

Sabbatical Report Nigel Bioletti, Birkenhead Primary School

Purpose of Sabbatical

“A brief look at how we can best involve children in reporting their progress and development to their parents”, and a look at some of the developments in ICTs which may assist this process, and/or make it even more worthwhile”

Why this goal?

I think that it is really important that children take a central role in reporting their own progress. Of course this means that they need to be aware of what the learning is all about, but the more involved they become in their reporting, the more they realise that their education is a long term process, and that they must play a key role in their own development.

This report is not overly long. I have only read two or three books, with a browse at some internet sites. It is really just a take on the issue. If you have read it, and if you wish to swap ideas, then I would really like to hear from you. I would be interested in your take on this whole area of children’s learning. What do you do to maximise children’s involvement in their own learning? How do you involve them in reporting their achievement? Have you read “Personalising Learning”? Have you read Shirley Clark’s books? Have you read “Clarity in the Classroom”? If you would like to make contact, email nbioletti@birkenheadprimary.school.nz

Summary statement – You may not have time to read the rest of my report

We all want to build lifelong learners, and to place the child at the centre of their own learning.

We cannot expect this to happen if we do not involve the children in more than a token way

So:

We need to find out what children like to do, the ways they like to learn, the things that are important to them

We need to plan for the children and with the children

We need to create a learning environment in which children feel safe, valued, acknowledged, befriended, cared for – but one in which they know that they are “here to learn”.

We need to allow teachers to feel confident that they can hand over some of the responsibility to the children, and that they will not be criticised for that.

We need to build the team that will help ensure that the child achieves to his/her best

We need to let children see that everyone wants to see them achieve their best

We need to ensure that children know what they are learning and why they need to know it

We need a curriculum which is responsive to the differing needs of children, the different needs of groups of children, which is engaging, motivating, and purposeful.

We need class organizations which allow teachers to give responsibility to children, which trust them to commit to their own learning, and which allow teachers to be the motivators and facilitators of learning, and the givers of feedback, rather than to be all things to all children at all times.

We need ways of truly integrating the use of ICTs into class programmes, rather than using them on an ad hoc basis

We need to involve children in checking on their own progress

We need to build the abilities of children to talk about their learning, and give them regular opportunities to do so.

We need to involve the children in deciding what they need to focus on next

We need to involve parents in the process – keeping them informed about what their child is doing, the help they can give as parents

We need to employ the techniques we know of which will help this whole process work to the best for all concerned

We need to encourage teachers to seek feedback on the learning – did the children enjoy the learning, do they have suggestions for the next time the teacher takes the unit? Did they feel that they gained skills and knowledge? Do they feel that they have grown as a result of the learning experience.

Is a classroom management system based on an Assessment for Learning approach, supported by a “rotation” system of Literacy groups, with groups rotating through time with teacher, independent reading, writing time, time on computers – the best way to allow the whole approach to come together.

If we can achieve the above, we will realise the widely desired aim of creating “life long learners” – children who will be able to be closely involved in their actual learning, its monitoring, and in talking about the learning.

I now realise just how important this is.

We have to make greater efforts to really find out what children need to learn to do, and what they need to learn about. We do this but we do not do it well enough. If we want to fully engage children in their own learning, we need to find out more about “where they’re at”. This probably won’t happen on paper. It might well happen through discussion. Group conversations are good – where one child’s ideas stimulate other children to think about themselves and their learning.

What are we currently doing at Birkenhead Primary School that fits into this “Chn involved in their own reporting” approach:

The following are happening to varying degrees in different classrooms in the school, ordered from wide implementation to lesser implementation:

1. Daily timetable – a two hour Literacy block 9am to 11am to actually allow Literacy development, time to reflect on Learning.
2. Teachers being guided to look at assessment data as a syndicate, identify children’s general and more specific needs.

