Mapping the English Curriculum
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Libby Limbrick, Jan Keenan
Auckland College of Education

Anne Girven
Unitec

This study aimed to map the *written language* strand of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, with the purpose of establishing profiles of the Years 5, 6, and 7 students working within Levels 2, 3, and 4. A detailed set of Levels 2, 3, and 4 descriptors/ indicators was developed based on focus groups of expert teachers from Years 5, 6, and 7. There was much variability in the expectation of student achievement within each level of the curriculum and the teachers noted the importance of context, purpose of instruction, prior classroom experiences, and the differing processes and strategies that students can use to read and write. The importance of clear specifications of the levels, particularly in *expressive writing* and *poetic writing* was noted, as were the future studies to assist NZ teachers to have a better understanding of the functions and processes of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* and their purpose. This is a debate that is valuable and well overdue given that *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* has been gazetted for six years.

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Introduction

Our role in the asTTle research project, undertaken by University of Auckland, was to map the *written language* strand of the English Curriculum, with the purpose of establishing profiles of the Years 5, 6, and 7 students working at Levels 2, 3, and 4.

"Mapping" is interpreted as "unpacking" the curriculum achievement objectives for these levels (a term more familiar to teachers). The project seeks to establish a detailed set of indicators of student achievement, and relate them to the curriculum objectives. These will be used to devise and validate a range of tools for assessing the literacy standards of students in Years 5, 6, and 7.

Teachers were asked about their understanding of the functions and processes defined in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (*ENZC*), and how they relate to teaching and learning. The project analyses data collected from a small group of expert teachers of Years 5, 6, and 7 as the basis for indicators of reading and writing achievement at Levels 2, 3, and 4.

Methodology

Eighteen expert teachers of Years 5, 6, and 7, with strengths in language teaching, were selected through professional networks. Identifying "expert teachers'" is admittedly subjective, but all of these teachers have contributed demonstrably to language programmes in their respective schools, and are respected by colleagues for their knowledge of the English Curriculum.

They were drawn from a range of schools that broadly represented the geographic areas of Auckland, and two decile groupings (deciles 1–5 and deciles 6–10).

Development of Indicator Tables for Levels 2, 3, and 4

Indicators were drafted to reflect what classroom teachers from a range of schools expect students to be able to do at Levels 2, 3, and 4 of the *written language* strand of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (*ENZC*). A document compiled by Professor John Hattie on the basis of various published teacher support documents was used as a starting point. The research team consolidated and refined the draft indicators into tables, grouping indicators into functions relating to each *ENZC written language* strand: personal reading and close reading, expressive writing, poetic writing, and transactional writing.

The tables asked respondents to note whether students were *beginning* to demonstrate the indicators, *developing* beyond a beginning level, or demonstrating them *consistently*.

Exploring language, thinking critically, and processing information are the processes through which students achieve the objectives of the *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* document. The tables also asked respondents to identify which of these processes are implicated in the demonstration of each of the indicators. They were constructed to allow respondents to identify learning contexts in which they would expect these indicators to be assessed.

The tables were distributed to the "expert teachers" for discussion and further refinement in focus groups. A full day of data collection was held on 3 November, 2000 at the Auckland College of Education. Eighteen teachers, one observer, and three researchers were present. The teachers worked in Year groups (Years 5, 6, and 7), facilitated by the researchers.

The focus groups were intended to:
1 Refine the indicators.
2 Determine which indicators should be included in profiles of the learner at Levels 2, 3, and 4 and whether these students would be *beginning* to use, *developing,* or *consistently* using the indicator.
3 Identify which of the processes set out in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* would be implicated in the demonstration of the particular indicators.
4 Identify contexts in which these indicators could be assessed.

A further unscheduled half-day meeting of just eight teachers was held to clarify issues that arose out of the first focus group meeting.

A matrix was completed by participating teachers, asking them to indicate:
• how the indicators described what the students within the class were able to do;
• which curriculum level the indicators represented; and
• the degree to which they are achieved (i.e., *beginning*, *developing*, *consistently*).

Data were summarised by curriculum Levels 2–4 and by function. This permitted a comparison of teacher standards by the Year level being taught.

Results

Teachers' responses to the indicators proposed for curriculum Levels 2, 3, and 4 are summarised in the following section. The responses were inconsistent, and sometimes incomplete, and ultimately inconclusive; for these reasons they are not reported exhaustively here. The *Writing* indicators listed are those recorded following clarification and discussion at the second focus group meeting.

