Athelstone Primary School
Round Table Assessment

Summary
Round Table Assessment provides an opportunity for year 7 students to demonstrate their learning achievements to a panel made up of teachers, family members, peers and community members.

Band
Middle Years—upper primary

Context
There are three year 7 classes from which all students participate

Learning Area
All

Timeline
2 terms, with preparation over the preceding two years

School
Athelstone Primary School

Educators
Ros Maio (principal)
Karin Pettge
George Sarantaugas
Gary Wheaton
Marilyn Cook

The Vision
The following material is adapted from Round Table Assessment overheads, prepared in 2002 by Ros Maio, Principal Athelstone Primary School.

Athelstone Primary School's research into effective teaching and learning methodology demonstrated that:

• learning activities should be anchored to holistic connected tasks
• ownership of tasks should connect with students and value their life experience
• authentic activities should have a clear context, purpose and audience
• learning tasks should reflect real life complexity
• students should be able to negotiate processes used
• learning environments should challenge students' thinking, ensuring intellectual quality
• cooperative learning supports critical dialogue.

They concluded that their research had the following implications for pedagogy:

• emphasis should be on learning and skilling
• students should be skilled in multiple literacies
• student learning styles and values need to be catered for
• students should be involved in real situations within a supportive learning environment
• when assessing, emphasis should be on performance and understanding.

Further assessment implications were that assessment should

• be authentic
• be embedded and performance-based
• be personally meaningful
• include self, peer and expert evaluation

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through http://www.saesa.sa.edu.au/. The material is provided with permission of Athelstone Primary School.
• provide opportunities to observe student performance
• include a range of self created or constructed activities.

Round Table Assessment was trialled in 2001 and demonstrated that it
• builds a culture that focuses on the learner, their interests and achievements
• makes explicit Essential Learnings
• develops skills and competencies and values personal knowledge
• provides a nurturing environment for practising real life skills
• gives ownership and responsibility to the student
• actively involves students and their families, and connects with the wider community.

Furthermore, Round Table Assessment offers the opportunity for
• students to articulate what they value and how they apply their literacy skills in the real world
• literacies acquired out of school to be connected with those gained in the classroom
• staff to gain a greater insight into students—their interests, experiences, strengths and areas for development
• the school to actively involve and inform families about their child's learning
• students to make sense of their experiences
• each child to provide a rich portfolio of their capabilities.

Round Table Assessment is successful because it
• focuses on Essential Learnings and Key Competencies, giving it a skills focus rather than a content emphasis
• captures what students can do through Heart, Hand and Mind, thus valuing their funds of knowledge and social literacies
• is richer, more whole and real for all participants by being performance based
• is constructivist in its approach
• is supported by the infrastructure which already exists at the school and classroom level.

The Journey
Round Table Assessment offers an opportunity to celebrate and demonstrate learning around a negotiated topic within constructivist principles.

Round Table Assessment was trialled in 2001 with the aim of providing an authentic opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning achievements.

_It gave us an opportunity to explore aspects of students’ learning in their senior primary years. It also supported our desire to develop self-awareness in our students and an understanding of their identities, giving each student a strong sense of self-worth in a school setting._

Students, staff and parents are equally enthusiastic about the value of Round Table Assessment.
The principal comments:
*Round Table Assessment has helped staff understand how working from a constructivist approach benefits students.*

A parent adds to this:
*I am very enthusiastic because it is preparing them for the world of work, interviews and developing confidence.*

And students sum up their experiences:
*I think it's a really good thing to have to do because you realise how helpful it will be for the future.*

*It helps you know how good it's got to be. If you didn't know that, you wouldn't push yourself to be better. So you wouldn't do as much or push yourself.*

*In the future I won't feel a panic about it because I'll know what I need to do and can concentrate on organising it instead of rushing around.*

*You can come away feeling really proud of having done a really good job.*

The success of Round Table Assessment has ensured its continuance; it is now in its third year and is an integral part of reporting and assessment for Middle Years at Athelstone Primary School. Aspects of it will be refined; talks have become longer, so next year students will need to address timing, with one of the criteria being completion within a set time period. Furthermore, teachers are preparing an oral language continuum across the school, so that they can prepare students at a younger age for their Round Table Assessment, linking formal presentations in Middle Years—upper primary with show and tell in junior primary. A continuum of learning, reflective of the learning journey, will therefore be explicitly set in place.

