

# The TRILLIUM

Summer 2010

A Resource for the Ontario Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development



*Ontario ASCD, a diverse community that promotes excellence in education, is dedicated to supporting the growth and success of each learner.*

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## EVIDENCE TO ACTION // EXEMPLARY CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

### The One Thing You Need to Know *It's a Secret Hidden in Plain Sight*

by Karen Hume

There are dozens of books about assessment because it is a complex topic and a crucial part of everything that we do in the classroom. As teachers, we accept that assessment is a way to help move students forward and that it provides us with evidence about whether our actions in the classroom are working. Yet we struggle with assessment because it is seldom an easy task to embed it in a specific, teaching moment in ways that are simultaneously systematic, rigorous, flexible, and responsive to diverse student needs.

Making our assessment practices both meaningful and manageable is a daunting task, especially when there are so many other demands on our time. As a result, we do the best we can—we read books, talk with our colleagues, and attend conferences. From one source, we take a good idea for recording marks; in another, we find a rubric we can use in our poetry unit; from a third, we learn about the characteristics of effective feedback. We hope that over time we will become more comfortable with our assessment practices and the professional judgments that arise from them. But, for many of us, the calm, confident certainty we seek seems light-years away.

### WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT THERE'S A SINGLE ACTION YOU CAN TAKE THAT WILL BE ENORMOUSLY HELPFUL

What if I told you that there's a single action you can take that will be enormously helpful, not just in assessing appropriately but in differentiating our instruction effectively? It's a secret hidden in plain sight; an action that seems too obvious to be meaningful.

Before I share the secret, please decide which one of these three guiding questions from the National Research Council (2001) is easiest for you to answer when thinking about your classroom and which one is most challenging:

1. Where are you trying to go?
2. Where are you now?
3. How can you get there?

For many of us, our strengths lie in answering question 3. We tend to be highly skilled at finding or creating the teaching and learning actions that will move our students forward.

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IN THE FALL ISSUE OF  
THE TRILLIUM

### Instructional Coaching



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Question 2 is answered by the assessment *for* learning practices we employ. However, for assessment to be meaningful and useful, it must be based on clearly defined learning goals (the first question) and that, I respectfully suggest, is where many of us still need to do some work. That's the one thing we need to know and do—plan our instruction and assessment *after* we have defined a clear learning goal and the corresponding indicators of success.

Consider the following curriculum expectation: Listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes.

At first glance, this expectation seems straightforward, and open-ended enough to allow great latitude in choosing or designing activities that will provide students with a variety of listening experiences, and teachers with a number of opportunities to assess students' listening skills. However, when we attempt to conduct our assessments for or of learning, we find that while we usually recognize the signs when someone is not listening, recognizing successful listening is more difficult, and defining degrees of successful listening is more difficult still.

To teach so that students will learn, we must not only clearly identify our goals, but also deconstruct those goals so that we know exactly what a student will accomplish in each section of Ontario's Achievement Chart. Then we need to share that information with our students.

When students know the details of how they are to be assessed, and understand the nuances of differences among various levels of achievement, they feel greater ownership of their learning and their engagement in the learning increases. When students are involved in determining the details of how they are to be assessed and in elaborating on the nuances of differences among various levels of achievement, their sense of ownership increases even further.

Here's part of a line master from one of my new assessment books. You can use it to self-assess the measures you take to ensure that your assessment goals are clear to you and your students.



## CLEARLY IDENTIFYING THE LEARNING GOAL AND INDICATORS OF SUCCESS IS THE FIRST STEP

Clearly identifying the learning goal and indicators of success is the first step in Wiggins and McTighe's model of backward design (2005). This step is critical to the next two, which are:

- Determining what evidence is going to show that students have done the learning
- Designing lessons aligned with the measures of achievement you identified in the previous step. (Planning for differentiated instruction also benefits from backward design. It's much easier to determine options when the learning goal and indicators of success are clear.)

When planning follows the backward design sequence assessment and instruction are aligned, and the tasks of planning, teaching, and assessing become effective, efficient, and pleasurable. Let's not keep the secret any longer! 🍁

National Research Council (2001). *Classroom assessment and the national science education standards*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*, 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Karen Hume is an Ontario teacher, administrator, Student Success Leader and, most recently, full-time author, keynote speaker, and workshop facilitator. Karen's books for teachers are appreciated for their focus on practical and achievable research-based strategies. The books, all published by Pearson Canada, are: *Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent*; a two-book set about assessment—*Evidence to Action* and *50 Tools and Techniques for Classroom Assessment* and, due to be released this fall, *Tuned Out: Engaging the 21st Century Learner*.

### NOVICE

The goal is stated in the language of the curriculum.

If the assessment tool allows for different levels of achievement, this information is not provided to students in advance, or is provided with minimal helpful detail.

### PRACTITIONER

The goal is stated as an activity.

If the assessment tool allows for different levels of achievement, the criteria for success are delineated; however, students may not know how to progress through the levels.

### EXPERT

The goal is stated in student friendly terms and clearly explains what the student will know, understand, and be able to do when the goal is achieved.

If the assessment tool allows for different levels of achievement, the criteria for each level are delineated so clearly that students know what they need to do to progress through the levels.

## Ontario ASCD's First Web Conference!

Well we did it! With the help of Karen Hume, Pearson Canada and Curriculum Services Canada, Ontario ASCD and SEAL (Standards for Excellence And Learning) coordinated our first web conference! We established several targets:

1. To support the importance of assessment "action" based on evidence
2. To service more teachers in more schools across Ontario.
3. To ensure an affordable offer (recognizing that many PD budgets are slashed and traveling to one place can require additional travel and accommodation)
4. To support the professional development of teams of teachers in one school.
5. To provide an interactive forum (so participants could learn from Karen and others contributing to the professional conversation.)
6. To learn more about this PD medium

We decided to walk our talk and make our evidence transparent in order to further enlist additional feedback from our Ontario ASCD newsletter readers and 'responders'.

