

Quadrant

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Issue 2, October 16, 2022

The Four Patterns of Observation

The Big Idea

We observe teachers for many reasons but use the term “observation” generically. This leads to a lack of clarity which increases stress on teachers and decreases effectiveness of observations.

The Why?

We can create clarity about teacher observations if we develop a vocabulary that helps all parties understand the purpose of each observation. Clarity of purpose helps focus the observer, prepares both parties for the type of feedback, and creates common expectations regarding the use of observation data.

Listen to our overview of the Four Patterns of Observation in [Episode 65](#) of The Assistant Principal Podcast.

There are four patterns of observation. Each pattern asks a different question(s):

- Evaluative: How well is the teacher doing their job?
- Performative: What can I (the observer) learn?
- Normative:
 - Was our PD successful?
 - What comes next
- Formative:
 - Was our coaching cycle successful?
 - What comes next?

The How

Step-by-step implementation suggestions:

1. Review the MVP with your ILT and reflect on discussion questions
2. Share visual #1 with teachers in small groups and use discussion questions
3. Print and give cheat card (visual #2) to all teachers and ILT members
4. Phase in use of language by the ILT and reinforce with teachers

M V P

	Evaluative	Formative	Performative	Normative
Purpose	Contract decisions	Improve performance of a specific individual teacher	Improve instructional leadership	Assess implementation of a specific practice to inform PD
Focus	State performance standards	A specific area in need of growth (ideally, teacher-driven)	Varies	A specific practice
Documentation	Based on state forms	Targeted and limited specific to area	Little to none (informal)	Customized “look-fors” of the practice
Data collected	Observed/not observed and notes	Yes/no, tally, scripting, video	Little to none	Fidelity and consistency of implementation
Customization	Little or none	High	Variety of set formats	High
Data sharing	Post-conference and written; other according to state and district policy	Post-conference and written	With teachers – informal and positive only With leadership – generalized observations of areas of strength/concern	Collective (not individual) data shared with ILT and teachers
Next steps	Formal reporting to applicable agency	Determines next steps in coaching cycle	Leadership team discussions	Use data to plan PD. May follow up with individual teachers
Teacher development	None	Individual skill specific	Reinforce positive practices	Group focus
Why the word?	Evaluation is what this is all about	Like formative assessment, it is used for aiding growth	Watching teachers perform for leaders’ benefit	Reinforcing practices that are expected to be the norm



ON AN ISLAND?

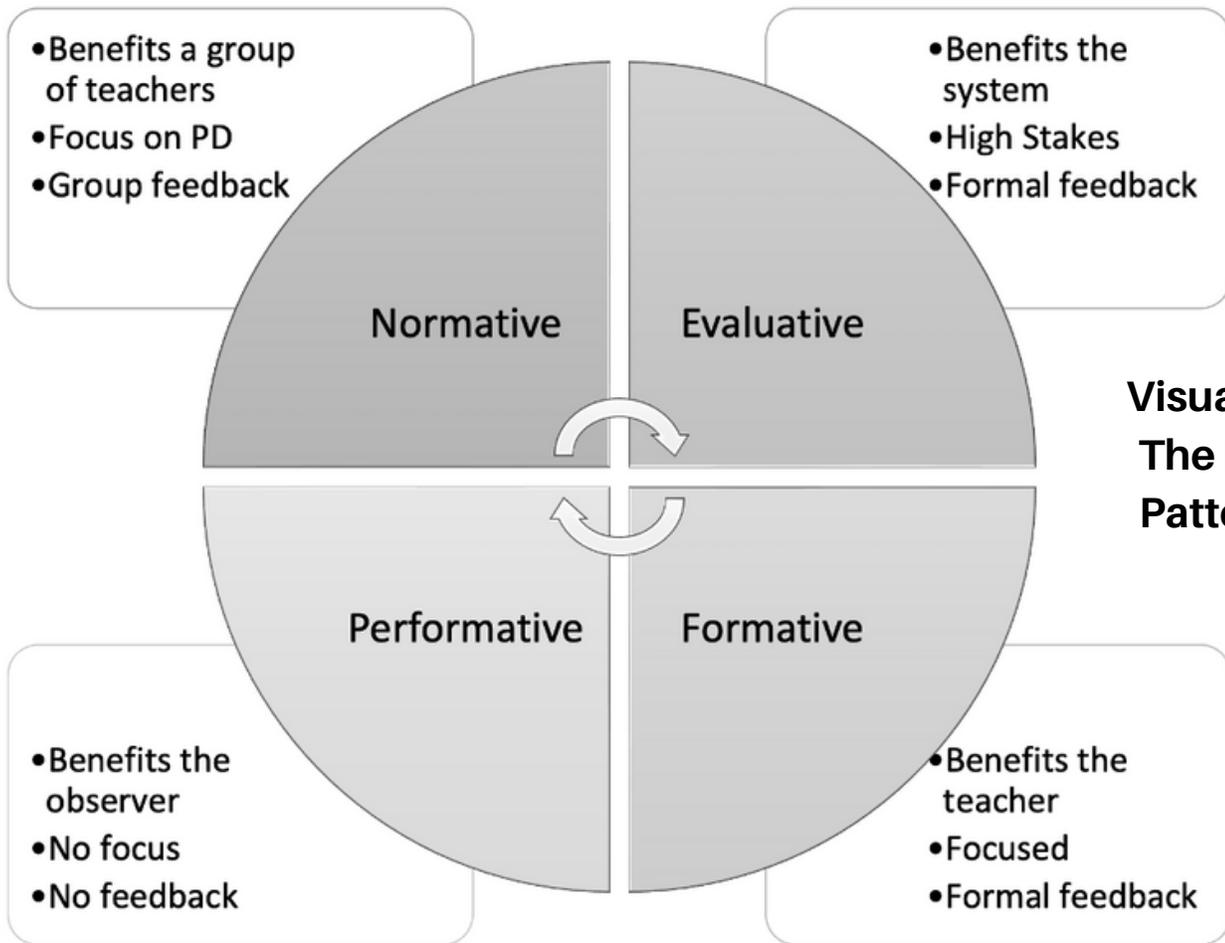
This is another practice for which you do not need a team to implement. The most basic thing is to simply adopt the language yourself and use it consistently when talking about observations with anyone. An additional step is to share the types or explain them to the teachers you work with.

