

# Observing *Hashkafa's* Teacher Learning Communities: Why, How, and What?

## Why observe teacher professional learning communities?

The *Hashkafa* Program took up the challenge of leading substantive change in teachers' professional development.

The Program is founded on the insight that opening the classroom door and observing teaching and instruction are crucial for improving pedagogy.

Similarly, we believe that observing a learning community is crucial for its growth and development.

The purpose of the observation is to identify phenomena, patterns, and points of interest as the basis for discussion and reflective thinking in the community, about the community, and, more broadly, regarding *Hashkafa* communities and the Program in its entirety.

## What is the Observation Tool and how is it used?\*

The Observation Tool is intended to provide guidelines for observing *Hashkafa* communities, focusing on **the core elements of their work**:

- **Establishing a culture of shared learning.** This refers to the relations within the community and comprises two components: **commitment to a shared goal** and **engagement in productive discourse**.
- **Investigating and improving teaching.** This refers to the community's work and comprises two elements: **focus on teaching and learning processes** and **reflective action**.

The Tool offers a number of points for observing each of these components, with the observer instructed to gather evidence of each point from the community meeting (see Page 2). The Observation Fan is intended to assist with processing the evidence gathered and with the discussion of its ramifications for the community.

The Observation Tool can be used in a number of different ways, including:

- Community self-observation. This can be performed by one of the community members or in rotation by members. The community can decide on the frequency of observations and on the allocation of the observer role. This type of observation will constitute the basis for a discussion in the community about different dimensions of its activity and possible courses of further development.
- Observation by the personal coach/facilitator. Optimally, this type of observation should be conducted at least twice annually. It will constitute the basis for a discussion between the personal coach/facilitator with the leading teacher and with the community.

## Points of Emphasis for the Observation –

- ▶ Although the observation of the community is in relation to a group comprised of individuals, it does not focus on any specific individual.
- ▶ Not all of the community's characteristics are present and represented at all times or at every meeting, and therefore they should not all be expected to manifest in a single observation.
- ▶ The evidence that emerges from the observation will be processed taking into consideration context (community age, working environment, etc.) and community members' perceptions and insights.
- ▶ Use of the Observation Tool requires on-going comprehension and practice, as well as a willingness to learn.
- ▶ Communities develop along a variety of paths and in many forms, evolving in different ways and paces with relation to every component. Accordingly, the Observation Tool should be used a number of times, to allow a unique space of development for each community.

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\* The Observation Tool was developed by the *Hashkafa* Research & Development team, in collaboration with representatives of the professional advisory partners. Any comments or suggestions with regard to the Tool will be appreciated and can be sent to [hashkafa@macam.ac.il](mailto:hashkafa@macam.ac.il).

