In Search of Key Answers

Principals Who Learn: Asking the Right Questions, Seeking the Best Solutions.

Whether you are a new or seasoned principal, this book is an opportunity to acquire practical strategies and ideas to jump-start your staff. Four themes in the book—listening to all voices, seeing possibilities, asking the right questions, and creating collaborative cultures—provide the framework for principals to become “designers, stewards, and teachers.” The book reminds us that we are constantly inundated with new learning and, with little prior knowledge, we often must choose the best course of action.

Hitting home with me was the adage that principals don’t know what they don’t know. Thus, essential questions must be asked often. These questions are presented throughout the chapters as vignettes about actual elementary and middle schools. Ideas are offered for creating staffs that continually focus and communicate. Our goal is to redefine our relationships from boss and employee to teacher and learner.

Useful strategies are provided for creating meetings where principals can devote time to professional conversations about teaching and learning. A variety of ways to change seating arrangements, agendas, norms, and reflection are included. Relevant topics in the book include information on visible data that helps school staffs recognize current reality, how an open-door policy can create a culture of insiders and outsiders, the importance of disseminating as much information as possible to as many people as possible, and how to effectively implement a program of teachers observing colleagues.

The end of each chapter has reflection questions that help principals apply what has been learned to their current position. Tables throughout the book summarize strategies that can be easily followed.

The book challenges us to shift from improving ourselves to improving our work, and this segues into helping teachers focus more on improving their work than on improving themselves. This easy-to-read book has the questions we need to ask and the strategies we need to transform our schools.

Reviewed by Lisa Hannah, Principal, Three Oaks Elementary School, Virginia Beach, Virginia, lisa.hannah@vbschools.com.

Reconciling Traditional Approaches


If you’re disillusioned with traditional approaches to teacher evaluation and professional development, or would like to improve your own coaching skills, you’ll want to read Instructional Coaching. The author begins by offering a rationale for instructional coaching and how this approach contrasts with traditional professional development. Describing a negative experience that captured how one-shot professional development is often “done to” participants with a lack of respect, individualization, or relevance, Knight shares how this led him toward instructional coaching as a model to replace traditional approaches.

Each chapter begins with a graphic organizer that gives a visual overview of the chapter. The summary at the end of each chapter provides quick access to the content with the option of referring back to the chapter for review. Relevance and interest are increased with the insertion of stories from the field to illustrate the principles being discussed.

While this book is primarily for those in the specific role of instructional coach, I found the last two chapters focused on spreading effective practices and leading change to be particularly relevant to the work of school principals. I also found Knight’s discussions of what effective instructional coaching looks like to be of value for the principal involved in classroom walkthroughs or teacher evaluation and coaching. This book helped me better understand the roles of our building-level reading specialist as well as our district-level curriculum specialists in working with teachers in our school. In fact, after reading this book, I immediately ordered copies for each of these individuals to provide us with shared knowledge and a common language as we all develop our skills as instructional coaches in our various positions.

This book is a great reference for further learning about instructional coaching for anyone desiring a deeper conversation with teachers around instruction. Read and apply the described processes and you’ll have many energizing conversations with teachers and significantly impact learning for both adults and children in your school.

Reviewed by Jim Warnock, Principal, Alma Intermediate School, Alma, Arkansas, jwarnock@almasd.net.
Would your job as a school administrator be easier if your teachers…

… made fewer office referrals for discipline?
… possessed skills that enabled them to stay out of unwinnable power struggles with students?
… knew how to build and maintain great relationships with parents?
… spent less time expecting you to fix the kids and more time delivering instruction?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you need the 9 ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR THE LOVE AND LOGIC CLASSROOM professional development curriculum.

This step-by-step turn-key curriculum teaches the following techniques:

• Preventing disruptive behavior
• Building cooperative relationships with tough students
• Avoiding power struggles and arguments
• Helping students develop problem-solving skills and self-control
• And much, much more!

Regardless of your district’s choice of behavior management, curriculum or instructional models, Love and Logic is what makes them all work better!

Why spend thousands of dollars hiring high priced consultants when someone on your staff can provide on-going staff development for a fraction of the cost?

For more information, or to order the 9 Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom teacher training curriculum, call 800-338-4065 or visit www.loveandlogic.com.

(Mention this ad and get 10% off any Love and Logic product.)