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Advocating for Cycles of Inquiry as Alabama's Professional Development Model for Teachers

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National Louis University

Policy Advocacy Paper

Dr. Gloria Hall-McDaniels

February 22, 2019

Digital Commons Document Origination Statement

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF JOB-EMBEEDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN
AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

AN EXAMINATION OF PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDING OF BEST PRACTICES IN
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHER PEDAGOGY:
A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

THE UTILIZATION OF CYCLES OF INQUIRY AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
MODEL FOR TEACHERS: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

The single most important variable in student achievement is the quality of the teacher in front of them (Darling-Hammond 2014). As Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) professional development mission statement has included adult learning principles, states must begin to align to this expectation. If schools are going to see the quality that Darling-Hammond references, states must think about adopting a professional development framework that gives districts guidelines but allows for autonomy. Cycles of Inquiry is a researched based framework that aligns to the principles of adult learning but isn't so rigid that school district and schools couldn't augment it to meet their specific needs. With a large percentage of the teaching population being rated in the lowest two categories on the teacher evaluation tool, and an achievement gap growing rather closing, the State of Alabama must quickly look to examine its current mission for professional development to ensure that it not only aligns to ESSA but research. COI does just that and is a cost-effective way of focusing on developing teachers.

Preface

As a lifelong educator with more than 20 years and an extensive background in teaching and learning, states and school districts continue to practice outdate "sit and get" professional development. In order for Local Education Agencies (LEA) continue to align with the mission of professional development in Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), they must first examine their current practice. In began my research of a district in Alabama in my first dissertation. While examining the local district's policy of professional development, I wanted to understand the state's guidance.

As I reviewed the state's mission for professional development, I quickly noticed that the language was vague and left districts to have to interpret what it meant. One of the recurring themes in my literature review was that professional development only works when it is job-embedded and specific to teachers' needs. I started by exploring many professional development models in comparison to the literature and found that there is a framework that perfectly aligns. The framework is Cycles of Inquiry, which at every step of the cycles fits the seven principles of adult learning; **data driven**, **content focused**, **job-embedded**, **collaborative**, **sustained** over time with **feedback** and builds in **reflection**. In this dissertation, I plan to advocation through a series of analysis that Alabama adopts Cycles of Inquiry (COI) as the its professional development framework.

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Advocating for Cycles of Inquiry as Alabama's PD Model for Teachers

SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

A compilation of empirical evidence, news articles, public opinions, and state statistics reveals that Alabama's public education department is in need of policy reform in order to improve professional outcomes and subsequently student achievement outcomes. Specifically, Alabama's current, teacher professional development (PD) standards are in need of revision to become more cohesive, more comprehensive, and more effective at driving teacher pedagogy, intentionally designed to drive student outcomes. As a researcher, I became critically aware of this current educational PD policy issue while researching Bullock County's School District professional development design. Current teacher qualification policy states that all Alabama teachers must hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree and show completion of an approved education program prior to obtaining teacher certification. Even more startling, the undergraduate GPA requirement for teachers is set at a minimum of 2.5 (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2018).

These same arbitrarily lower standards apply to PD and continuing education. For instance, teacher certificate renewal certification requires submitting certificates for renewal, with a fee, during the first six months of the year to Alabama's DOE (Department of Education). Additionally, certificate renewal requires engagement in only one of the following PD, or continuing education processes: 50 clock hours of PD, or three semester credit hours of education per three years of teaching full time, six semester hours of credits (as approved), 100 clock hours of PD, or standards certification by the National Board of Professional Teaching (AEA, 2018). The semester hours can be in education and doesn't have to be related to their field.

Undoubtedly, these requirements merely obligate teachers to obtain one item of recorded certification; they lack explicit guidance on the types of PD teachers should take to renew their certificate. School districts are able to currently have little guidance on how to support teacher development using a best practice in research. Hence, a new policy surrounding Alabama's PD for teachers is needed in order to advance the current gap in educational achievement and improve state educational conditions.

In justification of this proposal, critical issues clarifying the need for a revised PD program include Alabama's present student achievement gap, particularly as evidenced between African American and Hispanic students versus other racial subgroups. Additionally, teacher burnout and lack of effective strategies could potentially be minimized if Alabama adopted a framework for PD. Mitchell (2018) notes that the achievement gap, especially between African American, Latino and Caucasian students in Alabama, has widened in recent years according to standardized assessment data.

A comprehensive research-based PD framework could be effectively in closing this gap Additionally, Dell'Angelo and Mawhinney (2017), as well as Haberman (2005) evidence the fact that teacher burnout and thus turnover continues to become a costly issue among Alabama's urban schools. Dell'Angelo and Mawhinney (2017) suggest that current high levels of burnout call for a paradigm shift among Alabama's teaching institutions—particularly related to management and PD that could serve to reduce turnover and burnout, thereby improving efficiency for school, as well as, student achievement outcomes. Finally, Kisha's (2015) research further supports the notion that an effective PD model within Alabama's schools is currently lacking.

In light of this context, this present policy advocacy discussion proposes the implementation of a structured professional development model, known as Cycles of Inquiry (COI), as a primary framework guiding K through 12 urban school instructor's PD requirements. Organizations and scholars including Learning Forward (2018) and Vrasidas and Glass (2007) refer to this model as the Results Oriented Cycle of Inquiry, or ROCI framework. Hence, ROCI and COI are used interchangeably herein. Learning forward (2018) notes that the ROCI is an incredibly powerful tool for improving organizational potential through the implementation of professional learning that is continuously engaged in, so as to effect continuous, adaptive, evolving improvement and organizational culture.

The ROCI model essentially uses five cyclical steps to facilitate the learning and development process, while simultaneously improving learning focus, results (staff and student outcomes) as well as cultivating optimal organizational habits fostering continual staff motivation and outcome improvement. Because the ROCI pays particular attention to student learning outcomes, it centers instructor PD upon advancements that will directly benefit classroom and curriculum-oriented activities. Section three of this proposal will outline, in greater detail, the theoretical functioning of the ROCI, or COI.

SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

Educational Analysis

The literature discussed within this section clearly documents Alabama's need for the COI as a revised framework of educational PD by evaluating the issue from an educational, economic, political, social and ethical/moral perspective. To begin with, Riley (2018) notes that most educational administrators and leaders are well aware that maintaining PD standards and continuing education requirements for instructors is an imperative part of ensuring students are receiving a quality education and ensuring that teachers are prepared to successfully navigate the changing cultural, informational and economic environments of the student bodies and surrounding social context they interact with. Since students depend primarily on teachers to guide their learning process, which determines, in large part, the success of students' outcomes and achievements, ensuring teachers receiving effective continuing education and PD is imperative to student achievement.

However, and unfortunately, Mitchell (2018) documents the current growing educational gap between students of color and white students nationwide. This achievement gap is particularly evident in US southern states such as Alabama. Within Mitchell's (2018) discussion, achievement gap refers to the academic shortfalls between demographic student groups evidenced by standardized test score outcomes. Specifically, the recent statistics documenting achievement gaps between Black, Latino and White students in southern states such as Alabama ranges between 37 and 41 percentage points in the subjects of math and reading. This is an enormous gap approaching 50%, clearly warranting the attention of educational administrators, leaders, and policymakers.

Additionally, as noted, teacher burnout continues to impose a costly burden upon today's schools, Alabama not excluded. Empirical evidence suggests a clear link between teacher burnout, turnover, and diminished student achievement scores (Kisha, 2015). Furthermore, Kisha (2015) seems to suggest, logically, that advancements in PD and teacher support could minimize the stress and thus burnout teachers feel, thereby effecting positive outcomes on student achievement. As confirmed by Morieux and Tollman's (2014) case studies and experiences, changes in organizational management practices (including changes in PD processes) across industries most often yield positive outcomes in regard to end-user and consumer experiences and outcomes, (which in this case, entail student achievement scores).

Furthermore, Alabama's high teacher burnout levels are arguably evidenced by Alabama's lack of student success, specifically as seen by the fact that less than 40 percent of Black students in Alabama's Jefferson County are enrolled in AP classes. Interestingly, AL (2017) also notes that students of color in Alabama statistically perform better when taught primarily by teachers of color. —perhaps due to the ability to establish social trust, relatability and feel comfortable with one another. While racial diversity is an important factor to consider, this realization is important when it comes to ensuring successful learning environments. This further supports that since there is a higher number of non-minority teachers, an effective PD model is needed. In other words, AL's (2017) research seems to suggest that Alabama's current teacher-student environment in which the number of non-minority teachers is disproportionately high to the number of black and brown students. Al (2017) implies this does little to foster the establishment of trust and success between teachers and students, and instead, aggravates racial tensions, stereotypes, and thus subsequently increases teacher burnout as teachers feel frustrated and ill-equip to teach a student body diversely different than themselves. Therefore, this context

justifies the need for a more comprehensive, critical-thought-oriented PD program that successfully prepares teachers, regardless of race, to manage and relate to the student bodies they interact with.

Economic Analysis

An analysis of Alabama's economic environment also supports the proposal and need for an improved PD education policy. According to a recent study conducted by WalletHub, Alabama ranked low on America's economic standing scale. Out of 50 states, Alabama ranked near the bottom as 44th in terms of economic standing. Economic standing was evaluated using criteria such as economic innovation and the presence and activity of innovative businesses, economic health in terms of state financial performance, debt to asset ratios and more, and overall state economic activity including per capita figures. In total, dozens of metrics were evaluated including unemployment rates, household incomes, and percentage of individuals within Alabama living at or below poverty. Some of the most startling statistics are as follows: Evaluated out of 50 states, the study found that Alabama is ranked 41st in terms of GDP, and 43rd in terms of its level of startup business activity—evidencing a lack of fresh, economic innovation. Furthermore, Alabama ranks 45th in terms of the unemployment rate (exhibiting a high unemployment rate) and 45th in regard to state-government deficit per capita (exhibiting a high debt-to-asset ratio). Finally, Alabama ranks 47th in terms of household income, meaning that residents exhibit a relatively low national per capita household income, which evidences an overall economic depression within the state (McCann, 2018).

These economic figures relate directly to the issue of addressing Alabama's need for an improved educational system to prepare students for college and careers. This can be supported by enacting this PD policy. Education, in many respects, is the foundation of a state's and

nation's sound, adaptable and progressive economy. Thus, in order to stimulate Alabama's economy, graduates must achieve better academic outcomes. Furthermore, current teacher burnout rates only place a fiscal burden upon schools and the overall state economic and education budget, as schools struggle to replace turnover and train new teachers while experiencing poor achievement outcomes. Identifying an improved PD policy would likely only serve to bolster Alabama's economic standing long term.

Social Analysis

Within the context of this discussion, it is important to understand that a state's social, educational, economic, political and moral health and climate are all intricately intertwined. Simply stated, educational outcomes naturally impact subsequent economic climates that are influenced by graduates, and education levels directly impact household incomes. Likewise, social issues such as racial prejudices directly impact educational outcomes and subsequent economic climates, which in turn influence political decisions and vice versa. Considering these examples, understanding the multi-faceted and mutually influential relationships between these factors becomes clear. A social analysis of Alabama's current environment reveals several prominent issues that are likely indirectly tied to Alabama's economic and educational issues. According to the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (2018), gambling, crime and substance abuse (namely opioids) have become state-wide epidemics.

Perhaps the predominant root issue underlying the symptom-like issues such as substance abuse and gambling is the broader and more pervasive issue of mental health challenges. A substantial percentage of Alabama's citizens struggle with mental health issues. And according to research, behavioral health issues, when not addressed, can increase a community's crime rate, substance abuse rate, adversely impact educational outcomes and more. Therefore, teachers must

be well-equip to face the social and emotional challenges that students in classrooms may be

dealing with—a task that a properly designed PD program can assist in accommodating.

