Data Interpretation II
2008

Ministry of Education

Purposes for the Day

- Deepen understanding about the writing assessment project results;
- Initiate reflection and discussion among division-level staff members related to the writing assessment results;
- Provide a range of tools and processes to support division-level staff in their work throughout the system related to school improvement; and,
- Provide opportunity to discuss and plan around the data in the context of school improvement.

Agenda

Opening

AFL Into to Writing Assessment
- Conceptual Framework
- Comparators
- Information from the Reports

Here's What!
- The Data
- Processes to Support School Improvement
- Changing Contexts
- PLC
- Building Capacity
- Reflection

So What?
- Analysis of Structures & Data
- Role of Central Office in Support School Environment
  - Sustainability
  - Challenges to Sustainability

Now What?
- Goals to Inform Planning
- Monitoring and Assessing Progress
- Linking Goals and Assessment
  - Identifying Interrelationships
  - Evidence of Implementation
    - Two models
      - Boudette and Murname
      - Davies

Closure

Provincial Writing Assessment: Conceptual Framework

The goal of the Saskatchewan Assessment for Learning Program is to raise the level of learning and achievement for all students in the province. To do this, the Assessment for Learning Program:

- promotes and facilitates the use of data derived from assessments to improve programs, instruction, and learning.
- raises the level of assessment literacy among the education partners;
- supports the development and maintenance of professional learning communities;
- strengthens the ability of school divisions or school councils to report to the public on student learning and school effectiveness;
- engages education partners in identifying processes for the effective use of assessment information and in sharing responsibility for learning outcomes; and,
- provides school and school division achievement data that are referenced to provincial curricula.

The Writing Assessment is one component of the Assessment for Learning Program. Cross-curricular data about writing proficiency, processes, and strategic writing behaviours of Saskatchewan students in grades 5, 8, and 11 will be gathered. It provides teachers of different subject-disciplines with information for discussion, planning, and action toward effective instruction and assessment in writing.

Writing is integral to all learning and all areas of study. It serves as a "means of generating and communicating thought and understanding across all subject areas" (SAIP, 2002, p. 10) and beyond the classroom. It develops higher-order thinking skills – analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting (Emig, 1983). Writing requires students to process knowledge, theorize, make connections, draw conclusions, imagine, support or refute claims, apply knowledge, and reflect on their own understanding. Students need to be able to write the text forms used in various subject areas, in the workplace, and in life.

"Writing is a complex process that includes drawing on prior knowledge and experience; developing and organizing ideas, choosing and shaping the form of presentation associated with a specific purpose; selecting the words, syntax, and stylistic devices, and applying the rules (conventions) of language accurately and purposefully" (SAIP, 2002, p. 10). It requires attention to both process and product, both form and content (Hillocks, 1995, pp.99-110). "Writing takes place within a specified context or situation. Therefore, the situation, purpose, and intended audience form the framework that governs how all writing elements function within the text" (SAIP, 2002, p. 10). This assessment will consider the writer's strategies and the writer's skill in integrating such elements as the choice and development of ideas, organization, stylistic features employed, and language conventions and usage used in carrying out a specific purpose.

Writing in today's world requires students to produce a range of texts for a variety of purposes. Although all writing has its roots in what James Britton refers to as the expressive – using language that is "close to the self" and verbalizes the writer's consciousness (Britton, 1972, p. 96), most public writing "comes in two main directions – toward the transactional and towards the poetic" (Britton, 1972, p. 110).

- Informational or transactional (efferent in Rosenblatt's, 1983, terms) writing informs, persuades, and instructs, and is always concerned with an end outside itself such as explaining in logical way.
- Imaginative, literary, or poetic (aesthetic in Rosenblatt's, 1983, terms) writing is a verbal construct, an *object* made out of language and explores the inner world of an experience and often focuses on a good, believable story or narrative and includes poetry, scripts, and stories.

Writing is rarely done extemporaneously or without preparation. This assessment requires students to explore a topic linked to a real-life issue or component of curricula that they have experienced. Students will have the opportunity to consider, through reading, discussing, and reflecting on several texts and their background knowledge, what it is they might say about a specific topic when given specific prompts that identify the key communication variables of audience, purpose, role, and format.

This assessment will have three components: a teacher questionnaire; the writing task; and, a student questionnaire.

