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INTRODUCTION

This report provides an analysis of responses to the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* and makes recommendations for the next phase of development.

The report considers:

- submissions received on the draft document through the formal consultation process;
- in-depth consultation undertaken as a follow-up to some of the submissions;
- the results of a questionnaire used as part of the research being undertaken with teachers in the Literacy Professional Development Programme (LPDP) case study schools in 2008;
- an analysis of the consistency of the language of the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* in comparison with *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1-4*, *Effective Literacy Practice Years 5-8*, and the learning area, English, in *The New Zealand Curriculum*; and
- an analysis of the links between the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* and the range of assessment tools and procedures used in LPDP.

Further comment on the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* will be available once the report of research that is being undertaken as part of the LPDP have been completed and analysed. This report is expected by June 2009, and should be able to inform the work programme associated with the final version of the progressions.
BACKGROUND

In late 2006, the Minister of Education directed the Ministry to develop an aspirational goal and associated expectations for student progress and achievement in literacy. This arose as a response to data on literacy achievement that continued to show a group of learners who were not making the progress necessary to achieve success in their schooling.

The Minister agreed to the Ministry’s proposal to develop literacy learning progressions within the context of reframing the national Literacy Strategy. In particular, the Literacy Strategy was to increase its emphasis on raising teachers’ expectations and ensuring that teachers focus on accelerating early literacy learning.

The purpose of the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* was to provide teachers with a professional tool that describes the competencies their students need if they are to meet the reading and writing demands of the *New Zealand Curriculum*. The intention was that literacy learning progressions would describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes the students need to have developed at specific points in their schooling if they are to engage with the texts and tasks of the curriculum, and make expected progress.

The brief that the Ministry of Education gave the developers was that the literacy learning progressions had to:

- be set in the context of *New Zealand Curriculum* and the Literacy Strategy;
- align, where possible, with the literacy materials (including assessment tools) currently used in New Zealand schools, and the theories about literacy learning upon which these are based. In particular, the Literacy Learning Progressions had to reflect the articulation of practice outlined in the Ministry of Education’s publications, *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4*, and *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5-8*;
- make links between reading and writing, and highlight where appropriate, the importance of oral language in underpinning reading and writing;
- make the expectations for student progress and achievement clear. Acknowledging that current norms reflect performance by some students that hinders their successful engagement with the curriculum, expectations at specific points will include aspirational achievement;
- be produced in a way that enabled teachers to easily engage in the content as a whole, possibly even produced as a wall mural.

The development team comprised academics, researchers, curriculum developers, and professional learning developers. Where possible, the team consulted other experts and drew on research to inform decision-
making. However, decisions were also made on the basis of the team’s professional judgment, informed by their collective extensive experience in both national and school-based literacy research and development.

The draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* were released by the Minister of Education, on 29 November 2007. The Minister encouraged all interested parties to consider the draft and provide feedback to the Ministry of Education.

Subsequently the Government has called for the development of standards for reading and writing. While the progressions were not developed with this purpose in mind, they clearly provide a framework for developing these standards.
**CONSULTATION PROCESS**

Copies of the draft document, *Literacy Learning Progressions* were sent to all schools on 30 November 2007 with feedback requested by 30 November 2008. A feedback form was provided in the back of the booklet as well as online at [www.literacyprogressions.org.nz](http://www.literacyprogressions.org.nz).

Feedback was received from early February through until mid December 2008. 299 organisations or individuals presented submissions using the feedback form (representing a total of 1128 individuals). Of these, 29% were provided online, the rest using the printed feedback form.

The feedback form asked respondents to specify the level of teaching with which they were most concerned. Some submissions addressed several year levels, and in a number of cases different groups within the same institution lodged individual submissions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Submissions</th>
<th>Yr0-3</th>
<th>Yr4-6</th>
<th>Yr7-8</th>
<th>Yr9+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Respondents</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not all submissions addressed every question on the feedback form. Some respondents addressed only those aspects or levels in which they had specific interest or expertise. Some respondents also provided quite specific detail concerning the progressions themselves. In such cases, detail has been extracted from the submissions so that it can be further considered during the next phase of development.

Several responses came from groups that had used the consultation process as the basis for professional learning discussions.

*Great staff discussion arose from activities unpacking this draft*

Principal, decile 8 contributing school

Given the small number of submissions received, representing fewer than 5% of teachers in the system, it would be unwise to make more than tentative recommendations for the next phase of development on the basis of our analysis of this particular set of responses.

However, a significant submission was also received from The New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI), which provided comment on the basis of an extensive consultation process that used the questions in the feedback form as prompts.

