



Assessment in Alberta: Discussion Paper

This discussion paper explores internationally accepted principles and practices of fair assessment within a context of critical thinking and the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies.

This resource can be accessed online at:
<http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssass/html/index.html>

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Overview

Assessment is the process of gathering data about student learning. It embraces a range of formal and informal strategies and employs a variety of tools (structures that provide support for doing work in a variety of contexts) where evaluations of learning are recorded and shared. It is more than a test, more than a grade, and more than a report card. Assessment spans the breadth of teaching and learning and helps nurture critically thoughtful learners.

Alberta curriculum is based on *learner outcomes* that identify *what students need to do* in order to demonstrate their attainment of these outcomes. Until we engage in assessment to gather this evidence, we cannot say with assurance that learning has taken place. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

The new Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies "provides opportunities for students to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens" (Alberta Education 2005, p.1). In order to accomplish these goals, teachers will need to create classrooms where the focus of instruction and assessment is on critical thinking and inquiry.

Such classrooms will be visibly different from classrooms of the past. Rather than a focus on covering a defined set of knowledge outcomes, students will be engaged in asking meaningful, purposeful questions that arise from their study. Students will be encouraged to "approach any task, problem or issue in an open-minded manner, to look carefully at the various options and to reach reasonable conclusions based on careful assessment of relevant factors" (The Critical Thinking Consortium 2005, p. 3). Assessment experiences that consider multiple plausible answers provide opportunities for students to think critically about the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the program of studies.

Critical thinking is:

- a complex activity, not a set of generic skills
- concerned with judging or evaluating what is reasonable or sensible in a situation
- focused on *quality of reasoning*, not on performing a specific set of mental operations
- dependent on the possession of relevant knowledge
- done in endless contexts and is required whenever the situation is problematic
- is effortful but not necessarily negative.

In essence, "critical thinking is about being thoughtful about everything students do and study in school" (The Critical Thinking Consortium 2005, p. 3).

Creative thinking is a companion skill to critical thinking. A creative solution finds ways to use existing knowledge and skills in new ways to arrive at a solution that meets established criteria. Simply encouraging students to "think outside the box" is insufficient. Creativity is not a random generation of ideas but rather is guided by a purpose. Thinking outside the box with no criteria to guide their thinking does not help students to arrive at plausible, feasible or even relevant

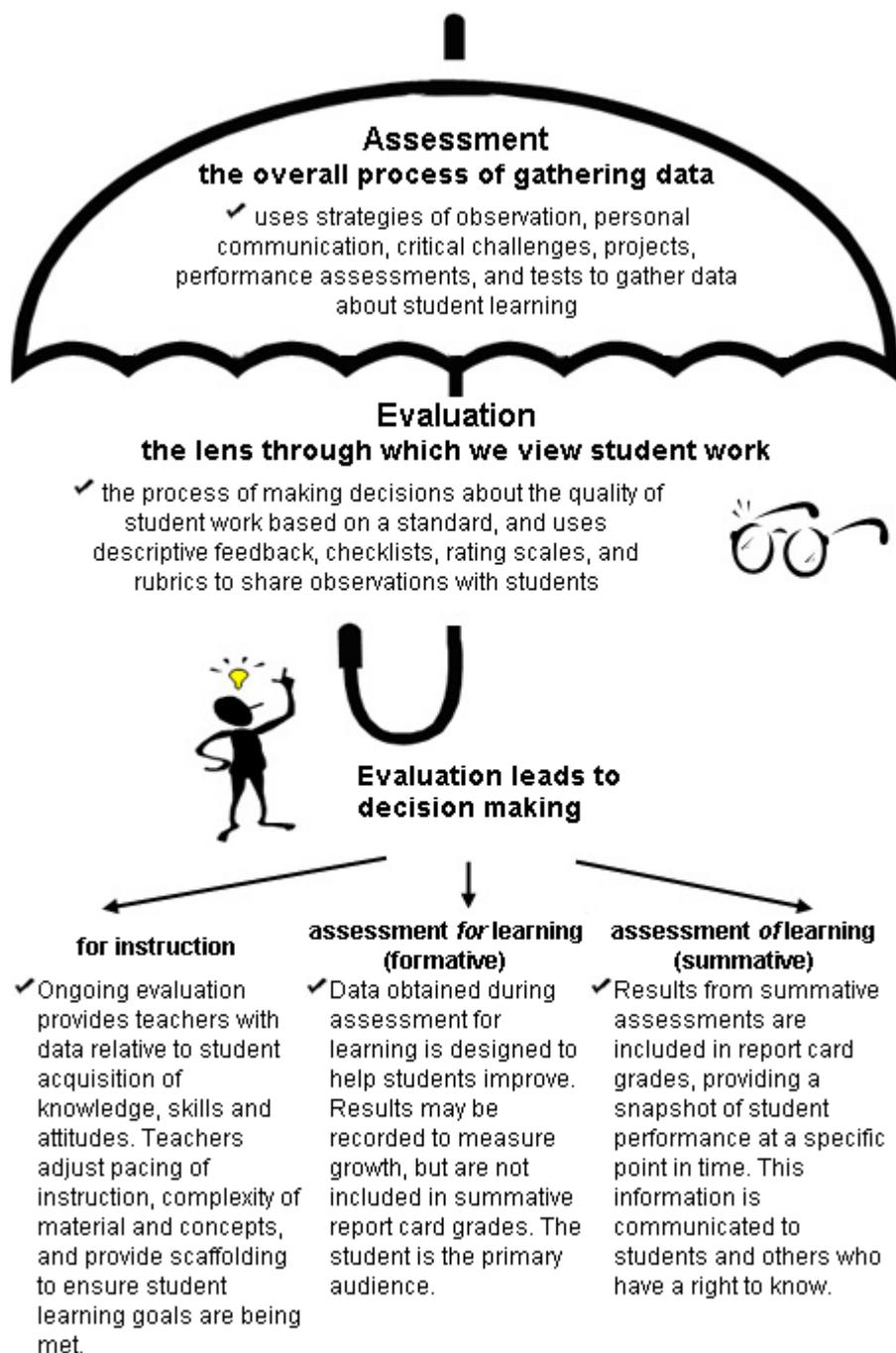
solutions to the problems and challenges they will face. When both critical and creative thinking are properly employed, teachers and students see how ingenuity results from the application of skills and knowledge in a critically thoughtful manner.

To nurture critically thoughtful learners, teachers need to teach in a critically thoughtful manner. The teacher's role changes from that of a provider of knowledge and information to that of a facilitator and mentor. This approach to teaching and learning requires an adjustment to the commonly-held understandings of assessment.

Speaking the Language of Assessment

A common language facilitates conversations about assessment practices.

The following graphic provides a basic overview of assessment terminology. A detailed glossary of assessment terms is available at http://www.aac.ab.ca/glossary_en.html



Source: Alberta Assessment Consortium Workshop Materials (2007)
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Research Base

(See **Bibliography** on p. 20 for source information)

A substantial research base supports the role of assessment for learning in nurturing critically thoughtful learners. Along complementary lines, research in critical thinking highlights the importance of teaching critical thinking not simply as a skill among many others to be taught; rather critical thinking should be seen as a methodology that is infused throughout the curriculum. The work of Wiggins and McTighe brought to the forefront the importance of linking assessment with curriculum. Curriculum, assessment and critical thinking are complementary to one another and create a natural forum for discussion and planning.

The Alberta Assessment Consortium visual (Figure 1) incorporates leading research-based classroom assessment practices that align with the Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices in Canada.