Be aware of these challenges:

Being intentional and consistent in using the language

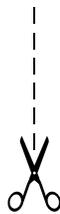
Implementing with fidelity, especially regarding feedback

Using the data appropriately



**Visual #1:
The Four
Patterns**

**Visual #2:
Lanyard-sized
cheat sheet**



<p>Normative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ For the group ☞ Semi-formal - focused ☞ Group feedback 	<p>Evaluative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ For the system ☞ Formal - broad ☞ Written feedback
<p>Performative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ For the observer ☞ Informal - variable ☞ No feedback! 	<p>Formative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ For the teacher ☞ Formal - focused ☞ Written feedback

BONUS POINTS:

Regarding praise notes or similar feedback after performative observations... The purpose of performative observations is for ILT members to work on their own observations skills and to informally get a feel for what is happening in individual or groups of classrooms. Performative observations should require as little effort as possible so that they can be done frequently and simply.

Providing feedback adds a layer of effort. Additionally, providing feedback undermines the idea that performative observations are for the observers benefit.

Performative observations work because there are no stakes for the teacher. Offering feedback, even praise, implies judgement.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- **Does implementing the four patterns require any specific skills?**

The skills required are consistent with teacher observations in general. Any observation requires a degree of observation and recording skills. Developing look-fors and customized observations documents is necessary for capitalizing on normative observations and can benefit formative observations.

- **Can one pattern of observation lead to another?**

Definitely! Performative observations can lead to discussions about teacher development which can lead to PD that would require normative observations and individual teacher support requiring formative observations. Evaluative observations may also lead to formative work with individual teachers.

- **What if I see a problem while I am doing a performative observation?**

Detecting issues before they blow up is a huge reason for doing frequent and consistent performative observations. Remember, identifying problems benefits you, not the teacher. If there is a one-time issue, it should generally be ignored so that coaching efforts can be focused on teachers with more intense needs. When a problem is observed consistently, it should be discussed informally with the teacher and then followed up with support that would include formative observations.

Questions for your team:

- How do our teachers respond during unannounced informal observations?
- Do we consistently follow-up on PD with targeted observations?
- If so, how do we use that observation data?
- If not, how do we gauge implementation and impact of professional development?
- What are the triggers for initiating individualized teacher support?
- How do we use multiple forms of observation to enhance our approaches to supporting and growing teachers?

WHAT'S COMING?

Adding value through APEx Community...

Next month we'll be working through a more detailed look at the four patterns. We'll look at examples of adapting instruments and recording data for each pattern and how to use that data in planning group and individual professional development.



The Assistant Principal Podcast

- 10/25 – Q&A Grab Bag

Quadrant 2

- Coordinating observations for maximum impact
- Overcoming urgency

Tools, links, and resources

- Do you get your daily email? Use it to help set a leadership intention each morning.
[Sign up here!](#)