

Leading implementation

Using professional learning cycles to strengthen implementation

September 2026



Planning and delivering professional learning cycles is an important strategy for implementing an evidence-based teaching practice. This practice guide provides practical advice for school implementation teams using professional learning cycles within a broader implementation effort.

About this practice guide

This practice guide is informed by research on implementation strategies and effective professional learning. It also incorporates insights from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s work with schools through the [Learning Partner project](#). This project operationalises key concepts and frameworks from implementation research to support schools in using a [deliberate and structured approach](#) to implement evidence-based teaching practices.

This practice guide has 3 parts:

- **Part A** details what professional learning cycles involve and why they're important.
- **Part B** outlines practical steps when getting ready for, running and reviewing professional learning cycles.
- **Part C** provides practical tips for addressing challenges your school may encounter when starting to use professional learning cycles.

Using this practice guide

This guide is part of a set of practical resources for school implementation teams on professional learning cycles. The set also includes:



a video case study, [Using Professional Learning Cycles to Strengthen Implementation at Maffra Secondary College](#)



[editable slide decks on elements of explicit instruction](#) for running staff knowledge-building sessions



[modelling and coaching checklists](#) aligned to the same elements of explicit instruction.

We recommend you use this practice guide once you've already:

- ✓ developed some familiarity with a **deliberate and structured approach**
- ✓ formed a **school implementation team**
- ✓ identified an **evidence-based teaching practice** to implement in your school
- ✓ started drafting an **implementation plan** that:
 - outlines your school's goal for improving use of the evidence-based teaching practice
 - specifies which teaching team(s) will be involved in the implementation effort.

Tip: Getting started with implementation

- For an overview of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation, complete the 10-to-15-minute microcourse, [Achieving Lasting Change](#), or complete the module, [Implementation for Impact: A Deliberate and Structured Approach](#).
- To help establish an implementation team, complete the module, [Building an Effective Team and a Specific Implementation Goal](#), or read the [Building and Operating an Effective School Implementation Team](#) practice resource.
- To draft an implementation plan, read the practice guide, [Developing a School Implementation Plan](#).





Key points

- Professional learning cycles offer more support for changing teaching practice than isolated, one-off professional learning sessions. They're a core strategy in a deliberate and structured approach to implementation.
- Start planning for professional learning cycles early in the implementation process, but don't feel you need to prepare everything at once.
- Minimise cognitive load by focusing each professional learning cycle on specific elements of the practice being implemented.
- Identifying a team or individual staff members with practice expertise to lead, model and coach is important for ensuring professional learning cycles are successful in your context.
- Professional learning cycles include knowledge-building sessions, planning support, modelling and coaching. Each of these activities has unique considerations.

Part A:

Understanding professional learning cycles

Professional learning cycles support teachers in understanding, trialling and refining evidence-based practices in their day-to-day teaching. This section outlines how these cycles:

- differ from isolated, one-off professional learning sessions
- fit within a broader implementation effort
- can best be structured to help teachers use and sustain evidence-based teaching practices.

Making professional learning more effective

Professional learning sessions are a standard part of teacher professional development. Often, this professional learning is used in an isolated way (for example, in one-off staff presentations, through dissemination of recorded webinars and resources or in whole-day, off-site workshops).¹ Such sessions – especially when well-designed and delivered by practice experts in engaging ways – can alert participants to new ideas or spark further engagement.² However, isolated approaches to professional learning are unlikely to lead to sustained practice change among teams of teachers or at a whole-school level.³

Implementation research highlights how *ongoing* dynamic training and small cycles of change can drive successful implementation.⁴ More specifically, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has found that professional learning is more effective when it involves a balanced design of ‘mechanisms’ like managing participants’ cognitive load and modelling the relevant technique.⁵ These mechanisms are grouped into 4 categories, and drawing on one or more mechanisms from each category is enough to have a ‘balanced’ approach.^a

The professional learning cycles described in this practice guide draw on the EEF’s mechanisms of effective professional learning, as well as broader principles of evidence-informed implementation, to guide sustained practice change. These cycles can be contrasted with isolated forms of professional learning ([Figure 1](#)).

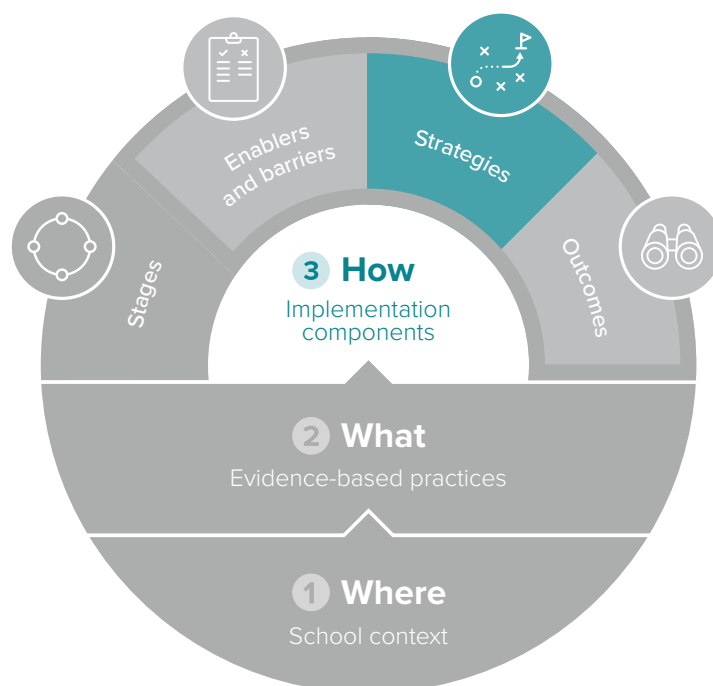
a The categories are: 1. build knowledge, 2. motivate teachers, 3. develop teacher techniques and 4. embed practice.

