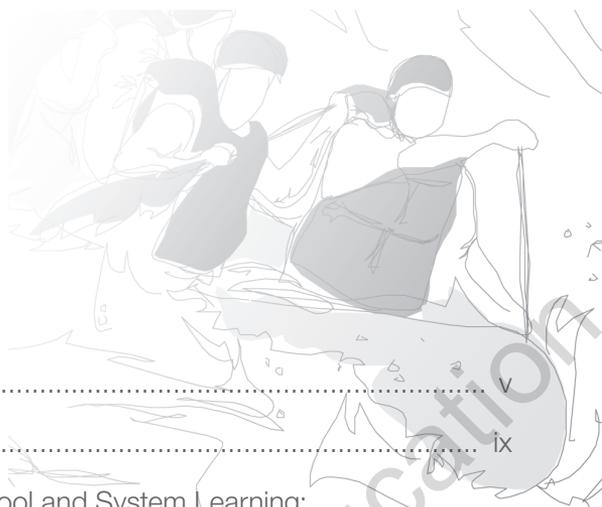


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# Preface

*“To cope with a challenging world, any entity must develop the capacity of shifting and changing – of developing new skills and attitudes; in short the capacity of learning.”*

*Arie de Geus*



The leader's journey will inevitably bring you to the river of learning. Some see this as a good time to quit. Others see an opportunity for a new and exciting experience, even knowing that there will be obstacles and tests ahead. Once you commit to the river, you can't go back; once you commit to change, forward movement is going to occur.

The only way to feel confident and reduce anxiety is to prepare for the ride, make a plan; choose a sturdy raft, a guide who knows the way, a committed team and reliable equipment to keep you safe. Once you hit the rapids, bailing out doesn't work – you don't end up dry and safe onshore. Instead, abandoning the learning at this point leaves you going forward *without* your raft, your equipment, your team and your guide.

As you enter and negotiate the rapids of system learning, let the successes of other leaders give you the courage you need to face the fear of the unknown. Then you will share the passion of meeting the challenge as a team and the exhilaration of surviving the "spin cycle".

Along the way, these rapids also have obstacles that need to be overcome. But we can't focus solely and pointedly on them. Rather, we need to concentrate on the water that flows between these obstacles, as it pushes and pulls us along our journey.

Getting from where you are to where you want to go requires continuous assessment *for learning*. It provides the processes leaders need to negotiate what lies before us and to plan next steps.

This book is jammed with examples of how you can lead the way to system change at all levels of education. Let the lessons learned by others support your preparation and implementation. You might choose to read it from front to back, or go directly to a chapter that focuses on a topic you are currently thinking about.

The journey requires that we pay attention to the following areas:

- Establishing a common starting point (chapter 2)
- Systemic focus and alignment (chapter 3)
- Time to reflect (chapter 4)
- Rethinking time and resources (chapter 5)
- Professional development that leads to learning (chapter 6)
- Expanding proof of success (chapter 7)
- Moving from resistance to support (chapter 8)
- Bridging the implementation dip (chapter 9)
- Involving parents and community (chapter 10)
- Increasing quality feedback (chapter 11)
- Standards-based reporting (chapter 12)

We have also included a task at the end of each chapter to get you started on practising assessment *for learning* with your leadership team – your colleagues. We invite you to spend time considering these ideas in relation to any initiative. They work because all learning involves assessment *for learning*. That said, the examples in this book are focused on change in relation to classroom assessment and assessment for adult, school and system learning. No matter what kind of learning you are seeking for yourself and your learning organisation, assessment *for learning* will help you achieve your goals and stay on track to success.

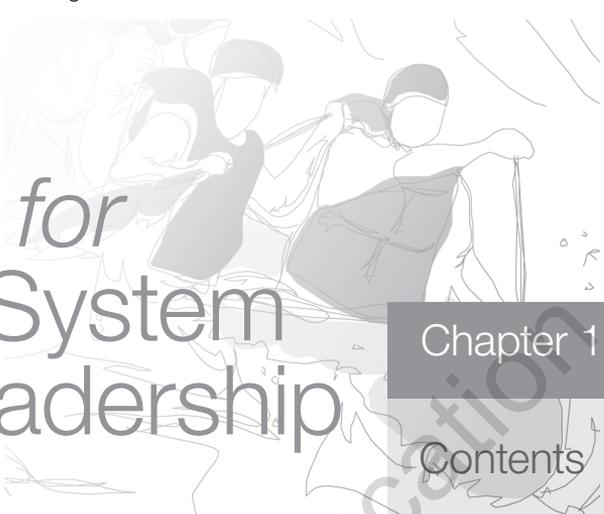
This is not a step-by-step, how-to book – given the complexity of the work we do, we can't simply adopt previously used methods to suit the river that we need to navigate. However, the experiences of others help us find our way. As leaders, we need the research at our fingertips, so that when we are asked *why*, we are prepared to shine a light on validated research practices. We provide a collection of pertinent research summaries – brief descriptions of the key findings of those dedicated people upon whose shoulders we stand – that you can access in our companion resource, *Leading the Way to Assessment for Learning: A Practical Guide*.

