



Update: Reporting Student Curriculum Outcomes to Parents and the Community

Overview

Note: Please read this update (or mini-chapter) in conjunction with chapters 4, 5 and 7 of *Curriculum and Assessment*.

- Reporting to parents should be considered within a framework of developing partnerships between home and school in support of children's learning.
- Partnerships in learning are key to improving learning outcomes.
- Strengthening partnerships is a key part of school improvement (ACT Parents & Citizens Council, n.d).

Introduction

Opening Questions

- In your view, which curriculum and assessment stakeholders matter most in the reporting process? Make a list. Are they the same for early childhood, primary, secondary and university sectors?
- What are the purposes of reporting information to parents? What about reporting to the community?
- How might the involvement of some of the stakeholders you have listed improve the reporting process?

Case Study

'A splendid citizen! Problems were the only weakness.'

This comment on my Year 6 report (over four decades ago) had an interesting effect. Upon reading it, my father sent my mother to talk to the teacher about his comment—for the first time in my school career, and in the days when parent-teacher interviews were not the norm. It seemed that my ability to work through mathematical problems was the only concern my teacher had about my abilities, but it had a significant impact on my life. While my parents were reassured, they understandably formed the view that mathematics was my weakness, a view they did not change over the rest of my schooling. For the next ten years, despite successfully doing Advanced Mathematics in secondary school, I too regarded myself as weak in this subject.

This case study demonstrates that how teachers, schools and systems report student learning abilities and outcomes to parents, to the students and to the broader community can have far-reaching and often unanticipated effects.

Do you know Alan Ahlberg's famous poem *Parent Evening*, in which parents, student and teacher are all depicted as waiting in either the corridor or the classroom with nerves and pounding heart? For some reason reporting often creates anxieties in us all, yet reporting to parents is an important aspect of curriculum and assessment storylines. It is central to the learning partnership that teachers, parents and students must establish for optimal outcomes. Often, when the subject of reporting to parents is raised, we immediately think of school reports and parent-teacher interviews. There are, however, many other ways that contemporary schools communicate with both the community generally and their parent community more specifically. These might include school handbooks or prospectuses, newsletters, open days, annual school reports, parent meetings, school performances, Speech Days/Nights, homework diaries or journals and public community displays. Schools that genuinely invite community and parental participation in the school are more likely to use communication and reporting processes as a way to develop learning for all stakeholders.

For discussion

Examine some school prospectuses. What kind of information about the school and student learning outcomes is reported in this way? Think back to the last school assembly or Speech Day you attended. What did you learn about the school's processes through this public activity?

Reporting to parents is a topic that has certainly received its share of attention in Australia over the last few years. Several years ago there was huge debate in Australia about the form that reporting to parents would take. The then Federal Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, threatened to reduce education funding to the states should they refuse to implement an A to E grading system in school reports. More recently, there has been a great deal of discussion

about reporting school results more generally and what implications this might have for how schools are viewed. The new *My School* website, established recently by the current national government, enables schools that have been judged 'statistically similar' to be compared on NAPLAN literacy and numeracy results.

Activities

- Search online for some annual school reports. In role as a parent of a child at one of these schools, write a response to the principal about what you have learned from the information reported there.
- Consult the *My School* website. Identify a range of schools. Examine one of the league tables on the website itself. Examine one of the league tables constructed by the newspapers, available electronically. To what extent do you think classroom teaching has an impact on what is reported?

The following sections explore two aspects of the reporting storyline: reporting individual student curriculum outcomes to parents and the issue of more general public reporting of school achievement.

Reporting student curriculum outcomes to parents

All education systems require schools to provide parents with regular, detailed and accurate information about their children's academic, social and personal development. Many schools also suggest that the students themselves should be an integral part of this reporting process. Such reporting often happens anecdotally when teachers and parents communicate with each other during the normal school routine, and more formally through parent-teacher and sometimes teacher-parent-student interviews, as well as through written reports. In addition, students will often have portfolios or records of their achievements over a specified time

frame. There may also be opportunities for the use of a regular communication diary or learning journal.

Written reports

Typically a written report will include a summary of the student's results in each learning area, teacher comments on this assessment, a principal or coordinator's comment and relevant examination results if appropriate. Attitude to learning, behaviour and a comment about the child's effort are also common sections of current reports. Teachers need to consider the audience of the report as well as its purpose, and the kind of record keeping needed to ensure such a report is as accurate, jargon free and information rich as possible. Both summative and formative information is desirable—the student's achievements need to be recorded, but so do any specific strategies that are planned to enable improvement and development. Some schools are now using specialist software to generate report proformas. See the appendix for two examples of reports.

