



Traditional Learning Centre



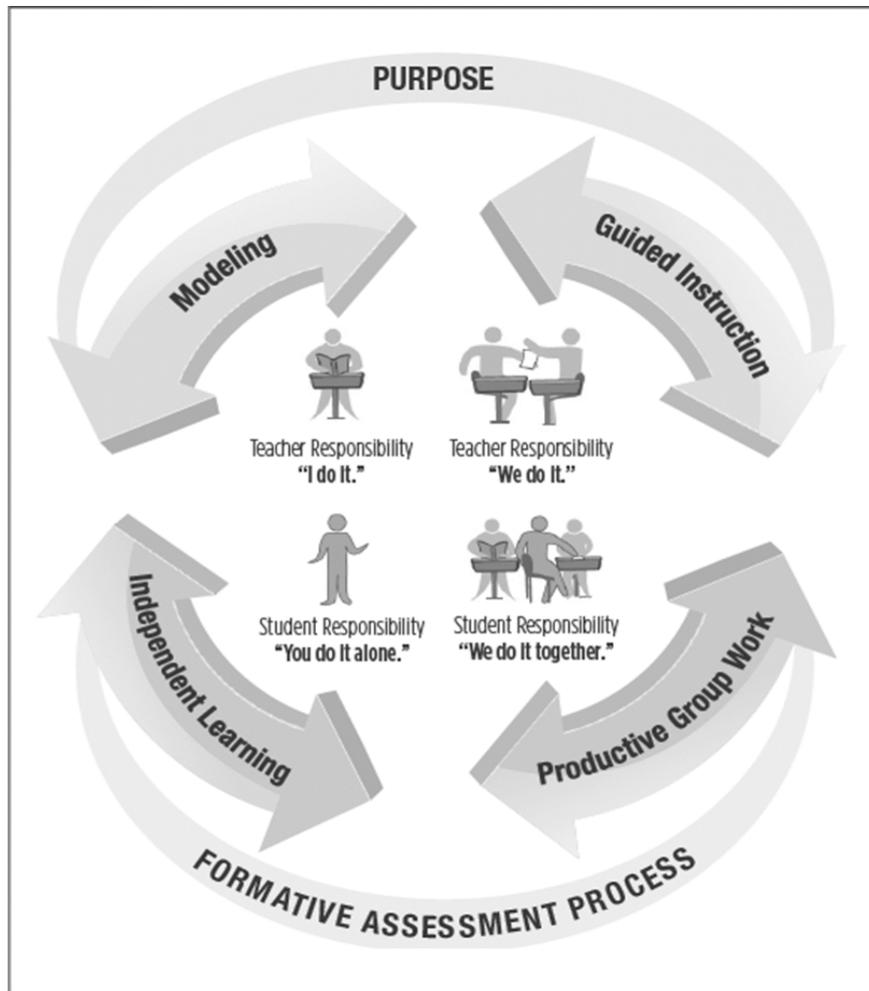
Frequently Asked Questions
As of March 2016

What is Teacher-Directed Whole Group Instruction?

“Direct Instruction is an explicit, intensive instructional method that allows students of all abilities to become confident, capable learner.”¹

- Teacher-directed instruction in all subject disciplines represents a central component of the TLC program.
 - Direct instruction has the same goals as all other teaching strategies. The goal is to create active learners with the skills to become independent, integrated thinkers.
 - Whole-group instruction is provided with sequenced, organized and guided lessons. Scaffolding is planned to be meaningful to students and enable students to make connections. Building knowledge and understanding is the underlying goal. Learning is personalized through regrouping, open-ended tasks, and providing multiple entry points.
 - Foundational skills and concepts are taught directly and integrated across curriculum areas. They include phonics/spelling, grammar, reading, writing and mathematics. Problem-solving strategies in any subject discipline are also taught in a direct manner.
 - Direct instruction is holistic and includes all the skills needed in literacy and numeracy. Skills may be isolated to obtain mastery, but they are always connected to the whole process by giving an explanation and making activities meaningful.
 - Direct instruction is not “Drill and Kill.” Students practice with the teacher until they have a firm understanding, and then the skill is used in a broader context. Occasional review reinforces the concepts but it is not the focus of instruction.
 - Direct instruction is not rote learning. There must be a cognitive strategy given so that children can understand “why” a rule applies.
 - Direct instruction is not basic skills alone. Higher order thinking is critical in applying the skills to student learning. Students are provided with opportunities to apply higher order thinking through open-ended tasks with multiple entry points and are given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in multiple ways.
 - Direct instruction is not exclusively teacher directed. In a *gradual release of responsibility* environment after the lesson is given, students are given an opportunity to work independently, discuss, or work in groups as is appropriate for the objectives.
- Tasks must be designed to demonstrate student understanding of the concept being taught. Formative assessment is ongoing and tasks are adapted to the needs of the students. **Avoid excessive use of worksheets.**

¹ McGraw Hill, *Direct Instruction Methodology*. Available: <http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/sra/What-is-Direct-Instruction.pdf>



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What might a Lesson look like?

