Literacy Improvement
PARTNERSHIP

Facilitating Improvement in Teacher Practice

Learning Module 1 Workbook

Framing the Series

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Acknowledgments

This module series includes work that has been adapted from successful strategies developed by Alicia Bowman and Kim Austin for the Regional Education Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. We would like to acknowledge the Center for the Collaborative Classroom and Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada, for their partnership in this work. We would also like to acknowledge the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for its contributions to the field that are cited in this work.

Alicia Bowman and Kim Austin at WestEd developed these workbooks as supplemental materials to the *Facilitating Improvement in Teacher Practice* slide decks developed under REL West.

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Module 1: Learning targets and agenda

Learning targets:

- Understand why continuous improvement is important for student success.
- Consider the expectations for the series and what success looks like.
- Begin to build a community of practice.

Agenda

	Key content
Opening	• Welcome • Logistics
Part 1	• What is continuous improvement, and why is it important? • Expectations for the series

Part 2	• Developing a learning community
	  ○ Community agreements
	  ○ What is important to you?

Closing & Next Steps	• Module review • Action period work

What is continuous improvement and why is it important?

What is continuous improvement?

The term "continuous improvement" is often used to describe action and reflection, organized in a repeating cycle, to get improved results over time.

We have four key improvement questions that we use when engaging in improvement work:

1. What are our priority needs?

2. What is the problem we are trying to solve?

3. What might we change or introduce and why?

4. How will we test and build confidence in our changes?

Source: Adapted from Langley (2009).

The continuous improvement process has a structure that you apply to organize your improvement work to drive continuous improvement. Generally, a continuous improvement process structure includes …:

- A needs assessment.
- Problem identification.
- Root cause analysis.
- Multiple inquiry cycles.
- Implementation.

The overall goal of this series is to use continuous improvement methods to improve Tier 1 instruction with systematic, collaborative, job-embedded structures and processes of reflecting on instructional practice, guided by goals and data. The modules are designed to support educational leaders—principals, coaches, and teacher leaders—in engaging in this type of learning together with teachers.
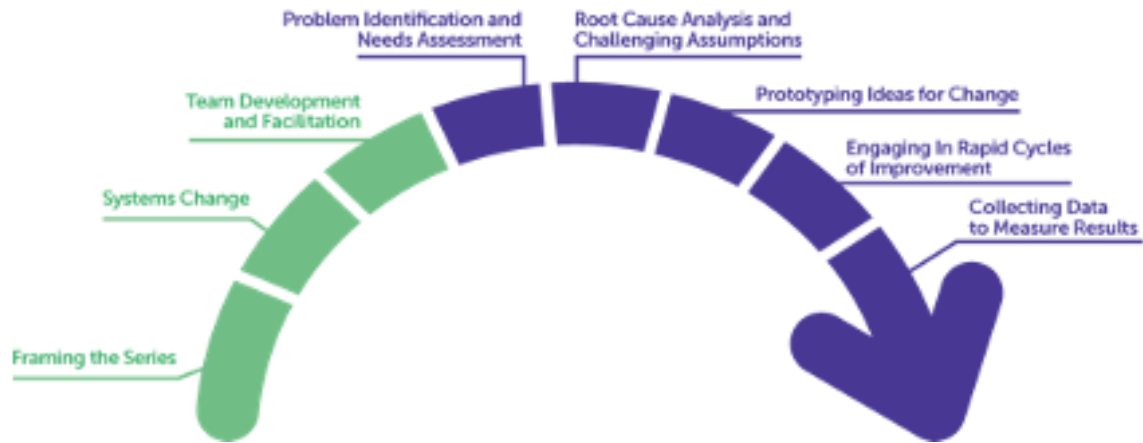
Expectations for the series

During this series, participants will:

- Complete eight, half-day modules.
- Identify a team to work with.
- Complete 2–3 hours of planning and team meetings between each module.

Learning Arc for the Modules

Module 1: Develop a general understanding of continuous improvement, understand the overall structure of the learning series, and unpack your motivations for leading continuous improvement work.

Module 2: Understand what systems are and how you can impact systems change.

Module 3: Learn about team development, facilitation practices, and routines to improve instructional practice.

Module 4: Explore methods to identify and prioritize areas for improvement.

Module 5: Understand the importance of—and explore methods for—a root cause analysis to identify the problem you need to solve.

Module 6: Identify what you will change and the development of a specific change idea to test.

Module 7: Engage in inquiry cycles and continuous improvement methods for rapid testing.

Module 8: Explore different types of data to measure results.

The modules are separated into clusters of professional development topics, with supporting materials, for principals, coaches, and teacher leaders to learn from, then use with the educators they support.

The intended outcomes of the modules are to

- Develop—or deepen—your understanding of continuous improvement processes.
- Strengthen your capacity to facilitate teacher learning and collaboration.
- Try out structures and routines that embed continuous improvement methods in daily work.
- Reflect on and improve a culture of collaboration that supports transparency and organizational learning.

What is something that you are looking forward to learning more about as you move through the modules?

What would be helpful for the teams you work with?

Defining success

For continuous improvement work to be effective, there needs to be agreement around what success will look like. What individuals in a system care about helps to define success.

Self-reflection

In your experience, what makes teacher collaboration successful?

For continuous improvement work to be effective, there needs to be agreement around what success will look like. What a system cares about helps to define success.

