

Making the Most of Observations

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Time to Talk

Take the stance of one of your teachers who is uncomfortable being observed.

What reasons might he or she give you to explain that resistance?

What might be some underlying reasons for this resistance?



Take Five

Today's goal

- ★ Engage you in thinking about ways to improve your use of observations as part of your professional development systems.
 - Compare and contrast the observation roles of principals, coaches, and peers.
 - Compare and contrast tools for observations: open-ended notes, rubrics, and checklists.
 - Compare and contrast strategies for observations: walkthroughs, targeted observations, full observations.
 - Consider strategies for providing feedback to teachers.

Why observe?

Literacy coaches are charged with supporting teaching and learning; they collect student data to measure the success of their programs.

- It does not make sense to measure program effects without measuring treatment fidelity.
- It does not make sense to measure treatment fidelity without observing the treatment.
- It does not make sense to document treatment fidelity without trying to improve it.

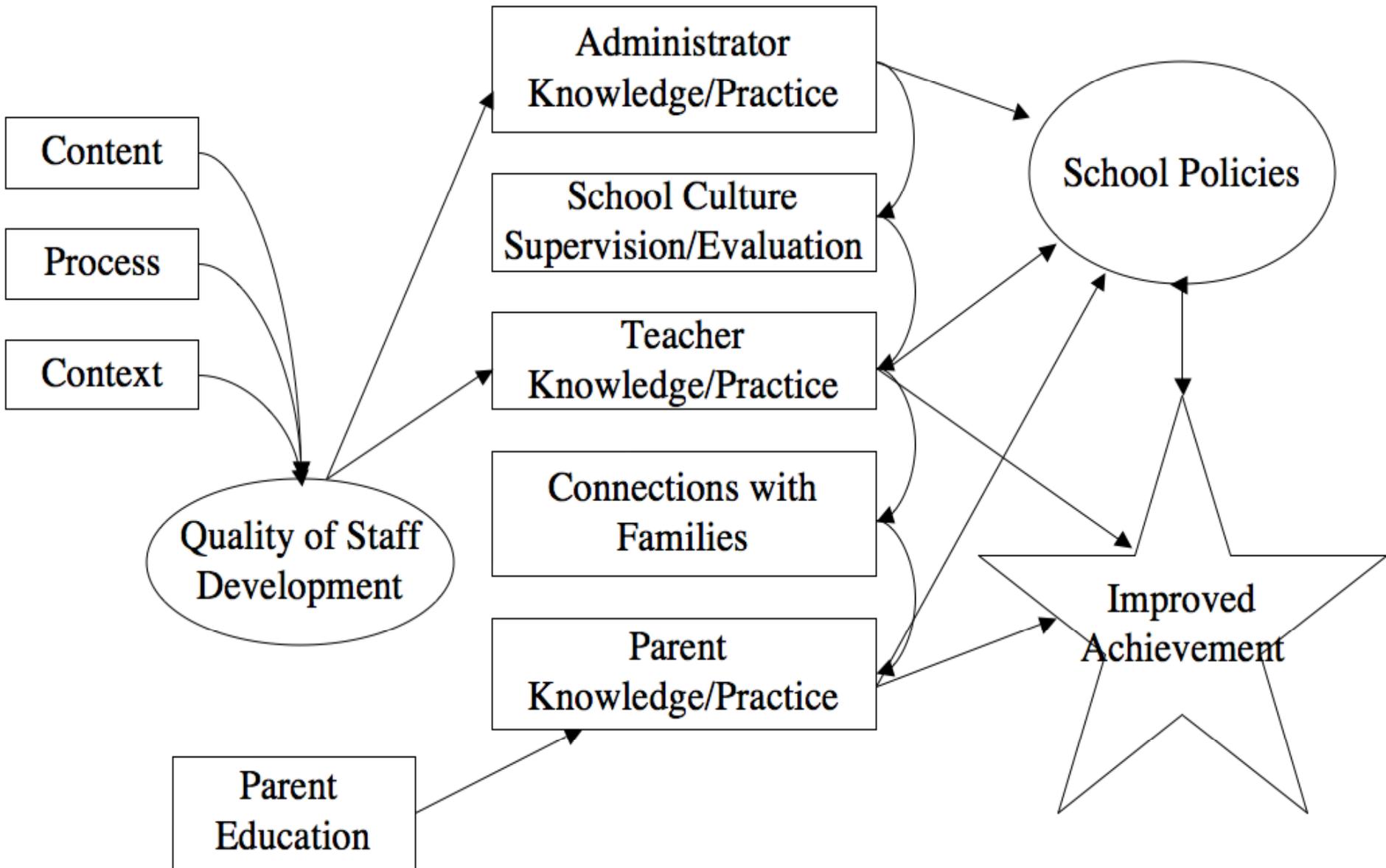
Setting the Stage

- If principals describe the goal of literacy coach observations early in the school year, teachers will know that these observations are part of the professional development initiative and part of the principal's overall plan for the school.
- This type of coherent plan is more likely to yield improvements in practice; improvements in practice are more likely to yield improvements in achievement.

Guskey and Sparks provided a model for the complex relationship between staff development and student achievement – a central concern for schoolwide initiatives.

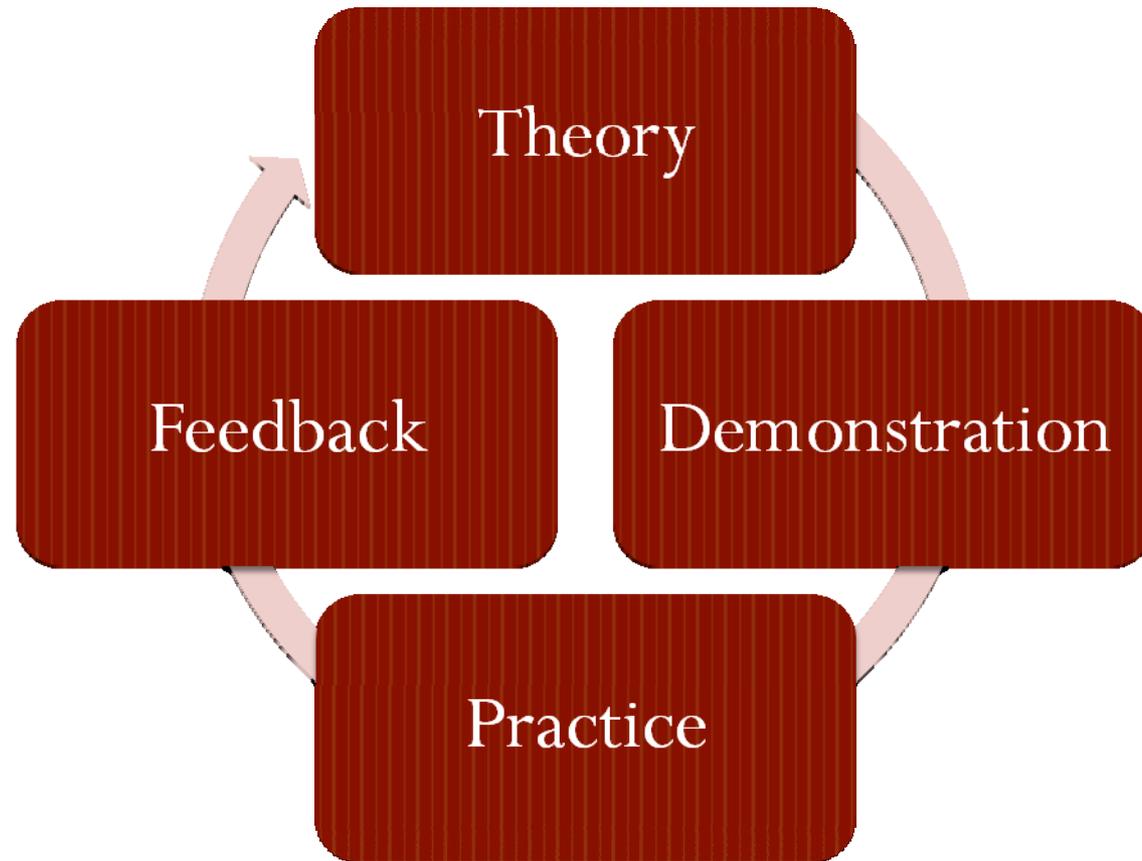
Guskey, T. R., & Sparks, D. (1996). Exploring the relationship between staff development and improvements in student learning. *Journal of Staff Development*, 17(4), 34-38.

