LANGUAGE DIVERSITY & LITERACY DEVELOPMENT:
LEADING ADVANCED LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO FOSTER ELLS' ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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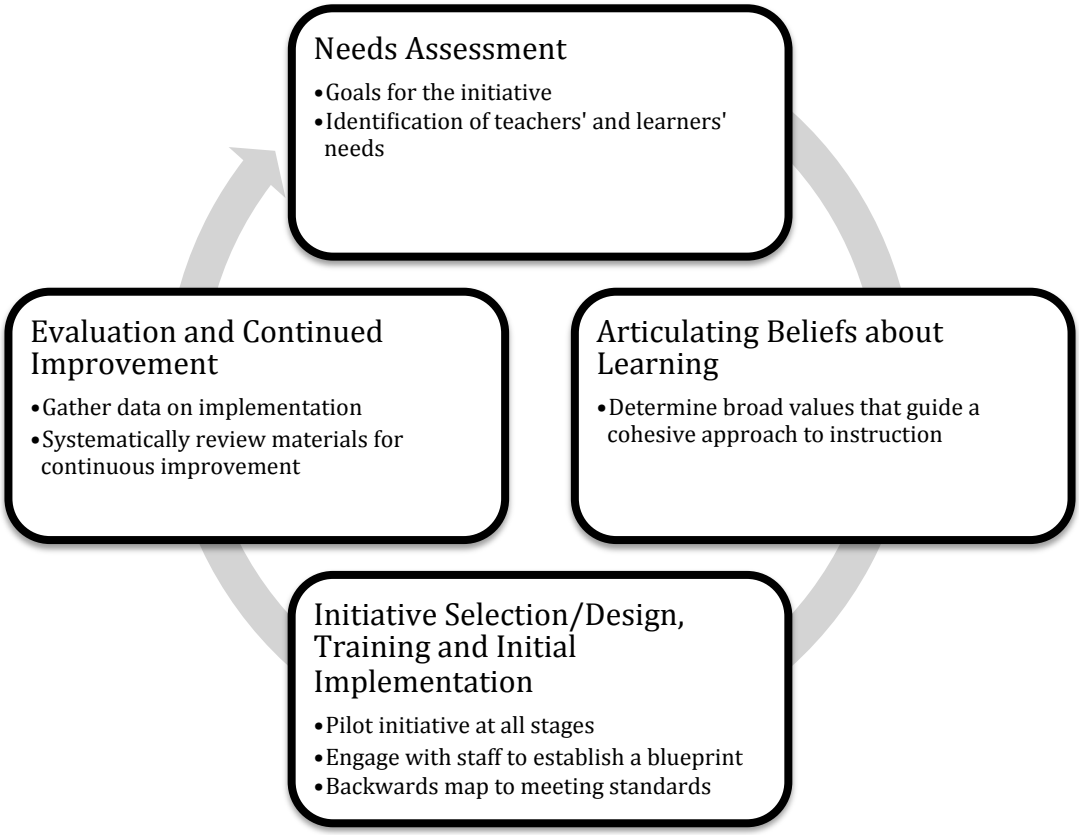
Meeting #6
March 13, 2014
Agenda

9.00 a.m.	Review: Academic Language in Curriculum and Instruction
9.15 a.m.	Supporting Teachers through Observation and Feedback
10.30 a.m.	Instructional Implementation: A School-Level Cycle (Steps 1, 2)
11.45 a.m.	Lunch
12.30 p.m.	Instructional Implementation: A School-Level Cycle (Steps 3,4)
1.30 p.m.	Planning to Promote Effective Use of Materials
2.15 p.m.	Wrap-Up

Instructional Improvement: A School-Level Cycle

Leading instructional improvement efforts requires systematic planning and evaluation. We view the design or purchase of curriculum and interventions as one type of literacy improvement initiative—others might include efforts to increase books read through a library-based competition or to create inquiry communities or study groups for teachers as forums to share new instructional practices. To guide instructional improvement, whether your school is implementing a new curriculum or designing instructional supports for struggling readers, or supporting a new PLC initiative, we suggest a cyclical approach to implementation. Any new effort requires revision through ongoing monitoring and mid-course corrections:



Instructional Improvement: A School-Level Cycle Unpacked

Step 1: Needs Assessment

Instructional Requirements

No single instructional effort can address all of the needs within any given learner population. In fact, school communities are best served by having a series of 'functional requirements'—or a short list of what the instructional improvement—whether a curriculum, intervention or PD effort—*must* accomplish. For example, a curriculum may need to meet ELA standards through CCSS alignment or promote literacy development for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Working groups should be guided by this key questions when assessing the needs of the school community:

- What are our priority needs that must be accomplished by this instructional improvement effort?

