

**Technical Report # 34
Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning**



English Reading Curriculum Framework and Map:

Levels 2 - 6

Submitted by the Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning team,

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This report explains the principles underlying the mapping of Levels 5 and 6 of the functions in the reading strand of English in the New Zealand Curriculum and includes recommendations for the asTTle Reading Framework, Curriculum Map and Item Development Levels 5 and 6. asTTle is funded by the Ministry of Education to Auckland UniServices Ltd. at the University of Auckland to research and develop an assessment application for Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Pānui, Pāngarau, and Tuhituhi for Years 5-7 (Levels 2-4) for New Zealand schools. We acknowledge this funding, and thank the Ministry of Education for their continued assistance in the development of this project.

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Assessment of curriculum content requires a clear understanding of the structure and nature of the content to be assessed. Two powerful tools in guiding the development of assessment items are a content framework and a curriculum map. A content framework classifies the content of a subject into major categories or big ideas and sub-divides the big ideas into major or key themes. What is being taught in classrooms ought to relate to children learning these major ideas and related themes. Furthermore, a curriculum will specify a multiplicity of achievement objectives across a range of difficulty levels that need to be taught and mastered as the substance of the major curricular themes and ideas. A curriculum map relates the detailed achievement objectives to the major categories and key themes identified in the content Framework. The whole process of identifying the structures and relationships of curriculum content is called curriculum mapping.

This report was commissioned to analyse the asTTle English Reading Framework and Curriculum Map in light of extension of Project asTTle into curriculum Levels 5 and 6. The majority of the students will be in Years 9 and 10, but there will also be some working within Levels 5 and 6 who are both above and below Years 9-10. The Levels 5-6 curriculum map for reading takes into consideration the range of reading texts and demands in both print and multi media and the different purposes for reading. The discussion is confined to the purposes and demands of Close Reading, since Wide Reading is not assessed by asTTle, although, of course, much of the same literary theory and reading research applies to both Close and Wide Reading. The report also raises some issues relating to interpreting the scope of the achievement objectives for the reading functions for English in the New Zealand Curriculum (ENZC) and thence of the nature of the development of higher level reading skills and strategies and assessment tasks.

Understanding Close Reading

There are two types of English achievement objectives that teachers need to consider when planning programmes. These are the functions and the processes. The processes (Exploring Language, Thinking Critically and Processing Information) are seen as being integrated into the achievement objectives for both the receptive and the productive functions of all oral, written and visual language. The asTTle Curriculum Map for Levels 2-4 has devised five categories of deeper features and three categories of surface features for text processing. The five deeper feature categories are Find Information, Knowledge, Understanding, Connections, and Inference. The three surface features are Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling.

It should be carefully noted that *ECNZ* is a spiral framework (Brown, 1998). The set of performance criteria at each level are not discrete. At each successive level, it is assumed that students will have mastered the more skill-focussed objectives such as using an atlas, or finding a detail using age appropriate tasks and materials and will be developing competency with the more complex reading processes with texts selected as suitable for this level. However, both types of reading tasks may be repeated with more complex vocabulary, syntax, structure, or content, and new objectives, which reflect the curriculum objectives at the next level, will be added.

Reading Taxonomies

There are many different types of reading taxonomies. Some are specifically framed around what are regarded as traditional “subject English” in that they refer to

comprehending and evaluating the literary worth of different texts, such as prose literature (fiction and non-fiction) and poetry (e.g., Smith, Smith, and Mikuleckey, 1978; Beard, 1990). Others are more generic to the reading process, while still others are framed around reading in different curriculum or content areas or reading for academic purposes (e.g., Smith, Smith, & Mikuleckey, 1978; Tonjes and Zintz, 1981; Grellet, 1983; Dubin, Eskey, & Grabe, 1986). These taxonomies were considered in relation to the descriptors, which had been developed with reference to the SOLO taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982) and the PISA categories for text processing (Kirsch, Mendelovits, & McQueen, 2000) as two key sources, in conjunction with a number of other sources, which are listed in Appendix 1 of Meagher-Lundberg & Brown (2001).

The “skills and strategies” referred to in the achievement objectives in the English curriculum are embedded into the subsections of these categories, although they are not described as such in the map. The curriculum’s glossary offers a definition of reading strategies, but not of skills, which are mentioned, but not separately identified in the definition of the reading process. Strategies are defined as “The methods used to apply reading processes to gain understanding. They include predicting, self-correcting, recapitulating and confirming” (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 141). The reading process is defined as “The process by which we construct meaning from texts. ... the skills and information used to interpret texts of all kinds, not only written texts. The process includes using semantics, syntax, visual cues, context and background knowledge and combining these to construct meaning” (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 141). The document does not make explicit reference to the role of metacognitive strategising in effective reading, the importance of which has been stressed in much current research on reading. Kucer’s table of Reading Strategies and Processes (Kucer, 2001, pp. 121-122) is a useful summary that includes metacognitive strategies.

In addition, because Curriculum Levels 5-6 both precede and overlap Level 1 Achievement Standards for the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA), the curriculum map was also configured in relation to these standards, specifically the English Achievement Standards. The achievement objectives for Level 7 of the English curriculum were also analysed, since an understanding of what higher levels require is necessary to establish some boundaries between the levels.

