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CREATING CONDITIONS
FOR
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Creating Conditions for School Improvement Planning

Phase One: Needs Assessment:

This is the entry point where a wide variety of data sources should be gathered and examined. Trailing data, formative data, both qualitative and quantitative data are used to create a clear picture of your current state. When analyzed, these data will provide you with the information needed to answer the questions, How are our students doing? What is going well? Where are the gaps? How do I know? Keep in mind the availability of any new sources of data to inform the needs assessment.

Phase Two: Identifying a Problem of Practice:

Call it Problem of Practice/Challenge of Practice... From the data, you have disaggregated and analyzed a problem of practice should emerge. This is a reflective process and might take some time to determine.

According to Dewey, the process of reflection for educators begins when they experience a difficulty, troublesome event, or experience that cannot be immediately resolved, what Hugh Munby and Tom Russell (1990) refer to as 'puzzles of practice'. Prompted by a sense of uncertainty or unease, educators step back to analyze their experiences.

What emerges is the problem or challenge of practice.

Elmore et al (Instructional Rounds in Education, 2009, 102) stated that a problem of practice 'comes from data, dialogue, and current work'. It 'is grounded in some kind of evidence, preferably shared evidence'. For schools' problems of practice

focus on the instructional core

are directly observable

are actionable

connect to a broader strategy of improvement (contribute to BIPSA goals)

are high leverage

Phase Three: Goal Setting for Student Learning:

This is a key phase. Goal setting brings structure and track-ability to improvement planning and implementation. Without clearly articulated improvement goals, monitoring becomes even more challenging. Goal setting provides the opportunity to move from somewhat vague resolutions to a verifiable trajectory towards a goal or objective. It allows for milestones to be set along the way, monitoring moments to inform your journey.

 "One of the greatest challenges to team success is the inattention to results. . .. But there is no getting around the fact that the only measure of a great team—or a great organization—is whether it accomplishes what it sets out to accomplish. . .. When it comes to how a cohesive team measures its performance, one criterion sets it apart from noncohesive ones: its goals are shared across the entire team" (Lencioni, 2012, pp. 65–66). As outlined in the Ontario Leadership Framework, goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. As well the goals need to be student focused and monitor-able. Here are some considerations when developing your math goal(s).

1. **(Be Specific)** When setting a goal, **be specific** about what you want to accomplish. Clarity is key. A specific goal will provide focus and motivation to achieve. Think about this as the mission statement for your goal. This isn't a detailed list of how you're going to meet a goal - that becomes apparent through your strategy - but it should include an answer to some popular 'w' questions:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- Why is this goal important?
- Who has a role to play? Who are our partners?
- Where is it located (classroom, school, system)?
- What resources are needed? Are there any constraints?

2. **(Measurable)** What **metrics** are you going to use to determine if you meet the goal? What will you see, hear and feel when you reach your goal? This makes a goal more tangible because it provides a way to measure or describe progress. How will you monitor progress? If it's a goal that's going to take a prolonged period of time to achieve, set some milestones by considering specific tasks to accomplish along the way. It is often suggested that what gets measured in relation to goals, gets done.

3. **(Attainable)**Is your goal attainable? This focuses on the importance of a goal as perceived by educators throughout the system. Do they feel they can contribute to the attainment of the goal? Is the goal a stretch but within reach? What would it take to be successful? What are the opportunities? What are the constraints? The goal is meant to inspire motivation rather than discourage. Think about how to accomplish the goal and if you have the capacity yet to do so.

4. **(Relevant)** Relevance refers to focusing on something that makes sense with the broader goal(s). In terms of goal setting this would be finding the precise "inch" so you can go a mile deep. Why this goal? What is the objective behind the goal? Will this goal really achieve that objective? Checking for relevance provides an opportunity to ensure the goal is aligned with the urgent student learning need. Will this goal leverage the kind of change we want to see for our students?

5. **(Time-Bound)** The provision of a timeline helps to frame the improvement journey. It provides 'something to work toward', can be motivating and may create a sense of urgency. It's best if timelines are realistic and flexible, especially as monitoring evidence emerges and informs next steps. Ask specific questions about the goal timeline and what can be accomplished within that time period given the opportunities and constraints.

> ## Only after creating your Goal for Student Learning
> ## can a Theory of Action be created.

Phase Four: Theory of Action. A theory of action is "your best thinking made explicit… Your rationale for choosing one strategy over another…Your predicted course of action with identified checkpoints and evidence that it's working, or not." The theory of action is often written as an If...Then statement. Schon and Argyris (1992) refer to the 'Theory of Action' as having two parts -espoused theories of what we say we do or want to do and theories in use which are about what actually happens in practice.

Elmore et al (Instructional Rounds in Education, 2009, 40-41) describe a theory of action as 'the storyline that makes a vision and a strategy concrete. It provides a map that carries the vision through the organization'.
This is especially helpful when we think about the role of implementation and monitoring in determining whether we're doing/attaining what we say we will do. The theory of action statement helps to define this work.

Typically, a theory of action follows the following format:

Proposed Strategy:

If we do this, (describe in detail)

Then "X" will happen in the classroom.

And we will see this result in….

As mentioned earlier you must have a goal before you can develop a theory of action.

Richard Elmore in his book Instructional Rounds in Education (2009) describes the impact of a theory of action**.**

· Aligns intended theory with the realities of work within an actual organization.

· Connects strategy to the actions and relationships critical to good instruction and student learning.

· Identifies the mutual dependencies that are required to get the complex work of…improvement done.

· Grounded in research or evidence-based practice.

· Begins with a statement of a causal relationship between what I/we do and what constitutes a good result in the organization

· High leverage for achievement and equity

· Powerful enough to transform programs and practices

(Adapted from *Instructional Rounds in Education* – Elizabeth A. City, Richard F. Elmore, Sarah E. Fiarman and Lee Teitel, 2009)

Phase Five: Planning for Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies

Only after conducting a needs assessment, identifying a problem of practice, goal setting for student learning, creating a theory of action can a plan be devised for monitoring and evaluations strategies. Developing and executing this plan is critical and will provide prescribed and agreed upon time for regular check-ins to answer the questions: What's changing and who's better off as a result? Are things getting better for students? How do we know? (From slide 12) Are we making progress in closing the gap between where we were and where we want to be? What's changing in the instructional core? What are we learning about our under-served students? What are we doing that's having an impact? Regularly assessing progress provides opportunities for collective-reflection and collective-adjustment.

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