> Meet the A•S•K… a process for assessing reading and responding skills in gr.1-12

During the **A•S•K** assessment learners apply skills and knowledge as they connect to text, read/view and analyze text, summarize and synthesize understandings, and generate written responses to open-ended tasks (fiction or non-fiction). Through the process learners show where they are in relation to learning outcomes in the curriculum[1], and in relation to important 21st century skills[2]. Achievement is documented using standards[3/4] set for learners of a similar age, outlined on a continuum of grade-specific skill development[5].

Each grade-level of the **A•S•K assessment** uses a protocol[6], a skill continuum, and the *SmartLearning*[7] process to show achievement in relation to the following skills:

1. **Goal setting:** learners use co-constructed criteria and self knowledge to express personal *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goals[8].
   - Learners focus brain activity[9, 10 to] support work towards goal achievement. Self-monitoring and self-regulating[11] is encouraged throughout the process. In grades 3-12 learners identify a plan for achieving their goals.
2. **Activating knowledge and making connections:** learners use prior knowledge to make significant connections to tasks, prompts and text.
3. **Questioning:** learners generate and justify questions that connect meaningfully to the tasks, prompts and text.
4. **Predicting and inferring**: learners generate and justify predictions and inferences that probe the ideas suggested by the tasks, topics, prompts and text.
5. **Processing information and reflecting on reading** (Gr.1 & 2):
   - The text is chunked[12, 13] into two sections, and with a task in mind the learners read, think with, and apply their skills and knowledge to one section at a time.
   - Following the reading of each section, the learners generate images[14] and ideas to develop their understandings; make connections; generate questions, inferences and predictions; and with their task and goals in mind, reflect on their reading. They identify evidence of being powerful readers, use class generated criteria and emerging self knowledge to set a new goal, and explain why the new goal is personally appropriate.

   Processing information and reflecting on reading (Gr.3-12):
   - The text is chunked[12, 13] into three sections, and with tasks and personal goals in mind the learners read, think with, and apply their skills and knowledge to one section at a time.
   - Following the reading of each section, learners generate images and detailed ideas[14]; summarize and synthesize information into a keyword gist (caption or headline)[15;] generate new connections; develop and justify questions; develop further predictions or hypotheses (non-fiction; synthesize and justify the meaning in the text; and then with their tasks and reading goals in mind, reflect on their reading skills. They find evidence of meeting their personal stretch goals for reading, identify personal, use class generated criteria and emerging self knowledge to set a new goal and explain why the new goal is personally appropriate.

6. **Transforming understanding and reflecting on writing:** (Gr.1&2):

- Learners engage in open-ended response tasks by writing in role to retell and interpret text. They identify evidence of being a powerful writer, use class generated criteria and emerging self knowledge to set a new goal for writing/responding to text, and begin to explain why their new goal is personally appropriate.

Transforming understanding and reflecting on writing/responding to text (gr.3-12)

- Learners use class generated criteria for powerful response to set a personal stretch goal for writing/responding. They explain how they plan to achieve their individual goals and focus brain activity to support work towards goal achievement. Following the writing, they use the criteria and emerging self knowledge to identify evidence of meeting their goals, identify personal strengths in their writing, and set a new goal for writing/responding to text. They explain how the new goal is personally appropriate.

Aligning teaching and assessing… realizing the goal

In the *SmartLearning* approach we strive to align teaching and assessment. At the beginning of the year, term or semester teachers establish *SmartLearning* routines. Once the learners are comfortable with the *SmartLearning* process, structured partner-talk, and some of the *BrainSmart* thinking tools associated with *SmartLearning,* teachers use the **A•S•K** assessment process to gather baseline achievement information. Learners are active partners in this process. Their personalized goal-setting is based on what they learn about their own strengths and challenges through the process. Learners are challenged to set and achieve *s-t-r-e-t-c-h* goals.

Anchoring and marking

Teams of teachers work in groups to anchor the student papers, before assessing individual achievement. Five or six papers that reflect a cross-section of grade-specific achievement levels are copied. The teachers use an **A•S•K Skills Continuum** for their grade level to assess and reach agreement on the skill achievement seen in each of the anchor papers. Once agreement has been achieved, individual papers are marked using the scales and the anchor papers as a guide.

As each teacher assesses individual papers (s) he develops a *Class Trend Sheet,* noting each learner's strengths and areas for improvement. Skills to target for instruction are identified from an analysis of the trends sheet.

