

Fall 2009

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Important Dates

October 29, 2009
Leadership Day

October 30 – 31, 2009
15th Annual
Fall Conference
Assessment is...

Shaw Conference Centre,
Edmonton

2009 2010 Executive
Deborah Rowley, Chair
Jean Claude Couture
Roger Lacey (interim)
Maureen Parker
Judy Williams

Executive Director
Sherry Bennett

Field Services Facilitators
Catherine Coyne
Wendy Davidson

Assessment Consultant
Anne Mulgrew

Administrative Assistants
Holly Miller
Jennifer Hogg

AAC *Communique* is also
available on line at
www.aac.ab.ca

Who Owns the Verb?

Sherry Bennett, AAC Executive Director

No, it's not the name of a new game show, nor is it a language arts sentence mapping activity. It *is* a reminder that while teachers have the primary responsibility for creating the learning environment, students are the ones who are ultimately responsible for the learning. Learner outcomes in Alberta are written from the perspective of what the student will *do* to demonstrate learning. As such, the focus of instruction and assessment is on the student.

An interesting opportunity exists for us as jurisdictions to explore the concept of student engagement. At first glance, our thoughts might equate engagement with interest. Certainly it is desirable for students to be interested in their learning. We can increase student interest as we provide learning and assessment tasks that are meaningful to students and that mirror real life contexts.

However, there is another dimension to engagement and that has to do with commitment. When students are committed to their learning, they are involved at a deeper level. They are not simply concerned with *what* they need to do, but are involved in learning *why* and making decisions as to *how*.

Alberta Assessment Consortium, in collaboration with Livingstone Range School Division and the University of Lethbridge, developed a visual organizer to represent key qualities of successful learners. The text of the graphic is reproduced below.

As a successful learner I . . .

- am an active participant in my learning
- am motivated to learn new ideas
- know the next steps to take when I am stuck
- ask questions to help me understand
- look at work samples to deepen my understanding of what to do
- collect evidence of my learning
- use criteria to reflect on the quality of my work
- seek descriptive feedback from others to help improve my work
- use the results of assessment to improve my learning
- set learning goals then work to accomplish them



Successful learners take ownership for and are engaged in their learning. They are on their way to becoming self reliant and personally responsible. The graphic reflects and supports the principles and strategies represented in the AAC key visual, *Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom*.

To download the graphic and view the animated version, click the graphic icon, above.

Consider the potential for improved student learning when we support students along their way to becoming engaged, committed, and responsible learners.

AAC is interested in sharing the journey of student engagement with jurisdictions and education partners. We want to make this visual a constantly changing repository of exemplars of high quality assessment practices. Watch it grow as we build it together. In so doing, we are building assessment capacity among teachers and leaders for the benefit of improved student learning.

Assessment Before, During and at the Completion of Learning

Wendy Davidson, AAC Field Services Facilitator

For many of my years of teaching, I thought of assessment as something given to students at the end of a unit of study, for the purpose of seeing how well they had learned the required material. I am so glad that I have had the opportunity to expand my vision of assessment.

I have now come to understand the value of assessment at all stages in the learning cycle. Assessment before learning? But, of course! Diagnostic assessment is an efficient mechanism to determine learning needs. It gives direction for learning by providing information on what students already know and can do. Given this information, teachers can plan instruction with learner needs in mind.

Is there still a place for summative assessment at the end of a learning cycle? But, of course! However, with my new vision of assessment, I now understand that learning does not have to end with the summative assessment. Giving students an opportunity for a second chance on a summative assessment only makes sense. If a student takes the time to learn what they need to know, they should be given the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do.

For me, the greatest "aha" assessment moments have come in regards to assessment for learning, assessment that happens while learning is occurring. Assessment at this stage in the learning cycle encourages students to be involved in their own learning. It provides students with the "whats" and "hows" of learning. Does it not make sense for a student to know what they need to know (the learner outcomes) and the steps along the way to achieve that learning (the criteria to achieve those learner outcomes)? But, of course! The teacher is not the only expert in the room. With appropriate modeling and practice, students can reflect on their own work and other students can offer peer coaching. Because students know that summative marks are not assigned during this part of the learning cycle, they are more willing to ask questions, explore and take risks. Student motivation and engagement increases. Learning goes to a deeper level. Based on what students say and do during this stage of learning, a teacher can then adjust instruction to meet students' specific needs.

