CYCLE OF SUCCESS

WEEK 4
FINAL ASSESSMENT

ANCHORING
THE STAFF

WEEK 3
PROFILES OF PRACTICE

WEEK 1
ADDING TO THE TOOLBOX

WEEK 2
MIDCOURSE CORRECTION

LEARNING SEQUENCE MELDS DISJOINTED ACTIVITIES INTO A STREAMLINED STRUCTURE

By Colleen Broderick

It began with the challenge of focus and alignment, and a template for a work plan. Six of us were sitting around a dining room table. Dirty glasses and bowls emptied of nuts and chips were buried beneath unrolled butcher paper and coded surveys of teachers' suggestions for next steps. Our charge was to refine the school's professional development structures for the upcoming year. In reviewing staff feedback, we recognized many of our designs had fallen short in terms of meeting the staff's need for autonomy and differentiation for their own learning, as well as connecting the work we did as staff to improve student learning. A clear question surfaced: How could we design professional development to empower the learning of individuals to serve the growth of an organization that was all about student success?

The leadership team at Mapleton Expeditionary School for the Arts (MESA) in Thornton, Colo., responded to this question with its version of a teaching and learning cycle. In our first year of implementation, we developed a cycle to achieve the commonalities of teachers' suggestions through four primary goals:

- To advance schoolwide implementation of a single structure that we invested in the previous year;
- To improve assessment to better understand instructional needs, our work plan focus;

- To align and link multiple professional learning designs that were in place; and
- To empower the learning needs and expertise on staff.

As a school designer responsible for supporting the school in implementing the Expeditionary learning model, I planned and facilitated professional learning aligned with school improvement plans and served as a curriculum coordinator and instructional coach. The teaching and learning cycle was the primary organizing structure to support this work across the school.

A SNAPSHOT OF STRUCTURES

When we introduced the teaching and learning cycle to staff, MESA had in place a number of key structures and routines. These structures included a six-week coaching cycle supported by an instructional mentor for all teachers, a routine of Looking at Student Work, and whole-staff Wednesday morning professional development. Previously, these pieces, although powerful, felt disconnected and sometimes frenetic, as well as driven by an agenda that was created at the administrator's table. Instead of moving the staff forward together, these structures often created questions about priorities. The teaching and learning cycle served to link multiple learning designs to add depth and consistency to a shared dialogue grounded in student learning.

ANCHORING THE STAFF
GROUPING: Whole staff
LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARD: Learning Communities

We discovered the previous year that, to leverage the work of the community, we needed to be clear about our direction by identifying and communicating the knowledge and skills that would be essential for teachers to accomplish our schoolwide goal around assessment. To reach this end, we opened the school year with a shared learning experience aligned to our schoolwide target: "I can use learning targets and quality assessments OF learning to access what my students know and are able to do." The two-day, on-site institute provided an opportunity to frame our work together and create the conditions where teachers could use the learning communities embedded in the teaching and learning cycle structure. Through a series of short, focused workshops, teachers were introduced to the core templates and protocols that would serve our work throughout the year during our weekly 75-minute meetings. In addition to the protocols and templates, we provided strategies for facilitation and instilled a deep belief that everyone had the capacity to lead their teams. At the core of our learning was the role and design of learning targets in unit design. We accomplished two core tasks

by presenting the big picture of the year's learning and by providing intentional planning time that aligned with the school's goal. Teachers had the opportunity to self-assess against the schoolwide target and set individual goals for their coaching cycle, and they had the opportunity to set a four-week student achievement target informed by standardized data that would initiate the cycle.

WEEK 1: Adding to the toolbox
GROUPING: Small group, staff choice
LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS: Learning Communities, Learning Designs

With their four-week achievement targets in hand, teachers used the first week of the cycle to dig into research to refine their instruction in ways that empowered them to respond to student needs based on data results. We learned that once teachers had a goal for their own growth and student learning, the transfer from staff room to classroom was more consistent. The four-week student achievement target, recorded on a template that prompted teachers to consider the skills and knowledge needed for a defined assessment task, gave me a snapshot of staff needs from which I would choose a number of texts for their learning. The first week was an opportunity for shared inquiry — to build the proverbial toolbox of instruction by drawing on colleagues' thinking and expertise.

