Assessment Handbooks Series

Portfolio Assessment

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Assessment Handbooks Series

Student-Centred Conferences

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ministry of Education

Assessment Handbooks Series

Student-Centred Conferences

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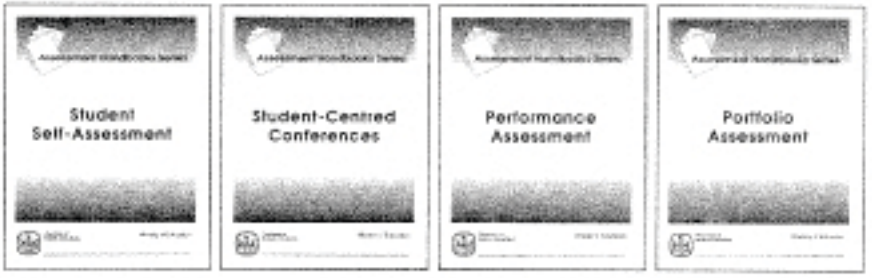
About this document

Rationale

Surveys of teachers (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1992) and studies (Bachor and Anderson, 1991, 1993) show that assessment practices in B.C. classrooms are changing. Teachers are seeking alternatives to traditional testing methods by rethinking their assessment practices and changing their evaluation techniques. With this evolution in practice have come practical questions regarding methods for assessing student achievement. A key request has been for support in the development and implementation of assessment methods.

The Assessment Handbooks Series



This series has been developed to provide guidance for teachers as they explore and expand their assessment repertoires. The four handbook series includes *Student Self-Assessment, Student-Centred Conferences, Performance Assessment* and *Portfolio Assessment*. For the sake of clarity, the handbooks separately address each of these assessment methods. However, in practice, the methods are not used in isolation. For example, self-assessment is an important component of portfolio assessment and both can contribute to a successful student-centred conference.

Each of the handbooks contain a definition and rationale, reflective questions, ideas for getting started, and samples in varying forms. While each handbook includes information

specific to a particular type of assessment, cross-referencing is used to identify important links between them. *Student Self-Assessment* is particularly central to the other handbooks as it expands on self-assessment, goal setting and establishing criteria, topics common to the whole series.

This Handbook

Student-Centred Conferences supports student-centred conferences as an effective means of communication between students, teachers and parents. It discusses organizing for a conference, types of conferences, and the roles and responsibilities of the participants. Sample forms and agendas are included.

What is a student-centred conference?

A student-centred conference, as described in this booklet, implies the active involvement of students who work with their parent(s) and teacher(s) to examine and reflect on their learning. This differs from a traditional reporting conference in which parents and teacher meet alone to discuss the student's progress.

Holding a student-centred conference is not an isolated event but an integral part of learning. The opportunity for students to demonstrate skills and abilities during a conference gives relevance and meaning to all the work and practice prior to and following a conference.

All partners are actively involved during a student-centred conference. Their specific roles will vary depending on the type of conference being held, either that of the Three-Way or Student-Led. Whichever type of student-centred conference is chosen, both focus on open communication, honour each participant, encourage supportive attitudes, and help students recognize their growth and set goals for further learning.

Why hold a student-centred conference?

A student-centred conference enables all participants to collaboratively support learning and foster student growth. Open, honest dialogue is encouraged between teachers, students, and parents. Each participant benefits from the process.

"Children were quite confident leading their conference. They were able to discuss what they knew about themselves with people who cared about their learning: their parents."

Teacher

For teachers, a student-centred conference:

- enriches understanding of the student
- allows the responsibility for creating profiles of student development to be shared
- builds on and supports classroom assessment practice
- enables teachers to see interaction between parent and student
- provides opportunities for teachers to model constructive feedback
- strengthens communication between home and school

For students, a student-centred conference:

- builds the student's knowledge of self
- enhances self-esteem
- involves students in their own evaluation, helping them take responsibility for their learning
- develops and extends communication and organization skills
- empowers students to set meaningful goals for themselves

"I felt very important when I got to tell about my work."

"If I didn't get to come to the conference I would feel the report card wasn't part of me."

"I said all my thoughts out."

"Rather than just telling our parents about what we do, it's easier to show them what we've done and can do."

