

Why the **TEACHING-LEARNING CRITICAL PATHWAY** and Why Now?



There is urgency at a global level to address the needs of 21st century learners. How can we develop new thinking to deal with the complexity and challenges of a rapidly changing global economy and the advancement of information, communication and the technologies that have shrunk the world into an interdependent and interconnected village? How do we provide our students with improved life choices and life chances?

We cannot be certain what our world will look like even five years from now. There is a new imperative to develop a different kind of thinker, a sceptical thinker, with high intellectual ability and connectedness to the world. 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 a facility with a complex set of skills to deconstruct, construct, co-construct and reconstruct meaning efficiently and effectively. This is the new criteria for success. Students will require an education that has a solid foundation based on deep thinking and action - one that values and understands the human condition. This is about a type of education that prepares students to make positive and lasting contributions to their world.

The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (T-LCP) is a model used to organize actions for teaching and student learning. The T-LCP is the work of the professional learning community (PLC). The T-LCP was inspired by a strategy presented by Carmel Crévoila, Peter Hill and Michael Fullan. In their book entitled *Breakthrough*, they present a model called the Critical Learning Instructional Pathway (CLIP). Their idea is that classroom practice can be organized in a practical, precise and highly personalized manner

with the outcome being increased student achievement. Their central question is “How do we know that our actions are resulting in improved student learning?”

Effective professional learning communities (PLC) involve more than simply bringing the right people together in a room. They focus on evidence of student learning to determine the area of greatest need in order to improve teaching and learning.

The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway is a model that sequences the work of each PLC. This model is an organizer for deep learning and enquiry. However it should be noted that the T-LCP is not simply a technical exercise. It also involves new ways of working together. This work engages educators in relationships of trust. Trust propels momentum towards collaboration and creates contexts within which people feel able to take risks to develop innovative practice. This work values creative thinking, new knowledge and teacher expertise.

A school may have more than one professional learning community operating at any given time, depending on the number of teachers within the school. All professional learning



communities find common ground when the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway is used. The T-LCP aligns the work of all professional learning communities within the school. Each professional learning community will be at a different point on the “knowing-doing” continuum.

Professional development, the notion of providing teacher development based on theory and strategy, addresses the “knowing-not knowing” gap. Embedded professional learning changes the school culture by holding everyone accountable for continuous improvement. The T-LCP is about embedded professional learning. It provides PLCs the best opportunity 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 T-LCP embraces the belief and understanding that all students can learn and all teachers can teach to high standards and articulate their practice. Embedded professional learning addresses the “knowing-doing” gap.

Embedded professional learning is driven by a focus on student evidence and the power of co-constructing ways and means of improving student learning. Discussion and action is centered on

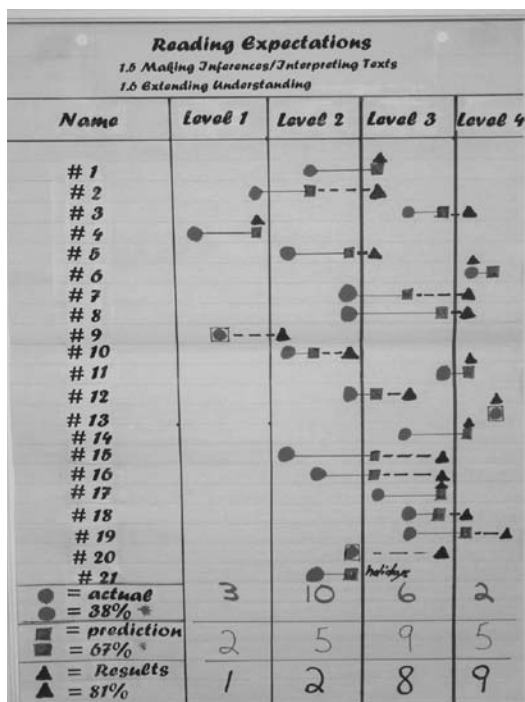
the interdependence of curriculum expectations, assessment of and for learning, thinking strategies, teaching strategies and reflection.

Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway Tips

The T-LCP should be a full school effort that:

- identifies students’ area of greatest need;
- takes about six weeks (time varies);
- requires time for professional learning community sessions;
- is facilitated by a school administrator;
- develops distributed leadership;
- identifies a “Big Idea” that engages students;
- provides students with many opportunities to develop and demonstrate deep thinking;
- identifies learning (curriculum) expectations that will be used as a focus;
- provides opportunity for both staff and students to reflect on learning and teaching; and
- concludes with next steps that contribute to the next T-LCP and school-wide changes.

