

Creating Learning Progressions for Standards

Learning progressions are vertically sequenced steps of acquiring expertise pertaining to skills, knowledge, or dispositions within a specific domain. This sequence utilizes the concepts of continuity and coherence. “Learning is not viewed as a series of discrete events, but rather as a trajectory of development over time in a vertical fashion connecting knowledge, concepts, and skills within a domain over multiple grade levels” (Heritage, 2008).

Learning progressions are relatively new and have come into popularity because of the standards movement. Popham (2007) describes them as a “carefully sequenced set of building blocks that students must master en route to a more distant curricular aim. The building blocks consist of sub skills and bodies of enabling knowledge” (p.83). Smith, et al. (2006) state that learning progressions are “based on research syntheses and conceptual analyses and describe successively more sophisticated ways of reasoning in a content domain that follow one another as students learn” (p. 2). Learning progressions enable teachers to more easily view what skills and knowledge come before and after a student’s current learning status.

Some learning progressions are empirically based. Such progressions are “top-down” or “uppercase” approaches and have gone through multiple renditions and testing by discipline-specific content experts and child psychologists (Smith, et al., 2006). The U.K. history progression used for the Catholic standards K6.IS1 (see below) is an example of this and might be used as a beginning template for learning progressions for Catholic specific standards.

Currently, research-based learning progressions addressing elements such as developing a student’s wonder and delight in God’s creation are not easily found. Since learning progressions are themselves relatively new, teachers have been enlisted to create such progressions from what is called in the literature a “bottom-up” or “lowercase” approach (Heritage, 2008). This means that in many cases teachers, based on their day-to-day experience, will need to create initial progressions and then tweak and update them. Needless to say, there can be many different approaches, as long as the standard itself is achieved in a developmentally appropriate way.

There is no particular template used for creating learning progressions. The most important thing is whether necessary prior knowledge and skills are in place to advance a student’s learning — whether through a linear or “branched” framework. Stevens, et al. (2007) assert that branching out and making connections between ideas, especially in science, is as essential as using a linear building block approach. Either way, knowledge and skills must be coherently sequenced or inter-connected so that students’ understanding and growth mature.

This can be achieved by using a series of statements similar to exit standards. These created statements indicate what the student will know, do, or be like at a certain point along the learning continuum — much like existing benchmark standards. These leveled statements should increase in the degree of knowledge or skills that students are to acquire in order to attain mastery of the exit standard. They should be developmentally appropriate, guided by how children learn, increase in complexity, and build on previously identified knowledge and skills.

Example

English Language Arts K-6 “Standards-Formatted” Learning Progression

CS	ELA.K6	IS5	Recite poems of substance that inform the human soul and encourage a striving for virtue and goodness.
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Poetry:

Level 1: Students will recite short nursery rhymes of virtue and goodness in groups and with help as needed.

Level 2: Students will recite poems of virtue and goodness with help as needed.

Level 3: Students will recite poems that encourage virtue and goodness without help.

Level 4: Students will recite more complex poetry that encourages a striving toward virtue and goodness.

Level 5: Students will recite increasingly complex and nuanced poetry using literary elements and techniques that delight the soul and encourage virtue and goodness.

Target Level – Grade 6: Students will recite poems of substance that inform the human soul and encourage a striving for virtue and goodness.

Below is an example of another standards-formatted learning progression using benchmark standards as the goal and a proficiency rating scale. Teachers should incorporate formative assessment once the progressions are in place so as to make instructional adjustments to assist student learning.