According to CSACO (2016), Alabama's Civil Justice Foundation asserts that social service

organizations in Alabama ought to contribute to the state's Social Return on Investment, or

SROI. Though not classified as a social service organization per se, Alabama's educational

institutions are arguably critical social service organizations contributing to the state's social

climate. For this reason, bolstering the integrity, strength and organizational solvency of schools

is a critical task needed to better manage Alabama's social issues.

Political Analysis

Similar to the manner in which a social analysis reveals issues indirectly linked to

Alabama's compromised state of education, so too does a political analysis of the state's climate.

Moseley (2017) comments of various predominant, current political issues clogging the state's

otherwise smooth, efficient, political decision-making processes and the justice system. For

instance, one of Alabama's primary political concerns is also a social concern: over-crowded

correction facilities. Arguably, if the state's educational outcomes were to improve, research

suggests crime rates may fall as a result—which subsequently might alleviate the burden of

overcrowded corrections facilities. Though these speculations require continuing research to

state as fact, numerous researchers in organizational management such as Morieux and Tollman

(2014) have established a case for strong correlations between a community's level of

functioning, crime rates, educational outcomes, and social climates. Interestingly, current

governor Bentley considered and proposed a band aide approach, which fueled the corrections

facility business rather than solving the social issue of crime: raising billions to replace

Alabama's 17 small prisons with newer ones—a costly endeavor for a legislature that would

have failed to tackle the problem of crime. This funding could theoretically support the expansion of comprehensive teacher PD. Ironically, Mosely (2017) states that "finding more money for prisons is clearly the biggest need the state faces," (p. 1) when in fact this present discussion argues that "finding more money" (p. 1) is a need that fails to solve the problem. Instead, Alabama's need lies in correcting the social and educational issues underlying such a political problem by improving social outcomes through improvements in education using a revised PD policy.

Second, Mosely (2017) notes that additional funding for state transportation is required, as is funding for the state's increasing medical expenses. Due to the high poverty level and low per capita incomes in the state, many citizens are on Medicaid. As a result, this has exhausted Alabama's social welfare resources. Improving the educational outcomes in part by improving education institutions via a new PD policy would assist graduates in earning higher incomes, thereby minimizing the reliance on Medicaid for future generations.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

Finally, an evaluation of the moral and ethical climate surrounding Alabama's educational issues as well as a moral and ethical examination of why this proposed PD policy revision is warranted further supports its implementation. Morally and ethically, educators have a responsibility to contribute to bettering a community, the state and the nation they serve. Likewise, educational leaders and administrators have a responsibility to ensure the systems teachers work within, the tools provided to instructors and the requirements imposed upon them serve to advance professional and educational outcomes for the betterment of all stakeholders. Clearly, as demonstrated, Alabama needs support in this matter. As Chowdhury (2016) notes, the social, political and economic decisions and actions executed by a community are not committed

in moral nor ethical isolation—rather, ethics and morals are often the undercurrents guiding such actions. More specifically, morals refer to individual behavior in which cultural concepts of appropriate ethical behavior is practiced, whereas Chowdhury (2016) refers to ethics as a systematic and theoretical rationale for that behavior. Thus, morally and ethically speaking, it is the responsibility of educational administrators and leaders to pursue policies that advance educational outcomes and improve the working climates for educators and students. One such policy advancement is the development and implementation of the COI PD model used as a framework for Alabama teachers' professional development. This model would stimulate teachers to engage in critical thinking and actively collaborate to contribute to solving these aforementioned social, economic, political, and educational issues.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

According to the present proposal's previously described vision statement, implementing the COI will serve to improve educational outcomes by better preparing teachers to navigate educational challenges and environments through more relevant and robust continuing education requirements and professional education. Hence, implementing Cycles of Inquiry as a framework advocates for the following goals and objectives:

1) To create a coherent professional development program for teachers that is morally and ethically sound and works to advance to objectives of Alabama's Department of Education.

2) To establish a cohesive state-wide model that diverse Alabama districts can refer to and use as a baseline model for progress and outcome evaluations.

3) To advance student achievement scores between white and black students by minimizing student achievement gaps by at least 10% during the first 12 month period of implementation.

4) To increase school principal retention, statewide by 10% during the first 12-month period of implementation.

5) To improve teacher satisfaction levels and ratings and thereby improve teacher retention rates by an average of 10%, state-wide during the first 12 month period following implementation.

The COI model will work to advocate for and advance these goals in several ways. As Chowdhury (2016) states, teacher PD programs are a primary avenue through which the moral and ethical climate surrounding an education system can be advanced, as well as a primary avenue through which educational outcomes can be advanced. There are several ways the COI model can facilitate a more practical, well-rounded professional development program for teachers that will cultivate better results. First, through the COI model, teachers may engage in

discussions and interactive learning. Contrary to the manner in which current certification

requirements mandate standardized testing and certificate renewal, a new COI framework will

require instructors to engage collaboratively in critical thinking processes, relevant problem-

solving processes and discussions with colleagues that are aimed at actually resolving current

social and pedagogical issues in schools, rather than merely meeting outdated certification

requirements.

    Second, the COI model will aid instructors and Alabama's educational environment by

advancing teachers' and leaders' decision-making capacities, thereby transforming instructors

into leaders and critical advocates for the betterment of Alabama schools. The advancement of

instructors' pedagogy and decision-making capabilities as it relates to instruction will be

advanced through the aforementioned discussion-based learning and collaborative, critical

thinking and problem-solving. As Morieux and Tollman (2014) describe, the more autonomy

subordinates are granted (alongside responsibility and interdisciplinary, collaborative learning),

the greater the sense of investment in an organization subordinates are likely to feel, and thus the

more committed subordinates are likely to be to that organization. Hence, by increasing the

pedagogy, decision-making capacity and collaborative autonomy of instructors in Alabama

schools though COI PD programs, Alabama schools' teacher turnover rates are likely to fall.

Furthermore, as workplace environment improves in this way for teachers, students are likely to

benefit and receive better instruction as a result, which translates to better student learning and

achievement outcomes (meeting the needs of goals 3 and 4).

