

Research Snapshot #2

Title: What Are We Learning About Supervisory Officer Learning? Learning About How the Supervisory Officer's School Visit Can Build Principal and Vice-Principal Instructional Leadership Capacity

IMPORTANT QUOTE:

“Research has shown that leaders who believe their major role is to evaluate their impact are amongst the most effective.”

What is this study about?

Supervisory Officers (SOs) were interested in learning about the impact their school visits were having on supporting the Instructional Leadership (IL) capacity of principals. The participants in this study formed a learning network that sought to answer the question: **How do I learn which things I do as a SO make a difference on the IL capacity of principals?** The question was framed as an adaptive challenge because the necessary knowledge to answer the question did not yet exist. The participants committed to engaging in individual inquiries to learn about the impact they made specifically in respect to their school visits. Each SO engaged over an eight-month period, using the plan-act-assess-reflect model to work through incremental ‘next best learning moves’.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Even though each SO engaged in their own individual inquiry, in the network meetings they shared where they were in their inquiry and received support and feedback from others. They used a conversation protocol to ensure that the conversations moved beyond superficial discussions to focused learning conversations.

Each SOs began the project in very different places in terms of their school visits and therefore different inquiries emerged.

For example, various inquiries included:

1. How can I support newly appointed administrators during my school visits?
2. How can I best model for administrators what they might do with their teachers?
3. How can I build principal capacity to lead effective professional learning communities
4. How can I involve school teams in my school visits?

THE DETAILS OF THE STUDY

Project participants included Supervisory Officers (SOs) from Ontario Public School districts. The process involved each SO defining a ‘learning case’, which was a bounded learning space of one or two schools/administrators where the SO believed that s/he could add value in terms of building IL capacity and where what was learned would have transfer potential to other similar contexts. The learning moves the SOs engaged in were intended to be very small, to allow them to be easily monitored, and learned from.

Research Snapshot #2

Details continued...

For example, a learning move might be “If I ask Principal X what she sees to be her greatest learning need in terms of instructional leadership, by asking the following question: What do you think you need to learn in terms of instructional leadership?’, then I will see if my assessment of the principal’s learning needs were the same as her own assessment of her needs.”

The participants used a template (Figure 1) to document their ‘moves’ and what they were learning from them. One key aspect of the template required SOs to separate what they *did* in their move from what they *learned* from their move.

Plan	Plan	Plan	Assess	Reflect
My next best learning ‘move’...	Success Criteria	Evidence	What happened?	What did I learn FROM this ‘move’?
(What will I do next to learn	(What will success for this ‘move’ look like? What do I hope to learn from this ‘move’?	(What conversation, observation, and/or product will I look at to evaluate the success of my learning ‘move’?	(What did I find out?)	“I learned from this ‘move’ that...” What did I learn ABOUT this ‘move’ as a transferable practice? “I learned that...”

Figure 1. Template for Inquiry

A variety of data sources were gathered to learn about the *process* of working together in a network and to learn about *promising practices* to use as a SO to make school visits more impactful.

Results:

The following key findings were reported.

Learning About the Process

1. The power of a learning network is in each person working on his/her own slice of the problem, with the network aggregating the learning.
2. The inquiry template is a vital tool because it works as a scaffold to plan, capture, and label the learning.
3. Learning moves need to be small.
4. Reflecting on both what you’ve learned FROM a move and ABOUT a move is critical.
5. Using a structured learning protocol ensures that the group adds value to the work of each individual, well beyond what each individual could accomplish on his/her own.
6. Hearing about others’ inquiries makes you consider new ideas both for yourself and for your district.

Research Snapshot #2

7. Relationships don't need to come before the work begins: they can develop as you do the work.
8. Learning with an 'outside' critical friend can be an important part of the learning experience.

Learning About Promising Practices

1. Be intentional about the purpose of visiting classrooms during a school visit.
2. Think about differentiating school visits even within an individual school.
3. The frequency and length of the visits depends on the purpose.
4. The kinds of questions asked at a school visit are critical.
5. Think about preparing administrators in advance of your visit.
6. The quality of reflection after a visit can be increased if you have more than your memory to rely on and reflect from.

Citation: Katz, S. (2015). What Are We Learning About Supervisory Officer Learning? Learning About How the Supervisory Officer's School Visit Can Build Principal and Vice-Principal Instructional Leadership Capacity. Ontario Public Supervisory Officer's Association.

https://opsoa.org/application/files/2014/8476/1200/SO_Learning_Monograph_16-04.pdf

Connections to Your Next Level Leadership (NLL) Practice

1. How are the findings from this study's *Learning About the Process* similar or different from what you've experienced as part of the Next Level Leaders Network?

2. What promising leadership practices resonate with you? Why?

3. How does the template for inquiry (Figure 1) help you in thinking about your leadership 'moves' and what you might learn FROM them and ABOUT them as you support teachers in improving teaching and learning?

4. How do you learn which things you do as a school leader make a difference on the instructional capacity of teachers?