Key questions emerge from this visual to guide the discussion of social studies assessment in Alberta:

- **Question 1:** What will students learn? (p. 7)
- **Question 2:** How will we know learning has occurred? (p. 8)
- **Question 3:** How will we collect and provide evidence of learning? (p. 10)
- **Question 4:** What activities will enable students to learn? (p. 11)
- **Question 5:** How does formative assessment (assessment *for* learning) nurture critically thoughtful students and prepare them for success? (p. 13)
- **Question 6:** How will students receive and use feedback? (p. 14)
- **Question 7:** How can summative assessment (assessment *of* learning) enrich the learning process? (p. 16)
- **Question 8:** What is the role of student reflection and goal setting? (p. 16)

Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom

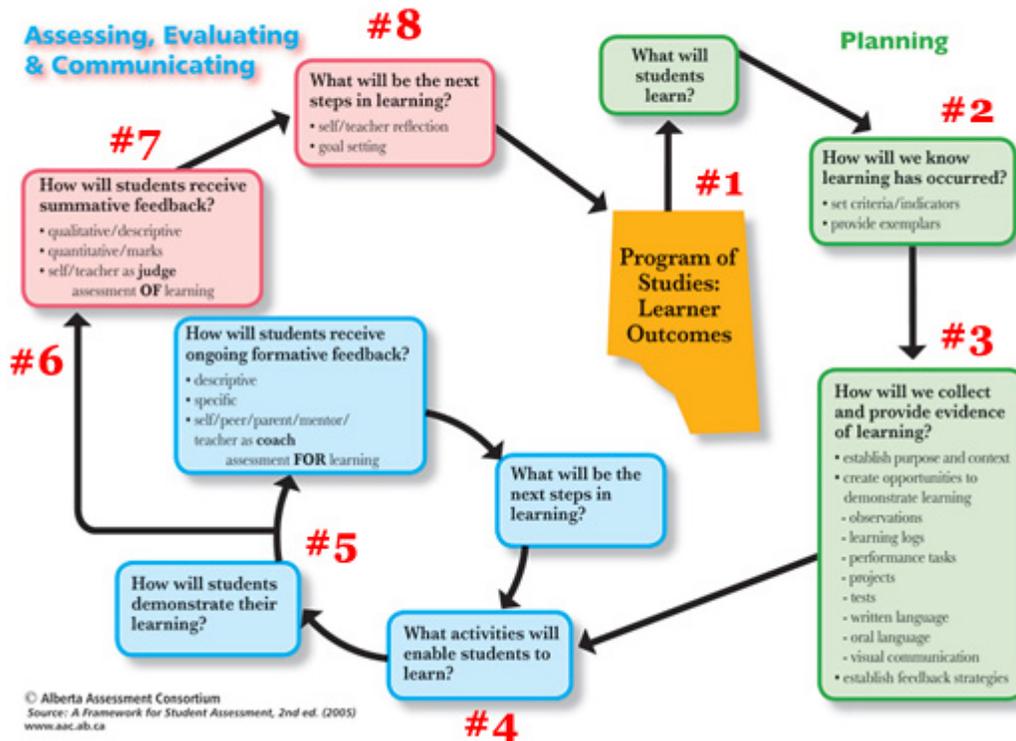


Figure 1: Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom.

Question 1 – What will students learn?

The program of studies forms the basis for instruction and assessment in Alberta. Learner outcomes identify what students need to *do* in order to demonstrate their attainment of these outcomes. Tomlinson and McTighe point out the importance of examining both the nouns and the verbs within the learner outcomes (Tomlinson and McTighe 2006, p. 32). Nouns point to the big ideas and essential questions, whereas the verbs suggest assessment opportunities. Unique characteristics of various learner outcomes have implications for assessment.

Values and Attitudes outcomes engage students in the expression of their beliefs about topics and issues. Students consider personal responsibility as citizens of various communities – home, classroom, local, national and global.

Assessment experiences should provide students with opportunities to think critically about their values and beliefs and to align their current and future actions to those values. Verbs such as appreciate, respect and value permeate the grade level Values and Attitudes social studies outcomes. Letter or number grades may not be appropriate for such assessments and teachers may find that personal communication in the form of descriptive feedback is an effective way to provide feedback and report student progress (see **descriptive feedback examples** on p. 37).

Knowledge and Understanding outcomes ask students to investigate, examine, analyze, evaluate and assess critically. The bulleted items may be considered as inquiry questions to provide structure for the specific outcomes.

Assessment experiences must go beyond the content of the bulleted item and reflect the cognitive processes identified in the specific outcomes. Involving students in critical challenges from the Online Guide is one way to move students beyond the specificity of the various bulleted items and on to thinking critically about the content of the curriculum.

Skills and Processes outcomes have consistent categories among all grades, providing a continuum of skill development. While critical thinking is one of the dimensions of thinking within the Skills and Processes outcomes, student learning is enhanced when critical thinking is embedded in all aspects of instruction.

Quality assessment experiences go beyond simply asking students to provide facts and details. For example, students might be asked to critically evaluate the impact of various peoples on each other and on subsequent events. To do this, they must access the necessary background information, consider multiple perspectives, filter for bias, and draw and support conclusions. These critical thinking processes, rather than content, become the criteria (basis for making reasoned judgement) for evaluation.

When students are engaged in critical thinking, it changes the way they learn and the nature of evidence teachers use to make judgments about student achievement. There is a shift from the accumulation of isolated bits of information to the use of information to solve relevant problems, create products of value or meet challenges. "...Critical thinking can be used to enhance student understanding of content, appreciation of attitudes and mastery of skills in the social studies curriculum" (The Critical Thinking Consortium 2005, p. 2).

Question 2 – How will we know learning has occurred?

Assessment experiences are designed to gather evidence that students have met the expectations of the learner outcomes. In order to do this, teachers must develop a deep understanding of both the intent and content of the program of studies. Teachers examine and "unpack" the outcomes (Wiggins and McTighe) or in other words, articulate **criteria** that form the basis for making judgements about the quality of student learning.

This process of unpacking the outcomes is easier to do with some outcomes than with others. In Alberta social studies, the **Skills and Process outcomes** begin with verbs that can be easily observed. It is fairly straightforward to observe students as they compare and contrast, filter for bias, articulate a plan of action, and so forth.

The **Values and Attitudes outcomes** present more of a challenge. How will teachers know, for example, if students *appreciate* the variety and abundance of natural resources in Alberta? These outcomes are best framed within the realm of habits of mind - qualities such as respect, open-mindedness and self-reflection. While these outcomes may not yield quantitative assessment data, they represent a critical component in supporting the development of the core concepts of

citizenship, identity and multiple perspectives that are at the heart of the Social Studies Program of Studies.

Knowledge and Understanding outcomes reveal an interesting combination. The specific outcomes, shown in bold font, begin with verbs. The bulleted items, however, are phrased as inquiry questions. Knowledge and Understanding outcomes must be paired with Skills and Process outcomes in order to see evidence of the learning.

