

High School NEPF Learning – Focus on Standard 4

Introduction

In August of 2015 the principal of White Pine High School requested professional learning around the NEPF High-Leverage Instructional Standards for his teaching staff. His hope was that, through this collective learning, his teachers would improve their practice related to the indicators within the framework. Based on his own understanding of the instructional standards and previous teacher observations, the principal felt that *Standard 4, Students Engage in Metacognitive Activity to Increase Understanding of and Responsibility for Their Own Learning* needed more attention than the other NEPF standards at this point in time. A professional learning plan was created and focused on the following learning outcomes.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand NEPF Standard 4
 - a. Indicators, evidence, and description/notes
 - b. Levels of Performance
2. Create goals/plans for day-to-day implementation
3. Improve practice through formative assessment and feedback

Question

How does a school wide professional learning design that includes ongoing learning sessions and formative observations with feedback affect classroom implementation of NEPF Standard 4?

Structure

The goal of professional learning is change in practice. This is a process that occurs over time and requires support in order to embed the new learning into practice (Learning Forward, n.d.). It was a priority for the principal that the learning design support implementation, not just awareness. The coordinator presented the following design plan to the principal:

- Collective professional learning on Monday afternoons 1-2 times per month during the first semester. 45 minute time allowance.
- Formative observations and feedback provided by RPDP Coordinator offered between professional learning sessions.

Professional learning sessions began in September. The sessions were designed to engage teachers in learning activities that would not only deepen their understanding of NEPF Standard 4, but also give them strategies they could use in their classrooms. Present in these sessions were all the teachers at the high school as well as a long term substitute, the principal, and assistant principal. It is noteworthy that both administrators were present for all of the Monday sessions as full participants, not just observers of the learning.

Each session included attention to the learning objectives, the three listed above, as well as the specific objective for that day's learning. Teachers were given time to articulate their understanding of the learning objectives to their peers, not just see them posted or hear the coordinator say them. Teachers then engaged in activities that activated their current understanding or prior knowledge related to the specific learning objectives. Questions like the following enabled teachers to think about learning, metacognition, and motivation.

- What does it mean to be a learner?
- What do you like to learn?
- What resources do you use to learn?
- How do you know if you have learned something?
- What motivates you to learn?
- What motivates your students? How do you know?
- What is the current level of motivation of the students in your classroom? How do you know?
- What concerns do you have regarding your students' motivation?

The Literature Review and lesson videos accompanying the Standard 4 Learning Modules were used to deepen teachers' understanding of metacognition and its role in learning and motivation. Additionally, the coordinator planned learning activities that would engage teachers in metacognitive activities for their learning of Standard 4. These activities provided examples of strategies teachers could use in their classrooms, a frequent request of teachers during professional learning. Using the knowledge gained from the Monday sessions, teachers used a document (created by the coordinator) to set specific goals to implement metacognitive activities in their classrooms. They shared their goals with their peers and gave and received feedback about their goals during the Monday sessions.

The coordinator provided dates and times she would be available to observe the implementation of their goals and provide formative feedback. Teachers signed up for these observations as desired; observations were not required. The coordinator created an observation form as a notetaker for these observations. (See Appendix I.) This was shared with the teachers and administrators to provide transparency about what the coordinator would be looking for during the observed lesson (Wiggins, 2012). At times teachers would ask the coordinator to look for evidence of a specific indicator within Standard 4. During all observations the coordinator made note of any activities that engaged students in metacognitive activities thus supporting teachers as they worked toward their implementation goals (Wiggins, 2012).

These formative observations became a key element for teachers' learning and implementation. (See Figure 29.) Over the course of the year, the coordinator was able to observe most teachers at the high school at least once. Noteworthy is that the principal, who teaches two classes, and the assistant principal, who teaches one class, also requested and participated in the formative observations. In fact, the coordinator observed the principal's lessons four times during the year. Several teachers requested multiple observations, as many as five during the year, and those teachers said they found them to be extremely helpful. The coordinator's feedback included noting the observed metacognitive activities as well as suggestions for other metacognitive activities and/or mentions of actions that could have occurred during the lesson or might occur in future lessons. This formative feedback was immediately given to teachers as timely feedback is

essential to improve learning and actions (Wiggins, 2012). A copy of the observation document, including feedback was also given to the principal so he could be aware of the observed activities and suggestions made by the coordinator. Occasionally a teacher would request a meeting with the coordinator to further discuss the feedback provided.

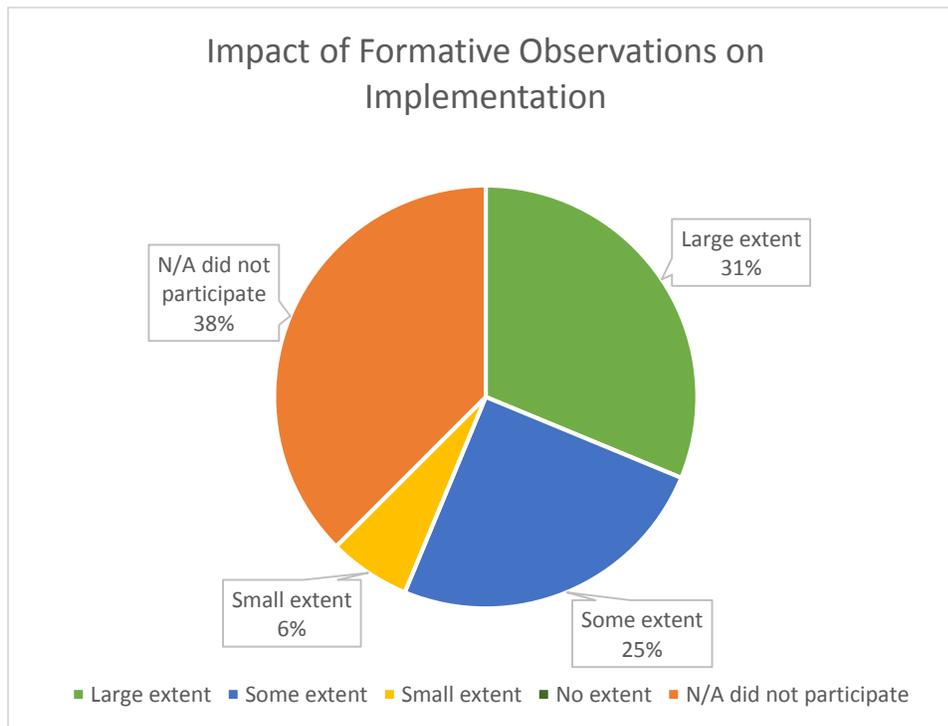


Figure 1: Impact of Formative Observations

Measurement and Results

Having conducted many professional learning meetings and trainings, the coordinator recognized the power of the structure for White Pine High School's plan in moving teachers from knowledge to implementation. The following list highlights these structural elements:

- All participants recognized a need for the professional learning.
- Administrators were full participants in the learning activities.
- There was a collective and collaborative meeting structure on the Monday sessions.
- There were opportunities to set and implement goals.
- There were opportunities to receive formative feedback related to those implementation goals through formative observations.
- There was full participation by all teachers which allowed for conversations related to the NEPF learning to occur during the course of the year.

The collective learning improved teachers' confidence in implementing NEPF Standard 4, which was also reflected in the formal observations by their administrator. (See Figure 30.) And, the administrators indicated they were more confident in their ability to recognize metacognitive

activities in classrooms because of their participation in both the Monday sessions and the formative observations.

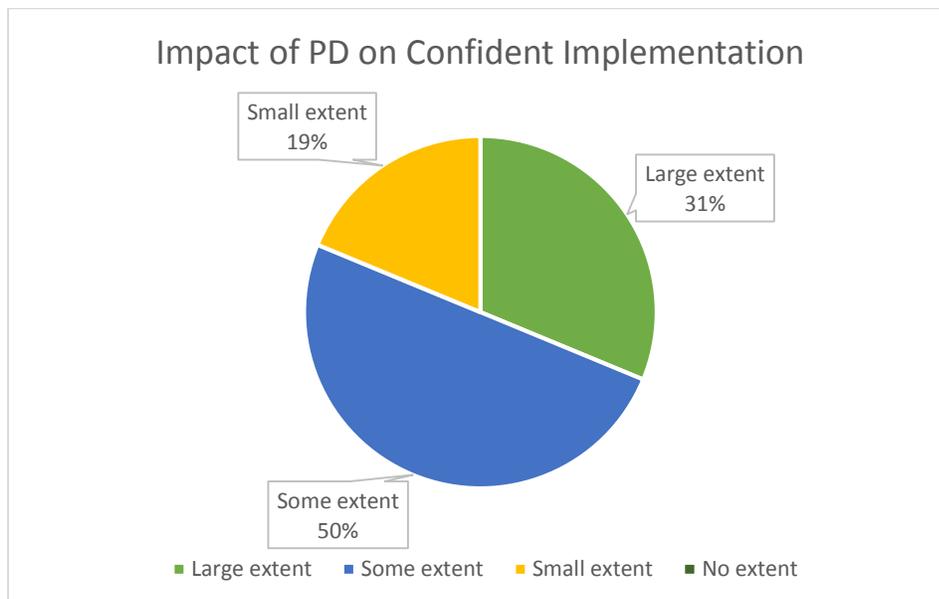


Figure 2: Impact of PD on Confident Implementation

Of this professional learning structure the principal said, “The coordinator spent time observing and providing feedback with teachers as they focused on implementing this Standard. She was very effective in her delivery of this message, as well as her responses to teachers as she worked more independently with them to coach them through the implementation process.”

