

Preparing for a New Year: Building an Assessment Plan

By Anne Davies, Ph.D.

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As I work with teachers new to the profession, I am often asked to help them construct an assessment plan that will allow them to be successful right away. In this article, I walk through the key steps to building an assessment plan and provide examples from Language Arts (Alberta). As you work with colleagues who are new to the profession, consider helping them engage in this very powerful and practical work.

Step 1: Get a copy of the outcomes you are responsible for assessing, evaluating and reporting. Try to find a digital copy online if possible, so you can cut and paste into the tables you make (see column one in Figure 1).

Step 2: Review the specific and general learner outcomes and determine the proof of learning that will be needed. (see column two in Figure 1). As you build the collection of proof, be sure to use sound assessment principles (See Chapter 5 in *Making Classroom Assessment Work*). For example, ensure the evidence of learning comes from multiple sources (observations, conversations, and products) and is collected over time. This increases the likelihood that the body of evidence will be both reliable and valid.

Step 3: Determine what activities or tasks will cause the PROOF to come into existence (see column three in Figure 1).

Figure #1: Assessment Plan based on Language Arts Curriculum – Alberta Outcomes		
Students will engage in purposeful language activities that respect individual differences and emphasize the interrelated and mutually supportive nature of the general and specific outcomes.		
General and Specific Outcomes	Proof of Learning (Term One)	Activities and Tasks (will vary depending on age and needs of students)
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to:	Products, observations and conversations from ELA and other subject areas.	Activities and tasks result in evidence that can be used as proof of learning. Along the way it can be used to inform day-by-day teaching.
General Outcome 1: ... explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences. 1.1 Discover and explore 1.2 Clarify and extend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader response journal • Observations from small group work • Writing folder • Photographs of 3-D work as well as presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and respond daily to choice reading materials • Talk in small groups (lit circles/readers club) • Write daily – writers workshop • Class meetings • Conflict resolution center
General Outcome 2: ... comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts. 2.1 Use strategies and cues 2.2 Respond to texts 2.3 Understand forms, elements and techniques 2.4 Create original text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader response journal entries: include responses during choice reading time, responses to text or media (whole group and choice), responses to required reading, as well as practice assignments • Observations of small group work • Observations of individuals • Writing/Representing portfolio (includes choice writing and required exercises) • Photographs of 3-D work as well as presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and respond daily to teacher selected materials, including texts read aloud/materials viewed • Practice reading strategies (whole class/small group/individual) • Read aloud daily • Daily focused lesson and individual practice • Write daily using writers' workshop (deliberately use text structures in writing and storyboard structures in viewing)
General Outcome 3: ... manage ideas and information. 3.1 Plan and focus 3.2 Select and process 3.3 Organize, record and evaluate 3.4 Share and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See evidence listed in assessment plans for Science and Social Studies • Literature projects (criteria) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects and tasks connected to Science or Social Studies topic • Literature projects (If you are not self-contained then you must provide time in each term to focus on a learning and students producing evidence that addresses this general outcome)
General Outcome 4: ... enhance the clarity and artistry of communication. 4.1 Enhance and improve 4.2 Attend to conventions 4.3 Present and share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily oral reading record/observations • Presentations of work to partners and small groups (observations in relation to criteria) • Video and audio presentations (recordings) • Presentation to parents and family (at home performance) (feedback form) • Daily Edit (conventions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily reading • Presenting work (during and end) • Small group work • Video/audio presentations • Presentations to parents and others • Daily Edits • Writing & Representing Folder
General Outcome 5: ... respect, support and collaborate with others. 5.1 Respect others and strengthen community 5.2 Work within a group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group meetings (criteria) • Partner work (criteria checklist) • Small group work (criteria checklist) • Conflict resolution center (log notes) • Big buddies (criteria) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group meetings • Partner work • Small group work • Conflict resolution center • Big buddies

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Step 4: Consider how you can use the time allotted to teach and assess day by day. Develop a tentative weekly agenda for the daily allotment of time available. As you create this agenda think about the flow of a lesson time from whole group to guided practice to individual work time. This gradual release of responsibility prepares students to be successful and permits teachers time to work with small groups and individuals.

