

aviso



The Magazine for Nova Scotia's Teaching Profession
La revue de la profession enseignante en Nouvelle-Écosse

Winter 2014

Assessment for Success





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Winter 2014 Volume 30 Number 2

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aviso is published three times per year by the
Nova Scotia Teachers Union
3106 Joseph Howe Drive
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, B3L 4L7

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aviso is a member of the Canadian Educational
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ISSN 0830-0011

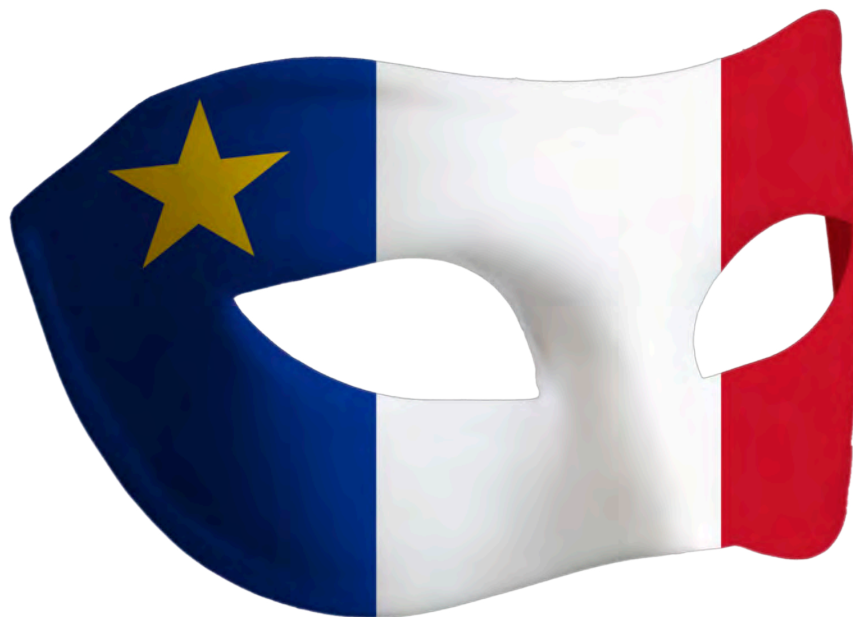
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Long Live Mi-Carême!

Vive la Mi-Carême

Barbara Le Blanc et Mireille Baulu-MacWillie

Each year, Acadians in the Cape Breton communities of Chéticamp, Saint-Joseph-du-Moine and Magré, sing “Long Live Mi-Carême!” to celebrate a mid-winter/early spring carnival-like festivity. This is a period of merrymaking and revelry that contrasts with the austere Lenten period of penance and abstinence. Mi-Carême takes place in the middle of Lent and the date changes each year. The first French-speaking colonists to settle in North America introduced the tradition of celebrating Mi-Carême. The fun linked to this fête is always contagious.

Like Carnival, masks and costumes play an important role in the celebration of Mi-Carême. The event also includes eating food, playing music, singing and dancing. There are many traditions linked to Mi-Carême. The most popular one is called “running the Mi-Carême.” In small groups, masked revellers go from house to house to see if their neighbours can guess who is behind their disguises.

You can create activities at your school to discover

Chaque année, les résidents des trois régions acadiennes de Chéticamp, Saint-Joseph-du-Moine et Magré au Cap-Breton, célèbrent une fête appelée la Mi-Carême, qui a lieu au milieu du Carême. Cette fête est un genre de mini-carnaval et elle remonte au Moyen Âge en Europe. Ce sont les premiers colons français, venus de France en Amérique du Nord, qui ont apporté avec eux la tradition de fêter la Mi-Carême. Celle-ci, comme la fête de Carnaval, est une période de réjouissances et de divertissements qui a pour objectif de contrecarrer le Carême avec ses obligations de jeûne et de pénitences.

Comme le Carnaval, le masque et les déguisements jouent un rôle crucial dans la célébration de la Mi-Carême. Cette fête comporte aussi les éléments suivants : la nourriture, la musique, la chanson et la danse. Il y a plusieurs traditions rattachées à la Mi-Carême. La plus répandue est celle de « courir la Mi-Carême ». En groupe, des personnes masquées et costumées vont d’une maison à une autre afin de voir si leurs voisins peuvent deviner

more about this lively tradition. If you go to the Mi-Carême Centre website (<http://www.micareme.ca/en/>), you will find information about Mi-Carême and a museum that commemorates and celebrates this tradition. You will also find two units that can be easily used for a number of outcomes found in different curricula such as French language and social studies. These two units offer active and dynamic ways of entering into the world of Mi-Carême.

The unit called “Battle Between Carnival and Lent” allows students to discover ancient traditions that are still practiced in many communities today. The students will have fun while being given the opportunity to express their creativity and appreciate a famous work of art. The unit offers activities that help students understand the cycle of Carnival, Lent, mid-Lent and Easter. Each student in the class becomes a member of a group that creates short scenes to highlight parts of the painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder entitled “Battle Between Carnival and Lent.” There are 10 scenes and each group works on a different scene. The scenes are as follows:

- The dancers (five people)
- The twins Orson and Valentine (two people)
- The fishmongers (two or three people)
- The dice players (two people)
- The nobleman and the beggars (three people)
- The pancake makers (two people instead of only one who appears in the painting.)
- The spinning top players (two to three people)
- The Carnival Parade (four or five people)
- The Lent Procession (four or five people)
- The symbolic battle between Carnival and Lent (two people)

Each group receives a short introduction about the painting and Mi-Carême, and are given an image of a scene from the painting. Students then role-play the characters in the scene. By bringing the painting to life, they learn to understand the richness of Carnival and Lent.

“By bringing the painting to life, they learn to understand the richness of Carnival and Lent.”

leur d'identité comme visiteurs déguisés.

Le musée appelé Centre de la Mi-Carême, situé dans le hameau de Grand-Étang, paroisse de Saint-Joseph-du-Moine, met en valeur cette fête. De plus, des visiteurs virtuels peuvent explorer son site Web et voir des aspects de la fête. Ces visiteurs peuvent télécharger deux unités d'apprentissage que nous avons préparées pour des jeunes. Les activités dans les unités d'apprentissage peuvent être adaptées pour des élèves de la sixième année à la douzième année. De plus, ces activités peuvent être intégrées à plusieurs programmes d'études, tels, les sciences humaines, les langues et les arts.

Le site principal peut être visité en cliquant sur le lien suivant :

<http://www.micareme.ca/fr/index.html>

Pour télécharger les unités, il suffit de cliquer sur le lien suivant :

<http://www.micareme.ca/fr/programmation-2010.html>

L'unité sur la peinture de Pieter Bruegel, dit l'Ancien, intitulée « Le combat entre Carnaval et Carême »

L'unité d'apprentissage intitulée « Le combat entre Carnaval et Carême » permet aux élèves de découvrir le sens d'anciennes traditions, d'exprimer leur créativité, d'apprécier une œuvre d'art célèbre et d'avoir du plaisir. Elle offre des activités qui portent sur la compréhension du cycle Carnaval, Carême, Mi-Carême, Pâques. Chaque élève de la classe fait partie d'un groupe qui crée des saynètes pour mettre en valeur le tableau de Pieter Bruegel, dit l'Ancien. L'ensemble des élèves fait vivre le tableau en devenant des personnages de petites scènes que l'on retrouve dans la peinture. Les élèves s'organisent en équipes de deux, trois, quatre ou cinq personnes et choisissent une des dix scènes dans la liste suivante pour la jouer. Chaque groupe de travail représente une scène différente.

