

A Teacher's Resource for Large-Scale Assessments

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Spring 2007



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by Marguerite Jackson,
Chief Executive Officer

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passionate about student success

by **Marjorie Clegg, former Head of Quality Assurance at the Ottawa-Carleton DSB**

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try your hand at scoring a student response!

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- Tips for getting the most out of Item Information Reports
- View from an elementary school teacher
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Welcome

**Marguerite Jackson**

Chief Executive Officer

I am delighted to welcome you to this first issue of *EQAO Connects* — our new webmag written specifically for Ontario teachers. It is another tool we've created in our ongoing effort to empower the education community and provide resources that help teachers better understand and use large-scale assessments to support the vital work they do in the classroom.

Three times a year, *EQAO Connects* will bring you articles written by teachers on strategies that have worked for them. As well, leading experts will share their insights and best practices relating to assessment and the use of data to inform classroom instruction. You'll also find a compilation of pertinent tips, practical information and interviews with interesting personalities. We're particularly pleased to present an interview with Elvis Stojko in this inaugural issue.

As professional learning communities have proven so well, the sharing of knowledge and expertise allows us to learn from each other in order to better support students on their educational journey. I hope you will enjoy this new resource and that you too will choose to share your insights with us in future issues. ■

Marguerite Jackson

CEO, EQAO



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Coffee Break



interview with Elvis Stojko

As a two-time Olympic silver medalist, three-time world figure skating champion and seven-time Canadian figure skating champ, Elvis Stojko has learned a thing or two about performing under pressure. In this interview, he reveals the secret for coaching kids into a winning mindset so they can approach any test without fear.

The Richmond Hill, Ontario, native spent most of his life working with some of the world's best coaches in figure skating and kung fu. Today, he too is dedicated to inspiring kids and building their confidence, in the same way that his coaches helped him prepare physically and mentally for such extreme evaluations as the Olympics.

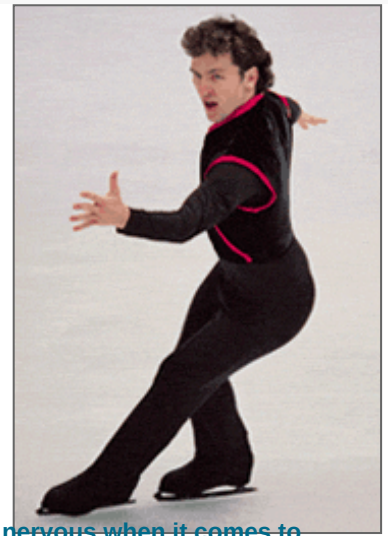
Stojko is a Sifu (teacher) in the Chinese martial art of Hung Gar Kung Fu at the Cead Bua Fighting Arts Centre in Milton, Ontario. And like all great teachers, Stojko, who won the 2005 Canadian championship in kung fu and a silver medal at the world kickboxing championships, says he's still learning every single day.

You started skating at five years old. What did you learn as a skater that helped you as a student in school?

I discovered that it's understanding *how* you learn that makes all the difference. My skating and martial arts taught me that when you understand how you learn, you understand what needs to be done to absorb information, mentally and physically.

School didn't come easily to me and I had to work at it. The exception was English, which I liked because I could be creative. But I learn visually, and I've sat in classes where information was thrown at me like someone was throwing a pie at my face. Nothing was absorbed. For the longest time, I couldn't make sense of certain subjects, such as biology for example. That's because I needed to see a big picture and we were learning things in small sections. I couldn't absorb it that way. First, show me the big picture and then I can see how the small sections fit into it.

Now I tell kids who hate school, learn how you learn. That's how you enhance your ability.



Elvis performing the short program at the Salt Lake Olympics.

As someone for whom competing was a way of life, what would you tell students who get nervous when it comes to school tests?

No matter what anyone tells you, a test doesn't tell you anything about how intelligent you are. A test result is not who you are; it doesn't evaluate your self-worth—that's based on how you look at yourself, at the things you do, at the way you treat other people.

I could go out and compete because I knew whether I bombed or whether I won a medal, I was still the same guy. Competition was only ever about challenging myself, and I never thought for a moment that if I don't win the gold I'm not a champion.

When I skated the long program, which is four and a half minutes, I'd break it into chunks and I'd enjoy each section. The thoughts running through my mind were "It's awesome to be out here; this is so cool." I never thought, "This is do or die." And I never beat myself up about a score. A result is only feedback.

How did you get to a place where you didn't feel defined by test scores?

I developed a strong sense of self and that's thanks to my kung fu teacher Sifu Glen Doyle at Cead Bua Fighting Arts Centre, who has, over the years, become my best friend. Glen would say to me, "You can fall every jump, but it's not going to change a thing about how I think about you." That really helped me move forward.

