

The national curriculum statement, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, says students should be able to engage with and enjoy language in all its varieties. They should be able to understand, respond to, and use oral, written and visual language effectively in a variety of contexts.

Language is broad and pervasive; there is seldom a time or place in any area of the curriculum where language is not present. The same is true of language in relation to human activity in everyday life.

Language is communication

The purpose of language is communication. Communication is a process of sharing knowledge, experiences, information, ideas and feelings. Communication through language involves webs of interaction between messages that are given and received.

We produce messages by speaking, writing and presenting. We consume messages by listening, reading and viewing.

Interrelationships within and beyond language as a learning area

Because communication is essentially an interactive process, the oral, written and visual components of language are highly interrelated. The ability to read and present a play, for example, combines skills of reading and speaking. The idea of interrelationships is even greater when the components of language are applied throughout and beyond the curriculum. Much of the learning that takes place in mathematics or social studies, for example, is inescapably language dependent. Our day to day transactions of personal and social activity rely heavily on oral, written and visual communications.

Characteristics within language components

Accepting the connections that exist within and beyond the components of language, it is recognised that there are particular skills that have special and distinctive relevance within each component. Reading, for example, requires an ability to interpret printed symbols in order to get meaning out of those symbols. In turn, essential technical skills are often a precondition for higher level skills such as identifying main points, analysing, thinking critically, and making inferences from what is read.

National monitoring assessment of language components

One of the purposes of national monitoring is to find out and report on what students know and can do in respect to important learning outcomes. Since language and communication is an extensive domain, it requires organised treatment for assessment and reporting. Within the four-year programme of monitoring, the project has chosen an arrangement that focuses on speaking and reading in one year, and listening, viewing

and writing in another. On each occasion the emphasis is on understandings and skills that are particularly relevant within, and to some extent between, the respective components. This treatment of the language domain is not to suggest that each component represents a separate curricular experience, but rather to acknowledge the distinctive characteristics of each.

Speaking and reading

The primacy of oral language is widely recognised, with spoken language being language in the true sense of the term. Children first encounter language and begin to learn to use and interpret it in its spoken form well before they commence formal education. The development of their language from fundamental beginnings through to more sophisticated constructions requires increasingly rich and complex opportunities and interactions in personal social, cultural and curricular settings. These experiences lead to understandings about the meanings, effects and consequences of what is said, and help children to gain greater control over what they say and how they say it.

Reading demands the ability to decode and give meaning to the symbolic representations of sounds that are constructed into words, phrases, sentences and statements intended to convey ideas and information. The effective reader is able to go beyond the symbolic representations of letters and words to interpret the underlying meanings, messages and intentions of what has been written. Children encounter written language in a variety of settings including the home, the school and the community, and they see it presented in a variety of forms such as signs, labels, letters, brochures and books. To be able to read is to be able to obtain personal satisfaction from literary experiences and to use written information for knowing and doing.

Frameworks for national monitoring assessment

National monitoring task frameworks are developed with the project's curriculum advisory panels. These frameworks have two key purposes. They provide valuable guideline structures for the development and selection of tasks, and they bring into focus those important dimensions of the learning domain which are arguably the basis for valid analyses of students' skills, knowledge and understandings.

The assessment frameworks are organising tools which interrelate understandings with skills and processes. They are intended to be flexible and broad enough to encourage and enable the development of tasks that lead to meaningful descriptions of what students know and can do. They are also designed to help ensure a balanced representation of important learning outcomes.

The frameworks for speaking and reading have central organising themes supported by three interrelated aspects.

The speaking theme, “constructing and communicating meaning orally for various purposes”, and the reading theme, “constructing meaning from a range of texts for a variety of purposes” together endorse the unity and inter-relatedness of these two components of language. They also highlight the centrality and fundamental importance of active pursuit of meaning.

The *understandings* aspect of each framework summarises important ideas about the actions, impact and consequences of the ways in which messages might be shaped, communicated, interpreted and used.

The *skills and processes* aspect lists key abilities that stu-

dents could be expected to demonstrate while engaging in speaking or reading. The performance of these skills and processes is highly related to demonstrations of ideas listed in the understandings aspect.