- 1) La danse (cinq personnes)
- 2) Le conte « Ourson et Valentin » (deux personnes)
- 3) Les poissonnières (deux ou trois personnes)
- 4) Les joueurs de dés (deux personnes)
- 5) Le noble et les deux mendiants (trois personnes)
- 6) La personne qui fait des crêpes (deux personnes quoiqu'il y en ait seulement une dans la scène)
- 7) Le jeu de la toupie (deux ou trois personnes)
- 8) Le cortège du Carnaval (quatre ou cinq personnes)

“These approaches engage students in the discovery of cultural traditions and history by exploring characters, situations, events and relationships.”

Once the students are in work groups, they receive information and a list of the following activities:

- a) Look at the painting “The Battle of Carnival and Lent” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder
- b) Read the Brief History of the Cycle of Carnival, Lent, Mid-Lent and Easter
- c) Form work groups of two, three, four or five students who will choose a scene to rehearse and present
- d) Look carefully and attentively at the scene chosen
- e) Visit the suggested websites
- f) Read the texts on the suggested websites
- g) Find some costumes and accessories that can be used in preparing the scene chosen
- h) Prepare a still image of the scene chosen
- i) Present the still image to classmates
- j) Write a short script for the scene chosen
- k) Choose a role in the scene chosen
- l) Become the character and rehearse the scene
- m) Create a mask for the character chosen (where appropriate)
- n) Present the scene to classmates

These activities allow the students to discover a traditional fete and have fun at the same time. They validate their work by presenting it to others. In so doing, they are showing their acquisition of knowledge and abilities in a significant manner.

The unit called “Event Plan — Fetes and Celebrations” gives students the opportunity to further explore Mi-Carême. The students imagine they are members of an event planning company. In their roles, they create a Mi-Carême event at their school. They work in small groups. Each group has a file on the following subject

- 9) Le cortège du Carême (quatre ou cinq personnes)
- 10) Le combat symbolique entre Carnaval et Carême (deux personnes)

Une fois dans leur groupe de travail, chaque équipe reçoit des informations pour faire les activités suivantes :

- a) Visionner le tableau « Le combat entre Carnaval et Carême » de Pieter Bruegel, dit l’Ancien
- b) Lire le bref historique du cycle Carnaval, Carême, Mi-Carême, Pâques
- c) Se familiariser avec une image figée
- d) Examiner attentivement la scène choisie
- e) Visionner les images qui se trouvent sur les sites Web suggérés
- f) Lire quelques textes dans les sites Web suggérés
- g) Trouver des costumes et des accessoires en utilisant sa créativité pour mettre la scène en valeur
- h) Préparer une image figée de la scène choisie
- i) Présenter les images figées
- j) Écrire une courte saynète de la scène choisie
- k) Prendre les rôles dans les saynètes
- l) Se mettre dans la peau de son personnage et pratiquer la saynète
- m) Fabriquer un masque pour son personnage (lorsque c’est approprié)
- n) Présenter les saynètes à un public choisi qui peut être des élèves de l’école

L’unité intitulée « Planifier un évènement : Fêtes et célébrations »

Comme l’unité sur la peinture « Le combat entre Carnaval et Carême », cette unité intitulée « Planifier un évènement - Fêtes et célébrations » permet aux élèves d’explorer la fête de la Mi-Carême qui remonte au Moyen Âge en Europe et d’y prendre plaisir. Les élèves, guidés par leur enseignant, font les activités suivantes qui sont développées sur le site Web indiqué :

1. Participer à un remue-ménages au sujet des fêtes que vous connaissez et auxquelles vous avez déjà participé dans vos communautés.
2. Imaginer une compagnie composée d’un groupe de planificateurs d’évènements. La compagnie a comme raison sociale de créer des activités pour des fêtes dans un contexte local et actuel. Vous travaillez pour cette compagnie qui s’appelle FÊTES ET CÉLÉBRATIONS. Le Centre de la Mi-Carême vous engage parce que

IN MY CLASSROOM

areas: dance, song and music, masks and costumes, food, expressions and poems, visual arts, promotion of an event, and “running the Mi-Carême.” Each file contains a page with a short history about Mi-Carême, links to websites and a specific task they must complete about their subject area.

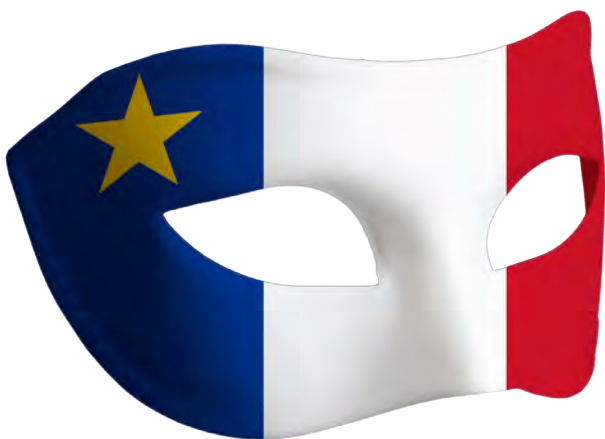
Once students have done their research and created an aspect of the event, they share their results with their classmates. Finally, if they wish, they can then bring Mi-Carême to life in the school for others to enjoy.

In both units we have used drama for learning approaches. The first unit uses role-play and the second unit uses the mantle of the expert approach. These approaches engage students in the discovery of cultural traditions and history by exploring characters, situations, events and relationships. Teachers become facilitators and students become active learners.

While doing the activities in the units, students use words, images and movements in a personal and collective journey of discovery. These drama strategies can enrich student involvement in their understanding of themselves and the world that surrounds them.

Barbara Le Blanc is professor in the Département des sciences de l'éducation of l'Université Sainte-Anne, working from the campus of Saint-Joseph-du-Moine in Cape Breton.

Mireille Baulu-MacWillie is a retired professor of the Département des sciences de l'éducation of l'Université Sainte-Anne, Church Point.



les membres du conseil ont besoin d'experts dans différents domaines pour organiser un tel événement. Les élèves jouent le rôle d'experts et chacun doit se choisir un domaine d'expertise en répondant à un questionnaire préparé à cet effet.

3. Travailler en petits groupes de trois à six personnes représentant les différents domaines d'expertise : chansons et musique, expressions et poèmes, arts visuels, danse, masques et costumes, nourriture, promotion, courir la Mi-Carême.
4. Prendre un dossier (chaque groupe d'experts). Chaque dossier comprend des tâches à accomplir. Vous devez examiner et interpréter le matériel contenu dans le dossier. L'examen des documents nécessite parfois une consultation avec d'autres groupes d'expertise afin de réussir l'interprétation.
5. Planifier une fête de la Mi-Carême dans un contexte local, par exemple dans l'école.

En guise de conclusion

Dans les deux unités d'apprentissage, nous avons utilisé la pédagogie du jeu dramatique. La première unité se sert du jeu de rôle et la deuxième unité repose sur la pédagogie du manteau de l'expert. Les activités dans les deux unités permettent aux élèves d'explorer des personnages, des situations, des événements et des relations interpersonnelles. De plus, les activités donnent l'occasion aux élèves de découvrir des traditions culturelles et de prendre plaisir à apprendre. Dans ces approches, les enseignants deviennent des facilitateurs qui offrent aux élèves des façons engageantes d'apprendre.