From Staff Development to Student Learning



If we use observation as part of our professional development, we are more likely to see changes in both knowledge and practice.

A professional support *system*



Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Three Types of Observers

Principals

- Evaluate and supervise

Coaches

- Provide targeted professional support

Peers

- Learn from colleagues

Time to Talk

What types of observation are most prevalent in your school?

How are the observer roles similar and different?



Take Five

Structure for Observations

Before

- Inform teachers of purpose and procedures
- Engage teachers in inquiry
- Establish ground rules

During

- Take care not to interrupt instruction
- Collect information, formally or informally

After

- Consider what the information you collected means
- Prioritize
- Provide feedback

Tools for Observation

Open-Ended Notes

- May capture both activities and time
- Demand more of the observer
- May be uncomfortable for the teacher

Rubrics

- Apply preset categories
- May be tailored to the specifics of the school's program
- May capture quality

Checklists

- Document presence or absence of specific items
- May be made for a specific strategy
- Typically do not capture quality

Observations with open-ended notes

- Observer (Sharon) used a lap top to capture as much about the instruction as possible.
- After the observation was finished, she went back to her office, read her notes, and wrote feedback to the teacher.
- The teacher got a copy of the notes *and* the feedback by lunchtime, in a sealed envelope.
- Sharon kept no record of the observation or the feedback.
- The next slides are actual feedback from a kindergarten observation; she gave it back to Sharon years later!

As you read this feedback . . .

Note that the segment you are seeing is preceded by three pages of description of the actual lesson. These segments of feedback were numbered at the bottom.

- What can you infer about the relationship between the coach and teacher?
- What can you infer about issues that this particular teachers was struggling with?
- What strategies did the coach use?
- What skills did the coach bring to the observation?

Substantive feedback from an open-ended observation

1. You have set up an extraordinarily positive environment. There were so few instances of management talk and so many instances of instructional talk. That's really how we all win.

2. That's it. That was a perfect example of kindergarten literacy work. But here's the catch. You really have to do that every day. Every day. Every day. If you did that every day, over the next 10 years you would retain 2 students and you would have 5 who didn't pass the benchmarks and sail into first grade ready for action. You seemed so happy and natural, and so did the kids. So do that every day. It's a great balance between direct instruction for the phonemic awareness part, interactive writing that is connected to experience, and then application of letter sound knowledge in authentic, individual writing tasks. If you try to tell me that you don't have time for interactive writing every day, I'm going to raise my eyebrows at you. How's that for keeping you honest?

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3. There is a lot of language in your work with the kids, and it goes both ways. You to them and them to you. There were many responses from children to you that were quite elaborated. It may be, though, that I am only hearing the really proficient ones. Try to think about the types of responses that you get from individual kids so that you can focus more attention on those who are not yet able to do it.

4. When you do segmenting tasks, as in say it and move it, end each word with your own modeling. Before you do a new word, say mop, mmmm-oooo-pppp, mop. Model the blending part both with your voice and with your hand sweeping. When you look back at your language, you'll see that you modeled the segmenting for most words, but the blending only very rarely. Segmenting helps kids to spell. Blending helps kids to read.

4. The kids seemed a lot higher than I thought they would. I know that's your top group, but they seemed pretty good at segmenting to me.
5. Remember to ask the kids to read back to you when they write rather than you trying to read their work.
6. That was a wonderful lesson. You don't want to teach first grade. At least not with my bossy self!

Considerations for open-ended notes

- There is more pressure on the observer; it is possible to be too global in focus.
- Strong relationships are necessary if written feedback is given.
- Written feedback must be inviting, personal, and specific.
- Feedback can only target a few areas for improvement.

