

# Reading and Writing in Action

## About the Vignettes

This teacher support document and resource for instruction and classroom-based assessment consists of two vignettes that are windows into two different Grade 8 classroom learning communities. The learning/teaching contexts and strategies referenced in the vignettes, along with their sources, are also included to assist teachers in planning for the specific next steps in the students' learning journeys. (See Appendix: "Strategies, Contexts, and Tools for Facilitating Reading Comprehension and Writing in the Grade 8 Classroom.") This story is divided into two vignettes: Part 1 is about reading to learn and learning to read; Part 2 is about instructing students in writing to learn and writing to communicate. The classroom teachers in both vignettes demonstrate instruction and authentic classroom-based assessment within an active community of learners. The students in both classrooms are actively engaged in "making meaning" as readers and writers.

## Planning for Classroom-Based Instruction and Assessment

The vignettes show teachers how to plan for formative assessment based on what they see and hear in their classrooms in the context of everyday instruction. *Grades 5-8 English Language Arts: A Foundation for Implementation* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1998) is the teacher's planning "toolbox."

The format of the foundation document comprises four columns. Column 1 lists the learning outcomes that provide teachers with appropriate targets for planning strategic instruction. Strategies and criteria in columns 2 and 3 create rich learning experiences and contexts for formative assessment and differentiation. Column 3 also provides teachers with criteria for quality assessment and for uncovering curriculum, as well as suggestions for summative assessment of learning (demonstrations, performances, processes, products), where learners are applying their newly acquired skills and strategies in new and relevant contexts.

Planning for classroom-based assessment using the *Foundation for Implementation* document ensures that instruction and assessment criteria are consistent throughout Manitoba classrooms.

Planning may culminate with a celebration and/or summative assessment. Throughout the learning and teaching experiences, students and teachers have shared descriptive feedback based on criteria for quality work, and collected the evidence of learning (goals and action plans, focused observations, work samples, reflections...) to support formative and summative assessment. In the vignettes, the classroom-based assessment process includes portfolio assessment, planning for student-led conferences, and reporting assessment of learning to parents, particularly through the provincial Grade 8 Reading Comprehension and Expository Writing reports.

## Teachers and Students as Learners

Learning and assessment are responsibilities shared by students and teachers. The teachers in both classrooms model reading and writing. They construct criteria with their students based on curricular learning outcomes, teach strategies through explicit instruction, guide learning and practice, focus observations based on criteria to “see” and “hear” their students’ understandings, provide descriptive feedback based on students’ goals or the criteria, reflect on observations, monitor and gather evidence of learning, and differentiate instruction and assessment to enable students to become independent, self-regulated learners.

Student engagement is integral to the learning that takes place in these literacy-rich classroom communities. The students have been taught to set goals from criteria constructed from curriculum learning outcomes that describe *what proficient readers/writers know and do*, and *what quality writing looks and sounds like*. They practise readers’ and writers’ strategies with their peers, reflect on their learning, inquire and construct new ideas and understanding, assess their own and others’ learning, offer descriptive feedback based on their criteria, collect the evidence of their learning, revise goals and action plans, and celebrate their learning with peers, parents/guardians, and the community.

## Guiding Teachers and Building Capacity

The primary audience of this resource is the classroom teacher. Explicit strategies and tools for planning and ongoing monitoring of learning in the context of everyday instruction, as well as suggestions for next steps in the learning/teaching process, are demonstrated by the teachers and students. However, it is not just classroom teachers who may find this resource meaningful in building capacity. Learning communities may also use this resource as an entry point, or framework, for conversations about planning for strategic instruction, formative and summative assessment, assessment *for/as/of* learning, assessment and differentiated instruction, reflective and responsive practice, descriptive feedback, student engagement, and various other professional learning needs. Because of the genre and the presence of the learner’s voice in each vignette, the student, too, may be able to identify with one of the characters, make connections to her own learning style or goal(s), notice strategies that readers and writers use for “quality work,” and even chuckle at the humour.

Though instruction and assessment in the classrooms is particular to the processes of reading and writing, this resource has relevance to learning and teaching processes in any classroom learning community or curriculum, discipline, or age group.

The format and content of *Reading and Writing in Action* suggests a variety of entry points and users. It can be revisited frequently and briefly. Whether a professional learning community decides to focus a conversation around one vignette, a reflective dialogue on one page within a vignette, or perhaps a comparison of the reading and writing processes, building capacity to improve learning and teaching is eminent. Upon each invitation into these classrooms, one is bound to see and hear a connection to developing competent strategic readers and writers through quality classroom-based assessment.