Consider the criteria that flow from the Knowledge and Understanding outcomes in the following example:

Learner Outcome:
<p>7.1.4 Students will assess, critically, the economic competition related to the control of the North American fur trade by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did the fur trade contribute to the foundations of the economy in North America? (ER, LPP, TCC)
<p>Discussion: At first glance, the bulleted question appears to be a content-based item. Students could answer this question by providing a list of ways the fur trade impacted the economy in North America.</p> <p>However, it is the relationship between the specific outcome (in bold) and the bulleted item that is important. In order to meet fully the intent of the outcome, students must interact critically with the content. One way to accomplish this is to turn the content into a problem, as in the following critical challenge:</p> <p>What is the most important way that the fur trade impacted the economy in North America? Provide reasons for your choice.</p> <p>In order to complete this critical challenge, students will need to access background information and develop criteria for judging the impact of the identified factors. For example, students might suggest that the criteria for deciding or judging the most important factor would be the number of people impacted, the degree to which people were impacted or the long-lasting nature of the factor. The factor the students choose is not as important as how well they support the reasons for their choice.</p> <p>Students demonstrate their understanding of the content as they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluate impact of factors on the economy• provide support for opinion. <p>These processes become the criteria or the basis that teachers use for making a reasoned judgement regarding student performance.</p> <p>In this scenario, both students and teachers are using criteria. Students use criteria as the basis for evaluating the impact of factors on the economy. Teachers use criteria as the basis for evaluating student performance. Although the context is different, the process is the same – articulating the basis on which reasoned judgements are made.</p>

As teachers clarify their understanding of the outcomes by articulating criteria, it is essential to share those criteria with students. As we help students understand "what counts" (Gregory, Cameron and Davies 2000, p. 7), the stage is set for their success.

Inherent in and flowing from the criteria is the performance standard. That is, what does good decision making, or any other critical thinking skill, look like for a student in a particular grade? The learner outcomes provide the basis for articulating the standard. Specific wording within the grade level outcomes, including the skills and processes outcomes, provides support in helping teachers articulate the standard of performance. Examination of exemplars of student work at varying levels of proficiency provides an opportunity for students to think critically about their own work, measure it against the standard and set about to make adjustments to improve the quality of their work.

Question 3 – How will we collect and provide evidence of learning?

With the shift from content- to process-based curriculum, a wider variety of assessment strategies must be used to gather evidence of the full range of learning. Many learner outcomes cannot be measured with selected response test question formats such as multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and matching. Performance assessment, inquiry and critical challenges provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and demonstrate skills. In fact, many social studies learner outcomes can only be measured through these strategies.

Teacher observation is an effective and purposeful assessment strategy for many social studies skills and processes. Highly relevant evidence can be obtained when teachers are clear about criteria for evaluation and plan for observation opportunities within the instructional sequence. When further combined with student reflection/personal communication and accompanying student products, triangulation of evidence (observations, products and conversations) provides teachers with multiple sources of evidence for making informed decisions regarding student learning (Davies 2000, pp. 35–36).

Assessment tasks can be designed to engage and motivate learners when carefully designed with the learner in mind. Differentiated assessment ensures that students with varying learning preferences, interests and aptitudes have opportunities to demonstrate their learning in ways that are compatible with their learning needs. The key to differentiated assessment is establishing clear criteria that are "derived primarily from the content goal, not the response mode" (Tomlinson and McTighe 2006, p. 35). Thus the criteria for evaluation that appear on the rubric will focus on the content and skills that will be evident in all student work and not the specific details of the selected presentation format.

For example, consider a critical challenge where students communicate their understanding of the concept they have researched. Students could select from a variety of presentation formats to demonstrate their learning (see **Suggested Performances and Products** on p. 34). The majority of the summative evaluation criteria focus on items related to the concept under investigation while a single criterion is based on the students' abilities to communicate their understanding of the content effectively, considering the purpose and audience. Correspondingly, one row of the project rubric describes what communication looks like at various levels of quality (see **Teacher Rubric (Summative) for Evolving Identities in Canada** on p. 29) Formative checklists further describe what effective communication looks like for the specific presentation format selected by the student (see samples: **Student Self-reflection: Communicating Effectively through a Collage** on p. 28 and **Student Self-reflection: Communication Effectively through a Multi-**

media Presentation on p. 33). Since the checklists are formative tools designed to help students improve their work in progress, each checklist can identify elements that are unique to the selected presentation format. Thus, the rubric criterion is focused on the 'big idea' derived from the learner outcomes related to communication skills and the checklist is focused on the details of the presentation format. Both tools work together to support student learning.

Question 4 – What activities will enable students to learn?

Part of teachers' professional responsibilities involves translating learner outcomes into meaningful learning activities (see Alberta Education *Directive 4.2.1.* in **bibliography** on p. 19). Wiggins and McTighe caution teachers against the danger of merely "covering" the curriculum and suggest instead that the teachers' goal is to help students "uncover" and discover the curriculum. The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC²) maintain that the uncovering of curriculum occurs only when students investigate purposeful questions that present meaningful problems or challenges to address. Even well planned, interesting, colourful and relevant learning activities can fail to involve students in thinking meaningfully about the ideas.

Simply asking students to think will not yield critically thoughtful students. Planned, purposeful instruction is needed to provide students with the intellectual tools they need to think critically. Background Knowledge, Criteria for Judgement, Critical Thinking Vocabulary, Thinking Strategies and Habits of Mind are powerful means to scaffold student learning and guide students as they interact with the content of the curriculum.

Figure 2 represents the foundational role the intellectual tools play in promoting critical thinking.

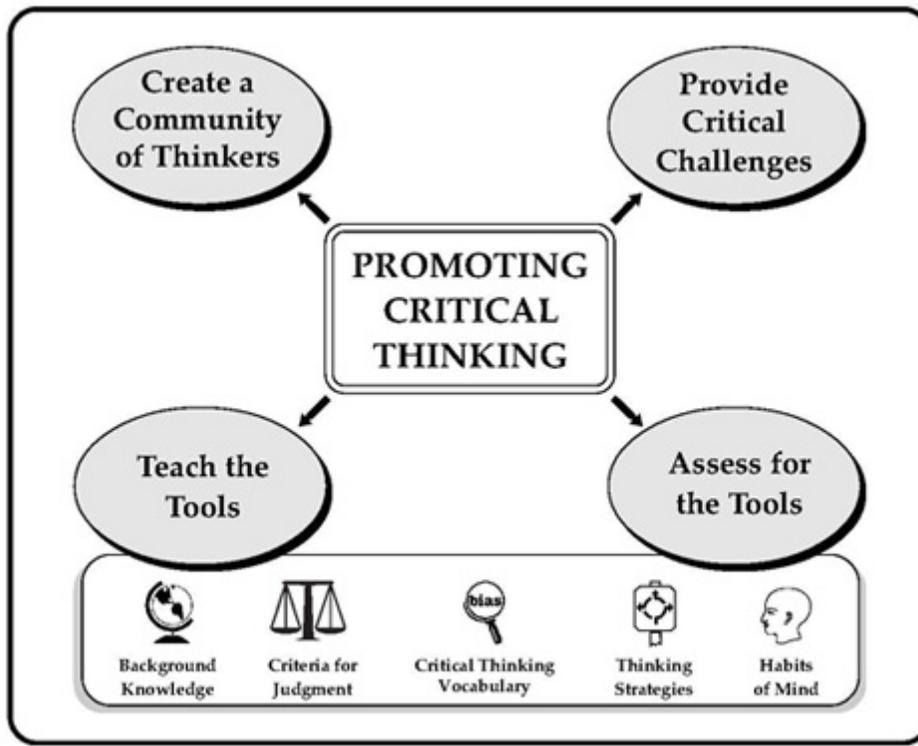


Figure 2: Promoting Critical Thinking © The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2)

Background Knowledge is essential in order for critical thinking to occur. Students require information on which to base their reasoning, judgements, decisions, and so forth. Critical thinking instruction is best achieved when embedded within authentic curricular content. The content of the program of studies can be taught in a more meaningful way when taught through the skills of critical thinking. Both content and skills are important.