Observations with Rubrics

- One roadblock to implementation of new practice is the distance between current practice and the new practice.
- Teachers may need to engage in small steps.
- Rubrics, designed to document (and describe) *levels* of implementation, may provide teachers incentive to engage in small, cumulative improvements.

Roy, P. A., & Hord, S. M. (2003). *Flourishing NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

Innovation Configuration

Full Implementation	Partial Implementation	No Implementation
The target practice is described here.	A practice in between (or, more likely, several different ones) is described here.	A description of a practice inconsistent with the target is described here.

Procedure for Making an IC

1. Describe components of your ideal implementation.
2. Observe in the world; what does real implementation look like? What variations exist?
3. Line up the variations from furthest to closest to the ideal.
4. Use the resulting rubric to observe instruction and to guide feedback.

We provide some sample categories from an IC to measure schoolwide programming.

Instructional Materials

4

There is clear evidence that the leaders in this building made thoughtful choices to purchase commercial curriculum materials to meet school-level needs.

3

There is evidence that the leaders in this building are in the process of choosing commercial instructional materials to meet school-level needs.

2

There is evidence that commercial materials were purchased, but no evidence that these decisions were made based on school-level needs.

1

There is no evidence that new commercial materials were purchased for this project.

Word Identification and Fluency Strategies

4

There is evidence that the leaders have chosen non-commercial instructional strategies implemented them fully.

3

There is evidence that the leaders have chosen non-commercial instructional strategies, but they were not fully implemented.

2

There is evidence that the leaders are considering non-commercial instructional strategies.

1

There is no evidence that new non-commercial instructional strategies were used in this project.

Oral vocabulary and Comprehension Strategies

4

There is evidence that the leaders have chosen non-commercial instructional strategies implemented them fully.

3

There is evidence that the leaders have chosen non-commercial instructional strategies, but they were not fully implemented.

2

There is evidence that the leaders are considering non-commercial instructional strategies.

1

There is no evidence that new non-commercial instructional strategies were used in this project.

Study Groups

4

The leaders in this project reflectively designed professional development to include both formal knowledge-building and collaborative study groups.

3

The leaders in this project reflectively designed professional development, and it is partially implemented

2

The leaders in this project have conceptualized a comprehensive professional development system, but it is not implemented.

1

The leaders in this project delivered professional development, but there is no evidence that it was comprehensive or adapted to the school's needs.

In Class Support

4

The leaders in this project provide systematic and regular support to all teachers, based on their level of expertise , through modeling and observation.

3

The leaders in this project are implementing a system to support most teachers through modeling and observation.

2

The leaders in this project are implementing a system to support some teachers through modeling and observation.

1

There is no evidence that the leaders in this project provide systematic and regular support to teachers through modeling and observation.

Use of Assessment to Drive Instruction

4

The leaders of this project have designed a comprehensive assessment system that teachers use to differentiate instruction.

3

The leaders of this project have designed a comprehensive assessment system, but teachers do not yet use it to differentiate instruction.

2

The leaders of this project have designed a partial assessment system that teachers use to differentiate instruction.

1

There is no evidence that leaders of this project have designed a comprehensive assessment system that teachers use to differentiate instruction.

Leadership Support

4

There is clear evidence of cohesive support for this initiative as the only one guiding literacy instruction.

3

There is some evidence of cohesive support for this initiative as the only one guiding literacy instruction.

2

There are competing reforms that specific leaders support.

1

There is evidence that building- or district-level leaders actively hinder this initiative.

Time to Talk

Could you see a rubric as a useful tool in your observation system?

What specific aspects of your program would be best captured this way?

How could you make a rubric?



Take Five

Observations with Checklists

- Teachers may feel especially comfortable with observations when they know the format in advance.
- Checklists can be developed to guide observations of very specific aspects of instruction.
- Checklists can combine “yes and no” formats with structured notes.

Next we show an example of a checklist/notetaking form we developed to observe teachers teaching vocabulary.

