

Time to ditch school reports

Much has been said about the 'traditional' ways in which student learning is communicated to parents. The written school report and the parent-teacher interviews are products of another era when we didn't have access to the internet and emails. Every school has their own version of the report, which can provide a lot of information or sometimes little information about a child's progress. Then there's the parent-teacher interview, which, in some cases, can be education's version of speed-dating. These communication channels are usually dominated by one voice: the teacher's.

In a world where student voice is becoming increasingly recognised, many schools here and overseas are adopting Student Led Conferences (SLCs). The aim of SLCs is for parents to see learning from the student's perspective. This happens by allowing students to report back to parents on their learning journey.

Some primary schools begin their SLCs in kindergarten with teachers gently guiding students through the process. In one primary school I am aware of, students role-play beforehand in order to develop their confidence and presentation skills. Teachers see this as a valuable learning opportunity in itself.

Secondary school students have the opportunity to dive deeper into their learning by reflecting on their individual strengths, subject highlights and areas for improvement. Teachers will provide feedback along the way giving parents an interactive and 360 degree view of their child's learning rather, than the one dimensional view that characterises the traditional parent-teachers interview model.

One of the great stories I heard about SLCs was from a parent of a child with additional learning needs. The student who is now in Year 2 was leading a SLC recently and had to politely tell her teacher to refrain from talking so that she could lead the discussion. The parent found this approach more insightful and meaningful than a written report.

SLCs will end up replacing the standard parent-teacher interview as we develop new ways of communicating with parents in real-time and new opportunities for students to direct and reflect on their learning.