
Developing an Inquiry Focus: Sweet Spot of Innovation

Purpose of the Tool

DEVELOPING AN INQUIRY FOCUS

When thinking about school-based innovation, there are many factors to consider. Amongst those factors are your community's minimum and maximum thresholds for change. School-based innovations that fall below your community's minimum threshold for change may be doable, but the results of these innovations may seem underwhelming, boring, or not worth the effort. School-based innovations that fall above your community's maximum threshold for change may seem overwhelming, difficult to grasp, or simply beyond reach. In either case, these innovations are likely to be rejected by your community because they will be perceived as being either too dull, or too extreme. In order for your school-based innovation to have a lasting effect, it is important that it falls within your community's optimal threshold for change—a space we call the sweet spot of innovation.

Suggested Time Commitment



You will probably need at least an hour to engage in this activity, and you will likely return to this activity throughout your innovation process.

When & How

Before beginning the process of developing a school-based innovation, one of the first things you may want to do is to determine your community's threshold for change, or sweet spot of innovation. Once you have done that, you can then begin to develop ideas and see if they fall within this generative space.

Steps

1. Establishing an innovato-meter

Take a piece of large chart paper and place it on a wall. Then, with a marker, make a long vertical line. Place incremental horizontal lines on your long vertical line in order to make a scale from zero to ten. This is your innovato-meter.

2. Identifying a minimum threshold for change

On your innovato-meter, zero may be considered your baseline practice, the status quo, or business as usual in your school or learning environment. It's what you do, and the way you do things every day. This is not to say that your regular school or classroom practice is dull in any way, it is just to place a point on where you are at with no change to your practice. Conversely, ten is the most radical change imaginable: a total reconceptualization of what you do—and how you do it—everyday. Given these two points, consider what may be your community's minimum threshold for change. This is the minimum point of change your community members will get excited about. Use a different colored marker to mark that point on your innovato-meter.

3. Identifying a maximum threshold for change

Next, using this same scale, consider what may be your community's maximum threshold for change. Mark that point on your innovato-meter.

4. Identifying a sweet spot of innovation

Now draw a box between these two points on your innovato-meter and label it sweet spot of innovation.

5. Considering your community's threshold for innovation

As you develop potential ideas for your school-based innovation, consider those ideas in terms of this scale from zero to ten and whether or not they fall within the sweet spot of innovation. Remember, ideas that fall below your sweet spot of innovation will likely be rejected by your community because they will be perceived as being too dull or boring, and ideas that fall above your sweet spot of innovation will likely be rejected by your community because they will be perceived as being too radical or extreme.

6. Use it often!

Keep your innovato-meter handy, and use it often to reflect on the prospective innovations you and your colleagues come up with in regards to your community's threshold for change. You may want to start out by developing innovations on the low end of your community's optimal threshold for change, and then gradually move up—always keeping the sweet spot of innovation in mind.

Suggestion: Different constituent groups within your community may have different thresholds for change. If you find this to be the case in your school or classroom, consider developing multiple sweet spots of innovation that are specific to each of these different constituent groups.

Attributions and Additional Resources

Project Zero researcher David Perkins often speaks about “wilding the tame, and taming the wild” in education. To explain this concept, he has developed a tool he refers to as a “wild-ometer.” The innovato-meter presented here is a respectful adaptation of Perkins’s original concept.