Figure #2: Sample Weekly Agenda

Teaching Task and Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday (or missing day in week)
Transition (5–10 minutes)	Daily Edit (welcome message/news) and choice reading	Daily Edit (writing focus) and choice reading	Daily Edit (reading focus) and choice reading	Daily Edit (writing focus) and choice reading	Daily Edit (reading focus) and choice reading
Whole Group Lesson (15–20 minutes - switch focus week by week)	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus	Writing/Speaking/ Representing Focus	Writing Focus
Guided practice (3–5 minutes)					
Independent work (10–40 minutes)					
Small Group Instruction (5 minutes initially to 15 minutes later)	First Group Second Group	Second Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Third Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Fourth Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Catch-up/think of it as an enrichment day for all students... learn in different ways
Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	
Closing Reflection/ self-assessment (3–5 minutes)	Closing Reflection/ self-assessment	Closing Reflection/ self-assessment	Closing Reflection/ self-assessment	Closing Reflection/ self-assessment	Closing Reflection/ self-assessment
Transition to next class (3–5 minutes)	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings

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Step 5: Review the proposed daily agenda and compare it to the plan for collecting proof of learning. Will your weekly agenda give students opportunities to create needed proof of learning? Will your weekly agenda give you time to do the small group work and collect the observations you need to make?

Figure #3: Daily Agenda Showing Evidence – Proof of Learning						
Teaching Task and Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday (or missing day in week)	Proof of Learning
Transition (5–10 minutes)	Daily Edit (welcome message/news) and choice reading	Daily Edit (writing focus) and choice reading	Daily Edit (reading focus) and choice reading	Daily Edit (writing focus) and choice reading	Daily Edit (reading focus) and choice reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks • Writing folder
Whole Group Lesson (15–20 minutes - switch focus week by week)	Reading/Viewing/Listening Focus	Reading/Viewing/Listening Focus	Reading/Viewing/Listening Focus	Writing/Speaking/Representing Focus	Writing Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks
Guided practice (3–5 minutes)						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Observation
Independent work (10–40 minutes)						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks • Writing Folder • Reading Response Journals • Project Evidence
Small Group Instruction (5 minutes initially to 15 minutes later)	First Group Second Group	Second Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Third Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Fourth Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Catch-up/think of it as an enrichment day for all students... learn in different ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher observation • Notebooks
Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks • Writing Folder • Reading Response Journals • Photographs and recordings
Closing Reflection/self-assessment (3–5 minutes)	Closing Reflection/self-assessment	Closing Reflection/group meeting	Closing Reflection/self-assessment	Closing Reflection/group meeting	Closing Reflection/self-assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks • Journals • Teacher observation • Recordings
Transition to next class (3–5 minutes)	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fat Files • Portfolio

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Step 6: Check the proposed weekly agenda against all the proof of learning required across the term. Compare the weekly agenda and the proof of learning with the outcomes for which you are responsible. Have you missed anything? If so, make necessary revisions.

