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Student-Led Conferences: An Alternative Reporting Method

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Student-led conferences, an alternative reporting method, have been used in primary and intermediate schools for several years, both in New Zealand and overseas. This thesis examines *the extent to which student-led conferences are effective as a reporting method, how they change teachers' practice, and their impact on the development of student competencies in reporting*. It is the argument of this thesis that student-led conferences can be effective if there is clarity around four conditions of reporting if teachers have sufficient knowledge and understanding of assessment and reporting as they link to class-based teaching, and learning that result in student competencies in assessment and reporting being developed.

From this study, a conceptual framework and four-stage audit and evaluation tool to assess the effectiveness of student-led conferences based upon school, teacher, and student capacity has been developed.

This thesis was developed using an embedded multiple case study design. Within two case studies there are three sources of evidence: Year 3-6 students, their parents, and teachers. Results showed teacher and parent expectations in each case study differed and that some conditions of reporting were met in each case study. There were high levels of variation in teachers' levels of understanding of assessment within and between schools, and students' knowledge and understanding of assessment information and ability to articulate the information about reporting, also varied within and between schools. Differences found were attributed to school practices around assessment and reporting, teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' levels and the extent to which they had been effective in developing students' understanding of their learning and skills to articulate this to parents.

To successfully implement student-led conferences, schools need to align professional development, effective teaching practice, assessment, and reporting systems to student-centred pedagogy, and be willing to redefine the roles of students and parents in the reporting process. From this study, a conceptual framework and four-stage audit and evaluation tool to assess the effectiveness of student-led conferences based upon school, teacher, and student capacity has been developed.

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This research would not have been possible without the support of the parents, teachers, and students of the two case study schools on which this thesis is based. Thank you all for your contributions. It was much appreciated.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In New Zealand, reporting to parents about student progress and achievement has become a topical aspect of current political reform in education. Like other Western countries (such as the United Kingdom, America, and Australia), in New Zealand one aspect of the reporting debate has focused on parents' rights to access meaningful information about their children's learning (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Education Review Office, 2008; Power & Clark, 2000). A prime mandate in these reforms has been a call for schools to be 'accountable' to stakeholders such as parents, in providing reliable, accurate, 'easy to understand' information about student progress and achievement. At the same time, research supporting increased parental involvement in education has focused attention on the way schools promote parental involvement in student learning that leads to improved student achievement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Hattie, 2009).

It is evident from the research that the nature of reporting is complex for a number of reasons. There is lack of clarity around the purposes of reporting, and literature that suggests no one method of reporting serves all purposes well (Austin & McCann, 1992; Kofoed, 2009). Teachers' knowledge of assessment is variable, which affects processes schools use to collect, collate, analyse, and communicate trustworthy, reliable, accurate, and valid assessment information to parents (Black & William, 1998a; Education Review Office, 2008; Guskey, 2002; Stiggins, 2002; Thomas, Lai, Robinson, Agbede, & Pythian, 2003). In New Zealand, evaluations of 'Assessment for Learning' professional development contracts show the interaction between assessment, teaching, and learning, varies both within and between schools, and there is a wide variation in the quality and usefulness of data collected by schools (Absolum, et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010b). Reporting issues identified as problematic, such as the frequency of reporting, timing, use of jargon, the quality of information shared, and in what detail, also affect the quality of reporting to parents (Hattie & Peddie, 2003; McKinley, 2000; Power & Clark, 2000; Robinson & Timperley, 2000).

In literature around parental participation, engagement, and involvement in their children's education, there is general agreement that this is a desired outcome (Bull, 2009; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Ministry of Education, 2007, 2010a). Despite this, agreement how schools can facilitate the development of new types of partnerships that empower all parents to support their children's learning as genuine and valued partners in the

learning process remains unresolved. How to develop these partnerships in ways that positively impact on student achievement is also unclear.

As well as involving parents as active participants in the reporting process, there has been a growing trend focused on involving students in assessment and reporting. Traditionally, students have not been part of the reporting process (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Power & Clark, 2000). In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education's Position Paper on Assessment (2010) states:

All students should be educated in ways that develop their assessment capability with and across all learning contexts. Assessment capable students are able to actively participate in assessing their own learning, recognize important moments of personal learning and make 'what next?' decisions. Assessment capable students are more likely to take ownership of their learning and become independent learners. (p. 33)

If students are to be encouraged, supported, and involved in all aspects of their learning, including assessment, the creation of 'Student voice' in the reporting process would be an extension of class-based teaching and learning practices focused on developing student assessment capabilities, learning-focused relationships, and 'Assessment for Learning' practices. There would be recognition of the relevance of 'Assessment for Learning' pedagogy to teaching key competencies. This would involve the development of valid teacher-designed classroom assessments; consistency around judgments for complex assessment tasks; analysis, evaluation, reporting and use of assessment information to inform teaching, learning, and school resourcing (Absolum, et al., 2009; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Power & Clark, 2000).

Literature on student involvement in reporting is not extensive. Bailey and Guskey's (2001) work provides a comprehensive review of the literature on reporting and rationale for involving students in reporting using student-led conferences. Other research in this area is mainly descriptive, focused on the process of how to implement student-led conferences, descriptions of conference events, and feedback from students, parents, and teachers about the student-led conference and their reaction to it (Hackmann, 1997; Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996). Despite this, there has been growing support for student-led conferences as a reporting method by both practitioners and academics, because of the potential this reporting method has to fulfil the purpose of reporting, strengthen communication between

home and school, and build parent capacity to assist their children in their learning while also empowering students as active participants in the learning process (Absolum, et al., 2009).

Definition of student-led conferences

Different studies have defined student-led conferences in different ways. For the purpose of this study, a student-led conference is a two-way conversation between a student and their parents about learning. Students lead the conference, and for between 30 and 60 minutes discuss their learning in different curriculum areas, using relevant assessment information, demonstrations of skills, explanations of process and progress or work samples, and projects as evidence of learning. Through the student-led conference, parents and students engage in a range of interactive activities, designed to demonstrate current skills, knowledge, and understanding of their learning. Typically, several student-led conferences take place concurrently in classrooms with family groups seated far enough apart to guarantee privacy.

Literature describing student-led conferences shows the teachers' role, the parents' role, and the students' role can vary, depending on how student-led conferences are defined, their purpose, the school context, the age of the students participating, decisions made by the teachers as to what information will be shared with students and parents, by whom, and in what medium (Fox, 2006; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Hackmann, 1997). Ideally, if students have been well prepared and have a strong understanding of all aspects of their learning, the teachers' role would be one of observer and supporter with teachers periodically moving between conferences to check that there are no problems, clarifying information, and helping to set up activities at the students' request. Parents would be active participants in the conference, led by their child, engaging with the information shared in order to further develop their understanding of their child's learning and ways they can support them at home.

The purpose of this research

This study looked to implement student-led conferences, as a reporting method in two primary schools. The primary question that framed this research was:

To what extent are student-led conferences effective as a reporting method that communicates information about student progress, achievement, and 'next steps' in learning that is understood by teachers, students, and parents?

Student-led conferences represent a new reporting method that could begin to address some of the issues with traditional reporting methods identified in the literature, while providing

opportunity for parents to become more actively involved in the reporting process. Research on student-led conferences has largely been focused on implementation, and at this time, no empirical investigations have been located that critically examine the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method that develops a collective understanding of information shared by teachers, through students, to parents.

While the key focus of the research is focused on reporting, because student-led conferences are the product of quality class-based teaching and learning, it was also important to assess the impact the implementation of student-led conferences had on the teachers' class-based practices and to what extent teachers' practices impacted on the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method. The second question this study sought to answer was:

To what extent are student-led conferences effective in focusing teachers on class-based assessment strategies that promote deeper understanding of assessment as it relates to student learning?

Research on teacher effectiveness as it is linked to teaching and learning, assessment, and reporting, has suggested 'Assessment literate' teachers are essential to the development of confident, connected, knowledgeable, life-long learners who take ownership of and responsibility for their learning (Absolum, et al., 2009; Black & William, 1998b; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2010a; Stigler & Hiebert, 1997). This study also looks to assess the extent to which the implementation of student-led conferences provide impetus for teachers to further develop their 'Assessment Literacy' knowledge as it relates to their practice.

When developing the research focus based upon a system of reporting led by students, it was essential to consider the impact preparation and implementation of student-led conference would have on students in the study. If students were leading conferences about learning, the evaluation of the effectiveness of this reporting method was to be, to some extent, dependent on the knowledge, understanding, and skills they brought to the reporting process. The third question this study looked to answer was:

To what extent does the process of preparing for, and conducting student-led conferences develop students' knowledge, motivation, confidence, skills, and understanding of their learning?

Literature focused on evaluating student-led conferences has been based on feedback about the student-led conference event, rather than any empirical evidence of changes in students'

knowledge, understanding, or attitudes towards learning during the process of preparing for, and implementing student-led conferences (Fox, 2006; Hackmann, 1997; Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996). It is anticipated that changes in ‘Student Competencies’ will be found in this study as a result of teachers and students working together to develop and strengthen students’ understanding of aspects of their learning to be reported to parents.

Theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences

While the student-led conference reporting method aims to communicate student progress and achievement information to parents, and involve parents as active participants in a reporting process led by students, a theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences was needed to determine the extent to which they were effective in their primary purpose—to inform parents about their child’s learning. A theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences was developed to assess the outcomes of each case study. The first two indicators looked to evaluate the core function of providing information about progress and achievement to parents. Other indicators focused on assessing the effectiveness of other outcomes that student-led conferences were expected to achieve. They included:

1. Providing information about students’ progress and achievement levels using normative or criterion referenced benchmarks.
2. Identifying the next steps in students’ learning.
3. Creating ‘Student voice’ in the reporting process.
4. Creating opportunity for students’ to engage with and understand all the information about their learning.
5. Sharing information about how learning had been achieved with parents.
6. Providing information that was understood by parents and creating opportunity for parents to ‘learn about learning’ so they are better able to support students’ learning at home.

For the purpose of this study, ‘progress’ referred to an improvement made over a period of at least one term, seen in comparisons of achievement grades, samples of work, or demonstrations of skills. ‘Achievement’ referred to current grades or levels in reading, writing, and mathematics, that have been obtained using nationally recognised measurement tools referenced to success criteria indicators or a matrix based upon New Zealand curriculum levels.

The ‘process’ of learning (or how learning has been achieved) refers to the different aspects of learning that students have been through to achieve goals or improvement in their work. Typically this would involve establishing learning intentions (specific goals); success criteria (how students will know they have achieved success); and tasks or processes students have worked through self, peer, or teacher feedback and evaluation against set criteria.

Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 (p. 8) summarises the literature in four areas of research that have informed this study: reporting, teacher effectiveness, student voice and parental participation. The literature review provides the foundation upon which to establish a theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences, and the definition of student-led conferences that are used in this study. It also looks to build an understanding of the inter-relationships between reporting, assessment, effective teaching, and learning of teachers, students, and parents, that informs student-led conferences as a reporting method.

Chapter 3 (p. 37) describes the case study methodology used in this study. The design of the study is outlined and is followed by participant information, an overview of data collection methods, sources of evidence, analytical framework, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with sections on ethical considerations, methodological constraints, and generalisability.

Chapter 4a (p. 68) presents findings from Case Study 1. The extent to which four conditions of reporting that teachers and parents wanted a reporting method to meet is summarised. Section A of this chapter uses problem-based methodology as a framework to explore teachers’ beliefs, practices, and consequences of these practices on the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method at three points in the study: the initial stage, pre-conference, and post-conference. Section B uses the problem-based methodology framework to explore interviewed parents’ beliefs, practices, and consequences of their experience of student-led conferences at two points in the study: the initial stage, and post-conference. The extent to which student-led conferences were effective for teachers and parents was considered under each of the conditions of reporting and compared to a theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences.

Chapter 4b (p. 109) explores changes in teachers’ knowledge, understanding, and practice through the process of implementing student-led conferences. An ‘Assessment Literacy’

matrix was developed using emerging themes from the teachers' semi-structured interviews conducted in the initial stage, pre-conference, and post-conference stages of the study.

Chapter 4c (p. 128) uses student survey data and semi-structured interview findings to examine the extent to which student-led conferences developed student competencies in five dimensions.

Chapter 5a (p. 149) follows the same structure as Chapter 4. Chapter 5a examines the extent to which teachers and parents found each of four conditions of reporting were met. Chapter 5b (p. 221) uses the 'Assessment Literacy' matrix to assess the extent to which teachers' knowledge, understanding, and practice changed through the process of implementing student-led conferences, and Chapter 5c (p. 249) describes evidence of changes in 'Student Competencies' from the beginning to the end of the study. Findings are compared to findings in Case Study 1 and to the theories of effective reporting.

Chapter 6 (p. 278) begins with a summary of the findings on reporting as they link to the literature. A conceptual model of entry levels for reporting using student-led conferences is introduced and findings from Case Study 1 and 2 are used to illustrate how the model could be used as a reporting, audit, and evaluation tool to support schools to implement and further develop effective reporting practices. A 'Reporting Audit' framework is also introduced to support schools in the process of assessing current capacity in reporting and designing a student-led conference implementation process for individual school contexts. Findings from Case Study 1 and 2 are again used to illustrate how this tool could assist in the process of improving reporting practices. The development of teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' and 'Student Competencies' using matrices developed for this study are summarised and findings are linked to the literature. How findings could inform professional development for teachers in assessment and reporting are considered, as are ways to develop teaching and learning practices, linked to class-based assessment and reporting practices that involve students in all aspects of their learning.

Limitations of the study are discussed and implications for future research explored. Finally, the initial questions are revisited and conclusions drawn based upon the evidence found in this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following section begins with an overview of recent trends in reporting policy focused on improving the quality of reporting in New Zealand schools. The literature from four areas of research: reporting, assessment, student voice, and parent participation, are then considered as they relate to the research questions this study looked to address. The first section on reporting discusses the characteristics of effective reporting practices and issues with traditional reporting methods, as they relate to the emerging trend of involving students in the reporting process through student-led conferences.

Assessment, the focus of the second section, reviews the changes in assessment that have impacted on reporting and assessment for learning teaching pedagogy. The concept of ‘Student voice’ in the reporting process, as it relates to literature around the development of students’ involvement in assessment, motivation, self-perception, confidence, and goal-setting is discussed in the third section. Finally, research on parent participation in education is examined as it relates to the emergence of student-led conferences, an alternative reporting system that has the potential to empower students to lead conferences about their learning with parents; create opportunity for parents to become authentic, valued partners in the learning process; and embed assessment as it links to reporting as an integral part of class-based teaching and learning.

Background

In New Zealand and internationally there has been a growing trend for schools to be more transparent and accountable to parents in reporting on student progress and achievement (Ministry of Education, 2009; Power & Clark, 2000; Thomas, et al., 2003). In 1989, New Zealand schools became self-managing under the *Tomorrow’s Schools* administration reforms, and schools were required to develop charters and policy statements which included those relevant to reporting. Subsequent amendments to the National Administration Guidelines in 1999 and 2003 (Ministry of Education, 1999, 2003) mandated that schools report to parents and provide regular reports on progress to try and improve consistency and quality of information shared by schools with parents. In 2008, the Education Amendment Act was passed that required all schools to assess students using national standards and in 2009, new administration guidelines around reporting were introduced (Ministry of Education, 2009), requiring schools to report to parents in plain language, at least twice a

year on students' progress and achievement compared to national standards. This has had the effect of generating much discussion and debate about the process of developing and implementing national standards, and the assessment capabilities teachers need to develop to create consistency in assessment, as it relates to reporting within schools and between schools.

While the primary focus of these guidelines is to improve communication to parents about students' progress and achievement, to support further learning and to develop parents' understanding of how students' learning is progressing, they also aim to strengthen relationships between home and school. Research around parent participation in education shows parent involvement in education supports success in student learning (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Fan, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2007). In New Zealand, community engagement is one of eight principles underpinning the revised New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), the underlying assumption based upon this international research being that together, teachers and parents, can support students' learning more effectively than separately.

Another trend in education that has impacted on reporting has been the development of student-centred 'Assessment for Learning' teaching pedagogy. The premise of this pedagogy is that students need to be educated in ways that support them to become involved in all aspects of their learning, including assessment and reporting, so they develop the capacity to take responsibility for, and ownership of, their learning. This requires reporting practices to not only inform parents about students' learning, but also inform the student (Absolum, et al., 2009; Guskey, 1994). In the New Zealand Ministry of Education Reporting Guidelines (2010b), recognition of the links between reporting, assessment, and the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum to develop "confident, connected, actively involved, life-long learners" (Ministry of Education, 2010b), has seen the development of six reporting principles, three of which directly relate to students. The guidelines state:

Reporting should benefit students, involve students, support teaching and learning goals, be planned and communicated, be suited to the purpose and be fair and valid, Reporting processes should promote student ownership of their learning, and students should feel ownership of the information that is reported (p. 42).

Because of the Ministry of Education's current focus on reporting, schools in New Zealand are being asked to review and further develop assessment and reporting practices, to

communicate information about student progress, achievement, and ‘next steps’ in learning to students and parents effectively, and to build effective relationships with parents. Through the process of implementing student-led conferences in two different schools, this study looked to assess the extent to which information about learning was understood by teachers, students, and parents, and how effective student-led conferences were at involving parents in their children’s learning. Conclusions from this study are expected to inform and support reporting policy as it is applied in practice.

Reporting to parents

When reviewing literature on school reports and how effective they are in conveying information to parents about student progress and achievement, there is very little research to be found (Hattie, 2003a). It would seem that while schools engage in the activity of designing, preparing, and delivering reports to parents, their effectiveness in conveying information is rarely examined. This has led to a call for schools to review and reform school systems of reporting to parents, to reduce the gap between professional practices and the needs of parents, and to improve the consistency and quality of reporting practices.

The New Zealand Academy (2009), in response to Ministry of Education changes in assessment and reporting policy, developed a list of characteristics they believed should inform reporting practices in schools. The Ministry of Education stated that information should be trustworthy, comprehensible, or understood by the audience for which it was written, relevant in that it meets the needs of its audience, evidence-based, use multiple sources of assessment that are ‘weighted’ to provide a balanced indication of students’ achievement, and be a ‘best fit’ report of students’ growth and levels of performance (p. 7).

In 2010, the Ministry of Education Guidelines for Reporting outlined criteria for effective reporting. They included what the child has learnt and can do, their rate or progress of learning, the extent to which the relevant standards for that child have been reached, next learning steps, and ways to support learning. As well as including information about learning areas and key competencies, reports are expected to comment on students’ levels of engagement, be written in clear, plain language, be balanced, hold no surprises for students, parents or families, and have a clear description of their purpose. So why is this not already being done?

Traditionally it would seem implementation of reporting practices in schools has been left to schools’ discretion. Power and Clark (2000), in an analysis of 183 secondary school reports,

found that there was little evidence of common grading systems across schools. While English government legislation and guidelines, and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) required that schools report to parents, it was left unclear as to whose job it was to guide schools on reporting procedures. Cuttance and Stokes (2000) reported that across Australian states, there was no system that prescribed the format a written report should take.

Similar results were found in research conducted in New Zealand (Hattie & Peddie, 2003). In a study of 10 New Zealand schools, Timperley and Robinson (2002) found that not only did reports differ in standards against which achievement was reported between schools, but there was also inconsistency within schools. In a comparison of reports from 136 primary schools, 18 intermediate schools, and 2 New Zealand high schools, Hattie and Peddie concluded that too few of the reports provided parents information about performance relative to standards. Some schools reported to parents using value added notions such as: 'improving' and 'needs to do better'. Other comments were focused on effort: 'needing to attend more', and 'try harder'. Some grades assessed were against class-based standards while others were against national standards. Students with lower levels of achievement were less likely to have references made to standards in comments.

One possible explanation for the inconsistencies in school reporting systems could be schools' perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses. Power and Clark (2000) reported that secondary schools were able to identify twice as many strengths as weaknesses in their reporting systems. Schools were most confident about the content of their reports, target setting, and achieving consistency and clarity. Issues related to administration were raised more frequently than anything else, and problems with non-involvement of particular groups of parents were seen as a weakness, though not a fault of the school, or the reporting system. Because there has not been any systemic review of reporting systems, schools have not been challenged to re-think traditional reporting methods used.

Austin and McCann (1992) suggested that while there are many different methods of reporting, no one method of reporting serves all purposes well. Lack of clarity around purpose of reporting has been hindered by trying to meet the needs of a range of different constituencies (Cangelosi, 1990). Some researchers suggest reporting should relate to learning, and include information about progress towards the goals of learning, where the child is at in their learning, and what their priorities for future learning might be (Absolum, et al., 2009; Black & William, 1998a, 1998b; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Others have found parents also want information about students' attitudes, values,

personal, social development, and core learning competencies (Broadfoot, Murphy, & Torrance, 1990; Guskey, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2007). Harlen (2004) suggested non-academic information should be reported separately from academic achievement, as non-academic factors such as behaviour, effort, and attendance, can influence assessment and disadvantage some students.

The frustration of trying to interpret school reports that lack consistency and explicit information about achievement is evident in research involving parents (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Power & Clark, 2000; Savell, 1998). Where grades were used, parents wanted information on what they meant and how they were decided upon (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Ohlhausen, Powell, & Reitz, 1994; Savell, 1998).

Consistently in research findings, parents identify difficulty in understanding the grading system being used. From the information they receive, parents often find it difficult to understand how their child is achieving compared to a standard, or when compared to other students. Often the grading systems are not explained. Not understanding the assessment systems being used, especially those related to curriculum where a child may be on one level for two years, also confuses parents and makes it difficult for them to match a child's learning level to a child's year level or to their chronological age. Parents also report that while not getting enough explanation about normative-based outcomes, criteria-based outcomes, or standards, is problematic, so too is getting too much information, especially if it is hard to understand, too wordy, and jargon filled (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000).

Parents reported the amount of information a report contains, and to what extent the information is standardised or individualised to the specific student were inconsistent, and influenced their perceptions of computer generated reporting systems (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002; Power & Clark, 2000).

Reporting assessment information is inherently subjective and the more detailed the reporting method, and the more analytic the process, the more likely it is subjectivity will influence results (Ornstein, 1994). Research by Thomas, Lai, Robinson, Agbede, and Pythian (2003) showed teachers' technical understanding of assessment tools and their interpretation of data varied, which added to parents' difficulties in understanding reports.

The use of educational jargon in reporting is another issue parents struggle with (Alton-Lee, 2003; Hattie, 2009). Timperley and Robinson (2003) suggest that teachers want to use professional language when reporting to parents because they view reports as professional

documents. Because of this, language used in reporting mirrored the language used in curriculum documents, even though teachers were aware that parents may not understand it. The ability of teachers to interpret and communicate information about assessment has left parents confused by grading systems (Nolen, Haladyna, & Haas, 1992; Power & Clark, 2000).

While parents have found language used in reports to be unclear, misleading, and filled with educational jargon, they also have worried about the trustworthiness of the information received. Cuttance and Stokes (2000) reported that parents found teachers unwilling to tell hard truths and comments about students' difficulties in learning are couched in positive terms. Parents were clear that they wanted fair and honest assessment, and that lack of honesty about their child's achievement levels can lead to problems with learning not being identified and dealt with early enough (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Savell, 1998)). Research conducted in New Zealand by Timperley and Robinson (2002), also revealed problems with honesty in reporting to parents about progress and achievement.

Savell's (1998) research showed that parents expected to receive accurate, explicit information about their child's progress and achievement against national benchmarks for their age and class level. Savell (1998) argued that as professionals, teachers cannot justify keeping assessment information from parents—in the same way it would not be acceptable for a doctor to test a child's blood sugar level, and withhold information that could result in a child becoming diabetic because the parents might get upset.

Resistance to reporting consistently and explicitly on student achievement can be linked to teachers' beliefs about parents, and the way they might interpret 'hard' data. Teachers stated they were concerned that the parents would abuse the information by making unfair comparisons, put undue pressure on students, and create negative feelings of anger, loss of confidence or self-esteem of students (Savell, 1998; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Not wanting to give the 'hard' messages could also be interpreted as teachers not wanting to create negative backlash from parents. Reporting is in theory, about reporting student progress and achievement. For schools and teachers, it is also a public relations exercise designed to preserve both the positive relationships between the school and home, and the reputation of the school itself (Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Timperley & Robinson, 2002).

The frequency of reports and their timing are also aspects of school reporting that parents find inconsistent and potentially frustrating. Parents argue that it is not helpful to receive

reports on the last day of term. They want reports to be distributed at times that can maximise their input into their child's learning, preferably near the beginning of the year or the term (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Power & Clark, 2000).

Traditionally, the roles of teachers and parents in the reporting process have been unequal, with school leaders and teachers setting the agendas for reporting, deciding what information will be shared, when and how (Power & Clark, 2000; Timperley & Robinson, 2003; Wholey, 1979). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) believe schools put up 'buffers' to limit the depth of involvement of parents or interference with professional decision making. Parents can also lack confidence because they are not learning professionals. Research shows parents can be reticent about asking for information from schools and are unsure about changing teaching methods (Clinton, Hattie, & Dixon, 2007; Education Review Office, 2008). Other research suggests that other home factors such as time and work pressure, family responsibilities, and inflexible employment conditions, also prevent parents from being more involved with their children's learning (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

In literature on reporting to parents, there is general agreement that information about student progress and achievement comes from a variety of sources. Furthermore, to rely on any one source of information alone is not enough to get an accurate picture of how well a child is progressing and achieving (Ohlhausen, et al., 1994; Power & Clark, 2000; Sanders & Epstein, 1998).

Written reports are one of the most common reporting methods used by schools. In many ways they are problematic because they often leave parents feeling less informed than they want to be (Guskey, 2002). In several countries, research has found parents found reports inaccurate, inconsistent, and lacking explicitness and useful information that would inform them about their child's learning (Broadfoot, et al., 1990; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Power & Clark, 2000; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Stiggins (1994), points out that letter grades, while giving some idea as to level of attainment or effort, requires abstracting a great deal of information into a single symbol and that the cut-off between grade categories is always arbitrary and difficult to justify. While narrative and checklists of learning can give more information, they take more time to prepare, so comments can become less personalised (Afflerbach & Sammons, 1991).

Parent-teacher interviews, like school reports, are another common reporting method used to communicate student progress and achievement. While meeting face-to-face can be helpful

for parents, like school reports, they can be problematic for a variety of reasons. The structure of traditional parent-teacher interviews, decided by the school, does not always create a forum for working together to improve children's educational progress. Some parents report that they do not find out about meetings because this information is not passed on by their child. Meetings of 10-15 minutes are limited in usefulness because there is little time to do more than to make contact with the teacher (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000).

Mutual understanding of the purpose of teacher-parent meetings needs to be clarified between the school and parents. Many parents view parent-teacher meetings as opportunities for two-way communication, and an opportunity to form a relationship with their child's teacher (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000). Parents want to have an interactive discussion about the written report, how teachers interpret their assessment in terms of focusing on improvement with reference to samples of work, and how parents can assist their child's learning. However, parents often feel the parent-teacher interview is a one-way dissemination of knowledge (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Power & Clark, 2000). Scott and Morrison (2006) concluded that traditional teacher-parent interviews revealed a physical and psychological border between home and school stating:

Parents are not allowed inside the border, while at the same time their assistance and supervision in educational matters at home is considered essential. Furthermore they are perceived to be as much in need of guidance and instruction as their children are. On the contrary, teachers are seen as the experts who not only determine what happens in school, but also directly influence what takes place at home (p. 50).

Parents reported that they also wanted to share their perceptions about their children, and that teachers were not always receptive to advice. Where parents hear a different interpretation of difficulties that students are having from that of their child, they are placed in the difficult position of believing either their child or the teacher (Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996). Some parents do not have the confidence to be assertive in parent-teacher meetings, especially if from a lower socio-economic group or ethnic minority (Cairney, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents also commented that in general, vague discussion about their child was unhelpful and some came away from parent-teacher meetings wondering if the teacher really knew their child (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000).

The place of students in the reporting process

Most of the literature on reporting to parents is focused on teachers providing information about the student to the parent (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Ohlhausen, et al., 1994; Savell, 1998). Reporting to parents has always had a focus on the student, but there is a growing awareness of the need for schools to reassess ways they communicate information about progress and achievement to both parents and students. If reporting is about sharing information about student progress and achievement, then arguably the most important person to ensure is informed is the student. Involving students in the reporting process means opportunity is created for students to engage with information about their progress and achievement. Students can then become part of the process of interpreting the information and planning for future learning with their teacher, supported by their parents.

In some instances, students do attend traditional parent-teacher interviews. Cuttance and Stokes (2000) described how students involved in three-way interviews were able to discuss their reports with parents before attending the meeting. The strengths and weaknesses of the child's learning was the focus of the interview, and teachers, parents, and students knew what types of things were to be discussed (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Hargreaves, et al., 2002). Some teachers and parents believe this assessment activity should be an integral part of learning, and invite students to be part of the discussion. It is however, more common for students not to attend the meeting and to discuss their reports with their parents at another time. According to parents the quality of the time spent sharing school reports is variable. Some parents feel that having their child present can act as a constraint and inhibit discussion, while in other situations, parents favour their child being present for part of the time (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000).

Student-led conferences

To create a system of reporting that gives the student a voice, that deepens understanding, improves communication about learning between parents and students, and enhances understanding of progress and achievement is needed. In doing this, a consistent, clear, coherent system to communicate information about assessment, through students to parents, can evolve, a system that traditional parent-teacher interviews and other formal and informal meetings do in less systematic and consistent ways.

Student-led conferences are a system of reporting to parents that is led by students. Teachers and students prepare a portfolio of work samples from a range of curriculum areas. The

student-led conferences typically have three phases: the preparation, the actual conference, and an evaluation component.

The preparation, as described by Hackmann (1997), involves teachers instructing students on how to lead a conference, helping the student prepare and collate information to be shared with parents, and clarifying with students how to explain or interpret academic information to be shared. Students practice the skills of introducing their parent(s) to the teacher, preparing an agenda, articulating the process by which work samples were achieved, and presenting information about their learning. Students send invitations to their parents inviting them to their conference.

During the conference, students talk to their parents about their learning and engage in dialogue about their progress and achievement in the different curriculum areas. To explore ways in which future goals could be supported (both at school and at home), is an aspect of the conference that is promoted as a way parents can become more involved and make a difference to their child's progress and achievement in learning. Multiple forms of student progress and achievement through written, numerical, oral, visual, and technological or dramatic media, collected into a portfolio of activity and achievement, would showcase students' diverse skills and accomplishments.

Because the definition of a portfolio is different in different contexts, the effectiveness of the student-led conference process in providing accurate and valid information can be questioned. To give student-led conferences rigor, ways to combine teacher feedback with the students' own reflections upon their progress and achievement, in each curriculum area would need to be developed—for example, information about student achievement compared to national benchmarks and exemplars.

There is limited literature on student-led conferences. Bailey and Guskey (2001) provided a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of student-led conferences, the implementation process, and how to gather feedback from participants. Bradsford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) suggest school environments need to be learning-centred, knowledge-centred and assessment-centred before there can be successful implementation of student-led conferences. Other researchers provide descriptive accounts of the process of moving from traditional parent-teacher interviews, to an alternative system of reporting to parents that predominantly focus on students in the middle school years (Borba & Olvera, 2001; Faulkner & Cook, 2009;

Goodman, 2008; Hackmann, 1997; Kinney, 2008; Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Little & Allen, 1989; Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004).

Schools which use student-led conferences have similar goals they want to achieve. These involve encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning; teaching students to self evaluate; improving organisation; oral language skills and confidence; encouraging dialogue between students, teachers, and parents; and improving parent attendance at conferences. It is a reporting method aligned with a philosophy of teaching and learning that involves students developing ownership of and responsibility for their learning (Absolum, et al., 2009; Conderman, Ikan, & Hatcher, 2000; Goodman, 2008; Hattie, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2007; Monroe, 2009).

These research findings suggest student-led conferences have a positive influence on student ownership of learning, and lead to an increase in parent attendance and participation in reporting (Borba & Olvera, 2001; Becker, Nakagawa, & Corwin, 1997; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Faulkner & Cook, 2009; Goodman, 2008; Kinney, 2008; Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004; Tholdander, 2011). Hiatt-Michael (2001) highlighted the need to address the issue of decreasing parent participation in parent-teacher conferences from the early grades to the middle school and suggested there were few school structures that encouraged the students to take responsibility for their own learning. Tholander (2009) found even though students had led conferences about their learning and conversations were more open, planning for, and participation in, conferences had been dominated by teachers resulting in less participation in discussion by parents.

A district-wide project in Anchorage, Alaska (Goodman, 2008), involving 7,000 middle school students has shown student-led conferences improved parent attendance rates across many schools. In this project resources have been created to support district-wide teacher training and to further develop and define the role of the teacher to improve the quality of conferences over time. Tuinstra and Hiatt-Michael (2004) reviewed four middle schools that had used student-led conferences for at least two years. Findings linked the change to student-led conferences to increased student responsibility, higher academic success and decline in discipline problems. All schools in the study emphasised the need for staff development and the on-going challenges of streamlining paperwork and the time involved in preparation for the conference event.

Research shows parental feedback about student-led conferences is positive in many instances (Borba & Olvera, 2001; Fox, 2006; Goodman, 2008; Hackmann, 1997; Stiggins, 1999) As well as improving parents' understanding of how their child learns researchers suggest they develop more effective partnerships with parents, in some instances they appear to diffuse parent-teacher conflicts and foster more caring communities (Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004). In the literature there is also evidence that some parents have found they were unprepared for student-led conferences. Several studies showed parents found student-led conferences were an unsuitable forum for addressing sensitive issues. At the end of the conference process, some parents still wanted additional information from their child's teacher (Black, 2005; Faulkner & Cook, 2009; Fox, 2006; Goodman, 2008; Le Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Taylor, 2003).

Absolum et al. (2009), suggested that while student-led conferences have the potential to improve reporting to parents and enhance communication across all stake-holders, there needs to be substantial planning and capacity building of teachers, students, and parents. If the purpose of reporting is to provide quality information through students to parents about progress, learning, and achievement, and in the process empower students and create opportunities for parents to be active participants in the reporting process, this needs to be communicated to all participants (Absolum, et al., 2009; Fox, 2006; Goodman, 2008; Tuinstra and Hiatt-Michael, 2004). Student-led conferences are a means by which schools can shift from a one-way flow of information, to a reciprocal sharing of quality information in which students and parents are actively involved in the process of sharing their knowledge and understanding. Absolum et al. (2009) stated:

Together with paper-based tools and web technologies, student-led conferences can improve the ease and quality of information exchange. An increasing number of schools have the capacity to provide parents with rich evidence of student learning on an everyday basis along with commentary (for example, via webinars). As the technology improves and the number of homes with the resources to interact in this way increases, so do opportunities for building valuable partnerships. (p. 29)

In summary, literature on reporting has identified many of the issues present in current reporting methods used by schools. How to address the issues, while also communicating quality information about students' learning with clarity, to students and parents is the challenge. Guskey (1994) suggests "Nothing less than clear thinking, careful planning and excellent communication skills, and an overriding concern for the well-being of students

[combined with] ... current knowledge on effective practice” is needed to improve the effectiveness of current reporting practices. If we are to improve the quality of reporting in schools we need to begin with an understanding of the extent to which they are effective.

The key question this study looks to address is: *To what extent are student-led conferences effective as a reporting method?*

Because the quality and type of information used in reporting has such a large influence on its effectiveness, the next section of this review examines literature on assessment. If teachers are to further develop students’ assessment capabilities, there is a need to understand the complexity of assessment as it relates to both effective reporting practices and as it relates to effective teaching practice. In the next section assessment is discussed under these two headings.

Assessment

Assessment and reporting

If a reporting system is to be a useful, accurate, specific statement about achievement, it is important that schools are clear about what it is they want to report to parents. The type of information schools gather about student achievement, how it is analysed to ensure there is consistency against defined, national benchmarks, and the process of reporting being as transparent as possible are issues that need to be addressed. Good assessment has to occur before good reporting can take place.

When examining literature on assessment policy, inconsistencies between views held by educational policy makers, teachers, and the wider public are identified (Hargreaves, et al., 2002; Nuttall, 1994). Ramirez (1999) identified assessment-driven reform as a policy approach that can be traced back to the origins of public education. Underpinning standards and assessment driven reform is the assumption that educational change and improved student learning are the responsibility of an external authority with the power to judge quality, exercise control, and order compliance. Assessment data that is standardised, comparable, and can be applied consistently to large populations, are ways this group see evidence of learning being validated (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 1992, January 29). Harlen (2005) argued that the two main purposes of reporting are for helping learning and summarising learning. Summative assessment involves grading for record keeping, informing programming, and reporting to students and parents. Harlen maintains that when information about student achievement is used for decisions that are important, not just to the

individual, but to the teachers and school, that “results become ‘high stakes’. This puts pressure on teachers, which impacts not only on the learning experiences of students but also on the nature of assessment itself” (p. 208).

Critics of national educational goals that promote state level academic standards, claim this type of assessment does not improve student achievement (Black & William, 1998a, 1998b; Broadfoot, et al., 1990; Crooks, 1988; Stiggins, 1999). Instead, findings show teachers focus on the content of the tests, teaching to the tests, training students in answers to specific types of questions, and adopting transmission styles of teaching. Black (2000) reports common findings from research on classroom assessment practice show:

...assessments encourage rote and superficial learning, that in questions that teachers use they are not critical about what was being assessed, and that in the use of assessment the grading function is over-emphasized and the learning function under-emphasized. Such studies indicate the weak development of formative assessment is due in part to the dominance of external testing... (p. 408)

Because tests are designed to be objective and need to be reliable in terms of marking, what is assessed is then reduced to what can be marked with reliability, rather than what should be taught. Assessment that is reliable, (i.e. reproducible), so as to be a good predictor of current and past success, fair, and reflect learning, is complex and problematic (Black, 2000).

One commonly used method is to report grades from various tests. Hall (1990) argued that grades were appropriate indicators of progress, and could motivate students, prepare students for real life in a competitive world, provide a method for comparing students, predict future success, and that students and parents liked them. Others have argued that grades dehumanise students, promote extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation, promote competition, do not document the progress of the student because of their normative nature, focus on one aspect of the student only, and adversely affect teaching methods (Hargreaves, et al., 2000). Test anxiety and the affect of low scores on self-esteem and students’ perceptions of themselves as learners can result in students becoming disengaged and losing hope (Harlen & Deakin, 2002). Where there is a reliance on the results of ‘high stakes’ tests and test results, scores will improve over time as teachers learn how to drill students to meet its demands (Linn, 1994). Teachers can end up ‘teaching to the test’ and there can be apparent improvement without any real gains in learning. Assessment that relies on tests may not necessarily reflect the content and aims of the subject and it is argued that some of the

important aims of education, the values and understandings of the ways children develop, cannot be assessed by external exams (Broadfoot, et al., 1990; Osborn, McNess, Broadfoot, Pollard, & Tiggs, 2000).

Hargreaves et al., (2002) identified global issues that also impact upon the assessment debate. Because of the world-wide explosion of information and knowledge, it is no longer clear what is essential to teach. School communities are growing more culturally diverse and the complexity of meeting the needs of changing populations has led schools to embrace diverse teaching and learning styles. New curriculum initiatives have looked to focus on process-based, integrated curriculum, rather than a content-based, specialised curriculum. In Ontario, Canada, the government in the early 1990s developed assessment policies and alternative assessment practices to measure both the process and product of integrated curriculum learning. With the change of government in 1996, government policy changed, shifting to a focus on standardised testing traditions like the governments of the United States, England, and Australia (Hargreaves, et al., 2002; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000). If policy makers influencing government policy and legislation cannot agree on what constitutes effective learning (and therefore how to measure student learning and achievement), it follows that there will be difficulties arising when changing policies are interpreted, reinterpreted and assimilated into practice by schools and teachers.

In New Zealand, assessment reform has not followed the policies favoured by the United Kingdom (Key Stage Assessment) and the United States (No Child Left Behind). Instead there has been a focus on developing assessment approaches conducive to quality teaching and learning (Absolum, et al., 2009). In 2010, the Ministry of Education position paper on assessment stated:

When assessment is used as a process of learning, for learning – that is, to inform teaching and learning as a key component of quality teaching – its effective interaction with teaching and learning makes it a key contributor to improved student achievement. System-wide improvement is contingent on the effective collection and use of quality assessment information at all levels of the system – class, school, sector agencies. (p. 20)

To improve the validity of assessment information teachers have used to report to parents, the New Zealand Ministry of Education, over the last decade, has developed a number of initiatives designed to improve the quality and dependability of assessment, including tools

such as e-asTTLe, that can provide regular, dependable information about student progress and achievement and professional learning designed to build assessment capability. It is a system reliant on system-wide improvement, based on the “effective collection and use of quality assessment information at all levels of the system—classroom, school, sector agencies ... to inquire, decide, adapt and transform to improve student learning” (Ministry of Education, 2010a). New policy initiatives, focused on implementing national standards have highlighted the need to revisit assessment policy and practice, to better understand the complexities of assessment, both to inform teaching and learning and to inform parents about learning. Absolum et al. (2009), when considering how to best support practitioners to fulfil ministry policy around reporting, focused on what constitutes quality assessment information, how it should be collected and collated, in what form it should be communicated to stakeholders, and how it should be used to support learning. They and other researchers suggest that effective reporting is dependent on the assessment capacity of students, teachers, school leaders, and parents, and if assessment is not well understood it can be used in ways that are harmful to learning (Absolum, et al., 2009; Afflerbach & Sammons, 1991; Cangelosi, 1990; Chastain, 1990; Guskey, 1994). Absolum et al. (2009) stated:

What assessment information is gathered ... and how it is subsequently used profoundly affect student motivation and capacity to learn. If we get the conditions wrong—if we collect the wrong information in the wrong way for the wrong purposes—we will add to the number of students who disengage from learning and leave school with little to show for it. If we get the conditions right, the reverse will be true: achievement will increase and disparities decrease. Not only that, teachers will be enthused, parents and whanau will know how their children are doing and will have the confidence to support them and their learning, and boards, senior managers and central agencies will be able to base policy and resourcing decisions on sound information. (p. 5)

The use of performance based assessment, portfolios, video journals, and exhibitions, as alternative assessment tools that integrate learning, assessment, and student self-reflection on learning, has been supported in the literature (Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Ohlhausen & Ford, 1992; Stiggins, 1997). In order to implement this more complex, sophisticated alternative assessment, it is important that there are also valid and reliable measures developed (Torrance, 1995). Researchers have questioned the assumption that teachers will have the understanding and skill necessary to develop, implement and integrate a range of these forms

of quality assessment measures (Hargreaves, et al., 2000; Stiggins, 1991). Stiggins (1997) also questioned the amount of time, resource, professional development, and support, teachers have available to them to assist them to become more proficient in this form of assessment.

The importance of effectively communicating changes in assessment, between teachers, parents, and students, is essential if alternative assessment systems are to be a viable option for schools to use when reporting to parents. No matter the methods of assessment, teachers and parents need to develop a mutual understanding of expectations and how student achievement should be measured. Ways in which to communicate the changes in assessment to parents was another challenge identified by Hargreaves et al. (2002). In this research, the traditional report card became inconsistent when teachers changed their assessment practices. The school needed to revisit the assessment expectations of school and home and, with the community, develop a new understanding of learning, and its links to assessment.

'Assessment for Learning' teaching pedagogy

While large-scale, legislated assessment receives the most attention, many researchers claim it is classroom assessment that has the most impact on student learning (Absolum, et al., 2009; Black & William, 1998a, 1998b; Gipps, 1994; Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Researchers leading assessment reform to raise student achievement have shifted their focus from the data schools generate about student achievement, to a focus on schools analysing the data they have and setting targets for learning. Better understanding and knowledge of the processes that lead to learning in the classroom, through the practices of teachers, is seen to be an integral part of assessment reform (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, 1998b; Stigler & Hiebert, 1997). Strategies to promote higher standards of teaching, more powerful learning and more credible forms of public accountability have become favoured strategies to promote student achievement for all students (Black, 1998; Gipps, 1994; Murphy & Broadfoot, 1995).

Changes in classroom assessment represent major paradigm shifts in thinking about learning and teaching. In developing effective teaching practice, focused on embedding assessment in the learning process, teachers are required to become assessment literate. Teachers need to apply and integrate knowledge and skills related to curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical practice.

Because teachers intermittently practice the identified key components of class-based assessment in the course of their teaching, there is a widespread belief that they already do

them well. Black & Wiliam (1998b) refer to teachers' poor skills in formative assessment as "a poverty of practice". The dilemma for teachers is that professional development in assessment has not systemically taught principles of measurement, evidence, interpretation, and analysis of data to inform learning in pre-service or in-service training (Guskey, 1994; Stiggins, 2008).

To be 'assessment literate', teachers need to know more about constructing test questions, how to score essays, how to create rubrics, and interpret standardised test scores, to create an 'overall teacher judgement' about student progress and achievement (McMillan, 2000).

Teachers also need to be able to interpret statistical procedures and understand concepts such as percentiles, standard scores, norming, reliability, validity, and accuracy, in order to make meaning of data and then communicate their interpretation of results to students and parents (Shepard, 2000). Concepts such as criterion-referenced assessment, norm-referenced assessment, standards-based assessment, valued-added, and absolute standards, both influence data interpretation and add to the complexity of assessment. This is further complicated by the knowledge that all classroom and standardised assessment contain errors and especially where assessment has "high-stakes" accountability "it is critical all educators understand concepts like standard error of measurement, coefficients, confidence intervals, and standard setting" (McMillan, 2000).

Researchers, such as Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b), Harlen (2005), Marzano, Pickering, and McTighe (1993), and the Ministry of Education (2010a) have described class-based 'Assessment for Learning' strategies that teachers need to focus on in order to raise student achievement. These include: teachers explicitly stating goals and aims of a lesson; modelling or providing exemplars of successful work; clearly stating tasks and the process of learning; providing timely, descriptive feedback during the learning process; adjusting instruction as needed; and ensuring students reflect upon their learning and the extent to which they have achieved success (Black & William, 1998b; Stiggins, 2002). Through these strategies, assessment becomes an integral part of class-based teaching and learning, rather than an unrelated means by which to audit learning. A focus on 'Assessment for Learning' teaching pedagogy also has a positive impact on students' self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, and enjoyment of learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black & William, 1998a; Hattie, 2003a; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Central to this pedagogy is the quality of teacher-student relationships. Hattie (2009) stated:

Building relationships with students implies agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the child brings to the class (from home, culture, peers), and allowing the experiences of the child to be recognised in the classroom. Further, developing relationships requires skill by the teacher—such as the skills of listening, empathy, caring, and having positive regard for others. (p. 118).

Self and peer assessment is considered an essential component of class-based assessment (Black, 1998). Self-assessment can only occur if students have a sufficiently clear picture of the learning goal, their present position, and some understanding of the way to close the gap between the two. The Assessment Reform Group (1999) stated:

Current thinking about learning acknowledges that learners must ultimately be responsible for their learning since no-one else can do it for them. Thus, assessment for learning must involve pupils, so as to provide them with information about how well they are doing and guide their subsequent efforts. Much of this information will come as feedback from the teacher, but some will be through their direct involvement in assessing their own work. The awareness of learning, and ability of learners to direct it for themselves is of increasing importance in the context of encouraging lifelong learning. (p. 7).

Hargreaves et al. (2002) reported that teachers valued the process of self assessment and sharing of assessment targets with other students and themselves more as students took ownership of their learning. As students became more confident in their ability to self assess, they began devising and applying evaluation criteria to their work independent of the teacher. Teachers found their assessment role became that of a collaborator, helping students understand their learning and achievement.

To embrace student-led conferences as an alternative reporting method would, in theory, not be problematic if through strategic planning, a school embarks upon ‘Assessment for Learning’ professional development with teachers. Student-led conferences would represent a whole school alignment of assessment for better learning, strategic intent, professional development, and classroom pedagogy. Assessment literate teachers would teach in ways that develop students to be fully informed about all aspects of their learning.

It could be argued that the process of preparing for, and participating in student-led conferences, could provide teachers with an additional, external purpose to focus to further develop their class-based assessment practices. The second question this study looks to

address is: *To what extent does the introduction of student-led conferences change teachers' practice?*

Student involvement in assessment and reporting is a concept that represents a shift away from traditional teaching and reporting practices. Having discussed the potential impact student-led conferences could have on teaching practices, the extent to which student-led conferences could influence students' development as learners is the next focus for consideration in this literature review.

'Student voice' in assessment and reporting

While most decisions about assessment in the past have been made on behalf of students, to involve students in assessment and reporting looks to provide clarity to students about "where they are going, how they are going and where they might go to next" in their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). One of the premises upon which student-led conferences is based, is the notion that preparing for and conducting conferences about learning, as well as developing students as "assessors of their own learning" will also increase student motivation, confidence, involvement in, and understanding of learning. Absolum et al. (2009) suggested "All our young people should be educated in ways that develop their capability to assess their own learning" (p. 5).

Traditionally, most decisions about assessment have been made by adults on behalf of students, and information about assessment and achievement has not always been shared with students. Absolum et al. (2009) stated that assessment should be a core aspect of students' learning in order to meet students' individual learning needs. When students develop their assessment capabilities, learning becomes more real and relevant and as they 'learn to learn' they take more ownership of the decisions they make. Furthermore, as long as students have assessment done to them, and they see no benefits, their engagement will remain passive. Types of involvement in assessment could include setting challenging learning goals; accessing, interpreting and using evidence; using peer and self-assessment strategies to make judgements about their learning; developing strategies to positively engage with learning; integrating new learning with what has gone before; and demonstrating or using new knowledge in a range of contexts (Absolum, et al., 2009; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Stiggins, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and William (2004) described effective ways to involve students in class-based and summative assessment. They included: questioning, feedback by

marking, student peer and self-assessment, reviewing past work to prepare for tests, getting students to set test questions, to devise marking schemes and to involve students in the marking of each other's tests. In this way, students' understanding of the assessment process was developed and the focus of assessment shifted to 'improvement' in learning. Stiggins (2008) suggested that students have always assessed themselves as learners, and do so continuously, making decisions about learning based on internal thinking such as "Can I learn this or am I just too dense?", "Is the learning worth the energy I will have to expend to attain it?" and "Is trying worth the risk that I might fail ... again... in public?" To ensure students stay engaged, making positive decisions, students need to understand what good work looks like, to learn how to self-assess to find the points of difference and then they need help to close the gap between the two.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education Paper: Assessment (2010) states "Assessment-capable students are more likely to take ownership of their own learning and become independent learners. It is important that all students build their assessment capability and develop into autonomous, self-regulated, life-long learners" (p. 33). Student-led conferences provide an authentic purpose for the development of assessment-capable students.

Over a series of school-based longitudinal studies, Eccles (1983) and Wigfield (1994) investigated the links between students' self-perceptions of their ability and expectancy for success. They found self-perceptions and expectancy to be the strongest predictors of future learning. These findings have been further validated by Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis research on what makes a difference to student achievement, where it was found that student self-reporting was the most accurate indicator of success in learning. The process of student-led conferences involves students reflecting upon their work, their goals, and how well they have met given success criteria. It can also be seen as a process in which students' self-perceptions are developed in a systematic way, helping students get an accurate picture of their competence. That competence and skills will continue to grow and develop are important concepts students need to internalise, in order for their expectations for future success to remain positive.

Teachers want students to value the academic domain (Steele, 1988; Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991). Understanding of the effect of motivation from different domains, and how to make relevant, meaningful connections between these and academic learning is needed if student motivation is to be enhanced by teachers. The structure of student-led conferences, showing students' competence in a range of domains, could assist students in making these

connections. During the process of preparing the conference, students (with their teachers), could explore the value they place on effort, persistence, and competence across different domains. If such connections could be made explicit, systematically evaluated, compared, and connected to future goals through student-led conferences, student motivation in the academic domain could be enhanced.

Confidence, arguably, is a positive outcome of motivation and effort that results in success. If confidence comes from the experience of past success, it is essential students are supported to take risks in all domains of learning. Black and William's (1998b) research suggested that 'Assessment for Learning' teaching strategies were effective in supporting students to become more confident learners because they got to watch themselves succeeding in learning. Stiggins (2002) claimed confidence leads to students continuing to try, achieve more, and in the process develop understanding of what it means to be in charge of their learning. The anti-thesis of this is the intimidation of accountability that results in anxiety in students, which inhibits learning and can lead to hopelessness and despair. Students' emotional response to assessment will determine what they do with assessment information and the belief that they can succeed in learning is paramount (Stiggins, 2008).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) described four levels of feedback: about the task, the process, self-regulation, and personal evaluations. Their research found that when students move from feedback about the task, to the process and understandings needed to become self-regulatory, students gain confidence and invest more effort into learning. Student-led conferences require students to not only understand tasks, but the process of learning, and the outcomes of that learning.

The quality of student engagement has been a more recent focus for researchers. A distinction has been made between learning goals (sometimes referred to as "mastery" or "task" goals) and performance goals (referred to as "ego" goals). Learning goals involve students developing skills and understanding so as to achieve mastery in their learning. Performance goals, in contrast, see students focus on the getting a good grade, achieving public recognition for their efforts, looking smart, or avoiding looking incompetent. Performance goals are associated with extrinsic motivation because the goal is not related to the task itself. Where students share challenging goals of learning, adopt self-assessment, and evaluation strategies, self-efficacy results in students becoming more focused on mastery of learning and understanding of their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Characteristics of classrooms that foster mastery goals were identified by Ames and Archer (1988). Teachers who fostered mastery goals focused on improvement and progress, effort learning and working hard on challenging tasks, how students were learning rather than how students performed, with errors and mistakes being part of the process of learning. Students reported engaging in learning strategies such as planning, organising materials, and setting goals. Students in classrooms supporting mastery goals experienced greater emotional involvement and pleasure in their work.

Student-led conferences have the potential to foster both mastery and performance motivation goals. The process of preparing for a performance could see students working towards looking smart, avoiding looking incompetent, and focusing on the external feedback they receive, before, and during the conference. However, the content of the student-led conference is also about the mastery of learning. Through the process of the conference, students discuss their goals, the process of learning, progress they have made, and future goals. Students and parents are provided with an opportunity to celebrate success and explore specific learning difficulties in a problem-solving context.

‘Student voice’ in the learning process is dependent on the extent to which teachers allow students to be part of the decision-making processes in class and the extent to which they seek, and are responsive to, feedback from students. If student self-reporting is the most significant indicator of student achievement (Hattie, 2009), there is much to be gained from developing new types of class-based partnership in learning that result in the development of students as effective “assessors of their learning”, who are motivated and confident because of the knowledge and understanding they have of their learning, and themselves as learners. The third question this study looks to answer is: *To what extent does the introduction of student-led conferences impact on the development of student competencies in reporting?*

In the final section of this review, literature on parental participation is examined.

Understanding of the issues inherent in traditional home-school partnerships will provide a basis from which to consider how student-led conferences could empower parents, as genuine partners in the process of learning.

Parental participation in education

Integral to the concept of the student-led conference as an assessment process, is the desire to involve parents in their children’s education. Parental involvement is a term used to describe the various processes of parental and community input to schooling (Cuttance & Stokes,

2000). Research findings show parental encouragement and support for learning activities at home, and parental involvement in schools and classrooms, have a positive impact on children's learning (Bastiani, 1993; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 1983, 1987, 1995; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988).

Historically, communication between parents and teachers has been one way—school to home (Beattie, 1995). The concept of partnership has developed as governments in Western countries have sought to encourage increased citizen participation in education (Beattie, 1995; Savell, 1998). Harris and Goodall (2007), suggested that parental involvement is not the same as parental engagement and that engagement implies that parents are an essential part of the learning process that moves beyond being involved in school life to being engaged in learning.

In New Zealand, the collaborative model of school management was adopted as part of New Zealand's *Tomorrow's Schools* policy reform in 1989. A major focus of this model was the development of a strategic partnership between parents and teachers. While some aspects of parental involvement have become formalised through the establishment of Boards of Trustees (elected parental governance bodies), parental involvement that both results in improved academic achievement of students and empowers parents is an under-developed area within the *Tomorrow's Schools* framework. Student-led conferences as a means to report on progress and achievement, while also providing parents 'a window' into their child's learning world, could be an assessment tool that meets these two purposes.

Current literature on partnerships and participation develops the themes of social democracy and student achievement separately, without examining how they are linked, or how effective home-school partnerships could be developed to combine the two themes (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Literature on social democracy is focused on social equality, the power relationships between the partners, barriers that inhibit successful relationships developing, and the development of partnerships that empower parents (Anderson, 1998; Cairney, 2000; Crosier, 1998; A. Edwards & Warin, 1999; Malan, 1999; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Other studies have focused on the involvement of parents as partners in the learning process, providing the basis for improving student achievement (Bastiani, 1993; Pugh, 1989; Tomlinson, 1991)). On the subject of partnerships, Bastiani (1987) stated:

Partnership is a term widely used throughout the education service, to cover a range of situations and circumstances. Its use, or over use, is more often than not uncritical, implying that it is highly desirable, unproblematic and easily attainable. (p. 103).

When considering the introduction of student-led conferences, both themes of student achievement and social democracy need to be considered. As an assessment tool for reporting progress and achievement, it is expected there would be improved student achievement as a result of introducing student-led conferences. Of more significance could be the impact of student-led conferences, as a method by which the roles, and therefore the power relationships, between teachers, students, and parents, are redefined. The nature of these changes could lead to a long-term, stronger, more collaborative and effective partnership between students, teachers, and parents.

When schools consider promoting parental involvement in their children's education, they need to be clear about the nature of that involvement, the process by which it could happen, and the desired outcomes. Parents (like teachers), want their children to succeed in their learning, but they along with researchers, do not necessarily have a concept of how to enhance this success. Edwards and Warin (1999) suggested that schools are not clear about what they want parents to contribute to a child's learning. In their research they found 20% of schools' rationalisation for parental involvement was about communicating what the school was trying to do, 10% was linked to developing the confidence of parents as educators, and 8% mentioned raising student self esteem. Edwards and Warin (1999) argued parents were being asked to assist in the delivery of an 'over-crowded' curriculum that stressed coverage rather than mastery. They suggested the under-lying beliefs of teachers were that parents need educating. Research by Harris and Goodall (2007) showed parents benefited from learning about strategies for assisting their children's learning at home, as well as capabilities needed to take on instructional and support roles in the school. Other activities that maximised parental engagement involved the development of skills in effective parenting, leadership, governance and decision-making.

Crosier (1998) defined the tension teachers have, between seeking to involve parents and controlling their interference or maintaining the professional boundary. Teachers wanted to 'bind' parents to activities that would support them and 'manage' them. Lightfoot (1978) believed that while the literature focuses on getting parents involved the real focus is how to 'change' parents to conform to school expectations. The aim of an ideal home-school partnership is to build a positive two-way relationship that is complementary in nature and

provides the environments conducive to students developing their learning potential. For this to happen, it is essential teachers examine their beliefs about 'good' parents, parents' roles in children's education, and the values of the school, in the context of the community in which they serve (Becker, et al., 1997; Crosier, 1998; Savell, 1998).

As well as addressing the assumptions teachers hold about parents, teachers need to understand that the process of involving parents in their child's education is about changing the nature of teacher-parent relationships. Mawson (1996) found many teachers perceived parents as a threat to their position. Where parental involvement increased from passive receipt of information to consultation with the teacher, teachers were found to be less secure (Bastiani, 1988; Ramsay, Harold, Hawk, Marriot, & Poskitt, 1992). This view can be linked to the findings of Casanova (2000), that suggested negative consequences of parental involvement could result in teachers being 'monitored', a minority of parents seizing power and dictating their preferences to the school, and other parents and controlling parents having a detrimental effect on their own and other children.

The literature also identifies parental concerns with teachers. Cullingford and Morrison (1999) described the relationship between parents and teachers as one of mutual fear. The reluctance of teachers to give information about their child's progress in relation to their age and class level and the school's reluctance to alert parents to children's difficulties early, are issues well documented in the research (Power & Clark, 2000; Savell, 1998). This reluctance has been linked to fears that parents would misuse the information, put undue pressure on their children as a result, and a belief that if students were achieving within a broad, normal band, there was no cause for concerns. Wylie and Smith (1995) found that when teachers found students having difficulties they either put the onus on themselves to help the child overcome the difficulty, or they lowered their expectations of the child, especially if the teacher had limited contact with the parents.

Teachers need to have an appreciation of unique conditions for learning that cannot be provided in a school context. Tizard and Hughes (1984) identify five factors that enhance learning in the home situation. They are: the range of activities that take place in the home, the common life experiences of the parents and children, the low parent to child ratio, embedded learning, and the quality of the relationship between the mother and child. Research by Fan (2001) and Ma (2001) showed parental aspirations had a significant impact on students' intrinsic motivation to succeed and self-efficacy. To be successful in developing the parental role in their child's education through student-led conferences, it is important

that teachers understand and value the unique knowledge and experience parents have of their child and the influence this can have on school-based learning.

Cuttance and Stokes (2000) defined characteristics of effective parent-teacher partnerships in education as the sharing of power, responsibility, and ownership, but with different roles, responsive dialogue characterised by 'give and take', shared aims and goals based on a common understanding of the educational needs of children, and commitment to joint action. If parental involvement is to be more than a one way linear process of informing or instructing parents it needs to be a 'mutually constructed set of expectations' (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The opportunity for teachers, parents, and students, to begin to engage in dialogue, based upon a shared power relationship such as that found in a student-led conference, could result in dialogue and commitment to action that improves student learning for a wide range of students.

Timperley and Robinson (2002) suggested that successful partnerships are more likely to occur where there are clearly defined tasks to meet specific goals which may be focused on student achievement, shared responsibilities, explicit processes, and mutually accountable partners. For schools to build successful learning partnerships with parents, it is important they are clear about why they want parents involved in student learning and how they are going to develop this involvement of parents in their child's education. The change needs to be managed so as not to be a threat to teachers' professionalism. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) suggested that when teachers have a high sense of efficacy (confidence in their programme and their students' ability to learn), they were more likely to involve parents in conversation to encourage them to tutor their children and to perceive parents as supportive. The introduction of the student-led conference, with its clearly defined task of parents engaging with students in dialogue about their learning, could improve parental understanding of the learning process and regard for teachers.

If schools believe parental involvement in their child's education is important for all students, it is essential there is an understanding of the ways schools can disadvantage students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Cairney (2000) argued that if learning is a socio-cultural practice, where there is a mismatch in culture between teachers and students, and structural inequity where schools unconsciously reinforce power relationships of ethnic groups present in the wider community, students from different cultural backgrounds are less likely to succeed. Student-led conferences help overcome the mismatch in culture between the teacher, student, and parent, by allowing the student to take responsibility for

conferencing with their parents. Students are the ones who walk between their own culture and that of the school. They are able to communicate information about their learning in their own language, in a way that is understood by their parents. The teacher is there to clarify, support, and offer further information if needed. Because parents are able to access the same information other parents receive, chances of their children succeeding is improved.

Eccles and Harold (1993) linked parents' efficacy to three variables: how confident parents were in helping their children with schoolwork, their view of their own competence as their children go to higher grades, and their belief in their ability to influence the school—should there be a problem. The process of student-led conferences requires parents to engage in dialogue with their children about their learning. School-based environment parents will bring a range of experiences, beliefs and expectations which will add to this. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) believe parents get involved because of the way they define their parental role as it relates to their child's education, their sense of efficacy, and its perceived influence on their child's educational outcomes and parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved.

Another influence on the levels of parental involvement in schools are students. Edwards and Alldred (2000) found students could be active or passive in mediating parental involvement. For instance, students did not always want, or need parental involvement in homework. If they thought parents were 'too busy' they would not pass on information from school—for example newsletters.