Les activités proposées permettent aux élèves d'utiliser des mots, des images et des gestes pour réaliser des expériences personnelles et collectives. Le jeu dramatique peut mener vers une meilleure compréhension de soi-même et du monde qui nous entoure.

Barbara Le Blanc est professeure titulaire dans le Département des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université Sainte-Anne.

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NSCC's School of Access

Deborah McVeigh

Adults wishing to begin or return to post-secondary education have educational options available to prepare them to meet the prerequisites for their chosen career path. The Adult Learning Program (ALP) and Academic and Career Connections (ACC) are two such programs offered by the NSCC School of Access. Taralee Hammond is the Acting Dean of the School.

Q: *Taralee, what does the School of Access encompass?*

A: The NSCC School of Access strives to provide entrance and pathways for Nova Scotians looking to enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge required today. The School encompasses a broad range of inclusive programs designed to ensure student success. Many of the program and pathway options are developed and delivered in the community or with a specific partner. Traditionally the on-campus programs offered include:

- 1. The Adult Learning Program:** The Adult Learning Program is a unique program designed to meet the needs of adult learners who do not have a high school diploma. This program is available for full-time and part-time study. Students have the option to complete the program in-class, online, or through a combination of courses delivered in-class and online. Evening classes are available at the Institute of Technology Campus, Kingstec Campus, Marconi Campus and Waterfront Campus.
 - a. English as an Additional Language (EAL) Option:** Provides an integrated approach for adult students (19 years of age or older) who need to complete their High School Graduation Diploma and build their English language skills at the same time.
 - b. African Canadian Transition Option:** This is a unique program for students who self-identify as being black from the African Canadian community. Students have an option of starting the ALP program in

the African Canadian Transition option offered at Akerley Campus.

- 2. English for Academic Purposes (EAP):** English for Academic Purposes is offered to support new Canadians with permanent residency; a refugee with protected person status; or a new Canadian citizen who needs to update English language skills to pursue post-secondary studies. English for Academic Purposes is a rigorous and challenging program designed to prepare students for the academic demands of a post-secondary institution.
- 3. LINK Programming:** This is a unique program designed for students who have had their high school education interrupted. LINK students are academically assessed for entry into the program at ALP Level 4. In addition, they commit to be enrolled in continuous study for a period of 14-23 months depending on the program. Students work concurrently towards completion of their Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults and an NSCC certificate. Currently the NSCC offers a Continuing Care Assistant Certificate and an Office Administration Certificate.
- 4. Academic and Career Connections:** Academic and Career Connections provides students with the missing prerequisites and/or knowledge needed to pursue the post-secondary program of their choice. The courses typically consist of academic sciences, mathematics and communications.

Community College Q&A

Q: What is the Adult Learning Program?

A: The Adult Learning Program is a program designed for students who for a multitude of life circumstances have not had an opportunity to complete their high school education. This program is offered at no cost to the learners (tuition and learner resources). The program is funded through a partnership between the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education and the Nova Scotia Community College. NSCC works in partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services and Employment Nova Scotia to facilitate access to the program for Nova Scotians looking for pathways into the workforce. In this way, learners can complete their education while continuing to receive their benefits. The majority (72 per cent) of students who successfully graduate with their Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma continue with their post-secondary education.

Q: How does one gain entry into the ALP program?

A: Students can start the program throughout the year (as seats become available). Interested students begin the process by contacting the Adult Learning Program Counsellor at the campus of their choice.

Q: Does a student need to adhere to a specific time frame in order to graduate with their Nova Scotia Grade 12 certificate?

A: Students may choose full-time or part-time study options depending on their life situation. The time to complete the program will vary depending on the schedule a student chooses and the number of courses completed each term. Completion time also depends on the number of credits a student may have already completed prior to coming to the NSCC. Documentation of all previous credits is required.

Q: What is unique about the Adult Learning Program offered at NSCC?

A: NSCC offers a unique post-secondary learning environment for students in the Adult Learning Program. Being on campus allows each student to take full advantage of all the College offers socially and academically. In addition, all ALP students receive additional support through a dedicated professional Adult Learning Program Counsellor who supports and facilitates their transition into learning in consultation with fac-

ulty and staff. Recently, a new course, Transition IV, has been piloted successfully. This course is now available in both ALP and LINK and focuses on the unique journey for students as they return to learning, culminating in a learning plan. Focusing on student success and the return to the learning phase of the student's journey ensures that students have a strong foundation to continue to pursue their dream of higher education.

Q: Individualized System of Instruction seems to be the main model of instruction. Are other teaching methods encouraged to facilitate different types of learners?

A: Absolutely! Faculty are encouraged to utilize whichever methods best meet the needs of the learners in front of them. Some courses are offered in a cohort model; however, if a learner is outpacing the cohort, the learner is supported to excel at their pace. Similarly, if a learner requires more time on task, then the system is responsive to the needs of the student.

Q: The Academic and Career Connections program is a post-secondary program. Why would students choose this program and how would they gain entry?

A: Academic Career Connections is designed for the high school graduate who requires additional preparation to pursue and prepare for a future at NSCC. Perhaps a student is missing a chemistry or physics course, ACC can help. Science for Technology and Science for Health are very popular course clusters. Students will gain the knowledge and skills they need to advance to the next step in their education. Students can enroll full-time or part-time and many campuses offer courses in a classroom setting during the day and/or options to study online. Some courses are offered through Continuing Education. Students apply through the College Admissions process.

Q: The students in ACC must meet with the Academic Chair or Registrar to select their courses. Do the students need a background in any of the courses they select?

A: Once a student is admitted to NSCC, they are referred to the Registrar or Academic Chair at the campus of their choice to make course selections. Courses in ACC are primarily academic level courses and students do need a level of comfort and the foundational knowledge to be successful. Most recently the College

has added an introductory math course to assist learners refresh or gain the foundational knowledge in order to be successful at the academic level.

Q: Do these programs (ALP and ACC) prepare students for other post-secondary programs? If so, how?

A: Both ALP and ACC prepare students for success in NSCC programs. The student has an opportunity to discuss their career goals with their faculty, the Academic Chair and the Adult Learning Program Counsellor as well as any additional NSCC staff as needed. Students receive guidance in course selection to ensure they have the prerequisite skills and/or courses for the next step in their learning journey. The rigor and quality of the courses and professional level of staff collectively have student success as the goal.

Q: What career paths do students follow from taking either ALP or ACC?

A: Students have entered Skilled Trades, Health and Human Services, Technology, Applied Arts & New Media – each and every school within NSCC has graduates of both ALP and ACC.

Q: How many ACC programs are offered through NSCC? Are they all the lockstep model of teaching?

A: Currently there are 10 sites offering ACC. A number of options are available to students. Some programs are offered in a cohort-based learning environment, others are offered online, part-time or full-time and two campuses (Strait Area and Cumberland) offer multiple intakes with an individualized negotiated pace. Depending on the unique learning needs and the specific career goals, in consultation with the Academic Chair, Counsellor and Registrar, a student maps out their ACC journey.

