Involve Educators in the Process

Involving the faculty in these discussions, dialogues, and debates is important. But this might first require building their data analysis skills so that they are comfortable, competent, and confident in analyzing achievement data as well as other forms of student and educator data. Earlier it was argued that educator involvement would lead to ownership and commitment to change. Their involvement also builds collective responsibility for student learning. Collective responsibility is a value that exists within some schools when educators are jointly committed to the success of all students who attend the school, work together to ensure the success of every teacher, and work collaboratively to build each teacher's expertise and competence. Collective responsibility builds a collaborative culture within the building, which has been recognized as an important component of an effective school.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

> . . . *the three keys to inspiring change . . .* **reinforce, reinforce, reinforce.** *Many leaders in times of change grossly underestimate the need for continuous reinforcement. During a time of change, we have doubts, fears, and occasional disappointments. The challenge is how do you keep the change alive until the behavior is consistent with your goals?*
>
> Anderson & Feltenstein, 2007

Educators have learned to create and use formative assessments of student learning to monitor progress toward an ultimate student

learning outcome. Yet, many schools are not currently gathering formative data on educator practice to monitor their use of new instructional and curricular practices. These data are not used to evaluate educators but to determine whether benchmarks are appropriate, provide additional assistance and support, or make adjustments to professional learning designs and strategies to increase educator learning and implementation. Assessing progress produces a juncture at which professional learning and the process of change intersect.

Monitoring assists us in supporting educators as they make a change in their daily classroom practice. Our culture is steeped in adages about the difficulty of change: *The only people who like change are babies with wet diapers,* or *this change may be the answer to my prayers but it's not the answer I was praying for.* The critical need for assessing progress is based on work in the many areas of change. The difficulty of changing daily habits and work behavior is part of the human condition, whether in schools or other lines of business. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton (2000) explain the phenomenon of the knowing-doing gap: where knowledge replaces actual changes in behavior. The authors explain that many organizations, including educational systems, build their workers' knowledge but never assist and support those same employees to make the transition of actually putting that knowledge to work. They found that leadership talks a great game and uses all the buzz words, but a quick observation of how employees are working or interacting shows very little change in daily practice.

What are some of the processes and procedures that can help educators transfer knowledge into practice? How can we support and assist educators as they learn about new practices and then actually implement them in their classrooms? This is an essential component of effective professional learning: educators' use of new classroom strategies leads to improved student learning. Among those processes recognized by research and good practice are (1) establishing benchmarks, (2) defining what the new practice looks like in operation, and (3) monitoring educators' classroom practices. Each of these processes will be described in the next section.

Establish Benchmarks of Progress

Many educators still think of professional learning as a simple action-reaction relationship: new knowledge leads inevitably to

changes in classroom practices—*X* causes *Y.* A more realistic metaphor for the change process might be that professional learning is like a cross-country journey—a journey without the use of a GPS that probably also includes lots of detours, traffic snarls, and construction zones. At a minimum, we would want to know key destinations along the way where we could check in to make sure we were on the right track. Those key destinations or benchmarks would allow us to make some minor course corrections early in the process rather than waiting to find out we made the wrong turn in Kankakee and are now wildly off course, states away from where we wanted to go. What most of us really want is our GPS to show restaurants, hotels, rest stops, construction zones, and alternative routes.

Many of the changes in practice we ask educators to make never provide detailed maps and are filled with many detours and construction zones. Educators also need checkpoints along the way to determine whether they are on course. Benchmarks allow them to determine whether they are on track or need to make small or large course corrections as well.

When Rosabeth Moss Kanter, world renowned for her applied work in organization change, focused on school improvement work, she identified building a public, transparent system for monitoring progress of the use of new practices as an essential leadership practice. Her recommendations about a monitoring system include

- identifying clear and discrete benchmarks—events or results that illustrate an incremental step toward the desired outcome;
- sharing benchmarks publicly so that staff can monitor their own progress;
- using a wide variety of measures of progress;
- adjusting intermediate goals and benchmarks based on data;
- creating systems that allow identification of both successes and problems and pinpoint where support might be needed;
- celebrating when progress has been made; and
- sharing this monitoring information across the system (Kanter, n.d.).