The process of student-led conferences, led by the students inviting their parents to the school, provides an opportunity for parents not only to participate in the event, but to re-interpret their educational role with their child, in the context of their beliefs, background and expectations. The teacher becomes the facilitator of the preparation for the conference, the student, the presenter of information negotiated with the teacher, and the parent is both an audience and active participant. Where problem-solving about learning between the parent and child occurs, it is likely that the majority of parents, from different cultural backgrounds will feel empowered to respond.

Epstein (1991), in a study of the effects on student achievement as a result of teachers' practices to involve parents, found that parents want teachers to tell them it is alright to help their children and to explain how to use time at home productively to work towards school goals. However this required teachers' leadership in organisation, evaluating, and continually

building their parental involvement practices. Harris and Goodall (2007) suggested that while schools have spent a good deal of time and energy getting parents to interact with the school, it is how they subsequently interact with learning that will have impact on student achievement. Parental engagement needs to be a priority in schools, “embedded in teaching and learning practices, so parents are seen as an integral part of the student learning process” (p. 68). Practices like student-led conferences can be built into school systems to enhance two-way processing of information and instruction without becoming ‘extra’ tasks for teachers.

When considering the introduction of student-led conferences as an assessment tool, it becomes important to define the task of reporting on progress and achievement and the parent’s initial role as an audience and participant. Parents have the potential to be powerful influences on student achievement. Student-led conferences are expected to change the nature of parental involvement in their child’s learning. While the initiative for this new reporting method may come from the school, feedback from teachers, students, and parents will be important to analyse and action. In this way, a new forum for learning partnerships to develop, between teachers, students, and parents, that is effective in working together to improve student achievement can be created.

In conclusion, this study, examining the *extent to which student-led conferences are effective as a reporting method* has been informed by literature in four areas: reporting, assessment, student voice and parental participation. Each area of research informs aspects of reporting and related areas of assessment, teaching, and learning, but also identifies tensions with current practices in schools, and gaps in the literature about alternative practices that raises student achievement. Student-led conferences as a reporting method has potential to positively impact on the nature of teaching and learning, the relationship between teachers, students and parents, and the development of genuine, valued home-school partnerships, focused on learning. The three questions that underpin this thesis are as follows:

- To what extent is the student-led conference reporting method effective as a reporting method for teachers, students, and parents?
- To what extent are student-led conferences effective in developing teachers’ ‘assessment literacy’ as it relates to class-based practice and reporting?
- To what extent does the process of implementing student-led conferences support the development of ‘Student Competencies’ in assessment and reporting?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methods used to investigate the three research questions of this study:

- To what extent is the student-led conference reporting method effective as a reporting method for teachers, students, and parents?
- To what extent are student-led conferences effective in developing teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' as it relates to class-based practice and reporting?
- To what extent does the process of implementing student-led conferences support the development of 'Student Competencies' in assessment and reporting?

The case study was chosen as a disciplined inquiry methodology to investigate the research questions above. The study was both descriptive and explanatory, in that its aim was to both describe what happened during the implementation of student-led conferences and explain what happened as a result. It was exploratory in that the research also sought to understand the extent to which teachers, students, and parents found student-led conferences effective as a reporting system.

Through participant-observation, the researcher was in a position to manipulate the environment as student-led conferences were introduced and implemented within a school, but the outcomes were determined by the groups of people involved. Because of the type of research questions framed, the naturalistic contemporary setting, and the degree of control the researcher had over the outcome of the implementation process, the research strategy best suited to this study was the case study.

The chapter is divided into nine sections. Included is a description of the research design, the participants, data collection methods, sources of evidence, analytical frameworks, data analysis, ethical considerations, methodological constraints, and generalisability.

Section 1: Research design

Student-led conferences redefine the traditional roles of teachers, students and parents. Because of this, the study was designed to explore the extent to which the introduction of student-led conferences changes the way knowledge about learning is communicated, and acted upon, by each group involved. Questions investigated were as follows:

- To what extent is the student-led conference effective in reporting information about student progress and achievement that is understood by Year 3–6 students, their teachers, and their parents?
- To what extent is the student-led conference effective in focusing teachers of Year 3–6 students, on class-based assessment strategies that promote a deeper understanding of assessment, which is critical for the preparation of students to conduct student-led conferences?
- To what extent does the process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences lead to Year 3–6 students feeling more knowledgeable, involved, motivated, and confident about their learning?
- To what extent do parents develop understanding of their child’s progress and achievement as a result of the student-led conference?
- To what extent are student-led conferences effective in assisting parents of Year 3–6 students in their understanding of their child’s learning and ways in which they can support them?
- What are possible explanations for why differential outcomes of student-led conferences occur?

The design selected to investigate the questions was an embedded multiple-case study.

Within the case study three perspectives were sought. They included evidence from parents of students of Year 3–6, evidence from teachers of students of Year 3–6, and evidence from students of Year 3–6.

The process of introducing and evaluating student-led conferences was replicated in two schools. Replication was used to ascertain the extent to which findings in different school contexts differed. If conclusions reached were similar, the generalisability of findings would be able to be expanded and external validity strengthened. If conclusions from the second school were different from the first, hypothesised results would support a theoretical replication.

Case study research, like other forms of research, needs to have construct validity, reliability, internal validity, and external validity. Within the multiple-case study design construct, validity needs to be built into the design using multiple sources of evidence, such as participant observation, interviews, archival records, physical artefacts, and documentation

(Yin, 2003, p. 86). As a researcher, it is essential to state the specific types of changes that are to be studied as they relate to the original objectives of the study. Once the measures have been selected, they need to be justified as measures that reflect the types of change that have been selected. From these complementary sources, a case study database is set up to analyse the information collated. As a result, a chain of evidence is created and developed.

Using multiple sources of evidence, the researcher can triangulate the data to develop converging lines of inquiry that measure the same phenomenon in different ways. Patton (1987), describes four types of triangulation: of data sources (data triangulation), of different evaluators (investigator triangulation), of perspectives to the same data set (theory triangulation), and of methods (methodological triangulation). It is by using all of the above that construct validity will be addressed. In this study, data triangulation was utilised by collecting data from a variety of sources, including teachers, students, and parents.

Methodological triangulation was established through the use of different research methods. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Methodological triangulation was established by using the same data collection methods in three different phases of each case study to collect the same type of information.

Reliability is the extent to which the research process is made transparent. It indicates consistency and stability of findings over time, across researchers, and across methods. Reliability within a research design is created by the development of a case study protocol and a case study database to organise and analyse empirical data. Consistency across time, places, procedures, and researchers is what makes the interpretations from research reliable. The methods and procedures used in this study have been described in detail, including the context and social setting of the research, to make each stage of the research process explicit. Limitations linked to methodology have also been identified.

Researchers are able to establish their objectivity against bias further, by stating explicitly their role and status, how they interact with the subjects, context and data, and by keeping a provisional running record of analysis and interpretation. Areas of uncertainty, limitations of categories, and discarded data need to be identified and rival evidence documented. When conclusions can be checked with the participants for accuracy, authenticity of data can be established. As a participant-observer in the proposed research study, it was important as a researcher that, in addition to the above, personal values, beliefs, and biases were consciously considered, and how interactions with the subjects, context, and data were managed.

Categorisation and conceptualisation process in this study needed to be explicit, so conclusions could be clearly linked to data. In this study three conceptual frameworks were developed to assist in the analysis of data gathered. Data was analysed to examine shifts in beliefs and consequences of practice of participants.

Consistency and stability of findings over time, across researchers and across methods were addressed in several ways. Inter-rater reliability was established to verify that results could be replicated across researchers, and were used in this study where evaluative judgements were being made. Because multiple field workers were used for data collection, protocols were developed. Questionnaires were piloted by groups of students, teachers, and parents respectively.

Internal validity of a research design is examined through data analysis. Through the process of analysis, trends and patterns from each type of information is expected to emerge that does, or does not match the predictions made by the researcher. If the patterns do match the predicted patterns, the internal validity of the research is strengthened. Where patterns do not show the outcomes expected, independent variables are used to establish possible rival explanations, which in turn, support the original propositions made. In the current study, evidence from documentation, interviews, questionnaires, and physical artefacts was analysed for trends and patterns that either matched the propositions stated, supported a rival theory, or the development of a newer theory.

In a similar way to pattern matching, internal validity can be addressed by analysing the data to build an explanation about the case and make causal links between the phenomenon and the empirical data. Yin (2003) described explanation building as:

beginning with a theoretical statement, comparing the findings of an initial case against the statement or proposition, revising the statement, comparing other details of the case against the revision, comparing the revision of facts against a second, third or more cases and repeating this process as many times as is needed. (p. 121)

Data from the first case study was used to revise and refine the original theoretical definition of student-led conferences, so it was more explicitly aligned with the criteria for an effective student-led conference. Refinements in Case Study 2 included consideration of the context of the second school in which student-led conferences were being implemented, and how the contexts impacted upon the effectiveness of student-led conferences from students', teachers', and parents' perspectives in both case studies.

When analysing the outcomes of the student-led conferences in each case study, another aspect for consideration identified was the difference between students, teachers, and parents' beliefs in each school context. Through teachers and students working together, the ultimate outcome would be every student effectively conducting a student-led conference, and in the process, sharing information about the process of learning, their progress and achievement in a way that is clearly communicated to their parents and that through this process parents engage in dialogue, with their children, about their learning. Differences within and across the parent communities in each school were expected to influence the findings in each case study. When examining the empirical data for causal links that could explain outcomes different from, or similar to the initial propositions, rival theories were considered.

Student-led conferences were planned for and implemented over a timeframe of 6 months in each case study school to coincide with schools' annual mid-year reporting timeframes.

Stake (2000) argued that the value of the case study is the in-depth understanding of what is important about the particular case, and that when the commitment to generalise or theorise overrides the focus on important features of the case study, the value of the case study is undermined. Yin (2003) suggested that, when using a multiple-case study design, analytic generalisation should be the method by which results are generalised. Analytic generalisation is where "a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study" (Yin, 2003, p. 32). If the results of both cases are shown to support the same theory, replication can be claimed. If rival theories can be discounted by the results, the credibility of the study is strengthened further.

Section 2: Participants

The next section of this chapter provides an overview of participants in the study.

The schools

The two schools chosen for this study were both contributing, multi-cultural primary schools in Auckland, New Zealand. Case Study 1 school had a student population of 530 students, and the Case Study 2 school had a student population of 320 students.

The schools were chosen because they both had completed a two-year 'Assessment for Learning' Ministry of Education professional development contract prior to the study. The Case Study 1 school had completed the contract five years earlier, while the Case Study 2 school had completed the two-year contract in the previous year. Both schools were introduced to student-led conferences for the first time as part of this study. The schools'

socio-economic decile ratings were 3 and 5 respectively, and in both schools the majority of students were of Maori, Pacific Island, or Asian descent.

Senior leaders in both schools were given introductory information and informed consent forms that were signed by the Board of Trustees, the principal, teachers, and parents. Parents were also asked to sign consent forms on behalf of their children. Initial meetings with senior leaders and Board of Trustees members in each school provided opportunities to discuss the proposed research. Ways the study could be linked to schools' professional development, assessment, and reporting systems were outlined and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Board of Trustees in each school, along with teacher and parent participants.

Researcher's position

In the first Case Study school, the researcher knew the principal as a fellow colleague. A senior teacher in the school was allocated as a liaison person for this project by the principal. This teacher oversaw the distribution and collection of student and parent questionnaires and timetables for semi-structured interviews with teachers and selected students at each stage of the study. The researcher organised the timetable of semi-structured interviews with parents at the beginning and end of the study.

In this study, the researcher led five professional development staff meetings with teachers in the school as part of the preparation for student-led conferences and conducted the initial teacher semi-structured interviews. Two trained field-workers collected the majority of the qualitative data at each stage of the study.

In the second Case Study school, the researcher was also the principal of the school. Because of this, one of the researcher's supervisors introduced the study to teachers at a staff meeting and provided opportunity for teachers to ask questions without the researcher being present. It was emphasised teachers did not have to participate in the study and if they did, they could withdraw at any time during the study. Two of seven teachers in Case Study 2 School chose not to participate in the study.

To further minimise the impact of the principal as researcher in Case Study 2 an administrator was employed to assist with administration, liaise with participants and to oversee the collection of data at each stage of the study. Field workers collected all data from teachers, students and parents. The researcher conducted four of five professional development sessions with teachers, as had been done in Case Study 1. The last professional

development session, focused on ‘What if’ scenarios, was led by a senior teacher from a school that had introduced student-led conferences, so teachers in Case Study 2 school could ask questions and discuss possible issues without constraint.

Teachers, students, and parents

The design of the study was constructed to gather different types of data from different groups, within each group of teachers, students, and parents. It was decided to focus on Year 3–6 students in a school population because of the difficulties that could be predicted in getting a variety of reliable, accurate data from younger students. Also, by Year 3, students had been at school for two years and so, in most instances, their parents have experience of the current school reporting system and a basis for comparison between this and the alternative reporting system that used student-led conferences.

There were eleven Year 3–6 teachers in Case Study 1. Seven teachers completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of the study. Four teachers volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews in each phase of the study. These teachers were asked to identify students in their classes, of different gender, ethnicity and of mixed academic ability, whose parents would consider being part of the study. The parents of six students were approached by the researcher and agreed that they and their children would participate in semi-structured interviews at different phases of the study. Two of the four teachers participating in interviews had provisional registration, having taught for less than two years. These two teachers both taught Year 3 and 4 students. The other two teachers being interviewed taught Year 5 and 6 students and had both taught for more than five years.

Six students, three in Year 3 and 4 and three in Year 5 and 6, were interviewed at the beginning of the study, before the student-led conference, and after student-led conferences had taken place. A second source of information was provided by a second group of students, made up of all Year 3–6 students in the school. These students completed questionnaires at the beginning of the study and again after the student-led conference event.

The parents of the six interviewed students made up the first parent group in Case Study 1. Initially approached by their child’s teacher, then by the researcher, these parents agreed to be interviewed twice in the study, once at the beginning and again after the student-led conference event. A second source of information from parents came from a second group of parents, made up of all Year 3–6 parents in the school. This group also completed questionnaires at the beginning of the study and after the student-led conference event. The

return rate for parent questionnaires was 57% for the initial questionnaire and 45% for the post-conference questionnaire.

In Case Study 2, all Year 3–6 teachers were invited to participate in the study. Five of seven teachers agreed to take part. As in Case Study 1, teachers were asked to identify students in their classes, of different gender and ethnicity and of mixed academic ability, whose parents would consider being part of the study. Parents of fourteen students were approached and agreed that they and their children would participate in semi-structured interviews at different phases of the study. Questionnaires completed by all Year 3–6 students and their parents were a second source of data collected at the beginning and end of the study.

The five teachers of Year 3–6 students were interviewed at three stages during the study, at the beginning, prior to, and after the student-led conference event. Two of the teachers had provisional registration, having taught for less than two years. These two teachers both taught Year 3 and 4 students. The other three teachers had all taught for more than five years. One of these teachers had a Year 3 and 4 class and the other two teachers taught Year 5 and 6.

In Case Study 2, fourteen students, eight in Year 3 and 4 and six in Year 5 and 6, agreed to be interviewed. All students were in the classes of one of the five teachers who had agreed to be interviewed at different stages of the study. Initially, names of students were put forward by teachers. As in Case Study 1, teachers had been asked to identify students with a range of academic capabilities, different genders, and from different ethnic backgrounds, whose parents they thought would agree to be part of the study. All of the fourteen students were interviewed at the beginning of the study, pre-conference, and post-conference. A second source of information was provided by a second group of students, made up of all Year 3–6 students in the school. These students completed questionnaires at the beginning of the study and again after the student-led conference event.

The parents of the fourteen interviewed students made up the first parent group in Case Study 2. Initially approached by their child's teacher, then by a field worker, these parents agreed to be interviewed twice in the study, once at the beginning and again after the student-led conference. A second source of information from parents came from a second group of parents, made up of all Year 3–6 parents in the school who completed questionnaires at the beginning of the study and after the student-led conference event. The return rate for parent

questionnaires was 93% for the initial questionnaire and 67% for the post-conference questionnaire.

Selection bias

The choice of two schools for this study was based primarily on criteria that both had completed ‘Assessment for Learning’ Ministry of Education contracts but had not implemented student-led conferences. The study was limited to Year 3–6 students, even though both case study schools implemented student-led conferences from Year 1. The older age group was selected because of these students’ greater ability to articulate their thinking than their younger counterparts and their prior experience of traditional reporting systems.

A further constraint in selection of students was that interviewed students were not randomly selected, rather they were chosen by their teachers. The researcher requested selection of a range of students with regards to academic ability, gender and ethnicity, but the primary factor in selection became the willingness of their parents to take part in the study.

Teachers who took part in the study had a range of teaching experience. Findings showed that while provisionally registered teachers found the implementation of student-led conferences more difficult than more experienced practitioners, this did not impact upon the extent to which teachers gained shifts in practice.

Section 3: Data collection methods

In Case Study 1, data were collected over the first six month period of a year from teachers, students, and parents at three different stages—at the beginning of the year, before student-led conferences took place in Week 9 of Term 2 and after the student-led conference event.

The second six months of the year was used to examine the results from Case Study 1, compare them with theoretical statements about the effectiveness of student-led conferences, revise the statements, and compare other details of the results against the statements. From this analyses, parent questionnaires for Case Study 2 were further developed, as were procedures and technical aspects of data collection.

Data were collected from the Case Study 2 school over the first six months of the following year. Again, the timing of the introduction of student-led conferences was designed to coincide with the mid-year reporting timeframes of the school.

Stages of data collection

Stage 1

There were three stages of data collection in each of the two case studies. Stage 1 took place over the first term of the school year. It involved gathering baseline data about the school's current reporting practices, teachers' knowledge of class-based assessment strategies, and teachers' current use of class-based assessment strategies in writing and mathematics.

Questions used in semi-structured interviews with teachers (see Appendix A) were also the basis of a questionnaire for the seven teachers in Case Study 1. Baseline data were gathered from students about their knowledge of, and attitudes towards, learning through interviews with selected students (see Appendix B), and similar information was sought through a questionnaire completed by all Year 3–6 students. Information from parents about their understanding of, and thoughts about, current reporting practices used in the school were also collected through interviews with selected parents (Appendix C) and a questionnaire seeking similar information was completed by parents of Year 3–6 students.

Table 1
Data collection Stage 1—Prior to the introduction of student-led conferences

Participants	Methods of data collection	Information
Principal N=1 Case Study 1 N=1 Case Study 2	Document Analysis	Characteristics of the school History, location, area it serves, size, ethnic makeup of the school population Current assessment and reporting systems
Interviewed Teachers N= 4 Case Study 1 N= 5 Case Study 2 Other Year 3-6 Teachers N= 7 Case Study 1 N= 0 Case Study 2	Semi-structured interviews Questionnaire	Demographic Information Views on assessment, reporting and student involvement in reporting Demographic Information Views on assessment, reporting and student involvement in reporting
Interviewed Students— Year 3-6 N= 6 Case Study 1 N= 14 Case Study 2 Other Year 3-6 Students N= 276 Case Study 1 N= 186 Case Study 2	Semi-structured interviews Documentation Questionnaires	Demographic Information, Academic levels in writing and mathematics, Views about learning, involvement in reporting to date Demographic Information, Views about learning, involvement in reporting to date
Parents of interviewed students N= 6 Case Study 1 N= 14 Case Study 2 Other Year 3-6 Parents N= 117 Case Study 1 N= 116 Case Study 2	Semi-structured interviews and Questionnaires	Demographic Information Degree of involvement in their child's education – examples, Views on reporting, assessment, student involvement in reporting

Stage 2

After baseline data had been gathered, four staff meetings that were designed to support teachers as they prepared students to lead the student conferences were conducted with the teachers over the second part of Term 1, and in Weeks 4 and 7 of Term 2. In Case Study 1, all professional development sessions were led by the researcher. In Case Study 2, the researcher led three of four sessions with teachers to maintain consistency in professional development support provided in the two schools. The last session in Case Study 2 was led by a senior teacher from another school that had implemented student-led conferences. This was done so teachers in Case Study 2 could identify and problem-solve potentially difficult scenarios without the constraint of the principal researcher being present. Information was sent to parents about the introduction of student-led conferences over Term 1 and 2 and two parent education evenings were held in each school.

In the week prior to student-led conferences, selected teachers were interviewed individually about the process they had been through in preparing students for student-led conferences (see Appendix D). This data gathering phase was focused on developing understanding of the extent to which the implementation of student-led conferences had changed teachers' practice.

Selected students were also interviewed at this time about aspects of their preparation for student-led conferences, their learning, and their thoughts about the forthcoming event (see Appendix E). Data from interviewed students sought to explore the extent to which the process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences lead to Year 3–6 students feeling more knowledgeable, involved, motivated, and confident about their learning.

In addition to collecting data from the interviewed teachers and students, the second parent evening about student-led conferences was run. Invitations from the students were sent to parents in Week 6 of Term 2, so conference times could be confirmed.

Table 2
Data collection—Stage 2—Preparation for student-led conferences

Participants	Methods of data collection	Information
<p>Interviewed Teachers</p> <p>N= 4 Case Study 1 N= 5 Case Study 2</p>	<p>Document Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolios <p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>Portfolio data collection processes</p> <p>Student-led conference implementation overview</p> <p>Assessment information shared with students</p> <p>Preparation for student-led conferences</p> <p>Student confidence levels</p> <p>Students' understanding of information to be shared</p> <p>Students' levels of motivation</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>Concerns</p>
<p>Interviewed Students</p> <p>N= 6 Case Study 1 N= 14 Case Study 2</p>	<p>Semi-structured interview</p>	<p>Assessment information shared with students</p> <p>Preparation for student-led conferences</p> <p>Student confidence levels</p> <p>Students' understanding of information to be shared</p> <p>Students' levels of motivation</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>Concerns</p>
<p>Parents attending Parent Evenings (2)</p> <p>Case Study 1 School N = 12 First meeting N = 40 Second meeting</p> <p>Case Study 2 School N = 10 First meeting N = 2 Second meeting</p>	<p>Researcher presentation and field notes</p> <p>Document Analysis</p>	<p>Parents' questions and responses to the presentation about Student-led conferences</p> <p>Newsletter information sent home to parents</p>

Stage 3

The third stage of the study focused on collecting data about the perceptions participants had of the student-led conference after the event. Student-led conferences were held in the second to last week of Term 2 in each school. Each of the interviewed students conducted conferences with their parents and copies of their portfolios were made. Guest books that were signed by all the parents attending student-led conferences were collected from the different Year 3–6 classrooms. All parents were given a questionnaire to take away, to be returned to the school by the end of Week 1 of Term 3 (see Appendix F).

Teachers were interviewed in the last week of the term (see Appendix G). Teachers not interviewed in Case Study 1 also completed questionnaires. Students were also interviewed during this week (see Appendix H) and their parents were interviewed within three weeks of the student-led conference. Post-conference questionnaires using questions similar to those in the post-conference student interviews were completed by all Year 3–6 students in the last week of Term 2.

The analysis of data collated from each stage of the study was used to identify trends and patterns that emerged from each of the groups of participants and from each type of data—documentation, interviews, and questionnaires. Through each stage, the process of explanation building around the theoretical statements underpinning the study was informed using triangulation of data.

Table 3
Data collection—Stage 3—Post-student-led conferences

Participants	Methods of data collection	Information
<p>Interviewed Teachers</p> <p>N= 4 Case Study 1 N= 5 Case Study 2</p>	<p>Document Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolios <p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>Portfolio data collection processes</p> <p>Student-led conference implementation overview</p> <p>Assessment information shared with students</p> <p>Preparation for student-led conferences</p> <p>Student confidence levels</p> <p>Students' understanding of information to be shared</p> <p>Students' levels of motivation</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>Concerns</p>
<p>Interviewed Students</p> <p>n= 6 Case Study 1 N= 14 Case Study 2</p>	<p>Semi-structured interview</p>	<p>Assessment information shared with students</p> <p>Preparation for student-led conferences</p> <p>Student confidence levels</p> <p>Students' understanding of information to be shared</p> <p>Students' levels of motivation</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>Concerns</p>
<p>Parents attending Parent Evenings (2)</p> <p>Case Study 1 School N = 12 First meeting N = 40 Second meeting</p> <p>Case Study 2 School N = 10 First meeting N = 2 Second meeting</p>	<p>Researcher presentation and field notes</p> <p>Document Analysis</p>	<p>Parents' questions and responses to the presentation about Student-led conferences</p> <p>Newsletter information sent home to parents</p>

Section 4: Sources of evidence

Sources of evidence used in this study included documents, semi structured interviews, and questionnaires.

Documentation

For case studies, the importance of documentation, which can take many forms, lies in their use as support for, and validation of, other sources of evidence. They can be very detailed and contain exact information, references, or details of an event. It is possible to make inferences from documents, which in turn can lead to further investigation. There were four types of documents collected to augment evidence from other sources. These included

- demographic information about each case study school;
- documentation from professional development sessions for teachers conducted in each school by the researcher and a senior leader in Case Study 2;
- parent meetings notes led by the researcher and newsletter information that was sent home during Term 1 and Term 2; and
- the interviewed students' student portfolios that were used as part of the student-led conference.

Demographic information about the two schools was obtained from office records and through the senior leaders in each school at the beginning of the project. Information was used to plan meetings with participants to get consent forms signed; to schedule interviews, staff meetings, and parent evenings; to arrange the distribution and collection of questionnaires, and the collection of student portfolio information.

Documentation from the four professional development sessions was collected by the researcher from teachers at each session. Two sessions were run in Term 1 of the school year, and two sessions were run in Term 2 in Weeks 4 and 7. Session 1 was an introductory session. Sessions 2 and 3 focused on teaching practices as they linked to supporting students to lead conferences about their learning, and Session 4 was a 'What if' problem-solving session to discuss strategies teachers would use if parents or students experienced difficulties.

A summary of teachers' feedback from a post-conference staff meeting was sent to the researcher by the school-based liaison teacher in Case Study 1. The implementation of student-led conferences was not the primary focus of the study, but to ensure there was consistency in support for teachers through the implementation phase, the researcher led the

professional development sessions for teachers in each school. These sessions informed teachers' practice and there were references to these sessions in the interviewed teachers' pre- and post-conference interview transcripts.

Planning notes and the PowerPoint presentation used for the two parent evenings were kept, along with a record of how many parents attended these meetings in each school, and questions they wanted answered at the end of the presentation.

Copies of student portfolios of each of the interviewed students (used as part of the reporting process), were provided by their teachers after the student-led conference event. To ensure anonymity, any information that would identify individuals was removed.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a valuable source of evidence because they enable the researcher to explore people's thoughts, feelings, and motivation for doing what they do. They can be focused directly on the case study topic and because they are oral, they are open to immediate exploration of initial responses, both in terms of areas explored and the direction the discussion takes. Interviews allow both parties to explore the issues involved.

Selected students, teachers, and parents of selected students were interviewed at three different stages in the study, at the beginning of the study, and then pre- and post-conference. The design of the semi-structured interviews was linked to the three key questions underpinning the study. Carefully constructed questionnaires focused on exploring the informants' opinions, attitudes, and beliefs, about teaching, learning, and reporting; their role in the reporting process; and their expectations of student-led conferences as a reporting system. Initial interviews of teachers and parents were based on participants' self-perceptions, beliefs, and understanding of current reporting practices, their knowledge of assessment practices and their beliefs, understanding, and experience of student involvement in the reporting process. Initial student interviews were focused on participant attitudes, motivation for learning, understanding of their learning, and the extent of their involvement in reporting to date.

Pre-conference interviews of teachers and students were focused on preparation for student-led conferences and how it impacted upon teachers' practice and students' development of competencies for student-led conferences. Post-conference interviews of teachers, students, and parents were closely aligned. Participants' description of the student-led conference event, their understanding of information shared, and beliefs about reporting were explored.

Prior to the first case study, the researcher piloted semi-structured interview questions with two teachers, a group of five Year 5 and 6 students, and four parents. Additional probe questions were added to the semi-structured interviews and the student interviews were shortened. Training for field workers used in both case studies was provided by the researcher to ensure consistency in protocol and interview techniques.

The power relationship between the researcher and the respondents in the second case study needed to be considered because the researcher was also the principal of the school. An administrator was employed to oversee all data collection procedures. One of the researcher's supervisors conducted the initial staff meeting with the teachers, outlining the research project. They discussed research protocols, the rights of the participants to withdraw at any stage of the study, and emphasised that data collected during the study would only be used for research purposes. The supervisor also provided information about who to contact if participating teachers had any concerns about ethical aspects of the study.

To further minimise the impact of the structural power relationship, all interviews with students, teachers, and parents in Case Study 2 were conducted by field workers. Teachers in both case studies were interviewed during school time. A relief teacher was employed to release teachers for the 45 minute interview. Four of the six parents in Case Study 1 were interviewed in their homes, and two met with field workers at their child's school. In Case Study 2, twelve of the fourteen parents were interviewed in their homes, and two were interviewed at school by a field worker. For the post-conference interviews, ten parents were interviewed at school, and four were interviewed at home by a field worker.

Students in both case studies were interviewed during school time by field workers, at the beginning of the study, pre-conference and post-conference. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. All teachers, students, and parents who were involved were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time. No participants withdrew.

The questionnaire

Social surveys are designed to collect, organise, measure, and analyse information. Structured and in-depth interviews, observation, content analysis, and questionnaires, are all types of social surveys. Questionnaires can be used to describe the views of a particular population, to make predictions and to evaluate outcomes, and to confirm or disprove information gathered using other methods.

There were six questionnaires designed for this study. They included initial and post-conference questionnaires for the group of teachers in Case Study 1 who were not interviewed, initial and post-conference questionnaires for Year 3–6 parents, and initial and post-conference questionnaires for Year 3–6 students. Like the semi-structured interviews, the design of the questionnaires was linked to the three key questions underpinning the study. Initial questionnaire responses were based on participants' self-perceptions and opinions of current reporting practices; their engagement with assessment information; and their knowledge, understanding, and experience of student involvement in reporting. End point questionnaires, by comparison, were based on participants' experience of the student-led conference event.

Questionnaires were constructed using both closed form response items and opened ended questions. Closed form response items asked participants to choose from a five-point Likert-like scale, as the questionnaires had no centre or neutral point, such as 'neither agree nor disagree' (i.e., 1 = not at all motivated, 2 = not very motivated, 3 = reasonably motivated, 4 = very motivated, and 5 = extremely motivated). For each question it was assumed each response represented the participants' continuum of agreement with the statement. Instances of two responses or no response were classified as missing data.

To minimise this limitation, open ended questions were included in the questionnaires so participants had the opportunity to explain their ratings for different questions. This information provided another rich source of responses that was collated, analysed, and included in the results chapters.

A group of four parents and four teachers from a school not participating in the study were used to pilot the questionnaires through their development phase. Revisions were made based upon feedback, particularly around clarity of wording and the minimal use of education jargon. Adjustments were also made to the order of items, and to the relationships of items across parent and teacher questionnaires.

Student questionnaires were developed with a group of six Year 5 and 6 students not involved in the study. The questionnaire was trialled with a group of students from a school not participating in the study. The questionnaires were subsequently shortened and the decision was made that all student questionnaires needed to be read orally, particularly with Year 3 and 4 students.

All questionnaires were piloted and amendments were made based on feedback from participants. A review of the format of some questions in the questionnaires would have enabled a wider range of statistical analysis to be carried out across the two studies.

Questionnaires completed by teachers, students, and parents at the beginning of the study and after the student-led conference event were designed to provide an additional source of evidence, one that could confirm trends and patterns found in the interview data, or reveal possible rival hypotheses. Each questionnaire was similar in content to the semi-structured interviews format used in each stage of data collection. Questionnaires were also similar in content and structure across the three groups of participants – teachers, students, and parents.

In Case Study 1, the researcher observed the distribution and collection of teacher questionnaires. One of the senior teachers, who also acted as the school-based project coordinator, organised the student surveys to be distributed and collated at the beginning and end of the study. Student surveys were done in classrooms by all Year 3–6 students.

Questionnaire instructions were provided and teachers were asked to read all questions out loud, to better ensure questions were understood by students. While 276 students completed the initial student questionnaire, only 208 students completed the post-conference student questionnaire. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, 42 did not attend the student-led conference event, so were not asked to complete the questionnaire by their teachers.

Secondly, one class of Year 3 and 4 students did not complete the questionnaire because they had a new teacher at the beginning of Term 3 and this class was overlooked by the senior leader project coordinator.

The principal of the Case Study 1 school organised the distribution and collection of the parent questionnaires. Parent questionnaires were sent home with the oldest child in each family near the beginning of the year, and again after the student-led conference. Response rates for the return of parent questionnaires in Case Study 1 was 57% for the initial questionnaire and 45% for the second questionnaire. In Case Study 2, where the researcher was principal of the school, both pre- and post-conference student questionnaires were distributed and collected by the research administrator. All Year 3–6 students in the study completed both questionnaires. Teachers were asked to follow the administration instructions, to read the questions orally, and ensure students completed the questionnaires in class. The administrator also observed the distribution and collection of pre- and post-conference parent questionnaires. As in Case Study 1, parent questionnaires were sent home with the oldest child in each family near the beginning of the year, and again after the

student-led conference. Response rates for the return of parent questionnaires in Case Study 2 was 93% for the initial questionnaire and 67% for the second questionnaire.

In both case study schools, the student-led conference was held in Week 9 of Term 2 so there were seven working days to get parent questionnaires returned to school before the holidays. In Case Study 1, the student post-conference questionnaire was administered after a two-week holiday break. In Case Study 2 the same questionnaire was administered in the last week of the second term, before the holiday break.

Section 5: Analytical Frameworks

To begin the process of analysing qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews, an inductive approach was used to make sense of the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis that came from the data collected. In this study three broad themes were identified—reporting, teacher practice, and student capabilities—all of which needed to be considered in order to assess the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method.

The audio recordings of all interviews were initially transcribed. Scripts were read and re-read to get a sense of the scope of the data. Theoretical memo notes were made down the side of each transcript. A topic code for each question was created and categories under each code were created. The sentence was the text unit for analysis. Each sentence of transcripts from teachers, students, and parents was then coded into sub-categories.

Reporting Analytical Framework

Within the theme of reporting teachers', students', and parents' views about assessment and reporting at each stage, four categories emerged for analysis: reporting focused on learning; social purposes of reporting; traditional issues with reporting; and student-centred reporting (see Table 4). Categories developed linked to both empirical evidence in the literature review and to the data collected in this study.

Table 4
Conditions of reporting—A framework for analysis

	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	Condition 4
	Reporting focused on learning	Social purposes of reporting	Traditional issues with reporting	Student-centred reporting
Stage 1	Initial beliefs and understandings of teachers, parents, and students about reporting, assessment, and student involvement in reporting.			
Stage 2	The impact of preparation for student-led conferences on teachers and students.			
Stage 3	Consequences of the implementation of student-led conferences on teachers', students', and parents' views of student-led conferences as an effective reporting method.			

All transcripts were re-read and responses from each group of participants were allocated to one of the four categories. Sub-categories for analysis under each of the four conditions of reporting were developed. Sub-categories included: beliefs; descriptions of practices; descriptions of outcomes; general statements about reporting; and other, to ensure all data was considered at each stage of data analysis. The three stages of data collection in each case study are represented by the horizontal dimensions in the Reporting Analytical framework. In this way teachers', students' and parents' initial beliefs about conditions of reporting could be compared to their views after having been through the process of preparing for and participating in student-led conferences. A summary of key findings about the conditions of reporting using student-led conferences, based upon teachers', students' and parents' views at three stages of the study, can be found at the beginning of Chapters 4 and 5.

Data from teachers, students, and parents were also used to analyse the extent to which student-led conferences had met the criteria for effective reporting using student-led conferences. The criteria, developed from the literature and in consultation with supervisors, included the transparency of information shared around progress and achievement, next steps in learning, parental participation and understanding of information shared, and the extent to which student voice was evident. Qualitative data from Stage 3 of the study was used to ascertain the extent to which student-led conferences in each case study had been effective.

Teachers' practice

Teachers in this study were asked to share views on reporting, assessment as it linked to their teaching practice, the implementation of student-led conferences and its impact on their teaching and their students. These were the initial categories created for analysis.

Transcripts were read and theoretical memos made. Sentences, as units of analysis, were reorganised under the categories above and into three phases, as had been done with the reporting data. To capture the shifts in teachers' beliefs and practice through the process of implementing student-led conferences more effectively, a second analytical framework was developed.

The teachers 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions framework

The framework developed was based upon the work of Michael Absolum and the team from Evaluation Associates. As facilitators of the Ministry of Education 'Assessment for Learning' Contract, Evaluation Associates has developed a rubric of effective teaching practices over several years. Initially based upon the work of Black and William (1998a, 1998b), the rubric has been trialled and updated over a number of years, informed by facilitators' documentation, direct observation, and video analysis of teachers' practice.

In this study, the focus of the data collected from teachers centred around assessment, as it linked to effective classroom practice and to reporting, using student-led conferences. Data collected were closely aligned to the 'Assessment Literacy' criteria used by Evaluation Associates. Criteria under each of four levels of effective teaching practice and five dimensions of 'Assessment Literacy' were considered and where appropriate modified for this study. The revised framework criteria was informed by the literature and empirical responses coded. Changes made were checked and discussed with Michael Absolum. The framework was then trialled with the researcher and a senior teacher to clarify and improve the interpretation of criteria in each level, for each dimension. Teachers' transcripts were re-coded and organised into the five dimensions.

Table 5
Teachers 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions framework

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Dimension 1	'Assessment Literacy' as it links to Teaching and Learning			
Dimension 2	Student involvement in assessment			
Dimension 3	Clarity about 'Next steps in learning'			
Dimension 4	'Big Picture' understanding of assessment			
Dimension 5	Assessment as it links to reporting			

Sub-categories used within each of the five dimensions included initial teacher beliefs; teachers' descriptions of preparation for student-led conferences; teachers' descriptions of the student-led conference event; reflections on outcomes; and other. Through the development of the teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions framework shifts in teachers' beliefs and practices were able to be clearly mapped, at each stage of the study.

Student capabilities

The effectiveness of student-led conferences is inextricably linked to the knowledge, understanding, and skills students develop as assessors of their learning. How students' involvement in reporting, using student-led conferences impacted on aspects of their development as learners was the third theme developed. Initial categories created for analysis included knowledge of learning, motivation for learning, teacher behaviours, involvement in reporting, confidence levels, and parent support. Transcripts were read and theoretical memos made. Sentences, as units of analysis, were reorganised under the categories above and into three phases, as with previous data. To better capture the shifts in the development of students' capabilities through the process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences, a third analytical framework was developed.

Student competency framework

This framework was based on the student competency framework developed by the facilitators at Evaluation Associates. Empirical evidence from student interviews and the literature was used to develop a 'Student Competencies' matrix in five dimensions specifically linked to assessment and reporting (see Table 6). Data from student interviews, collected at each of the three stages of implementation of student-led conferences were reorganised under the Student Capability framework headings, using sentences as units of analysis.

Sub-categories within each dimension included initial descriptions; descriptions of preparation for student-led conferences; descriptions of the student-led conference event; reflection on the experience; and other. The researcher and an experienced senior teacher, familiar with 'Assessment for Learning' principles of teaching and learning, reviewed the criteria developed in each of the five dimensions of the 'Student Competency' framework. In this way, the development of student competencies, over the six months timeframe in each study, were evaluated and compared to findings in teachers' practice.

Table 6
'Student Competency' dimensions framework

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Dimension 1	'Assessment Literacy'			
Dimension 2	Student motivation for learning			
Dimension 3	Student confidence to share information about learning			
Dimension 4	Student capability to articulate learning			
Dimension 5	Student understanding of learning			

Implicit in the evaluation of a theory of action is the possibility of an improved alternative. In this study there were four conditions of reporting that were identified, each based upon different purposes of reporting. The student-led conference reporting method was assessed as to the extent to which they were effective in fulfilling each condition. Teachers' development of 'Assessment Literacy' through the process of implementing student-led conferences was also assessed, along with students' development of competencies as they linked to reporting. Through data analysis, evidence of improvement in reporting, teacher practice and students' knowledge and understanding of their learning was considered.

Section 6: Data analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data analyses, using information gathered from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and documentation were completed as described in the following sections.

Analysis of interviews

The audio recordings of semi-structured interviews were transcribed. Theoretical memo notes were made for each sentence, linked to the literature, and a topic code was created for each question. Topics included reporting; teacher assessment literacy; and student competencies. The sentence was the unit of analysis. In consultation with supervisors, theoretically-derived categories and sub-categories for each topic were developed to organise the data and assist with the analysis process. Sentences were sorted into categories and sub-categories under each topic code (see Appendix I). The categories and sub-categories were further developed and refined in response to themes that arose from the transcriptions through an iterative process.

The process of allocating responses from teachers, students, and parents to codes was repeated for each of the three stages of data collection. Quotations from the transcripts were selected as illustrative examples of the category/sub-category for each group of participants. Coding reliability was checked through independent coding of a sample of transcripts. The researcher and an experienced deputy principal, familiar with ‘Assessment for Learning’ principles of teaching and learning, used the coding descriptors to rate teachers’ levels of proficiency in each of the five dimensions of ‘Assessment Literacy’. The independent coding of each transcript was compared with that of the researcher and any ambiguity of coding criteria was discussed until agreement was reached, both on the interpretation of the framework criteria and the evaluation levels allocated. Using the exact agreement method for specific checklists items in each of five teacher ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions, inter-rater reliability checks were completed. Overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed teachers’ levels of ‘Assessment Literacy’ for Case Study 1, was 77.2% ($n = 52$ comparisons). In Case Study 2, overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed teachers’ levels of ‘Assessment Literacy’ was 81% ($n = 65$ comparisons). Inter-rater reliability checks were also completed when using data to rate interviewed students using the student competency dimensions. In Case Study 1, overall inter-rater agreement between the two scorers was 80.5% ($n = 72$ comparisons). In Case Study 2, overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed students’ levels of ‘Student Competency’ for each dimension was 80.2% ($n = 182$ comparisons).

Analysis of questionnaires

Questionnaires completed by teachers, students, and parents at the beginning of the study and after the student-led conference event were designed to provide an additional source of evidence, one that could confirm trends and patterns found in the interview data, or reveal possible rival hypotheses. Each questionnaire was similar in content to the semi-structured interviews format used in each stage of data collection. Questionnaires were also similar in content and structure across the three groups of participants—teachers, students, and parents. Questionnaire data were initially entered into an Excel spreadsheet. A code book was created to code each question in the questionnaires. The code book was used to assist with the organisation of data, and the interpretation of data as it related to other sources of evidence. Code categories were developed from the literature, the research questions and theoretical hypotheses underpinning the study. Data were checked to ensure all items were coded correctly and then transferred to SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to establish

frequencies, means, percentages, medians, and standard variations. Tests to identify significant and non-significant findings were conducted. Effect sizes, using Cohen's d were used in the analysis of relevant items to measure the impact of student-led conferences from the beginning to the end of each study and to compare their impact from Case Study 1 to Case Study 2. In this research a medium effect size was defined broadly as $d = 0.4$.

Emerging themes from the questionnaires were compared to those identified in the interviews where the same or similar information had been sought. Further analysis of findings, based on Strauss and Corbin (1990) included consideration of causal conditions, contextual factors, and any intervening conditions that assisted or hindered actions and outcomes.

Document analysis

Student portfolios provided a written source of evidence used to support the implementation of student-led conferences. Given the small number of student portfolios, the analysis of this documentation was completed manually. Seven categories of information were identified. They included curriculum information; teacher comments; samples of work; tests; information about progress over time; information about current achievement levels; and information to validate or clarify assessments and judgments that had been made. Each of these categories had sub-categories that included specific descriptions of information found in the portfolios. A frequency count was made of the occurrence of types of information found in each category.

The document analysis was used to cross-reference teachers', students', and parents' statements about perceptions of reporting processes and as evidence of information shared through the student-led conference events at each school. Student portfolio documentation was also used as a basis for further comparison of schools' assessment systems, levels of teachers' 'Assessment Literacy', and levels of student involvement in assessment and reporting. There were high levels of consistency of documentation within each case study school, but the variation between schools in both the purpose and content of student portfolio information was considerable.

Conclusion

When drawing conclusions from the data analysis, the accuracy of conclusions reached, the extent to which the theory of effective reporting matched the practice, and the coherence of links made between reporting, teaching and learning were considered further. Accuracy focuses on understanding the complexity involved in establishing effective reporting

practices, by triangulating information. In this thesis, one approach to triangulation involved collecting and comparing data from different participants—in this case, teachers, students, and parents. Another approach involved checking across data sources: interviews, questionnaires, and documentation.

To gauge the effectiveness of the study and the extent to which espoused theories of action were found in practice, findings were compared to either a theoretical criteria or a theoretical framework. Teacher, student, and parent perspectives were compared to each other and to a theory of effective reporting under each of the four conditions of reporting. Teachers' assessment literacy and students' competencies in reporting were assessed against dimensions created to assess levels of competence.

When assessing the coherence of the study a “big picture” approach required the researcher to consider whether a particular solution to one problem, such as reporting to parents, was compatible within the context of other problems for which the participants were responsible (Thagard, 2000). In this study, student-led conferences were analysed to assess the extent to which they met the four conditions of reporting identified in the literature as problematic, and compared to a theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences. Because reporting, using student-led conferences is inextricably linked to teaching and learning, information from teacher interviews was also used to evaluate teachers' assessment literacy using a four dimension teacher 'Assessment Literacy' matrix. Finally, because the evidence of success in reporting using student-led conferences is based upon students' development of competencies linked to reporting, these were also evaluated using a 'Student Competency' Dimensions framework.

Section 7: Ethical dilemmas

Approval to undertake this research was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee on 27.04.05 (Reference Number 2005/157). This ensured that the research complied with the committee's code of ethics pertaining to the conduct of research involving human participants.

Ethical responsibility for the participants, professional colleagues, the wider public, and sponsors were considered. Procedures including voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy protocols were put in place (De Vaus, 2002, p. 59).

In both case studies participation was voluntary. Information about the purpose of the research and the nature of participant involvement was provided, therefore the choice participants made to take part was informed. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study within a specific timeframe. Consent was sought from both the Board of Trustees of each school, and from individual participants. As discussed in the participants' section, because the researcher was the principal of the second school in the study, consent from teachers in Case Study 2 was obtained through a supervisor and a research assistant was instated to oversee all field work in the school. Any concerns or complaints from participants in Case Study 2 were to be directed, in the first instance, to the supervisors. Forms were collected from the Boards of Trustees in both schools and all participants in the study. They will be held for a period of seven years.

To ensure confidentiality was maintained, the ownership of the data and who had access to it was established. Information that could identify people was removed from all documentation and categories of variables collapsed from specific to broad groups.

Protocols to ensure the welfare of students were maintained during the student-led conference. Prior to the student-led conference, staff meetings were held in each case study school to discuss ways in which teachers could support and assist students during the student-led conference if needed. Teacher and student concerns were identified and strategies to manage potential issues were put in place.

To prevent harm to the reputations of the two schools from the dissemination of publication of research, results from each case study were written to ensure anonymity of participants.

Section 8 :Methodological constraints

Sources of evidence, reliability of data, and interviewer bias were all considered as methodological constraints.

Sources of evidence

Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation were the sources of evidence used in this study. While the content of interviews and questionnaires did provide empirical evidence to answer the key research questions, much of the evidence was based on self-reported descriptions of practice. Descriptions of the event from interviewed teachers, students, and parents were all very similar, but to have additional video evidence of class-based practice and the student-led conference event would have strengthened the reliability and validity of the study further.

Four professional development sessions were conducted over six months in each school by the researcher. Because professional development linked to the implementation of student-led conferences was not the focus of this study, the extent to which it impacted on teachers' practice and the outcomes of student-led conferences, is not known. More research is needed to identify effective catalysts for change to teacher practices that inform students about all aspects of their learning, so they can lead conferences about their learning successfully.

Reliability of data

Through the data collection, collation, and analysis phases of this study, both confirming and disconfirming evidence were presented. To further improve reliability, a members' check of information from semi-structured interviews needed to be included in the methodology as participants did not have the opportunity to review or comment further on transcripts of interviews.

Time to review and refine the Analytical Framework Dimensions through inter-rater reliability checks and discussion would further strengthen the findings of this study. To extend these Analytical Frameworks to include aspects of teaching and learning, linked to class-based activities, would enable factors linked to preparation for student-led conferences to be identified and investigated further. This in turn, would strengthen the evidence-base for effective reporting using student-led conferences.

In Case Study 1, there were some problems with student attrition in the post-conference questionnaire. Because the student sample was still statistically significant, despite the attrition rate, findings were still considered reliable.

Interviewer bias

To minimise interviewer bias, the researcher provided training for field officers who collected data in both Case Study schools. Questions were asked in the same way, using the probe questions that had been developed and trialled with colleagues. Field officers were teachers from different schools. Because of this, they had understanding of the school context and the potential impact of change management on teachers.

The coding of transcripts was carried out by the researcher and checked with their supervisors. Some sentences were coded to more than one category or sub-category. Findings drawn from the qualitative data were illustrated by quotes or linked to other sources of evidence. Inter-rater reliability checks around evaluations of teacher assessment literacy and student competencies were carried out to minimize researcher bias.

Section 9: Generalisability

This study looked to evaluate the effectiveness of student-led conferences in two different schools. Both schools had completed ‘Assessment for Learning’ Ministry of Education contracts. Both schools implemented student-led conferences over the first six months of the year. Participants were selected using the same criteria. Professional development was similar in both schools and at the end of the study while some findings between the two case studies were similar, other findings were very different.

The research instruments used provided information specific to each school context. But, through analysis of triangulated data from multiple sources, using theoretical criteria developed from the literature and three analytical frameworks, it is possible to generalise findings beyond this study. The following two chapters describe the findings from each school in detail.

CHAPTER 4A: CASE STUDY 1

Section A: Conditions of reporting—Beliefs, practices, and consequences

Effective reporting is a process of sharing of relevant, specific information about a student's learning that is understood by parents. In this study, it is about a process that involves teachers sharing relevant and specific information that is understood by students, who in turn share it with their parents.

A student-led conference is a student-centred reporting method designed to give parents specific, detailed information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning, and the learning process, so they can be informed, supportive and authentic participants in their child's learning. Another purpose of student-led conferences is to develop students' understanding of all aspects of their learning. Effective conferences that achieve these dual purposes are, however, highly dependent on the nature and quality of teaching and learning that happens in classrooms every day and on the information teachers share with students.

In Case Study 1, 30–60 minute student-led conferences took place in Week 10 of Term 2 in all Year 1-6 classrooms, at the time when traditional teacher-parent interviews were normally held at the school.

The definition of an effective student-led conference

Indicators for an effective student-led conference were developed for this study to evaluate the core function—providing information about progress and achievement to parents. Other indicators focused on assessing the effectiveness of other outcomes student-led conferences were expected to achieve. They included:

1. Providing information about students' progress and achievement levels using normative or criterion referenced benchmarks.
2. Identifying the next steps in students' learning.
3. Creating 'Student voice' in the reporting process.
4. Creating opportunity for students' to engage with, and understand, all the information about their learning.
5. Sharing information about how learning had been achieved with parents.

6. Providing information that was understood by parents and creating opportunity for parents to ‘learn about learning’ so they are better able to support students’ learning at home.

Overview

In Case Study 1, teachers were asked to define the purpose of reporting. Their espoused beliefs were compared to their practice, as they prepared students for student-led conferences. The consequences of these practices were then analysed in three ways: in terms of how they related to teachers’ beliefs about reporting and in terms of consequences as they related a theory of effective student-led conferences.

There were four conditions that teachers were trying to satisfy as they implemented the student-led conference reporting process. The first of these was to give parents information about progress, achievement, and students’ next steps in learning. The second condition was to meet a range of ‘other purposes’ of reporting, including building relationships with parents, sharing information about behaviour, social issues, student attitudes and motivation for learning, and other concerns. The third condition was addressing traditional reporting issues teachers had identified—the most significant of these being parent attendance. The fourth was building teacher and student capabilities. This latter condition was linked to the redefinition of roles of teachers, students, and parents in reporting. The teachers’ challenge was to develop students’ capabilities, through effective teaching and learning, to become the ‘holders of knowledge’ in the reporting process. Parents’ roles were to change from being passive receivers of information to active participants, while teachers were to take on the new and unfamiliar role of observer and technical support. Trying to meet all four conditions created tensions for teachers, which they resolved in the first instance by making a series of decisions about what information was to be shared, in what format, by whom, with whom, and when.

To meet the first condition, teachers in Case Study 1 chose to send home student portfolios, containing information about progress and achievement information, as had been done in previous years before teacher-parent interviews. They contained a curriculum diagram to indicate approximate achievement benchmark expectations for students. Writing criteria sheets for Levels 1-4, mathematics criteria for different numeracy stages, and reading skills criteria were highlighted by teachers, to indicate the skills that students had mastered in writing, mathematics, and reading. End of unit

assessment tasks with students' self assessments were also included, along with writing samples, spelling tests, and handwriting samples.

The purpose of the student portfolio was two-fold: to inform parents about their child's progress and achievement, and to create a cumulative file. It contained beginning of the year goals sheets, tracking sheets in reading and writing, and copies of end of year reports from different years. The information collected in the student portfolios was problematic. There were no explanations or guidelines to inform the information that was there. There were no teacher generated comments, nor were there any indications about how the students' achievements in different subject areas compared to class, school, or national norms or benchmarks. As a cumulative file it may have served a purpose, but as a portfolio that was to inform parents, information needed further explanation by teachers to make meaning.

Teachers decided to create a 'teacher slot' at the end of each student-led conference. They did not believe students could understand summative assessment information, or explain it to parents. Teachers also believed achievement information was their job to share. It was intended that the 'teacher slot' would be a time for teachers and parents to discuss portfolio information in more detail, along with any other information either party thought to be relevant, thus meeting conditions one and two.

Because teachers had retained responsibility for sharing information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, the students' task in student-led conferences was to explain the process of learning they engaged in during class. They would share samples of work showing "where they were at", and demonstrate skills in interactive activities during the student-led conference part of the evening. Teachers' beliefs about student involvement in assessment and reporting changed the nature of the student-led conference as defined above. In this study, students led conferences sharing aspects of their learning with parents, which was followed by a traditional 'teacher interview time', with students present at the end of their student-led conferences.

To build teacher and student capacity, teachers took part in four professional development staff meetings over two terms. In team meetings teachers continued to develop their teaching practice to incorporate strategies to support students in their preparation for student-led conferences. They also made decisions about the structure of the conference event and details of what students would share during their conferences.

Consequences: Competing conditions

Consequences of teachers' beliefs, as they were translated into practice, were evident in 'teacher-student-parent interviews', and in student and parent surveys. The four conditions of reporting were met, but with varying degrees of success. The first condition—sharing information about student progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, was identified as the core purpose of reporting by all the teachers. Evidence from parent surveys and parent interviews showed the portfolio and 'teacher slot' mechanisms for giving this information did not give parents the specific, detailed information they wanted, nor did it develop with any consistency in parents' understanding of grades and what they meant. Instead, there was a focus on students supporting parents to gain understanding of the process of learning in their part of the student-led conference. Teachers' descriptions of information shared in the 'teacher-slot' showed inconsistency in information shared and that discussion of children's progress and achievement had remained general in most instances.

The 'teacher slot', as well as creating opportunity to discuss aspects of student learning with parents, also met teachers' second condition for effective reporting. They were able to meet parents and take time to build relationships and to address related education issues, more than may have been possible if students had shared all the information about their learning.

The third condition—addressing traditional issues with reporting that teachers had identified was also successfully met. The student-led conference reporting method had improved parent attendance, which had been described by the principal and teachers as low in previous years (35-50%). Student survey data showed 78% of Year 3-6 parents had attended student-led conferences. Parents and students actively participated in the conference process. Time had been created to engage with information more fully, and as a result teachers thought parents had a better understanding of their child's learning.

With the fourth condition—managing the process of implementing student-led conferences, teachers thought they had done a good job in building student capabilities in the process of preparing students for their conferences. Conferences had gone well. Students had shared information about their learning with confidence. Teachers' concerns about student capabilities had not been realised, their expectations of what the students did know and could share were exceeded, and both students and parents reported that they had enjoyed the experience.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Using the indicators to define an effective student-led conference as outlined in Chapter 3a, the conferences conducted in this case study were only partially effective as a learning-focused reporting method designed to develop students' and parents' 'in depth' understanding of progress, achievement, and 'next steps in learning'. Information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning were not made explicit. 'Student voice' was created, and students did share information about how they had developed their understanding, knowledge and skills with parents. But, because teachers had chosen not to engage students with information about their progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, students (as well as parents), had little understanding of these aspects of their learning at the end of the study. Parents did learn more about 'how students learn' but there was little evidence of parents making links between information gained from the student portfolios and the 'teacher-slot' and how they could support learning at home.

There were also unintended consequences of this implementation process. The decision teachers made to continue to share information about student progress, achievement, and next steps in learning in the same ways they had traditionally through portfolios, and the 'teacher slot', meant that the quality of information about progress, achievement, and the next steps in learning given to parents did not change, nor how parents and students engaged with it. Teachers, however, thought this had been done well and there was no discussion about reviewing or changing this aspect of the reporting method at the end of the study.

The 'teacher slot', designed to meet the teachers' beliefs about the purpose of reporting, created the opportunity for teachers to reverse the student-led conference roles of teachers, parents, and students, back to traditional reporting roles. Teachers had retained control of the knowledge about students' progress and achievement, which somewhat undermined the students' contribution during their conferences. It also introduced a less safe, adult-focused, unpredictable conversation that could create unwelcomed 'surprises' for students and parents.

Teachers' un-spoken beliefs about sharing information about student progress and achievement with students being "not for them to know" and "too hard" for students to understand, were never challenged. Students did not engage with this information in any systematic way, so understanding of all aspects of their learning was not achieved.

Furthermore, there was no suggestion by teachers in post-conference interviews or surveys, that they should have access to this information, or that they could develop knowledge and understanding of this if given the opportunity.

Summary

In this case study, the first condition of reporting—to effectively share information about learning was not met. Because of the teachers' decisions to retain traditional elements of the school's reporting system, and to take responsibility for sharing information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with students, the student-led conferences were not effective in sharing this information through students, to parents. Teachers believed they had been effective in sharing information about student progress and achievement but according to parents, getting detailed and specific information about progress and achievement was still problematic.

From the teachers' perspective, the second condition—to build relationships with parents, share information about behaviour, social issues, student attitudes, and motivation for learning, and other concerns, was achieved through the 'teacher slot'. Some teachers became aware that the type of conversation or information they wanted to share, for example, information about their expectations of a students' behaviour or attitude, did not fit a student-centred reporting method. It could be argued that in retaining the 'teacher slot' some teachers undermined student contributions, reversing the roles of reporting which reduced student ownership of the process and introduced an unpredictable, and potentially negative element into the conference.

The third condition—addressing traditional issues in reporting identified by teachers, was met. Student and parent participation was achieved, and time was made to engage with information. The introduction of student-led conferences was successful in improving parent attendance. While parents received new information about how children learn and students' work was used to show evidence of progress, the traditional teacher-parent format, re-defined as the 'teacher slot' had remained the same. As a result, some parents chose not to participate in conversations with teachers. Others expressed frustration that teachers did not share specific information about progress and achievement.

The fourth condition—managing the implementation of student-led conferences through the development of students and teachers' capabilities, was evident in the success of the

student-led conference, as they had been defined by the teachers. The challenge for students to effectively explain the process of learning to parents was achieved.

The fundamental purpose of student-led conferences—creating opportunity for students to engage with and share information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, was not considered by the senior leaders or teachers through the process of planning and implementing student-led conferences. Because of this, the paradigm shift that required teachers to provide students with access to all available information about their learning was not made, creating a situation where students did not have the knowledge or understanding to lead a conference about all aspects of their learning. Teachers' expectations of themselves and their students had the effect of maintaining status quo in terms of students' engagement with, and understanding of all aspects of their learning. It was an opportunity lost, but also an opportunity not recognised by teachers, students, or parents.

In the next section, a problem-based methodology approach is used to explore the tensions between teachers' beliefs, practices, and consequences as they implemented student-led conferences. How teachers looked to resolve the four conditions of reporting is explored in detail to understand in more depth how teachers' beliefs influenced the extent to which student-led conferences were effective in meeting the four conditions of reporting in this case study.

Table 7 below summarises findings based upon evidence from teachers' initial, pre-conference and post-conference interviews.

Table 7

Case study 1: The purpose of reporting—Teachers—Beliefs, practices and consequences

Teachers' Beliefs			
Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning	Condition 2: Social Purposes of Reporting	Condition 3: Addressing traditional issues with reporting	Condition 4: Participation in a student-centred reporting paradigm
All teachers believed the purpose of reporting was to give parents information about where a child is 'at' and the next steps in learning.	Teachers believed there were social purposes of reporting—which included discussion of behaviour, social issues, student attitudes, and motivation for learning, effort and thinking skills. Teachers believed the reporting process was about meeting with and developing relationships with parents.	Traditional issues with reporting to address, identified by teachers in Case Study 1, included parent attendance, lack of student involvement, lack of parent participation, not enough time, and parents not understanding the information.	Teachers all wanted students more involved in the reporting process, but interviewed teachers thought student-led conferences were going to be a lot of work. Interviewed teachers worried they did not have the capabilities to prepare students well and students did not have the capabilities manage this.
Teachers' Practices			
Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	Condition 4
<u>In preparation:</u> Teachers made decisions about the content and structure of the student-led conferences event—what they would share and what students would share. A 'teacher slot' was created to discuss portfolio information in more detail with parents. Students were given the task of explaining the process of learning and sharing samples of work to demonstrate skills, knowledge and understanding of their learning.	<u>In preparation:</u> The 'teacher slot' was created to be used by teachers to discuss a range of issues.	<u>In preparation:</u> Students sent home invitations to their parents. Each student-led conference did create more time to discuss aspects of learning. Conference agendas were designed to be interactive to support parents' understanding of the learning process. The 'teacher slot', a designated 10 minutes at the end of each child's student-led conference, created opportunity for the teacher to chat with	<u>In preparation:</u> Teachers took part in professional development to incorporate effective teaching strategies that would develop student capabilities. Teachers shared ideas and resources in team meetings. 'What if' scenarios were discussed and strategies planned in case students or parents needed support. Teachers developed a range of strategies to support 'at-risk' students.

