

GRADE-TO-GRADE SEQUENCING OF CURRICULUM

Sequencing & Standards

Most of today's standards either incorporate sequencing in their content, or attempt to do so. A number of organizations provide guidance in helping teachers interpret and converse about sequencing, or what is now often referred to as instructional *coherence*. We see descriptors like *intergrade professional learning*, guided by something called a *progression document*, applied with a variation of the original Professional Learning Community where teachers are able to have grade-to-grade conversations about *fluid instruction*. Such newly conceived structures are referred to as *collaboration across grades* and can be used in all subject areas, although the trend is currently being applied predominantly within the teaching of mathematics. Some of these descriptors and other terms are actually used in the standard documents. The most often used phrase is for students to "apply and extend previous understandings," which is based on an expectation that teachers will be familiar with a subject's curriculum at multiple grade levels.

A Fragmented Approach to Sequencing is Unrealistic

No one can argue with the need for teachers from different grade levels having conversations with each other. However, this not only applies to math, reading, and writing—it applies to all disciplines. Other important

disciplines are often minimized, overlooked, or woven into some kind of interdisciplinary theme in current education trends where there is much dependence upon the complex writing used in new math, reading, and writing standards and progressions documents to make decisions about sequencing. The key to successful sequencing lies in the hands of the district to provide the planning time necessary to discuss grade-to-grade articulation of all core subjects. This is a difficult task within today's school schedules, but one that Curriculum Leadership Institute (CLI) highly encourages.

Textbook & Software for Sequencing has Limitations

There was a time when textbook companies that produced resources for use in elementary schools tried to ensure that subjects dependent on skill development (like mathematics, reading, and writing) were logically sequenced for the purpose of deepening and expanding student ability year to year. That process was called *scope and sequence* (how much and in what order) by many of the companies, and some even referred to it as *curriculum spiraling*, such as Jerome Bruner. These terms are still used today, and essentially mean that intentions for student growth (like objectives, outcomes, or outcome components) need to be clear and carefully articulated, using words and phrases

that can be translated into an effective progression of instruction and learning. However, not all companies competently apply this articulation, and none of the resources can take the place of a teacher in interpreting and properly using them in classroom instruction.

Another fundamental problem with commercial or informal approaches to curricular sequencing is that they rarely, if ever, go beyond grade six. During the era when junior high schools were converted into innovative and sometimes interdisciplinary middle schools, scope and sequence was either ignored or given minimal importance. High schools throughout those years, and even now, use course progression to handle scope and sequence in the core areas and beyond. In short, grade-to-grade sequencing is important K-12, not just for K-6.

CLI Model is a K-12 Systems

Approach to Curricular Sequencing

Proposed solutions to today's educational challenges with new standards seem to be aimed at individual or small groups of teachers. As mentioned, those groups are often becoming vertically aligned professional learning communities or similar groups. Rarely mentioned in most of today's recommendations is something the CLI has

advocated for over 25 years: system-wide modifications in academic decision-making and action-taking. The advantages to that approach over independent and isolated efforts in schools, grade levels, or departments include these points:

1. Local curricular alignment with standards is a K-12 effort.
2. The subject area committee (SAC) process ensures that all teachers of a subject are included as much as possible.
3. SACs create logical sequencing of unit outcomes and components throughout all the grades, with particular attention given to verbs used and content fields identified.
4. Curriculums produced by SAC's go through a rigorous validation process in which teachers using them, offer their critique and suggestions for modification.
5. The instructional planning resource (IPR) created and sponsored by CLI links an intended local curriculum to classroom instruction, and is an excellent way to guide teaching and learning. Unlike the progressions documents suggested by those who advocate processes inherent in standards documents, the IPR is a usable guide in the sequencing of learning skills and conceptual knowledge.