PROFESSIONAL VOICE

WINTER 06

ASSESSMENT & REPORTING

Volume 4
Issue 2

RRP $10

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
AEU

EDITOR
Diana Ward

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Ross Dean, John Graham, Ann Taylor, John Fry and Diana Ward

DESIGNER
Peter Lambropoulos

PUBLISHED BY
The Australian Education Union Victorian Branch

PRINTED BY
Erwin's Printing

PRINTED ON
90gsm Crystal Offset

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS
$25 within Australia (free to financial AEU members). Please contact the AEU Publications Unit on **03 9417 2822** for further information. A subscription form is available in the back of this issue or downloadable from **www.aeuvic.asn.au/publications**.

BACK ISSUES
$10 within Australia

Advertising is accepted according to AEU guidelines. Please contact Lyn Baird for further details. Phone: 03 9418 4879. Email: **lbarid@aeuvic.asn.au**. A rate card is available for download at **www.aeuvic.asn.au/publications**.

Editorial correspondence should be directed to Diana Ward, Professional Voice, Australian Education Union Vic Branch, 112 Trenerry Crescent Abbotsford VIC 3067. Phone: 03 9418 4811. Email: **diana@aeuvic.asn.au**.

The AEU Victorian Branch can be contacted at:
112 Trenerry Crescent, PO Box 363, Abbotsford 3067
Tel: 03 9417 2822 **Fax:** 1300 568 078
Web: www.aeuvic.asn.au

ISSN:1445-4165

ASSESSMENT & REPORTING

contents

7 Editorial: The Drivers of Change
John Graham

11 Raising Quality and Equity in Education through Systemic Reform
Andreas Schleicher
Andreas Schleicher from the OECD provides a review of the outcomes of international testing and Australia's performance in the PISA testing program.. He reviews the performance data from the testing and relates it to important contextual issues such as social equity, school organisation and school climate.

21 Assessment and Reporting: What do we need to understand?
Margaret Forster
Margaret Forster discusses four underlying issues which have the potential to improve assessment and reporting in schools.

27 Assessment in the Middle Years
John Gough
John Gough traces developments in Middle Years assessment, including the role of rubrics, assessment interviews, diagnostic profiling, portfolio assessment and authentic assessment.

33 Promoting a Seamless Curriculum Between Preschool and Primary Education
Kathy Walker
Kathy Walker explores the need for a seamless early years curriculum across preschool and school, centred on the needs of the child.

37 The Information Age: Literacy Assessment and Reporting
Heather Fehring
Heather Fehring analyses the quality gap between good classroom practice in literacy assessment and the methods used in high stakes standardised testing.

41 Changing the Culture of Assessment
Ross Taylor
Ross Taylor provides a case study of the steps taken to change assessment practice at Parkdale Secondary College.

45 Evaluation, Assessment and Reporting at Moonee Ponds West Primary School
Ann Taylor
The assessment and reporting policy at Moonee Ponds West Primary School is based on a set of shared beliefs about student learning.

49 Richard Elmore on good schools, failing schools and school improvement (Part 1)
Interview by John Graham

55 Notes on contributors

The Drivers of Change

JOHN GRAHAM

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING have become (once again) centre-stage in Australian schools. This is due to a number of converging pressures. Firstly, most states and territories are engaged in a curriculum renovation process. The packages of new standards and a reconfiguration of content have been tied together with the usual driver of change—a revamp of assessment and reporting policies. The bureaucratic hope is that the broad spectrum of existing assessment and reporting practice in schools will be replaced by new 'best practice' systems consistent with the new frameworks.

Secondly, and cutting across these developments, has been the Federal Government's decision to step around the constitution and impose its own dogma about where, how and what students learn through control of funding of state education systems. This is particularly true of reporting of student achievement where the Federal Government is attempting to micro-manage the communication process between the school and the parent by mandating A-E grading and percentage quartiles. After some public huffing and puffing between the Commonwealth and the states, the quartiles have been put into an 'on demand' category, leaving a 'best practice' system which requires A-E grades from Prep to Year 10.

A third pressure which is adding to the visibility of assessment and reporting in schools is the seemingly unstoppable rise in the amount and status of large scale external testing. This is being driven by both Federal and State Governments through MCEETYA.

In 2006, for example, Victorian students will take part in two local tests (AIM—expanded to Year 9—and GAT), two national tests (trial national literacy and numeracy tests and science literacy) and two international tests (PISA and TIMSS). Evidence of the growth in status of external testing is found in everything from school annual reporting requirements to the MCEETYA decision to make school participation in the international tests compulsory. Testing becomes globalisation knocking on the classroom door.

All of these changes to assessment and reporting policies have come down from on high—introduced into Australian classrooms without any real discussion and debate within the profession. The implementation concept is that of 'rowers and steerers'—the dominant paradigm of conservative governments throughout Australia and beyond. The Ministers and the Departmental heads are the steerers and the teaching professionals are the rowers. The policies are delivered to teachers to test-run and suggest some fine-tuning, but only within already fixed parameters. Their role is to implement 'best practice' determined elsewhere.

CLEAR AND SIMPLE REPORTING

The interrelationship between learning, assessment of learning and the reporting of assessment outcomes to non-professional audiences is full of complexities. "The essence of the assessment problem is that something uncertain and complicated, which learning is, has to be turned into something clear and simple, namely a report" (Hannan).

Both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments believe that the essence of a 'clear and simple' report (now referred to as 'plain English' reports) is a mechanism to locate a student's level of achievement within a standardised performance scale. The centrepiece of the new mandated reporting format in Victoria for example, links a five letter grade scale to a set of curriculum standards. The idea behind a return to letter grades is that parents understand their meaning. Referencing these grades to statewide criteria or standards makes them, it is argued, educationally justifiable.

While reporting to parents may take place in a number of different forms, the written report card has the greatest authority. Its judgments about a student are in writing in a school-authorised format which subsequently becomes the school (and family) record of a student's performance. This means that written reports, whether 'in plain English' or not, should strive to be as accurate, valid and professionally credible as possible. The problem with almost all 'head-office policy' is that it glosses over awkward and uncomfortable issues in a rush to market the benefits of what has already been decided. The new Victorian reporting system is no exception. As a consequence, it looks both educationally fragile and open to community disquiet. The debate at present is on a slow fuse as concerns about the new system begin to emerge.

It replaces a system of six levels for each standardised curriculum area with up to 23 levels (some of which are referred to as 'progression points'). The rationale is that this will assist in reporting student progress. It is doubtful that 23 valid standards of progression, reflecting graduated student concept and skill development, can be formulated for each P-10 curriculum area (or 'dimension'). It also runs counter to a rationale for introducing the new Essential Learning Framework – a reduction in the number of standards. A plethora of 'horizontal' standards are being replaced by a plethora of 'vertical' standards.

Teachers will be expected to place each student, whether a real fit is found or not, precisely at one of these progression points/standards for each dimension. The official software program has been configured to aggregate only the standardised progression points for each dimension to produce a grade for the subject (domain) as a whole. This is a form of moderation by software.

The combination of a letter grade system with a criterion-referenced set of standards is fraught with tensions. In a criterion-referenced system a student is assessed in relation to meeting a set of criteria or standards. In this hybrid system the standards are also rated between A and E at each Year Level. Each grade has to be arbitrarily located at a specific point on the ladder of progress through the standards. The decision to reference a C grade to achievement of the expected standard highlights the problem with this system. Added to this are the difficulties in allocating top and bottom grades to particular standards and determining the level of difference in the standards between each grade. For example, research has shown that at Year 5 there is a five year difference between the top 10 per cent of readers and the bottom 10 per cent (see Forster article in this edition).

The decision to make a C grade the normal standard for the majority of students in a class creates a communication problem with parents. The general community understanding of a C is a low to mediocre performance. Yet this is the grade awarded for meeting the expected standard. The idea that a parent will understand the nature of the achievement of their child when their report card is filled with Cs is doubtful. Evidence that the provision of grades lessens the impact of written comments, suggests that the problem of explaining what the C grade means may be a lot harder than is anticipated. Grades are 'clear and simple' in appearance only.

Using grades in reports will inevitably wash back into curriculum assessment processes. Some parents will want to know what grade a particular piece of work deserves. Students will want to relate the assessment of their work to the grades that count in their summative reports.

The negative impact of grading on some children, particularly those in the early years of primary school, will be sanctioned by the new system. This impact will be exacerbated by the 'on demand' option for parents to request a written report from the school for the percentage quartile that their child is in.

The introduction of the new system has substantial immediate teacher workload implications. Although these may diminish over time—such as if the software is smart enough and reliable and support materials are not just a phone-up helpdesk—professional concerns will remain.

A RANGE OF PERSPECTIVES

The articles in this edition of *Professional Voice* are part of the AEU's determination to involve the profession in the debate about assessment and reporting. They contain a range of different perspectives on statewide and national policy developments. Andreas Schleicher from the OECD sees the outcomes of international testing as a means of getting countries to reflect upon and improve their education systems. While the headlines focus on the performance data, the real value of the testing program is that it relates a country's performance to the context within which it occurs. The data provides evidence to associate test performance with issues such as social equity, school organisation and school climate.

Margaret Forster from ACER believes that the potential for assessment and reporting to improve teaching and learning is yet to be realised. She identifies four underlying issues which need to be better understood: the implications of research into learning, the context of a standards framework, the spread of student achievement and the school context. John Gough from Deakin University critically traces the developments in Middle Years assessment from the 1970s to the present day. He considers the role of rubrics, assessment interviews, diagnostic profiling, portfolio assessment and authentic assessment.

Kathy Walker believes that the 'whole' child must be placed at the centre of the curriculum in early years education. This means assessment and reporting policies which can encompass the richness and depth of learning which takes place at this early stage of development.

Heather Fehring from RMIT decries the quality gap between good classroom practice in literacy assessment and the methods used in high stakes standardised testing. She contrasts the sophistication of assessment in student portfolios, particularly in their new digital form, with the limitations of standardised literacy testing. Ross Taylor from Parkdale Secondary College provides a case study of how assessment practice was changed at his school. He identifies the steps taken to implement the change and offers advice to other schools about what processes should be followed. The final contribution is about beliefs that underpin the assessment and reporting policy from Moonee Ponds West Primary School. This illustrates how one school has developed a detailed and comprehensive policy on assessment and reporting to meet the needs of those in its school community.

Apart from the articles on assessment and reporting, this edition of *Professional Voice* contains the first part of a unique interview with the eminent American educationist, **Richard Elmore**. In a wide-ranging interview Elmore talks about the characteristics of good schools, low performing schools, values education, school improvement and "sustained collective problem-solving". Parts two and three of this interview will appear in the next two editions of the journal.