Figure 1: How professional learning cycles differ from isolated, one-off professional learning

 Professional learning cycles	 Isolated, one-off professional learning
✓ Are part of a broader implementation effort, which helps to ensure (among other things): • the practice is appropriate and feasible to implement in the first place • key implementation barriers are addressed • there are structures and plans in place that will maximise the impact of the professional learning	✗ Often relies on individual teachers or small groups of teachers applying key takeaways from a professional learning session without structures and processes to support this ongoing work
✓ Include planning support, modelling and coaching in addition to knowledge building	✗ Often attempts to move straight from knowledge building to practice change
✓ Take place over time rather than as a one-off event	✗ Often relies on one-off events, making sustained practice change difficult
✓ Allow for a balanced design of professional learning mechanisms to be effectively incorporated.	✗ May not be able to incorporate a balanced design of professional learning mechanisms (e.g., it may rely on 1 or 2 mechanisms like instructing teachers on how to perform a technique).

How professional learning cycles fit within a deliberate and structured approach

Implementation strategies are one of the ‘how’ components of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation (Figure 2). Strategies are the actions teams can take to shift evidence-based teaching practices from theory to everyday use.⁶ Planning for and delivering professional learning cycles is a core implementation strategy alongside other strategies like forming an implementation team.⁷

Figure 2: Where strategies fit in a deliberate and structured approach to implementation

[Appendix A](#) provides a summary of when to plan for and deliver professional learning cycles according to the stages of implementation.

Understanding and sequencing activities within a professional learning cycle

Professional learning cycles are made up of connected activities sequenced over time and include ways to observe and evaluate change in practice. These activities first aim to build teacher knowledge in a new practice and then support teachers in effectively applying the practice in their own classrooms.

Ideally, professional learning cycles include a sequence of:

- staff sessions to **build knowledge** of the evidence-based teaching practice
- support for teachers to **plan** how to incorporate the practice into their teaching
- **modelling** the practice in classrooms with expert or lead practitioners ('practice experts')
- **coaching** individual teachers to use and sustain the practice.

Each activity within the cycle should support the activities before and after it.

Part B:

Practical steps to plan for and use professional learning cycles

This section outlines practical steps for preparing for, carrying out and monitoring professional learning cycles. It's organised into 3 steps implementation teams can work through over time:

1. Get ready for professional learning cycles



2. Run each professional learning cycle



3. Review each professional learning cycle



1. Get ready for professional learning cycles

1. Get ready for professional learning cycles



2. Run each professional learning cycle



3. Review each professional learning cycle



As an implementation team, you can get ready to use professional learning cycles by:

- analysing the practice being implemented and 'chunking' it into smaller elements
- identifying which elements of the practice to prioritise in professional learning cycles
- identifying who your practice experts will be
- getting organised for each cycle.

Most of these activities will happen in the Prepare stage, before teaching teams are involved (see [Appendix A](#) for more information).

1.1. Chunk the practice

Once your school has identified an evidence-based teaching practice to help achieve your implementation goal, break this practice into smaller 'chunks' teachers can **gradually master** over time. Each individual chunk may later become the focus of a professional learning cycle.

Depending on how you chunk the practice, your school will likely use **multiple professional learning cycles** within the same implementation effort.

Table 1 provides an example of chunking explicit instruction into 6 practice elements and 6 potential professional learning cycles aligned with AERO's [model of learning and teaching](#).

Table 1: Example of chunking professional learning cycles on explicit instruction

Professional learning cycle	Focus	Content covered
1	Rules and routines	- Setting up classroom environments - Using key instructional routines and techniques to support the learning process
2	Learning objectives and success criteria	- Writing clear and measurable learning objectives and success criteria - Using techniques to help students understand and engage with these learning objectives
3	Teach explicitly	- Explicitly teaching something new, including how to explain new content - Using demonstrations and worked examples to model skills
4	Scaffold practice	- Planning and designing scaffolds - Determining the need for scaffolding to help students practise and apply new learning
5	Monitor progress	- Effectively checking for student understanding - Planning and providing adequate opportunities for guided and independent practice - Delivering timely feedback focused on success criteria
6	Revisit and review	Using review practices so students can recall and retain their learning

Tip: Breaking a practice into smaller 'chunks'

For more information on how to 'chunk' a practice, see AERO's practice guide on [developing an implementation plan](#).



1.2. Identify which practice elements to prioritise

Your implementation team can use a range of methods (for example, classroom observations, staff feedback, student surveys and reviews of lesson plans) to understand **how often** practice elements are being used and whether teaching teams are already using these elements **as intended**.