Teaching is ultimately a lot like coaching. What's the best thing a coach can do for you on the day of a test?

A good coach knows the most important thing isn't knowing what to say; it's knowing what **not** to say. If you say something wrong, it's all over. Under pressure, my coach Doug Leigh wouldn't say much. He'd ask me how I feel; he'd make me talk so he'd know what would be helpful for me to hear.

I can't stress how important it is to be aware of what you're telling kids on the day of a competition. When kids are under pressure, any negative thing you say will affect their performance.

It's also important to know what to say the day before a test. A lot of skaters do poorly in practices just prior to a big competition. I know I'd have a terrible skate and that's because in my head, I wasn't there; I was thinking of the next day. My coach would say to me, "Don't worry about it, you're doing great, your mind is already in Germany and you're using today to just purge some stuff."

That's what you have to hear, and the kids who don't get these kinds of messages panic.

What strategies do coaches use to help put competitors into a positive mind frame that teachers could apply in the classroom?



Elvis performing a weapon kata.

Coaches and teachers need to get kids to be comfortable with the situation they're in. You're comfortable when you get to a point where you say, "I can handle this."

This doesn't mean you don't have butterflies; everyone does. But I tell people to get their butterflies flying in formation so they're not taking over your mind. If you can laugh, if you can be jovial, you'll be okay.

Physically, you can calm the butterflies through deep slow breathing, which brings down your heart rate and clears the mind. But there's another thing you have to do too, and that's to talk out your fears.

The job of the coach is to help you get out your demons. You have to be able to say, "I'm afraid," or "I don't like this" and talk about it. There was a time when I was in school when I would write everything down—I'd call it subconscious writing—to purge it all.

Coaches know that if something is bothering you emotionally it's going to affect your performance in every way. That's why they'll ask how you're feeling, how things are going in your life, because they are well aware that if you don't deal with the dragons, they're going to come out with a vengeance on game day.

As someone who knows what it takes, what are the lessons for success you pass on to your students?

I tell kids—and as a motivational speaker I tell adults the same thing—that the three keys to success are to have self-worth, to be comfortable with a situation and to be honest with yourself. One thing I know for certain is that the way you see yourself is the way your life will be. ■

**Your feedback
helps us improve.**

Please take a moment to
grade this article and send
us your comments.

Grade this article**Comments**

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
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View from the Front of the Class



a teacher's perspective

by Patricia Remmer, English Teacher

Brockville Collegiate Institute
Upper Canada District School Board

Starting Early: Preparing Struggling Readers and Writers for the OSSLT

Patricia Remmer, English teacher from Brockville Collegiate Institute in the Thousand Islands area of eastern Ontario, turned her students into newspaper editors to reinforce key reading and writing skills. She details the strategy that prompted the 27 young people in her class to take the power of the pen to heart.

Students need to feel involved and interested in what they are reading and writing in order to develop the skills required to be successfully literate, in school and out. With this fact in mind, I worked with my Grade 9 applied-level English students on building a newspaper unit.

This exercise addresses all three of the OSSLT reading skills (understanding directly stated ideas, understanding indirectly stated or inferred ideas and making personal connections). It also teaches the skills and organization required to build an original news story.

Here's a quick step-by-step breakdown of the three-week unit that had my students discussing, analyzing and writing with enthusiasm.

Step 1: Our local newspaper generously donated a class set of newspapers every day, including weekends. First, we examined the paper to understand how it's organized. We reviewed every section: the front page, the inside front page, local, provincial, national and international news, sports, classifieds and personals. We discussed how editors would decide in which sections to put the articles.

(As a follow-up, in the future I may distribute headlines or short

Resource Material

MS Word
Word Perfect



End of Unit Project ENG1P
Newspaper Unit



Newspaper Organization



Reasons to include a story in the news



News Article Analysis Template



Newspaper project rubric



What are the sections of a newspaper



Why a newspaper gets published

articles to students and ask them to “lay out” a newspaper the way editors would.)

Step 2: We turned our attention to what makes a news story. The list of criteria included currency, proximity, celebrity, importance, magnitude and a “catch-all” category that included stories of “first, last, smallest, strange and/or bizarre.”

Every day, the students selected stories that demonstrated the qualities of each category and provided reasons for their thinking. Since many of the stories were based on local events, especially sports events, the students’ interest was maintained and their comfort with the theory developed.

Step 3: Several times throughout the unit, students were given “scavenger hunt” tasks, which required them to skim and scan the entire paper, or sections of it, to find answers to questions. (For added fun and incentive, they received tickets to enter lucky draws for completing the scavenger hunts.)

Step 4: We dissected the structure of a news story. We discussed the qualities of a lead, the follow-up to the lead, the inverted pyramid structure of a news story, the non-standard use of paragraphing, all using stories of local, personal and current interest. We also looked at the conventions and importance of direct and indirect quotes to add emotional impact to the objective reporting of facts.

