Towards Consistency of Teacher Judgement

Sub Title: Moderation in All Things

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Consistency of Teacher Judgement: *Moderation in all things*


In regard to moderation.

Since 1994 with the release of the National Statements and Profiles Brisbane Catholic Education has been working towards:

- Providing teachers and schools with a road map of learning in the KLAs
- A common language for describing learning and assessment
- A community of judgement in relation to achievement of the outcomes.

The major aim has been shared professional understanding about the above and the major vehicle has been the “moderation process”.

After each moderation process members of the Curriculum Team from Brisbane Catholic Education have collected feedback and sought to improve the process for the following year.

For some time it has been suggested that while the present process has been refined and is working well within its own limitations it may not be the only nor indeed the most effective mechanism for supporting a wide range of teachers in achieving consistency in judgement across all strands of all key learning areas through the process of developing shared understandings.

This year in Health and Physical Education a focus group of teachers has been formed to discuss and trial other strategies to achieve this consistency in judgement. In addition Brisbane Catholic Education Curriculum personnel are now working with the Queensland School Curriculum Council on a small project to explore the same premise.

For the year 2000 and beyond, particularly with the new syllabuses, Brisbane Catholic Education should experiment with other strategies while still retaining the most effective elements of the previous process.

**The Purpose of the paper:**
To define "moderation"
To give a snapshot of the process as it has been
To articulate issues and benefits
To propose new directions
To generate discussion re the process, issues and value of 'moderation'.

**What is it:**
'Moderation' is a process in which teachers engage to support their development of common understandings of levels and phases that inform planning, teaching and learning, monitoring and assessing, reporting and evaluation. The 'moderation' process is designed to enhance a climate of collegiality and professionalism among teachers in Brisbane Catholic Education schools.
The History:
In 1994 a comprehensive review of curriculum in Queensland was published (Wiltshire et al, 1994). This review contained a number of recommendations which became a focus for a wide consultative process within the school communities of Brisbane Catholic Education. A set of approximately 25 recommendations emerged as a result of consultations. These were endorsed by the Brisbane Catholic Education Council for gradual implementation. The recommendations were titled Choosing Our Future, and they continue to provide a platform for curriculum reform. They also provided a strategic direction which has remained constant over subsequent years.

The recommendations were closely aligned with three reform areas: Curriculum Structures, Curriculum Frameworks and Quality Assurance (Choosing Our Future, Information Brochure For Teachers, 1994). 'Moderation' fits with the latter area, and relates to Recommendation 12:

'that each school work toward outcomes based reporting'; and

Recommendation 19:

'the moderation of student outcomes becomes a necessary component of effectively implementing outcomes based reporting'.

These recommendations recognised that reporting based on an agreed set of common outcomes such as Student Performance Standards (SPS) or the Early Years Diagnostic Net were appropriate mechanisms for:

- Focusing on individual student achievement
- Providing teachers with a common language for assessing and reporting
- Promoting educational accountability, and
- Encouraging curriculum renewal by recognising assessment and reporting as integral to the planning, teaching and learning cycle (Choosing Our Future Update 26, 1996).

At that time 'moderation' was described thus:

This refers to a process among teachers where the sharing of good practice and exemplary curriculum programs occurs, as well as the opportunity to develop 'a community of judgement' in relation to student achievement of outcomes.

The phrase 'a community of judgement' and general concepts such as 'sharing of good practice' started to become part of the language. At this stage there was no mention of 'comparison' of student achievements either within or between schools, and the term 'exemplary' has since disappeared as the notion of subjectivity was recognised through dialogue with teachers and principals. What was yet to be put together was the actual process of how this would look and be supported.

At the time some of us were hopeful that this process might counter balance the need for and the trend towards grand scale standardised testing as a means of public accountability (and comparability). A process that captured a rich and valid representation of individual student achievement (through the use of a common descriptive language and common judgements of standards or levels of achievement),
was perceived as more aligned with the values and principles underlying the mission of Brisbane Catholic Education.

**Moderation processes in the Early Years.**
In 1995 teachers in Years 1, 2 and 3 engaged in moderating processes in order to gain a greater understanding of the phases of the continua in Reading or Writing. For those of you familiar with the continua as per the First Steps Program, the Early Years Continua used by Teachers in Queensland is similar.