In the writing task, the first part of the assessment will consist of pre-writing that is intended to establish a context for the writing and build and extend background knowledge of the students. The second part will consist of considering the prompts, focusing the topic, considering the communication variables (audience, purpose, format), considering the assessment rubric, and the production of a first draft. The third part will help students to revise using a revision checklist (for self-editing) and to review the assessment rubric. Students will then be asked to reflect on their writing and writing habits (questionnaire).

This assessment focuses on the student's ability to use effective writing strategies to produce both informational (expository) and literary (narrative) texts for a specific purpose and audience in a specific context. Students will be expected to use pre-writing (before), drafting (during), and revising (after) strategies and to attend to the conventions of written language including organizing and paragraphing, structuring sentences effectively, selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively, and adhering to appropriate spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Standards of performance will be determined by a diverse group of standards setters.

An *Online Writing Pre-assessment Package* to support this assessment is available for use by teachers and students.

Here's What!/So What?/Now What?

Here's What!

Data

Processes for School Improvement

So What?

Now What?

Building Capacity for Success: Learning by Trial *and* Evidence

Hardly a day goes by when education is not in the news. In fact, seldom in history has education generated such intense discussion not only in the media, but around the dinner table, in the boardroom, and in every part of the community. Stories in the news are often short-lived. They are discovered, discussed, and quickly replaced. Why does education persist in the headlines?

There are two major explanations:

First, education affects us all. We are students and former students, parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, employers and employees, taxpayers, and citizens. Although we relate to the system in different ways, we all depend on the education system to perform well.

Second, education has become even more important to everyone because we live in a period of tremendous economic and social change. Now, more than ever, we want to feel confident that our schools are achieving the results we intend.

An educated population has always been a social policy objective; now it is also an economic imperative.

Broadening not only opportunity, but high achievement for all is a central challenge in 2002 and beyond. We need our young people to emerge from their formal schooling committed to ongoing learning, able to contribute to social progress, and eager to embrace innovation. If students could once make their way in the world without the benefit of high academic achievement, that day is long gone. To put it bluntly, the haves and the have-nots will be determined, more than ever, by educational success or failure. So, "making it" in school has taken on a whole new meaning and importance. The programmes in schools must meet the needs and learning styles of many more students than in the past. If a student does not achieve the required outcomes in 2002, the price to be paid by the student and our information society is much higher than it was in 1902 or 1952 or even 1992. Now that we succeed at keeping most students in school, we must figure out effective and engaging ways to ensure that everyone we keep there acquires the skills and knowledge necessary to become privately happy and publicly useful.(FN1)

In Canada and many other places around the world, the context in which educators work and live is profoundly different than we may have experienced in the past. Public discussion of what is important for students to learn and public demands for accountability for educational outcomes are pervasive. The stakes are higher for our students than ever before and the bar is higher. It is the responsibility of educators to find ways to get all students over that bar. The parents in our communities and the students in our classrooms are more informed, more involved, more skeptical about accepted wisdom, more questioning of authority, and more intolerant of ambiguity. More is expected from teachers and schools than ever before.(FN2)

That is why the exciting and promising practices described in this issue are so powerful. Each one, wherever it is rooted across the vast expanse of this country, renews our faith that imaginative strategies can really make a difference in the learning experience of all our students and that, as the British researcher, Mel Ainscow, puts it, "You don't have to be ill to get better".(FN3) Those who have implemented these projects have recognized the need to ensure that exemplary practices rest on ***evidence*** of effectiveness in order to genuinely contribute to improved achievement.

We don't want to cast these inspiring stories of enhanced capacity in teachers and their students as examples of "best practice". In fact, we don't believe in "best practice" because it suggests there is one preferred way to achieve a goal and that the approach is recipe-like and can be baked the same way, in any oven, with a near-perfect outcome. And what is more, it will taste better than anyone else's cake. Rather, to borrow a slogan from General Motors, we see these approaches as "tried, tested and true". They are the result of careful consideration, planning, collaboration, monitoring, and evaluation. They have worked wonders for students in situations which are both unique in some ways and universal in others. Each is characterized by a commitment to improvement, by encouragement of new perspectives (or "thinking otherwise" as Roland Barth describes it),(FN4) by the provision of appropriate resources, the monitoring of progress, the measurement of outcomes, and the celebration of success. In each account, the members of the learning organization asked either explicitly or implicitly the following

questions:

* What will the students learn?
* How will teachers best support each student's learning?
* What are the indicators of successful learning?
* How will we measure the success of the practice?
* What can we do to help students who are not meeting the expectations?

