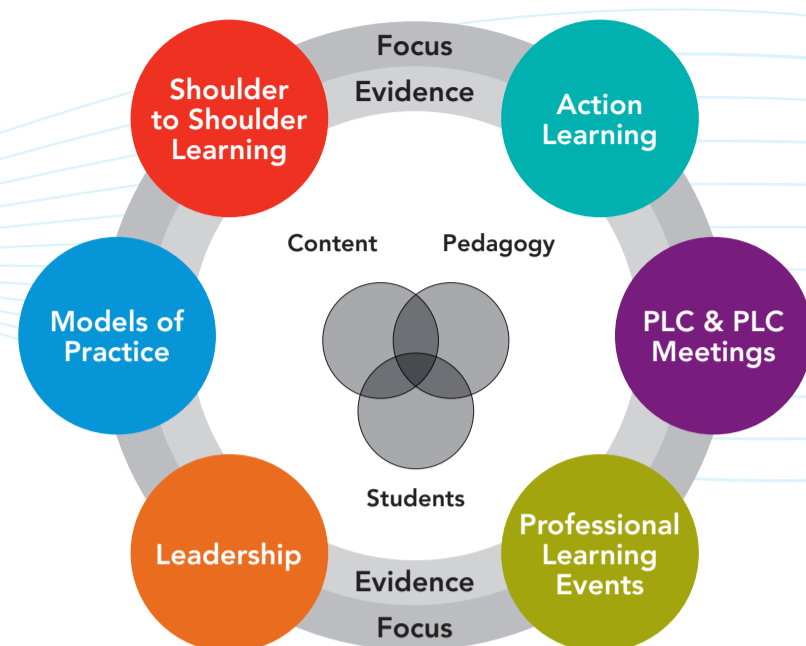


# COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN ACTION



*Belief in Education*



## PREPARING

Using knowledge of their school and their students, educators define a focus for their learning that they believe will create valuable and worthwhile improvements for their school community and in student outcomes. This focus is worded in terms of an instructional question to ensure that their focus remains where it can have the most impact: on their teaching practice.

The Principal establishes opportunities for teachers to deeply investigate student data. The data is explored in a balanced way celebrating teaching and learning strengths and questioning areas of lesser strength. The teachers return to their vision for learning setting the tone for pedagogical inquiry with the knowledge that what they do will make a difference.

The teachers, informed by system, school and classroom data and their knowledge of their students and community, work together to define an instructional question that will become their focus for investigation. The teachers also take the time to celebrate improvements and strengths in their teaching that they can see has had an impact on their data when considered over time.

## ENVISIONING

**Looking In** - During the early weeks of engagement at this phase, teachers take stock of existing practices and knowledge engaging in classroom explorations alongside colleagues noting exemplary practice. When complete, they have a clear understanding of what works well at the school in relation to the instructional question. This serves to ensure that exemplary practice remains part of the instructional program and celebrates the knowledge and expertise that exists within the current teaching staff.

The teachers visit one another in their classrooms. The visits are structured so that the visiting teacher can look for the strengths evident in the teaching in the area under investigation. They collect data about the teaching to share and discuss with the wider professional learning community. The goal is to define the practices that will be kept by the learning community.

Some teachers visit other schools looking for practices that may suit or be adapted to suit their school. Other teachers engage in workshops and professional reading aiming to get a comprehensive picture of the possible alternatives that may help them to solve their instructional question.

**Looking Out** - During the later weeks of this phase, teachers consult the authoritative pedagogy in relation to the school focus in an effort to determine what can be integrated into existing practice in order to answer their instructional question. During these weeks, teachers engage in discussion and debate over educational literature, spot-trial ideas that surface and begin to fashion a complete school-based solution that will lead to improvement.

Groups of teachers begin to trial and play with ideas and pedagogies in their classroom to get a feel for the possible strengths and the suitability for their particular school context. The school collects baseline data in the area under investigation in preparation for measuring the impact of the eventual proposed solution.

At Professional Learning Community Meetings, various members of staff lead deep discussions about the area under investigation. The conversations are informed by the data collected and resources noted during their Shoulder to Shoulder visits and participation in Professional Learning Events. Rich animated discussions about possible approaches occur as they move toward an eventual proposed solution.