> **Mapleton Expeditionary School of the Arts**
> Thornton, Colo.
> Grades: **7-12**
> Enrollment: **542**
> Staff: **33**
> Racial/ethnic mix:
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | White: | **43.9%** |
> | Black: | **2.6%** |
> | Hispanic: | **49.6%** |
> | Asian/Pacific Islander: | **3.2%** |
> | Native American: | **0.7%** |
> | Other: | **0%** |
> Limited English proficient: **28.4%**
> Free/reduced lunch: **57.7%**
> Special education: **9.6%**
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After a brief text walk, teachers would choose a text to investigate with colleagues. All the articles aligned with assessment for learning strategies, providing a snapshot of instructional practice that would move us towards our schoolwide goal. The groupings were rarely reflective of a single grade level or discipline, which generated good conversation across the school and provided an opportunity for teachers to serve their individual learning goals. I chose text not only for its content, but for its brevity and practicality as well. We all learned that 75 minutes, when crafted with care, was plenty of time to grow as an educator.

After reading the articles, teachers would use the three levels of text protocol to "call out" essential lines of the text and consider implications for practice. Since we used the protocol every week one of our cycles, we were able to appreciate a growing sense of grace of facilitation and depth of dialogue.

WEEK 2: Midcourse correction
GROUPING: Discipline-based teams
LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS: Learning Communities, Data

With our goal under way and strategies in process, we designed the second week to analyze and respond to the two-week formative assessment data based on the four-week achievement goal. We were slowing the pace of schooling so teachers could determine if students were on track to demonstrate understanding toward the four-week achievement goal, and if not, what changes in instruction needed to happen to ensure students were successful. One teacher fondly called this week "triage." It was our opportunity to talk with teammates, to problem solve, and to share successful practices in order to build and critique lesson plans to support student success.

> One teacher fondly called the midcourse correction week "triage."

Building on a Looking at Student Work routine that we used the previous year, teachers analyzed a formative assessment task of one rotation of students in advance of Wednesday's team time. Commonly, teachers analyzed this rotation in collaboration with their instructional support point person or a teammate. Using the student work to prompt reflection, they tracked their thinking on a template, which included space to list the strengths of student understanding as well as weaknesses, ranging from missing information to misconceptions. In teams, again using a protocol to guide conversation and thinking, teachers shared their reflections and collectively problem solved instructional responses. Learning from the first week often took root in the resulting lesson plan. As a roving facilitator, I discovered this was one of the most powerful weeks within the cycle. At this time, colleagues came together to ensure that kids were learning, and a spirit of instructional innovation permeated our professional space.

WEEK 3: Profiles of practice
GROUPING: Grade-level teams
LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS: Learning Communities, Learning Designs

So, now that we used time to monitor progress and design a lesson, teachers (eventually) embraced the opportunity to get feedback based on the implementation of their instructional response. Our original plan was based on the Japanese lesson study model, but in a small, public school where coverage was difficult and the content of lessons varied significantly from classroom to classroom, we decided to use video study. Observations the previous year highlighted the fact that the power is in the practice, not in the written plan.

Feedback from peers using a defined protocol was tied to the instructional goals linked to teacher and student achievement goals, and we used the workshop lesson design template that the staff developed the year before. Although the teams gave feedback to one instructor, this was an opportunity for all staff to see models of instruction that may improve their practice. We intentionally grouped teachers in grade-level teams so they had access to each other's routines in an effort to build more consistency across the grade level. Over the course of a year, there were enough rounds of the teaching and learning cycle that each teacher had the opportunity to present once.

WEEK 4: Final assessment
GROUPING: Grade-level teams, whole staff, discipline-based teams
LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARD: Data

Rounding off the cycle was a double whammy. The fourth week served two purposes and included two sessions. The first goal was to communicate achievement results for the four-week achievement goal; the second was to determine the next four-week achievement goal that would set the cycle into motion again. Although most of the teaching and learning cycle work was designed to fit into a 75-minute block, we had an additional 50 minutes during our early release Wednesdays that we used to address other needs of our professional community. During the fourth week, we used all our professional development time to complete — and continue — the cycle.