In addition, four in-depth submissions were received from literacy experts or specialists, and one from two early childhood academics.
RESULTS OF THE FEEDBACK

Response to overall intent of the document

In order to gauge their general reaction to the document, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements in relation to the document, the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions*:

- It is a professional tool that will help teachers improve outcomes for students.
- It will better identify students at risk and highlight the need to intervene and increase the urgency for action.
- It will help teachers to better understand the literacy demands of texts and tasks in different curriculum areas.
- It will reinforce the need for teachers at every level to be aware of the literacy knowledge and skills that students require to make progress in learning.
- It will help teachers to tailor their literacy teaching.
- It complements other Ministry of Education documents.

As shown in Figure 1, the response to the overall intent of the document was very positive, with most respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing with every statement.
There were many general comments from across the range of respondents in support of the document’s intent, for example:

I feel that this is a very important document that will allow most students to meet the requirements of the Curriculum. It is essential that all teachers understand and use these guidelines. It should raise the literacy levels of the nation. An excellent document thank you!

junior school teacher

Thank you for finally putting something together that gives guidelines for all teachers in NZ regardless of decile, place, etc. so that we can work towards lifting literacy standards of all children in NZ.

junior school teacher

We are very pleased to see this document. We’d like to have more information on national averages/levels in order to better evaluate our programmes.

junior school syndicate – decile 2 school

I feel I still need development in literacy and this helps me clarify what is needed. They will help me form my learning intentions and success criteria

Year 5 & 6 teacher

We consider this to be a valuable resource that all teachers should be given quality time to discuss and unpack. It provides clarity and accessibility to both beginning and experienced teachers.

14 RT:Lits & RTLBs

We feel this is a great idea and making literacy explicitly wider than the English area is to be welcomed. We are all literacy teachers and we need to acknowledge and work with this. We think this will make a lot of sense for the primary schools but are worried it could disappear into a box in the secondary schools.

We feel this is a great initiative but it will need a lot more behind it. It would be really good to have lots more exemplars on line for different subject areas to sit behind this document.

secondary school department
The NZEI noted in its submission that principals and teachers responding agreed or strongly agreed that the progressions would:

- help teachers improve outcomes for students
- help teachers to better understand the literacy demands of texts and tasks in different curriculum areas
- reinforce the need for teachers at every level to be aware of the literacy knowledge and skills that students require to make progress in learning
- help teachers to tailor their literacy teaching
- provide key signposts in the development of reading and writing in English.

However, the NZEI reported that principals and teachers were less sure that the progressions would better identify students at risk, or highlight the need to intervene and increase the urgency for action.

Very few respondents expressed concerns about the general intent of the document. Those respondents who did, tended to see the progressions as being some form of national benchmarks which might be used for high stakes assessment.

A few submissions challenged the underlying philosophy of literacy learning in the document. Some also considered that it was at odds with that described in Effective Literacy Practice, or in the case of one group of university academics, not as convincing as the “Luke and Freebody model”. In fact, the progressions deliberately drew on the same theories and frameworks upon which the Effective Literacy Practice handbooks were based. Further, the experiences of the professional development team that has worked with teachers to implement those handbooks provided insights into where further exemplification and elaboration would assist teachers to use the handbooks to improve their classroom practice.

One submission expressed a concern that there was too much emphasis on reading and writing in the early years at the expense of other literacy practices.

Three respondents considered that there was a lack of alignment between the English curriculum and the Literacy Learning Progressions. This seemed to relate to how each was structured, rather than the underpinning theory or the learning outcomes being sought. A close analysis of the language used in each document found that they were well-aligned.

A careful reading of the draft Literacy Learning Progressions has identified only a small degree of mismatch between the language of the progressions and that of the Effective Literacy Practice handbooks and English in the New Zealand Curriculum.

LPDP leadership team
The LDPD team identified only some specific grammatical and theoretical terms that are used in the Literacy Learning Progressions but which are absent from the New Zealand Curriculum. This is considered further in the discussion of Issues, later in this report.

There were only three responses from early childhood educators. One of these responses was particularly supportive:

*It is valuable to see what skills and knowledge children are expected to mostly arrive at school with. This allows us to reflect on experiences we provide in early childhood; to foster interest and curiosity about language; and to help us extend children towards the next steps as the show interest.*

early childhood educator

However the other two submissions from early childhood educators expressed a concern that, in their view, the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* do not align well with the approach to literacy learning articulated in Te Whariki, as well as being incongruent with the approach to the transition to school implied in the way that Level One is set out in the *New Zealand Curriculum*.