Items from the Level 5 Assessment Resource Bank from the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER) English item bank were used as another point of comparison. Current research in the fields of reading and learning and current literary theory was also considered. The process further took into account the developers’ perceptions of some limitations in aspects of teacher knowledge about reading skills and strategies and text types and forms, terms whose usages are somewhat inconsistent in English curriculum document itself. Work from the Exemplar Projects has not been used as a direct reference point for reading, since this is currently being applied only to Level 5 Writing of the English curriculum.

The Nature Of “Subject English”

In the light of these requirements, there are a number of issues which need to be taken into consideration when deciding what might be included in the broad outline of Close Reading competency at Levels 5 and 6, and in deciding what types of texts might be used in designing items to assess the level of this competency in the different categories. It is important to recognise that there are two branches of research and commentary in relation to reading different types of texts. There is the field relating to the reading of literary text and the field relating to the reading of content area texts,

often taken to mean texts in curriculum areas other than English (i.e., non-literary texts). This begs the question of the extent to which texts used in reading for the English curriculum do or should relate to other curriculum areas. The debate on what constitutes “subject English” is still a heated one. Grossman (in Richards 2002, p. 427) makes reference to Robert Scholes’ assertion in his book entitled *The Rise and Fall of English* that “English as a field of study can no longer afford to retain literature as the centrepiece”, certainly a contentious view. This issue will be explored further later in this report.

Frameworks for Response to Literary Text

In processing text at these Levels 5 and 6, learners are required to “discuss ideas”. For literary texts whether fiction or non-fiction, this is interpreted as meaning that learners must identify what these ideas are and put them into some framework of literary analysis. The type of framework will be guided by the teacher, and will be informed or constrained by the teacher’s explicit or implicit knowledge of literary theory. It will also be reflected in the teacher’s choice of texts for discussion and analysis and influenced by choices of other teaching materials (such as English text books or teacher designed worksheets).

It can be noted here that there are a number of waves of literary theory, which have influenced approaches to teaching literature. These include new, archetypal/myth, psychoanalytic, and Marxist criticisms; post-colonial, existentialist, structuralist, post-structural and deconstructionist and postmodernist criticisms; feminist and genre criticisms, and reception and reader response theory. Some of these have had far less direct influence on the school sector than others but the various aspects and interpretations of reader-response theory are among the most powerful and pervasive to have influenced the teaching of literature in schools and have been extended in some case to aesthetic readings of factual non-literary texts. Critical literacy approaches to textual analysis incorporate various aspects of many of these theories. The selection of which aspects and the nature of their application to the analysis will be strongly determined by the political and philosophical positions of the teacher, mediated to some extent by the curriculum.

Developmental Considerations

A number of discussions of reading competency support the idea that there are developmental stages of interpretation and evaluation. Squire (1991) cites Applebee’s work in investigating the influence of age on children’s response to text. Flood and Lapp (1991) also refer to a number of studies reporting on the range of factors, including age, which affect reader response. Rebecca Barr (2001) suggests that the 1968 framework of Purves and Rippere is still useful for comparisons of the differences between older and younger students’ responses. This framework allocates response to text to four major categories (with 139 subcategories!). The four major categories are engagement/involvement (determined by reaction and interest), perception, (determined through retells, summaries and descriptive statements), interpretation, and evaluation. Barr supports the contention that it is likely that younger learners focus mainly on perception, while adolescents move to interpretation. She sees this as consistent with another framework constructed by Langer in a 1995 study (Barr 2001, p. 419). This is a four-stage framework for creating an interpretation (or “envisioning”) a text. It consists of “stepping into text” – or picking up cues for orientation to the text; “being in and moving through the text”

– questioning the text to build meaning; “rethinking the text” – considering its relationship to the world, and “objectifying the text” – focussing on the craft of the text.

The two frameworks can form one type of matrix for comprehension of and response to text. Her view, formed from applying this matrix to an analysis of the responses of different age groups to literary texts, is that older learners are “more likely to look for themes and generalisations in text” and focus on the social/psychological motivation of characters, not just actions and moreover that they thus evince what she describes as “symbolic” responses (Barr, 2001, p. 420). The types of pathways along which teachers can lead students to enable them to form their own frameworks for response to literary texts are exemplified with a series of helpful questions generated from socio-cultural views of the reading process in an on-line article entitled [*On The Reading Process. Notes on Critical Literary Philosophy and Pedagogical Practice*](#) (Woodlief & Cornis-Pope, 2002). The writers state that this is a preview of a chapter for publication in a 2002 text *Intertexts: Reading from A Writer’s Perspective*. These writers strongly urge “critical comparative” rereading as part of the reading process, in order to produce “significance” in reading (Woodlief & Cornis-Pope, 2002 p. 6).

Close Reading Achievement Objectives at Levels 4—6:

What Do They Require Of Learners?

It is always challenging to design rubrics which are both sufficiently comprehensive and specific enough to be useful and explain real differentiation both between and within performance levels, and which at the same time are manageable and useful for assessment. In terms of designing assessment items, the following framework is suggested. It is suggested that the broad profiles of achievement at Levels 5 and 6 will encompass the characteristics discussed below and summarised in Appendix 1.

At Level 4, students are expected to meet the Close Reading Achievement Objective, which requires them to “discuss language, meanings and ideas in a range of texts, relating their understanding to experiences, purposes, audience, and other texts” (MoE, p. 34). At Level 5, the objective remains the same, but in meeting the objective students are required to use a “range” of both “contemporary and historical texts”(MoE, p. 34). The added component for Level 6 is that in addition to meeting the Achievement Objectives from previous levels, students are expected to be able to “analyse” not only the “language, meanings and ideas” but also the “literary qualities” of the text.