Raising quality & equity in education through systemic REFORM

ANDREAS SCHLEICHER

INTRODUCTION

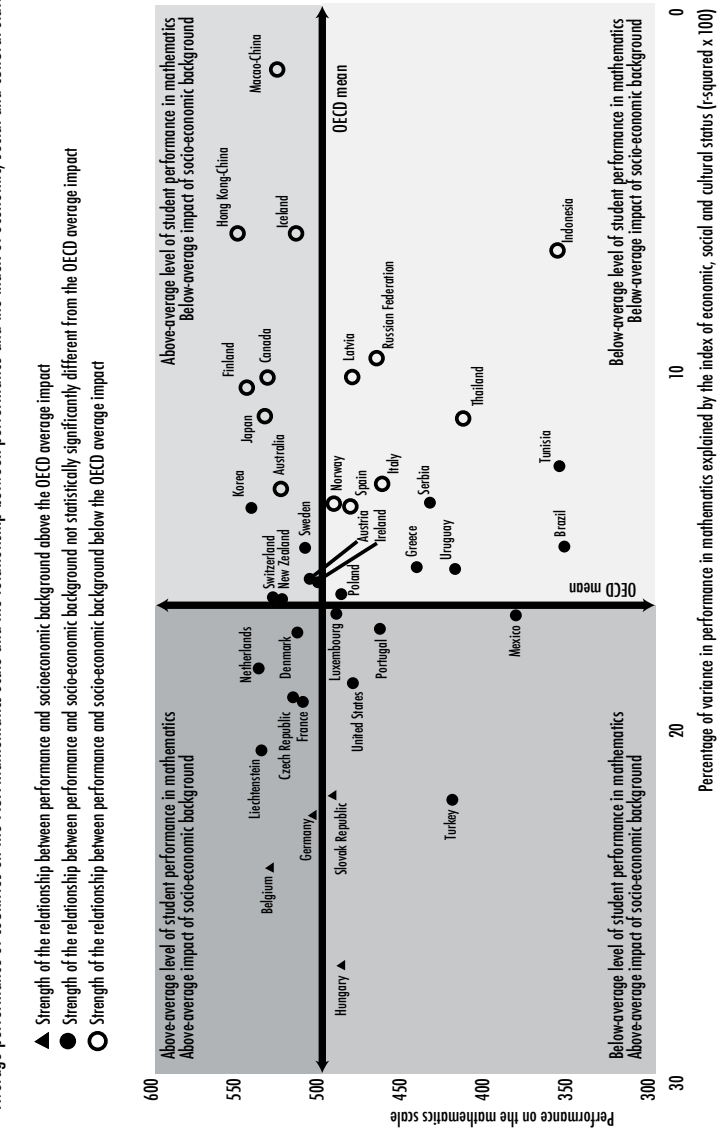
IF THE PERCENTAGE of students achieving high grades in examinations increases, some will claim that the education system has improved. Others will claim that the requirements for attaining the grade must have been lowered. Behind the suspicion that better results reflect lowered criteria there is often a belief that overall performance in education cannot be raised. However, OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the most comprehensive international assessment to date, showed that some countries do much better than others and provides compelling evidence that excellence in education and, indeed, improvement is possible.

Australia's 15-year-olds do well by international standards, not just in key subject areas such as mathematics or science but also in cross-curricular domains such as problem-solving. However, some countries—whether situated in Asia (Japan or Korea), in Europe (Finland) or in North America (Canada)—demonstrate that further improvement is possible. Equally important, these countries show that poor performance in school does not automatically follow from a disadvantaged socio-economic

background of students and that education systems can do better in combining high performance levels with a socially equitable distribution of learning opportunities. Finally, some education systems show that success can become a consistent and predictable educational outcome.

In Finland, the country with the strongest overall results in PISA, the performance variation between schools amounts to just 4 per cent of students overall performance variation. This means that parents can rely on high and consistent performance

FIGURE 1



Note: OECD mean used in this figure is the arithmetic average of all OECD countries.
Source: OECD PISA 2003 database, Table 4.3a.

standards across the entire school system. In contrast, in other countries more than half of the OECD average performance variation originates at school and/or program levels, often combined with only moderate overall performance (in Australia, quality differences among schools amounts still to one fifth of the overall performance variation, with much of this difference closely related to the socio-economic intake of schools).

Figure 1 summarises the results from PISA for mathematics, the focus of the latest assessment. The vertical axis represents the average performance of countries. The horizontal axis represents the amount of performance variation that is accounted for by the social background of students. Countries for which this relationship is stronger than for the OECD as a whole are plotted to the left. Countries in which the relationship is weaker are plotted to the right. This horizontal axis can thus be considered as representing the 'social equity' of the education system. The figure is divided into four quadrants by a horizontal line at 500, the mean mathematics score for the OECD as a whole, and a vertical line at 16.8, representing the OECD average strength of the relationship between social background and student performance. The top-right quadrant can be described as 'high-quality, high-equity' compared with the OECD as a whole and the other quadrants can be labelled correspondingly as shown in the figure. The most important feature of the figure is that high quality and high equity can be achieved together.

Monitoring shows how things are. Comparisons with others can show whether more could be achieved. But monitoring will not, by itself, improve performance. Results from international comparisons therefore inevitably raise the question about what countries can do to help students to learn better, teachers to teach better, and schools to be more effective. A cross-national international assessment such as PISA alone cannot identify clear-cut cause-and-effect relationships between certain factors and educational outcomes, especially in relation to the classroom and the processes of teaching and learning that take place there. However, it can identify factors that appear empirically to be "universal" features supporting good quality learning at school and which are specific to particular cultures or systems. Qualitative analysis can then enrich the picture and seek to identify policies and practices that underpin success. All 30 OECD countries, and more than 20 others, are using PISA to take an outside look at their education systems. All can be provoked by aspects of the performance of others to raise their own expectations.

COMBINING AMBITIOUS STANDARDS WITH STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Across the OECD area, the shift in public and governmental concern, away from the mere control over the resources and content of education towards a focus on outcomes has driven the establishment of standards for the quality of the work of educational institutions. Many countries have pursued the establishment of a "culture of achievement" that articulates the expectations that society and parents have in relation to learning outcomes and how these expectations translate into the establishment and monitoring of educational goals and standards.

However, where increases in challenges were not paralleled with sufficient investments in teacher professional development, improved technology, or attention to social circumstances, this has often resulted only in conflict and demoralisation. Some of the best performing countries in PISA therefore build their success on combining clear and ambitious standards for educational performance with access to best practice and professional development and support for schools. Some countries seek to primarily address heterogeneity in the student body, with services directed towards individual students on a needs basis, including services for students requiring special educational or social assistance, or educational and career counselling. Others relate to establishing networks between individual schools and between schools and other institutions aimed at facilitating performance improvement of teachers and schools.

There is also still considerable debate in OECD countries as to how standards can best be harnessed to raise educational aspirations, establish transparency over educational objectives and content, and provide a useful reference framework for teachers to understand and foster student learning while avoiding the risks of narrowing the curriculum and teaching to the test. Some countries have gone beyond establishing educational standards as mere yardsticks and introduced performance benchmarks that students at particular age or grade levels should reach. In these countries, a lively debate often follows on how such performance targets can best be defined to ensure baseline quality in educational outcomes while, at the same time, raising performance and aspirations for *all* students, including those who face particular disadvantages as well as those who show particular talents. And countries have found quite different answers to this question. England, for example, defines average student performance at the end of each 'key stage'; Finland and Sweden establish minimum performance standards that all students should reach at specified grade levels as well as standards that constitute excellence; while countries like France employ more traditional normative performance standards in which student and school performance is assessed by how far it deviates from a national or school-level average.

Schools, too, can make an important difference to performance orientation in education. The PISA results confirm a range of other research which suggests that students perform best in a positive learning environment that is oriented towards results. PISA indicates that students and schools perform better in a climate characterised by high expectations and the readiness to invest effort, the enjoyment of learning, a strong disciplinary climate, and good teacher-student relations. Among these aspects, students' perception of teacher-student relations and classroom disciplinary climate display the strongest relationships with student performance, across countries. Students' perceptions of the extent to which teachers emphasise academic performance and place high demands on students also tended to be positively related to performance, albeit less strongly so.

The views which Australian school principals in PISA expressed suggest that more could be done on some of these dimensions. 31 per cent of school principals reported that learning is hindered by teachers' low expectations of students, 48 per cent report that learning is hindered by teachers not meeting individual students' needs and 34

per cent report that learning is hindered by staff resisting change. In contrast, when it comes to the strength of teacher-student relations, Australia compares very favourably: When asked about their mathematics classes, 64 per cent reported that their teacher shows an interest in every student's learning (OECD average 58 per cent), 85 per cent reported that the teacher helps students with their learning (OECD average 73 per cent), and 72 per cent reported that the teacher continues teaching until all students understand (OECD average 62 per cent). Few OECD countries showed much stronger levels of teacher support, when the various dimensions of teacher support are combined on an index.

The establishment of performance standards leads to the question of how they can be implemented and assessed and combined with effective mechanisms to feed results back to teachers and school principals. Assessments of student performance are now common in many OECD countries—and often the results are widely reported and used in public debate as well as by those concerned with school improvement. However, the rationale for assessments and the nature of the instruments used vary greatly within and across countries. Methods employed in OECD countries include different forms of external assessment, external evaluation or inspection, and schools' own quality assurance and self-evaluation efforts. There are also diverging views on how results from evaluation and assessment can and should be used. Some countries see them primarily as tools to reveal best practices and identify shared problems in order to encourage teachers and schools to co-operate and develop more supportive and productive learning environments. Others extend their purpose to support contestability of public services or market-mechanisms in the allocation of resources, e.g. by making comparative results of schools publicly available to facilitate parental choice or by having funds following students.

SHARING DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND SCHOOLS

Increased autonomy over a wide range of institutional operations, with the objective to raise performance levels through devolving responsibility to the frontline and encouraging responsiveness to local needs, has been a main aim of the restructuring and systemic reform since the early 1980s.

In fact, in most of the countries that performed well in PISA, local authorities and schools now have substantial autonomy with regard to adapting and implementing educational content and/or allocating and managing resources. It is noteworthy that the trend towards devolved responsibility has not been uniform across the different areas of decision-making. In some countries, the development and adaptation of educational content can be considered the main expression of school autonomy. Others, by contrast, have focussed on strengthening the management and administration of individual schools through market-oriented governance instruments or collaboration between schools and other stakeholders in local communities while, in some cases, even moving towards centralised governance of curricula and standards.

While countries with greater levels of school autonomy in particular areas tended to perform better in PISA, a concern is that greater independence of schools might

lead to greater inequalities in the performance of schools. One way to examine this is by relating the PISA measures of school autonomy to the proportion of student performance differences that lies between schools. This comparison does not reveal a consistent relationship, and therefore suggests that greater school autonomy is not *necessarily* associated with greater disparities in school performance, as long as governments provide a framework in which poorer performing schools receive the necessary support for improvement. In fact, Finland and Sweden, among the countries with the highest degree of school autonomy on many of the measures used in PISA display, together with Iceland, the smallest performance differences among schools.

In essence, the PISA comparison brings into focus a model of a flexible school system that offers schools a high level of individual responsibility while simultaneously ensuring their accountability and maintenance of standards, through a system of evaluation and targeted and intensive intervention where problems are greatest. Decentralisation (under the catchphrase 'school autonomy') and external evaluation are not, as is sometimes claimed, diametric opposites, but rather an interrelated part of governance of the school system.

ENGAGING WITH AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE STUDENT BODY

Much of the difference in average performance of countries in PISA can be explained by the prevalence of poorly performing students and schools. Similarly, countries vary much more in the performance of students from disadvantaged socio-economic contexts than in the performance of students from advantaged backgrounds. This suggests that raising performance levels depends critically on the capacity of education systems to address the needs of poorly performing students and schools.

Performance variation between schools provides a particular challenge for quality and equity in education systems. PISA has taken the analyses of equity-related issues further by separating equity-related issues between those that relate to the socio-economic heterogeneity within schools and those that relate to socio-economic segregation through the school system. This allows examination of the extent to which education systems moderate or reinforce socio-economic background factors. In countries like the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Austria and Germany, but to a somewhat lesser extent also in Australia, high-performing students are grouped in high-performing schools and tend strongly to come from advantaged social backgrounds. In contrast, poorly-performing students are grouped in poorly-performing schools and tend strongly to come from disadvantaged social backgrounds. The consequence is that there is very little relationship between students' social background and their mathematics achievement within schools, the range having been restricted on both variables. In Finland and Canada, by contrast, there is little effect of grouping in schools. In these countries, the relationships between social background and mathematics achievement are similar at all three levels: overall, between schools and within schools. Spain belongs to this latter group of countries too.

In some of the countries in which a considerable proportion of the total variance is between schools, this is a consequence of education policy. In Germany, for example, students are sorted into schools of different types from age 10 on the basis of achieve-

ment at that stage and a judgement of whether a more academic or vocational school would be most appropriate for the next step. The deliberate intention of the policy is to reduce variation within schools, by bringing relatively similar students together, and to increase variation between schools that will then be reflected in differences between the schools in curricula. Of course, in no country are students deliberately sorted into schools on the basis of social background but the consequence of the sorting that does occur is to sort on social background as well. In many countries the consequence is that students from more privileged social backgrounds are directed into the more prestigious academic schools which yield superior educational outcomes (as indicated by their higher performance on the PISA measures) and students from less privileged social backgrounds are directed into less prestigious vocational schools which yield poorer educational outcomes (as indicated by lower performance on the PISA measures). The school organisation, therefore, both reflects and reproduces existing social divisions.