Figure #4: Checking Weekly Agenda against Evidence or Proof Across Term and Learning Outcomes				
Teaching Task and Time	Monday	Tuesday	Proof of Learning in relation to Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes
Transition (5–10 minutes)	Daily Edit (welcome message/news) and choice reading	Daily Edit (writing focus) and choice reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations from small group work • Writing folder • Photographs of 3-D work as well as presentations • Reader response journal entries -include responses during choice reading time, responses to text or media (whole group and choice), responses to required reading, as well as practice assignments • Observations of individuals • Writing/Representing portfolio (includes choice writing and required exercises) • Photographs of 3-D work as well as presentations • See evidence listed in assessment plans for Science and Social Studies • Literature projects (criteria) • Daily oral reading record/ observations • Presentations of work to partners and small groups (observations in relation to criteria) • Video and audio presentations (recordings) • Presentation to parents and family (at home performance) (feedback form) • Daily Edit (conventions) • Group meetings (criteria) • Partner work (criteria checklist) • Small group work (criteria checklist) • Conflict resolution center (log notes) • Big buddies (criteria) 	<p>Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to:</p> <p>General Outcome 1: ...explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences.</p> <p>1.1 Discover and explore</p> <p>1.2 Clarify and extend</p> <p>General Outcome 2: ...comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts.</p> <p>2.1 Use strategies and cues</p> <p>2.2 Respond to texts</p> <p>2.3 Understand forms, elements and techniques</p> <p>2.4 Create original text</p> <p>General Outcome 3: ...manage ideas and information.</p> <p>3.1 Plan and focus</p> <p>3.2 Select and process</p> <p>3.3 Organize, record and evaluate</p> <p>3.4 Share and review</p> <p>General Outcome 4: ...enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.</p> <p>4.1 Enhance and improve</p> <p>4.2 Attend to conventions</p> <p>4.3 Present and share</p> <p>General Outcome 5: ...respect, support and collaborate with others.</p> <p>5.1 Respect others and strengthen community</p> <p>5.2 Work within a group</p>
Whole Group Lesson (15–20 minutes - switch focus week by week)	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus		
Guided practice (3–5 minutes)				
Independent work (10–40 minutes)				
Small Group Instruction (5 minutes initially to 15 minutes later)	First Group Second Group	Second Group Those who need help (small group or individual)		
Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers		
Closing Reflection/self-assessment (3–5 minutes)	Closing Reflection/self-assessment	Closing Reflection/group meeting		
Transition to next class (3–5 minutes)	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings		

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Step 7: Consider each part of your daily agenda and make a list of the instructional skills and processes that must be taught or incorporated into the practice time. As the term proceeds, you can ensure you introduce each new skill and process, as well as allow time to learn and time to practice and later, time to revisit and work towards mastery. Remember Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences as well as Mel Levine's idea of All Kinds of Minds — our learners are increasingly diverse and so our instructional plans and the resulting evidence also need to allow for a range of diversity.

Figure #5: Building an Instructional Plan with Student Needs and Outcomes in Mind

Teaching Task and Time	Monday	Tuesday	Instructional Planning Notes
Transition (5–10 minutes)	Daily Edit (welcome message/news) and choice reading	Daily Edit (writing focus) and choice reading	Reading and writing conventions, vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph structure... (insert detailed list(s) for grade level(s))
Whole Group Lesson (15–20 minutes - switch focus week by week)	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus	Reading/Viewing/ Listening Focus	Whole group lesson is based on observed needs in relation to outcomes. Make a list of grade level strategies and skills to be taught and mastered.
Guided practice (3–5 minutes)			List possible ways to practice and attain the different skills and strategies appropriate to needs and age of students. Whatever students practice here they will apply independently immediately.
Independent work (10–40 minutes)			
Small Group Instruction (5 minutes initially to 15 minutes later)	First Group Second Group	Second Group Those who need help (small group or individual)	Small group lesson based on baseline evidence collected and ongoing observed needs. Students come together in flexible groups depending on emerging needs.
Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Independent reading and writing in literacy centers	Literacy centers provide on-going practice in a variety of forms. Consider using resources such as student activity sheets (along with answer sheets) as independent practice work. Also include "hands-on" materials so students can physically engage their bodies as they construct their understandings.
Closing Reflection/self-assessment (3–5 minutes)	Closing Reflection/self-assessment	Closing Reflection/group meeting	Reflection and self-assessment needs to be taught and modeled. Consider beginning with whole group, then small groups, and then individual. Consider moving from verbal to written over time.
Transition to next class (3–5 minutes)	File evidence and Closings	File evidence and Closings	Find simple ways for students to file evidence of learning. Ensure everything is dated.

