

Perry: Welcome to the core perspective an innovative podcast project from the Abbotsford school district. I'm Perry Smith, Director of Instruction for Curriculum. I'll be having conversations with staff and key partners who help us fulfill our vision of providing a world-class, innovative and individualized educational experience for every student. I would like to acknowledge that we're gathered on the traditional ancestral and unceded territory of the Semath and mathequay first nations for our premier episode of Core Perspective. We'll be exploring the ever evolving world of assessment for learning. As we deepen our understanding of competency based assessment, we'll be exploring how our new proficiency scale plays a role in our teachers, students and parents understanding in the language of assessment. The curriculum department recently launched proficiency scale posters in every school, a teaching resource that provides teachers and students with friendly language related to the new proficiency scale, but what does this mean?

Perry: We're going to get to the core of that today. Our first guest is Tawnie Hildebrandt. Tawnie is the curriculum helping teacher for numeracy here in the Abbotsford school district. We've asked Tawnie to speak with us today about our proficiency scale posters as she is affectionately known at core as the queen of learning targets. Hi Tawnie. How are you today? I'm good, thanks. How are you? Good. Thanks for joining us here. Welcome. So Tawnie, before we get into the proficiency scale posters and what they mean, I wanted to take a moment just to orient us to how we've made a shift in learning and assessment in the district. Can you tell us a little bit about the changes we've made to reporting language and proficiency scales?

Tawnie: So I believe it was last year we moved our middle schools from letter grades into achievement indicator language, which last year was about if a student was fully meeting, minimally meeting, not yet meeting or exceeding expectations instead of using letter grades. That was also used for grade four and grade five was last year. The first year we tried that and part of that movement came out of a few different areas. Part of it was we wanted to help students maybe understand a little bit more about their progress. What does an A mean? What does a B mean? And we know that sometimes it doesn't always mean the same thing depending even on this subject from year to year what that might look like. And so wanted to move our grades four to eight to more aligned with grades K to three because that is what grades K to three have been using on the report card for quite some time. Right. And so now moving into the new language of the proficiency scale emerging, developing, proficient and extending, I think that that language is going to be, I hope, even more powerful for students and teachers and parents because it describes, we hope, the idea that a student is proficient in understanding the concepts and competencies that were explored in a term. Yeah.

Perry: What excites me about having this new proficiency scale is working towards a common language from kindergarten all the way to grade nine and eventually through grade 12 about what is the scale that we're using to assess student learning? What is the scale that students are doing using to reflect on their learning and talk to their parents about how they're doing in school and to have this common language that we're all using so that we can be confident that from year to year we have some consistency in how we assess and communicate student learning.

Tawnie: Yeah. And that when a student has a conversation with their parents and they're talking about their learning, but that student can, can say, right now I'm developing my understanding of this area of science or this area of socials, meaning that, that, that, that learning is in progress. And that's a really wonderful thing because that's what happens in life. We don't become experts at things the first time that we try them the first time that we learn them and that that's the language that's part of everyday life. Yeah. So with students and parent can have that conversation to say, are you developing? Are you proficient, and what does it mean to be proficient? Which is a really big question that I think we're going to talk about. Okay.

Perry: Thanks Tawnie. Well, let's dive into the conversation about proficiency posters. Sure. So I'm super curious and hoping you can tell me a bit more about how this conversation about the new proficiency scale started.

Tawnie: So it originally started in connection with the ministry of education and some changes that they've been making around the language of the proficiency scale and the words that we use for different achievement indicator sections. It's something that we've talked about for a long time. We've talked about lots of different language in connection with their proficiency scale and the new language is really exciting. I think it's really exciting because it has more of a growth mindset to it. So when we're looking at students that are previously considered to be fully meeting, now we're talking about that they're being proficient and there's some, there's some differences between what it meant to be fully meeting and now what it means to be proficient that we're going to talk about, I think, and the new language is really helpful in building a growth mindset for students. That learning takes time and then it takes a process and then when we start to learn something we might have an emergent understanding of it and that we move through that progress of learning from being an emerging learner to being developing that we're developing or understanding and then to being proficient and potentially having the opportunity to show an extension of our understanding.

Tawnie: And extending that thinking. So tell me a bit more about this, cause I'm really curious to know what it means to be proficient on this new scale as we have the terms of merging, developing, proficient and extending. I, I'm, I'm curious and want to know more about what does it mean to be proficient? So this is a conversation that we've had for as long as I've been in education, but we talked about it as being fully meeting before. When we're talking about being proficient, it means that a student has more than just a content knowledge that we're really looking at the depth of understanding that a student has for both components of the learning standards, both the curricular competencies and the content. So we are looking at a student has complete understanding of the concepts and the competencies that were explored. And a lot of what we do is we look at the content through the lens of the curricular competencies.

