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A Primary Principal's Sabbatical Leave Study Report on

**MANDATORY CURRICULUM TESTING, ASSESSMENT & REPORTING
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS THREE INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES**

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1. Preamble

This report is the result of two periods of study leave undertaken by the Kohukohu School Principal during 2003 and 2005. The earlier period was of four months' duration taken as unpaid leave teaching and observing in English primary schools. The latter period of one term in 2005 was spent in Queensland Australia and in the Solomon Islands, specifically researching mandatory assessment, testing and reporting regimes existing as integral components of the respective education systems. I am grateful that the salary funding available from the N.Z. Ministry of Education and the approval of the Kohukohu School Board of Trustees has allowed the opportunity for observations and the time to prepare this report. Most importantly, the periods of leave have allowed me to reflect on some elements of assessment and reporting in primary schools elsewhere and to draw some valid conclusions and comparisons with N.Z. schools.

Preface

The subject matter 'Curriculum Testing – Assessment – Reporting in Primary Schools' is of particular interest to me. When I started teaching some 45 years ago as a probationary teacher in a District High School, my headmaster insisted upon longitudinal comparative measurements of each pupil's reading and spelling ages with accompanying test evidence. Where there was no

reliable testing resource in the core subjects, he designed it. The staff recorded it all and had plenty of historical data to inform them of their pupils' capabilities, achievements and progress. And we used the data; 'the great A.O.' (his initials – not achievement objectives) demanded it!

While teaching in Britain and the Pacific in the 60s, I had plenty of opportunities to study their systems; the infamous and feared 11 + exam which separated the English sheep and goats into either grammar or secondary modern schools and in the south-west Pacific selection tests which destined Solomon Island pupils to becoming part of the educated elite or a school 'drop-out'. In both regimes, the 'failures' far outnumbered the successful. Upon returning to New Zealand in the mid 70s it seemed to me that our egalitarianism was the path to be pursued over other education ideologies, and that with the advent of our own N.Z.C.E.R. Progress and Achievement Tests we had the ideal assessment and reporting tools to monitor our pupils and enhance the teaching – learning process. An idealistic view I suspect, because some thirty years on, with an increasingly mobile and often transient school population, my school often enrolls pupils about whom we have insufficient information in the way of objective, statistical curriculum data. I can already hear the protestations of indignation from many fellow principals and there is some justification in their protests. After all, do we not have:

S.E.A. tests, Six Year Net tests, Reading Running Records, P.A.T. tests, S.T.A.R. Reading Tests and a battery of N.Z.C.E.R. Essential Skills Tests? Yes we do, and our very good schools use many if not all of these. But - and there is a 'but' – not all schools use the assessment tests available to them. Even if they do, they may not record them systematically over a period of time, and worse, not report the data to the pupil's next school. In fact, there is no national

system, no external moderation and no state regulation to compel us, N.Z. wide, to do anything reportable in our primary schools.

I do of course recognise that change is coming as asTTle, in bits and pieces, is providing teachers with more assessment tools, but I also note the N.Z. Principals' Federation reaction to any suggestion that the Ministry of Education might use the pupils' results to make any assessment of schools or the quality of instruction or draw any comparisons. It is a 'No Go' area. Every school is its own island, and our non-standardized system of reporting to parents on the attainment levels of their children is often more subjective than objective.

There has to be a better way, and so I went visiting to see how the English and Solomon Islands systems have changed since the 70s to meet today's needs for validity in assessment and openness in reporting. Australia too, as our nearest neighbour and the co-host for increasing numbers of our pupils, had to be on my calling list.

The activities undertaken and the resulting findings needed – of necessity – to be confined to certain geographic or geopolitical areas. On account of variations in practices and procedures in each of the three countries I visited and to avoid invalid comparisons, the areas studied were:

- In England ; Lancashire County (but assessment and reporting systems are similar throughout England)
- In Solomon Islands ; Western Province (part of a nation-wide system)
- In Australia ; Queensland State (each Australian State has its own system in place)

This report attempts to identify, in general terms, what testing systems are in place at some ‘key’ stages in these countries primary schools, what is assessed and the content of the resulting reports that are produced. This report also comments on any comparisons with N.Z. primary school practice.

However, this report is not - :

- A discourse on the validity of the specific tests and procedures in place
- An attempt to draw international comparisons of educational attainment
- A debate on the effectiveness of educational testing, assessment and reporting – per se.