Q: Can you share a success story from both ALP and ACC?

A: We have many success stories and each one is unique. Please visit <http://www.nscnow.ca/education-makes-world-of-difference> to learn about our successes.

Q: How do you recruit students for both of these programs?

A: Students come to the School of Access through a variety of pathways. Some students are referred through their case worker in either Employment Nova Scotia or the Department of Community Services. Students often hear about the benefits of NSCC through their friends, family and successful graduates.

Q: What supports are available to students in these programs?

A: Students in the School of Access like all students at NSCC have access to and receive the full range of supports provided by the College.

In addition, students enrolled in the School of Access Adult Learning Program are supported and served through a dedicated and qualified Adult Learning Program Counsellor. The ALP-C works in collaboration with faculty and staff to support each student to ensure they have the resources required to be successful. In addition to counselling services, faculty and staff support and facilitate students with issues related to the following: housing, food and clothing bank, and referrals to other agencies on a per

student basis. Staff works as a team to ensure that they provide all available and appropriate support to enable each student to focus on academic success.

Students in the School of Access also receive professional support through the Disability Resource Facilitator. Funds are provided through the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education to ensure students access to tutoring, psychological educational testing and other accommodations, which are provided at no cost to the student.

Q: If a student is interested in either ALP or ACC, how do they apply?

A: Students can contact NSCC through Admissions, or they can contact the campus of their choice and speak to an Adult Learning Program Counsellor for advice and support.

Students in the School of Access like all students at NSCC have access to and receive the full range of supports provided by the College.

Deborah McVeigh is a Faculty member at NSCC, Marconi Campus.

Assessment for Success



David Ritchie



My early introduction to assessment and evaluation was as a student in public schools and universities. After Grade 6, with the exception of some science courses, I experienced high stakes and criterion referenced assessment that used a final exam as the sole tool for evaluation. My second experience with assessment and evaluation was in urban planning, with respect to the opinions of the public and politicians, and decisions regarding development, land use and future planning. Essentially they were very similar in expectation and delivery. We collected data from a variety of sources and methods which lead to final decisions or recommendations. In the wonderfully visual Waldo illustrations, the observer is asked to find Waldo hidden among a variety of cleverly constructed images designed to camouflage his location. I will extend the “Where’s Waldo?” metaphor in an attempt to reveal the true nature and expectations of assessment and their subsequent use in evaluation in schools today.

For the purposes of this article, assessment is defined as the collection of multiple task information regarding Waldo’s progress and achievements and the sharing of that information with Waldo and his parents. Evaluation is the cumulative and ultimate conclusion of a series of observations, experiential tasks and marked assessments which produce an assigned grade. The grade, or achievement indicator, is much like a GPS, becoming the point of reference for Waldo’s progress on his educational journey. The process of assessment should never be seen as an indicator of failure but rather as informative, fair and important feedback to everyone concerned with Waldo’s individual educational location and progress. This is especially vital to Waldo. As the educational journey unfolds, he deserves to know when he has travelled well and when he needs to fine-tune his performance. The greatest gift Waldo

can receive is an accurate reading of his educational location.

While there have been significant changes, there are basic principles that have remained intact. First, Waldo deserves to know where he is on his educational journey. In the past, the sequential grade system with its inherent promotion based on very specific educational achievement allowed students to clearly understand what they had achieved and, based on their relative corresponding grades, how prepared they were to meet the challenges of the following years. However with changes in retention policies, students no longer have the same security of knowing how prepared they are to meet the next year’s challenges. While there are many significant drawbacks to the former promotion policies, they did usually provide an accurate predictor of readiness. From a variety of assessments undertaken and evaluation reports sent home, parents understood as the year progressed how their children were performing. A policy of modifying the delivery of the pedagogical essentials is tailored for individuals as they progress through the system without complete mastery of their designated level in school.

Fair evaluation is critical. Since taking an educational measurement course for my education degree at Mount Allison University 37 years ago, I have believed that any evaluation should be fair. The element of fairness rests firmly on the foundation that subjects clearly understand what is being assessed and exactly how that assessment is going to be used. One device we were taught to use was the rubric. In its simplest form, this is a matrix of qualitative expectations (measurement) and quantitative values (feedback) to be assessed. From the onset of the undertaking everyone knows the expectations and at the completion of the process everyone knows how they have fared.

Assessing the last paragraph				
Quantitative feedback > across	2	3	4	5
Quantitative V Skill observed down	Communication Needs Attention	Met basic Communication Expectation	Excellent Communication of idea	Exceeded expectation of communication
The paragraph with the assistance of this illustration explains the Rubric method				



This simple method accompanied by some encouraging comments has provided excellent feedback to my students over the years. Limiting the number of qualities being measured also facilitates success.

Recently there has been a great deal of debate regarding the difference between self-esteem and self improvement. Careful attention must be given to the balance between these two psychological and educational realities as they relate to assessment. Imagine Waldo is required to learn to swim. It is believed that everyone can learn to swim. However, swimming well is an acquired skill. As an instructor it is wise to observe the potential participant's attitude to the water and the challenge (diagnostic and ipsative). In the sink-or-swim scenario, if an individual thinks they are going to sink they will often sink and if they believe they will float they will float (dynamic). The individual can be taught to believe and trust that they will float. Self-esteem plays a part as well. If the individual wishes to improve, there are a whole series of skills they must learn, practice, improve upon and eventually store as muscle memory (synoptic).

It is fun but hard work to become an expert swimmer. Not everyone needs to progress to the Olympics to benefit from and enjoy learning to swim well. It is critical that Waldo knows how well he can swim and what may present an unnecessary risk given his level of skill development. I firmly believe the eventual self-esteem that comes from dedicated self improvement is the natural outcome of an individual's commitment to learn. I do not want to see Waldo overestimate his preparedness level and put himself at risk in the water. Waldo needs to know how well he can swim. Through a series of well defined exercises, Waldo can receive feedback and know what he has to do to improve even more. As he incorporates the feedback, by making adjustments and stretching his risk wisely, he is able to undertake even greater challenges. The feedback, calculated risk and the development of self-esteem leads to improvement. The children who stand at the edge of the water convinced they cannot swim, will not learn to swim. They must enter the water, be willing to learn

skills, apply themselves and eventually relish their accomplishment. It is wrong to tell Waldo he can swim when he cannot swim.

Success is a key to progress. However success does not mean never making mistakes. As teachers we owe it to our students to take qualified risks in our practice and teach them to take qualified risks in their learning. Some of the most successful people in history have agreed that failures have lead to redirection, application and subsequent achievement. I prefer to see students experiment, test the water and occasionally fail to accomplish exactly what they had set out to achieve. The students' appreciation that they have missed the mark is healthy and often leads to wonderful insights, explorations and experimental adjustments. This is learning at its best. What has frightened me as a teacher is the growing number of students who seem paralyzed in their growth.

“The students’ appreciation that they have missed the mark is healthy and often leads to wonderful insights, explorations and experimental adjustments”

I have often heard students lament that they cannot do something after a very cursory and brief attempt at a new task. As an art teacher I tried to reinforce the attitude that we were all developing a skills set. All too often we reward the near-perfect rather

than rewarding the truly experimental and sometimes breathtaking mistakes that so often lead to delightful innovations, creative solutions and sometimes enchanting disasters. Creativity is often the child of “breaking the rules” and “blazing new trails.” Reward Waldo for his exposure to risk. Originality means knowing the algorithm and being willing to alter the procedure. Do not mistake accuracy for insight.