<p>Teachers focused on developing students' skills in articulating their goals and the process of learning.</p> <p>Teachers sent home portfolios with test results, highlighted criteria sheets in writing, reading and mathematics, samples of work, tracking sheets in reading and writing.</p>		<p>the parents, to make connections and to share information.</p>	<p>Students developed skills in articulating the process of learning and demonstrating skills in a range of curriculum areas and felt well prepared leading into the conference event.</p>
<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u></p> <p>Students shared their goals and the process of learning with parents.</p> <p>Teachers met with most parents in the 'teacher slot'. One of the four interviewed teachers discussed portfolio information with parents. Other interviewed teachers discussed a range of topics.</p>	<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u></p> <p>During the 'teacher slot' time interviewed teachers discussed social issues, behaviour, grades, portfolio information and homework.</p> <p>Some parents engaged with the teachers more than others.</p> <p>Teachers were able to meet and connect with most parents.</p> <p>Some teachers chose not to discuss learning with parents so students' new role would not be undermined</p>	<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u></p> <p>Most parents did attend.</p> <p>Students and parents actively participated.</p> <p>Time created allowed parents to engage with information students shared in depth and the 'teacher slot' meant parents could talk with teachers at the end of their child's conference.</p>	<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u></p> <p>Students explained the process of learning to parents and shared samples of work during their student-led conferences.</p>

Consequences of Teachers' Beliefs			
Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	Condition 4
<p>Teachers thought the portfolio and 'teacher slot' had been effective in giving parents information about progress and achievement so no future changes were discussed.</p> <p>Information about progress and achievement was not discussed in detail with parents but teachers thought they had done this well.</p> <p>Students had shared information about the process of learning with parents, which contributed to their understanding of the process of learning, progress and where they were 'at'.</p> <p>Students did not engage with any of the information in portfolios, before or during their conferences, so did not understand this information well.</p> <p>Teachers' paradigm shift to share information about all aspects of learning with students was not made.</p>	<p>What was discussed matched the teachers' beliefs about social purposes of reporting they thought were important to discuss.</p> <p>The tension between wanting to develop positive relationships with parents meant some teachers were reluctant to bring up potentially difficult topics, such as implications of low achievement and behaviour.</p> <p>Some teachers expected to give hard messages in the 'teacher slot' but found it was not appropriate in this forum and did not fit with the collaborative student-centred learning focus of student-led conferences.</p> <p>Some teachers did not want to undermine the students' contribution by reversing the new reporting roles so chose not to share information about learning with parents in the 'teacher slot' which meant parents did not get information from portfolios clarified further.</p> <p>The 'teacher slot' time created a more unpredictable conversation that could create unwelcome 'surprises' for students and parents.</p> <p>Some teachers felt the 'teacher slot' time</p>	<p>Parent attendance did improve and teachers appreciated meeting parents, especially those they had not met before.</p> <p>Students had shared information about the process of learning which parents had understood.</p> <p>Parents had been active participants in the reporting process and had enjoyed engaging with their children.</p> <p>Time was created for parents to engage with information about learning in more detail.</p> <p>Teachers thought parents had a good understanding of all aspects of their child's learning as a result of the student-led conferences.</p> <p>Student-led conferences had been successful in reconnecting a number of disengaged parents with the school.</p>	<p>Teachers' concerns about student capabilities or parents not being supportive were not realised.</p> <p>Students had an authentic role in the reporting process and were able to share information with parents about the process of learning.</p> <p>For 85% of students student-led conferences had been a positive experience.</p> <p>Teachers' predictions as to which students would struggle had not been accurate.</p> <p>Teachers thought parents were positive about what their children had shared and had learned more about the process of learning.</p> <p>Teachers felt students had developed new skills in the process of preparing for and participating in student-led conferences and that there was more students could share in the future.</p> <p>The student-led conferences exceeded teachers' expectations. All teachers in the study were very keen or extremely keen to do student-led conferences again.</p>

	<p>was too short to give and receive information from parents.</p> <p>Wanting to build positive relationships with parents and giving honest information to parents was a dilemma made more difficult because of the semi-public forum conversations took place in.</p>		
<p>In sharing information about progress, achievement and next steps in learning teachers believed they had done well.</p> <p>Teachers identified giving information about next steps in learning as a future teaching focus.</p>	<p>Keeping the ‘teacher slot’ in effect became the teacher-parent interview—in terms of time allowed and information shared status quo was maintained—it was seen to be effective by teachers and matched their beliefs.</p> <p>The type of conversations and messages some teachers wanted to give in the ‘teacher slot’ did not fit a student-centred collaborative way of teaching and learning.</p> <p>How to create other forums for teachers and parents to discuss social aspects of learning, so reporting can stay focused on learning was a challenge that emerged.</p>	<p>Student-led conferences resolved traditional reporting methods identified by teachers, but had not resulted in improving the information about students’ learning shared with parents.</p> <p>Teachers thought student-led conferences were very effective as a reporting method.</p> <p>Student-led conferences had been successful in reconnecting some disengaged parents, through the students, with the school.</p>	<p>Teachers’ beliefs that information about progress and achievement was “too hard” for students was not challenged in this case study—a paradigm shift about students having access to all the information about their learning was not made by ten of eleven teachers.</p> <p>There was no suggestion that opportunity for students to engage with this information in the future.</p> <p>Students leading a conference about all aspects of their learning was a second paradigm shift not made.</p>

Table 8

Case study 1: Frequency count of purposes of written reports and parent-teacher interviews (n=116)

Purposes of written reports and parent-teacher interviews	<i>n</i>	%
Progress and achievement in learning	112	96.6
Next learning goals	75	64.7
Student attitude and motivation for learning	92	79.3
Social skills of students	61	52.6
Support for learning at home	73	62.9
Sharing concerns	76	65.5

Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning—The teachers' perspective

Teachers' definitions of the purpose of reporting all included some of the indicators of effective student-led conferences. In the initial teacher survey, all teachers stated the purpose of reporting was to share information about where the child was 'at' in their learning, and next steps in learning. Just one teacher mentioned the importance of providing comparisons of student achievement to national standards. Two of the interviewed teachers identified student involvement in the reporting process as important, and two interviewed teachers thought it was important to share information about how the learning was achieved.

The indicator that interviewed teachers did not identify as part of the purpose of reporting at the beginning of this study was "Creating opportunity for students to engage with, and understand, all the information about their learning". Providing information that was understood by parents was not initially linked to the purpose of reporting by three of the four teachers, but they did identify this when discussing issues with traditional reporting methods.

Preparation for student-led conferences

In preparation for student-led conferences, teachers in Case Study 1 focused on: supporting students to talk about their goals, or learning intentions, the process of learning they had worked through, the extent to which they had achieved these goals, and to describe the hardest parts or easiest parts of their learning. Students practised discussing samples of work and demonstrating skills mastered.

Students in pre-conference interviews described what they had been doing in class to prepare for student-led conferences in a similar way to the teachers. Their comments reflected the teachers' focus on being able to explain aspects of their learning:

Yesterday she (the teacher) gave us a task to write down the whole process of what we've been doing in technology and to try to remember it ... (so we can) explain the three "what's" to our parents ... trying to explain how we've done it, and why we've done it ... (Student F)

In pre-conference interviews, students identified different curriculum areas they were going to cover in their conferences, that they would be sharing what they've been learning with parents and the activities or games they were going to play. Information to be shared by students in student-led conferences was summarised by Teacher C:

Students will share information about reading, writing, ICT, speeches, Education outside the classroom (EOTC) and technology. They will go through the process, share work or demonstrate an activity ... Portfolios as far as I know, unless the parent has specified, has got nothing to do with the (student-led conference) process.

Student portfolios were sent home to parents prior to the student-led conferences, as had been planned. Information in the portfolios included cumulative information from previous years, current samples of work, and recent test results. Achievement information was not shared with students in class, nor was it expected to be included in the students' part of the student-led conference agenda.

Student-led conferences in practice

Interviewed teachers in the post-conference interview, described how students had followed their agendas, sharing aspects of different curriculum areas at stations set up around the room. In the post-conference interviews, students' descriptions of information they had shared was similar to both their pre-conference descriptions and to each other's descriptions.

Consequences: Teachers' beliefs

Teachers had initially stated that the purpose of reporting was to share information about where a child was 'at' in their learning and to make explicit the next steps in their learning. By providing a current sample of work, or test result in a range of curriculum

areas, teachers believed they were giving this information to parents in the student portfolios sent home prior to student-led conferences.

In practice, the marks or grades given were not referenced to class, school, or national benchmarks. Information in the student portfolios made no links between progress made, current achievement levels, or next steps in learning. Teachers expected to discuss these things in the ‘teacher slot’ part of the student-led conference, but this only happened in some instances, with some parents. Interviewed parents’ comments about the student portfolios made it clear that they did not engage with this information to any great extent.

During the ‘teacher slot’, teachers expected to discuss any information from the portfolios or from the student-led conferences that parents wanted to know more about. One of the interviewed teachers engaged parents with the portfolio information but for other teachers, the expected conversations about information in the portfolios had not happened:

There was no talk of student’s portfolios being the focus and perhaps that was our fault too. We were told parents need to know exactly where their child was at and where they were going before they left the room but that didn’t happen. ... I could have done it but I didn’t want to—I wanted the child to be in control. I didn’t want to step on their toes. It was their show, not mine. (Teacher B)

For one teacher, there was a sense of frustration that parents had not engaged more with the student portfolio information:

The parents didn’t ask me about them (achievement levels). Maybe it wasn’t a problem for them but it certainly was a problem for me. The portfolios were there for them to go through but none of them wanted to pick them up or the children had not directed them towards the portfolios. The portfolios were not part of the agenda—they perhaps should be for next time. (Teacher C)

All teachers in the post-conference survey thought parents had been given good information about their child’s progress and achievement. Only five out of eleven surveyed teachers thought parents had received information about their children’s next learning goals, and four teachers identified focusing on the next steps in learning with students as a future teaching focus. There was no discussion about reviewing student

portfolio information among the teachers in the post-conference survey, or at a post-conference staff meeting.

When considering the first condition of reporting—reporting student progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, introducing student-led conferences had not changed reporting practices in this school—rather student-led conferences had been added onto the traditional ‘teacher-parent interviews’. Teachers thought they had been effective in giving parents information about progress and achievement. Their decisions and practices were consistent with their beliefs about what information should be shared by teachers, with parents.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

When considering the indicators used to define an effective reporting method, teachers believed they had provided information about progress and achievement, created ‘Student voice’ in the reporting process, provided information about how learning had been achieved, and provided information that parents understood and opportunity to ‘learn about learning’ in order to support learning at home.

The only indicator some teachers had identified as a next step in their development, was providing information about the next step in learning.

In reality, information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, was not shared with students, and teachers had not discussed these aspects of learning in any depth with parents. Interviewed teachers thought parents’ understanding of progress and achievement was *reasonable*. Discussion about ways to support learning at home had not been a focus of conversations between teachers and parents in the ‘teacher slot’. Teachers’ beliefs and practices met two of the six indicators of an effective student-led conference. Parents had been given information about how students learn as part of the students’ contribution during their student-led conference and ‘Student voice’ had been created through this reporting method.

Teachers’ beliefs, in effect, narrowed the information about learning students accessed in class, which limited information they could share with parents. What was presented to parents was new for students and parents, but the way teachers had interpreted the students’ role in the reporting process meant that students gained no depth of knowledge of achievement levels or their next learning goals, unless it was discussed in the ‘teacher

slot'. The paradigm shift teachers were asked to make that put students at the centre of the reporting process was not made.

Condition 2: Social purposes of reporting—The teachers' perspective

The second condition teachers were trying to meet was their beliefs about 'Social purposes of reporting' not directly focused on teaching. In the initial teacher survey, three of seven teachers considered the purpose of reporting included giving parents information about their child's social skills and their relationships with their peers. Two teachers in the survey also listed motivation and attitude to learning as being important for parents to know about.

The four interviewed teachers identified sharing information about social issues, behaviour, difficulties students had, teacher concerns, work habits, thinking skills, students' attitude towards learning, and dispositions such as effort as important topics to discuss in a reporting context. Providing honest information to parents was identified by three of the four teachers as important.

Preparation for student-led conferences

In this case study, provision to address wider education issues was made by including a 10 minute 'teacher slot' at the end of each student-led conference. When asked why it was important that they met with parents as part of the conferences replies included:

(It is) very important ... especially for those behaviour problem kids or those who are a real liability and the parents don't know—then you have time to discuss this. (Teacher B)

To be able share where children are at to talk about social or behavioural concerns is important ... There are different motivations for wanting to see different parents—such as encouragement. (Teacher D)

Student-led conferences in practice

Through the 'teacher slot,' teachers had opportunity to talk to parents about wider education issues which supported the teachers' (and parents') agendas for reporting. Interviewed teachers had discussed a range of topics including grades, portfolio information, behaviour, social issues, and homework.

Consequences: Teachers' beliefs

Interviewed teachers' beliefs that the reporting process was a time to discuss a wide range of topics linked to learning were met. Topics they had discussed with parents were similar to those they had identified before the conferences. Teachers valued the opportunity to meet their parents, some for the first time, and they felt they had been able to give key messages with both the parents and students present.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Because teachers wanted to cover a range of topics in the 10 minute 'teacher slot', they created the same dilemma traditional teacher-parent interviews have. If they wanted to discuss progress, achievement, and next steps in learning in any detail there was not enough time.

Discussion about a range of issues cut into the time to discuss topics directly related to learning. Topics were, by the teachers' descriptions, very focused on their agendas, which perhaps did not allow for parents' agendas to be heard. The dominance of topics chosen by teachers to discuss could also be viewed as a way of teachers avoiding giving parents 'hard information' about the implications of their child's current achievement levels. It could be that the teachers, having not engaged in any analysis of the information in portfolios, did not have this information to share.

For students, the 'teacher slot' reversed the student-led conference reporting roles back to traditional roles, where the teachers were the 'holders of knowledge', and students and parents went from being active participants to potentially passive listeners. As roles shifted, so did the focus on learning to any number of issues the teachers or parents thought were relevant.

The reversal of roles created by the introduction of the 'teacher slot' arguably undermined the students' contributions as teachers still held the information parents wanted the most. For students, at this point in the student-led conference the conference shifted from a practiced, predictable focus on information about learning, to a more unpredictable adult-focused conversation that could potentially introduce a range of topics.

For one interviewed student, it totally changed the whole conference experience from a positive conference about learning, to an experience he did not want to repeat. In this instance, after a conference highlighted by positive interactions between the student and

his parents, the teacher had felt it necessary to discuss behavioural concerns with his parents in the ‘teacher slot’. The parents did finish the evening by going to the hall to see the student’s technology project as planned, and behaviour was the sole topic of conversation all the way home. Consequentially, the student did not want to participate in a student-led conference again.

Condition 3: Traditional issues in reporting—The teachers’ perspective

In the initial teachers’ questionnaire, teachers identified traditional teacher-parent interview issues to be parent attendance, lack of student involvement, low rates of parent participation, interview times being too brief, and parents not understanding the information.

In their initial interviews, three of four interviewed teachers thought information in written reports was not well understood. Teachers thought there was lack of clarity around implications of achievement levels for students not achieving, that teacher comments needed to be allowed to be more honest and teacher jargon was an issue, especially for parents who were English second language speakers.

The written reports are not understood—there is too much teacher jargon—we have tried to make the language more ‘parent-friendly’ in the last two years ... we can’t say what we want to say—we have to use PC language. Parents gloss over it (the language)—they don’t know what it means. I wish we’d come more to the point. (Teacher C)

Nine of the eleven surveyed teachers thought students should be part of the reporting process. Two of the interviewed teachers thought the strength of this reporting method would be the interest and improved understanding parents would have as a result of their children presenting information about their learning. All the interviewed teachers wanted to meet, and make a connection with parents of their students, particularly the ones they had not met or whom seldom attended school functions.

Preparation for student-led conferences

The third condition—addressing traditional reporting methods, was met by teachers in a range of ways. Invitations were sent home by students, inviting their parents to their conferences. Student conference agendas were designed to get parents participating in learning activities with their children, as well as develop their understanding of the process of learning. Up to 60 minutes had been allocated for each conference, so time

was created for students and their parents to engage with the information in detail, to support parents in their understanding of the learning process.

Student portfolios, containing information about progress and achievement were sent home prior to the student-led conferences. Because teachers thought they were easy to understand, no changes were made to the format or the information from the previous year.

Student-led conferences in practice

Parent attendance at the student-led conference was considerably higher than for traditional teacher-parent interviews. Teachers met parents they had not met before and because of the format, time had been created for parents to engage with the information shared.

Consequences: Teachers' beliefs

Teachers were delighted that the student-led conference had improved parent attendance with student post-conference survey results showing 78% of the Year 3-6 parents had attended. Student involvement had increased, parent participation had increased, and more time was created to engage with information—all of which resolved teachers' identified issues with traditional reporting practices. Teachers felt students had provided detailed information about their learning without using teacher jargon. Opportunity for three-way discussion was created with the 'teacher slot', which interviewed teachers thought had created more open, honest communication.

Teachers beliefs about issues with traditional reporting methods were all met. Because of this, teachers' perceptions of the value of student-led conferences as a reporting method were extremely positive, even though five of six interviewed parents had not engaged with information sent home in the portfolios. and some parents in the post-conference survey still identified time to talk to the teacher as an unresolved issue.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

For this school, improved parent attendance was a crucial first step in the development of a home-school partnership that supported student learning more effectively. Parental presence created opportunity for parents to participate in the reporting process. This would provide the platform from which to develop parental engagement in learning, which if effective, would lead to greater depth of understanding of their children's

learning and the development of stronger, more genuine, learning-focused, home-school partnerships.

The extent to which parents engaged with the teachers, from the teachers' perspective, was variable. But, because of the information that had been sent home in student portfolios and information parents had engaged with during the conferences, ten out of eleven teachers in the post-conference survey thought parents had been given good information about their child's progress.

At the end of the study there was a mismatch between teachers' perception of parents' understanding of learning and parents' perception of their understanding of learning.

Even though traditional issues were addressed the extent to which parents actually engaged with information about all aspects of their child's learning raises the question: Can a student-led conference, or any reporting method, be successful if the core function of reporting is not met?

Condition 4: Student-led conferences—A student-centred reporting method—The teachers' perspective

The fourth condition teachers were trying to manage as they introduced student-led conferences was linked to concerns they had about teacher and student capabilities. In the initial teacher survey, one teacher was *reasonably keen*, four teachers were *quite keen*, and six teachers were *very keen* to trial student-led conferences.

In reality, while nine of eleven teachers thought students should be part of the reporting process, teachers saw the introduction of student-led conferences as a lot of work and were worried both about their ability to prepare student and students' ability to run a conference about their learning with their parents.

Preparation for student-led conferences

Because of this concern, in addition to four staff meetings focused on supporting teachers to prepare students for their conferences, teachers worked in teams to share teaching strategies and resources to ensure students were as prepared as possible.

Before the student-led conference, teachers were still concerned that they had not done enough to prepare students and that parents might not be supportive of the conference process. "What if" scenarios were discussed at a staff meeting prior to the student-led conference, and procedures were developed to cope with a range of possible problems

during the conferences. Interviewed teachers described specific activities they had taken time to do with their identified “at-risk” students, to prepare them for their conferences and that they planned to observe their students closely on the night to make sure students were coping.

When asked to state what they were the most worried about leading into the student-led conferences, teachers’ responses included parents who wanted to speak to the teacher more than the student, parents who might be too shy or embarrassed to participate, and that students would clam up. Teachers also worried about parents not wanting to talk to them.

Students, when asked how prepared they felt all thought they were prepared and that there was nothing the teachers needed to do to help them in particular.

Student-led conferences in practice

Students ran their conferences, sharing information about the process of learning and what they could now do. Teachers met and had some degree of interaction with all their students’ parents. None of the teachers’ main concerns were realised. Students ran their conferences well without clamming up, and parents participated in appropriate ways to support their children.

Consequences: Teachers’ beliefs

Teachers’ fears that they would not have the capabilities to prepare students for conferences, or that students would not have the skills to run conferences, were not realised. The intensive preparation and scaffolded room environments meant that students were well prepared and well supported. In the post-conference teachers survey, comments emphasised the growth of students’ ownership and understanding of their learning as the process had unfolded.

Students that interviewed teachers had been concerned about before the conferences had coped well on the night, while five of the six interviewed students gave a rating of 4—*quite a lot* or 5—*a lot* for how much they had enjoyed their conferences.

As a result of the conference event exceeding expectations, eight teachers thought the student-led conferences had been *very* or *extremely effective*, and all teachers in the case study were either *very* or *extremely keen* to participate in student-led conferences again.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Because of teachers' concerns about their capabilities and student capabilities, they never considered engaging students with information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. Teachers had however given students a genuine role in the reporting process, and their contributions were valued by parents. As a result, parents did know more about how learning had been achieved and opportunity to 'learn about learning'.

In hindsight, teachers' predictions of students they thought would struggle had been inaccurate. Teachers had believed it would be the lower achieving students that would struggle. Instead, it was students lacking confidence, regardless of ability, that found the conference process difficult.

What is unclear is what caused this lack of confidence. It could have been students' concerns about the new expectation being placed upon them, their perception of their skills in explaining their learning, lack of understanding about their learning, students' concerns about parent expectations, or the quality of the relationship they had with their parents.

Conclusion

The four conditions of reporting that teachers were trying to meet in this study were done so with varying degrees of success. Teachers' beliefs about the purpose of reporting were met. 'Social purposes of reporting', identified by teachers were also met. Traditional issues which were problematic for teachers were resolved, and teachers were successful in developing student capabilities to run conferences for their parents.

When considering the effectiveness of the student-led conferences, in terms of the two key purposes—to inform parents about progress, achievement, next steps in learning and process, and to engage students with all aspects of their learning, this conference process was not totally successful. Teachers' espoused theories about the purpose of reporting were not borne out in practice. They wanted student participation in the reporting process but their beliefs about who should hold what information led to all the elements of a traditional teacher-parent interview being retained. While students did engage with their parents in a conference about the process of learning, in terms of reporting, status quo was maintained.

Section B: Parents and the purpose of reporting—Beliefs, practices and consequences

This section begins with an overview of parents' beliefs about the purpose of reporting, social purposes of reporting, issues with traditional reporting, and reactions to the concept of student-led conferences.

Information collected in initial parent surveys and parent interviews was compared to post-conference survey findings and parent interviews, to assess the extent to which student-led conferences matched parents' beliefs about effective reporting.

Consequences were then considered in terms of the extent to which parents' experience of the conference process matched the indicators of an effective student-led conference. Unintended consequences were also identified.

Overview

There were four conditions that parents wanted a school reporting system to address. Parents wanted specific, detailed information about their children's progress and achievement, and normative or criterion referenced so they knew how their child was doing compared to other children their age. They wanted the reporting process to meet a range of 'social purposes' and they wanted traditional issues they had identified addressed. The majority, 67.9% of parents were *extremely keen* or *very keen* for the idea of students to be involved in the reporting process, in order to improve communication, to clarify expectations, and work together more effectively.

Student-led conferences did not meet all these conditions in this case study. Because of this, the majority of parents rated this reporting method only as effective as traditional methods of reporting used by the school.

Consequences: Parent beliefs

The first condition—giving parents specific, detailed information about progress and achievement was identified by 96.6% of parents as the most important purpose of reporting, while 64.7% wanted information about next steps in learning (see Table 9). Because of decisions made by teachers, information sent home in student portfolios and information shared during the 'teacher slot' did not change from previous years. The traditional mechanisms for reporting this information, in effect, were retained with the introduction of student-led conferences and were not effective in giving parents the information they wanted.

Like teachers, condition two—getting information about other purposes of reporting, was considered an important part of the purpose of reporting by parents. In the initial parent survey, getting information about student attitudes and motivation was identified by 79.3% of parents, as important information to share. Findings showed 65.5% of parents identified sharing concerns as important. This condition was met through the retention of the ‘teacher slot’ at the end of students’ conferences.

Parents did discuss a range of issues during the 10 minute ‘teacher slot’, but some parents felt there was not enough time allowed for this and that they did not get all the information they were looking for. Because of the random nature of the conversations, some information came as a ‘negative surprise’ to parents and students. While parents valued the opportunity to talk to the teachers, the semi-public forum meant that some parents felt they could not discuss issues or concerns freely. In meeting social purposes of reporting, the student-led conference method was effective, but not more than traditional reporting methods.

The third condition parents wanted addressed linked to issues they identified in the school’s current reporting methods. The first and overwhelming issue was getting information about progress and achievement. Other issues they identified were getting information about progress over time, not understanding information provided, and the need to provide information more frequently. They wanted more time at interviews and more specific information about how to help their children at home.

Of the issues above, student-led conferences created more time for parents to engage with information their children had to share. The dilemma was that the students did not have the information parents wanted. Teachers used the ‘teacher slot’ to discuss a wide range of issues, but only some parents felt they got information they sought. The ‘teacher slot’ time allocation of 10 minutes meant it had the same time constraint as a traditional teacher-parent interview. Two of the interviewed teachers had given parents general information about how to support their children at home, but this was not mentioned by parents in post-conference interviews or surveys.

The fourth condition—participating in a student-centred reporting process, was both positive and problematic for parents. Most parents appreciated their child’s input and believed their involvement had improved their children’s motivation and understanding of learning. Parents did learn more about the process of learning from their child. Opportunity for three-way communication was created with the ‘teacher slot’, resolving

the issue of ‘second-hand’ information and ‘mixed messages’ between teachers, students, and parents.

Student-led conferences also however created a constraint as to what could be discussed. At the end of the study, 13% of parents did not support student involvement in the reporting process because there was some information ‘for adults only to know’.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

If student-led conferences had been set up to engage students with all aspects of their learning, it would have followed that students would have been able (to some extent at least), inform their parents about their progress, current achievement levels, and next steps in learning. The ‘teacher slot’ would not have been needed, and any time constraint would have been removed.

In terms of the indicators of an effective student-led conference, students did share one aspect of their learning with parents, and parents did get time to develop understanding of the process of learning. Post-conference interviews however, did not show parents had made links between this information and how they could support learning at home.

Opportunity to develop parents’ understanding of all aspects of their child’s learning, with time to engage in specific, detailed information was not realised.

Parents’ expectation that social purposes of reporting would be part of an effective reporting method, in effect, clashed with the learning agenda of the student-led conference concept. The time allocated in the ‘teacher slot’ was too brief for teachers to give the detailed information parents wanted, even if the focus of the time had remained on sharing information about learning.

Because of the way student-led conferences were organised and run, parents, while enjoying the students’ input, wanted more time with the teachers to discuss progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. Like the teachers, they did not begin to entertain the idea that students might have the capabilities to engage with, or share this information.

In the next section, a problem-based methodology approach was used to explore the tensions between parents’ beliefs, practices, and consequences before and after they had participated in student-led conferences. Parents’ expectations around the four

conditions of reporting are explored in depth, to understand more fully their views about the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method.

Table 9 summarises the parents' findings from this case study, based upon evidence from parents' initial and post-conference interviews and questionnaires.

Table 9
Case study 1: The purpose of reporting—Parents—Beliefs, practices and consequences

Parents' Beliefs			
Condition 1—Reporting focused on learning	Condition 2—Social Purposes of Reporting	Condition 3—Addressing Traditional Reporting Issues	Condition 4—Participation in a student-centred reporting paradigm
<p>Believed purpose was to provide information about progress and achievement, including comparisons to national benchmarks, strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Parents wanted information about next steps in learning.</p>	<p>Wanted information areas of need in learning, about attitude and motivation and to discuss concerns</p>	<p>Traditional issues identified included getting information about progress and achievement, not understanding information and not getting it frequently enough. They wanted more time and more information about how to help their children at home.</p>	<p>Wanted students involved to improve communication, to clarify expectations and to work together more effectively.</p> <p>Some parents thought there were issues that were for 'adults only' to discuss</p>
Practices			
<p>Parents received student portfolios with information about progress and achievement that were sent home.</p> <p>Parents participated in student-led conferences, with their children.</p> <p>Parents met with teachers in the 'teacher slot' so could discuss information in more detail</p>	<p>Through the 'teacher slot' opportunity to discuss identified social purposes of reporting was created.</p> <p>Some teachers discussed social issues with parents.</p>	<p>Student-led conferences were up to an hour long. The students' shared information but it was not the information parents wanted—which left some parents feeling frustrated.</p> <p>Included in this was the 'teacher slot'—some parents engaged with teachers, discussing a range of issues, including progress and achievement.</p>	<p>Parents were invited to attend a parent evening to learn more about student-led conferences.</p> <p>Parents received invitations and student portfolios the week before the student-led conferences.</p> <p>Parents participated in the student-led conferences with their children and learned new information about the process of learning.</p> <p>Some parents made another time to talk to the teacher again.</p>

Consequences—Parents			
<p>84% of parents thought they had got information about their child’s progress.</p> <p>There was an improvement in parents’ understanding of progress and achievement (ES .49).</p> <p>Teachers did not give the detailed information about progress and achievement parents wanted.</p> <p>Parents could not easily connect information from the portfolio with information shared during the student-led conferences.</p> <p>The ‘teacher slot’ was too short, teachers did not always have the portfolios handy and their attention was divided.</p>	<p>The aspect of student-led conferences parents liked the most was time to talk to the teacher.</p> <p>There was not enough time to discuss issues in detail.</p> <p>The semi-public forum meant some issues could not be discussed freely.</p> <p>Some parents wanted time to talk with the teacher without the child present.</p> <p>Some information was a ‘surprise’ to parents and students.</p>	<p>Parents did not get the information they wanted from the students or the teachers.</p> <p>The time to discuss information with the teacher was only 10 minutes—the same as in traditional teacher-parent interviews.</p> <p>Some parents chose to by-pass the ‘teacher slot’.</p> <p>Parents still wanted information more frequently, more comments from teachers and more specific information about achievement levels.</p> <p>Parents first needed to get and develop understanding of information about progress and achievement before discussing ways to support student learning at home.</p>	<p>Student voice had been created, which was appreciated by parents.</p> <p>Students’ perceptions of their parents’ views about the student-led conference experience were very positive.</p> <p>Issues with three-way communication were resolved for some parents.</p> <p>Parent support for student involvement in the reporting process did not increase as a result of student-led conferences.</p> <p>How to better inform and induct parents was a communication issue identified in the parent post-conference survey.</p>
<p>Student-led conferences did develop parents’ understanding of students’ progress and achievement but parents wanted more detailed information about achievement and grades.</p>	<p>Student-led conferences were not conducive to meeting all purposes of reporting, due to lack of time and privacy.</p>	<p>Traditional issues identified by parents were not addressed.</p>	<p>Parents rated the overall effectiveness of student-led conferences only as effective as other reporting methods</p>

Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning—The parents' perspective

In the initial parent survey, 61.2% of parents rated the overall effectiveness of current reporting methods used in the school as *very effective* or *extremely effective*.

As seen in Table 9, when asked to identify the main purpose of reporting from a list of descriptors in the initial parent survey, parents gave the highest frequency ratings to aspects of reporting linked to learning. Parent comments indicated that they wanted information about what learning was mastered, where children were struggling, and comparisons of how children are performing against other children of the same age throughout the country. One parent stated “The reports have a graph showing the levels and the ages—but the teachers don’t say what level my child is”. Another parent commented:

To give me a mark of whether your child can do multiplication or tell me that in their exam result got 70%, well that’s that’s like telling me how long a piece of string is I’ve got nothing to gauge that by. No benchmark. (Parent A)

The initial parent survey also showed 64.8% of parents thought teacher-parent interviews were *extremely effective* or *very effective* in communicating information about students’ learning.

Interviewed parents described the purpose of reporting in similar ways to the teachers. Four interviewed parents stated they wanted information about their children’s achievement levels in different areas, their strengths, and weaknesses. Two selected parents wanted information about their children’s behaviour, motivation, and attitude to learning.

Indicators not identified by interviewed parents were identifying next steps in learning, creating student voice in the reporting process, creating opportunity for students to engage with, and understand, all the information about their learning, and sharing information about how learning had been achieved with parents. Providing information that was understood by parents and creating opportunity for parents to ‘learn about learning’ so they are better able to support students’ learning at home, was not mentioned when initially discussing the purpose of reporting, but was identified as an issue when discussing traditional reporting methods.

Student-led conferences in practice

In the post-conference parent survey, 79.9% of parents agreed they got information about progress and achievement and 73.1% thought the reporting process had provided information about next steps in learning.

Interviewed parents described the information that their children had presented to them in their conference in similar ways. Conferences began with students introducing their parents to their teacher, the teacher giving parents cards with questions to ask the students, and then students led parents to different stations around the room.

He introduced me to the programme of what he was going to show me ... he showed me his topics—the ICT, Education Outside the Classroom camp book, his maths book, his English—Oh, the kids pix and his speech. Then we went from section to section round the room. (Parent G)

Other interviewed parents described in detail what they discussed in each of the sections:

We saw her speech. We saw it on the computer along with a video tape of her presenting her speech had a look at her maths book and played a maths game. We saw a Kidpix display of other people in the classroom she also did a bit of English progress um telling us what she did in her character study. She told us her learning intentions - well we asked her what those were and she seemed to have a fair idea. (Parent F)

In practice, students shared current work in a range of curriculum areas with parents. Some of the interviewed students had talked about their goals and the learning process they had gone through to produce the work sample or project. Students were able to show their development of knowledge and skills through games and demonstrations, and parents asked questions where appropriate, to prompt the student or to clarify information the child had shared.

Consequences: Parents' beliefs

In the post-conference survey, 79.6% of parents said they had got information about their child's progress, while 73.1% thought they had received specific information about student achievement compared to a national standard or age comparison (Cohen's $d = .49$). Just 55.9% of parents thought they understood the grading system used.

Parents' comments from the post-conference survey were very positive with many of them commenting on how much their children knew about their learning. One parent commented "The questions at each station for the parents to ask their children helped to show how much my child really understood about how and why she was learning".

Interviewed parents, in their post-conference interviews, were asked about the extent to which student-led conference clarified or supported information about student progress and achievement that was sent home in the portfolio. Parent responses identified the lack of connection between information in the portfolios and information shared in student-led conferences. One parent had not read the portfolio at all, and another claimed it did not have any current information in it from this year in it. Parent C felt that while the information in the portfolios did support information provided in the student-led conference, because of her knowledge of how the portfolio information was collected, she had more confidence in information provided in the student-led conferences.

Suggestions for improvement included more specific information about students' achievement levels, more comments from the teacher, and work samples from throughout the year, rather than just one two week period of the year. One parent, when discussing portfolios, suggested that they "Don't have it!" (Parent E)

Just one parent noted that it was the portfolio that provided information about student levels of achievement, rather than the student-led conference stating "I don't think that the thing last night (the student-led conference) showed us the levels of anything that she was up to but it was there in the portfolio." (Parent F)

The surveyed parents were quite specific about what information they still wanted at the end of the conference that had not been provided by either the portfolio or in discussion with the teacher. One parent commented: "Talks with teachers were only effective when there was space and time to sit down and talk, teachers had portfolios handy to talk through and explain and teacher's attention was not too divided." In effect, the teachers' decision to have a 'teacher slot' was made even more difficult than a traditional teacher-parent interview because of competing interests for their time and attention.

The parents' beliefs about the purpose of reporting were not met as a result of teachers' beliefs that the two traditional mechanisms for sharing information about progress and

achievement were effective. Their decisions to leave the information in portfolios unchanged and to have a 10 minute ‘teacher slot’ was not effective and left parents frustrated once again.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

The post-conference survey parents’ comments were predominately focused on lack of information about student achievement, and lack of specific information about next steps in learning. From the parents’ perspective, just two of six indicators of an effective reporting method were met. Students did have some voice in the reporting process, and parents did engage with information about how students learn.

Parents had difficulty making connections between the information in the portfolios and the information shared in the student-led conferences, expressed in comments such as “I could not get an accurate scale of how my child compared to others their age”, and “There seemed to be no link between the portfolio and the student-led conferences”.

One interviewed parent expressed frustration that information shared was split between the child and the teacher: “I had to find out more information with the teacher after (my daughter) and I went through all the stations. I only had half the information and I had to get the other half from the teacher anyway.”

As a result, at the end of the student-led conferences, both students and parents did not have specific information about current progress, achievement levels, and next steps in learning. Six of the seven selected parents, while extremely positive about student-led conferences as a reporting method, identified provision of specific achievement information and opportunity to spend time with the teacher without the child as aspects of the reporting method they would like to see addressed.

Condition 2: Social purposes of reporting—The parents’ perspective

Like teachers, parents wanted the reporting process to meet a range of purposes beyond reporting on learning. In the initial parent survey, 79.3% of parents thought getting information about student attitude and motivation towards learning was part of the purpose of reporting, 65.5% rated discussing concerns, and 52.6% of parents wanted information about social interactions (see Table 8). Two of the six interviewed parents had stated they also wanted information about children’s behaviour, motivation and attitude to learning.

Student-led conferences in practice

During the student-led conferences, most parents engaged in discussion with the teachers to some extent where a range of topics were discussed. Because teachers had prioritised sharing information about behaviour, social issues, and concerns in general, time during the ‘teacher slot’ was focused on these topics.

Consequences: Parents’ beliefs

In the post-conference parent survey, the highest rated criteria for things parents liked about the conference was “Time to talk to the teacher about any concerns at the end.” This could have been because parents still needed teachers to clarify their understanding of their children’s progress and achievement. It could have been because they wanted to discuss students’ attitude, motivation for learning, behaviour, or strengths and weaknesses, as they had done traditionally.

Like the teachers, some surveyed parents felt there were some wider education issues that were for ‘adults only to know’. This was expressed in comments such as:

We feel the old system of a 10–15 minute appointment with the teacher was still required. This precious time is very valuable for teachers and parents to openly discuss concerns and worries, as well as a child’s progress openly and honestly.

Some parents thought time to talk with the teacher, without the child present, would have improved the reporting process.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Teachers and parents identified sharing information about progress and achievement as the key purpose of reporting, but both groups were not prepared to make this an exclusive priority. Teachers did not prioritise discussion about learning, and parents’ agendas were too broad. Even if conversations had stayed focused on discussion of aspects of learning, to give parents the detailed information they wanted in a range of curriculum areas was not possible in 10 minutes.

If students had been sharing the information, supported by written information from teachers and illustrated with samples of work, parents would have had time to engage with information about learning in depth. If there had been more focus on learning by teachers, through students with parents ‘other’ topics parents and teachers felt compelled to bring into the student-led conference may have become irrelevant.

Students' attitude, motivation for learning, engagement in learning, effort, understanding of learning, progress, strengths, weaknesses, and achievement would have been self evident.

The random nature of topics discussed by teachers and parents in the 'teacher slot' presented an ethical dilemma. In this context it was possible parents, students, or teachers to become engaged in a 'semi-public' conversation that was potentially emotionally or ethically unsafe.

What was needed was a process where teachers or parents could make a time to meet to discuss sensitive issues or concerns so the meeting could to be planned, with the agenda shared beforehand and meeting in a private setting.

Condition 3: Traditional issues in reporting—The parents' perspective

The third condition—addressing issues with traditional reporting methods, for parents was similar to meeting the first condition of reporting because the issue identified most consistently by parents was the lack of specific information about student achievement.

Other issues surveyed parents identified were not getting information about progress over time, not understanding the information being provided, the need to provide information more frequently, the need for more time at interviews, and information about how to help their children at home. One interviewed parent suggested that “at the middle of the year I feel it is a little late to find out if your child has any problems or difficulties”. Teachers' suggestions about the need for more honest communication were also echoed by parents.

Interviewed parents' suggestions for improving the current reporting systems included providing more specific information about achievement levels, more comments from the teacher, with work samples from throughout the year rather than just one two week period.

Student-led conferences in practice

The format of the student portfolios had remained unchanged. There were no written comments from teachers and samples of work were from a two week period of time in Term 2. A graph plotting achievement levels in reading and writing over time had been included, but there was no reference to expected levels of achievement for each age group.

During the student-led conferences, parents did meet with teachers, but parents' post-conference comments showed they wanted more specific information about how their child was going. One parent stated "The brief conversation we had with the teacher left us unsure about the progress our child was making".

Consequences: Parents' beliefs

This reporting method did not address the traditional issues with reporting identified by parents. The progress and achievement information in student portfolios had not changed. The method used to clarify information about progress and achievement had not changed. More time to discuss this information, or other concerns, with the teacher had not changed. Strategies to support parents to develop understanding of information was not discussed by teachers, and ways to give parents information more frequently was also not resolved through the introduction of student-led conferences.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Student-led conferences in this context did not develop parents' understanding of all the aspects of their child's learning. While they learned more about the process of learning, in the 'teacher slot', parents found it difficult to make connections between what the students had shared, what their current skill levels were, and what they could do to support them in their learning at home.

The expectation that parents would want to deepen their understanding of information was based on an assumption that they would have engaged with information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning during the student-led conference. Parents in this case study were more focused on trying to get this information, than understanding it in depth. Applying understanding of the assessment information to support their child's learning at home was a third stage of engagement that was unrealistic in this context.

In the post-conference parent survey, parents rated student-led conferences as effective as traditional reporting methods. Their frustrations with reporting had not been addressed.

Condition 4: Participating in a new student-centred reporting method—The parents' perspective

Initial parent survey responses indicated that 67.9% of parents were *quite* keen or *very* keen on students being involved in the reporting process. Comments showed parents

thought this would empower and inform students, create a ‘Student voice’, improve communication between the teacher, the student, and the parent, and motivate students.

Other parent’s comments indicated that they valued student involvement as an opportunity to have a three-way dialogue—between the teacher, the student, and the parent. Like the interviewed teachers, parents saw this as a way to strengthen communication, to clarify expectations, and to work together more effectively. These comments were based upon the previous year when students had been invited to attend teacher-parent interviews in Term 2.

Just three parents in the initial parent survey expressed negative views about student involvement in the reporting process as they preferred traditional roles to be maintained. One parent maintained “Children need to be led by teachers and parents not the other way round—(this is) children’s rights and equality gone mad.”

When asked about their initial reaction to the concept of student-led conferences, interviewed parents’ views were mixed. Two parents were *not very* keen, expressing concerns about the change of teacher and student roles in the reporting process and the type of information they could expect to receive. One parent stated:

I can’t still kind of visualise how much of the information they can bring by leading a conference ... obviously a child is going to talk about all the positive aspects about themselves which is nice but we also need to know the negative things I think. I think they would need more time because they wouldn’t know when to stop talking about the same thing ... how do we find out about the child if they’re going to be explaining what they did? Where are they; at what level are they in all that they’ve done? Who is going to tell us that? Because if it’s going to be led by them; is the teacher going to tell them? Like is she going to spend some time and explain and say, so this is where she is; and all this, or are we going to rely just on the report? (Parent B)

Three of the parents were reasonably keen, and two parents were very keen about the concept and how it would empower students.

Preparation for student-led conferences

Parents had been invited to a parent meeting in Term 2 to learn about this reporting method. Forty parents attended, representing 8% of the school’s parent population. Information about student-led conferences was put into school newsletters during Term

2 and students sent invitations home (with student portfolios), the week before the student-led conferences. Over two days, at the end of Term 2, 78% of Year 3-6 parents had attended student-led conferences.

Consequences: Parents' beliefs

In terms of parent concerns about their children's capabilities to conduct a conference, most parents thought their children had run effective conferences. Post-conference survey data showed 84.4% of the students believed their parents thought their conferences had been *very effective* or *extremely effective*.

Surveyed parents' comments about student-led conferences were also positive. Parents thought students knew about how and why they were learning, they found being able to see samples of work helpful, and some parents felt it had built confidence and self esteem. For one parent at least, it was a great system stating "If everyone feels the same way I do you have got a sure fire winner. Kudos all round—a superior system, worthy of implementation in every school, if it is not already".

Suggestions for improvements included more training for students in running a conference, more information for parents about what was expected of them, more time allocated (at least 60 minutes), the inclusion of demonstrations, interactive activities different from those done for homework, comparative information, and more involvement from the teacher.

Three of the interviewed parents thought their children gained confidence over the course of the conference, particularly when discussing high-interest aspects of their learning. They believed the process had developed student accountability and developed their child's understanding of their learning. They valued their children's opinions about their work and appreciated having the time to see students' work and to learn different things about their child and their learning:

I think it was more personal. I really, really enjoyed it. I really did. I think I learnt probably a little bit more, maybe; no not more, different things perhaps with the personal one on one with James going around his room ... I think he felt like he was including us in his learning. (Parent G)

One parent commented:

The child understands their own process (and) it benefits them ... whereas (when) a teacher and a parent do the interview, well they don't actually know what they've accomplished. (Parent C).

Other parents felt problems with communication with teachers were resolved:

I don't know the right questions to ask the teacher and each teacher is different to what they would think was important to that parent and I do think that your child knows. (The teachers) they haven't got that time have they. (Parent D)

As a result of the student-led conference experience, six out of seven parents were *extremely keen* to take part in another student-led conference.

In the post-conference parent survey, parents were asked again to what extent they supported the idea of student involvement in the reporting process. Results showed 23.1% were *extremely keen*, 39.6% were *very keen*, 27.5% were *reasonably keen*, 7.7% were *not very keen*, and 2.2% thought *they should not be involved at all*.

This result was slightly lower than those in the initial parent survey. The results can be best explained by the degree of student involvement parents were basing their views upon in the two surveys. Before the introduction of student-led conferences, student involvement meant students attended a teacher-parent interview and perhaps participating in a three-way discussion. Post-conference, student involvement referred to students being an integral part of the reporting process, leading a conference about learning.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

The process of introducing and implementing student-led conferences was new for everyone. Despite this, parents did gain more understanding of the learning process and of skills, knowledge, and understanding their children had. Time was created for dialogue between students and their parents about learning. Parents had participated, positively in interacting with their children.

How to better inform and induct parents into their new role of 'active participant' in this reporting process was a 'next challenge' identified in the post-conference parent survey.

In this case study, the student-led conference format did not offer privacy for teachers and parents to discuss sensitive issues, which some parents would have appreciated. For some parents, there was a mismatch in expectation between parents and teachers about the extent to which teachers would participate in each conference. If students had had access to all the information about their learning, and they had presented this information, with written input from teachers to validate or affirm information they shared, the changed role of teachers' role in the reporting process may not have mattered so much.

Summary

From the parents' perspective of the four conditions of reporting, Condition 1 and Condition 3 were not met, but Condition 2 and Condition 4 were resolved through the implementation of student-led conferences.

Condition 1, reporting focused on learning, showed parents wanted specific, detailed information about their child's progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, and that this expectation was not met. They had difficulty making connections between the information in the portfolios and the student-led conference, and teachers had not provided the information they wanted in the 'teacher slot'.

By comparison, Condition 2 was achieved. Meeting social purposes of reporting was incorporated into the student-led conference through the 'teacher slot' and a range of issues were able to be discussed because of this. Parents appreciated the opportunity to talk to the teacher, but some parents wanted more time and privacy to discuss issues.

Condition 3—addressing traditional issues identified by parents in this Case Study, was not resolved. Parents did not get information about progress over time. They did not get more time to discuss progress and achievement information during the conferences, and they did not get specific information about next steps in learning or how to help their child at home.

Condition 4—participating in a student-centred reporting method, had been a positive experience for most parents. Their initial understanding of student involvement, however, was different to the reality of student-led conferences. Having students involved was less about a three-way conversation led by adults, and more about students engaging their parents in new information about the process of learning. Parents appreciated the students' input during the student-led part of the conference, and

the three-way conversations between teachers, students, and parents that created the opportunity to improve communication between teachers, students, and parents. But, as with Condition 2, some parents wanted more time to talk to the teacher without the child present.

Other parents identified parental preparation as an area to address for future years.

Conclusion

The extent to which student-led conferences were effective as a reporting method has been considered from the teachers' and parents' perspectives. In this study, teachers believed they had been effective in reporting information about student progress and achievement to parents. Parent survey information showed the student-led conference process did improve parents' understanding of information about progress and achievement, but despite this, parents viewed student-led conferences as no more effective than other reporting methods. Student data showed that 84.6% of the students thought they had done *very well* or *extremely well* in leading a conference about learning.

In terms of meeting social purposes of reporting, there were some commonalities between topics teachers and parents thought were important purposes of reporting. During the student-led conference, information shared by teachers about progress and achievement was not specific enough to be helpful for parents. Some parents did not want to discuss this information at all. In other instances, the 'teacher slot' time was taken up with other topics of conversation teachers or parents wanted to discuss.

The opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss a range of issues meant the social condition of reporting was met, but both teachers and parents expressed frustration about what information was not shared. For one student at least, this aspect of the student-led conference had not been a positive experience. When considering the third condition—addressing traditional issues with reporting, most of the teachers' issues were resolved. Parent attendance improved, parents and students successfully participated in the conference process, and time had been created to engage with information more fully. For parents, it was the opposite. At the end of the conference process they had not received the information they wanted about progress, achievement levels, or next steps in learning. More time to discuss these aspects of learning in detail

had not been created, and they still did not know how to help their child in their learning at home.

The fourth condition—implementing and participating in a new student-centred reporting method, had been achieved. Teachers had developed their capabilities in the process of preparing students to lead their conferences. Students had developed new skills and understanding of the learning process, and were successful in leading their conferences about their learning. Parents did participate and learnt more about how students learn in the process.

For teachers, students, and parents, there was uncertainty about their new roles in the student-led conference process. Both teachers and parents, while valuing students' involvement, found the re-defined roles of teachers, students, and parents, created constraints during the conferences that were not entirely overcome with the addition of the 'teacher slot'. For teachers, the implementation of student-led conferences had been a success, and 85% of students had found the student-led conference experience a positive one. For parents, this method of reporting was no more effective than any other.

Student-led conferences as a reporting method can be viewed as a snapshot of an on-going, student-centred, teaching, and learning process. To effectively meet all six conditions of effective reporting as defined in this study, it is essential to understand teachers' beliefs about assessment as they relate to their practice. This reporting method requires teachers to make a paradigm shift that places students at the centre of the reporting process, with the knowledge, understanding and skills to effectively report to their parents. The next section of this chapter considers five aspects of teacher 'Assessment Literacy' competence that are used as a framework to explain aspects of teacher practice that impacted upon the effectiveness of student-led conferences in this case study.

CHAPTER 4B: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER COMPETENCY IN ASSESSMENT THROUGH THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATING IN STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Overview

In theory, student-led conferences are an extension of the daily conversations teachers and students have about learning. To effectively develop students' knowledge and understanding of their learning, teachers need to provide regular opportunities for students to engage with assessment information, to reflect upon progress made, and to discuss aspects of their learning. In this study, as well as being a mechanism for reporting to parents, a second purpose for preparing students to conduct conferences with their parents served to focus teachers on using specific, class-based assessment strategies to ensure students did understand their learning and could explain it to another audience.

Because the quality of student-led conferences as a reporting method is dependent on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, the effectiveness of teachers' practice needed to be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method.

In Case Study 1, the school had been part in a two-year Ministry of Education 'Assessment for Learning' Professional Development contract five years prior to this study. Two of the teachers in this study had taken part in this professional development contract. The other two teachers, being provisionally registered teachers, had some knowledge of the principles of 'Assessment for Learning' from their teacher education courses. It was expected that teachers with understanding of 'Assessment for Learning' principles would be effective in supporting the development of students' knowledge and understanding of their learning as they prepared for student-led conferences.

To understand the quality of assessment information shared with parents during student-led conferences by students and teachers, teachers' knowledge, and understanding of assessment were evaluated using data from teachers' initial, pre-conference and post-conference interviews. Responses were analysed using an 'Assessment Literacy' framework, initially developed by Evaluation Associates facilitators over a number of years and further developed for this study. Competency criteria were modified to link teachers' assessment competencies more specifically to reporting in order to better

understand how teachers' assessment knowledge and understanding affected the effectiveness of this student-centred reporting method.

Assessment criteria included:

- 'Assessment Literacy' as it related to teaching and learning
- Student involvement in assessment
- Clarity about next steps in learning and
- Assessment as it links to reporting.

To strengthen reliability of interpretation of teachers' data an inter-rater reliability check was carried out. Using the exact agreement method for specific checklist items with each dimension of the 'Assessment Literacy' framework, overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed teachers' levels of 'Assessment Literacy' at each stage of the case study was 77.2% ($n=52$ comparisons).

Using the 'Assessment Literacy' framework as a basis for analysis, all teachers at the beginning of this study were operating at Level 1 in 'Assessment Literacy'. Even though the school had been part of a Ministry of Education Professional Development contract on 'Assessment for Learning', teachers' overall knowledge and understanding of assessment and how it could be used to inform teaching and learning at all levels of the school was not strong at the beginning of the study. Teachers saw assessment data as something they did for someone else, so not only did it not inform their teaching practice, it was not analysed, specific next steps were not established, and information was not shared with students.

In pre-conference interviews, teachers showed the beginning of shifts in practice in assessment leading up to student-led conferences. Teacher A described beginning to share assessment information with students, as did Teachers B and D by the end of the study. All four teachers described their understanding of their students' next steps in learning in more detail, with reference to a range of assessment tools and strategies by the end of the study. Teachers' descriptions of reporting had also shifted from teachers giving information about curriculum coverage and student achievement (Level 1) to encouraging students to explain aspects of their learning to parents (Level 2).

Consequences of implementing student-led conferences on teachers' knowledge and understanding of assessment in post-conference interviews showed Teacher A and D

had shifted from Level 1 to Level 2 in most ‘Assessment Literacy’ criteria. Teachers B and C had shifted to Level 2 in three criteria.

In summary, the process of implementing student-led conferences for the first time, shifted all four teachers’ practice in the area of ‘Assessment Literacy’. The most significant criteria that did not change was teachers’ beliefs about assessment as it linked to teaching and learning. Because of this, the decision not to share all assessment information with their students did not change. Arguably it was this criteria that impacted the most on the extent to which students in this case study could effectively report on their progress and achievement in learning.

The theory of effective student-led conferences

If student-led conferences are to be effective, teachers need to have knowledge and understanding of assessment and engage in teaching practices that support students to gain evidence-based knowledge of themselves as learners. Three teachers in this case study had still not made strong connections between assessment and teaching practice by the end of the study. Because teachers did not engage in analysis of assessment information, they did not have specific, detailed information about students’ progress and achievement to share with students in the classroom context, or with parents in the ‘teacher slot’ at the end of student-led conferences. As a result, there was lack of clarity around next steps in learning, evident in parents’ comments in the post-conference interviews.

Teachers beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences need to understand the link between class-based assessment practices that give students access to assessment information, to inform their learning, and to fulfil their new role in the reporting process.

In the next section, the five aspects of the ‘Assessment Literacy’ framework, as they related to teachers’ descriptions of their practice are explored in more depth, to gain understanding as to how teachers’ practices were influenced by the introduction of student-led conferences.

Table 10

Teachers 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions matrix—based on the work of Michael Absolum in Ministry of Education 'Assessment for Learning' contracts

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher assesses when required but does not link results with teaching and learning. • Assessment is considered a separate activity from teaching. • Teacher sees formative and summative assessment as distinct concepts. 	<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher describes assessment as linked with teaching and learning • Makes some efforts to use formal tests diagnostically and for learning. • Teacher may group students according to results from initial testing 	<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher describes all types of assessment as Assessment for Learning – uses most summative assessment measures (like post tests and assessment checklists, etc.) to inform teaching and learning. 	<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher shows understanding that all informal and formal assessment is central to teaching and learning and uses it to make informed decisions about where individuals and groups are in their learning.
<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher collates test or exam results and students receive limited feedback about results. • Teacher does not describe peer or self assessment as a class-based practice. 	<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher collates test or exam results and shares these with students. • Teachers show awareness of the value of self and peer assessment and uses these assessment practices infrequently. 	<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher shares assessment results and analysis of them with students to establish future goals. • Teachers describe using self and peer assessment used as a regular part of class assessment. 	<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher involves students in all assessment, shares results and analyses them with student to inform further learning. • Teachers describe students being able to peer and self assessment independently with accuracy.

<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has an understanding of where students are at in their learning through personal curriculum knowledge, observation and summative testing. 	<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has an understanding of where students are at in their learning through personal curriculum knowledge, observation and the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, use of an exemplar or matrix. 	<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers help students to develop an understanding of where they are at in their learning through making transparent the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, exemplars or matrices. 	<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers give students the opportunity to decide on where they are at in the curriculum the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, exemplars or matrices and other curriculum resources.
<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has <i>little</i> understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally or how it relates to their classroom practice. 	<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has <i>some</i> understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally and how it relates to their classroom practice. 	<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally and how these analyses relates to their classroom practice. 	<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally and how these analyses relates to their classroom practice—and shares this information with students.
<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting to parents on curriculum coverage and student achievement. Teacher uses assessment information to give general information to parents. 	<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting to parents and encouraging students to share what they are learning at school. Teacher uses assessment information to inform parents and students where they are ‘at’ in their learning. 	<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting in terms of supporting students to talk to parents about their learning progress. Teacher uses assessment information to inform parents, through students, where students are ‘at’ in their learning. 	<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting in terms of enabling students to lead conversations about their progress, achievement and next steps in learning with parents. Teachers use assessment information to inform parents, through students, about learning so students and parents can identify actions to support future learning.

Table 11

Case Study 1: Teachers' development in 'assessment literacy' through the process of implementing student-led conferences

Beliefs
<p>At the beginning of the study:</p> <p>Three of four interviewed teachers were operating at Level 1 in most 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions (See 'Assessment Literacy' Matrix, p. 112)</p> <p>Despite being an AFL school knowledge and understanding of assessment and how it can be used to support students' development of understanding, inform teaching practice (class-based) or to inform leadership, the BOT, the parents, the MOE (other stakeholders) not strong at the beginning of the study.</p> <p>The main impact on student-led conferences was that teachers were not using data to inform students about their learning or to inform teachers' practice at the beginning of the study.</p> <p>Because teachers didn't engage with data analysis was not done, specific next steps were not established by teachers so could not be shared with students or parents.</p>
Practices
<p>Pre- conferences interviews showed:</p> <p>Teacher A still operating mainly at Level 1, showing awareness of different aspects of 'Assessment Literacy'. Beginning to consider sharing results of tests with students and thinking about reporting in terms of encouraging students to share what they are learning at school.</p> <p>Teacher B still operating at Level 1, shifting to Level 2 in two areas—discussing students' current achievement levels in terms of the use of specific assessment tools, exemplars or matrix and reporting in terms of encouraging students to share what they are learning at school.</p> <p>Teacher C mainly operating at Level 1, but beginning to talk about reporting in terms of encouraging students to share what they are learning at school.</p> <p>Teacher D mainly operating at Level 1, shifting to Level 2 in two areas—like Teacher B, discussing students' current achievement levels in terms of the use of specific assessment tools, exemplars or matrix and reporting in terms of encouraging students to share what they are learning at school.</p>

Consequences

Summary:

Teacher A—Shifted from Level 1 to Level 2 from beginning to end of study in most criteria

Teacher B—Shifted to Level 2 in three criteria by the end of the study

Teacher C—Shifted to Level 2 in three criteria by the end of the study

Teacher D—Shifted to Level 2 in three criteria by the end of the study and Level 3 in one criteria

The process of doing student-led conference did develop assessment competencies of teachers

Teachers began the process of introducing student-led conferences without understanding the new roles in the reporting process and how this relates to shifts needed in class-based teaching practice, particularly around sharing assessment information with students.

If teachers do not engage with assessment data before introducing student-led conferences it is unlikely they are going to share specific information about progress and achievement with students in sufficient detail to make the reporting process effective.

Assessment of teachers' levels of 'Assessment Literacy' at the beginning of the study

At the beginning of the study, Teachers B and C scored Level 1 ratings in 'Assessment Literacy'. In initial interviews they stated they did assessment when required but it was not something that informed their teaching and learning. Teacher B commented:

Personally I think it's a pain to have to do it. I know it's an important tool but it's really hard when you spend half your time assessing instead of actually teaching which I find difficult and I often assess at the end of a unit that they're not going to return to until after two years ... Assessment is not useful—it takes too much time and I don't use the information ... it is important in reading, writing and maths but in subjects you will not return to it is not helpful and it doesn't affect my teaching.

Teacher C believed assessment information from standardised tests did not accurately reflect the learning ability of some students stating she preferred to share information with parents in person. They interpreted assessment as something separate from teaching and learning:

Well we do have the 'dreaded tests' that they go through and, like it or not, that's where their age groups come from and their levels come from. Not a very good process I might add because a lot of the children in my class and I'd say in a lot of other classes are 'hands on' children, they're oral children which really back-fires on those kids.

Teachers C and D saw formative and summative assessment as two distinct concepts: formative assessment being "good" assessment, and summative assessment as necessary but not helpful. Teacher D explained:

Everyone's, everyone's working towards ... see(ing) the benefit of assessment that's actually geared towards children as opposed to assessment that's geared towards number crunching or providing (information showing) this is where the child is at compared to the rest of the schools of this decile or the rest of the schools who are Pacific Islanders and all the kind of statistics that you can get out of those standardised tests.

Teachers A, C, and D, when asked how they used assessment information from standardised tests, described Level 2 criteria using the information to group students in reading, writing, and mathematics. Teacher D stated:

I guess it can be useful as far as grouping and organisation goes ... As far as grouping is concerned it's quite handy. We're also given documents showing their progress over the course of their last three tests so you can see in spelling and you can see in writing where they've actually gone and what progression they're making and that's a good indicator just to see. It's a very good way to quickly get a general idea of what a child can and can't do.

Teacher A was the only teacher to use Level 2 indicators to describe assessment as it linked to teaching and learning. She talked about assessment in terms of gathering information about students' learning using a range of strategies, including teacher observation, task completion, peer, and self assessment.

In summary, Teachers B, C, and D, did not describe assessment information as linked to their teaching program. The two more experienced teachers saw formative assessment as class-based "good" assessment, and summative assessment as a separate and somewhat negative activity that had little relevance to teaching and learning in the classroom.

Pre-conference interviews were analysed using the 'Assessment Literacy' matrix to assess any changes in teachers' thinking about assessment leading up to the student-led conference. In pre-conference interviews, Teachers A and C rated at Level 1 in 'Assessment Literacy'. Teacher A viewed some types of assessment as a separate activity from class-based teaching when describing how assessment data was collected stating "It's not for formative purposes." They went on:

Some of it's more like, more sort of a set statistical information like you do a Probe Test, a reading testing. You do an ENP test so that's more one on one. But there are other things that are actually more informative where they actually fill in like an activity ... then I can actually just go straight to the books and see if they've actually understood it. I can see that it's there.

Teacher C's views of formative assessment as separate from summative assessment had not changed from their initial teacher interview. In the pre-conference interview, summative assessments were described as "the dreaded tests". Teacher C did think assessment in the school had been improved because 'Student voice' had been included as part of the assessment process. "(We use) formative assessment now which is really good because there's more of how they (students) felt about the subjects as well."

Teacher D also showed no shift in thinking around ‘Assessment Literacy’ from the first interview. In their pre-conference interviews he stated summative assessment information was “not kid friendly” and that vocabulary became problematic when trying to explain the information more fully.

In post-conference interviews, teachers discussed assessment as it related to their perceptions of their students’ understanding of their learning. Just one teacher had moved to Level 2 in ‘Assessment Literacy’, as they specifically linked observations of their students to a future focus in their teaching. Teacher A explained:

I really recognise myself that my year 3’s are really a lot more really focusing back on the learning intention than my year 4’s and that’s come through because I’ve observed a couple who I’ve been watching. So that’s something I’ll be working on.

In summary, teachers in Case Study 1 did not link all types of assessment information with teaching and learning. Teachers did use summative assessment to group students and to see where students were ‘at’ in their learning, but any changes in their beliefs about the use of this information, to inform teaching practice or next steps in students’ learning, was not evident in post-conference interviews. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 1— ‘Assessment ‘Literacy as it relates to teaching and learning was 75% ($n=12$ comparisons).

Student involvement in assessment

At the beginning of Case Study 1, teachers’ descriptions of student involvement in assessment were aligned with Level 1 ‘Assessment Literacy’ criteria. When asked how they involved students in assessment, teachers discussed their practice in the context of writing and mathematics. Teachers B, C, and D’s responses were teacher-focused, describing the process of creating learning intentions and goal setting with students with no reference to assessment benchmarks or test results. Teacher D stated:

We are getting them to actually discuss and actually find examples of ... so for example if they’re coming up for conferencing I’d as much as possible try and say “Okay, so here’s the goal. Show me where you can achieve that goal,” and if they haven’t done very well to think about three ways you can actually do that ... it’s provided a good structure and it’s working well in writing and there’s a

nice clear easy framework in Numeracy as well because of the Numeracy Programme.

Teacher C described the difficulty they had becoming less teacher-centred in their practice:

We conference. They're given choices that they need to make. In the end, unfortunately I end up making a lot of those choices for them and that's probably the way that I've approached it. I'm almost at times too frightened to give too much to them and I want to pull it back off them because I'm the teacher—and I know it shouldn't be that way. That's probably me just not feeling secure.

Teachers A and D showed awareness of the value of using peer and self assessment in writing, which was a Level 2 criteria. Teacher D describing infrequent use of peer and self assessment:

There's writing, they assess themselves in writing. Other than that in most areas I haven't actually done it for reading but I work on, what they have here is peer discussions so that's more like peer assessment, about their learning.