As indicated above, the boundary between Level 6 and the next level of the curriculum is problematic to establish, since the both the Exploring Language and Thinking Critically process strands at Levels 3 and 4 use the term “discuss” in relation to language conventions and structures and meanings in text, and the Processing Information strand refers to “interpreting” information “from a variety of sources” which surely implies the necessity of critical use of multiple texts. At Levels 5 and 6, analysis and application are required in relation to Exploring Language. This is an important point, since the language choices made by writers are the realisations of meaning for the writers, and the comprehension of and responses of readers to these choices are integral to their construction of the text’s meaning. At Levels 7 and 8, as discussed above, the Exploring Language Objective explicitly requires evaluation of

language choices in relation to purpose and effect and the Close Reading explicitly requires evaluation only at Level 8 as noted above.

Establishing Profiles Of Achievement

Taking into account the precise demands of the curriculum Achievement Objectives for Close reading at Levels 5, we can interpret the expectation that students will **discuss ideas in a range of contemporary and historical texts and that they will relate their understanding to personal experience, audience, and other texts** as meaning the following.

The ability to “discuss” at Level 5 can be taken as meaning the ability to comment on text and incorporate the Exploring Language and Thinking Critically process strands into the discussion, as these are the processes that identify elements of the texts for the discussion. Response can be assumed to be an aspect of discussion, through “relating to personal experience”. “Relate” can be interpreted as meaning:

- Make connections to and between one’s own understandings and knowledge and the content, implications and context of a text;
- Make comparisons with other texts in the same sphere of ideas or content, from a number of perspectives (such as historical, geopolitical, or literary), stylistic or linguistic features, form, and medium (including technological aspects of the medium).

Level 5 reading strategies are likely to include, in addition to the strategies required at earlier levels of the curriculum, strategies for independently clarify meanings (from multiple perspectives) of texts at word, paragraph, and whole text level. Students should also be able to recognise incongruence in text. The question of what characteristics texts and assessment items might have for this level will be discussed below as part of exploring some issues in item design. The question of the use of hypertext will be explored later in the discussion on implications for asTTle assessment design.

Level 5

In summary then, at Level 5 students need to be able to:

- Identify texts as being written in different historical periods or in a range of cultural contexts (e.g., from an examination of vocabulary, sentence structure, setting, ideas);
- Identify and discuss the effects of a range of language features found in different types of historical and contemporary texts, including hypertext;
- Independently use different types of dictionaries and reference texts (e.g., dictionaries of idiom, dictionaries of New Zealand English, glossaries of literary or technical terms) to identify these features;
- Use a range of publishing conventions to assist identification and comprehension of main ideas and details in factual text;
- Distinguish between and describe different voices (including the author’s and characters’ voices) and perspectives in literary fictional text;
- Identify differences at a detailed level of language between objective and subjective texts and describe the reasons for and effects of these positions;
- Make judgements about motivations and events in literary texts;

- Analyse the effect of a range of language features (e.g., grammatical choices, vocabulary choices, literary devices) found in these texts and comment on their intended effect in relation to the writer’s purpose;
- Recognise by inference deliberate ambiguity in text and discuss the purpose and effect of this device;
- Explore some levels and types of humour in text;
- Recognise and comment on connections between visual and verbal text.

At Level 6 students need to **discuss and analyse ... taking account of purpose, audience and other texts**. Analyse, when applied to literary texts (both fictional and non-fictional) can be defined as:

- Use a range of literary terms and guided approaches to identify and describe the effects of the literary qualities of texts.

This is what may be described in Rosenblatt’s terms (cited by Grossman, 2001, p. 419) as an aspect of the “aesthetic” reading of the text in which texts are approached for their experiential and literary aspects. This is as distinct from “efferent” reading, in which the primary purpose for reading is to gain information from a text. Although literary texts can also be read for gaining information, in this sense, that is not generally the primary reading purpose. These descriptors also include perspectives inherent in the Achievement Standards at Level 2 of NCEA. In addition, they are referenced to the Level 6 Information Processing requirements of the curriculum.

Level 6

At Level 6 students should be able to:

- Evaluate the accuracy of a text and assess the adequacy of the information it supplies in relation to either the reader’s or writer’s purpose, using prior knowledge and reference materials;
- Judge the appropriacy of the writer’s choices of features (which overlaps with Levels, 5 and 7, particularly as the Levels 5-6 Process strands are conflated);
- Understand and describe differences between text types and forms in terms of rhetorical text structure and language features in a range of historical and contemporary texts;
- Use prior knowledge to evaluate the historical, social, cultural and/or literary worth of a text;
- Make use of multiple texts, including hypertext, to formulate a view on or understand or respond to a topic;
- Comprehend and respond to literary texts which subvert conventional syntax, text structure or surface features and recognise the purpose and effect of the writer’s choices;
- Recognise, interpret and respond to intertextuality in texts: this should include discussion of devices such as allegory, allusion and satire.