If most teachers are already consistently using a practice element, a professional learning cycle may be unnecessary. Instead, aim to provide targeted support for any teachers still developing their use of the element.

If all practice elements being implemented would benefit from a professional learning cycle, start with the first chunk in the sequence.

Example: Using data to inform the focus of professional learning cycles

A large primary school in Perth is implementing explicit instruction. Data from classroom observations shows that 85% of teachers are already using rules and routines with fidelity. Rather than spending further time on rules and routines, the implementation team decides to focus the first professional learning cycle on learning objectives and success criteria.

With only 50% of teachers consistently using learning objectives and success criteria in ways that research suggests are effective, the professional learning cycle begins by building knowledge on when and how to refer to learning objectives and success criteria.

While this cycle is carried out, the implementation team still uses occasional classroom observations to check that rules and routines are being sustained.

1.3. Identify who the practice experts will be

A key part of ensuring professional learning cycles are successful and feasible in your context will be determining who can deliver the necessary practice expertise (especially for modelling and coaching). Evidence-based teaching practices, like explicit instruction, will be most effective when they're used **as intended** (i.e., with fidelity). If professional learning cycles rely on guidance and feedback from peers who are still building their foundational knowledge and skills in a practice, it may be more difficult to reach high levels of fidelity across teaching teams.

Practice experts will need to either **already have** knowledge and skills in the practice or be prepared and supported to **develop** this expertise. They will need to understand the elements that make the practice effective and help to contextualise these practices in your school. Particularly for modelling and coaching, they will also need to be skilled at building relationships and communicating in open, authentic and non-judgemental ways.⁸

For sustainability, it's important to develop **internal capacity** for modelling and coaching within your staff cohort. This can also help to strengthen collaborative relationships across staff. However, your school may need to initially rely on external expertise (for example, from your system, a consultant, commercial provider or another school in your network) as you build staff capacity to model and coach. For possible ways of addressing what to do if your school doesn't yet have enough experts in the practice being implemented, see [Part C: Troubleshooting common challenges](#).

Consider establishing a coaching team

Schools with **large numbers of staff** involved in an implementation effort may find it necessary to form a coaching team (rather than rely on 1 or 2 coaches). This team is separate from the school implementation team, but is ideally overseen by a lead coach who is also a member of the implementation team. This structure can help with data sharing and consistent messaging across the teams (see [Reflect on professional learning cycles to inform decision-making](#)).

Depending on which teaching teams are involved in the implementation effort, members of the coaching team could be allocated a year level and/or learning area focus.

Consider:

- How many practice experts will you require to meet the needs of participating teachers?
 - For reference, Learning Partner schools have tended to have between 3 and 13 internal coaches, depending on the numbers of teachers involved in the implementation effort, how many staff already had practice expertise and what has been feasible for offering modelling and coaching within a professional learning cycle (see [Appendix B](#)).
- Will modelling and coaching need to be provided by practice experts from particular learning areas?
 - This may be particularly important in secondary schools.
- Will practice experts themselves need planning support to prepare for their subsequent modelling of the practice?

Tip: Feeding back to the implementation team

Members of the coaching team generally won't need to participate in implementation team meetings. However, it will be useful to have agreed processes for how coaches share observations, feedback and reflections with the lead coach, so the implementation team can use this information to monitor the professional learning cycle and make informed decisions (see [Review each professional learning cycle to decide next steps](#)).



1.4. Get organised for each professional learning cycle

Before starting a professional learning cycle with teaching staff, work together as an implementation team and/or coaching team to:

- Share a **consistent vision** of the practice and how professional learning cycles will run.
- Allocate **key roles and responsibilities** for leading activities in the professional learning cycle and planning logistics (for example, timetabling).
- Review and agree **how much time, on what days**, each member of the implementation team and/or coaching team can engage in activities connected with each professional learning cycle.
- Set a **clear timetable** that prioritises and protects time for all aspects of the professional learning cycle within available timetabling options (see [Appendix B](#)).
- Ensure any **physical resources** teachers need to support their use of the practice in their classrooms are available (for example, mini whiteboards with markers and erasers or posters related to the practice being implemented).
- Decide if all teachers will be asked to **participate equally** in all aspects of the professional learning cycle. (For example, teachers who are less accepting of the practice or have less experience might receive more planning support, modelling and/or coaching than others.)

2. Run each professional learning cycle

1. Get ready for professional learning cycles



2. Run each professional learning cycle



3. Review each professional learning cycle



As your implementation effort gains momentum and progresses to the Deliver stage, your implementation team can focus on running professional learning cycles on each element of the evidence-based teaching practice. This section details what's involved in running knowledge-building sessions, planning support, modelling and coaching, and outlines planning considerations for each of these activities.

For examples of how Learning Partner schools have scheduled professional learning cycles, see [Appendix B](#).

2.1. Knowledge-building sessions

Knowledge-building sessions involve delivering teacher training during staff meetings or allocated professional development time. These sessions may also include use of relevant readings or videos, and opportunities to rehearse a practice before it's used in a classroom.

