Professional learning as a creative process:
Framing the conversations

The purpose of this learning map is to help shape a variety of conversations around professional growth opportunities for individuals, teams, or academic divisions. This map builds upon the work of the professional learning team at Adlai E. Stevenson High School and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to differentiate five phases of learning, recognizing that individuals and teams enter into professional development with and from a variety of viewpoints, commitment levels, and understandings.

While the following five phases are interconnected, they are not meant to be strictly linear or to label teams or teachers. Instead, they help frame conversations around professional development within ongoing cycles of continuous improvement.

Use this tool to help build appropriate professional learning opportunities for individuals and teams.

PREPARATION

During this phase, professional learning focuses on becoming immersed in new learning, asking questions, and understanding how theory and practice are interconnected.

In this stage, teams or teachers may be working with new ideas around an issue, feeling frustrated with new initiatives, or curious about new or different viewpoints surrounding the issue at hand. These teams have not arrived at consensus on key points for moving forward.

The central questions might be: Is there a shared understanding? How does the new learning connect to better curriculum and instruction?

Possible team or teacher indicators

- Cannot define key terms.
- Present little or no evidence of usage of initiative or ideas in practice.
- Some aspects of new initiative may be a taboo topic for discussion.
- No evidence of understanding how changes will affect practice.

Professional learning may need to focus on

- Defining key terms and concepts
- Developing common understanding
- Creating measurable targets
- Researching

INCUBATION

During this phase, professional learning focuses on brainstorming, discussing and analyzing possibilities, thinking about better approaches, and reflection that leads to insights.

Teams in this stage may need to brainstorm and consider how they can best use new ideas and design them for student success. The intention of this stage is for educators to think through an entire process and usage of new concepts or practices and explore a variety of best practices for implementation.

The central question might be: What better ideas and practices can be generated?

Possible team or teacher indicators

- Can define key terms, but may need clarification at times.
- Presents minimal evidence of usage in practice.
- Discussions of new initiative may exist but are unstructured and informal.
- Some evidence of exploring and discussing how changes will affect practice, but no changes are made.

Professional learning may need to focus on

- Comparing various understandings of topic
- Developing common understanding
- Analyzing measurable targets
- Research and discussion

INSIGHT

During this phase, professional learning focuses on working with emergent ideas and building towards implementation.

Individuals and teams are developing insights into making effective use of the new initiative for their students. Data are starting to become a useful resource for teams and an essential component of their discussions. They have not entirely made the jump to fully using the new practices, but have implemented elements of them.

The central question might be: How might implementation of the idea be supported?

Possible team or teacher indicators

- Can define key terms when given a discussion frame.
- Presents evidence of usage in practice, but only within certain areas.
- Data-based discussions of new initiative are structured, but with no strong purpose.
- Opportunities to reflect on changes in practice are frequent and formal, but no changes are made.

Professional learning may need to focus on

- Analyzing various aspects of topic
- Deploying the new initiative or changes
- Collecting data and exploring how to read it
- Starting to use new practices

EVALUATION

During this phase, professional learning focuses on evaluating how well an insight is connected to successful outcomes.

At this stage, teams are exploring and using data collection and analysis tools. The team asks how well the new change is working. Teams can start exploring scaling the changes and analyzing data for mastery of understanding. These teams are ready to use data to inform their instruction and identify levels of performance.

The central questions might be: How well did that work? Why?

Possible team or teacher indicators

- Can define key terms in impromptu situations.
- Presents strong evidence of usage in practice.
- Data-based discussions of new initiative are structured and with a strong purpose.
- Opportunities to reflect on changes in practice are frequent and formal, and changes are made most of the time.

Professional learning may need to focus on

- Analyzing various stages of the new initiative or changes
- Collecting data and exploring how to analyze it and use it to change practice
- Using new practices
- Creating feedback loops to analyze implementation, measure targets, and make changes to fit individual needs

ELABORATION

During this phase, professional learning focuses on furthering an idea or how to take an idea to the next step.

Teams are working together to apply the ideas and learning beyond the initial prototypes and trials. Action research projects may be evident. In this phase, teachers may use something that helps them with analytical software to identify areas of growth. Elements in this stage include heavy reflection, collective team research, and changes in practice.

The central questions might be: How might the idea connect to other applications? Can it be used in different capacities?

Possible team or teacher indicators

- Can define key terms in impromptu situations and create new questions.
- Presents strong evidence of usage in practice and tracking of results to look for patterns of growth or regression.
- Structured and purposeful data-based discussions exist.
- Opportunities to reflect on practice are frequent and formal, and changes are made all of the time.

Professional learning may need to focus on

- Predictive and reactive data analysis
- Feedback loops
- Using technology at a mastery level

Adapted from: Reibel, A. & Onuscheck, M. (n.d.) Formative Assessment Learning Map. Session handout.