During this unit, a series of letters to the editor concerning the organization of our school’s timetable provoked interesting opinion discussions. As well, a series of articles about a classmate added even more personal interest to our reading.

As part of the unit, we also looked at information in the newspaper beyond news stories, including the conventions and organization of advice columns and classified ads.

Step 5: The culminating task for the unit was built around choice and allowing students to develop their own personal interests. Each student was asked to create a newspaper, which demonstrated their abilities to both read and understand news stories, and to write news articles.

Students first had to define a target audience for their papers—based on age, gender and interests. Some targeted the sports enthusiasts, the fashion and style lover or the car and truck fan. Others specialized in teen issues and even in international politics.

Next, they were challenged to create a name for their paper that would connect to the desired target audience, and to develop either a logo or a picture for their front page.

Step 6: As editors, students filled their papers by clipping stories from the local paper or from the Internet that would appeal to their target audience. They were asked to annotate these articles by identifying the features of the

stories as we had discussed in class.

As writers, they had to create three original stories: a news article, a classified ad and an advice column in question-and-answer format.

It worked! Overall, the unit was successful. Students showed enthusiasm for the writing, as they were able to direct their thinking and their presentations to areas of interest to them. Interestingly, the writing tended to be stronger than the reading skills; next time, we will devote more thinking to how to annotate and record reading responses.

Overall students learned about the structure of news stories, the layout and organization of newspapers, the conventions of direct and indirect quotes, skim and scan reading techniques, reading for inference in the use of quotes, the importance of audience and purpose in writing and reading and a lot about the events around them in their local communities. We were all pleased with these results. ■



Calling all writers:

Next issue: The view from the front of a Grade 4 class. We invite you to share your story with your colleagues across the province and explain how you use EQAO data to help students entering the junior division develop their reading, writing and math skills.

Please see our [Writer's Guidelines](#).

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
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The Key to Good Assessments



getting the most from your classroom tests

by **Bob Wilson**

Professor Emeritus, Queen's University

A good assessment item, whether on a classroom test or on an EQAO assessment, is one that fulfills its purpose. A major purpose for teachers is to assess students so that both the teacher and the students can use the information to shape future teaching and learning. When this is your purpose, the following ideas might help.

Create good assessment items that allow students to show what they know and what they can do with it.

Many test items ask students to recall discrete bits of factual information, recognize or define a particular term or show that they can perform a specific operation, such as multiplication, in mathematics. While the information about student achievement these items provide is sometimes useful and important, it is very limited.

Items that are more useful to inform future teaching and learning ask students not only to produce bits of information but also to link them to other related subject knowledge or to make personal connections between them and other knowledge and experience.

They ask students to use newly learned information to solve problems, make judgments and go beyond what they have learned in school by showing how it is relevant to real-life situations.

Such items are learning as well as assessment activities for students. They are engaging and interesting tasks that encourage knowledge and skill retention by linking newly acquired knowledge to what the student already knows.

Broaden your definition of a test.

Many learning expectations have multiple parts or are part of a process, and the most valid test items allow for the complexity or process to be assessed. For example, many times teachers ask questions that require a paragraph or an essay response. These items can be made more useful by broadening the test to include the stages of preparation prior to writing the paragraph or essay.

A part of the assessment might ask for a plan or draft. Reading comprehension can also be part of the assessment. Did the student understand the material that contained the basic knowledge needed for the response? Such elaborated items help students and their teachers discover where blocks to achievement are and may even suggest means of overcoming them. Multi-stage problems in mathematics, social studies and science provide excellent opportunities to develop such items.

Other methods teachers currently use for assessment include projects (group and individual), demonstrations (history museum, science fair), dramatic performances, formal or informal debates and portfolios. Tools for evaluating these kinds of assessments include student and teacher observation checklists; teacher, peer and self evaluation; and reflective student work journals for extended assessment activities.

Use problems that allow you and your students to diagnose where they are in their learning.

Good assessment items such as those described above are useful for diagnosis. These items provide useful information at the lower as well as the higher levels of student achievement. If a student is not able to respond at the simplest level to the vocabulary or operations required by the item, this tells both the teacher and the student where they have to start. If a student shows an understanding of the basics but is not yet able to see how various elements are connected, this indicates to both the teacher and the student what the next steps in the learning process need to be.

The reason students do not do well on assessments typically has more to do with their conceptual abilities than with the particular content they are being asked to learn. For example, students may grasp onto the first idea they encounter in a passage or a question and be unable to add or link more information to that concept for a more sophisticated response.

See the two examples at the end of this article of how student responses can be analyzed to understand student misconceptions and learning needs.

Involve the learner as more than the one being tested.

