

Teacher Evaluation of the Second Calibration of Reading and Writing Assessments: Summary

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Angela M. Parker & Gavin T. L. Brown
University of Auckland

This report summarises feedback responses of the teachers (n=120) involved in the second nationally representative calibration of asTTle reading and writing papers in May 2001. The majority of teacher and student responses to the reading and writing assessments is positive, though more negative comment is expressed about the writing papers.

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Writing assessment were received. This response sample represented about one third 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.

Note that Year 6 to 8 children were used in calibration 2 instead of Year 5-7 as in calibration 1. This was done because it was assumed that the achievement of children at Year 6 to 8 in May of the year would be closer to the achievement of Year 5 to 7 children in November of the previous year than would be the achievement of Year 5-7 children.

A nationally representative sample of one hundred and twenty one schools was invited to participate in the second calibration of the asTTle reading and writing assessments conducted in May 2001. Of this population, 82 schools, reasonably in proportion to the nation in regards to decile, school type, and school size, participated. Six reading papers and 16 writing papers were sent out for calibration.

The majority of the schools completed both reading and writing papers, with some only completing reading papers. Approximately 8,800 children in Years 6, 7, & 8 were involved in the calibration. Each teacher who administered papers to a class of students was asked to complete a feedback form. The potential pool of respondents, estimated at about one teacher per 25 students, would be 350. A total of 68 replies in response to the Reading assessment, and 52 responses to the

Reading Assessments

Question 1

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

About half of the teachers were satisfied with the content of the reading papers (Table 1). Only a quarter of teachers were dissatisfied. Of course, it was not possible to meet the needs of every student and every class, as summed up in the comments in the ‘both’ column. The

consensus was that the content covered an appropriate range for the students in question.

Table 1

Appropriateness of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	35	19	10	4	68
Percentage	51	28	15	6	100

Comments indicating a favourable response included: *“Most students coped alright with this. Able to follow the instructions with ease”*. While negative comments included *“The children found the content easy for their level. The completed the test very quickly”*.

Question 2

Was the content interesting and engaging for students?

There was very 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 appropriate for the age of the children, as summed up by *“Children related well to the topics of stories, especially skateboarding”*.

Table 2

Interest & engagement of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	55	1	7	5	68
%	81	2	10	7	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.

Question 3

Were the teacher's instructions clear and easy to follow?

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 teachers instructions needed to be more precise and sequential – too many practice questions”*. Nine responses (both negative and positive) made reference to a misprint in the teacher instructions.

Table 3

Clarity & ease of teacher's instructions

	Yes	No	Suggestion made	Both	No answer	Total
N	52	4	8	3	1	68
%	76	6	12	4	2	100

Question 4

Was the level of difficulty across the paper appropriate?

Half the teachers believed the difficulty of the papers was appropriate, although 24 of these respondents did not elucidate (Table 4). A fifth of teachers were negative with only one not expanding upon his or her opinion. The majority of negative responses indicated that the test was too easy. However, one negative respondent commented that *“the way the questions are worded are a bit ‘adult’ – they need to be written more simply”*. Two teachers remarked that they felt unable to comment until the papers were marked and they had seen the results. About three quarters of the negative responses were due to the papers being considered too easy for students (Table 5).

Table 4

Appropriateness of difficulty across the papers

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	33	13	13	9	68
%	49	19	19	13	100

Table 5
Reasons for inappropriate level of difficulty

	No	Too hard	Too easy	Total
N	1	2	10	13
%	8	15	77	100

Question 5

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

About two-thirds of respondents made a general comment (Table 6). Despite the fact that the responses were wide and varied, they fell into five main categories – positive, negative, both, uninterpretable, and suggestions given. Nearly twice as many comments were positive as negative.

Table 6
General comments about writing papers

	N	%
Positive	17	39
Negative	9	20
Both	5	11
Uninterpretable	2	5
Suggestions given	11	25
Total	44	100

Question 6

What was the student’s response to the paper?

All but 7 responses recorded some comment on behalf of or in summary of student response to the papers. A majority of the teachers reported that students enjoyed the experience (Table 7), while only one in seven reported students not being positive to the paper. In regards to the length of the assessments, all responses commenting on length indicated either that it was too long or that the children finished before the time was up.

Many positive comments were made regarding ‘shading the bubbles’ response formats used instead of the traditional a-b-c-d multiple-choice questions and one positive response commented that “*they wouldn’t have minded doing another one!*” However, one teacher commented that the “*children found colouring then ticking confussing* [sic]. *Perhaps one or the other?*”

Table 7
Student responses to paper

Comment	N	Percentage
Positive	37	55
Liked/enjoyed/interesting	16	24
No worries	1	1
Easy	2	3
O.k./alright/tick/fine	8	12
Good/positive	10	15
Negative	11	15
Boring	1	1
Hard	1	1
Too long/too easy/finished early	9	13
Neutral/Mixed	11	17
Neutral	3	5
Mixed general reaction	5	8
Liked some parts and disliked others	2	3
Suggestions for improvement	1	1
Response unclear	2	3
No answer	7	10
Totals	68	100

Writing assessments

Question 1

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

Fewer than two-thirds of teachers indicated that the content was appropriate for the level and ability of their class (Table 8). One teacher commented “*Yes. Students were able to write from personal experience*”. However, most did not make any further comment. Over a quarter of all teachers had mixed comments. Examples of those who responded with both are “*The questions based on own experience were, however the questions relating to a diagram my students found difficult*”.