General comments such as 'Robyn is working well' or 'Robyn is not reaching her potential' do not provide any substantive information nor any indication of particular knowledge, skills or understandings. The Tasmanian Reporting to Parents Taskforce (2006) emphasised that if there were to be genuine partnerships between parents, schools and teachers, it was imperative that the reporting element in the relationship was successful. Great care therefore needs to be taken to ensure that reporting to parents is:

- accessible—the language used needs to be devoid of jargon that is difficult to understand
- interactive—parents and students need genuine opportunities to genuinely respond to the report. For their part, parents and students must also take the time to read the report thoroughly and to ask questions about any area that they find difficult to comprehend.
- accurate—reports need to be based on a range of evidence.

For discussion

- Consider who the audience is for a school report. How can teachers ensure that they think about reporting from the parents' perspective(s)?
- How much information should be shared with parents? What must be included? Might anything be excluded? Why?

Interviews

Many early career teachers report that they are anxious about parent–teacher interviews (Ewing & Smith, 2002). It is an anxiety that is also often shared by parents. It is possible that past experiences create false expectations or preconceptions about these meetings, making them more complicated than they need to be. Griffin and Nix (1991) suggest that the following effective communication principles are extremely important in interview situations:

- attentive behaviours that convey that the meeting deserves full attention from all involved
- active listening
- clarity of information
- appropriateness of the form and channel of communication used.

The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens asserts that the role of interviews between parent, teacher and student should be enhanced and that schools need to ensure that the timing of such interviews is accommodating of parents' work schedules.

Public reporting of school and student achievement

Consider

The following two scenarios illustrate that school choice is not possible for everyone.

Scenario 1

Brindley and Amanda are both senior executives with high incomes. They have just learned that they are expecting a baby. They immediately make a short list of the elite independent schools in their area, initially using the schools' profiles on the web to make their list but also arranging interviews with each principal. Both carefully read each school prospectus. Finally they place a holding deposit on a place at their two preferences to ensure a place at each for their unborn child until they are ready to make the final decision.

Scenario 2

Elsie is a single mother who works full time in an office. She enrolls her daughter in the school closest to her place of employment because it also has before and after school care. She does not examine the school's policies before making an appointment to meet the Principal and complete the appropriate enrolment forms. On doing so she receives an information booklet and a copy of the school's policies and rules in the handbook. Elsie is concerned that her working regime will mean she won't have many opportunities to get to know the school or her daughter's teacher.

Currently there is huge debate about the Australian Government's introduction of a new website, *My School* www.myschool.edu.au. This website provides a great deal of information about individual school performance. Ratings are based on sixteen categories. These include parental income, percentage of student retention to Year 12 and the number of Indigenous students, as well as student performance in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy tests. A 'Community Socio-Educational Advantage' ranking is intended to provide a means of assessing advantage and disadvantage across all Australian schools, although thus far, the funding each school receives is not available on the website. The government's argument in developing *My School* is that parents need and want more information about how well schools are doing in order to make the right choices for their children. It is the Education Minister's assertion that this website will enable transparency,

identification of the schools most in need of extra resourcing and indicators of where there are difficulties.

Teachers and unions are particularly concerned about the publication of NAPLAN test results by school. One area of concern is the current lack of a national curriculum to tie the NAPLAN assessment to. They are also concerned that the government's arguments fail to take account of similar policies in the United States and England and that unhelpful simplistic ranking of schools in 'league tables' will result. Under former President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* legislation, National Assessment of Educational Progress tests were mandated. There are now strong reservations about the problems associated with using such test results to measure student, school and teacher performance. See, for example, the open letter written by the Board of Testing and Assessment to the US Education Secretary in October 2009.

As argued in chapter 4, standardised tests using multiple choice items narrow the intended curriculum, and measure a limited range of technical kinds of knowledge and skills on one occasion at one point in time. Teachers feel pressured to teach to the tests. The US experts also argue that it is highly problematic to use such tests to measure the 'value-addedness' of a school program or a particular teacher's effect on her students' performance. Similarly in England, two recent reports, *The Rose Report* (2009) and the *Cambridge Education Review* (2009), have both argued that external testing together with league tables and naming underachieving schools have not improved student achievement. In Australia, a recent paper argued strongly that the NAPLAN literacy and numeracy tests are compromised by measurement and sampling errors as well as administrative issues, and thus potentially lack validity and reliability (Wu, 2009).

Many educators and the Australian Education Union have suggested that such a website needs to have protective measures, to ensure that the information cannot be used inappropriately. Using league tables to rank schools is highly problematic, as demonstrated by an unfortunate incident in NSW in 1997 where a school in Sydney's outer west was publicly shamed in newspaper headlines. This led to the NSW state government banning league tables.

For discussion

Do you think that a public website with detailed information about each school, including student performance on national tests, will lead to a raising of standards? Will it lift the performance of underachieving schools and teachers? How? You might like to debate some of these issues with your colleagues.

Resources

My School www.myschool.edu.au

Ahlberg, A (1989). 'Parent Evening'. In *Heard it in the Playground*. London: Viking.

Tasmanian Taskforce (2006) has recommendations as well as some sample documents that can be used as a basis for discussion and critique.