*It is important that the curriculum in the first year of school recognises McNaughton’s research findings that children enter literacy practices through a number of communicative gateways: story-telling, dramatic play, dance, filming, art (including drawing), rich language experiences, funds of knowledge from home, and music. This “multi-modal” curriculum provides a foundation for reading and writing (and communication learning in general) and some writers would argue that it is the best way to learn, make sense, make meaning, in the school years as well as in early childhood.*

early childhood education academics
How appropriate are the descriptions of knowledge and skills in the progressions?

Question 4 in the feedback form asked respondents to circle whether they thought the knowledge and skills were either “very appropriate”, “quite appropriate”, “not very appropriate”, or “not all appropriate” for each level. Some respondents addressed each level; others only those levels that they had a specific interest in. We assumed that in most cases this was the level they were teaching.

Figure 2 shows that the respondents considered that all levels except school entry and after 6 months were either very appropriate or quite appropriate.

The proportion of respondents who considered the descriptions of knowledge and skills at school entry as “not very appropriate” or “not at all appropriate” was even more marked when just those respondents with a particular interest in years 1-3 are looked at, as shown in Figure 3.

Where concern was expressed about the level of the progressions in the junior school, it was usually in terms of the colour from the Ready to Read series that was suggested at each level rather than the knowledge and skills described in the progression statement. A typical comment was:

After One Year - not all chn will be reading at Green level. As long as this is descriptive, that is all right but if it becomes prescriptive and then possibly benchmarked, what do you suggest will happen to those chn who don't reach the green level.

After 2 years - movement from Green to purple is a big step whereas Purple to Gold is a much smaller step.

Response from a Yr1-8 Junior Syndicate

Comments tended to suggest a misunderstanding of the purpose of the progressions. Many respondents felt that given that many children, especially in low decile schools, arrived at school with few of the skills described then they somehow would be penalised – marked out for early failure.

Several responses suggested that the descriptions at the early levels should be banded to provide some “leeway”.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that many respondents who indicated a specific interest in the junior school felt that students could in fact catch up by the end of one year at school if they were given deliberate, intensive teaching.

… it is the school’s job to assist the child transition in school and school learning regardless of their entry profile i.e. meet them where they are and provide “make up” opportunities for them.

National Reading Recovery co-ordinator
Such comment, made by specialists as well as teachers and principals, reflects an understanding of the progressions, as a tool to help teachers address achievement disparity, that is more aligned with the intentions of the writers.

Figure 2: Question 4: All Responses
The comments concerning the progressions at years 4, 6, 8 and 10 were significantly different from those concerning the early years. Most respondents thought the descriptions at years 4, 6, 8, and 10 were either “very appropriate” or “quite appropriate”. However, many also considered that significant numbers of their students were currently performing below those expectations and therefore it was imperative that they were given opportunities to catch up. These comments seemed to demonstrate an understanding that the document was about the skills and knowledge needed to meet the reading and writing demands of the curriculum. This is understandable given the significant role that reading and writing play in these years.

The descriptions are appropriate if the students are to be prepared for NCEA Level 1. However, they do not necessarily reflect (current) reality.

HOD English secondary

Several respondents commented that they would like to see progressions at years 5, 7, and 9.

It is particularly interesting to note that the teachers working in the LPDP case study schools felt that the progressions were more appropriate once they became more familiar with them.
General comments about the knowledge and skills in the progressions

Feedback was also sought on general issues about the knowledge and skills in the progressions.

Oral language

18 of the 299 submissions commented that there was insufficient focus on the role of oral language in supporting reading and writing knowledge and skills. Some of these did not see oral language in the document at all, whereas others felt its role in supporting reading and writing needed to be made more explicit.

Attitudes to Reading and Writing

A few respondents had a broader concern that the progressions did not put enough emphasis on the importance of students’ attitudes towards reading and writing. In particular, they expressed a concern that enjoyment was mentioned only briefly in the early years, and there was insufficient emphasis on the importance of willingness to take risks, for example with spelling.

The development team understood that attitudes, and their role in motivation and engagement, are critical dimensions of reading and writing. However, it was difficult to develop meaningful progressions for these, and instead a section on the importance of motivation and engagement was developed for the introductory material in the progressions document.

Exemplification

Several submissions called for more exemplification of the knowledge and skills in the descriptors. The submission from the Literacy Professional Development Programme (LPDP) leaders suggested how such exemplification could assist teachers to determine, for example, how readers were “integrating the constrained and unconstrained knowledge and skills identified in the progressions and using this to make meaning.”

Specificity

Where comment was provided about the specificity of the progressions, it was mostly along the lines that the level of specificity was about right.

amount of specificity is very useful in determining the needs of children and planning for our class work

year 2 syndicate

the new curriculum document is so broad that the specific guidance provided in this document is valuable

7 junior teachers
Several respondents commented that it would be useful to have the progressions written in “student speak”.