Tawnie: It shows us sort of a deeper understanding of that one specific piece of content. So for example, if we were thinking about reading and we talk about having students make connections to what they read, it's not enough that a student can just make a personal connection or that, that they can even make a lot of connections being whether they connect what they've read to themselves or they connected to the world. What we're really looking for is how that connection impacts a student's understanding of the texts

they are reading. We don't want it to be a shallow connection. We're looking for depth of understanding of the strategy that is to make a connection and how that influences their ability to understand it. So when we're talking about being proficient, it's that content connected with the curricular competency and how well they can show us a complete understanding of what they're exploring.

Perry: Really interesting. So we're, we're talking about not just assessing content anymore, we're pairing content with a curricular competency.

Tawnie: And that's where we really get the richness, I think, in how well a student understands something. And that means we're looking at the different curricular competencies. And as teachers, we're developing our understanding of the curricular competencies as well. And I think with the new language that's on the proficiency scale, I know for me now when I think about it as I talk with teachers, I am thinking about students and when we're talking about specific students thinking about is the student proficient in that strategy, in that thinking, are they still in the developing stage? And it's not a negative to be in the developing stage. It's the process of learning. And it is the growth mindset that we want for both ourselves and we think about our students and that we want our students to think about themselves as learners. That learning is a progression. Fantastic. Thank you Tony.

Perry: So many of our schools now have these posters with the proficiency scale and student friendly language. The describes each proficiencies meaning on the poster. There's a graphic and the graphic is a group of concentric circles that look like a bullseye. Can you tell me more about the purpose of these posters and the graphic that's on there?

Tawnie: So when we started to think about how to share the proficiency scale with teachers, we thought that students really needed to be at the heart of that conversation and that if students weren't part of that conversation of their learning were missing a really big opportunity to make students be advocates for their own learning. And that's a really important piece for students. So when it comes to thinking about the posters, we wanted to have student friendly language that students could connect with to start to understand what it means to be proficient or developing or emerging. And we wanted students to really understand that learning is a process. And so we connected that concentric circle graphic is connected to the learning target poster that a lot of schools have been using, right. And the learning target graphic has four concentric circles and each ring on the circle is aligned with each of the different for proficiency areas of the proficiencies. Yeah. Yeah. So that's why that's in the background on the posters to try to create some alignment because we do want teachers using really specific learning targets with students and then having a conversation with students about where they are in the progress of showing their understanding for that learning target. So that's how we want it to link them.

Perry: So the, the intent of it then was to not just have another thing that we've added to the classroom process, but something that's totally connected to something we're already doing.

Tawnie: Yeah. And, and maybe helps reached an even deeper depth of what students are or what students and with teachers are doing with learning targets.

Perry: I love it. Okay.

Perry: So you talked a little bit about growth mindset and I'm really interested to hear more about how growth mindset connects with the posters and the learning targets.

Tawnie: So when we're talking about growth mindset, w it's really important both for teachers and students to have a growth mindset about our own learning, about the learning we believe our students are capable of and that our students see themselves as capable learners and that students understand that productive struggle and perseverance is going to be a really important piece in their learning, showing the progress that they hope it's going to learn even as young as kindergarten and grade one. I've used learning targets with really young students and it's really, really impactful. So the learning target for example, will stay the same say on a Monday. If it's about, I can make a connection to help understand the story if you're connecting this to read aloud, but that learning target is going to stay maybe on a Wednesday. It's the same learning target, but it's not through a read aloud activity.

Tawnie: Now it's through a more personalized activity that students are doing. But the learning target is staying the same so that students start to understand you might not hit a learning target on the very first day. That learning is a progression. And that when you start something, you might be in the emerging realm of showing your understanding of it, that you need more support. You're not independent yet. You need further instruction for that. And so I'm putting those, those two things together, we hope will help both teachers and students have really powerful conversations about where that student wants their learning to go.

Perry: Okay. So it sounds like it has a lot to do with feedback and really meaningful feedback about where am I with my learning, where do I want to go, and what is the next thing that I need to learn?

Tawnie: Yeah. And feedback is a really important component and when it's feedback that's tied to learning targets specifically, it helps ground those conversations for both teachers and students and help students as learners understand what this feedback is designed to help their learning progress. Super cool.

Perry: So here's one of the questions that I've heard a few times and we've talked about a bunch at the core department at, at core in the curriculum department. And, and I'm super interested to talk about this one because when you look at the, concentric circles, and if you were to think of it as a bullseye, yeah. Many people would think that we're shooting for the center of the bullseye, right? That w when you think about aiming for something, we're shooting for the center. Yeah. But when you look at the proficiency posters, proficient isn't the centre circle. Can you tell me more about that? Yeah.