We need to monitor the effectiveness of professional learning by continuously collecting data on whether the plan has accomplished our intended outcomes and results for educators. Creating a monitoring and benchmark system may seem an overwhelming task, but a

tool called the 30–60–90, developed by Susan Bailey (2000), is a simple way to begin creating a benchmark system.

You begin with a priority goal that you have decided should be implemented. Administrators, the school leadership team, and teachers then identify what they think they could/should accomplish in the first 30 days, then in 60 days, then in 90 days. This allows the change to be broken into smaller, bite-size pieces, and signifies to staff an area of monthly focus. Being able to implement big changes in incremental steps has been found to increase the likelihood that people will actually try the new practice. It's like the old joke: *How do you eat an elephant?* ***One bite at a time.***

Because this chart (Figure 2.4) can represent a whole school or grade-level goal, it can also encourage and support peer learning and collaboration within learning teams, PLCs, or among teaching partners. Planning and accomplishing these benchmarks can and should be done collaboratively so that staff shares their ideas, practices, and strategies as well as problem-solves barriers and challenges.

Once the primary focus is identified, staff also pinpoint specific examples for the rest of the chart—what are adults doing, and so on. Notice, in the example, that the major focus remains the same for 90 days. In fact, the major focus can remain the same for an entire year, yet specific strategies and practices might change every month.

Identifying a tool or strategy that will be used also identifies what evidence or artifacts can be collected to help the school or team keep track of its progress toward accomplishing the ultimate goal of improved student reading comprehension. Staff members can be expected to bring those artifacts (student work, descriptions of lessons, copies of questions, reflections on how it went, scores from a reading assessment, etc.) to a faculty meeting where individuals or small groups share with each other what has been done and reflect on how the new strategies are making a difference for student learning. Sometimes, the focus of the staff meetings might be on problem-solving challenges to implementation. Kanter counsels us that effective monitoring systems also need to identify problems in order to solve them before they become gigantic barriers to implementation.

Periodically, progress should be celebrated. Kanter has called this part of the change process the miserable middles of change. Everything looks like a failure in the middle. In the middle, our highly energetic kick-off of a new, promising practice has hit the

Figure 2.4 Sample 30–60–90 Monitoring Chart

Elements	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
Our major focus	Reading comprehension	Reading comprehension	Reading comprehension
What adults are doing	Focusing on developing a range of questions including higher-level thinking	Focusing on developing a range of questions including higher-level thinking	Focusing on developing a range of questions including higher-level thinking
What students are doing	Majority of time students use higher-order thinking skills	Majority of time students use higher-order thinking skills	Majority of time students use higher-order thinking skills
Skills being learned	Compare and contrast	Compare and contrast	Classifying: Organize according to similarities
Tools and materials being used	Graphic organizers: Venn Diagram	Graphic organizers: Comparison Matrix	Graphic organizers: Bubble Chart
Challenges, benefits, and frustrations	Teachers and students will be frustrated because they won't feel successful at this yet	Student frustration, matching questions to those found on the state assessment	Teachers need to scaffold learning to assist special needs students with higher order—these questions are rare

doldrums of hard work, extra planning, and challenging experiments with new classroom practices. We need to take note and celebrate our growth, our movement, and our incremental improvements.

Principals have done something as simple as bringing in large bowls of popcorn and a beverage to the staff meeting. Others bring in a decorated sheet cake and sparkling apple juice to make the celebration a bit more festive. A friend who was an elementary principal decided to recognize the hard work of her staff by giving each one a simple glass vase with a single red rose to signify their hard work and dedication to student learning. Celebrations are important not only en route but when we reach goal achievement to acknowledge risk taking and the importance of taking those "small bites."