

Action research from Colleen De Mille

Here are some of my thoughts on the exchange:

The purpose of this year long study will be to determine the strategies that administrators utilize during collaborative (co-learning), professional learning opportunities (learning team meetings) to assist teachers to critically analyse student achievement data and to select effective next steps for instruction to positively impact student achievement.

The Australian exchange was extremely beneficial to me in a variety of ways. To begin, this experience provided me with an opportunity to observe and job shadow an exemplary administrator in action and discover the conditions that would be present in a school where learning teams were functioning successfully.

For example at the beginning of my visit, I attended a professional learning meeting and noted the strategies employed by the administrator to actively engage all the participants and stimulate careful reflection on practice. However, even more valuable to me was having the opportunity to observe the ongoing interactions between the administrators and the teaching staff that occurred following that meeting over the remainder of the next week – the daily informal and more formal conversations with various teachers in classes, in the hallways, on the yard and in the staffroom about how things were going related to the effective instructional strategies that had been reviewed. I observed teachers eager to discuss and share student work and talk about successes and continuing challenges and an administrator who displayed a keen interest in engaging in discussions about students and celebrating accomplishments. During my stay, the administrator was highly visible in various classes throughout most of the day and in some classes even modeled or co-taught a specific strategy. The administrator would also sometimes request examples of student work to review and would use these samples as a way to begin the conversation with the teachers about how the students were progressing. During my stay, the administrator also arranged an opportunity for me to meet with the university facilitators assisting with professional learning meetings at the school. These individuals were working with the administrator to determine and implement the conditions for successful co-learning meetings by suggesting such things as asking open-ended questions to guide the teachers to come up with their own understanding about student needs and critical next steps for instruction. In addition, our engaging conversations at home each night provided quality time to debrief the day, and critically reflect upon and analyze what went well and possible next steps for intervention to support teachers and students.

In summary, the Australian exchange provided quality time free from personal and professional distractions to observe and actively learn from and with colleagues in a risk free environment. It provided an opportunity for me to learn about, directly observe and actively participate in an authentic learning experience designed to consolidate my understanding about a variety of educational initiatives such as the implementation of effective instructional and assessment strategies, methods for improving the quality of teaching, mentoring and coaching supports for colleagues, and ways to establish positive parent and community relationships.

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