Extensive professional development had occurred prior to this initial inter school 'moderation'. It continues to occur in order to familiarise Early Years Teachers (Years P - 3) with the use of the Developmental continua in Reading, Writing - and later in Number. Teachers discussed the placement of students as per the phases on the continua and discussed the indicators and the observed behaviours that lead to this placement. Through this discussion, they were able to share their understandings of student placement, as well as the strategies they used to assist in making the judgments about such 'placements'.

For Early Years teachers, 'an inter school moderation process' has occurred mid year on a Pupil Free Day. As well as developing a consistency in teacher judgement, the process also contributed to teachers talking about and developing classroom intervention strategies for students, and in reporting to parents. This reporting was generally through parent interview.

The timing of the inter school 'moderation' closely followed *validation* in Year 2 where data was collected on the number of students identified at this point in time as being 'caught in the net'. In Queensland, validation tasks were developed for use with Year 2 students in May/June. In Brisbane Catholic Education schools these tasks were only used with those students where teachers were uncertain of their placement on the continua. The exception to this was that for the first time each strand was introduced, every Year 2 teacher was encouraged to use the validation task with each student as a professional development exercise so they could become familiar and comfortable with the key indicators for the phases.

A significant difference in the implementation of the continua between systems in Queensland was that Brisbane Catholic Education had an expectation all early years teachers would use the developmental continua and report on student development accordingly. All early years teachers had access to the support material and the professional development including that for associated classroom intervention strategies.

Pre school teachers were invited to attend professional development so that they too would have an understanding of the Early Years Developmental continua, although there was no expectation they would implement this. This strategy for the inclusion of all teachers in the early years professional development was to enhance the concept of continuity in learning for students P - 3.

Inter-school 'moderation' for Early Years teachers has been held at a different time from inter school 'moderation' in other years (Years 4-10) until this year, 1999.
The first Inter-School 'moderation' Years 4-8 (1996).
In 1996 'moderation' was extended to include teachers in Years 4 -8 in English. In the following years teachers of Years 9 and 10 have been gradually included. Inter school 'moderation' was held on a pupil free day in October at the same time as the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (Years 11 and 12) 'moderation'.

Professional development was offered to teachers in preparation for inter school 'moderation'. This included planning units of work incorporating learning outcomes in English (Student Performance Standards - otherwise known as SPS), and on 'moderation' processes for in - school 'moderation' held during Term 3 (Intra school 'moderation'), and Inter school 'moderation' on the pupil free day in Term 4.

It was an interesting time fuelled by the belief that assessment and reporting and thus 'moderation' was part of the planning, teaching and learning and assessment cycle. This however was complicated but by the fact that teachers were planning and teaching with an inputs designed syllabus and assessing and reporting with an outcomes based framework.

The SPS framework was perceived by some as difficult to understand. Some schools were using the National Profiles in English, resulting in confusion when teachers came together to 'moderate' as the outcomes/indicators were different from those in SPS which in turn were linked to the Queensland English syllabus. This confusion is discussed in the following recording of Daisy's talk:

The other documents might be easier to decipher but it really does make the moderation process difficult. I don't think Cath Ed lay down too many expectations. But if the employer wants you to try to get a consistency across schools, and they give you the scope and the freedom to do that, well I don't think its too much to ask teachers, at least to give it a try. Using easier documentation just makes it harder in the long run, especially if we are trying to help each other out, in understanding it all. I though THAT was what moderation was supposed to be all about. (Hanifin, P. Phd Thesis, 1999, p.166)

This has implications for the clarity of system advice to schools regarding appropriate documentation. Brisbane Catholic Education as a system has subsidiarity as one of its principles, however in hindsight more direction regarding documentation may have been useful in this situation. It was also thought that some of the resultant confusion was linked to the levels of understanding and engagement in the use of the Queensland 1-10 English syllabus.

Wisdom is always useful in hindsight and perhaps the mega effort involving some 900 teachers for inter school moderation across sites in the Archdiocese was too ambitious.

