

An Instructive Teaching Improvement Model: How to develop a CoP with a Coaching, Mentoring and Feedback Regime.

David Lynch
David Turner
Tony Yeigh
Hoi Vo
Lana McCarthy
Aida Hurem
Jake Madden
Jacqueline Faulkner
Tom Casey

Introduction

This technical paper continues the theme of theorising and explaining the concept of embedded and self-actuating teacher professional learning as a strategy to effect whole of school teaching improvement. The paper references Technical Paper #2: *A model of data-informed professional learning cycle* and Technical Paper #3 *A conceptual schema that explains the establishment and operating elements of a community of practice focused on Teaching Improvement*. In this paper, conceptual elements from those technical papers are organised into an instructive strategy, located within a Community of Practice (CoP), for how professional learning is organised to effect whole of school teaching improvement.

To achieve such a goal this paper is organised into three sections. The first provides an account of principles which inform the operating logic of the overall strategy, while the second part details the operating elements, or things that are required to enable the strategy to be operationalised. In the concluding part the mechanics of such a strategy are outlined as a set of steps to follow. We turn now to the principles.

Three Evidence Based Principles

A central challenge for teacher professional learning is addressing problems of authenticity, relevance, practicality, and sustained impact on teacher practice and student learning (Burns Thomas & Niesz, 2012). To mitigate these problems and to engage a *teacher professional learning evidence base* three principles apply. These principles are (1) data informed decision making, (2) co-planning and (3) co-implementation and together they focus a strategy for sustainably improving teaching (see Technical Paper #2).

Data informed decision making has three parallel aspects. The first is an enduring process of collecting, analysing and monitoring data associated with teaching and learning. Data in this aspect is both an insight into ‘what is going on’ and a ‘target’ for what needs to be achieved. The second is about using data to seed a culture of continuous improvement, where data is the ongoing discussion point for work in the associated CoP. We discuss the premise of a CoP in a later section. The third aspect concerns peer reviewed literature, where published findings and conclusions (data interrogations) inform discussion around solutioning and strategy. This referencing, when actioned, is known as evidenced based practice.

Co-planning and co-implementation are about maximising teaching capabilities and capacities for required outcomes, but importantly they foundation teacher work within a community of practice. These two inter-related principles are the focus of coaching, mentoring and feedback which is also discussed in a later section. On a theoretical level these two principles tap teacher motivations by providing opportunities to share, collaborate and learn from one and other in a safe and supportive environment. On a practical level, these two elements can be understood as a process of ‘teaming’ where work tasks are shared based on each teacher’s personal capacities and capabilities in a context of dealing with the specifics of each student’s learning needs (Lynch, et al., 2012).

Key Operational Elements

There are four inter-related operating elements in a whole of school teaching improvement strategy: (1) Client centric teaching logics, (2) team teaching, and (3) individual teacher professional learning plans actioned in a context of (4) coaching mentoring and feedback (see Technical Papers #2 and #3). The mobilising of each is the product of school leadership, which specifically has carriage of creating the required conditions, resources and support mechanism for an improvement strategy to sustainably operate. Taken together these elements are the required ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ conditions and arrangements for whole of school teaching improvement (see Diagram 1).

The first element, *client centric teaching logics*, is a change in how education provision is arranged in a school.

At its heart, whole of school teaching improvement represents a movement from ‘mass education arrangements’ to ‘client centric logics’. To understand this movement is to appreciate the organisational logics of traditional schooling. When schools were first introduced into society two hundred or so years ago, they were designed to prepare future citizens for future

work and life in what was an industrial economy (Lynch et al., 2024). To that objective, students were organised conveniently into age related classes and then filtered into unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled work, based on perceived natural dispositions. If they could ‘do schooling’ they continued onto higher learning or dropped out to find work commensurate to education achievement. As societies matured and the industrial era transformed into a knowledge-based society, ‘highly skilled’ became the requirement for all workers. This implicates all students meeting the required benchmarks (the premise of data based decision making). On a parallel plane social movements arguing for more equitable education provisions, coupled with increased education research began to challenge these traditional education logics. In more simple terms, if the goal is for every child to make the required learning gains, then the system of schooling needs to focus provisions on strategies for each student and move away from age related --- teach to the middle--- programming and engineer a new type of schooling experience. These points are now a key strategic concern for all schools (Lynch et al, 2024).

