

Literacy
Improvement

PARTNERSHIP



Facilitating Improvement in Teacher Practice

Learning Module 4 Workbook

Needs Assessment and Problem Identification



Acknowledgments

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Module 4 learning targets and agenda

Learning targets:

- Use multiple methods to identify and prioritize areas for improvement.
- Explore some methods for identifying a high-leverage problem to solve.
- Consider the impacts of scope and scale of an improvement effort.

Agenda

	Key content
Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome• Logistics
Part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying your priority needs<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Data review○ Examining processes and procedures○ Empathy interviews
Part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying a problem to solve• Locus of control, scope, and scale
Closing & Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Module review• Action period work

PART 1

Identifying your priority needs

A needs assessment is a deliberate process to identify the priority needs in your educational system. During a needs assessment you will (1) review available data; (2) review existing processes and procedures; and (3) examine multiple perspectives from your teachers, your students, and families.

A needs assessment process consists of three broad steps

1. Initiation
2. Data collection
3. Summarize finding and determine priorities

Initiation

During initiation, the scope and scale of the needs assessment is determined, including which part of the educational system will be investigated, major questions you want to answer about your system, possible sources of information, and who is responsible for each part of the assessment.

Data collection and analysis

During data collection and analysis, data is collected to answer the major questions that were surfaced about your system. That data is reviewed to identify trends and patterns.

Summarize findings and determine priorities

After data is collected and analyzed, learning is summarized, and needs are prioritized. This information is used to clarify the current reality and identify a specific problem to solve.

Self-Reflection

Which part of the needs assessment process is most familiar to you? How is this the same as or different from other needs assessments you have participated in?



Starting a needs assessment

Common processes that are used when conducting needs assessments include ...

- Data review.
- Examining processes.
- Empathy interviews.

1. Data review

Data for review will depend on the focus area you want to address. You should begin with data that already exists in your system. This may include ...

- Academic assessment data.
- Grades.
- Attendance.
- Discipline data.
- Existing survey data.
- Existing plans and documents.
- Student work samples.

The continuous improvement process has a structure that you apply to organize your improvement work to drive continuous improvement. Generally, a continuous improvement process structure includes ...:

- A needs assessment.
- Problem identification.
- Root cause analysis.
- Multiple inquiry cycles.
- Implementation.

Self-Reflection

What existing data sources are available in your context? Which components of your educational system may not have available data?



To be useful, data should be collected and displayed in a manner that supports analysis for the focus area you want to better understand or address. For example:

- Disaggregate data for student groups that have been historically underserved.
- Use graphs and tables to organize data so you can see trends.

Once your data are organized, look for and identify patterns, surface questions, and identify additional data you might need to understand your context.

2. Examining processes and procedures

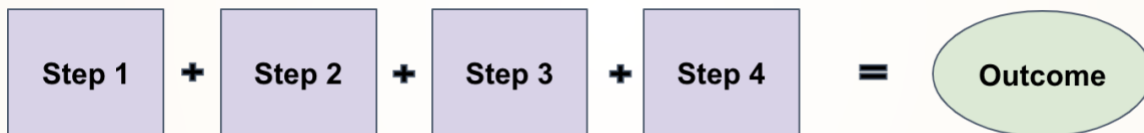
Identify processes and procedures that currently exist in the part of the system you are examining. A process is all the steps that come together to complete a task or produce a particular outcome. Processes are a basic building block of systems and create a shared understanding of “how we do things.”

Examples of processes

Systems	Processes
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom rules and discipline process • Office referral process • Restorative circles
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily attendance taking • Attendance notifications • Parent/teacher communication • School Attendance and Review Board
Classroom instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit or lesson planning • Daily reading instruction • Instructional intervention • Designated English language development (ELD) delivery

Examining processes

The simplest form of a process map is a flowchart. A flowchart is a series of steps that lead to a particular outcome.



To examine all the steps in a process, you map out all of the steps that you go through, noting any important transitions and decision points.


Having multiple people compare individual process maps can identify practices that are shared and where additional steps exist.

Examining your processes can also help you to identify ...


- Steps that should happen but don't.
- Steps that take excessive time.
- Steps that are particularly complex or difficult.
- Places where the process bottlenecks.