Teacher responses to a survey given at the conclusion of the year included:

- *“My students always use nepf #4 on a daily basis”*
- *“I really liked all the work we did on standard 4. It challenged me to think more about how I could incorporate metacognitive activities more often in my classroom.”*
- *“It was great to make us understand our own learning as well as the students learning.”*

Often professional learning plans are prescribed by administrators, but not attended by administrators. The full participation by both administrators at this high school was noticed and appreciated by the teachers. Commenting on the participation of the administrators, teachers said:

- *“I think it is always important for our leaders to participate, share their ideas and give examples of the ways in which they are implementing the same standards we are striving for in our classrooms.”*
- *“It is nice to see them there since they are using the standards to evaluate the teachers.”*
- *“It is always helpful to have our school leaders take part. It makes it a partnership and builds trust.”*
- *“I appreciate seeing the admin involved in our PD. It helps to see them as learners along with us, instead of feeling like they already know how to do this.”*

Conclusion

In September of 2015 only about 11% of the professionals at this high school felt confident in implementing Standard 4. (See Figure 31.) At the end of the year, 50% of the teachers and administrators indicated they were confident implementing not only Standard 4, but also Standard 3 and Standard 1. (See Figure 32.) Through the professional learning meetings, goal setting, and formative observations with feedback, the teachers and administrators at White Pine High School were able to move from knowledge to implementation and improved practice.

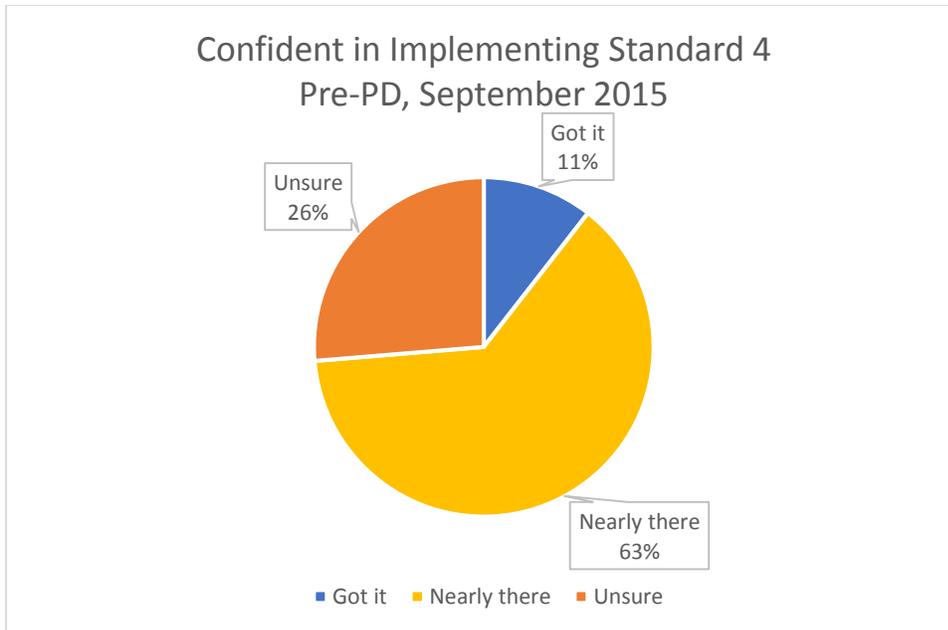


Figure 3: Confidence in Implementing Standard 4

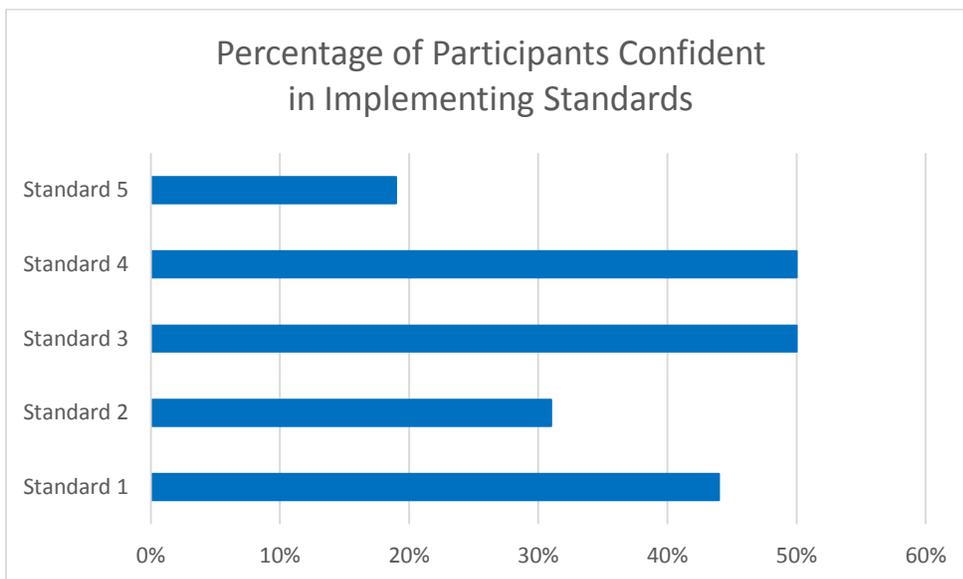


Figure 4: Percent Confident in Implementing Standards

References:

Learning Forward. (n.d.). Standards for Professional Learning. Retrieved from <http://learningforward.org/standards/implementation#.VzTGLYQrK70>

Wiggins, G. (2012, September). Seven keys to effective feedback. *Educational Leadership*, 70(1), 10-16.