real criteria

Educators worldwide are recognising the need to involve the learners in the assessment and evaluation process ...

After all, it doesn't really matter if the teacher and parent know a child's specific strengths and weaknesses. If our learners are not aware of where they are, where they need to go and how they can get there ... HOW WILL THEY GET THERE?

Criteria are commonly used with students in classrooms today. Unfortunately, all too often, the criteria have fallen short of achieving what they were designed to accomplish. Providing the learner with the opportunity to self-assess and evaluate using criteria is not enough. How often have we invited our learners to judge their work, only to ask afterwards, 'Has this child evaluated the same piece of work that I have just looked at?' Primary students will award themselves a smiley face or thumbs up for one of two reasons. First, because they want one! Second, they see their effort in a positive light if they worked hard. It matters little to them if that effort was directed in an entirely unfocused area, or if that effort did not address the required elements! This pattern is repeated at the secondary level.

Often, teachers provide a number scale as a guide: Content is worth 20, presentation 10, grammar, spelling and punctuation 10, etc. Although at first this approach may seem more specific, could we as teachers justify the difference between an 8 and an 8.5? A child may know that the top mark for presentation is 10, but does that knowledge alone enable the learner to achieve at that level?

We talk of the need for consistent judgments. That need is justified, but the approach we take in an effort to meet this challenge is not. Moderation is the universally accepted means of safeguarding against inconsistent judgments. Unfortunately, those condoning this practice have neglected to recognize that moderation deals only with the symptom of a much more fundamental problem... subjective and therefore ineffective criteria.

The first step toward developing criteria that are truly empowering for kids is recognizing the inherent failings in the hundreds of criteria 'exemplars' available to teachers on the internet and through various publications. Nonetheless, identifying those failings is simple – the challenge is to address them.

I have provided what I call the 'principles of criterion based assessment' for your reference below. For more detailed information on my thinking around criterion based assessment and evaluation practices, see, 'Where Assessment Meets Thinking and Learning', Lane Clark. Hawker Brownlow Publishing, 2009.

Principle 1

CRITERIA FOR CRITERIA™

Authentic assessment requires specific, measurable, observable and realistic criteria that is written in 'kid' speak. While this sounds relatively simply, in reality, when assessment criteria for teachers or learners, for that matter, is closely examined, this criteria for criteria is seldom met.

Specific

The most common challenge rests in the developer's ability to construct criteria that is specific in terms of both quantity and quality. Quantity vocabulary such as: begins to, rarely, often, usually, sometimes, few, some, many, seldom, etc. is unacceptable. The developer's idea of 'rarely' is 'rarely' recognized by the user; the user's 'some' will not likely represent the developer's 'some'. Eventually the outside evaluator will make a judgment in terms of what 'some' actually represents...simply outline this in advance. In this regard, a consistent judgment is much more likely to occur. Quantity specific language, once recognized, can be modified with relative ease.

The greater challenge rests in the modification of quality language. In an effort to illicit quality outcomes, criteria is often laden with adjectives and adverbs: interesting, creative, appropriate, mature, imaginative, simple, complex, obvious, confidently, consistently, carefully, coherently, etc. One might argue that subjectivity in this regard, is a necessary evil given the fact that quality itself, is a matter of opinion. I am adamant in my challenge of this perspective. In order to develop quality objective criteria, one must embed thinking into its design. Depth of knowledge and understanding where thinking is concerned, is critical to the design of truly effective criteria and consequently effective assessment and evaluation.

One should also be cognizant of criteria that is void of quality. Criteria often amounts to little more than a checklist of features. Empowering criteria, guides the learner in the depth and breadth of his achievement. It goes beyond the achievement of 'more elements', it focuses on developing sophistication and complexity.

Finally, when designing 'specific' criteria, it is important to 'unpack' it into its most basic elements. Anything less, assumes that the user understands what is being requested. For example, criteria might invite a learner to 'read with expression'. Reference of this criterion may result in more expressive reading by the user . Of course, this would be dependent upon the user's understanding of the generalized term. An 'unpacked' criterion (I can stop at full stops; I can pause at commas; I can raise my voice for question marks; I can spot quotation marks, skip ahead to see who is speaking, and then change my voice; etc.) leaves little to chance and successful attainment becomes a more consistent reality. While my example pertains to criteria developed for our younger learners, it is equally important to recognize the implications of including generalized terms within the design of criteria for our teachers.

