Problem of Practice Protocol

A combination of data and dialogue is used to identify an instructional issue. If students are not being successful in an area, what could we do differently as professionals to ensure that each student is successful and that our time is spent more effectively?

A Problem of Practice should be the focus of staff attention. Educators will need training and continued support to address a meaningful Problem of Practice. It is something staff genuinely doesn't know how to do and is trying to learn more about and get better at.

A rich Problem of Practice:
- focuses on the instructional core
- is directly observable.
- is actionable (is within the school's/district's control and can be improved in real time)
- connects to a broader strategy of improvement
- is high-leverage (if acted on, it would make a significant difference for student learning)
- is deep learning

In short, the problem of practice is something that you care about that would make a difference for student learning if you improved it.

Some general considerations to think about when identifying this "problem of practice" include the following:

1. What does data (both qualitative and quantitative) tell us?
2. What is there that, if done by everyone, could serve as an umbrella for a number of the teaching and learning strategies we have?
3. What can have the most positive effect on what students do, what teachers do and the quality of the work that students are producing?
4. Is what we are considering as a "problem of practice" something that we can control?
5. Is what we are considering observable?
6. Is the "problem of practice" we are considering supportive of other school and district efforts?

The statement of the Problem of Practice should be a description of an issue--a few sentences describing what is happening that is problematic. A brief generalization about the data that led the team to the specific issue it chose is an appropriate introduction. The focus questions are generated after the POP has been determined and described. These questions will likely be revised as the staff gains insight about their issue (from professional development and early implementation actions, etc). The questions provide guidance to observers on what they should be seeing as a result of staff successfully addressing the POP. They have been included here primarily to emphasize the fact that addressing a Problem of Practice involves all three components of the instructional core: what the teacher is doing, what the students are doing, and the content. Your staff's initial focus questions should be part of your building's Problem of Practice statement even though your questions will likely change as you and your staff begins addressing your POP.