Each indicator is related to the relevant functions and processes of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum.*

Reading Indicators

Indicators of Attitude

- Demonstrate a willingness to choose to read as a pleasurable activity.
- Use personal background knowledge and experience to bring meaning to text.
- Take a risk when choosing texts to read.
- Demonstrate a willingness to choose to read as a pleasurable activity.
- Use a range of technologies for personal reading; e.g., library and online texts.
- Read and discuss a range of texts from different times and places.

Level 2. On all indicators, teachers thought students should be *developing* to *consistent*, in both personal and close reading.

Level 3. On all indicators, *developing* to *consistent*; some dissent on personal reading especially.

Level 4. On all indicators, *developing* to *consistent* for personal reading; some dissent, and a reluctance to comment on close reading.

Responses on processes were few and inconsistent.

Indicators of Understanding and Comprehension

- Justify reading choices.
- Consistently read for meaning.
- Consistently read for meaning.
- Identify fiction and non-fiction texts.
- Compare similarities and differences both within and between texts.
- Make cohesive links between aspects of text.
- Explore author's purpose and question author's intentions.
- Identify main ideas in texts.
- Provide detail to support main ideas.
- Make inferences from texts.
- Use understandings and information gained from texts.
- Question to locate and retrieve information.
- Question to clarify meaning in texts.
- Read critically a range of texts for bias, stereotyping, and propaganda

Level 2. No consensus about the stages to which students should be exhibiting these indicators in personal reading; teachers placed most students at *beginning* or *developing* stages in close reading, but with some dissent. Most agreed that all processes would be involved.

Level 3. *Developing* to *consistent* on all indicators, with some dissent.

Level 4. In personal reading, *beginning* or *developing* on most indicators, with minor variations; but *developing* or *consistent* on distinguishing fiction and non-fiction, and comparing similarities and differences between texts.

Processes: processing information and thinking critically.

In close reading, *developing* to *consistent* on all indicators.

Processes: all, with an emphasis on exploring language and processing information.

Indicators of Communication (Sharing of Understanding)

- Share response to text with others.
- Discuss texts and identify aspects (e.g., sequence of events, plot, characters, setting, theme, illustrations.
- Empathise with characters and situations in texts.

Level 2. Responses on personal reading were few, and showed no consensus.

On close reading, developing to consistent on all indicators, with some dissent.

Level 3. *Developing* to *consistent* on these indicators for personal reading. No consensus on close reading.

Level 4. No consensus on personal reading. For close reading, developing to consistent.

Indicators of Strategies and Skills

- Read independently for sustained periods.
- Make confident use of semantic, syntactic, visual and grapho-phonic cues.
- Use strategies to solve unknown words and gain meaning: anticipate/predict, re-read, self correct, question, confirm.
- Make links between verbal and visual information.

- Predict possible outcomes.
- Identify some parts of word classes.
- Use word classes to explore aspects of texts; e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns.
- Identify features and purposes of text types.
- Find select and retrieve information.
- Skim/scan for information
- Take notes in a variety of ways; e.g., using graphic organisers.
- Use effectively dictionary, thesaurus, atlas.

Level 2. Developing to *consistent* on most indicators; *beginning* to *developing* on the last four. Agreement that most indicators did not apply to personal reading.

Level 3. Consistent to *developing* on most indicators; *beginning* to *consistent* on skimming and note-taking. Agreement that some indicators did not apply to personal reading.

Level 4. Developing to *consistent* (the majority); little consideration of personal reading.

Contexts Indicated by Teachers

Teachers listed a range of contexts for personal and close reading.

Writing Indicators

Indicators of Attitude

- Write for personal satisfaction.
- Initiate writing in own time.
- Choose to write in a range of forms.
- Confidently take risks.

Teachers agreed that it was not appropriate to assess *attitude* in relation to curriculum level; it was agreed, however, that attitude is critical to effort and outcome, and so should be observed and comments recorded. They also agreed that expressive writing was not assessable.

Indicators of Understanding and Comprehension of Meaning and Content

- Understand the differences between oral and written language.
- Use word classes effectively.

- Choose a form of writing appropriate to the purpose and the intended audience.
- Use language effectively for impact.
- Justify choices when writing.

Level 2. Beginning to *developing* on all indicators; with a trend towards *beginning* in poetic writing, *developing* in transactional writing.

Level 3. Similar result, but *consistent* for distinguishing between oral and written language, and for justifying choices in transactional writing.

Level 4. Similar result, but where indicators were applicable to both strands, *consistent* ratings on these indicators in transactional writing tended to parallel *developing* ratings in poetic writing.