Figure A - One example of a Class Data Wall



This data wall displays the achievement of students in a Grade 3 class. Achievement is mapped in relation to two learning expectations from *1.0 Reading for Meaning -The Ontario Curriculum - Language Grades 1-8*. The dot is used to represent student achievement at the beginning of the T-LCP. In this case 38% of the students were at Levels 3 and 4. The rectangle indicates the teacher’s prediction. The teacher is predicting that 67% of the students will achieve Levels 3 and 4 by the end of the T-LCP. The triangle shows where each student scored at the end of the T-LCP. Eighty-one per cent of the students achieved Levels 3 and 4.

The primary purpose of our work is to build capacity at all levels of the system to ensure continuous improvement and sustainability. Since its inception, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat has focused on building positive relationships in the system based on respect and collegiality. Improved student learning does not happen by accident; it happens because of intentional efforts and commitment to our moral imperative.

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THE THREE STAGES OF THE TEACHING-LEARNING CRITICAL PATHWAY

STAGE 1: Setting up the T-LCP	
Gather Evidence What evidence of student achievement do we currently have? • This is a comprehensive needs assessment.	
Areas of Greatest Need What does our evidence of student achievement tell us? Determine our areas of greatest need: • Build clusters of expectations related to areas of greatest need. • For example in Language, build clusters of learning expectations based on the deep thinking expectations that are found in the language curriculum expectations 1.5 to 1.9 - Expectation 1 Reading for Meaning.	
Current Practice What is our current practice in relation to our area of greatest need? What does the research literature tell us in relation to the areas of greatest need?	
Design: Rubric, Data Wall, Culminating Task 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 and design a rubric. • Develop a culminating post assessment task. • Build a data wall for each class (see figure A). Indicate the following: - actual performance of each student in relation to the cluster of expectations based on teacher judgment or a pre-assessment; - predict where each student will be at the end of the T-LCP; and - indicate the students’ actual performance on the culminating task/post assessment.	
Collaboration between teachers is necessary if they are to work within a professional learning community using the T-LCP. Teachers become engaged when working with evidence of student learning.	Facilitation works best when: • the explicit intention is to focus on the greatest area of student need as identified by the data; and • the group maintains a collaborative relationship respecting the differences of each other while working together.
One PLC meeting required for Stage 1 - Setting up the T-LCP	

STAGE 2: T-LCP Actions

A. Planning for Instruction

B. Checking In

How and what will we teach? What is the difference that will make a difference?

What did we notice about our students' pre-assessment results?

- Plan a six-week teaching block and build collective understanding re: how we are going to teach.
- What is the "Big Idea" students are learning about?
- Select a variety of rich texts (literary, information, graphic) for the instructional approaches.
- Select high yield teaching strategies that will promote the greatest student growth and align best practice with the identified areas of need.
- What thinking and metacognitive strategies will be used to support student learning?
- What could classroom assessment look like?

Evidence of student learning is the focus of the PLC "check-in."

- One student (refer to the class data wall) becomes a "marker" student whose progress is shared at each PLC.
- A number of students are identified as "students to watch." These students may need more precise scaffolding of their learning.
- Teachers bring student work; an example of a good piece and a piece of work that the teacher considers "puzzling."
- The student work is deconstructed using the criteria/rubric and next steps in the improvement processes are suggested.
- Teacher practice is shared.
- Presenting issues that arise out of the teacher conversations are discussed.
- Just in time embedded conversations take place to find solutions for the presenting issues.
- Teachers reflect on the T-LCP actions and next steps.

Students complete the agreed upon culminating task

Ownership

Teacher identification and ownership of an issue are necessary if they are to engage in an open-ended way despite the professional risks. **Ownership** by the school (and principal) makes it more likely that the PLC will be able to compete for priority.

Facilitators help the group to identify a meaningful teaching-learning focus which they can connect to pupils' engagement and attitude to learning.

Facilitators contribute to the maintenance of momentum without taking ownership.

Two or more PLC meetings are required for Stage 2

STAGE 3: Outcomes of the T-LCP

Moderated Marking & Sharing Findings

Is there a difference in student achievement? What is the difference that made the difference?

- Each teacher brings student work to share and one piece per teacher is moderated by the PLC then the breakout teams are formed. Each team moderates three or four pieces of student work, especially the puzzling pieces.
- Student work not moderated at the PLC is addressed by the teacher following the PLC.
- Individual student data is collected and placed on the classroom data wall.
- The classroom data wall is completed.
- Next steps are generated for each student.

Reflection

What did we learn? Based on our enquiry, 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?

Communication

Findings and information gained from the T-LCP are shared.

Attention and Reflection

Systematic evaluation of the consequences of actions is necessary if teachers are to refine and develop their current interpretations and solutions.

Facilitators offer non-directive support enabling members of the PLC to reflect on the outcomes of the T-LCP and to plan next steps.

Facilitators enable a balance between action and reflection that nurture teacher engagement.

One PLC meeting will be needed for teacher moderation

One PLC meeting to review findings and determine next steps