Why use knowledge-building sessions

Knowledge-building sessions:

- introduce teachers to what a practice is and how it can be used
- provide opportunities for staff to come together to develop a shared language and understanding of key topics.

This collective focus can help strengthen peer support networks across a school, increasing informal support throughout the professional learning cycle.⁹

How to carry out knowledge-building sessions

When preparing for knowledge-building sessions, your implementation and/or coaching team should develop or tailor session **materials** to reflect on the big ideas and key messages to reinforce with staff. While one team member may take the lead in presenting each session, all team members should share a clear and consistent understanding of the content before it's presented to the wider staff (for example, so they're all able to answer staff questions).

To help manage **cognitive load** in knowledge-building sessions, focus on only a few practice elements at a time.¹⁰ For example, when implementing explicit instruction, you might start with a 45-to-60-minute session on 'rules and routines' (see [Table 1](#)). This will mean most professional learning cycles will only need one initial knowledge-building session. More content than that may mean there's too much to cover in subsequent planning, modelling and coaching. Limiting the amount of new information introduced will also help you ensure the content fits within the time available in your school's schedule.

When running a session, ensure there are ample opportunities for staff to **actively participate** in the learning and demonstrate their understanding (for example, through regular checks for understanding, group discussions and rehearsing practice elements). Where appropriate, revisit learning from earlier knowledge-building sessions to reinforce key points and highlight how practice elements build on each other. At the end of each session, staff should be clear on the practice elements they will focus on throughout the professional learning cycle. This clarity will also help later in the cycle when staff can use coaching conversations to help set personalised goals.

Tip: Exemplars of knowledge-building sessions

AERO has developed [exemplars of knowledge-building modules](#) that break explicit instruction practices into key chunks. These modules are designed to be delivered in 45-to-60-minute sessions. They aim to provide:

- a clear definition and description of the practice element
- a purpose and succinct rationale
- examples of what the practice element looks like in classrooms
- opportunities to discuss and rehearse the practice element.



Further considerations

- Is there foundational or **background reading** that staff presenting the session should be across?
 - For example, sessions on explicit instruction would benefit from an understanding of [how students learn best](#).
- Is there an opportunity to run each knowledge-building session with your **implementation and/or coaching team** before running it with the wider staff (to address any issues and build team members' knowledge)?
- How can knowledge-building content be **contextualised** for your school without compromising the core elements of the practice?
- Are there **likely questions** or issues staff may raise that you can prepare responses for ahead of time?
- What are the best **available timetabling options** to maximise participation for each teaching team?
 - If the implementation effort involves specific teaching teams rather than the whole school, how will participating teachers not be 'disadvantaged' by additional meeting time?
- Can sessions be **recorded and stored** (for example, via a central location or through your school's learning management system) for staff who are unable to attend, need a 'refresher' or join your school later?

2.2. Planning support

Planning support involves implementation leaders and/or practice experts providing the guidance, resources and collaborative opportunities teachers need to plan how they'll incorporate practice elements into their upcoming lessons.

Why use planning support

Planning support is an important link between learning about and trialling a practice, because it allows teachers to plan how they'll adapt their teaching to include the practice.

By providing this focused time, planning support is likely to make implementation more feasible for teachers. It can also increase fidelity to the practice, as it allows teachers to feel prepared heading into lessons where they'll trial the practice.^{11,12}

How to carry out planning support

Following a knowledge-building session, practice experts and teachers should work together to:

- **reflect on** the new practice elements introduced in the professional learning cycle
- **share ideas** about how to best incorporate these elements into existing lesson plans, materials or routines.

Make sure this support involves **guidance** from practice expert(s) – rather than being seen as additional, unstructured planning time. Also make sure the support stays **focused on the practice elements** introduced in the knowledge-building session – rather than, for example, becoming time to develop a comprehensive teaching and learning plan. [Table 2](#) includes examples for focusing planning support in professional learning cycles on explicit instruction.

Table 2: Example of chunking professional learning cycles on explicit instruction

Professional learning cycle	Focus	Example focus for planning support
1	Rules and routines	Identifying natural points within lessons where rules and routines can be best incorporated
2	Learning objectives and success criteria	- Drafting learning objectives and success criteria - Making sure planned lesson activities align with the learning objectives
3	Teach explicitly	- Planning a clear and concise explanation of a new concept using language that will build on or align with students' prior knowledge - Planning the steps involved in some worked examples
4	Scaffold practice	Drafting a variety of scaffolds to support new learning
5	Monitor progress	- Designing questions and prompts that can be used in a lesson to check students' progress towards the learning objective and success criteria - Identifying points in the lesson where it will be particularly important to check for understanding
6	Revisit and review	Designing review activities for previously taught content, ensuring the content selected is relevant and ready for review

The **amount** of planning support required after a knowledge-building session will likely depend on the:

- complexity of the practice element
- confidence teachers have in being able to use it in class
- extent to which pre-existing lesson plans and materials need adapting
- time available.