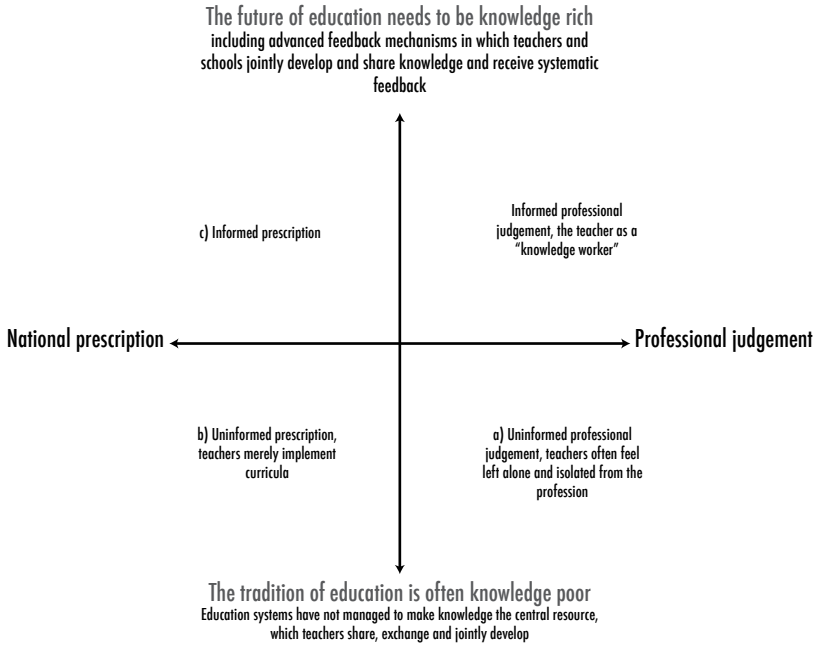
The approaches countries have chosen to address socio-economic differences vary. Some countries offer non-selective school systems that seek to provide all students with similar opportunities for learning. Other countries respond to diversity by forming groups of students of similar levels of performance through selection either within or between schools, with the aim of serving students according to their specific needs.

The effectiveness of these policies and practices remain under debate but the results from PISA suggest that both overall variation in student performance and performance differences between schools tend to be greater in those countries with rigid institutionalised selection and tracking practices at early ages. By contrast, virtually all countries that performed well in PISA place an emphasis on strategies and approaches for teaching heterogeneous groups of learners within integrated education systems, with a high degree of individualised learning processes and strong student-teacher relations.

CONCLUSION

Combining ambitious standards with strong support systems, and balancing devolution in decision-making with effective instruments for governments to intervene where things go wrong, are among the policy strategies pursued in many of the education systems that did well on PISA. But perhaps the biggest challenge for modern education systems lies in making teaching a knowledge-rich educational profession in which teachers and school principals have sound evidence on which to act, and access to effective support systems to assist them in making choices and implementing change. The current reality often seems far from this ideal. What do parents really know about what students learn, and how they learn? How does a teacher in the classroom profit from the experience of the teacher in the classroom next door? And how do schools learn from each other, and with each other? In fact, how much further progress would education systems make if they could know what teachers and school leaders know, i.e. if they succeeded in bringing together and linking the potential that is in the minds of the highly qualified teaching force—not just for the delivery of instruction in the classroom, but for creating a truly knowledge-based educational profession? The

FIGURE 2: Moving towards a "knowledge-rich" educational future



reality is that often there is insufficient room for parental involvement, teachers are confronting difficult problems in their classes in isolation, and schools operate without knowing much about their strengths and weaknesses and the results of their efforts. And in the darkness, all students, schools and education systems look the same, and when little is known about the strengths and weaknesses of schools and education systems, it is difficult to support them effectively.

No doubt, education has always been a knowledge industry in the sense that it is concerned with the transmission of knowledge, but it has yet to become a modern knowledge industry in the sense of one constantly transformed by the latest intelligence on best practices. There is a large body of research about learning but much of it is unrelated to the kind of real-life learning that is the focus of formal education. Even that which is, has an insufficient impact because education is dominated by local practitioners working in isolation and relying on folk wisdom about what works. Central prescription of what teachers should do will not transform teachers' practices in the way that professional engagement in the search for evidence of what makes a difference can.

As a result, education systems often find it difficult to enable schools and teachers to share, jointly develop and implement knowledge about their work and performance. While those who run education systems may have access to some evidence on school

performance, those who deliver educational services at school often do not, or face obstacles in translating such knowledge into effective classroom practices.

Some countries leave the establishment of instructional policies and practices entirely to teachers and schools. However, it takes capacity to build capacity, and if there is insufficient capacity to begin with in schools, uninformed professional judgement in individual classrooms or schools often leads to underperformance and idiosyncratic school results. Moreover, in an environment that is knowledge-poor, schools and teachers often end up working in isolation (see the lower right corner in Figure 2).

Other countries centrally prescribe educational development, seeing the roles of schools and teachers primarily in terms of implementation, but this has often led to demoralised teachers who implement prescribed curricula which they do not own (see the lower left corner in Figure 2). Some have begun to link prescription with devolved responsibility, good data and clear targets as well as access to best practice and quality professional development in order to give schools and teachers some role in development and improvement (see the upper left corner in Figure 2). Such 'informed prescription' does have the virtue of providing good ideas to a system that does not have them and there are indeed numerous examples where pressure to compliance with central directives has succeeded in bringing about large scale changes quickly. The downside, however, has often been the creation of a culture of dependence and reduced professional autonomy.

Ultimately, therefore, the challenge for modern education systems is to create a knowledge-rich profession in which those responsible for delivering educational services in the frontline have both the authority to act and the necessary information to do so intelligently, with access to effective support systems to assist them in serving an increasingly diverse client base of students and parents.

Assessment & Reporting:

What do we need to understand?

MARGARET FORSTER

THERE IS A widespread expectation that assessment and reporting should improve learning, enrich teaching and learning experiences, and assist teachers, students and parents to monitor learning. Yet, despite considerable effort by systems, schools and teachers, realising this expectation remains a challenge. Why? Is the expectation unrealistic? Are the needs of schools, teachers, parents and students so diverse that no process will be able to deliver? To address the challenge, I want to look beneath the assessment and reporting process and examine four issues that I think we need to better understand, if assessment and reporting are to live up to expectation.

ISSUE 1: THE IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH INTO LEARNING

When it comes to improving learning, the research evidence is clear about some effective guidelines (Bransford et al. 2000):

- Learning is enhanced when teachers identify and work from individuals' current knowledge, skills and beliefs
- Learning is more effective when it leads to the development of deeper understandings of concepts and their applicability
- Learning is enhanced when decision makers are able to monitor learning so that appropriate action can be initiated.

However, the implications of these guidelines for assessment and reporting are perhaps less well understood than they might be.

The first implication is that assessment and reporting has a central purpose; to provide an understanding of *where* students are in their learning. To report how a child is 'doing', teachers need not only to understand the beliefs, incomplete understandings and misconceptions that a child has developed, but also where the child has come from and is going to. That is, the teacher needs to know what it means to *grow* in an area of learning. This is true whether the area is discipline-based, generic or personal/social.

Unfortunately, there is a good deal of anecdotal evidence to suggest that some teachers do not understand what it means to grow in an area of learning. Colin Connor, a researcher at Cambridge University tells the 'golf ball' story[1]. Colin was observing the conversation of a group of teachers from a school cluster who had met to compare samples of student writing in order to develop a shared understanding of the levels of the standards framework against which they were all reporting. Several teachers agreed that a piece of work was 'Level 2'. One teacher strongly disagreed. When asked why, he said that the work couldn't possibly be Level 2 because there was no evidence of basic punctuation and a key indicator of Level 2 was the use of full stops. Several of the teachers began to laugh and pointed out the 'golf balls' in the writing. The teacher spoke with Colin at the end of the session and explained that although he had worked for more than 10 years as a primary teacher, he had never seen early children's writing and he thought the golf ball full stops were 'crossings out'.

Some teachers work for considerable periods at a particular stage of schooling, or with students from a particular background, so it is not surprising that these teachers may lose or never gain perspective on student development. Nevertheless, a teacher who does not understand growth in an area of learning is likely to have difficulty deciding how to move a child forward in their learning.

The second implication from these research findings is that assessment and reporting need to focus in part on the *depth* of a student's understanding—on the conceptual meaning that students give to knowledge, not just on the accumulation of knowledge. This means that teachers need to collect evidence by drawing on a range of sophisticated approaches that are less focused on establishing whether students can successfully recall and apply what they have been taught, and more focused on exploring, in a diagnostic way, how students are thinking. What mental models have they developed? How well do they understand when a principle applies and when it does not?

The third implication from these research findings is that students, as key decision makers about their learning, need to take a role in monitoring their learning. When it comes to what we know about how students reflect on their learning, the limited research evidence is sobering. The research suggests that if we want students to attend to feedback, then feedback should be in the form of written comments and not a score or grade. If students are provided with a score or a grade on an individual piece of work, they will attend to that only, even if they are provided with descriptive feedback as well. 'If the feedback is to be effective, it must be focused on what the individual student needs to do to improve (ie. it must be *task-involving*) rather than focusing attention on to the learner and her or his self-esteem (ie. *ego-involving*)' (Wiliam 1998:6).

We know from anecdotal evidence that while students can reflect on their progress, providing them with the opportunity to do so will not necessarily result in reflections that support progress. For example, a student who is asked to select their best piece of writing for their portfolio might select a piece that another student thought was funny rather than a piece that contained interesting ideas and demonstrated control over writing conventions. Students need to develop a shared understanding with teachers about what is valued and represents progress.

A teacher in Seattle describes how she trains very young children to 'write' reflections on pieces of work for their Friday folder—the portfolio that goes home to parents for comment. At the beginning of the year children ask the teacher to write comments like, 'I chose this because we got to use glitter and I like glitter'. With feedback and encouragement, within a short time children are writing comments that reflect on their expanding knowledge. By the time students in this school are in upper primary classes, they are adept at selecting appropriate pieces of work that demonstrate progress and they are adept at providing appropriate commentary[2].

ISSUE 2: THE CONTEXT OF A STANDARDS FRAMEWORKS

Reporting is fundamentally an inferential process—a process of inferring a learner's current level of achievement based on observations and evidence about their current knowledge, skills and beliefs. In this process, assessment methods are not an end in themselves but vehicles for gathering evidence about learning. Inference was always central to assessment and reporting but the use of standards frameworks requires the understanding of a particular kind of inference.

Standards frameworks make explicit what we value and define the direction of growth in an area of learning. They also provide a frame of reference for shared communication and against which achievement and progress can be mapped and monitored over time. Most importantly, they are independent of the particular instrument used to collect evidence of learning.

In educational assessment, these frameworks represent a significant paradigm shift. Teachers used to report student learning in relation to the particular *instrument* used to collect the evidence ("J. got six out of 10 on the last mathematics test."). Now they report against a *framework* ("J. is now at Level 3 of VELS/WA student learning outcome framework/Tasmanian Essential Learning Standards/etc."). This shift is based on a very simple idea that instruments are interchangeable tools for gathering evidence of learning.

Unfortunately, many teachers are uncertain about how to draw an inference from pieces of evidence (the detail) to a framework level (the generalisation). Although these frameworks are divided into levels they are not based on the assumption that a student will demonstrate all the knowledge, skills and understandings of one level before moving to the next. This means that teachers need to make an on-balance judgement about the level of a student's achievement. Second, although the levels describe growth and define the direction of growth, they are not a description of the path that all students follow as they learn. This means that teachers will need to make a best-fit judgement between the evidence (observations and assessments) of a student's learning, and the level descriptions. The task is to draw a generalisation from evidence, not to checklist 'indicators' or 'outcomes'.

ISSUE 3: THE SPREAD OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Although all teachers are aware that students may be at different points in their learning and progressing at different rates, many teachers are unaware of the wide range of development in their classroom (and that this range is likely to widen further over the years of schooling). The National School English Literacy Survey (Masters & Forster 1997) concluded that the top 10 per cent of readers in Year 5 are at least five years ahead of the bottom 10 per cent of readers in that grade. This finding is consistent with many other national (such as Rowe & Hill, 1996) and international research studies. In her UK research, Harlen (1997) concluded that, by the end of primary school, the range in children's mathematics achievements was equivalent to seven years of schooling.

