

**Clinical Field Experience D: Leading Leaders in Giving Peer Feedback Related to
Teacher Performance**

Ron Keller

College of Education, Grand Canyon University

EAD-533: Developing and Empowering Instructional Leaders

Instructor: Catherin Cisar

Due date: November 22, 2023

Summarize coaching experience

My novice instructional leader was our newest assistant principal, Ashley Appel. Ashley had an unusual former career as a professional dancer on stage and screen. She has since transitioned to a 4th and 5th grade teacher, then to a TOSA (Teacher On Special Assignment) within the district. She started her new position as an assistant principal at Orinda Intermediate School with much enthusiasm at the beginning of the year, so I was excited to see how she put her training into action.

One of Ashley's strengths is her listening ability and her sense of empathy. Just a few years ago she was serving as a classroom teacher and this year she's had to substitute in several classes because of a number of absent teachers. Her experience has helped make her even more sympathetic to struggling teachers and her observations perceptive and useful, in other words she went out of her way to communicate that this was to be an "observation" not an evaluation. That included dropping any language that had to do with blaming or shaming. There was no "That doesn't make any sense," instead it was, "I'm having trouble understanding" elements of the lesson plan (Marquet, 2020).

Her pre-evaluation was brief and to the point. She invited the teacher in and asked them what their learning goal was for the class and followed up with what they wanted her to observe. My research has revealed the importance of shifting the focus from observing the way teachers teach (teacher-center teaching) to what students are learning (student-centered learning). In the pre-conference, I would have probed deeper about the ways in which the teacher hoped the students would be able to demonstrate coordinate planes, ways she would be grouping students and strategies they will be engaging students in the learning.

I believe Ashley did touch on two of the most critical objectives of her observation. The first being asking the teacher what sorts of problems she will be asking students to solve and what the correct response might be and two, in what ways will she provide evidence of learning, how will it look like and sound like students “got it” at the conclusion of the lesson.

Once again, it would have been helpful to take her expectation of the instructor a step further by having the teacher explain ways students will demonstrate a mastery of the goal.

In the lesson itself the teacher used a huge coordinate graph on the floor in the middle of the room and allowed students to throw bean bags to plot points on different quadrants and explain the concept of coordinate planes. It was very visual, very engaging. Appel and I spent the time quizzing students about the concepts and vocabulary they learned (axis, origin, etc.). Because the teacher’s lessons had the students standing up, tossing bean bags, and walking to the points on the quadrants, students seemed comfortable grasping the concept before they graphed coordinates on paper.

Students then broke into partner pairs taking turns dropping soft “pom-poms” on a table graph and graphing coordinates. The lesson not only went smoothly, but students also enjoyed learning the new concept. But as engaging the lesson was, in our post-observation session, we pointed out the lack of pause before the teacher gave her instructions. She stated “all eyes on me” but then continued delivering instructions instead of waiting for students to stop talking and turn their attention to the front of the class. Also, there was no formative assessment we were able to observe.

Distributed leadership structure & recommendations

Following the post-observation Ashley and I met to discuss how we, as school leaders, could improve instructional time and focus organizational time on high quality instructional time. One way I suggested is to turn school leaders into single lesson classroom instructors for our newest teachers. This could happen with school leaders or veteran teachers who would meet a new teacher for a planning session. The veteran teacher or school leader would model instruction for that lesson with curriculum with which the new teacher may be struggling.

Another idea is to institute some type of blended learning where more and less experienced educators co-teach a lesson then afterwards discuss each other's areas of strengths and weaknesses. A third strategy would be a teacher flip where the instructional leader teaches a class, allowing the teacher to leave and observe another colleague teaching (Plotinsky, 2021).

Developing leaders within the school

One of our jobs as a school leader is to provide a platform for others to learn and grow their leadership abilities. One of the best ways to do that is to identify those who are already passionate about one area of growth in a school. For example, make a teacher who has a strong passion for tech and a willingness to learn the "tech lead." Their enthusiasm about the subject will be infectious. In the same way redirect teachers who are not passionate about the subjects they're teaching in areas in the school where they are more enthusiastic. Instead of putting the responsibility to solving all the school problems on the shoulders of "the management team" give those teachers ownership of problems the school faces and you are on a better path toward finding solutions (Couros, 2023). When others outside of the official leadership of the school

have ownership of the problems, it creates a community of leaders committed to making the entire school better.

References

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