

**LEARNING WALKS AND TALKS
IN PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS**



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LEADERS

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A Primary and Secondary School

LEARNING WALKS AND TALKS

Learning Walks and Talks provide an opportunity for administrators to be involved in a program developing and enhancing leadership competencies by focusing on reciprocal and respectful relationships. It is an approach for leaders to use to engage in reflective inquiry with teachers to positively impact student achievement and support the learning culture within each school. It creates an explicit framework to observe and talk about teaching decisions in and across classrooms that promote learning together as teachers and administrators.

Learning Walks and Talks help instructional leaders understand how they can best support assessment-based instruction that takes place in classrooms.

Practice sessions focus on:

- understanding classroom practice;
- building a common language;
- reflecting on developing patterns and trends in a school;
- asking students 5 questions to determine how assessment-capable they are
- asking teachers reflective questions about practice;
- giving constructive feedback to formulate a plan for next steps; and
- defining the support that an administrator (lead learner) can provide to teachers and students.

As well, relationships are built and improvement occurs when many educators care about the focus and work in each other's schools.

Learning Walks and Talks culminate in reflective conversations which engage professional communities to elaborate, extend, apply and evaluate their thinking to create new knowledge and to go beyond what they already know. Teachers are able to articulate what they do in their classrooms and why they teach the way they do by thinking about the criteria they use to make decisions every single day in their planning and teaching to impact student learning (Parameter # 1: Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012). Leaders need to be able to do the same – and add it to their Circle of Practice.

PROCESS	REFLECTIONS
STAGE ONE	
<p>Pre-Conversation with “Walkers”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the context of the school? • What is the school focus within its School Improvement Plan (SIP)? • What is your Action Research/Collaborative Inquiry question? • What can we expect to see? 	
STAGE TWO	
<p>A focus on data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the school’s SMART goal? • What does the student data and evidence tell you? • What evidence exists to support teachers using assessment data to differentiate instruction? • What is the focus of our Walk? What would you like feedback on? 	

PROCESS**REFLECTIONS****STAGE THREE****Protocols for the Learning Walk and Talk include:**

- Notifying “Walkers” of any classrooms that may be closed for the Walk on this day
- Walking in each classroom for 3-5 minutes in groups of 3-5 people (Note: when there are no “Walkers”, leaders do Walks and Talks often throughout the school week to get a sense of the patterns of classroom practice)
- Focusing on observing and talking with students only – not each other or the teacher
- Asking students, when appropriate, **5 Key Questions:**
 - **What are you learning?**
 - **How are you doing?**
 - **How do you know?**
 - **How can you improve?**
 - **Where do you go for help when you have a question?**
- Note-taking occurs in the hallway/meeting room afterwards – **not** in classrooms!
- Discussion with teachers can happen after many Walks and **not** while they are teaching.

PROCESS**REFLECTIONS****STAGE FOUR**

Making notes and having focused conversations in the meeting after the Walks. Think about the following:

Students:

- What did you observe the students doing?
- What are the students learning?
- Are the students able to articulate their learning?
- What are the students saying and to whom?
- What student work was in view? Was there Descriptive Feedback on work?
- What evidence exists to indicate that instruction is adjusted to reflect the level of student skill and knowledge?

Teachers:

- What is the teacher doing?
- What is the teacher saying and to whom?
- What instructional decisions is the teacher making?
- What student work is in view?
- What did you note about the classroom environment?
- What evidence shows that instruction is informed by diagnostic and formative assessment data?
- What decisions are teachers making about instruction that is differentiated using assessment data?

5 Key Questions for teachers:

- **What are you teaching?**
- **Why are you teaching it?**
- **How are you teaching it? What if students haven't learned it?**
- **How can you improve?**
- **Where do you go for help?**
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PROCESS	REFLECTIONS
STAGE FOUR continued	
<p>Participate in a facilitated conversation based on the observations and evidence identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with “what did you see” (i.e.) “I noticed that...”; “students are able to...”; “a pattern in the primary division or in the school is...” • What reflective question(s) would you like to ask the teacher to help you understand his/her instructional decisions? • What is the Professional Learning that could be implemented to support staff in going deeper? 	
STAGE FIVE	
<p>Developing an Action Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What learning is necessary for the Next Steps to be implemented in this school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – for the administrators/leadership team? – for the teachers? – for the students? • What strategies will you use to build collective capacity? • What expertise can you find in the School Board/District/Diocese to support your learning? • How will you know that you are moving in the right direction? • Observers return at a later date to support the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan developed. 	