Measurable and Observable

Authentic assessment requires hard evidence. The true power of criteria rests in the learner's ability to self-assess and evaluate his own efforts. This can only be done, if the learner has evidence to reference against the outcomes or criteria he is attempting to achieve. While an outside evaluator is often a reality in terms of 'real life', a learner should never be 'surprised' at the results of outside evaluation. The outside person should simply be confirming that which the learner is already aware of. If the evaluation differs, the learner references the evidence to disprove the outside evaluator or vice versa. True empowerment comes from knowing where you are, where you are going, and how you will get there. Hard evidence will promote self-recognition, personal goal setting, self-monitoring and the repeat of the cycle.

Because all outcomes cannot be proven on paper, authentic assessment necessitates the use and reference of multiple mediums. Assessment criteria and performance indicators must therefore invite the learner to capture evidence using a diversity of technologies. These may include: photographic, video, audio, and paper evidence

Realistic

In order to enable and empower the learner in successfully achieving desired outcomes, it is critical that the criteria be personally realistic for the learner. Knowing the standard is important; however, knowing how to meet the standard in relation to your current ability level is crucial. Empowering assessment criteria must be formatted so that a graduation of achievement levels is provided. This graduation should represent a developmental continuum. The format should enable the learner to place himself on the continua in relation to his current level of ability, and guide him toward the desired end. Extensions beyond the 'desired end' should also be included in the design of the criteria. Criteria that limits the learner, and therefore the learning, must be avoided.

Kid Speak

Independence, self-direction, responsibility, accountability…Just a few reasons for using criteria with our learners. If a student requires the teacher to self-assess and evaluate his work, these powerful outcomes are lost. Criteria must be written in a format that is independently understood by the learner. This may sound simple but all too often this criterion is ignored, particularly with teachers who work with our littlies. How many times do we find exemplars for our junior students that are text based alone? Many teachers who do attempt to develop 'student friendly' criteria often accomplish this by actually changing or limiting the criteria. This results in a teacher having his criteria reference and the learner having something quite different. The learner is now able to read and understand the criteria sheet but it is highly unlikely that they will ever determine a judgment that is consistent with the teacher or outside evaluator. The implications of this differentiation in evaluation are significant. Teachers often feel that the learner is not responsible enough to accurately self-assess- teachers may say that the learner is too hard or easy on himself. Instead of seeing criteria as the problem, the learner is seen as the problem. Ultimately, it is the teacher's evaluation that generally stands. A learner's self-evaluation can only be ignored or overruled so many times before he neglects to take the opportunity seriously, "…what's the point of doing this if my evaluation never really counts anyway!"

It is critical that the learner understand the criteria; and it is paramount that both teacher and learner use exactly the same criteria. Simplifying can be achieved through the use of the following techniques. *(Please refer to next page)*

My Reading Criteria - My Judging Rules

I can turn the pages.	I can read from left to right.	I can use a pattern to read.	I can pick my own book.
I can find words I know.	I can look at the pictures and read the story.	I can choose reading for free time.	
I can read signs.	I can point to the words as I read.		

picture or symbol sentences

My Oral Reading Criteria

☐ I stop

☐ I take a breath

☐ voice goes up

☐ lots of feeling

☐ I read smoothly by re-reading

picture and word sentences

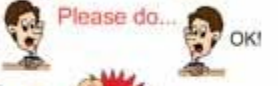## My Speaking Criteria

(1.1) ☐ I share stories about my life with others

(1.1) ☐ I answer questions when asked

(1.1) ☐ I share ideas with others

(1.1) ☐ I follow simple instructions — OK!

(1.1) ☐ I give simple instructions — Please do... OK!

(1.2) ☐ I talk to make friends

(1.2) ☐ I can take turns speaking and listening — I you then you I

word sentences with supporting picture sentences

Sr. Reading Comprehension Criteria

Part 2 - Level 2a

Overall Narrative Text Comprehension (mystery, sci fiction, fantasy adventures)

I can demonstrate an overall understanding of my reading material through the following responses...

Retell (to repeat, restate)

☐ I can share information about characters (physical features, actions, motives, feelings) from directly stated information in the text

☐ I can share information about setting at the beginning, middle and end (time, natural place, manmade place, weather)

☐ I can complete a plot line which indicates the rising actions, main events, problem/s, climax, and the resolving actions

☐ I can identify linguistic features used by an author (eg. metaphor, imagery, humor, descriptive language, simile, personification, punctuation: ellipsis, parentheses, dashes, connectives, sentence types)