Indicators of Command of Conventions of Writing

- Use spelling strategies (syllabification, visual memory, letter sounds and relationships, mnemonics, basic spelling rules).
- Spell an increasing number of high-frequency words.
- Demonstrate ability to record experiences, events, feelings, and ideas in a range of text forms using appropriate language and text features.
- Use apostrophe conventions denoting contractions and possessives.
- Use complete sentences.
- Use compound and/or complex sentences with conjunctions.
- Use appropriate tense.
- Use direct speech.
- Use indirect speech.
- Use appropriately a variety of punctuation conventions (commas, full stops, capital letters, exclamation marks, question marks, quotation marks).
- Use figures of speech (metaphors, similes, alliteration, personification).
- Create a bibliography.
- Acknowledge references.

Level 2. Beginning to *developing* on all indicators; agreement that certain indicators were obviously pertinent only to either poetic or transactional writing; also that some elements of multi-part indicators, such as figures of speech or punctuation marks, might be evident before others are mastered.

Level 3. Developing to *consistent* on all indicators, with the exceptions of the possessive apostrophe and indirect speech, both rated *beginning* for this level.

Level 4. Consistent across poetic and transactional writing on spelling strategies, appropriate tenses, and most punctuation; *developing* for the rest. In transactional writing, bibliographies were seen to be *developing*, and acknowledging references to be *beginning*.

Indicators of Editing and Proof-reading

- Craft or rework text (add, change, delete, adjust grammar, adjust for impact).
- Extend or refine writing.
- Underline approximations.
- Use a range of strategies to correct spelling; e.g., spelling rules, dictionary, spell check.
- Proof-read for sense, grammar, punctuation, spelling.

Level 2. Beginning to *developing*, in both poetic and transactional writing; it was noted that these skills were not likely to be exercised independently to any extent at Level 2; teacher modelling and some assistance has to be assumed.

Level 3. Beginning to *developing*, with consistent underlining of approximations; at this level fewer students might need assistance.

Level 4. Developing to *consistent* in both poetic and transactional contexts; although it was noted that students' behaviour varied according to whether they were assisted by a teacher or were working independently; and some of the relevant skills tended to develop sooner than others.

Indicators of Writing Strategies (Level 4 Only)

- Use stages of writing appropriately for the task; e.g., talking, planning, drafting

reworking, editing, proof-reading, and publishing (Level 4 only).
- Use complex writing structures; e.g., use variety in sentence beginnings, use paragraphs, use conjunctions to form more complex sentences, use varied vocabulary, develop and sequence ideas, develop plot, setting, and characters (Level 4 only).
- Demonstrate ability to record experiences, events, feelings, and ideas in a range of text forms using appropriate language and text features.

Level 4. Developing on all these indicators.

Range of text types. Range of text type elicited considerable debate as to whether text types can be used as indicators of progress or whether they constitute contexts. The following text forms were listed in the matrix: personal diary/journal; recount; information; eye witness, newspaper, or science reports; procedural texts such as games, activities, and recipes; argument; explanation; description; biography; autobiography; formal and informal letters; advertisements; book reviews; film, TV, CD reviews; poetry; plays (stage, radio, and video); and narratives (imaginary, fairytales, myths, legends, and fables.)

Most teachers stated that at all levels children should be using all text types, depending on classroom programmes. Modelling of the text types would be expected throughout the reading/writing programme (for example, using the *Journal of Young People's Writing*). By the end of Year 7 all students should have been exposed to all text types.

Teachers agreed that the text forms were valuable to have as exemplars for planning writing programmes, but they were contexts rather than indicators for assessment. Nevertheless, they agreed that students would be exposed to all text types by Level 4.

Discussion

Time Limitations

Note that time constraints prevented sufficient discussion at the beginning of the focus groups to ensure teachers' interpretation

of the indicators was consistent. There was noted difference of opinion about the meaning of the indicators and the curriculum function labels, such as *expressive writing*, among others. If questionnaires are to be developed for use with a national sample, it is probably important to spend time with teachers clarifying the meaning of each indicator and curriculum strand label before gaining their responses.

Definitions

There were different perceptions among teachers of what each curriculum level meant. This may indicate that schools have interpreted the levels differently. The teachers were asked to comment on the indicators in relation to the particular students they were teaching, rather than a generalised cohort of students.