When it comes to reporting achievement, students in any grade are likely to be spread across two or three levels of a standards framework, not in one level as we might 'expect' them to be. This reality presents a challenge for some teachers who have been confused further by requirements to report achievement within levels of the framework. For example, in one state teachers were asked to report whether students were 'beginning', 'consolidating' and 'established' (BCE) with the result that the achievements of students in any one class were reported within one level of the framework only (my best students are 'established', my weakest 'beginning'…) truncating the distribution of achievements. BCE judgements should have been seen as ratings made first in relation to *each* level. For example, a student might be 'established' for Level 3, 'consolidating' Level 4 'beginning' Level 5, and therefore, on-balance, 'consolidating' level 4.

ISSUE 4: THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Standards frameworks provide teachers with a common language for discussing progress and a common reference against which they can monitor learning across the years of schooling. They provide an impetus to build confidence and trust between teachers, and to support learning by reducing the discontinuities students experience as they move from one school year and one teacher to the next. (In some schools students carry a portfolio of their work—evidence of the level of their learning so that the next teacher does not need to begin again.)

It is critical that we understand the role of the school leader in supporting good assessment and reporting practice and in helping teachers to come to grips with standards frameworks. It is the school leader who can focus attention on assessment and, most important of all, it is the school leader who can protect time for ongoing discussion and collaboration.

ENDNOTES

1 Conversation between the author and Colin Connor.

2 Conversation between the author and teacher.

REFERENCES

Bransford, J.D, Brown, A.L., and Cocking, R.R.. (2000). *How people learn: brain, mind, experience and school*. Washington D.C: National Academy Press. **www.nap.edu/catalog/6160.html**

Harlen, W. (1997). *Making Sense of the Research on Ability Grouping*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.

Masters, G. N. & Forster, M. (1997). *Mapping Literacy Achievement Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Rowe, K.J., & Hill, P.W. (1996). Assessing, recording and reporting students' educational progress: The case for 'Subject Profiles'. *Assessment in Education*, 3(3), 309-352.

Wiliam, D. (1998). *Enculturating learners into communities of practice: raising achievement through classroom assessment*. Paper presented at European Conference on Educational Research, Ljubljana, Slovenia, September 1998. Available on line at **www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/education/publications/ECER98.pdf**

Assessment in the Middle Years

JOHN GOUGH

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING for the middle years fall into the structural 'middle' gap between the early years of beginning primary school, and the final years of completing secondary school. They also fall into the gap between traditional assessment methods, such as formal examinations and projects, and evolving newer methods of diagnostic assessment. To understand these two kinds of gaps it may help to consider some background.

Assessment is the major focus in two of the five fundamental, interrelated, equally important components of the education process:

- Finding out what students already know about some topic
- Choosing, making, preparing what is to be taught
- Teaching it
- Helping students learn what has been or is being taught
- Assessing how well the students are learning this.

But amongst these, assessment has had an uneven history.

In the mid-1970s a national scandal erupted with the publication of literacy and numeracy test results on 10-year-old and 14-year-old students. Approximately one-quarter of the 14 year-olds tested were unable to read the time on a clock-face with hands, in an era when digital clocks were a rarity, and analogue clock-reading was an essential life-skill. The resulting backlash against testing, nationally and across

Australia's states, had a lasting impact on school assessment, and teacher-training. Formal examination systems that had dominated assessment at all levels of secondary schooling, with parallel equivalents in end-of-term and end-of year tests in upper primary grades, were swept aside.

Despite this, in the last one or two years of secondary school it was still necessary to select as effectively as possible the best school-leavers for entry to scarce, expensive tertiary courses, vocational training, and employment. Formal examinations remained the standard method although, increasingly, non-exams such as projects contributed to students' final subject scores and tertiary-selection ranking. This summative end-of-secondary assessment is still a major feature of assessment in schools. Necessarily students should prepare earlier for this, to develop exam-taking skills, and avoid excessive exam-anxiety.

At lower year levels, examinations are currently less important. But concern for standards remains—how well are students learning literacy, numeracy, and other curriculum areas? One major global stimulus to such concern is the recurring international assessment and comparison of schools in mathematics and science, such as Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Another stimulus has been the successive Hobart Declarations (1989, 1997) and the Adelaide Declaration by the Australian Education Council (AEC), now Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which led to draft national profiles of curriculum, along with state-based alternatives.

Recent developments have led to a revaluing of assessment, along with the introduction (and, in part, re-introduction) of state-wide testing of literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Little that is being proposed and/or implemented now is genuinely new, although the vocabulary and supporting theories are superficially different from past approaches. However, new or not, the decades old assessment vacuum is being refilled. This article outlines some of the seemingly new developments.

RUBRICS

One topic seems new; 'rubrics'. More than 10 years ago they did not exist, except in old prayer-books, as a margin-note advising when to stand, kneel, or do some other action. Now rubrics are all the rage (NCTM 2003, Stenmark et al. 2001). What are they? Typically, in this new sense a 'rubric' is also a table, with rows and columns. The columns identify the *level* or *quantity* of achievement, understanding, or skill—ranging across:

- Not Begun and beginning
- Developing or consolidating
- Established

or

- None or not very much, or rarely
- A little, or seldom
- Quite a lot or often
- Usually or large amount.

The rows identify subject-related aspects of what was being learned. That is, a rubric is essentially an elaborated, tabulated checklist of expected learning outcomes, with

graded exemplars of observable behaviours. It enables a rubric-user to identify that Student X has learned Objective P to Definable/Observable level D. A rubric is a weighted, or quantified checklist. Although this use of 'rubric' is new, what it means is **not** new for actual teaching and assessment practice. Consider the graded criteria for assessing Year 12 projects that teachers use: these are essentially rubrics for grading project performance (Gough 2006:8-9).

During the heady 1970s, not only was formal assessment largely absent, but curriculum was often school-based, after decades of centralised prescription by official syllabuses or textbooks. Inevitably it became necessary to reconsider such a free-market approach. The result was that, around Australia (and overseas) existing curricula were surveyed, summarised, and redefined in terms of more loosely indicative (not prescriptive) frameworks of outcomes or objectives. This was essentially returning to the behavioural objectives that had dominated the 1960s, following the lead of Benjamin Bloom and colleagues (Bloom et al. 1956). The latest incarnation of this (Anderson & Krathwohl 2001), renews emphasis on higher level thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, problem solving, problem posing, creativity, and communication.

The New Basics of Queensland, for example, with its so called Productive Pedagogies, and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS 2005) and the earlier Curriculum and Standards Frameworks (CSF II: Board of Studies 2000), in their different ways, attempt the same thing: to specify what teachers might teach. Given some detailed specification, it follows logically that teachers will check how well a student has learned from the classroom experience that was developed to teach that specification. A rubric is an organised collection of specified curriculum outcomes and graded performance descriptors—little more than a useful common-sense tool for identifying and describing how students are progressing.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

More interestingly, while summative assessment has retained its usefulness in the last stage of secondary schooling, formative assessment has been researched, and shown to be highly effective as a way of promoting learning at all levels of schooling: it is arguably assessment for learning. (Summative assessment, investigates, analyses, describes, and judges what has been learned, without seeking to offer constructive advice about what to do next, or what to do if learning is found to be weak or patchy. Formative assessment offers diagnostic advice, shaping or forming the follow-on curriculum.) Research by Paul Black, and colleagues of the Cambridge University (School of Education) Assessment Reform Group shows that if teachers assess formatively, and use the assessment results to shape their subsequent teaching, negotiating with students what the students should do to learn more, then, not surprisingly, the students do learn.

This is, of course, dramatically different in its use of assessment (especially testing), compared with traditional approaches that accumulated week-by-week spelling and arithmetic test-scores, along with project marks or topic tests, and term tests, and added everything together to establish that, overall, Ferdie had a final score of 83 per cent in English, and a final score of 57 per cent in mathematics, whereas Mortie had scores of 74 per cent and 68 per cent respectively. By receiving diagnostic formative

advice about that relatively low-scoring end-of-April writing assessment, Ferdie might be helped to develop greater skill with written expression and proof-reading, while similar advice about weak test results on multiplying and adding fractions might help Mortie improve in that area.

An important and genuinely new development in assessment has occurred in Victoria, with its Early Years Numeracy Interview (for example Clarke 2000; Early Years Branch 2001), and in and other states, such as Queensland, with its Diagnostic Net (Paxton, Wolfe, & Zevenbergen 1998). Based on restated curriculum frameworks for primary mathematics, in the case of the Early Years Numeracy Interview, a one-to-one interview is conducted with school-beginners, about five years old, establishing how much of the proposed mathematics curriculum they already know. Not only are they asked questions that would normally be part of the curriculum for that first year, other, later, harder questions are asked, as long as the child is able to answer the questions correctly. Only when a child can no longer answer questions on one topic is the topic changed (for example, from counting with whole-numbers, to questions about reading and using a clock) and the interviewing resumes, with early, easy questions, progressively working through harder and later questions.

Although this is not a new idea, making a start-of-year diagnostic interview statewide policy is new. It is radically different from the usual approach to assessment, using questions that are strictly at the presumed level of difficulty for the students being assessed. Typically, for students in Year 3, or entering Year 3, for example, the questions would come from the more or less standard Year 3 curriculum (Schleiger & Gough 1993). By contrast, the new 'diagnostic profile' approach deliberately includes questions that start early and easy—around Kindergarten or Preparatory—and become progressively harder, up to about Year 8 level.

At the end of an Early Years Numeracy Interview, or an equivalent diagnostic profile (such as the follow-on Middle Years Numeracy Interview developed by Siemon and colleagues in 2000), the teacher knows what the student already knows and can do. The teacher then prepares suitable curriculum materials and learning experiences that will help that student learn more, starting from where the student is.

In the area of literacy, such an approach would be equivalent to starting the learn-to-read (or write) curriculum by having the teacher work individually with five year olds, finding out who can already read (and/or write), and how well they can do so. Then, of course, the teacher proceeds to work with the students individually, or in small groups, teaching further reading (or writing) skills, and language study.

RICH ASSESSMENT TASKS

And middle years? What is missing, as far as I am aware, is any counterpart to the Early Years Numeracy Interview, apart from my own *Diagnostic Mathematical Profiles* (Gough 1999, based directly on Schleiger's earlier *Diagnostic Mathematical Tasks*, which were year-leveled). Outside mathematics, little seems to be available to use in such a 'diagnostic profile' way.

However, a very different approach to assessment could be developed to help fill this large gap. Given the obvious need to establish, through the middle years, what individual students already know about a particular curriculum area, to start their

further learning at that point, open-ended questions are useful. These are loosely related to the idea of 'rich assessment tasks' or 'RATs'. Interestingly, decades earlier John Biggs proposed the use of potentially rich learning situations (with the acronym PRS), an early anticipation of the move to invigorate the teaching of problem solving in all curriculum areas (Biggs 1975). Importantly with PRSs and RATs individual students begin working at their own level of knowledge or skill, and pursue the task or question in widely differing ways.

Open-ended assessment is comparatively easy with literacy. A teacher can prepare a set of books (novels, non-fiction, plays or poetry; or pages from such a selection), ranging in difficulty from very easy to rather hard (for example, from simple picture-story books to *Robinson Crusoe* or *War of the Worlds*, in the originals). Then the student can be shown, one at a time, a page from each, and asked to read the page aloud. Judging whether or not the child can do this adequately is easy enough, and indicates the level of reading-difficulty at which the student would usefully re-commence reading instruction, language study, and literacy practice. Similarly, simply by asking a student to write a story, or a letter, it is possible to gauge the student's level of skill in written expression. Open-ended assessment in other curriculum areas could be based on questions which search for how much the student knows or can do: asking a piano student to play the hardest piece he or she knows, for example, or asking a science student to describe the most difficult piece of science he or she knows.