**Spelling**

One of the expert submissions focussed specifically on the way in which spelling had been (inadequately) integrated into the writing progressions, suggesting several improvements to address this issue, while still ensuring that spelling was developed alongside writing and not as a separate set of progressions.

**The risks with itemising knowledge and skills**

A major general issue is the risk that listing knowledge and skills will lead to their being taught as discrete items. The development team paid a lot of attention to developing stems for the sets of competencies in order to convey the intention that they were items to be noticed by teachers, as students are reading and writing. However, some key respondents felt that it wasn’t at all clear that the skills and knowledge listed are to be drawn on and used in an integrated way as students process and respond to text.

Moreover, some respondents expressed concerns that Scott Paris’s work on constrained and unconstrained skills had been misinterpreted, with the progressions suggesting to these respondents that there is a fixed sequence to teaching particular skills. Of even more concern to these respondents was their inference that the writers of the progressions intended that teaching of unconstrained skills should not start until unconstrained skills had been mastered. This message was certainly not the intention of the development team, and it is worth noting that Scott Paris himself does not feel that his work has been misinterpreted.¹

> Yes, it is important that teachers are aware that the knowledge and understandings outlined in the progressions are developing but it is not the case that “this knowledge needs to be prioritised for instruction”.

Literacy expert

Another submission felt that because there were more constrained items than unconstrained in the progressions for the earlier years, the message was given that constrained skills were more important than unconstrained skills (comprehension in particular).

> For Reading After Six Months at School, only one out of thirteen objectives includes comprehension strategies: “use comprehension strategies, including making connections to prior knowledge, to understand and respond to aspects of texts such as characters in fiction texts or simple facts in information texts”.

¹Personal communication.
²The actual text in the draft Literacy Learning Progressions read: “…when students have not mastered the prerequisite knowledge and skills at places identified in the progressions, their further development is limited. These skills and this knowledge will need to be priorities for instruction”. p4
We suggest, with Paris, that both kinds of skills should be taught alongside each other in the early years.

Early childhood education academics

A literacy expert expressed concern that teachers will focus on constrained knowledge and skills at the expense of unconstrained knowledge and skills and, in doing so, diminish the opportunities for low-progress students to learn.

...research shows that teachers focus on meaning when teaching high-progress readers and often neglect grapho-phonics items and word errors (Allington cited in McNaughton, 1987). However, for children making slow progress, teachers do the opposite. They pay little attention to meaningful responses but rather focus on grapho-phonics items and words.

...low progress students learn what the teacher teaches and tend to stay within that framework.

Literacy expert

Some respondents also thought that itemising knowledge and skills in a checklist that might lead teachers to teach them out of context.

There is a potential that the progressions, if viewed as “benchmarks”, will then be used as assessments in themselves and act as prescription for teaching discrete sets of knowledge, for example high frequency words

Reading Recovery teacher

**Expectations that are inconsistent with the evidence about current achievement (actual versus aspirational)**

Concern was expressed that some of expectations in the progressions are inconsistent with current achievement, i.e. they were not developed on the basis of normed data where this was available. This concern relates particularly to the indicators for student progress after one year at school.

Students clearly do not develop all concepts about print after one year at school. This statement is quite misleading

Literacy expert

the progressions don’t allow for an increasing spread of achievement in the first 18 months at school, when that is clearly what occurs...It is not clear whether what is “expected” in the progressions is at the high end or low end of a distribution, or that there is any distribution at all.

Reading Recovery co-ordinator
The contrary perspective, that the *Literacy Learning Progressions* were devised precisely to address the mismatch between current rates of achievement (including unacceptable rates of achievement disparity) and the demands of the curriculum, was outlined in the rationale statement that accompanied the publishing of the draft Progressions. The point is taken up again in the Issues section later in this report.

The response to the gap between current performance and the progressions further up the school is quite different. The submissions that comment on this gap acknowledge that the curriculum demand described in the progressions is real and they are concerned that their students do not have literacy skills and knowledge they need.

### Challenges in using the progressions.

Respondents were asked to list the challenges they thought that schools and/or teachers would face as they aligned their current expectations of students’ reading and writing achievement with those described in the progressions. They were asked to indicate whether these challenges were major, moderate, or minor.

**Major Challenges**

#### 1 Skills on School Entry

52 submissions representing 193 respondents noted the most significant major challenge is addressing the issue of many children coming to school without many of the skills described in the progressions for school entry.  