Characteristics of Texts for Level 5 and 6 Assessment Items: Some Challenges

There is one significant problem in a curriculum definition of text, which must be addressed. It concerns some confusion in the way the curriculum refers to text types

and text forms. The problem of text types and forms is foregrounded more in relation to writing than reading, but since the confusion is not actually removed in reading it can be assumed that the same terminological problems still exist in reading. ENZC defines transactional texts (presumably those written for students to read as well as those which they themselves write) as “writing which is intended to convey factual information or to argue the validity of a point of view with objective evidence” (MoE, p. 143). In elaborating on this, the document stated, “transactional writing is typical of the language of science, technology, trade, reporting, persuasion, legal argument and debate”. This is where there is a confusing mixture of concepts relating to field and purpose.

One example of this is the definition’s use of the terms “technology” and “persuasion”. Technology is an example of a field which has very broad parameters: as presented, the use of the term is not especially helpful in explaining to either teachers or students what types of transactional text might be found in this field. The use of the term “persuasion” alongside “technology” confuses because “persuasion” is not a field of interaction: it is a purpose to which language is put in huge range of forms and contexts. Moreover, persuasive text is often anything but “objective”. Effective persuasion frequently relies as much on the use of emotive language devices as it does on the “objective” presentation of “evidence”. Therefore, it must be made clear when linking assessment items to the curriculum that text types reflect the social purposes of language and that these text types will occur in a very wide variety of forms (e.g., a persuasive text may be a poem, a letter, a literary essay or an advertising poster). This interpretation of the terms is clear in Technical Report 4 (Limbrick, Keene, & Girven, 2000) and Technical Report 12 (Meagher-Lundberg & Brown, 2001).

Fantasy and ‘Reality’ Texts.

It is pertinent here to consider that in terms of the developmental response to text, (i.e., that adolescents are moving beyond “perception” into “interpretation”) Levels 5 and 6 would be a good point at which to prompt students, who by Level 4 are expected to have established the difference between fictional and factual texts, to begin to explore a particular aspect of difference between different types of fictional texts. There are fictional texts which reflect “reality”, or represent and interpret settings and events in the real world, or things that can and exist outside the text, and those which create “fantasy” worlds, in which there are things that cannot and do not exist in the real world. This is an important but fraught issue to explore, as it is connected to the ability to apply this understanding to other sorts of texts in which realities are distorted in different ways (such as in violent films or popular romantic fiction) and is also connected to developmental moral development. It is not likely that asTTle is a suitable tool for assessment of moral development in the sense that this applies to response to literature. However, despite the fact that moral development is, as noted above, a recognised but fraught area, assessment items, which determine students’ ability to make these types of distinctions and explore these sorts of issues, could be included under a number of categories.

Traditional Types of Texts for Close Reading Assessment

To date, texts used in the national School Certificate English examinations until 2001, when this was replaced by the Level 1 National Certificate of Educational Achievement external assessments, used texts that were typically about 250-300

words, and which, for at least the last two decades of its existence, were mainly from both factual and fictional contemporary New Zealand sources and had New Zealand contexts. Although there is no specified correlation, it is popularly understood that Year 11 of secondary schooling equates somewhere between the top end of Level 5 and the lower end of Level 6 of the Curriculum, so it is expected that many texts used for assessments at this level will demonstrate characteristics of texts used for NCEA Level 1. There has been no national testing at earlier years of secondary schooling, so both longer and shorter texts used for Close Reading at Level 5 of the curriculum are chosen by the individual schools, based on a combination of factors such as teacher preferences, available resources, and teachers' perceptions of curriculum demands and the needs of the learners.

However, while it is anticipated that texts of the types used in previous examination structures will feature in the bank of items, it is proposed that the range of types and forms of texts be extended beyond these typical texts. This will present some challenges to thinking around the topics such as the nature of text complexity, the use of hypertext, and the use of content area texts.

Text Complexity and Difficulty

Conventionally, increasing text difficulty (relating to text-based factors as opposed to reader-based or environmental factors) has tended to be construed as pertaining to aspects such as vocabulary frequency, syntactic complexity, and the nature of the content (although this interacts with reader-based factors). It may be an opportune moment to widen the types of texts that could be considered for item development for Levels 5-6 of asTTle, within the constraints of the assessment tool.

The developers of the curriculum map noted that the distinctions between the texts used at successive levels of the curriculum are relatively easier to see at earlier levels than they are at later levels. At early levels they reflect distinct stages of rapid reading development, starting just beyond the emergent reader levels. Degrees of complexity at this level can more easily be related to the text-based factors listed above, although assignment of some texts to a level can be a hotly contested, subjective and debatable exercise once this judgement is based on measures other than a choice of readability formulae. These formulae are themselves open to question and debate (e.g., Hiebert, 2002). Meagher-Lundberg and Brown (2001, p. 5-6) reported that the teachers involved in the item calibration for Levels 2-4 could reach no agreement on assignment to curriculum level for nearly a quarter of the texts selected for calibration, and no agreement on difficulty within a curriculum level for a high proportion (77%) of texts. Moreover, these distinctions are much more blurred and subtle at upper levels. At the higher levels, "critical thinking" and different approaches to unpacking texts, such as different frameworks of literary theory, mean that difficulty is not associated only with vocabulary or syntax.

Resolving Issues of Item and Text Difficulty

The developers strongly believe while increased text difficulty is one type of factor that could be used to fulfil the requirements at higher levels of the curriculum; it is the nature of some of the questions in the assessment tasks which will be able to reflect increased demands, especially when applied to analysis of short texts.

Short Texts with Embedded Complexity.