Diagnostic profiling is one of the main ideas in Roy Killen's recent book on programming (curriculum choosing and construction) and assessment (Killen 2005). Killen outlines effective assessment methods that incorporate the current ideas of 'Quality Teaching' (NSW), 'Productive Pedagogies' (Queensland), general high-level outcomes (promoted by Spady 1994, and Mayer competencies 1993), and other learning outcome approaches (Victoria and Tasmania's essential learnings), as well as the national benchmark system (Australian Benchmarks 2005).

PORTFOLIOS AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Portfolio assessment is a newcomer (Forster and Masters 1996, Watson 2002). Portfolios are ideal as a gallery for displaying either developing drafts of learning, or selections of best achievement. However as teachers' own use of professional portfolios (as an extended counterpart to resumes or curriculum vitae) is well known, along with the serious difficulties in making a consistent, objective summary of such portfolios, no more needs to be said here, except that the same problems apply to the potential diversity of student portfolios.

Only one further type of assessment, that might be new, or might be relevant, need concern us here—so called 'authentic assessment'. The very name is problematic, because its honorific name threatens to condemn any other kinds of assessment as 'in-authentic'. The technical definition of 'authentic assessment' is that it is based on so called 'authentic activities', that aim to achieve real-world, purposeful, practical goals (Anderson, Rede, & Simon 1995). What must be stressed, here, is that, valuable as many purposeful (non-recreational) real-life tasks are, as topics for classroom (and out-of-class) experiences, many otherwise ordinary curriculum topics cannot be justified as 'authentic' in this sense, but deserve to be presented

and assessed as seriously as ever. Consider, for example, quadratic equations (or any other medium for developing robust algebraic skill), history, oil painting, chess, and sonnet writing—things that arguably are, for all practical purposes, pointless, yet are still fundamental aspects of human culture. Hence, 'authentic assessment' should not be misunderstood, and should be treated cautiously. It is not a panacea or a total replacement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Judy Mousley for advice about an early draft of this discussion, and to the stimulus of teaching assessment issues to many students.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J.R., Rede, L.M., & Simon, H.A. (1995). "Applications and misapplications of cognitive psychology to mathematics education". Department of Psychology, Carnegie Mellon University. **www.act.psy.cmu/personal/ja/misapplied.htm**l

Texas Educational Review (Summer) pp. 1-15. (last accessed November 2005).

Anderson, L., & Krathwohl, D. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman, New York.

Biggs, J. (1975). "Process Learning: Challenge to Mathematics Education", *Australian Mathematics Teacher*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp 100-112.

Black, P.; Harrison, C.; Lee, C.; Marshall, B. & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: putting it into practice*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Bloom, B.S., et al. (1956), *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals: Handbook 1 Cognitive Domain,* David McKay, New York: Longman, London.

Forster, M., & Masters, G. (1996). *ARK Series: Assessment Resource Kit—Portfolios*. ACER: Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell.

Gough, J. (1999). *Diagnostic Mathematics Profiles,* Deakin University Press, Geelong.

Gough, J. (2006). "Rubrics in assessment", *Vinculum,* vol. 43, no. 1, 2006, pp. 8-13.

Killen, R. (2005). *Programming and Assessment For Quality Teaching and Learning*. Thomson/Social Science Press, Southbank.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM]. (2003). *Mathematics Assessment: A Practical Handbook,* National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), Reston.

Paxton, S., Wolfe, M., & Zevenbergen, R. (1998). "Numeracy Intervention: Issues Associated with Intervention". In Gough, J., & Mousley, J. (eds), (1998). *Mathematics: Exploring All Angles [Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Annual Conference of the Mathematical Association of Victoria]*. Brunswick, Mathematical Association of Victoria [MAV]. pp. 354-360.

Schleiger, H., Gough, J. (1993), *Diagnostic Mathematical Tasks,* Deakin University Press, Geelong.

Siemon, D. (2000). Numeracy in the middle years: A mirror image of literacy? *Papers from the Middle Years Numeracy Conference* [CD-ROM], AAMT: Adelaide.

Watson, G. (2002). *Inside Portfolios: A Handbook of Helpful Ideas for Planning and Developing Your Portfolio*. Department of Education & Training [DET], Perth, Western Australia.

Promoting a seamless curriculum between preschool and primary education

KATHY WALKER

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been an increase in awareness across the community that young children, particularly in the years between birth and eight years of age, are in a unique stage of development.

With this awareness, educators across childcare, preschool and school have been challenged to consider the notion of the child as the centre of the curriculum. This is a different approach from the child having to be manipulated around the demands of a curriculum that may set particular expectations, benchmarks and standards based on the rather simplistic notion of chronological age or national or international benchmarks that may not truly reflect the needs, culture, language and context of local communities, families and children.

Children's maturation, culture, development and learning demand much more of an individual approach to learning, which does not exclude the need for goals, objectives and accountability, but does challenge the traditional approach to schooling as `one size fits all'.

In recognising that nothing magical or miraculous occurs inside a child's brain or development in the January holidays, as children finish their preschool year and move into the school classroom, educators are faced with the reality that the child

in their first year of school, is the same child, the same learner, with the same strengths, needs and styles of learning as they were five weeks earlier in their preschool program.

Whilst the classroom environment may look different and, in some states, while preschool and school may still be under completely different government departments with little or no shared philosophy and certainly no shared curriculum between them, **the child is the same**.

It is not the child's fault that traditionally commencement of school was viewed as the more serious, real, and 'proper' learning time whilst preschool was viewed as the freer, more play-orientated program and that real learning did not really occur then.

Nor is it the fault of teachers or preschool school that traditionally, the curriculum, assessment, reporting, expectations and teaching styles were so different and separate from each other.

However, we now have in the 21st Century, greater knowledge, understanding, research and information that reminds us that not all children are ready to learn the same thing, at the same time, in the same way. We now know more than ever, that young children in their early childhood years, learn most effectively through active engagement, hands-on experiences, and through active exploration and experimentation of the materials and resources in the learning environment.

Despite the anxiety around benchmarks and standards, teachers know that some children are just not ready enough at the age of 6 to read and yet within another year, that readiness will be there, along with, of course, the supports and scaffolding from the learning environment.

These realities challenge educators to separate some of the unrealistic national or state standards from the very real children and their needs and strengths in the learning environment. This is not always easy to do with increased accountabilities and pressures upon schools to 'perform'.

However, placing the child at the centre of a curriculum, focusing upon the means and processes of reaching an end point, and the process required in the acquisition of a skill or achievement is what a seamless curriculum requires between preschool and school. Teaching is not about being driven by having all children achieve the magic designated benchmark. Teaching is about responding to the children who arrive in a classroom, having already commenced their learning journey through the preschool year.

The seamless curriculum is recognising that children do not walk through the prep classroom door, instantly ready to leave the active, play based learning behind, simply because they are in a new environment. Nor is the first introduction to school about setting up and providing some play as a transition strategy and then packing it away to start the 'real work and learning' once children have settled in.

Children need to be immersed in active, play and project based work alongside opportunities for skill instruction, group-learning experiences and directed learning.

Literacy and numeracy are rich and meaningful for children when they are contained within their play, their construction, their projects. Literacy is part of every day life and not locked into a particular hour within a day.

Children need their learning to be linked to relevant and meaningful experiences they that can relate to and engage with quickly. A classroom of children do not all need to sit and learn each letter of the alphabet or each colour at the same time. Some already know these things!

BUILDING BRIDGES

The seamless curriculum attempts to build a bridge for the child across the artificial divide between preschool and school curriculum. It acknowledges that the learning naturally flows for the child between the preschool and school experience.

The pedagogical tools of teaching and learning in the seamless curriculum across preschool to school are embedded in active, play, project and skill instruction with open ended, creative and hands on learning the major strategies.

The seamless curriculum recognises that children already bring with them from preschool a rich range of knowledge and skills and that through observation and , conversation with children during the first term, teachers will soon note the basic skills that children do and do not have, such as colour and shape recognition, who can already recognise words and who is perhaps already reading.

Attempting to interview and test children in the first weeks of school before they have formed a relationship with the teacher, before they are familiar with the school and trust the environment, does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of what a child already knows.

The best 'testing or interviews' I have witnessed are the ones where the teacher just uses the time to chat, to get to know and share some 1-1 time with the child and parent.

Colour recognition, shape recognition are such basic skills that are acquired and built upon naturally by children interacting with the environment and can be observed by teachers as the children work within the environment.

The first year of school must not place the child in stress or allow the child to become caught up in the current context of benchmark and accountability issues. Some of the worst car park gossip amongst anxious parents during the first year of school is all about, 'what reading level my child is at compared with another child's level'.

This is such a misrepresentation of what learning is about in these most important first years. Not all children will reach a level set by a particular school or government. However, all children need to move along the continuum of learning, skill and understandings at a progressive rate that reflects their own individual set of circumstances and that teachers are able to monitor and evaluate, not upon the state levels, but upon the circumstances and context of the child.

A seamless curriculum requires preschool and school teachers to view learning in these early years as a continuum of learning that does not stop in the December of one year and then have to restart in a different way the following January or February.

The seamless curriculum requires teachers across both preschool and school to share similar understandings about how young children learn. Teachers need support to view learning as a natural progression and to not feel the pressure to 'get children to a certain level' by the end of the first year of school.

The seamless curriculum allows children to explore, to learn and to acquire skills at a rate that matches themselves as an individual and provides time for some children to take a little longer than others without them or teachers or families feeling like the child or teacher has failed.

Assessment and reporting across preschool and school ideally can reflect the richness of the 'whole' child, where their social and emotional development, their thinking and creativity can be reflected upon, their imagination, their physical and language skills are highlighted as just as important and integral to being an effective learner as literacy and numeracy. Attempting to define a letter of A, B, C, D in a report to a child in their early childhood years is a gross misrepresentation of the huge amount of learning that each child is moving through in these early years. It locks parents into a mindset that a child with an A is the best and most successful learner. This, as teachers know, does not reflect the richness and depth of learning that occurs in these early years and defines children in the simplistic and narrow view that all meaningful learning can be graded and locked into a letter.

LEARNING AS A JOURNEY

The notion of a seamless curriculum reminds the entire community, that learning does not start at school, that learning is a journey that commenced from the day a child was born, and that learning is a process that cannot be placed neatly into a lock step model or a one size fits all approach.

The seamless curriculum places a child and their development at the heart of what it means to be a successful learner. Confident, assertive, respectful or others, able to think laterally and creatively and to be intrinsically motivated to find out and learn because learning is fun and exciting and purposeful.

As educators we walk a fine line at the current time, using rhetoric about recognising and respecting the individual child and yet being placed within certain accountability constraints that often appear to work in opposition to the realities of difference and diversity amongst and within our learning community.

A seamless curriculum places the child at the centre of the curriculum and whilst a community needs to know that teachers are accountable and that children are learning, the seamless curriculum reminds everyone that learning is a journey and a process that not all children will arrive at in the same way, take the same length of time or through the same means, and most importantly that these differences are okay.

The information age, literacy assessment & reporting

HEATHER FEHRING

THERE IS STILL an enormous gap between the reality of the literacy assessment practices of everyday classrooms and school environments and high stakes system assessment. Why have we not put more research into designing and developing literacy assessment techniques that reflect the knowledge we have of literacy acquisition processes, instead of using outdated practices combined with computer marking efficiency?

School communities in 2006, consisting as they do of interrelationships of students, parents, teachers, educational support professionals and educational administrators, are responsible for complex educational matrices of student attainment, curricula development and the monitoring of student achievement. One of the most popular techniques used by school communities to document achievement is student portfolios. The strength of student portfolios is that they are tailored to meet the philosophical and theoretical beliefs of a school community setting and the assessment principles that reflect the curricula in the school. Portfolios are student-centred, designed to demonstrate to students, parents and teachers the progress in the learning of individual children. They are structured so that the material contained in each student's portfolio specifically illustrates strengths and weaknesses in the areas of the curriculum relevant to each student. Portfolios provide the evidence to demonstrate change in the learning of individual students.

Student portfolios are basically "collections of artifacts of students' learning experiences assembled over time" (Forster & Masters 1996b:1).

