



TAKK - Paper pilot of a professional learning app

We have been developing online professional development systems at LAS for a few years. Our first version is known internally as the Program B observation tool. It has been used with approximately 20 teachers and is fairly well [documented](#). We developed a second, easier version in academic year 2014-2015, which has not yet been put into general practice.

From that experience, we have developed a new observation tool with a significant philosophical difference. We have taken the act of observing away from an official data collector (or person acting in the role as “knows more”) and put the act of observing in the hands of each individual teacher (or person who has a self-interest in developing professionally).

Here we describe the tool and its first pilot, for which we used a simple paper “app” to simulate its use.

What is it?

TAKK is designed for a mobile device in the hands of teachers. It provides ongoing, self-directed feedback over time, based on teaching and learning traits selected by the school. It allows individual faculty members *to catch themselves* and their colleagues being successful. Recorded successes build a profile for individual reflection and collegial conversations to support professional development.

We believe there is a need for a tool like TAKK. Professional development in school settings is sometimes characterized by infrequent classroom observations, after which a supervisor gives feedback to a teacher. The feedback may or may not be based on school-wide professional development goals and the supervisor may be trying to provide feedback in a discipline with which he or she has little training. The practice is by and large ineffective, but widespread.

Our paper version of TAKK contains six behaviors that we decided we would like to see in the teaching and learning of our future middle school (set to open in Fall 2016). We included:

- teachers incorporating ideas from **agile** (a workflow process);
- teachers letting students **revisit work** that didn't meet the standard;
- teachers **sharing ideas** with each other;
- the **student as presenter** to other students;
- students doing **collaborative group work**; and

- students exhibiting enough **self-direction** that the teacher can step out of the room without student work coming to a stop.

On the app, each behavior has its own icon. When individual teachers are logged into the app, they can press an icon for any of the six behaviors described above. The occurrence is recorded with date and time (and an optional Twitter size note) in the individual profile of the teacher, and flagged as selected by the teacher. There is a screen that the teacher can visit to see the accumulated number of instances of each behavior.

In a version one step more complex than the minimum viable product (MVP) described above, colleagues can also record behaviors for their peers. A teacher who sees another teacher using small groups can select that particular behavior by pushing on the icon, then select the teacher's name (and an optional note). That behavior goes into the observed teacher's profile, flagged as selected by a peer.

Over time, the profile grows and reflects how often teachers are recording (or being recorded) certain teaching and learning behaviors that the school has targeted for professional development.

There are additional steps beyond the MVP, including crowd-sourcing the development of icons and customizing the use of the app to a particular organization or purpose, all for a later time.

We think teachers would use the resulting data to monitor their own progress and as a basis for conversations with peers about classroom practices. Teachers might also use the data to build a more complete picture of classroom behaviors before a visit from a supervisor.

Pilot

We developed a paper app (see Appendix) to use with six teachers at our own school. The teachers were given the paper app at the beginning of the week. They were asked to record instances of the six traits we had selected (represented by six icons on the front of the app). Because the app is paper, the teachers were required to make a hash mark with a pen or pencil when they wanted to record a certain behavior. Definitions for each behavior (and a space to write comments) were also included.

At the end of the week, I collected the apps from the teachers and recorded their comments and current status, i.e. how many instances of each behavior they had recorded for themselves. Our school then left on a week long school trip. On our return, we repeated the process a second week. One of the teacher participants did not use her paper app the second week.

Teacher results

Instances of "clicking" on the six icons

The teachers in the pilot have teaching loads of two classes (1 teacher), three classes (1 teacher), and five classes. They were asked to use the app for “the week,” without more specific information. Teacher 5, for example, reported that she only used the app for two class periods (presumably on the same day) during the first week. She did not use it all the second week. She has seven instances of “clicking” on icons on the paper app.

Teacher 1, on the other hand, has 46 instances of “clicking” on icons of the paper app. For all kinds of obvious reasons, this doesn’t make Teacher 1 a better teacher, Mostly it makes her a different user of the app, with a different teaching load.