3. Children being involved in the identification of Success criteria. The planning of programmes is the crucial element – What do the children need in the LA? **We need really meaningful pre-assessment techniques, rather than simply asking children (to write) what they know about the topic under consideration.** This is hardly a good way of engaging the children from the outset. Develop Lis, plan activities, and success criteria/assessment format/rubric, then teach, assess, report.
4. Children involved in “Triangles” – Teacher, Parent, and Child discussions about their progress. We need PD to discuss these – reason for, guidelines for children, info for parents, portfolio as basis, but most importantly, how to enable chn to feel able and confident to talk about their learning.
5. Children being involved in peer assessment - according to the Success Criteria set for the learning – getting children to talk about learning, becoming familiar with the language of learning
6. Children keeping a Learning Journal – highlighting their personal achievements in curriculum or extra curricular, and noting KC development
7. Children using “KnowledgeNet” to publish their work so that Mum and Dad can see it as it evolves.

Possible moves:

1. To make children’s SMS (e-tap - On line) data available to parents – through log in and password. This would mean that parents had ongoing access to achievement data, allowing “Triangles” (conferences) to focus on the child’s actual learning, and looking forward rather than at the past – Goals to achieve.
2. Discontinue the End of Year Report – Replace this with a final “Triangle” to summarise/celebrate the year, look to the future, and an “Achievement Certificate” – with brief statement for Lit and Num, KCs, and General Comment.

Getting children involved from the outset.

Involving children in their own education

We actually need to ask the children (well before the beginning of the following year – say, later in Term Three) what they have enjoyed about their learning this current year. This will give a clear indication of the bits the children do like – probably the bits where they are fully engaged. This can give a guide to the way the curriculum should be delivered to them.

The term’s work needs to be planned really, really, really carefully.

This whole area of planning is becoming hard work. It is becoming a major exercise to plan out a term’s work. To come up with a unit that fits all of the pieces in:

LAs
AOs
KCs
LIs
SCs

ITs
TSs
ESOL
CWSN
GATE

is a major academic exercise, possibly actually beyond some teachers to deal with, and difficult for any teacher to accomplish while still wrapping up the current term's work, but critical if we are to ensure a curriculum that is truly responsive (ie it builds on previous learning) and engaging for children.

Consider:

School Mission

School Vision

School Values

How will the unit of study help realise these?

Where do we want children by end of the year, by the end of their primary education

How to engage the children, purpose (scenario)

How does this learning connect with previous learning?

The activities the children will engage in – repeated opportunities for them to acquire the skills we want them to learn

How the children will assess their own progress; how the children can help each other to assess their progress

How the children will demonstrate their learning

How the children will report their progress to parents

Relationships are important. The children need to feel that their teacher is really with them. They need to feel safe with their classmates. They need to feel that their viewpoint is valued. They also need to be responsible – to be respectful, to operate considerately in the classroom.

The children need to know that there is a purpose to their learning. Problem Based Learning offers an ideal framework to maximise this, better than an Inquiry approach in that it demands/expects a decision or recommendation from the children, rather than just an answer. The scenario is presented to them, and then, with lots of discussion, input from teacher, experts. Classmates, IT, books, the children are expected to formulate a solution to the problem the scenario presents. The children can be expected to present that solution to people (who might enable it to be realised). We therefore need to give the children lots of opportunities to speak in front of others, or to write to people they do not actually know.

We obviously need to integrate Literacy and “Theme” Learning Intentions. The children then gain literacy skills in a meaningful context – they are “learning about” and “learning to do” at the same time.

We need to teach the children how to talk about their learning. We need to give them a vocabulary – the LIs they are working on, and the Success Criteria which will enable them to know how they can succeed at the given task. The children need to be encouraged to make connections. If they learn a particular strategy in one LA, or one topic, they may well be able to apply that strategy in other LAs or contexts. They need to be given chances to think about how they might use a concept or strategy in the future. They need repeat opportunities to demonstrate their skills.

The pieces:

Assess for Learning – This is a waste of time if the teacher still does not know how effective their teaching has been. It's about enabling the children to be involved in the direction of their learning.