Various Students

For parents, a student-centred conference:

- invites them to participate in the reporting process rather than simply respond to it
- recognizes parents' understanding of their child
- heightens parents' awareness of their child's ability to be responsible for their own learning
- increases parents' understanding of learning and assessment
- provides an opportunity to see their child work with various materials in the classroom
- provides an opportunity to see interaction between the teacher and their child
- helps demystify the assessment, evaluation, and reporting process

"I think the parent/student conference is a good idea and it lets the child show his/her work and progress in much more detail."

"I believe my child is learning a life skill that will benefit him when he enters the work field."

"We particularly enjoyed watching the satisfaction our son took in sharing with us about his school experience. It was good for us to hear him tell us what was important to him."

Various Parents

Setting the stage for a student-centred conference

Classroom Environment

If a student-centred conference is to be an integral part of learning, teachers need to create a learning environment which promotes:

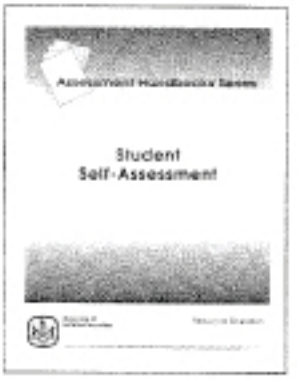
- student choice / autonomy
- the representing of learning in a variety of ways
- individual and cooperative work
- the sharing of ideas
- risk taking

In such an environment, teachers can provide ongoing opportunities for students to self-assess, set goals, and collect samples that represent their learning. Practising these skills prepares students for their role in a meaningful student-centred conference.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is a process in which students reflect on their own performance, products, thinking, and learning. Teachers need to ensure that students are taught how to self-assess and that they are provided with varied and ongoing opportunities to assess their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Self-assessment forms a basis for students to set goals and develop action plans. Thoughtful questioning, Back & Forth Books, Learning Logs, and Reflective Journals will help facilitate self-assessment.

For more information on self-assessment, see *Student Self-Assessment.*



Prompts to Develop Self-Assessment Form for a Student-Centred Conference

- The most important thing I learned this term was... because...
- I wanted you to notice the improvement I made in... It shows that I can now...
- Something I now want to learn about is... because... To help me, I will need...

Self-Assessment
Summary for Student-Centred Conference

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Student Comments:

Strengths:

Evidence:

Areas for growth:

Evidence:

Improvements:

Evidence:

Action plan:

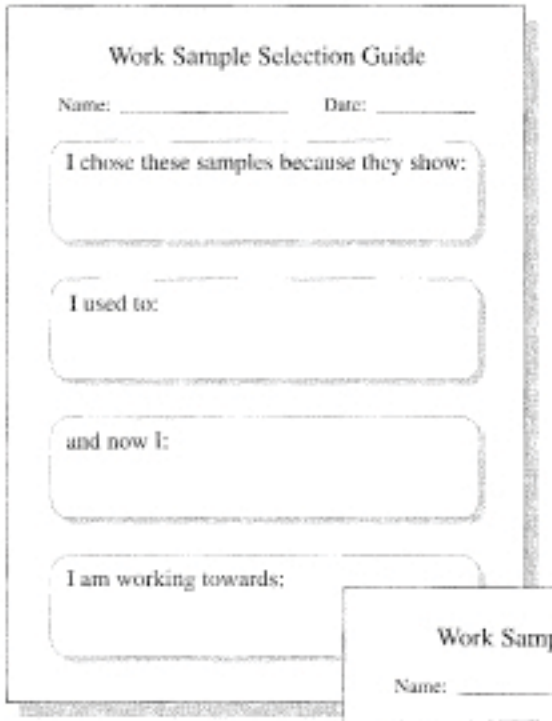
Parent Comments:

Collecting Work Samples

"It's fun to look back at the work and see how much it has changed and how much you have improved."

Student

Meaningful collections of student work are valuable to have at a conference. They provide a focus for discussion and evidence of student effort, progress, and achievement over time. As well, the samples reflect student growth and development in relation to classroom, curriculum, program, and/or personal goals. Work samples may be selected by both student and teacher according to collaboratively developed or shared criteria.


