



National Center for Literacy Education

# Continua for Capacity Building

These continua were developed by Michael Palmisano, Lara Hebert, Catherine A. Nelson, Robert Hill, and Sharon Roth on behalf of the National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE). NCLE brings together leading education associations, policy organizations, and foundations to support powerful learning about literacy in every discipline and sustained school improvement.

For information on this publication, contact the National Council of Teachers of English at (800) 369-6283. ©2012 by the National Center for Literacy Education/National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. All rights reserved. A full-text PDF of this document may be downloaded free for personal, non-commercial use (requires Adobe Acrobat Reader).

NCLE has developed the *Continua for Capacity Building* to support the inquiries of collaborative teams. The Continua are an extension of the *NCLE Framework for Capacity Building* that identifies the types of organizational conditions and practices that research has shown to have the greatest impact on student learning. The Continua offer developmental progressions of key elements within each of six types, or domains, of conditions and practices identified from the research. These domains are:

- Deprivatizing Practice
- Enacting Shared Agreements
- Creating Collaborative Culture
- Maintaining an Inquiry Stance
- Using Evidence Effectively
- Supporting Collaboration Systemically

The process of building capacity is a developmental one. It is unlikely that all of these conditions and practices are present throughout a system consistently. The Continua offer research-based guidance for setting goals and monitoring progress for improving key factors of capacity building – educator collaboration and professional learning. Continua for each domain identify conditions and practices of capacity building at four levels: Establishing, Applying, Integrating, and Coherence.

The *Framework for Capacity Building*, *Asset Inventory for Collaborative Teams*, and *Continua for Capacity Building* were developed based on the findings from the NCLE literature review, *Building Capacity to Transform Literacy Learning* (Nelson, 2012). <http://bit.ly/ncleshortlitreview>

**Continua Design:** Key elements within each domain address four *Dimensions* of capacity building at each developmental level: *Participation and Connectedness*; *Collaborative Culture/Norms*; *Structures and Resources to Support Collaboration*; and *Assessment of Collaborative Inquiry Practices*.

Dimensions	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Participation and Connectedness</b>	Some staff initiate collaboration and inquiry.	There is broader involvement of staff in collaboration and inquiry, but inquiry groups continue to work in isolation from each other.	Involvement in collaboration and inquiry broadens to include those in roles supporting instruction (administrators, coaches, paraprofessionals). Some cross-group sharing occurs.	All staff participate in collaborative inquiries and cross-group sharing occurs routinely. Sharing may go beyond the school walls to include families, the community, and other schools and school districts.
<b>Collaborative Culture/Norms</b>	Collaboration and inquiry are inconsistent in nature and frequency.	Organizations select or define a model for collaborative inquiry. Agreements regarding effective practice begin to emerge.	Shared purpose (agreements and commitments) guide collaborative inquiries. Teaching practices are becoming more transparent, with some groups observing classrooms and holding conversations centered on improving practice and student learning.	Decisions and focus for professional learning are guided by shared purpose that is clearly linked to student learning goals. Teaching practices are transparent and routine, with classroom observations and conversations centered on improving practice and student learning.
<b>Structures and Resources to Support Collaboration</b>	Few collaborative structures exist. Collaboration occurs primarily outside the school day.	Collaborative structures including assigned time support occasional collaboration.	Collaborative structures including assigned time support collaboration within weekly schedules.	Collaborative structures support almost daily conversations centered on improving conditions and practices that impact student learning. Technology supports communication, expanded networks, and access to information and expertise.
<b>Assessment of Collaborative Inquiry Practices</b>			Organizations define and implement methods for assessing the effectiveness of collaborative inquiry to improve instruction, leadership, and organizational practices and student learning.	Organizations systematically assess conditions and practices affecting collaboration and inquiry and use this information to improve practice and student learning.