TABLE 1: Instances of each instance recorded for each teacher.

| Teacher | Total instances for Week 1 and 2 combined | | | | | |
|---------|---|--------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| | Agile | Revisit work | Sharing ideas | Student as presenter | Collaborative group work | Self-direction |
| 1 | 15 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 14 | 6 |
| 2 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 7 |
| 3 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 12 | 6 |
| 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 6 |
| 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 13 | 9 |
| 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

A large caution, therefore, is to avoid using numbers inappropriately. Examples of appropriate uses of these teacher-recorded instances might be:

Teacher 1 thinks to herself: I am trying really hard to use agile and collaborative group work and think I am being successful. I should ask a colleague come observe to see if I’m on the right path.

Teacher 2, 4, 5, and 6 think to themselves: What is agile? Am I supposed to be able to do whatever that is or is it okay that I don’t know? Am I out of step with the general direction of the school?

Administrator X thinks to herself: I’ve talked with six teachers this week and only one feels she is really doing agile. We need to increase focus on agile if we want to see it work.

Teachers 3 and 4 debrief with each other, and Teacher 3 notes: Teacher 4, you've got good ideas and need to share them with others. Do you know that I used something you told me about just yesterday? And why don't you stop in at the beginning of my fifth period tomorrow? I'd like to show you something.

Department head X asks in a department meeting: Who has found that you are clicking the collaboration icon a lot? Can you share a bit with all of us about how you are getting your students to work together?

At a faculty meeting, an administrator notes: We've been using the self-direction icon for the past month. Results show that most everyone is getting students to work together in a sustained, self-directed way. Kudos to us all - and now, let's retire that icon and replace it with a teaching and learning trait we'd like to concentrate on next. Suggestions, anyone?

In sum, we need to be cautious, as there is little joy in working hard to create something if the result is misuse and confusion. We have enough of that already, just naturally, as we try to steer a large organization of many individuals.

Comments

Teachers in the pilot provided limited comments at the end of each week. In Week 1 five teachers commented, in Week 2, only two teachers commented.

Positive comments (from 4 of 6 teacher participants) include:

- I only did it for two classes, but it was kind of fun.
- I like the idea.
- ... it puts you into a mindset that these may be things worth trying, so you're constantly trying to incorporate them.
- I think this is a great reflective tool ...
- To have this tool as a reminder of good practice was beneficial in planning
- excellent for self-analysis, awareness, and PD
- I like how it unconsciously encourages reflection on teaching.

Cautions (from 2 of the 6 teacher participants, both of whom also provided positive comments), include:

- Was difficult to complete in lessons. I must confess that the scoring came after lessons. It is tough to do in flow. There is something about being too self-focused when you're giving/performing/"being in the zone" and it makes it difficult to record with a device such as this.
- ... unless done after classes it would be too time consuming.

What did we learn from our pilot

The app, in its basic functionality, should work. A teacher selects an icon, the selection is recorded in the teacher's profile. The cumulative total is in a small database which is accessed when the teacher moves to their "current profile" screen. Versions beyond the MVP need not present any significant difficulties, ie the ability to type a short note that is "attached" to the observation, the ability to direct an observation to a colleague (from a drop down menu of teaching faculty); the ability to attach a note regarding that observation; the ability to reset the app ...

There was not a strong dislike of the app. None of the teacher participants reported that they didn't like the app. Negative comments were limited to the suggestion that the app be used during the class period, and then only by two of the six participants.

The learning curve for using the app was small and gentle. Teacher participants learned how to use the app in an explanation less than five minutes long.

The electronic version should be about as difficult (or easy) as the paper app. With the digital version, a teacher would have to select the icon for the app itself, of course. If the teacher had chosen to stay logged in, the app would be ready to receive input by selecting an icon. In the paper version, the teacher did not of course press the icon, but rather made a hash mark. In the digital version, the teacher would press the icon, but not have to make a hash mark. Current status (e.g. how many instances of pressing each icon have been recorded) would be displayed on the digital app by selecting a button.

There needs to be options of how to use the app. Two teachers commented that using the app during class either broke their flow or was too time consuming. A third teacher did not use the app during Week 2 of the pilot because, as she reported in person, she was very busy. So, despite how easy it is to use, there still must be options regarding its use (at the end of a class, at the end of the day) and how often (for one period a day, for all periods once a week, for the week before a supervisory visit). Norms for using the app can all be addressed independently of the app itself - the mechanism of data collection does not require a certain type of use, which is the following point:

Flexible use. The app can be used in different manners and indeed in different contexts. The basic functionality is in essence a counter of instances of certain agreed upon types of classroom instruction and/or behavior.

