

Report on Teacher Feedback from the Third Calibration of Writing Assessments

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This report summarises feedback responses of the teachers (n=78) involved in the third calibration of asTTle writing papers in December 2001. Both teachers and students were generally positive in their feedback regarding the assessments.

Table of Contents

Question One	1
Question Two.....	2
Question Three.....	2
Question Four.....	2
Question Five.....	3
Question Six.....	3
Concluding comment.....	3

A trial of new asTTle writing assessment tasks was conducted in December 2001. The trial consisted of six writing papers, namely papers 25 to 30, each of which was designed to assess one transactional writing purpose (See Glasswell, Parr, & Aikman, 2001, Technical Report 5 for a discussion of the purposes of writing). This calibration was needed to ensure that there were at least four tasks for each of the six writing purposes in the asTTle item bank.

Approximately 25 schools that had previously participated in asTTle calibrations were invited to supply all their classes of students per each of Years 5, 6, or 7. Willingness to participate was so high from all the invited schools that it became necessary to restrict participation to just four classes per school. The schools were in the greater Auckland region and represented a range of socio-economic strata. Just over 2,300 scripts (average of 385 per test paper) were returned from a total of 2,500 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 100. A total of 78 replies were received. This response sample represented three quarters 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 yes and no”, or “No answer”. The category “Yes” indicates a favourable or positive response to the question, a “No” an unfavourable or negative response to the question, and “Both yes and no” indicates a response that contains both positive and negative comments. “No answer” includes comments that were incapable of meaningful interpretation.

Question One

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

Overall, teachers were very satisfied with the content in relation to the age level and ability of their students, with just over three-quarters indicating a positive response. Approximately one tenth of responses were classified in the ‘both’ category, with a further tenth (approximately) indicating a negative response.

Table 1
Appropriateness of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	61	9	6	2	78
Percentage	78	12	8	2	100

Favourable responses included: “Yes – it was an open task that they could achieve at their own level” and “The writing genre was very appropriate to the children as it is a major focus of their level”. Responses from the ‘both’

category generally reflected mixed abilities in the classroom, for example, *“As there is quite a range of levels within the class the task was appropriate for some but not for others”*. A number of the negative comments made actually related to the topic of Paper 30 specifically. These are summed up well by the following comment, *“With little or no experience of cooking a “food dish” they found this a daunting task and mostly they tried to memorise what they had observed someone else cooking”*.

Question Two

Was the content interesting and engaging for the students?

Just over half of the teachers gave a positive indication that their students found the content interesting and engaging. Examples of the types of comments made include: *“The manner in which it was set out appealed to all students including ESOL and remedial readers”* and *“They enjoyed it a lot and found it challenging, especially deciding what to write about”*. While a fifth of responses were negative, teachers often qualified these as being due to environmental factors, particularly in regards to the time of year; for example, *“At this time of the year it is hard for the children to settle and do their ‘best’ work”*. Responses in the ‘both’ category tended to refer to the fact that while some students were interested and engaged, others were not; for example: *“The children were divided on their interest level. The approaches were certainly different for them”* and *“Some students enjoyed it and others found it to be just a task”*.

Table 2
Content interesting and engaging

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	42	16	18	2	78
Percentage	54	21	23	2	100

Question Three

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

The majority of teachers responded positively this question, generally by simply responding ‘Yes’.

Table 3
Teacher Instructions

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	53	13	11	1	78
Percentage	68	17	14	1	100

Negative responses usually included suggestions for improvement. The three most commonly mentioned suggestions were: making it clearer as regards whether students were allowed to use dictionaries, indicating the purpose of testing earlier on in the instructions, and indicating whether or not students should write on every line or every second line for correcting purposes.

Question Four

Was the level of difficulty appropriate for all students?

While the response to this question was not as positive as the previous questions on the feedback form, half of the teachers gave a positive response. Responses classified as positive were generally just a simple ‘Yes’, however a number of teachers were more specific, for example, *“Yes, I think there was a good range of questions which provided a variety of levels”*.

Responses in the ‘both’ category generally reflected a mixed class response, *“A mix, not all students in my class work at the same level due to factors such as ESOL”*. The ‘No’ category included responses that simply indicated ‘no’, or a general negative response, for example, *“Doesn’t cater for slower children, they required lots of help just reading what’s expected”*.

Table 4
Level of difficulty

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	39	24	13	2	78
Percentage	50	31	17	2	100

Question Five

What was the response of the students to the papers?

Overall the response from the students, as indicated by their teachers, was positive. Over three-quarters of teachers either indicated that their students reacted positively or gave a mixed response.

Table 5
Student responses to paper

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	33	11	27	7	78
Percentage	42	14	35	9	100

There was a wide variety in responses to this question however, as seen in the example comments below:

- *“Children thought that this was challenging.”*
- *“They found it – in their own words ‘all right’.”*
- *“They enjoyed it and found it easy because they could choose the topic for instructions themselves, without being asked to write about something or answer questions about which they have no experience.”*
- *“They all thought it was just the same sort of thing that we do in class.”*
- *“Not another test! They generally seemed to enjoy it though.”*
- *“The children don’t enjoy completing tests where there is no immediate feedback.”*
- *“Negative, due to end of year tiredness. A couple really got into it and did a wonderful report.”*

Question Six

Are there any general comments you would like to make?

Just over half the teachers chose to make a general comment, and the responses were reasonably evenly mixed between positive, negative, or suggestions for improvement.

Table 6
General comments

Response	N	Percentage
Positive	13	17%
Negative	15	19%
Both	3	4%
Neutral	3	4%
Suggestion for improvement	10	13%
No answer/Un-interpretable	34	43%
Total	78	100%

Positive comments often related to the project as a whole, for example, *“Tests look excellent and will be of real benefit to busy teachers”*. Other positive questions related more to the test itself, for example: *“Challenged students to achieve their best – very positive during and at end”* and *“This task was set out very clearly. The way in which the information was presented was interesting, something the kids could relate to. Excellent task!”*

Negative comments generally related to issues such as the time limit, the difficulty, or instructions given. There were also a number of negative comments regarding the timing, for example, *“This is a very bad time of year to do this”* – this was a common theme throughout all questions of the feedback form. Suggestions for improvement were varied and often related to specific questions within the papers, setting-out of the booklets or to instructions (for either the teacher or the children).

Concluding Comment

The writing papers were well received by both teachers and students. Teachers commented particularly favourably on the content as well as the clarity of teacher instructions. There were a few issues with Paper 30 as regards the nature of the ‘cooking’ topic and a few other suggestions for improvement, particularly as regards to instructions given. Despite this however, the overall response was overwhelmingly positive.