

*Turning up the H.E.A.T. on Classroom Walkthroughs*

# Classroom Walkthroughs with H.E.A.T.



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“What gets measured gets done.” During the past decade, this popular business adage from the late 20th century has provided much of the impetus for school systems seeking to achieve AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress). By targeting the eligible or tested content, instituting benchmarking protocols at strategic grade levels, and ensuring that weekly lessons are aligned to a standards-based instructional methodology, school systems nationwide have clearly defined their instructional priorities.

Imagine if this same modus operandi was applied to schools striving to implement 21st Century skills. The first mention of 21st Century skills was Jamie McKenzie’s 1987 plea for schools to make changes “...as if our future depended on it...” in light of the impending Age of Information (McKenzie, 1987). Yet today, a preponderance of school districts still relegate 21st Century or digital-age learning to second tier status behind priorities such as test scores, school reform initiatives (e.g., differentiated instruction, rigor & relevance), and teaming structures (e.g., professional learning communities, instructional teams, school community councils). Part of the hesitancy to promote 21st Century skills rests with (1) a lack of clarity about what constitutes 21st Century skills and (2) the absence of resources for measuring success.

According to the Partnership for the 21st Century Skills, the skill-sets needed by today’s digital natives fall into three distinct categories: Learning and Innovation Skills; Information, Media, and Technology Skills; and Life and Career Skills. A practical synonym for these 21st Century skills is H.E.A.T. (i.e., Higher order thinking, Engaged learning, Authentic Connections, Technology use). Collectively, the acronym, H.E.A.T., represents the amount of 21st Century skills applied by students within any learning environment (Figure A). The Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. protocol was created to capture and document the amount of student H.E.A.T. and, in doing so, elevate digital-age teaching and learning in the classroom.

Research supports the concept that classroom walkthroughs assume a positive role in reflective practice and continuous improvement efforts (Downey, English, Frase, Posten, & Steffy, 2004; Downey & Frase, 2001; Elmore, 2000). According to Hall and Hord (2000), classroom walkthroughs that include focused one-on-one feedback is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact and change behavior. However, David (2008) cautions us that “... walkthroughs can play a constructive role only when districts make their purpose clear and carry them out in a climate of trust.”

The Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. process represents a hybrid of several current walkthrough approaches articulated in Kachur, Stout, and Edwards’ Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Teaching and Learning (2010) and includes five steps: Pre-Walkthrough, H.E.A.T. Walkthrough, Post-Walkthrough, Group Data Analysis, and Group Action Plan. A summary of the five-step Classroom Walkthroughs with H.E.A.T. protocol follows:



# Classroom Walkthroughs with H.E.A.T.



Figure A: H.E.A.T. Rubric

## Higher-Order Thinking

The task requires students operating at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (e.g., Analyzing, Evaluating, Creating).

- 6 Student learning/questioning at Evaluating/Creating levels
- 5 Student learning/questioning at Analyzing level
- 4 Student learning/questioning at Applying level
- 3 Student learning/questioning at Understanding level
- 2 Student learning/questioning at Remembering level
- 1 Students taking notes only; no questions asked

## Engaged Learning

The task asks students to show their “know how” on something important and challenging, not just their knowledge.

- 6 Students collaborate to define the task, the process, and/or the solution; collaboration extends beyond the classroom
- 5 Students collaborate to define the task, the process, and/or the solution
- 4 Students given options to solve a teacher-directed problem; collaborate with others
- 3 Students given options to solve a teacher-directed problem
- 2 Students report what they have learned only; collaborate with others
- 1 Students report what they have learned only

## Authentic Connections

The task reflects what people might actually do in the real world—real life issues, themes, and/or problems.

- 6 The learning experience is directly relevant to students and involves creating a product that has a purpose beyond the classroom that directly impacts the students
- 5 The learning experience provides real world relevance and opportunity for students to apply their learning to a real world situation
- 4 The learning experience provides extensive real world relevance
- 3 The learning experience provides limited real world relevance
- 2 The learning experience provides no real world application, or represents a group of connected activities
- 1 The learning experience is missing or too vague to determine relevance

## Technology Use

Technology (e.g., computers, handhelds, peripherals) is used in a seamless fashion to promote student learning.

- 6 Technology use is directly connected to task completion with one-to-one or unlimited resources
- 5 Technology use is directly connected to task completion with shared or limited resources
- 4 Technology use is somewhat connected to task completion
- 3 Technology use appears to be an add-on and is not needed for task completion
- 2 Technology is used only by the teacher
- 1 No technology use is evident

# Classroom Walkthroughs with H.E.A.T.



## *STEP 1: Pre-Walkthrough*

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007), a classroom walkthrough is defined as a brief, structured, non-evaluative classroom observation by a principal that is followed by a conversation between the principal and the teacher about what was observed. Though walkthroughs represent unannounced classroom visitations, it is essential that campus leaders plan with a focus or purpose in mind. According to Downey et al. (2004), this focus should include a consideration of curriculum (e.g., math benchmarks, new reading program, differentiated instruction) as well as instructional initiatives. (e.g., adequate wait time, questioning strategies).