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Step 8: Now that your instructional plan is in draft form it is time to consider what baseline evidence you need to collect in order to plan instruction AND to have the comparison pieces needed to show growth towards the outcomes by the end of the term. In Figure 6 the outcomes, the baseline evidence, and the end-of-term evidence of learning (proof) are listed. Each teacher will choose different items depending on their view of what is important. I have deliberately selected items that will require students to prepare the evidence of learning — both baseline and end-of-term — for me as the teacher. I will be busy collecting observations as students work. If students are busy creating and collecting the physical proof then I have time to make observations and keep students on-track to completion.

Figure #6: Planning Baseline and End-of-term Evidence of Learning (Proof)		
Outcomes: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to:	Baseline Evidence of Learning	End-of-Term Evidence of Learning
General Outcome 1: ...explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences. 1.1 Discover and explore 1.2 Clarify and extend	Writing about self — letter to the teacher... I want to be a successful learner this year. My strengths are: The areas I need to improve are: One goal I have for myself is: In order to help me, you, as my teacher need to know...	Writing about self — letter to the teacher... I have tried hard to be a successful learner this term. My strengths are: The areas I need to improve are: One goal I have for myself is: In order to help me, you, as my teacher need to know...
General Outcome 2: ...comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts. 2.1 Use strategies and cues 2.2 Respond to texts 2.3 Understand forms, elements and techniques 2.4 Create original text	Choose texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favourite all time text • Text currently reading • Text I would like to read • Read aloud. Record reading Note media: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favourite all time media (PG rated) • Last media I viewed • My favourite media storyboard (e.g. beginning, middle and end) Listen to the following text. Record (your choice — could be main character, setting, plot timeline or ???). Consider age and experience and what you want to accomplish during the term. Bring a sample of your writing you are most proud of and explain, in writing why you are proud of it. (Once students have brought in writing analyze it or teach them to analyze it for specific skills and strategies to be taught during the term.	Select text currently reading and record a read-aloud. Attach the best reader response. Explain why the reader response is of high quality in relation to criteria. Record last media I viewed and record storyboard and other important attributes given criteria developed in class (e.g. beginning, middle and end) Listen to a text. Record (teacher's choice — could be main character, setting, plot timeline or ???). Consider age and experience and what has been accomplished during the term. Select a sample of your writing that you (student) are most proud of and explain, in writing, why you are proud of it. Use criteria established for that kind of writing to self-assess.
General Outcome 3: ...manage ideas and information. 3.1 Plan and focus 3.2 Select and process 3.3 Organize, record and evaluate 3.4 Share and review	Bring a research project or any project you have from previous years.	Research project or any project completed this term. Self-assess according to established criteria. Explain what you will improve or set as a goal for next term.
General Outcome 4: ...enhance the clarity and artistry of communication. 4.1 Enhance and improve 4.2 Attend to conventions 4.3 Present and share	Observations during group meetings, class time, small groups, and partner work (need a checklist to record data).	Do final term observations and record in writing during group meetings, class time, small groups, and partner work (need a checklist to record data).
General Outcome 5: ...respect, support and collaborate with others. 5.1 Respect others and strengthen community 5.2 Work within a group	Co-construct criteria. Self-assess. Give evidence.	Revisit co-constructed criteria. Self-assess. Give evidence.

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Step 9: Once the baseline evidence is created and students are busy creating the physical evidence, it is essential that there be a place where students can put their important evidence of learning. Initially it is essential that the teacher collect all baseline samples as these are vital and must not go missing. The ongoing student evidence of learning can be stored by students in files or boxes. Any system of resources that works, given your space and availability, is a good one. Teacher-collected evidence of learning can be stored in a system that suits the teacher — online grade book, paper-based mark book, folders, checklists, clipboards and so on. The choices are varied. The decision needs to be made by each individual. It is helpful to have students creating at least a 'Before' and 'After' display of key pieces of work. You might want to refer to this as a portfolio — it is a simple one. Once students have displayed their baseline sample (the before) and the most advanced sample (the after) then ask them to do a simple reflection such as, "I used to... but now I..." This side-by-side work helps the students and parents understand the amount of learning that has taken place. It is no surprise this approach works — it is timeless marketing strategy. Help your students convince others of their learning.