*This will help us in the future in interview situations where we will feel more confident. Also you might have situations where you have to talk in front of people or maybe even cameras sometimes.*  

*Year 7 student*

**The Program**
Round Table Assessment provides an opportunity for year 6 and 7 students to celebrate and demonstrate their learning achievements to a panel.

Students present a negotiated topic:
- to a panel of teachers, family members, peers and community members
- linked to heart, hand and mind
- which explicitly incorporates the Essential Learnings
- lasting no more than 15 minutes
- using presentation aids such as video, white board, CD player, computer and others as negotiated.

They must precede their presentation by sending each panel member an introductory letter outlining their topic and how their presentation will incorporate the required aspects.

---

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacs1.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacs1.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Athelstone Primary School.
I was worried that 15 minutes would not be enough because I show a lot of equipment, so I had to cut it down a lot and cut down on some of the things I was going to say and make those decisions. I had to cut it down using major points and summing up. I was also concerned that it would be too boring for the audience. But in the end it was 22 minutes, so that was OK.

**Preparation**

Preparation for the presentation includes:

- negotiation of topic
- explicit teaching of letter writing skills
- explicit teaching and practice in oral presentation skills
- establishing assessment criteria
- selection of panel members.

Students have free choice in their topic, with teachers encouraging students to look at familiar topics in new ways and to break down any stereotypical notions they may have. Round Table Assessment is a two year process, beginning in year 6, when students give a presentation around a negotiated topic to their peers in the classroom. However, they must choose a different topic or topics for their Round Table Assessment in year 7.

*It's good being able to choose the topic yourself because you don't have to do so much research and you're not pressured to know everything about it. If you do something original the chances are that people won't know so much about it, which relieves the pressure.*

Working with constructivist principles, students may select and negotiate their topic; this allows for strong connections to be made between their extra-curricular interests and school. They can therefore demonstrate their passions, research topics for which they already have an interest and increase skills for life long learning.

Students are supported in writing their letters of introduction by explicit teaching and modelling of letter writing, including structure, grammar and editing. Their letters of introduction must indicate their topic and how they will incorporate the required components.

Time is allocated to presentation work at the beginning of term 2, by which time they are expected to have thought of a suitable topic.

*We have to start at beginning of term 2. I had decided already what I was going to do last year.*

---

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.saesa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.saesa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Athelstone Primary School.
Having given a presentation to their peers in year 6, students are already familiar with the concept of oral presentations. However, their year 7 presentation requires greater rigour; they must choose a different topic from that chosen the previous year and meet explicit criteria of incorporating heart, hand and mind, together with Essential Learnings.

There were two stages with the Essential Learnings—we had to understand them first and then find ways to put them into our talk. With learning about them in year 6, we could get the understanding part done earlier. Most of them were pretty easy to understand.

Teachers support students by:
• introducing and discussing the Essential Learnings, how these might be incorporated into presentations and their application into lifelong learning
• explicitly teaching oral presentation skills, with consideration for audience, purpose and context
• teaching organisational skills, including understanding criteria which need to be addressed.

Students work as a class, in groups and individually, preparing their Round Table Assessment, focusing on:
• what to include
• how to present to a panel
• what to do if something goes wrong
• how to respond to a question for which they don't know the answer.

Criteria
Their topic must address:
• Heart—something about which they are passionate, such as a hobby, sport, interest
• Hand—something practical they can do with their hands, such as construction, cookery
• Mind—something about which they have knowledge.

Students may choose to present one topic which incorporates all of these elements, or they may choose a different topic for each of the three.

Essential Learnings have already been introduced to students, although these are revisited at the beginning of year 7.

