

# **CREATING INDEPENDENT STUDENT LEARNERS**

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**

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# INTRODUCTION

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This book is about practical ways to help students become independent learners through *assessment for learning*. The ideas presented here come from an initiative to bring research on assessment into the classroom. During the years 2000 to 2003, 80 teachers from the Inner City District of Winnipeg School Division were given the opportunity to develop their skills in assessing their students. These teachers understood that assessment was an important part of their programs and were willing to explore their own practices and seek ways to improve. We named the project on assessment for learning *Feedback for Learning*.

This book is a showcase of the participating teachers who taught in grades N–3 classrooms, and of their experiences with reworking their assessment practices. Along with an abundance of information about how to create independent student learners, there are many comments and examples of their observations working with students. The eight steps in the scaffolding outlined in chapter 1 and expanded on in the remaining three chapters will give teachers a guide to how to rework their assessment practice and how to think about transforming their students into independent learners. Each chapter includes rubrics, working charts, and essays, themed according to our experiences with Feedback for Learning.

In addition to the practical information on creating independent learners, we believe it is important to share some of the thoughts and challenges we encountered, in part, to allow you to see that change in any teacher's practice is gradual; it takes more time than most of us would like, but it is worth the effort. We have included essays, our reflections, to help teachers feel more comfortable and confident as they embark on the process of change.

This book can be used independently by teachers, or as the basis of a study group with small groups of colleagues. Teachers may use the whole book as a program or they may read short sections to find effective ideas that will improve student performance. The book is organized around eight steps, structured into a scaffolding format. Each step is explained and there are examples of applications from participating teachers. We have also included ideas that helped teachers as they worked through the scaffolding to try to create independent student learners. We have divided the content into the steps in the scaffolding to help build the language, experiences, and thinking skills that students need in order to be reflective learners. The students become learners as they learn to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and strategies they can use to help themselves.

This is also a book about change. We believe that asking teachers to reflect on their practice and to implement new techniques in assessment are not trivial tasks. Classrooms are very complex places and teachers must be treated as adult learners. As you read through the book, you will see that teachers were encouraged to control the pace of their work, to discuss their ideas, to deepen their understanding, and to trust their intuitions.

The path for participating teachers was not always easy but their skill, perseverance, dedication, and good humour have resulted in a deeper understanding of how to help students become independent learners and of how to improve their students' performance.