Very short texts, which appear on the surface to be linguistically and syntactically simple, may be capable of being read in many layers and dimensions of inter-textuality, and indeed the writers may expect this to happen. One example of this type of text is billboard ads, which rely for their audience impact on sophisticated reading of verbal and visual codes, which may be quite cryptic and are certainly culturally specific. Other types of texts that have not been conventionally included are excerpts from graphic novels and cartoons. These are also texts that can require highly sophisticated reading, in order for the inter-textual layers to be appreciated and for the links to be made between the verbal and visual features.

In a related issue it should be noted that the relatively short texts needed in an assessment task are often derived from extracts of much longer texts. Such short extracts may require extra levels of prior knowledge on the part of the reader or require substantial scaffolding to permit valid questioning. Furthermore, it could be argued that reading closely shortened extracts is quite a different reading process than reading closely the full, much longer text from which the passage has been extracted. Indeed, as can be seen in the various anthologies of prose, the texts that lend themselves to extraction may be a restricted sample of reading texts. The issues of how short texts might be used will be considered in the section on implications for asTTle.

Hypertext and Multimedia Texts

Another area of interest is the issue of whether and how hypertext or other multimedia text might be used. The different types of constraints on the use of this type of text will also be considered in the implications section, but it is foreshadowed here as another consideration which should be borne in mind when formulating the characteristics of texts for assessment item design.

Texts Linked To Content Area Learning.

It is important that the issue of using texts from content areas other than English is fully explored. Education in primary years in New Zealand is generally, although not always, topic based in the sense that reading and writing components of classroom work are often based around a “theme”. Teachers often follow an eclectic teaching model which may include elements of enquiry based learning or integrated curriculum approaches, although there will often be a separate developmental reading programme running alongside this. This often means that the texts used in the language programme will contain content relevant to many curriculum areas. (Learning Media, who publish many of the Ministry of Education’s curriculum materials, designed a reading series for primary and intermediate students called Connections, each book of which contains reading materials on topics related to Maths, Social Studies and Technology). It should be noted that all of the reading passages in the asTTle materials for Levels 2-4 have been classified by panels of teachers as to the Essential Learning Area of each passage’s content. Approximately 50% are considered to fall in the area of Language and Literature; the balance reflects content in Social Sciences, Science, Technology, Health & Physical Education, and Arts.

As learners move through levels of schooling, there is a gradual trend towards subject separation, and increasing restriction of reading texts to the particular subject of the class so that by the time students reach secondary school, only a minority would be reading materials from other subject areas in most classes. Moreover, these

materials are generally in a fairly narrowly restricted range of forms and text types, although this may not be as restricted in some subjects such as history. As has often been observed, there is very little teaching of advanced reading skills and strategies in the vast majority of subject secondary classes other than English, and indeed limited and highly variable teaching of reading even in secondary English. The secondary school literacy strategy strongly emphasises that teachers in curriculum areas have a responsibility to teach the literacy skills and strategies necessary for learning in their own subject areas, including reading and writing skills and strategies. However, reading and writing per se are seldom assessed in these areas, for a number of reasons that will not be explored here.

It is accepted that asTTle is framed around the English curriculum, but this document, with its colonial independence, does not, unlike the English curricula of a number of other countries, prescribe texts. (This is both a blessing and a curse for many teachers and students!) The corollary of this freedom is that any secondary English programme can and does make use of a wide range of materials for different purposes. The majority of what is “studied” is short and long literary fiction and non-fiction traditionally associated with subject English. However, there are also many materials used from print media when studying topics such as newspapers or advertising, or in preparing a research assignment or a debate. These may be texts that could just as easily be encountered in other curriculum areas, for example a text on the effects of alcohol on the body might be used in science, health, technology, or even maths.

This issue is also related to the question of different students’ engagement with text and brings us back to Scholes’ contention that “English can no longer afford to retain literature as the centrepiece of instruction.” We do not wish to suggest that literary text, both fictional and non-fictional, does not have a central place in English programmes, nor those poor readers, the majority of whom are males, cannot become engaged with literary text. However a number of international studies have suggested that this predominant focus on literary text and teachers’ general preference for instruction in the aesthetic (experiential and literary experiential) reading of text rather than the efferent (reading for information) is a strong factor in underachievement in reading, particularly for males.

Therefore, we consider that it is both possible and desirable for the development of asTTle to be used as an opportunity to promote the teaching of skills and strategies necessary for reading (and writing) in secondary and tertiary education through the inclusion of assessment items using texts linked to a range of content areas. These assessments can be drawn from what Vacca (2002, p. 188) refers to as the three paradigms associated with content area reading. These are the reading and study skills paradigm, the cognition and learning paradigm and the social constructivist paradigm, the last of which can incorporate aspects of critical literacy as well as can literary text. Moreover, many aspects of the types of processes, skills and strategies associated with reading for information are inextricably linked to those associated with aesthetic reading, so inclusion of the explicit skill and strategy instruction more usually applied to content area reading instruction could enhance reading comprehension and aesthetic readings of literary texts.

Characteristics of Level 5-6 Texts: Some Descriptors

It should be remembered from the previous discussion firstly that the curriculum requires that the items should be chosen from both historical and contemporary texts and secondly that they should include a number of text types and forms.

The scope of historical texts needs to be considered. Comprehension demands are likely to increase as the language and concepts of the text become more remote from the present of the learners (such as moving from Charles Dickens or Jane Austen to Shakespeare). Likewise, contemporary texts may be more or less accessible to learners depending on the choices of the writer (e.g., written in an unfamiliar dialect or variety of English) and the prior knowledge the reader brings to the text. This is of course part of the complexity surrounding the way meaning is gained from text through the interaction of reader and text variables.