Criteria for Judgment form the basis for making reasoned judgement. This intellectual tool has broad application. People use criteria when making decisions on a daily basis from what to wear given the weather and the day’s activities; what to eat based on what is available, dietary restrictions and personal preferences; how to spend leisure time; and other decisions ranging from trivial to important. What moves these kinds of low-level responses into the realm of critical thinking is the awareness that is brought to the decision-making process; that is, being aware of the criteria and applying them thoughtfully.

Teachers use criteria when translating learner outcomes into meaningful learning activities. When planning instruction, they decide what’s important and identify the evidence they need to determine that learning has occurred. Inviting students into the assessment conversation deepens student understanding of the learning goals and increases the opportunity for success.

Critical Thinking Vocabulary refers to essential concepts and distinctions that are needed to process information in a critically thoughtful manner. Examples of such concepts within the social studies learner outcomes include:

- support and conclusion
- cause and effect
- evidence and inference
- bias and objectivity
- validity and reliability
- fact and opinion

These complex concepts require specific instruction, ongoing modelling and labelling before they become part of a student's repertoire of critical thinking skills.

Thinking Strategies are used extensively when working through challenges and problems. They become part of a personal bank of strategies to draw on during problematic situations. Part of learning to think critically is to be aware of the strategies and make purposeful decisions as to which strategy will best achieve the goals of the particular challenge based on reasoned judgement. Thinking strategies embedded within the social studies learner outcomes include use and development of decision-making models; use of graphic organizers; application of inquiry models; and communication skills such as note-taking, media literacy and presentation skills.

Habits of Mind are personal qualities that facilitate good thinking. They are commitments to the range of values and principles of a careful and conscientious thinker, such as being open-minded, fair-minded, accepting and reflective. These intellectual tools are often taught incidentally; critical thinking requires purposeful teaching of these habits of mind, with opportunities to use and reflect on them, planned into the instructional sequence.

The intellectual tools provide opportunities for students to interact with the content of the program of studies in meaningful ways. Critical thinking is a methodology that is infused throughout the curriculum. It can and should happen in virtually every context of learning – from reading to note taking to complex project work.

Critically thoughtful learners are metacognitive. They think about their learning and can articulate what quality looks like. They are developing the habits of mind that allow them to recognize the value of formative feedback. They see purpose and value in their work.

Question 5 – How does formative assessment (assessment for learning) nurture critically thoughtful students and prepare them for success?

In a constructivist and inquiry-based curriculum, students need a safe environment in which to learn. Assessment experiences that consider multiple plausible or warranted answers provide

opportunities for students to think critically about the content, values and processes of the program of studies. Assessment *for* learning is based on the premise that students have permission to take learning risks. It acknowledges that students require:

- clear learning goals
- appropriate scaffolding
- ongoing specific and descriptive feedback throughout the learning process
- opportunities to reflect on their work
- opportunities to improve their work through revision, editing and polishing.

During assessment *for* learning, teachers provide feedback and guidance but do not grade students on the process of learning. Summative assessments follow in due course once students have had sufficient opportunity to learn and explore the new skill or concept.

Carefully constructed tools for providing specific and descriptive feedback from teachers and peers provide data that *students* use to improve their learning. Students have opportunities to think critically about their performance to date, compare their own performance to the standard, and set goals for improvement of their work-in-progress.

Rick Stiggins has identified three practices which will lead to gains in student achievement:

1. improving the quality of classroom assessments; i.e., to create a solid link between the assessment task and the learner outcomes,
2. increasing the frequency of descriptive feedback, and
3. involving students deeply in the assessment process.

To the extent that these practices (i.e., quality of assessments, frequency of descriptive feedback, and student involvement in the assessment process) permeate a learning environment, impressive gains in student achievement are possible (Stiggins 2001; 2006). These practices could be considered criteria that teachers and leaders use to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment program in their classrooms and school.

Although they serve different purposes, assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning are related. At the beginning of the planning process, teachers consider the summative assessment tasks, and then work backwards to ensure that instruction and formative assessment opportunities are appropriately placed. The Alberta Assessment Consortium Grade 3 performance assessment task, [Making a Difference](#), models a sequence of instruction and formative assessment designed to support students toward successful completion of the task. Formative assessment tools guide students through peer feedback and self-reflection processes.

Question 6 – How will students receive feedback?

Teachers, students and peers can all be involved in the process of providing feedback. A variety of tools can be used to record observations and evidence of student learning. Effective feedback identifies areas in which students have been successful as well as areas for continued growth.

Feedback tools identify criteria for evaluation, describe the required standard of performance and provide a place to record observations and evaluations of student performance. The use of these tools, including specific and descriptive feedback from teachers, peers and self provide data that students use to improve their learning.

Feedback Tool	Characteristics
Descriptive Feedback (see Descriptive Feedback Examples) p. 36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides feedback that is descriptive and specific to the learning context • feedback must be based on learner outcomes in order to impact student achievement • may be oral or written • most effective in the absence of numerical or letter grades
Checklist (see Checklist Example) p. 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides for a yes/not yet response to indicate whether the criteria are present in the student work or not present • a comment column provides a place to record specific feedback
Rating Scale (see Rating Scale Example) p. 38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offers a range of responses • based on frequency, independence or quality • a comment column provides a place to record specific feedback
Rubric (see Rubric Example) p. 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creates a word picture of what work looks like at varying levels of quality • should be focused on observable qualities and avoid the use of quantitative descriptors

While each tool can be used separately in isolated assessment contexts, using the tools in combination creates powerful opportunities to support student learning.

See examples:

Using the Feedback Tools in Combination: Investigating Pictures (p. 31)

Using the Feedback Tools in Combination: Asking Powerful Questions (p. 25)

Using the Feedback Tools in Combination: Evolving Identities in Canada (p. 29)

“Optimally, over time, assessment no longer lies primarily with others. Rather, like seasoned professionals or experts, students gradually internalize the criteria by which they are assessed, becoming able to judge how well their performances stack up against an ideal...” (Gardner *Disciplined Mind* 2000, pp.131–132)

Carefully constructed feedback tools that are linked to learner outcomes and appropriately placed in the instructional sequence provide support for students and guide their learning. Involving students in the assessment process increases intrinsic motivation and the potential for learning.

Question 7 – How can summative assessment (assessment of learning) enrich the learning process?

Summative assessment is a natural extension of the learning process. Teachers make decisions about summative assessment strategies based on an understanding of the nature of the learner outcomes. Tests may be appropriate for some outcomes; performance assessments and critical challenges are a natural choice for other outcomes that require demonstration and application of skills and processes.

Howard Gardner states:

“A good assessment instrument can be a learning experience. But more to the point, it is extremely desirable to have assessment occur in the context of students working on problems, projects or products that genuinely engage them, hold their interest, and motivate them to do well.”

Gardner 1993, p.178

Students who use formative assessment to guide their learning find that culminating assessments can be "occasions of pleasure" (Gardner *Disciplined Mind* 132). This can be especially true if teachers create rich engaging tasks that provide authentic opportunities for students to solve problems. Performance assessment tasks and critical challenges engage students and provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in authentic contexts. When students understand the learning goals and believe that success is within reach, they will approach tests with confidence and enthusiasm.

Question 8 – What is the role of student reflection and goal setting?

