The Power of Creating a Logic Model
By Nada Bimbilov and Lynne Hollingshead

Abstract: As researchers working within a large school board supporting system-wide learning we are regularly asked by our colleagues, "How can we measure our impact?" Our answer has consistently been - what are your goals and what does it look like and sound like along the way to reaching those goals? We have found the construction of a logic model not only supports intentional planning and monitoring but also builds a shared understanding and commitment to our work towards improved student achievement and well-being.

Keywords: program evaluation, logic model, planning, monitoring, goal setting, developing success indicators

As researchers working within a large school district supporting system-wide learning we are regularly asked by our colleagues, "How can we measure our impact?" Our answer has consistently been - What are your goals and what does it look like and sound like along the way to reaching those goals? Like planning for instruction we must begin with the end in mind. Until we have a clear and shared understanding of what we intend to do or change, we cannot know what we need to measure, what data we need to collect in order to measure, nor what to look for in the data that we collect. Only when we have worked through each of these issues can we begin to understand our impact and what to do next.

During the last few years, we have explored the use of Program Evaluation tools to support our work in answering the question of how to measure impact for ourselves and our colleagues. Program Evaluation "is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions about projects, policies and programs, particularly about their effectiveness and efficiency" ("Program Evaluation," 2016). The Program Evaluation tool of particular interest to us has been the [logic model](#) (this link provides a multitude of examples).

A logic model tells the story of a program through a graphical representation of its underlying theories of action. Creating a logic model facilitates the alignment of actions to goals, demonstrating how what we do should lead to the goals we have articulated. The process of developing a logic model helps us explore our thinking more deeply and makes explicit what we have and what we need to have in order to operate and achieve our goals. The end result is a tool that can be used to support multiple purposes. It can be used as a communication tool to convey our objectives, build consensus, and advocate for funding. It can also be used to plan, implement, monitor, and/or evaluate a program.

Over the past few years we have developed and supported the creation of logic models for departments, strategies and short-term programs or projects. It is critical to incorporate the voice from a variety of stakeholders, policies and existing documents throughout the entire process. Inclusion of stakeholders builds consensus and a shared understanding of what we are trying to improve and/or achieve. It creates buy-in. Exploring existing documentation (e.g., policies,

research papers, reports, etc.) ensures we consider and unpack critical components and ideas that we need to consider, and allows us to build on the shoulders of giants, that is, include the important thinking of previous work.

As in most things complex, the process is time intensive, messy and sometimes frustrating and it is worth it. We act as facilitators when working with our partners prompting thinking and conversation while documenting their ideas as we work. We begin with the end in mind - goal setting and articulating the results we want, as the first step. Our prompts generally sound like, What is your overall goal? In 10 years what do you want your world to look and sound like? Once the goal is articulated, we deepen thinking further, to consider - What are the different components of this goal? What behaviours and attitudes do you expect to see within different groups of people (system staff, school administrators, support staff, educators, students, parent community, etc.) at different stages of implementation (learning, beginning to implement, proficient behaviour)? What learning needs to happen? What mindsets need to exist? What resources, policies, supports, etc. need to exist (or not exist) to support these changes?

The answers to these prompts and others eventually lead to clear articulation of what success looks and sounds like along the way to reaching the goals. We support our partners through this process by mediating their thinking, and documenting and organising their conversation, using the logic model as a graphic organizer.

 The logic model is a living document and is meant to be continually adjusted as we develop, implement and evaluate our programs. We find that the logic model benefits us by providing a detailed map or guide to support not only the development and implementation of activities within the project but also to be responsive to our participants along the way. In addition, having clearly articulated "look fors" provides us with a guide to determine what and how we need to monitor in order to identify success; thereby answering our partners' initial question - "How can we measure our impact?" In other words, developing and using a logic model first facilitates intentional planning, and then monitoring and evaluating our programs.

The benefits that we ourselves, and our partners have garnered from this process are
- a shared understanding of our work;
- a shared understanding of the language to describe our work;
- strengthened cross-team/cross-department relationships and cooperation;
- a growing confidence that the work we continue to define for ourselves is the work that needs to happen in order to reach our goals;
- a growing confidence in identifying the kinds of data we need to gather and examine in order to monitor our work;
- a growing understanding that collaboration, ownership and collective accountability is a means to reach our shared goals; and
- a growing understanding and respect for the complexity of change and the benefit of having a framework (the logic model itself) to guide us and keep us focused.

We discovered the true power of creating a logic model lies in the development of team cohesion. The process of working together to explore thinking, values, beliefs and challenging each other to think more deeply surfaces differences in understandings and ways of thinking. This collaborative experience is essential in ensuring we move toward a shared vision with a commitment to collective principles and actions. Armed with a clear understanding of what the end goal is and how we intend to get there, individuals became more engaged and empowered, able to see themselves in the work and thus taking ownership in their role within the team. In working through this process of intentional planning and monitoring with a variety of groups, we have discovered opportunities for meaningful cross-work and encouraged partnerships of shared vision.

References

Program Evaluation. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved November 5, 2016, from
    https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Program_evaluation