Teachers B and C were Level 1 in these criteria, as they did not describe self or peer assessment as part of their teaching practice in the initial interviews.

In pre-conference interviews, all the teachers, when asked to what extent they had shared assessment information with students, were operating at Level 1 using the 'Assessment Literacy' framework. Teachers clearly stated they had not shared information with their students and did not intend to for a range of reasons.

Teacher B stated "We never really actually tell them." When asked why they elaborated further:

Because we haven't actually specifically told them and I don't intend to ... They're not told you are below a level. With reading it's kind of a bit more obvious because they can look at their reading age but they don't actually really get much chance to except for the portfolios. Actually no, when they're doing their projects I'd actually say, "You're reading at an eight year level," but apart from that you don't actually tell them."

Teacher A, the only teacher to describe a Level 2 criteria (sharing information from formal assessments with students), while showing an awareness of the value of sharing information with students, also stated their reservations about the accessibility of the information. They were also not sure if they should be sharing information with students:

It's too quantitative and it's adult language. It's totally off-putting ... I find that it's something that I'm not too sure whether I should or I shouldn't but I say to a child if I'm doing a running record, I'm really clear after I've finished a running record, I say "Okay, you have done an excellent dah de dah de dah, but this is where we need to work together to move you on."

In post-conference interviews, when discussing students' understanding of their learning and assessment information, all the teachers were still operating at Level 1 in terms of collating test results and sharing them with students.

Teacher C thought students did not like testing and did not care about the results stating "I don't know it's very hard it's they're not a big fan on testing. That's all I can put it down to. It's not an "I don't care" attitude from all of them." Teacher D, when asked about student access to information about achievement and information kept in the student portfolios commented:

It's not something that is used in the class—it's a place to store tests and assessments and then they are put away until the next time they've got to file something so it's not actually a document they have got access to.

When asked if they thought it was important information for students to know Teacher D replied:

Um—to some degree it is because obviously it is nice for them to have some sense of where they are. I don't see that there's anything wrong with a child knowing where they are compared to their peers ... what you're avoiding is it becoming a competition which is always what can happen with numbers.

At the end of the study, Teachers A, B, and D, showed shifts towards the Level 2 dimension as they expressed their growing awareness of the need to share achievement information with students more explicitly. Teacher B commented "With their reading age I (did) try to explain to them where they are at when I did their running records or

Probe.” Teacher D, when describing students articulating where they were ‘at’ in their learning as a future focus said:

It’s good because the children are talking about their learning so they could say this is what they are doing, but, it’s something that we’ve addressed already for next year – there wasn’t the thing for them to say “This is what I’m learning and this is where I am in the scheme of things.”

In summary, teachers’ practices around student involvement in assessment were limited at the beginning of the study. The process of implementing student-led conferences showed teachers became more aware of what information they did, or did not share explicitly with students and their beliefs as to why this was so were challenged. At the end of the study, three teachers, while they had not changed their practice, did identify sharing information with their students about where they were ‘at’ in their learning, as a practice they conceded would have value. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 2—Student involvement in assessment was 92% ($n=12$ comparisons).

Clarity about next steps in learning

Initial descriptions of teacher assessment practices in the classroom matched Level 1 criteria. Teachers in Case Study 1 described having an understanding of where students were “at” in their learning using personal curriculum knowledge, observation, conferencing with students in writing, and giving specific feedback linked to learning intentions when marking work. Information from standardised tests or assessment using exemplars and matrices were not mentioned by teachers as tools to inform either their teaching practice or students’ learning at the beginning of the study. Teacher D summarised the use of standardised assessments:

(We have) two systems, the summative system, which over the course of the year they do various cycles of work. The idea is that each year they do a sample of work for a variety of curriculum areas. They do a numeracy test twice a year so they would be the standardised tests to do for portfolios and to provide evidence to parents.

In the pre-conference interviews, Teacher D had moved from Level 1 to Level 2 in their description of where students were ‘at’ in their learning, based upon information from

tools such as asTTLe, running records, or the use of exemplars or matrices. Teacher D summarised the tools used to establish achievement levels:

We use P.M. Running Records and Probe tests (for students with a reading age of 8 yrs +) for reading. In writing we used a new exemplar matrix and highlighted indicators that students have mastered in Level's 1 to 4. In maths we use the Numeracy assessment stages. Each syndicate has developed end of unit assessments L1, L2 and L3 for science, social studies and technology.

Other teachers continued to describe their understanding of their students' next steps in learning through personal curriculum knowledge, observation, and summative testing.

In post-conference interviews, teachers showed Level 2 understanding of where students were 'at' in their learning through the use of a range of assessment tools. Teachers A and B described conversations with parents about achievement in the 'teacher slot' where they had identified specific assessment tools, what they measured and what this meant in terms of student achievement. Teacher C described her concern about the new assessment tool being used in Mathematics and its impact on students' achievement levels.

While teachers were operating at Level 2 in clarifying next steps Teacher D summarised the extent to which this information was transmitted to students:

They (the students) are very aware of their current learning and probably not so confident to say what their next learning step is. They haven't been expected to say that.

If this was so, none of the interviewed students in case study one made specific links between where they were 'at' in their learning and any specific assessment tools that may have be used to establish their current achievement level.

In summary, teachers in the study were beginning to make links between assessment information they were gathering and how it informed them (and potentially parents), as to where students were 'at' in their learning. In terms of using the information to identify next steps in learning and sharing this with students, teachers had made little or no progress. It would seem that the pre-requisite for progress in this dimension is for teachers firstly to begin to share information about where students are 'at' in their learning with students. Once this is an established practice, teachers may then begin to use data to inform students' next learning steps more explicitly. Inter-rater reliability

analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 3— Clarity about next steps in learning was 58% ($n=12$ comparisons).

'Big picture' understanding of assessment

To teach students to become effective assessors of their learning, effective teachers need to have a broad, in depth understanding of the multiple uses of assessment for different purposes and different audiences. Teachers' comments were analysed to ascertain their understanding of the use of assessment at different levels, for different purposes. When discussing the use of how aggregated data is used in classroom practice, school-wide, nationally or internationally, Teachers A, B, and C showed Level 1 understanding of assessment. Teacher A stated "They do cover a wide area of assessment using a wide range of assessment tools. I don't always know when it is the best time to use them or which assessment is best when." Teachers B and C both made just one reference to a school-wide assessment practice describing a moderation process the school used to ensure teacher judgements about writing levels were consistent across the school. Neither teacher elaborated on this practice, how the information was used school-wide or to inform their classroom practice.

Teacher D showed Level 2 understanding of the use of aggregated data, giving examples of providing comparisons of achievement levels and ethnic data, based upon their experience of national testing and how information was used as part of school reviews in England. Teacher D also linked the use of summative assessment to informing the next teacher and reporting to parents using information in student portfolios. Like the other teachers, Teacher D in their initial interviews did not link summative assessment to class-based practice.

In pre-conference and post-conference interviews, teachers were not asked questions linked to use of aggregated data for purposes other than reporting to parents. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 4— Big picture understanding of assessment was 75% ($n=4$ comparisons).

This is commented upon in the next section.

Assessment as it links to reporting

At the beginning of the study, teachers in Case Study 1 all rated as Level 1. They described assessment linked to reporting in a teacher-centred way, based upon their experience of teachers leading the reporting process. Teachers B, C, and D described

using assessment to report to parents in curriculum coverage and student achievement in general terms. Teacher B stated what he thought parents wanted to know:

[They] would want to know if [their child is] about average in the class. [They'd] want to know if [they were] well behind and [they'd] want to know if ... the child was well ahead. [They'd] want to know if the person got on well with the class whether they were being teased or had friends and was popular or spent [their] whole time talking. I wouldn't particularly want to know about precise details of some things like that the child could catch a ball and throw it 50 metres, like I don't think that that's really that relevant, but some small details could be okay, like, I'd like to know if the child could work independently and can do a brainstorm and some things like that.

Teacher C thought it was important to share information about how the child learnt and to communicate clearly about any learning difficulties, especially if linked to behaviour. Teacher D thought parents wanted "An idea of what the children are doing well and what the children need to work on next."

Teacher A gave a Level 2 response. They thought assessment information should be used to give parents accurate information about their child's achievement against a benchmark:

I think they want to know where their child is overall compared to other children and how well the individual child is doing in a language that they understand, not in a teacher sort of 'order of assessment' form of language. So it's got to be, I think, person to person. This is where your child's reading is. I can show you that they're doing fine. I can show you against this, even information against a benchmark.

Teachers did not describe student involvement in the reporting process when discussing written reports, but Teachers C and D were both supportive of student being present at teacher-parent interviews.

In pre-conference interviews, all the teachers had shifted descriptions of reporting from being teacher-centred to Level 2 descriptions involving students sharing aspects of their learning at school.

Teacher A stated:

They're actually talking about what they're actually learning. What changes they're making and if they've had to do something again. They're talking about how they started for instance, their intention to describe the main character in a story then they would talk about how they read the story, had to identify the characters in the story and then decide which one was the main character, why they decided that and maybe the activity they may have done as the response ... they'll be talking about whether they actually felt they achieved it and so if they later on they wrote about something else. I'm hoping they're going to do that, I'm hoping they're going to say "But I also learnt this and I would do this later on because I now know this." So that's like they're really hooking in and they're recognising where they're going.

Teacher-generated information students might have expected to share with parents had remained with teachers. Teacher A stated they did not intend to share any teacher-generated information with parents because it was information that should remain confidential. Again Teachers B and D thought parents would be informed about achievement through portfolios and the 'teacher slot'.

Teacher C hoped "where they (their child) sit (where they are 'at' in their learning) in the classroom and all that kind of thing will just hopefully come naturally" as students shared learning intentions, success criteria, what was easy, what was hard, what (they) would do better next time and where do we go to from there with parents during their student-led conferences.

In post-conference interviews, Teachers A, B, and C described Level 1 use of assessment information in terms of assessment information teachers would and should share with parents. Teacher B thought the 'teacher slot' was extremely important to maintain. Teacher D suggested that:

A big achievement table on the wall that has "By the age of this is where your child should be" and be able to just point and say this is where your child is and this is where the average child is so that parents can see would be useful for teachers to use when explaining achievement levels to parents. While this strategy could clarify expected levels of achievement for parents, it would still not provide specific information about next steps in learning.

While teachers maintained a dominant role in disseminating achievement information, they did value the process of students sharing information about their learning with parents. Teacher B commented:

So they have this opportunity to see a window into their child's life and to see the classroom ... to see the kind of things they do, the kinds of games they play and get an idea of the school life.

Teachers C and D also commented on the difference between triadic conferences and student-led conferences in terms of students being encouraged to talk about their learning. Teacher C thought conferences were:

Much more effective because last year we started encouraging the children to come with the parents and we had the ... triad kind of thing going on but the child still didn't talk ... this year it's been so different and that's been the motivating, exciting thing about it. It's the kids talking and they're talking in their own language and know their parents and I know them.

Teachers had all moved to Level 2 in linking assessment to reporting. The process of students reporting to parents about their learning was effective in creating an external purpose, and pressure, for teachers to ensure their students had the knowledge and skills to share what they were learning with their parents. While parents did not get specific, explicit information about where students were 'at' in their learning from students or teachers, teachers believed they had shared this information through the student portfolios and the 'teacher slot' at the end of each student-led conference. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 5—'Assessment Literacy' as it links to reporting was 83% ($n=12$ comparisons).

Conclusion

The process of implementing student-led conferences did begin to shift teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' practices, with all four teachers shifting from Level 1 to Level 2, in at least two areas of the 'Assessment Literacy' framework in six months. Teachers began the process of preparing students for student-led conferences not fully understanding how the student-led conference reporting process linked to class-based practices around the use of assessment information, linked to teaching and learning. Overall inter-rater agreement between the two scorers was 77.2% ($n=52$ comparisons).

As can be seen in this case study, where teachers' understanding of assessment was not established before introducing student-led conferences, it was unlikely they were going to share specific information about progress and achievement with students in sufficient detail to make the reporting process effective. If students are to be effective in reporting information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning to parents, teachers need assessment knowledge that they share with students. Teachers' knowledge of assessment tools and strategies, using specific, focused next steps in teaching and learning, based upon a range of assessment information that is shared with students, is the new paradigm shift required.

To support the implementation of student-led conferences that are effective, as defined in this study, teachers need to understand the relationship between assessment information and their teaching practice, as it relates to what students learn. Ways to make assessment information explicit to students, so they understand all aspects of their learning, in order to share the information with their parents, then becomes the next challenge.

Having considered conditions of reporting that influenced the effectiveness of student-led conferences and the extent to which teachers' knowledge and understanding of assessment impacted upon what happened, the next section of this chapter considers the impact of student-led conferences on the development of five dimensions of 'Student Competencies'. This is because the evidence of effective student-led conferences, while influenced by the conditions of reporting and teachers' understanding of assessment as it links to reporting, is measured by the knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions each individual student brings to the reporting process.

The extent, to which 'Student Competencies' were developed through the process of implementing student-led conferences, is examined in order to understand the impact involvement of students in the reporting process had on the students, as learners, in five dimensions. Students' levels of competence in these five dimensions, as they impacted on the effectiveness of student-led conferences, are also considered.

CHAPTER 4C: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ‘STUDENT COMPETENCIES’ THROUGH THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATING IN STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Overview

In the previous section it was argued that the quality of student-led conferences was dependent on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, which in turn was dependent on the knowledge and understanding teachers had of assessment. In this section, the skills, knowledge, and understanding of learning that students in this case study brought to the reporting process are assessed. This is because it is the students’ competence in leading a conference about their learning that influences the real and perceived effectiveness of student-led conferences, both in terms of informing the learner about their learning, and as a reporting method.

A range of ‘Student Competencies’, linked to student-led conferences as a reporting method, were identified. A ‘Student Competencies’ matrix, based upon a ‘Student Competency’ matrix created by Evaluation Associates, was further developed to assess the development of students’ competencies over the study. Dimensions analysed included—‘Assessment Literacy’, ‘Student Motivation’, ‘Student Confidence’, ‘Students’ capacity to articulate learning’, and ‘Student understanding of learning’.

Students from Year 3-6 were surveyed at the beginning and the end of the study. Six students were interviewed three times, at the initial first stage of the study, pre-conference and post conference. Three of the interviewed students were in Year 3 or 4, and three of the students were in Year 5 or 6. To strengthen reliability of interpretation of students’ data an inter-rater reliability check was carried out. Using the exact agreement method for specific checklist items with each dimension of the ‘Student Competency’ framework, overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed students’ levels of ‘Student Competency’ at each stage of the case study was 80.5% ($n=72$ comparisons).

There was no change in the ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimension of Year 3 and 4 students in Case Study 1, from the beginning to the end of the study. Year 5 and 6 students moved from Level 1 to Level 2 in this dimension as they could describe their progress in general terms and had some understanding of their achievement levels.

‘Student Motivation’ was the second dimension in the ‘Student Competency’ matrix (see Table 14). Interviewed students generally described themselves as motivated learners throughout the study. Five out of six interviewed students gave themselves a rating of 4—*very much* for enjoyment of learning, with one student giving a rating of 2—*not very much* because sometimes they didn’t feel like learning. At the end of the study three of the students gave ratings of 2 for enjoyment of learning. These students reported having to work hard to prepare for student-led conferences, finish off work to show to parents, and put in more effort. All three students also thought if they were to do student-led conferences again they would work harder. For three students, who were more intrinsically motivated, their student interview ratings did not change from their initial interviews. When rating interviewed students at the end of the study, using the ‘Student Competency’ matrix (see Table 13), from analysis of transcripts from initial, pre and post interviews, three students were operating within the Level 2 dimension, two were operating at Level 3 and one was operating at Level 4.

Initial and post-conference student surveys showed a small gain in student enjoyment of learning from the beginning of the study to the end and an effect size of .31

Results from pre and post student surveys also showed all categories of ‘best practice’ teacher behaviours identified in the student surveys improved over the time of the study. Showing students what to do (modelling), checking for understanding and positively reinforcing learning were the three areas of teacher practice that showed the most gains from the initial to post conference survey.

Table 12

Frequency count of students’ perceptions of changes in teachers’ practices (n=208)

Response	Initial Student Survey	Post conference student survey
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Modelling for students	81.5	95.7
Repeating instructions	68.4	79.8
Checking for understanding	76.7	94.7
Providing thinking time	70.9	81.7
Positively reinforcing students	70.9	88.0
Identify next steps in learning	78.9	89.4
Make learning fun	81.5	88.9

In pre-conference interviews, four of six interviewed students were very confident to talk about their learning with their parents. Post-conference student survey results showed 68.7 % of students were extremely confident or very confident in their knowledge of their learning and the post-conference student survey. The ‘Student Competencies’ matrix (see Table 13) findings showed interviewed students were operating mainly at Level 2 in the dimension ‘Student capacity to articulate learning’ at the end of the study. Based upon descriptions of information they shared, students articulated the process of learning, the easiest and hardest parts, and what they would work on next in general terms. This result matched teachers’ descriptions of information they had shared with students during class-based preparation for student-led conferences.

In the dimension ‘Student understanding of learning’ the post-conference student survey results showed that 71.9% of students’ thought they understood their learning *very well* or *extremely well*, despite not engaging with information about progress and achievement and specific next steps in learning. Interviewed students’ self-assessments aligned with Level 2 and Level 3 dimension criteria. They thought they had good understanding of their learning, based upon feedback from their teacher and their parents. While students may have had good understanding of information shared, they were also unaware of what they had not been told and did not know about their progress, achievement levels, and next steps in learning.

In summary, through the process of implementing student-led conferences, in teachers’ and students’ pre-conference and post-conference interviews, multiple opportunities for students to engage in discussions about learning were described. This resulted in overall increased student motivation for learning and confidence to talk about learning with their parents. At the end of the study interviewed students were operating between Levels 2 and 4 in ‘Student Motivation’ and ‘Student Confidence’ dimensions. Students’ descriptions of what they had shared about their learning matched Level 1 and 2 in ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions and the Level 2 ‘Student capacity to articulate learning’ dimension. In the dimension ‘Student understanding of learning’, interviewed students in this case study were operating at Level 2 at the end of the study.

Overall development of ‘Student Competencies’ was positive. Year 3-6 students had actively participated in the reporting process. Confidence levels were high, and

enjoyment of learning has shown some improvement from the beginning to the end of the study. Interviewed students developed skills in articulating aspects of their learning in the process of preparing for and participating in student-led conferences. Dimensions that had minor gains were those linked to the quality of information shared by teachers, with students, in the classroom.

The theory of effective student-led conferences

When beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences into schools, it could be that a range of entry levels are needed based upon what information the students is to share with parents. This decision needs to be linked to how schools define the conditions of reporting they want to prioritise, the compatibility of the schools' teaching pedagogy, and this student-centred reporting method, and how the teachers' role and the students' role in the reporting process is to be defined. Because there will be different outcomes, differentiated criteria will be needed to measure success.

With different entry levels the differing expectations of students will need to be articulated. If these are not clearly articulated at the outset, it is possible that student-led conferences, as a process that develops students' understanding of, and motivation for learning, by placing them at the centre of the reporting process, will be undervalued and undermined by parental expectations that are beyond the scope of the student-led conferences, as defined by the school. The next section provides details of students' competencies in the five dimensions—'Assessment Literacy', 'Student motivation for learning', 'Student confidence to share information about learning', 'Student capacity to articulate learning' and 'Student understanding of learning'.

Table 13

'Student Competency' dimension matrix—based on the work of Michael Absolum in Ministry of Education 'Assessment for Learning' contracts

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Assessment Literacy – (cognitive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can talk about what I have been learning and identify things I have done well • I am not sure what progress I am making, or have made • I have little or no understanding of my achievement levels, compared to other students in my group or class 	<p>Assessment Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can assess my work using success criteria • I can talk about my progress and what I have improved in general terms • I have some understanding of my achievement levels, compared to other students in my class or cohort 	<p>Assessment Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can assess my own work and the work of other students using success criteria • I can talk about my progress and where I am “at” in my learning with reference to success criteria • I understand my achievement levels, compared to other students in my class, my cohort or school-based achievement levels 	<p>Assessment Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can assess my own work and the work of other students using success criteria, curriculum matrices or assessment data • I can talk about my progress and achievement and identify next steps in learning, with reference to success criteria, assessment tools or matrices. • I understand my achievement levels compared to my cohort, school-based or national benchmarks

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p style="text-align: center;">Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I lack enthusiasm for learning and do not enjoy it much • I do not think I am good at learning and am mainly motivated by extrinsic rewards, if at all 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am reasonably enthusiastic about learning but find it hard sometimes • I want to do well but may need to work harder at times, so needs some extrinsic motivation 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am generally enthusiastic about learning and enjoy most subjects • I describe myself as a good learner that tries hard, who is mainly intrinsically motivated 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am enthusiastic about learning and enjoy all subjects • I describe myself as an intrinsically motivated learner who consistently works hard in their learning
<p style="text-align: center;">Student Confidence to share information about Learning -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I lack confidence in my ability to discuss goals, strengths, weaknesses in my learning with peers or teachers • I lack confidence in my ability to share information about learning with my parents 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Confidence to share information about Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not very confident to discuss my goals, strengths, weaknesses and progress in some curriculum areas with peers or teachers • I am not very confident in my ability to share information about learning with my parents 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Confidence to share information about Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am reasonably confident to discuss my goals, strengths, weaknesses, progress and achievement levels in some curriculum areas with peers or teachers • I am reasonably confident in my ability to share information about learning with my parents 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Confidence to share information about Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am confident to discuss my goals, strengths, weaknesses, progress, achievement levels and next steps in all curriculum areas with peers or teachers • I am confident in my ability to share information about learning with my parents

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have been learning in one or two curriculum areas • I can discuss the process of learning in general terms • I cannot articulate what my current achievement levels are • I am not sure what I need to work on next 	<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have learned and the process of learning in two or three curriculum area • I can discuss the easiest part, the hard part and the best part of work done • I can talk about my current achievement levels in a general way, but am not sure how they were established • I can articulate what I need to work on next in general terms (e.g. work harder, do more reading) 	<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have learned, the purpose and the process of learning in two or three curriculum areas • I can explain the success criteria and how I know I have met it, using samples of work or through demonstration of skills • I can articulate my current achievement levels in two or three curriculum areas, with or without reference to specific assessment tools • I can articulate next steps in learning in one or two curriculum area 	<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have learned, the purpose and the process of learning, in a range of curriculum areas • I can explain what quality work is, the criteria for quality, with reference to success criteria, matrices, samples of work or through demonstration of skills • I can articulate my current achievement levels and how they were established, with reference to assessment tools used in different curriculum areas • I can articulate specific next steps in learning across a range of curriculum areas

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am not doing well in my learning in most subjects • I do not have good understand of my learning or how well I am doing 	<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am doing reasonably well in my learning in some subjects • I have a reasonable understanding of the process of learning and how I am doing 	<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am doing very well in my learning in most subjects • I have good understanding of the process of learning, the progress I have made and where I am “at” in my learning 	<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am doing extremely well in all subjects • I have a very good understanding of the process of learning, my progress, current achievement levels and next steps in learning

*Evidence of student competencies**Assessment Literacy*

At the beginning of the study, students were not asked about ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions because from initial interviews with teachers it was established that information about ‘summative’ assessment was not shared with students. In the pre-conference interviews, students were asked what information they would be sharing with their parents. They stated they were going to be sharing information about what they had been learning. None of the students identified progress in learning or current achievement levels as part of their conference agenda. Student L, a Year 4 student, described what she would be sharing like most of the students—“I’ll be talking to her about the stuff that I’ve been learning ... (in) writing, maths and language and um, oral language.” Student C, a Year 6 student, added a little more detail about the process and content of the student-led conference agenda—“We’re just rotating and if someone’s on something then we can just go to something else (and we will be showing them) our camping slide shows, our speeches, what we’ve been learning about electricity and we’ve been doing plays with our technology groups.” Student J, also in Year 6, added “after all our stations in the classroom we go up to the hall to show them our technology that we’ve been doing.”

Students were also asked if they knew what information was in the student portfolios sent home prior to conferences. The Year 3 and 4 students were vague about what was in the portfolios. They stated that they had tests in them and that they did not understand very much about that information. The Year 5 and 6 students shared that the portfolios had information about their levels in different subjects. Student J offered their interpretation—“I think they put how I’m doing in all those subjects and they just talk about how you’re doing and what you need to work on and if you’ve achieved your goals and learning intentions.” When asked how well they understood this information, two students rated their understanding as *extremely good*, two thought their understanding was *quite good*, and two students did not understand it at all well. Students B, H, and L interviewed students’ descriptions matched the Level 1 dimensions in the ‘Student Competencies’ matrix. Students C, S, and J matched Level 2 in that they did have a general understanding of information in the portfolios and could describe their progress and where they had improved in general terms.

In the post-conference interviews, students were asked to describe what information they had shared with their parents. Again, answers matched the Level 1 dimension in the ‘Student Competencies’ matrix under ‘Assessment Literacy’. Students gave general descriptions of the information they had shared with parents. Student H mentioned learning intentions and goals in two curriculum areas, but none of the students had specific details about progress they had made or what their current achievement levels might be. Student S, when describing the information she shared with her parents stated:

First I took them to reading and then we did the play scripts like I was supposed to. Then I went on to writing and I showed them how I did my speech, not that I did it, perfectly. Then I showed them my speech on the computer and then we went to maths. I showed them my slide show and they told my sister to read them because it would help her so they also told that was quite good then we went into maths and I showed them, like they went “How is that working? How is that working?” and I was using it to show them the strategy. They’d already read my camp book ... Then they talked to the teacher.

The process of preparing for student-led conferences as defined in this case study had not developed students’ knowledge of assessment, how it was measured, or how well they were achieving in their learning. While teachers had worked on ensuring students could share what they had been learning and the process of learning, because they did not use summative assessment information to inform their teaching, or students’ learning in the classroom, the students did not have this information to share with parents. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 1—‘Assessment Literacy’ was 75% ($n=12$ comparisons).

Student motivation for learning

In the initial interviews, students they were asked how much they enjoyed learning. Five of the six students gave Level 4 dimension ratings for enjoyment of learning. They were enthusiastic about learning and seemed to enjoy most subjects. Three of the students stated learning was fun. Two of the students thought the work was hard and that it was good to learn things you didn’t know because that made it interesting. Only one student rated Level 2 in this dimension at the beginning of the study. Student B liked learning sometimes but stated “sometimes I don’t feel like it.”

When asked what teachers did that made learning fun all six students agreed knowing what to do, having written instructions, interesting activities, doing subjects they liked, doing things they do well, knowing why they were learning something, and having choice in learning all made learning fun. Students liked to know what to do because “You do the right things and it is easier,” (Student B), we “Don’t have to ask what to do,” (Student H), “Otherwise you get stuck,” (Student C), it “is annoying and stressful if I don’t know what to do or can’t understand,” (Student S) and “It doesn’t waste your time,” (Student J). Students also appreciated having instructions written down to refer to because they clarified what they were doing and they could refer to it during lessons and didn’t have to ask the teacher for help.

Three students preferred working with other students because they “sometimes forget what to do,” (Student B), “If you are stuck there is no-one to ask,” (Student H) and “No-one makes sounds and that’s what you need while you are working.” (Student C).

Three students preferred to work alone because “You have peace and quiet to do your work,” (Student L), “You can work at your own speed”, (Student S) and “With quiet quality time it is easier to think about it.” (Student J)

At the beginning of the study, the Year 4-6 students surveyed were also asked how much they enjoyed learning. 65.3% of students liked learning *a lot* or *very much*. Frequency ratings for things that made learning fun showed students rated *teachers showing them how to do things* highest, followed by *making the work fun*, and *telling me I am doing well*.

In the pre-conference interviews, students were asked about how much effort they had put into their learning in an attempt to gauge the extent to which the preparation for student-led conferences may have affected motivation levels. Students B, H and J matched Level 2 dimensions for motivation, having felt pressure to work hard and get work finished for their conferences. All three students also stated that they would work harder if they were preparing for student-led conferences again. The other three students had not changed the levels of effort because they always worked hard. Student L stated it is “just like the same thing we used to do.”

In the post-conference interviews, four of six students rated lower on the ‘Student Motivation’ dimensions than in the initial interviews. While all the students thought they had worked hard, Students B and L were externally motivated by the conferences, a Level 2 dimension. Students L and C, by comparison, described themselves as hard-

working, and rated as Level 3 in the Motivation dimension. Student S, operating at Level 4, stated “I’ve just been working normally so it’s not really very different. It’s not really just because of the student-led conferences. It’s not so different from my normal day.” Student J thought he had worked really hard preparing for the conference but enjoyment of the conference experience was coloured by “getting into trouble at the end”.

While the interviewed students’ motivation levels had not increased during the study, post-conference student survey results showed that over the six months of preparation for student-led conferences, Year 3-6 students’ enjoyment of learning had improved slightly (see Table 14). Findings showed 52.4% of students reported they liked learning *a lot*, 24.5% *liked it very much*, 19.7% *liked learning a reasonable amount*, and 2.4% reported *not liking learning very much*.

Frequency rating for things teachers did that made learning fun showed students still valued ‘*teachers showing them how to do things*’ the most, but ‘*talking to me so I understand*’ was now the second highest rated teacher behaviour, followed by ‘*we work out what I need to practice more*’.

Table 14
Frequency count of student enjoyment of learning (n=274)

How much does the student like learning?	Pre (n = 274)		Post (n=208)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Not at all	9	3.3	2	1.0
Not very much	16	5.8	5	2.4
A reasonable amount	70	25.5	41	19.7
Very Much	68	24.8	51	24.5
A lot	111	40.5	109	52.4
<i>M</i>	3.93		4.25	
<i>SD</i>	1.09		0.92	
Effect Size			0.31	

Interviewed students were asked if they would be keen to do another conference. Students H and C were *extremely keen* and Students B and L were *very keen*. Student S, arguably the most self motivated and competent interviewed student, gave a rating of 3—*quite keen*, stating that “it had been a lot of work and I knew it all anyway.” Student S’s parents had rushed off at the end of the conference to their second child’s conference. By their own admission they were more concerned about their second child’s learning, so it could be that this student felt their efforts had not been valued because of this. Student J did not want to do another conference because of parental feedback about behaviour concerns.

In the post-conference student survey, 59.0% of students were *extremely keen* to do another student-led conference, 15.7% were *very keen*, 14.9% were *reasonably keen*, 5.2% were *not very keen*, and 5.2% were *not keen at all*.

The process of introducing student-led conferences did not improve student motivation and enjoyment of learning significantly. This could be due in part to the fact that the process of giving students a central role in the reporting process, while being a motivating factor for intrinsically motivated students, does did make students more accountable and did create pressure for some students in the lead up to the conference event. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 2 – Student motivation for learning – was 83% (n=18 comparisons).

Student confidence to share information about learning

At the beginning of the study, students were not asked how confident they were to share information about learning because this dimension needed to be measured in the context of leading a student-led conference.

In the pre-conference interviews, students were asked how confident they were to conduct a student-led conference with their parents. Students B and H were *quite confident*. Student B was not sure why, but Student H was quite confident “because sometimes I can do some things others can’t”. Students L, C, and J were *very confident* because they were doing well with their learning and weren’t concerned about making a mistake in front of their parents. Student S was *extremely confident* about conducting a conference with their parents “because they know us”. Five students, when asked how they thought their parents would respond to the student-led conferences, thought their

parents would be pleased with what they were going to share. Student J was concerned about sharing his results with his parents “because they’re not really getting up to the higher, the highest level”. All students stated they did not have any concerns or worries about the student-led conferences.

When considering the students’ responses as they relate to the student competency dimensions, Students B and H in the pre-conference interviews were reasonably confident to share information with their parents, which was a Level 3 dimension. The other four students described Level 4 dimensions of confidence about sharing information about their learning with parents.

In post-conference interviews, students’ perceptions of their parents’ enjoyment of the student-led conferences was very positive, all students giving ratings of 4—*very much* or 5—*a lot*. Asked what the hardest part of the conference was, responses were also positive. Student B had struggled to explain one aspect of maths but the other five students had enjoyed their conferences, in particular, showing off skills and beating their parents at the interactive games. Five students reported that they had had no worries during the conference. Student J, by comparison, had expected trouble because of an incident that had happened the day before the student-led conferences. When asked “If you’d had any worries did it happen?” he said “Yeap. Um, when I got in trouble I worried because I was going to get in trouble. Yeah, I knew that I was.”

When considering the ‘Student Competency confidence’ dimensions, four of six students’ descriptions of what happened during the student-led conferences matched Level 4. Student B was Level 3 in confidence to share information with parents, based upon their description of the hardest parts of their conference. Student J described being reasonably confident during the conference when sharing information, but had lost confidence when the teacher had discussed behaviour issues in the ‘teacher slot’. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 3 – Student confidence to share information about learning – was 66% (n=12 comparisons).

Students in the post-conference student surveys were asked how confident they felt about what they knew about their learning. Findings showed 68.7% of students reported that they were *extremely* confident or *very* confident about what they knew about their learning. The confidence dimensions in the ‘Student Competency’ matrix, relating to the range of information shared, does not fit this study well. Students in this

study had limited awareness of information they could have been sharing. If they had been asked to engage with, understand, and then share information about progress, achievement levels, and next steps in learning in more detail, confidence levels may not have been so high. The information students did have in this study, they were confident to share. Teachers had scaffolded preparation carefully, and the majority of students had coped with both the information and their new role in the reporting process with confidence.

Student capacity to articulate learning

Students' capacity to articulate aspects of learning emerged from this study as one of the most significant new challenges for teachers and students to address. For students to lead a conference about learning, teachers had to ensure sufficient 'air space' was created within lessons for students to develop skills in articulating understanding of their learning.

In the post-conference interviews, students were asked what information they had shared with parents and to reflect upon how well they had done this. Students' descriptions matched Level 1 and 2 dimensions of the 'Student Competencies' matrix. Students B and L were operating in the Level 1 dimension of student capacity to articulate learning. While they did either explain or demonstrate the process of learning, this was done in very general terms. Student B, when asked what they thought their parents now knew about their learning, stated "Maths, writing, project, about how I've been doing with my writing and reading, how we did the technology, and how I'm doing it." Students C, H, S, and J were operating at Level 2 in this dimension, describing general information about different curriculum areas.

Student C stated:

I was showing them everything and they were really listening a lot and they were learning a lot about how I'm doing in my maths. I told them about my speech; that it was good and that we got videoed and then put on the laptop and we saw me say my speech on the laptop. (I) told them the process. I've done, like how, what we went through to make it and the changes.

Student H described what they had shared:

I told her (Mum) about my writing and what stories I've been doing and my maths. I taught her a game and it was too hard so we played "I had who has." I

showed her my main learning intention and goals in writing. I showed her my neat writing, (my) stories and pictures.

Student S summarised what they thought their parents now knew:

I just told them everything I was learning about and they were a little bit ... learning about maths strategies and how to find out personality people in reading. Also that I can read my own speech and (that I) showed confidence in class, in front of my parents. I'd missed out on telling them my learning goals for writing. I did try and tell them about everything. In the Hall I just told them why we made the, our (technology) project. I told them why we made it bigger and what all we had to go through to do it.

Students H, C, and S did not find any part of the conference process problematic.

Students B, C, and L, when asked about the easiest part of the conference described curriculum areas where the information was self-explanatory because the evidence of their work was there to see, so there was less reliance on them having to explain the process. Student C thought "the easiest part was showing them my kid-pix slide-show because I didn't have to talk." Student S thought sharing their videoed speech was the easiest part, for the same reason. The easiest part of the conference for Student B was writing because all they had to do was share their goals and read their story.

When asked about the hardest part of the conference, students did not identify articulating the learning as difficult. Students S and J talked about challenges their parents created, one by not listening while they were explaining mathematics strategy, and the other by being competitive in the maths game. Student B identified maths had been the most difficult part because "I didn't really know how to do it."

The post-conference parent survey showed 79.6% of the parents thought their child had explained things they had been learning about clearly. One parent commented "(I) felt my daughter did very well in explaining and understood what she was telling me. (She) was excited to show me her work and could answer my questions." Two parents found their child's explanation of different aspects of their learning problematic because explanations were too brief and students couldn't add extra information when asked.

In summary, when considering the students' responses as they relate to the Student Competency dimensions for student capacity to articulate learning, Students B and L were operating at Level 1, while Students H, C, S and J were at Level 2 of this 'Student

Competency' dimension because they did articulate in more detail about a wider range of subject areas. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 4 – Student capacity to articulate learning was 83% ($n=12$ comparisons).

When comparing the teachers' ratings in 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions, it could be argued these student results are both accurate and predictable. Teachers had focused on articulating information about process with students and this is what students shared. In these student-led conferences, the depth and quality of information shared by students mirrored the depth and quality of information that was shared by teachers, with students, in the classroom context.

Student understanding of learning

The extent to which the process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences developed student understanding of learning was a key question at the beginning of the study. This was because evidence of student understanding of learning was considered both an outcome in itself, as well as a way to measure the success of student-led conferences as a reporting method.

In the initial student survey, students were asked how well they thought they were doing with their learning. Results showed 25% of students gave a rating of 5—*extremely well*, 43 % gave a rating of 4—*very well*, 19 % gave a rating of 3—*reasonably well*, 11 % gave a rating of 2, *not very well*, and 2 % gave a rating of 1—*not at all well*. Students' ratings at the beginning of the study were linked to perceptions of themselves as learners, based on teachers' and parents' feedback over time and portfolio information from previous years.

In the post-conference student survey, students were asked how well they thought they understood their learning. Frequency tests showed that 69.9% of the students thought they understood their learning *extremely well* or *very well*.

Table 15
Frequency count of students' perceptions of how well they were doing in their learning (n=208)

	Initial student survey (%)	Post-conference student survey (%)
Not at all well	1.1	3.4
Not very well	10.5	9.1
Reasonably well	21.5	16.3
Very well	42.2	35.4
Extremely well	24.7	34.5

Comparisons with the first survey show positive gains in students' perceptions of how they were doing in their learning.

Interviewed students in their post-conference interviews were also asked how much they thought they understood their learning. Students B, C, and L thought they knew 4—*quite a lot*, and Students H and S thought they knew 5—*a lot*, about their learning. Students B and H rated themselves higher than in the initial student interviews. Students' S and C's ratings stayed the same. Student L dropped one rating level from a 5 to 4. Interviewed parents' understanding of students' learning was also rated by students. Selected students gave these mainly positive ratings because they felt they had been given the time to share aspects of their learning with their parents that had helped their parents understand their learning. Students C and S thought their parents now knew 5—*a lot*, about their learning and Students B, H, and L thought their parents now knew 4—*quite a lot*. Student B stated "Now they know because they see everything that I've been doing." Student S thought their parents understood their learning because "I actually told them the things properly, so they understood."

Student J dropped from a rating of 5—*a lot*, in the initial interview to a 2—*not very much*, in the post-conference interview. This rating did not match this students' pre-conference statements about their understanding of portfolio information. Student J had commented in their pre-conference interview that they could have worked harder in their learning. This, combined with their parents' reaction to concerns about behaviour, raised by the teacher at the end of the conference, may have influenced their response to this question. Student J's parent in contrast, gave rating of 4—*very well*, for how well they thought their child understood their learning.

When considering the students' self assessment of their knowledge of their learning using the 'Student Competencies' matrix, selected students in this study span Level 2 to Level 3 dimensions in their perception of how well they understand their learning. Students B and J's responses in pre and post-conference interviews showed they thought they were doing reasonably well in their learning in some subjects. Students' H and L's descriptions of learning also placed them in the Level 2 dimension for having a reasonable understanding of the process of learning, but Level 3 in their beliefs about how well they are doing in most subjects. Students C and S were both operating in the Level 3 dimension. Both students thought they were doing well in their learning. They gave detailed information about the process of learning in different subjects and had some understanding of where they were 'at' in their learning from information they had read in their student portfolios and from listening to the teacher in the 'teacher slot' at the end of the conference. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 5 – Student understanding of learning – was 88% (n=18 comparisons).

Introducing student-led conferences had developed students' awareness of goals and the process of learning. Evidence of success had also been made more explicit. Students were able to articulate this to parents and demonstrate skills, knowledge, and understanding of learning as they shared samples of work during the conference process. In this study, students' perceptions of understanding of how well they were doing in their learning were influenced by students' confidence levels, motivation for learning, and feedback from teachers and parents, rather than factual information about progress and achievement.

Conclusion

The development of 'Student Competencies' in this case study were influenced by the way student-led conferences were defined at the outset. 'Assessment Literacy' of students was limited by the information teachers chose to share with students. The process of preparing for student-led conferences did not change students' enjoyment of learning significantly. The process created opportunity for students to take genuine ownership of part of the reporting process. Student survey results showed a small gain in student enjoyment of learning, while student interviews showed that motivation levels did not change for students who were intrinsically motivated. The process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences, did however put pressure on

students to work harder and take more responsibility for their learning which resulted in lower motivation ratings for four of six interviewed students at the end of the study.

By comparison, students' confidence levels were high, scoring in Levels 3 and 4 of the student competency matrix. Prior to the conferences, interviewed students were confident about the information they had to share and were not concerned about sharing this with their parents. Teachers had scaffolded preparation carefully and the majority of surveyed students had coped with both the information, and their new role in the reporting process, with more confidence than teachers and parents had predicted.

When considering students' ability to articulate aspects of learning students in this case study did not rate in this dimension as well as in other dimensions. The general nature of information shared during student-led conferences showed interviewed students' ability to explain their learning matched the Level 1 and Level 2 dimensions of the 'Student Competency' matrix. The development of this 'Student Competency' was reliant on teachers sharing information with students and then supporting students to develop skills in articulating this information to their parents. Students' oral language skills were developed and they could explain the process of learning in different subject areas. What they did not do is share specific details about progress, achievement levels, and next steps in learning.

Students' perceptions of understanding of their learning did not change significantly from the initial student survey to the post-conference survey. Interviewed students' ratings did change, but again not significantly from the beginning to the end of the study. In the post-conference student survey, 71.9% of the students in the study thought their understanding of their learning was *extremely good* or *very good*. 22.2% thought their understanding of their learning was *reasonably good*. Interviewed students' ratings of their understanding of their learning were also positive, matching Level 2 and 3 stages of the dimension in the 'Student Competency' matrix. It is possible to conclude that students in this case study did understand information that had been shared with them well. The concern is their lack of knowledge and understanding of information about their learning that was not shared with them, in the process of preparing for student-led conferences. Overall inter-rater agreement between the two scorers was 80.5% ($n=72$ comparisons).

When considering the development of 'Student Competencies' through the process of preparing for and running a student-led conference, there is a need to take into account

the context of the student-led conference, as it was defined by the teachers and the school. In this case study the way the student-led conference was defined at the outset affected what information was shared with students. The definition resulted in a process that showed some gains in student motivation for learning and developed students' confidence to share information. Dimensions linked to knowledge and understanding of assessment, as it links to learning, did not see strong gains but ratings for student understanding of learning were arguably distorted, because students were unaware of what information they did not know, or could have shared.

Students in this case study did improve in all five dimensions of 'Student Competencies' (see Table 13) through the process of preparing for and running student-led conferences. Their 'voice' was heard. The question is—how much more effective would this conference process have been if students had developed knowledge and understanding of information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning?

CHAPTER 5A: CASE STUDY 2

SECTION A: TEACHERS AND THE PURPOSE OF REPORTING—BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND CONSEQUENCES

Overview

As seen in Case Study 1, teachers' beliefs about the purpose of reporting influenced their practice and the outcome of student-led conferences. This section begins with an overview of the Case Study 2 school context and then teachers' and parents' beliefs about the purpose of reporting are explored. Teachers' beliefs are linked to their practice using evidence from teachers, students and parents, and finally the consequences of teachers' practices are considered as they relate to teachers' and parents' beliefs about reporting and to the theory of effective reporting method used in this study.

In Case Study 2, student-led conferences took place in Week 9 of Term 2, at the time when traditional teacher-parent interviews were normally held at the school.

Like teachers in Case Study 1, teachers were trying to satisfy four different conditions as they implemented student-led conferences. The first condition was that parents received information about progress, achievement, and the next steps in learning. The second condition was to meet a range of 'social purposes' of reporting, including: building relationships with parents, sharing information about behaviour, social relationships, student attitudes, motivation for learning, and other concerns. The third condition was addressing traditional reporting issues teachers had identified, and the fourth condition was to successfully implement student-led conferences through the process of developing teacher and student capabilities.

To meet each condition, the school's leadership team made decisions about what they were going to retain from their current reporting method, and what would be changed as they introduced student-led conferences. At this school, Three-way Goal-setting Meetings had been held near the end of Term 1 for the previous two years. Three-way interviews were focused on sharing information from Term 1 assessments with students and parents, in order to identify Term 2 goals in reading, writing, and mathematics. Teacher-parent interviews were traditionally held at the end of Term 2. As in Case Study 1, students had been invited to teacher-parent interviews the previous year, but at this time it was the parents' decision as to whether they did attend.

At this school, the student portfolios were designed to be a prop for students during their student-led conferences and to provide information about progress and current achievement levels, alongside samples of work and assessment matrices. The school had not used student portfolios before the introduction of student-led conferences. Portfolios contained student self-assessments, teacher comments about progress made, next steps for learning, a current achievement level, and a nationally referenced benchmark grid, to show where students were expected to be for their age or year level. These sheets were the ‘Teacher voice’ in the reporting process and designed to be understood by students and parents.

In Case Study 2, students were asked to engage with and share information about all aspects of their learning progress and achievement levels in each curriculum area and the process of learning they had engaged in during class time. As in Case Study 1, students were to also share samples of work, interactive activities, and demonstrations of skills during student-led conferences. Unlike Case Study 1, there was no ‘teacher slot’. Teachers in Case Study 2 were asked to ring parents in the first half of Term 2 to talk about any wider education issues that were pertinent for either party. This was an attempt to create opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss traditional topics addressed in teacher-parent interviews, so when they came to the student-led conference, the focus could stay on learning.

Teachers in this school participated in four staff meetings focused on implementing student-led conferences over two terms. Teams of teachers worked together to develop their programmes to support students as they prepared for conferences. In Term 2, a parent evening was held for parents to learn more about this new reporting method and at the end of the term the student-led conference took place.

Five teachers and selected students from their classes were interviewed three times, at the beginning of the year, pre-conference, and post-conference. Selected parents were interviewed at the beginning of the study and again after the student-led conference. In the first section of Chapter 4, teachers’ and parents’ expectations, as they related to each of the four conditions of reporting, are identified and then compared to their evaluations of the student-led conference experience. This was done using problem-based methodology that examined teachers’ and parents’ beliefs about reporting, their theory in practice and the consequences this had on their perceptions of the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method.

Results showed in Case Study 2 teachers and parents had different expectations in each of the conditions of reporting from teachers and parents in Case Study 1, but also different expectations from each other. Teachers and parents thought student-led conferences were effective, but used different criteria to evaluate effectiveness. This section begins with an overview of how teachers' beliefs about reporting changed through the study, based upon the four conditions of reporting—Reporting focused on learning, Reporting for other purposes, Reporting to resolve traditional reporting issues, and Reporting that is student-centred. These findings are then compared to a theory of effective reporting.

Consequences: Competing conditions

When assessing the impact of student-led conferences and their consequences for teachers, the results were mixed. The first condition of reporting—Reporting focused on learning, was achieved in this case study. Teachers had worked hard to ensure students shared information about process, progress, achievement, and 'next steps' in learning with parents. Despite this, at the end of the study teachers were concerned about how well this information had been understood by parents, expressing concern about students' depth of understanding of progress and achievement information.

Student-led conferences did not meet the teachers' second condition for effective reporting—Reporting for social purposes, in that teachers felt that there had been little opportunity to make social connections with or to build relationships with parents. Two out of the five teachers had made appointments to meet with four parents at another time to discuss concerns either they or the parents had. Several surveyed parents also stated they had wanted to talk to the teachers, either looking for clarification of information or to validate information students had shared.

The third condition—Addressing traditional issues with reporting that teachers had identified, was largely met through student-led conferences. Parents received written information about their child's progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. Consistency of information provided was improved through the development of the student portfolio, where information was set out in a uniform way. Samples of students' work were included to help clarify parents' understanding of what their children had learned, how they had learned it, and how it was related to their current achievement level. 'Student voice' was created through the inclusion of self-assessments in their portfolios and by students leading the conference process.

Teachers' concerns about lack of parental participation were addressed and expectations exceeded. Teachers appreciated the time created for parents to talk with their children about their learning and that parents had been given a lot of information, more so than in their traditional teacher-parent interviews. As with Condition 1, teachers were not sure parents understood all the information they had been given.

The fourth and most challenging condition, developing teachers' capabilities to support students in their preparation for student-led conferences was met. Teachers had changed the use of their instructional time, as they worked to develop students' understanding of all aspects of their learning in preparation for the student-led conferences. Initial concerns about lack of student capabilities were either not realised, or strategies teachers had developed to support different students during their conferences had worked. Student-led conferences had been a positive experience for students, and interviewed parents were able to give specific examples of achievement levels and their child's next steps in learning as well as examples of ways in which they had planned to support their child's learning at home as a result of talking part in the student-led conferences. Teachers had successfully developed teachers' and students' capabilities to implement student-led conferences.

In summary, while all the teachers thought the student-led conferences had been *very effective* or *extremely effective* as a reporting method, they also had some reservations about this reporting method. Even though students had exceeded teachers' expectations, in their ability to conduct conferences about their learning with parents, teachers worried that students had not explained information about progress and achievement well enough. Teachers believed parents still wanted, or needed, teacher input to clarify information about their children's learning. Beliefs were based on teachers' perceptions of their teaching capabilities, students' level of understanding and ownership of their learning, parents' knowledge and understanding of assessment information, and parents' confidence in the reliability of information presented. Teachers were not convinced that their new role in the reporting process was the best way to support the development of parents' understanding of information reported.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Using the indicators of an effective reporting method, student-led conferences successfully fulfilled five out of six indicators. Parents did get information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning through the student portfolio, and their

child's explanations of their learning. 'Student voice' was created, as they did engage in information about all aspects of their learning, and parents did learn about the process of learning. Information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning was made explicit through the student portfolio information and through information shared by students during their conferences. Students shared information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning, and the process of learning using work samples, test results, self assessments and demonstrations of skills to clarify the achievement information. Parents had received detailed information in writing that linked achievement to criteria, based upon national benchmarks. Teacher comments included 'next steps' in learning in each curriculum area.

The introduction of student-led conferences had the effect of 'opening the black box' of the classroom to students as well as parents, as teachers were challenged to share information about students' progress and achievement that traditionally was 'theirs to know' with students. While experienced teachers especially found it liberating to be "allowed" to share this information with students, all the teachers in this study stated they had underestimated the time it would take to develop students' knowledge and understanding of achievement information.

The extent to which parents firstly understood the information, and then made links between 'how students learn' and 'how to support their child's learning at home', was not something teachers included in class preparation and they did not know exactly what students and parents were going to discuss in the student-led conference context. Because teachers did not have direct input during the conferences, it was difficult for them to assess the extent to which parents' understanding of the information presented, enabled them to make links with how to support their children's learning at home. Evidence from interviewed parents showed some parents had made strong links between information provided and ways they were planning to support learning at home. To what extent this indicator was achieved across all student-led conferences is unclear.

The next section begins with a summary of findings from teachers around the four conditions of reporting (see Table 16). For each of the four conditions of reporting teachers' espoused theories are compared to teachers' practices. Consequences of practices are considered as they link to teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of

student-led conferences and compared to indicators of 'best practice' reporting using student-led conferences.

Table 16
Case Study 2—The purpose of reporting—Teachers’ beliefs, practices and consequences

Teachers’ beliefs			
Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning	Condition 2: Social Purposes of Reporting	Condition 3: Addressing Traditional Reporting Issues	Condition 4: Participation in a student-centered reporting paradigm
<p>Teachers believed the purpose of reporting was to give information about the where a child was “at” in their learning and identifying next steps</p> <p>Described reporting as a three-way partnership – to build shared understanding of students’ strengths, weaknesses and next steps in learning</p> <p>Students’ descriptions of Teacher-Parent Interviews and conversations with parents after interviews were nearly all focused on learning</p>	<p>Teachers believed time to discuss behaviour, social issues, family circumstances that may affect learning, concerns or worries was part of the purpose of reporting</p> <p>Teachers saw reporting as an opportunity to develop relationships with parents and to support them as learning partners</p>	<p>More student involvement and input into Teacher-Parent meetings, consistency in what was shared with parents in Teacher-Parent interviews, use of jargon, lack of visual or pictorial representation of information and more time to develop parent understanding of information about learning were issues identified</p>	<p>Teachers believed students should be more involved in the reporting process</p> <p>Teachers were concerned about their capabilities to prepare students and the students’ capabilities to be effective in running a SLC about their learning</p>
Practices			
<p><u>In Preparation:</u> Teachers focused on developing their AFL practices and as a consequence changed their use of time in class to support students to develop skills in explaining their learning</p> <p>Teachers made decisions about the</p>	<p><u>In Preparation:</u> Teachers rang parents in the first half of the term to discuss any concerns they, or parents might have – focusing particularly on parents not seen at school on a regular basis</p> <p>In the week prior to student-led</p>	<p><u>In Preparation:</u> Student portfolio content was developed to be consistent in content and layout across the school</p> <p>To include student voice in the portfolios student self assessments in each subject area were included</p>	<p><u>In Preparation:</u> Teachers shared the concept of SLCs with students at the beginning of Term 2</p> <p>Information about SLCs were put into the school newsletter during Term 2</p>

<p>format and content of Student portfolios, which were updated over term 1 and 2 – and how to include the ‘teacher voice’ in the portfolio to support information students were to share</p> <p>Specific information about progress and achievement levels, referenced to national benchmarks or curriculum levels, were included in Student portfolios. Matrices linked to curriculum levels were included to give parents additional information about how achievement levels were assessed. Teacher comments made statements about what the students could do and identified next steps in learning in a range of curriculum areas</p>	<p>conferences parents who had not made appointment times were rung by teachers to ensure attendance levels were as high as possible</p>	<p>alongside teacher assessments – which included teacher comments</p> <p>Samples of work were included as examples of work achieved at stated levels – which was referenced to national benchmarks</p> <p>Question sheets for parents were developed</p> <p>A Korean interpreter was found to support Korean families</p> <p>A timetable was set up so Year 3 and 4 conferences were 45 minutes long and Year 5 and 6 conferences were 60 minutes</p>	<p>Teachers engaged students in a range of activities designed to prepare them for SLCs – role plays / student self assessments / sharing information about their achievement</p> <p>Teachers developed conference agendas to include sharing information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning and the process of learning Students practised their conferences with a range of audiences</p> <p>Teachers problem-solved together re: special needs students, students they had concerns about, or parents that might not be positive in their support</p> <p>Teachers did end of term assessments sharing information with students to develop their understanding</p> <p>Information to go into portfolios was worked on until just before the conferences</p> <p>In pre-conference interviews 7 students reported feeling well prepared, while 5 had concerns they would make mistakes, get muddled up or lose confidence</p>
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<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u> Students ran conferences, sharing information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning and the process of learning – descriptions matched those of teachers and parents</p>	<p><u><i>In Practice:</i></u> During conferences teachers did not spend much time with parents – they took part in the introductions, helped with technical support and chatted generally at the end</p> <p>Two of the teachers had made times to meet with some parents on another day to discuss learning and behaviour concerns</p>	<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u> Student portfolios were consistent in layout and content</p> <p>Parent question sheets were used by most parents</p> <p>A Korean interpreter was used in some conferences and other student-led conferences were conducted in families' first languages</p>	<p><u><i>In practice:</i></u> During the conferences students shared information about their progress, achievement and process of learning with few problems and fears were not realized. Information about progress and next steps in learning were included in teacher comments to reinforce information students shared</p>
Consequences			
<p>Conferences met 5 of the 6 indicators of an effective student-led conference</p> <p>Parents got information about progress, achievement and next steps</p> <p>Students, through teachers, had the opportunity to engage with all the information about their learning</p> <p>Students had provided information about the process of learning</p> <p>Teachers did not think they had allowed enough time for students to be familiar with progress and achievement information</p> <p>Teachers thought parents still wanted or needed teacher input about</p>	<p>Teachers met parents they had not met before</p> <p>In Post-Conference Interviews all the teachers commented that they thought parents still either wanted, or needed, parent input about social aspects of their child's school life</p> <p>One teacher questioned the purpose of the event - if part of Teacher-Parent interviews were about making a social connection with the teacher, then this reporting method did not make this easy.</p>	<p>Parent turnout was 99.8% across the school and while parent attendance was not identified as an issue in Initial Teacher Interviews, the turnout of parents teachers <i>really</i> wanted to meet because of their children's learning, behavioural or social issues was a positive outcome</p> <p>Teachers' observations of parents as they participated in the conferences showed that parents had engaged, with their children and with the information they were sharing.</p> <p>Consistency in information given to parents was addressed through the Student portfolios, where information was set out in a uniform way, and agendas were developed with students that were similar in content, if not</p>	<p>Teachers' concerns about their capabilities to prepare students were not realized although they all were clear about what they would do differently to prepare students more effectively for another time</p> <p>Three teachers thought SLCs were <i>extremely effective</i> as a reporting method and two teachers thought they were <i>very effective</i></p> <p>Initial concerns about student capabilities were either not realized, or students were well supported during their conferences</p> <p>Four teachers thought the agendas had worked extremely well. One teacher thought students had glossed over some subject areas</p>

<p>progress, achievement and next steps in learning</p> <p>Teachers thought parents would have got better quality of information from a teacher-student-parent interview</p> <p>Teachers were not sure about the depth of parent understanding of information or if they had made connections between what they had seen and how they could support at home</p>		<p>order.</p> <p>Samples of students’ work, supporting the progress and achievement information, were included to help clarify parents’ understanding of what their children had learned, how they had learned it and how this related to the progress and achievement information.</p> <p>‘Student voice’ was created through the inclusion of student self-assessments for each curriculum area and by allowing students to run their conferences, with teachers taking a support role.</p> <p>Teachers’ concerns about lack of parent participation were addressed and expectations exceeded</p> <p>Students were able to explain their learning, in language understood by parents, or in their first language.</p> <p>Where parents wanted more information than students had given during their conferences, teachers had made appointments for another time</p> <p>From the teachers’ perspective, parents did participate fully and in the</p>	<p>All the teachers had found the development of portfolios a challenge and were keen to refine and improve systems around the collation of these for another time</p> <p>Teachers identified that more time needed to be allowed to familiarize students with assessment information, so they understood it better</p> <p>As a result of doing student-led conferences all teachers described effective ‘AFL’ teaching strategies that they would use in the future to further develop their students’ understanding of their learning and their ability to articulate it.</p> <p>SLCs gave teachers permission to share all the information about learning with the students – in the past this was not the case (Teacher D)</p> <p>Students had a voice in the reporting process</p>
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<p>Parents got specific, detailed information about students' progress and achievement in written form and through their child's conference BUT teachers were unsure if parents understood the information well and it did not fulfil their belief that reporting was a three-way partnership</p> <p>Dilemma: If teachers can explain learning better than students should students lead conferences about their learning? – short term goal V long term development of the student as “holder of knowledge about themselves as a learner”</p>	<p>Teachers' beliefs about other purposes of reporting were not met, even though other times had been created before and after the SLC event to talk with parents about specific concerns and issues</p> <p>Dilemma: the value of the conference for students and their learning V the value of relationship building with parents and teachers,</p> <p>Dilemma: the value of a learning-focused event V an opportunity to discuss a range of education issues linked to learning</p>	<p>process seemed to be developing understanding of the information being shared. Parents had asked for clarification of 'jargon' that students had used, perhaps more so than they would have in a traditional interview.</p> <p>Issues of student voice and involvement, consistency in what was reported, use of jargon, lack of visual or pictorial representation of information and more time to develop parent understanding of information about learning were met through student-led conferences</p> <p>Student-led conferences looked to focus students positively on what they had achieved in their learning and where to next, rather than what they should or should not have be doing</p>	<p>Student-led conferences develops teachers' capabilities to share information that is understood by students, which in the process, supports students to understand different aspects of their learning better</p> <p>To share information with students about all aspects of learning was a paradigm shift that the teachers in this case study made for the first time.</p> <p>Student-led conferences required teachers to find time to share assessment knowledge that traditionally was “theirs to know”. Making this information explicit is another way “opened the black box” in the classroom – not only to students, but to parents also.</p>
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Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning—The teachers' perspective

As in Case Study 1, teachers' definitions of the purpose of reporting all matched some of the indicators stated in the definition of effective reporting. All five interviewed teachers linked the purpose of reporting to sharing information about where the child was in their learning, and identifying next steps in their learning. Teachers B and C added that it was also a time to share information about student achievement against national benchmarks. Teacher C explained:

Well I guess starting with parents it gives them a good idea about where their children are at. Not only what their abilities are but parents do like to know where they fit in. If they're succeeding at the level they're meant to be succeeding at ... Also it gives them an idea of how they can support their children or what they need to do to extend them.

Teacher D thought parents also wanted to know how well their child was doing in comparison to other students, while Teacher E believed a lot of parents focused on the number of As and Bs students received in a written report. Teacher D stated:

I think they want to know where their child stands in a scale of 1-5. You know they still want to know how their child is faring compared to all the other kids. Yeah! And I think they need to know if the child's struggling and they need to know if any extra help can be given or if the child's you know, is getting all 1s or (if they are) at the top of the scale then they need some extension.

The two provisionally registered teachers were focused on ensuring they shared evidence-based information about learning in language that the parents understood.

Teacher B explained:

Let the parents understand the terminology that we use (so) they fully understand what we've been doing and where the child lies. Not to spend too much time on the social because it can start having; because I was listening in (as a student teacher) and they were talking about holidays and that sort of thing and it's really not, you know, it's not what we're there for. And, just hopefully that the child (and) the parents do actually understand and don't feel threatened about what you're telling them, basically. Some parents do sit there, and you see them, you see them shaking a bit at times and thinking "I don't know what

you're talking about." So I think to make it plain, simple and understandable for the children and equally, for the parents.

Teachers B, C, D, and E, talked about teacher-parent interviews in terms of a partnership between teachers and parents and about having alignment, or a shared understanding, about the students—their strengths, their weaknesses, and their learning. Teachers expected to share where they perceived the children to be at in their learning, to set goals based upon this information, to hear from the parents about how the child was going from their perspective.

Teacher A described information shared with students and parents in both the Goal Setting Meetings and the teacher-parent interviews:

In the first term for 10 minutes, which is like a "get together goal setting thing", that's quite hard to squeeze things in, in 10 minutes so it's quite a lot of teacher directed stuff at the start and maybe 5 minutes of me talking. 5 minutes if we're lucky of parents feeding back of how they're going at home maybe, or of issues round school ... then we set goals there. The second interview in the second term is normally fifteen minutes long. We ... invite them (students) to sit in on those ... but it seems to be the parents' decision ... the kids that do come in I get them to share their goals and how to involve their parents ... I give them (parents) a bit of a spiel about where they're at with their learning.

Teachers D and E both had involved their Year 5 and 6 students in both the Goal Setting Meetings and teacher-parent interviews for two years. Teacher D described the students' involvement:

For the last couple of years we've actually had the child involved and they've gone; they've had a form filled out and so they have about three areas. It might be reading, maths, writing and one of their own choice and we'll have talked with them and they will know what level they're at and what they need to do to get to the next stage, the next step and they share that with their parents... the children lead most of it. I'm there to um, just to add to it or to encourage the child and answering any questions the parent might have.

All interviewed teachers felt the inclusion of students in the teacher-parent interview process was important, but the extent to which they were expected to participate varied from teacher to teacher. Teacher A involved students in discussion, while Teachers B

and C described students being present rather than active participants. Teacher D made the point that in the past the information shared in teacher-parent interviews was not shared with students. For her, it was important that students were, not only present, but that they were the ones sharing the information with parents, rather than the teacher:

When we've got all three groups there; parents, child and the teacher and when the child is telling the parent. I think in the past ... The parents and the teachers have all this information and the kids weren't allowed to know, it so that's changing.