Students presented with a broad range of assessment tools are provided with the best opportunity to benefit from the feedback they receive. In a previous article I wrote of substituting an introductory autobiographical essay exercise for a three dimensional creation where the students were asked to create a container which represented their personas. The outside was a representation of the student's public persona and inside was descriptive of the private persona. This provided a great opportunity for the students to experiment with the presentation of information (dynamic and synoptic). It was a success. Try applying an assessment that



Assessment for Success

moves your students outside their comfort zones and into unexplored territory. I always trusted outlining, paraphrasing and précis as effective ways to promote the understanding and creation of prose and poetry. Mapping or brainstorming as individuals or groups can augment the same skill development. I remember as a teacher of senior English despairing that students did not employ the tried and true pre-writing formal outline technique that was instilled in me as a writer and debater. However, I still insisted that students submit the outline as part of their essays. Interestingly many students benefited from this as a post-writing exercise to check their content development and logic.

When I was proceeding through my education the final examination was principally arranged as a series of essay answers written in a defined time. Today the most accepted writing practice assessment is to allow significant drafting, editing and subsequent rewriting over a number of days. The latter is far most realistic in producing good solid well considered prose. I would hate if the editorial team put me in a room and gave me a restricted time to produce the articles that I submit.

The teachers' primary assessment should be student-based in terms of feedback. Tell Waldo and his parents where he is. Secondly the assessments should inform the teachers how well they have presented the material and supported the learning process. We were taught in Educational Measurement that we owed it to ourselves and to our students as professionals to examine our assessment efforts and their results as double checks of our practice. Assessment is also expected to inform the system on how well students are learning and how well the overall system is progressing. As a tertiary expectation I would hate to see this reporting interfere with the primary and secondary goals of assessment and teaching. Professionally we must never forget that our students and ourselves as teachers are the principle participants in education. Everyone else outside the classroom should be supporting the students and the teacher. Current grade keeping computer tools allow us to retain many complex and accurate records of the assessment. I shudder when I remember the old record books that required laborious weighting,

calculations and rechecking the paper hand-written accounting. The new computer bookkeeping methods have increased the efficiency, accuracy and effectiveness of teacher/student assessment records. Electronically reporting these records with a click to a higher power should be enough. The higher power then has the expertise to translate and correlate the reports into acceptable forms suitable to their use. Any expectations should not be loaded on the teachers as they are busy enough updating their practice, organizing, teaching, assessing and reporting feedback to the students and themselves.

When we talk about the important values of student assessment, we must remember a facet that is often forgotten. Keeping in mind the swimming example, we must help students develop the important ability to be able to assess themselves. What is worse than a student

proceeding without a realistic interpretation of where they are and how they are doing? Realistic positive reinforcement helps. Accurate and understood assessment by teachers helps. A range and variety of assessment opportunity helps. Diligent, involved and committed application by a student also helps. But an internalized well developed healthy confidence

facilitates the student accurately knowing where they are as they grow within their education. This facility supports increasing confidence as well as innovative and considered risk-taking.

Assessment should be student and teacher based. It should provide accurate and timely feedback and promote adjustments to the individual and collective learning in the classroom. The greater the variety and appropriate modifications of assessments and assessment options, the greater the opportunity for students and teachers to receive feedback that improves their learning and teaching. Promoting the creative process of risk-taking builds the opportunity for innovation, learning and positive self-image founded on the personal reward of having applied oneself to the process. Waldo deserves to know where he is.

David Ritchie is a retired teacher from the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.





The Power of Poetry

Using poetry to help create dynamic, inclusive and differentiated literacy experiences for students in Primary – Grade 6.

Nancy Letcher

I consider it a great honour to be a teacher. I also consider it a great challenge. As teachers, we are challenged daily to craft outcome-based lessons that will be differentiated, cross-curricular, inclusive, interesting and perhaps most importantly, meaningful and authentic to our learners.

I had never considered myself a poet or a great lover of poetry. But my teaching experiences have changed my attitude towards poetry. I am developing an acute awareness that poetry may actually be more than just a genre that I must explore with my students; it could actually be the powerful and positive change agent needed to create a literacy learner.

In my early years as an elementary teacher, I always included reading and writing poetry in my lesson planning. Even as an inexperienced teacher, I could see the benefits as my students and I read poems, chanted poems, wrote poetry together and experienced different styles of poetry. Poetry was an important part of my classroom.

I was aware of how my students became easily engaged in our choral reading and shared reading experiences. I would often look for poems containing humour to engage my “tough customers.” We had great fun putting poetry to music and familiar tunes. The students were eager to take their poems and chants home to share with their families. We were able to look for sight words and word families and experience rhyme and rhythm. I observed the way students would participate with a feeling of safety and joy.

Later, I was introduced to another benefit of poetry by my teaching partner Debbie Frenette. We were collaborating about our yearly writing plan and were discussing how we could teach students to use voice in their writing. Debbie shared with me her successes using poetry. Her students had created a compilation of poems expressing their feelings about memorable life

events. Indeed, these poems demonstrated voice and also a keen awareness of how word choice enabled the reader to connect with the poet’s feelings. We were, perhaps subconsciously at the time, creating the reading/writing link that growing learners need! Better yet, we could also connect these poetry lessons with health and visual art outcomes!

Now that I have many more years of experience, I have new insights surrounding poetry. As a literacy mentor with Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, I have unique and wonderful opportunities to work with amazing and diverse teachers and students. It is within this unique teaching and learning opportunity that I have witnessed even more powers of poetry. Here is what I’ve learned so far about teaching and learning with poetry:

The Power of White Space

Reading poetry may offer a safe feeling that reading other genres doesn’t always provide. As teachers, we are aware of our reluctant readers. We want them to feel the triumph of fluency and reading with ease. Imagine yourself as a struggling reader, looking at a full page of text. Even with our best intentions to differentiate and provide appropriate level texts, this may still happen.

Now, visualize a poem. Can you “see” the white space? Can you “see” that it may have fewer words? The very look of a poem may provide safety to a struggling reader.



The Power of Practice

I like to believe that poetry is meant to be read aloud so that you can experience the words, the pauses, the rate, rhythm, etc. I even tell my students that poetry sounds better when you sit on a special chair, or when you stand. Make it stand out! Read it with intention! Demonstrate it as a read-aloud. For a struggling reader, this is so powerful. Remember that a big part of an interactive read-aloud is thinking aloud. Don't leave them guessing; let them hear your thoughts.

Next, provide the time for shared and/or choral reading. Read and re-read together. Poetry can be so fun to read because you can change the rate, the tone, even the rhythm. Experiment with different voices or rhythms.

Repeated readings will offer success for even your weaker readers. Other supports such as rhythm and rhyme patterns offer predictability for words.

One of my favourite books is *Lessons for Climbing Inside a Poem* by Georgia Heard and Lester Laminack. They suggest:

"Living with a poem for one week is like spending time with a friend. At first you might feel a little shy because the person is unfamiliar, but as the week progresses and you spend more time together, you discover that you understand each other."