PROCESS	REFLECTIONS
<p>STAGE SIX</p> <p>Consolidating the learning from the Walk and Talk for the school's next level of work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the learning for us as a school? • What is the next level of work that needs to happen? • What do we need to implement more deeply? • Based on the data, what Collaborative Inquiry questions should we ask first? • Are there any classrooms here that could be recommended as 'Demonstration Classrooms'? 	

Leaders ask authentic questions about why teachers make the decisions they make. Leaders also take action if teaching is not occurring at a competent or preferably high-impact level. Action must be taken if students are not progressing at an expected rate (Sharratt, 2013a). Table 4.1 gives explicit examples of how leaders, teachers, and students work together to create clearly articulated purposeful learning.

Table 4.1 The Power of Five Questions to Answer “How Do You Know?”

5 Questions for Students	Teachers Do...	Students Say...	Leaders Observe...
1. What are you learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deconstruct curriculum expectations to develop Learning Goals/Intentions (LG/Is). ● Work with students to develop LG/Is in student-friendly language. ● Post LG/Is in classrooms for students’ reference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I am learning to discuss and use more descriptive words in my narrative writing.” ● “I am adding more descriptive words to my writing so the reader knows what I am thinking as an author.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Purposeful talk among students in classrooms. ● More student than teacher talk. ● Whole group/small group - individual work in classrooms. ● Students clearly articulate LG/Is and why they are learning them. ● No students say “I don’t know.” ● The five questions are posted in all classrooms to serve as a reminder of intentional teaching.
2. How are you doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Co-construct with students how to be successful using age-appropriate language. ● Ensure that students use Success Criteria (SC) language and they understand what they look like. ● Develop SC that are not checklists. ● Add to SC as lessons progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I am able to do the first SC at a Level 4.” ● “I am working on the second and third SC.” ● “Here’s my work that shows how I can do the first SC.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anchor charts/prompts/ scaffolds are clearly visible in classrooms. ● These charts are marked up (not laminated) indicating frequent use.

3. How do you know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give timely, relevant feedback based on LG/lis and SC. • Teach students how to peer and self-assess accurately based on LG/lis and SC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My teacher and I have talked about my writing, and we decided... “ • “I got feedback on my narrative from my friends, and they said... “ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written comments on students’ work are explicit and do not include “well done” or “good work” or other such platitudes. • Teachers are giving explicit oral feedback and recording it for follow-up.
4. How can you improve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make anecdotal notes of written and oral feedback to give ongoing feedback. • Track and monitor feedback given to know students’ progress and plan next steps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am working on being better at... “ • “The teacher gave me this writing feedback sheet to put in my binder.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can clearly articulate their next steps to improvement of their work.
5. Where do you go for help?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with students on becoming independent learners by teaching them where they can go for help beyond the teacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I go to [name of classmate] as s/he is very good at... “ • “I look at the chart we made in class to remember where I can go for help.” • “I go to our class website to look again at the lesson.” • “I go to my parents or to a homework help online site when I’m stuck.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolds in classrooms show discussions of where supports are for students’ learning. • Students can articulate several places where they can go for help in addition to the teacher.

Focus in School	Evidence in School and Classrooms
What is the next level of work to ensure alignment and focus?	

LEARNING WALKS AND TALKS: FOCUS – ALIGN – FEEDBACK

Overview:

Learning Walks and Talks allow leaders to get focused on a singular priority; align the work at every level of the system and schools; and give and get feedback to support improvement in classroom teaching practices. After many Learning Walks, teachers need and often seek feedback.

Two ways to accommodate this need:

- During a staff meeting, for example, by saying: “Here’s what I’ve been noticing during my Learning Walks and Talks... and here is our next level of work...”
- Having conversations with individual teachers about what they are noticing – see below for examples.

The “TALKS”: Conversations with Teachers

Conversations will not happen after each Learning Walk. When they do, they should take the form of:

- Reflective Questioning Conversations: asking genuine questions that the leader wants to know more about to strengthen his/her instructional leadership; and,
- Conferencing Conversations: which may range in the continuum from coaching conversations to courageous conversations. See levels 1 to 4 below.