*After 6 months at school reading and writing expectations will be a challenge with the students coming in well below the school entry levels.*

In general, the comments associated with this particular issue reflected concerns about teachers’ abilities to provide the specific instruction that is necessary, including both the availability of support such as teacher aides as well as their ability to sufficiently differentiate their practice.

Respondents from schools also considered that part of the challenge would be to improve links with early childhood services.

#### 2 Teacher knowledge and skills

79 submissions representing 358 respondents identified teacher skills and knowledge as a major challenge at all years.

They cited “lack of teacher knowledge” and “need for PD”.
The submission from NZEI encapsulated this concern:

A number of teachers have said that the progressions do not provide sufficient specificity to guide them. This comment is not surprising given the number of teachers in the focus groups who reported being amazed and concerned by the low level of exposure to literacy pedagogy, particularly practice, experienced by many of the beginning teachers in their schools. They questioned whether primary teachers were, in fact, literate enough themselves to be seen as teachers of literacy. Having an understanding of the reading and writing process is only one aspect of literacy. Teachers' confidence in their own competence with the English language has to be good enough to give feedback in respect to students on word choice, structure and tenses. Teachers need to be readers and writers themselves. While the progressions, used properly, will help them know their own students needs and abilities, the teacher still has the complex task of putting all these aspects together in a fluid and flexible way. There are currently serious questions being raised by the profession about the quality of some preservice education. Until preservice education introduces student teachers to literacy teaching and learning immediately in their first term and continue with a robust and focused programme on literacy throughout their career, many Beginning Teachers will not have the confidence to interpret the progressions and will continue to look for ready-made commercial, step by step teacher guides.

The words that many submissions requested to be added to the glossary lends weight to this view, as it is clear that a number of teachers are unfamiliar with some reasonably basic concepts of English grammar.

Respondents’ concern about the lack of skills, knowledge and confidence of front-line teachers to deal with literacy underachievers, echoes concerns that we encountered in the context of our investigation into early literacy interventions. Clearly this is a major issue.

### 3 Time and resources

29 respondents identified time and/or funding resources as a major challenge. Their comments indicated that these respondents felt they were unable to provide the amount of literacy instruction, or differentiation of instruction, that some of their students needed because there was not enough time (for the student or for the teacher), they did not have the resources, or they didn't have the skills or knowledge.

Providing appropriate programmes for ESOL students so that they could develop the reading and writing skills and knowledge in the progressions was also seen as a major challenge at all levels.

### 4 Tick box

Around 10% of submissions expressed concern about the progressions becoming a 'checklist' for the teaching and assessment of discrete items of knowledge and skills. This concern tends to reflect the

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3 It was interesting that this risk — identified by some experts as a major concern — did not receive much attention in the formal submissions.
misunderstanding about the intent and purpose of the progressions as noted earlier in the issue concerning itemising knowledge and skills. It also suggests that the progressions’ introductory stems for each group of descriptors had not been noted.

**Moderate Challenges**

Several respondents listed issues arising from transient students as a challenge. Students with special needs were also mentioned, although there was little elaboration other than a general comment that the progressions were inappropriate for many of these students.

A number of submissions thought that community (especially parents) expectations were too high, and this would present a challenge. On the other hand, a few respondents identified parents’ low expectations as a moderate or minor challenge.

Some schools saw aligning current benchmarks to the progressions as a moderate challenge, and some considered that aligning the progressions to *aTTLe* was also a moderate challenge.

**Minor Challenges**

One respondent thought that there was a risk that the progressions could become the de facto curriculum — replacing the English curriculum because “it was so much easier to understand”.

Another school thought that constructing targets would be a minor challenge.

**How the progressions will be used**

Respondents were asked to comment on how they, or their school, would use the progressions.

By far the most common response to this question was ‘for planning’ (82 submissions). This response was often elaborated with some comments that noted how useful the progressions were in showing teachers what went before and what would come after their year of teaching.

23 submissions explicitly stated that the progressions would be used to help write learning intentions or goals for programmes.

38 submissions mentioned using the progressions as a basis for formative assessment. 16 submissions also explicitly noted the potential usefulness of the progressions to guide reporting to parents.

22 submissions mentioned the use of the submissions to either set, or recalibrate their current, benchmarks for literacy achievement.
These responses are in line with those gathered through a questionnaire provided to teachers in case study schools for the LPDP project.

The largest category of response in terms of application of the LLPs concerned their use in planning, grouping and assessment, and identifying next steps.

How easy or difficult was the document to read and understand

Submissions representing 90.4% of the respondents indicated that the document was either very easy or quite easy to understand.