In much the same way as the second week, teachers were expected to analyze a rotation of student work prior to meeting as a staff. Again, a template helped them to track their thinking to inform the dialogue with their teams. Their first goal as a team was to represent this grade-level achievement data on a simple data board that identified the achievement goal, the assessment, and a summary of achievement for each of their disciplines. This provided a quick snapshot of achievement across grade levels. This first round of reflection was team-based. What did they notice? Where did data suggest a need for interventions? Where did data suggest successful strategies we may be able to replicate in order to support students? Then, using a protocol that supported staff in reflecting on trends, staff analyzed the data results across all grade levels to investigate where students successfully mastered the target, taking similar team-based conversations schoolwide.

This week is also designed to set up the next round of the teaching and learning cycle. Shifting into discipline-based teams for the final 50 minutes, teachers revisited their curriculum plans to identify the next stage of instruction, clarify assessment tasks, and articulate the next four-week achievement goal.

Many clear lessons emerged from the implementation of the teaching and learning cycle design. Some we were prepared for, others were icing on the cake. The initial days that anchored the staff were crucial. Not only did the leadership team define a clear pathway for the school, the teachers defined an equally clear pathway for student learning. Without that time to plan thoroughly in advance, teachers would not have been able to leverage the time with colleagues in valuable ways. Ad-

TEACHING AND LEARNING CYCLE FACILITATOR'S GUIDE AT A GLANCE

Stage	Facilitator considerations
Anchoring the staff	**Consider the schoolwide goal:** • What knowledge and skills do staff need to master? • How can we break these down into targets that can be supported and measured? • What learning experience can we provide to the whole staff to ground them in a shared goal? • What data can inform them of students' needs, to engage them in the need to learn? • How will teachers use the foundational experience to inform planning and their own learning needs?
Week 1: Adding to the toolbox	**Consider staff learning needs based on unit planning and teacher goals:** • What through-lines emerge from teachers' planning documents and coaching plans? • What text will provide opportunity for transfer to practice? • How can the text align with the knowledge and skills staff need to master to the schoolwide goal? • What protocol will best support staff dialogue? • How will we support facilitation?
Week 2: Midcourse correction	**Consider student work:** • How will we support teachers in choosing effective formative assessment data? • Where will the time come from for premeeting analysis? • What does evidence of learning look like? • How will we support facilitation? • How will we support/ensure transfer?
Week 3: Profiles of practice	**Consider teacher work:** • How will we coordinate filming a lesson? • What space and tools will be available for small groups to view their colleague's video during professional development time? • What segment of the lesson aligns with the instructional goal and provides an opportunity for rich feedback? • How will we support facilitation?
Week 4: Final assessment	**Consider the data:** • Where will the time come from for premeeting analysis? • How will we support staff in compiling and representing data in effective ways? • What materials and resources do we need to build the data boards?

ditionally, the multiple grouping configurations led to a significant shift in culture. We had a good staff to begin with, but after the third round of the teaching and learning cycle, we noticed teachers were having instructional conversations with just about anybody who would listen. The shifting of groups built a true community of learners. The teaching and learning cycle was not without its hiccups, however, and we still don't have an answer to some of the trickier conundrums. For example, the pacing of a four-week goal remains controversial on staff, and we questioned whether it drives more tests rather than an authentic continuum of assessment. In spite of this, we do know that our core learning designs were better with the teaching and learning cycle. We were able to sequence core designs to feed each other and provide the space for teachers to drive their learning. The teaching and learning cycle empowered us to use the learning of a community to benefit the success of kids. And kids did indeed benefit. As teachers sharpened their assessment dialogue, students became more precise in talking about their learning. Not only did students have more evidence in their portfolios to support learning reflections due to the clear assessment tasks that emerged from the cycle, but data from the Colorado Student Assessment Program highlighted an increase in proficiency in all 14 tests taken. MESA also continued to get 100% of student applicants accepted into college for the second year running, the first of Colorado's public high schools to achieve such a feat.

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