And, on the assessment front, if schools are going to create real Learning relationships, then teacher energy and time needs to be devoted to those assessment mechanisms which really do help grow the relationships. Schools will need to make decisions about the tools they use. They need to retain tools which identify deep learning needs, and discard those which only work at a superficial level, or only at an accountability level. So which tools are in, and which are out?

Planning – Teachers need to know what skills the children will have learnt by the end of the teaching cycle. They do need a range of activities in a well planned sequence (“Model and 3 Dos” [teacher models, chn have three chances to practice]), which give the children ample time to develop the skill, but they should not feel that they can't leave some holes in their planning – holes that the children might help to fill in. They should look out for errors in children's ideas/expressions. These are opportunities to correct the children's misconceptions.

Then, the circle – children grouped, rotating through “Work with Teacher”, Writing, Reading, IT activity, Language skills stations. But it is NOT an activity programme – the stations all require work towards the LIs. This arrangement gives the children a permanent opportunity to be partially responsible for their learning. Teachers need to recognise that they might not always feel in control. That's OK. The less the teacher feels in control, the more the children might feel so. The teacher has to construct the groups which make up the rotation. It is probable that the groups would be language/reading ability based, but not necessarily. It might emerge that some unlike children work together more effectively. They might interact in a way that enhances the learning of two children of a pair. It might be said that a rotation approach reduces the amount of teaching which can be done with the class. This is not necessarily so. If the class has been well set up at the start of the week/cycle, with clear IALTs (I Am Learning To..... to keep the focus on the child's own learning) and SCs developed and discussed with the children, and rubrics posted on the wall for children to refer to, then the children should be well geared to take control of their learning. Obviously, the week needs to be well set up, with the teacher able to CLEARLY articulate what he/she thinks the children should be learning, and with a clear idea of how the week might produce the results, but the Lis and SC can be reiterated throughout the week, at the start of Literacy time. The time the

children spend with the teacher will enhance that – in a number of possible ways. The first cycle might reiterate the LIs etc, and flesh them out for that group, clarifying for individuals. The teacher might take a mini-lesson – a Writing focus or reading focus. The children could follow this up at the next station. The conference time might just be a check up time – children to arrive with passages of text to read to the group – with a comment about the text in terms of the Lis being worked on that week. Children could be expected to bring all logs – Reading Log, Spelling log, Spelling list. So, essentially, there could be teaching rounds and review rounds. The rotation system allows the teacher to change very quickly – as the structure is there and the children are well used to it, but the teacher does not need to shift 30 children all at once, the changes can be introduced with each group. A child might decide that he/she would like to work with the teacher again, and stay behind for a second teacher time.

This is not easy. Teachers think that they have to be teaching all the time – otherwise they are not earning their money. It takes some effort to convince them that it's OK for them to allow children space to take some responsibility for their work.

The outcome – that teachers and children talk to each other about learning on a regular basis – not simply at the end of day, or the end of the unit of study. Children can give their teacher feedback – teacher asks “How's our learning going?” These repeated opportunities for learning talk will build a very close relationship between teacher and children. Children will become very used to the vocabulary, and will then find it increasingly easy to talk to their parents about things. Perhaps parents might get real answers to their question, “What did you learn about today?” instead of the traditional “Nothing much”.

On-line data – What has this got to do with my sabbatical topic you might say. If parents have access to the data that teachers are collecting on their child(ren), and if that data is able to be fully understood by the parent (through flags or links), then the time spent in “Triangles” will be able to be much more focused on the child. If the parent knows that their child is performing well in most areas of the curriculum, then they will feel confident that the “triangle” time can be more a “celebrating the learning” time, and a “Looking to the future” sort of exercise, than if the parent feels that they wish they could just sit down with the teacher and find out exactly how their child was progressing. Many parents would see far more value in the dialogue with teacher and child about the real learning that the child is enjoying, than learning that the child has a reading age of so many years, but little idea of what the child is actually achieving in class reading activities.