The *motivation* aspects of the frameworks draw attention to the importance of having information about students’ interests, attitudes, confidence and involvement in respect to their speaking and reading activities, both within and beyond the school setting. Educational research and practice confirm the impact of student motivation and attitudes on progress and learning outcomes as an important adjunct to opportunities to learn.

NEMP SPEAKING FRAMEWORK

Constructing and communicating meaning orally for various purposes:

- seeking and giving information • telling a story • performing a role
- talking to an audience • reading aloud • taking part in conversation or discussion.

UNDERSTANDINGS

- Messages can have different meanings for different audiences, and on different occasions.
- Messages can be interpreted differently when spoken by different people.
- Messages can influence the behaviour of others.
- Speakers can adjust to the reactions of others.
- The way something is said can influence the interpretation of a message.
- A role being portrayed needs to be consistent with the message being given.

MOTIVATION

- Enthusiasm for communicating orally.
- Active participation in oral communication activities.

SKILLS AND PROCESSES

Presentational Skills

Speech Production

- Audibility
- Clarity of speech

Message

- Relevance to audience and purpose
- Clarity of message
- Grammatical appropriateness
- Coherence

Style

- Fluency
- Expressiveness
- Conveying confidence
- Stimulating interest

Context

- Adapting to varying contexts
- Appropriate verbal and non-verbal language

Purposes

- Conveying information
- Expressing ideas
- Expressing opinions
- Persuading
- Questioning
- Discussing
- Instructing, directing
- Greeting, farewelling, thanking
- Telling a story
- Communicating a role
- Experimenting with language (humour, parody)

NEMP READING FRAMEWORK

Constructing meaning from text for a range of purposes:

- reading for enjoyment • reading to follow instructions • reading to search for information
- reading to assimilate knowledge • reading to critically analyse.

UNDERSTANDINGS AND INSIGHTS

- Reading is a complex thinking process which requires the integration of information from many sources.
- Reading is a means of exchanging and interpreting meaning.
- We read for different purposes.
- We adjust our reading strategies to suit the purpose and the material being read.
- Much of the information needed to understand a message is supplied by the reader.
- What is read is selectively interpreted.
- Comprehension is affected by the reader’s level of interest.
- Reading is used in interrelated ways with speaking, listening and writing.
- Language conventions differ according to context and culture.
- Language can have aesthetic qualities.
- Language uses linguistic conventions which have limitations.
- Text is written by people who have individual styles and personalities.
- The medium of reading is not restricted to print on paper.

SKILLS AND PROCESSES

Vocabulary

- Making use of semantic, syntactic, visual and grapho-phonetic cues in text
- Making self-corrections
- Adjusting reading speed to complexity and purpose
- Using and expanding word knowledge

Presentation

- Reading aloud
- ##### Comprehension

- Comprehending literal meaning
- Retelling and summarising
- Identifying main points and central ideas
- Thinking critically about what is read

- Analysing and interpreting
- Making inferences

Appreciation

- Investigating the writer’s use of language
- Selecting texts for personal satisfaction and for information
- Discussing books and authors knowledgeably

MOTIVATION

- Enthusiasm for reading for a wide variety of purposes
- Voluntary engagement in reading
- Commitment to being a good reader

The choice of reading and speaking tasks for national monitoring

The choice of tasks for national monitoring is guided by a number of educational and practical considerations. Uppermost in any decisions relating to the choice or administration of a task is the central consideration of validity and the effect that a whole range of decisions can have on this key attribute. Tasks are chosen because they provide a good representation of important dimensions of reading or speaking, but also because they meet a number of requirements to do with their administration and presentation. For example:

- Each task with its associated materials needs to be structured to ensure a high level of consistency in the way it is presented by specially trained teacher administrators to students of wide ranging backgrounds and abilities, and in diverse settings throughout New Zealand.
- Tasks need to span the expected range of capabilities of year 4 and 8 students and to allow the most able students to show the extent of their abilities while also giving the least able the opportunity to show what they can do.
- Materials for tasks need to be sufficiently portable, economical, safe and within the handling capabilities of students. Resources need to be chosen to have meaning for students.
- The time needed for completing an individual task has to be balanced against the total time available for all of the assessment tasks, without denying students sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities.
- Each task needs to be capable of sustaining the attention and effort of students if they are to produce responses that truly indicate what they know and can do. Since neither the student nor the school receives immediate or specific feedback on performance, the motivational potential of the assessment is critical.
- Tasks need to avoid unnecessary bias on the grounds of gender, culture or social background, while accepting that it is appropriate to have tasks that reflect the interests of particular groups within the community.