    Additionally, the COI PD framework will advocate for Alabama's improved educational

environment by encouraging instructors to learn from and glean information directly from

students, so that learning and problem solving is based upon firsthand, relevant classroom

experience and environments, rather than through theory and potentially outdated pedagogy alone. Together, these processes within the COI PD framework will allow Alabama to establish a model for teacher PD that all Alabama districts may turn to for baseline guidance and support. As a result, this PD program will guide the formation of curriculum structures in the years to come. Consequently, this will, ideally, advance educational outcomes because curriculum will be developed and implemented by instructors collaboratively, from a place of mutual engagement, critical thinking, present-day relevance, and high-level skill.

By advocating for an improved educational system, the COI PD framework will meet the needs, values and preferences of several stakeholders, including educational administrators, principals, teachers, students, and Alabama community members at large. Simply stated, improved educational environments will benefit the community and its members in countless ways, such as through the social, educational, economic and political avenues previously described. Educational administrators and principals will benefit from the policy reform by potentially receiving increased federal funding granted to underlying schools because of improved student and teacher ratings and standardized testing outcomes. It also allows schools and districts to have a common language and expectation for teacher development and coaching. Additionally, by improving the workplace climate through a new approach to PD, teachers' everyday job duties may be approached with more ease. This, of course, improves the well-being of teachers regarding their workplace climate (Morieux & Tollman, 2014).

Finally, students' needs will be met by the fact that as a result of the improved PD program, students will benefit from teachers who are more appropriately prepared and knowledgeable. Not only will teachers' pedagogy skills and curriculum knowledge likely increase, but teachers' social and EQ skills will likely also increase. This will, theoretically,

allow students to feel more comfortable interacting in class and with instructors, especially in

cases of racially-diverse classes and classes characterized by students with behavioral

disabilities. Simply stated, teachers will be more well-equipped to teach in a relevant, effective

manner, which will of course benefit students.

The aforementioned goals and objectives of the proposed PD reform are validated to be

appropriate, needed and beneficial on the theoretical basis of the cycle of inquiry as a relevant

framework for organizational learning and development (as described by the figure following),

and on the practical basis of the dire need for improved educational, social, economic and

political outcomes in the state of Alabama. In other words, the justification provided thus far

argues for the PD reform, and thus validates it. Financially, the implementation of a new PD

program is validated by a projected high ROI in terms of turnover savings per school, with

respect to a comparatively small investment in improved PD programs. Kennedy (2016) further

supports and validates the case for an improved PD program by discussing theories of action that

operate based on the assumption that teachers have an inherent responsibility to continue

learning, and that PD can be an effective strategy for helping teachers meet and accomplish this

responsibility. The COI model of PD will function as demonstrated by the figure below
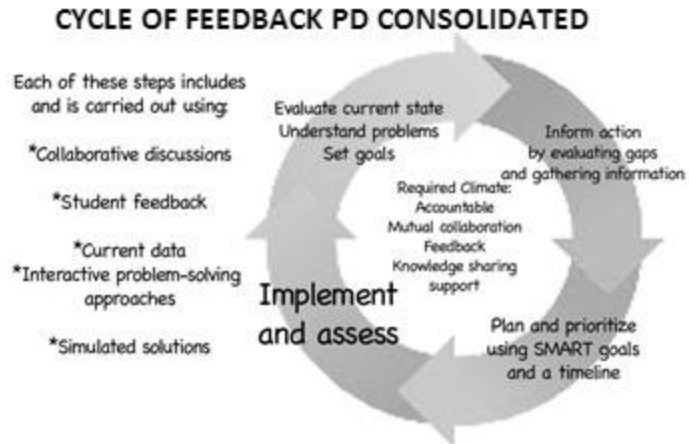
(Learning Forward, 2018):

CYCLE OF FEEDBACK PD CONSOLIDATED

Each of these steps includes
and is carried out using:

*Collaborative discussions

*Student feedback

*Current data
*Interactive problem-solving
approaches

*Simulated solutions

Evaluate current state
Understand problems
Set goals

Inform action
by evaluating gaps
and gathering information

Required Climate:
Accountable
Mutual collaboration
Feedback
Knowledge sharing
support

Implement
and assess

Plan and prioritize
using SMART goals
and a timeline

Figure 1. Cycle of Feedback PD Consolidated.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Introduction

As with all research and policy recommendations, researchers should effectively consider the pros and cons in order to speed up the decision-making and avoid analysis paralysis. Fundamentally considering an opposing view or examining differing research can be leveraged to assist the research and teams in making informed decisions. In this section, the researcher will examine the pros and cons of implementing Cycles of Inquiry as Alabama's professional development framework.

While the need and rationale for the proposed COI PD framework have been sufficiently established herein, it is essential. To thoroughly review the advantages and disadvantages of initiating the new framework, based on scholarly commentary of the subject. First, several advantages and disadvantages become apparent in regard to requiring the Federal government to dictate policy regarding professional development and coaching within school districts. While some would argue such governmental policy is too far-reaching and imposes micromanagement on schools, others would argue it serves to advance the state and quality of education.

Nathan (2004) discusses the fact that just because a school or school district(s) is or are failing, does not necessarily warrant the intervention of the federal government. In other words, the imposition of the COI PD in Alabama districts may not require the state government to mandate it. State intervention can be both beneficial and detrimental. Arguments in favor of state government intervention assert that the quality of national education, within all states, directly impacts the nation's health and economy, and therefore, the government should serve a primary role in helping to regulate teacher coaching and professional development programs within all national states. Clearly stated, national GDP growth depends greatly upon the underlying

population's skill and knowledge base—which is directly determined by educational

achievement. Hence, the government has the responsibility to play a direct and active role in

assuring educational success.

