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- the 107 teachers who administered the assessments to the children
- the 44 senior tertiary students who assisted with the marking process
- the 204 teachers who assisted with the marking of tasks early in 2002.



New Zealand's National Education Monitoring Project commenced in 1993, with the task of assessing and reporting on the achievement of New Zealand primary school children in all areas of the school curriculum. Children are assessed at two class levels: year 4 (halfway through primary education) and year 8 (at the end of primary education). Different curriculum areas and skills are assessed each year, over a four-year cycle. The main goal of national monitoring is to provide detailed information about what children can do so that patterns of performance can be recognised, successes celebrated, and desirable changes to educational practices and resources identified and implemented.



Each year, small random samples of children are selected nationally, then assessed in their own schools by teachers specially seconded and trained for this work. Task instructions are given orally by teachers, through video presentations, or in writing. Many of the assessment tasks involve the children in the use of equipment and supplies. Their responses are presented orally, by demonstration,

in writing, or through submission of other physical products. Many of the responses are recorded on videotape for subsequent analysis.

In 2002, the fourth year of the second cycle of national monitoring, two areas were assessed: health and physical education, and the writing, listening and viewing components of the English curriculum. This report presents details and results of the assessments of students' skills, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes relating to writing.

EXPRESSIVE WRITING

Chapter 3 focuses on expressive writing, in which students were given freedom to write inventively, within task guidelines. Characteristics sought included ability to write coherently, to communicate personal feeling, to communicate stories or ideas vividly, and to follow conventions associated with particular forms of writing.

Averaged across 50 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 21 percent more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Medium proportions of year 4 students and higher proportions of year 8 students followed the task guidelines quite

well, but most students were not able to achieve the clarity, vividness, personal feeling or humour that distinguished top quality writing.

Trend analyses showed no meaningful change since 1998 for year 4 students but a small reduction in performance for year 8 students. Averaged across 22 task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, 1 percent more students succeeded in 2002 than in 1998. At year 8 level, again with 22 task components included in the analysis, 5 percent fewer students on average succeeded with the task components in 2002 than in 1998.



ASSESSING WRITING

Chapter 2 presents the NEMP framework for writing. It has as its central organising theme *constructing and communicating meaning in written forms for various purposes and audiences*. Within it are listed 8 understandings, 3 main purposes for writing (and 13 specific ways of achieving them) and 16 skills, together with student attitudes toward and involvement in writing.

FUNCTIONAL WRITING

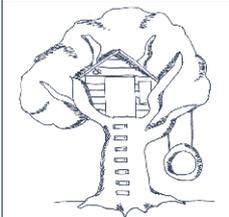
Chapter 4 explores functional writing. Students were asked to present information clearly and accurately in written form. They acted as reporters, gave instructions, prepared advertisements, filled in forms, and wrote letters, postcards, descriptions, email messages and text messages.



Averaged across 105 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 18 percent more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Trend analyses showed no change since 1998 for year 8 students but a marginal performance reduction for year 4 students arising entirely from one of the four tasks involved. Averaged across 41 task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, 2.5 percent fewer students succeeded in 2002 than in 1998 (9 percent fewer on *Accident Report* but 1 percent more on the other three tasks). Year 8 students performed equally in 2002 and 1998.

WRITING CONVENTIONS

Chapter 5 examines students' performance in spelling, punctuation and grammar, using tasks specifically designed for this purpose. These skills were also assessed more indirectly within some of the tasks in Chapters 3 and 4.



Average across 58 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 19 percent more

year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. The results revealed considerable scope for improvement in punctuation, spelling and grammar at both age levels. Trend analyses involved only one punctuation task for year 4 students and two very similar spelling tasks for year 8 students. This clearly is insufficient to allow trends in the use of writing conventions to be judged adequately.

The limited evidence available shows little change between 1998 and 2002: 3 percent fewer year 4 students succeeded in 2002 than in 1998, with no change for year 8 students.

PERFORMANCE OF SUBGROUPS

Chapter 7 reports the results of analyses that compared the performance of different demographic subgroups. School type (full primary or intermediate), school size, community size or geographic zone did not seem to be important factors predicting achievement on the writing tasks, or attitudes to writing. Non-Māori students outperformed Māori students on about thirty-five percent of the tasks at both year levels. There were statistically significant differences in the performance of students from low, medium and high decile schools on 72 percent of the year 4 tasks and 83 percent of the year 8 tasks. The most startling result, however, involved the comparison of results for boys and girls. Girls performed better than boys on 39 percent of the year 4 tasks, but on 88 percent of the year 8 tasks. At both levels, girls also displayed more positive attitudes to writing.

Between 1998 and 2002, there have been noticeable changes in subgroup differences for three of the seven variables. The only variable showing a change for year 8 students was the SES index (based on school decile), with the percentage of tasks showing performance differences increasing from 72 percent in 1998 to 83 percent in 2002. For year 4 students, however, three variables showed reduced disparity in 2002. The percentage of tasks on which year 4 Māori students scored lower than non-Māori students decreased from 46 percent in 1998 to 36 percent in 2002. Similarly, the percentage of tasks on which year 4 students from low SES (decile) schools scored lower than students from high SES schools decreased from 83 percent to 72 percent. The most dramatic change involved the percentage of tasks on which year 4 girls performed better than boys, which decreased from 79 percent in 1998 to 39 percent in 2002.

WRITING SURVEY

Chapter 6 reports the results of surveys of students' attitudes about and involvement in writing activities, and their perceptions of their capabilities. Students' attitudes, interests and liking for a subject have a strong bearing on progress and learning outcomes.

Writing stories was the most popular writing activity for year 4 and year 8 students, both in school and in their own time, with poems and letters also quite popular.

To be good writers, students at both levels thought that people needed to use their imagination. Year 4 students also placed emphasis on being willing to try things out, while year 8 students emphasized liking writing and learning how to use punctuation. Only about 10 percent of students at both levels reported using a computer for writing at school "heaps", but at home this rose to 26 percent of year 4 students and 33 percent of year 8 students.

Compared to year 4 students, fewer year 8 students were highly positive about doing writing at school, about how good they believed themselves to be at writing, and about how they felt their teachers and parents viewed their writing abilities. Year 8 students also reported fewer opportunities in school to write "things like stories, poems or letters", and lower enthusiasm for writing in their own time. These differences may, at least in part, reflect the well-known tendency of students to get more jaded about schoolwork as they get older. Such patterns have been found repeatedly in our other national monitoring surveys. Another influential factor may be that the emphasis on various types of writing tasks shifts between year 4 and year 8, with more creative opportunities at year 4 and substantial volumes of more formal writing required by year 8.



PACIFIC SUBGROUPS

Chapter 8 reports the results of analyses of the achievement of Pacific



Island students. Additional sampling of schools with high proportions of Pacific Island students permitted comparison of the achievement of Pacific Island, Māori and other children attending schools that have more than 15 percent Pacific Island students enrolled. The results apply only to such schools, but it should be noted about 75 percent of all Pacific students attend schools in this category.

Compared to Māori and "other" students in these schools, year 4 Pacific students performed less well than the "other" students on 25 percent of the tasks but similarly to Māori students. The results for year 8 students were very similar.