Observation Checklist: Teaching Tier-Two Words

The strategy requires teachers to choose 3-4 tier-two words from a children's literature read-aloud. I noticed

The strategy requires that you say the word, and children repeat. I noticed

The strategy requires that you tell how the word was used in the text. I noticed

The strategy requires that you tell a child-friendly definition. I noticed

- The strategy requires that you give examples of the word used in multiple, unrelated contexts. I noticed
The strategy requires that you invite the children to construct an example. I noticed

- The strategy requires that you have children repeat the word. I noticed

- Overall, I noticed

- Here are some questions that I had:

Time to Talk

Could you see a modified checklist as a useful tool in your observation system?

What specific aspects of your program would be best captured this way?

How could you make a modified checklist?



Take Five

So far . . .

- You have a role as observer.
- You have a before-during-after structure.
- You have some tools to choose from
 - Notes
 - Rubrics
 - Checklists

Now how will you actually use those things?

What strategies can you use?

Three Types of Observations

Walkthroughs

- Brief checks on the program in general

Targeted Observations

- Focused checks on a particular practice

Full Observations

- Comprehensive checks on the integration of practices

Standards-Based Walkthrough

- A standards-based walkthrough is a tour of all classrooms, during non-instructional time.
- Teachers work in teams to collect information about how the physical set-up of the classrooms provides evidence of a set of standards in action.
- Teacher teams summarize the evidence that they have collected to show that a particular effort is schoolwide, implemented in different ways for different grade levels or content areas.

Roberts, S. M., & Pruitt, E. Z. (2003). *Schools as professional learning communities: Collaborative activities and strategies for professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Standards-Based Walkthrough

Before

- Leader forms cross-grade teams
- Leader creates an observation checklist or form