I love when students apply their learning in other situations and/or share what they have learned with others. That, to me, marks the true essence of learning. As a teacher, my success is not marked by how well I teach, but by how I facilitate students to be successful learners.

From My Home Computer

Anne Mulgrew, AAC Assessment Consultant

I have the title of Assessment Consultant for the Alberta Assessment Consortium. What does that mean you might ask? Well, does the term "Jack of all trades..." ring a bell?

First and foremost, I act as a sounding board for the newly appointed executive director, Sherry Bennett. I am a second set of "eyes" for a variety of communications and publications for which Sherry takes ultimate responsibility. I also provide mentoring support to the AAC Field Services Facilitators, Catherine Coyne and Wendy Davidson.

Secondly, I serve as a resource person for the development of assessment tasks for the AAC website. This function involves direct work with individuals contracted to do the development, as well as serving an editing function prior to the materials being placed on the website.

I have extensive involvement in the development of new AAC resources, either as a primary writer, or as an editor. Some of my most pleasurable moments are seeing a document that has been on the drawing board for a number of months finally go to press.

I also deal with a limited number of requests for service from our member jurisdictions. For example, I just made contact today with a jurisdiction who has asked for professional development regarding grading practices. I have arranged to meet with an individual from that jurisdiction during Fall Conference to determine what kind of presentation would best suit their needs.

"Jack of all trades..."? Maybe not. But I love being involved in this work, and am totally committed to ensuring that students benefit from the best assessment practices that Alberta teachers are able to provide.

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- Claudia Parker

Yellowknife Education District
- Mieke Cameron

Assessment Is All About the “Aha” Moments

Catherine Coyne, AAC Field Services Facilitator

Whether you are in the classroom working with students or facilitating professional learning with teachers, it is these “aha” moments that sustain us as we work to implement the principles of strong assessment. There are times when it feels like no one is listening and then a student says or does something that makes you realize that you had an impact on learning. One day, in my junior high classroom, I was working with my students to develop a rating scale for a performance task, and I roughly sketched the template for a rating scale on the whiteboard. As we were working through the rating scale, a student said, “You forgot the teacher and student comments column. How am I going to use the rating scale without any specific feedback?” Not only did this student demonstrate that she valued the role specific feedback provided in our classroom, but that it was an expectation.

Similarly, there are “aha” moments when working with teachers; moments that are no less powerful, just different than those with students. Some of my powerful “aha” moments have come from working with teachers in a mentoring relationship. Sitting with a small group of teachers, having conversations and deliberations is an incredible way to introduce teachers to the principles of strong assessment. One day a teacher approached me with a performance task and rubric, and asked me to review it. “Be honest,” she said, “I didn’t have anyone to collaborate with at school, so I need you to ask the really hard questions that make me think.” These are moments of true professional learning.

One student at a time. One teacher at a time. These “aha” moments don’t occur immediately nor do they occur en masse, but rather through deliberate and purposeful work in the classroom and with teachers. It is moments like these that sustain us as we work to bring the principles of effective assessment to every student.

Administrative Focus on Assessment Practice in Grasslands Public Schools

David Steele, AAC Jurisdiction Representative, Grasslands Public Schools

Last September at an Assessment Specialist meeting we discussed the need to maintain a division wide focus on assessment practice. One of the priorities identified was ensuring that in school administrators were knowledgeable leaders with respect to assessment for learning and in improving practices in assessment of learning. We decided to make assessment a part of all admin council meetings for the upcoming year.

In October 2008, the Assessment Specialist team presented to the admin council, engaged in discussion, and provided a reflection worksheet for administrator use in determining the progress to date in each school. It was decided that it would be instructive for the group to hear about some of the effective assessment practices in use in other schools. We meet monthly and each school volunteered for, or was assigned, a month. We have now had ten school presentations at admin council and it has been very successful. Some noticeable changes have occurred in administrators’ commitment to being learners and leaders in assessment. The fact that the presentations were primarily made by classroom teachers, and in some cases involved students, has made the changes in practice seem attainable and applicable to the local context. The group has had an opportunity to meet some exceptional teachers from other schools, to be proud of the accomplishments within their schools, and to be motivated by what they see from others. A very significant benefit has also been the opportunity for teachers to extend their leadership capabilities by presenting to administrators and discussing assessment practices with that group.

During this same time frame, the opportunity to access student voices has also been very effective in motivating administrators and teachers. When students can speak knowledgeably about assessment for learning, and about the ways in which they learn most effectively, it conveys a powerful message to educators.