The more students can see that assessment is something that happens for a purpose (to support their progress) and not just something that happens to them, the more they will involve themselves in it and benefit from it. There are many ways to engage students in the assessment process. They can be asked to write or report orally on the quality of the learning they have demonstrated on an assessment. This reflection can include a section on what they need to work on to improve. Learners can also prepare assessment items themselves to give to fellow students. They can be asked to include a statement about why the knowledge required by the item is important and to report on how well the item has assessed the knowledge and skills of their classmates.

Metacognition (reflection on thinking and learning processes) is often referred to as the key to improved student learning. The revised *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Language* (2006) includes overall and specific expectations related to metacognition in all four language strands in every grade.

Use assessment items more than once.

Some of the most useful information for a teacher and a student is about progress over time. Looking at the differences in achievement by the class and by individuals within the class on the same items at different times will identify areas where the teaching and learning have been successful and areas where more work has to be done. This understanding is enhanced when both student and teacher can point to work that is arranged according to “what I could do then” and “what I can do now.”

An alternative to repeating items requires parallel tests with similar items but different contexts. Published items such as those

provided by EQAO on its Web site are a good source of parallel items.

Don't always mark the test; read it instead.

Reading a student's test straight through, noting the strengths and weaknesses as you go, is an alternative to scoring and grading it. After reading it, you can make some notes on what learning was demonstrated (strengths and weaknesses) and what this means for the student and perhaps for your teaching (next steps).

Keep in mind the differences between the purposes of classroom and large-scale assessment.

All assessments must produce accurate (reliable) information about learning (i.e., the information must be valid). The goal of large-scale assessments is to provide snapshots of achievement mainly at a group level for comparison to a standard over time. So large-scale assessments must sample the curriculum effectively and require students to work under common conditions in order to yield meaningful data about the diverse range of students being assessed. Classroom assessments must also be reliable and valid, but, since their goals are frequently different, they need not always share all the characteristics of large-scale assessments. For example, if a teacher is not interested in comparing one student to another, there is no need to be rigid about standardization.

Student Response

Example 1: Reading Comprehension

Question from the EQAO sample assessments Spring 2007 Primary Division, *Language*

Question: According to the text, what animal are scientists certain is a reptile?

- the fox
- the hawk
- *Tyrannosaurus rex*
- the blue racer snake ✓

The selection of the correct option shows understanding of information stated explicitly in the passage. The selection of an incorrect option says something about the reader's approach. Because *Tyrannosaurus rex*, for example, is given lots of space in the article, a developing reader may choose it for that reason alone even though it is not the correct response. A read-aloud session would help to validate this judgment.

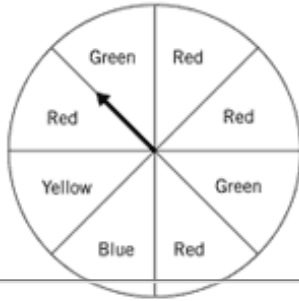
Student Response

Example 2: Mathematics

Question from the EQAO sample assessments Spring 2007 Junior Division, *Mathematics*

To answer the question correctly, the student must understand and use the concept of ratio. The selection of an incorrect option says something about the student's approach. For example, students who merely count the sections labelled "Red" may be swayed by answer F. Students looking at the top half of the circle and seeing that three of the four sections here

8. A circle is divided into sections of equal size.



are "Red" may use this information to select answer H. In both cases, the students are telling you something about how they have approached the question. ■

Your feedback helps us improve.

What is the probability that the spinner will stop on red?

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

F 1 out of 4
G 3 out of 8
H 3 out of 4
J 1 out of 2 ✓

Grade this article

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
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Spotlight



We pick the books for our classroom library.

celebrating the success of an Ontario school

St. Francis de Sales Elementary School
Toronto Catholic District School Board

Mission Possible:

From the Jane-Finch community, northwest of downtown Toronto, a team of teachers at St. Francis de Sales Elementary School report on the exceptional ways they work together and the innovative strategies they use to create literacy-rich classrooms.

The teachers point to indisputable research: If students can read and understand and apply knowledge, they have it made in school and beyond. But they say that the window of opportunity to develop high-level literacy skills is narrow and too easy to miss. Here, in their own words, is how they act quickly and strategically to make a difference.

In brief, we check our egos at the door and work closely together, sharing our learning. We use data; it drives our instruction. We organize our classes (they're small) and our school day (uninterrupted blocks for math and language). We provide a wide variety of cultural, academic and athletic activities to expand our student's experiences. We are as much a part of our community as it is a part of us.

Across Ontario, Toronto's Jane-Finch community is known as a hub of cultures and languages, and has a reputation that provokes strong opinions. Yes, we have many things to work toward, but we also have much to celebrate. Our kids come from such a complex variety of family situations, it would make your head spin. Are the parents interested in their kids? Darn right, and so are their extended families, and that includes the newly immigrated family who rents one bedroom in their apartment. We're all in it together, supporting each other through the challenges of the day; we have each other's back.