Further considerations

- Will it be useful to **strategically group** teachers during planning support (for example, according to learning areas or year levels)?
- How will teachers feel **ownership** of the materials being developed (so planning support isn't just about practice experts 'handing over' lesson plans)?
- How can you ensure teachers don't feel burdened to **overhaul** their existing planning, and instead focus on the specific practice element being discussed?
- Are there any related **curriculum resources** (for example, scopes and sequences or unit plans) that *must* be updated or changed to support use of the evidence-based teaching practice?
 - Focus only on those resources that, if not adapted, will be a barrier to teachers starting to use the teaching practice (see [Part C: Troubleshooting common challenges](#)).

2.3. Modelling

Modelling involves practice experts demonstrating how an evidence-based teaching practice can be effectively used in a classroom.

As aspects of modelling also apply to coaching, this section sometimes refers to both activities. Coaching is addressed in more detail in the next section.

Why use modelling

Modelling has been shown to have a beneficial effect on practice fidelity within schools.^{13,14} Through observing an evidence-based teaching practice, teachers can establish a clear idea of what the practice looks like in action, reducing potential misconceptions and variance across staff.

Modelling also helps make professional learning more dynamic, as it brings professional learning into classrooms where teachers will subsequently trial the practice.

How to carry out modelling

There's a range of ways to model, so consider what will be most effective in your setting and what's feasible in terms of resourcing and timetabling. Types of modelling include:

- **observing** a practice expert teaching a lesson – either in their own class or in the observer's class – in real time. (Where possible, it will be more efficient to have several teachers observe the same lesson.)
- **watching videos** of a practice expert demonstrating a practice element
- **rehearsing** (for example, with colleagues or with a practice expert outside of a lesson).

Before observing a modelled lesson, ensure teachers are clear on what practice elements they're **looking for**, so they can identify, analyse and take notes on how the practice expert is using those elements. Besides explaining these practice elements in the knowledge-building sessions, disseminate modelling and coaching checklists in advance that highlight the practice elements that will be in focus.

Tip: Using modelling and coaching checklists

It's important to have **modelling and coaching checklists** or proformas for each practice element, contextualised for your school. As an implementation and/or coaching team, collectively review or create these checklists so there's agreement on what to look for during observations. Share these checklists with teachers early in a professional learning cycle, and also share their ongoing purpose for both modelling and coaching.

AERO has developed example [modelling and coaching checklists](#) aligned with explicit instruction practices in AERO's [model of learning and teaching](#). These checklists can help guide coaches and teachers to focus on practice elements relevant to the current professional learning cycle.



Following a modelling session, consider having a **quick, informal conversation** to build rapport and check for any misunderstandings. You could discuss:

- what the observer noted
- what worked well with using the practice elements
- whether any practice elements were missing, hard to see or didn't work as intended (and why that may have been the case).

Tip: Deciding how much modelling and coaching to provide

The research is unclear on how much modelling and coaching is needed to ensure the benefits of these activities are realised. The **quality and focus** of support may matter more than the number of minutes. Aim to provide the dosage of modelling and coaching that's feasible for your context, while keeping a small allocation of time for responsive support for teachers who need more. Lead coaches can decide what staff need based on fidelity data and available resourcing.

Depending on the focus of the professional learning cycle, it may not be necessary for an observing teacher to stay for an entire modelled lesson. However, modelling a whole lesson (e.g., in explicit instruction) may foreshadow practice elements that will be the focus of future professional learning cycles and extend teachers who are ready to observe those elements.



Further considerations

- What's the existing modelling and coaching **culture** at your school? If this needs significant strengthening, see [Part C: Troubleshooting common challenges](#).
- What's the **most feasible** way to carry out modelling? And what would practice experts and teachers **prefer**? For example, would they prefer live modelling in the practice expert's class, a recorded video from the practice expert's class or live modelling in the observer's class?
- Especially when modelling takes place in an observer's own class, what **norms** or structures could be in place to enable that teacher to remain focused on the modelling (rather than, for example, feeling the need to work with individual students in the class)?
- If necessary, who will be responsible for timetabling or **covering classes** so teachers are released from teaching responsibilities to participate in modelling?

2.4. Coaching

Coaching (or instructional coaching) typically involves practice experts working with individual teachers over time to:

- observe their teaching
- provide feedback and guidance for improving this teaching.^{15,16,17}

Why use coaching

Coaching has been shown to improve teacher instruction and have positive effects on student achievement.¹⁸ It can help connect teachers' knowledge of a practice (developed through knowledge-building sessions) and their understanding of how to use it (developed through planning and modelling), with the reality of embedding it in their day-to-day teaching. Through timely feedback and clear improvement goals, coaching supports teachers to use a practice with fidelity in their classrooms.

How to carry out coaching

Coaching relies on **relationships**,^{19,20} and on coaches and teachers being aligned on its purpose.²¹ It's ideally cooperative, collaborative, personalised and non-evaluative.²² When coaches and teachers prioritise building rapport and develop equal, professional, trust-based partnerships, they create the conditions for meaningful collaboration.^{23,24}

Once knowledge building, planning support and modelling have taken place, teachers will likely be clear on the **practice elements to focus on**. Having a narrower focus for observations and follow-up coaching conversations may contribute to predictable and psychologically safe interactions, which may be particularly important for schools that don't have an existing culture of observation. Coaches should observe the teaching for as much of a lesson as is needed to gain an indication of how the practice element(s) are being incorporated, using an agreed upon format for documenting observations (see AERO's [modelling and coaching checklists](#)).