Teachers who had engaged in the process at a number of levels with school leadership support and that of curriculum officers (particular those who trained to be facilitators for the process on the day) found that the 'moderation' processes offered a number of wide ranging professional benefits. Generally, when the written feedback was reviewed there were significant positive perspectives named regarding the purpose and beneficial learnings exchanged on the day.
There was however aggravation expressed verbally on the day itself over what some teachers believed was an imposed system initiative, which indicated more work and a mistrust in traditional methods of teacher assessment and reporting. It was obvious that a shared understanding of the purpose and need for 'moderation' was not held by 100% of participants.

The system perspective however, was that 'moderation' was a means of supporting teachers in their understanding of outcomes based education. It had enormous potential for teachers learning from each other - sharing professional practice. It also had the potential back then to show in a public way that there were other reliable ways of reporting objectively on student progress rather than the juggernaut of standardised testing.

It could mean that rather than using processes which reinforce comparisons between the achievements of students on pen and paper limited item tests, a student's achievement could be judged in a reliable and consistent way by their teacher across a richer more extensive range of observable learning, and mapped in terms of their own growth in what they know and can do.

Teacher feedback has always been significant in influencing the way in which the "moderation" process has been refined over the years. It has also had a significant influence on professional development and support provided in subsequent years.

**What was the feedback initially?**

- It was a valued opportunity for sharing ideas about record keeping, management, folios, assessment strategies and the use of some of the resources such as criteria sheets prepared for the purpose.
- The instruments for planning assessment needed further development.
- The many changes to the document were not perceived to be helpful (which version was the correct one?).
- Teachers had difficulties in distinguishing between levels and interpreting the level statements with consistency.
- Teachers requested more inservice on understanding outcome levels and more preparation time to assign levels and prepare to report with confidence.
- Standard resources were requested such as report cards samples, work samples, criteria sheets, year level expectations.
- There was concern over parent education; and
- There was concern over teacher workloads.

**Some specific Teacher feedback:**

Siobhan refers to the first System organised inter-school moderation session, at which she “very nervously” assumed the role as facilitator.

*The moderation process was useful as it identified areas that were very clouded and it gave you the chance to try and work with others beyond the school to get some understanding. I think moderation as a process is a great opportunity to develop a shared understanding of Level statements, but I don’t think it’s about “I’m right and you’re wrong”. Some of the others felt that they had to get all of this levelling right. That just causes stress. I think though, that moderation*
forces you to be reflective because you have to consider what you are doing to help the students achieve the outcomes, what others are doing and then try to think of what you can do that’s better. After that moderation I realised that I needed to streamline the assessment. (Hanifin, P. 1999, Phd Thesis, P 226)

As referred to earlier, Daisy, when asked to reflect on practice, referred to the inter-school moderation as being a 'difficult and somewhat frustrating experience' whilst valuing the opportunity to share ideas. She attributed the problems being caused by some teachers’ use of documents other than official (SPS) ones to level student achievement. She believed that intra school moderation was of greater benefit to her (rather than inter school moderation) because she could talk on a 'level playing field'. (ibid, p.166)

The general feedback lead us to retain 'moderation' as a professional development activity aimed at assisting teachers reach a shared professional understanding not only of system wide initiatives but also of the 'outcomes' themselves. It provided a forum for the exchange of professional practice. We were able to listen to teachers - particularly to their comments regarding documentation and processes including the importance of intra-school moderation processes, consult with the Teacher's Union and with the support of system and school leadership, proceed.

The outcomes based approach to reporting provided an incentive for teachers to engage with recommended curriculum materials (eg syllabuses) and more structured resources were developed to support outcomes based reporting and engagement in 'moderation' processes.

To respond to the feedback regarding the need for more standard resources was difficult. There was a belief that the recently established intersystemic Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) might develop a consistent assessment and reporting framework. As it happened, the Curriculum Council was given no authority over reporting as this was deemed to be an employing authority responsibility.

The Queensland School Curriculum Council was however developing outcomes based syllabuses which required a different way of assessing and reporting, and we acknowledged that this may affect reporting frameworks. Investigation and trials with technology based instruments like Kidmap and Learner Profile were not successful for managing the tracking of outcomes. Brisbane Catholic Education is working with teachers as QSCC syllabuses in Health and Physical Education and Science are introduced and one of our major focuses in this work is for teachers to 'understand and be comfortable with the outcomes'. We believe that if we 'get this right' as a system of educators then we can truly say we are well on the way to having a 'shared professional understanding' - a 'community of judgement' as to when students have achieved the core learning outcomes of the syllabus.