Sometimes, for many families, the yoke is too heavy to bear, and sometimes life is very hard. When caregivers don't speak the language, when they don't have enough money for extras at the end of the month, when school is a strange and threatening place, we step up to the plate.

Our school feeds the children breakfast, a snack and lunch. It's easier to teach the kids when their bellies aren't rumbling. We have two clothing drives, because it's easier to teach kids when they are not concentrating on how to keep warm during the bitter winter

recesses. We all work on keeping our school safe so kids can learn.

Welcome to Operation Headquarters: The Staff Room

Everything we do stems from collaboration and teamwork. During our meetings, we discuss what should be on the agenda, we determine what PD we need, we collaborate on what materials we need to order, and we get to set goals together with our principal. This helps us to build stability and sustainability regardless of who moves away or changes grades.

We also work on committees; for example, a few of us are on the Volunteer Program

Committee, a couple work on maintaining the Bookroom and a few others are in charge of ordering, labelling and distributing resources when they arrive. All of us share the jobs.



Volunteers help our students to become better readers.

That R Word, Oh Yes!

Research—we follow it daily, just like the soaps. Much of our research is homegrown, teacher-driven, embedded in our weekly team meetings and ongoing. We keep a direct line open to the resource teachers in our board. They provide in-services on assessment techniques, EQAO, shared reading, guided reading, etc. We feed on a steady diet of the works of gurus like Miller, Johnston, Serafini, Harvey and Cole.

Classroom Exchanges

As a staff, we share our own particular areas of expertise through classroom demonstration lessons. For example, a teacher with expertise in guided reading conducts lessons in other classrooms, modelling guided reading.

We also create lessons with our teaching partners; we develop and deliver a lesson in each other's classrooms. We discuss successes and areas for improvement. After that, the lesson is reworked, analyzed and improved upon before the partner teaches the same lesson. This allows us to continue to improve and share practices with one another without the fear of being judged. This is how we learn to become better teachers.

We go on excursions to visit other exemplary classrooms and learn from their practices. We also borrow ideas for strategies from the Japanese Lesson Plan Model. We are scavengers of best practices. During our meetings, we pick specific skills and share examples of student work that we have collected. Now we can see, for example, what Level 3 synthesis might look like in a Grade 1 class compared to that same skill in a Grade 3 class.

It's a Data-Driven World

We believe that all students can learn; we believe that, as teachers, we have the skills and the intention to help all students experience success and, like the Apollo mission, we believe that failure is not an option.

Information from Running Records, standardized tests like EQAO, CCAT and CAT3, classroom observations, student work and teacher conferences with students helps us to target specific areas for focused intervention. Second-language learners and special education students receive more direct and frequent help through the volunteer program.

During our divisional (or partner) meetings, we gather around the new watering hole called the Data Wall. At first, we charted decoding and comprehension; now we go deeper, targeting other essential reading skills, like making connections and synthesizing. At the watering hole, we gossip about our successes, we plan for the students at risk and we work on modifying our teaching to reach all students.

Higher Level Thinking

Deep and broad understanding requires complex and advanced-level thinking. We concentrate on analysis, synthesis and evaluation and ask probing questions to illicit high-level responses. We want kids to think about their thinking and understand how they think. We keep the language simple and consistent across the grades. This makes transitions easier for our students.

Our Community Partnerships Help Us Help the Kids

Spanish-speaking mothers meet regularly with one of our teachers to discuss their children's needs and to play volleyball.

Community Links has made us aware of all the available community resources.

Scientists in the Schools brings science and technology into our classes. The Toronto Zoo is our great supporter and brings an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional perspective to the concept of biodiversity.



The honourable Lieutenant Governor James Bartleman hosts luncheon at Queen's Park with "Twining" schools

Ontario's Lieutenant Governor invited us to "Twin" with Mary Jane Naveau First Nations School in Mattagami. This experience has brought a whole new world of experiences, including sensitivity to the living conditions of some of our native brothers and sisters. We have been transformed as a result of our association. Our students write to each other, share their stories and undertake joint projects. As colleagues, we help each other to develop professionally. We invite each other to participate in workshops, we videotape lessons in reading and send them to each other and we chit-chat via videocam about the things we really care about, like the students and feasting the Oji-Cree way. We have forged strong friendships that may last a lifetime, and we have planted seeds that will one day grow into great-grandfather pines.

Where Did We Go to Get Help and an Extra Pair of Hands?