Work Sample Selection Guide

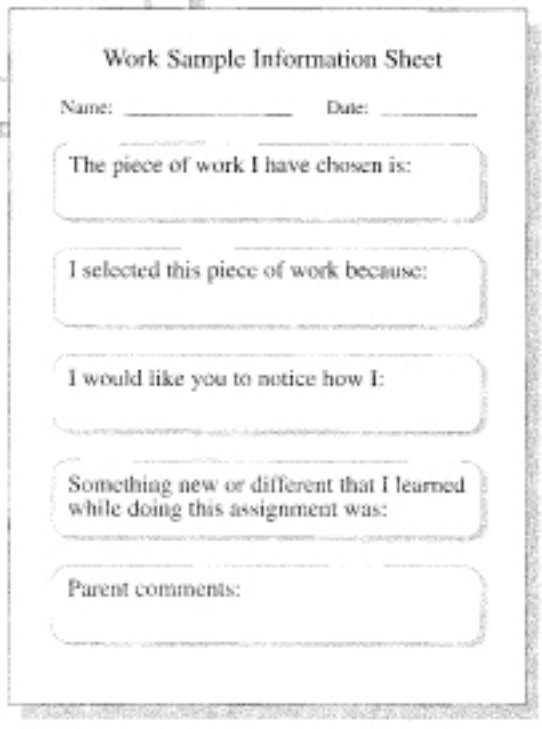
Name: _____ Date: _____

I chose these samples because they show:

I used to:

and now I:

I am working towards:


Work Sample Information Sheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

The piece of work I have chosen is:

I selected this piece of work because:

I would like you to notice how I:

Something new or different that I learned while doing this assignment was:

Parent comments:

For more information on collecting work samples, see *Portfolio Assessment.*

Goal Setting

Goal setting is the process of making plans for further learning. Students need to be taught how to set personal goals that are appropriate and attainable. Involving them in the development of learning activities and the setting of criteria for evaluation are ways of preparing them for effective goal setting. They need experience monitoring their progress towards a goal and opportunities to reflect on and re-set goals. A student-centred conference extends these classroom practices and provides a setting for the student, parents, and teacher to collaboratively set goals for further learning.

The more specifically the goal is stated, the more likely it is to be accomplished.

Sample Strategy for Conference Goal Setting

1. Prior to the conference, students identify goal(s) they would like to accomplish and record them on an action planner sheet.
2. During the conference, students discuss all their work samples with their parent(s), noting accomplishments and areas needing improvement.
3. Students review the goal(s) with their parents in light of strengths and areas needing further development that were noted in the work samples.
4. Student, parent(s), and teacher work together to revise the goal(s), if necessary, and to decide upon a plan for achieving the goal(s). Plans and a time frame are recorded on the action planner sheet.
5. Following the conference, students refer to their action plan on an ongoing basis and adjust goal(s) if/as necessary.
6. At the end of established time frame students reflect on whether they accomplished their goal(s) and identify what did and did not work.

For more information on goal setting, see *Student Self-Assessment.*

Getting started

Teachers interested in holding a student-centred conference as a way of communicating student growth are encouraged to:

- talk to other colleagues (teachers and administrators) who have experienced student-centred conferences
- look for resources (print and video)
- plan ways to prepare participants (students and parents) for their various roles and responsibilities
- trust themselves and their students
- be patient with the process

The following time line lists possible activities and conference dates that span a school year. It is only a sample, intended as a starting point. Teachers are encouraged to modify it to meet their own particular needs.

Sample Time Line

September

- Parent/teacher/student conference (get acquainted, goal setting, etc.)
- Parent input (wishes and concerns)

October

- Parent information meeting to introduce or review student-centred conferences
- Invite parents to observe in the classroom
- Set conference dates

November

- Students take work samples home to review them with their parent(s)
- Student-centred conference
- Written report is completed
- Conference evaluation and reflection forms distributed, collected, and information collated

December

- Evaluation/reflection feedback made available to parents

January

- Parents are welcome to continue classroom observations

February

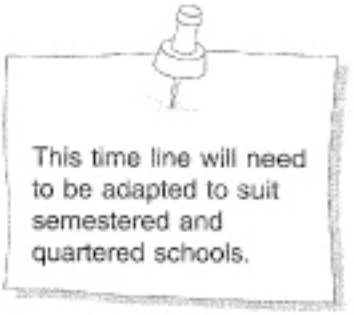
- Parents are welcome to continue classroom observations
- Conference dates set