When asked what made a teacher-parent interview successful, all the teachers in the initial teacher interviews described positive dialogue between teachers, students, and parents, as an indicator of a successful interview.

The theory of an effective reporting method

In initial teacher interviews, all the teachers identified providing information about where students were “at” and ‘next steps in learning’ as part of the purpose of reporting. Teachers’ B, C, D, and E, specified sharing achievement information. While all teachers valued student involvement in teacher-parent interviews, how ‘Student voice’ was interpreted varied from teacher to teacher. All the interviewed teachers described reporting as a time to share information with students and parents and emphasised the shared understanding they wanted to develop through this process.

The indicator three interviewed teachers did not identify as part of the purpose of reporting at the beginning of this study was ‘Students sharing information about how learning is achieved with parents’, but some of the interviewed students described how they did this when they discussed their experience of reporting.

Student background in reporting

Initial student surveys found 93% of surveyed students had attended teacher-parent interviews with their parents. When asked to identify the roles they taken during the interviews 33.6% of students reported *not talking*, 33.6% *answered some questions* when asked, 23.5% did *some of the talking*, and 10.7% reported doing *lots of the talking*.

In the initial student interviews, twelve out of fourteen students had attended teacher-parent interviews and the other two stated they attended sometimes. When asked what

they did at these interviews two students stated they *answered questions*, nine students stated that they did *some of the talking* at the interviews, and three reported that they did *a lot of the talking*. When asked what students talked about there were a range of responses. Students J, N and H talked about their learning as it related to their goals while Students A, D and F discussed their achievement levels. Student H stated:

I talk about what I did this year. What I did this term. What I've been learning. What level I'm at and how well I do these things.

Students B and C described a more passive and less informative role, where they were asked to show their work or answer a question from the parent or teacher. All the interviewed students identified topics of conversations at interviews that linked to learning, rather than social or behaviour concerns.

In the initial student interviews students were asked what parents discuss with them at home after teacher-parent interviews. Students C, F, and N, stated their parents *never or occasionally* (1-2 times) discussed things with them after teacher-parent interviews. Students B, D, and O stated their parents talked about levels or results. Students C and H stated their parents gave general positive feedback. Students E, G, J, K, N, and O said their parents discussed what they needed help with or to work on more. Student O stated:

They talk to me about what the teacher told me to improve in Math and then they um, my parents talked to me about how we can improve on it and if we can just keep practising and practising a lot so I get good at it and they talk to me about how well I'm doing.

Like their descriptions of contributions in the teacher-parent interviews, descriptions of further conversations students had with their parents at home were also learning-focused.

The next section summarises teachers' reflections upon their practice as they prepared for student-led conferences. Interviewed students were also asked to describe the preparation process and what they were going to share with parents in their student-led conference.

Preparation for student-led conferences

When asked to describe their practice in pre-conference interviews, teachers described in detail their focus on using the ‘Assessment for Learning’ teaching strategies—learning intentions, stating the relevance, clarifying tasks, developing success criteria, getting students to assess their learning and reflecting upon learning. Teachers B and C talked about how preparing for the conferences had focused them on ensuring they focused on students being able to articulate their understanding of their learning.

Teacher B stated:

Even if we weren’t doing student-led conferences the whole issue of this is what we’re learning, why we’re learning it, how we can use it in everyday life, and then discussing with a buddy about it—and how do you think—what we’ve been doing well and how can we get better I think that’s been a general thing throughout the school ... I think we’ve probably just pushed a little bit harder—a little bit more intensively, because of the student-led conferences. And it’s just kept me on my feet—um—to make sure that I am doing it because obviously we want the children to be able to explain, so it’s been a quite a good method to make sure we are doing it all the time.

Teacher D commented on the use of time in class to give individual students descriptive, detailed feedback, as well as using ‘Assessment for Learning’ teaching strategies consistently, as being important foci.

In pre-conference interviews, when asked to describe specific tasks and foci for the two weeks leading up to the student-led conferences, interviewed teachers had all concentrated on in-class discussions about learning more, as they checked students’ understanding of their learning and their ability to articulate their understanding to others.

Teachers described how they had changed the use of instructional time—spending less time in direct teaching and more time in having conversations with groups, or individual students, about where they were at in their learning. Role-play activities, designed to get students talking their learning were used by all the teachers. Teachers also created prompts to put around their rooms to further support their students to articulate aspects of their learning effectively.

For each curriculum area students had completed some form of self assessment, a formal assessment against a national benchmark, success criteria or indicator matrix, and had a practical game or example of work to demonstrate their learning during their conferences. In the pre-conference interview, Teacher A described the preparation in more detail:

We've done some key questions—basically formative assessment—um, with just basically what they've been learning and why it is important and what they've found most pleasing about the work—what they need extra help in and what mum and dad can do to help. And we've got those core questions for each of the stations the kids will be working at ... so for example in maths we've got the portfolio sheet, the test sample and then we've got a station set up with games for their level area they're at so it actually shows Mum and Dad from their "I Can" statements what they're working on—what they can do and can't do and what they need more help on and so actually, by playing the game together they can show Mum and Dad what they can do to help at home and just explaining it a little bit better instead of just looking at a sheet and going "O.K I kind of understand this but I'm not sure how it relates to a classroom activity".

Teachers had also focused their feedback and conversations with students on their current assessment results and where they were at currently, in terms of expected levels or stages. In the pre-conference interview, Teacher B commented:

We're looking at telling about levels and stages—where they are now, what we've been learning, why we've been learning it, the stages that we've gone through to go through to do it, what we think we're good at, what we think we might need to practice and what does Mum and Dad think about it. Say for example we're doing narrative so we've got—telling them this is what we've been learning. Narratives are—because Mum and Dad might not know what a narrative is, what we need to include in a narrative, um—why we're learning narratives—here's our plan, here's our draft, here's our published work—here's our success criteria—here's our finished work—we're reading it. What do you think? I think I need to work on this but I really enjoyed doing this. So that's the general sort of format.

Students were asked what they had been doing in class that had helped them prepare for student-led conferences in pre-conference interviews. Students' descriptions matched

those of the teachers. They had focused on being able to articulate their learning, portfolio organisation, and role-plays to practice their new roles in reporting.

When asked to describe what their conference agendas would include, students' descriptions again were similar to those of the teachers. Year 3 and 4 descriptions were focused more on the detail of what they were to share and where they were 'at' in learning. Year 5 and 6 students' descriptions were a mix of information they were going to share during the conferences and detail about progress, achievement and next steps in learning.

The next section uses evidence from post-conference teacher interviews and post-conference student interviews to examine the extent to which student-led conferences had met the first condition—'Reporting focused on learning', from the teachers' perspective. Based upon pre-conference interviews, it was expected that the student-led conferences would be focused on learning and that assessment information shared by students would include process, progress and achievement. Descriptions of the student-led conferences event were very similar across all teacher and student interviews, so a brief summary of the student-led conference begins the next section.

Student-led conferences in practice

Interviewed teachers in the post-conference interview described how students had followed their agendas, sharing aspects of different curriculum areas at stations set up around the room. In this case study, students shared the process of learning, their progress, current achievement levels using samples of work and games to demonstrate their skills.

Interviewed students described the information they had shared with their parents during their conferences. In these descriptions, eight of the fourteen students stated they had shared what they had been learning, current levels and what their next goals were.

Student K summarised what they had shared:

I told them things that I learnt and different subjects like maths and language and reading. Um, I told them I went up a stage in maths. I went up to stage 6—um, that were working on algebra at the moment. And in term one were working on "Capacity." Mostly (I need to improve) my times tables. In reading I told them I am reading at 14 and a half and in Term 1 I was 12 to 13 in reading. I

need to practice reading without hesitations ... I showed them my slide show (which was about) my reading group experiment, which was making felt.

Students demonstrated their reading, mathematics, and computer skills, with most students identifying the sharing of their Information Communication Technology work the easiest part of the conference.

Consequences: Teachers' beliefs

Teachers were asked, in the post-conference interviews, how successful they felt the student-led conference had been as a way of reporting students' progress and achievement to parents. One teacher felt it was *extremely successful*, three teachers thought it was *very successful*, while one teacher thought it was *reasonably successful*.

Teacher B made the point that information about progress and achievement was in the portfolios, so even if the students had not explained aspects of their learning well, parents still had the information there:

As for the expected levels, I think that was reasonably clear so I'd say reasonably successful there with regards (to) what have I got to improve this, or possibly the steps. How I got to this stage may not have been as clear but the expected levels were ticked and marked by the teachers so I think that was reasonably clear and it really only took the parents to look at it and the children didn't really need to explain it so even if the children weren't explaining that particularly well they could still see it.

All teachers thought parents had found the process empowering and that some parents had developed a new understanding of their child's learning, based on what had been shared by the students during the conferences. Teacher E commented:

On the evening I think they (parents) saw it as a new experience and it was an experience which was different ... for a lot of parents the comment (was) "I didn't know that my child could talk so much about their learning. I didn't know they were learning so much in the classroom."

Teachers, in the post-conference interviews, when asked how well their children understood their goals, achievement levels and next steps in learning gave ratings of either 3—*reasonably good* or 4—*very good*. Explanations of these ratings showed

teachers saw students' understanding as both a teaching and a learning issue. Teacher C stated:

I think in terms of stages they know where they want to be next ... they know what they want, but not why again. Like with writing because I haven't had the writing indicators up it's been a really difficult process for me to get my head around how to put it in language they can understand and then how to present it to them (the students).

Teachers' A, D, and E, thought most of their students' understanding of their learning was *very good*, but that some students had not yet taken ownership of, or responsibility for their learning. Teacher D said of one student: "He knows he's below but it actually doesn't seem to have an impact on him and he accepts that's where he is, but he is still not at the stage of taking any real responsibility for his learning." Teacher E stated:

You have ... a lot of students who know what they want and know what their next step is and then you have those who don't know what their next step is or what their goal is because they're always waiting for somebody to do it for them.

Teacher E thought parents needed more preparation and understanding of assessment information stating:

I think it still needs working on, looking at again the information given to parents beforehand and maybe there should be some evening groups so they can actually see what's happening and then they could understand ... there's work to be done both with the students, the testing leading up to this point, but (also) the understanding by the parents.

Teachers B, D, and E, also thought parents were looking for reassurance that information their child had shared was accurate. Teacher D commented:

I know there are a couple of parents I spoke to still wanted parent-teacher because they don't trust their children because it's the first time and I think that once this is, you know, done a few times and your kid's have come through the school it will become accepted ... but there's nothing really that I would have talked to them about anyway other than, what the kids had already told them.

In post-conference interviews, teachers all thought the parents found student-led conferences a positive experience, but four of five teachers were not sure parents understood the quality of information they might have got in a more traditional teacher-parent interview. Teachers' concerns were based on their perceptions of their capabilities preparing students, students' level of understanding, and ownership of their learning, parents' knowledge and understanding of assessment information and parents' confidence in the reliability of information presented.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

When comparing the findings of this case study with the indicators of an effective reporting method, five of the six criteria were met. Teachers, with students had provided parents with detailed information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. This was done through two mechanisms: the student portfolio which contained teacher comments and assessments, and students' explanations of their learning during the conference process. 'Student voice' was created, and students shared information about all aspects of their learning— progress, achievement, next steps in learning, and the process of learning—with parents. Because of this, parents also got information about how the learning had been achieved.

Teacher D thought students discussing help they needed made parents more responsive "Like that mother with the tables, because her child asked for help rather than me asking for help for the child, it just took on a whole new meaning." The three Year 3 and 4 teachers, by comparison, felt that this was an aspect of the conferences that would have benefited from teacher input. Teacher B explained how this input would have built upon the work shared by the students:

Just to explain a little bit deeper to the parents and more about what we're doing for the child. Say for example we'd look at the sheet, say the example sheet and say where the particular child is and where it should be and what we're actually doing in school to improve it; and possibly what they can do at home because I don't think the child would be able to explain that.

Even though five of the six indicators of an effective reporting method were met teachers were not sure their role of observer and supporter was the most effective way to develop parent understanding of information shared. Teachers' views revealed a tension between the students' role in student-led conference and effectiveness in

reporting. Teachers perceived students could not explain aspects of their learning as effectively as teachers, leading to teachers questioning their role in this reporting method.

The primary purpose of any reporting method is to inform students and parents about their child's learning. Teachers in Case Study 2 had ensured the focus of student-led conferences was learning. They showed that this student-centred reporting method has potential to systematically build students' in-depth knowledge and understanding of their learning over time, and to systemically develop parents' knowledge and understanding of how students learn. Prior to this study, students in this school had experienced three-way conversations about learning, which had begun the process of developing students' and parents' knowledge and understanding of learning.

At the end of their first student-led conference, teachers did not believe students had sufficient knowledge and understanding to report to parents more effectively than them. In this—they were right. But, arguably the teacher-led three-way teacher-parent-student interviews had also not been effective in developing in-depth student, or parent understanding of all aspects of students' learning. If they had, students and parents would have been more familiar with all aspects of information shared.

Systematic development of students' understanding of all aspects of their learning was begun through the process of introducing student-led conferences. Because of this, the first student-led conference could be seen as a foundation block upon which to build students' knowledge and understanding of learning over time and a way of changing 'who' holds the knowledge of the learner.

While teachers in this study had maintained a strong focus on learning, as a primary condition of reporting, they also valued 'other purposes of reporting'. The next section evaluates the extent to which teachers' beliefs about 'other purposes of reporting' were addressed in this study.

Condition 2: Social purposes of reporting—The teachers' perspective

In initial teacher interviews, when describing the purpose of the traditional teacher-parent interviews, all teachers broadened the purpose of reporting from sharing information about students' learning, to having conversations about social and behavioural issues, family circumstances that may affect learning, or any concerns or worries that the teacher or the parents had.

Teachers saw teacher-parent interviews as an opportunity to develop relationships with parents and to support them as learning partners. Because of this, the nature of the conversation and information shared could be variable and dependent on the individual teacher and parent. Teacher D described the purpose of the learning partnership between teachers, students and parents in the following way:

To let the children and the parents know where they're at and how the parents can assist the children. How I can assist the children. How we can work as the threesome really to get this, um, to take the child to the next step.

Teacher E described teacher-parent interviews as a time to set up 'professional development' for parents. Teacher E also made the point that this could, and should, happen when needed:

I think it is a place and a time for you to be able to talk together about the students learning ... where we can take the child with their learning and at the same time I think it could be also setting up professional development for the parents if they should need it ... It's also a place to visit, I wouldn't say issues, but if you might have concerns about the child, and depending of course on what it is, that the child's involved in that as well ... It's about aligning, having this alignment between all three parties But I think it's very, very important to have that, although for me personally you don't wait for parent/teacher interview if you're going to have it at the middle of the school year, or even at the end of the first term.

Preparation for student-led conferences

Because the sharing of information about behaviour, social issues and concerns was problematic in Case Study 1, teachers in Case Study 2 were asked to ring parents to discuss any concerns they, or the parents might have in the first half of Term 2.

Teachers rang those parents they did not see at school on a regular basis.

In a staff meeting prior to student-led conferences, teachers discussed ways to manage parents who wanted more information about their child's learning, or to discuss more sensitive issues, such as behaviour. Teachers were asked to make another time with parents who wanted to speak to them in a more private setting, who wanted more time or more specific information.

Student-led conferences in practice

Despite their beliefs about the importance of teacher-parent communication, during the student-led conferences all teachers reported spending very little, to a quarter of the time with students and their parents. In post-conference interviews, all the teachers described meeting parents at the beginning of the conferences to touch base, briefly explain that this was the students' night, how the evening was expected to work, give the parents the questions sheets and to clarify the teachers' role, as support person, for the conferences.

Teacher A stated:

We tried to keep out of it for most of it. There was times when I felt like I should go in and touch base but it was just going so well I just kept out of it because it was really humming.

Teacher B described how they had talked with some parents at the end of the conferences to explain information in more detail, or to tell them about support was in place at school to support their learning and how parents could help at home. Other teachers reported spending their time making sure power-points went and providing supportive prompts to students. Teacher E explained:

I'd just say something to them "Don't forget to show them your experiments" or "Is it time to show to do your portfolio?" I did say the prompts leading up to, for example, when the time was getting close to our 40 minutes, prompting them to say "Have you shown them?" Oh I said to them at one stage "You can continue your talking about your work at home, but have you shown your power-points yet?"

Teachers C and D commented that they had felt very "redundant". Teachers D and E had made times at the end of the conferences to meet with parents on another day to discuss concerns parents had in more detail. Teacher D commented:

And those parents who want to know anything, or you know, the traditional one where you talk about behaviour or attitude, whatever, I'm making extra time for those parents anyway. So they're getting a double shot at it.

At the end of the conferences, teachers again touched base with parents as they were leaving with their children. Teacher A described how they had attended to 'house-keeping' details stating "There was right at the end um, there was maybe two or three

parents who asked about spelling lists and their child had lost their spelling list and could they have another one and just little things like that.” Teachers B and C also had general discussions with parents at the end of the students’ conferences, summarising achievement levels in a general way and discussing the process of the evening and how parents had found it. Teachers D and E had between them, made additional appointments with five parents to discuss a range of different topics, including parent concerns about learning, and behaviour.

Interviewed students’ descriptions of the teachers’ role during the conferences were similar to that of the teachers and parents. Teachers had introduced parents to their teachers, got technical assistance when needed, and were prompted about what they may not have shared. Student B stated her teacher had chatted at the end about how well she was going.

Consequences: Teachers’ beliefs

While teachers had not had much input into the student-led conferences, in post-conference interviews all the teachers believed that parents still either wanted, or needed, teacher input about the progress and achievement information and social aspects of their child’s school life.

In the post-conference interview, Teacher B questioned the purpose of the event. They reasoned if part of teacher-parent interviews were about making a social connection with the teacher, then this reporting method did fulfil this purpose easily:

It depends on what you personally go there for. Is it the levels or a lot for the children ... it’s more of a social thing, you know when the parents come along and that sort of thing. But I think as for the expected levels, I think that was reasonably clear so I’d say reasonably successful there with regards (to) what have I got to improve this, or possibly the (next) steps.

Teachers A and B thought a ‘teacher slot’ at the end of the conference process would provide opportunity to reassure parents about social aspects of their child’s development, and to share information not directly related to learning Teacher B stating “I think parents still want to hear that from the teacher”.

When asked what reporting method they thought parents would prefer, having experienced student-led conferences, Teachers A, B, and C thought parents would like a mix of different reporting methods. Teacher D thought parents would prefer student-led

conferences and Teacher E thought parents might still want a traditional teacher-parent Interview. Teacher E stated:

For that deeper understanding I think that wasn't quite fulfilled and I think there are, looking at the surveys, there are some parents who rely on the teacher, you know the Parent-Teacher interview ... there's still a lot of traditionalists out there who believe that that's really important. I also think some of our parents don't – no I don't say they don't trust their children – but because it's so new they're not used to things like that, you know, the children actually relaying (information) and everything was, you know, about me and my good stuff and they actually wanted to know “Well what is the stuff you need to fix up?” cause parents are always looking at that.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

As with Case Study 1, the student-led conference process made it more difficult for teachers and parents to discuss subjects not directly related to teaching, that were part of a traditional reporting agenda. Because teachers had rung parents in the first half of the term, teachers seemed less anxious about sharing information about student attitude, motivation, or behaviour, and more concerned that they had not been part of the conversation about learning.

Teachers in this case study used planned strategies to make contact with parents prior to the student-led conferences and to make appointments with parents at another time, after the conference.

Despite this, teachers found it difficult not being directly involved in conversations about learning, with parents and students. They wanted to ‘add value’ to the conversations, both in terms of information about learning and in further developing relationships with parents. Opportunity was not made, so for teachers, Condition 2 was not met. Two purposes of reporting, informing students and parents about learning and building relationships with parents, highlighted a tension unresolved in this study.

The next section examines the extent to which issues teachers identified as problematic in reporting were addressed through student-led conferences.

Condition 3: Traditional issues in reporting—The teachers' perspective

Teachers were asked what they thought would improve the traditional written report. Teacher A thought it was fine as it was. Teachers B and C were concerned that information in the written report was not well understood by parents. Suggestions to improve written reports included careful use of jargon-free language and pictorial or visual representation of information.

Teacher D was keen to see information in the written report computer generated, to avoid extra work created when teachers are asked to record the same student information in different places, for different purposes. Teacher E mooted the idea of students having a section of the written report that they complete, suggesting the students could reflect upon their learning, or give feedback to their teacher. Teacher E stated:

I'd probably like to make bigger the comments section ... I like the back section of it because the kids you know are involved in that although I might probably like to look at re-doing those questions on the back for the kids and asking for what they think is important. Even to the point where instead of—there might be a couple of tick boxes for them and then maybe them doing the writing part section about how well they think they've done ... the teachers have just basically done an assessment of them or given feed-back on them. Maybe they can do a feedback on, maybe the teacher, or their learning.

In summary, improvements in the written report suggested by teachers included using jargon-free language, using pictorial or visual data to make the information more easily understood, creating computer generated reports to cut down on double-handling of information, and creating opportunity for 'Student voice', or student input into information in the written report.

When asked to consider how they would like to see traditional teacher-parent interviews improved, Teacher B talked about consistency of structure in what is shared with parents across the school, without being too regimented:

Just to let the staff have a good structure so that we're doing it across the board. So there is a structure that right - we've going, we've got to mention this, we've got to do this, we've got to this, we've got to do this and actually keep it not so

regimented that you feel like a robot just going in and doing it but so that there is consistency through the, through the classrooms, which I think there is here.

Teacher E suggested parents needed more time for information to be shared, both by the teacher and the parents.

Teachers' A, D, and E, thought more student involvement and input into the teacher-parent interviews would improve them. Teacher C thought parents would be more likely to understand the language used by students:

We're talking a lot about ... children being more in control of their learning and knowing what they're doing and they're also able to talk to their parents in a language that they understand and their parents understand ... it does put a lot of responsibility on us teachers to make sure that the children are capable of doing that.

Teacher D saw the involvement of students as an opportunity to develop students' understanding of what they are learning and why:

It's just developing the language of the children who are doing it you know ... so by the time they get to it they have a greater understanding of learning intentions and why they're doing things and what's expected and have they met that learning intention.

Teachers were asked how well they thought parents understood the information shared in traditional teacher-parent interviews. Teachers A and B thought parents understood the information teachers shared *reasonably well*. Teachers C, D and E teachers thought parents understood the information *very well*.

The two teachers who gave a rating of 3 did so because they felt sometimes parents did not ask for clarification of information. This could be because of lack of confidence, their belief that they "should" understand the information, or the lack of time to explain things more fully. Teacher A described the problem of parents who take a passive role in the interview situation:

Some parents will just nod their head quite happily and maybe it's a confidence thing. They're not actually asking a lot of questions if they're not understanding what it means - and then of course with the time limit we are rushing things so I don't know if they're taking it on board.

Teacher B recalled observing a teacher giving information to parents in a teacher-parent interview:

Because some of the parents don't want to ask when you know, one of the words was the "instructional reading age," and the teacher kept saying it and you could see that the parents had no idea what instructional reading was - but they weren't asking because they thought that they possibly should know what the instructional reading level was.

Teachers' C, D, and E, thought parents understood information *very well* because they explained things well and because of children who were able to translate for parents who did not speak English well. Teacher D pointed out that providing written information about students' learning meant parents could take away and discuss further with their children:

Because the child's got it written down and they talk about it and then they take their little piece of paper home and I think the conversation often carries on at home and one of the things ... is it's written language I will (explain) the indicators there so the parents can actually see that this is where they're at and these are the things they need to do to get to the next stage and it kind; so it sort of backs up what the child's saying but, yeah I think it's just a conversation's going on.

Teacher E stated "There's still that worry that people take on information at different rates. But it's my job that they can understand it."

In summary, problems teachers identified with traditional teacher-parent interviews included consistency in what information teachers were sharing, how it was shared and sufficient time for the whole interview process. Teachers also identified parent deficits—lack of parent participation in the interview, parents not understanding teacher jargon, parents whose first language was not English understanding the information and parents taking on information at different rates.

While Teachers A, C, D, and E, thought students should be part of the process, thoughts on how they would participate varied from teacher to teacher. Teacher D embraced students' involvement in the interview process to the greatest extent. Other teachers, while supporting student involvement in the interviews, saw it as a big responsibility to ensure students were well prepared. Teachers C and E clearly defined their role in the

reporting process as “transmitters of information”—with their success being determined by how well parents understood the information shared.

Preparation for student-led conferences

In preparation for student-led conferences teachers developed student portfolios that were consistent in content. All portfolios contained specific information about student progress from Term 1 to 2, their next steps in learning, samples of work, an achievement level based upon a national benchmark (for reading, writing, and mathematics) or curriculum criteria matrix. A grid stating levels of expectation for the time of year, age or cohort for reading, writing, and mathematics were also included. To include ‘Student voice’ in the portfolios, student self assessments in each subject area were included, along-side teacher assessments.

To support parent understanding of this new reporting method, information about student-led conferences was put into the school newsletter every second week in Term 2. A parent evening was run to introduce parents to the student-led conference process in more detail. Approximately 10% of the parents in the school attended, which was a low turn-out compared to the attendance rate of the student-led conference. This could have been due to the timing of the meeting; that it was a ‘one-off’ event or that parents had not fully realised the extent of the proposed changes in the reporting system.

Alternatively, parents may have gathered sufficient information about the forthcoming student-led conferences from the school newsletter, conversations with teachers and staff and their children. Question sheets for parents to use during conferences were developed by teachers, to support parents during the conferences. They were not sent to parents prior to the student-led conferences, but teachers had developed homework activities that involved students and parents using the questions to discuss an aspect of homework. The question sheets, based on plenary questions used in class lessons, were translated into three languages: Samoan, Tongan and Korean—to support English Second Language parents. A Korean interpreter was engaged to support three Korean families and students in their conferences.

A timetable was set up, based on Year 3 and 4 conferences lasting 45 minutes and Year 5 and 6 conferences lasting 60 minutes. Four to seven conferences were to run simultaneously in each classroom, creating flexibility for the length of time individual conferences might take.

In traditional interviews students are not invited; if they are, they often had a passive role in the process. In the pre-conference interview, Teacher E talked about how the process of preparing students to lead a conference about learning had required students to shift their thinking and to take ownership of both their learning and the conference process:

Another thing for kids is shifting their thinking about this interview process – they still have old stuff, and especially when I’ve got, like, students who have never had to actually converse with their parents. Term 1, I got the students to do a lot more talking (At teacher, parent, student goal-setting meetings) and for them that was really huge and new. Now it’s about me stepping back and letting them know that it’s actually about you, talking about your learning.

Student-led conferences students in the post-conference interviews identified teachers helping them get the order of information in their portfolios, finalising their agendas, and the activities they were going to include, practising introductions and explaining learning in role-plays and getting feedback from the teacher about how to do this better.

Student-led conferences in practice

The turnout of parents attending the student-led conferences in Case Study 2 was 99.8% across the school. While parent attendance was not identified as an issue in initial teacher interviews, the turnout of parents teachers *really* wanted to attend because of their children’s learning, behavioural or social issues was a positive outcome. Teacher D talked about a father whom she had never met, who had never attended a traditional teacher-parent interview. This parent came to the student-led conference which created an opportunity for the teacher to make a time for another meeting to address concerns the teacher had about his son’s learning. Teacher D stated:

He would never have come. Earlier in the year when we had the parent teacher child one he didn’t front and (after the conference) I was able then to nail him down – I actually did talk quite seriously to them ... because he was there, about how we had to do something for their child ... he agreed to take time off and come tomorrow morning so, I wouldn’t have had Dad without the conference.

Student-led conferences were conducted, based around information in their portfolios and a range of work samples and interactive activities, designed to support parents’ understanding of achievement information.

Consequences: Teachers' beliefs

Teachers were asked how effective they thought student-led conferences were compared to traditional teacher-parent interviews. All the teachers thought the student-led conference reporting was *very* or *extremely effective*. They appreciated the time created for parents to talk with their children about their learning, and that parents did get a lot of information, more so than in a traditional teacher-parent interview. Teacher C explained:

I think that parents actually see a lot more of the children's learning than when they have a ten minute chat to you. All they get from you is, sort of, where they're at and what level they're at. (In student-led conferences) they see examples of their children's work. They have conversations with them about their learning.

Teacher C shared their perception of parents' participation:

They just sort of kept going and asked a lot of questions like they were supposed to and prompted them when they needed it but the children really led it and it was really good ... I think they overall enjoyed coming in and seeing what their children were doing and were impressed with the way that their children could talk to them.

Teachers in the post-conference interviews all had similar descriptions of what students had shared with parents, using the student portfolio as a base, in dispersed with a range of different activities. Teacher E, when describing what her students had shared with parents, captured the reactions of parents as they participated. Activities in this classroom had included sharing information from portfolios, watching power-points, viewing artwork, sharing group projects and a class slide show:

They had a maths village that they needed to show and they also had their group (reading) experiments. Um, the amphitheatre ... groups of parent at the desks and then groups sitting around this, this theatre ... the parents didn't realise that the kids could actually handle and manipulate the power-points, the computer, the lap-tops (and) the projector. So, um, with mouths wide open for some of the parents and a lot of comments like "I didn't know you could do that." "Oh my gosh! You can do power-points? I've got a power-point presentation coming up. I need you to help me." "I didn't know you had the equipment at this school

to do this.” So all that, sort of like, opened up their eyes, to actually what the kids can do at school. One of the comments was “I didn’t know you did so much learning at school,” which really, um, was really blew me away, but they, the kids were just talking about so many things and they were teaching their parents at the same time, so I think those people who get blown away, it’s possibly because they didn’t know how much the kids, or how much depth the kids knew.

Teachers’ observations of parents as they participated in the conferences showed that parents had engaged, with their children and with the information they were sharing. In post-conference interviews, from the teachers’ perspective, parents fully participated and in the process seemed to develop understanding of the information being shared. Parents had asked for clarification of ‘jargon’ from their children, perhaps more so than they would have in a traditional interview. Teacher E commented “I could hear the parents saying, asking questions—What’s a plenary? What’s a plenary?” Teacher D shared the type of dialogue they had heard during conferences:

I could hear them say “Oh my learning intention was... and this is what I can do,” and “what I need to do next and can you help me with this ‘cause I’m not very good at that and to get to the next stage I’ve got to be able to do fractions and I don’t really understand them,” and that sort of comment and that was very good. They’re explaining and breaking their learning down.

Teachers’ perceptions that the student-led conferences would support parents to develop understanding of information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning and the process of learning was reinforced by one English-second language parent who, in their post-conference parent interview, stated:

Before, with the standard forms sometimes I wouldn’t be understanding because sometimes the teacher speaks very fast or sometimes I don’t quite get it like that. But with her (daughter), with the Student-led, she explained it to me very well. Coming from her yeah—that’s right. I got it.

In summary, issues identified in traditional reporting methods by teachers were addressed during the student-led conferences. Consistency in information given to parents was addressed through the student portfolios, where information was set out in a uniform way, and agendas were developed with students that were similar in content, if

not order. A range of different activities and demonstrations, supporting the progress and achievement information, were included to help clarify parents' understanding of what their children had learned, how they had learned it, and how this related to the progress and achievement information.

Teachers' concerns about lack of parent participation were addressed and expectations exceeded, as parents engaged with their children in the conference process. Students were able to explain their learning, in language understood by parents, or in their first language. Where parents wanted more information than students had given during their conferences, teachers had made appointments for another time. In this way, parents' could gain the level of understanding they wanted, rather than just receive information the teacher was prepared to share in a traditional teacher-parent interview. This also meant teachers' beliefs about their role as "transmitters of information" could be fulfilled.

Consequences-The theory of effective reporting

As a new reporting method, student-led conferences, as defined by schools, have the potential to address traditional reporting constraints. In Case Study 1, the most significant impact of this reporting method was to increase parent attendance and participation in the reporting process. In Case Study 2, the participation rate of parents was nearly 100% and included 'hard to reach' parents and families. Traditional reporting issues Case Study 2 parents identified as problematic were addressed. Parents got more specific, detailed information about progress and achievement. Information was presented orally, in written form and visually. More time was created to discuss learning.

Depending on the key issues schools want to address, student-led conferences have the potential to be modified to fit the current context of a school while also addressing different reporting constraints. Trying to address reporting issues identified by parents, while also aligning teaching pedagogy, school assessment systems and student involvement in the reporting process may not all be met by one definition of student-led conferences.

The next section is focused on the fourth 'Condition of Reporting'- the introduction of a student-centred reporting method that is aligned with teaching and learning pedagogy. In this study, unlike Case Study 1, teachers were expected to share the 'locus of control'

with students, so they had access to, and developed understanding of, all assessment information linked to their learning in the classroom. In addition teachers were expected to be present, but not take an active role during student-led conferences, unless asked to do so by the students. This section begins with a summary of teachers' initial reactions to the concept of student-led conferences as a reporting method.

Condition 4: Student-led conferences—A student-centred reporting method—The teachers' perspective

Three of the teachers, when asked to rate their initial reaction to the concept of student-led conferences, were *reasonably keen*. Two of the teachers linked this rating to their concern about student capacity, in general and for students with English as a second language. The third teacher who gave a rating of 3 did so because, as a teacher, it made her nervous, which could be interpreted as lack of confidence in her capability as a teacher to prepare students to conference with their parents. All three of these teachers also stated they could see the potential benefits. Teacher B felt it would keep teachers focused on doing their job “properly” stating

My initial (reaction) was very traditional ...the children aren't going to be able to say anything and it's just going, it's going to be “Oh, I don't really get it.” But the more that I've sort of um, learnt about it, it makes, it makes heaps more sense because I feel that if you've got a child here; it also keeps the teachers on the level, you know. It makes sure you're doing what you should be doing so that you're telling the children, or learning with the children and they know while they're learning it and they know exactly what they're learning and then they can tell Mum and Dad ... whereas before you could get away with probably not doing that much because you're the one that's telling the parents. But now I think it's a fantastic idea and it also keeps, one, the teachers on their toes to make sure they're doing their job properly and two, it just helps the children because they know what they learning and why they're learning it and if they can get it to the parents; and if the parents understand it all as well that's even better.

The two more experienced teachers gave a rating of 4— *very keen* when presented with the initial student-led conference concept. One teacher, while keen, had reservations they did not exactly know what a student-led conference was, or have experience of it. Teacher E gave a rating of 4 because they had not expected conferences to be a two-way

conversation, between the student and the parent. This teacher's initial understanding of the concept of student-led conferences was that of a three-way conference, where students discuss their learning with their parents and their teacher, with which she had experience. Teacher E did express some concern about student being able to 'manage' and also stated that the work done by the teacher leading up to the conference was going to be an important factor in the process.

I always thought I was doing it. I thought I was doing student led conferences because the students had their data in front of them. The students talked to their parents about their learning. Parents asked questions. But in finding out what it actually was, it is a 4. Now that I know what it entails I'm excited by the fact that I get to play a lesser role and that the students um, get to actually tell their learning and um, yes, they get to be the voice because as I said everything is actually centred around them so if they can actually talk about their learning to their parents ... I won't say that I'm frightened for them um, it's my job to try and give them, to have to build them up, you know, to manage it.

In summary, teachers were *reasonably* to *very keen* about the student-led conference concept initially. All the teachers expressed concerns of some sort, expressing concerns about either student capabilities or teacher capabilities. All the teachers were also positive about the possible benefits.

Students in their Initial Student Interviews were asked if their teachers had discussed the concept of student-led conferences with them. Most replied "No" that their teachers had not discussed this with them. Three students replied their teacher had discussed student-led conferences. Student D thought student-led conferences were "where students get their portfolio and show them to their parents and talk to them about what they've learnt and why they've learnt it and how they've learnt it." Student I thought student-led conferences were "When we talk to our parents and the teacher listen."

While students initially did not know what student-led conferences were they were positive about the concept for a range of reasons. They saw it as a way to inform their parents about their learning so they know more about what is happening for them in their learning, a chance to be heard and an opportunity to request help. Student C thought (it was a good idea because) "they'll know about our learning and they'll know what's happening at school," while Student D recognised it as an opportunity - "It's

because we get a chance to talk about stuff not just teachers. It's a big change to the learning." (Student D)

Other students thought conferences would enable them to share information that parents missed out on and that as a result parents would be more helpful at home because they would know how to teach things like the teacher. Student K suggested "Maybe my parents might want to hear it from me and not from somebody else - because I could explain it better."

Preparation for student-led conferences

Teachers, in preparation for student-led conferences, had taken part in four staff meetings designed to support them as they introduced student-led conferences. Team meetings had been used to develop student portfolio formats and content and to share strategies in preparing students for their conferences.

In class teachers had worked with students to develop their knowledge and understanding of their achievement results in a range of curriculum areas and explaining the process of learning, where they were 'at', how they knew this and what their next goals were. In teams, teachers had worked with students to develop their skills in articulating aspects of their learning, using different role plays, including coping with different conference scenarios such as the quiet parent and the bossy parent or the parent who did not understand what they were saying.

Despite this preparation, in pre-conference interviews teachers expressed concerns about how well prepared the students were to explain aspects of their learning that they had previously not engaged with. Teachers A, B, and C, who all had Year 3 and 4 classes, had focused on developing students' knowledge of progress and process and their ability to articulate this, rather than on developing students' understanding of achievement levels. Teacher B stated:

They're aware of their levels and not all of them obviously. And they're aware of this sort of position they are in regarding their age, especially for reading. Whether or not they fully understand how they've got to that stage or how they can get themselves even further, I would doubt that they're full comprehensive about the whole package.

Year 3 and 4 teachers were also not confident their students could articulate the next step in learning. They also were not sure students would be able to explain their Term 1

work samples and information as well as the work they had done in Term 2. Teacher A thought:

On the night—it seems its going to be a bit daunting trying to get through both term’s work. We have been to be honest—we have been focusing on Term 2 more as you do, and we’re going to just point out on the night to parents there’s Term 1 work there to show progress.

Teachers D and E, as teachers of Year 5 and 6 students, by comparison seemed to be concerned about some students’ knowledge of achievement information, in some subject areas, rather than all students. Teacher D stated:

You are always going to get one or two that I’m not, or it could be that they’re ESOL, but when I’m hearing them and talking to them, I think most of them do it very well—they know where they are at and they know what they’ve got to do next.

Teachers B, D, and E thought they had some nervous students leading into conference week. Teacher B’s perception of students in his class were that some appeared to be both excited and nervous at this time, while Teachers’ D and E’s comments described nervous anticipation of students rather than a worry about students not having the capabilities to run their conferences. Teacher E stated her students were “excited—a little bit apprehensive and scared, but excited because they get to talk about positives and the key word, the key phrase is celebration of their work.”

Teachers, when asked if there was anything they were worried about, spoke about specific students that they expected would need more support—English second language students or those working on individual education plans. Teachers B and C expressed concern that the students would not be able to talk about their learning and that the parents may not get all the information they need. Teacher B stated:

I think the one that the children aren’t going to say anything and it’s going to be sitting there and they’re all going to be quiet I suppose ... because there are things the parents sort of need to know and I’m not sure if the children are actually going to tell them.

Teacher D, by comparison, was worried that the students would not have enough time to talk because there was so much information they had to share.

After looking watching this thing today there's so much in these portfolios that I just don't think they'll get through—some of them won't get through it all—I'll just let them take the portfolios home and continue on and talk about it in their own time.

Teacher E felt some students were worried about the conferences because of negative feedback they may have received in the past from teachers and parents:

A lot of kids they're still a bit worried about all the naughty things because ... it's always been about "Well they should be doing this or they should be doing that" in previous years I think, um, and you know in the classroom you say "You could do this better or you should be doing this" and that's all they —yeah—for them it's actually saying this is what I have done, this is how I can make it better

Teacher E saw the change in students' roles in the reporting process as a challenge, or a new expectation of students that some students had not fully realised:

Another thing for kids is shifting their thinking about this interview process ... Term 1, I got the students to do a lot more talking (At teacher, parent, student goal-setting meetings) and for them that was really huge and new. Now it's about me stepping back and letting them know that it's actually about you talking about your learning. This is where it is a huge change for them and even, as late as, even on Friday, with recent work, for some of them it's just clicking ... that they actually got to have to have this conversation and it's not the old (system) where the teacher's sitting next door to them ... that the students own their learning, but in developing that ownership ... it's taken time for the students to understand what is learning, how they have learned it and possibly what the good things are at the very end of it.

Teacher C and Teacher E also expressed concerns about parents. Teacher C was concerned that the parents would not be positive enough. Teacher E worried that some parents would be condescending or dominate the conversation stating "Too much conversation on the parent side of things and not enough on the students could ... I know some of the parents and they can be quite condescending."

In summary, teachers had several concerns about their students' capabilities in leading a conference about their learning with their parents, prior to the student-led conference. Two teachers worried the students would "freeze" and not be able to talk. The Year 3

and 4 teachers worried that the students would not be able to articulate their next steps in learning well.

All the teachers expressed a degree of concern about students' understanding of achievement levels well enough to be able to explain them to parents. For the Year 3 and 4 teachers this had not been a focus until just before the conferences. For the Year 5 and 6 teachers they were aware that the assessments that had been completed late, resulting in students not having time to develop a good understanding of where they were currently at and what their next steps would be.

Because of this preparation, three teachers thought their students were nervous about leading their student-led conference. Two of the teachers expressed concerns about parents, either dominating the conference or not being positive enough with their children about their learning. Teacher E expressed concern about students' not having a good understanding of their new role in the reporting process. The teacher believed that students perhaps hadn't taken ownership of their learning and that they were unprepared because of this.

In the pre-conference interviews, when asked what they would be sharing with parents in their student-led conferences, students had similar descriptions to each other. Student H summarised the information and activities they expected to share:

Giving them what I know and what I have to; what I've been; what I've found new and what I've found tricky, like a new game in Maths. And I found out about global warming so what the last ice age was really cold and how the sea was about 5, like 6F ... I've been doing recounts and writing samples and I'm going to tell them um, what I found tricky in there and (In topic) I've covered the information, or some of it, and I'm coming up to putting it into order. (With ICT I finished my title page for my book, for my folder and I have finished my library card. Our team has finished the dance that we had to do.

When asked how they thought their parents would find the conference students' comments were all positive. They thought parents would learn more about what they do in their learning, that they would be proud of the students' achievements and they would be surprised at how well students could explain aspects of their learning. Student I stated "Probably they'll think it will go really well probably because they will know what I've been doing and it will help them to practise helping me."

Students thought teachers could help them in their conferences by making sure they had everything they needed, check that they were going 'O.K' during the conferences, help explain something if they got stuck, be positive and say something nice at the end.

Student D thought "It's going to be fun because it's got a twist. It's the student now being the boss."

Student-led conferences in practice

The Year 3 and 4 students had conducted their conferences around a series of "stations" set up around the room. In their post-conference interview, Teacher D described how the conferences had worked:

We had like a greetings table for all the information (Student portfolios) and key question cards and prompts that might help everyone on the night ... and then we had stations set up for each, um, curriculum area and they (students and parents) just really floated around in no real set order as long as they (students) did reading, writing and maths first and then they could go to the other ones ... then we had general, the ICT stuff set up, where they could access their slide shows and we had art all around the room that they could take the parents to ... (there were) prompt cards ... in there to tell Mum and Dad what ... What you're learning and why it's important. What you're most pleased about. What you need to work on next.

The Year 5 and 6 students shared information from their portfolios at a desk and then moved to where maths displays, art displays, ICT video clips, art work, and reading projects were displayed around the room.

In their post-conference interviews, students had described their conferences in similar ways to the teachers. Student C, a Year 3 student stated:

First I interviewed my parents and my teachers and then I showed my writing example, then I showed my reading, then I showed my maths. Then I read to mum and dad then I showed my Space Fax and my Space Lock and then I um showed them a game and um, then I showed them My Title Page—then my Computer Work. There were some things on our board which was in order so we know what to say and we know what order we're doing it in.

Student J, a Year 6 student described the order of their conference:

First we did written language and then we did ICT and then I showed my power point and that's for my reading and then I showed my Tapa Cloth (art) and my Communities (inquiry project) and reading for term 2. (I followed the plan for) nearly all of it, but my maths I, I mean my reading, I did the power point and my perfume (group reading inquiry topic), before I did what was I good at in reading.

In post-conference teachers' interviews, teachers' descriptions of their role in the student-led conferences was meeting parents at the beginning of the conference, technical support, checking in on parents, prompting students or parents if needed, clarifying anything that the students hadn't made clear or making times for another meeting if parents requested it. Teachers greeted parents and students when they arrived, made sure the students were set to go, observed conferences in process and stepped in if they thought input was needed. Teacher A commented on their "new" role in the reporting process:

We tried to keep out of it for most of it ... It was really nice actually because you realised you'd done all the "leg up" work, and that it was your job to just to step back now. So it was a different role now. So there was a bit of guilt in the first couple of, oh gee, I should have done more here... Yeah it was a different role and it felt more natural probably. More like the classroom where you're just facilitating things ... I think everyone was at ease which is the main thing. You were not sitting across a table and just talking to each other.

Teacher E also stated while they too had felt redundant, they had enjoyed watching the interactions between students and their parents—"The parents took so much interest and I was just was excited by it all, listening to the parents and to the kids and the way that they talked."

Consequences: Teachers' beliefs

When asked how effective they thought student-led conferences had been as a reporting method, three teachers thought they were *extremely effective* as a reporting method and two teachers thought they were *very effective*. All teachers agreed it had been better when there were around five conferences going at once because this number of conferences created an environment similar to that of the classroom. Timing had

worked and parents had been surprised by the knowledge their children had to share. Students had successfully led conferences about their learning and parents' responses had been extremely positive.

Three of the teachers who had worried that their students would clam up or not be able to communicate the information clearly all reported this had not happened. Teacher C stated:

I guess my main worry was that the children would still get stumped and really know what to say and that obviously didn't happen. Teacher E stated "They just had what they had in front of them and they just went with it. Um, they just blew me away, they really did.

Teacher B commented:

My major worry was "Are the children going to be able to explain it?" and I don't think there was a need for worry because they did manage to keep talking ... for 45 minutes ... from what I heard, no, I think they did really well to be able to explain what they were doing and why they were doing it.

Teachers thought special needs and lower achieving students had coped *reasonably well* to *very well*. Prompts had helped, as had the portfolios, and students had coped after teachers had supported some at the beginning of their conferences. Parents had also helped students with initial nerves. When asked about how conferences had worked for special needs students, teachers were positive. Teacher A stated:

I had a couple of concerns about a special needs boy in my class and whether he could really talk about his learning but Mum and Dad were great and I knew they were good, very supportive and they were lying down on the floor and playing games ... we stripped it back to the basic level a bit more for him so he was sharing his reading and talking about what he was good at and what he might need to work on and I don't think he always shared what he needs to work on but that was alright because Mum and Dad were sort of prompting him.

When considering the challenges of implementing student-led conferences, teachers identified getting end of term assessments done, making sure students understood the information, and preparing students to run their conferences while keeping a class programme going as the biggest challenges they faced.

All teachers were used to doing term assessments. Leading into student-led conferences, teachers had three extra tasks to attend to: sharing the information with students, getting information about students' progress and next steps in written form for portfolios, and then making sure students understood the information well enough to explain it to their parents.

Teachers reported underestimating the time students would need to familiarise themselves with assessment information in order for them to understand it. Teacher B stated:

I think for forward thinking next time if we do some of the tests next term, spend a lot more time going over them and talking to the children about them and making them more aware of what they are and how they are doing on those tests ... they could talk about the strategies that they used in running records—we did talk about that but I'm not sure if they could remember that to be able to talk to their parents about it ... with the maths testing with prompting they were okay ... most of them were aware of what stage they were at—they might not have been aware, why.

Teacher E felt students needed time to develop more depth of understanding and explained:

They need it (time) to get more meaning from, you know, and from what they actually mean, the benchmarks, what the benchmarks actually mean to them ... I'd shown them examples of (writing) work ... I don't think I gave them a clear understanding, well actually this is what 3i looks like, 3ii looks like and 3iii.

Teacher A identified making links between progress made from Term 1 to Term 2 with students as a future focus:

Probably, looking at the making links between term 1 and 2. We just ran out of time. We—some kids ... talked about their progress but really it was more term 2 stuff. And they might have talked about how they've gone up level since term 1, so probably more effort on that.

Teacher D identified subject-specific vocabulary, used in matrices used to inform achievement levels, being understood by students as a “next step” to improving students' understanding of their progress and achievement:

From the feedback from the kids, making sure that they understand the language on all the sheets we give them to fill out. Really working (on that), and particularly it was in visual language—the visual arts.

Teacher C discussed how preparing for conferences had disrupted the normal programme and that in the future, talking about learning needed to be part of an everyday programme, rather than an “add on”:

I just think ... somehow it needs to fit in with their learning ... because it really felt as if we had to stop to do the testing, to do the practise, to do all that ... so when they (were) talking about what they've learnt they (were) actually talking about things that they learnt several weeks ago which is quite hard sometimes for them to remember. Somehow we need to make it that you're not stopping that new learning, you know—the new stuff (so) you're not interrupting your classroom programme too much.

Post-conference, interviewed teachers all identified the need to refine paperwork systems around the portfolios. Teachers D and E were keen to involve students more directly in assessment of their learning, reasoning that students' comments could be extremely accurate and informative. Teacher B felt that it would be easier next time, because students had experience of a student-led conference and they would know what was expected of them.

As a result of implementing student-led conferences, all teachers were able to identify teaching strategies that they would use in the future to further develop their students' understanding of their learning and their ability to articulate it. These included using 'AFL' language consistently, doing plenaries consistently, ensuring teachers were clear about what they were teaching, that students were familiar with assessment tasks and matrices, and that through in-depth, two-way dialogue, on-going opportunities were created to develop students' understanding of their learning. Teacher C's sentiment expressed teachers' views overall:

It's just talking to them the whole time about their learning which we try and do. Yeah, just getting into that whole pattern of using that learning language and talking about, and doing plenaries, all the time. That's really important and then you're not doing this last minute sort of trying to prepare them for it, it's just part of their whole learning.

Teachers C, D, and E, in the lead up to student-led conferences, had changed class-based practices in order to give students more specific feedback, individually or in small groups. In post-conference interviews, teachers stated they intended to spend more time talking to students about their learning in small groups and one to one. They also intended to keep asking students for feedback about their teaching practice.

Teacher D described how it had made her reflect upon what information she had not traditionally shared with parents (or students):

Well it's given me a freedom ... When parents come in and I used to sit and explain to them where their child was and where and where the standard was meant to be. But we were actually told, you know, around fifteen years or so, that you don't tell parents unless they ask because this is, you know, teaching knowledge and you don't pass it on and we had that for a long time ... and suddenly when it's Formative Assessment and we share everything and we're sort of legitimising what we were doing ... You know, it's good!

In post-conference interviews, teachers were asked how keen they would be to use student-led conferences as a reporting method. Teachers' A, D, and E were *extremely keen* to consider student-led conference and a fourth teacher was *very to extremely keen*. These teachers identified the value the process added to students' learning and to parents' understanding and involvement in their children's learning.

Teacher E summarised their thinking:

I think it's a great form of reporting to parents. I think it's great that the— instead of the conversation being between parent and—um between teacher and parent that it actually is the learner who's actually conveying what they've learnt and what they've done ... the build-up, giving them the scaffolding of language, you know, you're building up students' skills for the future ... It's like them having the social skills to be able to introduce no matter where or when.

Teacher B thought student-led conferences would improve in time as parents became familiar with the process:

I think it's a great chance for the parents to sit down and talk about things with their children which from looking around, you know, there are some parents who aren't really comfortable ... I think the more we do it the more they'll be able to talk to their children and discuss what they're doing at school, at home

and asking them, you know, what do we need to work on and they can actually, the children can actually tell their parents I need to do this. And I think that's a huge bonus.

Teacher C was *reasonably keen* to do student-led conferences again—the key issue identified being how to link the preparation process to the regular classroom programme. All teachers had met the challenge of making the sharing of assessment information an integral part of class-based teaching and learning. A paradigm shift was made.

In the post-conference student survey, 91% of students thought their conferences had gone *very well* or *extremely well*. In post-conference student interviews, six students thought their parents had enjoyed their conferences *very much*, with parents having identified specific areas they needed to improve in. Eight students thought their parents had enjoyed the conference *a lot*. Reasons for their rating included: positive feedback from parents about their work, their ability to run their conference, being interested in the information they shared, and looking happy. All the interviewed students had found the interactive parts of their conferences the easiest part, because they were fun were demonstrations of skills, rather than explanations of information. When asked what the hardest part of the conferences had been for them, Student A had found the teachers' comments hard to read and Student C was not as familiar with their Term 2 information as with their Term 1 information. Students E and K found the "I Can" page difficult to explain in detail when parents asked questions.

In the post-conference interviews, students identified that the most effective teacher support in preparation was teacher feedback, teachers sharing information (so they knew how well their learning was going), tasks for student-led conferences being written on the whiteboard, and prompts that had been put up in their classrooms.

When asked how keen they would be to do another student-led conference, seven students were *extremely keen* to do another student-led conference and six students were *very keen*. Students had found student-led conferences fun, they thought they would be better at leading another conference now they knew what they were, they wouldn't be that nervous another time, they thought they were good at it, and had been more confident that they thought they'd be. For Student N, it was "the only chance you get to share your learning with your parents". Student K was *not very keen* to do another conference because they did not like talking much, even though they had been

extremely articulate in the conference context and had demonstrated high levels of student competency when assessed using the ‘Student Competency’ matrix (see Table 23).

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

When considering the indicators of effective reporting, teachers in this case study were effective in developing capabilities to support students to run an effective student-led conference. For the first time, teachers systematically shared information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with students, as part of their classroom programme, in addition to making the process of learning explicit.

The introduction of the student portfolio, while extra work for teachers, created a document that contained written information about progress, achievement and next steps in learning with samples of work. Portfolios were used by students as a scaffold for their conferences, but they also gave parents specific, detailed information about their child’s learning.

Students ran conferences for parents, sharing information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning, and the process of learning. Students’ voice was the predominant voice and, through these conferences, two purposes of effective reporting, as defined in this study were met. Students were given the opportunity to engage with all the information about their learning and information was shared in detail with parents.

This was not possible without teachers developing strategies to develop students’ understanding of all aspects of their learning through teaching and learning programmes. Teachers had changed the way they used class time, what information they shared with students, and how they shared it, to ensure students understood the assessment information they were to share with parents. Making this information explicit to students could be described as “opening the black box” in the classroom at another level—not only to students, but also to parents.

Section B of this chapter examines the four conditions of reporting from the parents’ perspective, to understand more fully how parents’ beliefs about the ‘Conditions of reporting’ were, or were not met using student-led conferences. Table 17 summarises findings from parents around conditions of reporting. Initial parent beliefs are compared to post-conference views about the extent to which student-led conferences

fulfilled their expectations around each of the conditions of reporting. This is followed by details of findings in each of the four conditions of reporting.

SECTION B-PARENTS AND THE CONDITIONS OF REPORTING—BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND CONSEQUENCES

Table 17
Parents and the conditions of reporting—beliefs, practices and consequences

PARENTS' BELIEFS			
Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning	Condition 2: Social purposes of Reporting	Condition 3: Addressing Traditional Reporting Issues	Condition 4: Participation in a student-centered reporting paradigm
<p>Parents believed purpose was to provide information about progress and achievement but also wanted information on social purposes of reporting</p> <p>Interviewed parents wanted more regular information about progress and achievement – written / with visual graphs or student samples</p> <p>Parents wanted more detailed information, referenced to age or national benchmarks, strengths and weaknesses and what to improve on</p>	<p>Parents wanted information about– student attitude and motivation, how to help at home, concerns, behaviour, and students' social interactions</p> <p>Half of interviewed parents wanted information about behaviour in addition to other information</p> <p>A third of interviewed parents described the T-P interviews as opportunity to have two or three way discussion, sharing info that developed understanding of their child and their learning</p> <p>A quarter of parents described a successful TP Interview as one where you got all the info you wanted</p>	<p>Traditional issues identified were getting regular information, more detailed information with comparisons to other students or national benchmarks, written reports (2 to 4 x yr), the need for open, honest discussion that can be understood and time to discuss information in detail</p> <p>Interviewed parents wanted more specific written information either in explanation of grades, written teacher comments, samples of work to link to a grade level, time to develop understanding of students learning levels and what can be done to support at home and more consistency in information discussed at Teacher-Parent interviews so all relevant info would be covered in the time</p>	<p>Two thirds of parents were very or extremely keen for students to be involved in the reporting process</p> <p>Some surveyed parents wanted to meet teachers without students present while other parents saw it as an opportunity for students to take responsibility for learning</p> <p>Interviewed parents expressed concerns about students' capabilities</p> <p>Some parents thought it would be a lot of work for teachers</p>

PRACTICES			
<p>Parents attended and participated in Student-led conferences</p> <p>Student portfolios containing specific, detailed information about progress, achievement and next steps of learning were developed and used as part of the Student-led conferences</p>	<p>Parents were rung in the first half of the term by teachers to discuss a range of issues or concerns that they or the parents might have</p> <p>Parents attended and participated in Student-led conferences</p>	<p>Parents attended and participated in student-led conferences which were between 25 and 85 minutes long</p> <p>More time was created to discuss aspects of learning</p>	<p>Parents were invited to attend a Parent Evening to learn more about student-led conferences</p> <p>Invitations were sent home three weeks prior to the student-led conferences</p> <p>Parents participated in Student-led conferences with their children and received information about process, progress, achievement levels and next steps in learning</p> <p>Some parents made another time to talk to the teacher again</p>
CONSEQUENCES			
<p>Positive outcomes identified by parents were developing responsibility for learning and being able to explain learning</p> <p>Parents thought they had got good information about progress and achievement (ES .55)</p> <p>Parents thought the information was easy to understand (ES .41)</p> <p>Parents had a better understanding of the grading system as a result (ES .59)</p> <p>Five surveyed parents wanted teacher involvement to explain the portfolio information / grading systems</p>	<p>Eleven of thirteen interviewed parents stated there was nothing they wanted to discuss at the end of the student-led conferences</p> <p>One interviewed parent had made a time to meet with the Teacher to discuss concerns about learning in more detail</p>	<p>Consistency of information shared with parents had improved because of the Student portfolio development and careful attention to student agendas</p> <p>Parents got written, detailed information, and evidence of learning through samples of work or demonstrations of skills</p> <p>More time had been created which parents appreciated</p> <p>Information about next steps was provided in teacher comments</p> <p>The interviewed English second language parent understood information more clearly because it had been explained in</p>	<p>Student voice had been created and students' perceptions of their parents' views about the student-led conference experience was positive</p> <p>The post-conference parent survey showed 84% parents thought students had clearly explained aspects of their learning</p> <p>Overall effectiveness of SLCs as reporting method – 61% of parents thought they were very or extremely effective</p> <p>Interviewed parents: all thought SLCs were <i>very or extremely effective</i> as a reporting method</p>

<p>Four of fourteen interviewed parents also stated they would have liked teacher input</p> <p>All the indicators of an effective reporting method were met, some more effectively than others</p> <p>More parent education needed around assessment and how it works</p> <p>More time needed for students to develop deeper understanding of information about their learning</p>	<p>Dilemma: If the focus of a conference stays on learning, to what extent do other issues related to learning retain importance / relevance?</p> <p>What other systems do schools need to develop to give parents this information?</p>	<p>their first language</p> <p>Frequency of reporting not addressed with one reporting event</p> <p>Time for open, honest discussion was not part of the SLC format – so not addressed</p> <p>Many of the issues identified by parents were addressed but frequency and time to discuss concerns not resolved</p> <p>Dilemma: Every reporting method has constraints – how to address identified issues inherent in each is the challenge</p>	<p>All interviewed parents <i>extremely keen</i> or <i>very keen</i> to do SLCs again</p> <p>Parents’ perception of students’ understanding of their learning did not change from the beginning of the study</p> <p>At the end of the study 67% of parents preferred student-led conferences 33% of parents preferred T-P interviews –</p> <p>Overall student-led conferences were rated as effective as traditional reporting methods</p> <p>Student-led Conferences were preferred by 66% of parents who wanted student involvement in the reporting process</p> <p>Preferred options for reporting show parents wanted a range of options</p>
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Condition 1: Reporting focused on learning

In the initial parent survey, just 6.3% of parents rated the overall effectiveness of current reporting methods used in the Case Study 2 School as *extremely effective*, 46.4% thought they were *very effective*, 43.8% thought they were *reasonably effective*, and 3.6% thought they were *not very effective*. Parents were asked to identify the main purpose of reporting from a list of eight descriptors (see Table 19). 94.0% of parents thought the purpose of reporting was to get information about progress and achievement, while 81.9% thought information about next steps in learning was important.

Table 18
Frequency Count of Purposes of Reporting (n=116)

Purposes of Reporting	<i>n</i>	Descriptor	%
Progress and Achievement in Learning	112	Extremely important	69.0
		Very important	25.0
		Reasonably important	25.0
		Not very important	5.2
		Not at all important	0.9
Next Learning Goals	116	Extremely important	48.3
		Very important	33.6
		Reasonably important	15.5
		Not very important	1.7
		Not at all important	0.9
Student Attitude and Motivation for Learning	116	Extremely important	62.1
		Very important	28.4
		Reasonably important	8.6
		Not very important	0.9
Social Interactions with other students	116	Extremely important	46.6
		Very important	35.3
		Reasonably important	17.2
		Not very important	0.9
Behaviour	115	Extremely important	56.5
		Very important	26.1
		Reasonably important	17.4
Ways to support learning at home	116	Extremely important	62.1
		Very important	21.6
		Reasonably important	14.7
		Not very important	1.7
Sharing Concerns	116	Extremely important	50.5
		Very important	33.3
		Reasonably important	13.5
		Not very important	2.7

The majority of parent comments in the initial parent survey, showed parents wanted more regular information about their child's progress and achievement. Five parents wanted more detailed information, referenced to age or national benchmarks. Two parents suggested getting more student involvement would improve current reporting methods, and one parent thought there should be more follow-up on items of concern.

Parents in the initial parent survey were asked to rate the effective of teacher-parent interviews were in communicating information about students' learning. Findings showed 16.2% of parents thought teacher-parent interviews were *extremely effective*, 48.6% thought they were *very effective*, 31.5% thought they were *reasonably effective*, 2.7% thought they were *not very effective*, and 0.9% thought they were *not at all effective*.

Fourteen parents were interviewed at the beginning of the study and again after the student-led conference. In the initial parent interviews, all fourteen interviewed parents described the purpose of reporting in terms of getting information about progress and current achievement levels. Parents H and I suggested information about how students were doing compared to other students in class, or against national benchmarks would be informative, while Parents J, K, and L wanted information about students' strengths and weaknesses and what to improve on.

Improvements to clarify understanding of information were suggested by parents. These included more written information to go with information shared in traditional teacher-parent interviews, visual graphs showing progress and achievement visually graphed, and a portfolio containing samples of students' work to relate to their child's current achievement levels. Parents K and L, both of whom were English-second language, identified jargon teachers' used as problematic.

As in Case Study 1, indicators for effective reporting not identified by interviewed parents were 'Creating student voice' in the reporting process' and 'Creating opportunity for students' to engage with, and understand, all the information about their learning', and 'Sharing information about how learning had been achieved with parents'. The indicator 'Providing information that was understood by parents and creating opportunity for parents to 'learn about learning' so they are better able to support students' learning at home' was identified by three out of twelve interviewed parents.