Hard copy file versions of student portfolios have been in existence for a decade. In the 21st Century such portfolios have been digitalised and cut onto CDs for parent teacher interviews and for students, parents and teachers to keep as a record of their progress. In addition, students and teachers are creating their own websites

(and blogs) where interactive material can also be stored and used to demonstrate students' learning in a myriad of different contexts, dimensions and modes. Material in digital portfolios can include: Video clips of students reading and teachers analysing Running Records, PowerPoint presentations of projects created by students, quite sophisticated Kazhoots programs designed by students to illustrate their integration of multiple areas of the curriculum, digitalised Mind Maps demonstrating a student's thinking processes and sequentially scanned samples of writing work indicating increasing levels of knowledge about the syntactic, semantic and grapho-phonic working of the English language.

If literacy portfolios such as these can be used at the school level to reflect and monitor the multi-dimensional and multi-modal nature of students' literacy acquisition why is it that national and state testing—such as Victoria's Assessment Improvement Monitor (AIM) —still lack the innovative assessment practices that should be expected of a million dollar operation?

BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking is an interesting and very misunderstood phenomenon. A benchmark can be based on any number of simple statistical analyses of test results (mean, mode, median, stanine, etc) or by more sophisticated Rasch modeling. For example, the mean, mode or median number of English alphabet letters correctly identified by the sample of children tested can become the benchmark of future comparisons. If 1,000 six year old children were tested in 2006 in relation to their ability to be able to identify the letters of the English alphabet and the results were as follows; mean=19.8, mode=18 and median=17, these statistical results may form the benchmarks to judge other six year old children against in the future.

Bill, six years old, who scored 16 on alphabet knowledge is below the mean, below the mode and below the median for six-year-old children in relation to his ability to identify the letters of the alphabet. The question that should always be asked is: 'so what?' What do we know about Bill's learning and understanding of the literacy process? What will assist Bill to progress? Certainly testing Bill will not cause him to improve. Certainly comparing Bill to other six year olds will not improve his literacy. However, professionally competent, articulate teachers working in partnership with Bill, his parents and the school community will assist his literacy achievement to improve.

Alternatively, benchmarks can be determined by the professional judgement of a group of experts as in Criterion-Referenced Benchmarking. The standard becomes whatever the expert group decides is the benchmark to be achieved. For example, the expert group may determine that the benchmark for an English speaking six-year-old student who has attended one year at school in Australia should be the correct identification of 24 letters of the alphabet.

Benchmarks may also be based on demand, as occurs with the VCE in Victoria. The Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) benchmark to gain entry to a university higher education program changes every year as a result of the number of students applying, the places available and the TER of the cohort. Such a benchmark is a constantly changing hurdle for Year 12 students throughout Australia.

There is no absolute standard or benchmark for literacy assessment. The benchmarks are constantly changing. So what is it that we are actually assessing? Psychologists and statisticians have a lot to answer for with the continued misuse of benchmarks based on the assumptions of the theory of the normal curve. The use of the normal curve theory in this context is a mixture of statistical nonsense and ignorance about the reality of understanding learning and progress. That is not to say as students, parents and teachers that we should not have standards to strive for and achieve. Of course it is important to understand the processes involved in the literacy acquisition process (Anstey & Bull 2004; Bull & Anstey 2005; Winch, Ross Johnson, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday 2004), to be able to identify student strengths and weaknesses, to be able to design curriculum to adapt to students' needs and report progress in meaningful ways to all the interested stakeholders. Such standards require a means of identifying student learning superior to the blunt tools of statistics. This pseudo-scientific and so called objective measurement model has passed its use-by date.

EVIDENCE-BASED EDUCATION

The recent Federal Government report *Teaching Reading: National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (2005) has the following opening paragraph in the 'Literature Review' volume.

> "Underlying a key purpose of the present review is the conviction that claims about what constitutes effective literacy teaching, and of reading in particular, should be grounded in findings from rigorous evidence-based research. To this end, the present review of the research literature on teaching practices for students, with and without reading difficulties, relies largely, though not exclusively, on well-designed meta-analytical syntheses that: (a) partial out methodological artifacts from the effect sizes; and (b) base their analyses on the actual procedures and components of instruction used in the studies reviewed." (DEST 2005:v)

It is quite apparent that this National Inquiry into the teaching of literacy has a very one-sided view of what constitutes acceptable evidence to be considered in the process of the investigation. The report also stated "the evidence reviewed indicates that all students are provided with the best opportunities for success when teachers integrate the following skills via explicit instruction in: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension" (DEST 2005:v). This is an unacceptable position to take. No one approach can possibly cater for *all* students. Such a contention defies everything we have learned about individual differences in human learning.

Recently, International Reading Association (IRA) president Richard Alligton commented on the notion of evidence-based education in the USA. *"Evidence-based education* (EBE) is hot! EBE is the new phrase used to describe one of the key aspects of recent U.S federal education legislation. The phrase seems to be replacing the old and narrow phrase, *scientifically based research…"* (Allington 2006:16). However,

as Allington goes on to comment, the US Department of Education has included *professional wisdom* in defining evidenced-based education. In Australia we would also do well to reflect on what constitutes evidence of students' achievements in literacy acquisition and progress.

Students and teachers in schools in 2006 already belong to the information and knowledge management age. Information technology is opening up a 'brave new world' of know-how in relation to online, interactive, on-screen testing, item banking and data management. Already there are massive item banks of test tasks that are recycled on a regular basis. The Road Traffic Authority in Victoria has a driving licence test that can be taken as many times as you like until you obtain 95 per cent or higher on the test before you go for your actual Learner's Licence test.

There are online educational assessment resources such as the Australian Council for Educational Research's (ACER) *iAchieve at home* for students and parents. iAchieve provides tests in English and mathematics at Years 3 to 10 for a cost.

This new form of online assessment is currently very basic. Ken Boston, CEO of the UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), told the 10th Annual National Roundtable Conference in Melbourne 2005 that there is still a great deal of work to be done at the technical and theoretical level. He pointed out that much of the present effort has been going into the technological 'front end' rather than improving quality in the 'back end' (such as the development of good test items). (Graham 2005:8).

While we should use the advantages that information technology can now offer us, our greatest need at present is for an open, critically inquiring mind. Narrow, closed definitions of what constitutes evidence need to be avoided. Isolated one-off component testing of aspects of literacy can be very dangerous and provide a distorted view of the complex process of human learning and the literacy practices required in the 21st Century. We need to commit the same level of research funding to innovative literacy assessment practices as we do to the national testing of literacy.

REFERENCES

ACER (2006) **www.iachieveathome.com.au** Accessed 17th January 2006.

Allington, R. L. (2006). What counts as evidence in evidence-based education? *Reading today,* 23(3), 16.

Anstey, M., & Bull, G. (2004). *Literate futures. Professional development.The teaching of reading for a multiliterate world. Years 7 - 12.* Brisbane, Queensland: Literate Futures, Curriculum Strategy Branch, Department of Education, The State of Queensland.

Bull, G., & Anstey, M. (2005). *The literacy landscape.* Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia.Department of Education Science and Training, C. o. A. (2005). *Teaching reading. National Inquiry into the teaching of literacy. Literature review.* (Government Inquiry). Canberra: DEST.

Forster, M., & Masters, G. (1996b). *Assessment resource kit: Portfolios.* Camberwell, Victoria, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Graham, J. (Ed.). (2005). *PD Coordinators News* (Vol. 2, 2, December). Collingwood, Victoria: Australian Education Union.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2006). Victorian Essential learning Standards, from **www.vcaa.vic.edu.au**

Winch, G., Ross Johnson, R., March, P., Ljungdahl, L., & Holliday, M. (2004). *Literacy. reading, writing and children's literature.* South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Changing the culture of ASSESSMENT

ROSS TAYLOR

OVER THE PAST five years, Parkdale Secondary College has made significant inroads in changing the culture of how assessment is regarded by both staff and students and how staff utilise the data that is collected throughout the assessment process. In this article, I shall be drawing upon the experiences that I have had over the previous years as a KLA coordinator who has led the SOSE KLA in implementing this developmental assessment approach.

It should be noted that in order for a change of culture to occur in a school, strong and focused leadership is required from the principal class group within that organisation. It is imperative that the principal has a strong belief in instructional leadership and develops a deep understanding of the learning theory that underpins developmental assessment and its role within the education sector. The principal can strategically lead the building of a culture which is about the teachers building their capacity through applying deep learning to the day to day challenges of the class room. In this particular case it is about embedding the paradigm of assessment for learning and of learning within the classroom to improve the learning outcomes of students.

Five years ago, when I joined Parkdale Secondary, the school had begun to make its first tentative inroads into clearly scaffolding the process of assessment. The school leadership group noted that assessment of student competence was not being carried out effectively for three main reasons:

1 The key skills, knowledge and understandings were not clearly understood by all staff within a KLA and varied from KLA to KLA.
2 The outcomes of tasks were not specified clearly enough for students to have a grasp of exactly what they had to do.
3 The framework of reference for inferring what is meant by an A, B or C or Level 1, 2 or 3 was non-existent, inappropriate or unable to be understood by all stakeholders.

Our goal at that time was for each KLA to produce a clear set of skills, knowledge and understandings for each subject within that KLA. As a member of the SOSE KLA, and principally a geography teacher, I worked with several other staff in producing a list of 'behaviours' that we believed would exemplify a student's work at Years 7 to 10. Although this sounds like a fairly simple and straightforward task, staff had differing expectations at various year levels and no-one was able to provide a sample progress map for KLAs to actually see what was expected of them.

However, despite the length of time that it has taken for KLAs to produce these progress maps and the need to now align them with the VELS, this process of working together in having a clear understanding of what we as a KLA expected students in our classes to achieve, was a valuable experience for many staff. Prior to this discussion, the sharing of ideas, expectations and even units of work was not as widespread as it is now. These 'progress maps', as we call them are now used by a variety of stakeholders—the pupils receive them at the beginning of a year level, therefore having a clear idea of what is expected of them during their educational journey; staff

TABLE 1: Geography progress map

VELS Level	Description
Extension	• Student is able to link the idea of the Earth's natural systems being a resource and the concept of sustainability. • The idea of sustainable use of these resources should be clear, as should the ability to factor in a wide range of stakeholders when creating a management plan. • They are able to evaluate the consequences of human interaction with the environment from a wide range of viewpoints and clearly express these viewpoints in the plan. • Justification of strategies is a key idea as is the evaluation of policies. • Student uses a variety of presentation techniques, depending on the audience. • The student is able to use a wide range of Geographical media from which to draw inferences and predict outcomes with well-developed reasoning. • Information collected from fieldwork is presented using a wide range of presentation techniques as well as following prescribed formats and conventions.
6b (Year 10)	• They are able to display an understanding of the Earth's natural systems through class work, homework and assessed tasks. • Student is able to conduct fieldwork effectively and safely and use the collected data to solve a specific problem. They have a good attitude to the personal responsibilities within fieldwork. • They have a clear understanding of the Earth's natural systems and are able to see these patterns in the local area through fieldwork. • Their ability to use a range of Geographical skills is high, with the correct method being used in the correct situation. The student can use a wide range of Geographic skills effectively and for a purpose. • The student presents their work clearly and effectively and follows all formats and conventions for bibliographies, references and structure. • The student is able to produce a management plan based on a range of factors, which take into account a range of stakeholders. • Presentation of work is clear and follows the correct formats and conventions. • Student can produce a management plan to ensure the sustainable use of the Earth's natural systems and is able to incorporate National and Governmental ideas and/or Policy into this plan. • The student is beginning to criticise their own techniques for collecting and processing information and coming up with improved ideas.

utilise them in producing assessment tasks and rubrics and parents are exposed to them during parent-teacher meetings. A sample of the Geography Progress Map can be seen in Table 1.

Our challenge, following the development of the progress maps, was to ensure that all students were exposed to, and suitably assessed on, their abilities to meet the ascribed skills, knowledge and understandings that were noted on the progress maps for each curriculum subject.

