



Diving In: Focusing On Effective Early Literacy Instructional and Intervention Strategies

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Background Leading to My Inquiry:

The question I have had throughout my first five full years as an elementary principal is "Do I impact the instruction of teachers and the learning of students through my position as an educational leader?". I have always felt I did a good job of running the building; managing the ever changing dynamics of the building. But I have a lot of different "jobs" that I take on from corporation testing coordinator, maintenance in my building, helping to maintain technology needs in the building, etc... As I deal with these management demands, my focus on instruction and learning has diminished. It is important to shift my focus toward the instructional side and figure out a plan to best impact instruction in my building.

I had a major challenge of transitioning from high school teacher to elementary principal. I focused on learning the dramatic differences between elementary education and high school education. These differences involved curriculum, students, and even the teachers. The challenge that led to my inquiry was the transition from high school administration to primary school administration.

The Purpose of My inquiry:

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to investigate the question, "Do I impact the instruction of teachers and the learning of students through my position as an educational leader?" The sole purpose was to make myself vulnerable by getting into classrooms, instructing students, and "diving in" as an early literacy instructor and interventionist.

My Wondering:

How will my leadership capacity expand if I become more focused on instruction and learning versus management?

My Actions:

During this process, I will share how I became a better instructional leader, and the difficulty transitioning from a high school teacher to an elementary principal. I will share the steps of how I created time to be in classrooms assisting teachers, not just observing. I am also learning from their instructional approaches, and in turn, modeling effective instructional and intervention strategies for teachers and staff.

My first step was to become more focused on assessments administered at the primary level. I received training on the administration of NWEA and DIBELS/TRC through our curriculum director and our teachers. I became trained at not only administering the assessment, but breaking down the data to improve instruction. This included similarities and differences between NWEA and Dibels/TRC. It



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also included what to look for with students at different grade levels and how this compared to their overall instruction.

Secondly, I started increasing the number of classroom visits where I was more involved in the instructional process. These visits were not formal, but involved more hands-on support for the classroom teacher. I was curious if an increase in visibility would enhance instructional awareness. I knew that I needed to become a better instructional leader to increase my leadership capacity. I wanted to increase my elementary curricular knowledge in all areas to help improve instruction and curriculum. During my visits I served more as a teaching assistant for the teacher and not as an observer/evaluator.

I followed a monthly calendar of stated expectations:

December 2019

Received DIBELS and TRC training the week of December 16 through our curriculum director and building teachers

Planned co-teaching and teacher assistant visits with grade level teachers

January 2020, February 2020, March 2020 - Data collection

During January, February, and March I started to focus on:

- Administration on DIBELS and TRC - Understanding of literacy assessment
- Supporting classroom instruction
 - Co-teaching lessons
 - Serving as a grade level teacher assistant during classes/lessons

April - Finalize data collection and create the action research project presentation

Data Collection:

I started to track how many visits to each classroom I conducted on a daily basis. I also went through training to be able to administer our NWEA and Dibels testing. The training was given by our curriculum director and some teachers that administer the testing right now. I took the time to observe some of these tests being given and then actually administered the tests with the supervision of the teacher. It is important to me to have a better understanding of what these assessments look like from the student and teacher side.

I also used a google document and calendar to track my visits into the classrooms. I made a concerted effort to stop by classrooms as I was out in the building for other purposes which is something I didn't do on a regular basis. The google document allowed me to visualize my visits so I didn't leave classrooms out. It was important for me to spread myself around the building and not leave some out.

My Data:

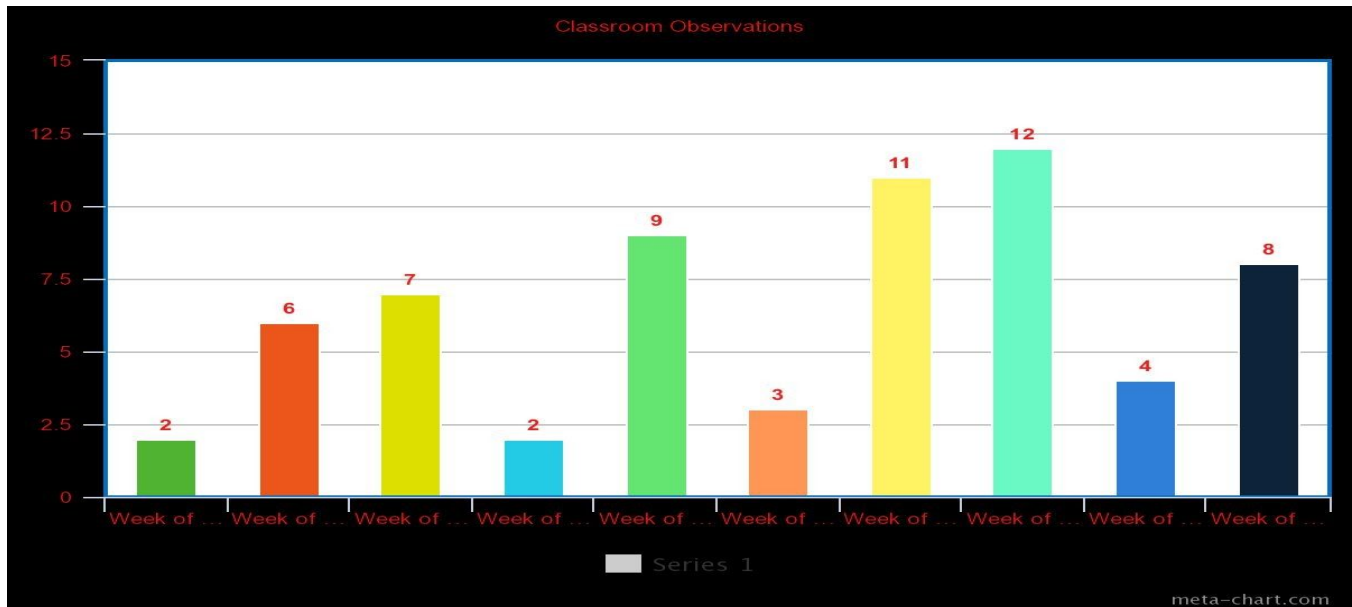
Here is the google document with my classroom visits or tests administered. I also included a graph showing the amount of visits per week.

	Administered DIBELS, TRC, or NWEA	Served as a Teaching Assistant or Co-teacher in a Classroom
1/6/20	OUT	OUT
1/7/20		
1/8/20		Assisted in Peterson (6th grade science) Observed: Rogers
1/9/20		
1/10/20	DIBELS (KDG - Pruss)	
1/13/20		
1/14/20	DIBELS (KDG - Hughes)	Assisted in Ingle (5th grade math) Observed: Rogers
1/15/20	DIBELS (2nd Grade Weinbender)	
1/16/20		Assisted in Drake (3rd grade) Observed: Frank
1/17/20	OUT	OUT
1/20/20		Assisted in Turner (3rd grade)
1/21/20		Observed: Ingle, Schmaltz
1/22/20		Observed: Weales, Drake
1/23/20	DIBELS (2nd Grade Weinbender)	Assisted in Frank
1/24/20	OUT	OUT
1/27/20		Assisted in Ingle (5th grade math)
1/28/20	DIBELS (1st Grade Frank)	Assisted in Turner (3rd Grade)
1/29/20	IPLI Seminar	IPLI Seminar
1/30/20		
1/31/20	OUT	OUT
2/3/20		Assisted in Hughes (KDG)
2/4/20		Assisted in Pruss (KDG)
2/5/20		Assisted in Kruetzkamp (2nd grade)
2/6/20		Assisted in Peterson (Science) Observed: Piche, Schmaltz



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2/7/20		Observed: Ingle, Weinbender, Pruss, Thompson
2/10/20		
2/11/20		Observed: Frank, Drake, Weales
2/12/20		
2/13/20		
2/14/20	OUT	OUT
2/17/20		Observed: Schmaltz, Kruetzkamp, Frank, Rogers
2/18/20		Observed: Ingle, Peterson, Piche
2/19/20	eLearning Day	eLearning Day
2/20/20		Observed: Hughes, Pruss, Frank, Rogers
2/21/20	OUT	OUT
2/24/20		Observed: Ingle, Peterson, Piche, Thompson, Rogers
2/25/20		Observed: Library, Speech, Lyttle (Art)
2/26/20	OUT	OUT
2/27/20		Observed: Hughes, Frank, Turner
2/28/20		Observed Music (Busha)
3/2/20		Taught PE (Wheat)
3/3/20	OUT	OUT
3/4/20		Assisted in Ingle
3/5/20		Observed: Piche, Peterson
3/6/20	OUT	OUT
3/9/20		Observed: Rogers, Frank
3/10/20		Observed: Hughes, Pruss, Drake, Turner
3/11/20		Observed: Schmaltz, Kruetzkamp
3/12/20	OUT	OUT
3/13/20	OUT	OUT



My Discoveries:

This was very difficult for me at first. I was so used to being looked to for everyday problems that were maybe not in my job duties, but were easy for me to fix. I had to learn to say no which is also something that is not easy for me to do. Especially when I know I am capable of fixing the problem. Being at a building with little resources and not close to campus where maintenance and technology are housed, we get used to doing things on our own.

Parental issues, testing coordinator duties, and constant questions or problems always tried to pull me away from the classroom. It was not easy to say no but my secretary and I managed a routine where I would tell her to hold all non-essential items when I scheduled classroom visits.