These are the questions which promising practices must be able to answer convincingly. If they can, then these practices contribute to systems for improvement, student by student, classroom by classroom, and school by school. Everyone wants to improve, so the better successes are substantiated and communicated, the more likely others are to adapt or replicate those productive practices. Well-documented outlines of the innovation and data which provide ***evidence*** of success are compelling catalysts for action. Data are a major asset in motivating implementation and charting progress.

All of the success stories captured in this issue share some distinct characteristics in their development, implementation and evaluation phases. In the design phase, the developers

* focussed on achievement,
* built in monitoring and measuring processes,
* relied on leadership,
* involved all partners, and
* took all students into account.

Throughout the implementation process, they made achievement for all involved the highest priority, provided expectations and support, and communicated widely all the way along to share victories and iron out the wrinkles that appeared or persisted. Finally, as they reviewed their progress, they gathered data using the criteria they had created for assessing the effectiveness of the practice. They measured and monitored in order to refine and adjust.

The criteria and instruments identified to provide ***evidence*** of the success of these initiatives were wide-ranging and appropriate to the context and nature of the programme. The "burden of proof" was established though a variety of means including data from local and provincial testing, questionnaires, and statistics on a variety of indicators such as graduation rates, as well as testimonials and recognition from outsiders.

The varied dimensions and complexity of the projects demanded, in some cases, somewhat informal and a limited number of data gathering instruments and techniques, and in other cases, more academic and comprehensive data collection and analysis processes. In all cases, the educators involved have demonstrated the importance of building capacity for improvement through "trial and ***evidence***."

* At Tusarvik School in Nunavut, success was measured by improved attendance, greater student responsibility for completing assigned work, and improved language skills.
* At Abbotsford Senior Secondary School in British Columbia, statistics are gathered on rates of attendance, graduation and college applications, etc.
* Similarly, in the Carleton University program, statistics are collected on the rate of admissions to degree programmes and of university graduation,
* The Acadia University project measures its success by the new skills obtained by its graduates and by the consistently high rate of recruitment and employment of graduates.
* The school self-assessment project in Quebec judges success based on student production and response and ***evidence*** of engagement and stimulation.
* Preliminary evaluations of the outcomes of the Queen's University mathematics course show that students are better prepared to teach a subject which, for many, would otherwise be a major challenge and that participating public schools are satisfied with their participation.
* The impact of the Compagnons-de-Cartier secondary school programme (Protic) in Quebec is being studied by researchers from l'universite Laval. They are examining the cognitive and affective behaviour of the students, their methods, and communication skills.
* The developers of the Inner-City Arts Training Program in Manitoba assess professional growth through a journaling process, student growth in learning through the evaluation of work samples and self-reflection sheets, and the program through written evaluations and feedback provided by teachers and school administrators.

* The Centres de formation en enterprises et recuperation programme (CFER) in Quebec judges its success through data which has shown low dropout rates, a high rate of placement of graduates in jobs in business and industry, and an expansion of the programme across Quebec and into Belgium, Brazil, and France.

* Educators in Livingstone Range School Division in Alberta will examine the impact that the use of laptop computers has on student achievement and on stakeholder perceptions, professional development practices, and the family's role in education by studying changes in formal test scores and administering questionnaires and interviews.

* The school improvement project in British Columbia reports on each school's success by including school-level data on student performance.

* In the Queen's University M.Ed. study, the formal assessment of the success of the Aboriginal Anti-bias Program included an examination and analysis of student responses to a questionnaire and teacher perceptions through a focus group discussion, and the creation of a developmental continuum.

* The paper on the involvement of "Emily Carr Elementary School" in Nova Scotia in a three-year national study on student engagement in school life and learning offers qualitative evaluative data to demonstrate the success of the programme.

* The Youthlinks/InterJeunes program uses teacher and student testimonials to measure its effectiveness.

All of the successful practices and programmes described here demonstrate the power of data in revealing slow but steady growth and in creating satisfaction and forward movement. The collection, analysis and use of data pays off.