![How easy is the document to understand](image)

Figure 4: All Respondents

Those who found the document difficult or very difficult typically wrote that the progressions were unnecessarily jargon-loaded or technical. 55 submissions noted one or two words that they thought should be added to the glossary. In most cases, the words or terms to be added indicate that these (mostly) teachers are unfamiliar with the language of grammar. The complete list is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Glossary Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adverbial clause of reason</td>
<td>juxtapose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affix</td>
<td>meta-language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alphabetic principle</td>
<td>metacognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>mixed hybrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book language</td>
<td>noun clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex sentences</td>
<td>noun clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonants</td>
<td>onset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical literacy</td>
<td>phonological awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cues</td>
<td>pronoun references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dependant clause</td>
<td>reciprocity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A few respondents commented that they didn’t like the “flaps”, but most appreciated being able to easily glance at “what comes before and after”.

A most valuable document for all schools. I would like to see all schools expected to use it and all teachers to become as familiar with it as the Ready to Read series of readers. This is not just a sometime reference booklet but should be an integral part of all teachers toolkit that is implemented in their day to day teaching.

assistant principal
DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

Positioning Literacy Learning Progressions as a Professional Tool for Teachers

The Literacy Learning Progressions have been developed as a professional tool for teachers so that they can identify the reading and writing demands of the curriculum and ensure that their students have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet these demands. The reason for positioning the progressions outside of the New Zealand Curriculum (and the English curriculum in particular), as a service enabling students to access the whole curriculum, was described in the rationale statement that accompanied the publishing of the draft (see Appendix 1).

There are, of course, overlaps between the progressions document and the English curriculum in particular. The development team took careful account of these. Much of the knowledge about English language and text features, which provide students with resources for reading and writing, will be developed through the English curriculum. However, the English curriculum also develops understandings about English literature as well as having a wider view of the receptive and productive modes of English language.

On the other hand, the progressions focus on the knowledge and skills students must have to read and write the texts, both continuous and non-continuous, through which they will successfully engage with all learning areas of the curriculum. While some of these texts will be literary texts, in which case they will almost always be taught within the English curriculum, many of them are texts, such as instructional materials, used in other areas of the curriculum. The specialised vocabulary and types and forms of text they use are often quite specific to particular subjects or disciplines.

An analysis of the technical terms used in the progressions, English curriculum and Effective Literacy Practice found a small degree of mismatch in the way some terminology is used. These can, and should be, easily addressed in the re-write.

Recommendations:

- The Literacy Learning Progressions continue to be positioned as tool for teachers to identify the reading and writing demands of the curriculum as a whole.
- The slight mismatch in language used in the various documents is resolved in the next stage of development of the progressions.
Ways in which knowledge and skills have been described at each level

The main purpose of the progressions is to support teachers to understand the texts and tasks of the curriculum at specific stages of schooling, and what these demands then mean for the reading and writing competency of their students if they are to engage successfully with the curriculum and make the progress they need to make.

Accordingly, the big stems used to frame the progressions were carefully thought out, e.g.

After one year at school:

*Students will be reading, responding to, and thinking critically about a variety of texts.*

The progressions then describe the features of the texts at this level—texts at Green in the Ready to Read series (the instructional reading series that the Ministry provides to schools)—that students should be reading largely by themselves.

And, in writing:

*Students will be writing texts in order to think and communicate for a variety of instructional, social, and personal purposes.*

This statement is followed by a description of the sort of texts—both in print and electronic forms—that the students need to be writing, again, largely by themselves.

And, for example, by end of Year 10

*Students will independently read texts in a large variety of text types and forms, in print and electronic media. They will often be required to read multiple texts on one topic.*

The types of texts typically demanded by the various subjects in the curriculum are described, along with the features of these texts.

*Students will be writing texts in order to think and communicate for a variety of instructional, social and personal purposes. Students will be writing a wide variety of texts independently (in print and electronic media) to meet the demands of different curriculum areas.*

Again, the progressions describe the types of texts and the features of the typical texts that students need to be able to write at this stage of schooling.
The writers of the draft Progressions also took considerable care in crafting the stem that introduced, at each level, the knowledge and skills that students need in order to read and write these texts with the degree of fluency and independence needed.

The stem that introduces the reading components is:

*As they read, students build on their expertise and demonstrate that they:*

The writers wanted to convey the idea, articulated in *Effective Literacy Practice*, that literacy learning is cumulative, and that students use the knowledge and skills listed in the descriptors in the service of reading and writing texts. That is, the focus of the progressions is on the end game of reading and writing for a purpose, not the items of knowledge and skills themselves.

There was no intention that these items should be taught discretely or in any particular order, but that teachers need to notice whether or not students have them and are using them, especially if their students are not reading or writing at the expected level.