3. Executive Summary

The issue of any government – imposed system of testing & assessment with mandatory reporting of results is a contentious one, particularly at the primary school level in New Zealand. In recent years N.Z. primary school principals have united to oppose any moves by government to impose any such system. By contrast, in all three countries visited, there are government / state / local education authority systems in place, occupying an integral part of the educational practice of each country. Why is there such opposition in N.Z.?

Testing – Assessing – Reporting, per se is itself not the issue. All teachers and all schools do it. All students throughout their primary school years are tested, assessed and reports are produced. Pupils’ progress is monitored in every curriculum area and at every level of their schooling. Such practices enable teachers to measure progress and identify those students who need extra support. It is axiomatic to say that all teachers, everywhere, use testing and assessing as part of

their effective classroom practice. So what is it that schools in England, Solomon Islands and Australia use, that New Zealand primary schools do not? More importantly, are we missing out on some of the benefits of state-wide assessments? Can we get the best features out of other countries' systems to support our teaching? Here are the 'others' systems for analysis and comparison.

1. ENGLAND (with a 'sophisticated' system of testing, assessing and reporting)

My previous experiences teaching in the United Kingdom made this country an obvious choice. As many of us have a degree of familiarity with the systems in England – a brief description will suffice.

Elements of the System:

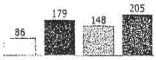
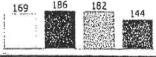



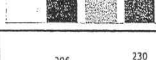

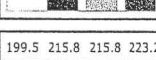
- All pupils are taught the National Curriculum.
- The achievement levels 1 – 4 correspond very closely to the N.Z. primary school levels.
- Most 7 year olds are expected to achieve Level 2, and most 11 year olds to achieve Level 4.
- Additionally, there are four (4) 'Key Stages' ; two of them, Key Stages 1 and 2, at the primary school.
- The end of Key Stage 1 is at the 7 year age level and the end of Key Stage 2 at the 11 years level.
- It is these Key Stages which are used as the 'national benchmarks'.
- All teachers are expected to check their pupils' progress in each subject as a normal part of their teaching and must also assess individual progress and attainment in English,

- Mathematics and Science against the National Curriculum standards when the pupils reach the end of each Key Stage.
- Pupils must also take national tests in English, Mathematics and Science at the end of Key Stage 2 which are intended specifically to give an independent measure of how pupils and schools are doing compared with national standards in these subjects.
- The results, with all schools named, are published by each Local Education Authority and, as normal practice, by the local media. 'Raw' comparisons between schools can be made easily. These are the commonly termed 'league tables'. An example of such a comparative table follows.

PRIMARY SCHOOL KEY STAGE 2 RESULTS 2002

2002 Primary Schools Performance Tables

Schools in LEA area

2002 Primary Schools Performance Tables		Background Information				Key Stage 2 Results						Improvement Measures		Absence record for day pupils of compulsory school age				
Schools in LEA area		Total number of pupils on roll (all ages)	Number of pupils on roll aged 11	Total number and percentage of pupils with SEN		Pupils Eligible for Key Stage 2 assessment	% achieving level 4 or above in (% absent or disapplied)			Average point score	Sum of Test Percentages	Number of day pupils of compulsory school age	% of half days missed due to					
				with statement	without statement		English Test	Maths Test	Science Test				authorised absence	unauthorised absence				
Primary School	CY 4-11	296	48	7 2.4%	110 37.2%	48	20 41.7%	33% (0%)	@ (@) (0%)	@	1999 N/A	2000 N/A	2001 N/A	2002 N/A	268	7.1%	1.0%	
Junior School	CY 7-11	185	37	1 0.5%	71 38.4%	37	14 37.8%	54% (0%)	68% (0%)	84% (0%)	25.5					205	5.1%	2.4%
Junior School	CY 7-11	232	71	2 0.9%	123 53.0%	70	29 41.4%	37% (0%)	40% (0%)	67% (0%)	23.6					254	7.3%	3.3%
Junior School	CY 7-11	303	78	1 0.3%	98 32.3%	77	7 9.1%	74% (0%)	79% (0%)	94% (0%)	28.1					322	4.2%	0.6%
Primary School	CY 4-11	438	68		34 7.8%	68	10 14.7%	90% (0%)	94% (0%)	99% (0%)	30.0					388	8.6%	1.2%
Primary School	CY 4-11	200	28		87 43.5%	27	12 44.4%	70% (7%)	70% (7%)	85% (4%)	26.4					178	5.9%	1.1%
Junior School	CY 7-11	504	120	2 0.4%	126 25.0%	120	22 18.3%	82% (2%)	87% (2%)	95% (2%)	29.5					508	5.1%	0.2%
Primary and Nursery School	CY 3-11	236	27	6 2.5%	107 45.3%	27	11 40.7%	63% (7%)	70% (4%)	96% (0%)	27.8					181	7.4%	1.1%
Junior School	CY 7-11	272	64		99 36.4%	64	25 39.1%	70% (0%)	72% (0%)	94% (0%)	27.2					289	7.7%	~
Average for Schools in LEA Area								67.2%	69.3%	86.7%	27.0	199.5	215.8	215.8	223.2		6.3%	0.8%
Average for England								75%	73%	86%	27.4	218	231	233	234		5.4%	0.5%