### *Deprivatizing Practice*

Key Elements	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Observation</b>	Observations of practice are primarily conducted by a supervisor for evaluation purposes. Some staff co-teach and informally learn from the practice of the others.	The leadership verbally recommends observations by staff, but no time is dedicated to this practice. A few staff choose to use their preparation time to observe others.	Release time is provided such that all teachers have observed other teachers and have been observed for the purpose of improving practice. Administrators and paraprofessionals also participate in peer observations and reflection.	All staff, regardless of role, actively seek opportunities to be observed and to observe others for the purpose of improving their practice. This includes inviting observations and feedback from parents/community and students. Cross-organization observations are also encouraged. Systems are in place that allow observations to occur easily.
<b>Learning Shared with Others</b>	Informal and voluntary groups form to share lessons learned from individual inquiries. Some might share lessons or resources with others. Teachers might share lessons learned with other staff after attending a conference or workshop.	Collaborative groups use protocols to share what they are learning with one another. Staff who attend conferences attend in pairs or teams to reflect together during the conference and when putting new learning into practice. New learning and student results are shared with others.	Dedicated time is provided for inquiry groups to share with one another what they are learning from their collaborative inquiries. Presenting at professional conferences is encouraged.	Educators share videos or reflections about their own practice with others outside of the school and district through conference presentations, publication, and participation in online professional communities. Organizations provide time and other incentives to support the work of preparing for publication or presentation.
<b>Accountability and Responsibility for Learning</b>	Supervisors hold teachers individually accountable for student learning and professional development. Some peers challenge one another to keep improving. Resources for ongoing learning are usually purchased out-of-pocket by individual staff.	Teacher groups meet regularly to discuss their lesson planning and classroom challenges. While holding themselves accountable, other teachers provide suggestions for improvement.	Teachers discuss teaching and student learning challenges and practices as critical friends. Individuals are accountable for follow through and group members ask for progress updates. Structures are in place to also encourage reporting progress and learnings across groups.	All students are the responsibility of all staff, community, and parents. Being critical friends serves this purpose. All staff hold one another accountable for improvement in addition to themselves. Participation in hard conversations is the expectation and the norm.
<b>Evidence-Based Conversations</b>	Discussions of challenges tend to be anecdotal with little reference to evidence that demonstrates the expressed challenge. Evidence and data-based decisions are encouraged, but most staff are unsure about how to do this.	There is an expectation within group meetings that problems be described in terms of supporting evidence and that plans for solution include the evidence that will be used to monitor and assess progress.	Organizational culture is one of trust and safety that encourages innovation and learning from practice. Data relating to classroom observations and student work are used in discussing progress and evidence of student learning.	Organization-wide data as well as individual student data are discussed routinely in small and large groups as a means of informing actions and assessing progress. Evidence is routinely discussed with parents and the community. In addition, all stakeholders contribute to the data sources and conversation.

### *Enacting Shared Agreements*

Key Elements	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Mission</b>	A process for establishing the mission statement of the organization has occurred and a mission statement, along with associated organizational goals, has been communicated to most stakeholders.	Stakeholders engage in conversations aimed at clarifying their understanding of the organization's mission. The conversation is two-way at all times.	At a mega-level, the planning functions and day-to-day operations of the organization are guided by the mission; success of the organization is measured by fidelity of the organization's work to its stated mission.	The mission statement(s) of the organization are rarely spoken; but they are constantly observable in the actions of educators and other stakeholders.
<b>Shared Agreements</b>	Standards for student learning have been identified, typically with the input of a team or work group representative of some educators in the organization. Some or most knowledge regarding effective practice is being imported from outside the organization.	Educators in the organization are beginning to base their instruction on their support for instruction on shared agreements about effective practices and student learning. Most staff engage in professional learning. Early adopters provide rigorous and ongoing feedback to their colleagues. Knowledge within the organization is explored, shared, and refined.	Educators engage in processes where they both provide and receive feedback from peers concerning successful implementation of shared agreements about student learning. Conversations address how and why to adapt shared agreements based on information and knowledge routinely generated in the organization. Coaching and mentoring of novice educators are routine.	Instruction for every student integrates learning standards across the curriculum. Inquiry produces new knowledge and wonderings that are shared across the organization regarding the need for refining learning standards and/or their assessment. The organization is both an exporter and importer of knowledge about learning standards for students.
<b>Shared Commitments</b>	Expectations for professional practice have been identified, typically with the input of a team or work group representative of some educators in the organization. Some or most knowledge regarding professional practice is being imported from outside the system.	Emerging and established collaborative work groups exist in many places throughout the organization. Early adopters model instructional and support practices to their peers, with some evidence of coaching. Teams of educators offer feedback to one another regarding professional practice. Walkthrough observations occur in some locations.	Educators observe the practice of one another, and focused conversation about what works, what does not, and what adaptation is needed happens routinely in the organization. Skill sets and strengths of educators are known by and shared among the professional staff.	Traditional practices of supervision are nearly nonexistent. Peers routinely observe, provide feedback to one another, and coach or mentor colleagues who enlist their assistance. The organization exports knowledge regarding professional practice while it continues to investigate new ideas. The organization demonstrates adaptation and innovation to meet student needs.
<b>Shared Purpose</b>	Shared purpose, the interaction of shared agreements and shared commitments, is a goal of most educators. The first communities of practice are taking root.	Communities of practice have become aware of their collaborative assets. Inquiries into shared agreements and shared commitments begin to occur in some of these communities of practice. Evidence of team planning, internal team feedback, and collaboration is growing within the organization.	The organization practices distributed leadership for teaching and learning. Collaborative structures and processes are routine. Communities of practice form, dissolve, and re-form in an ongoing cycle of inquiry about agreements and committed practice.	Professional learning happens seamlessly through collaborative practices where diverse points of view, agreements regarding student learning, and commitments to professional practice are routinely investigated.