Email home – This is a logical possibility if there is sufficient hardware in the room. Could be done in SSR time by one group each day. Imagine the buzz parents would get if they received an email at work (employer's permission gained first) from their child – Hi Dad – I just wanted to let you know how well I am doing at my story-writing. I have really improved this term. We have been writing exciting narratives based on “Survival”. I have attached my draft for you. How do you like my opening paragraph? Hope you are

having a good day. Sam. Imagine the child's delight at getting a response. How motivating would this be?

Learning Management Systems - (chn leading their learning, reporting as they work!!!)

– This is a perfectly sensible method of allowing the children to demonstrate their learning. Children can use their own “Space” as their “Project”, publishing their ideas, dragging graphics that interest them, etc etc etc, and able to work on their “project” at home, show Mum and Dad, get help from older brother/sister???? The Ministry is, I believe, expecting LMS providers to include a “Reflective Journal” facility in their softwares. This makes absolute sense. The development of a Reflective Journal facility will only enhance the opportunities children have for demonstrating their learning. It is an ideal way of allowing the children to log their Key Competency progress. They would need rubrics for this – so that they can report meaningfully. The on line facility might well work in conjunction with an in class monitoring scheme children might place a sticker on a classroom chart to show which stage they are up to in “Managing Self”. They might then report to Mum and Dad through their LMS. Mum and Dad would be able to comment on the child's entries – encouraging their child to “keep up the good work”.

Learning Stories – Difficult definitely, but teachers might be able to enlist the help of their parent helper to catch “Learning Stories” as they arise, post on the school's LMS for parents. However, Learning Stories could well be used as a pre-assessment technique. A ten minute conversation with one “just normal/average” child in a teacher's class would give the teacher a very valuable take on the general level of understanding this particular age group has of concepts about say “Material World” or whatever. This would be hugely beneficial when planning Lis.

Triangles (Conferences)

Absolum gives a very good overview of student led conferences. They are consistent with his belief in the need for Learning Focused relationships, in which the student can be an “originator” – initiating their learning rather than reacting to a teacher directed approach. Parents need to be fully involved in the change – reasons for, philosophy behind them, but as children become more and more skilled and used to reporting their learning, I am sure that parents will realise the value in having the children fully involved. Schools will still have to consciously develop this capability in children. I see that the more often children are expected to report to Mum and Dad, the more skilled and the more perceptive they will become. To that end, the start of the year needs to present the programme for the year to parents, and then start giving children regular opportunities for talking about their learning. If schools decide to involve their children just once a year, the children will never develop the fluency to be able to articulate their learning in an enjoyable way – they will feel nervous and unsure. It is possible that a mix of parent/teacher/child conferences, and parent/child conferences with teacher on hand to answer questions might be a way to really build the capability – more chances for children to gain the confidence they need to talk about their learning.

If teachers can give a range of motivations and reasons for children to talk, then, come the time to talk to Mum and Dad, there will be a rich dialogue – child, parent, and

teacher. Parents will hear their child's positivity about their learning, the things they believe they have achieved well, the difficulties they have experienced, the comments that their peers and their teacher have made about their learning, the things they believe they need to work on in the next period of learning, and the parents will gain an idea of how they can support their child in future.

Teachers could timetable a reflection time – as suggested above, just before Interval - the children could have a set reflection group, divided into pairs, so that they can form a threesome if one child is absent. Children “can learn to self-assess by first learning to assess the work of their peers” (Absolum)

During this time the children could:

Talk about how well they believe they have achieved against the SC for the LI. Where are they on the rubric? Why?

Read a section of their latest story and seek feedback

Describe how their ability to “Relate to Others” has improved as a result of recent learning

Give feedback to the teacher – How's it going for our class?

Quiz each other on knowledge they may have developed during their recent learning.

Give the teacher statements that the teacher could post on the class' webspace –“Our recent learning”.