To support struggling readers, we created a volunteer reading program. We found eager and knowledgeable help at the local colleges and universities; we recruited ECE students and teacher candidates to read with our students on a weekly basis. We trained our volunteers in specific reading strategies and provide one-to-one support for targeted students. This made a world of a difference for our kids. Their decoding skills improved, their confidence grew and their ability to make meaning of what they read skyrocketed. As well, students develop a personal attachment to their mentors and build relationships, which raises their confidence and self-esteem.

Literacy Is All About Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Communicating

It's about giving our young people a rich legacy of words and ideas with which to communicate,



I love creating things with my imagination.

understand their world and be understood. It's all about giving our kids the best chance to succeed and an equal footing in our society. Together, slowly and confidently, we have all come a long way. For us, this journey has taken us from "my students in my classroom" to "our students in our community."

Come up and see us sometime, and we can talk!

This article was written by St. Francis de Sales principal Carmel Preyra and a team of teachers at the school that includes Antonella Ricotta, Jonathan Purvis, Linda Bianchi, Mike Hewitt, Maria Curia, Stacey Hewitt and Ursula Petosa. ■



Calling all writers:

Next issue, our spotlight will be on Grade 9 math initiatives with feeder schools. We invite you to share strategies that are making a difference at your school.

Please see our [Writer's Guidelines](#).

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
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Data in Action



Photo by Lynn Ball, Ottawa Citizen

passionate about student success

by Marjorie Clegg

President of Maryholm Consulting

Former Head of Quality Assurance at the Ottawa-Carleton DSB

One of the most rewarding experiences for me is to see teachers, principals and parents getting excited about data. As a researcher, I expect to feel the passion myself, but it wasn't until I started helping school improvement teams use their data that I saw it in others. Of course, they weren't excited about the numbers but about the information those numbers gave them as a starting point

for discussions on how to help their students succeed.

When I was part of the Ottawa Carleton District School Board team responsible for providing some of this information to schools—and helping them use it—I organized time for the school improvement teams to get together and discuss the results of various kinds of testing. These teams, which often included principal, teachers and parents, and sometimes students, would spend time looking at the data, asking questions and putting all the pieces together.

As a school board, we had a lot of data to share at the school level, including results of EQAO testing, board-wide testing in mathematics, ability-testing, the Early Development Instrument and report cards. In addition, we had developed a “needs index,” which included a wide range of data on student demographics, some of which were summarized for schools to use in their planning. Finally, schools were asked to bring other information they thought might be relevant, such as absentee rates and school- or classroom-based assessment results.

Before the school improvement sessions, we made sure we provided the principals, as instructional leaders, with the knowledge and experience to use data effectively. We reinforced this professional development by extending it to teachers and other team members during the school improvement sessions, making sure to stress the following:

- 1** Every school is unique and has a distinctive character that comes from the community it serves. For instance, the school may have a significantly larger percentage of ESL students than the board or the province. We should always keep this in mind when interpreting results and reporting to the public.

Considering context is critical—not as an excuse but as an aide to deciding on strategies that might work to improve student achievement. The commitment to consider context resulted in, among other things, our school profiles, which report test results and summaries of school improvement plans within the context of school demographics, activities, etc.

2 In considering results over time, small increases or decreases from one year to the next are far less important than the general trend. Graphs showing these trends were prepared for the schools.

We know that each class is different, just as each student is different, and changes in achievement should be interpreted accordingly. For this reason, looking at change through a school year might be an additional step in the process.

3 There are many different ways to look at test results. For example, we shouldn't focus only on percentages of students that are at or above Level 3. You may want to know how many students are at each of the levels (e.g., Level 1 vs. Level 2), the percentage who have moved from one level to another or the percentage of male and female students performing at each level of achievement.

4 Where numbers of students are small, a few can have a dramatic impact on percentage fluctuations from one year to the next. In a class of 20, the difference between 60% and 70% of students meeting the standard is only two students.

5 EQAO assessment results need to be considered together with other school-based assessments. Are the results consistent across all these sources? What does each result tell you?

We also provided a checklist to help schools consolidate their information from different sources.

Most important, however, we provided the time to discuss what to do next, to look at what could be done to improve achievement at the school. To help with these discussions, we provided hard copies of research on instructional practices or strategies, including those developed by EQAO based on results from provincial testing. The resulting discussions were often wonderful to participate in, with new ideas, suggestions or affirmations heard throughout the room:

“Yes, let’s try that!”

Schools got a good start on their improvement plans during the session, using a template provided by the school board. At this stage, superintendents played a key role in the process, reviewing the plans and visiting schools to discuss progress.

Though the teams were there to discuss school results and come up with strategies or plans for the school as a whole, we did spend time talking about the necessity of looking at individual students.

**“Strive toward personal excellence,”
“strive toward success” and “reach personal potential.”**

Those of us who work in schools and boards are used to seeing these phrases in our mission statements—and believing in them for both ourselves and our students.

