Building Capacity in Assessment for Learning Through Instructional Rounds

Reflections of Our Learning So Far

Theory of Action
If students, teachers and principals develop their competencies in learning, implementing and modeling the core practices of assessment for learning; then principals and teachers will improve learning for all and students will learn to be more independent learners.

Focus of Learning:
Statements that help us operationalize the Theory of Action

• How can we ensure that both teachers and students know and understand what they are learning and what it looks like to learn it?

• How does the use of feedback support students to develop as independent learners?

• How can we provide meaningful opportunities for students to use descriptive feedback to self and peer assess to set independent goals?

In partnership with Curriculum, Assessment & Policy Branch of Ontario Ministry of Education

May 2014
Collected Trends Through the Lens of the Assessment Framework:

**Learning Goals**

- Learning goals are related to curriculum expectations
- Common use of assessment terms supports students knowing/understanding the goals
- Teachers and students are talking about and sharing learning goals and success criteria
- Students are accessing posted resources to meet the goals they set
  - This is different than when we began when we were pleased that students looked at the success criteria while engaged in the task
  - Evidence presents that students are using success criteria in a reflective manner while engaged in the parts of the assessment framework.

**Success Criteria**

- Success criteria describes what the learning looks like
- Success criteria is referred to by students
- Students interacting/dissecting criteria supports a deepening understanding of what the criteria means
- Students know, apply, and understand – reference success criteria
- Students are beginning to independently use success criteria to defend their choices in their work
- Students have a common understanding of how success criteria is supporting their learning
- Feedback is aligned with success criteria
- Teachers and students are talking about and sharing what they understand about the purpose learning goals and success criteria
- Teachers model how to use success criteria
- Students develop a shared understanding of what the criteria looks like
- Students describe how the success criteria helps them to use descriptive feedback

**Descriptive Feedback**

- We are building an understanding of the usefulness of feedback as another learning tool
- Teachers are modeling how to give and act on feedback
- Feedback is aligned with success criteria
- Students are using feedback with various degrees of independence
- Willingness to work with feedback demonstrates an attitude change
- Student’s understanding of the purpose of learning goals and success criteria supports students understanding of the feedback — they know what they will be assessed upon
- Students make connections between the feedback they provide based on success criteria and their own work yields increasing evidence of the success criteria in their own work
- Students’ view of feedback is evolving — it is seen increasingly as part of a loop that supports growth
- Students are supported to analyse and make meaning from feedback shared with them so they might use it in another learning opportunity
- Students are growing increasingly independent in their application of feedback — feedback is seen as another tool for learning.
- Continuum of implementation of feedback
  - It is hard work to provide effective feedback — even for adults… how do we create conditions that support the ownership of this process?
  - What do students need in success criteria to find it accessible, useable and meaningful?
  - Surface feedback vs deep feedback — what processes prompt students to move from one to another?
Self & Peer Assessment

- Students understand what makes feedback valuable
- Students can use success criteria to identify stars and wishes with prompting
- Students can use the opportunity to provide feedback to push their own thinking
- Self and Peer Assessment is related and impacts use of descriptive feedback

Individual Goal Setting

- Students are setting individual goals from feedback
- The use of success criteria and descriptive feedback to set goals for improvement is related to the strategies students use to implement success criteria to adjust their work and show their learning.

Intentional Planning

- Teachers check for understanding in varied ways to ensure that students know what the goals and criteria for success will be (writing, posting, reinforcing visual and verbal cues)
- Varied tools are available for students when checking their learning or how to be successful
- Checking for a common understanding frequently ensures that teachers and students know where the learning is, how it is progressing and where to go next
- Common language makes learning accessible
- Teachers intentionally and explicitly model and use success criteria in feedback as a preliminary step to support student in understanding how to use these tools
- Students respond to intentional and explicit opportunities to discuss how to use feedback
- Teachers use questioning based on success criteria to prompt thinking and confirm students are where they believe they are in the learning
- There are critical steps we need to take with students to move from process to practice
- Students are supported/prompted to use resources to support learning
- Students benefit from scaffolding and prompting

Assessment for Learning

- Student-Teacher-Student – co-lead learner transition occurs in assessment for learning
- This is a two way process — teacher provides feedback to students and students provide feedback to teachers that must be used and listened to in planning
- Questioning to clarify, lead, expand, inquire is used by both teachers and students
- Teacher questioning prompts students to enter into the learning
- Questioning — engaging students through justification and developing ownership of learning
- Teachers (and students) using assessment resources templates, tools to guide the learning.