Glossary Of Symbols: Figures in brackets show the percentage of eligible pupils absent or disapplied from test
 & - School with 10 or fewer eligible pupils
 @ - Results unavailable for reasons beyond the school's control

\$ - School did not provide information
 ^ - Charter Mark winner

~ - Less than 0.05%
 R - No confirmation school checked results
 B - No confirmation school checked background information

FM - Foot and Mouth affected

Additional data, nearly always identified in the L.E.A. publications but rarely in the local media, includes aspects such as – :

- total school roll
 - absenteeism / attendance
 - number of pupils using English as an additional language
 - number of pupils entitled to free school lunches (low economic)
 - number of special educational needs pupils, but all are still included in the league tables
- Schools can, and do, compare themselves with others.
 - Local Education Authorities can – and do – compare themselves with other L.E.A.s throughout England, and may allocate additional resources to schools where there is an established need.
 - City and County L.E.A.s have long regarded education as a major part of their ‘core’ business and use Key Stage results to promote themselves.
 - Some L.E.A.s also include historical data in their reports; e.g. the aggregate of average test percentages over the previous four years as an indication of improvement (or lack of it)

Observations & Opinions

- The Key Stage 2 tests taken towards the end of the primary school years create considerable anxiety for pupils and parents, and stress amongst those teachers responsible for the senior classes of the school.
- The curriculum becomes increasingly weighted towards the subjects being assessed – English, Mathematics & Science – in the latter years of primary education. In the final terms

leading up to the testing time the curriculum can become unbalanced to the extent of excluding most other subjects. This can become a very narrow focus for senior primary school classes although there are many who view the emphasis as justifiable attention to core subjects.

- The test results are rarely used diagnostically to analyse pupils' needs because the results are available shortly before the students leave primary school.
- Schools are 'measured' by the well-publicised results but parents are seldom able to transfer their children to other better performing schools
- Statistical demographic data, intended to provide a degree of balance when comparing schools, is not always considered by parents or the public at large who usually focus only on the individual schools' raw scores, averages and percentages.
- Comparisons of schools – often unjust because of the reasons given above – are dreaded by those teachers who do not have the opportunity to justify or explain 'below average' results.
- The resulting local media attention with headlines such as “Many Schools in W..... In Bottom Group of England's Schools”, together with raw score tables to illustrate the claim, can create low self esteem among schools, teachers and students.
- The 'league tables' which are considered to be one of the worst features of the English primary education system are being targeted by teachers who want to see a change to the reporting element of assessment.

II QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA (an 'evolving' system)

I could have selected any Australian state for study but Queensland became my choice because of a number of personal and professional contacts I already had there. What I found within its overall

education system was a vigorous programme of state-wide testing, assessment and reporting and comprehensive surveys of parents, pupils and staff.

Elements of the System:

There are many elements we have in common with Queensland schools.

- Primary school diagnostic testing in reading, writing and number
- Normal on-going school-wide assessments
- Standardised assessment tests at various stages of schooling
- Involvement of a national research body in assessment (ACER/NZCER)
- The use of assessment data to inform and strengthen the teaching – learning process
- Use of the Australasian Educational Testing Centre competitions (formerly known as the University of New South Wales Schools Tests) to indicate pupils' achievement and provide some measure of comparability between schools in the state
- Widespread teacher acceptance of testing and assessment methodology

However, superimposed over the 'normal' school activities of testing, assessing and reporting is a mandatory state-wide system at primary levels years 3, 5 & 7. Elements of this system are:

- The Queensland Studies Authority of the Q. State Government sets tests in aspects of
 - Literacy : Reading & Viewing, Writing and Spelling
 - Numeracy: Measurement & Data, Number and Space
 - Almost all pupils in years 3, 5 & 7 sit the tests which are then marked by the Q.S.A.
 - Analysis of the results is provided by the State's Corporate Data Warehouse in a form which allows confidential comparisons to be made (N.B. 'Confidential' will be explained later)

There is a wide range of reporting formats of the assessment results produced by Queensland's Corporate Data Warehouse. Examples of the templates are shown at the end of this section, and a brief description of each, follows.

