

The Elements of a Cycle of Professional Learning

Summary of each Element

Training/Input refers to direct instruction on how to implement a strategy or practice in a classroom setting. Quality training includes explanation, modeling, connection to research and results, differentiating for learners at different levels, opportunities for experimentation and discussion, introduction to all materials needed, etc. The input may resemble traditional professional development, or it may include video clips of local teachers implementing the practice, discussing articles about the practice, conducting demonstration lessons, etc. Training/Input may occur in a whole group or small group setting.

Opportunities for Safe Practice refers to allowing teachers multiple chances over several weeks to experiment with the new practice(s) in a low risk environment in their regular teaching settings. During Safe Practice, administrators and ILT members refrain from conducting walkthroughs looking for implementation of the new practice(s). It is important to set very clear expectations for what teachers are to do during their safe practice time – i.e. Use the instructional practice introduced in the training how many times with how many students over how many weeks before observations begin.

Professional Reading refers to having a system in place for circulating articles about the powerful practices being learned throughout the cycle. Not all articles need to be discussed, but all should have important sections highlighted and some key articles should be discussed by all staff using structured protocols. Schools should circulate at least four Professional Readings per cycle.

Peer Observation and Reflection refers to having each teacher observe several other teachers practicing the use of the new practice(s), and being observed themselves by other teachers. Each time a teacher observes another teacher, the two teachers should debrief to discuss what was seen, provide structured feedback and use questions to prompt reflection.

Reflecting on Implementation, Looking At Student Work and Examining Data refers to the important practice of regularly engaging teacher teams in using structured protocols for discussing their challenges with implementing instructional practices, sharing assignments and authentic student work and examining other common performance data that is directly connected to the cycle of professional learning. In City Schools, the time set aside for Collaborative Planning is a key space for teachers to engage in this work.

Monitor, Measure and Modify refers to the ongoing process of having administrators, ILT members and other school staff conduct frequent targeted learning walks to all classrooms, and convert the observations to school-wide or grade-level/department-wide data. The data collected should provide a clear understanding of the level of implementation of the practices being studied in the cycle of professional learning and inform future training and resource allocation.

Note: Although ILT Meetings and Collaborative Planning time are not elements of a Cycle of Professional Learning, they are key spaces for doing work related to the cycle of professional learning and the practice(s) being implemented in the cycle.