(Using a LMS, one group each afternoon could post a reflection about their learning this week, instead of their quiet reading time after lunch.)

The other children in the group would be expected to make constructive comments. Of course, this gives regular and real opportunities for children to develop their Oral language skills. Possibly a bit over the top, but if the children are eating their morning tea while they talk, then this valuable time might take on a “café” type atmosphere – comfortable, non-threatening, interactive, plus they put their rubbish in the bin before going to play, rather than dropping it in the playground!!

Regular opportunities of this sort will well prepare children for their conferences with parents.

As suggested, an end of year conference would seem to be very valuable. It would give an opportunity for the teacher and parent to congratulate the child on his/her achievements during the year – whether academic, cultural, social, or physical. It gives a formal opportunity for the teacher and child to conclude their learning relationship. A photo would seem appropriate, but difficult to manage. In the absence of an End of Year Report, an Achievement Certificate could give a concise picture of the child's current achievement levels, and does fulfil the “archive” requirement. Such an approach also enables the child's “goals for the following year” to be discussed in a meaningful way, rather than to be presented in written format with no opportunity to detail how these might be attended to.

*** We trialled this at the end of the year – offering parents in one class an end of year triangle, but still getting a report. General consensus – Forget the report – Much better to talk about the learning with the child and teacher – although a few would want both triangle and report.

Portfolios – Still too much “doing it to children”, rather than involving them in doing it for themselves. It is easy to see why a school should come to change these to “Treasure Books”. If they can become a part of the child’s reporting to parents, identifying and celebrating their learning, then all the better. If children can develop the ability to select for their ‘Treasure Book’ a piece of work of which they are very proud, that they are able to describe in terms of the LI the work was aimed to meet, and that can reassure parents that the child is giving of their best, then that would be preferable to a stressful “Have you all finished your Numeracy portfolio page?” This would take time of course, but isn’t the development of “Managing Self” an important Key Competency.

Reports – Do parents really want to know that their child “can gather, present, and interpret data” – do they want these specifics, or do they want generalisms, which become equally silly?? As described above, the end of year report is, in some schools, being deliberately used as a “starter” document for the following year’s initial discussion with parents. There is definitely some value in this, especially if the report does highlight “future learning goals”, which can now be attended to.

If a school chooses to make the ongoing data for a child available on line to parents, then it would appear that an End of Year report becomes of lesser value – merely creating an “archivable” document for parents.

An arrangement of the pieces we have in place and the pieces we might implement? What function should each piece serve? Annual timetable?

Term and week	What?	Why?	Based on?	So?	On line facilities
Term 3, Week 9	Survey of children	To establish general pattern of what kids like, what engages them	School format	Syndicate leaders to take into account in planning for following year – critical – if children’s needs are not	

				seriously taken into account before planning occurs, then they will not be able to take a valuable role in reporting their progress.	
Term 4, pre-check by end of November, and re-check on the last Friday of the year.	Check on data for following teacher	To ensure that following year's teacher has all data to set up their class for following year	School assessment plan	Before teachers leave at end of year, to show syndicate leader their data on e-tap.	LMS - End of year – all chn Yr 4 to 6 to have completed Reflective Journals for the year
Term One, Week 3	Meeting of parents and teachers	Outline of syndicate/class organization, with specific time devoted to explaining the reporting process for the year, the forms to be used, the expectations of chn and parents at “Triangles”, how to access e-tap, update on LMS.	Syndicates to have discussed and arrived at agreed plan of action	Parents know basic organization of the curriculum, and all on same wavelength	LMS – Children establish Reflective Journals for the year – with format allowing for individual needs.
Term One, Week 5	Triangle No. 1	Child, teacher, and parents to look at the child's start to the year – academic, cultural, physical,	Assessment data from previous year as baseline, with some degree of confirmation	Celebrate the Learning to date Baseline expectation – goals may be shorter term for	SMS: PAT results posted by end April??? Reading level/age and

