflection will be achieved through this open and transparent process.

References:

Kachur, D., Stout, J., & Edwards, C. (2013). *Engaging Teachers in Classroom Walkthroughs*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.