Are you assessing *for* learning in your work as a leader? As you move forward, we ask that you adapt these ideas to your own context. To help you do that, we have provided a collection of templates, found as forms in the appendix, to assist you in your planning.

Assessment *for* learning helps inform our work by building bridges from problems to solutions. When we are heading downriver, we have to continuously assess where we are in relation to where we want to be, and what needs to be done in the moment. We seek continuous feedback. We watch. We consider what might happen next. We keep our focus. When we keep the end in mind, we use assessment *for* learning to keep ourselves on track.

Being a leader is always a work in progress and continually involves building relationships with others. Leaders know the work is never done – but what's important is moving towards success, purposefully and thoughtfully, while making a greater difference for more and more learners along the way. Assessment *for* learning is the process that makes great results possible.

This book can help you to put into practice the principles and big ideas of assessment *for* learning. Whether your system is a school, a cluster of schools (or a district, referred to here as a group of schools or a school *area*), or an entire state or territory, we invite you to actively take on the role of learner – to not only use assessment *for* learning to inform your next actions, but to experience assessment *for* learning as the powerful learning structure that it is.



# Assessment *for* School and System Learning: Leadership in Action

## Chapter 1

### Contents

Leadership Lessons

Being Successful

Task for the  
Leadership Team

“To see the future, you have to travel on the rough edge of experience.”

Harriet Rubin

Transforming education isn't about the latest great idea. It is about imagining the best possible future for our students and putting our hearts into our work, so we can take the next steps on the path. It is about building on the research and finding ways to make the seemingly impossible both possible and practical. Research has shown us that what we need to accomplish – deep student and organisational learning – isn't possible unless assessment *for* learning is the key focus of our work.

As leaders, our journey to success begins with the *end in mind* and uses assessment *for* learning to keep us on track and to provide tools for the journey. Assessment *for* learning propels systems toward success. Using the same steps that enable our students to achieve, leaders can employ assessment *for* learning techniques to plan for, implement, gather feedback about and collect evidence of change for learning. This is an ongoing model of learning for the entire educational community. In education, the goal is organisational learning – constant, informed change.

Successful leaders don't attempt to do this work alone. System learning takes the wisdom of a crowd and the energy and passion of a leadership team devoted to helping each learner become all she or he can be by developing the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to learn and achieve success in life. As educators working together – respectfully, reflectively and with great resilience – we can create ways to continually improve schools and learning.

### Leadership Lessons

Like you, we are in positions of leadership, have read the books, have made our share of mistakes and have learned from them. We've provided leadership both when it was our job and when it wasn't. Over time, we've learned some lessons and uncovered some truths that guide our work. Here are some of our guideposts:

*Know yourself so your actions are aligned mindfully and thoughtfully. Reflection and self-knowledge are key.* What matters to you? What lessons have you learned that might help others? Your responses to these questions are important preparation.

*Plan and take action.* Leaders begin with the end in mind. Do you know where you are going? Have you considered how you want to live your life along the way? Do you have the courage and patience to persevere? Do you remember the *big* destination you are working toward? Do you keep your eye on the next step? Do you know your goals and keep them in mind, minute by minute and day by day? Do you find ways to walk your talk? Reflect on your responses.

*Plan for and consciously seek balance.* As leaders, we must plan for balance so we can move forward with zest, foster resilience in ourselves and in others, make time to laugh and to celebrate, and encourage others to step back from the hard work and reflect. We do this in order to keep focused and engaged in the work to the end.



## Lessons Learned

- Value reflection. Describe the purpose and benefits of practising it. Provide evidence that past reflections were considered in subsequent planning cycles. Do not judge others' reflections; they will be less likely to make their thinking public in the future. Consider saying "Thank you" and refraining from any further comment.
- Model reflection. As a leader, take the opportunity in front of your staff to make your thinking public. Reflect on how you came to make a decision. Talk about a challenge you face and how you are working through it.
- Provide structure for reflection. Offer frames, sentence starters or conversation templates that allow staff to practise and focus on the skill of reflection. (See figure below.)
- Structure reflection into all professional learning. Purposefully build time into agendas for participants to shine their "torch" both forwards and backwards.
- View reflection as essential to goal setting. Thinking about the current state and comparing it to a goal or desired state identifies a gap that can become the next step.

### Reflection Stems

I feel good about . . .

I used to . . . but now I . . .