Further Reading

Ewing, R & Smith, D (2003). Retaining quality beginning teachers in the profession. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 15–32.

Fiske, E & Ladd, H (2000). *When Schools Compete: A Cautionary Tale*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

Griffin, P & Nix, P (1991). *Educational Assessment and Reporting*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Reporting to Parents Taskforce (2006). *Report to the Minister for Education*. Tasmania.

Australian Capital Territory Council of Parents and Citizens (n.d). *Ways of Improving Reporting to Parents: Submission to the Government Schools Education Council Inquiry on Reporting to Parents and the Community*.

Wu, M (2009). *Interpreting NAPLAN Results for the Lay Person*. On the Australian Primary Principals Association website www.appa.asn.au.

Appendix

Sample reports

Year 10 Yearly Report 2009 Science—10SC2

Teacher: _____

Comment on Progress

_____ is a polite and courteous student who works well with others in group situations and contributes positively to discussions. The research assignment and Genetics topic were commented on in the first semester report. Results in Chemistry were disappointing and are not a true reflection of potential.

Outcomes	Level of Achievement					
	Outstanding	High	Sound	Basic	Limited	Not Assessed
Relates properties of elements, compounds and mixtures to scientific models, theories and laws						
Describes infectious and non-infectious diseases and the response of body systems to maintain health						
Describes voltage resistance and current using analogies and explains different methods of electricity production						
Relates the structure and function of cells, genes and DNA and classification to models and theories						
Applies models, theories and laws to situations involving energy, force and motions						
Uses appropriate strategies to analyse, solve and develop solutions to problems						
Semester 2—Overall level of achievement						

Semester

Student:

Class:

Year:

This report on your child's progress and achievement is based on the content taught this year. In preparing the report, teachers have used their professional judgment based on observation, regular ongoing class assessment, grade moderated assessment tasks and student work samples.

Assessment of Achievement in Stage 2 – Year 3

Please note that the majority of students will be assessed as having made SOUND progress.

Outstanding:

The student is working beyond the expected level for the year, has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the content and can readily apply this knowledge. In addition, the student has achieved an outstanding level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills to new situations.

High:

The student has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the content and a high level of competence in the processes and skills. In addition, the student is able to apply this knowledge and these skills.

Sound:

The student is able to demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the main areas of content and competence in the processes and skills.

Developing:

The student has a developing knowledge and understanding of the content and is working towards an acceptable level of competence in the processes and skills.

Basic:

The student is experiencing difficulty, with only an elementary knowledge and understanding of the content and very limited competence in some of the processes and skills. Degree of progress is of concern.

English

Overall Achievement	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
Reading					
Talking and Listening					
Writing					

Effort	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Teacher Comment

... demonstrates a love of language through his articulate participation in class discussions about literature. In a recent written response to ... has encapsulated the themes of the picture book with outstanding sentence structure and colourful language. ... general knowledge has assisted ... in engaging with complex ideas and concepts in books such as ...

Mathematics

Overall Achievement	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
Data					
Measurement					
Number					
Patterns and Algebra					
Space and Geometry					
Working Mathematically					

Effort	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Teacher Comment

... is a gifted Mathematics student who is able to explain strategies when problem solving and working abstractly. ... excellent measurement skills including telling the time and ... is accurate in multiplication tables and division. ... has already achieved most of the Stage Two outcomes in Mathematics. ... is able to represent data using column graphs and has sound spatial concepts.

Semester 2, 2009

Science and Technology

Overall Achievement	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Effort	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Human Society and Its Environment

Overall Achievement	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Effort	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Creative Arts

Overall Achievement	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Effort	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Personal Development, Health and Physical Education

Overall Achievement	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Effort	Basic	Developing	Sound	High	Outstanding
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Additional Programs		I			I
Chess			Public Speaking		
Regional Drama Festival			Sport - 1. School Representation - PSSA		

I = Involved

Work Habits	C	S	M	Values, Attitudes, Social Development	C	S	M
Abides by class rules				Accepts responsibility			
Abides by playground rules				Attentive in class			
Completes homework				Demonstrates positive self esteem			
Organises belongings				Displays initiative			
Practises Reading				Is considerate and supportive of others			
Shows a confident approach to school work				Is motivated to learn			
Takes pride in bookwork				Is tolerant and accepts the opinions of others			
Works well in group situations				Makes safe, healthy and sensible choices			
Works well independently				Shows persistence to complete tasks			

C = Causing Concern S = Sometimes M = Mostly

General Comment

_____ has outstanding interpersonal skills. _____ has a brilliant memory and general knowledge which assist _____ in conversational skills. During class discussions and deep questioning _____ shines. _____ friendliness and caring contribute to _____ popularity with both students and teachers. It has been such a pleasure teaching _____ this year.

Days Absent:

Principal's Signature _____

Teacher's Signature _____