We are always looking for ways to improve achievement one student at a time. Data are the springboard to conversations leading the way to improvement. Teachers are the key to making this happen. Some teachers have recently adopted the “data wall” as a way of displaying information about a particular student for discussion among professional staff at the school.

Here are some of the questions and methods we encouraged schools to consider:

Ask

What are the student's strengths? → How can they be built on?

What are the student's weaknesses? → How can they be addressed?

How do I know? → How will I know I've made a difference?

Measure where the student is

Teachers can and do use data from a variety of sources to measure where a student is, including running records, anchor booklets and exemplars, classroom assessments, ability and achievement test results (e.g., CCAT and EQAO), report card marks, absentee rates, teacher observation, homework completion and student attitudes. Are these results consistent? Do they make sense? Are they what was expected? How is this student doing compared to others in his or her class? or those of a similar demographic background (e.g., males vs. females, ESL)?

Determine what to aim for

Set sensible but challenging goals for the student to work toward. Where do you think the student should be in one month? several months? at the end of the year?

Provide support and encouragement

What needs to happen to move this student forward, to increase his or her level of achievement and help him or her reach the goals you've set?

Does the student need special help?

What best practices are there for ESL students? students with special needs? boys vs. girls?

What supports are available from other school staff? the board office?

How can the teacher and parents work together?

Measure progress

Periodically through the year, measure where students are (e.g., through running records or classroom assessments). Report progress for individuals and the group as a whole. Use more than one data source! Consult many of the same sources that

were used to determine where the students were at the beginning of the year and compare those results with where students are at the end of the year.

Most important, use data to talk about students and their achievements. This process can form the basis of an individual student plan—or a school action plan or improvement plan. The excitement comes from looking at the data and deciding what to do next. Moving students forward—one at a time—eventually adds up to a whole school. ■

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

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How Would You Score This? _____

try your hand at scoring a student response!



Use this rubric to score this Grade 6 mathematics question and then check out the rationale for the correct code.

Sample Question and Answer

Pie is served at a picnic. Each pie is made up of 6 equal pieces. Bradley records the number of pieces each person eats in the table below.

Name	Gurleen	Max	Ta-Shanya	Stewart	Brianne	Adrian
Number of Pieces Eaten	3	2	2	3	3	1

How many pies are eaten in total? Express your answer as a fraction.
Show your work.

There are 14 pieces eaten in total.

$B = \frac{3}{14}$ $A = \frac{1}{14}$ $M = \frac{2}{14}$ $T = \frac{2}{14}$ $S = \frac{3}{14}$ $B = \frac{3}{14}$

I drew pictures of pie cut up into 6 slices each. I put each letter on how many slices they ate. B = Brianne A = Adrian and so on.

They eat 2 and 2 pieces of pie.

EQAO Grade 6 Generic Rubric

Code	Description
B	Blank — nothing written or drawn in response
I	Illegible, irrelevant, off topic

Quick Tips:



Consider posting the open-response mathematics rubric along with the anchor papers on your classroom bulletin board, so students can reflect on their progress toward the provincial numeracy standard.

Useful Resources:



The following documents can be downloaded by educators, parents and students to support numeracy

improvement:

 [Student Assessments and Scoring Guides](#)

10	Problem-solving process of comparing and ordering fractional amounts shows limited effectiveness due to • minimal evidence of a solution process • limited identification of important elements of the problem • too much emphasis on unimportant elements of the problem • no conclusions presented • conclusion presented without supporting evidence
20	Problem-solving process of comparing and ordering fractional amounts shows some effectiveness due to • an incomplete solution process • identification of some of the important elements of the problem • some understanding of the relationships between important elements of the problem • simple conclusions with little supporting evidence
30	Problem-solving process of comparing and ordering fractional amounts shows considerable effectiveness due to • a solution process that is nearly complete • identification of most of the important elements of the problem • a considerable understanding of the relationships between important elements of the problem • appropriate conclusions with supporting evidence
40	Problem-solving process of comparing and ordering fractional amounts shows a high degree of effectiveness due to • a complete solution process • identification of all important elements of the problem • a thorough understanding of the relationships between all of the important elements of the problem • appropriate conclusions with thorough and insightful supporting evidence

[View score and rationale](#)

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A Teacher's Resource for Large-Scale Assessments

EQAO CONNECTS

WEBMAG

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Spring 2007



Fast Facts

1. It takes approximately three years to produce an EQAO test.
2. Every test item has been independently scrutinized by various committees of Ontario educators for curriculum fit and fairness for the province's diverse student population.
3. All reading, writing and mathematics items are field tested with Ontario students before they are included on an assessment.
4. When the tests are scored, they are distributed randomly and anonymously to scorers. Scorers are not given the region, student name or school name.
5. Previous years' test items with scoring rubrics and sample student responses are available on our [Web site](#).
6. Contextual information about students (e.g., on reading habits) is collected through the Student Questionnaire.