These factors and the range of possible choices make it likely that the boundaries between text levels for curriculum levels 5 and 6 will be even more disputed than at earlier levels for the reasons outlined above.

Taking all the discussion above into account, the developers propose the following guidelines for selecting texts for assessments for Levels 5-6. One or two examples are given in some instances to illustrate a particular characteristic.

Texts for **Level 5** will demonstrate many of the following characteristics.

At word level:

- Inclusion of items within an appropriate level of general and academic vocabulary (determined from some agreed corpus vocabulary bank);
- Use of technical vocabulary;
- Use of archaic or obsolete vocabulary items;
- Use of expressions (many of which may be idiomatic) that have a specialised meaning in the contemporary or cultural context of the text (e.g., “hard knocker” in Frank Sargeson’s short story).

At phrase or clause level:

- Syntactic complexity and/or marked (unusual or deliberately unconventional syntax);
- Be very cryptic and be capable of being “read” at many levels.

At whole text level:

- Requiring a wide range or depth of general knowledge to comprehend the content of the text;
- May include different types of visual text (especially likely for hypertext and print media content area text);
- Have a subverted or, if it is an authentic text from a curriculum area, inconsiderate (difficult to follow) text structure;
- May demonstrate elements of intertextuality (which may be present in texts for earlier levels, but be interpreted differently by students at different age levels: e.g., sophisticated picture books).

- (Note that assessment items could be constructed from a number of short texts, in the ways and for the reasons discussed above.)

Texts selected for items at **Level 6** will demonstrate many of the following characteristics, as well as some of those for Level 5 texts.

At word level:

- Use of less frequent general and academic vocabulary (determined from some agreed corpus vocabulary bank).

At phrase or clause level:

- Use of more sophisticated literary devices (e.g., allusion, satire, irony, parallelism) These may apply at phrase and whole text level as well and may also have begun to be developed at earlier levels of the curriculum;
- Subversion, for literary effect, of conventional syntax and surface features, such as “Absconder, by Noel Hilliard, or “stream of consciousness” in the work of Emily Perkins).

At whole text level:

- Assumed prior knowledge of topic/content area;
- Be written from multiple perspectives or in many voices (especially literary texts).
- These are some general guidelines, and many of the characteristics will be demonstrated by texts at both levels, with the level differentiation being determined partly by the task demand.

Recommendations For asTTle Reading Framework, Curriculum Map, and Item Development Levels 5-6

While largely endorsing the asTTle categories for reading for Levels 2-4, the developers recommended some adjustments to or reconsiderations of some of the wording and some additions to enable the same framework to encompass Levels 5-6.

Finding Information: A Possible Addition

One of the indicators for increasing reading proficiency is a gradual increase in the automaticity, fluency, and speed in reading. The developers considered that it might be possible to include, either as a descriptor or as an indicator in the performance measures, some reference to the ease with which information is retrieved, or how much text is processed in a limited time. This could be assessed by developing assessment items that use a number of very short texts, or texts of varying lengths and complexity with questions of varying demand, or even using time limited tasks to ensure speed is a factor in performance (see for example the Finding Information in Prose Text module within Croft, Dunn, & Brown (2002) *Essential Skills Assessments: Information Skills* tests). It is related to but different from the addition suggested below under the Knowledge category.

Knowledge

It may be appropriate to consider the addition of a criterion that assesses the reader's ability to recognise that different types of reading require different reading strategy choices. A particular case is the different reading speeds needed to process different types of texts for different types of information, or the necessity to reread short texts that have multiple, deeply embedded or ambiguous meanings. This relates to the requirement to "adapt strategy use for a variety of purposes" and "develop an increasing range of strategies" at upper levels of the curriculum. It raises the issues about the possibility and desirability of assessment of reading fluency.

It is suggested that, since it is widely acknowledged that efficient and effective reading, especially at the upper levels of the curriculum, requires a high degree of automaticity and fluency, there could be some exploration of ways in which this could be assessed. There should be some discussion of at what level or levels this might be appropriate. It may better fit a category other than Knowledge, since it is essentially part of Understanding, but this too is open to discussion, since it is a variety of areas of knowledge (in combination with the psycholinguistic skills required at earlier stages of the reading process, and with physiological factors) which will contribute to fluent reading.

Understanding

One of the descriptors in the Understanding category requires learners to "Consistently read for meaning", but it is debateable whether in the process of one assessment task it is possible to decide that a learner is "consistently "reading for meaning. Consistency in performance can only be measured by aggregation of a number of performances, not only over time, but also in a range of types of texts.

"Evaluation" of text is a process that is not explicitly specified until Level 8 of ENZC. However, it is difficult to see it as being excluded from the cognitive processes of "discussing and analysing language meanings and literary qualities...taking account of purpose, audience and other texts" required at Level 6. In addition, making judgements about the appropriateness and effectiveness of language features of a text, and "exploring ... attitudes and beliefs" in texts are expressed as achievement objectives in the Level 5/6 Exploring Language and Thinking Critically process strands. In fact, "interpret" is the wording used specifically for the achievement objectives at Level 7 and 8 rather than at earlier levels. The nature of the "interpretation" and "evaluation" of a text and the types of critical reflection about text that are implied, and indeed are desirable, at all levels of Thinking Critically (a term which is itself open to widely varying interpretation) must be carefully considered.

