Trusty Tools: The Learning Progressions Rubric

"Pass me my blue handled hammer, honey! No. Not that one. The blue handle!"

St Cecilia School in Ottawa Catholic District School Board teaches students the Cs up front at the beginning of the year. Using Y charts (what does it sound like, look like, and feel like) students come to a deeper understanding of the competencies. The same student friendly rubrics are used regularly in classes for assessment facilitated by peers, teachers, and the learners themselves. When teachers repeat the use of the learning progression rubric, it becomes a familiar trusty tool. Students then generate greater independence and depth in the ability to reflect on their progress and next step.

Ah! Sweet words to the ears of a renovation widow! Words, that got me thinking....

In the world of assessment, we have our "go-to" blue handled hammers too. Standardized tests. Quizzes. Essays. Pen and paper tasks. Tools that get "the job" done. I wonder, however, if there are better tools, other ways of working, that might add more precision, traction and impact to our work?

Within NPDL, there is a more effective tool in our tool box. The **Learning Progressions rubrics** provide comprehensiveness, precision, and measurability about each of the 6C's: critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, character

and citizenship. That's a lot of bang from just one tool. Let's break this down.

We all know: these global competencies are not new. What is new, is that we are finally talking about them in precise ways. For a long time, we spoke about critical thinking or collaboration and assumed everyone shared the same definition. Asking students to be "creative" without clarifying what being creative means, just isn't helpful. We know that explicitness is important if we want students to understand what we expect. Each of the NPDL 6 competencies is supported by a robust continuum of descriptors that makes its definition clear. What's more, the rubrics are available in student and parent friendly language. The rubrics not only allow us to pinpoint where learners are, they also show a pathway for further development.

Now imagine a school where every class is using the learning progressions. At the beginning of the year, a student progresses from grade 4 to grade 5, but is insecure. However, the teacher positions the 6C's and rubrics early to review and re-establish their importance. That uncertain student immediately feels that "can-do" attitude; she will continue to develop skills she learned in the previous year that will build her competence and independence as a learner.

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Trusty Tools

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For more information, contact:

Mag Gardner
mgardner@npdl.global

Max Drummy
mdrummy@npdl.global

Now imagine a new student moving to your school from a school at the other end of town. He learned the competencies last year and sets foot in your room not knowing a soul but recognizes the C's immediately: what a boost to his confidence! He's got this!

It's not just the students who benefit. When teachers regularly reflect on the rubrics and share how students are demonstrating the competencies, rich conversations emerge. Where is the student on the continuum? What is your evidence for that? What might be one next step for the student? How might you support the student's next move? How can I design the learning to better support this development? What can we do together to emphasize this skill?

When all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. When we only rely on conventional assessment tools, we have a narrow indication of how students can demonstrate learning and achievement. And, as educators we have too narrow an interpretation of what valuable learning looks like.

So open the toolbox and dig out the learning progression, it may take your students further than the blue hammer.

Questions for Discussion:

- What is your trusty blue handled tool?

- What impact is it having...or not?

- How might our students benefit from using the learning progressions?

- What is one next step for us as a staff?