Stage 2 of the assessment revolution at Parkdale SC began early this year, when a number of staff undertook a Post Graduate Certificate in Assessment and Evaluation, run by Professor Patrick Griffin through Melbourne University. Our school was very fortunate to be accredited as an off-campus provider for this course, meaning that Professor Griffin would come to Parkdale, rather than 15 staff traipsing to Melbourne University once a week. I cannot stress strongly enough how vital formal training was in providing staff with the necessary skills and strategies required to implement change in the classroom. Change in education is built around persistence in building a PD culture that successfully changes the mindsets of staff and this course is a fine example of this in practice.

This Certificate gave a number of staff, myself included, an in-depth knowledge of the theory of assessment, as well as the practical skills necessary to create a well-written assessment rubric. Over the previous couple of years, KLAs have been producing Common Assessment Tasks (CATs) that all students would complete after a particular unit of work. The idea behind this was to ensure that firstly, all students could be tracked on the progress map and secondly, that work between students and between classes, could be moderated and analysed. Of course, this can only take place if staff are using the same criteria and the same marking scheme. Assessment rubrics were the solution to this problem and enabled staff to create assessment tasks that actually assessed what they should, were aimed at higher order learning skills and included a range of appropriate skills from the VELS domains and were administered by all staff within the KLA in the same way.

TABLE 2: Year 7 geography CAT assessment rubric

Variables

1. Location of desert

1	Student states location of desert
2	Student uses map to describe location of desert
3	Student annotates map correctly with BOLTSS
4	Student provides geographical reasons for location of desert

2. Desert fauna

1	Student states the names of fauna & provides diagrams
2	Student describes the fauna
3	Student explains special adaptations of the fauna
4	Student links special adaptations of fauna to desert climate

Quality descriptors

A portion of an assessment rubric for a Year 7 geography CAT can be seen in Table 2. There are 12 variables for this particular task—this number varies depending on the size and complexity of that particular CAT. There are between two and four quality descriptors for each variable, although an even number is preferred as it forces a choice to be made, rather than opting for the 'middle' option.

These rubrics are being trialled at the moment and already we are beginning to see the benefits of using such an approach – staff are commenting that marking takes a lot less time than it used to; students don't argue about "why didn't I get an A?" as the rubric clearly specifies where a student did or didn't succeed and pupils are confident about the outcomes that a teacher requires.

Once the rubric is developed, KLAs can begin to decide what score on the rubric denotes an A, B or C and whereabouts on the progress map a pupil would be if they scored, say, 17 points. This common approach to marking the CATs allows all pupils to be marked fairly and without prejudice and allows for the collection of useful data as regards student progress.

So, after our journey so far, the lessons we learnt included:

- Use the keen, motivated staff to lead the revolution—this is important in building the 'critical mass' of staff within the school that understand the theory and practicalities of the developmental assessment process.
- Provide time for KLAs to meet and lead discussion around the key skills/understandings in their subjects—Parkdale staff have continually noted that this is really valuable.
- Continual, intensive PD is required to improve staff understanding, not once a term or on an irregular basis.
- Be persistent! School-wide change will not happen in a day, week, month or year. Parkdale is now five years into its journey and although we have made significant progress, we have some way to go yet!

THE FUTURE

I am currently on Teacher Professional Leave, during which I am working with three other staff in developing a Professional Development module that echoes the structure of the Post Graduate Certificate in Assessment and Evaluation. This module will allow all staff to have an understanding of Developmental Assessment and gain the skills necessary to create valid and reliable assessment tasks, with a well-written rubric. This module will be available on the Knowledge Bank during the middle of 2006.

Evaluation, Assessment and Reporting at Moonee Ponds West Primary School

ANN TAYLOR

MOONEE PONDS WEST Primary School, is situated in a quiet residential area of Moonee Ponds, an inner North Western suburb of Melbourne. Enrolment is around 450 students. The majority of the students are from the immediate locality, but an increasing number of students are drawn from an area that extends outside this area.

The guiding philosophy at Moonee Ponds West is respect for the rights and responsibilities of students, staff and parents. Children are listened to and respected as individuals. There is a high expectation that all children will learn and develop to their full potential. Learning is a partnership between home and school. The aim is for children to leave Moonee Ponds West with a love of learning, a strong sense of self-worth, confidence, independence, risk-taking skills and self-discipline.

This outlook is reflected in their evaluation, assessment and reporting policy which has been developed in collaboration with their community.

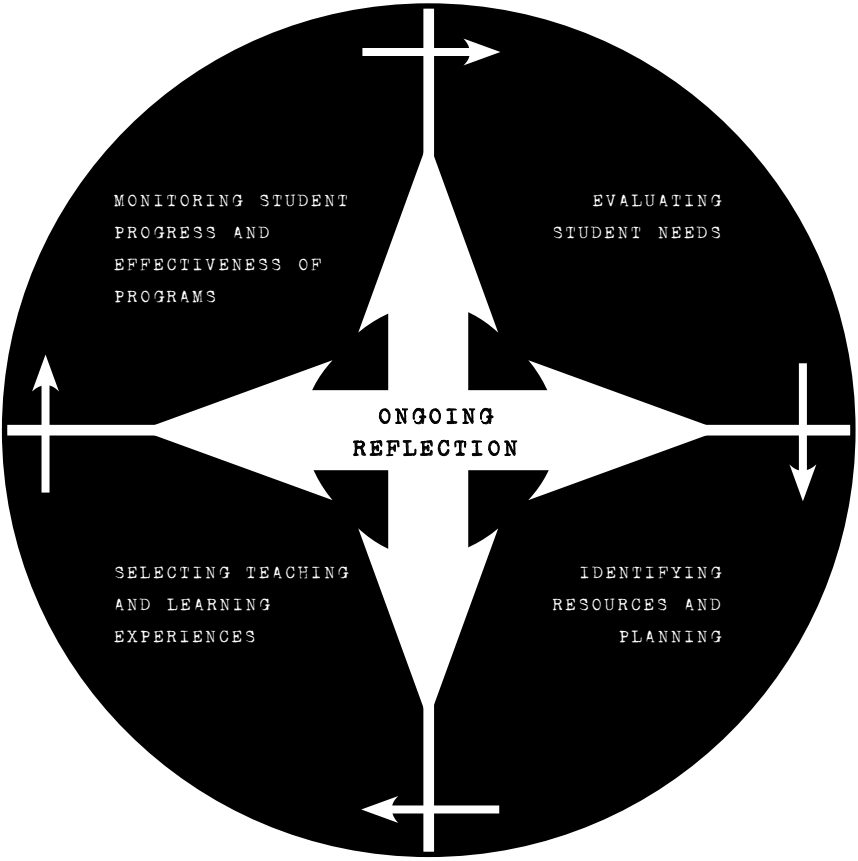
The school provides specific definitions for 'assessment' and 'evaluation'. They are taken from 'First Steps Second Edition: Linking Assessment, Teaching and Learning'.

"Assessment refers to the stage of gathering data. Effective teachers gather and record information constantly in a range of ways – through observation, conversations and student products."

"Evaluation is the stage of making judgements about the information gathered,

when the teacher draws conclusions about the progress of students and the effectiveness of teaching plans. Formative evaluation occurs during the learning activity or unit of work and is aimed at improving the learning experiences and student outcomes along the way. Summative evaluation occurs at the end of the learning activity or unit of work and focuses on the effectiveness of the learning experience and student outcomes."

The evaluation process can be illustrated in the following way.



Some of the beliefs that underpin the policy are:

- School Policy and Program assessment and evaluation, involves the collection and analysis of information to improve learning and teaching.
- Curriculum committees have a responsibility to report to the school community and D.E&T about the effectiveness of programs in achieving the aims of school policies.
- Teachers have a responsibility to report to the various curriculum committees regarding the effectiveness of classroom/school programs.

- How and what we assess communicates what is valued within the school.
- Assessment should involve a partnership between teachers, children and parents.
- Effective assessment is a continuing process.
- Assessment and instruction are intertwined (can occur before, during and after instruction).
- Assessment should be child-centred and based on our beliefs about how children learn.
- Child assessment should:
    - indicate a child's current achievement
    - indicate areas for further development and assist in the revision of goals
    - include consideration of the process not just the end product
    - promote positive attitudes towards learning
    - contribute to access and success for all students
- Competitive forms of assessment erode the self-esteem of many students and do not lead them to better learning. Assessment should not compare the progress of one child against another but rather be based on the continuing development of the individual.
- Assessment leads us to make recommendations for future learning.
- Mutual communication between teachers, children and parents is vital to the child's development and the school curriculum and should occur frequently.
- Reporting should be constructive and should clearly communicate the achievements of the child and include recommendations to assist future learning.
- Children have an important role to play in discussing/reporting on their own learning achievements and attitudes..

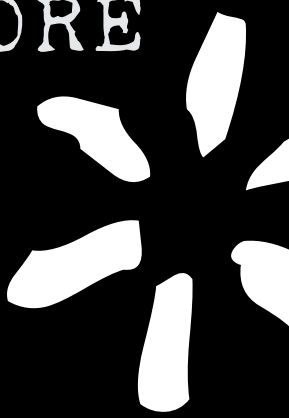
As a former teacher at Moonee Ponds West Primary school I know that the assessment and reporting process is a good example of what the Blueprint for Government Schools is calling for.

In the Blueprint area of the Department's website it states "Assessment and Reporting are essential elements of the learning and teaching process and are vital to the way students think about themselves and are engaged in the process of learning…Reporting is the process by which assessment information is communicated in ways that assist students, parents, teachers and the system in making decisions by providing information about what students know and can do, along with recommendations for their future learning."

It also says "The Primary purpose of reporting is to improve student learning. To do this the reporting must be an integral part of the teaching and learning process… [with] ongoing, constructive feedback…The process should develop students' capacity to reflect on their learning, their successes and areas for further learning—and hence assist their development as independent, life-long learners".

More details of the school and the policy can be found on their website at **www.mooneewestps.vic.edu.au.**

RICHARD ELMORE on Good Schools, Failing Schools & School Improvement



INTERVIEW BY JOHN GRAHAM

THIS IS THE first part of an interview John Graham conducted with Richard Elmore, Professor of Educational Leadership at Harvard University, during his visit to Melbourne as a guest of the Victorian Educational Leadership Consortium, Deakin University and The Department of Education and Training. Professor Elmore's most recent books include: School Reform from the Inside Out (2005), High Schools and High Stakes Testing (2003) and Restructuring the Classroom: Teaching, Learning and School Organization' (1996). Parts 2 and 3 of the interview will appear in subsequent editions of *Professional Voice*.

JG: What would you describe as the characteristics of a good school and what would you expect to see happening in a good school.

RE: Well for me a good school is a school that's focussed on creating a powerful learning environment for students and adults and this is clearly visible in the activities that people do in school. So teachers have strong relationships with each other and their individual and professional learning and are doing a lot of inquiry about their own practice. Students are in on what the adults' theories of good

instructional practice are and they can tell you what they are. They also have more or less unlimited access to high level work. There is some overall strategic focus in the school about what set of problems they're working on and what they expect to happen as a consequence of working on those problems.

JG: Are these qualities which are found in other organisations as well?

RE: All of these are characteristics of any high performing organisation, particularly in the knowledge intensive sector. The norm and expectation is that adults will learn over the course of their career at progressively higher and more powerful levels how to do their work. The more experienced and competent professionals are obliged and encouraged to work with less accomplished colleagues. Finally, there's distributed opportunities for leadership in the school. All of these characteristics are associated with the seminal work of the school, which is instruction.

JG: Do good schools have a set of shared values which everyone ascribes to?

RE: Central to my theory of learning is what I call the 'transfer of agency'. The primary purpose of education or learning is to transfer control over the process of learning from the teacher to the student. I don't believe that it's possible to have a high powered learning environment without also having a pretty healthy normative environment in the school. My theory of what powerful learning looks like requires you to have a pretty strong normative environment because if you're working in an organisation where the object is to get people to take responsibility for their own learning and work with their colleagues, that requires a pretty well worked out set of ideas about how the community works and how we respect each other. It's my experience that if you walk into a highly effective classroom there's always visual evidence that the teacher has worked on the norms, rules, expectations and behaviours that are associated with being in this classroom. So there's usually a sheet of paper somewhere which represents the collective work of the class on this issue.