National monitoring reading and speaking assessment tasks and survey

Many tasks centred on speaking or reading, but others interrelated those language components. The interrelated tasks typically involved reading some written material in conjunction with oral activity. Most of the interrelated tasks were assessed in only one domain. When a task involving both reading and speaking was being assessed for speaking only, any support necessary for the reading component was made available by the teacher administrator.

All tasks in chapters 3 and 4 are classified as reading tasks, and all tasks in chapters 6 and 7 are classified as speaking tasks. Two tasks from Chapter 5 (*Favourite Book* and *Language of Poetry*) are reading tasks, while the other four are speaking tasks (they involved reading but students had substantial opportunity to practise the material and the marking criteria gave strong weight to oral performance).

A special feature of this year's assessments is that two of the reading tasks assessed the students' ability to read Māori. These tasks are clearly identified in the results.



Nineteen reading tasks and eighteen speaking tasks were administered. Each student also completed a survey questionnaire that investigated their interests, attitudes, perceptions of competence, and involvement in reading and speaking activity.

Nine reading tasks and seven speaking tasks were administered in one-to-one interview settings, where each student worked individually with a teacher. Ten reading tasks used a stations or independent approach, with students working by themselves. Eleven speaking tasks were presented in team or group situations involving small groups of students working together.

Thirty of the thirty-seven tasks were the same or very similar for both year 4 and 8. Minor differences are described in the task commentaries. Two pairs of tasks used the same procedures but different content for the year 4 and year 8 versions. The remaining three tasks were attempted only by year 8 students.

Trend tasks

Thirteen of the tasks in this report were previously used in identical form in the 1996 reading and speaking assessments. These were called *link tasks* in the 1996 report, but were not described in detail to avoid any distortions in 2000 results that might have occurred if the tasks had been widely available for use in schools since 1996. In the current report, these tasks are called *trend tasks* and are used to examine trends in student performance: whether they have improved, stayed constant or declined over the four year period since the 1996 assessments.

Link tasks

To allow comparisons between the 2000 and 2004 assessments, twelve of the tasks used for the first time in 2000 have been designated *link tasks*. Results of student performance on these tasks are presented in this report, but the tasks are described only in general terms because they will be used again in 2004.

Marking methods

The students' responses were assessed using specially designed marking procedures. The criteria used had been developed in advance by Project staff, but were sometimes modified as a result of issues raised during the marking. Tasks that required marker judgement and were common to year 4 and year 8 were intermingled during marking sessions, with the goal of ensuring that the same scoring standards and procedures were used for both.

Task by task reporting

National monitoring assessment is reported task by task so that results can be understood in relation to what the students were asked to do.

Access tasks

Teachers and principals have expressed considerable interest in access to NEMP task materials and marking instructions, so that they can use them within their own schools. Some are interested in comparing the performance of their own students to national results on some aspects of the curriculum, while others want to use tasks as models of good practice. Some would like to modify tasks to suit their own purposes, while others want to follow the original procedures as closely as possible. There is obvious merit in making available carefully developed tasks that are seen to be highly valid and useful for assessing student learning.

Some of the tasks in this report cannot be made available in this way. Link tasks must be saved for use in four years time, and other tasks use copyright or expensive resources that cannot be duplicated by NEMP and provided economically to schools. There are also limitations on how precisely a school's administration and marking of tasks can mirror the ways that they are administered and marked by the Project. Nevertheless, a substantial number of tasks are suitable to duplicate for teachers and schools. In this report, these *access tasks* are identified with the symbol, *above left* and can be purchased in a kit from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (P.O. Box 3237, Wellington 6000, New Zealand). Teachers are also encouraged to use the NEMP web site (<http://nemp.otago.ac.nz>) to view video clips and listen to audio material associated with some of the tasks.