Self-Reflection

What are some processes that you want to examine more closely within the part of your system you are investigating? Can you think of some that are not done consistently and could be improved?



Can you think of any processes that are hard not to do or are hardwired into how you do business? How do you think they got that way? Are they producing the outcomes you want?



3. Empathy interviews

Self-reflection



What are some of the reasons a principal or a group of teachers would reach out to you or need support?

Empathy interviews allow you to learn important information for your needs assessment. An empathy interview uses humble inquiry to help to understand the experiences, feelings and needs of others. Through empathy interviews, individuals in your community can share information that would help you better understand their experience in this part of your system and what they might need.

Empathy interview observations

PART 1

Identifying your priority needs

Pair share

What did you notice about the questions that the interviewer asked?



Questioning guidelines

- ❑ Avoid leading and close-ended questions.

Do you feel welcome at your school?

- ❑ Begin with open-ended-questions and keep them neutral.

How would you describe your level of engagement with your school?

- ❑ Ask for stories and concrete examples.

Can you share a story about an interaction you had with someone at the school regarding ...?

- ❑ Practice listening.

Don't interrupt; let the interviewee finish their thoughts.

- ❑ Probe for emotions.

How did you feel when ...?

Empathy mapping

Empathy mapping is a way to organize your notes or transcripts from empathy interviews into categories to better help you pull data out of the conversation.

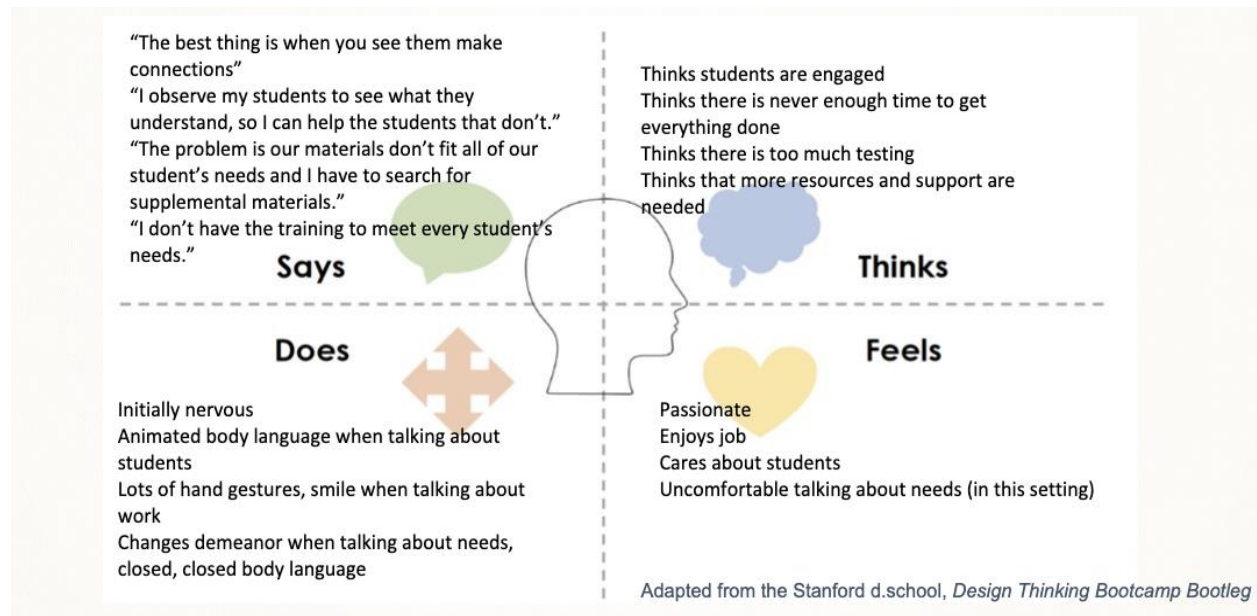
These are some common categories: What do they say? What do they do? What do they think? What do they feel?



On the left side you record direct quotes and observations (says/does).



On the right side you record thoughts and feelings (thinks/feels).

