



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Reading Literacy Tool Helps Principals Decide What to “Look For”

By Jackie Burniske

Prin cipals have many responsibilities, including working with teachers, students, and parents; managing a building, budget, and support staff; and reporting student progress to ministries and departments of education. How can principals find time to be instructional leaders as well?

Learning tools such as the Early Literacy (K-3) Classroom “Look Fors” succinctly present knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction. Using the “Look Fors” form developed by the Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory (Pacific REL) during classroom visits, principals can quickly identify teachers’ strengths as well as the areas in which the principal can provide support. Principals often don’t have the same opportunities as teachers to keep up with recent research on best practices. The “Look Fors” form (see pp. 7-8) helps create a greater awareness of and appreciation for the literacy learning experiences that teachers are providing.

The Process

To use the form most effectively, principals should follow the process outlined below.

1. Review the learning tool and talk with a reading content specialist to gain a better understanding of the items on the tool, which are divided into three parts: Reading/Writing Instruction, Print Rich Environment, and Reading in the Classroom. A glossary that explains each item is available at www.prel.org/programs/rel/lookfors.pdf.
2. After learning more about the “Look Fors” learning tool, share it with teachers and talk about the plan and purpose for the observations, stressing that the tool is not an evaluation, but a way to learn about and support instruction in the classroom.
3. Conduct classroom observations. You may want to observe the classrooms along with a reading specialist in order to have a content expert available to debrief the observation.
4. After the classroom observation, have a conversation with the teacher you observed. Use some of the suggested conversation starters listed in the sidebar for the teacher debriefing. Open-ended questions invite a supportive conversation and are in keeping with the goal of increasing your content knowledge about literacy instruction.

Putting It Into Practice

In order to support principals in their use of the “Look Fors,” one day of the Pacific REL’s 2003 Principals Institute was devoted to activities to help the principals and teacher leaders learn more about this learning tool. Use of the “Look Fors” complemented the theme of the Principals Institute, which was “Educational Leaders: Supporting Teachers and



Photo: Jackie Burniske

▷ At the Pacific REL’s Principals Institute, participants practiced using the “Look Fors” form for classroom observations.

Children,” with a content focus on early literacy instruction and assessment in K-3 classrooms.

Prior to the Principals Institute, the principals were introduced to the “Look Fors” and asked to conduct three observations using the learning tool in three different K-3 classrooms. Principals then wrote reflections about that experience. As a result, the principals came to the institute prepared to discuss their experiences using the tool. The principals were asked two questions:

1. What parts of the “Look Fors” do I (the principal) want to learn more about?
2. How will the information I (the principal) gained from the “Look Fors” impact how I work with my teachers?

Comments from both principals and teacher leaders who attended the Principals Institute suggest that they found the session helpful. One principal commented that the role playing and the sharing took away the fear of conducting classroom observations, adding, “I am free from the ‘What am I going to do?’”

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Conversation Openers for Classroom Observation Debriefings

Pacific REL staff have developed the following list of possible conversation openers for use after “Look Fors” classroom observations.

- I watched you do _____. Can you tell me more about that?
- I noticed _____. Could you tell me more about it?
- One of the students did _____. Can you tell me more about that?
- Help me to understand _____.
- The students were so interested in the activity you were working on. Can you tell me more about it? How can I support you in your teaching?
- What else can I do to help you create a literacy classroom?