Student-led conferences in practice

Turnout of parents for student-led conferences at this schools was extremely high. Interviewed parents were asked to summarise information that was shared with them in student-led conferences. Descriptions were similar to each other and to those of teachers and students. They discussed in detail information that was shared about progress, achievement levels and the process of learning. Parent M explained what their child had shared with them about their learning:

Joe started off by introducing me to the teacher before it started and he straight away he went to explain to me what he has done in the classroom using the portfolio and he started from reading, to written language, maths, art, visual language, some ICT or computers—um what else—some Inquiry learning, um, and lots of other areas he has worked on in the class and he had the samples of work to prove what he has done. Um, and also the process of other lessons using the models. They had set all their work on tables so he took me through all the stages he has done using the portfolio. At the same time he walked me in the classroom to show me what he what he has done in every areas—Um, the other things he did—computers—he showed me what he had done in computers - Inquiry learning and what other stages and how he started and how they did a flow chart and what was really interesting about all the things they have done is it is not just a one off test—like when I grew up or when I was in school it was always about a test, tests, and the outcome of it. It's more than that—it's how the learning process. How they started an idea or they started with just the one group or one word or some idea and how they have progressed. How they went about doing different ways—like in reading they had all these samples of recounts and narrative—they have done lots of reading – and he has samples of how they have done first brainstorming, first draft and second draft and finally we have this really nice draft on the wall. And even in those ones they have editing and there were a couple of words—he had other friends looking over—I think they went through his draft to find out and they had given him comments so it's a big process and I could see that.

Consequences: Parents' beliefs

The extent to which parents in this study believed the reporting process had been effective in reporting on learning was analysed using initial and post-conference parent survey data. In this case study findings showed there was significant improvement in parents' perceptions of the quality of information about progress and achievement they received from the student-led conference process (Cohen's $d = .55$) (see Table 19).

Table 19

Means, standard deviations and effect sizes of parents' views of quality of information from student-led conferences

Items	Descriptors	Pre		Post	
		<i>n</i> =111	%	<i>n</i> =82	%
Receive good information about progress and achievement	Totally	18	15.5	32	39.0
	Very much	47	40.5	34	41.5
	A reasonable amount	36	31.0	11	13.4
	Not very much	8	6.9	5	6.1
	Not at all	2	1.7		0.0
<i>M</i>		3.64		4.13	
<i>SD</i>		0.90		0.87	
Effect Size				0.55	
Items	Descriptors	<i>n</i> =112	%	<i>n</i> =81	%
Information is easy to understand	Totally	20	17.9	28	27.2
	Very much	63	56.3	44	48.1
	A reasonable amount	24	21.4	7	21.0
	Not very much	2	1.8	3	3.7
	Not at all	3	2.7		0.0
<i>M</i>		3.85		4.18	
<i>SD</i>		.83		0.74	
Effect Size				0.41	
Items	Descriptors	<i>n</i> =110	%	<i>n</i> =81	%
Understand the grading systems used	Totally	12	10.9	22	27.2
	Very much	47	42.7	39	48.1
	A reasonable amount	37	33.6	17	21.0
	Not very much	9	8.2	3	3.7
	Not at all	5	4.5		0.0
<i>M</i>		3.47		3.99	
<i>SD</i>		0.96		0.80	
Effect Size				0.58	

Parents had found information they received through the student-led conferences easier to understand than information they had received from other reporting methods (Cohen's $d = .41$). Most significantly it had improved their understanding of the grading system (Cohen's $d = .58$).

All interviewed parents stated they had been given information about current levels in different subject areas and next steps in learning. Seven of fourteen parents commented about the detail of the information shared, giving examples of tests that had informed achievement levels, teacher comments, the process of learning students had explained, and their clarity about next steps in learning.

Parent K shared specific information gained from their child's conference stating:

And he had the goal—I was good at this and I was not good at this or like in the writing he said he was really good at using language features like similes and onomatopoeia ... and at the same time he needs to work on doing better conclusions and in maths he was quite good at numbers—so there was almost everything was pretty good but in geometry—with shape, face and edges and stuff ... I think one of the things he said he couldn't do or couldn't say the sides—how many sides in some of the shapes.

Parent N found the samples of work helpful explaining:

She had some samples of her writing and bits and pieces that she was showing us and there was punctuation and full stops and she was putting the right capital letters in and bits and pieces like that. And that's very much, remember I spoke to you at the beginning and I said we were visual people—well that was a lot more helpful.

Parent O had found the teacher comments, seeing the tests and students' self-assessment useful information stating:

In all the subjects that she discussed about what level that she was at ... if she is at her expected level, or above or below ... I did like the teacher's comments written on there as well. So we had a good chance to actually see the way she was tested and seeing the learning intentions in front of you instead of just being told about it ... also I think they had to circle about what they thought they were good at these particular things and there were things that she wasn't—that she didn't always do. So I think that she is aware of that. I think in writing—story

writing using more exciting adjectives—I think that was the biggest thing that actually stood out—that she knows that’s what she needs to do.

Parent P also felt their child had showed good understanding of their learning summarising:

He knew exactly what the procedure was. He was well organised and he knew the sequence of his material that he was going to show me. He was able to explain the intention of the learning and the success criteria and where he fitted in—above, below or at the expected level. I really enjoyed the computer segment where he’d been videoed presenting his project and he was proud of that too. That was a great indicator for me to see his presenting skills—his oral presenting skills and it also showed me that he understood the material that he was presenting.

Parent J had found the information about the progress of learning helpful and explained:

It was actually much, much better than like a teacher-led conference where you’re sort of just getting how she’s sort of faring, how she scored against the norm I suppose, or the expected level for that group. I mean, while it certainly had that information in there, and that’s what you want ... but she actually went through some specific pieces of work which showed the thought process which goes into developing. So you realise kind of how they are learning as opposed to what they’re achieving—I think you learn a little bit more about how they are learning it.

Parents’ Q, R, and S specifically mentioned getting information about progress and Parents H, M, and Q described links they had made between information their children shared during their conferences and what they could do to support learning at home. Parent Q explained how they had made links between their child’s understanding of recounts (writing) mathematical concepts in the area of capacity and baking a cake:

And there were recounts. Well (the teacher) had put some comments in there that her recount—the things that she’d actually done—that she needed to get a bit more proficient in that and ... over the weekend we decided that ... Student K and I were going to bake a cake. So I said “O.K we can do this and then you can recount what we’ve done” ... it was a combination of recounting what she wants to do and then basically using the maths, like the measuring jugs and stuff

... to support (her) because we can do this with what we're doing with baking the cake—transferring her skills. But it was a real process as well because we went out grocery shopping together to start—it was the whole shabudle.

While 80.5% of parents in the post-conference survey thought they had received *extremely good* or *very good* information about progress and achievement, and 75.3% of parents thought the information was *extremely easy* or *very easy* to understand, only 62.2% of parents thought information about progress and achievement referenced to a national benchmark *extremely well* or *very well*. Post-conference survey results also showed 84.1% of parents thought the information had been explained *extremely well* or *very well* by their children.

Parent comments in the post-conference survey showed they supported student involvement in the reporting process and they had learned more about how students had learned. Developing confidence, responsibility for their learning, the ability to explain learning, pride in their work, and motivation for learning were other outcomes parents identified. Post-conference survey comments showed 11% of surveyed parents wanted teacher input, 3% of parents felt their children had not understood what they were explaining well and 6% had suggested teacher involvement to explain the portfolio information and grading system would have improved the conferences.

In post-conference interviews, nine of fourteen parents thought information about learning had been well explained and they did not need to get information from the teacher. Five parents stated teacher input would have been helpful. Parent I would have liked information about how their child compared to others in the class. Parents O and T thought their children had not been clear in their explanations in some areas. Parent T was concerned her child did not know what they were not doing well in writing, and had discussed this briefly with the teacher at the end of their child's conference. Parent M had made an appointment to discuss concerns about learning in more detail, with the teacher, at another time.

As teachers had predicted, student understanding of all the information they were asked to share was not consolidated, resulting in some parents still wanting clarification of information at the end of the conference process.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

When comparing the evidence in Case Study 2 to the indicators of an effective reporting method, initial and post-conference parent survey results showed statistically significant improvement in the quality of information about progress and achievement they received, parent understanding of achievement information and parent understanding of how the grading system worked (see Table 19). While eleven out of fourteen interviewed parents gave descriptions that demonstrated their children's ability to state next steps in learning, three parents had wanted further information and clarification about this from the teachers.

Parents' expectations of what their children would know and could share were exceeded and the information about how students learn did increase parents' understanding of the information. The extent to which parents had made links between what their children shared and how they could support learning at home is unclear. Four of fourteen interviewed parents gave specific examples of how they planned to support their child's learning at home, based upon information they had received through their child's student-led conference.

Summary

Despite the improvement in information given and the improved understanding of information received, the post-conference parent survey and parent interviews both showed approximately a third of parents believed some teacher input was needed in the reporting process about students' learning. When asked what reporting method they preferred at the end of the study, 66.7% of parents preferred student-led conferences, 57.7% preferred three-way teacher-parent-student interviews, while 33.3% preferred teacher-parent interviews.

The next aspect of reporting discussed is Condition 2—Social purposes of reporting. Parents' initial beliefs about purposes of reporting, other than learning, are compared to their views at the end of the study, after they had participated in student-led conferences.

Condition 2: Social purposes of reporting—The parents' perspective

In the initial parent survey, 90.5% of parents in this case study identified getting information about student attitude and motivations as the second most important purpose of reporting, after being informed about their children's learning. Results

showed 83.7% thought information about how to help their children at home was important, 83.8% wanted to discuss concerns, 82.6% wanted information about behaviour, and 81.9% wanted information about social interactions.

During initial parent interviews, six of fourteen interviewed parents stated they wanted information about their child's behaviour in a written report. Parents R and M wanted to know about their child's social skills and Parent H wanted to know about their child's attitude to learning. Parent I thought honesty in reporting was really important, and Parent L wanted explanations of information in layman's language.

Like the teachers, four of the interviewed parents (Parents U, L, I, and T), described teacher-parent interviews as an opportunity to have a two or three-way discussion, sharing information that developed understanding of their child and their learning. Parents H, M, and I, described a successful teacher-parent interview as one where you got all the information you wanted and Parents H and I added "So we know what support is needed from us at home". Just two (Parents U and N), of thirteen parents stated that they wanted information about behaviour from a parent interview. Parent U said a successful interview was one where there was opportunity to voice concerns.

Student-led conferences in practice

In post-conference interviews, all parents described being introduced to teachers at the beginning of their children's conferences and Parents H, T, M, and O, stated they had chatted briefly at the end with the teacher. One parent had made an appointment to meet with a teacher at another time to discuss concerns further.

Consequences: Parents' beliefs

In post-conference parent survey comments, four parents stated they preferred to speak to the teacher without the child present, and four parents thought three-way discussion around the information presented would have been valuable. There were no post-conference parent survey comments specifically stating that parents wanted information about students' attitude, motivation, behaviour, or social issues.

Eleven of the fourteen interviewed parents stated that that there was nothing they had wanted to discuss with the teacher at the conclusion of the student-led conferences.

Parent Q stated:

I think from the information we got from the portfolio we were able to look at what we could do at home to improve where she is slightly lacking in and so we didn't really need any input from the teacher as such because that information was there in the portfolio. And that's the difference—because traditionally we would look at the report or whatever, or have that little ten minute interview—and be teacher-parent talking to each other about “Well what can we do to about it to help?” but we were having that conversation with (our child).

Parents U, N, and L, also commented that if there had been anything they wanted to discuss, that the teachers would have been happy to accommodate them.

In the post-conference parent interview, Parent I stated he had wanted to know “just anything he was struggling with or you know, things like that that he may not come out and say to us you know and whether there's the discipline issues or whether he is too social”.

In Case Study 2, parents initially rated other aspects of reporting high when considering purposes of reporting. This could have been because they wanted more information about their child's attitude, motivation for learning, behaviour, and social relationships, or that they valued this type of information as part of the reporting process. By the end of the study, interviewed parents seemed less concerned about these aspects of reporting.

Consequences: Theory of effective reporting

Post-conference parent survey showed parents who wanted to meet with the teacher again were looking for additional information about how to support their child in their learning, rather than information about social issues. This could have been because the teachers rang parents in the first half of the term to create opportunity to discuss specific issues parents might have, but this was not mentioned by any interviewed parents. The lack of focus on students' attitude and motivation in post-conference parent survey comments, could also have been because parents could ascertain this information through the conference process for themselves. Two interviewed teachers had made post-conference appointments to meet with four parents to discuss social concerns, so another group of parents perhaps felt opportunity to discuss a range of issues related to their child's well-being had been attended to.

These findings raise further questions. If student-led conferences keep the focus of reporting on learning, to what extent do other issues related to learning, such as attitude, motivation, effort, and behaviour retain importance and relevance as part of a reporting agenda? Should schools be using student surveys to provide information about other aspects of learning, such as behaviour, attitude, and motivation as part of the reporting process? If reporting achieves the primary purpose of sharing information about learning, what are some strategies schools can use to give parents information about aspects of student well-being that is linked to learning, without compromising the learning focus?

In the initial parent survey and initial parent interviews, parents were asked to identify issues with traditional reporting methods that they found problematic. The next section examines the extent to which issues identified by parents in Case Study 2 were addressed using student-led conferences and how this might have influenced parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of student-led conferences.

Condition 3: Traditional issues in reporting—The parents' perspective

Parents in the initial parent survey were asked to state what would make current reporting methods more effective. Eleven parents wanted regular information, and five parents suggested having written reports two to four times a year. Seven parents wanted more detailed information with comparisons to other students or to national benchmarks. Five parents wanted open, honest discussion that could be understood. Two surveyed parents wanted student input in reporting discussions, while two parents wanted to meet teachers without students to be able to discuss concerns. Three parents suggested that time to discuss information in detail would add value to the reporting process.

In initial parent interviews, six of fourteen interviewed parents, when asked about issues with written reporting, thought information they received about progress and achievement in written reports was clear, easy to understand, and did not need to be changed. Parents M, N, and T, wanted more specific information, either in explanations of grades or by way of teacher comments. Parent I wanted specific written information more regularly and Parent R was keen to have samples of students' work linked to teacher assessments. Parent H did not know the school's reporting system, so did not comment.

When asked to identify issues with traditional teacher-parent interviews all fourteen parents wanted more time to develop understanding of students' learning levels and what could be done at home to support their progress. Parent I wanted more specific information stating:

I think maybe though it (teacher-parent interviews) could be supported with um actually having in writing those P.A.T's (Progressive Achievement Tests) or even at the time having the scores and how they did in their P.A.T's and where they're at maybe just having that as part of the process to um so that you can take it away and know ... that doesn't need to be a full report or anything like that but maybe a general results and how they're generally going maybe...it would be quite helpful.

Parent M suggested a set of questions for teachers and parents to work through to make sure all the relevant information would be covered during interviews in a more consistent way. Parent H stated:

I think it should be a um should be a time where parents are able to walk away a very real understanding of where the child's learning level is and where there needs to improve... and what can be done at home to help with what's been done at school to improve them.

All the interviewed parents had experience of their children being at teacher-parent interviews and goal-setting meetings. Parent O stated that their child was not very interested in what was discussed at the teacher-parent interviews, and Parent U stated that their child did not want the interviews to be longer.

Preparation for student-led conferences

In addition to portfolio development, which was focused on providing detailed written information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning (linked to national benchmarks), teachers created time-frames so student-led conferences in Year 3 and 4 classes would run for 45 minutes and in Year 5 and 5 classes for 60 minutes.

Conference times were open-ended, in that if students and parents wanted to take longer they could. Questions for parents to ask students, to begin a dialogue about learning, were developed, printed, and given to parents at the beginning of their child's conference.

Student-led conferences in practice

In post-conference interviews, parents' descriptions of the conferences were very similar to each others. Students introduced their parents to the teacher, who gave them a brief introduction to the whole process. In some instances, students had begun their conferences by going through their portfolio information before doing some of the activities. In other classes, students and parents moved around stations where resources had been set out for each curriculum area.

All the parents gave detailed descriptions of the information their children had shared with them. Like the students, parents' descriptions included students' goals, achievement levels, next steps in learning and information about the process of learning students had shared.

In post-conference parent interviews, all the parents commented positively about the time that had been created to engage with all the information shared. Conferences had ranged in length between 35 minutes and 75 minutes, and Parents S, U, and O stated they had continued conversations begun during conferences at home.

Parent T commented that it had been a lot of information to absorb at one time, and that it could have been helpful for parents to have a fifteen minute slot to read the information in the portfolio before their child's conference. This parent had sought clarification from the teacher about their child's writing at the end of their child's conference. Parent M had made a time with the teacher to discuss her child's progress in more detail on another day.

When asking for feedback from parents about what would improve the student-led conferences, comments in post-conference surveys showed that 10% of surveyed parents, while enjoying the conference experience, wanted more teacher involvement in the process. Two parents thought students needed to understand information better and two parents thought their children had explained their learning well.

Issues parents had identified with written reports and teacher-parent interviews were addressed. Parents had received specific information, both written and oral, through the student portfolios and from students. Samples of work had been used to clarify what students could do and what their next steps were. Questions had been provided for parents to use during the conferences and these, with the portfolio information, provided more consistency in information shared. Opportunities to discuss information with

teachers that students had not explained in sufficient detail, either at the end of their child's conference or on another day were created. More time had been created for parents to develop understanding of the information being presented.

Issues not addressed through the student-led conference were the frequency of reporting, and parents who wanted to meet with teachers without the students present.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

Student-led conferences in this case study addressed issues of parents' requests for detailed written and oral information that they understood, information being shared openly and honestly by students, and time to develop understanding of the information and consistency of information shared. This process was designed to mirror assessment practices in classrooms that effective teachers use to develop students' understanding of their learning.

The extent to which one reporting method alone can solve all identified issues with reporting is questioned when considering the feedback from parents in this case study. To be effective educational partners, parents do need to be given specific, relevant information frequently but so do students. It could be that multiple ways to share information in on-going ways, both inside and outside the classroom as part of the process of learning, involving teachers, students and parents, need to be developed in order to address all the constraints of reporting.

The final aspect of reporting, participating in a student-centred reporting method, was a new experience for parents, as it was in Case Study 1. It required parents to accept their children's new role as 'facilitators of conversations about their learning' and their new role as 'active participants in the reporting process'—role changes they may not have fully understood at the beginning of the study.

Condition 4: Participating in a new student-centred reporting method—The parents' perspective

In the initial parent survey, when asked to what extent they supported student involvement in the reporting process, 54.5% of parents were *extremely keen* or *very keen*, and 34.8% of parents were *reasonably keen*. Ratings were based on parents' experience of three-way teacher-parent-student goal setting meetings held in Term 1 and teacher-parent interviews, where students were invited to attend and had done so for the previous two years at the parents' discretion.

When asked about their initial reaction to the concept of student-led conferences in initial parent interviews, Parents U, P, O, and S expressed concerns about their children's ability to run a conference. Responses ranged from "How will he cope?" (U), to "I'm scared they won't be up to it" (P). Parent H expressed apprehension—"I felt that um I didn't fully understand how a child would, I suppose, comprehend what was being done, and therefore how would they be able to participate in that sense."

Parents R, P, and M saw it as an opportunity for students to take more responsibility for their learning, while Parents L and N were prepared to give it a go because "they (the teachers) are doing it for the benefit of the kids". Parent T wanted more information about it and Parent I thought it was going to be time-consuming for teachers to prepare students, given the suggested conference times were from 30 to 60 minutes.

Preparation for student-led conferences

Ten percent of the parents in the school attended one of two meetings based upon student-led conferences and how they worked. Because interviewed parents had been given information about student-led conferences by the field worker when signing consent forms, none of the interviewed parents attended these meetings. While interviewed parents may have had a better understanding of what a student-led conference was, other student-centred preparation strategies were put in place to ensure all parents in the school were informed about this new reporting method. Information was supplied through school newsletters, homework activities were developed that required students to engage parents in conversation about learning, and students informally shared information about student-led conferences with their parents in the weeks leading up to the conferences. These strategies, along with the lists of questions given to parents on arrival at their child's student-led conference were the means by parents were supported as active participants in this new method of reporting.

Consequences: Parents' beliefs

In the post-conference parent survey, 61.7% of parents thought student-led conferences were *extremely effective* or *very effective* as a reporting method, which was higher than the 52.7% ratings parents had given current reporting methods in the initial parent survey. This result is explained by the significant improvement in parents' perception of information provided and understanding of grading (see Table 19) rather than their belief that their children understood their learning. While 85.2% of parents thought

their children had explained aspects of their learning well, parents' perceptions of improvement in students' understanding of their learning was moderate (Cohen's $d = .39$).

Table 20

Means, standard deviations and effect size of parents' perceptions of students' understanding of their learning

Parents' perception of students' understanding of learning	Pre $n=110$		Post $n=82$	
	n	%	n	%
Extremely well	2	4.3	7	8.5
Very well	12	30.2	38	46.3
Reasonably well	56	48.3	31	37.8
Not very well	35	10.3	6	7.3
Not at all well	5	1.7	0	
<i>M</i>	3.26		3.56	
<i>SD</i>	.786		.755	
Effect Size			.39	

Post-conference parent survey data showed parents' rating for information about next steps in learning had dropped from 81.9% in the initial parent survey, to 60.3% in the post-conference parent survey. Teacher comments in the student portfolios contained information about next steps in learning, but parents may not have realised this information had been provided, or they may not have found the written information provided as effective as talking to the teacher and students. Another explanation for this finding could be that students were less effective in articulating information about their next steps in learning clearly, which is most likely to have been a result of what teachers chose to focus students on when preparing for student-led conferences.

In post-conference parent interviews, parents were asked how they found student-led conferences differed from traditional teacher-parent interviews. All interviewed parents identified getting more specific, detailed information as a feature of student-led conferences. Parent S explained how they had learned more about how students learn and how results have been—"Instead of just hearing she was at this level— she's

reading at this level which I've always thought was just all I wanted to know, I got a better understanding of why she is at that level".

Ten of fourteen parents thought hearing about learning from their child was powerful, and as a result, they had better understanding of how they comprehended their world.

Parent P commented:

I guess traditional Parent-Teacher interviews are without the child and it's more a sharing of the information between the teacher and the parents whereas this way it's the person who's really involved in the learning is at the centre of it.

Parents H, I, and U thought they had developed a better understanding of areas their children struggled in, and Parent N thought conferences created more honesty in reporting stating:

I think it is so different because in the Parent-Teacher meeting the teacher is always telling about the child—positive progress and in the Student Led Conference we can find out the real truth.

Parents H and I commented on how the conference process helped clarify their children's strengths and weaknesses. Parent I summarised:

The data was pretty much similar—it was just presented slightly differently. I guess the real thing was to see (our child) articulate what he had learned and how he had learned it and where he was going with it. I think that was something that was quite different—I mean you can get the teacher's opinion of it but you can be forming your own opinion of where he's at, what he's doing and where he's going with it based upon what he tells you.

Parent L stated student-led conferences had been more effective in developing their understanding as an English second language speaker. Parents P, O and T thought their children had taken ownership and responsibility for their learning.

While parents in the post-conference parent survey showed no significant change in parents' knowledge of students' 'next steps in learning', interviewed parents (by comparison), were very clear about their child's 'next steps in learning' and how they intended to support them. As a result of participating in student-led conferences, ten of fourteen interviewed parents identified specific areas of learning they wanted to work on with their children at home. Parent T commented:

We immediately launched into a plan of me trying to help him with some maths stuff—the next level that he’s at. It’s quite good to know exactly what the next level is. Mind you the maths passport helps with that as well. Um, and we started writing stories right away—you know—and concentrating on when he’s does reading—making sure he’s checking his comprehension. So yeah, quite specific things to do.

Parents P, H and S felt the student-led conferences had prompted them to provide more support for their children at home more consistently. Parent P shared their thinking:

We’re becoming more strict about the reading and more talking about the reading. We’re going to put more focus on and to—we always have done reading—but to be honest, probably not as regularly as we should, but (we are) more and more and more determined effort to get it up there. The other area that I really want him to focus on is his spelling so in the car, in the spa pool, we’ve been doing spelling.

While two thirds of surveyed parents were *extremely keen* or *very keen* to do another student-led conference, all interviewed parents were *extremely keen* or *very keen* to do student-led conferences again. Parents’ comments were focused on ways they thought the conference process had empowered their children and how much they had appreciated the quality time they had shared. Parent O commented:

Just to spend some quality time with her and actually find out what they enjoy doing as well. Yes it’s probably the longest we’ve ever had a discussion about school. And I think next time—if they confident this time and they weren’t quite sure about how it all worked—just imagine next time what they will be like.

Post-conference surveyed parents, when asked to identify their preferred reporting method, 66.7% of parents preferred student-led conferences while 33.3% preferred teacher-parent interviews.

Consequences: The theory of effective reporting

In this case study, student-led conferences were the catalyst for teachers to share information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with students who in turn, shared the information with parents. As a result, parents did receive detailed written information and parent understanding of information did improve significantly

from the initial parent survey to the post-conference parent survey. All interviewed parents identified ways they planned to use the information gained to support their child's learning more specifically, as a result of the student-led conference process.

Having taken part in three-way conferences and teacher-parent-student interviews where teachers had shared information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning, parents' perception of students' understanding could have been low because they were comparing students' explanations of learning to those of teachers. Parents' perceptions of students' understanding of their learning was similar to that of teachers, who had expressed concerns in pre and post interviews that students had not had enough time to develop good understanding of progress and achievement information.

Parents were also presented with written information in student portfolios for the first time during the conferences. It is possible their lack of familiarity with the format, and the detailed information, presented at the same time as their children were sharing information about the process of learning could have led to confusion.

Conclusion

When asked to give an overall rating for effectiveness, parents did not rate student-led conferences any more effective than other reporting methods they had experience of. This was despite parent surveys showing statistically significant gains in the quality of information shared, an increase in parent understanding of the information shared, and greater parent understanding of the grading system. In this case study, when asked to identify the purpose of reporting at the beginning of the study, parents' had given high ratings for getting information about attitude, motivation, behaviour and social issues. . Interviewed parents, in initial parent interviews, clearly described interview times as an opportunity to have a two or three way discussion with the teacher about their child's learning. Student-led conferences had not created opportunity to address social purposes of reporting, nor had they provided parents with time for discussion with teachers. Traditional issues with reporting identified by parents were largely addressed. Parents received specific information, both written and oral, and there was consistency in information provided. While the issue of extended time to talk about learning had been resolved, frequency of reporting still needed to be addressed. For parents in this case study, student-led conferences had met just some of their priorities around conditions of reporting.

In the next section, teachers' knowledge of assessment, as it is linked to reporting, is explored in detail. This is because the effectiveness of any student-led conference needs to be considered in the context of teachers' knowledge and understanding of assessment and how it links to their class-based practice. It is the argument of this thesis that because teachers determine what students know and understand about their learning, they are a key factor in determining the effectiveness of student-led conferences.

CHAPTER 5B: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER COMPETENCY IN ASSESSMENT THROUGH THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATING IN STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Overview

In this study the theory underpinning students leading an effective conference with their parents was that if teachers were effective in using specific, class-based assessment strategies to ensure students understood their learning and could explain it to another audience, student-led conferences would be effective as a reporting method. In Case Study 2, student-led conferences provided an authentic, external purpose for teachers to deepen their understanding of ‘Assessment for Learning’ pedagogy. Student-led conferences became a catalyst for change in teacher practice, as teachers’ beliefs about assessment and reporting were challenged. Teachers, for the first time, began integrating the development of students’ assessment and reporting knowledge and understanding into class programmes.

The school in Case Study 2 had been part of the two-year Ministry ‘Assessment for Learning’ contract in the two years prior to this study. Three of the five teachers had taken part in the two year professional development programme. Two provisionally registered teachers, beginning their second year of teaching, had completed just one year.

As in Case Study 1, to understand the quality of assessment information shared with parents during student-led conferences (by students and teachers), teachers’ knowledge and understanding of assessment were evaluated using data from teachers’ initial, pre-conference and post-conference interviews. Responses were analysed using the ‘Assessment Literacy’ matrix (see Table 10). The extent to which teachers’ assessment knowledge and understanding linked to class-based practices, that in theory would support students to lead effective student-led conferences, was evaluated in this second school context. To strengthen reliability of interpretation of teachers’ data an inter-rater reliability check was carried out. Using the exact agreement method for specific checklist items with each dimension of the ‘Assessment Literacy’ framework, overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed teachers’ levels of ‘Assessment Literacy’ at each stage of the case study was 78.4% ($n=65$ comparisons).

Using the ‘Assessment Literacy’ framework found on page 112 as a basis for analysis, Teachers B and C at the beginning of this case study were operating between Level 1

and Level 2 ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions while the three more experienced teachers were operating at mainly Level 2. Teachers in Case Study 2 had more ‘Assessment Literacy’ knowledge at the beginning of the study than teachers in Case Study 1, in three of five assessment dimensions. At the beginning of Case Study 2, four teachers were operating at Level 1 in the ‘Student involvement in assessment’ dimension. All five teachers were Level 1 in ‘Assessment as it linked to reporting’.

In pre-conference interviews, teachers showed shifts in their practice as they worked to develop students’ understanding of assessment. Teachers B and C, both in their second year of teaching, had expressed difficulty beginning the process of sharing assessment information with students. All teachers in pre-conference interviews described reporting in terms of supporting students to share information with parents, in accordance with Level 2 or 3 matrix dimensions. Teachers A, B, D and E, described Level 3 assessment practice as they described their focus on ensuring students could describe where they were ‘at’ in their learning, with reference to specific tests and samples of work. Teachers D and E described students being able to peer-assess and self assess independently with accuracy, which matched the Level 4 indicator in ‘Student Involvement in Assessment’.

In post-conference interviews, Teacher A had shifted from between Level 1 and 2 to Level 3 in most ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions and Level 4 in ‘Assessment as it links to reporting’. Teachers B and C were operating between Level 2 and Level 3, having identified next steps to develop their teaching practice in areas of ‘Student involvement in assessment’, ‘Clarity around next Steps’ and ‘Assessment as it links to reporting’. Teacher E moved from Level 2 to Level 3, and in two areas, to Level 4. The biggest shift was seen with Teacher D who by the end of the study, was operating at Level 4 in most dimensions.

As in Case Study 1, student-led conferences acted as a catalyst for shifting teachers’ practice in ‘Assessment Literacy’. Three teachers shifted one level in six months. Two teachers shifted two levels in six months. Even though the school had completed an ‘Assessment for Learning’ contract and teachers had engaged in three-way conferences, it was not until student-led conferences were introduced that it became important, even imperative, that teachers’ took the time to transfer their ‘Assessment Literacy’ knowledge to students.

Like the provisionally registered teachers in Case Study 1, the less experienced teachers in Case Study 2 (Teachers B and C), found it more difficult to be effective in all the 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions because they were still developing their knowledge and understanding of assessment at class and school-wide levels. Even so, all teachers in this case study became more aware of the links between student-centred teaching practice pedagogy, class and school-wide assessment practices, and the reporting process, as a result of implementing student-led conferences. Through this process, the quality of dialogue in classrooms changed and responsibility for learning became shared, as students were asked for the first time to genuinely take ownership of, and responsibility for, their knowledge and understanding their learning.

The theory of effective student-led conferences

Because teachers in this case study were asked to share all assessment information with students, it was expected that this would provide students and parents with specific, accurate information about students' progress and achievement, with samples to further clarify where students were 'at' and 'next steps' for learning.

Feedback from the post-conference parent survey showed parents thought their children had done a good job with their conferences and that they had received specific information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. Despite this, at the end of the study, 33% of parents stated they preferred parent-teacher interviews, while 66% wanted to retain student-led conferences. This was a similar result to Case Study 1, but for quite different reasons.

In this case study, students had been asked to explain all aspects of their learning in the student-led conferences for the first time. The consistency with which students did this varied across classes at least in part, because of teachers' knowledge and understanding of assessment, the effectiveness of strategies used to integrate it into their class practice and the age of the students. Parents at this school were used to students being part of a three-way conference, so having students as part of the reporting process was not new. The underlying concerns of both teachers and parents at the end of the study seemed to be the lack of direct input from teachers and concerns around reliability of information shared by students.

If, as has been shown, student-led conferences do shift teachers' practice, it is reasonable to expect that over time, students would develop consistency in the delivery

of information shared at student-led conferences, as both teachers and students gain experience with this reporting method.

Table 21

Case Study 2: Teachers' development in 'assessment literacy' through the process of implementing student-led conferences

The impact of knowledge of Assessment on teachers' preparation for SLCs
Beliefs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher A operating with two criteria in Level 1, 'Student Involvement in Assessment' and 'Reporting as it links to Assessment', one criteria at Level 2, 'Clarity around Next Steps', and two criteria at Level 3, 'Assessment Literacy' and 'Big Picture Understanding of Assessment' - Teacher B operating half way between Level 1 and Level 2 with two criteria in Level 1, including 'Assessment as it links to Reporting' and 'Student involvement in Assessment' - Teacher C operating half way between Level 1 and Level 2. Level 1 criteria, like Teacher B, included 'Assessment as it links to Reporting' and 'Student involvement in Assessment' - Teacher D operating mainly at Level 2, the Level 1 criteria being 'Student Involvement in Assessment' - Teacher E operating mainly in Level 2, with one criteria in Level 1 – 'Assessment as it links to Reporting' and 1 criteria in Level 3 – 'Student Involvement in Assessment' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While teachers were generally operating between Levels' 1 and 2 at the beginning of the study all describe reporting practices in a teacher-centred way, indicating that teachers had not considered 'Assessment for Learning' pedagogy applied to the context of reporting • Assessment Literacy is not necessarily dependent on teaching experience as Teachers' B and C rated higher initially than the experienced teachers in Case Study 1 and Teacher A in Case Study 2
Practices
<p>Level 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher describes collating test or exam results and shares these with students Teachers' A, • Teachers show awareness of the value of self and peer assessment and uses these assessment practices infrequently Teachers' C • Teacher describes reporting to parents and encouraging students to share what they are learning at school Teachers' C, • Teacher uses assessment information to inform parents and students where they are 'at' in their learning Teachers' C <p>Level 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers describe using self and peer assessment used as a regular part of class assessment Teachers' A,D • Teachers help students to develop an understanding of where they are at in their

<p>learning through making transparent the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, exemplars or matrices Teachers' A, E</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher describe reporting in terms of supporting students to talk to parents about their learning progress Teachers' A, B, E • Teacher describes using assessment information to inform parents, through students, where students are 'at' in their learning Teachers' A, B, E <p>Level 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher involves students in all assessment, shares results and analyses them with student to inform further learning. Teachers' D,E • Teachers describe students being able to peer and self assessment independently with accuracy Teachers' E, D • Teachers give students the opportunity to decide on where they are at in the curriculum the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, exemplars or matrices and other curriculum resources. Teachers' D • Teacher describe reporting in terms of enabling students to lead conversations about their progress, achievement and next steps in learning with parents Teachers' D,E (shows awareness of this next level with focus on next steps in learning) • Teachers use assessment information to inform parents, through students, about learning so students and parents can identify actions to support future learning Teachers' D,E (and identified next steps in learning for parents) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers' B and C had made shifts to Level 2 dimensions, Teacher A to Level 3 and Teachers' D and E to Levels' 3 and 4 dimensions - Ways to explain the assessment information to students effectively was the challenge identified by Teachers' B and C
Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher A – Moved from Level 1 / 2 to mainly Level 3, with one criteria in Level 4 – 'Assessment as it links to Reporting' • Teacher B – Stayed mainly at Level 2 but identified next steps to move towards Level 3 in the 'Student Involvement in Assessment' and 'Assessment as it links to Reporting' dimensions • Teacher C – Moved from Level 1 / 2 to mainly Level 2 – identifying some steps to move towards Level 3 in the areas of 'Student Involvement in Assessment' and 'Clarity about Next Steps' • Teacher D – Moved from Level 2 to Level 4 in all dimensions (the biggest gain across all teachers in the study) • Teacher E – Moved from Level 2 to mainly Level 3, and Level 4 in 'Student Involvement in Assessment' and 'Assessment as it links to Reporting' <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-led conferences, as in Case Study 1, acted as a catalyst for shifting teachers' practice to a more student-centred approach, with teachers shifting between two and three levels, in at least two dimensions, in six months • Even though the school had completed an 'Assessment for Learning' Ministry Contract and teachers had engaged in Three-way Conferences with students and parents prior to this study, teachers had not shifted their practice in terms of sharing assessment information with students. As a consequence, this became the main challenge for teachers in this study. • Less experienced teachers found it harder to shift their practice implementing Student-

led conferences for the first time because they were still learning about assessment tools, how to use them and how to share this information effectively with students

- All teachers were more aware of the links that needed to be made between their teaching practice and student involvement, both in class-based assessment practices and in the reporting process, as a result of implementing student-led conferences

In the next section, the five aspects of the ‘Assessment Literacy’ framework, as they related to teachers’ descriptions of their practice are explored in more depth, to gain understanding as to how teachers’ practices were influenced by the introduction of student-led conferences.

Table 22

Teachers 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions matrix—based on the work of Michael Absolum in Ministry of Education 'Assessment for Learning' contracts

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher assesses when required but does not link results with teaching and learning. Assessment is considered a separate activity from teaching Teacher sees formative and summative assessment as distinct concepts 	<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes assessment as linked with teaching and learning Makes some efforts to use formal tests diagnostically and for learning. Teacher may group students according to results from initial testing 	<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes all types of assessment as Assessment for Learning – uses most summative assessment measures (like post tests and assessment checklists, etc.) to inform teaching and learning 	<p>Assessment Literacy as it links to teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher shows understanding that all informal and formal assessment is central to teaching and learning and uses it to make informed decisions about where individuals and groups are in their learning
<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher collates test or exam results and students receive limited feedback about results Teachers does not describe peer or self assessment as a class-based practice 	<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher collates test or exam results and shares these with students Teachers show awareness of the value of self and peer assessment and uses these assessment practices infrequently 	<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher shares assessment results and analysis of them with students to establish future goals Teachers describe using self and peer assessment used as a regular part of class assessment 	<p>Student Involvement in Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher involves students in all assessment, shares results and analyses them with student to inform further learning. Teachers describe students being able to peer and self assessment independently with accuracy
<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has an understanding of where students are at in their learning through personal curriculum knowledge, observation and summative testing. 	<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has an understanding of where students are at in their learning through personal curriculum knowledge, observation and the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, use of an exemplar or matrix 	<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers help students to develop an understanding of where they are at in their learning through making transparent the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, exemplars or matrices 	<p>Clarity about Next Steps in Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers give students the opportunity to decide on where they are at in the curriculum the use of assessment tools such as asTTle, running records, exemplars or matrices and other curriculum resources.
<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has <i>little</i> understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally 	<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has <i>some</i> understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally 	<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally 	<p>Big Picture Understanding of Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has understanding of how aggregated data is used school-wide, nationally or internationally

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
or how it relates to their classroom practice	and how it relates to their classroom practice	and how these analyses relates to their classroom practice	and how these analyses relates to their classroom practice – and shares this information with students
<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting to parents on curriculum coverage and student achievement. Teacher uses assessment information to give general information to parents 	<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting to parents and encouraging students to share what they are learning at school Teacher uses assessment information to inform parents and students where they are ‘at’ in their learning 	<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting in terms of supporting students to talk to parents about their learning progress Teacher uses assessment information to inform parents, through students, where students are ‘at’ in their learning 	<p>Assessment as it links to Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher describes reporting in terms of enabling students to lead conversations about their progress, achievement and next steps in learning with parents Teachers use assessment information to inform parents, through students, about learning so students and parents can identify actions to support future learning

Assessment of teachers' levels of 'Assessment Literacy' at the beginning of the study

Initial teacher interviews showed four teachers' descriptions were aligned with Level 2 descriptors of 'Assessment Literacy', with one teacher working within Level 3.

Teachers made strong links between assessment and teaching practice when defining assessment and how they used assessment information.

Teacher B linked assessment information to goal setting, identifying next steps and teacher programming:

We obviously do use it and we can see where they now, or and where they need; and where their future um, future goal is ... to see what to focus on for that particular child, for where they might need more help or that sort of thing. Well say for example, if we're doing AsTTLe and from that AsTTLe test we're finding that the child in particular is having problems with a particular type of comprehension then you can focus on more, um, on how they make predictions or whatever. If they have problems, sort of looking forward, then we know we can target that child with um, doing some more prediction work.

Teacher D simply stated "To me it means finding out where the children are at so I can take them to the next step in their learning." Teacher E took this one step further when they described teachers, students and other partners in learning using assessment information to support learning:

Looking at the strengths and needs of students—that's what it means in the big picture. Getting a snap shot in order to track students learning and all the influences that impact on their learning ... assessment to me is, finding out about our students, where, and then of course it impacts on where I can help them, how they can help themselves and the partnerships with the people involved in their learning.

Teachers' descriptions linked with Level 2 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions when they described how they used assessment for diagnostic purposes and for grouping students. Teacher A stated:

I think we've really tightened that up now....the last few years and how we use the information, what we're doing with it. We're putting results into E-TAP so we can track where the students are at and can see gaps in programmes, um, any children that need extension or extra support.

Teachers B and D explained how they used assessment data to group students. Teacher D stated:

From the data you know, you can work out; like we used the maths last year to cross group children to get them moving because we could see where they were not moving in some areas and so we've done things like that and it helps with knowing where the kids are at with individuals and trying to work out what the problem is.

Teacher E was operating at Level 3 in 'Assessment Literacy'. They were strongly focused on using assessment to inform both their teaching practice and student learning stating:

I use this information to feed back to the students. It's the most important ... I come to school to teach so to inform them and I like to do it straight away ... doing a running record and telling them why ... (Assessment information) can feed into future programmes in the school so you're developing; from the start, you're developing programmes to help people.

Just one teacher made a distinction between class-based and summative tests. Teacher D commented that they found some summative test information less useful than class-based assessment practices:

I think in terms of things like GLOSS, observation, marking books; all those day to day or if I say, less formal testing assessment. They're really useful because they give you a good idea of where each child's at. Whereas P.A.T tests and things like that um, I sort of tend to think that the information gets stored in the computer and maybe not looked at again and I'm a little bit suspicious of data printouts too because I think it doesn't get the whole picture.

In summary, teachers in Case Study 2 were very aware of ways in which assessment data could be used diagnostically to group students and to inform teaching programmes and practice, at class and team level. Teacher E, operating at Level 3, used all types of assessment to inform learning and explicitly linked the use of data to informing students about their learning.

In pre-conference interviews, unlike Case Study 1, teachers had included all assessment information into student portfolios, so there was no separation between class-based assessment practices and summative assessment information as both were to be shared

during student-led conferences. Working at Level 3 in the ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions, teachers became more focused on sharing all assessment information with students, so they understood it well enough to explain it to their parents. When asked to describe the information students would be giving parents during their conferences Teacher B stated:

We’re looking at telling about levels and stages—where they are now, what we’ve been learning, why we’ve been learning it, the stages that we’ve gone through to go through to do it, what we think we’re good at, what we think we might need to practice and what does Mum and Dad think about it. Say for example we’re doing narrative so we’ve got—telling them this is what we’ve been learning. Narratives are—because Mum and Dad might not know what a narrative is, what we need to include in a narrative, um—why we’re learning narratives—here’s our plan, here’s our draft, here’s our published work—here’s our success criteria—here’s our finished work—we’re reading it. What do you think? I think I need to work on this but I really enjoyed doing this.

Teacher A elaborated further on what achievement information was to be shared:

Well just the achievement data we’ve got of where they’re at, below or above for each curriculum area. We’ve got the projected targets for each term— so for example Year 3 they should be at Stage 4 in maths and you’ve got that little high-light of where they are at. And then there’s the progress linking back from Term 1 so that’s high-lighted so the parents can see that.

Teacher C clarified the written information from teachers that were going into the student portfolios:

There’s the running records and the maths testing that is going in – and the comments for every curriculum on the “I can” sheet—there’s a comment from me that I write about their progress, what they’re able to do and what their next step might be—and there’s also a level that they’re working on in that area and information to how that level relates to where they should be at their age or at their level—Year 3 or Year 4.

Assessment had become a more central focus of teachers’ programming and practice leading up to student-led conferences, as they supported students to develop knowledge and understanding of assessment, as it linked to their learning.

In post-conference interviews, teachers were asked to describe what assessment information was shared and how well they thought students understood it. Teachers' perceptions of students' understanding of assessment varied between 3—*quite well* and 4—*very well*. Teachers all linked these ratings to needing to spend more time developing students' knowledge and understanding of assessment. Teachers B and C had begun to share summative assessment with students during Term 2, while Teachers A, D, and E had begun to make connections between class-based activities and achievement levels more explicit from the beginning of the year. Teacher B stated:

Just actually listening to some of them talking they understood a lot better than I thought they would but we did spend a little time on the last few days talking about the actual test that we have done and what they were for, so I'd probably say about 3 but I think for forward thinking next time if we do some of the tests next term, (we need to) spend a lot more time going over them and talking to the children about them and making them more aware of what they are and how they are doing on those tests.

In Case Study 1, just one teacher linked students' understanding of their learning to possible future foci for their teaching. In Case Study 2 all the teachers did this. Post-conference interviews showed teachers were not discussing whether or not students should, or should not have access to all assessment information. Instead they were focused on how to be more effective in developing students' understanding of assessment information, as it related to their learning. Teacher E stated:

They (the students) can rattle off bits and pieces off the top of their heads and they know where they need to be. They um, could possibly look at the bottom part of the benchmarks which we look at for whatever genre we're studying at the time, but actually the deeper understandings—the deeper features ... they don't understand as much as we would like them too ... I don't think I gave them a clear understanding, well actually this is what 3i looks like, 3ii looks like and 3iii so I'll have to go back to that.

Teacher A made a distinction between the assessment information students knew as part of classroom practice, and the newer, less familiar summative information students were asked to share:

They were really good talking about their learning and they sort of glossed over quickly about their level. Some were quite good, like the Year 4's were able to talk about—I'm reading at this level and working at this stage in maths and I should be here. We're working on this where some of the Year 3's didn't quite, sort of, get to that. They talked more about "the now" in the classroom, you know. What they're doing and not really about the information in the folder.

Teacher D discussed how students had begun assessing using matrices in different subject areas and that, through discussion with students, vocabulary in different subject areas had been identified as problematic. Teacher D explained:

We're now using a matrix to grade kids on and I sat with them and worked through it like for the inquiry learning—Can you do this? Yes. How much information can you find—if you can find three or four pieces you're level 3. If you find less you're level 2. And I worked through all that with them, but because it's the first time we're started doing that I think we're going to need more practice at it ... one of the things (the students) said they would change is that some of those "I Can" sheets we're doing, particularly visual language ... I went through every learning intention—explained it all—but I think next time we really need to make sure they do have that understanding ... they agreed they couldn't do geometry without knowing those names so I said well in visual art too ... we need to develop the vocabulary of, things like a relief block—and they didn't know what it was, even though they'd made them ... they need to develop their language of assessment.

Teacher C, a second year teacher, felt student-led conferences had been a difficult process to undergo when they were still inexperienced:

Like with writing, because I haven't had the writing indicators up, it's been a really difficult process for me to get my head around how to put it in language they can understand and then how to present it to them. And so I haven't done it because I wanted to be clear in my head before I tried to give it to them, so I didn't confuse them—and that's one of my goals for next term (is) to get those writing indicators up because, you know, there are the children at the top end of the writing ... but they don't know where they've got to go to next.

In summary, Teachers B and C had begun to work at Level 3 in the ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimension by the end of the study. Teacher A was working at Level 3, while Teachers D and E, with their strong focus on engaging in discussion with students about assessment, were working at Level 4. These results represent dimension shifts of between one and three levels in six months. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 1 – ‘Assessment Literacy’ as it relates to teaching and learning—was 80% (n=15 comparisons).

How to scaffold less experienced teachers to be effective in this dimension when they are still learning about class-based assessment practices, assessment tools, and how to use them to inform both their teaching and students’ learning, was a challenge identified through this study. To have all teachers operating at Levels 3 or 4 would maximise the effectiveness of the student-led conference method of reporting, but while to have all teachers operating at Level 4 is the ideal scenario, most schools will have teachers at a range of stages of development. The ‘Assessment Literacy’ tool could be used to provide school leaders with baseline information to inform a personalised professional development programme for teachers at different levels around assessment and reporting.

Accurate assessment of teachers’ ‘Assessment Literacy’ levels could also be used to ensure realistic expectations of the depth and quality of information students could be expected to share with parents are established. This would enable alignment of teachers’, students’, and parents’ expectations of what information will be shared in a student-led conference to be established. Finally, it is argued that the use of this assessment tool to establish teachers’ levels of expertise in ‘Assessment Literacy’ will help predict levels of effectiveness of student-led conferences and that it is teachers’ expertise in ‘Assessment Literacy’ that is a key predictor of success of this reporting method.

Student involvement in assessment

At the beginning of Case Study 2, teachers’ descriptions of student involvement in assessment were aligned with Level 1 ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions. When asked how they involved students in assessment, Teachers B, C, and D described class-based assessment practices—such as sharing learning intentions, modelling, creating success criteria, including plenaries in lessons, and seeking feedback about students’

understanding of content taught. Teacher A described student involvement in assessment in terms of sharing achievement information stating:

In terms of, just thinking of reading and writing ... we share all the time, what level they're at, with their reading and writing and where they need to go to next. Um, and what they can do or where they're working towards. We share that information all the time with the children.

Teachers in Case Study 2 identified class-based practices when describing ways they involved students in assessment. Teacher A did refer to achievement levels, but there was no specific description of sharing test results with students. Teacher E was the only teacher to describe sharing specific achievement information with students in their initial interview explaining:

I come to school to teach so to inform them and I like to do it straight away ... (for instance if) I've been doing a running record and telling them why. I've been doing it for a number of years even though it was - you weren't supposed to do it.

Like Teacher C in Case Study 1, Teacher C in Case Study 2 made the point that when teachers are not secure in their practice it is difficult to be more student-centred in practice. Teacher C stated:

You do focus on a specific thing that you're trying to learn and that makes it better for the children because they know. Oh, this is what we're trying to learn. This is what it's going to look like when we've learnt it and then they can check against that (success criteria) themselves. One of the things that I'm focusing on all of this year is giving the children more control over that whole process themselves too and I think that's partly something that comes with my confidence ... (If you're) not very confident at something at first you need to, sort of, do it all yourself so you can practice before you can give that control over to the people you're working with.

Peer or student self assessment practices were mentioned by Teachers B and E in the initial interviews. Teacher B explained that "Here we're doing some peer assessment because we do a lot of sharing and finding out each others' answers to see how we go." Teacher E stated "Wherever possible across the curriculum I like to involve the children

in assessing their own learning. Assessing their (work), and reflecting on their progress. Reflecting on what they've learnt in most areas.”

In summary, teachers in Case Study 2 were operating mainly in Level 1 of the ‘Student involvement in assessment’ dimension at the beginning of the study, while Teacher E was operating at Level 2.

In pre-conference interviews, teachers were asked to what extent they had shared assessment information with students leading up to the student-led conferences. Teachers had all begun the process of sharing assessment information with students, with Teachers A, B, and C operating at Level 2 of the ‘Student involvement in assessment’ dimensions. Teacher B summarised the changes these Year 3 and 4 had made around involving students in assessment and the emerging realisation about what was needed to do this more effectively with students.

I think it depends on what we mean by understand. They're aware of their levels and not all of them obviously. And they're aware of this sort of position they are in regarding their age, especially for reading. Whether or not they fully understand how they've got to that stage or how they can get themselves even further, I would doubt that they're full comprehensive about the whole package—type of thing. Well we've done discussions about it, but as I said before when it comes to the testing, I think we need to spend time as (Teacher E) does chatting about the test—one on one—and then hopefully that will be—that will start to build their knowledge of the tests, where they are and how they need to improve. Whereas before it's been the test—thank you very much—and they've in the dark. They don't really know what's happening. They just know what level they're at.

Teachers' D and E's description of the involvement of students in the assessment processes used aligned with Level 4 ‘Student involvement in assessment’ criteria.

Teacher D stated:

When it's ANP (Maths testing) we do the diagnostic sheets and we do that between week 5 and week 7 so there's the two week you know discussion, student-teacher, to really gauge their learning and their progress. (With) running records ... you do running records on the child to gauge their learning and you're recording diagnostic information and giving them (students) feedback ...

For any other area—for example now for art—now we’ve got some indicators that we can look at ... the assessment sheets that we can use to gauge their learning. Also the “I can” structure that the students can use to self assess in every area after a unit or, um, has been covered.

All the teachers described students’ peer or self assessment as part of the assessment information to be used in student-led conferences. Teachers’ B and C descriptions of self and peer assessment matched the Level 2 dimensions for ‘Student involvement in assessment’. Teacher C described how self and peer assessment linked to class practice “With every piece of work they do they have a success criteria and they usually self assess themselves against that and then show their buddies and then I assess them.” Teachers A and B described how self and peer assessment was part of the student portfolio content.

Teachers A, D and E described using self and peer assessment frequently as part of their class practice—a Level 3 dimension.

Teacher D described a Level 4 ‘Student involvement’ dimension when explaining how they had begun working with students, sharing results and analysing them with students to further develop their self assessment skills, identifying success criteria they had mastered and next steps in learning:

(In) inquiry we looked at ‘finding out’ (an assessment matrix) so that was the thing we were looking at ... so they are actually marking themselves ... one of the things is validating your information, so I’m sort of talking about that and just seeing what they all know ... when I’m hearing them and talking to them, I think most of them do it very well—they know where they are at and they know what they’ve got to do next.

In post conference interviews, when discussing students’ understanding of their learning and of assessment information Teachers A, B and C had all identified the need to continue to share assessment information with students as part of their classroom practice, representing a shift from Level 1 to the beginning of Level 3 in the ‘Student involvement in learning’ dimension. Teacher B stated “(It is) through the explaining to them and the goal setting that we need to make that clearer I think, as a second thought, with their testing and that will hopefully enlighten them a lot more.” Teacher A

believed the formative practices used throughout the school would continue to support student involvement in the learning process.

They explained “It is normal teaching practice and throughout the day with plenaries and talking about what we found difficult, and where to next and that sort of thing ... it’s ingrained.”

Teachers D and E, through the process of introducing student-led conferences, made significant changes in their practice, as they sought to both involve students in assessment and to develop their understanding of progress and achievement. Operating at Level 4 in the ‘Student involvement in assessment’ dimension, they identified future goals in terms of next steps in students’ development of depth of knowledge, understanding and ownership of learning. Teacher D identified further areas for student development:

They need to develop their language of assessment which they are doing through formative assessment. You know, they’re getting good at that. But it is, you know, the vocabulary of art and I just don’t think we’ve probably done that well enough.

When discussing writing, Teacher E thought students needed more time to develop depth of understanding. Teacher E also expressed a shift in expectation of students’ ownership of the learning process as a result of their involvement in assessment.

(We have) a lot of students who know what they want and know what their next step is and then you have those who don’t know what their next step is because they’ve never been able to predict where they’re going to go to next, or what their goal is, because they’re always waiting for somebody to do it for them.

In summary, Teachers A, B, C, and D in Case Study 2 described Level 1 ‘Student involvement in assessment’ dimensions and Teacher E described Level 2 dimensions at the beginning of the study. As they worked with students to prepare for student-led conferences, all five teachers shifted their practice as they systematically involved students in learning about assessment, as it related to sharing information about progress, achievement and next steps in learning from tests and assessment processes.

By the end of the study Teachers A, B, and C had identified future teaching goals aligned with the Level 3 dimension of ‘Student involvement in assessment’. Teachers A, B, and C had shared assessment information with students, but time to consolidate

understanding of this information was needed, along with a focus on establishing next steps in learning. At the end of the study, Teachers D and E, having moved to Level 4 in their practice, identified specific areas to develop further, in response to their perceptions of students' current knowledge, skills and understanding of assessment. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 2 – Student involvement in assessment – was 73% (n=15 comparisons). The process of involving students in assessment was a new challenge for teachers in Case Study 2, as it was for teachers in Case Study 1. Because teachers in Case Study 2 did shift their practice, their evaluation of 'Student involvement in assessment' focused on how to improve or refine changes they had made in their teaching practice. Case Study 1 teachers, by comparison, at the end of the study were asking the question: "Should we involve students in assessment?"

Clarity about next steps in learning

All the Case Study 2 teachers' initial descriptions of teacher assessment practices in the classroom aligned with Level 2 dimension around 'Clarity about next steps in learning'. Teachers had an understanding of where students were at in their learning through personal curriculum knowledge, observation, the use of assessment tools such as asTTLe, running records, or the use of an exemplar or matrix. These tools were used four times a year forming the basis of information shared at teacher-student-parent goal setting meetings in Term 1, teacher-parent interviews in Term 2, and end of year reports in Term 4. Teacher D, like the other teachers, described a range of assessment tools used to assess learning:

In the past we've done all the P.A.T's but this year we've changed; we've actually trialling AsTTLe Reading. We do P.A.T Listening. We do all the Essential Study Skills in the Senior School ... We all do running records. We all do the A.N.P (Advanced Numeracy Project) Assessment. We do use Shonnell Spelling. They're the main tests ... we all do a written language sample which is all done across the school. They're the ones we do the most.

Teacher B described class-based assessment practices and the use of matrices:

Here we're doing some peer assessment because we do a lot of sharing and finding out each others' answers to see how we go. We do a matrix type assessment form at the end of units.

Teacher C also described class-based assessment practices that they found useful:

I think in terms of things like GLOSS, observation, marking books; all those day to day or if I say, less formal testing assessment. They're really useful because they give you a good idea of where each child's at. What I'm trying to do is, is when I'm developing the success criteria with the children before I used to write that all out myself and now I get the children to say, "Well, what's it going to look like?" I might use a model of my own and then the children will give ideas about what makes that model successful and how theirs will look if they're successful.

In pre-conference interviews, Teachers A and E moved from a Level 2 to Level 3 dimension for 'Clarity about next steps'. Using specific assessment tools, they had worked with students using self assessment, work completed, or tests to develop students' understanding of where they were "at" in their learning in order to identify their next steps.

Teacher D had moved from Level 2 to Level 4 in this dimension, describing how they had involved students in the process of deciding where they were at in writing, art and inquiry learning, using a range of assessment matrices and tools.

(In) Inquiry—we looked at 'finding out' so that was the thing we were looking at ... I've got a couple of groups and I was asking them "How much information can you find—if you can find three or four pieces you're level 3. If you find less you're level 2." And I worked through all that with them ... filling out the matrices and they were saying "Oh we couldn't find three or four lots of information"—so they are actually marking themselves and knowing what ... and talking about—one of the things—is validating your information, so I'm talking about that and just seeing what they all know. But because it's the first time we're started doing that I think we're going to need more practice at it.

In post-conference interviews, teachers in Case Study 2 ranged from Level 2 to Level 4 in the dimension 'Clarity about next steps'. All teachers had written comments in student portfolios identifying next steps in learning and benchmarks stating where students were "at" in each subject area had been included. Teachers B and C, having identified the range of tools they had used to base this information on, had not shared this information consistently with students. As young teachers, they had found it

difficult to find time to use assessment information with students to inform next steps, as well as ensure students could articulate the process of learning, in the lead up to student-led conferences. Some of the Year 3 students also had trouble reading their comments around next steps.

Teachers A, B and C all identified Level 3, developing students' knowledge of where they were "at" in their learning through the transparent use of different assessment tools, as a future teaching focus. Teacher B stated:

I think for forward thinking next time if we do some of the tests next term, spend a lot more time going over them and talking to the children about them and making them more aware of what they are and how they are doing on those tests, that is the next step.

Teacher A and E had worked at Level 3 in developing clarity around next steps in learning. Teacher A felt that Year 3 and 4 students had struggled to understand all the information that was shared, for the first time, but that their understanding of their next goals in learning would improve over time. Teacher E stated that while all Year 5 and 6 students had shared next steps in learning, with more time for discussion in class, students' depth of understanding would improve.

Teacher D's description of the process of assessing students' progress and achievement in different curriculum area showed Level 4 understanding of 'Clarity around next steps.' Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 3 – Clarity about next steps in learning – was 86% (n=15 comparisons).

As a result of the processes used to establish achievement levels in a range of subject areas, involving the students and the teacher, this teacher was the most confident in their students' ability to share progress, achievement and next steps in learning stating "Most of them were quite clear on their assessment, what it meant and where they were at and what they needed to do next."

'Big picture' understanding of assessment

How aggregated data is used to inform classroom practice, school practices, and at national and international levels was an aspect of assessment teachers in both case studies could have identified when discussing the purpose of assessment, describing their school's assessment practices, or when discussing the uses of assessment. In Case

Study 1 teachers' showed Level 1 understanding of the 'Big picture' of assessment. In Case Study 2, Teachers B, C and D showed Level 2 understanding, all describing uses of data at class, team, and school level. Teachers A and E showed they had Level 3 understanding of the uses of aggregated data for a range of purposes and audiences.

In the initial teacher interview, Teacher A stated the purpose of assessment for diagnostic purposes, to inform programming, to assess progress, make decisions around resourcing and to report to parents and the BOT:

(Assessment is finding out) where children are at with their learning, you know, um, progress, probably where they need to go to next and also assessment of information and how we use that as teachers and as a school, and how we report back to parents and the B.O.T.

Teacher E linked assessment to partnerships in learning, with students, parents, and colleagues:

Assessment to me is finding out about our students, where (they are in their learning), and then of course it impacts on where I can help them, how they can help themselves and the partnerships with the people involved in that, in their learning ... I use this information to feed back to the students. It's the most important in this whole ... I come to school to teach so to inform them and I like to do it straight away, without you know, I've been doing a running record and telling them why.

Both Teacher A and Teacher E described ways data was used by individual teachers, at team level, senior leadership level and how it informed strategic resourcing decisions.

Teacher A reported:

We get together, as a class teacher initially, then with the other team teachers we look at gaps in programmes, um, or gaps in children's learning, any areas of weaknesses that we need to address and all sorts of E-TAP results now and the AsTTLe results. We can produce graphs that will track all those things and we can see any areas of need. We do get together as, in Senior Management and discuss those issues.

Teacher E added:

(It is) looking at what things I can do again to benefit the students but it also benefits the team that I'm leading - to work beside other colleagues so that I can help them, to assess their programmes or to assess themselves so they can be better assessors with the children. It can feed into future programmes in the school so you're developing; from the start, you're developing programmes to help people school wide.

Because the teachers in this case study had a broader 'Big picture understanding of assessment' at the outset, it can be assumed this helped them implement student-led conferences as a new reporting system. They had understanding of assessment tools and were used to using data for a range of purposes linked to learning.

In pre-conference and post-conference interviews, teachers were not asked questions linked to multiple uses of aggregated data specifically. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 4 – 'big picture' understanding of assessment – was 100% (n=5 comparisons).

Assessment as it links to reporting

From initial interviews in Case Study 2, Teachers A, B, C, and E all described 'Assessment as it linked to reporting' in terms of teachers leading conversations about learning, consistent with the Level 1 'Assessment as it links to reporting' dimension. Unlike the teachers in Case Study 1, teachers in Case Study 2 were less concerned with sharing information about curriculum coverage and student achievement, and more focused on establishing a partnership with parents that was supportive of their child's learning.

Teacher A described a successful teacher-parent interview as "a two-way thing when parents are talking a lot about how they think their child is going at school and their issues around home." Teacher C thought it was important to "really make sure that you listen to any concerns the parents have." Teacher B wanted parents to understand information shared without feeling threatened about what they were being told.

While teachers A, B, D, and E all thought student involvement in the reporting process was important, Teachers' A, B, and E's descriptions of student involvement was for them to be there, rather than to participate. By comparison, Teacher D's descriptions of 'Assessment as it linked to reporting' aligned with the Level 2 dimension. They talked

about encouraging students to tell parents about their learning and about the value of students knowing what has been discussed by teachers and parents.