The Power of Movement and Play

One of the joys of my job is that I may teach multiple grade levels in a day or week. So I get to try poetry lessons with many age groups. One thing has become abundantly clear to me: kids want and need to move! Currently, I am enrolled in a learning opportunity within our school board with Dr. Edmond Dixon. He states in his book *Helping Boys Learn* that "boys will learn where the action is!" I believe this to be true of many learners.

Poetry can provide so many opportunities for movement. I've done these activities with different grade levels and regardless of the age of the students, they all got up and moved! They marched, tapped, jumped and snapped to poetry to "feel" the rhythm. They created tableaux or still life dramas to demonstrate

comprehension of the poem. And they came up with actions to dramatize poetry. This play or dramatization of the poems can support comprehension and perhaps even more importantly, it is fun! Keep in mind that visualizing is perhaps one of our most powerful comprehension strategies. Give the kids the opportunity to bring their visualizations to life!

The Power of Content Area Poetry

I'm a strong believer in cross-curricular planning. Ask any teacher to list the challenges of their job, and time will be at the top the list: time to teach and time to learn – how do we make everything "fit?"

So, when I work with teachers, and they want to consider poetry for writers' workshops, my next question is always: "What are you doing in your content areas?" I'm always looking for opportunities to make meaningful links.

If my students are currently doing a science unit on rocks and minerals, then I will find a great poem about rocks!

We will, as Georgia Heard suggests, "live with this poem for a week." We will take time for a focus lesson for what Georgia Heard calls "craft talk." How did the poet craft or build the poem? We will examine word choice, voice, style, form, etc. Then we will craft our own poem about rocks. Just imagine poetry as an assessment tool!

Start with: "Tell me three to five things you know about rocks." This becomes an easy list poem. For a growing writer, this simple realization that a list of important, well-thought out words, is actually a poem, is amazingly powerful! Suddenly, even the most reluctant writer may picture themselves as a poet! Think it! Say it! (to yourself, to a friend, to the class) Now...write it! Again, the number of words doesn't matter; the word choice itself **is** the poem.

To extend this further, you can craft a phrase or stanza to explain the word. The poem the poet builds replaces a test or quiz. Students demonstrate their understanding of a topic by crafting a poem.

The Power of Celebration

Our understanding that celebrating success can

Reading poetry may offer a safe feeling that reading other genres doesn't always provide.



create a positive classroom/school climate, build relationships and boost confidence is not a new theory. We are always looking for ways to celebrate literacy learning within our learning communities. A very important part of any writers' workshop is the time to share. Students need to share their writing. Schools need to extend this further. School-wide sharing is a great way for students and staff to share their writing with a larger audience. Many schools host monthly author assemblies which offer students the chance to explore the real meaning of purpose and audience. Being a presenter or an audience member can provide the meaningful and authentic practice of speaking and listening goals and outcomes.

Try having a **Poem in My Pocket Day**. This day can be celebrated in your classroom, school or even within your community. This concept came from the Academy of American Poets. The idea is very simple. Choose a day to keep a favourite poem in your pocket. You share your poem with family and friends you meet throughout the day.

I introduced this idea to my school about five

years ago. The day was a success! Since becoming a literacy mentor, I've shared this idea of a school-wide celebration with many schools in my area. It is not without its' challenges but in the end, the kids get excited about writing and reading poetry. I consider that a powerful success!

I leave you with a poem written by a student, Eileen M. Kanost, published in the book *Kids' Poems-Teaching Third and Fourth Graders to Love Writing Poetry*, by Regie Routman.

Poems:

Poems can be funny, sad, angry, or mischievous

I like poems, because you can

Express

Your feelings freely

Without

Worrying about people

Laughing at you

I like poems.

Nancy Letcher is a regional literacy mentor with the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board.





ASSESSMENT

Clarification and Brain Research

Esther Morris Boyd

The results of the OECD's 2012 international PISA assessment of Grade 9 students in mathematics have been released and Nova Scotia's rankings have been discussed in the media and by educational departments and politicians. While this type of assessment is of value, it receives too much attention. Comparisons between provinces and countries always result in the same common statement whether the results are positive or negative: "We can do better." What follows is a futile search for a magic formula that will result in our students ranking closer to the top. However I don't believe that is going to happen for the simple reason that every single brain is completely unique and learns in its own way. Educators are noted for their search for excellence. (In case you haven't heard, you are doing a great job!) There are two forms of assessment for learning:

1. Summative assessment, like PISA and other formally standardized tests, provides information about student achievement but has little effect on learning. Summative assessment informs the teacher and parent about whether students have completed the learning tasks and activities. This is designed to provide information to those not involved in daily teaching (school, administration, parents, school boards, etc.) and determines what has been learned to date. A periodic report compiles data into a single number. This summative form of assessment is useful but fails to address the many variables of the students themselves.
2. Formative assessment should integrate learning and teaching into a whole and involve the student. It recognizes how much learning is taking place in the common tasks of the school day and how much teachers can learn regarding the students acquisition of the material taught – from general outcomes to specific outcomes for each subject. Seasoned teachers do this on automatic drive; they can identify who understands the material, who is just getting it and needs more practice, and who

is in trouble. On a daily basis, this process allows teachers to adjust their lesson plans to meet the needs of the students and provide challenges to those who are more capable. Continual evaluation

of instructional choices is at the heart of improving the teaching practice. Focus should always be on improvement, compared to the student's "previous best."

Let's talk about skill sets. How do we learn? Practice, practice, practice! Mothers talking to babies repeat, repeat and repeat until babble results in "Mom" or "Dad." This is spoken language. Newborns roll, crawl,

stand, stumble, and then miraculously, walk. These forms of motor skill development can vary widely due to home environment and brain development. Why do you think Sidney Crosby kept firing pucks at the dryer door? He called it practice, but in fact he was hardwiring his brain. When children enter school, their level of readiness for learning varies greatly. This readiness changes considerably over time. Learning is mind-body integrated. Movement and physical activity have powerful effects on learning. The brain seeks to create patterns. Intelligence is the ability to construct patterns. Providing students with skill sets in math is essential and that means memorization. Material learned

“...every single brain is completely unique and learns in its own way.”



through rote learning is retained in the language area of the frontal lobes whereas process knowledge is found in other frontal lobe areas. Meaning is more critical to the brain than isolated information.

Researchers have found that NMDA receptors and a protein called GAP-43 play a major role in learning. The more times NMDA receptors receive messages, due to repetition, the more GAP-43 is formed and more synapses are formed. Therefore memorization should not be the only skill set used. In fact, use everything but the kitchen sink! Say it, write it, read it, demonstrate it and play with it. Repeat, repeat and repeat. To quote Albert Einstein, “Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”

The role of the teacher is vital in this process. Learning must be made relevant through personal context, reinforced through hands-on experience and by linking new information to prior knowledge. Learning is achieved more efficiently when information is “chunked.” Students should be encouraged to identify what they currently know and set goals for themselves.

Literacy/reading follows much the same pattern. Students need exposure to the printed word and all the different forms it may take. Word lists chunking phonic sounds – repeating similar letters at the beginning and/or the end of words

– enable students to become familiar with patterns. Sight words are words recognized by sight rather than by being sounded out, in order to achieve reading fluency. They can be the most frequently used words in the English language, yet cannot be read phonetically. (“Was,” “are” and “out” are examples.) The child’s oral language skills are dependent upon genetics as well as the amount of verbal interaction with parents or dominant caregivers. This is enhanced by environmental experiences. What have the children seen or done? What has been their level of security and encouragement in the acquisition of language?