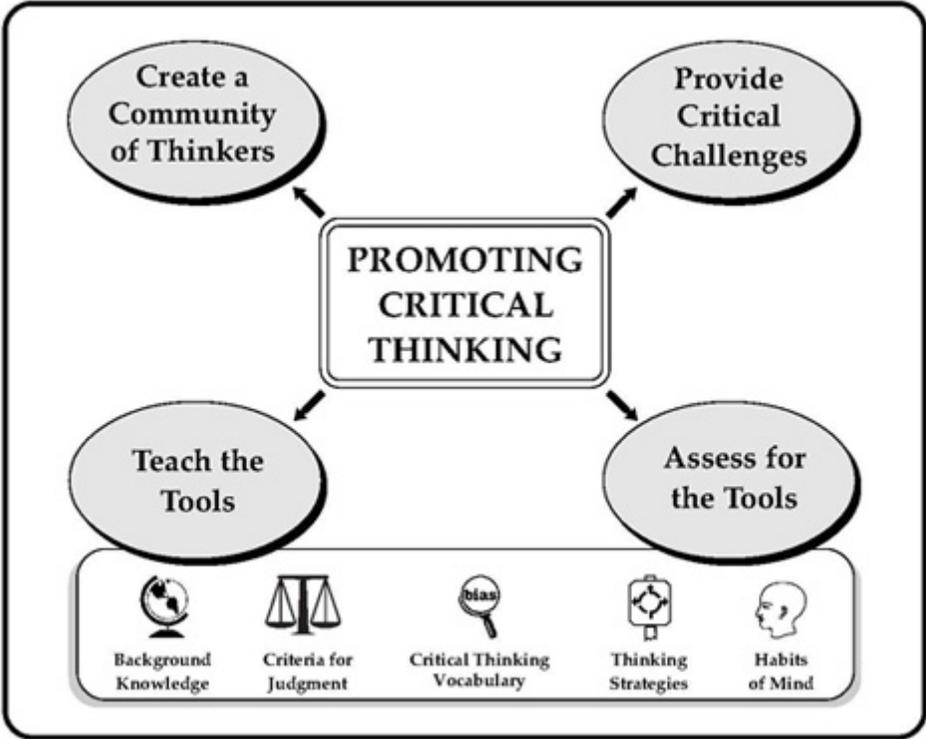
Powerful learning occurs when students take the time to reflect on what they can learn from a completed summative assessment. Reflective processes maximize student learning. Metacognition is key to moving students purposefully toward becoming more effective self-evaluators.

“We must constantly remind ourselves that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to have students become self-evaluating. If students graduate from school still dependent on others to tell them when they are adequate, good or excellent, then we have missed the whole point of what education is about.”

Costa and Kallick 2003, p.3.

Conclusion

Assessment is a process that is integral to nurturing critically thoughtful learners. **Figure 3** is a visual representation of the blending of critical thinking and assessment practices. They are companion processes that work together to support and nurture critically thoughtful learners.



Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom

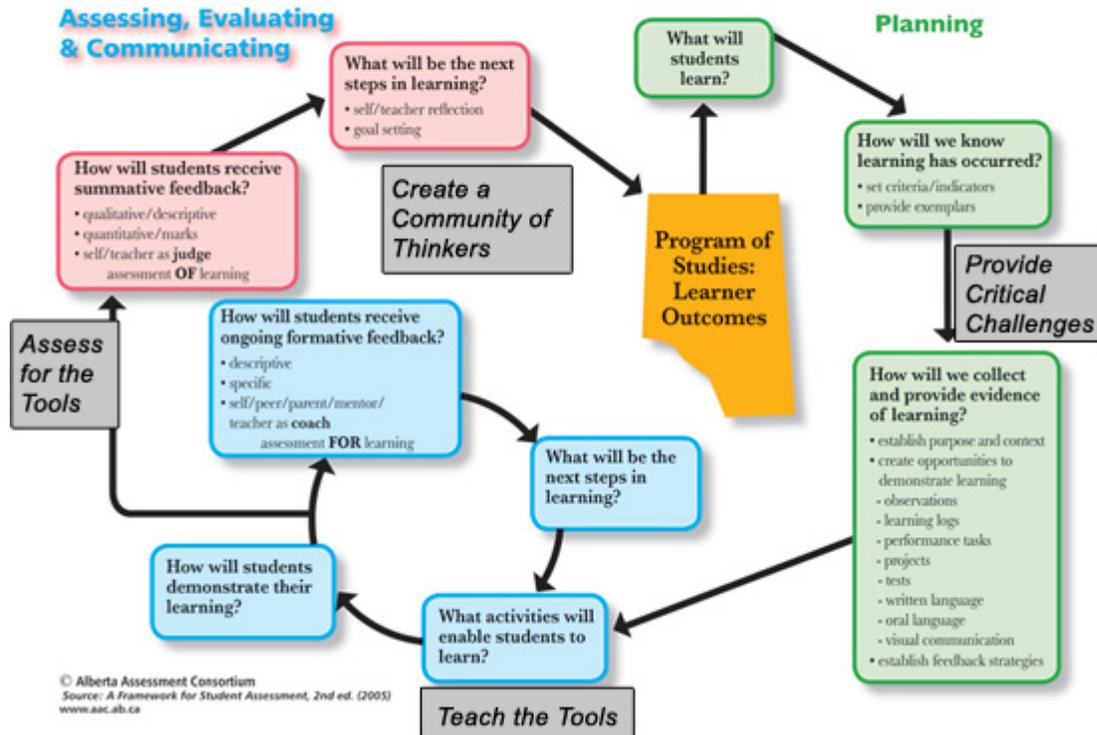


Figure 3: Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom.

Provide Critical Challenges

When the instructional program contains authentic critical challenges that are solidly linked to the learner outcomes, students see greater purpose in their work and take more ownership for their learning.

Teach the Tools

Instruction becomes less focused on imparting knowledge and more focused on providing students with intellectual tools that can be applied in multiple contexts.

Assess for the Tools

Students become active participants in the assessment process. Formative and summative feedback tools provide opportunities for students to think critically about their work and set about to make improvements.

Create a Community of Thinkers

Learning becomes the goal rather than external indicators such as grades. Students value feedback from others as a way to improve learning. Cooperation replaces competition as students learn and practice valuable life skills such as collaboration, self reflection and goal setting.

Authentic instruction and assessment that is grounded in the principles of critical thinking support the goals of the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies. They work in tandem to help

students become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens who are able to think critically about everything that they do in school and beyond.

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Critical Thinking Resources (Annotated)

Alberta Education. *Online Guide to Implementation*.

This government Web site offers excellent support material for the new program of studies. Included are hundreds of lesson ideas, assessment tools and student resources using the critical thinking approach.

<http://new.onlineguide.learnalberta.ca>

Alberta Education. *Social Studies Program of Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12*.

This government Web site contains the Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 program of studies, the implementation schedule, updates on student and teacher resources as well as other information pertaining to the new Social Studies curriculum.

http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/bySubject/social/default.asp

Alberta Teachers' Association. *Social Studies Specialist Council*.

This useful Web site provides links to a world of pertinent information.

<http://ssc.teachers.ab.ca/>

Case, Roland, and Penney Clark, eds. *The Canadian Anthology of Social Studies: Issues and Strategies for Teachers*. Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press, 1999.

This comprehensive collection of 41 articles by Canadian educators provides valuable insights and practical ideas for implementing many of the innovations in the new program of studies. A second edition of this collection, *The Anthology of Social Studies: Issues and Strategies for Elementary Teachers*, is scheduled for release in January 2007.

<http://www.pep.educ.ubc.ca>

The Critical Thinking Consortium.

The Web site for this non-profit group contains various articles on critical thinking and describes award winning teacher resources in social studies with sample downloadable lessons.

<http://www.tc2.ca>

Assessment Resources (Annotated)

Absolum, M. *Clarity in the Classroom: Using Formative Assessment – Building Learning-focused Relationships*. Auckland: Hodder Education Book, 2006.

Using practical examples, this resource describes an evidence-based, reflective approach that enables teachers to help students achieve higher levels of performance. Key strategies and easy-to-use techniques provide support for students to become confident and enthusiastic learners.

