COMPETENCY BASED LEARNING

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Competency Based Learning Playbook

Overview

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This Playbook will highlight how adopting elements of CBL could positively impact your classroom and school. From utilizing technology to classroom management, CBL can help teachers make great changes to create more student-focused classrooms.

What is CBL?

Competency Based Learning is a growing educational philosophy that many schools and teachers have been implementing to create effective means of utilizing best practices for their classrooms.

Characteristics of a Competency Based Learning classroom include a curriculum that is skill driven, students work at their own pace, assessments based upon skills/competencies, and student choice in delivery and exploration.

5 Hallmarks of a CBL Approach

· A learning system that involves changing the purpose of curriculum from only focusing on content to building skills or competencies.

· Students will be able to continue through course upon mastering measurable and visible prewritten competencies.

· Competencies are written to meet standards, build content knowledge, drive the creation of meaningful assessments, and manifest mastery learning.

· Student progress is tracked, transparent, and easily accessible for all.

· These classrooms allow for flexibility and differentiation. Students receive timely and effective support that is catered to their needs.

Why CBL?

· Competencies are transparent, measurable, and can be followed over time, making them an excellent means to build academic portfolios and fulfil new Colorado graduation requirements.

· Competencies focus on learning and better prepares students to develop skills to access the modern world and be college/career ready.

Competency Based Learning Department mission statement:

"Shifting systems and mindsets to elevate transparency and learning so students have the foundation to access the modern world."

Competencies

One of the ultimate goals of developing CBL is that teachers and school leaders need to shift focus to a system of learner's agency, which is student's investment in their own learning and life skills.

District wide Competencies have been created by Denver Public School's Competency Based Learning Specialists.
The current adopted competencies can be found here:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14jnpDepZqcM4p2HWkmcjwowiTRWR0HZ3iSTAmSCzSHo/edit

These competencies should be applied to ALL students regardless of pathway or program.
Expectations of the learner should be clearly communicated and consistent for all invested including students, families, teachers, and leaders.

Being capable of tracking progress over time is a pivotal aspect of implementation of competencies. There should be short term, general, and long term expectations that can be identified and traced. Over-time can be within an individual course or grade level. But, ideally would be over a larger period of time in school using a continuum.

CBL Culture, Climate, and Managament

Teachers who are struggling with creating positive cultures and classroom management can greatly benefit from CBL. There are many different CBL strategies that can implemented, but choosing what to implement will be based upon the type of classroom and what fits best for the school and classroom.

Teachers should adopt Standard Operating Procedures for implementing competencies. These include classroom structures to create efficiency and independence for students to create their own problem solving skills and projects to demonstrate mastery of competencies. Students should be invested and hold responsibility in their own classroom. An excellent means of building student efficacy is to create Codes of Cooperation. These will define the class' norms, and there should be no hidden consequences. These should be written and easily understood, so that students are clear of expectations. Students can also be invested in these codes by having a Shared Vision; allowing the students to help write their own rules, responsibilities, and goals.

CBL also promotes student choice in the classroom and not adopting a one size fits all atmosphere. Projects and assignments should aim to be personalized for the students to encourage student investment in their learning. Self assessment is a very important aspect of CBL and should be considered when creating your own standard operating procedures.

Other important strategies include helping students monitor their progress and aim to achieve their learning targets. Using achievement badges or other rewards are excellent means of celebrating success.

Academic achievement and progression should be examined separately from behaviors or character. Although, soft skills should be monitored, they should be communicated separately.

Grading and Assessment in CBL

Students should have choice in their demonstration of mastery. Assessments would be differentiated for the student and allow multiple avenues to prove proficiency.

If students fail mastery, teachers can not simply move on. CBL promotes the opportunities for students to have multiple attempts to demonstrate mastery if they fail to do so initially. Teachers need to create re-cooperative strategies that adapt to a struggling learner and allows them new methods and opportunities to demonstrate mastery of that competency.

A gradebook in CBL focuses not on individual assignments, but tasks that would demonstrate the competency. There is a shift from simple arbitrary grades and instead a measure of progress towards mastery of the competency. There should be transparency in this progression for the student in order to better track the growth as well as make differentiations to improve the assessments for the future.

Assessments in a CBL classroom focus instead on those skills-based competencies designed for subjects. Student achievement is based upon mastery of that competency. Formative assessments should be used to adapt teaching methods and academic support. Summative assessments measure a student's level of individual achievement based upon a certain period of time. Grades should be used to communicate progress and not just memorization or compliance.