Client centric provisions can be best understood as implementing a new teaching practice model, where teachers meet and plan their teaching work in a team, tasking members according to needs analysis (Lynch et al, 2024). There are three aspects of this type of teaching logic. First, each student’s learning performance is evaluated and benchmarked and in a later step is captured with a strategy in their individualised instruction plan. While this might seem onerous, the emphasis is upon considering every student’s progress and accordingly ensuring a commensurate strategy is actioned. Using spreadsheets help make the process efficient and ready-reference.

Second, teachers collaboratively plan how they will deal with the quantum of individual student profiles and accordingly, students are ‘grouped’ accordingly for teaching. In summary, instead of teachers being assigned an equal number of students (and abilities) for their classes, their teaching work assignments are based on ongoing team-based decisions where classes are constituted according to identified needs. Teachers in effect share their capacities to deal with cohorts of students with like abilities. While some students may be taught one-on-one or in a larger class arrangement, or assigned individualised self-directed tasks, the focus of teacher work, and their teaching assistants, is a series of benchmarks and targets which represent progress required for all students.

Third, and in a cyclic process, student data is monitored and evaluated for ongoing teaching planning purposes (Lynch et al 2024; Madden, 2012).

Team teaching is a key element in effecting client centric models. Team teaching in this paper's context is distinct from 'collaborative teaching' in that teachers are not necessarily working together to teach a class, but assigned a cohort based on a global strategy that harnesses respective capacities and capabilities for the required teaching and learning outcomes (Lynch et al 2012). The size of such cohorts is commensurate to the practicalities of what is to be taught and the demand factors of students in such cohorts. With these things in mind, class sizes would not be equal in numbers but matched to what is being taught, how and for what outcomes.

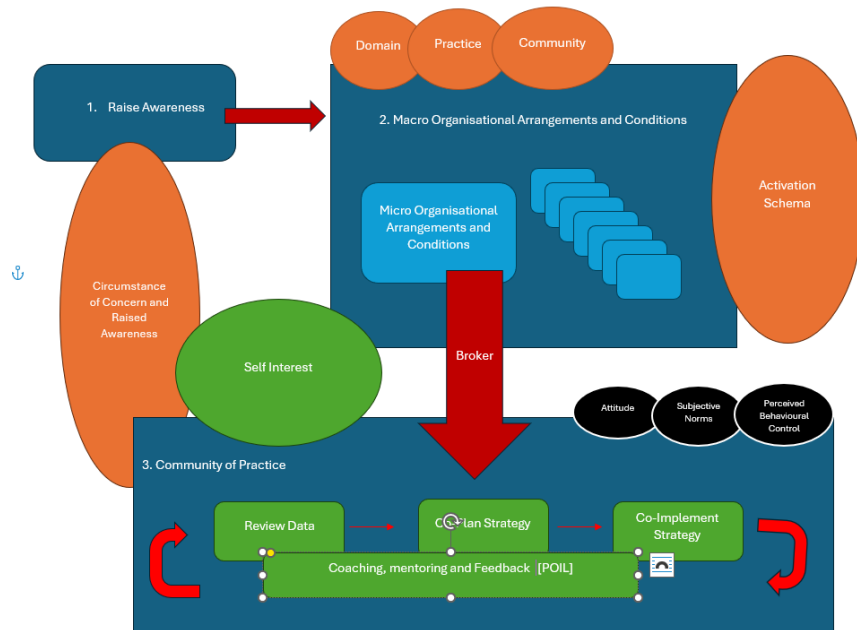
The final element is individual *teacher professional learning plans*. These plans focus school and team attention to ensuring each teacher is prepared for work assignments as well as maturing in teaching confidence and competence. These plans are organised around a set of student learning outcome targets and benchmarks as the embodiment of a work performance standard, and accordingly the plan defines strategies for sustainable teaching improvement. The plan is then actioned in an embedded coaching, mentoring and feedback regime that is facilitated from within the team with the oversight of the school's formal leadership structures for accountability and performance management requirements. The role of the 'broker' (see Technical Paper #3) is captured through the role of *teaching team leader*. A broker can be defined as Member #1 in the CoP, who by virtue of professional standing and personal wherewithal, is able to marshal team members into dealing with the *Circumstance of Concern*. We elaborate this role in a section which follows.