		social/emotional, set first goals – Lit and Num, KCs.	by present teacher, observations from Lit and Num group work, survey of chn “How are you feeling about things at this stage?”	Years 1 to 4. (Ensure that chn have practiced their Triangle talk)	Numeracy stage posted by end of Term???? AsTLe results posted by end of term. LMS – Year 4 to 6 chn to have updated Reflective Journals by end of term
Term Two, Week Two	Celebrate Term One, looking forward to Term Two	Child to reflect on progress to date, equipping for future, confirmation, re-jig if necessary	Evidence from books, opportunities taken – have I got into it?	Child is sharing his/her successes, weaknesses, where to, help I need etc – this is me as a reflective learner	LMS – Year 4 to 6 chn to update reflective journals
Term Two, Week 10	Portfolio home	Portfolio to demonstrate learning for 1 st half year – especially Lit and Num goals, and any other goal set in Term One.	The expectations of chn at the level – Curriculum Level, percentiles, stanines, etc	Parents and chn have an opportunity during the holiday to look at Portfolio, confirm where the child is at vs expectation, discuss, identify goals for 2 nd half year.	SMS: Reading Age/Level, Spelling Age, Basic Facts results, and Num stage posted by end of term LMS – Yr 4 to 6 chn to update reflective journals by end of term
Term Three,	Triangle No 2	Review Portfolio as basis of	Mid year assessments,		LMS – Yr 4 to 6 chn

Week 3		discussions, look at goals – Lit and Num, and KCs, goal set for second half year.	as posted at end of Term Two.		to update reflective journals by end of term
	Survey of children	Establish “flavour” for following year’s programme	School format	Child’s perception vs the teacher’s perception	
Term Four, Week One					Yr 6 Digital Portfolio to take away - “My Learning at Birkenhead Primary – me as a Lifelong Learner”.
Term Four, Week 9	Reports, Portfolios	Portfolio to demonstrate learning for 2 nd half year Written report	Reports based on the child’s development throughout the year, not on Term Four progress		SMS: WL Stage, Reading Age/level, Spelling Age, Basic Facts, Numeracy stage posted by last Friday of the year LMS: – Yr 4 to 6 chn to update reflective journals by end of term
	Input end of year data for next teacher				

Visit to school

Inter-operability trial – SMS and LMS linked for cross flow of data.

Background

Three schools have been involved in an “inter-operability” trial supported by the MOE – to trial the flow of student data between SMS and LMS systems. In this case the SMS is MUSAC Student Manager, and the LMS is “KnowledgeNet”. I had been interested in KnowledgeNet for some time, but had been unable to find the money to commit to implementation. It did so happen though, that we had been able to commit in 2007. I could see the possibilities such a programme offered in the way of enabling children to report their achievement and development to their parents. I can see value in this idea. It would be great to have a “one stop shop” for a child’s learning management. The LMS offers:

A place for the school to post notices, reminders, website recommendations, homework, even schoolwork if children have to stay at home during a flu epidemic

A place for the child to post their work

A place for the child to reflect on their learning – Key Competency development etc

A place for the school to post selected assessment data – so that child and parent can keep up to date with their progress

The school I visited said that it was very much a case of “early days”, making the following comments - there are differences in the ability of teachers to come to terms with this facility. Some of the staff have taken a lead. We hope that they will be able to assist other staff members to “give it a go”. Teachers are posting notices and are posting homework so that children (and their parents) have access to all the information they need for school events and to enable children to get homework done without hassle. Children have developed their own web spaces, with a range of formats and personalities. The school is gradually creating the formats that will enable children to report their progress in Literacy and Numeracy. For instance, one of the staff members has digitalised the “I Can” formats for Numeracy. This will allow the children, in conference with their teacher, to identify their level and report to Mum and Dad. The format will also identify Digital Learning Objects which the children can go to to practice the skills they need to develop at the stage they are working at. The school is developing a similar format for Literacy.

