

Activity 12: Building Coherence in Professional Learning Cycles

Purpose:	In this session, teacher teams will reflect on the extent to which previous professional learning opportunities have impacted their professional practice. They will then analyze sample professional learning cycles to see how an arc of learning sessions can create coherence between the goals and outcomes. They will also identify ways in which each session can be linked to teacher practice and student outcomes. Participants will then work together to determine next steps when planning their next round of professional learning.
Length of Time:	40 minutes
Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample Professional Learning Cycles: 2nd grade math, middle school, 7th grade social studies, 10th grade social studies, 10th grade ELA • (Optional) "Professional Learning Cycle Planning Guide" on p. 78
Essential Questions:	How do you increase coherence in a cycle of Professional Learning? What forms can aligned, coherent Professional Learning Cycles take?

Activity Steps:

1 Introduction and Framing (10 minutes): Just as with teaching, research shows that coherence is an essential element of a successful cycle of professional learning. Coherence between the needs assessment¹, cycle goals, sessions, and outcomes impacts how teachers make sense of the work, how seamlessly they incorporate the learning into their instructional practices, and the results they get (Hassel, 1999). For the purposes of this session, “coherence” is defined as the alignment of the professional learning sessions to the needs assessment and overall cycle goals as well as how strongly each session is rooted in instructional practice and student outcomes.

Share the purpose of this activity, informing participants that they will reflect on the extent to which previous professional learning opportunities have impacted their professional practice. They will next analyze several sample professional learning cycles to see how the arc of the sessions can create coherence between goals and outcomes. They will also identify ways in which individual learning sessions can be linked to both teacher practice and student outcomes. Participants will then work together to determine takeaways to be applied when planning their next round of professional learning.

¹ For more information on needs assessments, please see pages 15 and 73 in the [Handbook for Professional Learning](#).

Ask participants to reflect on the coherence of their most recent professional learning experience by discussing the following questions in triads:

- How, specifically, was your most recent professional learning experience informed by a needs assessment?
- What opportunities did you have to learn new instructional approaches?
- What opportunities did you have to practice these instructional approaches and receive feedback on your practice?
- How was student work used in goal-setting, shaping, or assessing the professional learning?
- To what extent did you reflect on your professional learning or share the outcomes of the learning with the larger school community?

If participants recently engaged in an evaluation of their most recent cycle of learning, this can be referenced here.

- 2 Examination of Sample Professional Learning Cycles (10 minutes):** In pairs or triads, participants compare two different sample professional learning cycles, considering the question: “In what ways do these cycles support coherence between the cycle goals, session goals, and the teachers’ instructional practice?”

Note: If participants are not familiar with the design of the Professional Learning Cycle template, it may be helpful to hand out a blank version of the cycle first to allow participants to orient themselves to the purpose and design of the document. This blank template can be found on page 78 of the [Handbook](#).

- 3 Discussion of Sample Professional Learning Cycles (10 minutes):** Participants consider and discuss the following questions:

- How are the two cycles similar and different?
- What data might have informed the needs assessment that led to these plans?
- What opportunities do the teachers have to learn new instructional approaches? What opportunities do they have to practice these instructional approaches and receive feedback on their practice?
- Where in each cycle are observable measures of student learning considered, and what impact does this have on the cycle’s progression?

Note: Point out that professional learning cycles can be fluid—in other words, what was planned for session four might change based upon what happens during session two or three. This responsiveness keeps the cycle grounded in instructional practice and helps ensure that the sessions offered reflect the current needs of teachers and students.

- 4 Takeaways for Upcoming Cycles (10 minutes):** Brainstorm elements from the sample cycles that can be incorporated into the team’s upcoming professional learning cycles or used by individual groups (departments, grade-level teams) to create coherence around whole-school professional learning activities. Chart ideas to share, coming to consensus on two or three elements that the group feels would have the most significant impact on teacher and student learning.

Extension Activity:

Using the “Professional Learning Cycle Planning Guide” on page 78 of the *Handbook for Professional Learning* and the takeaways generated by this session, teams can collaboratively plan a cycle of professional learning that is informed by a needs assessment². The “Considerations for Planning Professional Learning” document on page 80 and the “Checklist for Planning Professional Learning” on page 76 can also be used as supports throughout this process.

² Refer to pages 15 and 73 in the *Handbook for Professional Learning* to learn more about needs assessments.