Figure #7: Plan for Physical Collection of Evidence

Fat File	Progress Portfolio	Teacher's Evidence Collection
All physical evidence stored by students in...	Selected pieces for students to show progress towards outcomes to be displayed in...	Marks, checklists, observations and other teacher-collected evidence will be stored in...

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Step 10: Once students are collecting their important evidence of learning, it is essential they practice self-assessment and peer assessment in relation to criteria. This ongoing reflection and assessment helps students learn to guide their learning. It also helps students prepare to be an active partner in the assessment process because they are practicing articulating their learning. This not only helps teachers understand the learning more fully, it also helps other people, such as parents, appreciate the learning more fully.

Figure #8: Sample Self-Assessment Frames	
<p>Connections</p> <p>I make connections to self, to text and to the world. I know this because . . .</p>	<p>Communicator</p> <p>I am learning to enhance the clarity and artistry of my communication. I know this because....</p>
<p>Working Towards Standards in ELA</p> <p>I listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts. I know this because....</p>	<p>Working with Others</p> <p>I respect, support and collaborate with others. I know this because...</p>
<p>My Best Reading Response</p> <p>This is my best reading response. You can see it is because . . .</p>	<p>My Favourite</p> <p>This is my favourite piece of work because . . .</p>
<p>Improvement</p> <p>This work shows I have improved because . . .</p>	<p>I am an Ideas and Information Manager</p> <p>This piece shows I manage ideas and information because...</p>
<p>Trash It!</p> <p>One reason this evidence should be trashed is . . .</p> <p>If I did it over again, I would . . .</p>	<p>Explorer</p> <p>I explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences. I know this because . . .</p>

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Step 11: As the term draws to a conclusion, students need to collect their evidence of learning in relation to the outcomes. It is helpful if they can select it in such a way that they can draw attention to the growth they have made towards the outcomes during the term. Earlier I described a simple 'Before' and 'After' portfolio format. In Figure 9, you will find suggestions for expanding the evidence collecting. This prepares students from the beginning to collect evidence of learning in preparation for the end of term.

Figure #9: Preparing for Student-Parent-Teacher Conference – Summary Self-Assessment of all Evidence		
Outcomes: I am able to listen, speak, read, write, view and represent when...	Evidence of Learning (Proof): I am including the following evidence to show proof of learning:	Self-Assessment: As you examine the evidence of learning, please notice that I have learned. I know this because...
General Outcome 1: I explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences. 1.1 Discover and explore 1.2 Clarify and extend		
General Outcome 2: I comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts. 2.1 Use strategies and cues 2.2 Respond to texts 2.3 Understand forms, elements and techniques 2.4 Create original text		
General Outcome 3: I manage ideas and information. 3.1 Plan and focus 3.2 Select and process 3.3 Organize, record and evaluate 3.4 Share and review		
General Outcome 4: I enhance the clarity and artistry of communication. 4.1 Enhance and improve 4.2 Attend to conventions 4.3 Present and share		
General Outcome 5: I respect, support and collaborate with others. 5.1 Respect others and strengthen community 5.2 Work within a group		

Step 12: Once teachers have developed an assessment plan and tried it out, they are ready to fine tune it for the next term. Also, once the assessment plan is solid for one subject area it is easy to use the same process for other subject areas or courses. Or, consider working with your grade level or department colleagues and each selecting different courses or subject areas for which to build plans. Then, the plans can be shared and adapted to suit each teaching situation.

The most important idea is captured in this old adage, "The person who fails to plan, plans to fail".

Note – a minimum 45 minutes of class time needed plus an independent reading time, as well as a read aloud to students time at another point in the day. If you are NOT self-contained, then consider reading/viewing/listening focus one week and writing/speaking/representing focus the next week – and align all learning activities with the focus areas.

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