

Supporting School-Wide Reading Goals: The Challenges of Peer Observations and Teacher Collaboration at a Public Elementary School

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to conduct a peer-observation cycle with three kindergarten teachers in order to improve instruction based on recommendations in the literature for effective, high-quality professional development. The research design intended to include a series of three peer observation cycles within a two month period, each involving a pre-observation meeting, an observation while taking ethnographical notes, and a debriefing session including planning for next steps. However, given time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and added responsibilities, the action research in its original design did not occur. The major recommendation from this project is the need to prioritize time for colleagues to develop and maintain collegiate relationships within a professional development climate with a relentless focus on evidence and purposeful collaboration

Constraints: Time, Scheduling, and Other Responsibilities

- Highland Park underwent incredible change during the 2014-2015 school year.
- New administrator/over 15 new staff members/recommitment contract
- Extended Day: Teachers required to tutor for one hour after school two out of three days a week to meet recommitment requirements
- 30 minutes of daily collaborative planning time was not sufficient to do in depth analysis
- PD opportunities for teachers in the building and out of the school required more substitutes than are available
- Coordinating personal and professional schedules

Resilience

- Despite extraordinary disruptive behaviors from students, teachers continued to plan ahead with optimism
- Throughout the process of the action research project, administration worked with me to try and coordinate schedules
- Teachers were willing to conduct a peer-observation cycle after the action research deadline

Teacher Perceptions, Morale, and Learning

- Teachers were critical of their own students' disruptive behavior and concerned peer-observations would be ineffective
- Teachers feared they would be viewed as ineffective by colleagues
- Daily responsibilities of teaching, collaborating and challenges with students contributed to teacher's sense of "guilt", and ineffectiveness
- Teachers continued to pursue professional development opportunities
- Teachers continued to research strategies to address unacceptable student behavior
- Teachers demonstrated flexibility in order to continue professional learning