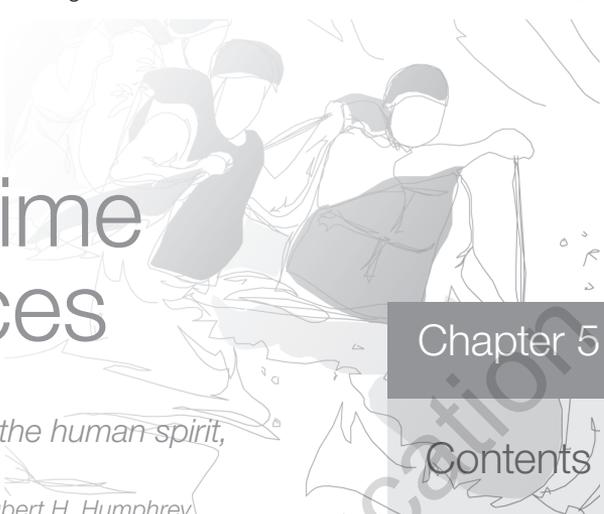
My goal is . . . I will know I am on my way when . . .

One thing that worked today was . . .

One question I have . . .

Two things I will remember are . . .

If I could do something again differently, I would . . .



# Rethinking Time and Resources

## Chapter 5

### Contents

Lessons Learned

Task for the Leadership Team

“There are incalculable resources in the human spirit, once it has been set free.”

Hubert H. Humphrey

All learners need to engage in assessment *for learning* continually, whether as an individual learner, a professional learning community or the learning organisation itself. How can we find the time and resources to do all this?

The demand for more time, money, space and people is a common theme that school leaders hear. Teachers cry out that they need more time to collaboratively plan lessons and to share examples of student work with each other. Year-level teachers suddenly discover that the resource materials that they have do not match the new learning goals for their students. Teachers and principals realise that in some cases the expertise needed to coach students and to involve them in the assessment *for learning* process does not exist within their building or their area/system/group of schools. Staff developers search for focused and job-embedded professional training around the new work of assessment *for learning*. Administrators recognise that current organisational structures and staffing patterns may not match the vision. Current budgets and daily schedules have very little wiggle room. The school system realises the need for different technology applications and for revised policies and procedures to support and allow for increased levels of collaboration, shared conversations, feedback, reflection and goal setting – and wonders where it will find the time and resources. Accountability demands compel us to work smarter, not harder, and dictate some forced choices in terms of allocation of resources.

Yet we also know schools and groups that move ahead in spite of seemingly insurmountable constraints. What lessons can be learned that may have relevance for us in our journey? Often the solution is not found to be simply having more resources. Great schools are willing to reinvent themselves to achieve the agreed-upon results. They are willing to reallocate and refocus resources and time creatively and flexibly when they see that they support their collective vision.

Rethinking time and resources means:

- Reflecting upon the existing infrastructure and the degree to which it supports the desired outcomes
- Using and modelling assessment *for* learning principles in framing and having conversations with groups
- Dedicating resources and time for deep learning
- Assessing what is working and what is not
- Matching human and capital strengths to needs and next steps
- Sacrificing individual preferences for the collective good of the organisation
- Doing things differently
- Thinking outside the box in ways that are flexible, innovative and creative

### **Professional Learning Connections:**

Bruce Wellman and Robert Garmston write about characteristics of professional learning that overcome the challenges of time, getting work done and doing the right work. Their work in adaptive schools provides school staff with resources and strategies to create collaborative norms, to design and conduct effective meetings, to engage in learning-focused conversations and to become skilled at group facilitation.

# Standards-Based Reporting

## Chapter 12

### Contents

Standards-Based Reporting

The Truth About Learning

Essential Reporting Questions: Checking for Alignment and Consistency

Lessons Learned

Task for the Leadership Team

“Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

Carl Sagan

The way we value and judge student achievement is changing. Standards-based curriculum, assessment and instruction require us to change our marking, grading and reporting practices. Assessment for learning is yet another reason to reconsider and redefine the way we measure success and report to others. How can we move forward in a way that captures what we know to be true about learning?

### Standards-Based Reporting

A move to standards-based instruction requires a complementary move to standards-based reporting. Standards-based reporting is an example of assessment of learning. It is when teachers review the evidence of learning and make a professional judgment – an evaluation. Historically, teachers have struggled to ensure school report grades fairly reflect student learning and achievement. There are many issues related to traditional evaluation and grading practices.

Common evaluation practices such as grading in isolation, averaging marks and scores, limiting evidence to products such as tests to produce marks and grades for school reports, and using electronic grading programs on default settings cannot continue. There is a danger of misrepresenting student learning and achievement, especially for students who face the greatest challenges as they learn and are punished most by these reporting practices.

Systems of grading and reporting can be difficult to change, despite their inconsistencies, disparities and poor quality. Yet educators who seek to improve classroom assessment in order that it better support