### *Creating Collaborative Culture*

Key Elements	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Trust and Safety for Hard Conversations</b>	Informal pairs, groups, or departments work together on the daily logistics. Some examples of co-teaching or teaming are evident. Staff discussing problems or challenges do so behind closed doors and only with their closest peers who can be trusted to keep the information from others, especially from supervisors.	Staff within small groups are comfortable discussing strengths, weaknesses, and new learning openly without fear of breached confidentiality. Supervisors are often absent from these discussions.	Staff are encouraged to try new things, to assess progress, and to discuss openly with other staff including supervisors without fear of reprisal.	Multiple collaborative structures exist—vertical, horizontal, cross-district, self-selected, or topic focused. Parents and students participate. Time is built into the workday for collaborative learning. All staff, parents, and community are encouraged to question decisions and practices for the purpose of improving learning and instruction for all students.
<b>Productive Use of Time</b>	Small and large group meetings are used for daily logistics and announcements. Some groups choose to address teaching practice or student learning on occasion.	Meetings have agendas and clearly stated purpose. Most meetings use protocols or structures to stay on task. Reports are given for the purpose of group discussion. Dissemination of most information occurs through other means.	Meetings are clearly focused on participants leaving with new knowledge and ideas for action.	All meetings have clearly stated purpose and focus on improving student learning. Participants leave meetings with new information, a goal for next steps, and accountability to discuss the effects of their actions with others.
<b>Shared Leadership</b>	Committees develop school improvement plans, interview new hires, and make some other school-wide decisions. Administrator typically lead and may override committee decisions.	Committee chairs are recruited from the staff and share leadership with the administration.	All participants take turns leading meetings and input is sought from all parties before decisions are made. Staff feel that their input is valued and considered even when decisions differ from an individual's recommendation or input.	All staff share responsibility for student learning and professional learning. Decisions are made as a group and informed by data and other evidence. Along with staff, administrators and supervisors create conditions for staff learning and organizational improvement.

### *Maintaining an Inquiry Stance*

Key Elements	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Come together around a need to know</b>	Staff participate in professional learning experiences with colleagues from their grade level or department.	Small groups of educators read and discuss professional literature and attend to professional learning opportunities in areas of shared interest.	Small groups of educators identify and investigate shared and personally meaningful issues or questions related to practice as it impacts student learning. Purpose and intended outcomes of investigations are clear.	All staff determine and investigate shared, data-driven, and culturally responsive issues or questions of practice and improving student learning. Purpose is clear and outcomes are shared. Inquiries connect to organizational priorities.
<b>Learn with and from colleagues (in inquiry-based professional learning)</b>	Some staff initiate study groups, often meeting outside of the school day.	Small groups (primarily teachers) meeting voluntarily, regularly and within the school day, investigate problems of student learning using the plan/act/reflect cycle.	Small groups of teachers and other staff in roles supporting instruction investigate and modify practice as part of a group that meets, regularly and at least weekly within the school day. Some groups observe in classrooms and discuss their observations as part of their inquiries.	All staff seek opportunities to investigate and refine practice as part of multiple and overlapping groups that meet regularly as scheduled into the work week. Groups routinely observe in each other's classrooms and discuss their observations as part of their investigations. Collaborative groups may extend beyond the organization to include families, community members, and educators from other schools and school districts.
<b>Seek expertise and perspectives of others</b>	Most staff act primarily on individual experience or intuition.	Inquiry groups occasionally seek expertise (theory, research, coaching) and perspectives of others.	Inquiry groups regularly seek expertise and perspectives of others who may hold differing views of an instructional problem and practices to improve student learning.	The organization supports inquiry groups in accessing expertise and differing perspectives to support investigations into problems of student learning.
<b>Reflect and refine practice</b>	Some educators may reflect on own practice or attempt to incorporate reflections into practice.	Groups of educators occasionally reflect on one another's practice and its impact on student learning, and implement actions based on reflection and data.	Groups of educators regularly reflect on one another's practices and their impact on student learning. Collaborative groups implement actions based on reflection and data to refine shared practice.	Groups systematically incorporate reflections and change individual and shared practice as a result of their inquiry. Groups work toward improvement by investigating organizational issues and sharing findings. Participants reflect on and refine collaboration and inquiry practices as well.
<b>Share and connect learning</b>	Some educators share reflections or modifications to practice with site colleagues.	Most educators share reflections and modifications to practice with site colleagues.	Time is designated for the sharing of reflections and modifications to practice with site colleagues. All staff participate and critique is welcomed.	Reflections and modifications to practice are shared regularly, in both formal and informal venues, with site colleagues and educators beyond the site. New learning is shared more broadly through practice exchanges, conference presentations, publications, etc. Critique is welcomed.