March

- Students take work samples home to review them with their parent(s)
- Student-centred conference
- Written report is completed
- Conference evaluation and reflection forms distributed, collected, and information collated

April, May, June

- Evaluation/reflection feedback made available to parents
- Parents are welcome to continue regular observations
- Final written report is completed



Types of student-centred conferences

The two types of conferences described in this booklet are Three-Way and Student-Led. They may be known by other names, but the purpose remains the same–to involve students in the reporting process by having them reflect on their learning and share with their parents.

Each of these conferences has its own unique characteristics and participants have specific roles. It is important to choose the type of conference that best meets the needs of the teacher and students. It is equally important that teachers be prepared to alter the type of conference as needs change.

To supplement a student-centred conference, teachers may wish to meet with parents and students on an individual basis:

- with parents to discuss sensitive issues without the student present
- with students to follow-up on goals established during the conference

Three-Way Conference:

- student, parent, and teacher are actively involved
- teacher is an integral part of the process
- participants meet for a specified period of time (perhaps 30 or 45 min. blocks)
- student is responsible for sharing their learning orally and through work samples
- student, parent and teacher collaboratively review strengths, set goals, and determine support in attaining goals
- teacher takes notes or summarizes the discussion
- could constitute the basis of a formal written report
- may be used as a way to informally report student progress
- may occur before, during, or after formal reporting

Teachers comfortable with traditional parent teacher interviews might find three-way conferencing an easy first step to involve students.

Student-Led Conference:

- student and parent are actively engaged
- student takes responsibility for leading the conference
- teacher acts as a facilitator
- student is responsible for sharing their learning orally and through work samples
- more than one conference can take place at a time
- could constitute the basis of a formal written report
- may be used as a way to informally report student progress
- most often occurs during or after formal reporting

Teachers with several classes may choose to hold student-led conferences as several can take place at once.

Participant roles and responsibilities

Prior to taking part in a student-centred conference, participants should be aware of their individual roles. While specific roles may vary depending on the type of conference, teachers, students, and parents need to be prepared for their general responsibilities before, during, and after the conference.

• Accommodate younger siblings by providing a "daycare" service. This might be run by student or parent volunteers.

• Arrange for an interpreter if the parent does not speak English.

Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

Before the conference, teachers:

- select the conference type best suited to teacher and student needs
- collaborate with students and parents about their roles and responsibilities
- prepare any necessary letters or forms for parents
- provide students with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment, goal setting, and collecting work samples
- collaboratively set an agenda with students and provide opportunities to rehearse the conference
- organize the logistics of time, place, and equipment
- provide opportunities for parent input (expectations and concerns)

During the conference, teachers:

- help students clarify work samples, if necessary
- act as a facilitator, encourager, and clarifier
- collaboratively set goals with students and parents
- encourage reflections and feedback from students, parents, and self
- be aware of the over-critical parent and have a plan to intervene if necessary

Keep the discussion positive. Remember the ultimate goal of the conference is to enhance the student's development and learning.

Dear Parent(s): Date

This year our class will be conducting our conferences a little differently. Instead of you and I discussing your child's progress, your child will be discussing his/her progress with you. The students will conduct the conference and I will be on hand to give support and encouragement.

There are several reasons for conducting the conferences in this way. By having the students actively involved in the conference, they will:

- assume responsibility for reporting their progress to you
- collaboratively set goals with you and me for further learning
- be accountable for the work they produce and the quality of that work
- develop good communication and leadership skills
- show you first hand some of the many learning activities they are involved in at school

At the conference, your child will:

- share work samples with you
- demonstrate some recently acquired skills
- ask you to comment on their progress
- offer you refreshments and give you a tour of the classroom

Your child will write you a personal letter of invitation to the conference. I hope that it will be possible for all parents to attend. In the event that you cannot attend, you and your child may find a substitute who would be able to take part in this important event. As the conference is a time for you and your child, a child-minding service is available in room ____ for siblings. If there are any issues that you wish to discuss privately with me after the conference, I would be happy to arrange a time to meet with you.