JG One of the issues which schools in Australia are looking at now is the notion of values education. Do you see values education as having a role within what you've just been talking about? Does a good school have a values education program, or is values education just integrated into everything?

RE: Well I don't really have a position on values education. I do have a position on culture which is fairly controversial and the only thing it's got going for it is the evidence. I'm increasingly persuaded by the evidence that you don't change people's behaviour by changing their values. You change their values by changing their behaviour, especially in educational situa-

tions. So, I'm much more interested in how people are modelling the behaviour they think corresponds to the values they espouse, rather than whether they're teaching people what those values are.

I think a lot of the problems in schools are cultural issues and they're very hard-wired. They're hard-wired in the beliefs and ideas that students and parents bring to schools in the sense that they are largely unconscious. They're hard-wired in the understandings and conceptions of teaching that teachers bring to schools. They're hard-wired in the organisational structure. They're hard-wired in the stuff that's hanging on the walls and not hanging on the walls. They're hard-wired in the leadership behaviour of people in school. It's not a bad thing to start by talking about values that are different from the way those cultural norms operate, but talking about values in my view, according to the evidence, isn't a very powerful way to change those things.

JG: How do you change the hard-wiring?

RE: The way you change it is to say we're going to work on a particular kind of behaviour or practice. We're going to work on how we talk to each other in the classroom, and here's some basic normative propositions I'd like you to try out. When we disagree with each other, for example, we should say that we disagree with each other and we should say why and we should disagree respectfully. Now let's try and see what that means. First of all it's a little bit of an alien idea to a lot of students that in the course of a classroom discussion they should say, 'I disagree with you, I don't believe that'. So getting people to disagree is modelling one norm, getting them to disagree respectfully is modelling another norm and I think that it's at that level that the powerful impact on culture happens, rather than in espousing values and hoping that those values in some way shape people's behaviour. If people knew how to act differently they probably would. But often they don't know what the behaviour is that corresponds to the values that people are espousing.

JG: So, one of the first steps is making the hard wiring visible?

RE: Yes. Bringing it into consciousness and talking explicitly about other ways of relating to each other. I first looked at this in primary school classrooms in New York City. Teachers were working on getting kindergarten, first and second graders to use very high level cognitive language in talking to each other and dealing with text. These are in inner city schools where students come into the school with what a lot of teachers would regard as pretty heavy duty behaviour problems. The teachers and the students worked very hard and very explicitly on developing a kind of a contract for how they were going to talk to each other. The teacher helped the students develop the contract by physically

writing down what the class agreed were going to be the understandings and the rules and norms by which the classroom was going to operate and by which they were going to talk to each other.

That's what I mean by visual evidence. You could walk into any one of those classrooms and you could see how the students have worked through these issues. It was not uncommon for teachers to say every couple weeks, let's go back and revisit our norms, our rules, our understandings and let's talk about whether we're doing things consistently with those norms. It impressed me at two levels. One is the way it got kids to an extremely high level of accomplishment and discourse in literacy very fast. But it also basically eliminated the behaviour problems in these schools, which a lot of teachers in New York City regarded as more or less systemic and coming with the territory. There, literally, were no such behaviour problems in those classrooms. The students became used to thinking about school as a particular place where they were nurtured and supported.

JG: In a number of your articles and books you have written about notions of the failing school and school improvement. What in your experience are the first steps that a school should take in terms of an improvement process?

RE: There's a lot of productive disagreement in the field right now on this subject. This is not an area in which the evidence is very good and it's not an area in which the knowledge is very well settled. I would characterise the argument as being between the 'ready, aim, fire' camp and the 'ready, fire, aim' camp. I put myself in the latter. The 'ready, aim, fire' camp says that you start by raising the consciousness of everyone in the organisation to the problems that they face, and to the evidence of those problems in the data about student performance and achievement, and what is going to happen to those students if the school fails to serve them well. I have colleagues who do this with schools. They go in and help them work through the initial stages of the trauma of confronting the reality of their situation.

This theory has something going for it, in the sense that people in very well-performing schools often get to a point where they've learnt to live with the problems they have and accommodate themselves to them and in doing so make the problems less visible. This kind of inquiry and soul-searching is supposed to expose the problems and transform people's behaviour by getting them to own the problems that they have.

What I find problematical about that point of view is that I don't think solutions follow automatically from that process, no matter how well motivated or well intentioned they are. Often what schools find themselves in after they've gone through that process is a set of very well-defined problems for which they have no solutions. If they don't get some

sense of success around working on a problem it becomes very demoralising because what you've done is specify the predicament you're in but haven't really specified a way to get out of it.

JG: What do you mean by a 'ready, fire, aim' strategy?

RE: A 'ready, fire, aim' strategy says let's choose something to work on that we know is problematical about this school. Let's not spend a lot of time saying what's problematical about it or whether it's the best formulation of the problem we could make. We need to get engaged in sustained collective problem-solving on something that we know will deliver results and we can use those results as positive reinforcement to begin to develop and deepen our work and to think about and develop a sense of competency and agency in doing the work. Part of the problem with very low performing schools is that people tend to be paralysed and tend to have very low agency, very low sense of efficacy. Their world is organised in such a way that they actually believe that they what they do in schools has no, or very little, effect on students.

JG: What sort of things would you encourage the staff to work on?

RE: Frequently the things people choose to work on are relatively low level tasks. I typically insist that they work on something to do with instruction (such as how well kids read) rather than cleaning up the hallways or working on kids' language or behaviour in the hallways. What you're doing in those early stages is refocussing the energy in the school on something productive which you're reasonably confident you can get some immediate positive reinforcement from.

One of those strategies is what I call the 'low-hanging fruit' strategy. You find something you can work on that you're pretty certain is going to produce an impact on reading scores. But it's not a particularly sophisticated task. One of the most common approaches is just to use time differently. You're not really changing the skill mix of teachers you're not really changing the curriculum. You're just saying 'I'm going to drop by your classroom between 9am and 10.30am every day and when I do I expect to see something going on in there called reading.' The effect of this is to get people engaged in the activity called reading and, lo and behold, you get somewhere.

You then need to capitalise on people's sense of success by ratcheting up the complexity of the task, the scope of the task and the nature of the problem you're working on. This will make people progressively more sophisticated and powerful in how they think about the problems in the organisation, to give them some sense that, ultimately, they can take on just about anything.

NOTES on contributors

ANDREAS SCHLEICHER is the Head of the Indicators and Analysis Division in the Directorate for Education at the OECD. He has worked in a range of positions within the OECD. Prior to joining the OECD he was Director for Analysis at the International Association for Educational Achievement at the Institute for Educational Research in the Netherlands. He also worked as the International Coordinator for the IEA Reading Literacy Study at the University of Hamburg in Germany.

MARGARET FORSTER is the Research Director of the Assessment and Reporting Research Program at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Margaret has extensive experience in the area of assessment and reporting and works as a consultant nationally and internationally. She has direct experience in the development of support materials for teachers, and policy makers. She conceptualised and co-authored the first Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART English Upper Primary), and is co-author of the ACER Attitudes and Values Questionnaire, and the Assessment Resource Kit (ARK) materials. She co-directed the National School English Literacy Survey (NSELS) and co-authored the NSELS report. She is a member of the the Victorian Ministry of Education Assessment and Reporting Taskforce. Recent national consultancies on the revision and implementation of assessment and reporting frameworks include work with the Western Australian Curriculum Council, the VCAA and Education Queensland.

JOHN GOUGH is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. He was a secondary mathematics teacher before moving into teacher education where he has worked for the last 30 years. He has extended his interests into primary mathematics, literacy, remedial and gifted education, assessment, and children's literature. He has edited the secondary mathematics journal Vinculum for more than 10 years, and has published widely on many topics.

KATHY WALKER is an Educational Consultant who conducts a range of professional development sessions for staff working across all sectors of early childhood and primary education in Victoria. Kathy has been a university lecturer in Education

for over 12 years and conducted professional development for over 10 years in primary schools. She has a Masters in Education in Multi-Age classrooms and Family Grouping models and has taught in both primary and early childhood programs. She is a regular wr
childhood and primary education.

HEATHER FEHRING is an Associate Professor in Literacy and Assessment in the School of Education at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University. She has been writing and researching for many years in the area of literacy assessment and reporting. Her PhD research involved investigating the influences on teachers' judgement of students' literacy development. She is joint author of Keying into Assessment: Case Studies, Strategies, Classroom Management; she edited Literacy Assessment : A Collection of Articles from the Australian Literacy Educators' Association and she co-edited Critical Literacy: A Collection of Articles from the Australian Educators' Association.

ROSS TAYLOR is a teacher of Geography and Information Technology at the secondary level and is currently the Learning Technologies Coordinator at Parkdale Secondary College, Melbourne. He worked as a Geography teacher in London for 4 years before moving to Australia in 2001. He is currently undertaking his Masters degree in Assessment and Evaluation and is on Teacher Professional Leave, where he is part of a team of teachers who are providing professional development in the area of developmental assessment.

ANN TAYLOR is the branch deputy president of the Australian Education Union (Vic Branch). She was formerly the Assistant Principal at Moonee Ponds West Primary School.

RICHARD ELMORE is Professor of Educational Leadership in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. He is director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), a group of American universities engaged in research on state and local education policy. His research focuses on the effects of federal, state, and local education policy on schools and classrooms. He is currently exploring how schools of different types and in different policy contexts develop a sense of accountability and a capacity to deliver high quality instruction. He has also researched educational choice, school restructuring, and how changes in teaching and learning affect school organization. His most recent book is School Reform from the Inside Out (2005).

JOHN GRAHAM is a research officer at the Australian Education Union (Vic Branch) with the responsibility for researching curriculum and professional developments in education and training. He has written extensively about curriculum change, teachers and teaching as a profession, developments in education at an institutional, state and federal level and on a range of other matters from funding to organisational review. John has been a teacher in Victorian government secondary schools, a researcher and writer for a national equity program and a project manager and policy developer for the Department of Education and Training.

ABN: 44 673 398 674 112 Trenerry Crescent, PO Box 363, Abbotsford 3067
Tel: 03 9417 2822 Fax: 1300 568 078 Web: www.aeuvic.asn.au

TAX INVOICE

PV SUBSCRIPTION

Professional Voice is published tri-annually and aims to stimulate debate within the Australian education community. Covering issues of curriculum, pedagogy, leadership, educational practices and related topics, *Professional Voice* is positioned to build awareness of innovation, best practice and reform within educational settings ranging from early childhood, primary and secondary schools, as well as TAFE, adult provision and disability centres. *Professional Voice* is funded by the Australian Education Union Victorian Branch and is available free to financial members.

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....Postcode:.....

Daytime telephone number:.....

Email:.....

Please start my subscription from the current issue ❒

Please start my subscription from the next issue ❒

Please send me the next issue of *Professional Voice* ❒

Please send me issue_____of *Professional Voice*
Current issue $10 / back issues $10 each / one year (3 issues) $25 / overseas (airmail) +$5 per issue / All prices are GST inclusive
Total amount payable: AUD$_____(includes GST)

Please find enclosed my cheque (in Australian dollars payable to the Australian Education Union Victorian Branch) ❒

Please debit my credit card: Visa ❒ Mastercard ❒ Bankcard ❒

Card Number: . . . . . Expiry: . . . . .

Cardholder's Name: . . . . .

Signature: . . . . . Date: . . . . .

Please use a separate form for each subscription.

Once completed this subscription form will constitute a tax invoice. When applicable please retain a copy of the completed tax invoice for your own records for claiming the appropriate GST input tax credit.

ISSN Number:
1445-4165

Featuring essays by

Editorial: The Drivers of Change
John Graham

Raising Quality and Equity in Education through Systemic Reform
Andreas Schleicher

Assessment and Reporting: What do we need to understand?
Margaret Forster

Assessment in the Middle Years
John Gough

Promoting a Seamless Curriculum Between Preschool and Primary Education
Kathy Walker

The Information Age: Literacy Assessment and Reporting
Heather Fehring

Changing the Culture of Assessment
Ross Taylor

Evaluation, Assessment and Reporting at Moonee Ponds West Primary School
Ann Taylor

As well as part one of an interview with Professor Richard Elmore on good schools, failing schools and school improvement.