What makes the difference between a flash in the pan and a sustained improvement, between what could be called the "deeply shallow" and the "surely deep" interventions in the status quo? Philip Schlecty writes that, "in spite of numerous waves of reform...schools are not much different ...than they were fifty years ago."(FN5) Similar observations have been made by many leaders in educational reform, including Michael Fullan, Thomas Sergiovanni, and Roland Barth. All of these experts have emphasized that the schools that are breaking the mould can shape, shift, and flex because they are vision-focussed and values-based. The people working in these institutions have a passion for learning and are part of a professional learning community where the collaborative team is the basic building block of an intelligent organization. The most hopeful strategy for sustained, substantive improvements in learning and teaching involves developing the ability of school staff to function as professional learning communities where, as Linda Darling-Hammond says, "both students and teachers ...respect learning, honour teaching, and teach for understanding".(FN6) A truly motivating learning cycle in a professional learning community depends on:

* collaboration;
* shared mission, vision and values;
* collective inquiry and reflection;
* action orientation and experimentation;
* continuous improvement; and
* a results orientation.(FN7)

Dufour distils the characteristics of effective schools to two ideas: "commitment to promoting success for every student" and "continuous discontent with the immediate present".(FN8)

The keen observers of promising practice frequently speak of building community from the inside out. All of the stories told in this issue depict a tenacious focus on a shared goal and outline coherent strategies to achieve important objectives. They also speak to clear direction to overcome fragmentation of effort and diffusion of energy. They are about people "who are able to imagine a meaningful future and who persevere in shaping it: people who can encourage commitment in the absence of certainty and who respect the need to learn new skills and to recover from mistakes and misjudgements".(FN9)

Now to the heart of the matter: promising and proven practice floats on a sea of professional talk. This is the stuff of collective inquiry about what works and why. It is the ongoing conversation about how to construct the way forward. There are strong echoes of this kind of dialogue in all the captivating tales told in this issue. Each idea awaits reshaping in new contexts where exciting possibilities will emerge for learning both for the student and the teacher.

Leaders and innovators, by describing successful practice, clarify expectations and help others envision doing things differently and better.

Green, J. & Protheroe. (2002). Building capacity for success*:* learning by trial and evidence. *Education Canada,* 42(2), 4-7.

FOOTNOTES

1 J.G. Althouse, Chief Director of Education for the Province of Ontario, 1944.
2 J. Green, "Constructing the Way Forward for All Students," *Education Canada*, 38, no. 3 (1998)
3 M. Ainscow as quoted in L. Earl, "What Does Accountability Mean for Teachers?" *Orbit* 32, no. 1 (2001)
4 R. Barth, *Learning By Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001).
5 P. Schlecty, *Shaking Up the Schoolhouse* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001).
6 L. Darling-Hammond, *The Right to Learn* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997).
7 R. Dufour, Professional Learning Communities at Work (Bloomington, Indiana: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998)
8 Ibid.
9 P. Laing, "Leadership in an Age of Uncertainty," *Women's Voices* (April, 1996).

Double-Loop Learning Model

- As a table group, use the provided double loop to clarify the connections between the professional structures supporting school improvement and the information you are getting from the AFL data.
- In the top circle write out the current structures (PLCs, catalyst teachers, PD) and initiatives (literacy) already in place in your division.
- In the bottom circle write down 3-5 significant (+ & -) indicators from the AFL data.
- Draw arrows from the items in the bottom circle that are connected to or could be supported by items in the top circle.

Adapted from: Lezotte, L. W. & McKee, K. M. (2006). *Stepping up: Leading the charge to improve our schools.* Okemos, MI: Effective Schools Products, Ltd.

Common Challenges to Sustainable, Collaborative Work

Challenges	Possible Solutions
• Thinking of school improvement as a linear process	
• Using annual data analysis versus continuous data analysis for decision making	
• Developing professional development plans that are selected and governed by persons outside of the school • Creating professional development plans that are loosely related to the school improvement plan	
• Using school improvement plans that don't include professional development	
• Constantly changing initiatives	
• Teacher supervision practices and methods are not connected to school and division goals	

Adapted from: Mooney, N. & Mausbach, A. (2008). *Align the design: A blueprint for school improvement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

