

The Capacity Building Series is produced by The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to support leadership and instructional effectiveness in Ontario schools.

The series is posted at:

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Why Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways?

The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway makes use of the following high-yield strategies for improving student achievement:

- setting high expectations for students (Brophy & Good, 1974)
- using assessment for learning to guide instruction (Chappuis et al., 2005)
- providing frequent, useful and useable feedback for students (Black & Wiliam, 1998)
- understanding the meaning and scope of curriculum expectations (Reeves, 2002)
- engineering effective classroom discussion, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001)

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Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways

One Model for Ontario Professional Learning Communities

We can predict with some certainty that our students will be graduating into a world that is based on a new knowledge economy. They will require facility with a complex set of skills to deconstruct, construct, co-construct and reconstruct meaning efficiently and effectively. This high level of literacy is the new criterion for success. Students will require an education that has a solid foundation on basic literacy and numeracy skills but also supports deep thinking and action – an education that values and understands the human condition. This is about a type of education that prepares students to survive and thrive in the 21st century and to make positive and lasting contributions to their world.

How can we as 21st century educators provide our students with the education they need?

Practical, Precise and Personalized

The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) is a promising model used to organize actions for teaching and student learning. The TLCP, inspired by a strategy presented by Michael Fullan, Peter Hill and Carmel Crévola in their book *Breakthrough*, is designed as the work of the professional learning community (PLC). (For an overview of the structure and benefits of PLCs, go to <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/PLC.pdf>.)

The basic idea of the pathway is that classroom practice can be organized in a practical, precise and highly personalized manner for each student, with the intended outcome being increased achievement for *all* students. The model which sequences the work of each PLC is an organizer for deep learning and inquiry. However, it should be noted that a teaching-learning pathway is not simply a technical exercise. It also involves new ways of working together.

As Little states, “improved student learning and teaching result when teachers collaboratively focus on achievement and assessment, questioning practice, and supporting professional growth” (cited in Schmoker, 2006, p. 109). This type of work engages teachers in relationships

TLCP tips ...

- Identification and ownership of issues is necessary to promote open-ended dialogue and professional risk-taking.
- Systematic evaluation of the consequences of actions is necessary if TLCPs are to refine and further develop interpretations and solutions.
- Ownership by the school staff makes it more likely that TLCPs will be able to compete for priority.
- Road blocks, misunderstandings, and disappointments need to be recognized as important “moments of learning” for both individuals and teams.
- Common understanding of assessment, rubric criteria, curricular expectations and “big ideas” takes time; all present potential moments of uncertainty and learning.
- Refining, adjusting and modifying occur in all stages and should be embraced as teachers co-construct their collective understanding through the experience.

of trust. Trust propels momentum towards collaboration and creates contexts in which people feel able to take risks to develop innovative practice. This work values teacher expertise, creative thinking and new knowledge.

Embedded Professional Learning

Embedded professional learning changes the school culture by holding everyone accountable for continuous improvement. Discussion and action are centred on the interdependence of curriculum expectations, assessment of and for learning, higher-order and critical thinking strategies and reflection.

Embedded professional learning provides teachers with opportunities to imagine ways and means to improve student learning *by doing*. It is about small, focused and precise steps that result in improving life chances for all students. The TLCP embraces the belief and understanding that all students can learn and all teachers can teach to high standards and articulate their practice.

Benefits

“A decade of experience,” Crévola, Hill and Fullan write, “has led us to propose what we see as the *breakthrough* that will transform classroom instruction and lead to quantum improvements in literacy outcomes” (2006, p. 10). The critical learning instructional path is one key because it provides teachers with a model or process “to manage instruction in the most expert way possible” (p. 14).

In Ontario, the critical learning instructional path has been adapted and piloted with a number of Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP) schools. Many superintendents, principals and teachers credit improvements in achievement to the use of the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway.