## REFINING

This phase calls for teachers to refine the original thinking, to understand the needs of teachers and students in order to ensure that the solution is appropriate for the current context. It demands that teachers become field researchers, problem-solving individually or in groups so that the solution is tried and tested. As teachers explore the proposed school-based solution, they work shoulder to shoulder, trialling, reflecting and discussing. Data is collected as pre and post-assessment of student performance so that the staff can be confident that the pedagogical change will lead to sustainable improvement in student outcomes.

Individuals and groups of teachers begin to work with the proposed solution in their classroom searching for evidence that confirms the solution or points out areas where modification to the approach may be needed to make it 'right' for their school. Adjustments are made to the proposed solution and investigation continues. Evidence is gathered about the impact of the change being explored.

Teachers observe one another trialling ideas and working together side by side with the proposed solution. They collect data on the teaching episodes, student interactions and outcomes of the lessons observed and discuss these at great depth with the teacher they have visited. Together they look for opportunities to celebrate their progress.

At this end of the refining phase, all staff are able to articulate the new practice, are aware of the resources and support structures that will support them and have the confidence (and the data) to know that they will make a difference. At this point, the school has reached universal acceptance of and commitment to a new school-wide practice.

Professional Learning Community Meetings turn to the practicalities, discussing the resources and knowledge needed to ensure success for everyone on staff. Teachers talk about the things that they have seen happening in the classrooms in relation to the proposed solution and engage in professional reading and discussion to deepen their knowledge about the content and pedagogies surrounding their solution.

Teachers who have rich expertise in the area under investigation move quickly to implement the proposed solution. They open their classrooms so that all teachers at the school have the opportunity to observe a working model of the proposed solution. They offer coaching and mentoring for those who feel that they need more support as the proposed solution becomes the identified solution and they move toward the Embedding Phase.

## EMBEDDING

The notion of embedding practice is essential for whole-school alignment and sustainability. This is a phase of focussed action, calling on staff to put their solution into practice. This phase reflects an understanding that change requires discussion, reflection and action over a period of time.

The school leadership team audits the resources to ensure that all teachers have the required resources to implement the identified solution. The Principal talks to each teacher to ensure that they have the professional learning support needed to align their practice with the new school-wide direction. The teachers make decisions about sustainability and ensure appropriate documentation of the new approach.

Teachers explore avenues for extra professional learning: attending workshops, engaging in a series of visits in the classroom of a particularly skilled teacher or seeking out conversations about the practicalities of implementing the identified solution with colleagues.

Teachers are able to articulate their current levels of knowledge and skills in relation to the new school-wide practice and determine their needs in order to participate actively in the approach. They review resourcing levels and learning environments to ensure that they have all that is required in order to implement the new practice. Adaptive and comprehensive professional support is also provided. The result of this phase is commitment to and enthusiasm for a comprehensive whole school approach to teaching and learning.

Teachers observe one another in the classroom implementing the identified solution. They provide feedback, engage in practice-oriented discussions and share resources. They challenge one another to greater levels of expertise and provide support and encouragement as all teachers begin to embed the identified solution into their teaching practice.

Student learning becomes the major source of discussion at Professional Learning Community Meetings with data, evidence and artefacts from lessons being shared and investigated. Conversations about the 'how' of the practices that form the identified solution are frequent.

## CHECKING

At some point in the future, determined by the level of change required by the new school-wide approach, the staff engage in review processes to determine that the approach remains part of classroom practice and that there is evidence of improving student performance. As is always the case with school improvement, constant review and evaluation are scheduled at appropriate times to ensure that the improvement is effective.

All teachers hold each other accountable for the continued implementation of the new whole-school pedagogy and provide support wherever needed. Long term data is monitored to ensure that continued evidence of improvement is seen. Plans are made for how to induct new teachers to the school into the shared pedagogies that all teachers at the school use.

Time is set aside at Professional Learning Community Meetings to revisit the new practices implemented over the last few years to provide opportunities to ensure continued shared understandings. When school and system data is revisited, teachers take the time to note and celebrate evidence of improvement.