Output Reporting Design: Focus Group 2

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

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This study is part of an iterative consultative process. Teachers of Years 5 to 7 have critiqued reports designed to communicate effectively the results of an assessment. A second group of practising teachers of Years 5 to 7 students were engaged to critique the revised output reports and suggest further changes. The aim of the study was 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.

Focus group participants were from a Decile 10 school. Participants were teachers of a Year 5 class, a Year 4/5 composite class, and a Year 7/8 composite class. The focus group took just over two hours, and was conducted during school time. Schools were given Teacher Relief Day funding, and teachers were provided with afternoon tea.

Major changes were made to the output diagrams by inserting all the images inside a replica of a World Wide Web browser box complete with menu bars and icons. It was intended that this mechanism would resolve navigation problems identified in focus group 1.

FINDINGS

Page 1: The Overview

Teachers commented that there was lots of information on the page and that it "was busy". When asked what the overview page meant to them the teachers were clear about how to operate the page (i.e., they were familiar with windows, understanding that it is necessary to click or double click on the symbols and features in order to open them).

The teachers all understood that this page showed school-wide information. They were less sure about the meaning of all features. They said that the symbol of the child was:

- A version of help/read me; and
- The means to access individual profiles.

The house, on the other hand, either:

- Represented the whole school,
- Was the means to return to the home page, or
- Led to information on home circumstances of a child.

The map led to national information. The coloured circle was the link to information on curriculum processes and functions. The

coloured squares led to information on learning pathways. Learning Pathways were defined as:

- Methods used in teaching something,
- Teaching strategies, or
- How to structure topics.

None of the teachers had heard of the SOLO taxonomy, clearly indicating a major professional development area if this taxonomy is to remain part of the asTTle assessment reporting. The feature "number compared" was said to mean three different things, with only the first option being what was intended:

- Number of students compared to nationally,
- Number of children at school in NZ; or
- The number of children who have been assessed.

The Reading Proficiency feature provided a comparison of the school's years 5, 6, and 7 student proficiency levels to the national means. The Curriculum Function and Process features, the dials, were cause for much speculation. Teachers said:

- The dials indicated the range within which the children fell.
- They showed the percentage of time the children had spent on that function or process;
- The numbers represented the curriculum levels;
- The numbers were confusing and distracted from the purpose i.e. to show level of performance;
- It would be easier to see the level of performance without numbers, and with the arrow pointing towards the words below average or above average; and
- The red and blue colours were confusing. Red and green would be better to represent negative and positive.

Page 2: Table Menu

The teachers understood that this was the means to access information on different groups. They did ask; if by clicking on the school button there would be more actions to access.

They said that all referred to national information, school meant information at a school level, year meant either age group or annual year (e.g., 2000), class meant year level, room meant the room in which the child was instructed, and individual meant an individual child.

Page 3: Comparisons Menu

The teachers considered this page to be clear and a good breakdown with useful options for comparison.

Page 4: Map Feature In Tool Bar

The teachers were clear that if you clicked on the features you would get information applicable to the reporting. One teacher commented that even if it was not clear what the icons represented you could click and find out what they were.

They questioned the use of the word suburb in this range of choices and the word location under comparisons on the tool bar. The teachers asked whether these two words referred to the same information.

Page 5: Writing Functions

The teachers said that they were not clear how they could access this page. They deduced that access was through the Report button on the toolbar. They understood that the page was showing achievement levels in curriculum functions.

Page 6: Reading Process By Curriculum Levels

Teachers said this page was accessed either through the circle on the toolbar or through the curriculum process features on the main menu page. They said this page broke down the three curriculum process area levels by curriculum level. If more information were required on processing information at level 2 they would click on this section. More information would then be available on individual children, by syndicate and so on.

Page 7: Poetic Writing

There was continued speculation as to how one could access the pages showing strands of the curriculum e.g. poetic writing. Teachers said that access was either through the Report

feature on the main toolbar, or from the menu command 'File'.

Teachers would have preferred to click on an icon/picture on the main menu representing curriculum strands. They understood that this report page showed whole school achievement in poetic writing processes by curriculum level.

Teachers indicated a number of ways they could make use of the information from report pages 5,6, and 7.

- Key teaching into areas of need. For example no one is achieving in thinking critically or exploring language at level 4, poetic writing, so these areas would become the focal point of the teaching programme.
- To close the gaps in achievement in thinking critically teachers would (a) do lots of modelling with examples so students can learn through these, (b) use close reading exercises to stimulate creative thinking, share ideas and build up rich experiences, (c) models kinds of words representing features such as "scary" and so on, (d) use discussion to teach students to weigh things up, make comments and back them up, and (e) use texts to get students to prove points of discussion and to be critical.
- Provide exposure to genre and different types of texts.