However, returning to 1996-97, a review of SPS (the assessment and reporting framework) lead to the Minister for Education at that time to announce the demise of SPS and their replacement by Queensland Levels of Student Performance. Catholic schools had not yet begun to use SPS in Mathematics but the changes in direction forced us to discern a path and to stick with it rather than be subjected to constant (and perhaps politically based) changes to processes and resources. It also meant that we
needed to work with current frameworks and resources to make them more 'user friendly'.

An Interdiocesan project developed an instrument for use in Mathematics reporting which was heavily based on the Parent Descriptors from the Department of Education and Children's Services in South Australia in an effort to assist teachers with simpler resources which were both consistent with Queensland syllabuses and able to have wider application.

Although we now had, for all intents and purposes, a common framework or instrument as a basis for assessment and reporting, an earlier Queensland Teacher Union moratorium on SPS appeared to have a pervasive and remaining affect that spread beyond the government schooling sector.

Even today, although outcomes based assessment and reporting and models of 'moderation' occur in many government schools - with significant leadership being evident- there remains a challenge to rectify the myth retained by a few teachers in the Catholic sector that outcomes based education and associated 'moderation' processes have no status.

In 1997 'moderation' was continued on separate days for the Early Years and Years 4-8 in English and the Number strand in Mathematics. As in previous years evaluation was gathered and considered. The main findings reinforced the value of the process with teachers identifying the most important purpose being the collegial support, exchange of practice and reaching shared understandings of outcomes and judgements. Teacher response however continued to provide evidence that very different levels of knowledge, understanding and expectations existed regarding 'moderation'.

Brisbane Catholic Education has a very successful system of Key or Leading Teachers in place as a focus of professional development. This has been an effective means of professional development not only for the leadership growth of the Key/Leading Teachers, but for teachers with whom they work on their staff. It means however that not all teachers in the system have the direct initial access to professional development and support during the year. This places an enormous pressure on the leadership role of the Key Teacher in the preparation of others for "moderation".

It was becoming obvious that the experience of teachers participating in intra school 'moderation' had enormous influence on the 'success' of inter school 'moderation'. A growing professional commitment of all teachers to the process was becoming obvious (in both early years and Years 4 - 8). Feedback gathered according to each strand area, shaped preparation in terms of discipline knowledge, knowledge of outcomes, and processes for 'moderation'.

The emerging concerns expressed by teachers and consultants were for the heavy workload and with more Key Learning Areas (KLAs) coming on line we recognised that this needed to be monitored. It appeared also that in some cases 'subjects' were being seen in isolation and the concept of integration across KLAs may be lost.

Was progress being made?
Perhaps the comments from a teacher who partook in a national consistency project give a clear indication:

"As a teacher in a school in Brisbane Catholic Education that has persisted with Outcomes Based Reporting when other systems have not, it was rewarding to sit with teachers from all over the country and see how far we had come and the positive direction in which we are heading".
(Paula Carroll, Daisy Hill. Teacher representative at the National Consistency Project Conference, Melbourne, 1998).

Developments in 1999.

It appeared that 'moderation' was being seen as an event - and to a large extent, a one day event rather than a process integral to the planning, teaching, learning, assessment and reporting cycle. In 1999 it was recommended that in terms of support and planning, the emphasis on 'moderation' be placed on the process. To this extent generalist consultants and discipline based consultants worked together to design a process for 1999 which emphasised the need for school based teams and preparation and skilling, of school staff. Intra school 'moderation' was promoted as critical. As per feedback received from schools, Inter school 'moderation' this year for Years 1-10 will be held on the one pupil free day in October.

The process remains a major activity in terms of system and school organisation and preparation.

What does Moderation 99 look like:

The intentions for 1999 are:
• The aim was to move moderation from an event to a process.
• To link it to the teaching/learning process
• To have school based moderation teams ( to help with the school process and the preparation for intra and inter school moderation)
• To move the emphasis to intra school (or in some cases small group clusters)
• To clearly communicate 'the process for Moderation 99'
• To begin to use the term 'consistency of teacher judgement'

Schools were asked to form Moderation Teams from key people in English, Mathematics, Religious Education and Administration. This meant that the role for organising and preparing moderation at the school no longer resided with one person. Discipline based and early years network meetings were held each term (with combined meetings in term 2) where processes for moderation and the preparation of school staff occurred. Posters were designed with an outline of the process and a time line.

