

Ottawa Catholic School Board: 2015 - 2016

Project Title	Intermediate Learning Connections
Description	<p>This was the first year of the Intermediate Learning Connections (ILC) initiative. Beginning in September 2015, a team of 4-6 educators and a vice-principal from each Intermediate (Grade 7/8) panel in our board formed to engage in collaborative inquiry about engaging their students in deeper learning. In planning for this initiative, a core team of cross-panel teachers (Gr 5-9) and a vice-principal, with a variety of perspectives, experiences and expertise were brought together. Under the guidance of the leadership team, the goal of the “core team” was to help organize, plan and facilitate professional learning networking and growth opportunities for their colleagues teaching Grade 7/8 around the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB).</p> <p>In alignment with our board’s involvement in the New Pedagogies for Deeper Learning (NPDL) Global Project, the ILC’s main focus was on developing the 4 elements of Deeper Learning (Pedagogical Practices, Learning Partnerships, Leveraging Digital and Learning Environments), to engage students in developing global competencies (Creativity, Collaboration, Citizenship, Character, Critical Thinking, Communication) and build capacity across our system.</p> <p>School teams were encouraged to pursue inquiries around a chosen Global Competency that supported both their curriculum, and the goals identified in their School Innovation Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being (SIPSAWs).</p> <p>Participants were encouraged not to see this as a requirement to produce a “project.” The ILC was not a “project”, but a learning journey where teachers assessed their own professional practice and identified where they needed to grow and how they could transform their practice to improve their students’ learning experience. Educators were invited to dig deeper, using the elements of deeper learning as a framework to guide their mindset and practice, to potentially try something new, or to innovate something they had previously been doing.</p>
Context	<p><i>Number of students: 2,500</i></p> <p><i>Number of teachers: 82</i></p> <p><i>Number of schools: 17</i></p> <p><i>Grades/Program: Gr.7-8</i></p>
Impact on Students	<p>Participating teachers reported that student engagement was positively impacted by this initiative. Whether students were shy or disengaged, rich learning experiences that were relevant to their interests enticed all students to engage in the learning. Student voice played a key role in this, as teachers increasingly provided students with choice in how they demonstrated their learning to their teachers, and had the opportunity to share it with a wider audience.</p>

	<p>As an example, by creating their own 'how-to' videos, students were able to select topics of interest and leverage digital to demonstrate and capture their achievement of FSL curriculum expectations. Students also demonstrated development of critical thinking and communication skills as they carefully planned, analysed and produced a video that would be shared with an authentic audience through YouTube.</p> <p>As a result of their teachers' participation in ILC, students also engaged in fostering a variety of learning partnerships -- from the broader community, to cross-school collaboration, peer feedback within the classroom, and learning alongside their teacher. Cross-panel collaboration was strengthened between elementary and secondary students as they engaged in deeper learning together. Once again, Language curriculum expectations were addressed, but with the additional dimension of an authentic audience in their elementary collaborators.</p>
<p><b>Impact on Instruction</b></p>	<p>Participating educators completed the NPDL Self-Assessment, based on the four elements of new pedagogies twice throughout their Intermediate Learning Connection experience. We were specifically able to correlate the individual pre- and post- responses of 34 educators. Generally, teachers self-assessed as higher in the 22 areas, especially around the use of student voice to drive learning design and improvement. Teachers also indicated an interest in continuing to learn more, and as evidenced by their inquiries, many have already begun to share their learning with their colleagues.</p> <p>As a result of ILC, many teachers began to transform their learning environments to support the engagement of their student in deeper learning. This often resulted in a shift from the traditional placement of desks in rows to groupings of desks, to promote collaboration and shift the focus of the classroom to the student desk. This represented a significant shift from the traditional learning environment, where all students are working individually on the same task. This new flexible environment became interactive and student-centered. The layout allowed for the teacher to vary instruction based on the needs of the students and to continually assess understanding and progress while giving meaningful feedback.</p> <p>Evidence of shifting pedagogical practice was also observed as a result of ILC. Educators involved their students in a variety of assessment and feedback strategies that promoted self and peer reflection to help activate and inform the learning. As an example, students participated in a process of building common understanding of this essential global competency. They then applied their learning through peer and self-assessment as they worked together. This resulted in the amplification of student voice as they meaningfully engaged in deep learning collaboratively. By moving from the use of a traditional teacher-created</p>

	<p>rubric to the co-construction of student-friendly progressions, students not only developed their ability to collaborate, but also strengthened their metacognitive skills and gained a deeper appreciation for how meaningful feedback can improve their own and others' learning.</p>
<p><b>Impact on System</b></p>	<p>Our Board's ongoing success, starting with our K-6 Learning Connections initiative a number of years ago, and now growing to include our Intermediate educators has created a strong foundation of knowledge and capacity around engaging students in deep learning and the development of global competencies.</p> <p>The self-assessment that was used in ILC will be part of all system learning networks next year, as will a focus on the four elements of deep learning to support the development of global competencies and academic achievement of our students. These tools will allow us to take the capacity that has been built throughout this project and scale it across all schools, all panels in our system.</p> <p>The NPDL school conditions rubric will be used by Supervisory Officers and School Leaders to engage in discussions about what conditions are required for deep learning to flourish in a school community. System staff will also be engaged in learning alongside the educators with whom they work to identify the pedagogical practices, learning environments, learning partnerships and digital tools that will allow their students to demonstrate progress in relation to one or more of the global competencies.</p>