

Collecting Whole Student Data through Pedagogical Documentation

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Abstract

Over the past two years, the Keewatin-Patricia DSB has been engaged in an external Efficacy Framework Review with Pearson Canada. The intent of the review was to involve a cross-sectional group of stakeholders in a collaborative reflection process to scrutinize the KPDSB Strategic Plan, and essentially determine whether or not the board was moving forward in its efforts to meet its goals. One of the recommendations from the initial report was to create a list of criteria for measuring the whole child within the northern Ontario context. Collecting data in the non-academic areas would then become a modern learning practice, as we become more familiar with the non-academic, whole child needs provincially. There is an increased number of resources to support teachers and administrators in learning about and supporting the emotional, social and well-being needs of students. In order to determine if whole child needs are being met in schools, there is an urge to find a way to collect and analyze such supporting data. By using pedagogical documentation, the hope is that not only will opportunities arise for the students to include their voice in the assessment process, but also the non-curriculum criteria can be measured.

Key words: whole child assessment, efficacy, pedagogical documentation, well-being, student success

Background

Over the past two years, the Keewatin-Patricia DSB has been engaged in an external efficacy framework review with Pearson Canada. Chief Learning Advisor, Sir Michael Barber, and his team designed and developed a collaborative form of engagement that allows individuals, teams, and systems to deeply investigate the impact on learning outcomes of any given intervention. This work relies on an Efficacy Framework and employs an Efficacy Review. The Efficacy Review and Efficacy Framework is a central function to ensure that over time any educational intervention, invention, or innovation can be reviewed against the criteria in the Efficacy Framework so that the capacity of the school board is strengthened to drive learning outcomes in context of the school systems strategic plan (Barber & Rizvi, 2013). The intent of the review was to scrutinize the KPDSB Strategic Plan, and essentially determine whether or not the board was moving forward in its efforts to meet the goals in the strategic plan.

One of the recommendations that came from the initial report was:

Teachers and leaders are working with generalized images of 'success for the whole child' and '21st century learning' and are uncertain of how their individual conceptions may or may not connect to a shared understanding or how to determine whether or not they are successful in relation to those goals. Their interpretation of 'the learning gap' is heavily focused on literacy measures.

Inquiry question

This led to a focus on creating a list of criteria for measuring the whole child needs, as they pertain to the northern Ontario context. The following question continues to guide our collective inquiry and remains top priority among all stakeholders: How do we best gather the evidence of achievement of these criteria?

Whole child indicators

As schools begin to look beyond the curriculum expectations and a narrow list of learning skills that are reported through the report card, there is an increased focus on an expanded definition of student success, often being referred to as 'whole child achievement.' School boards, organizations and advocate groups are taking curriculum, well-being and student health out of the silos where they have traditionally been placed and are coming up with a more inclusive and collaborative way of planning for student success. Models are being created around the world to look at the ways we can continue to service the needs of students using a more collaborative approach.

The Ontario Full Day Early-Learning Kindergarten Program (FDELKP) curriculum emphasizes the need for heightened awareness of those factors that impact children's learning as a whole. The Personal and Social Development learning area contains expectations and look-fors that provide educators with criteria about whole student achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The critical piece for the FDELKP educators is the way that this information is observed and documented through pedagogical documentation (learning stories).

Provincially, pedagogical documentation is being used increasingly in FDELKP classrooms as an assessment *for* and *as* learning strategy (Pedagogical Documentation, Capacity Building Series, 2012) [This reference is missing in the 'References' section at the end of the paper, but should it be (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012) anyway?]. Given the way that the FDELKP program is designed, without a scheduled time for each subject area to be taught in isolation, and frequent cross-curricular learning opportunities woven throughout the day, it is necessary to have a tool in place to collect data for a variety of learning areas all at once. When asked about collecting "whole child" data, one kindergarten teacher answered that by observing and documenting the learning story of a child, she is able to gather evidence of the child's social and emotional well-being as well as their understanding of the concepts that they are focusing on

Because of the wide-open nature of the inquiry-based FDK program, we really get to see the kids being themselves and help them pursue their interests. Because our days aren't really separated into subjects and units, we really do get to see the whole child. We don't expect to only see the child do math during math time- we look for the child to show their learning, in whatever way they want to show it, all through the year.

In their book, *Learning Stories: Constructing Learner Identities in Early Education* (2012), Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee discuss what teachers are able to learn about the child as a learner through this method of formative assessment. In referencing the work of John Pryor and Barbara Crossouard (2008), Carr and Lee (2012) describe that "formative assessment is seen as taking place when teachers and learners seek to respond to student work, making

judgments about what is good learning” (p. 26). The inclusion of student voice in interpreting his or her own learning comes to life through the recording of the learning through pedagogical documentation. What are the implications for increased use of pedagogical documentation and increased student voice as a means to assess the whole child in our district?