The format of the conversation can be determined by:

- The situation
- Your style
- The needs of the teacher

Reflective Questioning Conversations with Teachers

- Have no “right” answer or even an “answer” in the traditional sense of supervision...lead to an open to learning conversation
- Shift the view of the teacher to a decision maker completely in control and capable of altering teaching practice based on a variety of forms of feedback
- Are a catalyst for a conversation that influences teacher practice not just today but over a lifetime.

The following are examples of Reflective Questions for teachers:

- What decisions do you make when planning for instruction to meet all your students’ needs?
- What do you think about when grouping your students for instruction?
- What decisions do you make in the physical set-up of your classroom to ensure Accountable Talk?

Four Types of Conversations with Teachers

(adapted from the work with Dr. Barrie Bennett in York Region District School Board, 2000-2005.)

1. Level 1 Conversation – designed to focus on one or two strengths seen during Walks
 - Introduction: Set the tone
 - Phase 1: Reflect on what went well and what the teacher might do differently if they had an opportunity
 - Phase 2: Discuss one or two things that went well and why they are important
 - Closure: Thank the teacher

2. Level 2 Conversation - designed to extend the one or two good ideas into new areas
 - Phase 1: Reflect on what went well and what the teacher might do differently if they had a chance
 - Phase 2: Discuss one or two things that went well and why they are important
 - Phase 3: Extend one of those ideas in a new area
 - Closure: Thank the teacher

3. Level 3 Conversation - designed to assist the teacher with something that is of a concern of the teacher
 - Introduction: Set the tone
 - Phase 1: Reflect on what went well and what the teacher might do differently if s/he had a chance
 - Phase 2: Discuss one or two things that went well and why they are important
 - Phase 3: Develop some ideas to deal with a concern that the teacher has
 - Closure: Thank the teacher

4. Level 4 Conversation - designed to assist the teacher with something the observer notices
 - Introduction: Set the tone
 - Phase 1: Reflect on what went well and what the teacher might do differently if s/he had a chance
 - Phase 2: Discuss one or two things that went well and why they are important
 - Phase 3: Develop ways to refine, extend, or add a new idea
 - Closure: Thank the teacher

MOVING FROM DISPLAYS TO DOCUMENTATION

Dr. Lyn Sharratt, Updated 2016

Data Walls are a visual representation of where our students are in their learning journey in the assessment area chosen to be displayed. The advantages of Data Walls increase when they move from being Wallpaper/static pictures to being living conversation pieces.

Beginners may experiment with Data Walls that are easily put together using student assessment data from a purchased assessment tool such as PM Benchmarks, DRA Data, EQAO or NAPLAN results. These are valuable beginnings and provide opportunities for rich conversations about what instructional strategies will be needed for all students: those stuck, those struggling and those who need extending beyond their present grade level. The visual representation of every FACE on the Data Wall will prevent some students from falling out of sight – out of mind. In order for these visual reminders to become living, growing and thriving, these Data Walls need constant focus on being growth-promoting. They need to move from being stilted snapshots to living entities; from being pretty displays of beautiful FACES to becoming evidence and documentation of problem-solving strategies agreed upon by all teachers who teach each student.

As G. Forman and B. Fyfe (pp. 245 – 246) describe, “the passage from display to documentation travels the path from informing to educating and thereby changes the teachers’ [and leaders’] perspectives from observing children to studying children”. I add that this process also demands that teachers reflect on and change their instructional practices to meet the many needs of their learners. This happens more easily when the FACES are dynamically moving on the Data Wall. When Data Walls become a record of where students are and where they need to be and how teachers and students together will get them there, then the Data Walls are at a more advanced stage.

Data Walls become more in-depth when the assessment tools used to put the FACES on the data are teacher developed, focused on student work and collaboratively assessed to agreed upon levels to determine Next Steps for instruction (the Teacher) and for learning (the student). The documentation of this work invites inquiry into students’ thinking and raises questions for teachers and leaders about strong, high-impact instructional practices for all students: necessary for some – good for all.

Questions for us to consider in the Next Steps of moving from “*Data Walls as Displays to Data Walls as Documentation*” are:

- Does the Data Wall focus on learning or just something we did?
- Does the Data Wall help us re-examine our practice?
- Does the Data Wall raise questions that lead to action
- Does the Data Wall lead us to an inquiry about strengthening some aspects of our practice?

