

Action Learning Cycle: Redesigning Pedagogies and Literacies

A Professional learning Cycle offered by Dr Michele Anstey and Dr Geoff Bull

Overview of Structure

- The action learning cycle is designed to facilitate focussed reflection and change in literacy and pedagogy using an action research/learning model of spaced learning. It is individualized in that each participant starts where their learning is situated and on a topic that is relevant to their needs and the needs of their school and clientele. However it is also school or region focussed in that the individual topics selected will all address literacy and pedagogy and can focus on a common area identified by the school or region. Thus there is high individual motivation because of choice and being suited to individual needs, but also high extrinsic motivation because it can simultaneously address school wide or regional needs.
- The project consists of five full days of face-to-face work with us, the first two being consecutive and the remaining ones spaced over the year. This can be adjusted to suit the individual needs of the school or region – eg we can use a combination of full days and twilight sessions or weekends to reduce teacher release. However there does need to be space between visits to allow participants to make progress and work on tasks in between visits. This is a possible outline that can be discussed and negotiated to suit your needs.
- The first two days have three foci:
 1. input about literacy and explicit pedagogy,
 2. completing a reflection tool that helps teachers identify the focus of their action research,
 3. developing an action plan for their project.

Developing the action plan is a critical point because at this stage many teachers start focussing on the students and changes they want to see in their students. The goal of the action learning cycle is that teachers focus on themselves and their pedagogy and the changes they want to see happening and how they will measure them. It takes two full days to address these outcomes and these days are critical to the future success of the project because they provide basic knowledge and understanding of the process.

- The following days each have a learning focus (how to collect data and analyse it, changing pedagogy and teacher talk, the change process and how to manage it). These have been designed to occur at stages of the process that we have found teachers most need them. For example, if we talk about teacher talk and data analysis too early in the cycle before participants have a picture of their action plan and what they are going to research, they find it

overwhelming.

- In addition to specific learning focussed sessions each follow up day also has a time where teachers share their progress and their challenges around the focus topic of the day. It is expected that sharing would have occurred at the school in between times but on these days the sharing focus is more defined in order to help people through the process. This ensures that teachers are clear in their thinking about their project. It also means that each teacher in the group, whether it is a whole school or a network, knows what everyone else is doing. Each teacher learns from this process of sharing and it has the added benefit of helping them to refine their own project. Following this sharing at the group level we both work individually with each teacher or group of teachers to respond to individual needs, problems and/or challenges. The teachers in our projects identify these days and the sharing and individual assistance as one of the most beneficial aspects of the process.
- We always recommend that the Action Research be embedded as part of the normal teaching program going on in the school. Generally people plan their project, do professional reading and start organising implementation of their project earlier in the year in order to implement it in a specific unit of work or aspect of their normal teaching program a little way into the year. In this way it is not an 'add on' or 'an extra' and people find it easier to manage.
- The sixth (and final) day is a 'Showcase' or 'Celebration Day' where every participant makes a presentation about an aspect of his or her project. Each participant outlines what their project was about and shares significant findings and progress or change that has occurred using the data they collected and analysed. Sometimes this is just within the group or school and sometimes it is a public day where the sharing occurs in parallel sessions like a mini conference and teachers from the region are invited to attend. It is always an inspiring and exciting day.
- In our last two projects the people organising it decided to supply each group of teachers (5 in a group) with a copy of our book, [Evolving Pedagogies: Reading and Writing in a Multimodal World](#) as it provided a lot of the professional reading and knowledge about multimodal texts that teachers would use. We did not suggest this - it was their idea but we would suggest it in future as it was amazing the impact that having that source readily available as a first reference had. We were quite surprised. In the projects we are currently running (one in a whole school and one for several schools in the diocese project) every teacher has been provided with a copy of the book.

The action learning cycles benefit from the blend of face to face time with us and the follow up work that occurs in the schools through the leadership team managing the cycle.

Suggestions for Implementation of the Cycle within a school network or region.

- Ideally there should be four participants from each school attending the 'compulsory days', one teacher leader (eg head of curriculum, literacy co-ordinator principal, deputy principal) one teacher from each section of the school (eg lower, middle, upper) or if secondary, teachers representative of different disciplines. The teacher leader in secondary could be a Head of Curriculum, Curriculum co-ordinator etc.
- Teacher leaders and school principals must be committed to offering support and full participation throughout. Therefore it might be better to have leaders whose role is solely teacher support rather than administration.
- Schools would be encouraged to choose the way forward that best suits their school needs. Here are two possibilities:
 - Each participant to develop his or her own action plan. However in this case the leader's plan and project would focus on whole school development and participation and how they, as leader, are going to implement and evaluate that plan.
 - Alternatively the school could select a theme for their Action Learning Cycle and then each teacher would address some aspect of that theme in their individual action plan.

Contact us if you need further details or wish to discuss a project in your school

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