The Principal's Primer

Research-Based Supports for Early Learning Classrooms

This newsletter is the second in the series of bi-monthly newsletters designed specifically for Principals and Assistant Principals with early learning classrooms on their campus.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) have recommended that all Elementary School Principals should have the following:
An understanding of developmental science and instructional practices that support pre-K student learning; Knowledge of developmentally appropriate assessment principles and methods; Knowledge of professional competencies for teachers and how to support teachers' efforts to provide quality learning environments for young children; Knowledge of appropriate assessment of educators to improve child outcomes and inform professional learning; The ability to develop partnerships in the community within and across disciplines that touch the lives of children and families; and Knowledge and skills for effective school administration and management (IOM & NRC, 2015).

In an effort to strengthen your understanding of instructional strategies and developmentally appropriate perspectives, the Children's Learning Institute (CLI) is pleased to provide you with the latest research, best practices, resources for supporting early learning on your campus, and innovations in technology that support collaborative leadership.

In this issue we will take a more in-depth look at collective learning and effective use of data.

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In this issue:

Collective Learning & Effective Use of Data

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Collective or Organizational Learning

Recent school improvement research identifies a need for change that is not as focused on curriculum fidelity or the use of high stakes data to improve performance. Instead, the emphasis is that "schools must strengthen their internal capacity to manage change processes in order to reach high levels of performance" (Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcombe, & Fowler, 2012, p. 3). Rather than a focus on accountability and compliance, or support for program change, the focus is on organizational learning and collaborative practice within the school.

Organizational theory helps us understand the workplace conditions that support good data use.

One theory is that "organizational learning refers to a higher order of collective learning that extends beyond a single individual; individuals within an organization thus learn from one another" or groups (Higgins et al., 2012, p. 6).

In order for collective learning to take place, there are some key critical components. Absorptive capacity, for example, is an individual's or organization's ability to recognize the value of new kinds of information and absorb it into their existing ways of organizing.

Socio-cultural organizational learning research, such as Vygotsky's early work, has focused on individuals' social interactions within organizations.

So instead of understanding how people cognitively do or do not process information effectively, studies focus specifically on how social practices shape individuals' learning. For example, research "has studied how people or organizations assist others in learning and how communities of practice or learning communities emerge and evolve" (Higgins et al., 2012, p. 7).

Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino (2008) wrote that in order to understand organizational learning, we need to consider several **building blocks**. These building blocks were developed based on organizational research and described as important for successful organizational learning and adaptability.

1. Supportive Learning Environment:
In this environment, individuals feel psychologically safe. They value each other's differences, are open to new ideas, and have time for reflection. This psychological safety ensures it is okay to speak up, ask for help, critique their own practices, and most importantly, admit mistakes. This requires high levels of trust and a sense of safety for teachers to expose their vulnerabilities to each other.

Open dialogue about what went wrong and what is not working, provides far better and more honest conversations towards improvement, than simply celebrating successes.

2. Concrete Learning Processes and Practices:
These include the creation, collection, and transfer of information, experimentation, and analyses. If teachers are encouraged to ask questions or treat mistakes as an opportunity for learning, then they are far more likely to take risks and challenge current practices.

With safety and trust in place, teachers are willing to collectively look at progress monitoring data, examine the low points, and plan more effective and intentional lessons that better target skill development.

3. Leadership that Reinforces Learning:
These behaviors include listening attentively and encouraging multiple points of view. This means that leaders take the role of facilitating opportunities for learning with their teachers.

Principals can move beyond just organizing to ensure alignment with standards, to focusing on organizing around collective learning, as a means to deliberate continuous improvement.

Reference

Garvin, D. A., Edmondson, A. C., & Gino, F. (2008). Is yours a learning organization? *Harvard Business Review, 86*(3), 109-116.

Higgins, M., Ishimaru, A., Holcombe, R., & Fowler, A. (2012) Examining organizational learning in schools: The role of psychological safety, experimentation, and leadership that reinforces learning. *Journal of Educational Change.* Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8f16/46c97eec8cc7588f7ae0deba9e38754c4c18.pdf