What needs to be recognised is that it is clear from classroom practice and the expectations expressed in discussions and draft documents during the development of the curriculum map for Levels 2-4 that degrees of evaluation are expected at earlier levels. It is difficult to completely separate the notion of "evaluation" from either "Respond using understandings and information" or indeed from the item under the inference category "Explore author's purpose and question intent". Whichever category it might be assigned to, the notion of making reference to evaluation of text may need to be explicitly included for Levels 5 and 6 but with clear explication of what this means at this level. This issue will be explored further in the following sections of this report.

Connections

One of these descriptors requires learners to “*Compare similarities and differences within and between texts.*” The developers considered that a further component could be added to this descriptor, to include “inconsistencies” within and between texts. While one may argue that ‘differences’ may include inconsistencies, there is value in training readers to look for a number of types of incongruence or inconsistencies (logical, numerical, factual) in text. Identifying manipulated inconsistencies in text is one type of item used in some reading assessments, but one aspect of the development of critical reading skills requires readers to identify real inconsistencies not only within and between texts, but also between the text and their knowledge and perceptions of the world outside the text. One example of this is the ability to recognise that information in texts dates, so an important aspect of critical reading is to find out or recognise when a text was written, using a variety of cues from the text and relating this to world knowledge, so that the accuracy of the text can be assessed in relation to current information or contexts. Another is connected to metacognitive monitoring, especially in content areas where students make predictions or reach conclusions that should be able to be tested against the simple question “Does my prediction/conclusion make sense in the light of my knowledge and the given information?” Obviously there are Knowledge factors operating here as well, such as correct use of formulae for calculating an answer, but students need to know to ask the question. The same applies to processing reading texts

Another important consideration which is part of critical thinking particularly at upper levels of the curriculum is to consider the implications of the source of the text and how this might affect the choice of content or the viewpoint of the creator of the text and what omissions or inaccuracies there might be. Both of these aspects are also related to the descriptors in the Inference category. Recognising the existence and exploring the effect of these is of course only possible to a limited extent in the type of assessment for which asTTle is designed.

The nature of another of the descriptors was also seen as potentially problematic in respect of designing assessment items for this criterion. The wording is “*Use prior knowledge*”. It is widely acknowledged that the nature and extent of an individual’s prior knowledge whether it be cultural or conceptual, meaning factual knowledge about a concept such as ‘weather’ will always affect his or her understanding of the text and is an important component in constructing meaning from text. It is also true that most assessment items require some understandings from outside the text in order to answer questions about the text. However, it will always be difficult to determine from this type of assessment whether the learner has the prior knowledge and is not accessing it, or whether the knowledge or concept itself is not known. Nevertheless, in the interests of recognising the importance of prompting learners and teachers to encourage the accessing of prior knowledge, it is recommended that the descriptor be retained, but note that assessment items for this category are challenging to design.

Inference

It was considered that an additional descriptor is required in this category for Levels 5 and 6. The concept of synthesising information is important for these levels, particularly when integrated with Information Processing and considered in respect of the requirements for the Achievement Standards. Synthesising information from more than one text is interdependent with, but distinct from the concepts in the Understanding and Connections categories.

It may also be necessary to include the notion of “accuracy” in the descriptor “Read critically for: bias, stereotyping and propaganda”; sometimes there is not necessarily an intention to present text which displays one or more of these qualities, but the text contains inaccuracies. It is important that readers are able to identify these types of problems in texts, especially as accuracy of information is required in Information Processing at these levels. The ability to detect this is of course related to other aspects of the reader’s interaction with the text, such as his or her prior knowledge, or to other aspects of the text such as one part being inconsistent with another, which is linked to the Knowledge and Understanding categories as discussed above.

Potential issues

Achievement levels

Consultation with the sector about the draft map raised some issues, which need to be considered. In general, there was endorsement of the Close Reading curriculum map, with some responses suggesting that it clarified aspects of what the Achievement Objectives imply at a broad level, but fail to specify in particular. There was some concern expressed that some elements of the profiles of achievement might be too demanding in that they might be more challenging than and not entirely consistent with the demands of NCEA Level 1. In contrast to these views, there were also comments from other respondents who felt that this Close Reading curriculum map was a welcome elaboration precisely because it was comprehensive, detailed and showed the scope for challenge. It must be remembered that since asTTle is designed to be reported at Basic, Proficient and Advanced within each level, there needs to be sufficient scope for differentiation. The perception of its being too challenging for Years 10-12 or more difficult than NCEA may lie in the wording of the curriculum map, which is couched in the language for assessment task writers from which appropriately worded students’ tasks would, of course, be written. Nevertheless, care must be taken during development of asTTle materials to ensure appropriate continuity with exemplars already current in English reading for performance at and within Levels 5 to 6. There was also concern expressed that since this assessment tool is likely to be used alongside NCEA, then teachers may be resistant to alternative nomenclature for describing achievement levels, (i.e., Credit, Merit Excellence rather than Basic, Proficient Advanced). A possible resolution to this issue is the creation of a NCEA—asTTle equivalence reporting mechanism based on a standard setting and equating exercise.