Every district and school has its own unique "sphere of success." A sphere of success is a set of students for whom the current system and practices are working.

Regardless of how successful a school or district is, most have groups of students who are in this sphere and groups who are not.

Example definitions of success:

- Success is defined by test scores, classwork, and homework.
- Success is defined by standardized test scores.
- Success is defined by a group project score.
- Success is defined by demonstrated understanding of content.
- Success is defined by participation and engagement.

Small-group discussion

How do you define success in your context?
Who is inside the sphere of success, and who is not?

Self-reflection

What does it look like and feel like when you have successfully supported someone?
Why is that important to you?

For students to find success in classrooms, teachers need to find success as teachers.

Developing a learning community

"A community is a group of people who acknowledge their interconnectedness, have a sense of their common purpose, respect their differences, share in group decision making as well as in responsibility for the actions of the group, and support each other's growth."
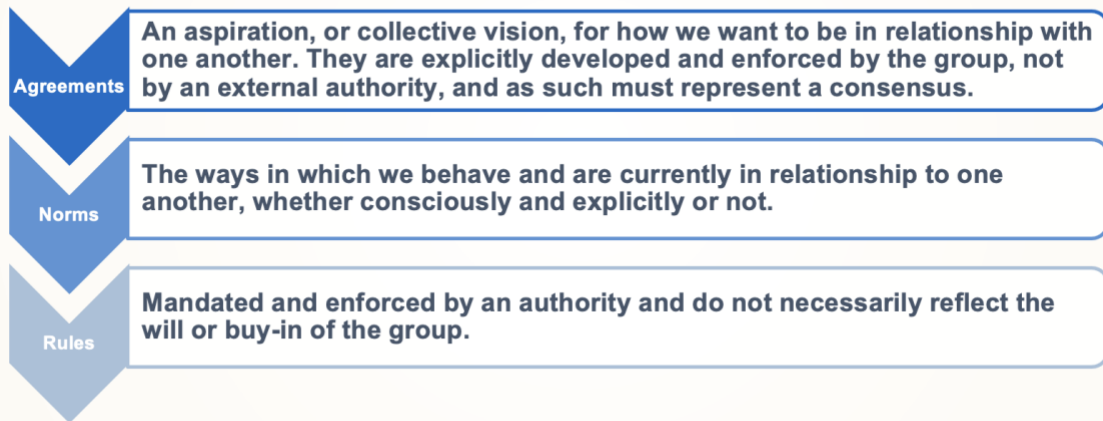
– Sheldon Berman

Source: National Equity Project (2020)

Why community agreements matter

- Adult relationships shape group culture.
- A healthy culture is key to personal sustainability in the challenging jobs of education.
- Teams can't achieve their goals in a hostile, disrespectful, or undermining group culture.
- Some of the most critical conversations teams need to have are emotional, painful, and uncomfortable (e.g., reviewing data, examining individual practice, acknowledging mistakes), but we won't engage or make ourselves vulnerable without emotional safety and trust.

Nondiscussables

"An important part of awareness is attending to 'nondiscussables.' Nondiscussables are subjects sufficiently important that they are talked about frequently but are so laden with anxiety and fearfulness that these conversations take place only in the parking lot, the rest rooms, the playground, the carpool, or the dinner table at home. Fear abounds that open discussion of these incendiary issues—at a faculty meeting, for example—will cause a meltdown. The nondiscussable is the elephant in the living room. Everyone knows that this huge pachyderm is there, right between the sofa and the fireplace, but we go on mopping and dusting and vacuuming around it as if it did not exist."

–Roland S. Barth (2002)

Community agreements help to create a learning community by acknowledging the need for a safe space for discussing "nondiscussables," by agreeing to what we all need to create and maintain that space.

Pair share

What are the nondiscussables in your context? What would make it safe to discuss the nondiscussables openly?

Generating community agreements

Sample community agreements:

- *Stay Present   *Assume Positive Intent   *Confidentiality
- *Listen to One Another   *Ask Questions
- *Speak Your Truth Without Blame or Judgment
- *Monitor Your Airtime

Individual reflection

What do you need from every person in this group in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive, and trusting so that we can do our best work and serve our students well?

Small-group activity

In trios

- Each person shares their top two agreements.
- As a group, agree on your top two to three agreements in priority order, and rewrite each one in a simple phrase or sentence.
- Enter your agreements into the sticky note slide for the whole group to review.

Whole group

- Review and clarify all agreements on the sticky notes.
- Group similar agreements together.

Self-reflection

Can you imagine doing this activity with a group of teachers? How might you adapt the activity for your own use?

Next steps

Module review

During this module, our learning targets were to:

Understand why continuous improvement is important for student success.

- Definition of continuous improvement.
- Improvement questions.
- Continuous improvement process.

Consider the expectations for the series and what success looks like.

- Learning arc and module topics.
- Defining success.

Begin to build a community of practice.

- Community agreements.

Action period for Module 1

Between now and the next session, begin thinking about a team that you would like to work with during this series.

- What teams are you currently working with or could you potentially work with?
- What are their strengths and areas of growth?
- How much access do you have to work with each team?
- What kind of relationship do you have with the team members?

Bonus reading: Read "The culture builder" by Roland Barth on the ASCD website. Continue to think about what topics may be nondiscussables in your school(s).

Notes

Notes