Alberta Assessment Consortium.

The Web site is a classroom assessment resource centre. Quality classroom [assessment materials](#) and [professional publications](#) are available for teachers looking for practical ideas and strategies. Links to these materials and other world-class resources are at your fingertips. Performance assessment tasks, based on the new Social Studies Program of Studies, are available to support implementation.

<http://www.aac.ab.ca>

Alberta Assessment Consortium. *How to Develop and Use Performance Assessments in the Classroom*. Rev. ed. Edmonton: AAC, 2003.

This is one in a series of five professional resources that provide teachers with practical approaches for assessing, evaluating and communicating student learning. Gain insights into the rationale for and use of performance assessments. Learn to apply five steps in their development complemented by a practical tool box of implementation ideas.

Arter, Judith A., and Jan Chappius. *Creating and Recognizing Quality Rubrics*. Portland: Educational Testing Service, 2006.

This book enables teachers to choose and develop sound instructional rubrics, use them effectively with students to maximize learning, convert rubric scores to grades, and communicate to parents about the use of rubrics in the classroom. It provides a description of quality performance tasks with effective rubrics to produce the desired results.

Davies, Anne. *Making Classroom Assessment Work*. Merville: Connections Publishing, 2000.

This resource provides a thoughtful and thought provoking framework teachers and administrators can use to reconsider how assessment is working in the classroom. Ideas range from building a foundation for student involvement through ways to report student performance. The resource bridges the findings in research with what teachers do in the classroom.

Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada.

Edmonton: Joint Advisory Committee, 1993.

Created by a collection of nationally renowned educational organizations and endorsed by the Canadian School Boards Association, the Canadian Teachers Federation, the Canadian Association for School Administrators, and the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, this document puts forward a number of practices and guidelines that can be used to ensure that the assessment of students in Canadian classrooms is authentic, accurate, and fair.

A summary of the document is available at <http://www.2learn.ca/Projects/Together/fair.html>.

Stiggins, Richard. *Student-Involved Assessment FOR Learning*. 4th ed. Columbus: Merrill Pearson Hall, 2004.

This resource shows teachers how to create high-quality classroom assessments and use them to build student confidence thereby maximizing (not just documenting) student performance and achievement. Features include tips on how to manage day-to-day classroom assessment effectively and efficiently; a practical guideline on how to select and use all types of assessments to match learner outcomes to assessment methods; and energy- and time-saving ideas for classroom teachers.

Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. 2nd ed. Alexandria: ASCD, 2005.

This resource demonstrates the importance of learner outcomes. It explains how understanding differs from knowledge, how to identify the big ideas in the program of studies, how to know when students have attained them, and how to improve student performance. Educators will learn why familiar coverage- and activity-based approaches to instruction fall short of attaining the intents (big ideas, enduring understandings) of the program of studies. Research-based principles are applied through an array of practical tools, strategies, tools and examples from various subject areas.

Acknowledgements

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DOCUMENTS

Using the Feedback Tools in Combination: Asking Powerful Questions

Student Self-Assessment Checklist: How powerful are my questions?

This is one of my questions:

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What are the criteria for asking a powerful question?

Criteria	Yes, because . . .	Not yet, but here's how I can make it better:
Is the question: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• on topic? Will it give me information I need?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• open ended? Will it give me more than a one word answer?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• engaging? Will it give me interesting information?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• respectful? Will it be appropriate to ask the question?		

This is my revised question:

--

Student Checklist: Effective Historical Diaries/Journals

Effective historical diaries/journals are:	Is my historical diary/journal effective?	
	Yes because . . .	Not yet, but here's how I can make it better . . .
Accurate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> includes documented historical facts is plausible for the time, person and place 		
Specific <ul style="list-style-type: none"> contains clear and precise details of the event 		
Revealing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides insight that is useful in understanding the historical event 		
Empathic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is sensitive and realistic in presenting the writer's feelings and opinions 		

Commentary:

This checklist provides students with the criteria for an effective historical diary or journal (listed in the left-hand column). Students then consider their diary or journal entry to determine if it meets the criteria or not. In the case of a Yes response, students are asked to provide evidence for their rating. In the case of a Not Yet response, students are asked to identify needed improvements in their work in order to meet the criteria. The checklist becomes a powerful learning tool when students take time to make the necessary improvements prior to submitting their work for grading.

Checklists are useful when it is possible to see a clear distinction between the presence of the trait or not. They are relatively quick to use, although the addition of the request for evidence extends the time required to complete. At the same time, checklists also strengthen the value of the tool and the information it provides. Checklists can be used by students to reflect on their own work or the work of a peer; teachers can use checklists to provide feedback to students.

A checklist is best used as a formative tool. It is recommended that checklists **not** be used to generate a number or letter grade. The effect of the extreme scores (100% for a Yes response and 0% for a Not Yet response) results in scores that may not accurately reflect student achievement.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- creates accurate historical context (Knowledge and Understanding; Skills and Processes S.2)
- shares key points (Knowledge and Understanding)
- shares insights (Skills and Processes S.1, S.2)
- demonstrates historical empathy (Skills and Processes S.1, S.7)

Student Self-reflection: Communicating Effectively through a Collage

What are the criteria for an effective collage?

Is my collage:	Yes, because . . .	Not yet, but here's how I can make it better:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> focused on the topic? Do the visuals and words support the message? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organized? Does the placement of visuals and text assist in communicating the message? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> visually appealing? Have I taken care with the details of construction (colour, shape, cutting, pasting)? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 		

Using the Feedback Tools in Combination: Evolving Identities in Canada

Commentary:

Three criteria for evaluation have been derived from the learner outcomes and form the first column of the rubric (see Teacher Rubric (summative) for Evolving Identities in Canada). The outcome codes are listed in brackets after the criterion. The rubric should be shared with students at the beginning of the project to help them focus their work.

A separate formative feedback tool is provided to help students further unpack each criterion and gain a better understanding of what is expected. The formative tools are not intended to be used to generate marks for report cards; their sole purpose is to assist students in creating a better product/performance en route to submitting their final project. The final project is marked with the rubric. As students use the formative tools purposefully and take time to improve their work along the way, they can increase their performance level on the rubric.

Criteria	Formative Tool
Explains historical context	See Student Checklist: Explaining Historical Context
Evaluates impact	See Student Rating Scale: Evaluating the Impact of Events on Collective Identities
Communicates information	See Student Checklist: Communicating Effectively through a Collage See Student Checklist: Communicating Effectively through a Multi-media Presentation

The checklist for Communicating Effectively demonstrates how separate, yet related checklists can be created based on criteria for a differentiated product. Since each presentation format differs in what makes it successful, the variation in the communication checklists is not only appropriate but necessary in order to be effective.