      However, according to Nathan (2004) opponents of state and local involvement claim

that imposing state regulations on PD and coaching standards will only increase the regulatory

burden schools already struggle to comply with. Furthermore, opponents argue that it is difficult

for state regulations to homogeneously apply to each individual district, and thus states, rather

than federal mandates, should more appropriately govern local performance and processes in a

way that is relevant to local needs and climate. Many schools end up finding loopholes in order

to abide by federal regulations for the sake of continued funding and recognition. Increasing the

federal and state burden may only aggravate instances of corruption and incentivize schools to

seek loopholes bypassing ideal PD action. However, refuting this point, it may be stated that if

the policy proposed (COI) is effective and engaging enough for teachers while serving the

interests of administrators (which it does—rather than being bureaucratically cumbersome

(Morieux & Tollman, 2014)), stakeholders will have little motivation to seek loopholes and are

more likely to abide by Federal regulations and receive the objective benefits.

      Another benefit of federal regulation of school policy, according to Dolph (2008), is that

school boards can provide a more enriched curriculum and experience more flexibility in terms

of extra-curricular offerings due to Federal support. Furthermore, Dolph (2008) suggests that by

operating under federal regulation, schools may benefit from increased staffing options due to

increases in Federal funding. In the case of this proposal, this implies that were Alabama schools

to abide by state-mandated COI PD requirements, school funding may increase and allow

underlying schools to more appropriately hire top-quality staff, which of course would further

institutional and student outcomes. However, opponents of federal and state regulation of PD and coaching argue, similar to those arguments stated by Nathan (2004), that this regulation encourages educational homogenization, and thus reduces the local pride and community investment school stakeholders feel. In other words, by regulating school administrative requirements and PD programs, PD requirements may become less relevant to the surrounding Alabama area, and local stakeholders may feel they have lost their voice of input in the process. However, in refute to this argument, the COI program specifically is designed to foster teacher feedback and collaboration, thereby helping teachers to feel valued, heard, encouraged, engaged and motivated. This fosters a sense of community. Finally, this proposed COI program is designed specifically based on Alabama's needs.

Lastly, Cody (2013) offers a valid opinion surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of federal regulation being imposed upon PD programs and school administrative coaching. Although Cody's (2013) opinion relates to federal regulation of curriculum development, similar principles apply when considering the opinion in light of federal oversight of PD programs and each school's unique mode of operation. Cody (2013) posits the question, from an educator perspective, of *who decides what is important to be taught in schools*, or rather, from this policy proposal's perspective, *who should decide what is taught to educators and how they are taught through PD and continuing education?* Cody (2013) notes that many school meetings are erroneously informed most heavily by standardized performance data, rather than pedagogy and students' learning needs. In other words, the question of "who" in "who" in the question of who decides what is taught seems to be most often defined by federal standards based on quantitative ratings rather than individualized needs—standards that are exhausting to school performance, especially socioeconomically compromised schools such as those in Alabama who struggle to

perform in the first place. Thus, from this perspective, local districts, rather than state or federal policy makers, should decide what is taught in schools and within PD programs.

However, in argument of the state government mandating the new COI PD program and enforcing its implementation, it may be understood that the COI program emphasizes a comprehensive evaluation of what is working, and what is not, within Alabama schools; rather than merely using quantitative standardized test results to measure achievement. This will be demonstrated in the following section in which evaluation measures corresponding to each of the aforementioned objectives and goals are reviewed. Thus, the COI framework is designed in a different, more qualitative and integrative manner than many previously upheld mandates.

Second, it is useful to understand the advantages and disadvantages of implementing professional learning cycles as cycles of inquiry (COIs) themselves. An opinion column shared by author Provini (2012) notes that professional learning communities are often ought to understand how they can receive the biggest "bank for their buck" (p. 1). In other words, educational organizations are constantly seeking ways they can obtain the best ROI for the actions taken. This means that continued improvement and enhanced internal staff performance are key objectives. Logically, it follows that the COI model is designed to enhance both of these objectives (improved staff performance and continual improvement and organizational evolution). This improvement and evolution relate not only to staff environment, performance, productivity, and morale but also to organizational fiscal performance, federal rankings and more. Hence, the use of a learning cycle, by nature, is a fluid way to incentivize continual assessment and adaptation.

Opponents of this idea may argue that such continual motivation of cyclical feedback and adaptation encourages evolution and change at times when it is not needed and may otherwise be

costly and disruptive to organizational and educational processes that are working smoothly. However, in such cases, if change is not needed, learning cycles that are mature and foster the practice of awareness will allow for functional systems to be preserved while continually re-affirming their efficacy and testing for areas requiring improvement, just as the COI is designed to do.

Within a well-functioning learning cycle and cycle of inquiry, professional educators are continually involved in the collaborative process of self and systems reflection, meaning that teachers, through PD, reflect upon instructional practices in relation to student benchmark goals. When this is practiced in tandem with monitored outcomes, it enables shortcomings to be pinpointed and relevant solutions to be devised. Simply stated, when educators continuously examine what does and doesn't' work, dysfunctional systems are less likely to take root.

The Ministry of Education (n.d.) also notes several advantages and disadvantages of imposing federal regulation upon PD coaching programs in schools. First, any change of current practice, especially when imposed from a vertical hierarchy, is a cumbersome and often labor-intensive process that can take considerable time to initiate and runs the risk of entangling stakeholders in intensified bureaucratic processes. Second, according to research conducted by the Ministry of Education, substantial change is difficult and seldom embraced by teachers themselves. From a psychological perspective, this suggests that subordinates are often not at first receptive to change, especially when bureaucratically implemented from a Federal or vertical-level authority. However, according to Morieux and Tollman (2014), this roadblock can be successfully overcome by intrinsically motivating instructors (stakeholders) to take action for change. This action can be motivated by initiating small-group, community-oriented discussions in which teachers (instructors) feel valued and heard for providing their input and feedback. This

practice aligns seamlessly with the COI process and it also follows Morieux and Tollman's

(2014) best practice recommendations for managing bureaucratic complexity with simplicity,

while using transformational leadership practices to help subordinates (teachers) feel heard,

thereby overthrowing the objective of change. Often, subordinates resist authoritative change due

to the fear or perception that their voice and feedback will not be heard (Morieux & Tollman,

2014). Hence, by allowing teachers to share feedback and engage in the cycle of learning, this

opposition will be overcome.