Assessment of Learning Task (s)

Success Criteria

The feedback students receive (e.g., oral, written) during the work as well as at the conclusion of such activities is based upon the success criteria. What criteria needs to be identified here to support the attainment of the goal(s)?

Students are encouraged to self assess their progress in meeting the learning goals by reflecting on the success criteria and asking “to what degree have I…?”

Intended Curriculum Expectations:

What do students need to know and be able to do to demonstrate they’ve met these expectations?

Learning Goals – what relationships exist in the above box? How can these relationships be stated in brief, student friendly language to illustrate the intended learning?

We are learning to:

Planned Learning Activities in service of Learning Goals

What learning opportunities will allow students to engage in this learning prior to evaluation?

Assessment of Learning
Spotlight on Descriptive Feedback

Conditions to support the use of descriptive feedback

- Teachers believe that all students can learn and that feedback supports the learning
- Being explicit in how to improve/refine “what is the next best step”
- Feedback meets students where they are ready to act
- Class culture supports a learning stance... errors are opportunities
- Feedback is perceived as manageable
- Timely — can still be used to improve learning
- Related to the students’ learning evident in the work – references success criteria
- Is adapted/broken down based on student’s use of feedback
- Trust (process/people)
- Common understanding of language (awareness of underlying meaning — what people associate with terminology — what meaning do students and parents bring to the learning?)
- Culture of class — physical, resources, mindset
- Closing the gap of student openness to using the tools and seeing themselves as part of the process of A4L
- Openness to risk taking- occurs as we build relationships with our students, knowing them, confidence and trust
- Accurate observations contribute to student trust — believing that we see their strengths before identifying next steps
- Teacher understanding of students’ developmental needs

Actions:

- Explicitly teaching how feedback helps us to grow
- Keeping feedback short and focused
- Applicable to their learning — meets the student where they are with the opportunity to use it
- Genuine in delivery
- Time for feedback to be used — occurs during the learning
- Modeling how to use resources
- Teacher understanding of how feedback will relate to assessment of learning

Other Purposes for Providing Feedback:

Discussion: Is it always about supporting the receiver of feedback?

Alternative uses for the process of Peer Assessment emerged:

- Provides students with ways to practice/engage with criteria to support the students more deeply internalizing what each piece looks like in work
- Used as A4L for teacher — making note of how clearly students can recognize criteria in others work, how well they can use criteria to provide feedback, to what degree of accuracy and precision?
- Prompts peer assessor to reflect on own work — could I update/refine that in my own work?
Independent Students when learning

- Understand the learning goal so they can persevere
- Self-assess based on criteria
- Use feedback to improve next effort

• Create feedback
  • Reference prior work to support next steps and set individual goals

"We learn the work by doing the work"

What have we been trying and observing?

- How do we help students to prioritize the ‘less visible’ criteria in their work (e.g., clarity over neatness?)
  - working to make success criteria something other than a checklist
  - taking steps to ensure there is a continuum within success criteria and making that continuum accessible to students
  - supporting students to approach learning with a growth mindset
  - use student work samples as stepping stones – samples that help teachers and students to identify the development of success criteria

- How might we support students to make observations about what they notice in others work and how it might be reflected in their work?
  - be explicit about the connections available
  - ask students to reflect on the feedback they’ve provided — could they use it as well?
  - engineer situations where peers discuss feedback after working through a process

- How might teachers be even more explicit in modeling how to use descriptive feedback?
  - using questioning as descriptive feedback
  - questioning about key aspects of descriptive feedback to prompt review and application by students
  - making the use of descriptive feedback critical in the design of subsequent tasks

- How do teachers make decisions about when to update criteria – what forms the basis of the refinement? Evidence from individual tasks or evidence of learning across tasks?
  - model the growth mindset we hope students will adopt
  - provide students with opportunities to apply feedback,
  - allow success criteria to change when we recognize student needs are not reflected (e.g. a new entry point for some learners, an extension that is surfacing in others’ work)
  - evolution of criteria illustrates student learning)
Making our thinking visible – our personal “If... then” with actions to support

If I differentiate amount, quality, specificity and timing of feedback, then I can help students prioritize/pick effective criteria.

Actions: Create richness in our SC that allows quality feedback to happen, model timing, and specificity of quality feedback to help students understand and utilize feedback.

