H. G. Bernard Public School

H.G. Bernard is a K–8 public school nestled in the heart of Richmond Hill. Bernard has a richly diverse community and focuses on inclusiveness and equity in all aspects of school life. Most of H.G. Bernard’s students will transition to Richmond Hill High School in Grade 9, and the staff at Bernard have been developing a collaborative relationship with the high school in order to support their students’ achievement and success. The priorities for continuous improvement are clear: to move towards 76% of all students achieving at level 3 or 4 in math and literacy by deepening their understanding of critical thinking and assessment for learning (AfL). H.G. Bernard is also dedicated to building relationships with the community and developing good citizens.

H.G. Bernard is part of the Ministry of Education’s Building Capacity in Assessment Project. The assessment focus is not a new one for the teachers at Bernard. Through their Literacy Collaborative and Networks Learning Community, they have been embedding assessment for learning in all aspects of literacy programs. The Building Capacity Project has helped them to go more deeply into assessment for learning in mathematics. By participating in this project, the principal, vice principal, and teachers are learning to examine the assessment process, beginning with an in-depth understanding of the curriculum, state learning goals in student-friendly language, collaboratively establish success criteria with students, and provide descriptive feedback during learning. Their goal is to support students in developing self-assessment skills. Through co-teaching, teachers are also learning to teach through problem solving and focusing on effective questioning that helps guide students. The results are not surprising:

- The two teachers from the Building Capacity Project took on the leadership of organizing and presenting for the November 2009 Professional Development Day. (See appendix)
- The two teachers provided insight and guiding questions during school literacy sessions, using the Teaching–Learning Critical Pathways (TLCP) model.
- Teachers are involved in the production of professional videotapes to highlight learning goals, the co-construction of success criteria, the use of questioning techniques, peer and self-assessment, and the move towards individual goal setting.

By participating in this project, the principal, vice principal, and teachers are learning to examine the assessment process, beginning with an in-depth understanding of the curriculum, state learning goals in student-friendly language, collaboratively establish success criteria with students, and provide descriptive feedback during learning.
• The school has embedded the AfL practices in the TLCP:

1. Stage 1 involves the gathering of evidence/data to determine what students can do and what the greatest area of need is. Teachers need to ask the question “How I will know when my students are successful?” This involves building clusters of curriculum expectations related to the area of greatest need and then reviewing current assessment practices.

2. In stage 2, teachers co-construct success criteria for assessment strategies.

3. Stage 3 involves the sharing of evidence of student learning after teaching a 4-week block.

4. Stage 4 involves reflection and moderated marking – Were my students successful? Did my instructional decisions meet the needs of all students? What worked well? What will I do differently in the future? What are my next steps?

• Teachers have more clarity about what they want their students to learn as they discuss learning goals (with other teachers) and cluster expectations around big ideas. Students have a better understanding of what teachers expect from them when they have co-constructed the success criteria, and when they are actively involved in the assessment process.

• Co-teaching has helped teachers to develop a better understanding of the assessment continuum, teaching through problem solving and creating a community of learners in their classrooms where the focus is on critical thinking and having students take ownership of their learning.

• Terms such as “learning goals”, “success criteria”, and “feedback” have appeared in the most recent set of report cards!

Zera Hameed, the Principal, and Kathryn Prince, the Vice Principal, at Bernard, are thrilled by the change in the learning culture at their school:

“We are moving forward on a solid front with both literacy and mathematical literacy at Bernard, with assessment for learning as the common thread that guides our work. The power of this initiative lies in the fact that we are all co-learners in this process, building a common understanding through rich discussion, hard work, and collaboration. The principal, vice principal, teachers, curriculum consultants, and ministry personnel have worked to enrich each other’s learning and develop a deeper understanding. The co-teaching opportunities provided by our math consultants have been extremely valuable.

With the support of this initiative, we can see classroom environments that reflect the language of assessment for learning (learning goals and success criteria are posted) and we can hear the language of assessment for learning in the conversations teachers are having with one another and with their students.
This “guided” learning has enabled our teachers to move forward in their practice more quickly than any other model we’ve witnessed. It takes courage to come from outside the school and work side by side with our teachers. It also takes great courage for our teachers to embrace the support offered from outside the school. We are impressed by the level of trust and safety established so quickly to allow this kind of in-depth work to take place. With the support of this initiative, we can see classroom environments that reflect the language of assessment for learning (learning goals and success criteria are posted) and we can hear the language of assessment for learning in the conversations teachers are having with one another and with their students. We are thrilled that we are now seeing that assessment for learning is becoming embedded in our teaching, and students are becoming an integral part of the process.”

“WOW” Projects at H.G. Bernard

1. Video Production Projects

The teachers in the Building Capacity Project are involved in the production of Assessment and Instruction videos and initially are creating the video storyboards. The scripts will be based on “planning with the end in mind”. Three questions will guide the information that is presented in the videos:

- What are students expected to learn?
- How will we know they have learned it?
- How will we design the instruction?

Key highlights of the videos will include the following:

- The teachers are ensuring that the videos capture all the essentials in the assessment and planning for instruction process.
- What we expect our students to learn lies in the curriculum documents. Overall expectations identify what students are to know and be able to do to be successful in their learning. The videos highlight the collaboration of teachers in identifying the learning goals based on the expectations.
- How we know that they have learned it includes script that focuses on quality assessment and provides evidence of student learning occurring in a timely fashion.
- How we design the learning includes script that focuses on teachers’ thinking on designing the learning in such a way that assessment and instruction work together to create optimal learning experiences for each of the students in their classes.

The videos are available at http://www.edugains.ca/
2. Report Cards at Bernard – Evidence that Assessment for Learning is Embedded in Instruction

The parent community, through school council sessions/presentations, school monthly newsletters, and class monthly newsletters, has been informed about the importance of the assessment continuum and its impact on evaluation.

**Teachers have incorporated the language of assessment for learning into their report cards. For example:**

“Sally” (a Grade 8 student) has improved in a number of areas this term, which is evidence of her drive to succeed. She has begun to take risks with her class participation, taking a key role in a class debate. She is beginning to see the benefit of using success criteria, and descriptive feedback from her teachers, to plan and revise her work. On occasions when she has done this, her level of work has improved dramatically. She is encouraged to continue to use these strategies in all subject areas and on a consistent basis and to share these strategies with her parent(s). “Sally’s” marks in English overall increased from 69 to 79, and in mathematics increased from 71 to 79. In particular, her writing went from 59 to 73, and her oral communication went from 68 to 77.

Comments like these, based on assessment for learning, are becoming standard at Bernard along with increased student success.

The **Building Capacity Project** has been effective in beginning to introduce all teachers at Bernard Public School to the learning agenda and its link to assessment for and as learning practices that make a difference in student success.
Appendix

1. November 2009 Professional Development Day