The children have excellent access to IT, with six or more computers to a room, and with a digital classroom able to be used by any class on a book in basis. This enables skills to be developed quickly, which can then become part of the programme back in class.

The school can see a point at which the end of year report becomes less and less important.

Visit to School

Student led conferences – teacher not directly involved in conference - “Children reporting their own progress to their parents”

I had read an “EdGazette” article about student led conferences. I thought this a brave move, but I could see that it could further reinforce the idea of children’s central involvement in their own development. Their involvement in the reporting process indicates to them that they are important, and that mum and dad are going to have 15 to 20 minutes especially just to talk with them about their learning. They become advocates for themselves – presenting themselves, analysing themselves, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, etc etc. Over time, this must build their sense of self-worth, and self-advocacy.

The school has a parent teacher meeting in early Term one, then has their parent child conferences at the end of term two. A portfolio is made available at conference time. This becomes a “discussion document” for the parent child conference. There is not an end of year conference. The portfolio can be added to during the second part of the year, and goes home at the end of year to stay, along with the end of year report.

The school moved directly to the parent child conference, with no intermediate step. The move was, in part, an attempt to make parents feel much more comfortable about coming in to school to see what their children were up to. This was a successful move. Parents who had never come in to the school were now turning up to talk with their children about their learning. There were some staff reservations about the concept, but they are now supportive of the idea. There are still parents who want to talk to their child’s teacher – needing reassurance that the child is doing well or similar, but they still have the opportunity to make an appointment time with the teacher.

The children have their portfolio. In this document there are self assessments by the child, and assessments by the teacher. These form the basis of the conference.

I raised the issue of children being overly positive about themselves, or, overly harsh. An interesting response here – and one which rings a bell for me – that a child whose parents place a lot of pressure for academic achievement sometimes has difficulty in rating themselves – whether they are fearful of the idea itself, or unable to look at themselves as most children would, because they are busy asking themselves how Mum or Dad would rate them.

I asked if the school could describe the whole learning process that enables the children to become effective “reporters” of their own progress. To what extent are the children involved in planning, Lis, SC, so that they are fully involved in the whole process?

It was agreed that this is the basis of the whole deal. The children can only report to their parents effectively if they are clear about what they have been working towards. The school had completed A for L and Literacy contracts, and is now looking to re-document their curriculum plan, with emphasis on clear Lit, Numeracy, and Enquiry skills, so that it will become easy for teachers to develop Learning Intentions/Success Criteria with the children – making it easier for the children to report the final outcome to their parents. The school has consistent portfolio formats – for teacher and children – which assist the children in reporting their progress.

I asked about the future of written reports. There is no plan to discard the end of year report or change the approach. The report is being used as the basis for discussions at the start of the following year.

Visit to school

I had not prepared questions, as I was just keen to see what the school was doing in IT, and how it managed that in the classroom environment. I was intrigued to find that the whole school teaches in small groups for the whole of their Literacy time – from 9ish through to 11ish. In the Junior school the group is of three children, five or six in the senior area. The teacher logs the development of the children in each group, so that, when he/she takes them the next day, there is always a known starting point. There are six computers in each classroom, so, the children can complete literacy activities on computer or otherwise while they are not working with the teacher. It was interesting to know that this rotation system can work.

All classrooms had Rubrics on their walls – with three levels of competency – advising the children of expectations for degrees of success.

An interesting aside here – schools should look at all the softwares which can be used to achieve a certain aim. For instance, there are other ways of enabling children to keep a “Reflective Journal” than by subscribing to a LMS such as Knowledgenet. A school can choose to use a blog type software – and parents who are on-line, will be able to read their child’s blog, add to it, etc. However, I guess that LMSs do provide the school with some additional confidence in the environment the children are using.

Reports – Discussion with Principal/Doctoral student

Background – The Principal of this school is currently engaged in a Doctorate programme, with a thesis topic looking at “Reporting to parents”. Can I hear you asking, “How does she do it?”