I hope you are looking forward to the student-centred conference as much as we are.

Yours sincerely,

Teacher

After the conference, teachers:

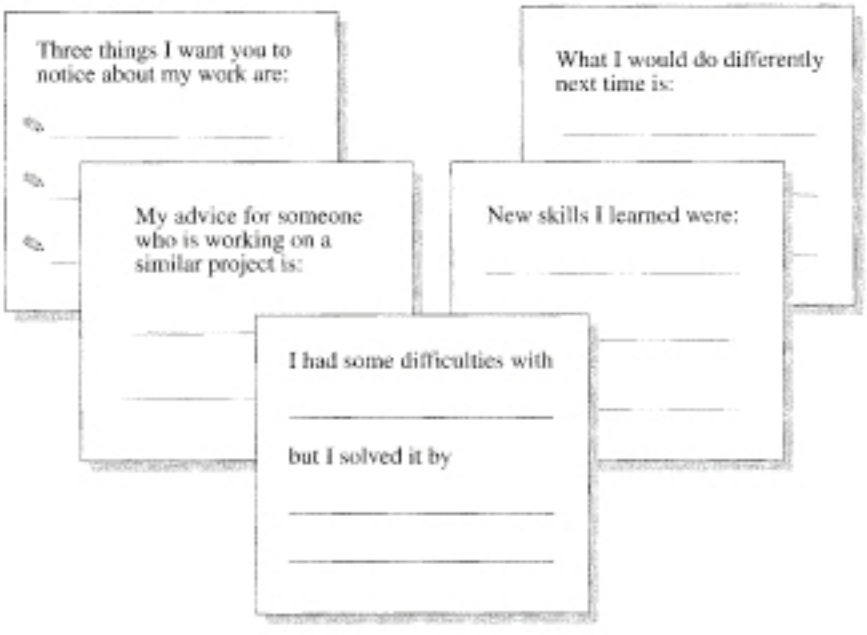
- read, summarize, and share student and parent evaluation comments
- conduct a debriefing session with students to discuss the conferences
- assist students with their personal goals
- if necessary, make modifications for future student-centred conferences

Students' Roles and Responsibilities

Before the conference, students:

- collaboratively set a conference agenda with the teacher
- rehearse the conference through role playing
- talk with parents about learning and work samples sent home
- write invitation to parent(s)
- self-assess, goal set, and collect work samples on an ongoing basis

If students don't have a parent who can attend the conference, they should be encouraged to bring someone else, perhaps an older sibling or a family friend.



Be aware that some students may not be as comfortable as others leading the conference and may require more encouragement to be active participants.

During the conference, students:

- perform necessary introductions
- demonstrate learning orally and by showing samples of work
- discuss work samples, looking at strengths and challenges
- demonstrate concepts using materials (computer, manipulatives, etc.)
- collaboratively set goals with parent(s) and teacher

After the conference, students:

- complete a conference evaluation sheet
- write a thank you note to parent(s)
- refine action plans
- work on personal goals

Conference Follow-Up

Student Evaluation Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

You've just been part of a conference with your parent(s) and teacher. What did you like / dislike about it?

_____

_____

How do you think being part of the conference helped you?

_____

_____

What advice can you give us to make the conference better next time?

Do: _____

_____

Don't: _____

_____

Parents' Roles and Responsibilities

Before the conference, parents:

- convey any concerns about their child's education to the teacher
- view and comment on student work samples that have been taken home

During the conference, parents:

- listen carefully and ask clarifying questions
- view and provide encouraging comments on student work
- collaboratively set goals with student and teacher

Be available to model questioning techniques for parents who may encounter difficulty.

If a parent begins to dominate the conference discussion, remind them of the purpose of the conference.

If there are other issues that parents wish to discuss, a separate interview could be scheduled.

Conference Guide for Teacher and Parents

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Introductory remarks:

Student's positive qualities:

New strengths noticed:

Areas needing improvement:

Goals for meeting student's learning needs:

- action to be taken by student:
- action to be taken by parent(s):
- action to be taken by teacher:

Other notes:

After the conference, parents:

- complete a conference evaluation sheet
- provide feedback to modify future conference agendas
- monitor student's action plans

Conference Follow-Up

Parent Evaluation Form

In order to make a student-centred conference beneficial for parents, students, and teachers, all must have an opportunity to provide feedback. Please respond to the questions below and return the form to your child's teacher as soon as possible.

