

Appendix 2: An overview of the A•S•K Skills Assessment

Welcome to the A•S•K.

Background

The A•S•K assessment is a process for assessing reading and responding, K-12. The process was designed to show how well learners are able to apply their skills and knowledge to texts they can read and understand, and it stands alone as a tool for that use. The skills assessed through the A•S•K are ones featured as outcomes or learning intentions in English Language Arts documents across the globe (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, 2012; OECD, 2009, 2011; National Research Council, 2012), and are skills now embedded in every curriculum. They are also ones learners need for critical thinking, critical literacy, and self-regulation.

The A•S•K assessment process was also designed to align with the teaching practices in *SmartLearning*. Years ago Richard Allington (2002) challenged educators to align teaching and testing. The first work to align testing and teaching was started in SD40, New Westminster. Through the district research team work (2000-2006), the *SmartReading* assessment and the *Reading Assessment Record* (RAR) were developed and implemented. Since that time the cycles of inquiry-based action research have expanded into other areas of B.C., Alberta and the Northern Territories, as *SmartLearning*. Each cycle of research included a literature review of findings in the learning sciences, and feedback from the classroom-based interactions. Findings always led to refinements to the *SmartLearning* teaching practices and to new tools being added to the *SmartLearning* toolkit.

In the fall of 2009 it was time to revisit and re-align assessment with current teaching practices in *SmartLearning*. Susan Close worked with Ann Nottingham, Erika Warkentin, Nadya Rickard (New Westminster), and Ingrid Fawcett (Greater Victoria) to develop and test the first prototypes. In 2010 and 2011 during action research cycles in B.C., Alberta and the Northern Territories, the prototypes were field-tested, studied and refined with input from everyone involved. Bev Krieger, MaryAnn McLean, Tammy Kay (SD67); Patricia Pain, Carrie Ng, Robin Speed (SD40), and Tammy Renyard (SD61) - along with the originators of the prototypes - led aspects of the classroom-based study. The result of that extensive fieldwork is the 2012-2013 A•S•K. Through the process, assessment is learning for all concerned.

The thinking and research behind the A•S•K assessment

1. A focus on basic literacy, critical literacy and self-regulation*

Learners of today experience a constant stream of ideas and information through mass media, print, on-line interactions, electronic games and television. They need skills to determine where to direct their attention, and how to interpret messages and use them appropriately. They need both basic literacy and critical literacy to come to terms with the types of text that surround them, to ask questions, to examine viewpoints (their own and others), to take a stand, and to clarify the issues and relationships. Critical literacy goes beyond understanding literacy as a set of skills and practices (Ontario Curriculum, 2009). In critical literacy readers explicitly analyze the author's message (Pearson, 2002, in McLaughlin and DeVogt, 2004).

A major goal of education is to help people become self-regulated learners. Self-regulated learning is particularly important for learning in environments where learners are exposed to so many sources of information, in different forms. Often at the speed they receive information, they make decisions and respond just as quickly (Delvecchio, 2012). Being critically literate is not only central, but necessary to being literate in a media-saturated, diverse world (Comber, 2001).

Self-regulated learning involves having useful generative learning skills and strategies that include:

- Setting personal learning goals
- Activating prior knowledge
- Interacting, *thinking with*, and responding to text:

Asking questions, generating images and ideas, generating inferences and connections summarizing, analyzing, synthesizing, elaborating, interpreting, drawing conclusions, generating and justifying perspectives...

- Assessing the adequacy, accuracy and authenticity of the information
- Monitoring, regulating, and controlling cognitive processing during learning
- Reflecting, and assessing how well they are learning (Azevedo & Cromley, 2004; BC ELA Curriculum, 2006/2012; Winne, 2001, 2011)

*Note: The skills remain constant; text complexity increases from grade-to-grade

2. A focus on metacognition

Self-regulated learners have both metacognitive awareness – they know learning strategies that work for them – and metacognitive control – they recognize when it is appropriate to use them during learning. Self-regulated learners understand how they learn and take responsibility for monitoring and controlling their learning (Mayer, 2009; Winne, 2011).

For years research findings and curriculum documents have identified metacognitive strategies as critical skills for deeper learning (Hattie, 2012; Shayer and Adey, 1981; B.C. ELA Curriculum, 2006; Schwartz and Perkins, 1997; Bransford, 2000; Walberg et al, 1996; McClaren, 2001). Deeper learning involves knowing when and why to use lower and higher-order skills in pursuit of understanding (in Pellegrino et al 2012, www.nationalacademies.org/dbasse). Reflective thinking is a critical component of the A•S•K. Everyone connected to the assessment learns more about each learner's metacognition: goal-setting, skill with monitoring and adjusting learning, and how they use their developing understandings to guide their own learning.

3. A focus on reading and writing for deeper learning

Current reading research supports a view that emphasizes reading and writing for meaning and deeper learning, balancing basic and more advanced processes, at all stages of reading. The Four Resources Model of reading defines reading for deeper learning. Through the Four Resources Model, readers at all stages of reading -- including early reading -- become decoders, meaning-makers, text analysts, and text critics.