Learner Needs

Before designing any instructional improvement effort, school communities should take stock of their students' needs. Often, this data comes from assessments—achievement, language proficiency—and from teachers' concerns and challenges, whether observed or reported. Schools should be guided by three key questions:

- Who are our students? (aggregate and subpopulations)
- What are our students' learning needs? (aggregate and subpopulations)
- Who are our teachers and what are their needs? (demographics, training, turnover rates, strengths and challenges)

Step 2: Articulating Beliefs about Learning

All instructional improvement efforts are guided by specific ideas about *how* learning for adults or students occurs. For instance, curricula and interventions are written by authors who have a particular orientation towards learning; some curricula primarily involve students in discovering knowledge through inquiry while other curricula primarily teach knowledge and skills explicitly to students. While some approaches may support the acquisition of particular skills—a notable example is the direct instruction in code-breaking skills for struggling readers, which has been shown to be effective in numerous studies—other skills may be taught using a range of approaches. Because schools and teachers also have beliefs about *how* learning occurs, the design and/or selection of instructional improvement mechanisms that mirror these beliefs can support fidelity of

implementation. In any instructional improvement effort, a district or school should consider these questions:

- How does our district/school believe learning occurs for students/teachers? What do we consider to be the elements of good pedagogy?
- What is the pedagogical approach in our modal classroom? What would we like to build of off? What we would like to improve upon altogether?

Step 3: Instructional Improvement Selection, Training and Initial Implementation

Instructional Improvement Selection. Once a school community has a clear sense of: 1) the goal to be accomplished; 2) the match between teachers' and learners' needs; and 3) the fit with learning beliefs and pedagogy, it is possible to create a blueprint of how the learning activities—whether directed at teachers or students—will unfold. The blueprint includes instructional procedures, routines, or structures. For example, we could create a blueprint focused on increasing the use of accountable talk to bolster the language production occurring in classrooms or we could create one focused on the design of PLCs to support teachers in adopting new practices.

Training. Deciding on an instructional improvement goal is the less time-intensive part of accomplishing instructional change. What's more time-intensive, and more important, has to do with professional training and support. Supporting teachers for instructional improvement demands significant investment of time and energy. This cannot take the form of a single workshop or by simply scheduling the PLC meetings. Instead, schools need to provide time for teachers to meet and work through the challenges they encounter. If we take the example of a new curriculum, the tendency to abandon components of instruction that are less comfortable or to revert to the previous curriculum can be prevented if teachers are provided with a supportive group of colleagues to discuss questions and issues about the implementation of the instructional improvement effort, and if these discussions are part of a plan for ongoing training.

Initial Implementation. It is often tempting to roll out new initiatives across a large sample of schools. However, research has long suggested that engaging in a pilot study—in which the instructional improvement effort is used with a few classes or adults to test its 'fit'—may be a better approach. At this stage, the committee tasked with selecting the setting the instructional improvement goals (whether that goal was to select curriculum or design professional learning opportunities) may decide to collect data to help evaluate the success of the effort. These data may include student performance data, teacher observations, and/or focus groups with colleagues and surveys.

One Mechanism for Instructional Improvement: Curriculum as a Case Study

The design or purchase of curriculum is a mechanism through which core reading instruction can be improved in middle school contexts.

Why Curricula? Developing advanced literacy skills is a complex endeavor for both teachers and students. Among many things, curricula provide and promote:

- a structure and platform to support effective teaching and learning
- an overarching, knowledge-building frame for lessons
- explicit modeling and teaching of key skills and competencies
- the consistency and routines that teachers and children need
- the materials (libraries, posters, props, etc.) for a cohesive classroom experience
- a structure promote vertical alignment across grades

Strong curricula balance the need to provide clear and explicit guidance for teaching and learning, with a knowledge brokering function in order to be "educative" for teachers (i.e., the *why* and the *where* we're trying to get to).

Selecting Curriculum Matching learner needs, instructional requirements, and learning beliefs to an overarching instructional blueprint or scope-and-sequence provided by a purchased curricula requires answering a series of questions:

- Instructional Requirements: Does this curriculum accomplish the instructional requirements (e.g., support us in meeting ELA standards)?

- Learner needs: Does this curriculum meet our learners' needs (all students or sub-group)?

- Learning Beliefs: Does this curricula/intervention have a particular orientation towards how learning occurs? Does this match our school community's beliefs about how learning happens?

- Teacher needs: Does this curriculum meet our teachers' needs? Will it serve an "educative" function? Do we have/might we have the professional development resources in place to support teachers in effectively implementing the curriculum?

If we find that a curriculum does not meet the needs of our learners or 'fit' with our beliefs as a school about how learning occurs, this should give us pause. Fundamentally, we cannot expect to have much buy-in around an instructional platform that teachers perceive to be a poor match with the needs of their students or to be in direct conflict with their professional identity. A group of teachers, administrators and specialists should be assembled to select new curriculum. At the same time, if we don't set-up the conditions for understanding the curriculum's value—even if it is a good match—we are not likely to get buy-in and its perceived value is likely to be low.

Step 4: Evaluation and Continued Improvement

Once an instructional improvement effort is underway, it is important to plan for strategic review and refinement. The best instructional improvement efforts are those that are constantly evolving to better meet students' and teachers' needs. At this stage, we are answering two central questions:

1. How will we gather feedback on implementation?
2. What is our strategic plan to inform adjustments?