Community: \_\_\_\_\_

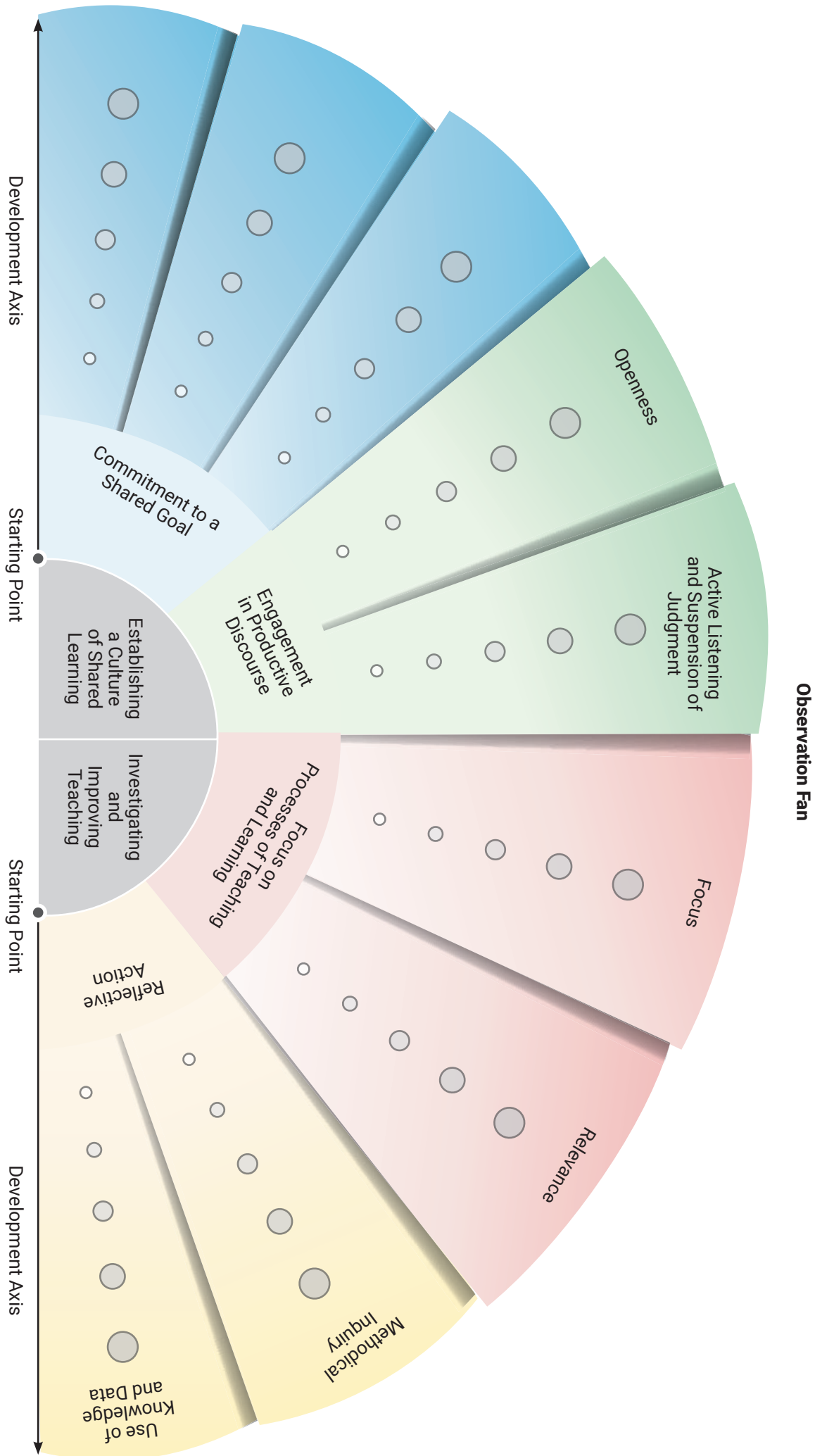
Date of Observation: \_\_\_\_\_

### Observation Tool

Points for Observation of the Community Meeting			Evidence (examples from the community meeting)
Commitment to a Shared Goal	Regularity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Does the community meeting begin on time?</li><li>▶ Are all the community members present for the entire duration of the meeting?</li></ul>	
	Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ How many of the members are actively engaged throughout the meeting?</li><li>▶ Does the engagement include multiple aspects (cognitive, emotional, action, meta-cognitive)?</li></ul>	
	Shared Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Are the community members willing to take on tasks (prepare something for the next meeting, volunteer an observation of their teaching, etc.)?</li><li>▶ Does the community engage (from time to time) in a discussion of its goals and the extent of their achievement?</li><li>▶ How does the community deal with conflicts that arise within its framework?</li></ul>	
Engagement in Productive Discourse	Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Are a range of views expressed during the discussion?</li><li>▶ Do community members share dilemmas, difficulties, and stories and examples that include an element of exposure?</li></ul>	
	Active Listening and Suspension of Judgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ To what extent do the community members actively listen to one another?</li><li>▶ What kinds of statements are made in response to an opinion or idea (supportive, judgmental, clarification requests, in-depth questions, reflective questions)?</li></ul>	
Focus on Teaching and Learning Processes	Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Is there a clear and defined topic of discussion?</li><li>▶ Does the discussion address teaching and/or learning processes in the classroom?</li></ul>	
	Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ How is the topic of discussion chosen? Are the community members involved in this choice and in what way?</li><li>▶ Is the topic of discussion connected to a significant issue of concern to the community in the school?</li></ul>	
Reflective Action	Methodical Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Does the community deliberate the issue in a methodical manner (for example, in a cyclical process that progresses from definition of the problem or issue for inquiry, to formulation of solutions, to experimenting in the classroom, to reflection in the community)?</li><li>▶ Are enough time and thought devoted to understanding the evidence and data before proceeding to solutions and generalizations?</li><li>▶ Are impressions or evidence from classroom implementation of issues discussed in the community raised for discussion by community members?</li></ul>	
	Use of Knowledge and Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Does the community make use of evidence or data from the classroom that are clearly related to the topic or issue?</li><li>▶ Does the community make use of a facilitation and thinking tool and of external knowledge that enriches the discussion?</li></ul>	

**Suggestions for Processing the Observation:**

1. Given the observation and evidence you have gathered, where would you position your community in relation to the different components? (For example, does the community exhibit a low level or high level of engagement? Of shared responsibility?) Mark the community's position on the Observation Fan.
2. How does the evidence support the positioning you've suggested?
3. Do your perceptions converge, or are there significant differences between them? Think about the central differences.
4. What have you learned from the observation? What surprised you?



# Suggestions for Discussion Following the Observation

- ▶ If you have used the Observation Tool in the past, what components have undergone change relative to the previous observation? (If this is the first observation, continue to the next question.)  

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- ▶ What components are important to develop from your perspective? Why?  

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- ▶ How do you aim to characterize your work in these components? How will you develop that work?  

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- ▶ What will assist you with this? What may hinder you?  

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- ▶ Additional thoughts and topics for future discussion.  

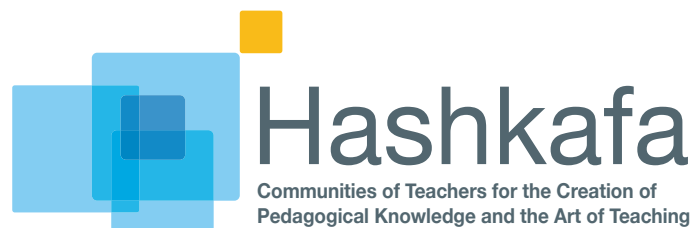
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Website