In the Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. protocol, this focus includes an inspection of the H.E.A.T. “Look-fors” embedded in the H.E.A.T. Walkthrough form, a review of prior H.E.A.T. Walkthrough reports, and a consideration of current curriculum initiatives on campus. Since H.E.A.T. represents student output and is synonymous with 21st Century skills, it is pivotal that building leaders possess a thorough understanding of the H.E.A.T. look-fors to ensure maximum validity and reliability with their classroom observations.

Reviewing prior H.E.A.T. Walkthrough reports and considering current curriculum initiatives will ensure that building leaders possess a purposeful intent for their classroom visits. For example, if prior walkthrough reports revealed a need to implement more informal assessment strategies by a particular teacher, then the follow-up walkthrough in this teacher’s classroom by the building leader would focus on specific informal assessment techniques used in the classroom such as choral responses, hand signaling, or exit cards.

The same is true with existing curriculum initiatives at the campus level. One of the advantages of the walkthrough process is to ensure that curriculum programs ranging from math benchmark assessments to a 1:1 laptop initiative are implemented with a high degree of fidelity. Addressing both the curriculum (e.g., math benchmarks, differentiated instruction, standards-based instruction) and instructional priorities (e.g., questioning strategies, higher order thinking) during a Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. creates an implied level of expectation on behalf of the administrator as well as the teacher.

## *STEP 2: H.E.A.T. Walkthrough*

How long should a walkthrough last? 3 minutes? 5 minutes? 15 minutes? Classroom walkthrough strategists offer their own perspective on the acceptable time period of a walkthrough. The Downey classroom walkthrough model suggests two to three minutes; other protocols range from one to 25 minutes depending on the scope and frequency of the walkthrough process (Kachur et al., 2010).

In the Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. protocol, the recommended time period is approximately five minutes depending on the availability of classroom artifacts (e.g., student work samples, teacher/student exchanges, availability of lesson plans). The intent is to collect as much data as necessary during the brief classroom snapshot to ascertain the amount of student H.E.A.T. generated from the entire instructional episode. In this manner, the walkthrough process is not dependent on arriving in the classroom at the “right” time.

How often have we heard from disgruntled teachers who became frustrated because their administrator came in at the wrong time, perhaps missing an important dialogue or interaction between the teacher and students or among the students pertaining to the content? By focusing attention on corroborating the gestalt of the entire instructional episode (e.g., class period) during a five minute data gathering period involving observation, informal dialogue with

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the teacher and/or students (when convenient and appropriate), and a review of available classroom documents (e.g., posted rubrics, lesson plans, student work samples), a complete picture can be generated that, in turn, can provide a foundation for reflective practice and continuous improvement.

## *STEP 3: Post-Walkthrough*

The Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. post-walkthrough is the most critical and beneficial step for professional improvement. Based on data collected from over 500 K-12 classroom teachers in Atlantic City, New Jersey, receiving a walkthrough from their administrators during the 2009-10 school year, 81% reported that the administrative feedback received was a useful part of the continuous improvement walkthrough process (e.g., positive, productive, promotes reflective practice). (LoTi Connection, 2010).

In the Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. protocol, the post-walkthrough process involves (1) creating a walkthrough summary highlighting the scope of the lesson and generating recommendations/commendations and (2) providing face-to-face feedback to the participating teacher(s). Using either a PDA or a clipboard with a H.E.A.T. Walkthrough Form attached, the administrator can automatically generate a H.E.A.T. walkthrough summary report for the teacher based on the amount of student H.E.A.T. witnessed or verified during the classroom walkthrough experience.

This H.E.A.T. Walkthrough report provides the basis for an informal follow-up post-walkthrough conference between administrator and teacher that should occur immediately (if possible), but no more than five working days from the date of the walkthrough. This post-walkthrough conference is pivotal to the entire process. The type of dialogue may range from a simple reflective question (e.g., How well do you think your students are grasping the content?) to a brief discussion surrounding a specific recommendation or commendation.