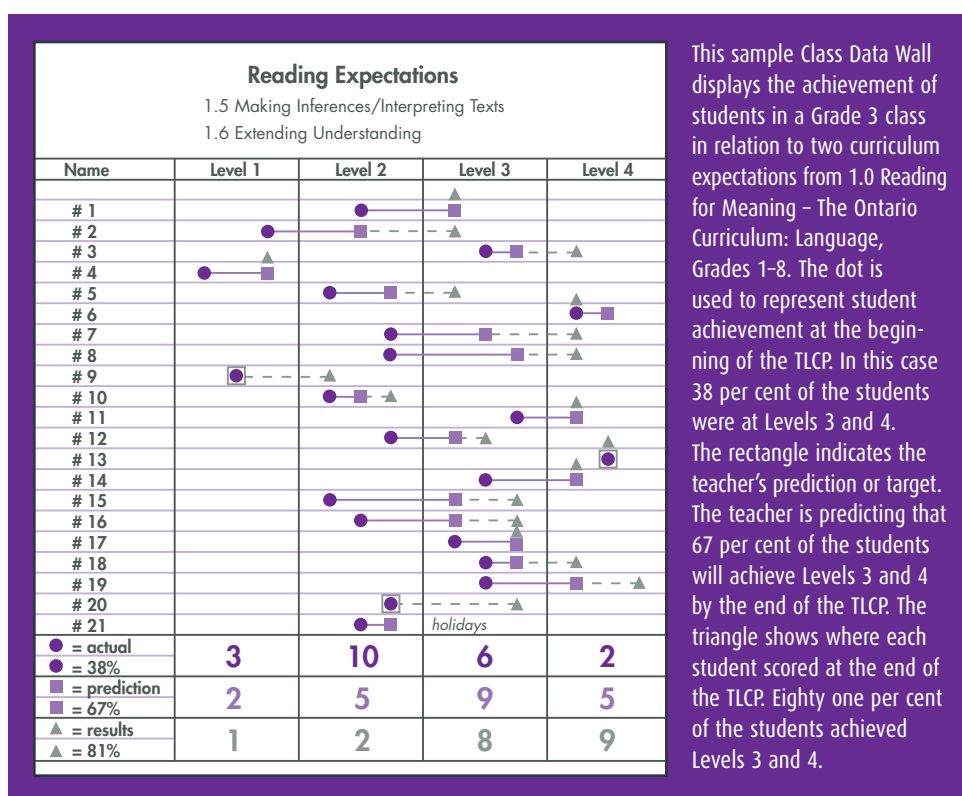


Figure 1 Class Data Wall

Getting Started: A Sample Process

The process described below has been used effectively in professional learning communities in Ontario schools. The number of PLC meetings and the order and number of steps may vary.

First Stage – Setting Up the TLCP

Number of PLC meetings will vary depending on the past work of the school.

1. Gather evidence.

What evidence of student achievement do we currently have?

2. Determine area of greatest need.

What does our evidence of student achievement tell us?

3. Build clusters of expectations related to the area of greatest need.

Which expectations from curriculum documents can be clustered to address student learning?

What is our individual understanding of these expectations?

4. Review current practice.

What is our current practice in relation to our students' area of greatest need? What does the research literature tell us in relation to the area of greatest need?

5. Design classroom assessments.

What should students know, do and understand at the end of the pathway?

- Develop criteria that reflect what successful student work would look like in relation to the cluster of expectations selected.
- Develop a rubric.
- Develop a culminating post-assessment task.
- Build a class data wall (See Figure 1 on page 2).

Second Stage – TLCP Actions

Two or more PLC meetings are recommended.

1. Plan a six-week learning block and build collective understanding about how you are going to teach it.

How and what will we teach? What did we notice about our students' pre-assessment results?

What is the "Big Idea" students are learning about? What thinking and metacognitive strategies will be used to support student learning? What will classroom assessment look like?

- Select a variety of rich texts (literary, informational, graphic) for the instructional approaches.
- Select high-yield teaching strategies that will promote the greatest student growth and align best with the identified area of need. (For video and print resources on high-yield teaching strategies go to <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/may2.shtml>.)

2. Share evidence of student learning (PLC "check-ins")

- Identify one student as a "marker" student whose progress will be shared at each PLC (refer to the class data wall).
- Identify a number of students as "students to watch." These students may need more precise scaffolding of their learning
- Bring in student work – both a strong piece and a piece of work that the teacher considers puzzling.
- Deconstruct student work using the criteria/rubric and suggest next steps in the improvement process.
- Share teacher practice. Discuss "presenting issues" that arise out of the teacher conversations. Hold "just in time" embedded conversations to find solutions for challenges.
- Reflect on the TLCP actions and next steps.

3. Have students complete the agreed-upon culminating task.

Evidence of student achievement may come from ...

- Common grade-level assessments
- Common board-level assessments (e.g., CASI, DRA, PM Benchmarks)
- Report card data
- EQAO

Specific examples of areas of greatest need include students being able to ...

- Make connections
- Make inferences
- Express personal opinions
- Identify points of view
- Understand how text features and stylistic elements relate to the meaning of texts

Examples of "big ideas" ...

- Overcoming prejudice
- Being an agent of change
- Poverty
- Empathy

Rich culminating tasks ...

- connect to the world beyond the classroom
- lead to outcomes of substantial intellectual substance and educational value
- reinforce reading and writing expectations
- engage students
- frequently include the arts (represented in print, movement, rhyme and rhythm)
- involve more than one curricular area
- require higher-order and critical thinking skills

TLCPs in brief ...

- require a full-school effort
- are facilitated by a school administrator
- develop distributed leadership
- take about six weeks (time varies)
- identify curriculum expectations that will be used as a focus during the TLCP
- identify students' area of greatest need
- identify a "big idea" that engages students
- provide students with many opportunities to develop and demonstrate deep thinking
- provide opportunity for both staff and students to reflect on learning and teaching
- conclude with next steps that contribute to the next TLCP and school-wide changes

Third Stage – Outcomes of the TLCP

One PLC meeting is recommended for teacher moderation.

One PLC meeting is recommended to review findings and determine next steps.

1. Conduct teacher moderation.

(For print and video resources on the teacher moderation process, go to <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/september10.shtml>.)

Is there a difference in student achievement?

- Each teacher brings student work to share and one piece is moderated by the group. The group then forms teams and moderates three or four more pieces of student work (make sure to include the puzzling ones).
- Data for individual students are collected and placed on the classroom data wall
- Next steps are generated for the students.

2. Engage in reflection.

What did we learn? Based on our inquiry, what do we want to do next? Were the most effective high-yield strategies chosen? What does or doesn't our student evidence tell us about student learning? How do we know that a high level of learning was achieved? What do we do for our students who are not meeting with success?

More Information about Networking for Learning

Networked learning communities have grown in popularity since they appear to address many of the key findings that present-day organizational/education reformers say are needed to produce change and improvement in schools, teaching and learning (Darling Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Readers are referred to *Building Networks for Learning* for additional resources and strategies (<http://www.curriculum.org/buildingnetworks.html>).

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