An advantage of allowing state regulation to govern PD programs is apparent in the fact

that they can assume some of the regulatory burden, rather than the burden being assumed

wholly by local school administrators. This means that the fiscal and human resource burden for

PD resources can be shared federally. This frees up resources for local Alabama schools to

devote to growing a staff of qualified educators, quality curriculum resources and more.

Finally, Tobia (2017) comments on the advantages and disadvantages of allowing state

and federal regulators to oversee PD and school coaching processes. Professional development

processes encourage collaboration between instructor colleagues, focus teaching skills and jobs

on learning that is relevant and applicable to actual classroom environments, employ systemic

improvements (and cyclical improvements) to learning and learning delivery, while also

monitoring standards and progress achievements. When managed solely at a state and local

administrative level, these objectives and the resources required to undertake and achieve them

can sometimes be overwhelming and unattainable, However, federal assistance often facilitates

an increased amount of resources available for program development.

Cycles of Inquiry is not only a researched based framework, but one though several meta-

analyses has drastically improved teacher practice and student outcomes. However, in order to

ensure that any new initiative is successful, the state must begin to consider an implementation

plan.

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Implementation plan is crucial element of launching any new initiative. This plan is a process that looks at moving a plan for strategies to actions in order to accomplish strategic goals and objectives. Likewise, implementation of a strategic plan is viewed as more important than the plan itself because it focuses on actions being taken. Too often strong strategic plans fail due to no formalized way of implementation. In this section, we will look the critical phases of implementing Cycles of Inquiry as Alabama's professional development framework by examining; education need, staff development, schedules, budget and progress monitoring.

Implementing the COI PD policy will require a variety of carefully plotted steps. First, the following resources will need to be more succinctly and specifically defined, itemized and identified to a greater extent than is possible within the confines of this brief discussion:

1) Budget requirements and items will need to be detailed and federal (or other) funding will need to be requested, granted, confirmed and allocated or distributed accordingly

2) PD staffing and learning resources will need to be pinpointed and either supplied internally, as third-party coaches that are hired with federal funds or supplied by state coaches.

3) A PD COI learning cycle will need to be outlined and itemized (with specific agenda for each meeting corresponding to each school) according to a timeline, with specific dates chosen for COI meetings relevant to each school's identified predominant needs and resources.

4) Any other PD educational resources will need to be identified and obtained, including but not limited to: COI curriculum material, assessment instruments, surveys, meeting guidance tools, software, hardware, technology to facilitate meetings, pedagogy tools relevant to each school, and data from each school informing meeting and COI participants of school needs, gaps and problems to be addressed.

Next, educational activities will be defined in accordance with each scheduled COI meeting. This will be a collaborative effort of each schools' internal, state lead, or third-party COI coaching leader in conjunction with school principals and administrators. Once the COI meetings and coaching process begins, instructors will contribute their feedback to the process, goals, and objectives. COI activities may include but not be limited to those such as:

1) Collaborative discussion groups

2) Discussion mapping in which common goals, opinions, methods, and solutions are visually mapped on a whiteboard or overhead projector (or other software). This is a viable method of decision-making and problem solving, and often a more productive and action-, or solution-focused method that is an alternative to democratic voting-based decision making. Hence, teachers may have the chance to have their solutions, administrative and pedagogical solutions to a school's problems mapped, compared and integrated with their colleagues' input via a visual map.

3) Data will be gathered through COI meetings, evaluated collaboratively through the aforementioned meeting structure formats (items 1 and 2), and primary needs will be identified.

4) Solutions will be proposed to those needs.

5) Evaluations of the success of implemented proposed solutions will inform action moving forward (steps 3-5 follow the model of the COI illustrated on page 13.

The implementation of the COI in Alabama schools will aim to improve staff performance and staff's perceived workplace satisfaction. While improving performance and productivity will work to advance curriculum delivery, student interactions with teachers (and one another) and thus student outcomes, improved workplace satisfaction will work to improve staff retention

(Morieux & Tollman, 2014). These two primary staff improvement items will be achieved through these aspects of the plan's implementation:

1) Cultivation of a collaborative work environment using transformational leadership practices that foster two-way communication between teachers and leaders (allowing teachers to feel valued and heard), inspire innovation, and help teachers feel a sense of belonging within the school community. This collaborative work environment will be fostered by leaders and teams who will assume transformational-oriented practices, such as positive reinforcement, rewards-based motivation, inspirational one-on-one feedback sessions with teachers, and discussion-based group meetings rather than lecture-based group meetings.

2) The delivery of new curriculum information and up-to-date pedagogical skills and instruction aimed at improving teachers' confidence in the classroom and ability to navigate stressful situations, such as addressing behavioral challenges, ESL, and all students' needs.

Implementation of the COI PD program will follow the general timeline represented below:

Table 1

Timeline

Date completed by	Action step
May 1st, 2019	Gathering fiscal, HR and hardware resources
July 1st, 2019	Developing detailed timeline and COI meeting agenda for each school
August 1st, 2019	Completing transformational leadership training for COI PD program leaders
August 15th, 2019	Program launch, live, in 2 pilot Alabama schools, followed by evaluation
October 1st	Launch of COI program in all Alabama schools
November 1st, monthly, ongoing	Evaluation and revision of program according to qualitative and quantitative feedback

The following table outlines a generalized budget of the tentative COI PD needs. This budget will be refined, considerably, based on the first action step to be completed by May 1st, 2019.

