Ms. McKay is teaching a class of Grade 9 students in an applied science course. Many students in her class struggle in school and have gaps in their learning. As part of the school’s Student Success plan, the teachers of Grade 9 applied courses like Ms. McKay’s confer with the Student Success Team for initial and ongoing planning based on the needs of their students.

Ms. McKay reflects on information gathered from the transition meetings with elementary colleagues through observations and conversations with her students, from the OSR, and, in some cases, with the Student Success team and the Special Education department. She determines that some students in her class have:

- personal histories of low levels of achievement at school
- low expectations for their own learning
- little or no experience with self-assessment
- low self-efficacy
- needs in the areas of literacy and numeracy skills, as well as learning skills and work habits
- a variety of learning strengths and areas of interest
- a tendency to take few risks in learning situations

“One does not ‘acquire a disposition’, one ‘becomes more or less disposed’ to respond in such-and-such a way. Learning dispositions can be construed as default responses in the presence of uncertain learning opportunities and circumstances. Suppose the idea of the ‘effective learner’ can be unpacked into a number of learning attributes: tendencies towards persisting, questioning, collaborating and so on. ...What is at stake here is how we can take a dynamic approach to such qualities.” (Claxton & Carr, 2004)
Why Assessment as Learning?
From Ms. McKay’s reading of *Growing Success* and her own experience, she knows that improving students’ self-assessment skills through explicit teaching and modeling will help students experience success as they develop the skills of goal setting, monitoring their own progress, determining next steps, and reflecting on their thinking and learning. Ms. McKay also knows that helping her students improve their learning skills and work habits will help them to achieve the curriculum expectations. Ms. McKay decides to develop her students’ self-assessment skills by having them self-assess both the development of their learning skills and work habits and their achievement of learning goals based on the curriculum expectations.

Ms. McKay knows she will have to plan carefully to incorporate assessment as learning into her instruction. She will explicitly teach and model self-assessment and provide her students with a variety of tools and strategies they can use to become successful self-assessors. Her ultimate goal for her students is for them to develop a stronger sense of efficacy and autonomy in their learning.

In order to promote this classroom culture, assessment as learning needs to take place in a safe, inclusive, and accepting learning environment where students are comfortable sharing their thinking and working together. Ms. McKay will:

- incorporate collaborative and cooperative learning structures into instruction
- model self-assessment, self-reflection, and risk-taking
- conference with each student and help them self-assess and self-reflect by providing descriptive feedback on the quality of their peer and self-assessments
- collaborate with parents, learning resource teachers, school support personnel, administration, and community agencies and groups to respond to exceptional student needs

Planning for Assessment as Learning in Science
Ms. McKay reviews the overall and specific expectations to identify learning goals that describe what she wants students to know and to be able to do. As she thinks about how students will be able to demonstrate their achievement of the expectations – the assessment criteria and tasks she will use to know that students have achieved the learning goals – she reviews the achievement chart for the science curriculum.
Integrating Learning Skills and Work Habits into Instruction and Assessment

Together, Ms. McKay and the class look at the six learning skills and work habits – responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative, and self-regulation – and discuss how these relate to their science classroom and which particular behaviours are most important to ensure they have a common understanding of what each one means. Ms. McKay states it as a learning goal: *We are learning to identify and explain each learning skill and work habit.* Ms. McKay has written each of the learning skills and work habits as six different headings on the blackboard, and together they begin co-constructing success criteria for each of these skills and habits. She poses the questions, “So what do we mean by each of these skills or habits? Could you show me or tell me what each of these look or sound like?”

She asks students to work with a partner or by themselves to find three ways they could describe or demonstrate each skill or habit, and she records these as success criteria. The students are particularly good at identifying things they shouldn’t say or do, so Ms. McKay turns these around to get students to articulate the things that they should be doing or saying by clarifying, supporting, and asking prompting questions as she co-constructs success criteria with the students.

