



Introduction to Essential Learning

It is the intention of this essential learning work to bring clarity and uniformity to what is meant by 'essential learning' and in doing so attempt to highlight the knowledge, values and skills students "must have" in specific curriculum in order to participate fully in society. Essential learning is not learning that students engage in once and then move on, but rather that which students explore, revisit and deepen as they move through school. To be considered essential learning, several criteria must be met. "It must

- take time to develop
- be foundational and support further learning
- be durable
- be transferable across curriculum and beyond the classroom walls" *H.Lynn Erickson*

One must ask - How does the term 'essential learning' fit within the context of teacher planning, student assessment, teaching approaches, and the implementation of the Provincial Report card? How can the knowledge of essential learning help guide educators' professional discourse?

For mRLC purposes, essential learning has three major components

1. **Enduring understandings**, (What students should know?)
2. **Key performance skills** (What students should be able to do?)
3. **Values/attitudes/dispositions** (What students should internalize about a discipline and how that influences their decisions and actions.)

Enduring understanding

"Enduring understandings are statements summarizing important ideas and core processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom. They synthesize what students should understand...as a result of studying a particular content area. Moreover, they articulate what students should "revisit" over the course of their lifetimes in relationship to the content area." Wiggins and McTighe

Key performance skills

Key performance skills draw on a variety of skills. Performance skills develop within the individual and grow in sophistication over time. Some examples of key performance skills include problem solving, critical thinking and inquiry, design process, etc.

Values/attitudes/dispositions

Students need to develop the values and attitudes that assist them in understanding each discipline with some depth, then knowing how to communicate their understanding while seeing the relationship between each discipline.

Why Essential Learning?

When everything is important, nothing is important

--Anonymous

“The approach to essential learning recognizes that, since the most important curriculum is the one that is enacted in classrooms, the classroom teacher’s instruction and assessment ultimately has the most influence on achievement.” John Hattie

1. When children and youth are engaged in learning experiences that are meaningful, relevant (enduring) with depth and complexity, students are more curious, and see the relevance and usefulness of what they are learning. They understand what matters, what is worth learning.
2. Essential learning helps teachers manage curricular outcomes. Given the scope and depth of our provincial curricula, along with the fact that all curriculum outcomes must be taught, how do educators make decisions about what is essential?
3. The process of articulating the essential learning assists teachers’ with planning instruction and assessment, one might even say it reforms classroom-based assessment. With clear targets, teachers can identify the evidence that allows students to best demonstrate their learning.
4. A focus on essential learning supports a learning environment, which is dedicated to promoting the highest levels of thinking in order to deepen student learning. In order to deepen learning students teachers provide opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking, and effective communication.

5. By determining what is essential, teachers can communicate learning clearly to their students, fellow educators, and parents.
6. In essence, the focus of essential learning is on the “what” of learning rather than just the “how.” It can improve the quality of discourse of students by changing the dialogue in the classroom, leading to a deeper understanding of the curriculum.
7. As school divisions across the province implement the provincial report card, identifying what is expected of students to learn is at the heart of developing specific essential learning. An essential learning framework facilitates assessment *for* learning, performance assessment and student-involved assessment. (See Appendix 1). This requires a shift in practice from grading and reporting student achievement according to tasks, to essential learning outcomes.

NOTE: Although the mRLC believes there is substantial value in articulating essential learning it is in no way intended to prescribe the learning focus for students. Teachers are encouraged to “innovate their practice and inspire their students” using this document as a pathway through the curriculum. *A Hargreave*

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