- Does the Data Wall focus on the process and the product?
- Does the Data Wall lead to rich conversations and “Academic Controversy”?
- Does the Data Wall lead us to want to know more about a certain aspect?
- Does the Data Wall lead to a new, more precise Data Wall being built?
- How can Data Walls be used by students to become “assessment capable” and own their own learning?
- Does the Data Wall allow the builders to become critical of it and cause it to be redesigned?
- Does the Data Wall enable us to conduct Collaborative Inquiry to benefit the System – School – Classrooms?

Complete the following chart drawing on your experience of constructing Data Walls

Displays	Documentation
A snapshot in time	Shows evidence of growth over time
What the students did	How the students are learning
Unconnected	Shows threads of learning
No FACES, no information, no problem-solving	Shows teacher collaboration in problem-solving interventions needed
Single perception	Demonstrates multiple perspectives

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE LEARNING INTENTION: *We are committed to establishing high expectations in increasing all students' achievement with a specific focus on developing critically literate learners.*

Sample Expected Practices	'Look Fors'/ Evidence	Structural Changes?	Implementation Strategies	PL Needed	Resources Needed
Promote a culture of excellence in student achievement and high expectations for all learners					
Establish a school literacy goal in each school effectiveness plan. The goal will include specific, measurable targets, actions and monitoring strategies					
Establish the practice of using Learning Intentions, Success Criteria and Descriptive Feedback strategies in order to increase the critical literacy skills of all students					

Sample Expected Practices	'Look Fors'/ Evidence	Structural Changes?	Implementation Strategies	PL Needed	Resources Needed
Increase the focus on inquiry, analysis and critical thinking in classrooms					
Ensure seamless continuity between regular classroom instruction and special education interventions in all schools					
Focus on cross curricular literacy in Years K-12 with emphasis on the Comprehension Skills in the reading of complex text					
Model a love of books, reading, writing, speaking, representing and learning					

Your Expected Practices	'Look Fors'/Evidence	Structural Changes?	Implementation Strategies	PL Needed	Resources Needed

APPENDIX B

Walks and Talks – Observations, Conversation Starters with Teachers, Next Steps for Professional Learning

Classroom Observations: 'The Walks'	Possible Conversation Starters: 'The Talks'	Next Steps for Professional Learning
Student Engagement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentically engaged • Attentive • Off task 	<p>When planning lessons what decisions do you make to ensure that all students are engaged?</p>	
Curriculum Expectations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it clear to students what they are expected to learn? 	<p>How do students know what they are supposed to learn?</p> <p>How do you communicate the curriculum expectations to students?</p>	
14 Parameters		

Classroom Observations: 'The Walks'	Possible Conversation Starters: 'The Talks'	Next Steps for Professional Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced literacy: M-S-G-I • Struggling students read and write everyday • Writers notebooks • Mentor texts used • Cross curricular literacy • Data Walls • Case Management Meetings 	<p>How do you ensure all students can do the performance tasks?</p> <p>How do you weave literacy into all the content areas?</p> <p>How do students know the focus of their learning and how they are doing?</p>	
Gradual Release of Responsibility		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelled • Shared • Guided • Independent 	<p>When you are planning lessons, how do you scaffold learning to meet the needs of all the students in your class?</p> <p>How do you ensure that students are getting the support they need in order to move towards being independent?</p>	
Instructional Approaches		

Classroom Observations: 'The Walks'	Possible Conversation Starters: 'The Talks'	Next Steps for Professional Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student grouping ○ Classroom displays ○ Materials and resources • Graphic organisers • Accountable talk • Cooperative learning – effective group work • Questioning – higher order • Purposeful homework 	<p>What criteria do you use when selecting instructional approaches?</p> <p>What factors do you consider when choosing visual displays in your classroom?</p> <p>When planning homework and assignments, what decisions are you making in order to support classroom instruction?</p> <p>When grouping students for instruction, what influences your decisions?</p>	
Assessment for Learning		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Learning Intentions • Co-constructed Success Criteria • Check for Understanding • Exemplars – strong and weak examples • Anchor Charts – visual prompts • Descriptive Feedback • Conferencing to set individual learning goals 	<p>When planning assessment to improve student learning, what criteria do you consider?</p> <p>What do you think about when deciding which task connects with the assessment data collected?</p> <p>How do you track the Descriptive Feedback you have given?</p> <p>Where do students keep their individual goals and when do they reflect on them or change them?</p>	

JOT NOTES