### *Using Evidence Effectively*

Key Elements	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Use of data</b>	Many educators in the organization possess the skills necessary for its interpretation and use to inform instruction and organizational decision-making.	Most staff have the skills needed to analyze and use data for planning, monitoring, and assessing improvement in student learning, decision-making, and organizational improvement.	Multiple sources and types of data on student learning are used routinely and collaboratively for instructional planning, decision-making, and improvement, and in formulating questions to guide inquiry.	Multiple sources and types of data on student learning and organizational effectiveness are used collaboratively, systematically, and across the organization for planning, decision-making, measuring the impact of improvement efforts, and in formulating questions to guide inquiries.
<b>Collection and analysis of data</b>	Many educators collect and analyze data to understand student achievement trends and plan instruction.	Groups of educators at all levels and functions collect and analyze data for the purposes of understanding student achievement trends and improving instruction. The organization supports educators in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and use in planning and assessing improvement.	Educators at all levels and functions collaboratively collect and analyze multiple sources and types of data. The organization provides comprehensive training in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and use in planning and assessing improvement.	Educators at all levels and functions collaboratively and systematically collect and analyze multiple sources and types of data for improving all practices (classroom instruction, leadership, coaching, collaborative inquiry, budgeting, etc.).
<b>Access to data</b>	Educators, parents, and the community have access to data concerning student achievement.	Educators, parents, and the community have timely access to data concerning student achievement and organizational effectiveness. The organization proactively shares data about student achievement and the organization.	Educators, parents, and the community have timely access to data concerning student achievement and organizational effectiveness. The organization provides data in formats that are accessible and meaningful to educators, parents, and the community.	Educators at all levels and functions, students, and families have timely access to meaningful data. Analysis and reporting is valid, reliable, and accessible to all. Educators have access to expertise and up-to-date technology tools for increased access, accuracy, and efficiency.

### *Supporting Collaboration Systematically*

Key Elements	Establishing	Applying	Integrating	Coherence
<b>Time and infrastructure</b>	Collaboration happens irregularly and on educators' own time in informal pairs, groups, or existing structures such as grade levels or departments. Fewer than half of educators participate in any team collaboration.	Time for collaborative learning is built into the workday at least monthly. At least half of educators participate in some kind of ongoing team collaboration.	Time for collaborative learning is built into the workday at least bi-weekly. Most educators participate in at least one team.	Weekly time is built into the workday for collaborative learning. Multiple structures for collaboration exist—vertical, horizontal, cross-district, self-selected, topic-focused. All educators participate in at least one team, many in more than one.
<b>Training and resources</b>	Teams figure out for themselves what collaboration means and how to do it.	Some educators have had training on effective collaboration models. A few tools and protocols are in regular use.	Most educators have had training on effective collaboration and use tools and protocols to structure their collaborative work.	All educators have had training on effective collaboration. Multiple tools and protocols are in routine use.
<b>Leadership support and shared learning</b>	Leadership takes no position on collaboration or experimentation. Products or learning from informal collaboration are kept private.	Leadership provides basic support for collaboration, such as protecting time. Structured experimentation with practice is tolerated. Learning and products from teams are sometimes shared.	Leadership encourages and supports collaboration. Learning and products from teams are shared routinely.	Leadership actively supports, promotes, and participates in collaboration. Structured experimentation with and learning from practice is celebrated. Learning and products from teams are widely shared.