

**Assessment for Learning
WebCast Series 2008 to 2009**

**Handout Two
October 1, 2008**

Setting Criteria

Coldstream Elementary School (K-7) in Vernon has been very involved in learning about and practising **Assessment For Learning Strategies**. A School Goal for 2008 / 2009 is: “Students will become actively engaged in their own learning through and understanding of their own thinking.” We have a focus on Writing, Math and Social Responsibility. AFL is a whole school endeavour, a strategy that supports all our work.

Following is just one part of our journey – **Setting Criteria in the Primary Grades**.

How We Begin to Set and Use Criteria in Grade One

(Based on *Voices of Experience – Practical Ideas to Spark Up the Year – Grades K to 3* – Politano, Paquin, Cameron and Gregory)

1. Beginning the first day of school in September, the children gather on the carpet. We begin with something they already know about – colouring. We brainstorm all the things that are important when we colour. I print whatever the children say on chart paper under the title “What’s Important When I Colour.” This needs to be kept short. After this they go off to colour.
2. Throughout the week we make reference to this chart going over it to ensure understanding and to add anything else someone might think of. This page gets quite messy.
3. During the week, we also spend time sitting on the carpet chatting about:
 - What’ Important at Carpet Time
 - What’s Important at Book Time
 - What’s Important During Writing Workshop
 - What’s Important During Gym

More of these have to do with behaviour. We make “messy” charts about all of these and keep them available around the room.

4. After a week or two, we talk about how these charts are really quite long and “messy”. We decide to reduce all these ideas to just 2 or 3 that will be easier for use to remember. With the children, we talk through one chart at a time. With coloured markers we try to clump “like” ideas with one colour. When this is done, we try to come up with one statement that summarizes all the little ideas of one colour, condensing them into 2 or 3 big ideas.
5. At some point, I have taken pictures of children modeling the desired behaviours.
6. After school, I rewrite the charts with the three big ideas on the left, and listing all their original ideas on the right. I keep their exact words to show that their original ideas are indeed being honoured.
7. I fit in the photos wherever I can for a visual.
8. The next day, we examine the new chart and chat about the two or three simplified criteria for that particular activity. I explain how I have kept their original words on the right hand side, and have then just added photos.
9. I keep all these charts on a chart stand and then just flip to them when we need them.

The beauty of doing all these charts is that by the end of September, the children know “What is Important” about their behaviour in their daily activities. They also have learned the language of “Criteria”. Now it is time to go on to Setting Criteria in subject areas.

A “Clothesline” of Writing Exemplars – K to 3

Most of the above – setting criteria for various behaviours – is done in the first three weeks of September. Now the children are familiar with the language and are ready to apply it to other areas. Below is how we establish criteria for “Writing”.

1. To begin with I use writing exemplars that are appropriate for beginning of September Grade One that I have made up myself – roughly, one for “I’m Not There Yet”, “I’m There” and “I’m Really There”. We gather at the carpet to look at them. The first day we just look at the pictures and come up with the “Criteria” for each picture of the sample. I print the criteria on the white board beside each picture. We go off to do Writing Workshop, keeping these criteria in mind. At the end of the lesson time, we gather again and chat about how we met the criteria for that day.
2. The next day we gather again to look at the actual “writing” that goes with each sample. Again, we come up with the criteria for each piece of “writing” and I print the criteria on the white board. Again, we go off to write and then come back to assess our progress for that day. This continues for a day or as long as is needed. NOTE: I have the criteria from the Grade One Performance Standards for Writing at the forefront of my mind (or close by). It’s amazing how the children can come up with exactly the same thing.
3. After a few days of this, the children just naturally bring their work to the samples; place their writing beside each until they decide where it belongs. I just happen to be standing close by and we chat about “Where it belongs? Why? And What’s Next?”

The magic is beginning and it is only September 22! We just did this last week in my class.

4. We are working up to using our “Clothesline of Writing Exemplars” – K to 3 – that hangs up in every Primary classroom. As our Primary staff was busy teaching Learning Intentions, Setting Criteria and Descriptive Feedback, etc. we felt that what the children really needed was something to SEE. Something VISUAL.
5. So... another colleague at Coldstream – Colleen Edgar – and I decided to try it. Our whole school takes part in a School Wide Write in November and marks it with the Performance Standards. We asked each K to 3 teacher to give us a sample of a “Not Yet Meeting, a Fully Meeting and an Exceeding” piece of writing from their class (the name and grade was blanked out). We had it the next day!

6. Colleen and I then met in the staff room with all these pieces and put them in what we thought was a progressive order of development. It was a great experience! We had thought it would be quite a time consuming task, but it actually turned out to be fast and fun! It was so exciting to see all the stages of writing and to see the progression develop naturally.
7. We brought our “findings” to the Primary staff and talked about the writing continuum again. **I think the conversations were the best part!** Why certain pieces belonged where they did and why?
8. We then Xeroxed and laminated copies for each classroom and provided the clothesline and pegs. Every classroom now has this “clothesline” hanging in their room.

Now the magic really begins

9. Teachers at different grade levels handle the use of the “Writing Line” differently. In my Grade One classroom, I only put up the beginning to perhaps “early grade two” at first. Then I add more pieces as we need it. It is a work in progress.
10. We spend the rest of the year bringing our work to the line, discussing where we fit. I just ask them:
 - “Where does your writing fit?”
 - “How do you know?”
 - “What’s next?”
 - “What do you need to get there?”
11. This whole process makes teaching writing so much easier for me – some days I just stand by the line and chat with children who come up to it. It is also very inclusive of any levels within the classroom as there are children all over the line. **Best of all, it’s their work and they own it.**
12. Towards the end of Grade One we get quite specific in the criteria we are looking for in our writing and often have a “rubric” to compare it to. By this time, the children are used to the routine so this is just a natural progression.

13. After every “Writing Unit” we have a Celebration. I put each child’s writing into a booklet with a letter to the parents as part of the front cover. I list whatever criteria we have been working on for this batch of writing and ask them to chat with their children about them. We then share our “Writing Books” with another class, have a treat and take them home.

14. **All this learning and thinking is then carried on to other areas and other grades.**

Resources:

1. *Voices of Experience – Practical Ideas to Spark Up the Year – Grades K to 3*
Colleen Politano, Joy Paquin, Caren Cameron and Kathleen Gregory
Publisher – Portage and Main Press – ISBN: 1-55379-028-6
2. *Units of Study for Primary Writing – A Yearlong Curriculum*
Lucy Calkins and Leah Mermelstein
Publisher – Firsthand – ISBN: 0-325-00533-8