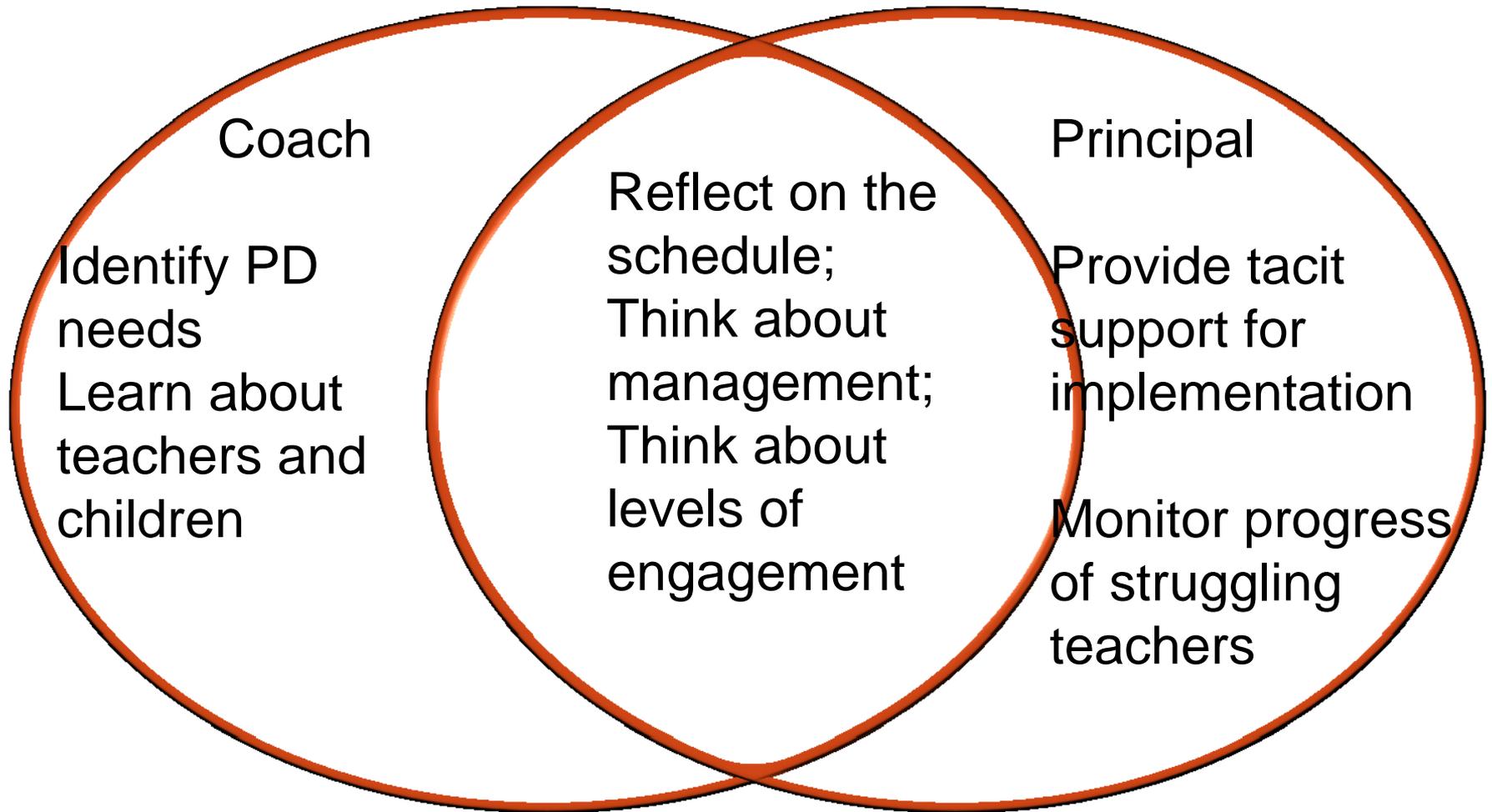
During

- Teams visit each room in the school
- Teams locate and discuss evidence of the curriculum in action

After

- Teams provide their summary form to the leader
- The leader prepares and shares evidence from all teams

Instructional Walkthrough



Time to Talk

What might teachers in your school learn from a standards-based walk-through?

How could you organize and facilitate it?

What about instructional walkthroughs conducted by the principal or coach?



Take Five

Targeted and Full Observations

Before

- Provide professional support
- Negotiate the time and focus of the observation
- Select or create observation tools

