Our Province is very diverse. The Pacific Northwest is an area of particular beauty and one that many British Columbians do not visit often. Monica Pamer continues her series on assessment by telling the story of her recent attendance at a regional forum in Prince Rupert. Rupert is known for its horizontal rain, but Monica was fortunate enough to experience Prince Rupert at its best – not only best weather but best inspiring teaching and learning.

Formative Classroom Assessment:
A Northwest View

Recently I was in Prince Rupert to attend a regional forum on Literacy Innovation Grant initiatives. I was impressed on two counts – the beautiful weather in Prince Rupert (yes, this is absolutely true!) which brought out the best in sea, sky and eagle sightings, and the high quality of the literacy work being done in this area of the province.

One thing that stands out is the innovative use of classroom assessment to differentiate instruction and help students take responsibility for their own learning. I have two examples to share with you, a laptop writing initiative from School District No. 92 (Nisga'a) and a vocabulary development strategy which can be either high tech, low tech or something in between, from School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert).

Both of these examples point out that assessment "for" learning and assessment "as" learning can happen at the same time. The teacher gets a good sense of where students are in their learning and can teach accordingly, and kids learn about their strengths and what they can work on to improve. The idea of an ongoing assessment partnership between teachers and students is a significant twist on the traditional teacher-centered approach of instruction, some practice, summative assessment and evaluation.

At the regional meeting Mary Takasaki, Director of Instruction in Nisga'a, shared her experiences using laptops to strengthen the reading and writing of intermediate students. Located in the Nass Valley, well over 90% of students in the Nisga'a district are Aboriginal. Mary works in grade 4 to 9 classrooms at four schools in the district, and bases her work on what the district has done as a member of the Network of Performance Based Schools. As Mary puts it, "Sometimes you discover great things by surprise", and one thing she discovered is that using the laptop for writing strengthens reading too.

This is how it works. Students build concept maps on their laptops using *Inspiration* software before they write. Struggling readers use U Tube and Google to get the information they need on the topic, while other students go straight to relevant web sites. It's all about linking new information with their own unique experiences and organizing it before they write. As Mary puts, it, "Concept Maps make kids masters of their own learning."

So far so good, but what happens next involves the laptops and a projector. A draft student concept map is projected (there's always an eager volunteer for this) and the class discusses the map with an eye towards the posted performance standards for writing. Strengths are noted and ideas that expand the topic in order to meet or exceed expectations as a soon-to-be piece of writing are provided. Naturally the students apply these standards to their own maps too, improving their grasp of the topic while they enhance their concept map. Then the eager line-up to show off their embellished maps on the projector starts.

This kind of class discussion puts students in the driver's seat while helping them assess their own thinking and writing and that of peers in a way that makes it safe to take risks. Mary's students differentiate their goals themselves based on their assessment of their own work. At the same time, Mary gets a good sense of where her students are in terms of their comprehension and writing. Assessment "for" and "as" learning, work hand in hand here to improve student performance.

Worried about the technology? According to Mary Takasaki, the saying around her district is, "If Takasaki can do it, anyone can." She also says she has some excellent support from Jethro Taylor, Media Tech in Nisga'a. Regardless of the technology used, the formative assessment cycle of looking at samples, applying standards through whole class discussion and revising your own work accordingly can support any learning in any classroom.

Next a quick sample of a word sorting activity from Prince Rupert that *almost* makes up for the deadly hours I spent in school looking random words up in the dictionary, writing the definition and using the word in a sentence. Furthermore, it makes more sense as a way to learn. This example was provided at the regional meeting by Kristi Clifton, ESL/ELD Coordinator, and Joan Mullin, the Learning Resource Teacher at Ecole Westview Elementary School.

It's very simple and probably familiar to all of us. Students are given words connected to what they will be learning on individual word cards. They're invited to sort the words using various criteria. Understandably, a popular one is "words I know" and "words I don't know". Other variations include people and objects or nouns and verbs; it all depends on the student. This activity gives the teacher an instant picture of where various students are in terms of their vocabulary, and by talking about their "sorts" students can assess what they know and learn more words from each other. In this way a simple vocabulary development strategy becomes a formative classroom assessment tool to use "for" and "as" learning.

Prince Rupert has created a bank of word lists on various topics which are stored on their website, so this word sorting activity can take place using a computer. But Joan and Kristi feel that physically moving the word cards around and talking about them has great appeal for kids and strengthens the cognitive aspects of learning. As far as they're concerned the computer is "nice but not necessary", though they do appreciate the web-based bank of words.

Thanks to Nisga'a and Prince Rupert for taking the time to share these ideas at the regional meeting. In a future Report on Education I'll provide an example of formative assessment "for" learning from a secondary school, just in case you're thinking, "This is fine for elementary but ..."

Assessment to differentiate and individualize instruction – this is powerful tool to provide for student success one student at a time. We will take a week off from our assessment series to bring you up to date on progress on the Rural Education strategy and describe the future for this work. But first, let me whet your appetite with this rural success story, another from Prince Rupert.

In School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert), Leah Robinson and her Network of Performance Based Schools action research team-mates Lisa Anderson, Joanne Larson and Elizabeth Robinson, have been documenting growth in the social responsibility at Port Edward Elementary. Port Edward is a small village about 15 kilometres outside Prince Rupert. The K-7 school enrols 67 students K through 7, 69% of whom are of Aboriginal heritage. The school is organized into three multi-age classrooms.

The staff established their research question as: "To what extent will using the social responsibility performance standards help students show greater focus and commitment to themselves and to group needs?"

The concepts of personal goal-setting and responsible choices were highlighted at weekly assemblies. Students in Grades 3 through 7 completed a personal assessment

and set a personal goal at both the beginning and end of Term Three. The results were very positive:

Grade 3-7	Not Yet		Approaching		Meeting		Exceeding	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Beginning Term 3	17	7	56	23	24	10	2	1
End Term 3	2	1	15	6	80	33	2	1

Grade 1 and 2 students were included in the project, but their results were not displayed above as they did not complete the baseline personal assessment. Leah and her colleagues did have them complete a self assessment at the end of the term and were surprised to learn that students that young could do an accurate self-assessment. Leah's reflection on the improved personal responsibility of their students is very telling; "In one term we noticed an improvement in student ability to assume responsibility for their actions……This is a challenging skill to teach and assess; it is difficult to assess student growth in setting goals and being responsible for personal choices. We were inspired at how accurate students were with their self-assessments, and the overall improvement that many students demonstrated."

The spirit of inquiry will continue next year. Students will be encouraged to think more about how their personal choices can affect the groups they are working with in their classroom.

Look for more on rural education next Friday.

Emery Dosdall, Ed D
Deputy Minister of Education

Tools for Teachers: Now All in One Place

As you all know, many practical and high quality tools for teachers are available on line through the Ministry website. These include Integrated Resource Packages and assessment tools for formative and summative classroom use, along with archived web casts, videos and presentations. These have all been around in web-based format for some time, with one caveat. Finding them has required a significant amount of on-line search time. We've now collected all these tools on the LearnNowBC site at http://www.learnnowbc.gov.bc.ca/

Simply click on the Tools for Teachers sidebar on the page designed for educators.   Whether for classroom use or professional development, we hope you find these outstanding tools and presentations both useful and easier to find.