

New Leader

Practical strategies for student achievement

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TLCP Model: Leadership Challenges and Opportunities

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Despite the hectic pace of our daily roles, principals need to seek out strategic opportunities to inform their ability to function as effective instructional leaders. There is a high propensity for this role to become buried in the multitude of seemingly un-ending, time-sensitive tasks that come our way. This is precisely the reason why our three schools embraced this tri-school TLCP approach which logically connects previous initiatives.

The longer term challenges revolve around our collective ability to sustain improvement through the TLCP model and maintain a level of enthusiasm which will “create conditions for perpetual learning ... an environment in which innovation and experimentation are not viewed as tasks to be accomplished or projects to be completed; rather they become ways of conducting day-to-day business – forever.” (Whatever It Takes)

What follows is our step by step approach to sustaining this environment of learning for many years to come.

Learning from the Elementary Model

Our elementary colleagues in area two are conversant and adept in TLCP implementation. The teaching and learning of critical pathways address the learning needs of students with professionalism and precision. In the elementary model one teacher delivers curriculum in a variety of subjects; consequently one teacher can zero in on the focus expectation (s) and the “big idea” regardless of the subject matter.

Data Analysis Informs Each TLCP Cycle

- Each TLCP cycle is data informed
- The data indicate the focus expectation for the TLCP cycle
- The Toronto Catholic District School Board is data rich – at its disposal the board has a variety of data available on its Data Integration Platform (DIP)
- Specifically, IIR data, CAT 3 scores, and Ontario Comprehension Assessment data were used to inform the TLCP cycles
- In the Superintendent's region of the TCDSB the data indicated that students were having difficulty in drawing inference and making connections (expectation 1.4 and 1.5 respectively) especially in reading graphical texts
- The data indicated that these difficulties were pronounced among students in the applied stream and in particular among boys
- On the basis of the data analysis we chose to focus on English and two other subjects in which graphical texts would be presented – Science and Geography in grade nine.
- The data were consistent across the three secondary schools within the region (Michael Power-St. Joseph, Father John Redmond, and Bishop Allen Academy)

Three-School Collaboration – The importance of Superintendent Support and Leadership

- The three- School collaboration was initiated and supported by the superintendent, who provided expertise, direction, and training for the principals and also provided release time for the teacher moderation (hub meetings). The three-school collaboration engendered rich dialogue and sharing of expertise, expe-

riences, and resources among teachers from the three schools. It was also consistent with the superintendent's goals within the family of schools, such as creating specific targets for improvement in the achievement levels among students in the applied level. The meetings also fostered crucial and needed capacity building. Improving student achievement is a key feature in both the board and school learning improvement plan. The work undertaken in implementing TLCP cycles supports this mission through professional learning and improved teacher efficacy.

Secondary Implementation (Adapting TLCP's to a secondary school structure)

Secondary school culture and structure, on the other hand, presented our first challenge in ushering the TLCP model for the following reasons:

- First, culturally, secondary school teachers are far more focused on the content of their subject matter than are their elementary school counterparts.
- Second, the "subject teacher" mode of delivery model makes it difficult to focus on key expectation(s).
- Third, the focus expectations as determined by the data reside in the English curriculum

Buy-in and Engagement (overcoming the "I don't teach English" argument)

- In order to implement the cycles it was necessary to get teacher buy-in. Outlining the data was helpful in this task. Teachers were receptive when we were able to demonstrate through use of data that it was necessary to focus on drawing inferences and making connections.

Teachers in secondary schools are focused on the subject matter and in particular the content. Because the focus expectations reside in the English curriculum it was likely that some teacher might resist teaching to these expectations because

they are not specific to their subjects. This is the "I teach science, not English" argument. **We were able to demonstrate to teachers in the focus subjects that while the expectations reside in the English curriculum, they are essential to learning in all subject areas are, indeed embedded in the subject-specific curriculum document expectations.**

The virtue of TLCP is that the expectations (the higher order thinking skills) transcend content. As a first step teachers drew links to the English expectation from their subject specific curricula. These links made, the TLCP cycles focusing on the inference and making connections could be implemented.

Some Key Virtues of The Teaching Learning Critical Pathway

- Data informed
- Precise – (teaching to specific expectations and related expectations)
- Personal – (meeting the learning needs of individual students and groups of students)
- Collaborative – (shared planning, moderated marking)
- Improves student achievement through precise instruction
- Improves assessment for, of, and as learning
- Enhances Teacher Efficacy
- Allows us to serve all students better, particularly those most in need of support
- Professionally invigorating

In order to move forward, the next steps are crucial. For ultimate success there must be an alignment of secondary TLCP cycles with elementary school cycles within the region. As well, a cross-panel meeting to facilitate the sharing of strategies and expertise will be necessary. This will help sustain the learning expectations and create a continuum of learning.

Authentic Professional Dialogue

- Our approach has validated our board's commitment to strengthening lateral capacity by facilitating evidence-building dialogue, modeling instructional best practices, and supporting mentorship and coaching.

- While our implementation has encountered challenges, it has been very effective in stimulating authentic professional dialogue and allowed a significant number of teachers to become more proficient in the use of high yield instructional strategies.

- Perhaps the greatest value-added component of our initiative lies in our debriefing and reflection sessions. The ability to distinguish between where teachers are and where we would like to move them in their professional practice is integral to our planning process.

- Even more important is our ability to know where our students are and where we would like to move them in their learning. The reality is that we must get both teachers and students to own where they are in their learning and willingly buy into the intervention of caring colleagues and teachers respectively.

- Positive feedback is the conduit for our success and our ability to share success stories should be the gauge of our improvement.