- Schools receive 'Class Reports' with the assessment results (for each subject area and each class level which provides information on:-
 - correct/incorrect responses for each child, for each test question
 - scaled scores for Writing, Spelling, Measurement & Data and Space
 - percentage correct for the Class, Boys & Girls separately, and the State.
- Schools also receive 'School Reports' in each subject area with averages achieved by the school compared to state-wide performance, and the middle 50% of pupils indicated on a graph showing the range of scores.
- Longitudinal 'Individual Students Overall Results' are also produced for each school showing the progress achieved in each subject area compared to that pupil's score two years previously, or two years and four years previously (for year 7 students).
- Schools are also able to monitor individual students' progress via an individual pupil identification system which tracks them throughout their schooling regardless of which school the pupil was attending at the year 3-5-7 assessment time.
- Schools are able to compare themselves with similar schools across the state. 'Like Schools' are identified as those having similarities – in broad band groups – determined by:
 - Size (pupil enrolment and staffing)
 - Socio-economic level
 - Numbers of indigenous students
- Standardised Individual Pupil Reports are produced for parents indicating:

- The child's results in each subject area assessed
- The average results for all Queensland students at that year level
- The range of results for the middle 50% of students in the state at that level
- The national benchmark, which is the minimum result expected at the year level

Observations & Opinions:

The reporting format for the Literacy and Numeracy testing at years 3, 5 and 7 was changed recently in accord with a stated desire from parents to be better informed about their children's progress and their need to know more from their school. Such consultation was achieved state-wide by means of School Surveys of Parents conducted by Queensland Education, and as can be seen from the example, the standardised state-wide test results are certainly presented in an easy-to-read format now common to all schools.

This is only one aspect of reporting requirements which aim to focus on schools building positive relationships with parents and providing them with more and better objective information about their children's progress. While acknowledging that most schools keep parents well informed about pupils' progress, the new requirements will ensure that all schools follow a set of agreed reporting principles, and that part of that will allow parents to compare their children to national benchmarks in Reading, Writing and Numeracy. In all of this, student privacy will be protected, but to

extrapolate that statement to assure schools that the school-wide results will also be confidential, is very questionable.

In the past, the test data from each school has been restricted information – to the school itself and to Education Queensland. Schools have been able to compare themselves to other ‘Like Schools’, but were not able to identify any individual school or its results. From 2005 schools were being ‘encouraged’ to provide details about their performance and publish the relevant data either on the web or through a separate information paper to parents. For some time Education Queensland has – through the information provided by Corporate Data Warehouse – been able to identify those schools performing well / performing adequately / under-performing, on the Literacy and Numeracy tests, when all the socio-economic and special indicators are considered, but that information is still confidential.