Implications for KPDSB

At a local level, anecdotal feedback from early years’ teachers and DECE/ECEs in KPDSB indicates that through pedagogical documentation, teachers, parents and learners gain a more wholesome, relevant picture of students’ strengths and areas of growth. FDELKP learning teams in the KPDSB have realized that by involving the learner in the goal setting process, student accountability and engagement increase. If we are making gains in our attempt to assess the whole child by involving the learner more in the assessment process and through pedagogical documentation in Kindergarten settings, why not explore implementing pedagogical documentation practice in older grades or divisions? Are teachers so focused on collecting subject-specific and learning skills data for the report card that there is less reason to purposefully collect these *other* data? Do school boards know what criteria they are focused on when determining “whole child achievement”? Are we still focused on more traditional data assessment methods of student achievement in grades 1 – 12?

In the more recent monograph, *Capacity Building Series: Pedagogical Documentation Revisited* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015), the authors explain that it is discussing wonderings, making inferences and determining next steps that make the documentation “pedagogical”. To answer the question of how this process might be different in older grades, a former junior-level now FDK teacher shared this insight:

Anecdotal notes used to be a chore and I know I didn’t do enough of them. Now that’s nearly all that we do for assessment and it makes so much more sense to me than using tests/worksheets/etc. to assess what kids really know, especially the information about who they are as a learner. I am able to use the learning stories to have conversations with kids, look at photos of them at work, “eavesdrop” on their conversations with peers- these are all so much more meaningful than a bunch of checkmarks on a paper. It is easier to write meaningful report card comments now because I’m allowed to write the learning stories that we record throughout the year. I look at my file of learning stories and write about the ones that give the best picture of the child as a learner in each subject.

Are we ready to make shifts?

Scaling pedagogical documentation ‘up the grades’ will require a sizable shift in assessment practice. Are we ready to move from a ‘culture of teaching’ to a ‘culture of learning’ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015)? When a school or school board makes a decision to observe and track whole child achievement data, would a shift in assessment practices be necessary to help ensure there is a method to track the “non-academic achievement”? We know that engaging students in metacognitive conversations about their learning helps them to discover who they are, explore opportunities, pursue their passions and design personal pathways to success in career, education and life (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Pedagogical documentation, could not only provide opportunities to give feedback to students for the purpose of goal-

setting for academic achievement; it might also create opportunities to provide learners with meaningful and timely feedback on how to develop as people.

Fortunately, projects and initiatives that leverage this method of formative assessment outside of kindergarten such as the Student Work Study Teacher (SWST), Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry (EPCI) and Collaborative Inquiry for Learning Mathematics (CILM) already exist in the province. Pedagogical documentation is seeping out of kindergarten through multi-grade professional learning communities that include kindergarten teachers who have had training and experience with this method of assessment. Early years teachers are also moving out of kindergarten into higher grade classrooms, bringing first-hand experience with using pedagogical documentation with them. A former kindergarten teacher, who now teaches grade five, said this about her skills and knowledge:

My instructional practices have changed after teaching full-day kindergarten. I now write down the things students say and reflect upon what I have noticed. I realize that I notice a lot more about them when I am engaged in this process of assessment. I am able to find more ways to help them succeed, learn about their strengths and interests as well as teach cross-curricularly.

What does a year's progress look like?

The schools in the KPDSB, and school boards around the province are changing a great deal, as our knowledge in the areas of mental health and social and emotional well-being increases. The more we know about what to look for, the more is the need to know how to respond to those needs at the school and board levels. Keewatin Patricia DSB Director Sean Monteith recognizes that more and more mental health issues are appearing in our schools. His concern that the board was so focused on the academic achievement of every student was leaving very little attention to the non-academic needs of the students. He acknowledged that whole child achievement meant more than simply the literacy measures that were solidly in place, but as the Pearson Efficacy Review pointed out, we could not adequately measure the whole child achievement without a solid definition of what that truly meant.

A year from now, it is Monteith's hope that not only will the Keewatin Patricia DSB have in place a clear set of criteria that defines whole child achievement, but it will also have implemented a manageable and accessible way to collect these data for analysis. There will be less of a micro focus on single areas of student achievement but a more holistic focus on all areas of student success. A tool will be in place to measure students' progress in all areas of their development that includes a continuum that captures academic, mental wellness and other elements of student development. Using methods such as pedagogical documentation to collect these data, this information will be accessible to all stakeholders and may be used for planning, feedback and goal setting. The data collected about students using board-developed criteria will be revisited year to year and follow a student to his or her exit from high school.

Conclusion

Pedagogical documentation allows ways to create shared understandings, recognize the student ownership of information, actualize shared responsibility and provide voice in learning for everyone (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). If we move from a stance of telling, to one

of listening, we would be better able to collect data about student achievement in all areas, and that include academic and non-academic. The following comment from a FDELKP teacher subtly sums it up:

Learning stories focus on each child and what they can do, not what they can do in comparison to others. Learning goals are personalized and are always communicated to the students. My kindergarten students are better at articulating the strategies they use to learn than any of the older kids I've taught. Because communication is open, assessment isn't a scary thing to these kids.

References

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