I think Essential Learnings should be introduced to students in year 5 and then developed further over the next three years. We have to give a talk in year 6 which involves Essential Learnings and then the Round Table Assessment in year 7 which gives us three years to understand.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through http://www.saesa.sa.edu.au/. The material is provided with permission of Athelstone Primary School.
I had trouble at first involving them [Essential Learnings] in my talk, but then I understood how to do it. My talk was on something I would like to do for a career, so I combined my Heart section with Futures. So I was talking about the future of my netball team, and the future for me with joining a club.

A full presentation of a Round Table Assessment is available as a PowerPoint presentation on the website.

Assessment

Students negotiate with their teacher the assessment criteria and together they construct a scaffolded rubric. This rubric is used by all panel members at the conclusion of the presentation and also by each student when self assessing their presentation the following day.

We went through the assessment rubric with our teachers beforehand and that's useful because you know what you are aiming for. If you have got a level 3 you know what the next step is towards getting a level 4. Otherwise you might just get a mark, like a B, and wonder what you need to do to get an A.

The rubric was explained to us and also what you have to do to be better. And you can mark yourself by practising in front of the mirror and you know what you are being tested on. So I always tried in my practises to go for a level 4 and if I thought I didn't have that, I would go back and try and fix it up to get a higher mark.

After the presentation, the panel members discuss the presentation and determine which level the student has attained in each of the criteria. Round Table Assessment allows for individual learning and presentation styles, where students can demonstrate skills to which they have applied rigour, and which will be rewarded in their assessment. Students who have not demonstrated such rigour are encouraged to review how they might be more successful in similar situations in the future.

Students invite their class teacher, another staff member and their parents or caregivers. They may also invite a community member and a peer. Teachers from other year levels are often invited, giving them the opportunity to become familiar with the expectations of Round Table Assessment in year 7, allowing them to work with their students towards this level of expertise. Teachers are given release time to attend, with 3rd and 4th year university students taking classes at that time.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/. The material is provided with permission of Athelstone Primary School.
Parents/caregivers attend an information session each year so they can become familiar with the expectations of Round Table Assessment.

*My parents didn't know a thing about Essential Learnings. But they helped me with my practices and gave me good feedback and at the end they knew all about Essential Learnings!*

Parent feedback on the process is extremely positive; often this is the first opportunity parents have had to see their child demonstrate their learning in a school setting.

A parent comments:

*It challenges the kids to do things they haven't done before. It's not the same as show and tell. You can develop other strengths outside the school and bring them into your school work. So it's useful academically but it is more than that in preparing them for life skills.*

Parents are also surveyed for their feedback as part of a process of continual improvement.

*I will never forget giving my RTA because it is a really big experience for me. There are experiences from it that you take away with you.*

**Benefits and outcomes**

Round Table Assessment allows students to gain invaluable experience, not least of which is organisation. This is developed further in terms 3 and 4, where students are challenged by considering and organising around a topic about which they may know nothing, for example, organising a wedding, including catering, budgeting, creating invitations.

*I think what is currently being delivered is excellent preparation for secondary and tertiary level!* Parent of a year 7 student

In addition to demonstrating understandings, skills and learning in other Learning Areas, presentations provide evidence towards demonstration of a number of English Outcomes at Standards 3 and 4, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts and contexts</th>
<th>3.2 Produces a range of spoken texts about topics and events of personal and community interest, for school and wider community contexts and audiences. In, T, C. KC2</th>
<th>4.2 Produces a range of spoken texts about topics, events and issues of personal, community and world interest and adjusts speaking for a wide range of contexts and audiences. In, T, C. KC2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>3.6 Selects and uses most aspects of language when producing a variety of text types. In, T, C. KC2</td>
<td>4.6 Controls and adjusts most aspects of language when producing a variety of text types. In, T, C. KC2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Athelstone Primary School.
| Strategies | 3.10 Selects and uses a variety of strategies for planning, composing, presenting and evaluating spoken texts for an increasing range of community audiences. Id, T, C. KC2, KC6 | 4.10 Controls and adjusts a variety of strategies for planning, composing, presenting and evaluating spoken texts for wider community audiences. Id, T, C. KC2, KC3 |