

Reporting in other countries

In looking at the evolving international practice, while there are a great many possible sources, it is necessary to select a more manageable number of example countries. In this instance we have chosen to focus on close neighbours Northern Ireland and Scotland as well as New Zealand, two Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Ontario) and two Australian states (Queensland, Victoria). While the approach to reporting in any given system is developed and practices in the specific context of that education culture, a number of features do emerge as being of significant across the systems reviewed.

Reporting as an ongoing process

The role of reporting as a means of improving learning and teaching is regarded as highly desirable across all the countries looked at. A number of systems regard reporting as an opportunity for students to reflect of agreed goals and for teachers to plan for effective teaching by referring to the evidence of previous learning. More regular communication on learning performance including that done within class, also part of reporting, is entirely set in the formative domain. This effectively recognises and shares the formative outcomes of assessment. The reporting at pre-determined stages should ideally contain a formative element; what the student is able to do, areas that require further attention, ways of supporting the student in his/her learning...as well as, a where appropriate, a statement of achievement against a standard.

A key aspect of the implementation of the Junior Cycle for leaders in schools will be to ensure that planning for professional development adopts a coherent approach and articulates the strong links between learning, teaching, assessment and reporting. It is clear from the evaluation reports of other countries where attempts have been made to change reporting arrangements that unless clear connections are made between learning, teaching and the reporting then the introduction of the new arrangements are generally seen to have little value and often viewed as unnecessary bureaucratic burden by teachers.

Reporting is seen as a partnership between parents, students and teachers

Prominent among the shared characteristics of the international practice reviewed is the perspective that effective reporting is aimed at fostering and maintaining close dialogue and information sharing between students, teachers and parents. This emphasis is seen as key in building a partnership to improve student engagement and learning; bringing students, parents and teachers together to discuss aspects of the student's learning performance including how parents can contribute to improving their child's learning. For example New Zealand parents stated that they wanted clear written information on achievement as well as more assistance on how they could help at home and they also indicated that they valued both informal and formal they received from teachers^[1]. It is interesting to note that in promoting the school/parent reporting relationship, the New Zealand experience suggests that

Schools with effective systems regularly inquire into and evaluate their information-sharing processes, and improvements in information-sharing policies, processes and practices are made as a result of listening to parents' and students' voices.

With this in mind the Ministry of Education provides guidance on how schools should check-in with the school community to find out what works for the various parties in terms of reporting.^[2] New Zealand is also one of several education systems that encourage the inclusion of a student comment or reflection as a strand of the reporting process.

Recognition of student's wider achievement is an important feature

In catering for a broader scope of learning achievement, the systems seek to reflect achievement in what might be regarded as curriculum-related areas such as key competencies, literacy and numeracy as well as areas such as work habits, health, social habits, and wellbeing.

Allows for comparison against national standards

The student's performance is presented in such a way as to allow for reference to achievement standards variously described as levels of progression, common achievement standards, or expected standards.

Manageability of the reporting process

It is readily accepted in the education systems reviewed that however worthwhile reporting can be, it should not consume excessive amounts of time or resources as an end in itself. The close relationship between regular learning and teaching practice and generating material for the purposes of reporting is key in avoiding any tendency to overload in this area. The challenge is to strike an appropriate balance between the need to report valid and useful information with the need not to place unreasonable demands on schools, teachers, and students. As the Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority puts it...*the difficulties in determining the most effective ways of reporting student achievement are a product of attempts to meet competing demands*^[3]. The gathering of evidence of learning and its use in a formative way are features of ongoing assessment practice in many learning and teaching settings.

Reports need to draw on the formal and informal evidence that has been collected routinely and recorded systematically as part of teachers' ongoing classroom assessment practice^[4]

Other features of effective reporting systems include

- Special provision for students with SEN and ESL students
- Inclusion of grades/marks together with formative comments
- Use of easily-understood language
- Innovative and appropriate use of technology
- Incorporation of student comment
- Use of templates that have scope for some customisation^[5].

References

- [1] Evaluation Associates (2014) *Reporting to Parents and Whānu; Background Paper*. Accessed on August 13th 2015 at <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/content/download/5358/46175/version/1/file/Reporting+to+Parents+Back+ground+paper.pdf>
- [2] <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Reporting-to-parents-whanau/Process-for-reporting/Checking-in-with-parents>
- [3] Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2014) *F–10 curriculum planning and reporting guidelines*. Accessed August 13th 2015 at <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/auscurric/F-10CurriculumPlanningReporting.pdf>
- [4] NSW Department Of Education & Training (2008). *Principles of Assessment and Reporting in NSW Public Schools*. Accessed on August 13th 2015 at http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/policy_doc/principles_ar.pdf
- [5] Interestingly from this year in Victoria a single common report format is no longer mandated. Schools have the flexibility to choose, in partnership with their school community, the way in which they will report student achievement.