Planning for higher understanding and independent application to personalized learning[16, 17.]

Teachers analyze the *Class Trend* information and plan *SmartLearning* sequences tailored to develop specific skills sets. They use the *SmartLearning* framework and a kit of *BrainSmart thinking* tools to develop higher understanding and lasting learning with the whole class (H•U•L•L). Learners are then guided to **m**•indfully **a**•pply their **s**•kills and **t**•ools to *just-right-texts*, texts read fluently and with understanding at the speed of speech, during daily guided independent reading (M•A•S•T).

Over time learners are guided to 'go-**s**•olo' and **a**•pply the *SmartLearning* framework and tools to **i**•ndependent **l**•earning -- personal inquiries or investigations -- through disciplined explorations (S•A•I•L). Through the process learners flexibly and creatively apply their skills and knowledge to matters of substance [2, 15,17,18].

The Power of Design-based Action Research
The *SmartLearning* framework was founded during the multi-district *Learning for Success Research* project, co-led by Susan Close and SFU professor emeritus Milton McClaren (1994-2002). The practices and related tools have been continually informed and refined through cycles of design-based action research. Action research teams[19,]studying the effects of *SmartLearning* on growth and achievement over time, have a history of guiding learners through an assessment protocol, anchoring and collaborative marking, and using the findings to develop and implement new plans for learning. The cycles of action research have always been informed by annual literature reviews, emerging findings from the learning sciences, and from the refining of inquiry questions. The professional interactions have grown into professional learning cycles that include classroom-based learning rounds[20] and opportunities for co-planning and co-teaching.

Aligning Assessment and teaching… realizing the goal
The A•S•K assessment process grew out of a 2010 need to fully align assessment practices with the evolving teaching practices in *SmartLearning*. In the past few years, the assessment practices in *SmartLearning* have grown to include an emphasis on assessment *as learning,* as well as the on-going focus on assessment *for* and *of* learning*.* Findings inform both formative and summative planning for teaching, and goal-setting for learning. Through the on-going assessment practices woven into each *SmartLearning* sequence, learners **gain insights into their own learning**. They use class-generated criteria, and self knowledge, to set goals. They use icons to focus and monitor brain activity as the learning unfolds. They self-regulate, find evidence of meeting their goals, and notice strengths in their learning. They set new goals, in light of a growing understanding about their own learning and offer a rationale for the goal choice.

An observer in a K-12 *SmartLearning* environment will see each learner supported as the teacher gradually releases responsibility. The learning is carefully guided and supported toward thoughtful application of skills and knowledge to ever-increasing learning tasks, over time. The learning realizes the goals of inclusivity and differentiation

WordWork*, and Integral Component of *SmartLearning
A thread through the *SmartLearning* system of practice is the development of vocabulary and orthographic knowledge. In *SmartLearning*, we call this thread, *WordWork*. To develop orthographic knowledge or how words work, we use Words Their Way[21], a Pearson publication. We are continually amazed at the power of the approach. Brain-friendly routines are used to systematically and thoughtfully develop a continuum of word knowledge and vocabulary skills. The approach has a vibrant effect on reading fluency, and standard spelling is a most welcomed by-product. Teachers also use a range of *BrainSmart* tools to deeply develop vocabulary across curricular areas.

2011-2012 Action Research Team work with the A•S•K assessment
We launched the **A•S•K assessment** (Gr.1-12) during our 2011 B.C. and Alberta summer institutes. After presenting the thinking and research behind the protocols and each grade-level skill continuum, we invited participants to develop a school or district-based action research or inquiry team. We see the **A•S•K assessment as an integral component of *SmartLearning*,** and we see the assessment process being used with teams of people implementing and studying the effects of *SmartLearning* on growth and achievement, over time.

The a•r•t in *Sm**art**Learning* has come from over twenty-five years of action oriented study -- work continually informed by findings emerging from the learning sciences, and from the analysis of the effects of *SmartLearning* practices on growth and achievement.

An invitation

If you are currently working to implement the *SmartLearning* approach, and interested in developing a local action learning project, please contact Susan Close: susan@susanclose.ca. The **A•S•K materials** (protocols, student response sheets, skills continua and trend sheets) are included in training sessions provided by *SmartLearning* trainers.

We have a number of action research teams up and running in B.C. districts, in the Northern Territories and in Alberta divisions. During our 2012 summer institutes we will feature findings from the projects.

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