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Writer's Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in contributing to *EQAO Connects*.

We publish three times a year. In each issue, we provide a forum for teachers to share effective classroom practices and advice for helping students develop numeracy and literacy skills.

Please submit an outline for either

- "View from the Front of the Class" or
- "Spotlight."

The deadline for your outline is **September 20, 2007**.

If your idea is chosen, we'll ask you to detail your strategy for your colleagues in 500 to 1000 words for the issue.

View from the Front of the Class:

The theme for this article in our next issue, fall 2007, is "preparing for my new Grade 4 students."

Are you a Grade 4 teacher that uses EQAO data from the primary division assessment to help plan for your incoming classes at the start of the school year? We invite you to share your story with your colleagues across the province and explain how you use this information to help students entering the junior division develop their reading, writing and math skills.

Submit your article outline at eqaoconnects@eqao.com.

Spotlight on Success:

The theme for this article in our next issue, fall 2007, is "Grade 9 math initiatives with feeder schools."

Share with teachers across Ontario ways in which your high school works with its feeder schools and the successful results.

Give us your outline for an article: eqaoconnects@eqao.com.

Thank you! We appreciate hearing from you.

TIPS

- This webmag is for busy people like you who need to get their information quickly and effortlessly. So write in your natural voice, as if you were talking to a colleague over coffee.
- When describing strategies or exercises, it can be helpful to break them down into easy-to-follow steps.
- Please be sure to include pertinent details:
 - the name and location of your school;
 - the grade and subject you teach;
 - relevant school or class demographics and challenges and
 - your contact information.

Let us know if you have visuals (a picture of yourself or other images to accompany the article).

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We appreciate learning your response to our survey question. We'll report back on significant findings in our next issue.

Do you use the following resources available on the EQAO Web site to inform your lesson planning?

	Yes	No	Didn't know it existed
Teacher Bulletins: Describe test features and lists resources for teachers.			
Assessment Frameworks: Describe each assessment and explains how it relates to the <i>Ontario Curriculum</i> expectations.			
Sample Assessments: Provide sample multiple-choice and open-response questions.			
Key Words: Identify the type of response required from students through words used in questions on EQAO assessments.			
Formula Sheets (Grade 9): Provide the measurement formulas students use.			
Guidelines for the Use of Item Information Reports: Describe approaches for the appropriate interpretation of student results.			
Guide for Accommodations, a Special Provision and Exemptions (Primary/Junior Divisions): Describe policy and procedures for special-needs students, English-language learners and special circumstances.			
Guide for Accommodations and Special Provisions (Grade 9): Describe policy and procedures for special-needs students, English-language learners and special circumstances.			
Planning and Preparation Guide (OSSLT): Describes the reading and writing skills assessed and the kinds of questions; provides sample test materials and tips for preparing students prior to the test.			
Getting Ready Guide (OSSLT): Provides students with details about test content, instructions for doing the test and tips for doing well.			
Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Exemptions and Deferrals (OSSLT): Describes policy and procedures for special needs students, English-language learners and special circumstances.			
Administration Guides: Provide detailed steps for teachers and principals.			

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Ask EQAO!

**Curious about EQAO and large-scale assessments?
Share your questions. EQAO will answer common queries
in the next issue.**

Here's an example of a question and a response:

How does EQAO ensure that tests and test results are comparable from year to year so that we can reliably track growth and do meaningful trend-over-time analyses?

EQAO ensures comparability in a number of ways.

- Each year's tests are based on a blueprint that ensures the consistency of the assessment over time. The blueprint ensures the characteristics of each test are the same. It dictates the number, type and degree of difficulty of items. All that changes is the content. This consistency means that the student experience of the test is the same every year and the results of the test are comparable over time.
- EQAO test scorers are always trained to the same specifications, using the same scoring rubrics year to year.
- EQAO embeds field-test materials in each year's assessments. The test for the following year is constructed from a selection of items that field tested best. Field testing provides data that are used to equate each year's test with that of the previous year, so that results can be compared validly. (Fewer than 20 percent of the items on the assessment are field-test items, and these are not counted toward the student's score.)
- EQAO uses well-established Item Response Theory (IRT) statistical equating procedures that not only equate tests across the years, but also adjust for the slight difference in difficulty that may occur in the test from one year to the next. In this way, EQAO can be sure that the results are comparable from one year to the next.

Questions

Your question will be received anonymously. EQAO will not be able to respond individually to questions submitted through this box.

For questions regarding this **web magazine**, please e-mail us at eqaoconnects@eqao.com.
For general inquiries about EQAO requiring an individual response, please use our [general inquiries form](#).



Welcome | Coffee Break | View from the Front of the Class | The Key to Good Assessments | Spotlight
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