It may also be useful to explore the feasibility and desirability of constructing separate norms for English language learners, especially for curriculum levels 2-4. There is currently much international discussion over the use of assessments designed for native speaking populations being used to describe and measure the competencies of learners learning in languages other than their first. This raises a number of issues in relation to judging them to be “failing” because they are significantly behind their age levels peers, when in fact they are progressing along a normal path of additional language acquisition.

Content

There was also endorsement for using texts, which would support learning across the curriculum, for the use of short text extracts with questions at different levels of

difficulty, for the inclusion of texts from a range of cultural contexts and for exploring the possibility of using downloaded hypertext. There is an assumption within this report that some of these texts, especially those from advertising and content areas for example, will include images. However, this being said, it is important to consider the extent to which this tool can or should examine details of visual or media literacy.

It is also important that when questions are written for knowledge about language, that they are not only derived from a coherent linguistic model, but aligned with the development of reading (e.g., developing the skill of recognising lexical and grammatical cohesion). They must be more than a “naming of parts” exercise.

The question of the age appropriateness of interest level of the texts as it affects older learners who are learning English as an additional language is less of an issue for this level of asTTle than it is for the lower level⁵. However, it should be borne in mind that if this tool is to be used to support assessment of reading development across a wide range of year levels, and to meet the needs of learners in the senior secondary school as well as those in junior secondary, it is important that content is selected with this in mind.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of items for the asTTle tool at levels 5-6 needs to take all of the previous discussion and the constraints of the design and the purpose of the tool into account, in conjunction with the following summarisation points:

- Items can be based on short texts, with question complexity being a factor in increasing the difficulty demand of the response;
- Items measuring reading fluency and requiring different types of reading for different purposes could be designed;
- The content of the reading texts should be drawn from a range of curriculum areas;
- Research on how gender affects reading preferences should be taken into account;
- Item content needs to reflect the curriculum requirement for the use of historical and contemporary texts. This should focus attention on the inclusion of texts reflecting the full range of cultural diversity in New Zealand classrooms;
- The use of hypertext is a possibility, but the medium in which this is presented (i.e., on screen or as a printout) will need careful thought, and decisions about the feasibility of presentation will depend on consideration of the technology constraints for schools. Some suggestions for assessment items using printouts of hypertexts include prediction of where a hyperlink might lead, inference of where a hyperlink might have come from, or nominating which metatags should be used for deciding which hyperlink would be most relevant for a task.

The mapping of reading at Levels 5 and 6 follows the categories in the framework established for Reading and Writing at Levels 2-4 of Project asTTle. The developers concluded that it is appropriate to describe Close Reading achievement profiles at Levels 5 and 6 largely from the same perspective as they were described for Levels 2-

4, with some adjustments to the descriptors. These descriptors are both sufficiently broad, but sufficiently specific to allow the range of macro and micro reading “skills and strategies” to be subsumed into one or more of the categories and to alert teachers to the complexity of the reading process. They also are a coherent reflection of a range of reading taxonomies. They are thus capable of embracing a range of different approaches to describing the elements of the reading process pertaining to both text and reader and the interactions involved in making meaning from text.

Curriculum mapping is an interesting exercise, the results of which will inevitably be debated. It is particularly important to harmonise as far as possible all instruments designed to give teachers better measures for literacy development and achievement in order to ensure that teachers feel supported with consistent approaches, terminology, and methodology rather than be confused by too many differences. At the same time, we should not be afraid of on-going critical analysis and review of all tools to ensure that these reflect current leading edge research from the world of reading and writing and cognition.

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Appendix 1. Level 5-6 Curriculum Map

asTTle Category	Level 5	Level 6
Find Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independently use different types of dictionaries and reference texts (e.g., dictionaries of idiom, dictionaries of New Zealand English, glossaries of literary or technical terms) to identify these features 	
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a range of publishing conventions to assist identification and comprehension of main ideas and details in factual text Identify and discuss the effects of a range of language features found in different types of historical and contemporary texts, including hypertext Identify texts as being written in different historical periods or in a range of cultural contexts (e.g., from an examination of vocabulary, sentence structure, setting, ideas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and describe differences between text types and forms in terms of rhetorical text structure and language features in a range of historical and contemporary texts Make use of multiple texts, including hypertext, to formulate a view on or understand or respond to a topic Comprehend and respond to literary texts which subvert conventional syntax, text structure or surface features
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore some levels and types of humour in text Analyse the effect of a range of language features (e.g., grammatical choices, vocabulary choices, literary devices) found in texts Identify differences at a detailed level of language between objective and subjective texts Distinguish between and describe different voices (including the author's and characters' voices) and perspectives in literary fictional text Recognise connections between visual and verbal text Comment on connections between visual and verbal text 	
Connections		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use prior knowledge to evaluate the historical, social, cultural and/or literary worth of a text Recognise, interpret, and respond to intertextuality in texts: this should include discussion of devices such as allegory, allusion, and satire.
Inference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise by inference deliberate ambiguity in text Discuss the purpose and effect of deliberate ambiguity Comment on their intended effect of a range of language features (e.g., grammatical choices, vocabulary choices, literary devices) in relation to the writer's purpose Make judgements about motivations in literary texts Make judgements about events in literary texts Describe the reasons for and effects of differences at a detailed level of language between objective and subjective texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the accuracy of a text and assess the adequacy of the information it supplies in relation to either the reader's or writer's purpose, using prior knowledge and reference materials Judge the appropriateness of the writer's choices of features Recognise the purpose and effect of the writer's choices in literary texts which subvert conventional syntax, text structure or surface features