If I give students the opportunity to get feedback on the feedback they were given then students will be more confident in the feedback they give.

Actions: model effective feedback, provide explicit links between success criteria and strategies that support the implementation of SC in learning.

If students fully understand what their goal is then they will be able to use the SC and DF to help them identify an appropriate strategy/action plan so they can meaningfully act upon the feedback

Actions: locate the gaps in the SC which don’t provide a clear strategy to achieve parts of the SC

If students can describe a strategy to address a piece of criteria then they will be better able to apply that concept independently.

Actions: examine my criteria to see if strategies can be applied, deliberate/intentional instruction on strategies in content areas

If students can dig deeper into the SC by using strategies then this will help them to apply SC in their own independent work

Actions: model strategies students can use to access success criteria (think alouds?), use questions to dig into SC and reflect on work in small conferences

If students focus on specific strategies and apply them to their work then their learning will improve.

Actions: feedback includes specific strategies to be applied, address with students the benefit of saying “listen more” or “think harder” and how the feedback might be more explicit

If teachers provide students with opportunities to apply feedback and work with success criteria in various ways, then students will go past the naming and get to application of success criteria.

Actions: point out specific success criteria in work and have students do the same in their work and the work of others, in small guided groups work with students to ask them to make their thinking visible (orally) as they make decisions about what to include in their work – coaching them to consider the success criteria.
You said … ‘sound bites’ while in the learning

My focus on questioning, as part of creating more independent learners, helped the room become an open forum for discussion on all subjects, as well as normal conversations. The classroom has become a safe place for students to ask whatever it is they need to help them learn. I’ve seen improvement in a lot of reluctant participants. Students have improved their knowledge of what we are learning and why.

This year I’m working to ensure that my learning tasks are in line with our learning goals and success criteria.

I used the same criteria for all tasks – it all linked and then I was able to give them feedback along the way to build up to the final photo story task. I know that is the way it is supposed to work, but somehow I could never quite get it to work in my mind before. It did this time.

I think in some rooms the criteria is just there on the walls, referred to at times. I want my kids to know it, feel it, to believe it and to not necessarily have to refer to it...I want it to be part of our discussions, part of their vocabulary so they are really feeling the need to think about and reflect on criteria.

We feel like this is a work in progress and we are on our way....

We are also working on how to monitor it on a regular basis (providing descriptive feedback based on success criteria)

May is often a confusing time for me as I always find myself in limbo between finishing up this year, and thinking about what to stop, start, continue, or refine for next year. I think that is especially true now. As a newcomer to the A4L process, I have learned such an incredible amount about creating specific learning goals that are accessible to all students, and about co-creating success criteria so students know where they should be heading. I said at my first set of rounds that I knew where I was in the process – at the beginning! As we continued to meet, I was able to identify elements in my classroom program that I may have considered as further down the continuum. I think I’ve determined that implementing A4L – embedding it into my practice – is not a linear process. I can’t expect this process, with my particular group of students, to go in a predetermined order.

[We’ve] built a community of learners, where students feel they want to help others learn... changing behaviours takes a lot of hard work (on both the teacher and student’s part), time and patience.

[Students] are getting into the habit – they are putting effort into reading feedback and are getting better at using criteria... providing students with the experience of reading feedback, acting on and giving feedback (next steps for all)

Students are getting feedback quicker, understanding more of how to use it as it is modelled for them.
A Snapshot of the Emphasis in Our Learning

And we are still learning…

- How can we help students to critically analyse the “why” their work fits where it does within the criteria and “how” to put the feedback into action?
- If students have internalized success criteria what will it look like?
- How can we use strategies like mini lessons, guided groups and strategies like bump it up walls and anchor charts as a thread running through all the learning that supports students to generalize learning?
- What evidence do we have that this is impacting student learning?
- How are we seeing our efforts in implementing the core practices of assessment for learning supporting the development of student independence?
- What does an afl approach look like - are we conscious of when we move from “doing afl” to seeing afl as the teaching and learning process that is shifting our interactions with students?
- What happens to student learning/voice when we ‘back off’ with our explicit planning and implementation of assessment for learning?

Questions for reflection…

What intentional decisions are you making about planning, assessment and student learning? “I decided…”

How are you creating a culture centred on assessment for learning in your class? “I am/we are…”

What impact is this having on students?

“Hope for/Already noticing…”

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board