☐ I can infer the meaning, message, theme, and purpose of a text and can provide evidence from the text to support my opinion

audio support

Writing Criteria
• I use a diversity of devices (imagery, metaphor, humor, sarcasm, idioms, colloquialisms, simile) to engage the reader
• I use vocabulary to signal comparisons (like, different, from, however, resembles, whereas, similar)
• I use vocabulary to signal alternatives (otherwise, conversely, either, instead of, whether)
• I use vocabulary to signal cause and effect (since, so, consequently, subsequently, hence, thus, results in, then, because)
• I use vocabulary to signal time order (rather, meanwhile, subsequently, consequently, initially, finally)

glossary support

Principle 2

BASELINE DATA

Authentic assessment requires baseline data. Without the ability to see specifically where you have come from, it is impossible to track genuine growth and development. In this regard, if a pilot aims to increase the capacity of the teacher in an effort to impact learner outcomes, baseline data would be required for both the teacher and learners. Because we are dealing with pilot projects that aim to increase the capacity of the teacher; and subsequently through this, improve learner outcomes, both 'soft' and 'hard' measures warrant consideration. The data collected would need to reflect each of the desired outcomes; as discussed earlier, it is likely that the baseline data will take on a variety of appearances. Given the fact that all outcomes cannot be proven on paper, photographic, video and audio evidence should also be considered when developing a tracking system.

Within the context of my own pilot project, I have included a wide variety of baseline data requirements. These include: video evidence of current teaching and learning practice; current planning documentation; student work samples; samples of assessment criteria and evidence of current assessment and evaluation practices; photographs of the learning environment; evidence of current ICT use; teacher and learner reflections as per reflection starters; teacher and learner survey.

The learner should be encouraged to identify what he believes to be the strengths and weaknesses evidenced within the data. His ideas for improvement should be incorporated into the criteria he will use to assist him in his learning development.

Principle 3

POST DATA

The collection of post data is also an important element of the assessment and evaluation process. In order to successfully track growth and change, an analysis that compares pre-data with post-data, must be conducted; if summative evaluation is required, the learner will need to reference his evidence against his success criteria prior to determining his level of achievement; finally, formative evaluation requires the learner to set goals based on what he has proven he has and has not attained.

The specific data collected upon the commencement of the learning must be collected again in its totality, as an effective comparative analysis requires consistent variables. The learner should be encouraged to use a thinking tool (i.e. venn diagram) to assist him in comprehensively identifying the similarities and differences that exist between his pre and post data evidence. Improvements should be documented as these represent the growth of the learner. In terms of a pilot project, it will be the improvements, or lack there of, that represent the ultimate success level of the pilot project.

As suggested above, the learner should also evaluate his post data against his success criteria. This will enable the learner to identify a level of achievement should that be required. Finally and most importantly, the learner should identify the strengths and weaknesses represented within his evidence and set goals for improvement. These goals should be incorporated into the design of new success criteria.

Principle 4

NEGOTIATION

When assessment criteria is developed and provided to the learner, it is most important that negotiation occur. Learners should first ensure that the criteria has been written in 'user speak'. If understanding is compromised, so too will the attainment of the outcomes. The learner must cross check the assessment criteria to ensure that it is specific, measurable and observable. Means of capturing evidence should be discussed with the learner in advance, and challenges worked through before the learner is expected to use the criteria. Once each of these areas has been considered, the learner should be invited to negotiate the criteria in relation to his current ability level. Reinforcements or extensions may be required, and therefore modifications to the criteria should be made at this time.

Principle 5

SELF ASSESSMENT FIRST

Self-awareness, self-reflection, analytical and evaluative skill development, responsibility, accountability, ownership, decision making, problem solving, self-improvement, idea generation...these are the ultimate goals of self-assessment and evaluation. These opportunities are lost when the learner is not provided the time to self-assess and evaluate before the involvement of an outside party. Further to this, and crucial to the aims authentic assessment, the learner must be provided with 'lag' time following his assessment and evaluation effort. What is the point of the learner now knowing exactly where he is, where he is going, and how he will get there, if he is not offered the opportunity to get there? The time line between the self-assessment and evaluation and the outside assessment and evaluation should be negotiated between the parties involved.

While it is recognized that there are times when evidence is 'taken away' and reviewed by an outside evaluator, an optimum scenario, would invite the learner to share with his outside evaluator his specific evidence against criteria; discuss what he has determined to be the strengths and weaknesses of his effort; and share what he believes to be his next steps. Should the evaluator recognise something missed by the learner, dialogue, in relation to the evidence, is advocated.

Peer assessment can certainly be designed into the reflection process; however it is important to recognize that if the learner is using criteria which is in 'user' speak, specific, measurable and

observable; if the learner is using evidence when he self-assesses and evaluates, a peer should come to the same results as the learner himself. Often a peer is used to help the learner see what he may not be inclined to see. The use of criteria as I am advocating, will never result in this dilemma.

In my opinion, peer assessment aids the peer assessor much more than the individual he is attempting to aid. When a peer is immersed in alternate examples or in exemplars, his own abilities are likely to be promoted. As a result, should a peer assessor be desired, as in the case of the outside evaluator discussed above, a negotiated time line between the self and outside evaluation should be negotiated.