An example of a direct instruction lesson might include the following:

- Review relevant skills and knowledge. An anticipatory set that focuses the students on the learning may be used.
- State what is to be learned (not what page is to be completed—rather what skill is to be presented).
- Reduce complex tasks to manageable, small steps and guide students through the process.
- Follow a scope and sequence that is progressive and builds on prior learning.
- Be explicit in nature using hints and cues to build success. Clearly, distinctly state directions and expectations to students.
- Actively engage the students using a multi-sensory approach.
- Guide students through the new learning task supported by modeling. Guided practice, brainstorming, modeling, use of study guides, rubrics, checklists, and anticipatory sets may be included.
- Constantly check for understanding (formative assessment) through circulating, observing, listening, calling on students, or having students signal their understanding. Question students using a variety of techniques, both whole

group and individual responses. On-going formative assessment is used to modify what students need to learn next.

- Throughout the lesson, provide students with opportunities to practice or apply what has been taught or modeled. Guided practice should include frequent opportunities to work in pairs and occasionally in groups.
- Allow students a chance to independently apply learning, practice and problem solve, and demonstrate learning in different ways. Tasks must be designed to demonstrate student understanding of the concept being taught. Avoid excessive use of worksheets.
- Homework assignments provide the time and opportunity for students to apply new knowledge, following the in-class instruction. They should be meaningful, open-ended, and require higher order thinking skills.

What Curriculum and Resources Do I Use?

The baseline for all curricula is the Alberta Education Programs of Study. Curriculum is extended or enriched through:

- Deliberate celebration of multiculturalism;
- French as a Second Language starting at Grade 1 and continuing through to Grade 9;
- Music starting in Kindergarten and Band starting in middle school;
- Compacting of mathematics where appropriate for the student; and
- Participation in academic/arts challenges and contests where staff and resources are available.

The TLC program goes beyond building knowledge and developing strong foundational skills. Making connections between subjects and to the student's interests is also a major objective of the program. This is accomplished in a variety of ways:

- adding depth
- adding breadth
- compacting curriculum so that unnecessary spiraling is eliminated.
- Once the foundation has been built, students may be introduced to topics sooner, experience the same topic from a variety of points of view, or investigate related topics that interest them.
- In Language Arts it is expected that Literacy M.A.P. will form the basis of the phonics program from Kindergarten to Grade 3 and that Open Court (under review), as an anthology, will be used from kindergarten to Grade 6. Teachers will also use leveled books and guided reading lessons to provide personalized learning support for students K- Grade 5. Teachers may supplement the resources with writers' workshop, novel studies or other projects. A working committee is currently reviewing and making recommendations for additional resources.
- In Mathematics instruction includes the use of recommended Alberta Education textbooks and other recommended resources.

How Are Students Assessed and Evaluated?

Students are assessed in multiple ways as an ongoing process to improve student learning. Assessment and reporting practices follow the policies of the CBE.

- Formative assessment to improve student learning.

- Specialized assessment to provide more information to support educational programming.²
- Summative assessment to evaluate student learning in relation to the learning outcomes.

How Do I Enrich the Program Using This Model?

(Synopsis from The First Days of School by Harry Wong)

The program goes beyond building knowledge and developing strong foundational skills. Making connections is the main objective. This is accomplished in a variety of ways:

- Teach for accomplishment. How am I doing? How do I solve that problem? Where do I go to find information? How do I write an excellent paragraph? What materials will I use to research my question? - NOT: What page do I do? What chapter do I read? What's the assignment? What do I do when I finish this worksheet? Those are jobs, not accomplishments.
- Start with the end in mind. Good tasks state what a student will achieve when they have finished the task. Be precise in what you are looking for. Offer structure, models, examples or rubrics that illustrate the end point.
- Use higher order questions. Bloom's Taxonomy should be considered in questioning students and creating tasks. Research shows that most teachers structure lessons using knowledge and comprehension. Aim for the higher levels.

How Do I Accommodate Individual Student Differences?

- Students within the program undergo skill level assessment in the areas of mathematics, reading comprehension, and writing. This information, in conjunction with last year's report card and teacher evaluation, are examined.
- Homerooms are based on straight grade groupings. Students may require regrouping for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics to accommodate for strengths and growth areas. All other subjects are taught according to the student's grade level. Informed groupings are based on previous year's performance and school-wide assessments. This, along with teacher observations, may result in a change in the child's ELA and Mathematics group. Differentiation occurs through regrouping, open-ended tasks and the means and scope of the outcomes.
- ELL students will be accommodated within the classroom with additional support provided, based on the school's ability to provide this at the intermediate or advanced ELL level.
- If a student experiences frustration in the whole group setting, a different grouping should be considered to accommodate for the child's strengths or growth areas. Flexibility to move children from one ELA/Mathematics class to another should occur throughout the year. ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!
- The Learning Support Team should become involved if the child continues to experience difficulty. Further support and testing will be considered if these interventions are unsuccessful in meeting the child's needs.

² For more information go to <https://portal.cbe.ab.ca/staffinsite/teaching/assessment/Pages/default.aspx>

- Parents need to be informed of difficulties early in the year. Regrouping, small group tutorials, and accommodations should be preceded by parent conversations. If the child continues to be unsuccessful in the program, the Student Services Specialist may be contacted to provide consultation concerning program placement for the following year.

