

# Instructional Activities and the Learning Cycle

The teacher educator resources on Teacher Education by Design are organized around a common framework: instructional activities and the learning cycle. The guiding assumption behind this framework is that the most impactful teacher learning experiences engage teachers in the actual work of teaching.

## Instructional Activities

Instructional Activities are routine episodes of instruction that specify how the teacher, the content, and the students interact. IAs have a consistent structure with a beginning, middle, and end, and contain important elements of teaching practice such as facilitating discussion. IAs provide a stable and rehearsable backdrop for the dynamic and improvisational work of responding to student thinking. This creates an opportunity for novice teachers to learn about and begin taking up the work of teaching in all of its complexity. IAs also provide a useful context in which teams of practicing teachers can develop shared practices and have conversations grounded in the work of teaching.

## The Learning Cycle

### Introduce

First, teachers are introduced to some aspects of practice such as an instructional activity, disciplinary content ideas, embedded core practices of ambitious teaching. Teachers learn about the activity and develop a lens for noticing important features of ambitious teaching. Teacher educators might introduce the activity by modeling teaching, showing a video representation of teaching, or engaging teachers in the activity as learners.

### Prepare

Next, teachers prepare to engage students in the instructional activity. Teachers collaborate to think more deeply about the routine structure of the activity, plan for how they will engage students in this work, and try out their plan. Rehearsals are one way that teacher educators can provide space for teachers to approximate enactment. In a rehearsal, teachers can try on the practices of ambitious teaching in a safe space with access to the thinking of peers and teacher educators.

### Enact

Then teachers enact the activity with students. Building on their planning and rehearsal of the activity, teachers must respond to live, in-the-moment interactions, developing adaptive expertise. The students' ideas and interactions become a resource for teachers to learn from. Teacher educators may support and mediate this experience through co-teaching, live coaching, or teacher time out.

### Analyze

Afterwards, teachers revisit and learn from their enactments, making sense of the complex practices at play. Teachers collaborate around artifacts of practice that emerge during enactment, such as videos or student work, to better understand student learning and how it is supported by core practices of ambitious teaching. Through this analysis, teachers begin to develop shared visions practices of ambitious teaching in relation to actual classroom experience.