Moreover, it is the level of specificity of these items in the progressions that teachers have reported they find useful. Respondents suggested changes to some of the descriptors to make them easier to understand, and others suggested improvements to address what they considered to be inaccuracies or omissions.

The knowledge and skills in each set of the progressions have been arranged using the framework in the *Effective Literacy Practice* handbooks, i.e.

- using the code
- making meaning
- thinking critically about texts

Clearly there are more constrained skills in the early levels than appear in the later levels, when fluent readers and writers are drawing on these particular items of knowledge and skills with automaticity and accuracy.

**Recommendations:**

- Reframe the descriptors of knowledge and skills in the progressions so that it is clearer that these are used in the service of reading and writing.
- Keep the same level of specificity.
- Take account of feedback concerning specific items.

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An analysis being currently undertaken by the Tertiary Education Commission to get a better insight into the needs of adults with very low levels of literacy in New Zealand, is showing that the lack of many of these constrained skills is the major barrier for adults other than those for whom English is a second language.
**Oral Language**
As noted earlier, several respondents expressed their concern that the role of oral language in reading and writing was not clear enough in the draft descriptors. While the development team made a deliberate effort to make oral language explicit, and a close read shows that it is there, this aspect will need to be further strengthened in the re-write.

**Recommendation:**

| Make the underpinning role of oral language in reading and writing more explicit in the progression descriptors and further elaborate the statement on oral language in the introduction. |

**Attitudes**
Attitudes were not developed through the descriptors because it was difficult to show progression. However, the consequence of this decision is that the importance of students’ attitudes in reading and writing is not made clear.

**Recommendation:**

| Reconsider ways that the development of attitudes can be included in the descriptors. |

**Spelling**
Specific feedback was received about the way in which the development of spelling had been dealt with in the progressions. The expert advice is that spelling should be developed alongside (that is, integrated with) the development of writing. The development team had attempted to do this, but will need to take a more systematic approach. There are also some critical aspects of spelling development, evidenced in the use of terms such as “conventional” instead of “accurate” that will also need to be addressed in the re-write.

**Recommendation:**

| Redevelop the writing progressions to incorporate a more systematic approach to the development of spelling. |

**Gap between actual and aspirational progress and achievement**
The specifications for the development of the progressions made it clear that the descriptors at each level would most likely be a mix between the
actual performance of students at that level (where it was known) and what is considered to be necessary. The approach taken is explained in the Rationale statement:

The development team looked at evidence about New Zealand student achievement in reading and writing from a range of sources: international surveys (PIRLS and PISA), national data sets and norms from assessment tools (asTTle, NEMP, PATs, the Observation Survey), regional (Reading Recovery data, data from schooling improvement clusters), and local (data from a range of schools).

For some competencies, particularly in the early years, although the norms in assessment tools showed most students were performing at a particular level, there were compelling cases to “shift the goal posts” in order to support the emphasis of the Literacy Strategy on accelerating early literacy learning. Therefore, some knowledge and skills, for example, concepts about print, have been deliberately introduced earlier in the progressions than is current practice in many classrooms. The level of Ready to Read texts that students should be reading is also more demanding than is currently the case in many classrooms.

In other cases, the actual student achievement is below that required to meet the demands of the New Zealand curriculum. This is especially the case in writing.

The descriptors are determined by the reading and writing demands of the curriculum at that point in the system, not the students’ current reading and writing achievement. Whether the descriptors are actual or aspirational therefore depends on how well aligned current literacy achievement is with the curriculum literacy demands, including the need to make good progress in the early years in order to meet the demands later in the curriculum.

Rationale statement (Appendix 1)

The underlying purpose for the progressions has not changed: indeed the need to now develop standards makes it even more imperative that the progressions reflect not the current norms, but the knowledge and skills that students need to engage successfully with the texts and tasks at each level.

Teachers need a suite of assessment tools and procedures to help them make judgements about student’s progress and achievement—to identify what students can and cannot do. The current standardised assessment tools can be used to provide some of that information at specific points in schooling. However, we think there is merit in further considering Scott Paris’s work and differentiating between the way in which constrained skills and unconstrained skills are assessed.

Paris differentiates between ‘constrained’ skills and knowledge (such as letter knowledge and letter-sound knowledge) for which absolute standards for achievement can be set, and ‘unconstrained’ knowledge and skills such as those used for comprehension which are more dynamic and may be measured on a developmental and eventually relative scale.

As students master the ‘constrained’ skills involved in decoding their reading becomes more fluent, which frees them to use more of their cognitive resources for
the complex ‘unconstrained’ task of working out text meaning. Similarly, as students master the ‘constrained’ expertise needed to record sounds, spell words, and form sentences, they become more fluent writers and can then apply more of their thinking to conveying meaning in increasingly sophisticated ‘unconstrained’ ways.