Table 2

Cost Analysis

Budget Item	Speculated up front or recurring cost, average per individual school
PD leader/coach compensation (Focused Leadership Consulting (2018) is an example of a viable third party coaching option that may be hired and leveraged by Various Alabama schools.)	$50,000 annually, recurring
Software and hardware for PD learning	$20,000, up front
Data gathering and survey tools	$10,000, annually
Additional staff	$200,000, annual salaries added, recurring
Miscellaneous, potential cost overruns	$10,000, up front
TOTAL cost per school recurring annually	*$30,000*
TOTAL cost per school up front	*$260,000*

Following the successful implementation of the aforementioned items, a feasible progress monitoring plan will need to be executed. This progress monitoring program will entail several key resources, factors, and steps:

1) Qualitative data from students involving student feedback towards learning environment and teacher competency, facilitated through a combination of surveys, case study interviews, and/or questionnaires, as deemed most cost-effective and results-oriented as possible by schools and federal oversight

2) Similar qualitative data from similar sources regarding teacher perspectives of the PD program, student success, student outcomes, student receptivity, and workplace satisfaction. Each of these items will be measured, itemized and evaluated separately.

3) Quantitative data regarding teacher and principal turnover versus retention.

4) Quantitative data regarding school fiscal performance, including costs lost to turnover and funding received as a result of federal recognition for academic outcomes (each item will be separately assessed).

5) Quantitative data regarding student achievement outcomes.

6) Qualitative data will be collected every six months using one of the aforementioned instruments and calculated by each school's HR team, before being sent to federal authorities for review.

7) Quantitative data will be collected using reputable survey instruments and reviewed every six months before being sent to state and federal authorities for review.

8) Qualitative and quantitative data will be retained by each school and reviewed during COI meetings in order to facilitate continual adaptation.

> An implementation plan is critical to the success of a new initiative. Ensuring that the plan considers many factors such as need, budget and monitoring will codify the results. In order to measure the effectiveness of a program, implementation should include a progress monitoring or assessment of the plan. Progress monitoring allows for participants to review relevant data in connection to the plan to determine the overall effectiveness. More importantly, it allows opportunities to make any adjustments to the implementation plan in a real time.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Using the assessment data described and captured above in the prior section, the COI

PD's assessment plan will operate with the objective of meeting the five aforementioned policy

change goals, including: 1) creating a coherent PD Program that is morally and ethically sound,

and aligned with Alabama's DOE, 2) establishing a cohesive state-wide model Alabama school

districts can refer to for progress evaluations, 3) advancing student achievement scores and

closing the achievement gap by at least 10% during the first 12-month period following policy

implementation, 4) increasing principal retention rates by an average of 10% statewide during

the first 12 months of policy instigation, and 5) increasing teacher satisfaction levels by 10%.

These outcome measures will be used to determine the efficacy of the COI PD. As noted,

comprehensive evaluations described above will take place on a 6-month basis. Monthly

evaluations of teacher and student feedback gained through discussions will be used to determine

weekly and monthly tasks covered in COI coaching meetings. This will include informal

principal and teacher follow-up meetings, and in-classroom student feedback gathered and

documented by teachers.

The first outcome measure will be determined as successful if the data qualitatively and

quantitatively gathered evidence that teachers are overall, satisfied with the new PD program and

student performance measures. Teacher and student satisfaction levels will be used as an

indicator that the program is operating in a morally and ethically sound manner that meets the

needs of involved stakeholders. Finally, since the program will be developed as a collaborative

effort between Alabama administrators and federal authorities, it will be crafted in accordance

with Alabama's DOE objectives. Whether or not it meets these objectives will be determined by

the outcomes in response to the following four goal's objectives.

The second goal, or outcome measure, will be determined to be successful if the data gathered through assessment evidence that the model is cost-effective and pedagogically effective for schools to implement. This will primarily be determined through the initial pilot trial of the COI PD that will be run before launching the PD program in all Alabama schools. If the PD is shown to be reasonably feasible and attainable through the pilot program, with no major cost overruns or complaints, and is in fact shown to initially advance school outcomes in conjunction with positive feedback, the model will be deemed to be a cohesive statewide PD model that other Alabama districts can refer to and use as a baseline for achieving progress.

The last three goals are relatively self-explanatory and will be determined successful by quantitative data gathered. In other words, if, through each of the two 6 months assessments conducted over the first 12 months of program implementation, student achievement gaps are revealed to have reduced by at least 10%, while retention rates and satisfaction levels increase by at least 10% on average, these measures will be considered to be achieved successfully. Student achievement scores will be determined using quantitative data including students compiled and averaged standardized test scores, including grades K-12. Demographic discrepancies, such as sub- categories, will be specified in order to determine the degree to which the achievement gap may be closed. Additionally, principal retention rates and teacher satisfaction scores will be compiled and determined using quantitative survey data gathered. Surveys used may include Likert surveys to assess satisfaction rates.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

Should the Cycles of Inquiry Professional Development policy program outlined herein

be determined to be successful through evaluation, the program will have an enormous impact

upon Alabama's state schools, educational outcomes and the greater community at large. Impacts

will include but not be limited to the social, economic, political, educational and ethical/moral

categories previously discussed. The COI PD policy discussed is an appropriate policy for

implementation within Alabama's school districts due to the fact that it cohesively addresses

multiple, integrated facets of Alabama's educational, social, political, fiscal, economic and

ethical needs. The proposed policy does this in a way that fosters transformational leadership and

management—an approach becoming increasingly leveraged and valued among educational and

business industries in America today (Morieux & Tollman, 2014). By addressing Alabama's

multi-faceted, yet mutually-influential needs in a transformative way, the COI PD policy offers a

potential solution to complex issues that is simple and engaging—and therefore likely more

effective—rather than bureaucratically cumbersome and resource-exhaustive. For this reason, the

COI PD model is likely to be more effective; as it addresses issues without imposing added

layers of bureaucracy that require enormous HR and fiscal resources. The COI model fosters

collaboration, critical thinking, and innovation on an individual level and an organizational level.

The COI model encourages educational leaders and teachers alike to exercise reflexivity

in practice and in collaboration. In this way, it dissolves the perception of vertically oriented

leadership and fosters a collaborative approach that is more likely to foster teachers' engagement

and receptivity to the program. In this way, the program also cultivates reflexivity and personal

awareness. Just as the COI model seeks to use organizationally gathered data to evaluate efficacy

and progress, and to determine how the model and actions should adapt, it also encourages

individual teachers to increase levels of personal self-awareness. By increasing personal

reflexivity and self-awareness, teachers have the chance to actively improve their performance

based on their own autonomy and volition. In this way, the COI model mirrors itself on a

personal and organizational level, creating a fluid, cohesive model that is simple to understand

yet profoundly consistent and effective.