The Mechanics of Enabling a CoP Centric Teaching Improvement Strategy

In this section we outline the steps (or stages) for enacting a CoP centric teaching improvement strategy. Diagram 1 illustrates the stages and their component pieces and the discussions which follow explain the associated elements. The diagram is representative of elements from Technical Papers 2 and 3 and they should be referred to, to fully understand each component and its relationship to others.

Figure 1:

Stages in establishing a CoP focused on Teaching Improvement



In all change agendas, which is fundamentally what a whole of school teaching improvement program is all about, *‘raising awareness’* is the starting point. Raising awareness is a strategic set of activities which identify and make clear a *‘circumstance of concern’* (See Technical Paper #3). For teaching improvement agendas *‘benchmarked base-line data presentations’*, with ample time for discussions and interrogations, in a safe environment, prove potent for achieving such a goal. It is important to understand that raised awareness occurs when the focus of the initial presentation moves to discussions about the teaching opportunities that the circumstance of concern presents. In a practical sense, this is evidenced by teachers reflecting on their teaching practices, and correspondingly articulating a need for change in how their teaching work is undertaken in the school. This can be understood as a process of generating personal *‘motivations to change’* and this type of change management work is best understood in a context of *‘tapping self-interest’*. In any change process self-interest, or a motivational desire to engage, manifests in teachers having the developing *‘attitudes’*, *‘subjective norms’* and perceived *‘behavioural controls’* aligned with dealing with the circumstance of concern. Understanding these three elements is important for school leaders who are leading change agendas in schools (See Technical Paper #3). Participants will know that this stage is concluding when discussions turn to solutioning. This stage is complete when there is a formalised commitment on behalf of teachers to deal with the identified circumstance of concern.

The second phase is creating the required conditions and arrangements for teaching improvement. This is understood as being engineered at the macro and micro levels. The macro level can be understood as ‘whole of school’ and includes everything from traditions, values and beliefs, policies, procedures as well as resource allocations and how work is assigned within the organisation and what is rewarded. The micro level is that which is immediate to the individual teacher, and in a context of this paper is defined as the conditions and arrangements for ‘teaching teams’ (Lynch et al, 2012).

This phase is school leadership centric in that it invariably means *readying staff* for what is a change agenda and then reviewing and sanctioning propositions for change and applying resources to support proposed actions. The central premise is the establishment of an ‘arena’ / ‘teaching and learning climate’ in which teachers are supported to improve their teaching and to build a sense of teacher identity commensurate to working at the level of *expert and confident teacher*. In a teaching improvement context, micro conditions are the things required for the establishment of an operational communities of practice (CoP).

A CoP is developed under the guise of establishing ‘teaching teams’ and the process of CoP work is framed by engineering team-based discussions and work approaches in the areas of ‘*domain*’, ‘*community*’ and ‘*practice*’ (see Technical Paper #3). ‘Domain’ can be understood as the specific shared professional focus. It is this element that creates the required interest and thus encourages someone to join and want to maintain the association. In a teaching improvement agenda, this is known as a shared ‘circumstance of concern’. The logic goes, that without remedy, a circumstance of concern will continue to hamper the teacher’s abilities and aspirations to undertake their work successfully, and accordingly solving it, plays to self-interest.

The ‘community’ element is the embodiment of members where, through a crafted mutual relationship, members share their learnings, perspectives and knowledge. In effect the community becomes the vehicle through which the individual teacher learns and builds a sense of confidence in their teaching area. This domain is all about inter-dependent productive relationship building that supports learning how to better teach: ‘practice’.