In addition to observation opportunities, coaching needs some protected time (e.g., 15 minutes shortly after the observation) for structured **coaching conversations**. These conversations are an opportunity to:

- provide feedback
- reflect on progress
- set actionable goals and next steps for improving use of the teaching practice over time.^{25,26}

While coaching should focus on the practice elements that are the focus of the professional learning cycle, goals should still be **personalised** to reflect a teacher's current context and expertise.²⁷ For example, some teachers may be able to focus on multiple practice elements at once, while others may benefit from isolating one element at a time. When facilitating these conversations, coaches should communicate in ways that suit the needs of each teacher. For example, some teachers may benefit from more direct guidance, while other teachers may obtain more value from open questions that prompt them to identify next steps for improving their practice.

Further considerations

- What structures do you need to put in place to build a **coaching culture** (see [Part C: Troubleshooting common challenges](#))?
- How will coaching observations and conversations be **documented**?
- How will coaching goals be **tracked, reviewed and updated**?
- How and when will teachers and coaches be released from teaching time to have a **coaching conversation**? Are there existing structures where this could happen naturally or will you need to allocate time?

3. Review each professional learning cycle to decide next steps

1. Get ready for professional learning cycles



2. Run each professional learning cycle



3. Review each professional learning cycle



Once you've run a professional learning cycle, your implementation team can:

- reflect on the cycle to inform decision-making
- provide teachers with feedback on progress
- get ready for the next professional learning cycle.

Most of these activities will happen in the Deliver stage (see [Appendix A](#)).

3.1. Reflect on professional learning cycles to inform decision-making

By reflecting together, your implementation team can make better decisions throughout the implementation process.²⁸ This includes decisions that improve current and future professional learning cycles and more effectively tailor support to teaching teams.

At implementation team meetings, consider:

- if there's a need to **revisit or repeat** any content in the current or previous cycles
- if data suggests the cycle has not yet been **effective**
 - if so, identify the implementation strategies in the cycle that will be most impactful to **repeat** (for example, if fidelity of the practice is low, then at least some teachers or teaching teams may benefit from additional modelling and coaching)
- whether to move to the **next** professional learning cycle (see [3.3 Get ready for the next professional learning cycle](#)).

When making these decisions, it will be useful to draw on any **fidelity data** collected during the professional learning cycle. It will also be useful to seek **reflections** from your implementation team and feedback from teaching teams, as drawing on diverse experiences can provide a more comprehensive understanding of what's working well and what needs adjusting.

Tip: Using classroom observations to monitor progress

As you're running each professional learning cycle, monitor its progress to make informed decisions on how to tailor strategies to student and staff needs.

For further guidance on monitoring progress (and, particularly, on monitoring fidelity), see AERO's practice guide, [Staying on Track: Monitoring Implementation Outcomes](#).



3.2. Provide teaching teams with feedback on progress

In addition to providing personalised feedback through coaching conversations, it may be useful for your implementation team to convey some **high-level feedback** about what's working well and what could be improved across teaching teams in general. For example, at a staff meeting, your implementation team could use high-level data from classroom observations to:

- **celebrate achievements** or progress in teachers' use of the practice
- discuss with teaching teams the best way(s) they might **continue to be supported** to use the practice – for example, whether they would benefit from more or less intensive planning support, modelling or coaching within this professional learning cycle.

As with coaching conversations, this feedback should focus on providing **support**, rather than evaluating or managing performance. Discussions will therefore ideally be led by member(s) of your implementation or coaching teams who are skilled at facilitating collaborative and supportive conversations.

3.3. Get ready for the next professional learning cycle

Once your implementation team has decided it will soon be an appropriate time to move to the next professional learning cycle, use your regular implementation team meetings to plan for this next cycle while also applying lessons from previous cycles.

Each professional learning cycle is likely to follow a similar internal sequence, but there may also be **differences** between cycles. For example, once the first professional learning cycle is complete, subsequent cycles may **revisit prior learning** by including a 'refresher' of previous content within knowledge-building sessions or coaching conversations.

Tip: Using implementation team meetings

To help use implementation team meetings to plan for the next professional learning cycle, use the practice resource, [Meeting Regularly as a School Implementation Team for Success](#). This resource includes prompts and questions for teams to consider as they plan for their next professional learning cycle.



Part C:

Troubleshooting common challenges

Your school likely uses at least some aspects of professional learning cycles already. However, there may be opportunities to strengthen what you're already doing and bring all aspects of professional learning cycles together.

Table 3 outlines some common challenges in carrying out professional learning cycles, along with some possible strategies for addressing these.