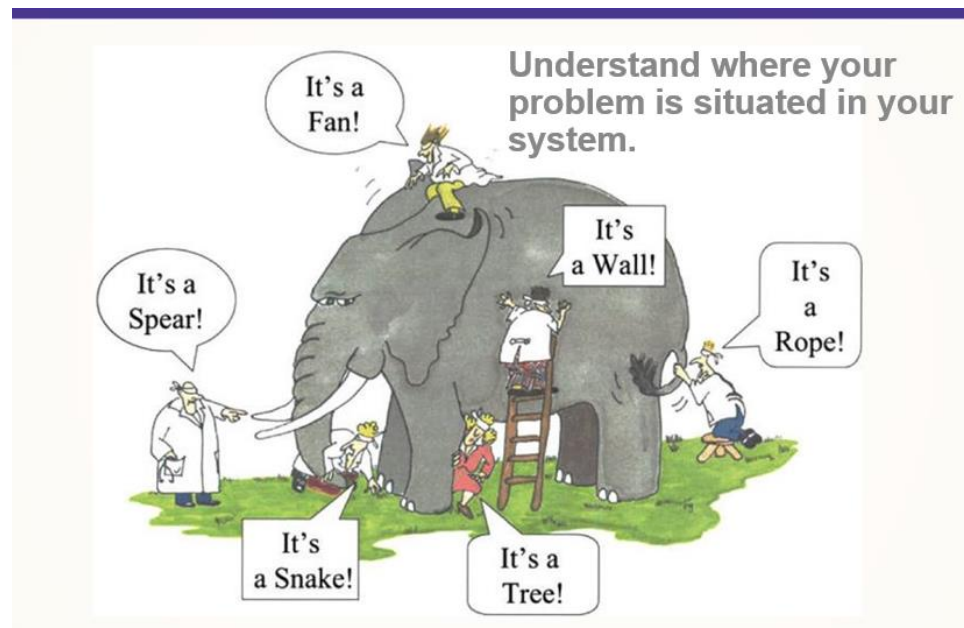


After completing the map, summarize any needs or new insights that have surfaced about the system or the issue you are investigating. With multiple interviews, you can then compare insights and look for patterns.

Identify a problem to solve

Begin with understanding your system:

- Review existing available data.
- Reflect on any gaps in processes or procedures that are involved in the issues you are examining.
- Talk to individuals in your system to understand what barriers they feel are in the way of improving outcomes.



When selecting a problem, choose ...

- A problem you care about.
- A problem that is a barrier to your organization's priorities.
- A problem that is regularly occurring.
- A problem that is within your control.
- A problem that has right level of specificity.
- A problem that does not include an implied solution.

Think about the challenges you are facing. Among those challenges, which ones meet these criteria?

Locus of control, scope, and scale

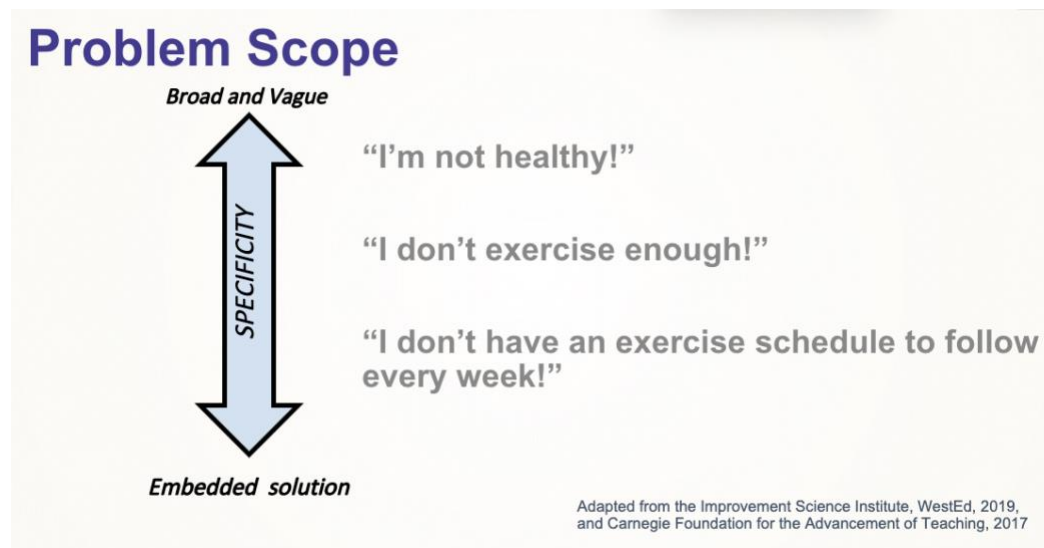
To be within your locus of control, your problem should be something that you, or someone on your team, can directly influence.