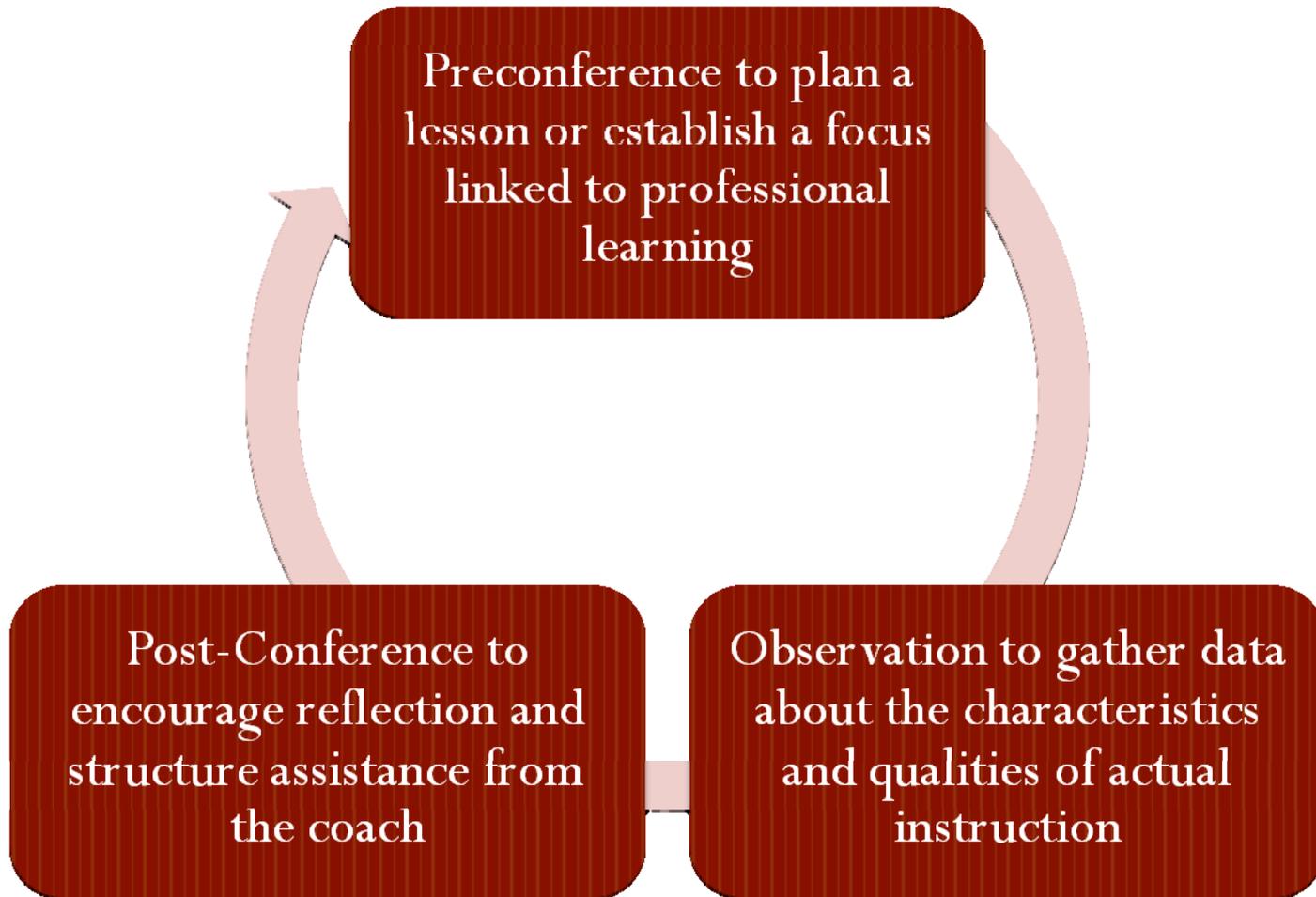
During

- Collect descriptive evidence of the type and quality of instruction
- Consider teacher actions and student responses