What were your feelings about having your child involved in the conference?

Did you feel as if both you and your child had an opportunity to say everything each of you needed to say? Please explain.

How do you feel your child benefitted from being involved in the conference?

In comparison to other methods of reporting, what are your feelings towards a student-centred conference?

Do you have any recommendations to improve future conferences?

Any other comments?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation form.

What might a student-centred conference look like?

First time participants in student-centred conferences may need to remind themselves:

- this is a new experience which may have its difficult moments—be patient
- active involvement of all participants will enhance the conference
- RELAX and ENJOY!

The organization and structure of student-centred conferences will evolve with the changing needs of all participants. Teachers who have held student-centred conferences submitted the following sample agendas:

Sample Conference Agenda
For Primary Level

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

- ❒ Reading: _____
- ❒ Journal: first and last entries
- ❒ Integrating Science: •Snails •Animals in Winter
- ❒ Tell about **migration**
- ❒ Tell about **hibernation**
- ❒ Math Centres: _____
- ❒ Problem Solving: 1. Tangrams: _____
  2. Geoboards: _____
- ❒ Modelling with Clay: _____
- ❒ "All About Me" Sheet.
  Tell about yourself at school.
- ❒ Clean up and Evaluation.
  Parent writes message to child.
- ❒ Say goodbye to Mrs. _____ .
- ❒ On your way out, you may wish to visit:
  The Computer Lab: _____
  Other: _____

All About Me

Name: _____ Date: _____

I feel happy in this class when:

I am proud of myself at school when:

I have fun in class when:

I challenge myself at school when:

Sample Conference Agenda
For Intermediate Level

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Introduce (or reintroduce) parent(s) to teacher.

2. Conference:
   - watch videos: notice _____
   - portfolios: as you go through your work, use the evaluation slips to remember why you selected each item.
     - ❒ Reading: _____
     - ❒ Writing: _____
     - ❒ Math: _____
     - ❒ Science: _____
     - ❒ Social Studies: _____
     - ❒ Art: _____
     - ❒ Other: _____
   - classroom displays: notice _____
     _____
   - goal(s) for next term: _____
     _____

3. Thank parent(s) for attending and have them sign the guest book before leaving.

Sample Conference Agenda
For Graduation Level

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Introduce parent(s) and teacher.
2. Conference:
   - go through homework / expectations
   - share portfolios
   - examine student goals
   - discuss "future" plans / goals beyond graduation
   -
   -
3. Have parents fill in comment sheet.
4. Refreshments.

This agenda is an example from a subject teacher, but it could be modified and used by the teacher adviser.

Final thoughts

Teachers will find that a student-centred conference is not an isolated event; it is a natural progression from classroom instruction that enhances students' development and learning by involving them and their parents in the assessment, evaluation, and reporting process.

In your exploration of holding a student-centred conference, we encourage you to seek your own path towards implementation. By working with colleagues, students, and parents, you can develop a personal method that best meets the needs of all participants.

Glossary

Assessment Assessment is the systematic process of gathering information about student learning, what they know, are able to do, and are trying to do.

Evaluation The process of making judgments and decisions based on the interpretation of evidence of student learning gathered throughout assessment. Evaluation might be done by the teacher or the student independently or in collaboration.

Performance Assessment Assessment that is based on students demonstrating what they can do. The term is sometimes used to describe assessment using performance tasks. More generally, it is used to describe approaches to assessment which value process as well as product.

Portfolio A purposeful collection of student work that shows the student's effort, progress, or achievement over time.

Portfolio Assessment Portfolio Assessment is a method of gathering student work samples for the purpose of evaluating student knowledge and learning.

Reporting The presentation of information gained through evaluation based on identified standards. Reporting may be done in writing, through a scheduled conference, or informally.

Self-Assessment / Self-Evaluation The ongoing process in which students get to know themselves as learners by reflecting on their own performance, products, thinking, and learning.

Student-Centred Conference A meeting of teacher, parent(s) and student to discuss the student's learning.

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