What is a Character Circle?

- Schools may timetable designated times for circle or find opportunities to integrate circle in existing classes. In many elementary classrooms they occur daily for 15 minutes.
- Character Circle discussions should reflect current and social issues related to virtues. Current issues are addressed as they arise. Problem solving and conflict resolution skills are emphasized. Students use “I” statements to describe how they felt rather than “You” statements to accuse others. Together the group finds solutions that use character words such as respect, friendship, kindness, and patience.
- The Character Circle reinforces societal values and provides students with an opportunity to discuss issues and solve problems in positive ways in a comfortable setting. It models negotiation rather than confrontation. Parents may bring issues to the attention of a teacher. The character circle is the place where these issues are dealt with if they concern other students.
- The health and physical education curriculum are integrated into Character Circle (i.e., books and stories illustrate character development; physical education reinforces fair play and communal responsibility; students look for opportunities to provide community service)

What Are The Behaviour Expectations?

- As per administrative regulation 6005 and 6006 Students and staff are expected to model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviours so that teaching and learning can take place in a safe and caring environment.
- Students show respect for self, others and the environment by their conduct within the classroom. Issues that arise may be managed during Character Circle.
- Students and parents are requested to report concerns directly to the teacher. Bus issues are handled by a supervisor first, and then an administrator.
- All inappropriate acts, including threats, bullying or acts of physical aggression will be addressed. Students are reminded of the expectation to show respect to others, themselves and the environment. In a restorative disciplinary environment the purpose of disciplinary action is to restore relationships and help students develop empathy and understanding. The intention is not to provide a list of do’s and don’ts, but to develop a common language of virtues and character and positive expectations that are lived throughout the building.

What are Dress Code Expectations for Teachers?

- A specific dress code is designated the first day of the school week, assembly days, and days when students are outside of the school in formal uniforms, on field trips in uniform and other similar formal occasions.
- Formal wear:
 - a white shirt or blouse
 - TLC sweater for the grade level or navy blazer
 - navy dress pants or skirt
 - black or navy shoes
 - men are asked to wear the TLC tie
- Other days:
 - professional attire is expected on all other days, including Fridays (no jeans)
 - teachers are encouraged to participate in Casual and Special Dress Days (jeans allowed)
 - optional golf shirt with crest
 - dress shoes
- For those who teach across programs, the expectation of compliance is where it is appropriate, practical, and respectful.
- Cost of the uniform is carried by the individual teacher, unless the school determines otherwise.
- The principal has the right and responsibility to discuss appropriateness of dress with staff members as needed. (The ATA has confirmed the acceptability of having a uniform requirement for teachers in a uniform school.)

What Are The Homework Expectations?

- Homework is designed to reinforce skills and concepts from classroom instruction and provide the necessary rehearsal needed to master the skill and build self-confidence.
- Homework assignments should be engaging, open-ended, inquiry based, provide opportunities for higher order thinking, problem solving and critical reflection. Homework should not be mindless busy-work, such as worksheets.
- Homework is on-going, providing opportunities for skill building, project work or study. Teacher preference and discretion are the deciding factors. Consistency between classes at the same grade level is necessary in order to avoid unnecessary comparisons by parents.
- As per Administrative Regulation 3066 guidelines are as follows:
 - Division I up to ten minutes per night
 - Division II up to twenty minutes per night
 - Division III up to one hour per night

How Do I Use The Agenda?

What Other Forms of Communication Are Expected?

- The main forms of communication between the school and the home are through the use of the student's agenda, D2L, or e-mail. The agenda is a public document. It is used daily and written in by the student, teacher and parent. Important information, reminders, upcoming events and homework assignments are addressed. Many teachers use it as a reflective journal even if no particular homework is assigned, (e.g. – "Today I learned how to manipulate fractions in an equation."). In elementary school parents are asked to initial the agenda nightly, therefore it is important that something be written each day or it will not become part of the daily routine.

- Teachers check the agendas on a regular basis and will write or respond to notes when needed. Parents and teachers are encouraged to use the agenda for any minor concerns or questions.
- Phone calls or e-mails are encouraged for more significant issues. Recording the date and nature of these calls is strongly recommended. A conference follows if required. Remember to make positive phone calls each week in order to build relationships with parents. It is much easier to discuss difficulties if you have already established a positive contact as your first phone call. Don't let the first phone call be negative.
- Keeping parents informed of important dates, activities and happenings with the school and your classroom enables parents to be informed and involved with their children's learning. Many teachers provide monthly newsletters or calendars for parents. This is well received by parents and models organization and structure.
- The student handbook and student/parent commitment forms are included in each agenda. The agenda is reviewed and signed at the beginning of each year.
- Interviews are between teachers and parents. Opportunities for students to share their learning may be set up by the teacher if they choose, however it is not to be done during the formal parent interview times.

Parents are the child's first educator and as such they are an important partner in the education process. The use of volunteers in the classroom is an individual choice of teachers. Parents are encouraged to be involved in School Council or as school/office volunteers.