Finally, the ‘practice’ element represents the sharing of a repertoire of multi-dimensional resources, i.e., professional experiences, tools, other teaching materials and processes that collectively represent how things are best done and problems overcome. Engaging in this area is critical as it requires ‘domain’ and ‘community’ to be established and represents the basis of

the coaching, mentoring and feedback regime that powers the inherent teaching improvement strategy that is represented by a CoP in this paper's context.

Coaching, Mentoring and Feedback: POIL

To this point in the paper a set of principles, pre-conditions and initiating goals have been outlined. These in effect represent a significant body of work in that nurturing the required teacher mindsets and attitudes, gaining the required commitments as well as changing school arrangements to support teachers to undertake the required work, is commensurate to the school's change leadership prowess. Our point is that until such conditions have been achieved any change process is unlikely to be adopted and/ or sustained. Once these have been established robustly, the enhancement of each teacher's teaching abilities is now the central and enduring focus of a whole of school teaching improvement program (Lynch et al, 2012).

As Technical Paper #2 outlined traditional models of teacher professional development where teachers are removed from their class to attend all manner of 'in-service' prove highly ineffective (Korthagen, 2017). This is especially so if the goal is a change in teaching practice. What Technical Paper #2 did establish was that a CoP represents the ideal arena for undertaking teacher professional learning and that a coaching, mentoring and feedback regime is a potent vehicle for sustainable and embedded teaching improvement.

At its heart a coaching, mentoring and feedback (CMF) regime captures the required elements for effective teacher professional learning (Technical Paper #3) to orchestrate a series of mechanisms that cause the teacher to (1) reflect on their own practice, (2) learn from others about how best to undertake required work and (3) work productively in teaming contexts where sharing is a key component. It is important to point out that a CMF regime requires the services of an '*expert*', which we term the 'team leader'. This leading teacher is a 'team recognised' accomplished teacher. This means there is a high level of professional respect from team members towards the team leader. *Expertise* is important here, as the team leaders proven abilities to know what and how to do what's required is the starting model for the CoP and its improvement focused work. Put simply, in the initial stages it is the knowledge and skills of the 'team leader' that are brought to bear on other members. In this context the team leader establishes the required protocols for teaching

improvement and with-it conditions and arrangements for CMF (Lynch et al, 2016; Madden, 2012; Lynch et al, 2012). As the prowess of the team develops the ‘team leader’ shares their role with emerging talent and so the cycle of sustainable teaming is embedded (Lynch et al, 2014). The ‘leadership frame’ discussion in a later section reinforces this logic.

In summary, CMF occurs by way of teachers [1] working collaboratively when planning and then contributing to the delivery of the curriculum for the student cohort, [2] having their practice regularly coached and reviewed by members of their teaching team; and [3], which is consolidated into their professional learning plan for ongoing CMF. [4] Finally, overall ‘performance’ in this arrangement is enmeshed in ‘feedback’, which is referenced to agreed goals and targets which in turn is referenced to student performance data and observational teaching skill metrics and indicators.

In specific terms, the process of CMF occurs in a multi-dimensional manner. This could be via a series of ‘*table discussions*’ where data, ideas and outcomes are shared and critiqued, ‘*teaching rounds*’ where teachers are observed during instruction and feedback provided or by *engagement in teaching collaborations* where the experienced teacher mentors the novice or the teacher wanting to improve. ‘Domain’, ‘community’ and ‘practice’ create a sense of focus for the CMF regime , but it is ‘relationship building’ that is key for CMF to be a success for all parties (See Technical Paper #3).

To enable a coaching, mentoring and feedback regime to have a sense of body and process teaching teams use the *POIL framework* (Lynch and Madden, 2015). ‘POIL’ is an acronym for *Planning, Organisation, Instruction and Leadership*. Each ‘frame’ comes to represent a sequential set of key elements that the team leader, and by direct association, the assigned teaching team, must consider together in their quest to improve their overall teaching performance. The point we emphasise here is that each ‘frame’ of POIL presents a sequential opportunity for CMF and embodies the focus for effective teaching and learning design work. We briefly elaborate each element.