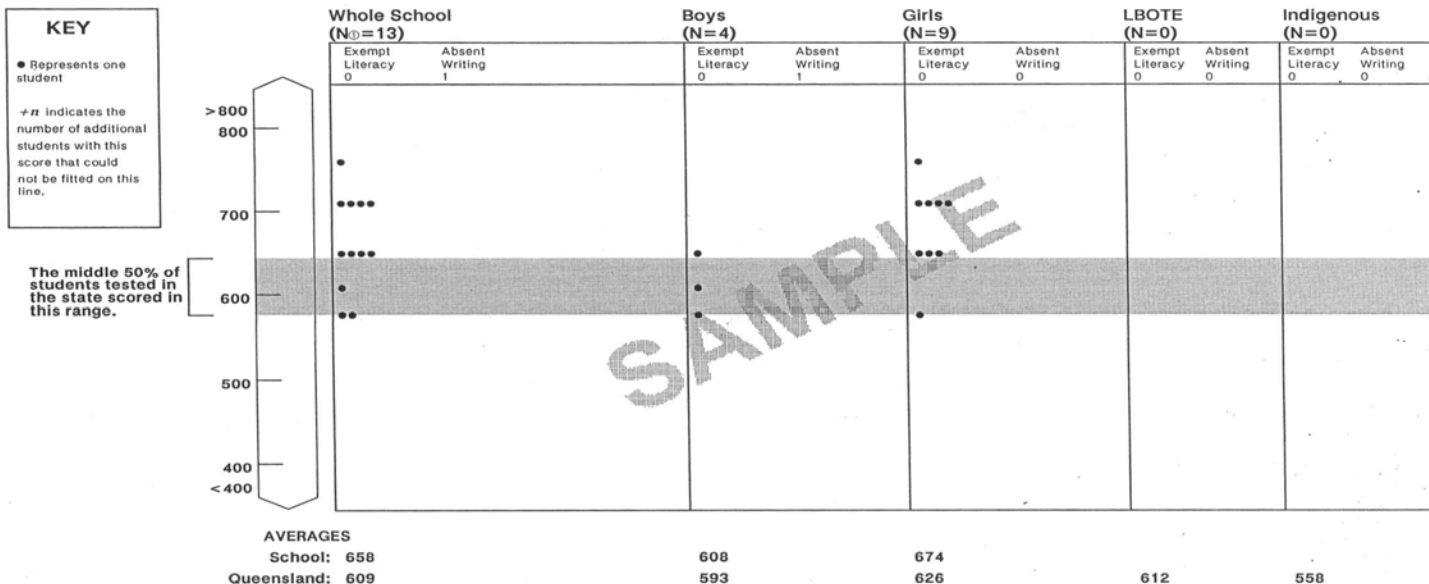
The future of reporting and its audience is less clear, with the Queensland Government Department of Education and the Arts stating that: “From 2006, all schools will publish their performance data...”. [‘Schools + Parents’ – Queensland Government ; Issue No. 1 2005] In this approach they are certainly supported – possibly ‘pushed’ - by the Australian Commonwealth Government’s Department of Education Science and Training which openly promotes comparative analysis of primary school curricula in the areas of Mathematics, Science and English across all Australian state education systems, as well as comparisons with a selected number of overseas countries. A recent report commissioned for the Commonwealth of Australia, was charged with identifying characteristics of those education systems that, on the whole, outperformed Australian students in international tests. That report came down firmly on “... that have centrally controlled curriculum and examination systems... (where) the principal focus is on centrally devised system wide examinations at key stages”. [‘Benchmarking Australian Primary School Curricula’ – Education Strategies; October 2005].

I was informed – reliably – that the Commonwealth Government wants to see open publication of schools’ key stage test results, and although education is a state – not Commonwealth Government – responsibility, the inclination for central government to interfere in state government activities is well signalled. Even where there exist state regulations to preserve the confidentiality of test data (as in New South Wales), such protection will be of little effect if the Australian Government decrees that results shall be published. The assertion by the Queensland Government’s Minister of Education that, “The information is intended to be used in a constructive way, for the benefits of parents, not for developing a ‘league table’ of schools” – begs the question of how that can be achieved, especially in view of the English model.

SCHOOL REPORT

0000
Sample School

2004 Queensland Year 5 Tests Aspects of Literacy — Writing



Students self-identified their gender, and their LBOTE and Indigenous status.

① In cases where the students did not indicate their gender on the test booklets, the total number of boys and girls will not equal the total number for the school.

CLASS REPORT CLASS 5

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Sample School

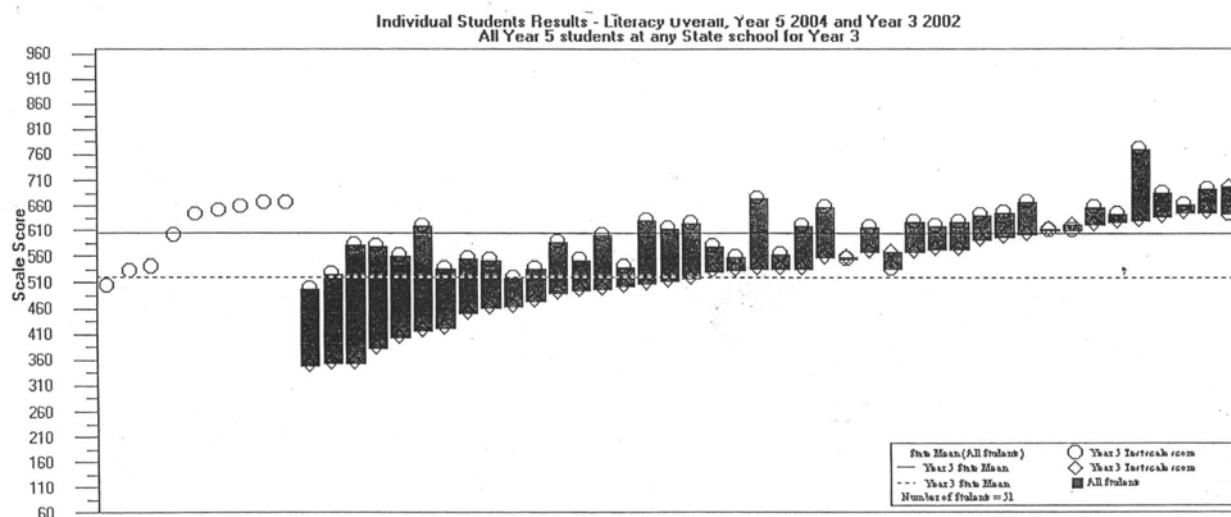
2004 Queensland Year 5 Tests Aspects of Literacy — Writing and Spelling

