What is a profile?

In simple terms, a profile is a scale depicting progress in learning. The profiles of literacy consist of descriptions of reading, writing and spoken language. Each scale presents a detailed description in a series of nine levels called bands and labelled from A (lowest) to I (highest). They are designed to assist teachers, schools and systems with the complex process of assessment, recording and reporting on students’ developing competencies and achievements.

An essential feature of a student's profile is that it shows growth. Through its ordered sequence of bands, the profile makes explicit what it means to progress in learning. It provides a framework against which evidence of an individual’s progress can be charted and achievements of a school or even an education system can be monitored.

Profiles were first developed in the mid 1980s by the State Department of Education in Victoria (Griffin and Jones 1986). The research and development unit was asked to develop a system of monitoring literacy programs in schools that did not involve standardised, paper and pencil testing. This was especially important, since most of the literacy programs focussed on the early years of primary school in which paper and pencil tests were impossible to administer and could not provide adequate data for decision-making. In 1985, the project team surveyed schools to identify teacher assessment practices. The findings from that survey suggested that it would be possible to use the wide variety of assessment skills and methods that teachers already used in schools and to highlight these in a way that gave teachers confidence in their own judgements and approaches to student assessment.

Although the range of assessment methods had been shown to be appropriate for the teachers’ purposes, there was a need for better ways to communicate students’ achievements to the State Department, parents and others involved in student education. Views were sought from parent and employer agencies regarding their
expectations of reporting, and from the literature on student assessment and reporting, particularly in literacy and other basic skill areas.

The first area to be addressed for monitoring was student literacy. Despite the relatively common approach to the literacy curriculum in schools, there seemed to be no commonly shared means available to teachers that would assist them to document the changes in students' literacy. Thus, there was a need for assessment and reporting strategies that reflected the changes and assisted the observation, interpretation, recording and reporting of achievements.

Teacher observation and judgement were central to the development of student assessment strategies. This belief was based on the understanding that teachers observed, interacted and changed with students on a constant basis throughout the school day. As such, there could be no richer source of information about student learning, change and progress. Teachers assess students continuously and intuitively by observation, interaction, questioning, directing, evaluating and supporting students in the process of learning. This formative, analytical and intuitive assessment is one of the most powerful influences in promoting students' educational growth and development.

There are obviously a large number of approaches to assessing student learning. Any one of the many methods of assessment provides evidence of an observable behaviour that can be used as an indicator of learning. However, each on its own provides only a small part of the overall picture of student learning and development. The information a teacher observes on one occasion or which a test provides on a given day might be considered as necessary information to conclude that learning has occurred, but it may not be sufficient. The information may be appropriate to the circumstances in which the learning is taking place but it may not be adequate for other audiences. Information must be both appropriate and adequate to conclude that progress in learning is occurring.

By harnessing and formalising the wealth of information incorporated in teacher observation and intuition and using commonly shared ways of interpreting, recording and communicating the information, the relevant audiences (i.e., student, parent, teacher, school, system, employer and community) can be better informed about students' established attainments and developing literacy. Moreover, the combination of multiple observations from both formal and informal methods of assessment in the form of Profiles, would provide a more comprehensive view of student performance and competence, and add to the validity of the conclusions reached.
Thus the major aim of the Profiles was to make both the formal (standardised tests and related assessment tasks) and the informal (implicit, intuitive and formative) assessment practices of teachers explicit and available to others, so that this powerful range of information could be systematically gathered, recorded and communicated. Profiles aim to provide teachers with both practical and comprehensive competency indicators, using a common language. While traditional assessment procedures such as standardised tests might be used to inform and assist validation of the assessment process, no one test, or even a battery of tests alone, could be sufficient to meet either the explicit or implicit criteria entailed by the notion of developing competence.

Assessment and reporting

Assessment is a process that goes on throughout the year. It is not a one-time event in teaching and learning. It is a gradual gathering of information, or evidence, that learning is occurring. Every time a teacher asks a student a question, assessment occurs. The reactions and comment a teacher makes is a form of reporting. In between, the teacher interprets the student's answer, checks against other information (possibly stored in the teacher's memory) and adds the most recent piece of information. Thus, the basic sequence of teaching is the same as assessment and reporting (see Griffin and Nix 1991, Griffin 1994). Moreover, the form of reporting will determine to a large extent, the way information is gathered, stored, retrieved and used. Reporting may be the most influential aspect of teaching and its washback effect on assessment may be the first component of the assessment washback process.

The literacy profiles development process

The development of Profiles has been extensively documented by Griffin and Nix (1991) and more recently by Griffin (1994). Essentially, the process began with teachers of grades K-3 identifying the areas of literacy development for the students they teach. This was originally done in a series of workshop exercises. They identified 36 areas including, among many others, reading and comprehension, spelling, independent reading, approach to unknown words, literature, attitudes to reading, beginning writing, sequencing (children's
writing) and revising and editing.

The teachers worked together to reach agreement on what they called the ‘key milestones’. Taking the area of ‘independent reading’ as an example, the teachers specified ‘interest and awareness of books’, ‘recognition of print symbols’, ‘understanding concepts of print’ and ‘developing a cueing system’.

Once there was agreement, teachers were asked to describe and agree on the most appropriate methods to assess these milestones in the classroom. The link between assessment and teaching emerged and it became clear that distinguishing between these two classroom activities was artificial. Then the task was to cross the milestones with the assessment strategies and develop a matrix like the one below.

Each cross point (for instance ‘direct observation’ in relation to ‘understanding concepts of print’) was called a cell, where an assessment technique is applied to a milestone. The task then was to agree on the evidence to show how the ‘key milestone’ was demonstrated using the assessment method. In a sense they were engaged in an attempt to identify indicators for each relevant cell. (The word ‘relevant’ is important because some cells could reasonably remain empty.) For the example of ‘towards independent reading’ the matrix with its indicators is shown below.
### Figure 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES</th>
<th>TOWARDS INTEREST AND AWARENESS OF BOOKS</th>
<th>INDEPENDENT RECOGNITION OF PRINT SYMBOLS</th>
<th>READING UNDERSTANDING CONCEPTS OF PRINT</th>
<th>DEVELOPING A CUEING SYSTEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMAL CONFERENCING</strong></td>
<td>Acts out characters/events from stories.</td>
<td>Consistently 'reads' familiar words and symbols.</td>
<td>Responds appropriately to punctuation. Can predict one-to-one correspondence between written and spoken words. Reading indicates appropriate directionality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GAMES &amp; DRAMA</strong></td>
<td>Consistently 'reads' familiar words and symbols.</td>
<td>Points out familiar words</td>
<td>Completes cloze activities. Supplies appropriate words in spaces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORAL READING</strong></td>
<td>Points out familiar words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEACHER TESTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In some workshops, parents joined the teachers to identify indicators and to help form the matrices. This also helped to ensure that the language was generally understood by a large range of audiences.

Field testing and band scales

Field tests almost always led to matrices being changed, though with successive field tests the degree of change diminished. The purpose of the field tests of the matrices was to check the appropriateness of the indicators and to ascertain whether the descriptions of learning were able to be used by different teachers, in different classrooms and under different teaching and language models.

After the field tests of the matrices, the project reached a point where some breakthrough was required to make the matrices, the indicators and milestones useful. Thirty-six matrices were developed covering just the skills of reading and writing. The sheer size of the material made them unusable. Teachers could not use thirty-six matrices to observe classes of students and the ‘Milestones’ project team were unsure of how to develop the project further. The project stayed in a hiatus period for some months. During that time the project staff became involved in an international project to develop English tests for International students wishing to study in British, Australian or Canadian universities (International English Language Testing System (IELTS)). During this project, scales of proficiency in ESL were developed by the IELTS project team and it became clear that the descriptions of increasing proficiency in English as a Second Language were very similar in nature, emphasis and intention to the descriptions of literacy development teachers had used to describe their evidence that students were developing literacy skills. The IELTS descriptions of language capability were collected into clusters called bands and sequential bands demonstrated progress in English language that university students were making towards the goal of native-like proficiency in English. The Lancaster model of the IELTS proficiency scales (with their descriptions of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking bands demonstrating growth in language skills) offered a solution to the problem of what to do with the matrices in the ‘Milestones’ project in Melbourne. The problem was to transfer the isolated indicator statements from the matrices to a proficiency scale. The word band seemed to offer a neutral description for the levels in a growth continuum and the proficiency scale of ESL offered a model for the application of the indicators developed by teachers.
A combination of item response theory (Rasch 1981) and matrix sampling offered the opportunity to obtain the data required without making excessive demands on teachers. Item Response theory, in particular the Rasch rating scale model (Wright and Masters 1981) takes rating scale data and allows the identification of an underlying cohesive relationship between items (or in this case indicators). A matrix sample enables all indicators to be observed without asking all teachers to observe all students on all indicators in all matrices. To do this, overlapping lists of indicators were distributed among project teachers to gather data for calibration purposes and a rating scale was used to describe their observations of students on all of the indicators. A zero (0) was to be used if the teacher had not observed a student exhibiting an indicator; a one (1) if the teacher had observed the behaviour but was not convinced that the behaviour was consistent and that this type of behaviour was still developing; and a two (2) if the teacher considered that the indicator was now an established part of the student’s repertoire of reading related behaviour. Item response theory enabled the indicators to be calibrated so that all indicators could be mapped onto one continuous progression or scale. The students were then compared directly to indicators of general reading and writing development in order to interpret their proficiency level. This analysis enabled the indicators to be mapped onto a single continuum mapping a variable ‘reading’ or ‘writing’ or ‘spoken language’. Not all indicators were able to be included. Some did not fit the analytical model. An interesting outcome of this analysis was the sharp distinction between school-based reading indicators and home-based reading indicators. The bands were labelled from A through I setting band A at the earliest developmental level. The bands for reading and writing are presented below.
Figure 2:

**WRITING BAND A**

What the writer does: Uses writing implement to make marks on paper. Explains the meaning of marks (a word, sentence, writing, letter). Copies "words" from signs in immediate environment. Reads, understands and explains own "writing".

What the writing shows: Understanding of the difference between picture and print. Use of some recognizable symbols in writing.

Use of Writing: Comments on signs and other symbols in immediate environment. Uses a mixture of drawings and "writing" to convey and support an idea.

**WRITING BAND B**

What the writer does: Reproduces words from signs and other sources in immediate environment. Holds pencil/pen using satisfactory grip. Uses preferred hand consistently for writing.

What the writing shows: Use of vocabulary of print-letters, words, question marks. Use of letters of the alphabet and other conventional symbols. Use of letters in groups to form words. Placing spaces between groups of "letters". Knowledge that writing moves from left to right in lines from the top to the bottom of the page.

Use of Writing: Writes own name.

**WRITING BAND C**

What the writer does: Commences writing without assistance. Has a personalized handwriting style that meets most handwriting needs. Checks written work by reading it aloud. Sound out words as an aid to spelling.

What the writing shows: Legible writing with recognizable words. Words put together in a sentence format. Words written in a logical order to make a sentence that can be read. Upper and lower case letters used conventionally. Written sentences that can be understood by an adult.

Use of Writing: Sentences convey messages on one topic. Uses "I" in writing. Writes about feelings, judgement or direct experience. Creates characters from experience and immediate environment.

**WRITING BAND D**

What the writer does: Marks most common words with incorrect spelling when editing writing. Uses ideas, themes and structure from books in writing. Uses concepts of order and time in writing. Reads, rereads and revises own written work. Uses everyday words in appropriate written context.

What the writing shows: Punctuation used conventionally. Conventional spelling used most of the time. Spelling shows recall of visual patterns. Story can be read, understood and read by classmates. Several sentences constructed on one topic in a logical order. A smooth connection of ideas. Beginning, middle and end in narrative writing.

Use of Writing: Stories contain characters from outside personal environment. Writes with ease on most matters of personal experience. Writes on a variety of topics. Writes personal anecdotes.

**WRITING BAND E**

What the writer does: Edits work to a point where others can read it. Corrects common spelling errors, punctuation and grammatical errors. Develops ideas into paragraphs. Uses a dictionary, thesaurus, word checker, etc. to extend and check vocabulary for writing.

What the writing shows: Sentences have ideas that flow. Paragraphs have a cohesive structure. Ability to present relationships and to argue or persuade. Message in expository and argumentative writing can be identified by others but some information may be omitted. Brief passages written with clear meaning, accuracy of spelling and use of punctuation. Appropriate shifts from first to third person in writing. Consistent use of the correct tense. Appropriate vocabulary for familiar audiences such as peers, younger children or adults with only occasional inappropriate word choice. Compound sentences - using conjunctions. Variations in form, print styles or fonts. A print style appropriate to task. A consistent handwriting style. Use of Writing: Writes a properly sequenced text which has a convincing setting. Creates characters from imagination.

**WRITING BAND F**

What the writer does: Edits work to a point where others can read it. Corrects common spelling errors, punctuation and grammatical errors. Develops ideas into paragraphs. Uses a dictionary, thesaurus, word checker, etc. to extend and check vocabulary for writing.

What the writing shows: Sentences have ideas that flow. Paragraphs have a cohesive structure. Ability to present relationships and to argue or persuade. Message in expository and argumentative writing can be identified by others but some information may be omitted. Brief passages written with clear meaning, accuracy of spelling and use of punctuation. Appropriate shifts from first to third person in writing. Consistent use of the correct tense. Appropriate vocabulary for familiar audiences such as peers, younger children or adults with only occasional inappropriate word choice. Compound sentences - using conjunctions. Variations in form, print styles or fonts. A print style appropriate to task. A consistent handwriting style. Use of Writing: Writes a properly sequenced text which has a convincing setting. Creates characters from imagination.

**Use of Writing:** Completes standard forms requiring personal information. Makes appropriate use of narrative and other forms of writing.
Figure 3:

READING BAND A

Concepts about Print: Holds book the right way up. Turns pages from the front to the back. On request, indicates the beginning and end of sentences. Distinguishes between upper and lower case letters. Indicates the start and end of books.

Reading Strategies: Locates words, lines, spaces, letters. Refers to letters by name. Locates own name and other familiar words in a short text. Identifies known, familiar words in other contexts.

Interest and Attitudes: Responds to literature (smiles, claps, listens intently). Joins in familiar stories.

READING BAND B

Reading Strategies: Locates words, lines, spaces, letters. Refers to letters by name. Locates own name and other familiar words in a short text. Identifies known, familiar words in other contexts.

Reading Strategies: Takes risks when reading. "Reads" books with simple repetitive language patterns. Uses pictures for clues to meaning of text. Asks others for help with meaning and pronunciation of words. Consistently reads familiar words and interprets symbols within a text. Predicts words. Matches known clusters of letters to clusters in unknown words. Uses knowledge of words in the environment when "reading" and "writing". Recognises base words within other words. Names basic parts of a book. Makes a second attempt at a word if it doesn't sound right.

Reading Strategies: Selects own books to read. Describes connections among events in texts. Works, role plays and/or or draws in response to a story or other form of writing (e.g., poem, message). Creates ending when the text is left unfinished. Recounts parts of text in writing, drama, or art work. Retells using language expressions from reading sources. Retells with approximate sequence.

READING BAND C

Reading Strategies: Rereads a paragraph or sentence to establish meaning. Uses context as a basis for predicting meaning of unfamiliar words. Reads aloud showing understanding of purpose of punctuation marks. Uses picture cues to make appropriate responses for unknown words. Uses pictures to help read a text. Finds where another reader is up to in a reading passage.

Reading Strategies: Writing and art work reflect understanding of text. Retells, discusses and expresses opinions on literature, and reads further. Recalls events and characters spontaneously from text.

Interest and Attitudes: Seeks recommendations for books to read. Chooses more than one type of book. Chooses to read when given free choice. Concentrates on reading for lengthy periods.

READING BAND D

Reading Strategies: Reads materials with a wide variety of styles and topics. Selects books to fulfill own purposes. States main idea in a passage. Substitutes words with similar meanings when reading aloud. Self corrects, using knowledge of language structure and sound-symbol relationship. Predicts using knowledge of language structure and sound-symbol to make sense of a word or phrase. Uses vocabulary and sentence structure from reading materials in written work as well as in conversation. Themes from reading appear in art work. Follows written instructions.

Interest and Attitudes: Recommends books to others. Reads often. Reads silently for extended periods.

READING BAND E

Reading Strategies: Reads to others with few inappropriate pauses. Interprets new words by reference to suffixes, prefixes and meaning of word parts. Uses directories such as a table of contents or index, telephone and street directories to locate information. Uses library classification systems to find specific reading materials.

Reading Strategies: Improvises in role play, drawing on a range of text. Writing shows meaning inferred from the text. Explains a piece of literature. Expresses and supports an opinion on whether an author's point of view is valid. Discusses implied motives of characters in the text. Makes comments and expresses feelings about characters. Rewrites information from text in own words. Uses text as a model for own writing. Uses a range of books and print materials as information sources for written work. Reads aloud with expression.

READING BAND F

Reading Strategies: Describes links between personal experience and arguments and ideas in text. Selects relevant passages or phrases to answer questions without necessarily reading the whole text. Formulates questions and finds relevant information from reading materials. Maps out the plots and character developments in novels and other literary texts. Varies reading strategies according to purposes for reading and the nature of the text. Makes connections between texts, recognizing similarities of themes and values. Discusses different aspects of a genre. Discusses authors' intent for the reader. Discusses stories used by different authors. Describes settings in literature. Forms generalisations about a range of genres including myths, short story, etc. Offers reasons for the feelings provoked by a text. Writing and discussion acknowledge a range of interpretations of text. Offers critical opinion or analysis of reading passages in discussion. Justifies own appraisal of a text. Synthesises and expands on information from a
Consultations

Teachers and language consultants were consulted in several countries. The band scales were distributed to teachers and a sample of academics, consultants, and inspectors and other advisers in several Australian states, in New Zealand, the United States, Ireland and the United Kingdom. They were asked to act as 'expert informants' and to review the draft version of the bands; to advise on the need to edit, delete or move the indicators included in the bands or (if they considered that important indicators of the development of reading were missing) to suggest additional indicators. Advice was also sought on the structure, appropriate use and suitability of the band scales. The Profiles therefore describe indications of increasing achievement. Early levels of achievement are described in terms of beginning level skills, knowledge, and concepts; the bands progress then to outline more advanced skills, deeper knowledge, and more sophisticated understandings.

The bands are meant to form a quasi cumulative scale. That is, a student placed at band E is likely to have behaviour patterns indicated by bands A, B, C and D as well as some behaviours in band E. It is not obligatory that every student exhibit all behaviours in each band. Teachers report that holistic impressions allow them to judge whether a student is beyond a band level, has not yet reached that level or is developing the behaviours at the level. Different interpretations of development were also possible. Some teachers felt more comfortable discriminating between students who were just beginning to exhibit the behaviours in a level and those who were well into the level but had not completely developed the level of competence. This interpretation of student progress was later adopted for more formal survey work during the field trials.

Data from pilot studies with the Profiles provided firm support for their cumulative nature. In general, students who are rated as having established the behaviours in a particular band have already established the behaviours described in preceding bands. However, the bands are far from a stepwise sequence of development. They are not perfectly equivalent in length and the rate of progress is not even across bands. Moreover, it is possible for students to demonstrate development of indicative behaviour in more than one band at any one time. For this reason, teachers are presented with three bands at a time in the profiles handbook. The pages are expected to be copied and included in the student's portfolio. This becomes a recording system of the evidence of progress. The comments section on the profile record also provides the opportunity for the teacher to make any pertinent annotation of the portfolio information. Nutshell statements (see Figure 3) contain the gist of each band level. Instructions to the teacher encourage them...
to use the nutshell statement first to get the gist of the level rather than use the
detail as a mandatory list. This also encourages a holistic approach to the use of
judgement based on nutshell and levelness rather than detail and using the bands
for confirmation. Teachers are strongly advised not to check off each indicator as
a compulsory behaviour that all students must exhibit. The gist is used before the
list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Profile Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing band C**

**What the writer does**
Commences writing without assistance. Has a personal handwriting style that meets most
handwriting needs. Checks written work by reading a draft. Sounds out words as an aid to spelling.

**What the writing shows**
Legible writing with recognisable words. Words put together in sentence format. Words written in
logical order to make a sentence that can be read. Upper and lower-case letters used conventionally.

**Use of writing**
Sentences convey message on one topic. Use of spelling. Words about feelings, judgement or direct
experience. Names characters from experience and immediate environment.

**Writing band D**

**What the writer does**
Marks most common words with incorrect spelling when editing writing. Uses ideas,
themes and structure from books in writing. Uses concepts of order and time in
writing. Reads, rereads and revises own written work. Uses everyday words in
appropriate written context.

**What the writing shows**
Punctuation used conventionally. Conventional spelling used most of the time;
spelling showing recall of visual patterns. Stories that can be read, understood and
read by classmates. Several sentences constructed on one topic in a logical order. A
smooth connection of ideas. Beginning, middle and end in narrative writing.

**Use of writing**
Names stories containing characters from outside personal environment. Writes with
ease on most matters of personal experience. Writes on a variety of topics. Writes
personal anecdotes and letters to friends. Writes for a known audience. Uses a range
of written forms — poems, letters, journals, logs, etc.

**Writing band E**

**What the writer does**
Edits work to a point where others can read it. Corrects errors in spelling, punctuation and
grammatical errors. Develops ideas with paragraphs. Uses dictionary, thesaurus or word-checker
to expand and check vocabulary for writing. Uses vivid, specific language.

**What the writing shows**
Sentences with ideas that flow. Paragraphs with a cohesive structure. Ability to present relationships,
and to argue or persuade. Messages in exposition and argumentation. Writing admired by others,
although some information may be omitted. Brief passages written with clear thinking, accuracy of
spelling and use of punctuation. Appropriate style from first to sixth person in writing. Commonsense
use of the correct tense. Appropriate use of vocabulary for familiar audience with specific, younger children
or adults. Written with interest and appropriate word choice. Compound sentences, using pronouns.
Variations of letters, print styles or forms. A prose style appropriate to task and consistent handwriting.

**Use of writing**
Writing composed under instruction for a reading audience. Names characters from imagination.

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**COMMENT**

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Figure 4: An Example Writing Profile Record.
Recording and reporting with profiles

Recording and reporting information about learning has been a difficult issue for many teachers. There has been a huge amount of research into assessment issues but very little into reporting and next to none into recording methods. Reporting methods may indeed be the initiator of washback effects of assessment. The mode of reporting, so often taken for granted, may determine the form of assessment which in turn is argued to affect teaching practices. Portfolios have been developed in recent years as a means of storing assessment information. But the communication of the assessments has remained unchanged from grade levels, percent scores or grades. There is little available to tell teachers, parents and others with an interest in student growth and development three pieces of information that are important for planning, diagnosis and for resource allocation. These are: Where is the student now? What is the rate of progress? and How does this compare to peers?

Reporting and recording assessments with the profiles will be illustrated with an example of a student who has been developing in reading and writing at a little slower rate than his peers. His name is Gary. Although this analysis is based on one piece of writing, it would be normal to expect a portfolio of writing samples to form the basis of the assessment.

Gary is a grade 6 boy. He is 14 years old. Obviously he is older than usual for his grade level. Progress has not been automatic. His teachers had been encouraging Gary to write on a range of topics for some years without a great deal of success. In his fifth year, Gary’s teacher discovered his passion for racing cars. He allowed Gary to read and write and prepare his class talks on this topic without restriction. Gary suddenly became interested in writing, and ‘read’ as many car magazines as he could lay his hands on. Gary now willingly seeks out stories and writes on this topic. He was watching the San Marino Grand Prix when Ayrton Senna crashed. Gary’s story of the event became a watershed in his literacy development. His story is presented in detail by Griffin, Smith and Burrill (1995). Taking this example as a basis, it is possible to present different forms of reports that illustrate answers to the following questions: Where is Gary now? What has his rate of progress been? How does he compare to his peers?
The literacy rocket

A student’s progress can be represented using nutshell statements and a graph illustrating the full range of the continuum if the range where a student group is expected to be developing is located on the graph. These norms have been established through surveys of students using teacher judgement as a data source. These are extensively reported by Griffin (1994) and by Hill (1994). This is illustrated in Figure 3, which is called the Literacy Rocket. There are several components of the rocket. First, the nutshell statements illustrate the progression of literacy described by the profiles by providing summary statements about what the student can do. Second the box in the stem of the rocket presents the expected level for the middle 50% of a year level cohort. Finally, the rocket presents the teacher with an opportunity to place the student on the profile scale using both normative and criterion referenced information.

This is such a simple task. Suppose that Gary’s work was contained in a portfolio with reading logs, tapes of his speaking, reports of his discussions and so on. The teacher would only need to build the profile once every few weeks. The richness of the assessment would feed into teaching and be based directly on the assessment of the student’s work. The teacher only has to mark the rocket as illustrated with a small shaded region to show Gary’s progress. Now, Gary and his parents can be shown what he has achieved, where he is heading and how he compares to the ‘norm’ for Grade six. There is both norm referenced interpretation and criterion referenced interpretation on the same report.
Writing Profile Rocket

Class 6
Teacher Ms. Smith

Writes in many genres. Masters the craft of writing. Is capable of powerful writing.

Uses rich vocabulary, and writing style depends on topic, purpose and audience. Writing is also lively and colorful. Can do major revisions of writing.

Can plan, organize and polish writing. Writes in paragraphs. Vocabulary and grammar are suited to topic. Can write convincing stories.

Now says something in own writing. Is writing own sentences. Is taking interest in appearance of writing.

Knows that writing says something. Is curious about environmental print. Is starting to see patterns.

Is learning about handwriting. Knows what letters and words are and can talk about ideas in own writing. Is starting to write recognizable letters and words.

Can write own stories. Changes words and spelling until satisfied with the result.

Can describe things well. Can skillfully write and tell a story or describe phenomena. Now has skills to improve writing.


50% of the Grade 6 students can be located within this range. Norms for all grades can be identified by locating the 'box' from the box and whisker plot in Chapter 13 for the relevant skill.

Gary is estimated to be at about this location on the profile. See the worked example for writing shown on pages 106-8.

Figure 5: A Writing Profile Rocket
Plotting rate of progress.

Another form of individual record keeping and reporting based on profiles was devised by a school district in New York State. They created a box and whisker plot for their school district. They presented the norms for the school district and monitored student growth from year to year compared to norms. The report was accompanied with the full text of the profiles. Obviously the use of criterion referenced reporting and recording formats allows great flexibility and enormous communication ability of the part on the teacher and the school. Using this approach, Gary's progress was plotted over a number of years. In the diagram, the norm (box) for the grade level can be used as a reference point and the progress used to illustrate the rate of progress. In Gary's example there has been dramatic growth in both reading and writing from grade 5 to grade 6. If this information is supplemented with portfolio examples of his work, parents and teachers alike can gain a very clear understanding of his development. This is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 6: A Box and Whisker Report Showing Rates of Progress.
Gary’s progress is represented by the dot (•) under the box plots. His progress over the six years of school is represented by his position at the end of each school year and this information has been added to Gary’s portfolio. The permanent record of Gary’s development shows some remarkable development in the upper primary years. Teachers getting this kind of report would see that Gary has had a slow beginning. Gary’s teacher was able to show that improvement occurred late in primary school. Because it is a judgement made on the basis of continuous information and observation in class, there is little chance of the change being dismissed as an aberration attributable to a different testing program or to coaching for a testing program. The profiles can help to overcome many of the negative aspects of assessment.

The class record

Using a standard class list, the profiles can be mapped onto the list using the nutshell statements to illustrate levels of growth. Examples from Gary’s class are illustrated below. This helps to establish local comparisons and for the teacher to gain a continuous overview of the relative development of all students in the class. A thermometer approach (that is, adding small bits to the record as improvement is seen and matched to the bands) would be best in this case so that the development and accumulation of skills can be seen. The example above illustrates how a small class group can be recorded according to the Profiles for Writing.

Teachers can use highlighter pens to illustrate the rate of progress by adding a different colour on the chart each term to show progress. It is like topping up the chart to show the amount gained this term. This is shown in Figure 7 below. The different shading on the top of the profile chart bars for each student illustrates the progress made in a single school term. Some have advanced more than others but Gary’s progress can be shown to be spectacular and recent using this approach.
## Writing Profile Class Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Writes in many genres. Masters the craft of writing. Is capable of powerful writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Uses rich vocabulary, and writing style depends on topic, purpose and audience. Writing is also lively and colorful. Can do major revisions of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Can describe things well. Can skillfully write and tell a story or describe phenomena. Now has skills to improve writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Can plan, organize, and polish writing. Writes in paragraphs. Vocabulary and grammar are suited to topic. Can write convincing stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Can write own stories. Changes words and spelling until satisfied with the result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Now says something in own writing. Is writing own sentences. Is taking interest in appearance of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Is learning about handwriting. Knows what letters and words see and can talk about ideas in own writing. Is starting to write recognizable letters and words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Knows that writing says something. Is curious about environmental print. Is starting to see patterns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7:** The Class Record Reporting Format.
In the example class record above, Gary can be shown to be below the expected range for his grade level but he has other students in his class who are at similar levels. The range in the class is quite large and the teacher would have to develop an instructional approach to compensate for the range of development. This alone illustrates to teachers and others that one approach can never work successfully. Graphic reports may also be supplemented by descriptive reports. Generally, teachers will not have time to write long descriptive reports about the student's development. However, profiles provide the opportunity to use the indicators to frame the descriptive report that shows what the student has completed, what they are working on now and the next signs of progress that can be expected to be seen. Parents can be involved in helping to develop those signs by working with the student.

Descriptive reports

Descriptive reports emerged about a decade ago in an effort to overcome a perceived competitive basis of norm referenced interpretation of assessment information. A difficulty with the descriptive report was that it often lacked information about progress or learning. Profiles provide the language which supports reporting on progress without the competitive basis of the report. This style of report might be best accompanied by the box and whisker style overview or by the 'rocket' chart report in order to put the report into context. The descriptive report below describes Gary's progress.

Gary is reading a wide range of materials now. He is able to identify appropriate reading materials for his interests and tends to read a lot of materials on racing cars if the materials are well illustrated and the captions are simple. He is prepared to tackle some materials on cars even when the text is difficult. This is particularly true if there are many pictures to help with the reading. He will need to broaden his reading materials in the next year. His relies on classmates and others in the school to discuss the material he reads.

His written work also reflects the books he reads. He writes his own stories and can check his spelling to a limited degree. His grammar will soon improve as he learns more about sentence and paragraphs and as he reads a wider range of materials. He writes about the things he has seen on TV and in the newspapers about car racing. His writing also reflects the conversations he holds with his classmates and others at school. His range of topics is limited but recently he has begun to write letters and other forms of writing. He can be expected to improve in both range and content of his writing in the near future as he begins to develop ways of planning his writing and his command of grammar and spelling.

Figure 8: An example Descriptive Report.
Conclusion

Profiles therefore can show how Gary has progressed. His development can be seen to have been dramatic late in grade 6 after his teacher realised that one topic would fire his imagination and allowed him to explore this area. His progress is plotted relative to his own rate of progress, relative to that of his classmates and relative to norms established by system-wide surveys. But quite apart from these norm referenced presentations the profiles also enable the teacher to report on the progress in terms of achievements. On the same chart, both norm and criterion referenced interpretations are presented. This enables the teacher to make maximum use of the information, but more than that it offers a flexibility in reporting to a range of audiences that no other assessment and reporting system seems to offer.

References