When we've got all three groups there; parents, child and the teacher and when the child is telling the parent... I think in the past ... before we started having them involved and I've talked to them (students) about what their parents went home and told them after the interview and the parents, half the time, didn't. They've said "Oh, you know, you've been good. That's good," and that was it, or "You know, you have to pull your socks up." But ... it's as though it's a secret society. The parents and the teachers had all this information and the kids weren't allowed to know it. So that's changing.

In pre-conference interviews, Teachers' B, C, and E shifted to Level 3 'Assessment as it links to reporting' dimension, all describing students using assessment information to inform parents about where they were "at" in their learning and the learning process. Teacher B summarised what information students would be sharing:

We're looking at telling about levels and stages – where they are now, what we've been learning, why we've been learning it, the stages that we've gone through to go through to do it, what we think we're good at, what we think we might need to practice and what does Mum and Dad think about it. Say for example we're doing narrative so we're telling them this is what we've been learning. Narratives are – because Mum and Dad might not know what a narrative is, what we need to include in a narrative, why we're learning narratives, here's our plan, here's our draft, here's our published work, here's our success criteria, here's our finished work – we're reading it. What do you think? I think I need to work on this but I really enjoyed doing this.

Teachers A and D shifted from Levels 1 and 2 respectively, to Level 4, describing similar processes to other teachers, with a stronger focus on students leading conversations around process, current achievement levels, identifying next steps in learning and discussing with parents how they could support their learning. Teacher D commented:

They start with that "I Can" page because it focuses them on the learning intention and what we were trying to achieve and I have written a comment, or they've written ... and then they turn over and show the parents—"(These are)

my results - this is what I actually did,” and they’re all going through that process of looking at their —“This says I’m now a (Level)3 (Stage) i and this is what I’ve done and this is what I need to do,” and they’re ... following that process.

Teacher A described information students would share in their conferences included a focus on ways parents could begin to identify strategies to support their children in their learning:

(They will be sharing) what they’ve been learning and why it is important and what they’ve found most pleasing about the work—what they need extra help in and what mum and dad can do to help ... for example in maths we’ve got the portfolio sheet, the test sample and then we’ve got a station set up with games for their level area they’re at so it actually shows Mum and Dad from their “I Can” statements what they’re working on, what they can do and can’t do and what they need more help on. So actually, by playing the game together they can show Mum and Dad what they can do to help at home and just explaining it a little bit better, instead of just looking at a sheet and going “O.K I kind of understand this but I’m not sure how it relates to a classroom activity,” or “I need to see it in practice.”

Teacher-generated information about progress and achievement was in the student portfolios, but this information, along with students’ self-assessment, was just part of the information shared through students, to parents.

In post-conference interviews, Teachers B and C described the Level 3 ‘Assessment as it links to reporting’ dimension. Teachers had supported students to talk to parents about the learning process and where they were “at” in their learning. They were not sure how well their students had understood some of the achievement information, which was presented in a new format in Student portfolios for the first time, but were confident students had explained the process of learning well. Teacher B shared how he had looked to clarify achievement information with parents during each conference:

I made a point of touching in with each parents and that was one of the specific things that I thought that they needed teacher guidance with, just to show the parents ... where is my child and where are we going next.

Teachers A, D, and E were all operating at Level 4 in this dimension at the end of the study. They had enabled students to share information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning, and the process of learning so parents could understand the information.

Teacher D shared an example of the power of the student identifying a need and asking for support from their parent:

I think it's extremely effective because it's the kids that have got to know what they are doing. And it's good that they can tell their parents – like that mother with the tables – because her child asked for help rather than me asking for help for the child, it just took on a whole new meaning.

Teachers D and E both observed the growth in ownership of the process of reporting by their students. Students from one class had identified that the vocabulary used for the Visual Arts matrix had been hard to understand and needed more work to be “student friendly” so they could explain their achievement levels more easily. Teacher E commented on the interdependence needed between the teacher, the student and the parents to make this reporting process effective:

I think it gives each party an ownership of the learning full stop, and your part to play in it—and I think it high-lights that. Hence why my nervousness beforehand—my nervousness was I wasn't prepared enough for my students so that they could be prepared. So, um, I was a little bit worried that they wouldn't perform because I hadn't met their needs. Um, so in saying that, if I had not met my part, if the parents don't come along, to ask the right questions, they're not meeting their part. If the students don't have the paperwork or the confidence or the knowledge - it doesn't matter how, you know, how, whether they're my special ability kids or my, at either end, we've all got our part to play.

Teacher E also identified parent education around ‘Assessment as it links to reporting’ as a future focus:

I think it still needs working on, looking at again the information given to parents beforehand and maybe there should be some evening groups so they can actually see what's happening and then they could understand. I think it's important that they have those build-ups and then they can actually enjoy their (children) talking about their learning successes and understand it ... I still think

there's work to be done both with the students (with) the testing leading up to this point, but (also with) the understanding of the parents.

At the end of the study two teachers were at Level 3 and three teachers were at Level 4 in the 'Assessment as it links to reporting' dimension. Inter-rater reliability analysis showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 5 – Assessment as it links to reporting – was 66% (n=15 comparisons).

The process of reporting to parents, as in Case Study 1, had been effective in creating an authentic, external purpose, that focused teachers on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in sharing assessment information with students. Students taking a central role in the reporting process shifted teachers' classroom practice, creating opportunity for students to engage with all assessment information, resulting in focused, specific conversations about learning.

As Teacher E summarised, this was the first time teachers had supported students to report to their parents. Because of this, there were challenges around how to share assessment information effectively in class, for students to use in the reporting process. Through the implementation of student-led conferences, as defined by this school, teachers did shift their practice around student access to, and engagement with, assessment information. As a result students did become more informed about their learning. Because of that, with teachers' support, parents did receive detailed information, orally and in writing, about their child's progress, achievement and next steps in learning, illustrated with samples of work or demonstrations of skills, through this reporting process. A future focus identified by teachers was how to be more effective in developing students' and parents' knowledge and understanding of assessment.

Conclusion

In Case Study 2, the process of implementing student-led conferences shifted teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' practices from mainly Level 2 to Level 3 and 4 in most dimensions in six months. Arguably, teachers in this study began the study with stronger knowledge of assessment as it linked to teaching and learning, knowledge of assessment tools and understanding of how assessment information was used at a range of levels than teachers in Case Study 1. Teachers did change their practice as they made the paradigm shift (i.e. moving from Level 2 to Level 4) to share assessment

information with students, which they in turn shared with parents during student-led conferences.

Teachers identified challenges around ‘how’ to effectively develop students’ knowledge and understanding of their progress and achievement within their classroom practice. Teachers B and C specifically identified dilemmas they had experienced in the process of becoming familiar with assessment system and how to share this information with students. Teacher C explained “with writing, I haven’t had the writing indicators up it’s been a really difficult process for me to get my head around how to put it in language they (students) can understand and then how to present it to them.” Teacher B also reflected upon the challenge of developing students’ understanding of assessment:

When it comes to the testing, I think we need to spend time ... chatting about the test—one on one—and then hopefully that will be—that will start to build their knowledge of the tests, where they are and how they need to improve. Whereas before it’s been the test—thank you very much—and they’ve in the dark. They don’t really know what’s happening. They just know what level they’re at. I think, in the future, (this is) where my testing will go, so they’re a lot more aware of it.

Because they did, for the first time, share progress and achievement information with students systematically throughout the school, students did engage in more purposeful, meaningful conversations about their learning, through the process of preparing for, and conducting student-led conferences. At the end of the study teachers were not questioning what assessment information was appropriate or not appropriate for teachers to share with students. They were not questioning students’ capabilities around comprehending assessment information, nor were they debating the place of students in the reporting process. Rather they were focused on how they could improve their practice, to support students and parents to further develop their understanding of assessment, as genuine, valued partners in learning.

The next chapter examines the extent to which teachers were able to support the development of ‘Student Competencies’ through the process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences. To what extent student-led conferences developed students’ knowledge, motivation, confidence, skills and understanding of their learning is considered in relation to teachers’ ‘Assessment Literacy’ levels.

CHAPTER 5C: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ‘STUDENT COMPETENCIES’ THROUGH THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATING IN STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Overview

The previous section, detailing the development of teachers ‘Assessment Literacy’, showed teachers from Case Study 2 had, for the first time, systemically worked to share information about progress, achievement, and next steps with students. In this section, the effectiveness of students’ knowledge and understanding and their skills in articulating this information is assessed using the ‘Student Competency’ dimensions. ‘Student Competencies’ are compared to those of students in Case Study 1, and teacher competency ratings and findings are considered as they compare to the theory of effective student-led conferences.

Student dimensions including ‘Assessment Literacy’, ‘Student Motivation’, ‘Student Confidence’, ‘Students’ capacity to articulate learning’ and ‘Student understanding of learning’ were used to evaluate the development of students’ capacities over the time of the study.

Students from Year 3–6 were surveyed at the beginning and the end of the study. Fourteen students were interviewed three times, at the beginning of the study, pre-conference and post-conference. Six of the interviewed students were in Year 3 or 4 and eight of the students were in Year 5 or 6. To strengthen reliability of interpretation of students’ data an inter-rater reliability check was carried out. Using the exact agreement method for specific checklist items with each dimension of the ‘Student Competency’ framework, overall inter-rater agreement on interviewed students’ levels of ‘Student Competency’ at each stage of the case study was 80.2% (n=182 comparisons).

In Case Study 1, only the Year 5 and 6 students showed gains in ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimension, moving from Level 1 to Level 2. In Case Study 2, at the end of the Study Two, Year 3 and 4 students were operating at Level 2, nine students were Level 3, and three students were Level 4. These students demonstrated knowledge of the process of learning, progress they had made, achievement levels, and next steps in learning. As was the case in Case Study 1, students’ results matched teachers’ ratings in ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions.

In Case Study 2, interviewed students showed high levels of ‘Student motivation.’ At the end of the study, nine students were Level 3 and four students were Level 4 in this dimension. Increased effort in learning was linked to conferences, the content they had to share, the organisation of their student portfolios, and the new skills in articulating learning that they had worked on developing. Like results in Case Study 1, Case Study 2 student surveys showed ‘Student Motivation’ showed no significant change from the beginning to the end of the study. The post-conference student survey also showed students perceived no significant changes in teachers’ practices, although some changes were identified by interviewed students.

One possible reason for this result was students began this study with high levels of motivation. A second reason for this result could be linked to how the students’ role in reporting was defined in this case study. Students in Case Study 1 were asked to share the process of learning with parents. Students in Case Study 2 were asked to share information about process, progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. Students’ comments in Case Study 2 showed they were aware of the changed roles in reporting, new expectations being placed upon them, and the additional responsibility they were being given. Interviewed students identified changes in teachers’ practice around giving students more opportunity to talk about learning, but initial and post-conference student survey results showed students’ had not perceived any significant changes in teaching behaviours over the six months of the study. When asked how keen they would be to do another student-led conference, results were higher than those in Case Study 1, with 80.1% *extremely keen* or *very keen*, compared to 74.7% *extremely keen* or *very keen* in Case Study 1.

At the beginning of Case Study 2 ‘Student Confidence’ levels for interviewed students ranged between Level 2 and 4. Students’ explanations showed confidence levels were linked to the extent to which they understood the information they were to share and their perceptions of their skills to articulate this information to others. At the end of the study seven of the interviewed students were Level 3 and seven students were Level 4 in the ‘Student Confidence’ dimension, a similar result to Case Study 1. Students reported developing confidence through the process of preparing for student-led conferences. Practising explaining their learning had helped them understand information better and role-plays had helped them develop confidence in their ability to articulate their learning. Confidence level ratings, based upon an analysis of students’

comments, did not change from pre-conference interviews to post-conference interviews for thirteen of fourteen interviewed students. Post-conference student survey results showed 66.9 % of students were *extremely confident* or *very confident* in their knowledge of their learning, and 20.9% were *reasonably confident* and that 91% of students thought their conference had gone *extremely well* or *very well*.

In Case Study 1, interviewed students were operating mainly at Level 2 in the dimension ‘Student capacity to articulate learning’. They had shared the process of learning, the easiest and hardest parts, and what they would work on next in general terms. In Case Study 2, ratings in this dimension showed two students were Level 2, seven were Level 3, and five were Level 4 at the end of the study. Overall, Year 3 and 4 students talked about their learning in general terms, and were less secure in their knowledge and understanding of their learning, even when they could articulate their current levels of achievement, the easiest part, the hardest part and ‘next steps’ in learning. For all students in this study, the challenge was to develop understanding of information about process, progress, achievement, and next steps in learning and then be able to explain it clearly to their parents. Students’ ability to share this information did develop through the process of preparing for student-led conferences, particularly in the Year 5 and 6 classes.

Post-conference parent survey results showed 85.2% of parents thought their child had explained things they had been learning about *extremely well* or *very well*, compared to 79.6% of parents in Case Study 1. Some surveyed Year 3 and 4 parents, like parents in Case Study 1, expressed concern that information shared could not be discussed in more depth. This result could have been because of students’ maturity levels, or it could be related to teachers’ ‘Assessment Literacy’ levels.

In the dimension ‘Student understanding of learning’, at the end of this study Year 3 and 4 students were operating at the beginning of Level 3, while Year 5 and 6 students were all Level 3 or 4. The process of doing the student-led conference had helped all students develop better understanding of their progress in learning and where they were “at” in different subject areas. Feedback from teachers and parents were the primary sources of information for Year 3 and 4 students, while Year 5 and 6 students referred to assessment information and samples of work to validate their views about their learning.

In conclusion, like Case Study 1, the process of implementing student-led conferences created multiple opportunities for students to engage in discussions about different aspects of their learning. At the end of the study, twelve of fourteen students were operating at Level 3 or 4 in ‘Assessment Literacy’, thirteen of fourteen students were operating at Level 3 or 4 in ‘Student Motivation’ and all fourteen students were Level 3 or 4 in the ‘Student Confidence’ dimension. ‘Student capacity to articulate learning’ showed two students operating at Level 2, seven at Level 3 and five at Level 4.

‘Student understanding of learning’ showed four students to be at the beginning of Level 3, five at Level 3, and five at Level 4. This compared to Case Study 1 results that showed students to be operating at Level 2 in ‘Assessment Literacy’, ‘Student capacity to articulate learning’ and ‘Student understanding of learning’ at the end of the study.

Compared to Case Study 1, results from interviewed students in ‘Student Motivation’ and ‘Student Confidence’ were similar, but Case Study 2 interviewed students rated higher in ‘Assessment Literacy’, ‘Student capacity to articulate learning’ and ‘Student understanding of learning’. While student survey results showed motivation and confidence levels did not change from the beginning to the end of the study, students had developed better understanding of all aspects of their learning and made more progress over the five ‘Student Competency’ dimensions than students in Case Study 1.

The theory of effective student-led conferences

In Case Study 2, students, as in Case Study 1, were effective in reporting information they knew about their learning to parents. Teachers believed student-led conferences had been effective, but they were not sure students understood information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning well enough to lead a conference effectively. Parents reported getting good information about their child’s learning and the majority of parents thought students had done *very well* or *extremely well* leading their conferences.

In this case study the focus of student-led conferences was on sharing information with students and parents about learning. Opportunities to share information about social skills, behaviour, health, and welfare, were made through teacher phone calls to parents. Key issues with traditional reports, identified by teachers and parents were addressed. More time was created to share information, both with students during class time and with parents through the student-led conference process. More detailed information about progress and achievement was supplied, orally and in writing, using graphs and

samples of work. Some parents got enough information from their children's conference to identify ways to further support learning at home, while other parents wanted opportunity to discuss the information in more detail with the teacher.

In Chapter 5c findings from student surveys and interviews are discussed in more detail under the headings of the five 'Student Competency' dimensions: 'Assessment Literacy', 'Student Motivation', 'Student Confidence', 'Student capacity to articulate learning' and 'Student understanding of learning'. Sources of evidence include an initial student survey, initial, pre-conference, and post-conference interviews and a post-conference student survey.

Table 23

'Student Competency' dimensions matrix—based on the work of Michael Absolum in Ministry of Education 'Assessment for Learning' contracts

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>Assessment Literacy – (cognitive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can talk about what I have been learning and identify things I have done well I am not sure what progress I am making, or have made I have little or no understanding of my achievement levels, compared to other students in my group or class 	<p>Assessment Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can assess my work using success criteria I can talk about my progress and what I have improved in general terms I have some understanding of my achievement levels, compared to other students in my class or cohort 	<p>Assessment Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can assess my own work and the work of other students using success criteria I can talk about my progress and where I am “at” in my learning with reference to success criteria I understand my achievement levels, compared to other students in my class, my cohort or school-based achievement levels 	<p>Assessment Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can assess my own work and the work of other students using success criteria, curriculum matrices or assessment data I can talk about my progress and achievement and identify next steps in learning, with reference to success criteria, assessment tools or matrices. I understand my achievement levels compared to my cohort, school-based or national benchmarks
<p>Student Motivation for Learning – (affective)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I lack enthusiasm for learning and do not enjoy it much I do not think I am good at learning and am mainly motivated by extrinsic rewards, if at all 	<p>Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am reasonably enthusiastic about learning but find it hard sometimes I want to do well but may need to work harder at times, so needs some extrinsic motivation 	<p>Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am generally enthusiastic about learning and enjoy most subjects I describe myself as a good learner that tries hard, who is mainly intrinsically motivated 	<p>Student Motivation for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am enthusiastic about learning and enjoy all subjects I describe myself as an intrinsically motivated learner who consistently works hard in their learning
<p>Student Confidence to share information about Learning - affective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I lack confidence in my ability to discuss goals, strengths, weaknesses in my learning with peers or teachers I lack confidence in my ability to share information about learning with my parents 	<p>Student Confidence to share information about Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am not very confident to discuss my goals, strengths, weaknesses and progress in some curriculum areas with peers or teachers I am not very confident in my ability to share information about learning with my parents 	<p>Student Confidence to share information about Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am reasonably confident to discuss my goals, strengths, weaknesses, progress and achievement levels in some curriculum areas with peers or teachers I am reasonably confident in my ability to share information about learning with my parents 	<p>Student Confidence to share information about Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am confident to discuss my goals, strengths, weaknesses, progress, achievement levels and next steps in all curriculum areas with peers or teachers I am confident in my ability to share information about learning with my parents

<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning - cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have been learning in one or two curriculum areas • I can discuss the process of learning in general terms • I cannot articulate what my current achievement levels are • I am not sure what I need to work on next 	<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have learned and the process of learning in two or three curriculum area • I can discuss the easiest part, the hard part and the best part of work done • I can talk about my current achievement levels in a general way, but am not sure how they were established • I can articulate what I need to work on next in general terms (E.g. work harder, do more reading) 	<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have learned, the purpose and the process of learning in two or three curriculum areas • I can explain the success criteria and how I know I have met it, using samples of work or through demonstration of skills • I can articulate my current achievement levels in two or three curriculum areas, with or without reference to specific assessment tools • I can articulate next steps in learning in one or two curriculum area 	<p>Student Capacity to Articulate Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain what I have learned, the purpose and the process of learning, in a range of curriculum areas • I can explain what quality work is, the criteria for quality, with reference to success criteria, matrices, samples of work or through demonstration of skills • I can articulate my current achievement levels and how they were established, with reference to assessment tools used in different curriculum areas • I can articulate specific next steps in learning across a range of curriculum areas
<p>Student Understanding of Learning - cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am not doing well in my learning in most subjects • I do not have good understand of my learning or how well I am doing 	<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am doing reasonably well in my learning in some subjects • I have a reasonable understanding of the process of learning and how I am doing 	<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am doing very well in my learning in most subjects • I have good understanding of the process of learning, the progress I have made and where I am “at” in my learning 	<p>Student Understanding of Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I am doing extremely well in all subjects • I have a very good understanding of the process of learning, my progress, current achievement levels and next steps in learning

*Evidence of 'Student Competencies'**'Assessment Literacy'*

At the beginning of the study, interviewed students were asked how they thought they were doing in their learning. The eight interviewed students all gave themselves ratings of 4—*very well*, or 5—*extremely well*. When asked how they knew, four of the Year 3 and 4 students gave a general response, linking their rating to their understanding of their work and getting feedback from their teacher. Ten students, two Year 3 and 4 students and eight Year 5 and 6 students, referred to information they had discussed at their three-way goal-setting meeting during Term 1. Two students reported they answered questions at the parent interviews. Eight students reported that they did some of the talking at the interviews, and four reported that they did a lot of the talking. When asked what was discussed in these meetings, Students A, E, D, F, H, and J, specifically referred to one or more aspects of learning including process, current achievement levels, next steps and goals they were working on. Student H stated:

At the Parent Teacher Interview my teacher said that I should be down here but I'm away up there. (At the interview) I talked about what I did this year. What I did this term. What I've been learning. What level I'm at and how well I do these things.

Six students who gave themselves a rating of 4 referred to subject areas they felt they needed to improve in. Student J commented "I still think I have to learn some of my maths and ...develop my confidence (in) all of my subjects. (I know) what I'm doing in my learning and what I need to learn and what goals I am working on."

Student competency ratings for 'Assessment Literacy' showed Students B, C, I and N, to be at Level 1 and the other ten students to be at Level 2 at the beginning of the study. Because students in Case Study 2 attended three-way goal setting meetings in Term 1, it is plausible that this is one of the reasons why ten students began the study with more knowledge of assessment, as it linked to their learning, than students in Case Study 1.

In the pre-conference interviews, students were asked what information they would be sharing with their parents. Students made reference to different subject areas, work they had completed, tests they had done, and achievement information. Student N, a Year 3 student gave a Level 2 explanation of what they were to share with parents. They

included some detail and referred to assessment information that had been shared with them:

Well we've been doing a narrative and like I've learnt you need a solution and you need a problem and stuff because otherwise if you don't have that, it's not a narrative. (And in my portfolio there is) some writing ... the title page— what I made on the computer ... maths and reading, and how I've been tested and because I've been reading too fast and so I don't get the words right sometimes. Like "chum" is, I said "chuff" instead of chum, because I was reading too fast. Yeah, and what stages I am.

Student L, a Year 6, gave a Level 3 description of aspects of learning they planned to share with their parents.

If this was my reading I'd show them what my success criteria was for a book or some questions from my book and then I'd show them how I did that and what I learnt, what I did good and what I need to improve on. If it was for ICT I'd show them the title page I did and all the things I've learnt - how I've been going and what I've been learning mostly.

Using the 'Student Competency' matrix criteria, Students A, C, D, E, I and F, gave Level 1 descriptions of information they planned to share. Like students in Case Study 1, they detailed subject areas they were going to share, but did not elaborate on information about process, progress, achievement, or next steps that they might include. Students B, E, N, F, and H were still operating at Level 2 in the 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions. They talked about their progress in general terms, and had some understanding of their achievement levels. Students J, L, O, and Q, were working at Level 3 as they made specific reference to success criteria, the process of learning, progress they had made or current achievement levels. An example of this detail is shared by Student K:

I will tell them (parents) things that I learnt and different subjects like maths and language and reading. Um, I will tell them I went up a stage in maths. I went up to stage 6 - and that we're working on algebra at the moment and in term one were working on "Capacity." Mostly (I need to improve) my times tables. In reading I am reading at 14 (years) and a half and in Term 1, I was 12 to 13 (years) in reading. I need to practice reading without hesitations. Um, with my

art it is up on the wall. Um, I will show them my slide show (which is about) my reading group experience, making felt.

Students were also asked about the information that was going into their portfolios. Teachers in Case Study 2, when discussing challenges they had faced, had stated that the implementation of portfolios meant information had been collated late. This resulted in students not having much time to develop understanding of exactly what information was in the student portfolios, before being asked to explain it. Because of this, the Year 3 and 4 students were less clear about the student portfolio information than the Year 5 and 6 students. Student C stated “I don’t understand the portfolio information that well because I don’t know lots about it.” Student I thought “the writing stage is quite hard because like my reading age is 11 to 12 and I’ve sort of been getting told what my level is in writing, but I am not that sure.” By comparison, the Year 5 and 6 students could explain their achievement levels and how they had been arrived at. Student O, a Year 5 English second language student, shared:

I’m at 2ii but then Mrs. Dunn said underneath 2ii there are all the things (indicators) that you have in a narrative in stage 2ii so you look through that and tick which one you think you’re not well at, and if you think that there’s nothing in there that you’re not well at, then look on the next stage and if you find something there you tick it, highlight it and then if you don’t then turn over another page and um, lots of people they got different ones. Like I got 2ii, so on the next page I might have something at stage 3 – Like 3i, 3ii and 3iii.

In the post-conference interviews, students were again asked to describe what information they had shared with their parents. Students A, B, C, and I, had moved from Level 1 to Level 2 in ‘Assessment Literacy.’ Answers that students gave showed these Year 3 and 4 students had shared general information about the process of learning, and had general understanding of their achievement levels and what they needed to improve in. Student N and E, adding information about achievement levels and next steps, rated at Level 3 in this dimension. Student E stated:

(I shared) what level I was up to in reading and maths and I told them about my topic and showed my two writing samples ... we went and looked at the group’s Power Point It was about netball ... there was like what we were learning how to do and how we were learning it and why we were learning ... I told them I need to work on um, multiplication and I was good at addition, subtraction and

um, I needed to work on my reading. I talked about what I'm aiming to go to next and like I want to get on, where I want to be at the finish of the term. I think it was in Maths (I am at) Stage 6 and I want to be on Stage 7.

Of eight Year 5 and 6 students, five were Level 3 and three were Level 4 at the end of the study. Students were able to describe their current achievement levels, the process of learning, and next steps in several subject areas. Student Q, operating at Level 4, demonstrated their knowledge of assessment in three subject areas:

In Term 1 for maths I was stage 6 for multiplication and division, Stage 6 for proportions and fractions and I was stage 6 for addition and subtraction and Term 2 I'm stage 7 for addition, subtraction, Stage 7 for multiplication and division and Stage 6 proportions and fractions. In reading Term 1 I was 12 to 13 (years) and I've gone up to 13 to 14 (years) level for my Term 2 test. I need to work on my comprehension. I'm getting into like deeper and deeper comprehension and understanding (it more). In written language for Term 1 we were recounts and I was on 2 iii and Term 2 we wrote narratives and so for Term 1, I was a stage 2iii and this Term 2, I think I might be 3i so I've moved up a stage in written language.

The process of preparing students for student-led conferences, as defined in Case Study 2, had developed students' knowledge of assessment as it related to their learning, with all students moving at least one level in this dimension. The Year 3 and 4 students had made less progress overall than the Year 5 and 6 students. One reason for this could have been the levels of knowledge Year 3 and 4 students had of assessment at the beginning of the study. Another factor explaining this result may be found in their teachers' levels of 'Assessment Literacy' and the extent to which sharing assessment information with students had become part of everyday class-based practice. Teachers of Year 3 and 4 students in Case Study 2 stated they had underestimated the time needed to develop this knowledge with students. Year 3 and 4 students identified the late collation of the student portfolios as problematic. They were not familiar with the layout. They did not have sufficient time to go through the teacher's comments about progress and next steps and were unsure how to use them in the conference context.

By comparison, the Year 5 and 6 students made significant progress in the development of 'Assessment Literacy', compared to students in Case Study 1. At the end of the study, two Year 3 and 4 students and eight Year 5 and 6 students were operating at

Levels 3 or 4. Students had knowledge of the process of learning, the progress they had made, current achievement levels, and next steps in learning. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 1—Assessment Literacy—was 78% ($n=28$ comparisons).

Students' ratings in 'Assessment Literacy', as in Case Study 1, matched Teachers' ratings in 'Assessment Literacy'. Where teachers were operating at Level 2 in the dimension of 'Assessment Literacy', their students did also. Where teachers were operating at Levels' 3 and 4, their students did also.

In this case study, teachers, through three-way goal setting meetings, had already embraced the notion that students, as well as parents, needed to know information about progress and achievement and be part of a goal-setting process. The paradigm shift they were asked to make was to ensure information about progress, achievement and next steps in learning became an explicit, regular part of class-based teaching and learning. Because of this, students in this case study did develop 'Assessment Literacy' knowledge through the process of preparing for and conducting student-led conferences.

Student motivation for learning

In the initial interviews, students were asked how much they enjoyed learning. Eight students gave ratings of 4—*very much*, and six gave a rating of 5—*a lot*. Using the 'Student Competency' dimensions criterion, eleven students were Level 3—generally enthusiastic about learning. Three students stated they liked learning. Four students thought the teachers made it fun. Three students liked knowing what to do because they liked being independent and not having to ask for help. Three students enjoyed having a range of different things to learn, while two students enjoyed having work with the right level of challenge. Two students thought learning could sometimes be boring and one student was sometimes scared of the teacher. Students E, H, and Q, were motivated in all their subjects. They enjoyed learning and considered themselves consistent in their effort.

When asked what teachers did that made learning fun all the students, like those in Case Study 1, agreed knowing what to do, having written instructions, interesting activities, doing subjects they liked, doing things they do well, knowing why they were learning something and having choice in learning all made learning fun. Students liked knowing what to do because "then you know what you are actually doing." (Student E). Student

F explained having instructions on the board was helpful because “if you didn’t hear what the teacher says you can just go up and look at the board.” Student N didn’t always like instructions on the board because “sometimes when the instructions are on the board it isn’t that exciting.” Like one student in Case Study 1, Student H found instructions on the board unnecessary, as it made it too easy.

Like Case Study 1 some students enjoyed working with others while other students liked working alone. In this study, three students preferred working with others, three students preferred working alone, and eight students didn’t mind either. Student J explained one of the problems of working with others:

I’m not really good at choosing partners. Cause, when I go to choose someone they’ve already have a partner. But then some people choose me and then too many people choose me and I don’t know who to go with.

Student N also found working with others problematic at times, stating “sometimes when I work with someone else I just get um, get to arguing ... and then, finally at the end we realise then we haven’t done anything because of too much arguing.” Reasons students enjoyed working alone included “getting more done” (Student F), “not having to fit in with someone else” (Student E), and having “quiet so I can concentrate” (Student Q). Doing subjects they liked rated the highest with all the students, while doing well and being good at it were popular motivating factors. Student O explained:

That’s what makes it fun. Because if you’re really good at it then you can help your next door neighbour or you can get really good at it and then when you go to Year 6 you’ll be able to be an expert at it.

Student G thought teachers showing students what to do, rather than just telling students helped with enjoyment of learning. Students H and J found games motivational.

At the beginning of the study Year 3 to Year 6 students surveyed were also asked how much they enjoyed learning. Findings showed 76.2% of students liked learning *a lot* or *very much* compared to 65.3% in Case Study 1. 19.4 liked learning *a reasonable amount*, 3.8% *not very much* and .6% *not at all*. Frequency ratings for things that made learning fun showed students rated ‘doing well in a subject’ highest, followed by ‘liking the subject’ and ‘being good at the subject’. By comparison, in Case Study 1 students rated ‘teachers showing them how to do things’ highest, followed by ‘making the work fun’ and ‘telling me I am doing well.’ In this study, students’ enjoyment of learning was

more reliant on teacher practices, while students in Case Study 2 linked enjoyment of learning to success in learning.

In the pre-conference interviews students were asked about how much effort they had put into their learning in an attempt to gauge the extent to which the preparation for student-led conferences may have affected motivation levels. All students believed they had made more effort as a result of preparing for student-led conferences, but their motivation derived from different sources. Student A, less motivated in some subjects than others, had made more effort to ask students, or get help from the teacher, than they had previously, because they needed to understand their work better to be able to explain it to their parents. Students C, H, I, J, N, L, and Q, linked their effort to their new roles in the reporting process with Student L explaining “it won’t be the teacher explaining it would be you ... you have to like scratch up on your work.” Student I commented “you have to tell the parents and you have to work quite hard because you have to tell them what you need to do.”

Students’ E, H, and Q, highly motivated students, made the links between the process of preparing for student-led conferences and work they did every day in class. Student H explained “Because it’s just practically doing the same thing except it’s going to be a big thing so I just increased my way of learning, like I’m more open to learn than what I usually am.”

Using the ‘Student Competency’ matrix, students’ motivation for learning in the pre-conference interviews ranged from Level 2 to Level 4. Student A was operating at Level 2, being reasonably motivated in their learning, more so because of the extrinsic pressure of student-led conference. Nine students, operating at Level 3, described positive intrinsic motivation factors such as trying hard so they do better in their work, learning new skills so they were mastered, and wanting to go up levels or stages and working so they understand their work better. Student J was also intrinsically motivated, but from anxiety about not doing well, both in their schoolwork and in presenting information about their learning to their parents.

Students L, N, Q, I, and H, showed awareness of new expectations being placed upon them. Student I was working harder because they needed to be able to tell their parents about their learning. Student L talked about subject areas they wanted to improve in to tell their parents stating “(I’ve been working harder on) the things that I have been kind

of like, lacking in, like spelling and reading.” Student O reported having worked hard to develop skills speaking in front of others.

Students D, E, K, and Q, were Level 4 in the ‘Motivation competency’. They were positive about their learning, enjoying all subject areas. They described their efforts in learning as consistent. Like Student S in Case Study 1, these students did not think they had significantly changed their work ethic because of student-led conferences, because they already worked hard. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 2 – Student motivation for learning – was 71% (n=42 comparisons).

In the post-conference interviews, all the students rated enjoyment of student-led conferences as a 4—*very much*, or 5—*a lot*. They felt prepared, they had lots of information to share, they had enjoyed sharing information with their parents, and having their undivided attention. Student C stated that now they had done one, the next one would be much easier because they would know what to expect. Student J, who had been anxious prior to their conference, was very positive about the experience stating “I like[d] telling what I’m good at and what I need to work on. [Next time] I would practice more on what I’m OK at and then I might get better and (Mum) will be impressed with my learning, but she already is.”

Students were very specific about what they would do next time if they were preparing for a conference again. Year 3 and 4 students made reference to getting work finished, making sure their portfolio was in order, making their stories more interesting, trying harder in mathematics, and sticking to the agenda during their conference so they didn’t miss anything out. Year 5 and 6 students’ comments about how to improve their conferences for another time included ensuring they articulated aspects of their learning with more detail, that they did understand what they were explaining, especially the vocabulary in the matrices, and that they needed to try hard in all their subjects, not just those they enjoyed the most.

When asked how keen they would be to do another student-led conference, all students, except Student K, gave a rating of 4 or 5—*very keen* or *extremely keen*. Students thought the conference experience had been fun, it had been easy, that they were now more confident, and they would do it even better now they knew how it worked. Student J still thought they would be a “little afraid”, but not that much.

In Case Study 1, two interviewed students had not been keen to do another conference. For one student, the conference focus had shifted from learning to behaviour, which had negatively impacted on their motivation level. In Case Study 2 one interviewed student gave a rating of 2—*not very keen*, for doing another conference. Student K had enjoyed the conference process and was pleased that their parents were pleased with them. As was the case with Student S in Case Study 1, their rating had little to do with ability, success, or anxiety about sharing information with parents, nor did it appear to link to the student's skills in articulating their learning. Evidence from transcripts and feedback from Student K's parents showed Student K led an extremely successful conference in terms of sharing information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning. But, Student K was shy and had found the process of talking about their learning a huge effort. Because of this they were not very keen to do another conference.

In this case study, the interviewed students' enjoyment of learning did not increase significantly during the study. One possible reason for this was that students began the study with relatively high levels of motivation. It could also be the new expectations that were placed upon students in this case study, as defined by their role in these student-led conferences, created more responsibility for students to understand their learning, and to develop skills in articulating this information. This shift in expectation, while creating opportunity for students to become more involved in the reporting process, also created accountability and pressure.

In the post-conference student survey, 'doing well in their learning' and 'liking the subject' were still the highest rating categories for making learning fun. The change from the initial student survey to the post-conference survey was their third rating category changed from 'being good at a subject' (in Student Survey 1) to 'knowing why they are learning what they are learning.' Initial and post-conference student survey results showed students' had not perceived any significant changes in any teaching practices over the six months of the study.

Comparisons between Case Study 1 and Case Study 2 post-conference student surveys showed 77.1% of students in Case Study 1 were *extremely keen* or *very keen* to do another conference compared to 74.7% in Case Study 2. Data showed 11.1% of students in Case Study 1 were *reasonably keen* compared to 14.9% in Case Study 2. Just 5.2% of students were *not very keen* to do another conference in Case Study 1,

compared to 5.8% in Case Study 2. 5.2% of students were *not at all keen* to do another conference in Case Study 1, compared to 2.9% in Case Study 2. Considering the different interpretations of conferencing, these two results were very similar.

In summary, the process of introducing student-led conferences in Case Study 2 had no significant impact on student motivation and enjoyment of learning. Student surveys indicated no significant changes in teachers' practices through the process of introducing and preparing students for student-led conferences. Students' survey ratings of categories around 'what makes learning fun', showed students linked enjoyment of learning to success in learning, liking subjects, and knowing why they were learning what they were learning. Interviewed students' comments indicated they were aware of the new expectations being placed upon them, but they all looked forward to the conferences and were positive about the experience in the post-conference interviews.

Student confidence to share information about learning

At the beginning of the study, students were asked how confident they were talking about their learning to other people. Initial student survey results showed 36.3 % were extremely confident, 25.0% were very confident, 20.6% were reasonably confident, 17.5% were not very confident, and 0.6% of students were not at all confident.

Interviewed 'Student Competency' matrix levels in 'Confidence to talk about learning', were determined from their answers to two questions about confidence to talk about learning to other people and to their parents. There were a range of confidence levels across the group. Students B, D, F, J and N, were Level 2, Students A, C, I, K, L and O, were Level 3, and Students E, H, and G, were Level 4 in this dimension at the beginning of the study.

Level 2 students were concerned about forgetting what to say, getting confused, feeling shy, nervous, or a bit scared. These students thought it would be good for their parents to understand more about their learning. Level 3 students, while lacking confidence to talk before an audience, were more confident about their learning and what they knew. These students saw sharing with parents as way of increasing their understanding of what they did at school and a way of helping them understand how to help them with their learning. Student K thought they were the best person to explain the information because they were the one who had done the work and perhaps would explain it the

best. The three most confident students explained they enjoyed talking about learning and it didn't matter who the audience was. These students were confident in both their understanding of their learning and their ability to talk about it with others.

In the pre-conference interviews, students were asked how confident they were to conduct a student-led conference with their parents. As in Case Study 1, ratings ranged between 3—*reasonably confident*, and 5—*extremely confident*. Students B and J, who gave ratings of 3, were concerned they would make mistakes and not share the information about their learning well enough. Students A, I, N, D, K and L, seemed more confident with the content of what they were to share, but were concerned that they might forget things or not speak clearly enough. Students C, E, F, H, O and Q, were the most confident students. They were looking forward to the conferences and had confidence in both their understanding of the information they had to share and their ability to share it. Student Q explained:

Last year (when we attended teacher-parent Interviews) when we had our things we did not know what to say. We weren't confident. We hadn't practised. We didn't do any like role-plays or anything but this year we've sort of organised ourselves and are more prepared for it.

When considering students' ratings, students who were least confident were concerned both about their understanding of information and their ability to share it. Students who were more confident were either confident in their understanding of information, or in their ability to talk about it, while very confident students were confident in their understanding of their learning and the preparation that had been done and were looking forward to sharing this information with their parents. None of the students expressed concern about not having done well enough in their learning, but Students B and L had found getting all their work finished for the portfolio a challenge. As in Case Study 1, all the students were Level 3 or 4 in the 'Student Competency' dimension of 'Confidence to talk about their learning'. Students A, B, D, I, J, K, L, and N, were Level 3, reasonably confident, while Students C, E, F, H, O and Q, stated they were very confident to talk about aspects of their learning.

In post-conference interviews, students' perceptions of their parents' enjoyment of the student-led conference was very positive. All students gave ratings of 4—*very much*, or 5—*a lot*. They had enjoyed talking about their learning, sharing samples of work, answering their parents' questions, and playing different games that demonstrated skills

they had developed. Students found they had lots of information to share and the experienced had helped them feel more confident about what they did know about their learning. Student C thought “it would be easier to share my work now I’ve just shared it with my mum cos sharing it with mum is kinda like sharing it with the class.” Student Q explained how they had developed in confidence as their conference progressed:

I could tell them everything about my learning because all the information was in the portfolio and I could show them samples of my work. I was still nervous at the beginning but it was just like being in class when we talk about our learning so after a while I wasn’t nervous at all.

Student O thought that they now “knew a lot and their parents learnt a lot”, while Student F commented “It was fun showing all the different things and I had to explain it all over again when I got home to Dad.” Students B and J both had been more confident than they expected to be. Students A, B, D, I, N, and J, showed increases in confidence as a result of preparing for student-led conferences. In the pre-conference interviews, Students J and L described Level 3 criteria when discussing how confident they now felt when talking to their parents about their learning. The other twelve students were Level 4. When considering how confident students were to talk about their learning in detail in post-conference Interviews, results showed Students’ A, B, F, I, J, K and L were Level 3 while Students’ C, D, E, H, N, O and Q were Level 4. Just one student (Student N), made a gain this dimension as a result of doing the student-led conference. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 3 – Student confidence to share information about learning— was 86% ($n=42$ comparisons).

This result would suggest the preparation for student-led conferences is an integral part of developing students’ confidence to talk about their learning, as it was not the conference experience that improved confidence levels of students in this case study. Changes in this dimension happened between the initial interviews and the pre-conference interviews. The traditional concern about parents’ reacting negatively when learning about students’ current progress and achievement levels, was not the experience of students in this case study. All the interviewed students thought their parents had enjoyed their conferences, so confidence to talk to their parents had remained high.

Students in the post-conference survey were again asked how confident they were to talk about their learning. Results showed no significant changes in confidence from the beginning of the study. Frequency ratings showed 34.3% were *extremely* confident, 32.6% *very* confident, 20.9% *reasonably* confident, 7.0% *not very* confident, and 5.2% were *not at all* confident. This result showed there had been little change with students who were *extremely* or *very* confident, but that 10.5% of students had shifted from being *not very* confident to *reasonably* confident, while 4% had become *not at all* confident.

One explanation for confidence levels showing little change could be linked to students' prior experience of being participants in conversations about their learning. In the initial student survey, students may have linked confidence to talk about learning to their experience of three-way goal setting meetings. In these meetings, students took part in the discussion, but the reporting on progress and achievement to parents was the responsibility of the teacher. Confidence to talk about learning, in the context of students having led a student-led conference, may not have changed significantly because they had experience of being part of discussions about their learning with their parents, in Term 1 of the year. This meant information about progress and achievement from Term 1 was not new to parents or students. Parents having conversations about learning with their children contributing was not entirely new either. What did change was that students were now being asked to engage with, understand and share information about progress, achievement levels and next steps in learning. For most students this new expectation did not make a difference to their levels of confidence.

Student capacity to articulate learning

As in Case Study 1, the challenge of developing students' ability to articulate information about learning was a significant one. The Case Study 2 school had traditionally shared information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with students and parents, through three-way goal setting meetings in Term 1, and three-way teacher-student-parent interviews in Term 2. To ensure students understood this information well enough to share it with their parents, was the biggest paradigm shift that needed to be made by teachers and students in this Case Study.

Students in the pre-conference interviews identified opportunities to practice talking about their learning as a major part of their preparation for student-led conferences. All students mentioned role-plays. Student C explained how they were used : "We have

buddies that we practised talking about our learning with and in threes, we've got people to be the Mum, the teacher and the student and we're sharing our portfolio (information) with them". Student D shared how this practice had become integrated into class lessons: "At the mat the teacher talks to us and she says ... Tell them about your learning to the person next to you and we talk about our learning and the success criteria and reflections. We were practising talking in a loud voice." Other students' comments suggested teachers had worked on getting rid of "ums" and "like" from speech patterns.

Students J, L, and O, described the changes in teachers' practices around who did the talking in class. "In term 1, the teacher did most of the talking and we didn't know much about our learning and we now have to talk about our learning, so we know more about it." (Student J)

In the post-conference interviews, students were asked what information they had shared with parents and to reflect upon how well they had done this. All students gave themselves ratings of 4—*very well*, or 5—*extremely well* for how well they had explained their learning. In Case Study 1, students' descriptions of what information they had shared matched Level 1 and 2 of the 'Capacity to articulate learning' dimension. In Case Study 2, Students A and B were Level 2, Students C, D, I, N, F, H, and L, were Level 3 and Students E, J, K, O, and Q, were Level 4. Level 2 students described information they had shared in general terms. Like students in Case Study 1, they had found sharing their ICT work the easiest part of their conference because it was "easy to remember". These students had encountered difficulties reading teachers' comments, and not being able to explain the maths game to their parents easily. Level 3 students described what they had shared in more detail, with reference to levels, stages, or matrix criteria. When discussing the easiest and hardest parts of their conferences they used examples that specifically linked to aspects of their learning. Student L explained:

I said most things about my learning and how I was learning and then I got up to 9-10 years age of learning and level 5 of Maths and level 4 for my Times Tables because (in term 1) I wasn't at level 5 at my Maths and I was at 8-9 years of Reading and I got better and better at it. (The easiest part) was doing the Art because we had to talk about our Art using the matrix. It was easy because you could see the art work and how it fitted the (criteria) levels.

Teachers in Case Study 2 had discussed their concerns about students being familiar enough with Term 2 information about progress and achievement, given the tight timeframe between assessing students, writing comments, and getting information to students at the end of the term. Students had practiced talking about their learning using Term 1 portfolio information, while teachers were finishing Term 2 comments. Because of this, some Year 3 and 4 students in particular, found it more difficult to explain Term 2 information. Student C, a Year 3 student, was the only student to identify sharing information about progress as problematic stating:

The easiest part was sharing our um, our stories that we wrote because it was easy to read out and (to say) what level I'm on. The hardest part was telling my mum and dad what level I'm on and kinda telling the term 2 stuff because I didn't know much about doing that. I mostly knew just term 1 stuff.

Students E, J, K, O, and Q, were Level 4 in this dimension. They clearly articulated the process of learning, their current achievement levels and next steps in learning in different subject areas.

Level 4 students also discussed the easiest and hardest part of their conference, with reference to specific assessment information. Student Q discussed what they had shared about reading:

Our topic, our inquiry-learning was 'Journeys' and we had - for the journey we had like we had to do our title page and think about what a journey was and think of enduring understandings and a central question about what a journey is. I learned that journeys can be long and they can be very short ... We did a 'Journeys' project in our reading group and for my group, we'd been making perfume and we had to make a power point about the journey of making perfume and the process that we went through. We got our parents to smell the perfume we'd made - it was awful so it was funny watching their faces because they thought it was going to be O.K. I answered questions like ... What did you find tricky? How have you learnt it and how did you feel when you were learning it? The hardest part was when I shared my reading tests and told my parents what I need to improve. I was good at inference questions and the next step is to do more 'beyond the text' questions. For reading I knew I needed to work on my comprehension so I tried to - I worked on it quite well and I had one

question I got wrong ... last time I had like a few questions that I got wrong - when you use it you know ... what you need to keep working on.

Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 4 – Student ability to articulate learning – was 75% (n=28 comparisons).

Post-conference parent survey results showed 85.2% of parents thought their child had explained things they had been learning about clearly, compared to 79.6% of parents in Case Study 1. Parent comments showed they appreciated the skills students were developing, with one parent commenting “Students have opportunity to organise the reporting process. They are learning how to make an oral presentation and they are motivated to recall their learning process.” Other parents were concerned that there was a lot of information students were being expected to share, and that Year 3 and 4 students did not have the depth of knowledge to do this effectively.

As a dimension, ‘Capacity to articulate learning’ to an audience was the new challenge for teachers and students. Teachers had to revisit their use of class time, to ensure students had time to discuss aspects of learning regularly. Student-led conferences made it essential that teachers checked that students did understand what they had been learning. They needed to develop students’ ability to assess and critique their own, and others’ work, to build their knowledge of progress and achievement information, as well as develop their oral language capacity for the purpose of reporting.

As was the case in Case Study 1, teachers’ ratings in ‘Assessment Literacy’ dimensions matched students’ results in this dimension. Teachers had focused on students being able to articulate the process of learning, progress and achievement, and next steps in learning. In this, their first student-led conference, students demonstrated that they could do this, with twelve of fourteen interviewed students achieving the Level 3 or 4 criteria in this dimension.

Student understanding of learning

As in Case Study 1, students were asked to self assess the extent to which they thought they understood their learning, to test the theory that the process of preparing for, and leading, a student-led conferences would develop students’ understanding of learning.

In the initial student survey, students were asked how well they thought they were doing in their learning. Frequency ratings showed 29.4 % of students gave a rating of 5—

extremely well, 47.5 % gave a rating of 4—*very well*, 18.8 % gave a rating of 3—*reasonably well*, and 3.8% gave a rating of 2, *not very well*. Compared to Case Study 1, ratings were similar for students who thought they were doing *extremely well* and *very well* and *reasonably well*. The greatest difference between the two case studies was 10.5% of students in Case Study 1 gave a rating of 2 for how well they were doing in their learning, as opposed to 3.8% in Case Study 2.

In initial student interviews, students' ratings ranged from 3—*reasonably good understanding*, to 5—*extremely good understanding* of their learning. Students giving ratings of 3 or 4 did not always understand their learning. Student N explained “Sometimes when we—I was writing a story map, like, “What is a story map?” ... I don't get what they're trying to say.” Student K gave a rating of 4 “Because sometimes I have to ask somebody to explain to me about what I have to do.” Student O, being an English second language student did not always understand vocabulary used. Student J commented that while they could understand what they were being asked to do they could not always explain it to others. Students' C, D, H, and Q, were the most confident about their understanding of their learning because they knew what to do and learning was made explicit. Student D gave a rating of 5 “because (my teacher) shows examples and she writes up learning intentions so we know what we're learning and why we're learning it.”

All students, except Student D gave themselves ratings of 4 or 5 for how well they were doing in their learning. Reasons for why they thought they were doing well linked back to information they had been given by the teacher, or information that had been shared in goal setting meetings. Six students who gave themselves a rating of 4 referred to subject areas they felt they needed to improve in.

Using the ‘Student Competency’ matrix criteria for this dimension, all the Year 3 and students were Level 2 at the beginning of the study. Students J, K, and O, were also Level 2. Students D, F, and L were Level 3, and Students H and Q were Level 4. These ratings were based on students' descriptions of three-way goal setting meetings, held in Term 1 with their teacher and parents. When asked what was discussed in these meetings, students with Level 3 or 4 ratings specifically referred to one or more aspects of learning including process, current achievement levels, next steps and goals they were working on. Level 3 students all commented on how they needed to work hard to improve in specific subject areas.

In the pre-conference interviews, students were asked to rate their understanding of information in their student portfolios that they were to share with parents. Students all gave themselves ratings of 4—*very well*, or 5—*extremely well*, so it was the detail in their explanations that was used to assess their understanding of learning. Five of six Year 3 and 4 students were still Level 2 in their understanding of this information, while Student E and all the Year 5 and 6 students were Level 3 or 4 in this dimension.

Student D, showed good understanding of the information in their student portfolio:

(In) writing, being successful is using interesting language like alliteration ... Some of the work, like the “I Can” (achievement information) sheets, some of it’s sort of hard to understand. (In writing) we have like, level one and level two and level three. We have those indicators that tell us what you need to achieve to go to that level. The teachers they put out indicators for like, writing and our writing sample has to show where those things are.

In the post-conference student survey, students were asked how well they understood their learning. Findings showed 30.5% of students gave a rating of 5—*extremely well*, 39.0 % gave a rating of 4—*very well*, 24.0 % gave a rating of 3—*reasonably well*, and 6.2 % gave a rating of 2, *not very well*. Results in Case Study 1 were very similar across every rating category. It was interesting that even though there was a difference in the type and range of information shared with students and parents in both case studies, students’ ratings for understanding of what they knew about their learning was similar.

Surveyed students were also asked how well they thought they were doing in their learning. In this study 29.4 % of students gave a rating of 5—*extremely well*, 39.0 % gave a rating of 4—*very well*, 27.7 % gave a rating of 3—*reasonably well*, and 4.0% gave a rating of 2, *not very well*. Comparisons with results in Case Study 1 showed similar frequency levels for ratings of 3—*reasonably well*, 4—*very well* and 5—*extremely well*. The greatest difference in the two case studies was with students rating 2 for how well they were doing in their learning. In Case Study 1 10.5% of students in thought they were doing *not very well* in their learning, compared to 4% in Case Study 2.

In post-conference interviews, students were again asked how well they thought they understood their learning. Students all rated themselves 5— *extremely well*. Students now knew what the teachers thought about their learning because of the comments in

the student portfolios and they had also developed a better understanding of this information in the process of preparing for the conference and then doing it with their parents. Students thought teachers had explained things in more detail and allowed them more opportunity to clarify their understanding of what they were learning in class. From their perspective, the process of doing a student-led Conference had helped them develop understanding of their learning. Student N, a Year 3, explained:

When I did my Student Led Conference – even though my Mum was learning, I was learning quite a lot too. I was like, I don't know, I was just learning. (Now) I have done one Student Led Conference ... now when they ask me, I am quite confident to say it. In term 1, I didn't know even my stage, level or anything. So now we have (done) Student Led Conference by ourselves like when we're doing it ... it's pretty good 'cos then you know what your levels are.

At the end of the study, Year 3 and 4 students in this case study were operating at the beginning of Level 3, while Year 5 and 6 students were all Level 3 or 4 in the dimension of 'Understanding learning'. Year 3 and 4 students, apprehensive about the extent to which they understood the information about progress and achievement, found the process of doing the student-led conference had helped them understand the progress they had made from the beginning of the year and where they were "at" in different subject areas. Feedback from teachers and parents was still the primary source of information for Year 3 and 4 students, while Year 5 and 6 students referred to assessment information and samples of work to validate their views about their learning.

Students D, F, and L, operating at Level 3, understood process, progress, and achievement levels in a range of subjects. Students H, J, K, L, O, and Q, operating at Level 4, demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the process of learning, progress they had made, current achievement levels and next steps in learning. Inter-rater reliability analysis of interviewed students showed the percentage agreement between the two raters for Dimension 5 – Student understanding of learning – was 88% (n=42 comparisons).

Students' results in this dimension were similar to the 'Assessment Literacy' levels of the teachers in this study. At the end of the study, the two Year 5 and 6 teachers were working mainly at Level 4 across the 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions and their students were Level 3 and 4 in their understanding of their learning. Two of the three

Year 3 and 4 teachers were operating at Level 2 and the beginning of Level 3. Teacher A, also a Year 3 and 4 teacher, was working mainly at Level 3.

Results showed the Year 3 and 4 students were Level 2 and the beginning of Level 3 for 'Understanding of learning' at the end of the study. This outcome could have been influenced by a number of factors. This was the first time teachers had been asked to support students to lead a conference about learning. Two of three of the Year 3 and 4 teachers were first or second year teachers, so had less experience of teaching, assessment and reporting than the other three teachers. Year 3 and 4 teachers, by their own admission, underestimated the time it would take to develop students' understanding of achievement information. Portfolios were introduced in the process of implementing student-led conferences and the teacher-generated information in them was not necessarily 'user-friendly' enough for Year 3 and 4 students. Nor were students familiar enough with the portfolios to share the information with confidence. The Year 5 and 6 teachers were more experienced, but the students, being older, also had more knowledge and skills to bring to the conference context.

Surveyed students' perceptions of their understanding of their learning did not change during Case Study 2, nor were they significantly different from student survey results in Case Study 1. This result highlights how students' perceptions of 'Understanding of learning' are dependent on what information is shared with them by teachers. In both case studies, students were asked to rate their understanding of learning. While results were similar, there were two different levels of information being shared with students, and parents, in each case study. By comparison, interviewed students in Case Study 2 all showed gains in the 'Understanding of learning' dimension of the 'Student Competency' matrix, more so than interviewed students in Case Study 1.

Conclusion

In terms of meeting the criteria of effective reporting, students in Case Study 2 were successful in sharing information about their learning to their parents. Through the process of preparing for student-led conferences, they systemically had multiple opportunities to develop understanding of the process of learning, progress, current achievement levels, and next steps in learning, along with skills in articulating this information to their parents, aligned with the criteria for effective reporting.

At the beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences, students and teachers in the two case studies started at different competency levels. In both studies the interviewed Year 5 and 6 students had made more consistent progress in developing knowledge, understanding, and skills in articulating their learning, which could be partially linked to students' levels of maturity, and partially linked to competency levels of their teachers and shifts they made in their practice around sharing information about learning. Results were influenced by teachers' beliefs about students' capacity to develop understanding of all aspects of their learning and their beliefs about their role in the reporting process. Students in Case Study 2 demonstrated that, with six months preparation, it was possible for Year 6 students to lead a reporting process that met most, if not all, criteria for effective reporting using student-led conferences. Both case studies showed the process of implementing student-led conferences developed students' understanding of their learning.

In terms of reporting, both case studies showed student-led conferences were effective in engaging parents in their children's learning and in sharing information with parents. At the end of Case Study 1, parents still wanted more specific information about progress and achievement. In Case Study 2, parents were looking to further develop their understanding of information shared, so they could better understand how to support their child's learning at home.

Further consideration of entry levels for the implementation of student-led conferences is needed, so the outcomes of this reporting method can meet expectations of key stakeholders. School leaders need to make informed decisions need to be made around the school's definition of student-led conferences, the key purposes of reporting as they align to their beliefs about student-centred pedagogy, assessment, teaching, and reporting. They need to be clear about traditional reporting issues that are problematic in their specific context, so these can be addressed effectively. Finally, school leaders need to understand their current teacher and student competency levels in dimensions that link assessment and reporting, so realistic expectations of what they want to achieve through the implementation of student-led conferences match the outcomes. In this way, student-led conferences can be implemented so they are effective both as a learning-focused reporting method, and in meeting expectations of teachers, students, and parents.

The question this thesis began with was “*To what extent are student-led conferences an effective reporting method?*” Results show student-led conferences can be highly effective as a learning-focused reporting method, but that their effectiveness is dependent on a range of contributing factors, including conditions of reporting that school communities value, the definition of student-led conferences a school adopts, the ‘Assessment Literacy’ levels of teachers and the extent to which ‘Student Competencies’ are developed through the implementation process.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study focused on developing understanding of effectiveness in reporting, as it related to student-led conferences using evidence from teachers, parents, and students. Teachers' and parents' beliefs, practices, and post-conference reflections were analysed using a problem-based methodology approach. A framework of four conditions of reporting, underpinned by a theory of effective reporting, were used to assess the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a reporting method in two case study schools.

Teaching practice as it linked to reporting, was a second theme explored because the effectiveness of student-led conferences is inextricably linked to quality, class-based, teaching and learning. Five dimensions of teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' were used to examine and compare 'Assessment Literacy' levels of teachers at the beginning of the study, prior to the student-led conference and after the student-led conference. This was to ascertain the impact implementing student-led conferences had on teachers' beliefs and practice, but also to understand how teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' knowledge and understanding had impacted upon the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a 'learning-focused' reporting method.

The third theme of the study focused on students. Five dimensions of 'Student Competencies' in reporting were used to analyse the extent to which 'Student Competencies' developed over six months leading up to student-led conferences and how student competency levels affected teachers, parents, and students' perceptions of student-led conferences as an effective reporting method.

In this chapter, findings informed by the conditions of the reporting framework and the theory of effective student-led conferences are drawn together and linked to the literature. Findings inform a four level conceptual model that defines different entry levels for schools introducing student-led conferences and different levels of effectiveness that schools using student-led conferences may achieve. Descriptors of each level enable the model to be used as both an audit tool and an evaluative tool for effective reporting.

Case Study 1 and 2 results have been used to demonstrate how the entry level matrix and 'Reporting Audit' framework can be used in conjunction with the teacher

‘Assessment Literacy’ and ‘Student Competency’ dimensions to inform the design and implementation of an effective student-centred, ‘learning-focused’ reporting method for individual school contexts that is linked to literature in these areas of research. Finally, the original research question is revisited, limitations of this research identified, and implications for further research opportunities described.

Conditions of reporting: Case Study 1

The extent to which student-led conferences were effective as a learning-focused reporting method was viewed through three different lenses: teachers, students, and parents, and then compared to a theory of effective student-led conferences. In Case Study 1, teachers believed they had been effective in reporting to parents about students’ learning. For parents, student-led conferences had improved understanding of the process of learning, but overall, because the information about progress and achievement remained unchanged, this reporting method was only as effective as other reporting methods had been. From the students’ perspective, 85% of the students thought they had done *very well* or *extremely well* in leading a conference about learning. Compared to the theory of effective student-led conferences, findings from Case Study 1 met three of six criteria—‘Student voice’ had been created, information about how learning had been achieved was shared, and information that was provided began the process of supporting parents to ‘learn about learning’.

In terms of meeting social purposes of reporting, there were some commonalities between topics teachers and parents thought were important purposes of reporting. As has been found elsewhere in the literature, during the student-led conference, information shared by teachers about progress and achievement was not specific enough to be helpful for parents (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Power & Clark, 2000). Some parents did not want to discuss this information with teachers. In other instances, the ‘teacher slot’ time was taken up with other topics that teachers or parents wanted to discuss. That there was opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss a range of issues meant the second condition of reporting was met, but, as has been found in research on reporting, both teachers and parents expressed frustration about what information was not shared (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Guskey, 2002). For one interviewed student, this aspect of the student-led conference had not been a positive experience.

When addressing the third condition—traditional issues with reporting, most of the teachers' issues were resolved in Case Study 1. As was found in research on student-led conferences by Bailey and Guskey (2001) and Le Countryman and Schroeder (1996), parental attendance improved, parents and students successfully participated in the conference process, and time had been created to engage with information more fully. Parents however, had not received information they wanted about progress, achievement levels, or next steps in learning. More time to discuss these aspects of learning in detail had not been created and parents still did not know how to help their child in their learning at home, findings similar to those in studies by Broadfoot (1990), Cuttance and Stokes (2000), Power and Clark (2000), and Timperley and Robinson (2002).

The fourth condition—implementing and participating in a new student-centred reporting method, had been achieved to some extent. Teachers had developed their capabilities in the process of preparing students to lead their conferences. Students had developed new skills and understanding of the learning process, and were successful in leading their conferences about their learning. Parents did participate and learnt more about how students learn in the process as anticipated by research findings by Absolum et al., (2009). They appreciated the students' input during the student-led part of the conference, and the three-way conversations between teachers, students, and parents in the 'teacher slot' that created the opportunity to improve communication between teachers, students, and parents.

The roles of teachers, students, and parents, were redefined in the process of implementing student-led conferences. Problems with interpretation of teachers' and parents' roles in the reporting process have been well documented in the literature (Crosier, 1998; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Power & Clark, 2000). For teachers, students, and parents in this case study, there was uncertainty about their new roles in the student-led conference process. Both teachers and parents, while valuing students' involvement, found the redefined roles of teachers, students, and parents, created constraints during the conferences that were not entirely overcome with the addition of the 'teacher slot', a finding replicating those of Le Countryman and Schroder (1996), Fox (2006), and Taylor (2003). For teachers, the implementation of student-led conferences had been a success, and 85% of students had found the student-led conference experience a positive one. From the parents'

perspective, while they enjoyed the student-led conference, this method of reporting had been no more effective than any other.

Conditions of reporting and the theory of effective reporting

In Case Study 1, while teachers and parents believed reporting should be focused on learning, in reality, reporting was designed to fulfil traditional social and relationship purposes. Sharing information about progress and achievement levels, based upon normative and/or criterion referenced assessment was the espoused purpose, but, as found in the literature there was lack of readiness on the teachers' part to share this information with parents (Savell, 1998; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). School-wide systems of assessment were not linked to class-based teaching and learning. Because of this, and teachers' Assessment Literacy' levels, the extent to which teachers shared progress and achievement information with students, or with parents, was less than effective.

In this case-study, information about progress, achievement, and 'next steps', were seen to be the teachers' domain, and while shared, was not based upon close analyses of students' needs. Teachers in Case Study 1 supported student involvement in reporting but did not at any time, contemplate sharing progress and achievement information with them. They believed students had the capacity to share information about the process of learning and hoped this method of reporting would improve parent participation in the reporting process. Students as learners, needing access to all the information about their learning, to build understanding of themselves as learners, to take ownership of and responsibility for their current achievement and 'next steps' in learning. was not a paradigm shift made by teachers in this study.

