

## **The Teaching- Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP): A Resource Guide**

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### **Introduction**

Most Ontario schools are using Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) as a perspective or way of organizing actions for teaching and student learning (Crevola, Fullan & Hill, 2006). The pathway is based on the premise that classrooms can be organized in a *practical, precise* and highly *personalized* manner for each student, with the intended outcome being increased achievement for all students. This model of teaching and learning focuses on deeper learning and inquiry. Data, viewed in this way, is used to inform instruction, assessment practices and evaluation. The whole Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) cycle engages teachers in relationships of trust. Trust, in turn, fosters collaboration and provides a context in which educators feel enabled to take risks in order to develop innovative classroom practices.

The Teaching- Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) was inspired by Michael Fullan, Peter Hill, and Carmel Crevola in their book *Breakthrough*, the (TLCP) draws on a number of evidence-based practices, including:

- Setting high expectations for students
- Using assessment for learning to guide instruction
- Providing frequent, useful and useable student feedback
- Creating effective classroom discussions which elicit evidence of learning.

### **A Moral Imperative: The Teaching Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP)**

The TLCP that results in developing the 3 P's (precision, practical, personalization). The TLCP involves *precise, practical* and highly *personalized* classroom practice(s) with the intended outcome being increased achievement for all our students. This TLCP engages teachers in reflective collaborative work that aims to improve both teacher practices and student achievement.

We, as educators, can predict with some certainty that our students will be graduating into a world that is based on a new knowledge;- one that is technologically literate and takes into consideration the influences of the socio-political economy. They will require developing a complex set of skills to deconstruct and co-construct meaning both efficiently and effectively. This higher level for literacy is a new criterion for success in the work force. This type of literacy values and understands the human condition. How can we as twenty first educators provide students with the education that they need to survive in an increasingly competitive global society?( [www.Curriculum.org](http://www.Curriculum.org)).

### **Rationale for TLCP and SLA (Second Language Learners)**

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) sets the foundations for the practical application of the gradual release model and teaching learning critical theory pedagogy in today's schooling. Vygotsky's theory asserts that learning occurs through dialogical interaction between a novice and student with the assistance of an expert or teacher.

Applied to SLA, the significance of his theory lies in that the emphasis of the learning process is shifted from assessing the student's performance to assessing the amount of help s/he needs. That is, instead of focusing on exams to assess students' performance, language teachers can implement a re-writing process from which students with a need for additional help can benefit. Furthermore, while Vygotsky describes the manner in which each stage of the learning process includes the previous one, he also addresses the non-linear nature of learning, in which students both progress and regress as they learn (Schinke-Llano, 1995).

To apply ZPD theory to SLA when the classroom size might be too large for the teacher to be the only expert or facilitator, Schinke-Llano proposes several techniques such as peer teaching (help from a more competent peer) and collaborative learning (as the process of joint-problem-solving). In this way, the classroom becomes a place where the teacher is not the sole provider of knowledge and help, and where learners' inputs are valued. In addition, she proposes to use a Vygotskian paradigm of enabling learners to use new language in the process of modeling their own language proficiency through activities outside the classroom (such as interviewing members of their community).

The Zone of Proximal Development is an approach that focuses on students' *voices* and encourages active learning. Therefore, in the SLA setting, when applying a critical pedagogical approach to beginning and intermediate levels, the use of the students' mother tongue facilitates student participation in classroom procedures and debates on cultural issues. This requires the teacher to allocate class time in which students express their concerns about the learning process and the content of the course in their mother tongue.

### **Benefits of Teaching Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP)**

There are many benefits of using the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) in the curriculum planning, review, development and implementation (CDRI). From our own experiences, as educators within the Toronto Catholic District School Board, we discovered the whole Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) fosters collaboration amongst teachers. It affords teachers the opportunity to reflect on their daily practices in a genuine way. Teachers continue to effectively dialogue about their student results through the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway process. Teachers are putting their students first in the whole scheme of things. In analyzing data, to inform instruction, we as educators have identified students' needs based on varied forms of assessment and evaluations. Students' needs, for example, within our own school and for our junior and intermediate students, focused on the area of inferring.

The TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway) allows teachers to become experts and use data to inform instruction. As Fullan succinctly points out in his book, *The Six Secrets of Change* (2008:23), "the quality of the education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers". The two go hand in hand like bread and butter. Data is useless without making sense of it. Communicating your knowledge is key in making the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) work.

The TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway) helps build capacity. Capacity building concerns competencies, resources and motivation (Fullan, 2008:57). Educators are high in capacity if they develop knowledge skills, if they attract and use resources (time, ideas, expertise, money) wisely, and if they are committed to putting in the energy to get important things done collectively and continuously (Fullan, 2008).

Another advantage of the TLCP process is that it encourages a common grade-level of assessments and a wide range of evaluations to help form benchmarks and improve teachers' classroom practices. For example, at the beginning stages of the TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway), we closely examined multi-forms of varied assessment practices that assisted us in establishing the greatest student need in each division (e.g. making inferences).