Trio sorting activity

Sort the following problems into the four quadrants above, to identify the locus of control. Discuss your reasoning.

- poverty,
- student performance,
- instructional practice,
- class size, curriculum,
- student behavior

You need to select a problem that is focused enough to be clear to everyone and broad enough that it has multiple possible solutions.



Problem scale

What size is the right-size problem? What resources will it take to solve?

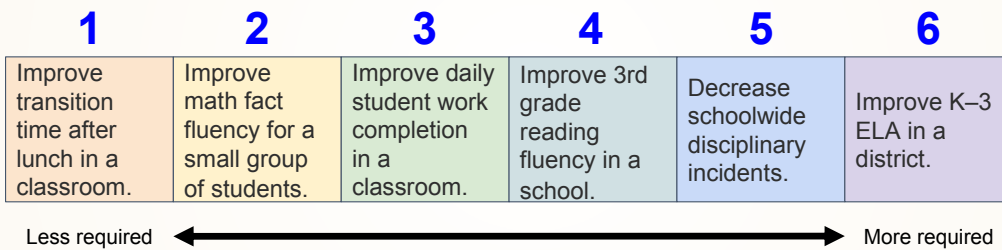
For an improvement project, you usually want something at the level of 2–3 on a scale of 1 to 6.

Questions to consider:

- How many people are involved?
- What resources will be required?
- How much time will it take to solve the problem you selected?
- How frequently can you have data to measure progress on this problem?

Problem scale

What resources will it take to solve?



Adapted from source: Gunrow & Park (2017)

What number on the scale is a problem you are considering for your team?

Group discussion

As you think about the scope and scale of your projects, what questions are coming up for you?



An improvement story: Lemmon Valley 3rd grade team

Lemmon Valley was in its second year of participating in the Literacy Improvement Partnership with a focus on improving writing instruction. At the time, the school was using the Collaborative Classroom *Being a Writer* curriculum and was using improvement methodology to improve teacher practice and student writing quality.

After considering places to improve their writing instruction and looking at best practices, the 3rd grade team decided that providing formative feedback to students was an evidence-based practice that they wanted to improve. The problem was, they were not reaching all students as frequently as they felt they needed to.

Opinion Writing Conference Notes - CNI


Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Have each student tell you about his or her piece and read it aloud to you.

As you listen to the student, ask yourself:	Yes	No	Not evident	Evidence:
• Is this student able to identify an opinion to write about?				
• (Beginning Week 2, Day 2) Is the student able to write an opening that gets the reader interested?				
• Does the student state his or her opinion clearly in the opening paragraph?				
• Does the student give several different reasons that support his or her opinion?				
• (Beginning Week 2, Day 3) Are the reasons supported by facts and details?				
• (Beginning Week 2, Day 3) Does the student use transitional words and phrases?				
• (Beginning Week 2, Day 3) Does the student conclude the essay by restating his or her opinion?				

Initial goal: confer with every student at least once a week.

EQUITY



PAUSE

The writing curriculum in our improvement story called for meeting with all students throughout the week.

- When thinking about meeting with students “as frequently as they needed to” what equity issues do you think the team needed to consider?
- What data do you think would have been helpful for them to look at?

Next steps

During this module our learning targets were to:

Use multiple methods to identify and prioritize areas for improvement.

- Needs assessment.
- Data review.
- Examining processes and procedures.
- Empathy interviews.

Explore some methods for identifying a high-leverage problem to solve.

- Problem identification.

Consider the impacts of scope and scale of an improvement effort.

- Locus of control, scope, and scale.

Action period for Module 4

- Site-level needs assessment:
 - Identify a focus area to investigate.
 - Plan and conduct empathy interviews.
 - Identify data sources.
- Plan and facilitate a team meeting:
 - Review and analyze data.
 - Begin to clarify the problem you are trying to solve.
 - Use meeting success criteria to monitor team dynamics.

Closing reflection

What are you thinking about focusing on next to continue this work?



Notes

Notes