

Evaluation of the First Trials of Reading and Writing Assessments

Technical Report 2 for Project asTTle – University of Auckland 2000

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This report summarises feedback responses of the teachers to the first asTTle trial literacy assessment papers conducted in October 2000. Feedback was generally positive across both reading and writing and from both teachers and students.

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Fifty schools agreed to participate in the first trial of the six reading and six writing assessment papers in October 2000. These schools were selected nationally across New Zealand and 38 of these schools provided teacher evaluation forms subsequent to the trial (72% response rate). The responding schools were from: all decile levels; from Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Canterbury, Christchurch, Gisborne, Nelson, Southland, Waikato and Wellington; and from Contributing (Y1-6), Full Primary (Y1-8) and Intermediate (Yr 7-8) schools. The schools were provided with trial assessment tools in either Reading or Writing to administer to Years 5, 6 and 7 students.

There were responses from 60 teachers about the Reading tests, 53 teachers responded to Writing and 1 teacher responded to both Reading and Writing (n= 114). The individual responses from the teachers and students were grouped according to categories 'Yes', 'No', 'Both yes and no'. The category 'Yes' related to a favourable response, 'No' an unfavourable response, while 'Both' a response that included both positive and negative comments.

Question 1

“Was the content appropriate for the age level and ability of the students?”

Most teachers agreed that the content for the age level and ability were matched, especially for Writing. For example, one teacher from a decile 4 school suggested that: “Yes, interesting age-related topics to read about and a good variety.” A comment from a decile 9 school in Table 1

Appropriate content for age and ability of students

Test	Yes	No	Both	No	Grand Total
Reading	78	2	13	7	100
Writing	91	2	4	4	100
	84	2	9	5	100

Wellington was that the content was “varied and challenging”. Reasons for the No’s were that “questions were a bit confusing and too much to read for Yr 5 children”. Another teacher suggested that “students were not ready for dictation activities”. The ‘Boths’ were mainly from teachers who suggested that they had mixed responses with their students. For example one claimed that “some was appropriate and some wasn’t. Some were too easy.”

Question 2

“Was the content interesting and engaging for the students?”

Overall there was a favourable response. Teachers were positive about the student’s enthusiasm after doing the assessments. Teachers commented:

- “Yes- they were fascinated by both New Year stories and thought the dictation one was quite funny.”
- “Definitely, children talked about the fun topics that were in it after sitting the tests. They shared new facts and interesting points”

- “Students liked the practice questions and enjoyed the topics.”

Table 2

Interesting and engaging content

Test	Yes	Both	No	Grand Total
Reading	83	8	8	100
Writing	85	8	8	100
Total	84	8	8	100

There were nine ‘No’ responses, 5 for reading and 4 for writing. One teacher suggested that their “students did not like the trees topic” in writing 10, and there were “too many different styles of answering questions to do” in reading 3. Overall, the other ‘No’ teachers remarked that students ranged from being bored to just not interested.

Question 3

“Were the teacher’s instructions clear and easy to follow?”

114 teachers answered this question. Nearly all teachers felt that the instructions were easy to follow and clear. One ‘No’ felt that, “all the bits to be read out should be shaded”, and the other asked, referring to Task B writing 9, that the instructions should read ‘circled’ not ‘shaded’. Otherwise this latter teacher noted that the instructions were clear and easy to follow.

Table 3

Clarity of teacher’s instructions

Test	Yes	No	Grand Total
Reading	100	0	100
Writing	98	2	100
Total	99	1	100

Question 4

“Was the level of difficulty across the paper appropriate?”

As to the appropriate level of difficult, most teachers responded claimed that both the Reading and Writing Assessments were appropriate. For most of the ‘No’ responses, teachers commented that texts and tasks might have been too easy.

Twenty-two of the 114 teachers left this Question blank, indicating no further comments. The majority of comments were positive (70%) or a combination of positives with some areas noted for improvement (16%). Some comments included:

- “children loved the experience. Can we do more Mrs. G”
- Many complimented the layout and pictures such as “children liked shading answers. Print size just right for age group. Questions and information were straight to the point”
- “loved the imaginative story-writing will continue with your guidelines”

There were 11 queries about the use of dictionaries for editing from.

Table 4

Was the level of difficulty appropriate?

Test	Yes	Both	No	Grand Total
Reading	78	10	12	100
Writing	84	10	6	100
Total	81	10	9	100

Question 5

“Is there any other general comment you would like to make about the paper?”

The ‘No’ responses were mainly about the use of time and the way questions were structured, for example: “the test is probably too long for the age group”. The negative parts of the ‘Both Yes and No’ related to the instructions (e.g. one teacher identified

confusion from students about where the Tuatara was bred).

Table 5

Are there any general comments?

Test	Yes	Both	No	Grand Total
Reading	69	18	12	100
Writing	70	13	18	100
Total	70	16	15	100

The majority of students responded positively to the assessments. About 90% made favourable comments about positive response. For those citing ‘Both’ the comments related mostly to some of the class enjoying the assessments and some not. For the few ‘No’ responses, the teachers saw a relationship between student reaction to the assessment and the kind of task they had been asked to perform.

For example:

- Some students struggled with the paper when they had to write an argument, and
- Students were comfortable with some aspects, but lacked the narrative writing ability.

For the ‘Yes’ responses, the comments included:

- “They liked the choice of topic – it gave them plenty of scope. They liked the larger print and generally found it a pleasurable experience.”
- “The children found the tasks quite interesting and challenging. [I] found it compatible with their learning experiences this year”

Question 6

“What was the student’s response to the paper?”

Overall all six questions over 90% of all teachers expressed positive comments about the assessments. Only 8% (about 7) teachers made no comment.

Table 6

Student response to paper

Test	Yes	Both	No	Grand Total
Reading	76	15	8	100
Writing	73	10	16	100
Total	75	13	12	100

Concluding Comment

The evaluation of the trial assessment tasks by 114 teachers across 38 New Zealand schools suggests a most positive evaluation. Overall, teachers found the tools helpful and useful. On all of the evaluation items there is a far greater positive response. There may need to be some attention to instruction clarity, with most attention to encouraging those students who find the tasks challenging to persevere and enjoy the activities.

Table 7

Overall All Six Questions

Items 1-6	Yes	Both	Yes & Both	No	Grand Total
Reading	81	13	93	8	100
Writing	84	9	93	9	100
Total	82	11	93	8	100