

Output Reporting Design: Focus Group 1

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Abstract: This report summarises findings from the first qualitative focus group of teachers who reacted to initial draft outputs designed to report assessment results to teachers. Information gained from this study was used to redesign and improve the communication of the output reports.

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Introduction

Project asTTle, a partnership between The University of Auckland and ETC, is developing, under contract to the Ministry of Education, new literacy and numeracy assessment tools for students in years 5, 6 and 7 in English and in Maori. These tools, to be supplied on a CD-ROM, will extend the range of voluntary-use assessment tools currently available to primary schools. Schools will be able to analyse and aggregate information about the achievement of individual students and/or groups of students within the school in relation to national standards at any time during the year. All items have been initiated by New Zealand teachers and, through a series of workshops, have been reviewed by other New Zealand teachers.

The tools are being developed in consultation with schools. The development process allows for modifications as a result of these consultations, providing feedback on the use of the assessment information generated by the tools.

The following study is part of the consultative development process. The outputs reporting design developed to communicate assessment results to teachers is to be critiqued by practising teachers of Years 5 to 7 students, and changes recommended.

Aim Of The Study

The aim is to:

- Gather critical comments on the communicative effectiveness of each report mechanism in the output reporting design; and
- To ascertain what teachers of Years 5 to 7 might do with the information from the outputs reporting.

Method

Ten pages of proposed assessment reporting images were developed and evaluated by a teacher focus group. The focus group was conducted with three teachers of year 5, year 6, and years 7 and 8 classes. The focus group took just over two hours, and was conducted during work time. Schools were given Teacher Relief Day funding, and teachers were provided with afternoon tea.

Information Use

The information from reporting would be used for:

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- Programme planning for both groups and individual students
- Assessment of the current programme.
- A reporting tool.

Findings

This section outlines in some detail the comments made by teachers in response to each page of reporting.

Page 1: The Overview

When asked what the overview page meant to them the teachers said that they were unclear as to how to operate the page and would have liked more direction. Typical of the comments was:

- “Where do you start?”; and
- “Is this what you would choose to open?”

They did not realise that the page was a menu to the contents. Teachers suggested that The title “asTTle Report Kauri School” positioned at the top of the page in another colour and that written directions be incorporated e.g. “click on comparison choices for.....”.

They believed there was too much on the page for the eye to take in. and that both the “Processes” and “Curriculum Function” features confused the teachers. In particular:

- They did not understand what the dials were saying. One teacher said they “*threw her*”.
- They focused on the numbers on the dials rather than the direction of the arrows and were confused by the numbers beginning at 350. They would have preferred a title or words to signal that this was the position of their school.
- It was unclear what processes were referred to. Teachers asked if this meant English processes. Similar comments were made about “Curriculum”.

The numbers on the arrow to signal the position of the school for “Teaching and Learning Pathways” vis-a-vis easy and hard were distracting. It took some time before the teachers noticed the words easy and hard. Just one teacher understood the meaning of the feature, “Cognitive Processing”. This person has expertise in literacy. The teachers were unsure what the red circles were showing on the graphs. The use of green to signal the NZ mean was not clear - one teacher asked if this applied to the range of numbers that were green. One teacher thought the “Number Compared” feature meant the number of items.

The teachers found the “comparison choices” feature easy to understand because this allowed them to choose the strands and comparison groups. They liked the use of the pictures to signal choice.

Page 2: Teaching And Learning Pathways

Teachers took some time to work out the information being offered on this page. They said that one of the four sub-titles in the four boxes was more prominent than the others, (“where to next”), causing them to focus on this as the feature. Teachers would prefer the sub-titles at the bottom of boxes to be moved to the top and underlined.

The colour difference distracted the teachers initially with one teacher focusing on the yellow. It was not clear to this person that there were two categories – “answered correctly” and “answered incorrectly” with sub-groupings.

Page 3: Advanced, Proficient, Basic

Teachers were unsure how they moved to this page, that is, what they should have clicked on to get here. They understood that they clicked on the

selection key to find which students were in which category and that the “Individual Teaching and learning Pathways would tell them what the

Technical Report 9: Output Focus 1 were not clear as to what level Room 4 was at as the numbers were confusing them. They were also puzzled as to the meaning of “school brief descriptors”.

