

Teacher Evaluation of the Reading Level 4 Assessments: Summary

Technical Report 30, Project asTTle, University of Auckland, 2002

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This report summarises feedback responses of the teachers ($n=20$) involved in the evaluation of asTTle reading level 4 papers in November 2001. The majority of teacher and student responses to the reading assessments were positive, though more negative comment is expressed from students regarding the difficulty of items.

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A trial of new asTTle reading assessments was conducted in November 2001. The trial consisted of three reading papers namely I, J, and K each of which was designed to assess close reading at Level 4 Advanced of the New Zealand English curriculum. New items and texts were written, and analysed (See Brown, 2002, Technical Report 28 for details of the items and texts) to meet the need for greater numbers of difficult Level 4 reading items. Because of the difficulty of the questions and passages it was decided to calibrate the items on students in Years 7, 8, and 9 only to ensure that the items were within the capability of students in the target range. However, given the widespread of abilities in mainstream classes it was anticipated that some students would find the items challenging. The new items and tasks were linked with selected Level 4 Proficient and Advanced materials already calibrated in previous testing.

Nine schools, of which seven agreed to participate, were invited to supply three classes of students per target year level. The schools were in the Auckland region and represented a range of socio-economic strata. Just over 950 scripts were returned from a total of 1,150 sent out. Each teacher who administered papers to a

class of students was asked to complete a feedback form. The potential pool of respondents, based on one teacher per class, would be 36. A total of 20 replies were received. This response sample represented just over half of all teachers potentially involved in administering the asTTle papers.

Responses were in the nature of comments to prepared questions. The comments were generally coded using a “Yes”, “No”, “Both”, or “No answer”. The category “Yes” indicates a favourable or positive response to the question, a “No” indicates an unfavourable or negative response to the question, and “Both” indicates a response that contains both positive and negative comments. “No answer” includes comments that were incapable of meaningful interpretation. Because teachers administered more than one paper, responses are summarized by type of paper rather than by individual paper.

Question 1

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

More than half of the teachers were satisfied with the content of the reading papers (Table 1). Only one teacher was dissatisfied and one-fifth of teachers considered the content neither appropriate nor inappropriate for the age and ability level of students.

Table 1
Appropriateness of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	13	2	4	1	20
Percentage	65	10	20	5	100

Comments indicating a favourable response included: “*Yes. Students could relate to it and understand the information*”. Negative responses included “*Some words were quite hard to understand and some questions were too hard (student responses)*”.

Question 2

Was the content interesting and engaging for students?

There was strong support for the interest level and degree of engagement the tests provided, with only one teacher totally disagreeing (Table 2). The content was considered interesting and engaging for students as suggested in one response: “*Yes- there definitely was a variety of types of questions as well as texts*”.

Table 2
Interest & engagement of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	13	2	4	1	20
%	65	10	20	5	100

While it was the case that the overwhelming majority was happy with the material’s level of interest, the answers that were coded as ‘Both’ were often comments relating to the fact that due to differing interests, the tests did not suit all of the children in the class, which was to be expected.

One of the negative responses related to the difficulty of one standard test fitting all students’ interests. “*No, It was not something that stimulates the mind. To keep concentration got difficult at times.*”

Question 3

Were the teacher’s instructions clear, easy to follow and sufficient?

There was considerable support for the tests in terms of their clarity of instructions (Table 3). However, there were still concerns expressed, and suggestions offered for ways in which to improve the papers. Suggestions included “*The teacher instructions would have been more useful if the practice questions had been outlined with the instructions*”. One of the negative responses was that: “*No. There was no*

box to record the school number. The practice question instructions were not specific e.g., ‘check that students know how to answer...’ P.A.T. type verbal instructions and numbering would be helpful”.

Table 3
Clarity & ease of teacher’s instructions

	Yes	No	Suggestion made	Both	No answer	Total
N	14	1	3	1	1	20
%	70	5	15	5	5	100

Question 4

Was the level of difficulty appropriate for Proficient to Advanced Level 4 students?

More than half the teachers believed the difficulty of the papers was appropriate for the students working at proficient to advanced levels (Table 4). Two teachers were negative about the appropriateness for these levels of difficulty, though their comments that the tests were “*more to the advanced end of the spectrum*” were consistent with the design brief of the materials. One teacher remarked that he/she felt unable to comment until the papers were marked and that he/she had seen the results.

Table 4
Appropriateness of difficulty across the papers

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	12	2	3	3	68
%	60	10	15	15	100

Question 5

What was the response of the students to the papers?

The majority of respondents made a general comment (Table 5). Despite the fact that the responses were wide and varied, they fell into five main categories – positive, negative, both, uninterpretable, and suggestions given. There were slightly more negative comments than positive ones made by the students. The negative comments identified the issue of the test materials being inappropriate for certain classes or types of students (i.e., too long, too hard, too easy). This was to be expected given that the test materials were designed for Proficient and Advanced Level 4 and that

classes of students contain students ranging from Levels 2 to 5 of the English curriculum.

Table 5

Student responses to paper

Comment	N	Percentage
Positive	7	35
Liked/enjoyed/interesting	4	20
No worries	2	10
Good/positive	1	5
Negative	9	45
Boring	3	15
Hard	4	20
Too long/too easy/finished early	2	10
Neutral/Mixed	2	10
Liked some parts and disliked others	1	5
Suggestions for improvement	1	5
Response unclear	1	5
No answer	1	5
Totals	20	100

Question 6

Are there any other general comments you would like to make?

All but 9 responses recorded some comment on behalf of or in summary of student response to the papers. A majority of the teachers who commented reported that students enjoyed the experience (Table 6), while only three teachers reported students not being positive to the paper.

Table 6

General comments about papers

	N	%
Positive	4	20
Negative	3	15
Both	0	0
No Response	9	45
Suggestions given	4	20
Total	20	100

In regards to the three different assessment papers, all responses commenting on these indicated that this was a good way to prevent the students from copying. A typical response was: *"I liked the 3 different tests, it eliminates*

the need to separate desks etc. I would like to retain this feature if possible".

The three teachers who coded a negative response did not give enough information to indicate what the reasons were for their response (Table 6).

Concluding Comment

Overall the papers for level 4 were well received by the teachers and less so by the students. Students' responses suggested that the difficulty of the items impacted students differentially with more able students having a more positive experience than less able students. Although, only roughly half of all responses were favourable and positive, the results suggest that students found the papers challenging and interesting. It should be remembered that when asTTle is implemented by teachers, the asTTle software will allow teachers to design suited to the ability level of their own students.

There were some small areas for improvement suggested by the participants, including a closer examination of the instructions for teachers and a box for entering the school number. Again it should be noted that the latter suggestion applies only to the collection of student data for asTTle norming purposes and will not be a requirement of the asTTle application when used by teachers.