Racing the Clock


How much time do you, as a principal, spend in your classrooms? When you visit a classroom, do you have a specific focus? Are you able to follow up on what you saw? If you would like to get into classrooms on a daily basis, but find it difficult to do so, this is the perfect book for you. It explores a walk-through approach, developed by the authors, that takes only two to three minutes. The first step is to narrow the focus of the observation. The authors describe a structure that principals can use to observe, for instance, whether the teacher is assisting a student or lecturing. They then explain how to pose reflective questions to the teachers, based on these observations. For example, a principal observing a math lesson might ask, “When you are choosing problems, what factors do you use to decide which problems will move students forward with their thinking?” This type of question encourages teachers to become more self-analytical. The overall purpose of these short, frequent, conversation-starting visits is to develop a more collaborative and reflective culture.

In regard to record-keeping, the operative phrase is “Keep it simple!” Notes from walk-throughs are simply to jog the principal’s memory of what was seen in the classrooms, and the book includes sample note-card formats.

This is an informative, practical book that all principals can use to develop or streamline their classroom walk-through style. With this three-minute approach, principals become coaches and mentors, rather than judges, as they make their daily classroom rounds.

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Picking a Child’s Brain


In A Mind at Time, Mel Levine provides a link between research on brain-based learning and the current emphasis on differentiating instruction in the classroom. A pediatrician by training, Levine identifies eight specific brain systems that are involved in learning: attention control; memory; language; spatial ordering; sequential ordering; motor; higher thinking; and social thinking. He devotes a comprehensive chapter to each system, describing how it works and how it interacts with each of the other systems.

Levine provides case studies of children who went through school with undiagnosed system breakdowns—what we call learning disabilities. He explains how these children’s frustration in learning manifests itself in disinterest, negative attitudes, poor self-image, and behavior problems. However, Levine also demonstrates through other examples that students with system breakdowns, given appropriate strategies, can retrain their brains and turn things around, even as late as high school.

Levine is unwilling to lump children into labeled categories. Instead, he promotes the concept of variations in the “profiles” of individual children. These profiles are developed by a combination of genes, family life and stress level, cultural factors, friends, health, emotions, and educational experience. Viewed in this way, a child can change, improve, or compensate for these variations with the help of teachers and parents.

Levine has some questions about how children are taught. Should they know a little in a lot of areas, or should they learn in greater depth in fewer areas? He also believes that children’s success can be measured by becoming an expert in at least one domain, experiencing some mode of motor success, finding a medium for creative expression, experiencing the satisfaction of helping others, or demonstrating skills and a broad base of knowledge.

The book provides an extensive bibliography, including books to help children understand their learning profiles.

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