Item Key		Writing			Dictation Items												Proofreading Items						Scale Score ①	
		CF	TF	SPE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Writing②	Spelling③
					See 2004 Test Reporting Handbook												See 2004 Test Reporting Handbook							
First Name	Last Name	E	E	E	O	*	*	*	O	*	*	*	O	*	O	*	*	O	*	*	*	643	730	
First Name	Last Name	F	F	E	O	O	O	O	O	*	O	O	O	O	*	O	O	O	A	D	B	702	550	
First Name	Last Name	E	E	D	O	*	*	O	O	O	*	O	*	O	*	O	O	O	D	D	*	643	574	
First Name	Last Name	E	E	D	*	O	*	O	O	*	*	*	O	O	*	O	*	*	O	A	C	*	643	629
First Name	Last Name	G	G	E	*	*	*	*	O	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	O	*	*	*	759	786
First Name	Last Name	F	F	E	*	*	*	*	O	O	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	D	*	702	746
First Name	Last Name	E	E	D	*	O	*	O	O	O	*	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	A	D	C	643	523	
First Name	Last Name	F	F	E	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	A	B	702	730	
First Name	Last Name	F	F	E	*	*	*	*	O	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	O	*	*	702	746	
First Name	Last Name	D	D	C	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	C	D	C	577	441	
First Name	Last Name	-- absent Writing --			absent dictation and proofreading																		----	----
First Name	Last Name	D	D	C	O	*	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	*	O	O	O	A	*	B	577	509	
First Name	Last Name	E	D	C	O	O	*	O	O	O	*	O	*	O	*	O	*	O	C	*	A	604	562	
					SAMPLE																			
% correct: Class					50	58	75	42	8	50	83	50	50	17	83	17	58	50	17	42	42	50	Range of Scale Scores in Queensland	
% correct: Boys					0	33	67	0	0	0	67	0	67	0	67	0	33	0	0	0	33	33		
% correct: Girls					67	67	78	56	11	67	89	67	44	22	89	22	67	67	22	56	44	56		
% correct: Queensland					48	75	63	38	11	45	52	50	48	19	76	19	46	57	17	53	48	64	263	Lowest
																							278	Highest
																							1018	1156

* Denotes a correct response for the dictation and proofreading items. O is used to indicate an incorrect response to all dictation items and proofreading items 13-15; for proofreading items 16-18, the incorrect response is provided. For Writing, the letters N and A through J indicate the standard achieved by the student for each criterion.
— The student did not respond to the item or the response could not be interpreted.

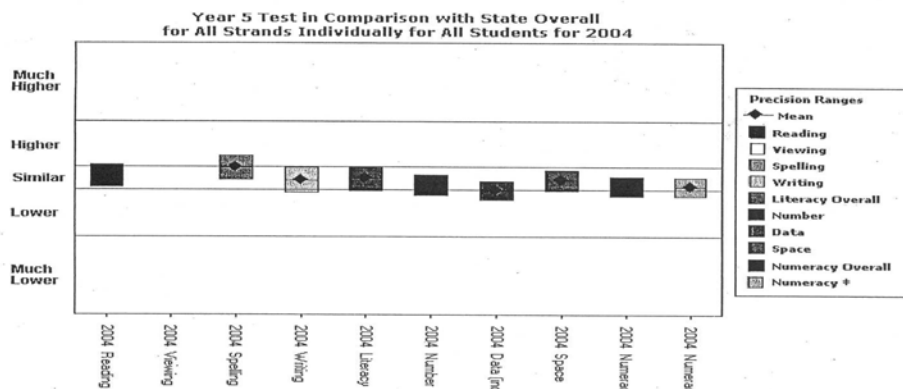
① Scale scores enable teachers to compare the student's performance on different aspects of the Test. The scale score is based on the number of items answered correctly and is on the same scale that appears on the graph of the school report.
② The Writing scale score is calculated from the Contextual Factors and Textual Features criteria only.
③ The Spelling scale score is calculated from the dictation and proofreading items and the Spelling criterion from the writing task.
* The student's performance in Writing is below the National Standard.