Once I started getting into the classroom more, some things became very apparent. As I started to purposefully go to classrooms, I found myself looking for reasons to stop. If I was in the gym for a maintenance issue, I would stop by a classroom on the way back to the office which is something I never did in the past. I also found as the teachers became more accustomed to me being in the classroom, they started to ask me to stop by. I was invited to help with lessons or to simply watch something the teacher and/or students were excited about.

As I spent more time in the classroom, I also felt more empowered on the pulse of the building. I knew of student or teacher issues earlier and instead of being reactive, I could try and be proactive. I was able to take different teaching styles from teachers and share with others to provide more instructional tools for success.



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I also found that I avoided classrooms based on my personal interests or how well the teacher was with classroom management. I realized I was doing a disservice to not only those teachers but to the entire building. Being in those classrooms allowed me to improve not only instructional deficiencies, but improve the overall moral of the building. Things felt more cohesive since I had a better picture of the educational environment of the building.

Where I Am Heading Next:

My goal is to make classroom observations and walkthroughs commonplace in my building. I realize how important it is to be present and visible not only in the building, but in the classrooms. I plan to set aside time in the mornings for classroom walkthroughs. I realize how important this aspect of the job is and saying no to some of the requests is vital in making this work. I am switching positions next year as I will be the principal at our middle school. It will be even more important to be in the classrooms there as I become familiar with the teaching staff and students of a new building.



You Sure Manage Your Building Well...Now What?

Sam Melton - Principal
Dillsboro Elementary School



Background Leading To My Inquiry

- I have always felt like I managed my building well. But I am constantly being pulled in different directions.
 - District Testing Coordinator
 - Fixing Chromebooks
 - Maintenance Issues
 - District RISE Co-Chair
- I constantly find myself managing these things instead of spending more time in the classroom.

The Purpose of My Inquiry

- My purpose is to determine if I impact the instruction of teachers and the learning of students through my position as an educational leader?



My Wondering

- How will my leadership capacity expand if I become more focused on instruction and learning versus management?
- Will more time in the classroom lead to better instruction and more student learning?

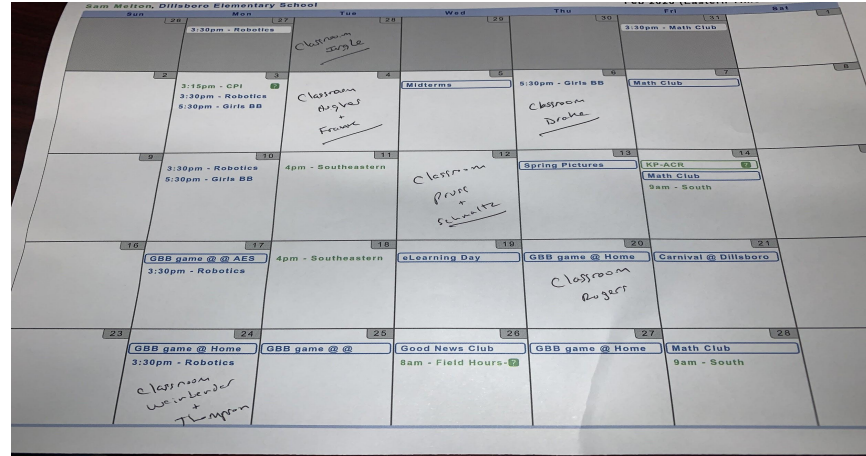
LEADERSHIP

My Actions



- I wanted to become more focused on assessments administered at the elementary level.
 - NWEA
 - Dibels/TRC
- I was good with technical support but not what that assessment looked like from the teacher point of view.
- I received training from our curriculum director and teachers on administering these assessments.
- So...I went into the classrooms to administer these assessments to the students.

My Actions



- I took a hard look at how much time I spent in the classroom.
 - The numbers were frightening
 - I would go days without walking into the classroom for meaningful observations
 - In fact, I averaged two (2) classroom visits a week based on my calendar information.

My Actions

- I started increasing my classroom visits.
 - I focused on being involved in the instructional process (not there to observe).
- This meant I had to start saying no to other things that would constantly pull me away from the classrooms.



