Learning Cycle: Measuring Our Success

Our journey continues with the Learning Cycle

This school year follows three years of growth and positive change in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. With 2009-2010 comes more steps along our journey of improvement. We are proud of our growth because it tells us we are doing even better than we used to be, and that we're heading in the right direction. It means more success for our students.

What is a Learning Cycle

The WRPS Learning Cycle is a working model or process that teachers follow. It helps them provide a quality education in context with learning ensuring success for all students. Teachers are applying effective teaching research, through thoughtful and deliberate planning. The Learning Cycle outlines four Key Elements that teachers use to plan for student learning,

- **1. Outcomes** – are goals set by the province. They describe skills and knowledge a student is expected to have at the end of a particular lesson, unit, or grade. Student learning improves when the student clearly understands what they need to know and can do. We are inviting parents to ask this question; “How can I tell if my child knows what the learner outcomes are at the beginning of each lesson?”

- **2. Practices** – knowing the outcomes, teachers choose how they’ll teach each concept. In WRPS, teachers are encouraged and supported in using practices that have been proven effective. The more students are engaged in their lessons, the more they will learn and understand what they need to know and be able to do. We are inviting parents to ask this question; “What can I do to help you engage my child in his/her school work?”

- **3. Assessment** – while using proven teaching practices, teachers also find methods of assessment to help them understand how students are doing, such as observations of student work in class, homework assignments, group projects, student comments, and tests. Based on this knowledge, teachers adapt their teaching to address areas that might be challenging for individual students. Practice helps students learn, and not all assignments need to be given a mark to be considered important. We are inviting parents to ask this question; “What assignments were used to help my child understand what he/she needs to know and do?”

- **4. Evaluation** – having adapted their teaching to the needs of individuals, teachers find students are more prepared to face a final exam or project. Evaluations are based on the outcomes set by the province. When teachers know that students understand the outcome a final assessment is given for grades. We are inviting parents to ask this question; “How will I know what assessments are practice and what assessments are for grades?”

What can we expect next in our Learning cycle?

There are three phases to the Learning Cycle: Initiation; Implementation and Sustainability Phases. AISI Cycle III was the initiation phase from September 2006 to June 2009. The initiation phase provided teachers with extensive professional development regarding “Outcome-based Instruction”, “Assessment For Learning” and the “Nine High Yield Instructional Strategies”. Teachers also received collaborative time with colleagues to apply this knowledge and address improvements in classroom practices, based on students’ needs.
AISI Cycle IV is the Implementation Phase from September 2009 to June 2012. The implementation phase is everyone’s responsibility. As we continue to have teachers implement the Learning Cycle and its goal to improve student engagement, learning, and performance by:

- Implementing assessment strategies to inform instruction and instill student self responsibility. And
- Applying the right instructional strategies to actively involve students in the mastery of their learning.

The Learning Cycle is our process we follow to plan for learning, to analyze and reflect on our instruction, to use questioning for thinking, to mark for improvement, to collect feedback for learning, and to report for learning not just accountability. We found that:

- Teachers and students know that good assessment is to inform instruction and modify learning styles.
- Teachers and students know that formative (for learning) and summative (of learning) assessments are difference and have distinctive purposes.
- Teachers understand that student growth will increase much faster with appropriate descriptive feedback.
- Teachers understand the benefits of actively involving students in their own learning.
- Teachers are recognizing how good assessment can motivate and improve self-esteem of students.
- Teachers are beginning to truly understand the need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.
- Teachers are beginning to plan for academic (instructional) engagement as well as intellectual (big thinking ideas) and social (participation and belong) engagement.

After three years of working with teachers, students, and parents on the Initiation Phase of the Learning Cycle we believe we are armed with various teaching and learning strategies to begin making significant differences on student achievement. In WRPS, teachers have spent the last three years focused on improving instructional practice (Marzano’s High Yield Strategies) to actively involve students in the mastery of their learning. We have also been focused on implementing assessment strategies (Assessment FOR Learning) to inform instruction and instill student self responsibility. Armed with various strategies teachers are ready to take on some next steps, which we will call the Implementation Phase of the Learning Cycle.

Teachers will continue to collaborate to ensure all students benefit from creation of authentic, multi-level formative and summative assessment tasks. The Learning Cycle process is challenging us to look at our behaviors and our attitude/beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers are using these strategies to guide classroom practice in such a way as to maximize and enhance student achievement.

The Learning Cycle process allows us to implement assessment strategies to inform instruction and instill student self responsibility. And the Learning cycle directs us to applying the right instructional strategies to actively involve students in the mastery of their learning; most importantly the Learning Cycle redefines teacher/student relationships in our classrooms.

We believe our project has allowed teachers to begin designing authentic, multi-faceted and meaningful assessments that are increasing student ownership through good assessment practices.

Our student – teacher survey data supports these findings.
WRPS Assessment For Learning Data

Identify learner outcomes
Use student friendly outcomes
Uses student exemplars
Allows practice time

Students
Teachers
Students have a choice of tasks.

Students demonstrate they are ready to move on.

Outcomes are re-taught.

Students can describe what comes next.

Grades are based on outcomes taught (Summative).