Her research has identified many of the beliefs and expectations of school reporting. She has concentrated on written reporting. Parents definitely like written reports, partially because of the “archivability” of such documents, but also because the document is a fixed “take” on the child, written for the parent. She has identified a “control” issue in reporting. Parents like conferences (in fact conferences and reports are almost equally desired by parents) but they do seem to feel that teachers still have control in conferences, whereas a school report is published, handed over to the parent.

Parents are generally very appreciative of the efforts schools go to in providing a written report. They want schools to be honest. They do not want their reports to be “warm fuzzies”. They are happy to know of their child’s strengths and achievements, but they are also keen to know of any areas in which they can further support their child – such areas to be written as “Goals for the future”, of course, rather than as areas of failure. They like to see good objective data, but are particularly keen to be able to understand the reports they receive. Of course, it would not work to try and have explanations of data forms included in the reports themselves, but somehow, the information needs to be available to parents – eg what does a Reading Age mean, what does a STAR result mean if such data is included. They prefer narrative reports to “tick the boxes” type reports – they want to know that their child’s teacher has written specifically about their own child. They are particularly keen to know of Literacy and Numeracy results, and very keen on the ‘General’ comment which most reports include.

The researcher has reservations about the idea of reporting against Curriculum levels – difficult enough for teachers to get a grip on, let alone the parents.

She believes firmly in the idea that parents must be well able to understand the reports. There is a need for minimal “Eduspeak”. There is little point in teachers using this style of writing if parents are unable to understand the message. She advocates good professional development before changes are made to reporting techniques, so that teachers are well able to understand the reporting format they are being asked to complete. She also advocates for full community consultation, so that parents receive the information they prefer, and so that they are able to understand it – terminology etc.

The researcher found that a number of schools are sending home more than just the “End of Year Report”. Her own school is sending home a “Settling in” report early in Term One, and then another mid year report. The children write a self evaluation on the back of the form the teachers complete. Junior children draw a picture, perhaps of themselves at school. A final report is sent home at end of year.

She has changed from a Portfolio to a “Treasure Book” – basically highlighting children’s successes. She is also a firm believer in having children involved in conferences, but this was only introduced when her whole school community had had the opportunity to learn why this approach was being adopted, and how it would work for all concerned.

Some of the documents you need to allow your children to be active participants in their own learning, and their own assessment and reporting:

Three year coverage Plan

Annual Curriculum Plan

Annual Assessment and Reporting plan

Assessment and Reporting to parents for this year – info for parents

Format for parent meeting

“Assessing your child” – tools we use and information we get - document for parents
Daily timetable to maximise opportunities for children to be involved in reporting their progress

“School Values”

“Charter – Promoting our Learning”

“Stuck? What you can do.”

Unit plan format which encourages development of active learners

Weekly Planning format – with time segments which allow chn to be reflective

School Format for Portfolio entries:

Format for rubric publishing – with space for chn’s initials as they reach different levels.

“Our Goals for the Term” - how far have you got?

“Triangle” format suggestions

Key competency indicators and self-assessment format

Reflecting on our Learning – Ideas to promote

Format for “Reflective Journal” on LMS

Email address book set up for class

Timetable for “Email to Mum or Dad”

Timetable for Reflections on LMS

Achievement certificate??

Mid year report format

School Report format

Conclusion

If my school can really find out from children what they do know/are able to do, and then help children to identify what they need to know/need to be able to do, if it can then plan comprehensive units of study which incorporate all the desirable attributes that we would wish a classroom to feature, if it can engage the children in motivating learning activities, and allow them to take an active part in assessing their needs and their progress, then it should certainly enable children to be involved in reporting their learning to their parents/family – in whichever format is seen to be the most effective medium – whether “triangle”, student led conference, portfolio, on line report or reflective journal by child, or written report. In all of these formats other than the written report, the actual process of reporting is a very valuable learning experience for the child, and so, has value over and above the actual information which is shared. That is how we can create “lifelong learners”.

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