Individual Students Results - Literacy Overall Year 5 2004 and Year 3 2002 All Year 5 students at any State school for Year 3



The difference between the Year 5 and Year 3 Test scores for a student cannot be used in comparison with other students results. Students potential for growth is greater for students with a lower Year 3 score than for students with a higher Year 3 score.

Year 5 Test in Comparison with the State Overall for All Strands Individually for All Students for 2004




Your child's results at a glance


2004


Legend

 Your child's result.

 Your child's result is outside the range of the graph.

 The average result for students in Queensland at this year level.

 Range of results for the middle 50% of students in Queensland at this year level.

 The national benchmark. This is the minimum result expected at this year level. There are benchmarks for Reading, Writing and overall Numeracy only.

SAMPLE STUDENT Year 5

Literacy

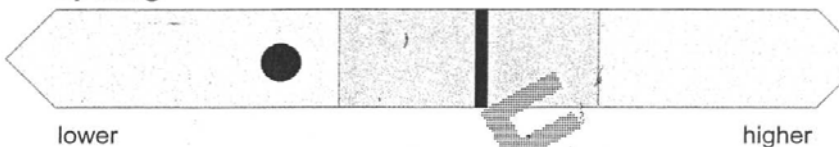
Reading & Viewing



Writing



Spelling



Numeracy

Overall



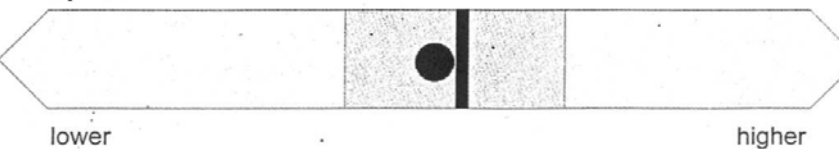
Measurement & Data



Number



Space



III SOLOMON ISLANDS (presently developing its ‘unsophisticated’ system)

For me, the selection of this Pacific country was another obvious choice as I spent some years there in its pre-independence era. As the Solomons is a former British protectorate it is not surprising that its education system has had a relatively long (40 years) exposure to testing and assessment regimes established by government. Those regimes have been rigorous, aimed at restricting entrance to secondary school education to the most academically capable students because of the country’s constraints in terms of financial resources, human resources (insufficient trained teachers) and physical resources such as buildings and equipment.

To put accurate figures on those constraints is not an easy task but realistic estimates given here are that:

In 1970:

- Approximately 55-60% of the primary aged children attended a school
- Of those in Standards 1-4 (ages 7-10) half went on to Standards 5-7 (ages 11-13)
- Of that half, only 50% progressed to a secondary school
- Thus about one primary pupil out of four entered secondary school
- The secondary entrance figure represented 15% of the cohort age group

By 1990:

- Approximately 65% of primary aged children attended a school
- About 30% of those completing primary school (by then Standards 1-6) entered a secondary school
- The progression figure represented about 20% of all children

By 2004:

- Approximately 73% of primary aged children attended a school
- About 58% of enrolled primary pupils progressed to secondary school

- Participation in secondary education is limited to about 42% of all children in the Solomons. (Because of the recent conflict, these figures may have declined.)

Today:

- These figures are given as background information to indicate how, in the past four decades, the primary schools have been affected to a major degree by the testing and assessment system imposed upon them which saw half of their pupils 'fail' their primary education.
- Among the many issues facing the country's education system is the one of assessment, and led to the comment in the current 'S.I. 2004-2006 Education Strategic Plan' that: "The assessment system excludes young people from education rather than assessing competencies, promoting learning or enhancing teaching practice".
- For primary schools there have already been considerable changes to their testing, assessment and reporting systems. While the Solomon Islands Secondary Entrance Examination (SISEE) remains at the end of Standard 6 (13 + years)- where the results are of little use either to those progressing or those failing – there are many positive moves.