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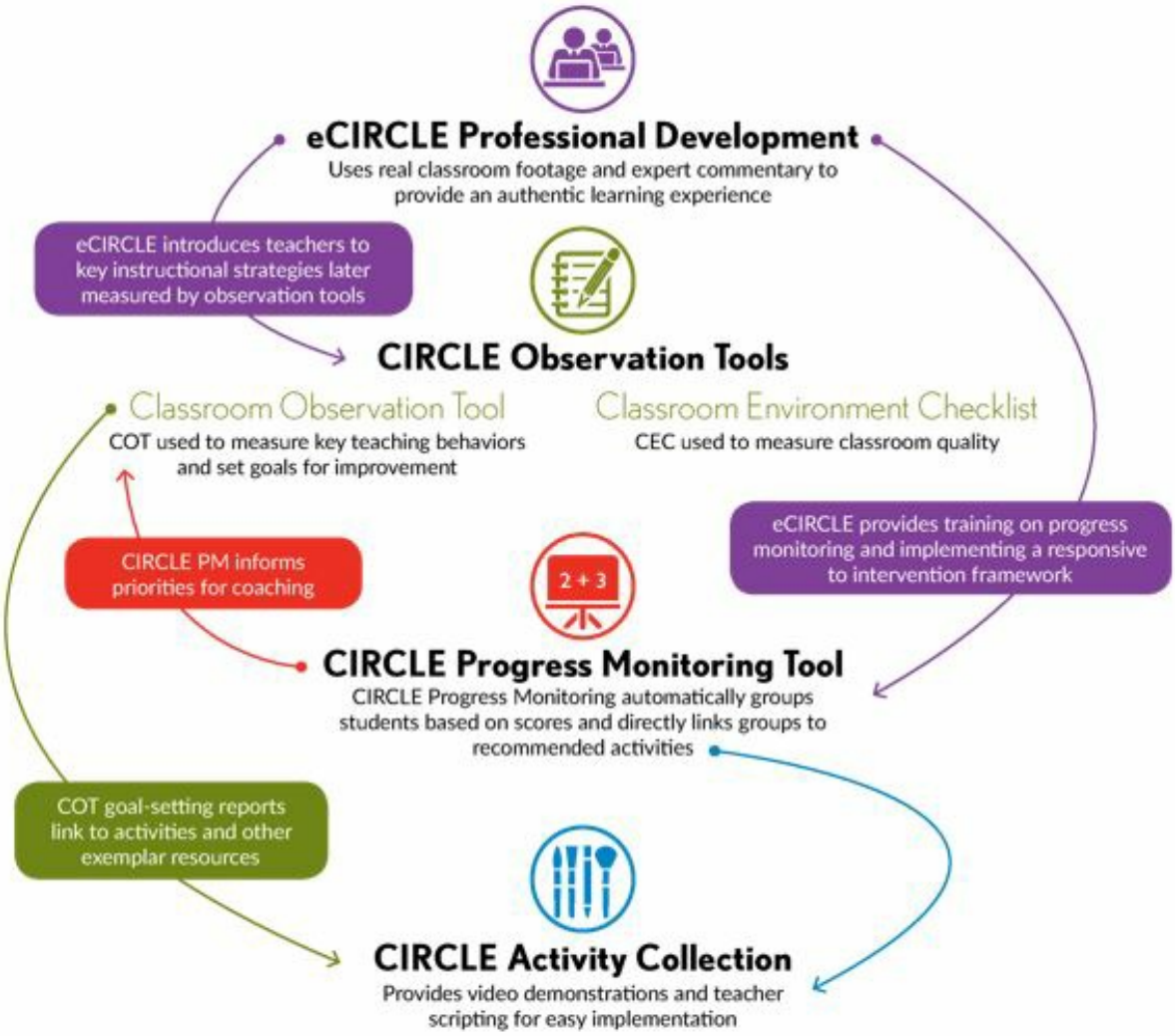
Components of a Data-Driven School Culture

- **Set School-Wide Goals:** What is the vision for your school?
- **Assess What Matters**: Only assess what is needful, and collect only data on which you will take action.
- **Build Trust:** Use of data is about improving student achievement, not teacher performance evaluations. Create a blameless data culture so that everyone is working together, to look at the data and collaborate for change.
- **Empower Teachers:** Support teachers' use of progress monitoring as part of their teaching and learning cycle (assess-analyze-plan-teach)
- **Provide Training:** Use outcomes to determine staff deficiencies in understanding and provide personalized professional development to increase and improve best practices
- **Assess What Matters**: Only assess what is needful, and collect only data on which you will take action.

Learn about the CIRCLE prekindergarten tools and resources available on CLI Engage to support your teaching staff. Free for many schools within Texas, available resources include: professional development certificate courses, teacher observation and goal setting tools, ongoing student progress monitoring, and personalized activities for designing interventions.



Learn More About CIRCLE Tools & Resources

"Effective leaders align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self."

(National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 12)