Teachers would also like to be able to click on the whole group of children in a category, rather than individuals, to find what their common learning needs and strengths were as a group.

Page 4: Student: James Smith: Reading

Once teachers could see this page up close they understood the purpose of providing the information in four different boxes. They particularly liked the unexpected strengths and learning needs. A typical comment was:

“I needed to see this sheet to understand what it was saying”.

The Information from the report mechanisms on pages 2,3, and 4 would be used to (a) plan the teaching programme, (b) develop individual plans for students (e.g., IEP’s and plans for exceptional students), (c) report to parents, Board’s of Trustees and ERO, and (d) look at the teaching programme offered to the students;

Page 5: Close Reading

Teachers commented that they did not understand how they accessed this page. They believed the title would be clearer if amended to “Levels within the English Curriculum”. They were unsure what the label “click on section for more details” alluded to.

Teachers did say that the graph gave clear, easy to read information on school achievement levels in terms of the English curriculum and that the breakdown in curriculum levels was very helpful.

Page 6: Transactional Writing

The teachers said they were unsure how they would move from the page

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Writing”. One teacher asked how to close the document, another suggested returning to the main page. The teachers would like to be able to click to access different curriculum strands on the page they were in rather than returning to the main menu.

The teachers were positive about the overview presented in the graph, and the opportunity to identify which students were in which level.

Page 7: Poetic Writing

Teachers understood that this was an overview of school achievement in curriculum levels and that they needed to click on the appropriate section for details on students.

One teacher suggested that directions be made more explicit (e.g., the “click here” direction be moved closer to the labels, and the labels be emphasised by being placed in boxes).

The teachers agreed that the information from pages 5, 6, and 7 would be used to:

- To strengthen programme planning and teaching,
- Reporting in syndicates on progress, and
- Reporting to BOT on school achievement levels.

Page 8: Average Close Reading Proficiency

Teachers had now decided that they were required to return to the main menu to access this feature. They understood that this page would allow them to identify class mean levels, compare these to national means, and compare year levels. They asked if the mean for

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the school was the highest number in green? The teachers would like to be able to track the student reading

The information from this report mechanism would be used to:

- Compare class groups, and
- Track class progress in terms of an overview.

Page 9: Room 6, Kauri School

The teachers understood that this page showed an overview of where the class is at regarding reading proficiency. The information from this report mechanism would be used as a reporting tool, though they commented that this information would not be useful for structuring their teaching programme as it was not specific enough.

Page 10: Kauri School Progress

Teachers understood that this report showed average progress by students, in reading, over the year, by class, year and school. They commented that more instructions on the lead in page about what the selection panel offers would be useful. They found it confusing that the key and column colours were not matched and that it was not clear what scale score and gain score meant.

The information from this report mechanism would be used to:

- Identify progress and ascertain if external factors are influencing this i.e. is the choice of some items more relevant than others to the students,
- Identify lack of progress and ascertain what the cause is i.e. are there outside influences affecting teaching such as lack of food, or has the topic area been covered sufficiently, and
- If outcomes are positive, market the school.

proficiency by year group over different years (i.e., in 2003 to look at the same group in 2002 and 2001).

Summary Of Findings

Teachers needed to examine the contents pages before the main menu page made sense to them. They would like the following areas improved on the main menu page:

- Operational instructions.
- Explanations on each feature.
- A clearer title.
- The dials amended, in particular the numbers to run from zero to 100.
- Less information on the page.

Improvements to other pages included:

- Clearer titles and sub-titles.
- More directive instructions.
- Explanation on the statistical features.
- Re-wording for clarity the direction “School brief descriptors” in “Click for individual Teaching and Learning Pathway School brief descriptors”.
- Direction on how to move between pages.
- Changing the colour of Teaching and Learning Pathways so that it is clear which sub-section belongs to which main section i.e. – “answered correctly” and “answered incorrectly”.
- Key and columns colour matched in Close Reading Proficiency school progress.

After redesign in light of this information, further focus group response to the images is recommended.