Ongoing Support

In developing the rest of the lessons, Ms. McKay will continue to help her students self-assess their demonstration of the learning skills and work habits at appropriate points. She will use strategies to support self-assessment and reflection, including:

- modeling self-reflection, metacognition, and setting individual goals
- providing descriptive feedback to students and giving them opportunities to provide it to one another
- providing multiple opportunities to apply descriptive feedback to improve their work
- having informal and formal conversations with individuals, small groups, and the whole class:
  - “I noticed that your group did not finish the lab during class. Look at the success criteria. Why do you think that happened? What will you do differently next time?”
- using exit tickets and reflection forms that help students self-assess and set goals
- suggesting reflective journal topics
  - Describe one learning skill and work habit that you are struggling with and identify which success criteria you will work on to improve.
  - What strategy could you use to help yourself improve?
- tools to help students track their achievement of the learning goals
- building opportunities for student choice into learning and assessment activities
Connecting Assessment as Learning with the Curriculum
Sharing the Learning Goal

While Ms. McKay and her students work on practicing and improving learning skills and work habits, they are also addressing curriculum expectations. Ms. McKay starts by creating learning goals from the curriculum expectations. As she begins each topic she will introduce the learning goals and co-construct the success criteria with the students.

Ms. McKay introduces the unit first with an activity based on the second overall expectation in the strand Scientific Investigation Skills and Career Exploration. Ms. McKay calls the activity “Who Needs Science?” and presents a challenge to the class: she asks students to find examples of careers that are not related to science in any way. She has students work together in small groups to brainstorm lists, and then has each group present its best example to see if they can stump her by providing an example of a career she cannot relate to science. She explains the science in each of the examples they provide and relates each example to the appropriate discipline(s). As they proceed through this activity Ms. McKay notes students’ answers that can be turned into success criteria when they examine the learning goal.

Then she asks the groups to see if they can continue the activity on their own. They make a game of it and take turns trying to stump each other. Ms. McKay encourages students to help each other and to give each other hints if they can’t provide the explanation. She provides guiding questions and prompts when required.

Next, she reveals the learning goal that has emerged from the activity: We are learning to identify careers related to the science we are studying. Ms. McKay engages the class in identifying and defining key terms that students will need to attain this learning goal.

Co-constructing Success Criteria

As she continues her explicit teaching of the concepts and skills necessary to achieve the learning goal, Ms. McKay listens intently for students to identify success criteria as they are learning. When she hears one she posts it up and brings it to the class’ attention.
Peer Assessment and Descriptive Feedback

Ms. McKay begins to teach her students about using the learning goals and success criteria to provide each other with descriptive feedback. She starts by modeling the process for her students. Using an example of a career and how it is related to science, she assesses herself aloud by applying the success criteria to her example. She then reflects on the strengths in her example and suggests a specific next step she could take to improve. Next, she gives another example and asks the students to assess her and provide her with descriptive feedback.

Modeling helps her students by showing them exactly what they will be doing, and how they will be sharing feedback with their peers about their learning. The next day, instead of sharing examples with the class, Ms. McKay has students practise by giving each other examples with a peer, and as she circulates, she contributes to their assessments by providing feedback on how they are giving and receiving descriptive feedback to each other.

Self-Assessment

Ms. McKay gives students an exit card to fill out based on their reflections on their achievement of the learning goals and using the success criteria. They will set personalized goals for learning. She will repeat this each day and at the end of the week students will use the information they recorded to help them self-assess their progress throughout the unit.

“Students use assessment as learning to gain knowledge about their progress, show milestones of success that are worthy of celebration, adjust their goals, make choices about what they need to do next to move their learning forward, and advocate for themselves.” (Earl, 2006)
Works Cited


Resources for Further Learning

From AER GAINS:

Self-Assessment Video Series
eModule: Assessment for and as Learning
Student Voices

From Research Literature:

