Child Studies

2011 Assessment Report

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OVERVIEW

Assessment reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Practical Activity

Action Plan: Problem-solving

Evidence of learning in the action plan is provided in relation to the assessment design criterion Problem-solving.

Many students provided evidence of sound problem-solving and decision-making. Action plans were presented in a range of formats and the creative and strategic use of tables and dot points encouraged students to provide extensive discussion and some justification.

Teachers typically focused on specific features within one assessment design criteria this year, yet students still tended to address all features as has been taught in the past. Generally students were able to identify factors effectively, although some students did not discuss them or only did so in the context of the health and well-being of children.

Students who achieved a high standard addressed only factors that were specific to the task and justified them thoroughly. Students who attempted to address an extensive list of issues found it more challenging to provide enough justifications. High-achieving students were able to demonstrate strong forward-planning and analytical skills in identifying a range of implementation strategies for the practical application. Students do not need to identify 'Year 12 standard' or 'time available' as factors, since these influence everyone.

Implementation strategies should relate to the practical implementation of decisions made in the action plan. This year there were some concise outlines of how students intended to approach and implement the tasks. Unfortunately a significant number of students identified steps that had already been completed in the action plan (for example, 'research a disability' or 'search for recipes').

Teachers needed to be aware of changes to the performance standards this year, particularly in the area of problem-solving. Teachers should now refer to the 2012

subject outline, which is available on the subject pages for Child Studies on the SACE website (www.sace.sa.edu.au).

Research Task

Evidence of learning in the research task is provided in relation to the assessment design criterion Investigation and Critical Analysis.

Some research tasks were written as general topics, rather than statements, and were too broad to provide opportunities for in-depth investigation and critical analysis. If a task has a specific focus it is easier for students to identify and select relevant sources and information.

Students may need support in defining issues and contemporary trends and the differences between these terms. If a student is unsure what is meant by a contemporary trend in Child Studies, he or she may be unable to investigate this component at a higher level. At times more emphasis was needed on contemporary trends or issues and how they were part of the area of study. Research statements or questions can enable students to begin to think and write in the format required for the investigation.

Teachers are encouraged to avoid statements or questions that may produce a one-word answer (such as 'yes' or 'no'). For example, 'Are literature and stories important in the development of young children?' Suitable topics may be in the form of a question that has a single sharply defined focus, as this enables a student to demonstrate in-depth investigation and perceptive critical analysis. Teachers should phrase these statements to encourage students to write original information.

It was noted that some students incorporated their practical decision-making and justification within the research task's word-limit. This detracts from the intent and thoroughness of the research component of this assessment type. Some research tasks asked students to develop an opinion rather than enabling them to critically analyse a contemporary trend or issue as is now required.

Students used a range of primary and secondary sources and made greater use of in-text referencing than last year. Some students gathered statistics but sometimes used them ineffectively in the research task. Students should analyse all information for its relevance. In this way, they are able to clarify the meaning of the data and make the implications of their findings clear.

Sources should always be appropriately acknowledged and teachers are encouraged to teach students how to write footnotes, reference lists, and bibliographies. Teachers and students should refer to the referencing guidelines on the SACE website (www.sace.sa.edu.au).

In many cases students demonstrated sound literacy and numeracy skills. Students are reminded to write headings and captions on graphs, pictures, and tables, and to acknowledge sources.

Teachers should remind students to state the word count clearly in both written and multimodal research. Teachers and students should refer to the SACE Board's policy, which is available on the SACE website.

Practical Application

Teachers included the 'evidence of practical' in the task design and supported students in providing this evidence. The practical activity should make connections with the research from the area of study. Photographs, enhanced with captions, support the teacher's assessment decisions for the practical and help the moderators to understand the decisions more readily. It was pleasing to see comprehensive evidence presented in a variety of styles.

Teachers and students are encouraged to use keywords from the performance standards to provide evidence of student work. Teachers are reminded to include their feedback or grades for the student practical with the student evidence.

Students applied a wide range of technologies to enhance all aspects of their work.

Some teachers have supportively assessed student practical tasks with a heavier weighting than other parts of the task. It was pleasing to see that teacher feedback sheets had been further developed to include the specific features and grades rather than marks. This is important to support students to learn and use subject-specific terminology in their work.

Individual Evaluation Report

An individual evaluation report is completed in the final stage of the practical application. Teachers should select an appropriate range and combination of the specific features to be assessed in the report. They should also focus on demonstrating links between the research task, the problem-solving action plan, the practical, and the outcomes.

More scaffolding and explicit teaching of the terminology used in the performance standards would help to support students in analysing, forming conclusions, and identifying suggestions for improvement, particularly when students tend to provide only a basic description of what took place during the practical. Students are also reminded that it is wise to use different formats across the evaluation.

Teachers should continue to support students in providing recordings of oral presentations or other multimodal documentation as evidence of the discussion in this part of the task.

Assessment Type 2: Group Activity

Group Decision-making

Many teachers designed interesting group activities related a specific area of study. When two group activities were set some teachers assessed all available specific features rather than selecting features, which carried the risk of over-assessing. Few teachers chose to assess the criteria research, investigation and critical analysis, but this is an option to consider.

Some action plans in the group decision-making task did not include problem-solving discussion or evidence within the word-limit. It helps the moderators if a photocopy of the group decision-making task is included in each student's completed assignment

Teachers should continue to support students in providing recordings of oral presentations or other multimodal documentation as evidence of discussion in this task.

In the group decision-making task students provided evidence of collaboration in a variety of formats: written, DVD, tables, and lists. Some schools strategically discussed collaboration during the decision-making, in the group practical, and in the individual evaluation report. Many group activities clearly provided a range of opportunities for leadership within the group, and enabled students to negotiate with others in the school and wider community.

Group Practical Application

A range of group activities that reflected children in a culturally diverse society were presented for moderation. Teachers developed creative ideas for students to manage time, space, and access to meaningful resources. During practical applications students should apply knowledge and skills rather than recalling information on a poster, PowerPoint, or flyer.

Many students presented photographic evidence, with captions, for their group activity; it is important that each student in each group has a copy of such evidence if this format is used. Students who provided well-informed and thoughtful evaluations generally fulfilled the requirements of the specific features assessed in this part of the task.

Individual Evaluation Report

Some evaluations provided only a recount or basic description of the practical rather than making links to the group planning or research. It was concerning that some individual evaluation reports contained a considerable amount of research. Teachers and students should refer to the subject outline for guidance on this issue.

In oral reports the student work and teacher notes should clearly demonstrate evidence for the grade awarded.

Teachers are encouraged to remind students to evaluate the effectiveness and collaboration of the team.

Often, the discussion and evaluation of the impact of the technology on the health and well-being of children was not clearly addressed or was included with an inappropriate task.

Changes should be made on the addendum or next learning and assessment plan.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The task of selecting an original contemporary trend and/or issue posed a challenge for many students and for some classes as a whole. Topics that focused on the health and well-being of children enabled students to draw strong links with the

performance standards, and these investigations tended to achieve higher results. The hypothesis or research question should be carefully designed.

Investigations that called for critical analysis enabled students to achieve at the highest levels against the performance standards. Topics such as child abuse and domestic violence were unsuitable for the investigation as students who completed one of these topics could not critically analyse the information. Teachers should be mindful of the likely safety issues in potential topics, and students are strongly encouraged to select an appropriate topic that lends itself to critical analysis.

Most investigations reflected contemporary trends and/or issues. The most effective investigations were able to identify a trend and then break it down to specific skills, while others made statements rather than investigating a debate. Students did well when they developed an issue rather than presenting information on a topic, as they were able to develop an argument in their writing and to examine their chosen issue from a range of perspectives.

Many issues selected in Child Studies did not focus on children's health and well-being and it was sometimes hard for students to link child health and well-being with parental roles and responsibilities. Teachers should support students by providing close supervision of the investigation and guiding students on the structure and requirements of the task. The topic should be well defined, succinct, and stated as a question or hypothesis to produce a debate; many issues this year were couched as statements of fact with a foregone answer and so were not suitable for critical analysis, although there was still evidence of in-depth investigation.

Clearly defined focus questions, with supporting and achievable topics, gave students the opportunity to achieve at the highest levels. Teachers should ensure that students select useful focus questions that help them to provide opportunities for adequate critical analysis. Well-structured introductions provided a clear outline of the scope of the investigation. Precise details regarding methodologies and sources of information helped students to be successful.

Teachers are reminded to use the areas of study at the planning stage to guide students in developing an appropriate issue to investigate. A few of the studies this year were more like projects, often due to selection of a too-narrow topic rather than a clear and well-focused issue. However, many students did make a clear link to a selected area of study, which helped to define the focus of the investigation, and these students tended to stay on task. Students who made a clear association to an area of study developed well-defined focus questions. In some cases, students selected focus questions with very few links to the research question or hypothesis, and so were not in a strong position to critically analyse the selected issues in the discussion and analysis.

A range of topics were selected, including childhood obesity, TV and media influences. In an investigation topic such as 'teenage parents' the focus should be on children rather than parents.

Some students described rather than analysed the information in their investigation. Most students demonstrated strong research skills, but teachers may still encourage them in developing analytical skills for this task.

Most students selected a range of appropriate sources and used a balance of primary and secondary sources of information. References were generally handled

well, although some students did not include primary sources in their bibliography. Investigations at the higher levels tended to use quotes selectively, using only the most relevant materials.

A few investigations included graphs, tables, and diagrams without discussing them. To make the full use of such data, students need to refer to it in the text of the investigation.

Many students were creative in accessing information through email or blog-style sources. There was a strong dependence on the Internet and this formed the basis of evidence for some students; however, investigations that used no other source tended to attract low scores, as students' ability to examine the material for relevance and bias was limited.

Students may benefit from clear direction on the selection and interpretation of data, which may help them to avoid, for example, simple pie-charts and graphs that show 100% agreement with a statement. Students are advised to take care with interviews so that responses are not biased or treated as expert opinion, and are reminded that all surveys must be relevant to the task. It is recommended that teachers and students familiarise themselves with SACE Board referencing guidelines.

Teachers are encouraged to support students and supervise them closely throughout this task. Although many students achieved a high standard in their investigation, closer supervision of the drafting, editing, and proofreading stages would help to eliminate errors in, for example, grammar. Teachers should refer to the subject outline for guidance on conducting the investigation, and should also be familiar with the SACE Board's policy on the supervision and verification of students' work. This would support teachers in addressing concerns about what level of intervention in student work is permitted and how to safeguard against plagiarism. Teachers and students are reminded that plagiarising material is a breach of rules and carries a penalty.

It was pleasing to see that most investigations were closer to the word-limit of 2000 words this year, with fewer students going over the word-limit.

Students should take care to avoid identifying themselves, their teacher, or their school (for example, in an appendix or the bibliography). The more successful investigations were a pleasure to read; they demonstrated a depth of understanding of the contemporary trend or issue, clear communication, and a real interest in and enthusiasm for the research, while effectively addressing the performance standards at a high level.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Learning and Assessment Plan Design

It is noted that some teachers strategically selected specific features in the required assessment design criteria for each task, rather than aiming to cover all in every task. Teachers should exclude confidential information about students from the package and avoid discussing issues such as low levels of student literacy in the addendum.

Task Design

Some tasks were exciting and designed to enable students to achieve at the highest level. However, teachers should focus on refining their selection of specific features to be assessed in a task. Most teachers assessed all specific features in the research task, action plan, and evaluation, which limited students' ability to demonstrate in-depth, perceptive, and insightful work within the 500-word limit. Some tasks were too general for students to demonstrate focused skills at the highest level and, in some cases, students could not respond fully to the assessment design criteria and the specific features for the task.

When teachers set 'closed' tasks in the practical activity these did not always enable the students to demonstrate problem-solving or perform at a high level. Teachers are encouraged to continue to support students in presenting oral and multimodal tasks.

The group activity boundaries for the practical should be clearly shown on the task sheet.

Packaging

Generally learning and assessment plans were included in the packages, but often the version included was not the approved one with the accession number. It is important for moderators to have a copy of the approved learning and assessment plan (attaching an addendum if applicable), and teachers are reminded that the principal or SACE coordinator needs to sign them.

Teachers should follow the guidelines in the subject operational information (available on the Child Studies subject pages on the SACE website, www.sace.sa.edu.au) and check each student's sample before submitting it for moderation. This year SACE numbers were easily visible in the submitted work, and it would help the moderators to be able to see students' initials as well. Some teachers provided an overview cover sheet of each student's grades, which was beneficial. Some tasks were missing from student samples and it was not clear if this was due to students being absent or losing or not submitting the evidence for the task.

To help the moderation process:

- assessment tasks should be attached to the front of students' work, including the performance standards
- materials for moderation of Assessment Type 1: Practical Activity and Assessment Type 2: Group Activity should not be packaged together as they are moderated separately
- student work should not be presented in plastic folders or sleeves
- schools should not include drafts of student work (e.g. garments or learning activities); instead, teachers should support students in providing photographic evidence of their practical activities.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Good practice was observed during this year of transition to the new SACE. Some teachers are still using marks rather than grading student work according to the performance standards, although we anticipate that this will change in the future.

In many cases inconsistent feedback was provided to students about how to develop their understanding and skills. Teachers are reminded to provide specific feedback for each component to students who need it during the teaching and learning program.

There was some concern about teachers' grade calculations this year, both in the tasks and in the compilation of each assessment type. Teachers should take particular care when transferring results from marks to results sheets, to ensure that calculations are correct; this will help moderators to confirm teacher grades more readily.

Some multimodal student tasks were submitted this year, and we anticipate that more students will explore this option in the future.

Teachers should familiarise themselves with the SACE word-limits, as stated in the subject outline, and with the Board's policy on the supervision and verification of student work, particularly the rules about plagiarism.

Chief Assessor
Child Studies