**Recommendation:**

More focus is placed on supporting teachers to understand the literacy demands of the New Zealand Curriculum, and the need for some students to make greater rates of progress than those resulting from current practice and reflected in current achievement norms.

**Particular Issue of School Entry description**

The statement at School Entry in the progressions was intended to be a description of the kinds of literacy practices and understandings displayed by those five-year olds who are able to meet the demands of instruction in reading and writing from their first day at school. To the extent that a significant number of new entrants lack these practices and understandings, the progressions guide teachers to the ground that needs to be rapidly made up. Naturally, these are not the only literacy practices that children participate in, but those that are particularly pertinent to engaging with written text.

The development team was concerned about the potential for this particular set of knowledge and skills to be used as a checklist in a way that labelled some children as failures on day one. To avoid this, the writers considered a more narrative description, but in the end created the lists to maintain a consistent ‘look and feel’ throughout the progressions. As with all the progressions, careful attention was paid to the stems.

Nevertheless, given the level of concern expressed in the submissions, we suggest that the way literacy practices and understandings at school entry are described should be reconsidered, and that the statement itself be re-positioned as a pre-amble to the progressions.

**Recommendation:**

Work with early childhood educators to develop a statement that more effectively fulfils the intention of describing the skills and knowledge of children who are well on their way to reading and writing when they start school. Ensure that this statement is placed in the context of broader literacy practices.

The progressions “after 6 months”
The level of concern expressed about the descriptions of progress for students after 6 months at school suggests that these need to be revisited. However, it is important to remember that the call for progressions arose out of concerns about students’ not making the progress in reading and writing they need in order to engage successfully with the curriculum. A critical aim of the learning progressions is to shift teacher expectations, especially in the early years.

In an early paper on reading interventions, Marie Clay argued that:

For five-year-old New Zealand school entrants, the opportune time to survey, which is neither too soon nor too late, is not before 6 months in school and not later than 12 months.⁶

Waiting until the end of one year to determine whether a student might need more intensive literacy instruction may be too late for many students. In the early years it is particularly important to intervene as early as possible to prevent the “Matthew effect”, as research clearly shows that literacy achievement disparities evident among the youngest children widen rapidly as they get older—‘the rich get richer and the poor get poorer’. Waiting too long not only gives students opportunities to develop unhelpful compensatory strategies that can be difficult to unlearn, but also means that they are losing confidence in their ability to learn, as well as the actual opportunity to engage effectively in the broad classroom programme.

The progressions for “after 6 months” at school are critical in this context. However, it may be possible to reframe the descriptors at this point to act more as prompt for teachers to think about the student’s progress and the particular path they appear to be on.

Recommendation:

Accepting that the descriptors in the draft progressions describe the knowledge and skills necessary for all children to access the curriculum, consider reframing the descriptors to prompt teachers to investigate and respond with urgency where children have not made the expected progress after 6 months at school.

Progressions at Years 5, 7, and 9
The draft Literacy Learning Progressions do not attempt to describe the knowledge and skills needed to meet the literacy demands of the curriculum in years 5, 7, and 9. This decision was based on the difficulty

that the progressions developers had in differentiating the literacy demand at these each of years from that of the following year. Essentially, during these of these two year periods (Yrs 5 and 6, 7 and 8, 9 and 10), the curriculum requires students to do much the same sort of tasks with similar types of texts. Over each two-year period, students develop their expertise by becoming more independent and fluent. They also need to be able to cope with a fuller range of texts and tasks – although these remain at a similar level of complexity throughout.

However, at the beginning of each of these three periods there is a significant shift in the text and task demands of the curriculum from that of the preceding year. By the end of years 5, 7, and 9, the students’ ability to cope with the increased demand should be well under way, with the expectation that they have the necessary literacy knowledge, skills and strategies by the end of the following year.

One option is to reframe the progressions in two-year bands for years 5 and 6; 7 and 8; and 9 and 10. The intention would be to provide a full description of the text demands at the beginning of each period, i.e. years 5, 7, and 9, highlighting the shift in demand in terms of texts and tasks at these transition points. Key indicators, perhaps after 6 months, could provide signposts for desirable progress along the pathway to the progressions descriptors at the end of the following year.

**Recommendation:**

| Consider reframing the progressions in two-year bands for years 5 and 6; 7 and 8; and 9 and 10. |
REFERENCES

asTTle technical reports and user manual available at www.tki.org.nz/r/asttle


International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2006) Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) Assessment Framework and Specifications Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement


Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs) website at www.nzcer.org.nz/tests
APPENDICES