1. Planning Frame

In the traditional single classroom teaching arrangement, the teacher is assigned a teaching cohort (25 to 30 students), generally a ‘share’ of a year level or discipline

area in the school and which is perceived as being ‘fair’ in terms of student abilities and numbers (ie: the industrially based ‘equal’ workload allocation). Then, using the appropriate school planning documents, the teacher, on their own, plans a program of instruction. Limited teaching capacity in the classroom (i.e.: just themselves) generally inclines the teacher to teach strictly to the scope of their year/discipline level curriculum and where possible utilise a teacher’s aide and extension/remediation programs (i.e.: paper-based resource books) to deal with those students who don’t fit age-appropriate learning norms. While the curriculum attempts to represent a manageable level of content ‘to be covered’ (in a term/school year) the reality of student learning performance, in any given classroom, can be one of extremes (Hattie, 2009) and thus the teacher’s ability to adequately deal with each individual student’s learning needs in such arrangements is somewhat diminished (Madden, 2012). Couple these circumstances to an ‘isolated’ teacher, where feedback mechanisms are often self-serving (without third party input) and you have very limited scope for teaching improvement.

In the planning frame all teachers in the teaching team (e.g.: all Year 3 teachers) meet and discuss the profile of **each** student. In effect they open their classrooms up for coaching, mentoring and feedback. Where student performance data is limited or incomplete the team enacts appropriate assessments (standardised and norm referenced and/or diagnostic) or petitions the school’s leadership to acquire more detailed performance results or access to specialist interpretations. A base-line set of data becomes important for gauging learning growth. Teachers then collaboratively plan a course of instruction, where the collective teaching capacities of the team are harnessed to best effect for *all* students. Studies (Lynch et al, 2014; Madden, 2012; Lynch et al, 2012) into this approach indicated that this had the effect of teachers streaming students into custom arrangements dependent on student profiles and need, thus teachers were able to deal with students more efficiently and more effectively. The use of a teaching design organiser such as the *Learning Management Design Process* (Lynch and Smith, 2011) with its ‘8 key planning questions’ proves an effective tool in such a process. The 8 questions, and which can be used to facilitate the Planning phase are:

Q1: What have our students achieved to date?

- A Global Student Performance profile: *Review performance data*

Q2: What do we aim to achieve in our students?

- Outcomes set based on profiles (together with targets and goals for instructional outcomes)

Q3: How do our students best learn?

- Reviewing the literature for evidence based best practice
- Considering the peculiarities of the cohort

Q4: What resources do we have at our disposal?

- The means to enact plans

Q5: What are our teaching strategies?

- The Application of Evidence Based Strategies to achieve the defined learning outcomes

Q6: Who will do what to achieve support our teaching strategy?

- The team arrangements harnessed for effect

Q7: How will we check that students have achieved the defined learning outcome?

- The assessment and data collection strategy

Q8: How will we report student progress?

- Reporting
- Identifying gaps in the data profile for the next planning phase.

From a coaching and mentoring point of view, the ‘team leader’ leads the process and in doing so is focused on building the *planning* capacities of each teacher. In a cyclic process subsequent feedback mechanisms will require teachers to revisit the planning frame to take corrective action and thus further coaching and mentoring is embedded through this frame.

By the end of the planning frame, each teacher will have become ‘signatory’ to a set of teaching plans for the global cohort of students (in a year level, discipline area) and thus their teaching role within is defined. In effect each teacher has agreed on a set of performance goals and targets to be met. The planning frame will be complete when plans have been expanded to make it ‘teaching ready’ by each teacher.

In summary, the team leader will have engaged teachers in interrogating available and appropriate learning performance data and then coached and mentored teachers in

making appropriate and corresponding teaching planning decisions. This frame is enacted first as ‘whole of team’ and then into ‘one-on-one’ sessions with less competent teachers. The process of feedback, referenced to subsequent student performance data, will inform the next planning iteration and by association the teacher’s subsequent coaching/mentoring focus with their ‘team leader’.