- **The reader as decoder:** the reader builds a coherent text base where each idea is tested for coherence with all the previous ideas gleaned from a close reading of the text.
- **The reader as meaning maker:** the reader develops meaning based on the task at hand, the ideas in the text, and on his/her prior knowledge.
- **The reader as text analyst:** the reader considers how the author's choice of words, form, and structure shape regard for different characters, an issue, or event. The reader tries to evaluate the validity of the arguments, the ideas and the images presented.

- **The reader as text critic:** What intentions, subtexts or motives are at play in the text? What are the various goals of the author? (Freebody and Luke, 1997, in Pellegrino et al 2012, www.nationalacademies.org/dbasse)

We were touched very deeply by a finding coming out research on analysis and critique:

“...unless one focuses directly on analysis and critique, through reading and discussion of ideas, it is not likely to emerge on its own” (Murphy et al, 2009).

4. A focus on engaging with challenging tasks

Through *SmartLearning* interactions and through the A•S•K assessment learners are invited to respond to tasks that invite them to both analyze and critique texts.

For more than twenty years now, the *SmartLearning* model has invited learners to develop deeper thinking and sophisticated understanding by engaging with challenging tasks. We thank Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe for their important universal design work. We feel grateful for their influence on our practices. Through reading with different task/s and skills in mind, readers have opportunities to engage as decoders, meaning-makers, analysts, and critics.

5. A focus on using imagery to develop deeper understanding

We thank Dr. Michael Pressley for personally encouraging us, very early in our research, to focus on concept imagery as a way of dramatically increasing reading comprehension. His generous guidance led to a deeper understanding of the role of imagery in comprehension. Dr. Pressley's influence ultimately led to the development of the *SmartLearning* coaching cards. Sadly, Michael passed away on May 23, 2006 from cancer complications. His footprint will always be felt in the developing work of *SmartLearning*. We shared with him the dramatic gains made in SD40 (New Westminster) prior to the publishing of *Driven by questions, inspired by findings: one district's strategy to improve literacy achievement*, in November 2005 (www.slc.educ.ubc.ca/eJournal/Issue2/Close.pdf).

Components of the ASK

Each level of the A•S•K comes with an A•S•K Skills Continuum, a protocol, student response pages, and a Class Trends Sheet. Teachers analyze the Class Trends Sheet and use the information to guide their planning and teaching. Learners use the information gleaned from the assessment to set personal goals for their own learning.

1. Texts

Texts are provided for the A•S•K in Gr.3-9 (fiction): baseline, mid-year/semester, and year/semester end. In Grade 1 and 2 teachers use leveled texts from sets like PM Benchmarks or ones published by *Pearson*, Scholastic or other publishing houses. The A•S•K process works with any text, fiction or non-fiction. Specific guidance for applying the process to fiction or non-fiction texts is provided in the protocols.

2. The A•S•K Skills Continuum

Each A•S•K Skills Continuum was derived from the B.C. Performance Standards (1998), and the Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continua (2009). You will notice the *Not Yet Meeting* category is missing on each continuum. Achievement on the A•S•K reflects how well learners are able to read and respond to texts they can read and understand. If learners are reading below grade level, their achievement is documented using an A•S•K Skills Continuum at that grade-level.

In *SmartLearning* classrooms, the A•S•K Skills Continuum is used on a regular basis to guide planning and teaching. Following whole-class work on learning sequences designed to scaffold skill development over time, and during the parallel independent reading process when learners are guided to apply their skills to *just-right* texts of choice – texts read at 98% accuracy -- teachers note achievement in relation to a particular skill focus (Allington, 2002/2012). Planning evolves from the learning.

3. Orthographic Continuum

On the back of each A•S•K Skills Continuum is an orthographic continuum. This scale reflects word knowledge for English, and is not grade specific. *SmartLearning* classrooms use Words Their Way practices to systematically develop word knowledge through the grades. The word knowledge developed through the *WordWork* routines increases reading fluency and leads to standard spelling (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton and Johnson, 2004).

4. One-to-one Reading Conference Guide

A *One-to-one Reading Conference Guide* is on the back of each A•S•K Skills Continuum. The skills outlined in the guide are ones teachers see developing over time. Through daily work and one-to-one conferencing, teachers identify individual achievement levels related to the skills.

5. Validity and reliability

We also thank Dr. Sharon Jeroski for her advice during the early days of our research work, and for instilling in us the need for validity and reliability in an assessment tool. When working with the A•S•K, teachers are assessing outcomes in the curriculum using standards set for learners of a similar age; they are guided by a protocol, and they engage in an anchoring process to establish exemplars for assessing achievement.

Thank you to so many...

The A•S•K assessment was field-tested and refined over three years, through cycles of inquiry-based action research. Feedback each year led to important refinements. We thank the BC, Alberta and Northern Territories educators who engaged in the workshops and classroom-based learning rounds. Their collective applications, insights, and feedback led to deep revisions. Thank you also to leaders for your commitment to the work, and for coordinating and supporting interactions at the local level.

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**Everyone involved in the work reinforced Warren Bennis' (1997) notion that
"...none of us is as smart as all of us together".**