Table 3: Possible strategies for addressing common challenges

Challenge	What you could try
Our school currently doesn't have enough staff who are expert enough in the evidence-based teaching practice to model or coach.	- Plan to spend more time in the Prepare stage of implementation to upskill a small group of leaders or teachers in the practice. - If resourcing is available, seek external experts (e.g., consultants) who could initially deliver some of the knowledge-building sessions, modelling or coaching and upskill a small group of staff. - Work with other schools in your network or with your regional system team to identify other sources of practice expertise. - Use published resources (e.g., AERO's Teaching for How Students Learn: Videos of Practice) to model a practice. - Consider remote virtual coaching to improve implementation fidelity, which can also lead to improved student outcomes – particularly for students with reading difficulties.^{29,30}
Members of our coaching team may not be the most suitable staff for this role.	Reconsider membership of the coaching team – Ideally, coaches should be identified based on demonstrated coaching capability and suitability for the role, rather than whether they have existing leadership positions, are assumed to have practice expertise or are most available. - Have one or 2 lead coaches who can help develop the skills of other members of the team.
Our school has limited resourcing to provide teachers with time off class for modelling or coaching.	- Incorporate more modelling and rehearsal opportunities within knowledge-building sessions or in short videos that teachers can access outside class time. - Consider if leaders can cover parts of lessons to allow teachers to join modelling or coaching opportunities. - Consider if 2 classes can be joined for a lesson to allow for modelling and coaching to take place. - Use existing resources in other creative ways, reallocating responsibilities to free up leadership time and prune less impactful initiatives.

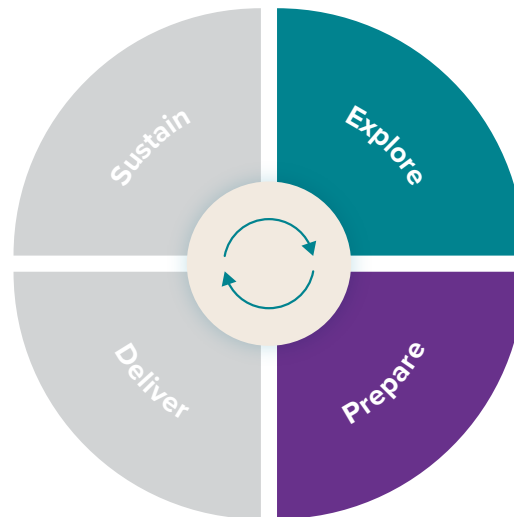
Challenge	What you could try
Our curriculum documentation (especially our scopes and sequences) need work, which makes it harder to provide planning support.	• Start professional learning cycles with: – learning areas or year levels where curriculum documentation is strongest – practice elements that are less dependent on strong curriculum documentation (e.g., entry and exit routines). • Request copies of curriculum documentation from other schools. • Seek support for curriculum documentation from regional system staff. • While the professional learning cycles go ahead, identify other learning areas where school teams can begin to <u>develop a teaching and learning plan</u>.
Our school doesn't have an existing culture of classroom observation, modelling or coaching.	• Explain the evidence behind modelling and coaching. • Emphasise that the process is non-evaluative. • Have members of the coaching team first invite staff into their classrooms for informal observations. • With permission, record video examples of positive coaching conversations and share these with staff. • Start with a 'trial run' of modelling and coaching involving a small group of teachers. • Develop or tailor modelling and coaching checklists so staff are clear on the focus of observations and coaching conversations. • Start with a 'low stakes' practice or routine (e.g., an entry or exit routine or a 'do now' activity). • Ensure staff providing modelling and coaching are adequately prepared for this role (e.g., provide them with opportunities to practise coaching conversations). • To build teacher confidence with coaching, consider starting an observation with more of a 'team teaching' structure (where the teacher uses a practice element alongside the coach) before the coach steps back to observe.

Challenge	What you could try
Our school currently uses a lot of isolated, one-off professional learning .	• Communicate the rationale behind professional learning cycles and the hopes of leadership about how changing to professional learning cycles will be useful for teachers and students. • Draw on research to emphasise the importance of structured professional learning cycles compared with isolated professional learning sessions. • Start with a 'trial run', either by using planning support, modelling and coaching with a small group of teachers or by running one professional learning cycle with staff and inviting reflections on how it went. • Consider what can be reduced or removed to prioritise professional learning cycles. • Commit to scheduled professional learning cycles in whole-school strategic planning documents. • Recognise that you're already off to a good start with knowledge-building sessions and focus on some of the other activities in a professional learning cycle.
Our school already uses coaching but it's often ad hoc .	• Timetable and schedule in coaching: – For example, if there's no time for a coaching conversation immediately after an observation, commit to meeting for 15 minutes at another time that day. • Refer to research on the importance of structured professional learning cycles compared with ad hoc coaching. • Recognise that you're already off to a good start with coaching (even if there are some aspects to improve on) and focus on some of the other activities in a professional learning cycle.

Appendix A: Stages of implementation

Implementation takes places across 4 stages: Explore, Prepare, Deliver and Sustain. Planning and delivery of professional learning cycles takes place across multiple stages of the implementation process – especially in Prepare and Deliver (Figure A1). Initial work is concentrated in the school implementation team, before later involving any coaching team and the wider teaching staff.