Reading is a complex brain activity. It has been

shown that 80 to 90 per cent of learning disabled students are primarily reading impaired. Reading is not a natural brain function. The brain has to recognize and distinguish between the various arbitrary patterns we call letters. To further complicate this exercise, using different fonts and a combination of upper and lower case letters can result in inconsistent shapes. Brain research has shown that girls tend to speak and read earlier than boys. This is likely due to the slightly larger left hemisphere in the female brain and the greater number of neural connections in the female corpus callosum. The brain research coupled with independent research by educators on reading programs reveal there is no single best program to teach reading. Each student or cohort of “similar students” brings to the exercise specific skills and need to be accommodated by selecting appropriate strategies from the plethora of programs available. Some students will require one-to-one interventions and others will be capable of having their needs met in varying group sizes working with customized programs.

Here is my appeal to decision makers: Please give reading specialists the authority to deliver the reading programs which best meet the needs of the individual students. Support reading; it makes good economic sense.

One of the best ways to help students understand what will be assessed is to establish the criteria with them. Working with students to develop rubrics and other assessment tools is a powerful way to help students build an understanding of what a good product or performance looks like. It helps students develop a clearer picture of where they are now, and where they are going, and how they can close the gap. Teachers have a strong role to play in guiding students through this process.

Esther Morris Boyd is a retired teacher and principal who worked in the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board and the Halifax Regional School Board.



The Many Forms of Assessment and Evaluation

Techniques to support learning and teaching

Susan Summerby-Murray

Assessments and Evaluation – the bane of our existence! As students, we hated tests and exams, and as teaching professionals, the idea of report cards sends shivers down the best staff spines! Yet in reality, we evaluate all the time. We decide whether to have a cookie based on our evaluation of whether we're hungry, whether it might taste good or whether it might add too much to our waistline.

As teaching professionals, we need to evaluate many things during the day. Are students hungry, tired, sick? Are they coming to school in a manner that suggests they're ready to learn? If not, why not? What do we need to do and how can we ensure students (and staff) have the support they need to be successful?

Here are some of the techniques I've found most helpful over the years, from highly formal assessments to "check ins" that inform our teaching practices:

Make sure you generate instant feedback from students throughout the day. For most of us, students raise their hands when they *want* to be called upon to answer a question or when they definitely *know* the answer. Some of the best feedback comes from having students raise their right hands to show the teacher they know the answer and are prepared to be asked to provide a response in front of the class. Raising their left hand means they didn't listen or understand or know the answer so they aren't ready to respond yet, but they *are* ready to learn. Right away, students are not "checking out." What about a group of students who are too young to know right from left? No problem! Use red and green flags; green means I can answer and red means I can't answer *yet*. Students need to know they're not going to be punished for answering honestly and teach-

ers need to know that if 80 per cent of the class is showing the "not yet" signal, they should go back and review with the students or find a more effective way to present the material.

Have students explain concepts or information to a small child or to a classmate. Keep a puppet or stuffed animal on your desk so that reluctant students can speak aloud to "someone" that won't judge them (and you can listen quietly). You can see how well a student understands a concept based on how well they can explain it so that a young child will "get it."

Track behaviours in small steps. Be careful not to make your steps too big. You want to know where the error has happened so you can go back and help fix it. Create tracking forms where a simple tick box is filled to track almost anything; the number of visits to the washroom, math facts in a minute, office visits, journal entries, late arrivals, etc. There's no end to the information we can track – information which may ultimately be very informative. Design or obtain checklist formats so that you can evaluate students throughout the day in a variety of areas and skills. Frequent evaluations provide excel-



“It is our job to keep evaluations as objective as we can – keeping personal preferences or judgments out of any assessment.”

lent information, allow you to make quick adjustments to supports and give you the “proof” you need if questioned about grades by parents, students or other teaching professionals to provide more information about grades you have given.

Ensure your students have the background skill set they need in order to succeed. Students will not be equipped to write homework if they can’t hold a pencil or tell if a book is upside down. Students will not understand algebra if they can’t read word problems or count without a number line.

Formalized testing occurs when students’ skills are judged against many others from across the country at the same age and grade as the student being assessed. This means the test setting is controlled rigidly with respect to number of repetitions, time allotted to complete a task, or types of permissible supports. Students who perform far below the “standard” results may perform better when the conditions are individualized; someone else reads the questions, a scribe writes down oral answers, the student is removed from distractions in a classroom, etc. Students may do better or worse in a one-to-one setting. Standard tests are used by medical and educational professionals to provide our best estimate of skill mastery by using objective evaluations and measuring them against thousands or tens of thousands of peers of the same age. Because educational assessments are behaviour based (i.e. we don’t measure a physiological marker like heart rate, rather we measure a behavioural response) they are often important pieces of a puzzle when trying to determine how a student learns best or what areas require further support. It is our job to keep evaluations as objective as we can –

keeping personal preferences or judgments out of any assessment.

Be sure you know what you’re testing, and check the component areas if you see areas of difficulty. Understand what kind of knowledge you’re testing. Fact based recall is simple for some students, hard for others. Summarizing, synthesizing and inferring or predicting are higher level skills that prove challenging. Be sure this is clear when you report results. Parents are often surprised when their brilliant elementary student suddenly starts to struggle in middle school. Without clear information, parents make judgments about the final grade, and not about the evaluation techniques or standards you used in order to reach those grades.

And finally, let’s address the elephant in the room. Be honest to your student, yourself and to your fellow teaching professionals. When you report assessment results, give information that is accurate, so you don’t leave next year’s teachers struggling to figure out why your report card grades were so good and yet there are no obvious signs the student has any ability to do the work you’ve claimed. Most of our education builds on previously learned and mastered skills, so by pushing a student forward, we set them up for failure later on, often at huge expense to the family and education system. We all like to report on success, but only if it’s true and accurate. Be wary of mark inflation. This is a pervasive problem throughout education; students are applying for university scholarships, some having final marks greater than 100 per cent which gives them and their instructors reduced credibility and leading to heartbreak for those who had expected greater success at that level.

Susan Summerby-Murray is a speech language pathologist who works with the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board.

Teaching for Nova Scotia Virtual School

Dr. Steven Van Zoost

So there I was, on camera, teaching for Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS). Two students had missed our class “eChat” discussion due to school closures and I was meeting with them to re-do this specific lesson. They were interviewing each other about their communities; one student was in Baddeck and the other in Upper Kennetcook. The course they were taking with me was Advanced English 12.

The course involves 84 lessons and a final exam. Students log in to Moodle (an online content management system) to find their daily lesson, including readings and assignments, and they log in to VIA (an online video conferencing tool) to find other students and of course, me. I have online office hours where students can converse with me on camera or chat with me in the Moodle environment. Most often, I receive emails when a student is seeking clarification about a task or needs help. The online course is as challenging as the one I teach in a brick and mortar classroom.

As you can imagine, I’m in front of a screen more than I ever dreamed when I first began my teaching career. I’m certainly not alone in experiencing this increased screen-time. NSVS enrolment is growing at an incredible rate. This semester, 70 of the 79 secondary schools in Nova Scotia have students enrolled in Nova Scotia Virtual School. In the 2013-2014 school year, 12 teachers will have NSVS as their full-time teaching assignment with their school board for either one or both semesters, offering 48 courses to students across the province.