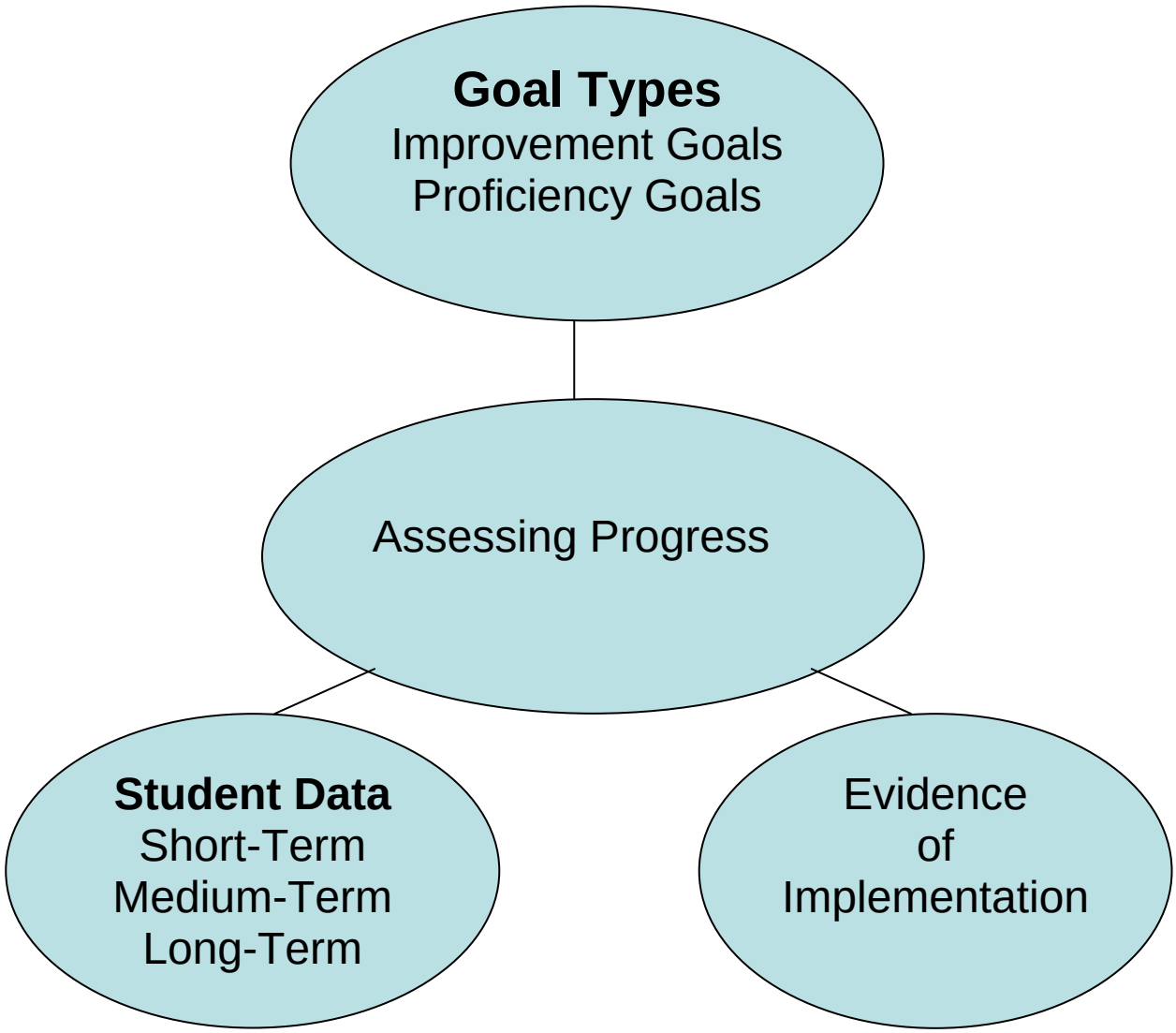
Goals to Inform Planning

- Identify your school or division goals.

- What structures and supports do you have in place to support sustainable improvement towards that goal?

- What kinds of data are you gathering to inform decision making and progress?

Progress Measure Areas



From Boudette, City, & Murnane (2005) and Holcomb (2004).

Short- and Medium-Term Assessment Planning to Achieve Goals

Type of Assessments	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Approximate Times

EVIDENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION INDICATORS

Strategy: _____

	What we will see and hear in classrooms	Evidence	Collected By
Teachers			
Students			
Classrooms			
Student Work			

Adapted from Boudette, K., City, E. A., & Murnane, R. J. (2005). *Data wise: A step-by-step guide to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Indicators of Classroom Application Using Assessment for Learning

Division Goal _____

What evidence is there of:	Who will collect?	How?	When?
Descriptions of success – learning destinations			
Student awareness and understanding of success in that area			
Articulation of objectives and links to learning activities			
Exemplars, models, criteria displayed			

3-2-1 Reflection

3 Big Ideas from the day...

2 Commitments I am making to use this knowledge...

1 Action I plan to take...