Finally, parents in this case study did begin the process of 'learning about learning' through participating in student-led conferences. They saw their children demonstrate skills, and they were active participants in the reporting process. Because students did not have all the information about their learning, and this was also not shared with any consistency by teachers, parents were still unsure about their children's progress and achievement and how to help with their 'next steps' in learning.

Conditions of reporting: Case Study 2

When considering the indicators of effective reporting, teachers in Case Study 2 were effective in developing capabilities to support students to run an effective learning-

focused student-led conference. For the first time, teachers systematically shared information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with students, as part of their classroom programme, in addition to making the process of learning explicit. The introduction of the student portfolio, while extra work for teachers, created a document that contained written information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with samples of work. Portfolios were used by students as a scaffold for their conferences, but they also gave parents specific, detailed information supported by samples of work, providing trustworthy evidence of learning, aligned with ‘best practice’ characteristics described by the New Zealand Academy (2009).

Students ran conferences for parents, sharing information about progress, achievement, next steps in learning and the process of learning. ‘Student voice’ was the predominant voice. Through these conferences, two purposes of effective reporting, as defined in this study were met. Students were given the opportunity to engage with all the information about their learning and information was shared in detail with parents.

This was not possible without teachers developing strategies to develop students’ understanding of all aspects of their learning through teaching and learning programmes. Teachers changed the way they used class time, what information they shared with students, and how they shared it, to ensure students understood the assessment information they were to share with parents, in the process aligning their teaching pedagogy with that of assessment reform researchers (Absolum, et al., 2009; Black & William, 1998a; Broadfoot, et al., 1990; Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Making this information explicit to students could be described as “opening the black box” in the classroom at another level—not only to teachers, but to students and parents also.

In this case study, student-led conferences were the catalyst for teachers to begin the process of sharing information about progress, achievement, and next steps in learning with students—who in turn shared the information with parents. As a result, parents did get detailed information, and parent understanding of information did improve significantly from the initial parent survey to the post-conference parent survey. All interviewed parents identified ways they planned to use the information gained to support their child’s learning more specifically, as a result of the student-led conference process, findings consistent with Harris and Goodall (2007). Parents’ perceptions of students’ understanding was similar to that of teachers, who had expressed concerns in pre and post interviews that students had not had enough time to develop good

understanding of progress and achievement information. While this was the first student-led conference, teachers, students, and parents had been part of, therefore a learning experience on more than one level, Absolum et al. (2009), along with other proponents of student-led conferences, have emphasised the need for careful preparation. The breadth and depth of understanding of student learning, teachers, and parents are alluding to could also be something that can only be developed over time.

When asked to give an overall rating for effectiveness, surveyed parents did not rate student-led conferences more effective than other reporting methods they had experienced. When asked to identify the purpose of reporting, parents' ratings around information about attitude, motivation, behaviour, social issues, and concerns were as high as receiving information about learning. Interviewed parents, in initial parent interviews, clearly described interview times as opportunity to have a two or three way discussion with the teacher about their child's learning. Student-led conferences had not created opportunity to discuss social purposes of reporting, nor had they provided parents with time for discussion with teachers, findings similar to research by Le Countryman and Schroder (1996) and Fox (2006). While successful as a student-centred reporting method focused on learning, in this case study, student-led conferences did not meet all parents' expectations of an effective reporting process.

Conditions of reporting and the theory of effective reporting

In Case Study 2, the focus of reporting was on learning. While teachers' espoused theories stated this should be the key purpose, like the parents they also valued social purposes of reporting. This school did begin the process of implementing student-led conferences with more capacity than the school in Case Study 1. School wide systems of reporting were linked to class-based teaching and learning, and teachers were expected to share this information with students as part of this study. Unlike Case Study 1, students were asked to share all the information about their learning with parents in student-led conferences, the teachers' voice being communicated in written comments in student portfolios focused on information about what each child had achieved and their 'next steps' in learning. Analysis of students' interviews showed Year 5 and 6 students were able to articulate this information to parents with more confidence, more detail, and greater understanding than Year 3 and 4 students.

In this study, teachers had underestimated the time it would take for students to develop understanding of assessment information from different curriculum areas. The

paradigm shift was made in that teachers did support students to engage with all the information about their learning, and students did share this information with parents. Teachers had valued the process of students taking ownership of, and responsibility, for their current achievement levels and ‘next steps’ in learning. At the end of this first student-led conference experience, teachers, and some parents, did not think students sharing all aspects of information with parents had been totally effective.

Case Study 2 (like Case Study 1), did however begin the process of systemically supporting parents to ‘learn about learning’. Parents interacted with students in activities designed to demonstrate skills and the process of how students learn in different curriculum areas. This was supplemented with samples of work in student portfolios, and in the classroom with teachers’ written comments about progress, achievement, and ‘next steps’. Parent survey data showed significant improvement in parents’ understanding of progress, achievement, and the grading systems used. The process of developing parents’ capacity to support their children’s learning at home was begun.

For any process of reporting to be effective, schools need a process to develop understanding of their current capacity in reporting, and how they might develop a reporting system that meets the needs of teachers, students, and parents in individual contexts. Based upon the findings of this study, a conceptual model has been developed that suggests there are four entry levels for ‘Effectiveness in learning-focused reporting’ using student-led conferences. In the next section, this model and a ‘Reporting Audit’ matrix is used to demonstrate how schools could design an effective ‘learning-focused’ reporting method, suited to their context, using student-led conferences.

Figure 1. Conceptual model—Entry levels for schools implementing student-led conferences

Levels of engagement in learning-focused, student-centred reporting		Teachers: Support students as they lead two-way student-led conferences with their parents—clarifying information as needed.	Teachers: Observe student-led conferences—there to support students— will make appointments to meet with parents who want additional information about how to better support their children in their learning.
		Students: Lead the reporting process with their parents having engaged with all information about their learning to some extent—process, progress, achievement levels and ‘next steps’ in learning.	Students: Lead the reporting process with knowledge and understanding of themselves as learners—the process of learning, progress, achievement and ‘next steps’ in learning.
		Parents: Engage with their child in learning about process, progress achievement and ‘next steps’ in learning, seeking clarification if needed at the time.	Parents: Are fully engaged learning partners—have knowledge and understanding of assessment as it links to supporting their child’s learning beyond school—seek additional information if needed.
		Entry Level 3	Entry Level 4
Presence	Participation	Engagement	Understanding
Teachers: Lead the reporting process as ‘holders of the knowledge’ about the students’ learning.	Teachers: Participate as facilitators of three-way conversations about learning—or a mix of student-parent time and a ‘teacher slot’ where the teacher shares progress and achievement information.	An audit and evaluation tool	
Students: Present in the reporting process—are passive recipients of information about their learning.	Students: Participate in the reporting process—sharing some information about their learning in two or three-way conversations with parents and/or the teacher		
Parents: Present in the reporting process—are recipients of information.	Parents: Participate in the reporting process—learning about ‘how to learn’ from and with students and receive information about assessment, progress and achievement from the teacher		
Entry Level 1	Entry Level 2		

Table 24

Reporting Audit and evaluation framework—For design of student-led conferences for individual school contexts

Clarity of purpose around reporting	Understanding of current reporting and assessment practices	Key reporting issues identified by teachers and parents to be addressed	Understanding of current teacher ‘Assessment Literacy’ capacity in the school	Understanding of current levels of ‘Student Competencies’ linked to reporting
Underpinned by				
The extent to which student-centred teaching and learning philosophy is embedded in the school culture, systems, class-based teaching, and learning and community.				

Student-led conferences: Entry levels and effective reporting

Literature on parent participation in education shows there is general agreement that parent involvement in their child's education improves the students' chances of being successful in learning. What remains problematic is *how* parents can be systematically supported to become genuine partners in the learning process. This study put forward a theory of 'best practice' for reporting using student-led conferences that required students and parents to become actively engaged in the reporting process. Teachers' and parents' beliefs about the purpose of reporting were categorised into four conditions of reporting they hoped would be met. Outcomes of the implementation of student-led conferences were compared to teachers' and parents' expectations, and to a theory of 'best practice' student-centred reporting.

The process of comparing the outcomes of student-led conferences to each 'Condition of reporting', and a theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences, did two things. Firstly, it clarified why no one reporting method meets all the expectations teachers and parents have. Issues that teachers and parents, in the two case study schools wanted a 'new' reporting system to address, were all issues identified in the literature (Austin & McCann, 1992; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Education Review Office, 2008; Hargreaves, et al., 2002; Hattie, 2003b; Ohlhausen, et al., 1994; Power & Clark, 2000), but were different in each school context. Because of this, the success or failure of student-led conferences in their views, were dependent on the extent to which student-led conferences had either resolved identified issues, or met their expectations. As a result, the criteria for effective reporting in each school community were different. Student-led conferences were both effective, and less effective, for different reasons in each case study school. Teachers and parents in both case studies had different beliefs from each other about what was needed to improve reporting in their contexts. Because of this, they had different expectations of student-led conferences as a new reporting method. What was not evident at the outset, was that teachers and parents within the same school prioritised different 'Conditions of reporting' and that these were also different from the priorities of teachers and parents in the second school.

Secondly, the two case studies showed the quality and depth of information shared by students during student-led conferences was dependent on a range of factors. The first of these, found in research by Cangelosi (1990), Bailey and Guskey (2001), Austin and McCann (1992), and reiterated by Absolum et al. (2009), was clarity around the purpose

of reporting. 'Clarity of purpose', based upon the different 'Conditions of reporting' a school prioritised, affected decisions around what information was to be shared with students and parents, by whom, orally and/or in written form. Effective reporting using student-led conferences was also determined by the schools' current practices in assessment and reporting, aspects of reporting they wanted to improve, the capacity of the teachers in 'Assessment Literacy', and their ability to support the development of 'Student Competencies' in their classrooms. The notion that assessment capacity of schools, teachers, and students impact on learning, found in this study, is also clearly articulated in the New Zealand Ministry of Education Position Paper on Assessment (2010a).

Before schools begin the process of developing and strengthening learning-focused reporting, a systemic way to audit current assessment and reporting practices is required, so schools can begin to develop reporting practices that meet the expectations of their community. To support school leaders to navigate the complexities of the purposes of reporting, a process is needed to firstly identify the purpose of reporting they wish to focus on. School leaders need to understand their current capacity in assessment and reporting and also be clear about traditional reporting issues their community perceive to be problematic, realising individual communities' views can be very different from those of teachers, or from other school communities. Different types of information need to be shared using different reporting methods to meet different purposes of reporting, for instance, developing positive, social relationships between teachers and parents (Austin & McCann, 1992). Kofoed, (2009) stated parents want a range of different types of information from teachers. This study has shown student-led conferences can be effective as a student-centred 'learning-focused' reporting method, and one that can resolve many of the issues with traditional reporting identified in the literature and through this study.

Teachers in this study began the process of implementing student-led conferences having different levels of capacity in assessment and reporting. Because of this, the depth and quality of information students shared with parents was very different in each school. In order to create realistic expectations of student-led conferences as a learning-focused reporting method, this thesis demonstrated the two case study schools had different entry levels to student-led conferences that were dependent on each schools' definition of student-led conferences, their 'actual' purpose of reporting (as opposed to

their espoused theory), current assessment and reporting capacity, the quality of their teachers' 'Assessment Literacy', and the teachers' skills in developing key 'Student Competencies' through the process of preparing students to lead conferences about their learning.

Student-led conferences entry level conceptual model

Using the findings, a conceptual model outlining four levels of effectiveness in reporting (see p. 283) has been developed to support schools, teachers, and students to systematically develop effectiveness using a student-centred reporting method. The model describes the engagement of teachers, students, and parents, as they develop different levels of knowledge, skills and understanding of learning. It is expected the model could be used as an audit tool for schools beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences and an evaluation tool to measure progress in development of school, teacher, and student capacity in reporting, once student-led conferences have been introduced. Because the model can assist in identifying initial capacity schools, teachers, and students bring to reporting using student-led conferences, realistic expectations for outcomes of student-led conferences for each of the key stakeholders—teachers, students, and parents can be aligned from the outset.

The model is based on the premise that different levels of 'Learning-focused' reporting require different levels of knowledge, understanding, and engagement of teachers, students, and parents. This thesis has demonstrated that teachers need to be 'Assessment literate' to be effective in developing students' knowledge and understanding of themselves as learners, and that through student-led conferences students and the process have the potential to systemically build parents' knowledge and understanding of learning over time. Schools need to begin the process of introducing student-led conferences while understanding that the different entry levels of 'learning-focused' reporting will strongly influence outcomes.

Using the 'Entry level' matrix criteria (see Figure 2) the school in Case Study 1 was at Entry Level 1 at the beginning of the study. Prior to the introduction of student-led conferences, parents and students may have been present at teacher-parent interviews, but they were 'passive receivers' of information held by the teacher. Through the process of implementing student-led conferences, the school shifted to Level 2 by the end of the study. Through student-led conferences, parents had learned about 'how students learn', students had shared information with them, while teachers had

discussed information about progress and achievement in a three-way conversation as part of the conference process. More parents were present, and both and the students had an opportunity to participate more fully in the reporting process than in the past.

In Case Study 2, the school began the study at Entry Level 2. Prior to the study, teachers, parents, and students had participated in three-way conferences. Students had shared some aspects of their learning in some instances with their teacher and parents, and the teacher had shared information about progress and achievement levels. Parent attendance levels were high, and parents reported participating in discussion around their child's learning. By the end of the study, the school had moved to Level 3. Teachers had shared information about progress and achievement with students, who in turn shared this information with parents during their conferences. Students and parents were asked to engage with the detail of assessment information presented in a more focused way as they participated in a two-way conference. Information came from several sources—the students' presentation, the student portfolio, and examples of work or interactive activities that demonstrated skills. The teacher's role had changed from participant and 'holder of progress and achievement information' to one of support, as needed. The 'Entry level' matrix in both case studies accurately identified an initial entry level for schools beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences, but also showed progress and possible 'next steps' when used as an evaluative tool.

The extent to which schools choose to involve students in the reporting process, as part of a shift to a student-centred philosophy of teaching and learning, is a paradigm shift that separates student-led conferences from traditional reporting methods. As well as describing four levels of engagement of teachers, students, and parents, the model outlines how reporting roles can change and develop as students and parents develop different levels of knowledge and understanding of learning, through student-led conferences. Before schools embark on the introduction of student-led conferences, informed decisions need to be made around how schools define student-led conferences so they are aligned with the level of 'learning-focused' student-centred reporting they aspire to.

Student-led conferences: A reporting audit framework

If schools in this study had begun the process of implementing student-led conferences with an audit framework to ascertain their current capacity around reporting, the process of implementation could have been more tailored and possible outcomes more

predictable. An analysis of the extent to which the two schools' reporting practices were learning-focused, and descriptions of the schools' current assessment and reporting practices, would have created a more informed starting point from which to develop more specific goals and professional development priorities. Identifying the entry levels of each school would have aligned expectations of teachers, students, and parents, with probable outcomes of this reporting method more explicitly.

At the beginning of the study, both schools did not know what aspects of reporting teachers or parents found problematic, so opportunity to address identified contextual issues using a range of different reporting strategies was not created. This could have been done using a 'Reporting Audit' framework (see p. 292). As was shown in this thesis, conditions of reporting other than learning had influenced the development of student-led conferences in each of the case study schools, which in turn influenced perceptions of effectiveness of student-led conferences. Using the main reporting issues, teachers and parents from Case Studies 1 and 2 identified as problematic, a 'Reporting Audit' framework has been developed. Descriptors of each issue have been developed to align with each of the four levels of 'learning-focused' reporting levels and used to assess each school's progress in addressing key issues.

Table 25

Reporting Audit framework: Schools moving towards effective student-centred reporting practices

Entry Levels	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Clarity of purpose of Reporting—Extent to which reporting is currently focused on learning.	Reporting information about learning is shared but is mainly focused on social, behavioural and compliance issues.	Reporting provides general information about progress in learning, but also looks to include ways to share information about social, behavioural and compliance issues.	Reporting provides specific information about progress and achievement and will not focus on social, behavioural and compliance issues – but these may be discussed at another time.	Reporting provides specific information about progress, achievement and ‘next steps’ in learning and has no focus on social, behavioural and compliance issues because these are not issues.
Current reporting practices—frequency/type of reporting used.	Report twice a year using same reporting format.	Report twice or more using different reporting formats (written report, student portfolios, teacher-parent interviews, three-way meetings).	Report twice or more a year, using different formats, involving students in at least one or two of these reporting methods	Report twice or more a year, using different formats, involving students in all reporting methods
Current assessment practices.	School-wide assessments done twice a year for reporting purposes.	School-wide assessments done twice a year—lass-based assessments done at the end of units of work—used for reporting purposes and to inform teaching and learning.	School-wide assessment done three or more times a year – class-based assessment on an on-going basis – all used to inform teaching and learning – used to inform students about their learning	School-wide assessment done three or more times a year – class-based assessment on an on-going basis – all used to inform teaching and learning and students – done in collaboration with students, as appropriate.
Reporting issues—Current reality				
Time	Time—less than 15 minutes to speak with the teacher and the student may or may not be present.	Time—less than 20 minutes to speak with the teacher/student present and may or may not participate in part of the	Time—to share information is created. Students share information with parents—who still may want more time with the teacher to clarify	Time—to share information is open-ended. Students share information with parents who don’t need time with the teacher because they have all the

		conversation.	information shared.	information sought.
Detail of information about progress and achievement provided.	Detail of progress and achievement information not shared—focus of conversation is more on other purposes of reporting.	Detail of progress and achievement information shared is general—more focused on process and progress that has been made.	Detail of progress and achievement information given with specific examples.	Detail of progress and achievement information given with specific examples and clear ‘next steps’ are identified.
Understanding of the ‘language of learning’ used to discuss progress and achievement.	Jargon—progress and achievement information shared <i>not well</i> understood by parents or students.	Jargon—progress and achievement information shared <i>reasonably well</i> understood by parents and students and used infrequently in conversations about learning in the classroom and in the reporting process.	Jargon—progress and achievement information shared <i>very well understood</i> by parents and students and used regularly in conversations about learning in the classroom and in the reporting process.	Jargon—seen as language of learning—progress and achievement information shared <i>extremely well</i> understood by parents and students and used frequently in conversations about learning in the classroom and in the reporting process.
Understanding of assessment—Evidence of learning used in the reporting process.	No evidence of learning is shared in the reporting process so grades/assessment is uninformed.	Some evidence of learning is shared—in main curriculum areas—by teacher and students so there is some understanding of how assessment works.	All evidence of information is shared by students with parents—with teacher input if requested, so assessment is linked to evidence.	All evidence of information is shared by students with parents so assessment is fully informed by evidence and understanding.
Information about how to support students’ ‘next steps’.	Some general information on how to support student learning is given to parents by the teacher.	Some specific information on how to support student learning is given to parents by the teacher.	Specific information on how to support student learning is given to parents, from teachers, through the students.	Specific information on how to support student learning is given to parents, from teachers and students, through the students—and discussed with parents by students.

Using the 'Reporting Audit' framework, the school in Case Study 1 began the process of implementing student-led conferences at Level 1. While information about learning was shared with parents, there was also a strong focus on other purposes of reporting, including discussion around social, behavioural, and compliance aspects of learning. Reporting to parents occurred twice a year, and whole-school assessments were used for this purpose. By comparison, the school in Case Study 2 began the study operating between Level 2 and Level 3 of the 'Reporting Audit' framework. This school was Level 2 in 'Clarity of purpose of reporting', and had systems in place that provided specific achievement information to parents about learning. Teachers looked to fulfil social purposes of reporting, for example, strengthening relationships with parents through three-way goal setting meetings and teacher-student-parent interviews. The school was Level 3 in 'Current reporting practices'. Reporting to parents occurred more than twice a year, and students were involved in at least one of the reporting methods used. In 'Assessment practices' the school was Level 2. Assessment information was collected, collated, and used by teachers to inform class-based teaching practice each term. At the beginning of the study, some assessment information was shared with students, but not consistently or in specific detail.

At the end of this study, the Case Study 1 school was working at Level 2 around 'Clarity of purpose of reporting', the emphasis of reporting being evenly balanced between sharing information about learning and discussion around social, behavioural, and compliance issues. The school was Level 3 in 'Current reporting practices', as they had diversified their reporting practices in the process involving students. In 'Assessment practices' the school remained at Level 1. Assessment information was collected and collated primarily for reporting purposes and was not used to inform class-based teaching and learning. In Case Study 2 at the end of the study the school was working at Level 3 in 'Clarity of purpose of reporting', 'Current reporting practices', and 'Assessment practices'. Student-led conferences had focused teachers, students, and parents, primarily on learning and to manage the social purposes of reporting another time to discuss social or behavioural issues had been arranged with parents. Students had been involved in the reporting process and assessment practices informed teachers about their practice, students about their learning, as well as parents.

In both case studies, schools had developed a stronger focus on learning, and through student-led conferences reporting practices had become more diversified, and more student-centred. 'Assessment practices' shifted in Case Study 2 school from Level 2 to Level 3, but in Case

Study 1 there was no change in the use of assessment information from the beginning of the study.

Student-led conferences and teachers' 'Assessment Literacy'

Student-led conferences provided a genuine, authentic, external motivation for teachers to focus on ensuring students developed understanding of all aspects of learning, so they in turn could share the information with their parents. Implementing student-led conferences also demonstrated that the process of preparing students to lead conferences about their learning, strengthened student-centred teaching and learning in schools and improved teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' capacity, as defined in this study.

Findings showed teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' knowledge and understanding impacted upon the depth and quality of information shared with students in both case studies.

“Effective assessment is a key component of quality teaching when it is used as a learning process to inform teaching and learning and improve student learning (Ministry of Education, 2010a, p. 10). It is through the development of assessment-capable teachers that student assessment capability can be built, so students can take ownership of and be responsible for their learning. Through the process of implementing student-led conferences, teachers' assessment practices in Case Study 1 changed with all four teachers in Case Study 1 shifting from Level 1 to Level 2, in at least two areas of the 'Assessment Literacy' framework in six months. Teachers in this case study began the process of preparing students for student-led conferences not fully understanding how the student-led conference reporting process linked to class-based practices around the use of assessment information linked to teaching and learning. Because of this, they did not share specific information about progress and achievement with students in sufficient detail to make the student-led part of the reporting process effective for parents, a finding similar to that of the Education Review Office (2008) and research by Hargreaves et al. (2000), Timperley and Robinson (2002), Thomas et al. (2003), and (Torrance & Pryor, 1998) that has found teachers have a limited theoretical understanding of how assessment could and should be integrated into the learning and teaching process.

Student survey results also showed the process of implementing student-led conferences shifted teachers' practice in Case Study 1. Through the process of implementing student-led conferences, teachers began providing more detailed explanations or demonstrations of what they wanted students to do and checking for understanding with students. Case Study 1

demonstrated that for student-led conferences to be effective, teachers need to understand the relationship between assessment information and their teaching practice as it related to the development of students' knowledge of themselves as learners. Once teachers develop knowledge of ways to collect, collate, and use assessment to inform their teaching and students' learning, making assessment information explicit to students then becomes the next challenge. As stated in the Ministry of Education Position Paper: Assessment (2010a):

Responsive, respectful and reciprocal learning-focused relationships are fundamental to enabling better learning because of the link between relationships and the motivation required to engage with learning. This is true of all assessment-related relationships but is particularly critical for the relationship between the student and teacher and the consequent interaction between assessment, teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. (p. 28)

In Case Study 2, the process of implementing student-led conferences shifted two teachers' 'Assessment Literacy' practices from mainly Level 2, to Levels 3 and 4 in most dimensions in six months, while two teachers were Level 2 in all dimensions at the end of the study. Findings showed teachers began this study with stronger knowledge of assessment as it linked to teaching and learning, knowledge of assessment tools and understanding of how assessment information was used at a range of levels, than teachers in Case Study 1. All teachers strengthened their practice as they made the paradigm shift to share assessment information with students, which students in turn shared with parents.

Teachers identified challenges around 'how' to effectively develop students' knowledge and understanding of their progress and achievement within their classroom practice. Teachers B and C, new to teaching and to the school, specifically identified dilemmas they had experienced in the process of becoming familiar with the assessment system and how to share this information with students. That the less experienced teachers in both case studies were less effective in supporting students through the process of implementing student-led conferences is consistent with research by Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2007) that showed teachers with more experience are more effective than those with less experience.

Teachers in Case Study 2 did for the first time, share progress and achievement information with students systematically throughout the school, resulting in students engaging in more purposeful, meaningful conversations about their learning, through the process of preparing for, and conducting student-led conferences. At the end of the study, teachers were not

questioning what assessment information was appropriate or not appropriate for teachers to share with students. They were not questioning students' capabilities around comprehending assessment information, nor were they debating the place of students in the reporting process. Rather they were focused on how they could improve their practice, to support students and parents to further develop their understanding of assessment, as genuine, valued partners in learning.

In both case studies, overall teachers' ratings using the 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions were the same level as students' ratings in 'Student Competency' dimensions in each of the student dimensions linked to learning—'Assessment Literacy', 'Student capacity to articulate learning', and 'Student understanding of learning'. For example, if a teacher was working at Level 2 in 'Assessment Literacy', their students were Level 2 in the 'Student Competency' dimensions linked to learning. These findings showed that the effectiveness of student-led conferences as a 'learning-focused' reporting method was reliant on the teacher, and their depth of knowledge of assessment as it linked to their classroom practice and the reporting process.

To have an 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions framework when beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences, will enable teachers to assess their current 'Assessment Literacy' capacity and then develop a tailored professional development plan focused on specific aspects of their teaching, that impact upon student learning and the quality of reporting to parents. The 'Assessment Literacy' dimensions framework could also be used as a guide for teachers wanting to systematically improve the effectiveness of their class-based practice and reporting to parents over time, through the process of implementing student-led conferences.

Student-led conferences and the development of 'Student Competencies'

Development of knowledge of progress and achievement by students in Case Study 1 was limited by the information teachers chose to share with students. The process of preparing for student-led conferences was however motivational, creating positive changes in student enjoyment of learning, findings similar to those of Hackmann (1997), Fox (2006), Hattie and Timperley (2007). The process created opportunity for students to take genuine ownership of part of the reporting process. Student interviews showed motivation levels did not change for students who were intrinsically motivated, but did improve motivation levels of students less positive about learning at the beginning of the study.

Student confidence levels in this case study were high, with all interviewed students scoring in Levels 3 and 4 of the 'Student Competency' matrix. Prior to the conferences, interviewed students were confident about the information they had to share and were not concerned about sharing this with their parents. Teachers had scaffolded preparation carefully and the majority of surveyed students had coped with both the information, and their new role in the reporting process, with more confidence than teachers and parents had predicted.

'Assessment for Learning' teaching strategies were also linked to the development of student confidence by Hattie and Timperley (2007).

When considering students' ability to 'Articulate aspects of learning', students in this case study did not rate as well. The general nature of information shared during student-led conferences showed interviewed students' ability to explain their learning matched the Level 1 and Level 2 dimensions of the 'Student Competency' matrix. The development of this student competency was reliant on teachers sharing information with students, and then supporting students to develop skills in articulating this information to their parents.

Students' oral language skills were developed and they could explain the process of learning in different subject areas. What they did not do is share specific details about progress, achievement levels, and next steps in learning.

Students' perceptions of understanding of their learning did not change significantly from the initial student survey to the post-conference survey, nor did interviewed students' ratings change significantly from the beginning to the end of the study. In the post-conference student survey, 72% of the students in the study thought their understanding of their learning was *extremely good* or *very good*, and 22% thought their understanding of their learning was *reasonably good*. Interviewed students' ratings of their understanding of their learning were also positive, matching Level 2 and 3 stages of this dimension in the 'Student Competency' matrix. It is possible to conclude that students in this case study did understand information that had been shared with them well. The concern is what they did not know and understand about their progress, achievement, and next steps in learning at the end of the study.

When considering the development of 'Student Competencies', through the process of preparing for and running a student-led conference, there is a need to consider the extent to which schools embrace student-centred pedagogy and the implications this will have for reporting. In Case Study 1, the way the student-led conference was defined at the outset affected what information was shared with students. The definition resulted in a process that improved 'Student motivation for learning' and developed 'Confidence to share information',

while dimensions linked to knowledge and understanding of assessment (linked to learning), did not see strong gains. Students' ratings for 'Student understanding of learning' were based upon the aspects of assessment that teachers had chosen to share with students, which they in turn shared with parents.

In terms of meeting the criteria of effective reporting, students in Case Study 2 were successful in sharing information about their learning to their parents. Through the process of preparing for student-led conferences, teachers systemically created multiple opportunities for students to develop understanding of the process of learning, progress, current achievement levels, and next steps in learning, along with skills in articulating this information to their parents, aligned with the criteria for effective reporting (Absolum, et al., 2009; Guskey, 1994; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009; The New Zealand Assessment Academy, 2009). In the post-conference student survey, 73% of the students in Case Study 2 thought their understanding of their learning was *extremely good* or *very good*, and 21% of the students thought their understanding of their learning was *reasonably good*. While survey results were very similar to students surveyed in Case Study 1, the Case study 2 interviewed students' ratings showed students were Levels 3 and 4 in all five 'Student Competency' dimensions, including 'Understanding of learning'.

At the beginning the process of implementing student-led conferences, students and teachers in the two case studies started at different 'Student Competency' levels and finished at different levels. In both studies, the Year 5 and 6 students made more consistent progress in developing knowledge, understanding, and skills in articulating their learning than Year 3 and 4 students. Explanations for these results could be attributed to students' levels of maturity, but another plausible theory that the Year 5 and 6 students had the more experienced and 'Assessment literate' teachers, who were able to modify and develop their class-based practice through the process of implementing student-led conferences.

Findings in this study showed 'Student Competencies' were influenced by teachers' beliefs about students' capacity to develop understanding of all aspects of their learning, and their beliefs about their role in the reporting process. Students in Case Study 2 demonstrated that with six months preparation, it was possible for Year 3-6 students to lead a reporting process that met most, if not all criteria for effective reporting using student-led conferences. Both case studies showed the process of implementing student-led conferences did improve students' understanding of their learning.

In the literature on student-led conferences, little has been said about the development of specific ‘Student Competencies’ needed for students to successfully lead a conference about their learning, or the need for systemic development of students’ knowledge, skills, and understanding of themselves as ‘Assessment literate’ learners over time, for them to be successful in leading conferences about their learning. Mention of student skills, or knowledge, has been embedded in information on what teachers should do to prepare students for student-led conferences (Fox, 2006; Guskey & Bailey, 2001). The ‘Student Competency’ dimensions could be used as a guide by teachers to systematically develop students as ‘Assessment literate’ learners and leaders in the reporting process, competent, capable, and ready to take responsibility for, and ownership of, their learning.

Research and policy challenges

Currently there is a strong focus at a national level to create more consistency in reporting student progress and achievement to parents, in clear, easy to understand language as seen in the New Zealand Education Amendment Act (New Zealand Government, 2008) and the Ministry of Education Reporting Guidelines (2010b). Consistency and clarity in reporting relies on the quality of assessment information made available, and how well it is understood by its intended audience. Assessment is complex and not easily explained in brief written reports. Shared understanding needs to be built over time, with teachers, students, and parents.

Effective reporting involves clearly defined tasks to meet specific goals, focused on student achievement, shared responsibilities, explicit processes, and mutually accountable partners (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Reporting policy needs to recognise that the quality of any reporting method is an end result of the organisation of inter-related and integrated school systems that inform the reporting process.

For the last decade, the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s ‘Assessment for Learning’ professional development initiatives have focused on teachers using effective formative teaching practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Absolum, et al., 2009). While these contracts have created school-wide consistency in teaching pedagogy, more work needs to be done around how teachers use assessment information, what data is collected, how it is collated and analysed, and how the information from the data is used to inform teachers, students, and parents. Findings from this study show interaction between assessment, teaching, and learning, varied both within and between schools, a sentiment

echoed by the Education Review Office (2008) and the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2010a). There is more work to be done to ensure teachers have the capacity to ensure students are informed about all aspects of their learning, so that students understand the purpose of their learning, their next learning steps in learning and how to get there.

Limitations and implications for further research

Findings in two case studies have been compared to a theory of effective reporting using student-led conferences and used to develop a theoretical framework for the implementation of student-led conferences. To have replicated the study in more schools would have broadened the scope of the study and improved external validity. Further research could include schools from different socio-economic groups, different contexts, and different sectors. It could also include students from Year 1-10, rather than students from Year 3-6, which was the age range chosen for this study.

To further strengthen internal validity, collecting initial information about the schools' current context and capability around assessment and reporting could inform the implementation of student-led conferences in a more deliberate way. Information about participating teachers, could be used to tailor professional development to more specifically support teachers as they prepared students for student-led conferences. For future studies, resources that develop teachers', students', and parents' understanding of learning in the context of reporting at different levels could be developed. Professional development as an intervention could then be analysed, as to the extent to which it impacted on teachers' practices, students' learning, and outcomes of the student-led conferences.

In a larger study, to compare teachers', students', and parents' reflections and interpretations of the student-led conference with evidence from the actual student-led conference would provide another rich source of evidence. Analysis of video footage would provide additional information about individual student-led conferences, such as the quality of the relationship between the student and their parents, the levels of engagement of parents during the conference, and the depth and breadth of information discussed. Building 'respondent validation', as described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), into semi-structured interviews would be another way to strengthen internal validity. Providing teachers, students, and parents with additional knowledge about the study, the theories being tested, and their views on these as part of the semi-structured interviews could lead to different interpretations of qualitative data.

Currently, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has a strong focus on improving the quality of reporting to parents because of the evidence that shows parental engagement in their children's learning is a strong indicator of future success in learning. As has been shown in this study, while teachers and parents expect the reporting process to meet a multitude of purposes, no one reporting method can serve all purposes of reporting, or resolve all issues in reporting effectively. Where schools focus reporting on learning, student-led conferences can be an effective reporting method at different levels and designed to support teachers', students', and parents' learning about process, progress, achievement, and 'next steps' in learning in individual school contexts.

To further test and evaluate the conceptual model, audit and evaluation tools need to be developed along with replications of this study. This will refine the processes school leaders and teachers with different levels of capacity in teaching, learning, assessment and reporting use, to design and implement student-led conferences as a reporting method for individual school contexts. To understand what happens to students' and parents' learning over time, and what impact student-led conferences have on student achievement, would also add value to this area of research. Longitudinal studies of schools using student-led conferences could measure the impact of professional development, teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting on teachers', students', and parents' development, but also the impact this has on student progress and achievement results over time.

Conclusion

In summary, if the purpose of reporting is 'learning-focused', and schools want student-led conferences to be effective as a reporting method, clarity of purpose, careful analysis of current assessment and reporting practices, teacher and parent identification of key reporting issues, teachers' current levels of 'Assessment Literacy', and students' levels of 'Student Competencies' should inform the design of individualised student-led conference reporting practices. In this way, the process of implementing student-led conferences in different school contexts (at different levels), will become more focused on achieving outcomes and levels of effectiveness that align with current assessment and reporting practices, a focus on improvement in reporting practices, expectations of teachers, students, and parents, and a theory of effective reporting.

The theory of effective reporting and models developed from findings in this study provide frameworks to strengthen reporting in schools. Criteria can be used by schools to benchmark

progress towards becoming a ‘learning-focused’, student-centred school community, that is effective in reporting to parents using student-led conferences as a reporting method.

Student-led conferences require teachers to be effective student-focused practitioners. They require teachers to find a different balance between coverage of the curriculum and ‘mastery’, or understanding, of curriculum content. Student-led conferences work if teachers engage with assessment information, to inform their teaching programmes, and to inform students about their progress and achievement. To do this effectively, teachers have to use lesson time in ways that engage students in quality conversations about their learning. This research highlights the importance of effective professional development that supports teachers at different levels, to become effective, student-centred practitioners.

Student-led conferences focus teachers on supporting students to develop the competencies needed to become informed ‘assessors’ of their own and others’ learning. As they prepare and conduct conferences about their learning, students are developing their knowledge and understanding of themselves as learners. They are also developing ‘real life’ skills in presentation, making the reporting process an authentic part of students’ learning.

Student-led conferences create new ways for parents to learn about their child’s progress and achievement in learning. Over time, they have the potential to systemically support all parents to become informed partners in the learning process, and more able to understand how learning can be supported at home. Student-led conferences improve parents’ attendance, participation, engagement with, and understanding of learning. They create social democracy in the reporting system, because power traditionally held by teachers is shared with students and parents. Learning-focused student-led conferences can effectively provide quality information about the process of learning, progress and achievement, and ‘next steps’ in learning.

As schools work towards becoming ‘learning communities’ that are effective in preparing students for the 21st century, the nature of teaching and learning is changing. Teachers are learning to work in new ways and creating different types of partnerships with students and parents. Effective 21st century reporting systems need to be learning-focused, student-centred and underpinned by new definitions of partnerships in learning. This study has shown that through student-led conferences, students can develop competence and confidence as ‘assessors of their learning’, teachers can develop their ‘assessment literacy’ and parents can become genuine partners in the learning process.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Initial interview: Teachers

Name: _____

Date: _____

Background:

1. Can you tell me about your background in teaching? (Years of teaching, school/s you have taught at, levels, people that have influenced your teaching practice)

Assessment:

2. In the last few years assessment has become a focus in school professional development. How do you define assessment?
3. How has professional development in formative assessment influenced your teaching practice? (Give examples)
4. To what extent do you involve students in assessment of their learning in the classroom? (Give examples)
5. Can you describe the assessment systems used here at Prospect School?
6. What information does the school's assessment system give you about the progress and achievement of students in your class?
7. How do you use this information?

Reporting:

8. Can you describe the formal systems of reporting to parents that you have used, in the past and currently?
9. What do you think is the purpose of reporting? Why do you think this?
10. What information do you think parents want in a written report?
11. What information, as a teacher, do you think is important to be in a written report?
12. What information is in the written report used at this school?
13. How well do you think the information is understood by parents? Why do you think this?
14. What, if any, improvements would you make to the current written report used at your school?

Teacher-Parent Interviews:

15. Can you describe the system of Teacher-Parent Interviews used in this school?
16. What do you see to be the purpose of Teacher-Parent Interviews? Why do you think this?
17. How do you structure your Teacher-Parent Interviews? Why do you do it this way?
18. What makes a Teacher-Parent Interview successful?

19. What, if any, improvements would you make to the current Teacher-Parent Interview system used at your school?
20. How would you define an educational partnership between home and school?
21. To what extent do you think parents embrace the concept of educational partnership?

Students and Reporting:

22. What was your initial reaction to the concept of student-led conferences? Why did you think this?
23. What do you see to be the strengths of this reporting method?
24. What are some of the challenges you see in introducing this type of reporting? Why do you think this?
25. Can you describe your students' reaction to the idea of student-led conferences? Why do you think they responded this way?
26. How do you think parents will respond to the Student-led Conference method of reporting? Why do you think this?

Motivation:

27. What do you think motivates students to want to learn?
28. What strategies do you use in your classroom teaching to motivate students?
29. How motivated do you think your students are about learning? Why do you think this?

Appendix B: Initial student interview

Code No: _____

Background Information:

What is your name?

How old are you?

What year level are you?

What language/s do you speak at home?

Learning:

1. a) How much do you like learning? (*Read the descriptors*)

Not at all	Not very much	A reasonable amount	Very much	Heaps
1	2	3	4	5

b) Why is that?

2. a) How well do you understand your learning? (*Read the descriptors*)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

b) Why do you give yourself that rating?

3. I am going to read you a list of ideas that can make learning fun for kids.

Read list of possible reasons. Can you give each idea a rating from 1 to 5 for how much you agree that the idea makes learning fun

1 is Do not agree at all , 2 is Agree a little bit, 3 is Agree, 4 is Agree a lot and 5 is Agree totally

When I know what to do	1	2	3	4	5
When the instructions are on the board	1	2	3	4	5
When the activities are interesting	1	2	3	4	5
When I can work with someone else	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I can work by myself	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I am doing subjects I like	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I have done something well	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I know why we are learning something	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I get to choose how to do my learning	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I am good at it	1	2	3	4	5 <input type="checkbox"/>

Can you think of any other things that make learning fun for you?

What would they be?

4. Can you explain why you gave these ideas these ratings? (Pick top two and bottom two ratings to discuss/ask for an example if appropriate)

5. a) How well do you think you are doing with your learning? (*Read the descriptors*)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

- b) Why do you think that? (Is that for all subjects? What about different subjects? Would your answer be different for different subjects? Why?)

6. How often does your teacher tell you how you are doing with your learning?

Not often	Some days	About once a day	About once a block	About once an hour
1	2	3	4	5

7. How often does your teacher give you help with your learning? (*Read the descriptors*)

Not often	Some days	About once a day	About once a block	About once an hour
1	2	3	4	5

8. How often do you feel you need help with your learning?

Hardly any of the time	Not much of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1	2	3	4	5

9. What are the things your teacher does to help you with your learning? (Probe - What sort of help makes learning easier / more fun? Can you give me an example?)

10. a) How confident are you right now to talk about your learning to other people?

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

- b) Why did you choose that rating?

Parent-Teacher Interviews:

At this school you have a Parent-Teacher-Student Interview in Term 1 and a Parent-Teacher Interview in Term 2 and you get a report at the end of the year. Is that right?

11. a) Do you go to the interviews? (If the answer is No go to Question 11)

b) When you went to these interviews did you

- i) Sit quietly and listen
- ii) Answer some questions that you were asked
- iii) Do some of the talking
- iv) Do lots of the talking and explaining

c) *If students answered some questions or did some or lots of talking* What did you say or what did you talk about? (Can you give me an example?)

12. a) Do your parents talk to you about your learning after they have been to the Mid-year Parent-Teacher interviews? (*Read the descriptors*)

Never	Occasionally (1–2 times)	Usually	Nearly every time	Every time
1	2	3	4	5

b) If they do, what do they talk about with you? (Can you give me an example?)

13. a) How much do your parents help you with your school-work at home? (*Read descriptors*)

Not at all	About once a month	About once every 2 weeks	About once a week	More than once a week
1	2	3	4	5

b) *If they do help at home* ‘What sorts of things do they do to help you?’ (Can you give me an example?)

Reporting

I want to talk now about your parents and what they know about your learning.

14. When your parents get your end of year report do they talk to you about it?

Never	Occasionally (1–2 times)	Usually	Nearly every time	Every time
1	2	3	4	5

15. a) How much do you think your parents know about your learning? (*Wait for a response – match it to the closest criteria – or probe to ask them which would be closer*)

Nothing	Not much at all	A reasonable amount	Quite a lot	Heaps
1	2	3	4	5

- b) Why do you think this? (Probe - How do you know? Can you give me an example?)

16. a) In general, how much do your parents talk to you about your learning/school-work?

Not at all	About twice a month	About once a month	About once a week	More than once a week
1	2	3	4	5

Student-led Conferences:

Student-led Conferences: The last two questions are about student-led conferences.

17. a) Has your teacher talked to you about student-led conferences and what they are? (If the answer is Yes go to b)

- b) Can you explain to me what a Student-led Conference is?

18. a) What do you think of the idea of you reporting to your parents about your learning?

Not a good idea	Not a very good idea	A reasonably good idea	A very good idea	An extremely good idea
1	2	3	4	5

- b) Why do you think this? (Good points/bad points)

Appendix C: Initial Interview: Parents

Name: _____ Date: _____

There are four sections in this interview. The first section looks to get a bit of background information about you.

Background:

1. Can you tell me about your background in education - where you were educated?
2. How long has your child / children been at Flanshaw Road School?
3. How long is your association with the school?

Less than 1 year	Between 1 & 2 years	Between 3 & 4 years	Between 6 & 7 years	More than 7 years
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4. In what ways do you, or have you, been involved in the school? (functions attended / time spent in the school / contact with teachers /trips / sports days / camps / committees?)

Reporting:

Because this study is about reporting to parents we are interested to find out what you think about reporting from a parent's perspective. These next questions are focused on written reports that you get at the end of the year (i.e. written information about student progress and achievement from school to home).

5. As a parent what information do you want in a written report?
6. Can you tell me about Flanshaw Road School's end of year report that is sent home? (What information is in it? / layout / type of language used / computer-generated? etc)
7. How well do you understand the information that is in the reports? Why is this?
8. What, if any, improvements would you make to the current written report used at this school?

Parent-Teacher Interviews:

The next set of questions I'd like to ask you are about your experience of Parent-Teacher Interviews.

9. Can you describe the system of Parent-Teacher Interviews used in this school? (Prompts: 2 types – Term 1 and Term 2 / Timing / organization / who attends / when they are held / flexibility if you can't attend / quality and type of information you receive / how comfortable you feel about attending)
10. What do you see to be the purpose of Parent-Teacher Interviews? Why do you think this?
11. In your experience how are the Parent-Teacher interviews structured? (What is talked about? In what order? Who makes the decisions about this? What do you contribute?)

12. What makes a Parent-Teacher Interview successful for you?
13. a) Does your child attend Parent-Teacher interviews with you? *Why? Why not? (If they say the child does not attend go to Question 14)*
 b) Do you talk to your child / children about their learning after you have been to the mid-year Parent-Teacher interviews? *(Read the descriptors)*

Never	Occasionally (1-2 times)	Usually	Nearly every time	Every time
1	2	3	4	5

c) If you do, what do you talk about? (Can you give me an example?)

14. What, if any, improvements would you make to the current Parent-Teacher Interview system used at Flanshaw Road School?
15. How do you think teachers should define their role/ job in communicating with parents? (What should they do to support a home-school partnership with you the parents?)
16. As a parent, how do you interpret your educational partnership role in relation to that of your child’s teacher? (Prompts could include – facilitator if there are problems, to advocate, get help if needed, support with homework, help out with trips, know what’s going on etc...)

Students and Reporting:

The next set of questions is about students and reporting. We are interested in your views about the involvement of students in the reporting process.

17. For the last few years this school has invited students to the mid-year Parent-Teacher interviews. What do you think about this? Why do you think this?
18. When you heard about student-led conferences what was your initial reaction to the concept of your child leading a conference about their learning with you? Why did you think this?
19. What do you see to be the strengths and / or the challenges in this type of reporting method?
20. a) Have you discussed the concept of student-led conferences with your child?
21. (If the answer is ‘No’ go to question 20)
 b) If you have can you describe your child’s reaction to the idea of student-led conferences? Why do you think they responded this way?
22. How do you think other parents will respond to the Student-led Conference method of reporting? Why do you think this?

Motivation:

The last few questions explore your views about student learning and motivation.

23. a) How well do you think your child understands their learning at present?

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

b) Why do you think this?

24. What do you think motivates children to want to learn? (Prompts could include – knowing what they are learning and why, encouragement, a good relationship with the teacher, interest in the subject, making learning fun, being successful)

25. a) How motivated do you think your child is about learning at present?

Not at all motivated	Not very motivated	Reasonably motivated	Very motivated	Extremely motivated
1	2	3	4	5

b) Why do you think this?

26. What strategies do you think teachers do, or should use, to motivate students? Why do you think this?

27. a) Right now how confident do you think your child would be in talking to you about their learning?

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

b) Why do you think this?

28. At present how much time would you spend helping your child with their learning?

Not at all	Less than once a month	About once every two weeks	About once a week	More than once a week
1	2	3	4	5

Please explain your rating

29. As a parent, what are some of the things you do to support your child with their learning?

Appendix D: Pre-conference interview: Selected teachers

Name: _____

Date: _____

Background:

1. Can you give me an overview of the things you have been doing over this term to prepare your class for the student-led conferences over two terms / this term / in the last two weeks
 - Class sessions (based on work book)
 - Professional Development – staff meetings
 - Professional Development and team organisation - team meetings
 - QLC's
 - Other

Assessment:

2. What is the format of the portfolio that is being used to report to parents as part of the Student-led conferences in your class? (What is in it? / the order)
3. Who developed the agenda format for the students to use during the conference? Why do you think it was developed this way?
4. What information have you focused the students on sharing with their parents, about their learning, during the conference? (Is this different / the same / some of / all of what is in the portfolio or not?)
5. What teacher-generated information about the progress and achievement of students is being given to parents as part of the Student-led Conference? (In what format?)
6. What was the process used to get the achievement information about the student's progress and achievement? (School tests? Class tests? Assessment methods used? – measurement tools?)
7. How well do you think your students understand the achievement information?

Not at all well	Not very well	Quite a well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this?

Preparation for the student-led conferences:

8. Can you describe in more detail what you have done to develop your students' knowledge, skills and understanding of their learning for the conference evening? (In different subject areas, over time, questioning focus, feedback, dialogue about assessment, student role-plays etc...)
9. What have been the challenges?
10. What, if any, effect has the preparation for these conferences had on your teaching?

11. From your observations of your students over the term, what effect has the preparation for these conferences had on your class's motivation and attitude towards their learning? (lower-ability students, average students, higher-ability students?)
12. At this point in their preparation, how well do you think students in your class understand their learning, where they are at and what their next learning goals are?

Not at all well	Not very well	Quite a well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this? (Examples to illustrate?)

13. At this point, how confident do you think the majority of your class are about running their conference?

Not at confident	Not very confident	Quite confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this? (Examples to illustrate?)

14. What preparation, if any, were you planning to do in these last few days leading up to the conference with the class? Why?
15. What have you thought to do to scaffold your less confident / less able students before and during their conferences?
16. What, if anything, would you do differently if you were preparing students for student-led conferences again?

Teacher-Parent Contact:

17. What, if anything, do you want to share with parents the Student-led Conference Evening?
18. Why do you think this?
19. Are there specific parents you want to see / talk to – if so what about?
20. What, if any, worries / concerns do you have about the conference evening at this stage?
21. What strategies have you thought about / do you intend to use to manage these potential difficulties?

Appendix E: Pre-conference interview: Selected students

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

The student-led conferences are not very far away now. We wanted to talk to you about what you are going to be doing, and how the preparation for the conferences has gone for you.

Assessment:

1. What is the agenda for your student-led conference? (The order of things you will talk about?)
2. What information are you giving your parents about your learning during the conference? (What sorts of things will you tell them about – writing, reading, maths, visual art, topic, ICT)
3. a) What information about your learning has written to give your parents as part of the student-led conference?
b) What is this information? (School tests? Class tests? Assessment\methods used? Achievement Information used)
4. How well do you understand the achievement information? (The below/at /above information- the matrices, the stages) (*read indicators*)

Not at all well	Not very well	Quite well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

Why did you choose that rating? (At least one reason would be helpful here)

Preparation for the student-led conferences:

5. Can you give me some examples of things you have done in class to get ready for the conference with your parents (In different subject areas, over time, questioning focus, feedback, dialogue about assessment, student role-plays, invitations, practicing their conferences with peers / students in other classes etc...)?
6. What are the things you have done that have been helpful for you? (What has helped you the most get ready for the conference?)
7. What have been the hard parts so far?

Self Assessment:

8. How well do you think you are doing in your learning?

Not at all well	Not very well	Quite well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this?

9. Has getting ready for the Student-led Conference had any effect on how hard you try in class/on your effort?

Not at all	Not very much	Some	Quite a lot	Lots
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this?

10. At this point, how confident are you about running your conference?

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Quite confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this? (Examples to illustrate?)

11. What, if anything, would help you feel more ready?

12. What, if anything, would you do differently if you were getting ready for student-led conferences again?

Teacher-Parent Contact:

13. What do you think your parents are going to think about the conference? (that you have learned a lot/pleased/upset/disappointed??)

Why do you think this?

14. What, if any, worries do you have about the conference evening at this stage?

15. What do you need the teacher to do to help you before, during and / or after the conference

Appendix F: Post student-led conference parent questionnaire

Room Name: _____

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Reporting

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about student-led Conferences?

Do not agree at all	Do not agree very much	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree very much	Agree totally
1	2	3	4	5

(Please circle the number that applies)

a) I got good information about how my child/children are doing 1 2 3 4 5

b) The information was easy to understand (portfolios, student work, samples, demonstrations, teacher's comments) 1 2 3 4 5

c) I understood the grading systems used 1 2 3 4 5

d) My child/children explained things they had been learning about clearly 1 2 3 4 5

e) I was able to make another time to talk to the teacher about any concerns not discussed at the end of the Student-led Conferences

Yes No Not needed

2. How well did the information you got from the student-led conference/s explain the following areas of learning?

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

(Please circle the number that applies)

- a) Progress your child / children has made with their learning 1 2 3 4 5
 - b) Information about your child / children’s achievement compared to a national standard or age comparison 1 2 3 4 5
 - c) Understanding of the process of learning your child has been involved in 1 2 3 4 5
 - d) Your child’s next learning goals 1 2 3 4 5
 - e) Information about how your child/children assesses themselves as a learner 1 2 3 4 5
 - f) Other (please state)
-
-

3. What, if anything, did you not like about the student-led conferences? (Tick the box of the comments you agree with)

- a) I did not get good information about how my child is doing
- b) The information was not easy to understand (portfolios, student work samples, demonstrations, teacher’s comments)
- c) I did not understand the grading systems used
- d) My child did not explain things they had been learning about clearly
- e) I did not talk to the teacher about concerns I had

4. What, if anything, would have made the student-led conferences more effective for you?

5. Having taken part in a Student-led Conference, to what extent do you support the idea of student involvement in the reporting process? (Please circle one)

Not at all keen	Not very keen	Reasonably keen	Very keen	Extremely keen
1	2	3	4	5

Why is this?

6. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of student-led conference as a reporting method? (Please circle one)

Not at all effective	Not very effective	Reasonably effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
1	2	3	4	5

Assessment

7. How well did you understand the information about your child children’s progress and achievement from the student-led conference format? (Please circle one)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

8. How well do you understand the way your child’s levels / stages of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, as it was reported in the student-led conference format? (Please circle one)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

9. How well do you think your child / children understand their learning? (Please circle one)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

10. How confident do you think your child / children are as learners? (Please circle one)

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

11. How confident do you think your child / children was when running their conference? (Please circle one)

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

12. How much do you help your child/ children with their school-work? (Please circle one)

Not at all	About once a month	About every two weeks	About once a week	More than once a week
1	2	3	4	5

Student Motivation

13. How much do you think your child / children enjoy learning at present?
(Please circle one)

Not at all	Not very much	A reasonable amount	Very much	A lot
1	2	3	4	5

14. How motivated do you think your child / children is towards improving their learning?
(Please circle one)

Not at all motivated	Not very motivated	Reasonably motivated	Very motivated	Extremely motivated
1	2	3	4	5

15. How important do you think the following factors are in motivating children in their learning?

Not at all important	Not very important	Reasonably important	Very important	Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5

(Please circle the appropriate number for each statement)

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| a) Clear guidelines | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| b) Recognition and rewards for effort and success | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| c) Encouragement | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| d) An enthusiastic teacher | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| e) Work at the right level | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| f) A variety of fun activities | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| g) Knowing the purpose of their learning | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| h) Linking learning to their experiences | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| i) Being involved in decision-making about learning | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| j) Other (please state) | |

16. To learn about my child / children's progress and achievement I would prefer:
(Tick the box of the comment/s you agree with)

- a) Parent –Teacher Interviews
- b) Parent-Teacher-Student Interviews
- c) Student-led conferences
- d) Written Reports
- e) Other (please state)

Demographic Information

i) **Gender:** Male Female

ii) **Ethnicity:**

N.Z European Maori Pacific Islander
Asian Other Please state _____

iii) **Country of Origin:**

New Zealand Other Please state where _____

iv) **Years associated with this school as a parent / care-giver:**

0-2 Yrs 2-5 Yrs 6-10 Yrs 11+ Yrs

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix G: Post student-led conference questionnaire

Room Name: _____

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Reporting

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about student-led conferences?

Do not agree at all	Do not agree very much	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree very much	Agree totally
1	2	3	4	5

(Please circle the number that applies)

- a) I got good information about how my child / children are doing 1 2 3 4 5
- b) The information was easy to understand (portfolios, student work, samples,
demonstrations, teacher's comments) 1 2 3 4 5
- c) I understood the grading systems used 1 2 3 4 5
- d) My child / children explained things they had been learning about clearly
1 2 3 4 5
- e) I was able to make another time to talk to the teacher about any concerns not
discussed at the end of the Student –led Conferences

Yes No Not needed

2. How well did the information you got from the Student-led Conference/s explain the following areas of learning?

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

(Please circle the number that applies)

- a) Progress your child / children has made with their learning 1 2 3 4 5
- b) Information about your child / children's achievement compared to a
national standard or age comparison 1 2 3 4 5
- c) Understanding of the process of learning your child has been involved in
1 2 3 4 5
- d) Your child's next learning goals 1 2 3 4 5

e) Information about how your child / children assesses themselves as a learner
 1 2 3 4 5

f) Other (please state)

3. What, if anything, did you not like about the student-led conferences?
 (Tick the box of the comments you agree with)

- a) I did not get good information about how my child is doing
- b) The information was not easy to understand (portfolios, student work samples, demonstrations, teacher's comments)
- c) I did not understand the grading systems used
- d) My child did not explain things they had been learning about clearly
- e) I did not talk to the teacher about concerns I had

4. What, if anything, would have made the student-led conferences more effective for you?

5. Having taken part in a student-led conference, to what extent do you support the idea of student involvement in the reporting process? (Please circle one)

Not at all keen	Not very keen	Reasonably keen	Very keen	Extremely keen
1	2	3	4	5

Why is this?

6. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of student-led conference as a reporting method?
 (Please circle one)

Not at all effective	Not very effective	Reasonably effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
1	2	3	4	5

Assessment

7. How well did you understand the information about your child /children’s progress and achievement from the Student-led Conference format? (Please circle one)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

8. How well do you understand the way your child’s levels / stages of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, as it was reported in the Student-led Conference format? (Please circle one)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

9. How well do you think your child / children understand their learning? (Please circle one)

Not at all well	Not very well	Reasonably well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

10. How confident do you think your child / children are as learners? (Please circle one)

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

11. How confident do you think your child / children was when running their conference? (Please circle one)

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Reasonably confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

12. How much do you help your child/ children with their school-work? (Please circle one)

Not at all	About once a month	About once every two weeks	About once a week	More than once a week
1	2	3	4	5

Student Motivation

13. How much do you think your child / children enjoy learning at present? (Please circle one)

Not at all	Not very much	A reasonable amount	Very much	A lot
1	2	3	4	5

14. How motivated do you think your child / children is towards improving their learning?(Please circle one)

Not at all motivated	Not very motivated	Reasonably motivated	Very motivated	Extremely motivated
1	2	3	4	5

15. How important do you think the following factors are in motivating children in their learning?

Not at all important	Not very important	Reasonably important	Very important	Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5

(Please circle the appropriate number for each statement)

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| k) Clear guidelines | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| l) Recognition and rewards for effort and success | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| m) Encouragement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| n) An enthusiastic teacher | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| o) Work at the right level | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| p) A variety of fun activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| q) Knowing the purpose of their learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| r) Linking learning to their experiences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| s) Being involved in decision-making about learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| t) Other (please state) | | | | | |

16. To learn about my child / children’s progress and achievement I would prefer:

(Tick the box of the comment/s you agree with)

- a) Parent –Teacher Interviews
- b) Parent-Teacher-Student Interviews
- c) Student-led conferences
- d) Written Reports
- f) Other (please state)

Demographic Information

- i) **Gender:** Male Female
- ii) **Ethnicity:**
N.Z European Maori Pacific Islander
Asian Other Please state _____
- iii) **Country of Origin:**
New Zealand Other Please state where _____
- v) **Years associated with this school as a parent / care-giver:**
0-2 Yrs 2-5 Yrs 6-10 Yrs 11+ Yrs

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix H: Post conference interview: Selected students

Name: _____

Date: _____

The student-led conferences have now been done. I'd like to talk to you about what happened with your conference.

The Student-led Conference:

1. How much did you enjoy it?

Not at all	Not very much	Quite a lot	Very much	A lot
------------	---------------	-------------	-----------	-------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Why do you think that?

2. Can you tell me about what order you did things in during your Student-led Conference? How much of it went according to the agenda you had planned? (What happened?)
3. (If English is a second language) Which language did you do your conference in? Why was that?
4. How much do you think your parents enjoyed it?

Not at all	Not very much	Quite a lot	Very much	A lot
------------	---------------	-------------	-----------	-------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Why do you think that?

5. How much do you think your parents know now about your learning?

Not much	Not very much	Quite a lot	Most things	A lot
----------	---------------	-------------	-------------	-------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Why do you think that?

6. What do you think your parents learnt about you, and your learning, during the conference? What did you tell them? (Prompts here might include – what my goals were for different subjects / how I got better in each subject / how I made something – process / product / demonstration)

7. How much of the talking did you do during the Student-led Conference?

Not much talking	About 1/4 of the talking	About 1/2 of the talking	About 3/4 of the talking	All of the talking
------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

How much did your parents talk?

Not much talking	About 1/4 of the talking	About 1/2 of the talking	About 3/4 of the talking	All of the talking
------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

8. How much did the teacher talk?

Not much talking	About 1/4 of the talking	About 1/2 of the talking	About 3/4 of the talking	All of the talking
1	2	3	4	5

What did they talk about?

9. How well do you think you explained the information to your parents? Why do you think this?

Not at all well	Not very well	Quite well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

10. Which part of the conference was the easiest? Why was that?

11. Which part of the conference was the hardest? Why was this?

12. Which was the best part? Why was that?

Reflection upon learning:

13. Of all the things you did to get ready for the conference in class what was the most helpful thing/s ?

14. How well do you understand your learning now?

Not at all well	Not very well	Quite well	Very well	Extremely well
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this?

Has this changed from – for instance – last term?

15. How hard have you tried in your learning in class because you had the Student-led Conference coming up?

Not at all hard	Not very hard	Quite hard	Very hard	Extremely hard
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this?

16. How confident do you think you are now to talk about your learning?

Not at all confident	Not very confident	Quite confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
1	2	3	4	5

Why do you think this?

17. Was doing the conference what you expected it to be like? Why? Why not?

18. What would you do differently if you were going to do another Student-led Conference?

19. How keen would you be to do another conference?

Not at all keen	Not very keen	Quite keen	Very keen	Extremely keen
1	2	3	4	5

Why is that?

Teacher-Parent Contact:

20. We talked about worries you had before the conference – did they happen? What did you do about them?

21. How much did the teacher help you during the conference?

Not at all	Not very much	Some	Quite a lot	A lot
1	2	3	4	5

22. What did your parents say to you when you got home?

Thank you for answering these questions.

Appendix I: Codes for qualitative analysis

Topic: Reporting

Categories: Linked to the Analytical Framework for Reporting

- Reporting linked to learning
- Social Purposes
- Traditional Issues
- Student-Centered Reporting

Sub-categories:

- Beliefs
- Practices (descriptions)
- Consequences (descriptions of outcomes – expected and unexpected)
- Parent and Student Participation Levels, General statements about reporting
- Other

Topic: Teacher Assessment Literacy

Categories: Linked to the Analytical Framework for assessing Teachers' Assessment Literacy

- Assessment literacy as it links to Teaching and Learning
- Student involvement in assessment
- Clarity about 'Next steps in learning'
- 'Big Picture' understanding of assessment
- Assessment as it links to reporting

Sub Categories:

- Beliefs
- Descriptions of practice
- Reflection on outcomes – expected and unexpected
- General statements about assessment, as it links to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting
- Other

Topic: Student Competencies

Categories:

- 'Assessment Literacy'
- Student motivation for learning
- Student confidence to share information about learning
- Student capability to articulate learning
- Student understanding of learning

Sub-categories:

- Initial descriptions
- Preparation for student-led conferences
- Reflections on the Student-led Conference experience
- General statements about learning, as it linked to student-led conferences
- Other

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