A third advantage of the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) is that the whole process encourages both *precision*, *personalization* and *professionalism* (Fullan, 2006; Fullan, 2008). The essence of the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP), learning becomes the work (Fullan, 2008). The integration of the precision needed for consistent performance, for example, examining students' needs and formulating high yield strategies to address those needs (i.e. making connections, making inferences).

The TLCP looks at excellence that has already been achieved. As educators, we are preoccupied with excuses why traditional low-income students are not achieving excellence. The families of children, poverty keep them from achieving that their bilingual status keeps them from achieving. We can use the joke about the person who lost the quarter but is looking at the other

side of the room to find it. Interestingly, if we only turn the spotlight to where we lost the quarter in the first place the answer is in the spotlight.

The human being is a learning machine if you put them in the right position to be exposed by high expectations. As educators, it is our moral imperative to ensure that all children are successful in schools.

The following is a brief synopsis of the stages that we applied at St. Jane Frances Catholic Elementary School with respect to the TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway) process.

## **Stage One – Setting Up the TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway)**

### **A. Gathering Evidence**

**What reliable and valid evidence indicated student achievement?** (i.e. EQAO (Equal Quality Accountability Office), school-based assessments (e.g. Reaching Readers), Teacher Assessments, Report Card data etcetera).

At St. Jane Frances Catholic Elementary School, we gathered evidence of student achievement on the Data Integration Program with a team of teachers.

Our Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). Evidence included: CAT III results, Reaching Readers, (Canadian Achievement Tests), EQAO (Equal Quality Accountability Office), Report Cards etcetera.

### **B. Areas of Greatest Need**

What supports have you selected in choosing areas of greatest need?

Based on our evidence of student achievement, what does the data tell us?

How can the data inform instruction and evaluation?

Based on a wide range of evidence (i.e. school-based assessments, Canadian Achievement tests, Equal Quality Accountability Office), we established that the greatest areas of students' needs included: making inferences and making connections.

### **C. Current Practice: Building Clusters of expectations related to the area of greatest need.**

After establishing our area of need, we formulated our curriculum expectations from curriculum documents that had been clustered to address student learning? We discussed our individual understanding of these expectations in relation to student achievement.

### **D. Reviewing our current practice(s).**

What is our current practice in relation to our students' area of greatest need? With our junior/intermediate students, based on the data, our area of greatest need were making connections and students' abilities to make inferences or draw conclusions effectively.

### **E. Design: Rubric, Data Wall**

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

- Select curriculum expectations and identify students to watch
- Establish a criteria for success – develop a common rubric
- Build a class data wall – judge where each student is compared to the selected curriculum expectations.
- Predict student success

### **F. Culminating Task**

- Develop (a) culminating task(s)
- Agree upon instructional approaches

- Identify critical thinking strategies
- Choose a variety of rich text(s)/resources
- Differentiate instruction
- Have students discuss what strategies they found most helpful to support their thinking
- Plan classroom actions for teaching/learning.

Students, in our opinion, should develop criteria that reflect what successful student work would look like in relation to the cluster of expectations selected.

We developed a rubric in the area of needs: making connections and inferring.

We then developed culminating post-assessment tasks. We used a class data wall to inform our instruction. We also thought that it is really important the students became part of the process in terms of understanding assessment and evaluation. For example, before a lesson on making inferences. We analyzed the rubric in terms of the look-fors of our assessment and/or evaluation process.

## Stage Two – TLCP ACTIONS

The second stage of the Teaching – Learning Critical Pathway involves determining the students’ area of greatest need and designing instruction, interventions and monitoring systems that work effectively and efficiently.

Think about the common assessments that are in place in your school.

- What will be your area of focus when you return to your classroom or workplace?
- What assessment practices will continue?
- What assessment practices will change?
- How will you know that what you are doing is working for your students?

In this second stage of the TLCP also involves zeroing in on the Big Ideas and thinking about the strategies that will be used to support student learning. This is the implementation stage for the four-to-eight-week learning block that will end in a culminating task for students.

Educators need to ask themselves constantly why they are teaching what they are teaching at a particular time. Big Ideas play an important role in setting teachers and students up for success. Big Ideas engage students:

- How will you determine the Big Ideas in your professional learning community?
- How will you share these Big Ideas with staff, students and community?
- How will what you are teaching make your students better human beings who will make this world a better place?

## Our Personal Experience at Saint Jane Frances Elementary Catholic School

**A.** We planned a **six-week learning block** and built our collective understanding about how we were going to teach for example, students’ learning about making connections and inferences. What are the “Big Idea” students were learning about (e.g. taking risks)? What thinking and metacognitive strategies will be used to support student achievement in the learning process? What will the classroom assessments look like?

The grade six teachers at St. Jane Frances Catholic Elementary School had selected the novel *The Wanderer* by Sharon Creech as their choice of reading material. Our pre-test and post-assessment focused on the student need of making inferences.

**B.** We selected a **variety of rich texts** (literary, informational, and graphic) for instructional purposes.

**C.** We focused on a **wide range of high yield strategies** that would promote student growth and best align with the area of need identified (i.e. making connections and inferences).