SAMPLE OF LEARNING PROGRESSIONS AND CLASS BENCHMARKS

ELA	A	B	C
	Is the student using organizational patterns (e.g., compare and contrast, proposition and support) to access information?	Can the student make inferences and draw conclusions about grade-appropriate texts?	Can the student distinguish between explicit and implied information?
PM descriptors	Comprehension - LA.5.2.1 Understanding Text Structure	Comprehension - LA.5.2.2 Constructing Meaning	Comprehension - LA.5.2.3 Constructing Meaning
Advanced	Teacher notes that student showed proficiency "x"	Student has NOT shown proficiency yet on this benchmark	
Proficient	X Use organizational patterns (e.g., proposition and support) to access and construct meaning. 2 assessments	Use organizational patterns (e.g., proposition and support) to access and construct meaning. 1 assessment - will continue in 3 rd quarter	Use organizational patterns (e.g., proposition and support) to access and construct meaning. 2 assessments- will continue in 3 rd quarter
Approaching Proficient	X Use graphic representations to organize information in texts (e.g., proposition/ support frame, etc.). 1 assessment	X Use prior experience to draw a conclusion based on a simple text with clear clues as to a possible outcome (i.e., "The coyote was hungry. He saw a rabbit. So he..."). 1 assessment	X Locate clues within a text that might support an inference. Teacher observation/question student after reading
	Locate words that give clues to the organizational structure of a text (e.g., expert said, examples to support, etc.).	X Draw a conclusions about a passage based on both the text and an illustration. 1 assessment	X Identify explicit information in a text (i.e., find answer to a who, what, when, where question).
Foundational	X Identify the elements of an organizational pattern (e.g., proposition and support, problem-solution, cause-effect, etc.). 2 assessments	X Identify what is happening in a text after viewing an illustration. Teacher observation/question student after reading	X Define implied or inferred information as logical guesses based on personal experience (e.g., The cat is limping so he must be injured.).
Below lowest descriptor	X Locate signal words in a variety of texts 1 assessment X Match signal words with appropriate text structure 1 assessment	The teacher added notes about text structures included for instruction and formative assessments "below" the lowest descriptors on the Progress Map. Student successfully showed understanding. (See "x" in boxes for this benchmark.)	
NOTES	Text Structures: sequence, cause-effect, chronology, description, compare/contrast, proposition/support		

© Hess, K. (2008). Learning progressions in K-8 classrooms: How progress maps can influence classroom practice and perceptions and help teachers make more informed instructional decisions in support of struggling learners. Student profile for use with learning progressions. Minneapolis, MN: National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Below is an example of a descriptive based learning progression using the *Catholic Curriculum Standard* for History, H.K6.IS1 and a research-based learning progression created for history by the U.K titled *A Progression of Attainment in History*.¹

CSH.K6.IS1: Relate how history begins and ends in God and how history has a religious dimension.

Level 1: Students recognize that there is a past and present in their own lives and understand that God created all things at a point in history. They can recall simple events from the past and can find answers about simple events in the past from sources of information (i.e., religion textbook or children's Bible).

Level 2: Students show their developing sense of chronology by placing events in order (i.e., the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation). Students will show an understanding that events happened before they were alive and that God physically entered into history in the form of Jesus Christ. They will become familiar with the Bible as a source of historical stories. They will begin seeing the reason why people acted in ways that they did.

Level 3: Students show a developing understanding of chronology by an understanding that time can be divided into periods (i.e., God made the earth and everything on it; Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, entered into time as a child; Life on earth after Jesus' death and resurrection; the coming of the Holy Spirit to be with us until the end of time). Recognize similarities and differences between time periods. Students begin to mention more reasons and results for events and changes. Students use sources of information to answer questions about the past.

Level 4: Students show depth of understanding of past events and factual knowledge and how God intervenes in history, especially in the miracles and parables of Jesus. They are able to make connections between past events and give reasons for their causes and effects (i.e., the fall and sin, the death of Jesus and the opening of the gates of Heaven, etc.). They know that past events can be interpreted in different ways by different people. They begin to choose, organize, and evaluate particular information and begin to see how God has been evident throughout all of history.

Level 5: Students continue to make more in-depth connections between causes and effects of events in history, especially how the Catholic Church, as God's presence on earth, interacts with the local community for the benefit of all people (i.e., works of mercy, social justice, etc.). Students choose and organize larger bodies of knowledge with more specific dates, terms, and facts. They continue to evaluate sources of information understanding that people hold different perspectives as to how God is evident in the world yesterday and today.

¹ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (2007). Attainment targets for history. Retrieved from [http://www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6001&Session/@id=D_rDeVtq54ioMlzavOn88E&POS\[@stateId_eq_main\]/@id=3276&POS\[@stateId_eq_at\]/@id=3251](http://www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6001&Session/@id=D_rDeVtq54ioMlzavOn88E&POS[@stateId_eq_main]/@id=3276&POS[@stateId_eq_at]/@id=3251)

Level 6: Students become more precise in their descriptions of factual knowledge by describing past societies and time periods (i.e., formation and division of 12 tribes of Israel, lineage of Christ, the early Church) examining and explaining reasons and results of events. Students begin to understand different perspectives of historical events and their ramifications through the production of structured work that incorporates dates, terms, and concepts.

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