After

- Provide substantive, formative feedback
- Provide professional support

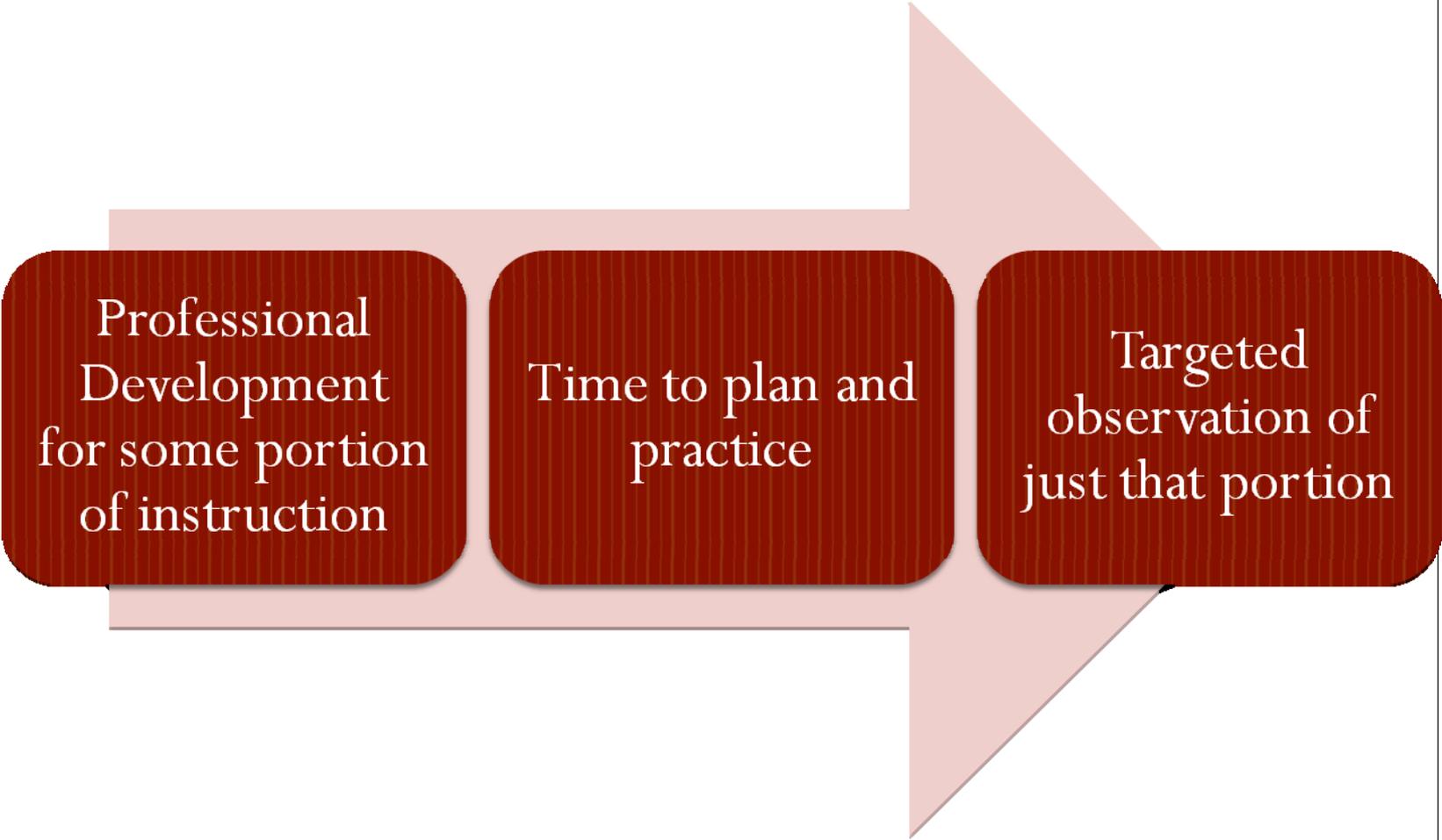
Coaching Cycle



Targeted Observations

- These observations are set up to address only a specific portion of the instructional plan (e.g., read alouds, fluency practice, or differentiated instruction).
- Teachers know in advance that this is the target.
- Teachers can work collaboratively with the coach to build a checklist or rubric in advance.
- Over time, a series of targeted observations can provide feedback for all aspects of the reading block.

Targeted Observations



Professional
Development
for some portion
of instruction

Time to plan and
practice

Targeted
observation of
just that portion

Full Observations

- Full observations are a means for providing truly differentiated feedback and support; individual teachers will differ in their strengths and needs, and sometimes these are only truly revealed by watching the entire reading block.
- Full observations allow the observer time to really think about the quality of the instruction and the interaction of the teacher's choices and the children's needs.
- But full observations are costly in terms of time; coaches may not be able to use them as the only means of support.

Time to Talk

What are the costs and benefits of full observations?

What roadblocks have you faced?

How have you overcome them?



Take Five

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

1

- It focuses on the lesson; talk includes specific examples.

2

- It references characteristics of effective teaching.

3

- It invites teachers to be reflective and to focus on student learning.

Feeney, E. J. (2007). Quality feedback: The essential ingredient for teacher success. *The Clearinghouse*, 80: 191-197.

Conferencing with teachers

- Be compassionate.
- Allow the teacher to take the lead or to negotiate the goals for the conversation.
- Ask questions.
- Use positive verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Be specific.
- Refer directly to the observation.

- And offer to help. A coach's job is not to give advice. A coach's job is to give direct assistance.

A possible format for a feedback conference

- Open by connecting to a topic that you know the teacher is concerned about.
- Ask the teacher to provide observations related to that topic.
- Clarify and respond to the teacher's observations.
- Invite the teacher to propose a course of action.

Gibson, S. A. (2006). Lesson observation and feedback: The emphasis on the reading coach course of action. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 45, 295-318.

	Open-ended Notes	Rubric	Checklist
Walkthrough			
Targeted Observation			
Full Observation			

Time to Think

What could you do to make observations more effective in your school?



Take Five