The course offerings are impressive to me as a first-time NSVS teacher. Students who attend small high schools are able to enrol in courses that are not otherwise available to them. I would be remiss to suggest that these are the only situations that lead students to take online courses. Sometimes, students are enrolling in NSVS courses because of scheduling conflicts

or ongoing medical issues including anxiety. However, online learning requires particular kinds of learning strengths and teaching supports.

As you probably know, online courses are quite different from correspondence courses. Typically, in a correspondence course, it has been the student who sorts out when they will complete the assignments and submit them to a teacher. In an online course, students

are required to log in and complete daily lessons on a class schedule. Students are only supposed to be enrolled in one NSVS course per semester, and they need time in their daily class schedule to complete the online course work. This also requires that students have access at their schools to a computer, appropriate Internet connection, a camera, and a headset with a built-

in microphone designed for online conversations. This requires a space and supervision for the students taking online courses. Students enrolled in NSVS courses have a contact teacher in their school who is there to help with equipment and space requirements. These issues are significantly different from correspondence courses and school boards have to sort out staffing and supervision challenges as well as technology resources and support for students taking online courses in their secondary schools. Extra funding for equipment and technical support for students enrolled in online courses has been provided to each school board by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

“One of the pedagogical perks of an online environment is that everything is recorded.”

When I first began teaching for NSVS I was frequently asked how I liked teaching online. I replied euphemistically, “It is very cutting edge!” Learning about best practices for online teaching is exciting to me. You might think that the Internet would provide students with an even greater selection of texts to read in their English program. In some ways this is true. However, Google doesn’t easily provide links for texts written recently by Canadians with high school readers in mind. Not all of the resources I’m used to using in my brick and mortar classroom are available digitally, but this, I suspect, will change.

One of the most difficult challenges for me was not being able to find a student in a digital world. If the student ignores my email or doesn’t log in to Moodle I can’t go down the hall to find them and have a chat to see what’s going on. Thankfully, NSVS has involved other supports for students.

- First, at every high school where there is a student enrolled in NSVS, there is an NSVS contact teacher. If I have a concern about a student, I can email the contact teacher. This year, a contact teacher met with one of my students on my behalf to discuss their progress (or lack thereof) in the course.
- Second, there is technology support for students at every school, although I have learned that this looks different from board to board and school to school.
- Third, there is a NSVS Student Engagement Facilitator who I can contact after I have made three attempts to sort out an issue with a student with no success. Typically, I have contacted this person when I’ve been worried about a student who has fallen behind in the course.

One of the pedagogical perks of an online environment is that everything is recorded. Our conversations can be reviewed and analyzed. In fact, in the course I’m teaching, students are expected to watch their recordings and reflect on their speaking and listening skills. Another perk is that all my anecdotal comments and

descriptive feedback on students’ assignments can be reviewed on one screen. It is easy to notice patterns in students’ strengths and as well as patterns in the kinds of suggestions I have made for further learning.

But I am skirting around what I think about when I’ve been asked, “How do you like teaching online?” To be truthful, I was unsure about how I would like it. I love my brick and mortar classroom environment – would I love an online classroom? I was worried about the affective part of education in an online environment. After all, as Aristotle aptly put it, “Educating the heart without educating the mind is no education at all.” I was worried about facilitating heartfelt conversations about Holocaust literature through screens and cameras. I was worried about being able to engage students with a sometimes needed “heart-to-heart” chat about what’s going on in their world. I was worried that those “light bulb moments” among students might not transcend Internet connections.

I won’t suggest that my worries were unfounded or that they are resolved. However, what I can suggest

is that I was not fully appreciative of the experience that students bring to online learning. Most young people use screens to communicate all the time; this is a normalized experience for them. While I might be in sheer wonder and amazement of the technological possibilities for teaching online, students are not. Many students today are ready for online learning – I

suspect that they have been ready for some time now. Students, during our synchronous “eChats” taught me this. The students in my class from Baddeck and Upper Kennetcook who did not know each other before this course, taught me this. They had heartfelt conversations and light bulb moments as they interviewed each other. While they were learning about each other’s communities, they were also creating an online community of their own.

*“I was worried that those
“light bulb moments”
among students might
not transcend Internet
connections.”*

Dr. Steven Van Zoost teaches for Avon View High School and Nova Scotia Virtual School in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.

Testing and Measurement: A Call for Balance in Evaluation

Brian Forbes

My B.Ed. studies many years ago included a course called “Testing and Measurement,” or something like that. It was taught by “Dr. C.” whose oft-repeated mantra was “Evaluate! Evaluate!” Dr. C. had a greater enthusiasm for statistics than any of his students and was even more enthusiastic about “objective” testing. His most recommended instrument was the multiple choice test.

As a term project each student in the class was required to produce a 100-question multiple choice test in his or her chosen field of study, and administer it to a class at a local school. Dr. C. assured us there was nothing in either the cognitive or affective domains that couldn't be adequately tested by a properly constructed multiple choice question. And so, Bloom's Taxonomy in one hand and copious quantities of coffee in the other, we dutifully struggled through long hours to develop questions we hoped would prove the truth of his thesis. Once the results were in, the statistical validity of each question had to be calculated against a bell curve. For me at least, it was an agonizingly mind-numbing project, resulting in a life-long aversion to any conjunction of statistical analysis and multiple choice questions.

But later events proved that Dr. C. was a man ahead of the curve, so to speak. By the late '80s, standardized testing was starting to become all the rage, and only continued from then on to gain in popularity and acceptance. By the turn of the century, news media were reporting a steady stream of results from national and international tests, interpreted to be authoritatively indicative of how schools in particular jurisdictions were performing vis-à-vis others. This inevitably provoked hand-wringing outcries from politicians, radio talk show hosts, pundits and the like, about the supposedly poor showing of “our” schools compared to “their” schools. Occasionally one of the less astute analysts was actually heard to declare that we could never rest content until every student was testing above average!

In this province, the crescendo was reached when the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS), in imitation of its more senior right-wing think tank, the

Fraser Institute, took upon itself to rank every secondary school on the basis of what they themselves admitted was inadequate data. The resulting media frenzy, unjustified preening by some, unnecessary sense of failure on the part of others, was distressing to watch. Most worrying was the sincere concern of many to find ways to rank higher on the next report – in other words, to allow public education to dance to the tune of AIMS.

For the NSTU, and for me as president at the time, the greatest challenge resulting from all this was to find effective ways to counter a simplistic argument (“Numbers don't lie!”) with more complex explanations as to the limitations of standardized tests, and the likely undesirable consequences of over-reliance on their results in assessing schools and promoting improvement. But I was, and remain, convinced that the principal driver of the standardized testing agenda promoted by the Fraser Institute, AIMS, and all their ilk is weakening of support for public schools, thereby opening up opportunities for their corporate sponsors to capitalize through various forms of privatization and public-private partnerships. (Even standardized testing itself is big business.) That is what makes it so essential that teachers and their organizations continue to insist on the primacy of the classroom teacher in student assessment, a balanced approach to school and system evaluation, and school improvement planning which takes into account the multifarious factors that affect and contribute to excellence in public education.

Brian Forbes is a retired teacher and former president of the NSTU.

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