54 school sites took part in our first webinar. Most sites hosted teams of teachers. At the end of the morning and the afternoon session, all participants were asked to provide immediate feedback. This data was compiled by Curriculum Services Canada, and now it is summarized to prompt further discussion to answer the question:

How should we proceed with web conferencing option for professional growth?

According to Curriculum Services Canada: "From the comfort of their own offices or homes, participants engage in meaningful professional dialogue through oral discussion and online interaction".

I've organized the responses according to the feedback with respect to the discussion as well as ideas to consider with respect to the technical aspect of this professional growth experience"

*Continued on page 4 ►*



*Limestone professional learning presents . . .*

# COACHING INSTITUTE with Dr. Jim Knight

**October 14 – 15, 2010 & April 18 – 19, 2011—Downtown Kingston, Ontario**

This four-day interactive learning institute is ideal for administrators, instructional coaches, and district staff who facilitate professional learning. Participants will gain a solid foundation regarding the principles of instructional coaching and understand what good coaching looks like and how to achieve it. In this you will learn how to support change in classrooms through meaningful dialogue, reflection, and planning.

### Who should attend?

This is most appropriate for professional developers, and other educational professionals, who are interested in learning about how to accelerate professional learning in schools and districts including school administrators, school leaders, instructional coaches, supervisory officers, system professional learning consultants, and teachers.

### Coaching Institute Registration Form participants are responsible for booking their own accommodations; please see hotel information below

CONTACT NAME		EMAIL	
SCHOOL BOARD / SCHOOL	# PARTICIPANTS	PHONE	FAX
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**October 14–15, 2010**

*Four Points Sheraton*

**1-888-478-4333**

*Room rates will be held until September 13, 2010*

**April 18–19, 2011**

*Holiday Inn*

**1-613-549-8400**

*Room rates will be held until March 17, 2011*

**Cheque enclosed: \$640\* x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Please send registration and cheque to: LDSB**

Attn: Susan Saccary

220 Portsmouth Ave, Kingston, ON K7L 4X4

*\*includes Ontario ASCD annual membership; for current Ontario ASCD members and EOSDN board members, \$599*



## Notable Quotes:

*"That I need to continue to have more conversations about feedback and to continue to work on providing descriptive feedback to my students in order to assist them with creating goals. I need to work on creating better goals and making sure my students know what those goals are. Our bump-it up walls are a start."*

*"I connected with Karen's point about feedback needing to involve a combination of pressure and support."*

*"The knowledge that we don't HAVE to do this all the time to help the students was supportive."*

*"Karen was very inviting in her questions so I felt safe no matter what I knew or didn't know."*

*"We felt that the process and delivery were great. We look forward to looking through the 50 tips book that was supplied. We really enjoyed the video clips and benefited from watching the "real-life" classroom exemplars. Perhaps a few more videos could be used in the future."*

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### Discussion—Expected "Take Aways"

- Formative assessment ideas
- Need to include students in the assessment process (writing rubrics...self assessment)
- Importance of clear goals; clarifying criteria
- Significance of immediate feedback
- Need to determine student readiness knowledge before planning
- Assess LESS

### Technical—Expected "Take Aways"

- An agenda ahead of time
- No break - like face to face - but it worked
- More time to reflect, read the postings of others, and then have a chance to think.
- Video feed of presenter would help
- Phone mechanism is cumbersome compared to other platforms, such as Wimba or Elluminate.
- Having more than one person at a sight made it hard to participate in the full conversation
- Needed books in advance; materials arrived in plenty of time
- Good to be able to interact with others without needing to travel.

### Discussion—Unexpected "Take Aways"

- Make sure the students have time to do something with the feedback
- Distinction between self report and self assessment (4)
- Activities not the same as goals (3)
- Using misconceptions to teach a concept
- Need to improve rubrics; checklist rubrics
- Need criteria written in student language
- Review Differentiated Instruction and it's role in assessment for learning

### Technical—Expected "Take Aways"

- Video would not play
- Hard to follow chats/responses of other's in small box area, scrolled too fast
- More time for questions at the end
- Does Karen have a partner whose expertise is in primary/junior?
- I'm looking forward to receiving a copy of this webinar. There were some comments during the chat sessions that I didn't have time to read.
- Can we have Karen Hume do a Book Club type conference once we've had time to go through her books?

### How experienced are you with web conferencing

New – 19%;  
Experienced – 41%;  
Confident users – 39%

### Want to be informed of future conferences:

Yes – 95% (41/43)  
No – 5% (2/43)

### Some Suggestions for further professional learning topics:

- Going further indepth on how to mark,

especially for high

school Math and Music

- Self-assessment tools
- Literacy and numeracy
- Effective leadership
- Disengaged youth and motivating students
- 21st Century learner
- Tuned Out (related to educators and students)
- Differentiated Instruction
- Critical thinking
- FSL instruction... geared towards French immersion

- Metacognition

- Writer's workshop

- Visual instructions

- Co-Operative Learning

- Using technology

- in the classroom

- Follow up after we set

- goals and practice

Well we took a risk

and tried on a new

professional learning

process. As you can

read by the feedback by

the participants in the

projects, our electronic

delegates were eager

to provide constructive

feedback so that when

we take on future Web

conferences, we will

continue to improve

the experience. We'd

like to continue this

conversation so we

invite folks to comment

and continue Karen's

conversation. 🍁

**Click here to add**

**your ideas ...**

**[dave.bird@ascd.ca](mailto:dave.bird@ascd.ca)**

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Take Aways