



Simply knowing what needs to change doesn't tell us how to get there. A learning process can help clarify next steps.

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CALL TO ACTION

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PIVOTING IS MADE EASIER BY AN INTENTIONAL CHANGE PROCESS

When Learning Forward released the book *Becoming a Learning Team* (Hirsh & Crow, 2017), I was an instant fan. At the heart of the book is the learning team cycle, a collaborative learning process for teams of educators to address problems of practice and improve teaching and learning. The cycle brings clarity and structure to continuous improvement so that teams can work together productively and coherently.

The learning team cycle also provides a way to think about a perpetual challenge and the topic of this issue of *The Learning Professional*: pivoting when the need for change becomes clear. Simply knowing what needs to change doesn't tell us how to get there. A learning process can help clarify next steps.

As we consider some important pivots in schools, it's worth revisiting the learning team cycle. It can be used to address all kinds of changes, from new methods for teaching reading, to reducing racial disparities in school discipline, to understanding how to use AI in schools.

The learning team cycle is a five-stage process aligned with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. The five steps are: Analyze data, set goals, learn individually and collaboratively, implement new learning, and monitor, assess, and adjust practice.

I have used the learning team cycle with educators at both district and school levels, and I have seen how the cycle helps people think about and approach change, whether a major pivot or a minor adjustment.

I have also seen how people change course within the cycle. It's not surprising that I most often see pivots occur during the "monitor, assess, and adjust practice" step. At this stage, teams are encouraged to reflect and adjust based on data, evidence, and insight, using questions like these:

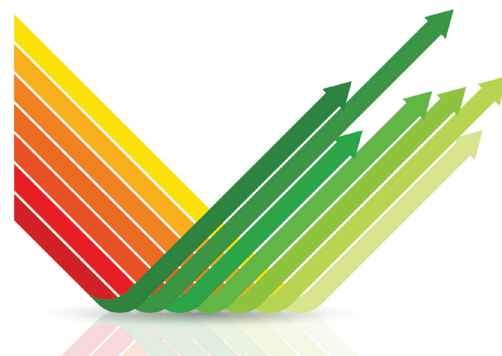
- What evidence do we have that shows we are making progress toward our goals?
- What is the impact of our change on our practice and our students?
- Where do we go from here?
- How can we apply what we are learning in this cycle to upcoming activities?

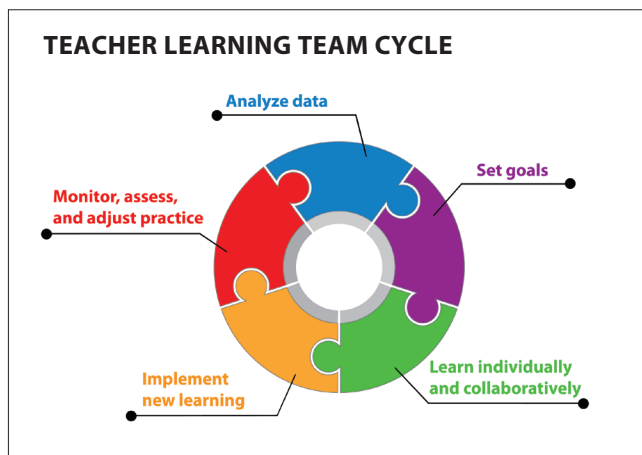
I've learned the following lessons for engaging in this step of monitoring, assessing, and reflecting. Teams looking to pivot may benefit from considering these lessons.

Reflection should be intentional, not an afterthought.

I love this John Dewey truism that is quoted in *Becoming a Learning Team*: "We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (Hirsh & Crow, 2017, p. 88). Yet it's so easy for teams to either gloss over or completely skip the reflective process. It takes intentionality to make the reflection process meaningful.

Facilitating meaningful reflection is about more than simply asking ourselves or our colleagues, "How do you think it went?" It's about going deeper and seeking a clear understanding about what happened and what it means for the work going forward. *Becoming a Learning Team* includes some questions that coaches and other learning facilitators might use to drill down on the specifics. They include — but are not limited to — the following categories and questions:





Source: Hirsh & Crow, 2017.

targeting a subgroup population or compromising students' ability to learn (by placing them in detention or suspension as a punishment). It also opened the door for a broader conversation about equity and fairness. Overall, it was a major learning experience and success for the team and the students it supported.

You might need to pivot more than once, and that's OK.

The learning team cycle is a cycle of continuous improvement. That means new data and evidence may cause the team to pivot a second or third time, and that's perfectly fine. Sometimes it takes time to get to the right approach. Other times, external forces push on us to make changes to apply the latest knowledge and best practices to help students achieve.

While I didn't have the language of the team learning cycle when I was a classroom teacher, my fellow 6th-grade teacher and I operated with this mindset. Over the course of a year and across years, student demographics and needs would change, the school would adopt new curricula and instructional materials, and other contextual elements would shift.

Throughout, we would collaborate to adapt as needed. There were times when it felt like we were constantly pivoting, but one thing was consistent: We were always learning and ensuring that the changes we made were supported by data, evidence, and reflection.

Pivoting to a new way of doing things can feel daunting, but following a series of structured yet flexible steps can make the change process more manageable. The learning team cycle is a great way to do that, putting collaboration and high-quality professional learning at the center.

REFERENCE

Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2017). *Becoming a learning team.* Learning Forward. ■

What happened?

- What did I do? What did students do?
- What was going on around us? When during the day did it occur? Was there anything unusual happening?

Why?

- Why did I choose to act the way I did? What can I surmise about why students acted as they did?
- What was I thinking and feeling, and how might this have affected my behavior?
- How might the context have influenced the experience?
- Are there past experiences — mine or the school's — that may have contributed to the response?

So what?

- What have I learned from this?
- How could I improve?
- How might this change my future thinking, behaving, interactions, lessons?
- What questions remain?

Now what?

- Are there other people I should actively include in reflecting on this lesson?
- Next time a situation like this presents itself, what do I want to remember to think about? How do I want to behave?

- How could I set up conditions to increase the likelihood of productive interactions and learning in the future?

Pivoting doesn't mean failure. It means learning.

I've seen individuals and teams incorrectly think about their need to pivot as some type of failure. "If we had done it right the first time, we would have succeeded," they might say. I suggest an alternative narrative with learning at the core. Phrases this person or team might say include, "Look at what we are learning about ourselves and those we are trying to support," or "Imagine how much stronger we are going to be at addressing this issue as we learn more."

I shared in a previous issue of this journal the story of a high school's leadership team shifting a tardiness policy that was unfairly targeting a subgroup of the building's population. After carefully reflecting on the data and evidence, engaging in conversations with building staff, and carefully reviewing its own enforcement of the policy, the team agreed a pivot was necessary.

From my observations, team members viewed their pivot as a learning experience. They recognized that their new approach would better address the problem they were trying to solve (student tardiness) without unfairly