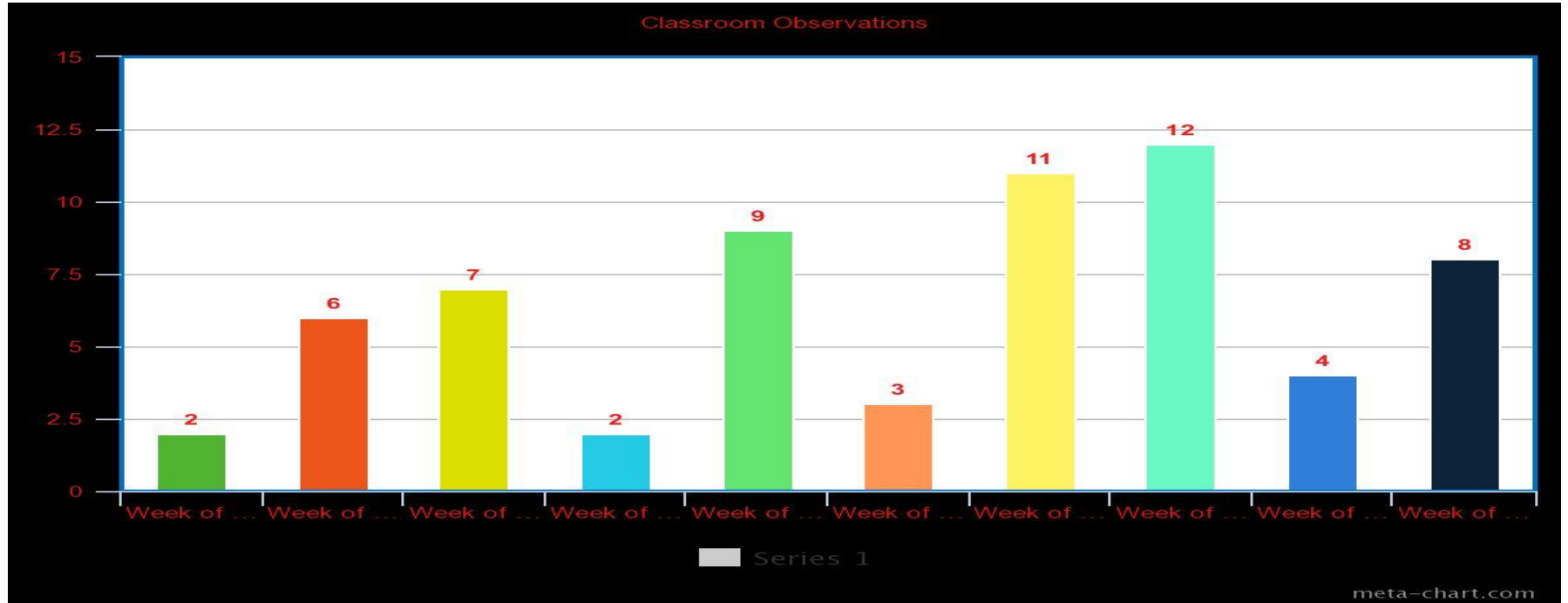
My Data

- I used a [Google Sheet](#) to track my observations or assistance in each classroom.

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1/15/20	DIBELS (2nd Grade Weinbender)
1/16/20	
1/17/20	OUT
1/20/20	Assisted in Drake (3rd grade) Observed: Frank
1/21/20	OUT
1/22/20	Assisted in Turner (3rd grade) Observed: Ingle, Schmalz
1/23/20	DIBELS (2nd Grade Weinbender) Observed: Weales, Drake
1/24/20	OUT
1/27/20	OUT
1/28/20	DIBELS (1st Grade Frank) Assisted in Ingle (5th grade math) Assisted in Turner (3rd Grade)
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1/30/20	
1/31/20	OUT
2/3/20	Assisted in Hughes (KDG)
2/4/20	Assisted in Pruss (KDG)
2/5/20	Assisted in Kruezkamp (2nd grade)
2/6/20	Assisted in Peterson (Science) Observed: Piche, Schmalz
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2/11/20	
2/12/20	Observed: Frank, Drake, Weales
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3/5/20		Observed: Piche, Peterson
3/6/20	OUT	OUT
3/9/20		Observed: Rogers, Frank
3/10/20		Observed: Hughes, Pruss, Drake, Turner
3/11/20		Observed: Schmalz, Kruezkamp
3/12/20		OUT
3/13/20	OUT	OUT

My Data - Classroom Visit Chart



My Discoveries

- This was a very difficult goal to accomplish.
 - Parental issues
 - Testing preparations as testing coordinator
 - Typical problems others relied on me to fix

My Discoveries

- Being more aware of classroom observations helped me get in the habit of stopping in classrooms
- These classroom observations also allowed me to become more aware of what was happening in the classrooms and building.
- This knowledge helped me support our staff more effectively.

My Discoveries

- I realized I was avoiding certain classrooms or teachers.
 - I seemed to avoid the classrooms that were not of as much interest to me personally
 - I gravitated to the classrooms where the teacher was more personable to me
 - I also spent more time in the classrooms with better classroom management

Going Forward

- My goal is to make classroom observations or walkthroughs common place (not only for my teachers but for me).
- I will set aside time each morning to use as classroom visit time and push back some of the managerial things on my plate