Traditional test question vs. a skills-based question

Traditional social studies test question:
Who won the election of 1912?
Right or wrong?

CBL Assessment:
Using the competency of analysis and synthesis, describe the contextual factors that contributed to the the victory of Woodrow Wilson in the election of 1912? What conclusions can you draw that explain how those same factors would impact future elections?

Example using a high school Social Studies standard

Target	1	2	3	4
I can evaluate a historical source for point of view and historical context (sourcing).(SS.H-C 1.T1)	I can identify the point of view and context for a historical source.	I can analyze a historical source for point of view and historical context.	I can evaluate a historical source for point of view and historical context (sourcing).	I can evaluate a historical source for point of view and historical context as well as draw connections to other historical information.

Competencies and Portfolios

Colorado Department of Education has adjusted student graduation requirements to demonstrate mastery in Language Arts and Math. One avenue to fulfil this requirement could include a portfolio capstone of mastery. Competency Based Learning is a natural path for students to track learning objectives over time and show mastery by their senior years.

Creating a career capstone portfolio can take many forms; however, the philosophy and end goal should be the same: demonstrate mastery throughout their secondary years. Students should have investment in their learning and progress. A portfolio allows for self-reflection and opportunity for students to display course work and success.

Portfolio Contents:
Once competencies have been executed, students should store products and scoring rubrics over time. Every year, students should catalogue graded works that demonstrated that they have scored proficient or above in all subjects. Self reflections of the work and score would be another excellent opportunity for student investment in the outcomes.

Portfolio Products:
For students and teachers who have access to electronic devices, portfolios can be stored in numerous platforms, such as:

Google Drive

Schoology

Google Sites

Schoology and CBL

DPS has invested into the learning management system Schoology for students and teachers. Schoology is an excellent system to execute both CBL in the classroom as well as a portfolio.
Schoology allows teachers to put learning units and assess competencies online. Teachers can easily align the standards and competencies with the assignments and assessments.
There are even options for teachers to adjust settings to the needs of the student. Options such as “must complete” or “must score” before moving forward.
Lastly, teachers keep track of progress in gradebook by observing scores on all assignments or even filter the competency that they would like to track.

Schoology has a simple portfolio page for students to collect and record their proficient achievements digitally for their entire school careers. Teachers and family members who have access to their Schoology page would have the same access to their portfolio to allow for that important CBL aspect of transparency.

Cross-Curricular Connections, PBL, and Pathways

Cross-Curricular Connections

Using competencies does not have to be limited to just one subject.

Competencies can be designed to be cross-curricular, which better tracks mastery over time.

For Example: ELA

Competency:
I can write clear and strong arguments.

Indicators:
I can introduce a claim
I can create a thesis
I can provide a compelling conclusion

This writing competency, although originally created for English Language Arts, can and should be utilized for all other subjects that a student is enrolled.

Project Based Learning

There should be different pathways for students to choose in order to demonstrate proficiency of competencies. One effective pathway is project based learning. PBL allows students choice and self investment in their learning. Rather than simply making requirements for a project, teachers should connect competencies to the project, and CBL encourages students to not only focus on their skills in the classroom but apply them in the modern world.

Using the example from above:

Project: Denver Local History

Directions: Student will create a exhibit for the local Denver History Museum that tells the story of a family who has lived through three generations of history by researching the national and local events that impacted their lives and drawing conclusions on how these historical events shaped the current youth generation living in Denver.

Students must fulfill the following history competencies:
Competency One: I can use primary and secondary resources for effective research.
Competency Two: I can write clear and strong arguments.

Alternative Pathways

Blended and hybrid learning are also great pathways for student learning. CBL can easily be adopted into these formats, especially with the use of a learning management system like Schoology.

Resources

Helpful Links

[Why Competency Based?]

[Three Key Characteristics of Competency Based Learning]

[Competency Based Learning in 60 Seconds]

[DPS Competencies]

[Schoology Implementation FAQ]

[Building a Mastery-Based Grading Policy]

CBL Team Contact Info

If you have further questions and/or want help implementing CBL in your classroom, please contact a member of your DPS Competency Based Learning Team:

Mark Muenchau (Director): Mark_Muenchau@dpsk12.org

Ian Kearns (CBL Specialist): Ian_Kearns@dpsk12.org

Mark Somanader (CBL Specialist): Mark_Somanader@dpsk12.org

Phillip Kyle (CBL Specialist): Phillip_Kyle@dpsk12.org