With the information from the writing functions report teachers would back off teaching comprehension and focus on communication and conventions through the medium of writing stories. They would also access individual achievement levels in order to group students by ability for teaching the conventions and communication skills.

Page 8: Average Close Reading Proficiency Years 5, 6 And 7

The teachers correctly understood this report page. They said that it showed that the mean for the school at Years 5 and 6 was near the national mean, while the Year 7 students were well above the national mean. Further, the Year 7 students were achieving at a much higher level than the Year 5 and 6 students in close reading. This suggested that teachers in Years 5 and 6 needed to focus more on close reading;

and that there needed to be an examination of what the problems could be.

Page 9: Average Close Reading Proficiency

Teachers commented that this report page showed that Room 6 students in both Years 5 and 6 were achieving at the national average.

Based on the information from pages 8 and 9, teachers said they would need to readjust their programme content for close reading. But before readjusting the programmes, teachers would look at the composition of students in these particular year levels. That is, whether Years 5 and 6 included some students who have English as a Second Language and so affected the average levels of achievement.

In relation to information by Room, teachers would determine whether some classes were younger than others or working at lower levels of achievement. Teachers claimed they would focus on development of students' skills in close reading. Methods would include:

- Use of simpler texts and focusing on the meaning of these;
- Re-visiting texts; and
- Look at understanding of texts using synthesis, inference, and judgement.

Pages 10 And 11: Teaching And Learning Pathways

Teachers said that this report page was clear and very helpful. In addition, they were excited that these report pages gave them the priority learning needs they needed to focus on in their teaching. They viewed this tool as a time saver. They liked that this bypassed the need to collate, work out, and analyse information from many sources.

The teachers were very positive about these report pages commenting that:

- It tells the teachers what the next step is tying in with action learning;
- All the information necessary to guide students in reading is present;
- The colour of the squares saying that they could link the results using the information in the yellow squares to focus the learning needs outlined in the blue squares;

- It was helpful to see where the student was in terms of easy and hard in relation to the national mean; and
- It was exciting to finally be presented with an assessment tool where the where to next was clarified.

However, the teachers were unsure about the numbers on page 11 as to whether the numbers were actual children's percentages.

The information from the Teaching and Learning Report Pages would be used:

- As a starting point to lift levels across the board,
- To direct programme direction,
- To ensure curriculum areas are covered in depth,
- For positive feedback to individual students,
- Integrate the pathways information into their teaching programme, grouping students by ability, choosing texts to support group learning,
- Focus on the learning needs in order to strengthen the skill base needed for "Where to Next?",
- Focus on what the students can do well, and use these skills to devise activities and modelling to extend students, and
- Take what students can do well and use these skills to support learning needs.

Summary

Report Design

The teachers were generally very positive about the report design. Teachers were familiar with how to use Windows and this promoted their understanding of how to use the programme and how to access the various features even when the icons were unfamiliar. Directions were easy to see and therefore to follow. Overall the information conveyed by the report pages was clear.

Improvements

Improvements to the report pages suggested include: (a) clearer title/explanation for the feature "number compared", and (b) clarification or explanation on the curriculum process and function dials. The numbers remained a cause for confusion. Suggested amendments included replacing the blue with green to indicate positive direction and an arrow pointing towards the words below average or above average.

Clearer directions on how to access the curriculum strands (e.g. an icon/picture on the main menu representing curriculum strands) were desired. Clarification when terms are similar (e.g., suburb, location) was needed.

Report content

Teachers were familiar with and understood the information indicated by nearly all the features. However, none of the teachers had heard of SOLO.

Information use

Teachers were very excited about the information provided in the output reporting. The Teaching and Learning Pathways were considered particularly useful. As one teacher said:

"You don't have to collate, work out and analyse. It will save hours. Rather than looking at lists of what to cover and you can miss key areas, they are identified for you".

The information from reporting would be used to guide teaching into areas of need. This would include (a) grouping students by ability, (b) focusing on development of students' learning needs, (c) readjusting programme content including modelling with examples, and (d) closing the gaps in achievement. It was believed that this information would:

- Act as a starting point to lift levels across the board,
- Provide programme direction, and
- Ensure curriculum areas are covered in depth.

This study clearly shows that redesign work done to accommodate user-interface characteristics was successful. Further work along this line is still required but this study provides optimistic grounds for believing that the assessment result output information will be successfully communicated to teachers.