Figure A1: When to plan for and use professional learning cycles in an implementation effort



Explore

School implementation team

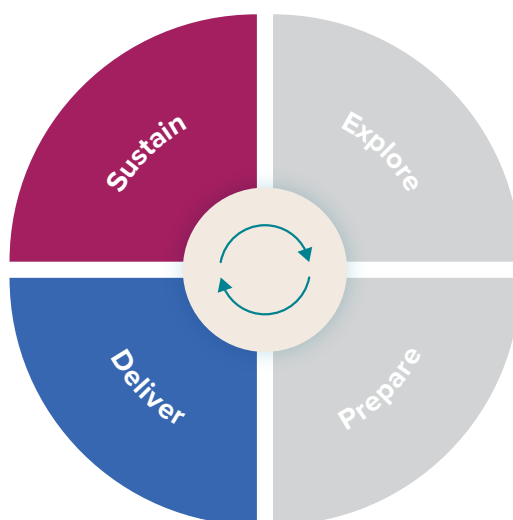
- Identifies the evidence-based teaching practice to be implemented
- Builds a shared knowledge of the practice
- Decides whether it's also necessary to form a coaching team



Prepare

School implementation team and/or coaching team

- Continues to develop their understanding of the practice
- Gets ready for professional learning cycles, including by developing resources to support knowledge building, modelling and coaching – for example:
 - creating professional learning modules
 - creating or tailoring modelling and coaching checklists
 - accessing resources for in-person or video modelling



Deliver

School implementation team and/or coaching team

- *Runs* each professional learning cycle to support staff in using the practice in their classrooms
- Collects data on fidelity of the practice
- *Reviews* each professional learning cycle and begins to plan for the next professional learning cycle

Teaching teams

- Participate in knowledge-building sessions, planning support sessions, modelling and coaching
- Provide feedback on their experience of the professional learning cycles



Sustain

School implementation team and/or coaching team

- Continues to monitor fidelity of the practice and decides whether it's necessary to provide any further knowledge-building or coaching support

Teaching teams

- Continue to use the practice, raising new ideas or issues where necessary

Source: 'Figure 1' in [Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation](#) by E4L (2019, p. 8), licensed under a [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#) licence. Adapted with permission, including recreating in AERO branding and simplifying content.

Appendix B: Example professional learning cycle schedules

Tables B1 to B3 contain sample schedules for how schools of different sizes have organised their professional learning cycles in ways that fit with their resourcing. These are combined versions of schedules used by schools in the Learning Partner project.

Example 1: Small primary school (5-week schedule)

Teachers participating in the implementation effort: All (whole school)

Coaching structure: With 8 classes in the school, it was achievable for one coach (a school leader and member of the implementation team) to reach 4 to 5 classes per week for modelling and coaching sessions.

Table B1: Sample schedule for a professional learning cycle in a small primary school

Week	Strategy	Implementation team or coach
1	- Knowledge-building session - Planning support	Implementation team members deliver first chunk of knowledge building about the practice. Coach: - finalises a modelling and coaching timetable - meets with a group of 4 teachers to plan lessons and identify required resources.
2	- Modelling - Planning support continued	Coach: - models the practice in 3 classrooms while each classroom teacher observes - meets with another group of 4 teachers to plan lessons and identify required resources.
3	Modelling continued	Coach models the practice in 5 classrooms while each classroom teacher observes.
4	Coaching	Coach individually observes and has coaching conversations with 4 teachers.
5	- Coaching continued - Reflection	Coach individually observes and has coaching conversations with 4 teachers. Implementation team reflects on progress.

Example 2: Large primary school (10-week term)

Teachers participating in the implementation effort: All (whole school)

Coaching structure: Given the large school size, 4 staff were identified as practice experts to model and coach teachers in the practice. They formed a coaching team, and the lead coach was also a member of the implementation team. The large school size also meant that modelling and coaching each needed 3 weeks to be carried out.

Table B2: Sample schedule for a professional learning cycle in a large primary school

Week	Strategy	Implementation team and/or coaching team
1	Knowledge-building session	• Deliver first chunk of knowledge building about the practice.
2–3	Planning support	• Prepare lesson materials, modelling timetables and coaching schedules. • Rehearse modelling sessions.
4–6	Modelling	• Model practice for teachers in classrooms.
7–9	Observations and coaching	• Observe lessons and have collaborative conversations with teachers. • Discuss observations during implementation team meetings.
10	Reflection	• Reflect on coaching observations and discuss next steps. • Provide additional support to teachers where needed (e.g., if a teacher missed a coaching session).

Example 3: Medium-sized secondary school (10-week term)

Teachers participating in the implementation effort: Pilot group (Year 8–10 maths, science and humanities teachers)

Coaching structure: The school had capacity to establish a coaching team of 3 staff, including one from each relevant learning area. The lead coach was also a member of the implementation team.

Table B3: Sample schedule for a professional learning cycle in a medium-sized secondary school

Week	Strategy	Implementation team and/or coaching team
1	Knowledge-building session	Implementation team delivers first chunk of knowledge building about the practice. Coaches attend session.
2–3	Planning support	Each coach meets with a group of teachers from their learning area to prepare exemplar explicit teaching lessons for an upcoming unit.
4–6	Modelling to domain leads and coaches	Each coach models and films the practice in classrooms within their learning area.
7–9	Coaching	Each coach observes lessons and has coaching conversations with teachers in their learning area.
10	Reflection	- Coaches share insights with the implementation team based on observations and coaching conversations. - Implementation team reflects and discusses next steps.

Endnotes

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