Table 8
Appropriateness of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	31	5	14	2	52
%	59	10	27	4	100

Of the few who wrote ‘no’, a couple noted that there were difficulties with particular groups of students; for example “*Difficult for this remedial English Class*” and “*This topic was not suitable for my ESOL students*”. While

the balance reported that students simply found it too hard.

Question 2

Was the content interesting and engaging for the students?

Half of the teachers reported that the content was interesting and engaging for students (Table 9). While most of those who agreed often felt no further need to amplify their comment, one comment stood out.

“Mostly. A few struggled, but I suspect unless it was about Pokemon or Dragonball Z they would anyway”.

Table 9
Interest & engagement of content

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	26	11	11	4	52
%	50	21	21	8	100

Those who responded with a ‘No’ or ‘Both’ gave quite specific feedback about what was engaging and interesting, and what was not. For example:

“Some students felt the subject was too constrained”.

“Not really certain that the water cycle is the most engaging topic for Y6 children”

Question 3

Was the level of difficulty for the writing task appropriate?

Half the teachers agreed the difficulty was appropriate, while a quarter equivocated with both positive and negative comments (Table 10). The response to this often seemed to reflect the ability or level of the class. As one teacher remarked “*Actual task was appr[opriate] for level of difficulty as ch[ildre]n perform to their level of ability*”. However, another teacher who made a similar comment considered this to be a negative feature of the papers.

Table 10
Appropriateness of difficulty across the papers

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Other	Total
N	28	7	12	2	3	52
%	54	13	23	4	6	100

Teachers whose responses were coded under the ‘Other’ column, provided comments that were ambiguous in nature or were irrelevant to the question of difficulty, such as; “*seemed to open → could write about almost anything*” and “*It was good having variation*”.

Question 4

Was the amount of time allowed appropriate?

Teachers were split two to one on the issue of time with twice as many regarding the time allowance as appropriate (Table 11). Of the responses that indicated that the time allowed was appropriate, most did not elaborate.

Table 11
Appropriateness of time allowed

	Yes	No	Both	No answer	Total
N	31	16	3	2	52
%	59	31	6	4	100

Just sixteen negative respondents provided a comment to elaborate their opinion (Table 12). Nine thought too much time had been allowed, while six felt the time was too short. These teachers often included the specific times and areas that they believed to be inappropriately timed. For example, “*Planning and checking – fine. 30 mins too long for writing, 20 mins would have been enough*”.

Table 12
Reasons for inappropriate time allowed

	“No”	“Too Long”	“Too Short”	Total
N	1	9	6	16
%	6	47	38	100

Question 5

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

Just over half of the teachers made an additional comment (Table 13). Half of those making a comment were negative and nearly the same proportion made neutral or mixed comments.

Table 13
General comments

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
N	3	13	11	27
%	11	48	41	100

The negative comments were mainly focussed around issues with the instructions, for example, *“Not sure whether to allow children to use resources e.g. dictionary”* and *“the instructions were not clear enough”*.

The neutral comments usually were hints and suggestions for the improvement of the papers. Comments included: *“having examples of some success ideas might have encouraged thinking outside sport”* and *“students asked for 10 minutes to plan rather than five”*.

The positive comments were captured by one teacher; *“students stayed focussed for the full 30 mins (I was impressed with their efforts)”*.

Question 6

What was the student’s response to the paper?

Almost all teachers reported on student reaction to the writing papers (Table 14). There was a fairly mixed response from the students, with a third positive and just over a third negative. About a quarter of teachers reported mixed responses by the students. One teacher responded, *“As with any ‘test’ – ranged from negative to acceptance”*. Unclear answers were answers that were unable to be defined as positive or negative, and were unrelated to the question (for example, the following response is the teacher’s response to the paper, not that of the students) *“the children have had numerous tests so far this year, they did the best and I am happy with their response”*.

Table 14
Student response to writing papers

Comment	N	Percentage
Positive	15	31
Liked or enjoyed	10	21
No worries	1	2
Interesting	1	2
Easy	1	2
O.K./alright	2	4
Negative	18	38
Too short/needed more time	1	2
Boring/not interesting	3	6
Hard	4	8
Disliked/didn’t enjoy	2	4
Apprehensive/uncertain	2	4
Not enough choice	3	6
Didn’t understand /instructions unclear	1	2
Overwhelming	1	2
Daunted by number of pages	1	2
Neutral/Mixed	12	25
Mixed general reaction	8	17
Liked some parts and disliked others	1	2
Got on with it	1	2
Suggestions for improvement	2	4
Response unclear	3	6
Totals	48	100

Concluding Comment

Both of the papers were well received by the teachers and the students. Roughly half of all responses were favourable and positive, with the reading questions receiving four times as many positive responses as negative, and the writing getting almost two times as many positive as negative. The smaller pool of items available may explain the larger proportion of negative responses to the writing papers (i.e., only fourteen writing tasks were in the calibration in contrast to over 200 reading items). There are some small areas for improvement suggested by the participants, including a closer examination of the content to ensure interesting material for children at this age.