Criteria for Evaluation:

Students provide evidence of their learning as they:

- explain historical context (7.S.2.3)
- evaluate impact of changes on collective identity (7.2.2, 7.2.6)
- communicate information (Skills and Processes 7.S.8.1, 7.S.8.6)

The above criteria are based on the following social studies grade level outcomes:

► Values and Attitudes	
Specific Outcome 7.2.2	recognize the positive and negative consequences of political decisions (PADM)

► Knowledge and Understanding	
Specific Outcome 7.2.6	assess, critically, the impacts of social and political changes on individual and collective identities in Canada since 1918 by exploring and reflecting upon . . . questions and issues:
SKILLS AND PROCESSES	
► DIMENSIONS OF THINKING Specific Outcome 7.S.2 7.S.2.3	develop skills of historical thinking: • explain the historical contexts of key events of a given time period
► COMMUNICATION Specific Outcome 7.S.8 7.S.8.1 7.S.8.6	demonstrate skills of oral, written and visual literacy: • communicate information in a clear, persuasive and engaging manner, through written and oral means ➤ use selected presentation tools to demonstrate connections among various pieces of information

Using the Feedback Tools in Combination: Investigating Pictures

Student Rating Scale for Investigating Pictures (independence)

Student Name _____

Picture Study _____

Criteria	I can do it on my own.	I can do it with some help.	It's hard to do even with help.	I'm not sure what to do.	My evidence
I can find clues in a photograph.					I showed this when:
I can use the clues to make a conclusion.					I showed this when:
I can explain why my conclusion makes sense.					I showed this when:

Commentary:

This rating scale is suitable for use by students who are beginning to learn to use the skill of identifying clues and conclusions from photographs. Students rate their performance based on the level of independence with which they are able to use the skill. Within the Social Studies Program of Studies, the skill of drawing conclusions begins in Grade One and continues through subsequent grade levels. It is reasonable to expect that students require time, practice and coaching in order to develop fully this skill.

Students use the sentence prompts to reflect on three separate tasks that are part of the skill of drawing conclusions. Students rate their level of performance and provide evidence for their rating. The metacognitive process increases student accountability and provides another opportunity for students to think critically about their work. The rating scale should be introduced and modelled so the students will know how to use the tool. Students who are emergent writers and emergent critical thinkers may need support identifying and reporting the evidence for their rating.

The information obtained from this tool, combined with teacher observation of student performance while examining the photographs, provides evidence of student's skill in drawing conclusions. Due to the ongoing developmental nature of the skill, it is recommended that this tool NOT be used to generate a mark in the beginning stages, but instead be an integral part of assessment for learning. Descriptive feedback provided by the teacher can support students in becoming more proficient with the skill.

As students gain experience and confidence with using the skill, teachers can move students to a rating scale based on frequency (see Student Rating Scale for Investigating Pictures (frequency)) of performance. For older students, the descriptors of the levels of performance could be adjusted as follows:

- Almost all of the time → Consistently
- Most of the time → Frequently
- Some of the time → Occasionally
- Not very often → Rarely, if ever

When students become even more experienced with using the skill, the teacher rubric (see link to Teacher Rubric for Investigating Pictures) could be used to generate a summative mark.

Student Rating Scale for Investigating Pictures (frequency)

Student Name _____

Picture Study _____

Criteria	Almost all of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not very often	I showed this when:
I can find clues in a photograph.					
I can use the clues to make a conclusion.					
I can explain why my conclusion makes sense.					

Student Self-reflection: Communicating Effectively through a Multi-media Presentation

What are the criteria for an effective multi-media presentation?

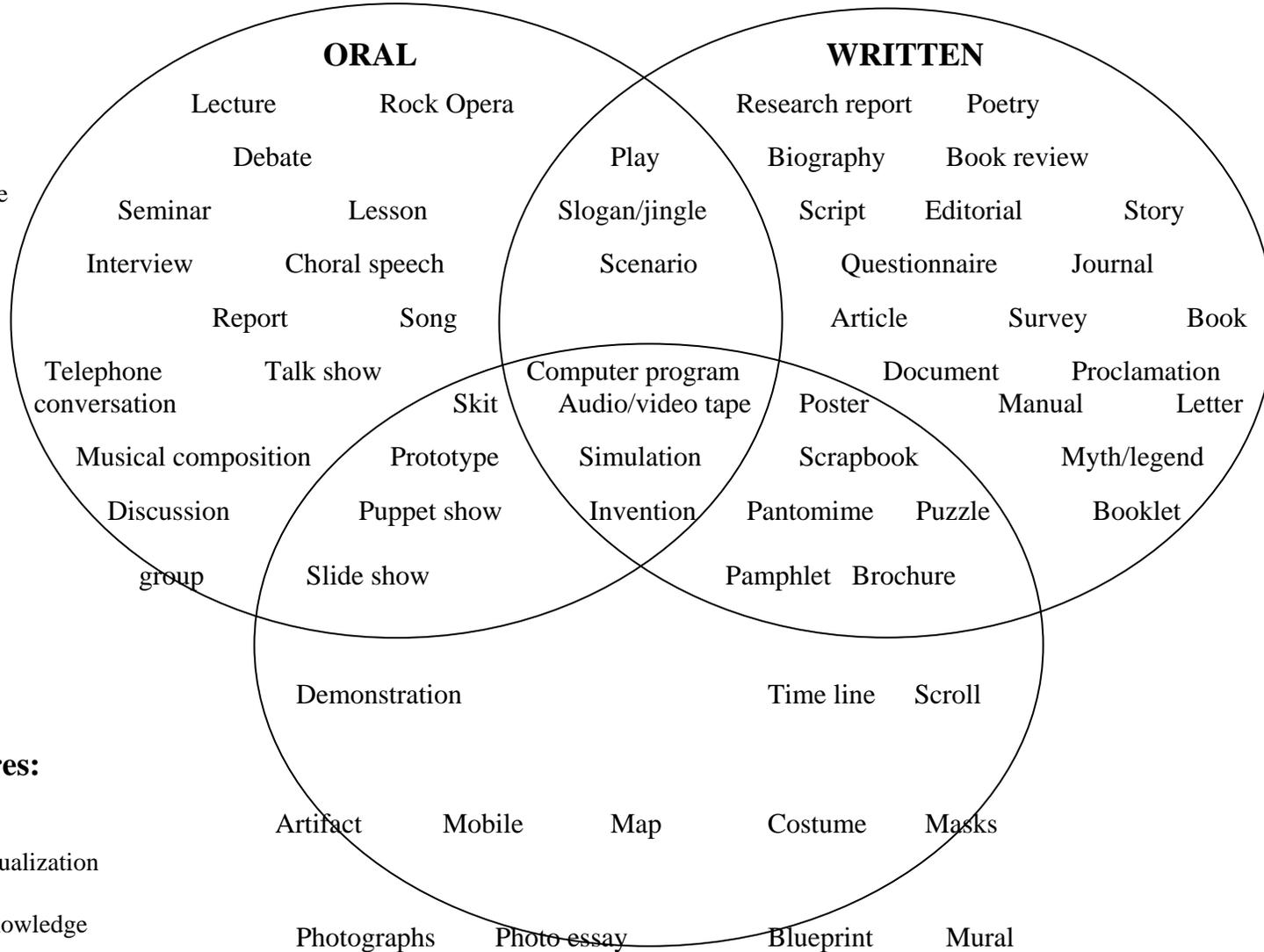
Is my multi-media presentation:	Yes, because . . .	Not yet, but here's how I can make it better:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focused on the topic? Can the viewer interpret my message? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visually effective? Is there balance between visuals and text? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technically sound? Have I used a variety of techniques (animation, font, sound) to enhance but not detract from the message? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		

ORAL

What it measures:

- speaking and listening skills
- reasoning
- composure, confidence
- enunciation, articulation
- ability to paraphrase and synthesize
- substantiation of positions, development of counter arguments
- organization

Suggested Performances and Products*



WRITTEN

What it measures:

- writing skills
- organization
- expression
- vocabulary
- style
- understanding different writing structures/genres
- research skills

VISUAL

What it measures:

- organization
- creativity
- depth of conceptualization
- synthesis
- application of knowledge and skills
- decision making

Cartoon/comic strip Collection Model
Graphic organizer Artistic creation Chart
Diorama Display Project/lab
Diagram Construction