2. Organisation Frame

The organisational frame in effect engages teachers to think through the ‘organisation’ of the designed teaching plan. The logic is that a collaborative teaching plan has been developed –*planning frame*-- and it then becomes incumbent upon each teacher to ‘organise’ his or her classroom for implementation. From a coaching and mentoring point of view the organisational frame enables the team leader to enter the classroom --- to break the ice for actual teaching observations (in the next frame) --- and to appraise themselves of the organisational viability. Considerations include seating arrangements; the use of the classroom and its environs; the day to day management of the classroom and its students, inclusive of the protocols that enable a classroom to be functional and effective as a place of teaching and learning: as well as the classroom culture and climate that has to be developed/evident (Marzano, et al, 2001). The organisational frame can also be extended to include those peripherals, yet important teacher tasks, such as conducting parent-teacher interviews, disciplining students and coordinating support staff. In effect a sound organisational arrangement becomes the second tier in a foundation for effective instruction. Learning Design Questions 3, 4 and 6 are helpful in planning such key organisational elements.

3. Instruction Frame

The third stage in the POIL framework is a focus on instruction. In this frame a series of classroom visits are made during the course of instruction (i.e., the scope of plans made in the ‘planning frame’). These ‘visits’ are chiefly made by the team leader, however through organisational arrangements in the pilot school, co-opted members of the teaching team would often join the team leader to add to the ‘team effect’. These visits take on a number of rather fluid approaches, each determined by the

‘improvement need’ of the mentee teacher: a body of knowledge known as ‘Learning Walks’ exemplifies the process¹:

- a) Formal teaching observations using a checklist of teaching capacities/ capabilities²
- b) Demonstration lessons by the ‘expert teacher’ of a key competency/ capability
- c) Collaborative teaching tasks with the ‘expert teacher’ (or other teachers) acting as lead teacher with the mentee assisting/ co-teaching
- d) Role plays and enactments to hone specific skills and approaches

Generally, the process commences with a ‘pre-meeting’ of the team leader and the mentee where specific performance data, in conjunction with agreed targets and goals are reviewed such that an agreed purpose for the visit is established. Notes are taken for record purposes. Subsequent to this visit a ‘post meeting’ takes place and what was observed and experienced is formatively discussed. In a cyclic process the premise of another visit is thus planned and the process continues. We hasten to add that the focus is upon the mentee being coached and mentored into improved teaching and the process is such that these ‘visits’ become normalised as part of working as a teacher in the school.

4. Leadership Frame

The central premise of a whole of school teaching improvement program is the growth of each and every teacher in the school. To this end the last frame is that of leadership. While this frame can be viewed as a strategy to create future school leaders, the strategy is chiefly designed to enable each teacher to engage with others as a leader in areas where they have expertise. In effect the professional growth of teachers is expanded in this frame such that the school becomes a coordinated entity of competent teachers each with a role to play and the capacities to capitalise on same for overall effect. Teaching teams evolve in time from reliance on the team leader as ‘expert’ to everyone having key roles to play in their team and thus having the leadership capacities to perform as required. The Australian Professional Standards for Principals provides guidance in this matter.³

¹ <https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/region/loddonmallee/lt-litlearningwalks.pdf>

² Use was made of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership proformas. See <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/classroom-practice>

³ <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standard-for-principals>

Summary

The fundamental premise of enacting a whole of school teaching improvement programming can be understood through the principles of (1) data informed decision making, (2) co-planning and (3) co-implementation. To effect such principles, this technical paper has identified a series of elements which when orchestrated by the schools leadership create the required conditions and arrangements for whole of school teaching improvement agendas. These elements are summarised as (1) Client centric teaching logics, (2) team teaching and (3) individual teacher professional learning plans actioned in a context of (4) a coaching mentoring and feedback (CMF) regime. CMF has been revealed as a potent vehicle for improving the individual teaching of teachers in a school. CMF occurs by way of teachers [1] working collaboratively when planning and then contributing to the delivery of the curriculum for the student cohort, [2] having their practice regularly coached and reviewed by members of their teaching team; and [3], which is consolidated into their professional learning plan for ongoing CMF. [4] Finally, overall ‘performance’ in this arrangement is enmeshed in ‘feedback’, which is referenced to agreed goals and targets which in turn is referenced to student performance data and observational teaching skill metrics and indicators.

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