If the terms *personal* and *close reading*, and *expressive*, *poetic*, and *transactional writing* are to be used in future surveys (and indeed in future discussion of the curriculum) it is important to establish understandings of what these terms mean. The fact that the sub-strands in the *writing* strand of the curriculum are not discrete categories in practical learning situations often leads to confusion among educators. This is especially evident in *expressive writing* and *poetic writing*. However, most of the teachers, regardless of how they understood the term, thought it was inappropriate to assess expressive writing.

In some instances, teachers may have identified a principal process pertaining to a particular indicator, while others have listed all that seemed implicated to any degree. In some instances, it was difficult to understand their reasoning: for example, at Level 4, Year 7 teachers said that when *finding, selecting, and retrieving information*, students would be mainly *exploring language* and *thinking critically* – disregarding *processing information* entirely. Teachers commented that the processes students use in different situations are not easily assessed, and some thought they should not be assessed.

Indicators

There was marked variation between teachers from Years 5, 6, and 7 in the way they evaluated the indicators. For example, at Level 4 with the indicator *make inferences from texts*, the Year 6 teachers thought this was *developing* to *consistently* demonstrated, while Year 7 teachers thought it would be *consistently* demonstrated within Level 4. Another example was in relation to the indicator *demonstrate a willingness to choose to read as a pleasurable activity*. While most teachers felt this did not apply to close reading, Year 7 teachers indicated that they thought students at Level 3 would demonstrate this *consistently*. There were many similar instances where this occurred. Thus, teachers differed in their understandings of which indicators could be validly applied to particular curriculum strands and functions – especially in respect of close reading and personal reading. We believe this reflects differences, between individual teachers, and more generally between teachers of particular Year groups, in what the levels specified by the curriculum document mean.

Assessment

Analysis of the data indicated that teachers disagreed as to whether personal reading indicators were assessable. This may have reflected different classroom experiences or practices in relation to personal reading. Perhaps differing perceptions about whether personal reading is an appropriate context for assessment by teachers are also involved. For example, not all teachers may use book discussions in a way that is assessable. Some teachers thought that personal reading is not an appropriate context for assessment relative to curriculum levels. Similarly, some teachers stated that it was not appropriate to assess expressive writing, as it is personal to the writer.

There was widely varying reporting by the teachers on the processes (exploring language, thinking critically, processing information) implicated in the achievement of particular indicators, and a high level of non-response. This may be because the teachers thought that

the processes students use in different situations are not easily assessed or should not be assessed.

Text Types

The teachers commented that judgements made in the classroom in relation to the indicators depended upon the context. For example, in reading, the achievement of a particular student in terms of a particular indicator would be affected by the type of text used, the way it had been introduced, the complexity of the text, and the teacher's scaffolding of the task.

Whether text types could be used as indicators, or specified as crucial elements of indicators, was debated. The view of the researchers is that further indicators should be developed to provide descriptors for different kinds of language and structures within particular writing forms. For example, it is often necessary to provide evidence in an argument. We would expect student ability in relation to such indicators to vary according to their level of achievement. However, most teachers argued that at all levels students would be using a variety of text types in authentic contexts, and that descriptors relating to text forms should be considered as contexts and not as indicators of achievement.

Modelling of text types would be expected through reading programmes – for example, when reading sections from the *School Journals* and the *Journal of Young People's Writing*. Teachers' knowledge of the characteristics and purposes of text types appears to be variable, depending on their schools' professional development policies and approaches.

Standards

A key outcome of the focus group discussions was the variability of teachers' expectations of student achievement at each level of the curriculum. For example, teachers of Year 5 students expected students at Level 2

in close reading to be *beginning* to use to *developing* their use of *understanding and information gained from texts*; whereas Year 6 teachers stated that this may indicate that each school has interpreted the levels in an individual way, thus influencing teacher judgement.

Teachers were reluctant to comment on the *attitude* category. They commented that the indicators were important, and implicated in achievement, but not indicative of curriculum levels.

Conclusion

The task of "mapping the curriculum" was extremely large and demanding for the teachers to attempt in such a very short time. Towards the end of the first focus group day, concentration probably waned. Although some clarification and elaboration was achieved in the subsequent half day, the researchers are aware of the tentative nature of the results of this research.

However, as well as providing data to inform the development of assessment tools for Years 5, 6, and 7, the unpacking of the curriculum levels should provide teachers with valuable information to guide programme development at Years 5, 6, and 7. Many schools have debated the meaning and implications of the curriculum levels and arrived at their own interpretations of student achievement at each of its levels. Debate over the indicators may also lead to better understanding of the functions and processes specified in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. This is a debate that is valuable and well overdue given that *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* has been gazetted for six years.

References

Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.