Elements of the Developing System

- All selection / elimination tests during the primary years have now been removed (except for the SISEE mentioned above).
- A national benchmarking test to establish standardised S.I. norms has been introduced at the end of the Standard 4 year, by the S.I. Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development.
- A previous 'S.I. Standardised Tests of Achievement' is to be revived, reformed and used at the beginning of Standard 6... "to help teachers realistically assess students' abilities, provide models of good assessment practice, and lead to teaching to students' strengths and weaknesses". [S.I. 2004 – 2006 Education Strategic Plan]
- Assessment tests already include five out of ten subjects studied; English, mathematics, science, social studies and health.
- There is widespread recognition – including at government level – that testing systems must include assessing competencies in the subjects of community studies, agriculture, the arts, physical education and Christian education, in addition to the previous five subjects, and to achieve this through school-based assessment.

- There is to be a conscious effort not to narrow the focus of testing as this will only allow teachers to continue to narrow their focus and student learning will be restricted to the academic skills needed in English, mathematics and science
- Results of tests are now starting to be widely shared with Government education officers, the council or church controlling authorities of schools and principals, (without being published publicly).
- National sampling surveys are to be introduced at two key stages in the primary school years using 10% of the cohort group to monitor national standards across the country's provincial areas, using a wide range of curriculum objectives. There is a multi-agency involvement in this researching, including :
 - S.I. Curriculum Development Unit South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment
 - Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
 - S.I. National Examination & Assessment Board
 - S.I. National Examinations Standards Unit
 - S.I. Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development

Observations & Opinions

- Although some of the test results are disseminated widely to those who 'need to know', this often excludes the teachers from knowing anything but the raw score and passing / failing grades. There is very little diagnostic work being undertaken, as there is little information accompanying the raw score other than the pass grades.
- Presently the students themselves are told very little about their achievement other than whether they failed or passed, and, if the latter, which type of secondary school their passing grade will get them into.
- Few valid comparisons are possible from the results. For example, school controlling authorities will see the results of only their own schools ; government education officers can see the results from all schools in their province, but not from other regions.
- Parents of pupils have very little knowledge of the systems in place, and few means of influencing the processes or future results, even though sending their children to school is a large expense for most of them. Education is not free.

- There is little in the way of formalised externally referenced norms – for example, comparisons with other South Pacific Forum countries – for the Solomon Islands to be able to compare its standards with the international community, although I am aware of some comparisons being made in the past.
- Primary Teachers' self-esteem is low and their motivation levels are low, caused to a large degree by the primary system's overall objective of aiming to achieve high acceptance levels into secondary education for their pupils, a goal which has been impossible to attain. The schools' drop out rates remain very high.

IV NEW ZEALAND

After all my wanderings I had to wonder whether we are trying to swim against the tide, or at the very least, emulating an ostrich. Of all the components of mandatory testing, assessment and reporting it seems to me that it is only the reporting element which threatens us, and yet we sacrifice the many benefits because of the potential harm of anti-educational reporting practices.

My view is that the positive aspects outweigh the negative. We need to assess our pupils against national comparisons. We need to have standardised results and there is every reason why our professional advisors and mentors should know the results too. We should be able to track pupils across their primary years no matter how many changes of schools they have. We should be able to compare our school with others having similar characteristics. Parents should know how their children measure up against their peers and where they sit on the graph. There must be some uniformity and objectivity in reporting to parents. There must be standardisation in reporting Literacy and Numeracy results to parents. We need to have a national system!

What of the spectre of public scrutiny and ill-informed comparisons? That possibility is certainly a concern, and yet I believe that with the strong leadership very evident today in the N.Z. Principals' Federation, their influence on a new system will ensure confidentiality to preclude such publication. Principals are pivotal in professional educational practice and are ethical in the extreme. It is not too much to expect the M.O.E. to be professional and ethical too, and not too much to expect principals

to accept the professionalism of the Ministry. In its role the Ministry is expected to provide the Government with sound advice; can we not then expect the politicians to act professionally in the best interests of pupils and the schools!

During my sabbatical time in Australia surprise was expressed that N.Z. principals had not recognised the inevitability of mandatory testing, assessment and reporting regimes, and had not yet taken the initiative in exercising an element of professional control over the situation. It is still not too late for this to happen. Principals can exercise that control by accepting the political education agenda rather than denying reality and hoping it will go away