**D. Share evidence of student learning.**

We found this step to be the most informative in terms of improving our own teaching practices. We created a “Students to watch” list and participated in moderated marking. We analyzed student data and created the criteria and/or rubric to evaluate students’ work based on the need identified.

**E. Sharing teaching practices.** We discussed issues that arose out of the teacher conversations and moderated marking. We focused on providing strategies for the inherent challenges involved in improving student achievement in our ongoing development of literacy. We also discussed our TLCP actions and next steps.

**F. Have students complete an agreed-upon culminating task.**

**Third Stage - Outcomes of the TLCP**

The third stage of the TLCP involves educators in the collaborative assessment of student work and the determination of the next steps. In defining next steps for the pathway, teachers engage in teacher moderation sessions. These sessions allow participants to work together, refine their instructional practices and clarify their thinking around assessment. Collaborative assessment of student work has many benefits for teachers and students:

- How will you know that what you are doing is working for your students?
- What change will you make as you plan for your next Pathway?

**A. Conducting Moderated Marking**

Each teacher brought a sample of student work to share and one piece is moderated by the group. The group then formed teams and moderated three or four more pieces of student work. Data was also collected for individual students and placed on the classroom data wall.

**B. 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 yield level of learning was achieved?

**C. Action: Professional Learning Community**

What is the difference that is making the difference?

- Bring evidence of student work
- Choose and share evidence of learning from student to what list.
- Use rubrics as a learning lens
- Share teacher practice

Capture emerging questions and choose research (articles/teacher learning resources) for just in time embedded Professional Development.

- Support teacher reflection.
- Stay the course.

**D. Culminating Task(s)**

**Is there a difference in student achievement?**

**E. Moderated Marking**

**What is the difference that made the difference?**

- Results – evidence of student achievement

- Actual student results posted on the class data walls
- Comparison of the predicted versus the actual results.

#### **F. Communication**

What did we learn? Based on our enquiry what do we want to do next??

- What did the evidence of student learning tell us?
- What did evidence of teaching tell us?
- Capture big ideas and solutions
- Plan for our next Pathway

#### **Challenges with the TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway) Process:**

One of the challenges inherent in the TLCP process is finding the time during the day for teachers to reflect on their own practice. What seems to work is to have the TLCP process embedded in the very structure of the block scheduling at the start of the school year. The TLCP process should not be perceived as extra work for teachers. The TLCP process is not something new. Teachers naturally reflect and talk about how they can improve their practice(s). The TLCP process is now just a way of formalizing the way teachers examine student data.

A second challenge is to view the TLCP model as a way of improving student achievement. Sometimes immediate results will not be evident, however, long-term results will be inevitable if you continue as educators to talk and reflect about data walls that inform teaching/learning practices and instruction.

#### **Successes of TLCP**

**Gradual release responsibility.** Teachers wanted to increase their skill in implementing gradual release of responsibility strategies and providing differentiated instruction according to student needs. Understanding the complexity of this challenge, they worked on many fronts, including: supporting each other with co-teaching and modeling: planning scaffolded lessons together as teams, assessing student work to determine next steps and inviting district area or Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) to work with them.

**Consistent assessments.** Teachers in all divisions wanted to ensure the assessments were consistent over time. With so many teachers at each grade level, there was inevitably a great deal of discussion about developmental continua and levels of performance. Focused conversation about assessment, together with the use of anchor/exemplars, enabled staff to come to some basic agreements. Now staff consistently builds moderation activities into their Professional Learning Communities.

**Focusing Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) on student needs.** Teachers wanted to link their PLC's more strategically to the needs of the students in the classroom. Using a self-reflection tool, they now generate topics to focus on in their meetings. Grade level PLC's determine what teachers are going to investigate, what they are going to try in their classrooms before the next meeting and what they will be bringing back to share.

**Ongoing professional learning.** Teachers have developed comfort with a moderate level of productive conflict. They bring a problem-solving, give-and-take approach to their ongoing learning discussions.

Performance on provincial assessments have improved in all areas tested over the past three years. Scores in Grade 3 and Grade 6 writing and mathematics are improving both at the provincial standard and board level.

### **What we would like to learn with and from others...**

- More about using larger blocks of learning time to differentiate instruction for struggling students
- What the process of teacher moderation looks like in other schools.
- Explicit –teaching strategies to accelerate learning for high-needs students.

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#### **Network for learning...**

- Inquiry project on mathematical communication problem-solving.
- Reflecting the Future Aces philosophy and “Me to We” philosophy of social justice, sharing).

#### **Moving into the future.....**

- Continue to provide time for professional learning communities during the school day.
- Use data to provide a baseline for SMART goals, to guide instruction and to assess student learning needs.
- Focus on problem-solving strategies and communication in mathematics (e.g. Bansho, Gallery Walk, Math Congress).
- Teachers to work in their study groups to:
  - assess student writing
  - plan and deliver steps for instruction
  - set goals for class and school improvement.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) is about changing the cultural of a school institution. Teachers are seeing human potential. The (TLCP) is not about implementing a single initiative or innovation. Teachers who have implemented the (TLCP) can achieve high results when students are engaged to rich text. It's about humanity. Teachers have captured heartfelt responses.

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