

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS CONSULTATION PAPER

SUBMISSION FROM THE VICTORIAN COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS (VICCSO)

Introduction

VICCSO welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Assessment and Reporting in Victorian Schools Consultation Paper. The response is submitted in the context of VICCSO's policy on Assessment and Reporting, the relevant section of our submission to the Public Education: The Next Generation (PENG) working party and our interpretation of the working party's Ministerial Report.

VICCSO's policy on Assessment and Reporting

Assessment

Assessment is the process of gathering information about student learning. The main function of assessment in schools is the improvement of student learning, and of the teacher's ability to teach the individual child. Assessment is an integral part of curriculum design. A wide variety of forms of assessment need to be used in schools to enable the recognition of a broad range of learning outcomes. The improvement of student learning is not supported by assessment practices which:

- are not directly related to the learning experiences of students in their classrooms;
- undermine the coherence of school curriculum programs, or
- undermine the self-esteem of students by focussing on competition, or facilitating the ranking of students.

VICCSO therefore opposes:

- the imposition of statewide or national testing programs;
- the aggregation of assessment information from individual schools;
- the use of data from student assessments to compare the performance of schools.

Reporting

The educational welfare of a student demands the fullest communication between teachers, the student and the student's parents. Reporting is the process of sharing information, so that parents, teachers and students can work together to improve student learning.

Reports of student progress need to:

- make clear the basis on which judgements are made and wherever possible cite the evidence;
- be an interactive process between parents, teachers and students;
- be designed to provide a basis for planning the future learning of the particular student;
- recognise the complexity of student learning;

- be based on assessment practices which enable any substantial differences in student achievement from their peers to be identified and reported;
- occur in a systematic and publicly understood manner;
- encourage parents, students and teachers to initiate reporting processes as soon as problems relating to learning are observed and ensure that students are involved in setting their own goals for learning and in helping to decide how their work will be assessed. This should begin at the beginning of formal education to achieve progressive student self-responsibility for learning.

Every school community should through its school council develop policy and processes for assessment and reporting through open collaborative processes and ensure that these are widely communicated and understood within that community.

VICCSO's PENG Submission

VICCSO's Submission to PENG on assessment and reporting was a restatement of our policy in the context of the current emphasis on written reporting to the exclusion of other more interactive and participatory methods of reporting student progress.

The PENG Report

The Assessment and Reporting Consultation Paper has emerged from recommendations within the PENG report, however it is VICCSO's view that inconsistencies within the report undermine some of the key assumptions of the Consultation Paper. In particular, the PENG report appeared to endorse the CSF II (although the specific recommendation referred only to "a statewide curriculum framework" Rec. 5), despite the fact that "A significant number of the submissions received focussed on student alienation and the need to tackle its causes, leading to such suggestions as the provision of alternative educational settings for some students and to *the need for a less crowded curriculum which is more in touch with students' interests and better tailored to their learning needs.*" (Section 6.3, p48) VICCSO also notes that educational experts such as Professor Allan Luke have challenged the suitability of the CSF II as a "unifying frame of reference".

In addition, the PENG report acknowledges "significant criticism" of the CSF (Section 6.1, p39). The report attributes this criticism to dissatisfaction with assessment and reporting against the Framework, however there is no research evidence to support the assumption that the CSF is widely supported by teachers or parents.

Given the detailed, technical nature of the CSF, there is no guarantee that systemically, the right balance between statewide consistency and local flexibility can be achieved, especially where assessment is narrowly focussed and/or highly standardized. Whilst VICCSO supports statewide consistency of reporting to parents, we have major concerns about the risks of attempting to satisfy a range of audiences with conflicting needs, with a narrowly based reporting device that is supported by standardized assessment tools. These risks are:

- A lack of curriculum flexibility

- The encouragement of a ‘teach to test’ culture (assessment instead of student needs driving curriculum)
- Failure to assess and report on a wide range of student achievements
- Promotion of the idea that learning is linear and progress steady and continuous
- The deprofessionalization of the role of the teacher
- Failure to incorporate diversity of culture, family background and learning styles into assessment and reporting
- Promotion of reporting as a one-way, rather than an interactive process.

Even if the CSF is accepted a valid “unifying frame of reference” the risks associated with the proposed model are such that there is a very real danger of statewide consistency being purchased at the expense of assessment and reporting that is responsive to the learning needs of individual students.

Key Consultation Questions – Section 2.0: The Role of Assessment

Which current assessment practices in schools are most effective?

The cornerstone of authentic assessment and reporting should be the well-being of the student. If an assessment procedure results in a serious diminishing of a student’s sense of self-worth, then it is inappropriate. When the emphasis is on fair, accurate and honest descriptions of performance it is possible to have a basis for positive development. The sorting, grading and labelling of students is neither helpful to them nor to the larger social good.