Finally, the COI model presents a morally sound manner of attempting to improve

Alabama's educational outcomes, social climate, economic context, and political issues. Scholars

commonly refer to education systems and educators, or teachers, as critical pillars upholding and

providing the foundation to a healthy, vibrant, economically stable and innovative society.

Clearly, a community that is plagued by high rates of crime, poverty, and reliance upon welfare

is far from economically, socially and educationally healthy. Advancements in education that

work to improve such a situation begin with advancements and improvements in the leaders of

an education system. Thus, by investing in PD for Alabama's teachers, Alabama will be taking

proactive action towards improving issues like crime rates, low academic achievement rates,

high poverty levels, high prevalence of behavioral health disorders and more.

From a moral and ethical perspective, teachers possess an inherent responsibility to

benefit the lives of the students they teach and influence. In this way, teaching extends far

beyond the scope of simply delivering the curriculum. Teaching also includes and requires the

ability to leverage pedagogical skills in order to effectively help students learn the content being

delivered and apply it to their lives in a way that fosters a healthy society. Since Alabama

currently lacks a sound, robust and effective teacher PD policy and framework, the COI

framework proposed herein will not only improve teachers' abilities but also student and

community achievements.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires district to implement professional development that aligns best practices in adult learning; as outlined in its mission statement. Alabama based on the state's overall performance and vision statement for professional development that is vague and broad in its language must begin to think about how to drastically improve teacher retention, quality of instruction and student performance.

Cycles of Inquiry framework is not only aligned to the principles of adult learning but is a proven framework that has been noted to improve teacher practice as it looks at a "real life" problem of practice and is framework that outlines actions of implementation. Adopting a uniformed framework that is flexible based on district or school needs would give the state a common language but also support differentiation based on the unique needs of a district or school.
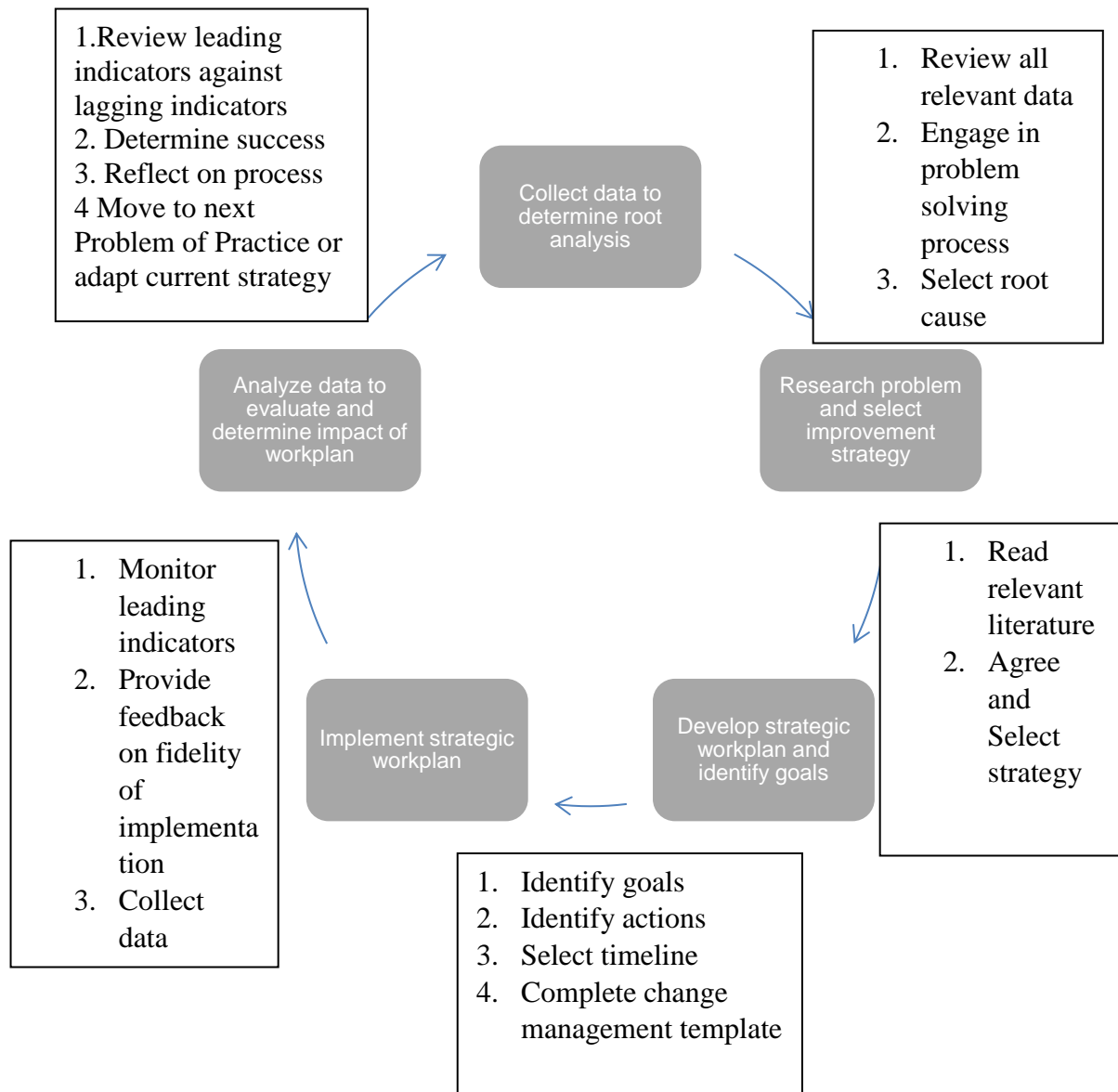
Cycles of Inquiry Framework

Figure 2. Cycles of Inquiry   Framework.

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