## *STEP 4: Group Data Analysis*

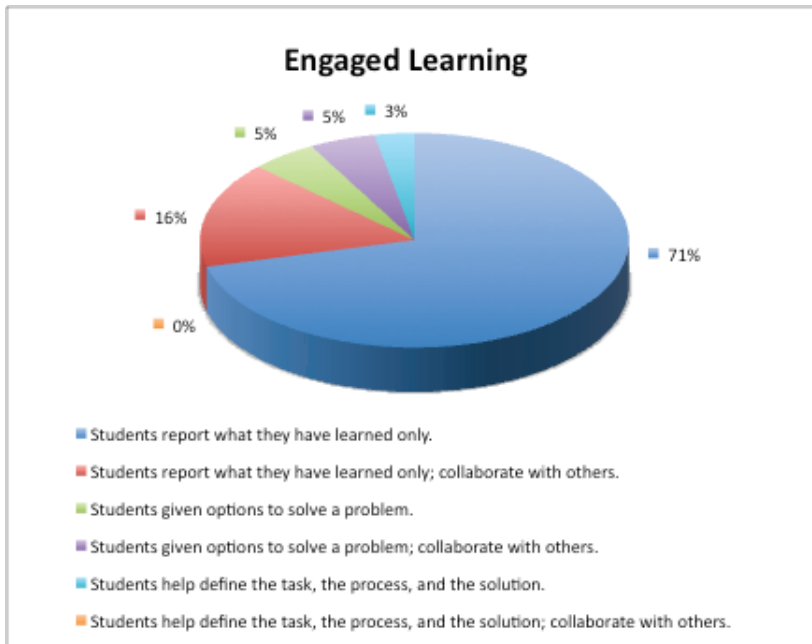
What sets apart the Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. protocol from other walkthrough methodologies is its focus on data analysis to promote system-wide continuous improvement. Aggregating the collected H.E.A.T. walkthrough data over time enables the campus instructional leader(s) to identify trends in 21st Century skill implementation (i.e., Higher order thinking, Engaged learning, Authentic connections, Technology use) that could potentially lead to adjustments in current professional development efforts and peer mentoring practices.

Figures B and C display pie graphs aggregating data from two of the H.E.A.T. components, Engaged learning and Technology use, captured from 156 classroom walkthroughs at a sample middle school.

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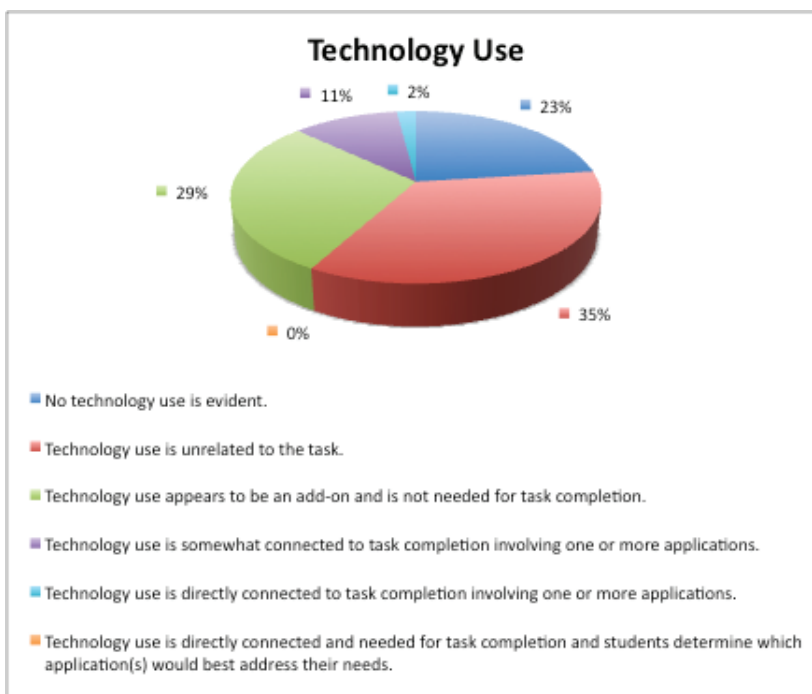
Figure B: Engaged Learning



The data in Figure B shows that approximately 71% of the classroom walkthroughs documented students reporting what they have learned only, without any opportunity for individual or group collaboration involving one or more complex thinking processes (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making, inductive/deductive reasoning). Figure C reveals that approximately 87% of technology use during the 156 lesson episodes was either (1) non-existent, (2) unrelated to task completion, or (3) used as an add-on and not needed for task completion.

Based on this data, the campus leadership team might want to investigate why the preponderance of low level engagement and technology use persists on their campus, especially if the campus already emphasizes project-based learning and possesses an abundance of digital tools and resources (e.g., high-access campus) for student collaboration.

Figure C: Technology Use



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## *Step 5: Group Action Plan*

Based on Figures B and C, the campus leadership team might also conclude that, though professional development efforts have addressed project-based learning and the integration of technology, the actual implementation at the operational curriculum level reveals a reverse trend in favor of conventional instruction with little opportunity for collaborative problem-solving and decision-making using the available digital assets—two pillars of 21st Century skills.

This awareness may lead to changes in existing professional development interventions. Possible suggestions might include a movement toward peer observations and a re-focus on differentiated coaching techniques that address the individual informational needs of the teacher (e.g., proof that the changes are better than the present, implementation mechanics, the impact on individual students). (Kise, 2006).

The adage, “What gets measured, gets done,” is a cornerstone of the Classroom Walkthrough with H.E.A.T. protocol. However, simply measuring what is happening in the classroom without a targeted focus or timely feedback can accomplish little towards instructional improvement. According to Gill (2010), “The problem is (often) the lack of will to use data to continuously improve systems and the lack of a process to interpret and apply data for continuous improvement.”

Providing a set of walkthrough “look-fors” that offer a tangible way of creating both an individual teacher and a campus-wide snapshot coupled with ongoing dialogue can serve as a valuable resource to promote student academic success, reflective practice in the classroom and, ultimately, a 21st Century learning environment system-wide.

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