The most effective assessment practice therefore will draw upon a wide variety of assessment devices, including peer and self-assessment and demonstrations, in the context of professional practice and innovation.

Are the issues identified in Section 2 on Assessment the key issues requiring improvement?

The issues identified in Section 2 as requiring improvement appear to be focussed on the discrepancy between teacher judgement and the results of statewide “snapshot” tests, such as the AIM (formerly LAP). This section implies that teachers need to improve performance up to the standard of the statewide tests. This assumes that the methodology of ‘snapshot’ testing is more empirically accurate than teacher judgement, however there is no basis for this assumption. Teacher judgements are based on a broader range of outcomes and student achievements and therefore cannot be unfavorably compared to “snapshot” testing.

Another issue evident in this section is the conflation of audiences. Although the data available to parents/students, the school and the system is ultimately designed to assist student learning, the uses of the data and processes employed in achieving this outcome are quite different. It is VICCSO’s view that where there are competing needs of different audiences, the individual learning needs of the student are paramount. In the proposed model this does not appear to be the case.

Are there any other issues which should be considered in refining the current arrangements?

The use of a wide range of assessment practices and tools should be encouraged and supported by the system. The provision of annotated work samples and calibrated tests provide part of this support, but are insufficient in themselves. Professional practice can be encouraged

through the sharing of innovative methods of assessment and most importantly, assessment practice should be informed by locally developed curriculum.

Key Consultation Questions – Section 3.0: Towards an Improved Assessment Model

Are these principles appropriate for an assessment framework linked to the CSF?

VICCSO does not support the linking of assessment to the CSF in the manner proposed. Assessment should be driven by curriculum. If there is genuine curriculum flexibility assessment will vary both within and across schools. The standardized nature of the proposed model militates against this curriculum flexibility and will not contribute positively to individual student learning.

VICCSO supports reporting that achieves consistency in the following ways:

1. There should be comment on the student's attitude to work, supported by details of what work has been satisfactorily completed and what has not.
2. The knowledge and skills developed across and within the main areas of the curriculum should be set out and the level of achievement in each of these commented on.

These broad parameters provide ample room for assessment to be based on curriculum which is designed locally to meet student needs.

Key Consultation Questions – Section 3.3: Elements of a Common Assessment Framework

Will the development of a broad range of calibrated assessment tasks and instruments provide a workable way to help teachers to assess more accurately against the CSF?

VICCSO supports an interactive process of assessment, whereby teacher judgement, collegiate moderation and parent and student input are used to analyse information, make judgements and develop future learning plans. The CSF II standards and the use of instruments calibrated to them may provide part of the information used in this process, however they should not be used exclusively to drive the assessment process.

How could student peer and self-assessment be included in the process?

Peer and self-assessment are important tools of assessment and should not be considered an adjunct or add-on to standardized or calibrated testing.

What sort of professional development will be most useful to teachers in implementing the proposed assessment framework?

VICCSO does not support the implementation of the proposed framework.

Are there any other components of an assessment framework you would like considered?

Any assessment framework should incorporate a wide range of strategies for assessment and reporting which can reflect and celebrate the variety of student achievements, including aspects which are not amenable to comparative and competitive procedures.

Key Consultation Questions – Section 4: Reporting

Would access to this form of report be more informative and improve the quality and accuracy of reporting to parents on student progress?

VICCSO does not believe this form of report would be more informative, accurate or of higher quality. It does not give examples or evidence of student achievements, is too narrowly focussed, and is not amenable to an interactive two-way process of teacher, student and parent input to develop future learning plans.

Would this approach take into account the diversity of students' needs?

VICCSO does not believe the proposed model would accommodate diversity of either students' needs or abilities.

Should schools report on social development? How might this be done? How could students be involved in this process?

VICCSO's policy is that assessment, and therefore reporting should take into account a student's creative and social development, as well as academic achievement. This should be done within an interactive process of information gathering through assessment, teacher judgement, parent and student input, and the development of future learning plans. It should incorporate a flexible approach to the nature, timing and frequency of formal and informal contact with teachers. VICCSO notes that a desire for more face-to-face contact with teachers was key finding of the Parents Victoria survey of parents.

What sorts of professional development will be most useful to teachers in implementing the reporting framework?

Professional development for effective assessment and reporting practice should be focussed on the professional role of teachers in curriculum design and facilitating parent (and student) participation. Teachers should have time available for moderation of student work, discussion of pedagogical practice, and the sharing of knowledge and ideas about new forms and instruments of assessment.

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