An outline of the overall process follows:

Term 1 was focused on Awareness raising and Decision Making. Network and Cluster meetings were held with school team members. Information was shared on the processes and the preparation of Student Folios was discussed.
Term 2 involved more **Strategic Planning and Preparation** with combined network meetings and further work on student folios. A Moderation Kit was developed for each school and Key/Leading teachers were provided an opportunity to work through its use at cluster meetings.

Term 3 was focused on **Participation**. During this term schools organised their Intra school moderation. Intra school moderation continued as the topic for Lead and key teacher cluster meetings.

Terms 4 also focuses on **Participation** however in this case it is the Inter - school Moderation on 18 October with other schools in particular cluster groups. Levels are assigned (or for the early years mapping is completed) and Reports are prepared.

Site Managers, Facilitators and Group Leaders are selected to assist in the technical organisation and management of the processes on the day. Training, including role clarity and resources are made available.

**What are the major outstanding issues:**

- **The appropriateness of the term 'moderation'**.
  As more secondary teachers joined the process, it has become clear that the term 'moderation' is no longer a suitable description of the process in Brisbane Catholic Education. It was being seen in terms of the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary Schools Studies 'moderation' which deals with ensuring that programs are of an approved standard and that assessment and assigned student marks are of a suitable comparable standard. Therefore unnecessary confusion existed for secondary teachers.
  - Action: To refer to the process as Consistency of Teacher judgement.

- **Organisational Demands**.
  With about 2,000 teachers gathering on the one pupil free day, and the organisational demand this places on consultants, facilitators and site managers, the Inter school 'moderation' still runs the risk as being seen as a one day event rather than an ongoing process which is integral to the teaching and learning (planning, assessment, reporting) cycle.
  - Suggested Action: To encourage flexibility about when interschool 'moderation' is to occur AND to encourage more intra school and small cluster group meetings to participate in consistency of teacher judgement exercises.

- **The need to explore other processes**.

- **The need for materials as well as processes to assist with promoting consistency of teacher judgement**.

**Other Strategies to consider:**

- Criteria sheets
- “criteria for success”
- Progress maps
- Student folios
- Common planning and assessment tasks
At this stage we believe that the present moderation process and its focus on developing shared understanding should be retained.

The emphasis should be changed to allow for more opportunities to be:

- Informal
- Teacher to teacher within school context
- Formal within school context
- Formal between schools on a strand basis
- Formal between school context on a Band of Schooling basis
- Informal across schools during workshops
- Formal between schools in a cluster basis as appropriate

Let’s Celebrate:
- There is a growing understanding of the purpose and benefits of engaging in "moderation" exercises.
- Teachers value the opportunity to work with others outside their school, to see examples of other practice, to have their own judgement - and practice - affirmed by their peers.
- Teachers gain in confidence regarding the assigning of levels (the link with outcomes planning, assessment, teaching and reporting is made). Their professional growth is affirmed.
- Teachers gain confidence in reporting to parents using levels of student achieving and being able to describe what the student knows and can do.
- There has been some benefit in being able to establish a direction and whilst being flexible to adapt as required and in response to feedback. There has been significant professional growth as we move in a gradual yet consistent way, towards an outcomes based education.
- For students - their achievement is acknowledged, reported, and recorded in terms of their growth in what they know and can do.
- For parents - they have access to a richer description of the progress of their child. (given that there is for some a way to go in providing parent education regarding this type of reporting….)

Summary

This paper attempts to articulate the journey taken by Brisbane Catholic Education with its teachers, principals, education officers and leadership, to understand and implement an outcomes based approach to education through a process of 'moderation' of student levels of achievement. The paper explains the orientation towards using the term 'Towards consistency of teacher judgement' as a more accurate
description of the current process. It has acknowledged the issues and generated some possible directions for discussion.

**Conclusion**

- Moderation has been a useful professional development exercise for teachers.
- It has been a means of orientation and a way of reaching an understanding of outcomes based education as it relates to planning, teaching and learning, assessment and reporting.

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