Perry: And, and we do often think that we're always aiming for the center and I think we always do on our students to aim for the center. We want to get as close to the centre as possible. When I started working with my students around the image of a learning target I brought in a little magnetic dartboard from the dollar store and we talked about how hard do you think it's going to be to hit the center? It's gonna take a lot of scale. It's going to take a lot of practice. It's probably going to take an extended length of time. Is it possible? Absolutely. Is it going to be tricky? Sure it's still worth trying of course. And so when they actually did that, they had a really concrete connection to the learning target visual, the goal that we're always aiming for the bullseye.

Tawnie: But we know that with practice we can get better. We're moving towards a approaching that bullseye center and a lot of times you can hit that ring, that proficiency ring, and that rings quite wide for a reason. You can move through through that ring. And so students will sometimes nudge themselves on the outer, the green ring or the second ring. Yeah. In the developing range and say, gosh, like I'm so close. I feel like I'm almost, I've almost made it into that proficiency ring and, and my students and I would talk about feeling like that feeling of, Oh my gosh, I've made it. I'm totally understanding this. I can show, I can show my understanding completely. And so we just want to always remind students that, how else could you sh could you show your learning and can you take it deeper? Because then we're talking about extending your learning. We're looking at a more sophisticated understanding that students are able to use their strategies in a more sophisticated way to show a really deep sense of understanding of the concepts and the content that they're exploring. Okay.

Perry: So what I'm hearing you say is, because we used to talk about exceeding expectations as sometimes working at a level that's beyond the grade level that is expected for that student to be at. What I'm hearing you say is that extending is not necessarily saying that a student is working beyond grade level, but it's at a depth of understanding that is deeper than is expected to be proficient.

Tawnie: Yeah. Just like fully meeting and the proficiency discussions that we've had for a long time. I've had really deep conversations with teachers about what it means to be exceeding and now extending. And what does that, what does it mean? And I think it's a conversation that we're going to continue to have. And so when we're talking about it, we are looking for that sophisticated understanding and sophisticated as kind of a tricky word sometimes. But it's that the understanding that their demonstrated is so beyond what we would have expected, that they're using the different strategies and skills and they're able to make connections between material. They're able to show their understanding in a way that's just beyond what would've been expected. So I think about it in like a real classroom kind of way. I think about grade two, grade two, math grade, UMass students are expected to add double digit numbers to 100. Right? If

Perry: Practicing that at home right now with my son. Tons of fun.

Tawnie: Well when we used to think about exceeding, if a student was in grade two and they were able to add two digit numbers, we'd say that they were fully meeting. Now we're looking at even just to be proficient, what are the skills and strategies that they're using in order to add those two digit numbers together? Because there's lots of ways to think

about it. If a student in grade two would be adding three digit numbers, which is technically a grade three area of, because we're adding to a thousand in grade three, we might've been tempted to say that student is exceeding, they're doing beyond grade level. Right? But when we think about students that are extending their understanding it doesn't necessarily have to be that there they're doing content areas that are beyond, it's how well are they able to show their understanding of double digit addition.

Tawnie: So if we look at that content area through the lens of a competency curricular competency that comes to mind is one that talks about modeling their thinking, which means they're using manipulatives, they're drawing if it's applicable, they're acting it out. They're using something really physical. And so if we look at adding two digit numbers through the lens of how can they draw it, how can they show they understand with manipulatives that really illustrates the thinking that's happening. There is a possibility depending on that sophistication of thinking seen through that competency that might show that that student is extending in their understanding of the concept. Wow. So

Perry: What I'm thinking is that the new proficiency scale really encourages teachers to have students

Perry: Describe and show evidence of their learning in a variety of different ways that might show that they're proficient or extending.

Tawnie: And I think we're always trying to think about who our students are as learners and that we all show our understanding in different ways. For some of us it's orally being able to share that. For other students it's written output. For some students it's actually doing things that are more hands on and concrete. And we want students to have that opportunity. And I think that through the proficiency scale, when we're really thinking about how can a student perfect, efficiently show their understanding, how do we get them to do that? What are the opportunities we're providing for them to show that understanding? Yeah. Very good.

Perry: Well Tawnie I really want to thank you for joining us today. This has been super interesting and I feel like we've it's really helped us get to the core of this question for today. So thank you again for joining us. We hope to have you back on the core perspective again and have a wonderful day.

Tawnie: Thank you. Thank you.

Perry: The core perspective podcast would not be possible without the collaborative support from our Abby School staff. We extend special thanks to Zhi Su District Vice Principal for blended learning in the library services and Kayla Stuckard manager of communications. Join us next time as we explore the topic of what is deeper learning with Dr. Kevin Godden, Superintendent of Schools for the Abbotsford school district.