Next steps

We are ready to identify a person or company that would like to develop a beta version of the digital app.

We have also begun discussing what a similar app built for students might look like, and the effect it might ultimately have on teaching and learning.

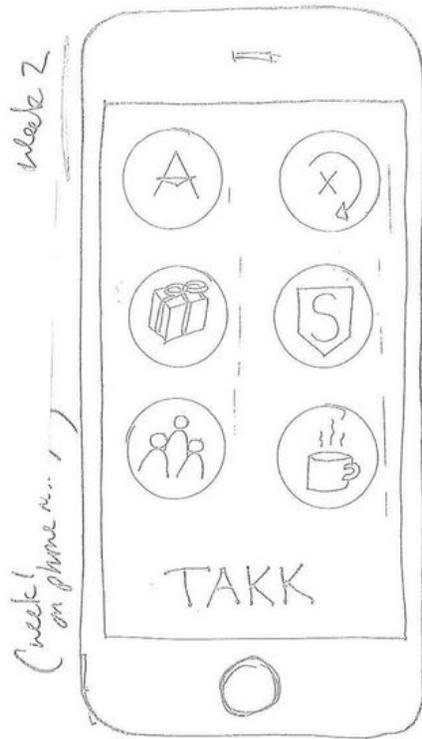
And finally, we recently began thinking how the app might be used when adults are meeting in specific professional development situations, and how the app might use the same structure for additional purposes.

[Leysin American School \(LAS\) Education Research](#) coordinates and investigates professional development of teaching faculty, emphasizing participatory research, curriculum development, and having fun.

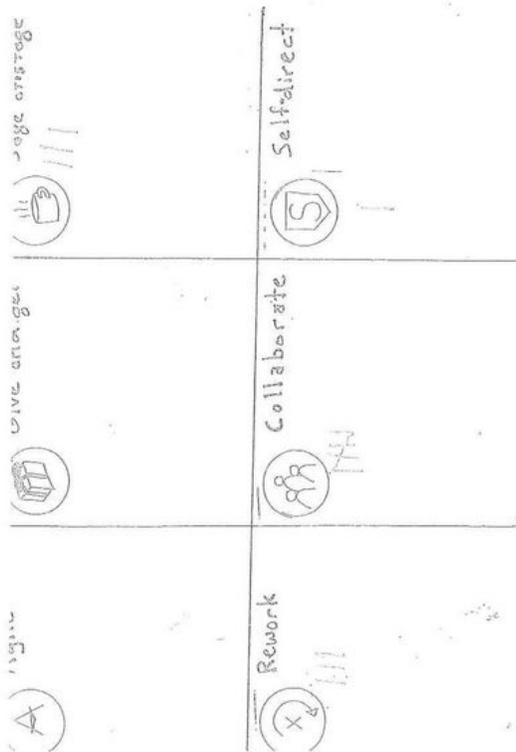
Paul Magnuson
6 November 2015

Paul Magnuson is director of curriculum and research. Questions and comments may be directed to pmagnuson@las.ch.

APPENDIX - the paper app



This paper iPhone was folded in half so that it was the shape of a phone. The front is the screen, the back was where teacher participants recorded instances of these six behaviors with a hash mark.



On the inside of the resulting fold were definitions of each icon and space to write comments on the use of the app.

TAKK



Agile - Did you try using Agile in your classroom? Press once on the icon if you did during the class hour.



Redo - Did one or more students fail to meet the expectations for completed work, or demonstrated understanding ... and then have the chance to turn that failure into a success? Press once on the icon if you did during the class hour.



Gift - Did you give a colleague an idea that was then used in class? Or did you get an idea from a colleague that you used? Press for each idea given or received as long as it was actually used in class.



Super hero - Did a student lead a significant (more than 5 minutes without teacher interruption) part of the class? Press the icon once for each incident.



Collaboration - Did students work in collaborative groups for more than 5 minutes without teacher interruption? Press the icon once for each incident.



Coffee break - Were you able to leave the room, watching the students from the hall, and they didn't notice you were gone as they continue to be on task?

Please write any comments or questions regarding using this prototype app here.

The prototype "app" should be given to Paul (desk chair, mailbox, in person) on Friday anytime after you have used it Monday through Thursday.

We'll test drive the app for 2 weeks. Thanks!