

Monitoring: Classroom Observations, Rounds, and Walk-Throughs

Classroom observations, instructional rounds, and walk-throughs are useful ways to collect and monitor implementation of new class-room practices. The groundwork for effective use of these strategies is a clear and concise definition of the new practice *in operation*. These descriptions should be shared frequently and broadly with staff members so there are no surprises or “gotcha” moments as observations occur.

A useful tool for monitoring implementation of new practices is called Innovation Configuration (IC) maps. They were first developed by Gene Hall and Shirley Hord during their time at the Research and Development Center in Austin, Texas. They were first to recognize and establish that clear and explicit descriptions of new practices were missing from much of the training provided at the time. These IC descriptions defined what the new procedures entailed when put into practice in the classroom. They also found that teachers did not implement the innovation in the same way nor at the same speed. Some staff moved swiftly to adopt new classroom practices while others utilized some components of the innovation but not all of them. As a result, their IC descriptions also included identifying essential components as well as a continuum of practices, which ranged from ideal to not-yet-begun levels of implementation (Hall & Hord, 2011). Explaining how to create an Innovation Configuration map is beyond the scope of this section, but more information about developing maps will be found in the Implementation volume of this series.

Another simple tool that can be used for beginning classroom observation or monitoring is the Practice Profile (Horsley & Loucks-Horsley, 1998). The Practice Profile involves developing a precise description of what effective implementation looks like and what it doesn't look like. Six to eight essential components are identified along with descriptive examples of teacher and/or student behavior. Often these behaviors are categorized into three levels: Ideal, Acceptable, and Unacceptable. A sample Practice Profile (Figure 2.5) is provided that describes the role of the principal in collecting and analyzing data to assess progress toward professional learning goals.

Figure 2.5 Practice Profile

How closely is the principal using formative data to assess the school's progress toward professional learning benchmarks and goals?

Ideal:

- Collects formative data monthly
- Works in cooperation with the school leadership team and staff to collect and analyze data
- Focuses data on professional learning benchmarks and goals
- Analyzes formative data monthly
- Identifies progress and barriers to implementation
- Assists staff and teams to make adjustments to professional learning designs and strategies to remove barriers and improve progress

Acceptable:

- Collects formative data quarterly
- Works in cooperation with the school leadership team and staff to collect and analyze data
- Focuses data on professional learning benchmarks
- Analyzes formative data quarterly
- Makes in-process, data-based adjustments in schoolwide professional learning

Unacceptable:

- Fails to collect or analyze formative data to measure progress of professional learning goals
- Does not establish professional learning benchmarks for teacher classroom practice

The purpose of monitoring progress is to make midcourse corrections in the professional learning plan. These corrections could involve using different types of learning designs, reinforcing and building deeper knowledge of critical attributes of new practice, or providing staff time to collaboratively plan new lessons and units. It might also involve identifying staff members who seem to be making fast-paced changes and which ones are having a little more trouble launching into new activities. With that information, we could, for example, create learning teams and have them work directly with a specialist or building-level coach to build needed knowledge and skills.

Our long-term professional learning plans are based on a hypothesis and educated guesses about the amount of time staff may need to learn and use new practices. Formative data can tell us whether our timeframes and plans were realistic. If not, the data will indicate changes that need to be made in order to accomplish our goals.

A district in Kentucky collected and analyzed data on their efforts to help educators understand the Common Core standards and plan units of instruction. The formative data they collected and analyzed on a monthly basis showed that their hypothesis about the amount of time needed was wrong. The staff worked together to understand the Common Core standards and then wrote lesson plans and units. A review of those plans by curriculum specialists and other central office staff showed that educators had not fully grasped the instructional shifts demanded by the standards. Based on that data, they decided to return to the concept of the instructional shift but address the learning in a new way.

They had originally introduced the topic by providing a short lecture, a video on the topic, and some lesson examples. They decided to have staff read summaries of lessons—some lessons that made the shift while others had not. Small groups were asked to rate how well the lessons demonstrated the instructional shift and explain why they had rated them the way they did. They were asked to highlight specific examples within the lesson that were examples of the shift. Three small groups met with a specialist to review and discuss their ratings and rationales. Time to reflect on what they had learned was structured into the session, and tweets summarizing their learning were posted on a group online site.

Just as in the classroom, we need to monitor learning and adjust learning plans to meet the needs of staff. This district found that sometimes you have to go slow to go fast!