VISUAL

*Adapted from Scarborough Board of Education, *The Handy Easy Learning Plan* (1996) and *Skillsbook for the Transition Years* (1995) and from *A Framework for Student Assessment* (AAC), 2005, pages 18-19
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Teacher Rubric (Summative) for Evolving Identities in Canada

Level Criteria	Sophisticated understanding	Extended understanding	Basic understanding	*Partial understanding	*Not Demonstrated
Explains historical context (7.S.2.3)	Uses pertinent information to provide comprehensive historical context.	Uses relevant information to provide thorough historical context.	Uses general information to provide partial historical context.	Uses trivial or inaccurate information to provide sketchy historical context.	No score is awarded because there is insufficient evidence of student performance based on the requirements of the assessment task.
Evaluates impact of changes on collective identity (7.2.6)	Provides insightful evaluation of impact of changes on collective identity.	Provides meaningful evaluation of impact of changes on collective identity.	Provides basic evaluation of impact of changes on collective identity.	Provides vague evaluation of impact of changes on collective identity.	
Communicates Information (7.S.8)	Communicates information in a convincing manner to engage the audience.	Communicates information in a purposeful manner to interest the audience.	Communicates information in a straightforward manner that generally holds the attention of the audience.	Communicates information in an ineffective manner that does little to sustain attention of the audience.	

* When work is judged to be at the partial understanding stage or not demonstrated, the teacher makes decisions about appropriate interventions to help the student improve.

Descriptive Feedback Examples

Example 1:

Critical Challenge: [A Poetic Picture](#) (Grade 2)

Specific Outcome: **2.1.1.1**
Students will appreciate how a community's physical geography shapes identity.

Example Teacher Comment: What powerful words you have used to describe the community! Your words create pictures in the mind of your reader and show what is important to the people who live in this community.

Example 2:

Critical Challenge: [Stories of Alberta's Past](#) (Grade 4)

Specific Outcome: **4.2.1.2**
Students will recognize oral traditions, narratives and stories as valid sources of knowledge about the land, culture and history.

Example Teacher Comment: What a wonderful story of your grandparent's journey to Canada! Now you need to identify what we can learn from their story about the land, culture and history. Select a graphic organizer to organize and share this information. You might be surprised to see how much good information is in their story!

Example 3:

Critical Challenge: [Exploring Personal Worldviews](#) (Grade 8)

Specific Outcomes: **8.1.4**
Students will appreciate how a society's worldview shapes individual citizenship and identity.

8.1.4
Students will re-evaluate personal opinions to broaden understanding of a topic or an issue.

Example Teacher Comment: The comparison of your responses from your first Personal Worldview questionnaire to your second identifies *where* your responses changed. Now go back and think about *why* you changed your response. What caused you to rethink your ideas? Record this new information.

About Commentaries:

Descriptive feedback provides feedback to a student that is descriptive and specifically related to the learner outcomes. It highlights what has been done well and prompts further thought.

Through comments and questions it models the use of the language of the outcomes and if used in assessment for learning, provides opportunities for students to improve their work.

Descriptive feedback is best used in the absence of letter grades or percentages. When students receive both a numerical grade and descriptive feedback, they tend to focus on the grade and the benefit of the descriptive feedback is lost (Butler). Descriptive feedback is an effective way to provide feedback to students relative to the Values and Attitudes outcomes where a letter or numerical grade might not be appropriate.

Rating Scale Example

Peer Review Rating Scale: A Formative Feedback Tool for Reporter's Log (Support Material)

Student Name _____ Peer Coach Name _____

Criteria	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not very often	Peer Comments You showed this when: OR You might think about:
You shared important information.				
Your reflections are thoughtful, interesting and could lead to further study.				

Commentary:

This rating scale provides a structure for productive peer review of the *What I See and Think* graphic organizer from the Reporter's Log (Support Material).

http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssblm/word/whatiseeandthink_blm.doc

Students research to find and record information. They then reflect on the information by providing personal observations. These are two separate, yet related skills that are critical to authentic inquiry processes.

The peer coach reviews the student's work and provides a general ranking of how well the criteria are met. The most important part of this feedback tool is the comment column, where the peer coach provides specific and descriptive feedback. The three-level rating scale is preferable in this context as it reduces the natural tendency for students and peers to assign an informal grade. Peer coaching tools should never be used to generate student marks and grades, as that is the teacher's professional responsibility. General ranking based on evidence and given in a supportive manner provides students with data they can use to improve their current work.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- shares key points (Knowledge and Understanding)
- reflects to clarify personal understanding (Skills and Processes S.1, S.7)

Rubric Example

Teacher Rubric for Creating Persuasive and Informative Visuals

Level Criteria	Sophisticated understanding	Extended understanding	Basic understanding	Partial understanding*	*Not Demonstrated
Shares key points (K & U)	Shares pertinent information.	Shares relevant information	Shares general information	Shares superficial or unrelated information	No score is awarded because there is insufficient evidence of student performance based on the requirements of the assessment task.
Supports visual through writing (S.8)	Supports visual by using a concise writing style.	Supports visual by using a direct writing style.	Supports visual by using an appropriate writing style.	Provides minimal support for the visual by using an overly detailed writing style, OR does not provide enough information to support the visual.	
Communicates through visuals (S.8)	Communicates using visuals in a compelling manner to engage and influence the audience.	Communicates using visuals in a persuasive manner to interest the audience.	Communicates using visuals in a straightforward manner that generally holds the attention of the audience.	Communicates using visuals in an ineffective manner that does little to sustain attention of the audience.	

* When work is judged to be at the partial understanding stage or not demonstrated, the teacher makes decisions about appropriate intervention to help the student improve.

Commentary:

One of the biggest challenges in using rubrics is working with the complexity of the language. Effective rubrics describe the quality of the performance rather than quantity of discrete elements (Arter and Chappius 63; Stiggins *Classroom Assessment* 205). This presents a particular challenge when working with younger students as well as students who are relatively new to rubrics. Strategies that will help students embrace the language of rubrics include the following:

- ongoing conversations with students about the criteria for evaluation based on learner outcomes

- provision of exemplars of student work at varying levels of quality
- use of formative tools as stepping stones to the rubric.

Translating the language of the rubric into words the students understand is an interim step that will support student learning. For example, the following explanations can help students understand the language of the rubric:

If your work is:	It means:
Pertinent	You included specific and important information about the topic.
Relevant	You included information that fits the topic and makes sense.
General	You included appropriate information that is correct but may need to be focused more directly.
Superficial	You included trivial information that isn't really very important and doesn't help us understand the topic.

If your work is:	It means:
Concise	You have used your words efficiently and skillfully to share the key points with the audience. Your work is easy to read and easy to understand.
Direct	Your writing is clear and to the point and helps the audience understand your message.
Appropriate	Your writing provides basic information to the audience using a style that does not hinder, yet does not enhance the message.
Long and drawn out	Your writing goes on and on and the audience loses interest in your message.

If your work is:	It means:
Compelling	The audience is convinced that your message is absolutely essential.
Persuasive	The audience believes your message is important and true.
Straightforward	Your message shares accurate information but lacks enthusiasm. Your audience has difficulty believing your message is important.
Ineffective	Your audience is not interested in your message and has no reason to believe it is important or true.

From Rubric Wordwall
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When teachers consistently use the language of quality, students will begin to use the language as well. The impact of the use of this language will increase dramatically as teachers begin to work as grade-level teams, multi-grade teams, school teams and division-wide teams and use the language of assessment to support student learning.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- shares key points (Knowledge and Understanding; Skills and Processes S.8)
- supports visual through writing (Skills and Processes S.8)
- communicates through visuals (Skills and Processes S.8)