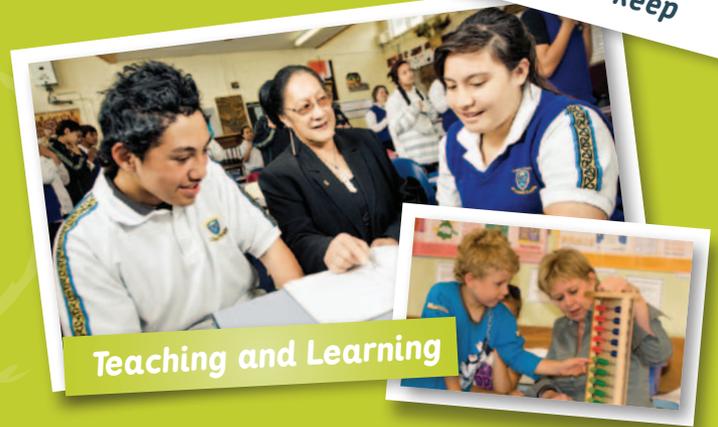


The New Zealand Curriculum

Update



Teaching and Learning

In this issue:

02

Framework for estimating text difficulty

04

Text selection and the dimensions of literacy learning

Welcome to *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*

Curriculum Updates support school leaders and teachers as they work to design and review their school curriculum in line with the New Zealand Curriculum and with current knowledge and understandings about effective classroom teaching.

Curriculum Updates are published in the *Education Gazette* and are available online at: http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

This Update introduces the new guidelines *Selecting Texts for Students in Years 4 to 8*, available at <http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Student-needs/Planning-for-learning>.



Selecting texts for students in years 4–8

One of the most important tasks for teachers is selecting appropriate texts to use with their students.

Teachers need to choose tasks and texts that will reflect their students' lived experiences and support their development of literacy as they develop the knowledge and understandings required in the various areas of the New Zealand Curriculum.

The New Zealand Curriculum Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8, page 7

When selecting texts for learning across the curriculum, a key consideration is the relative difficulty of the text for your students. Many series, such as the instructional series (see footnote on page 2) provided by the Ministry of Education, are accompanied by information on reading year levels.

However, when teachers are selecting texts from a wide range of sources, many of the texts will not come with this information. The guidelines *Selecting Texts for Students in Years 4 to 8* have been developed to help teachers make judgments about the relative difficulty and approximate reading year level of such texts.

The guidelines include a framework designed to help teachers select texts at an appropriate level of difficulty and to identify the characteristics likely to challenge or support learners. A completed example of the framework can be found on pages 2–3 of this Update.

When selecting texts, teachers will draw on the dimensions of effective literacy practice. Page 4 of this Update discusses the dimensions and matching texts to readers in more detail.

Framework for estimating text difficulty

The framework (illustrated on the right) provides teachers with a simple, straightforward tool for estimating the reading year level of a text and for identifying the text characteristics that will support and challenge their students.

The framework can be used with texts from a wide range of sources, including magazine articles, newspaper articles, and extracts from chapter books, novels, reference books, and the Internet. Further information about the framework, including instructions for using it and a blank template, is included in *Selecting Texts for Students in Years 4 to 8*.

> CASE STUDY

The teacher of a year 7–8 class was selecting texts for a level 4 social sciences study, Conservation – New Zealand Native Forests (conceptual strand: Place and Environment). His class would be required to read and synthesise information from a range of sources in order to evaluate how people’s decisions can protect or threaten native forests.

The teacher searched for a selection of texts in the instructional series¹ at an appropriate level of difficulty for his students. Selected texts included:

- “Timber!”, *School Journal*, Level 3, November 2011
- “The Man in the Outside Office”, *Connected 2* 2010
- “Deer, Oh Deer”, *School Journal*, Part 4 Number 1, 2010
- *The Wild Deer Debate* (School Journal Story Library)

“The Man in the Outside Office” and “Timber!” (with a reading year level of 6) were likely to be easily manageable for most of the year 7 students in the class.

The teacher was aware that “Deer, Oh Deer”, a complex text with a substantial amount of technical vocabulary and many long and complex sentences, would be challenging for a number of students in the class. *The Wild Deer Debate*, a targeted School Journal Story Library text, provided these students with similar content at the same curriculum level but at a more manageable reading level.

The teacher support materials for “Timber!” and *The Wild Deer Debate* (at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz) helped the teacher to identify the characteristics of these texts that might challenge particular learners. They also helped him to plan deliberate acts of teaching to support the learners to evaluate and use information from the texts.

The teacher also decided to use an extract (shown on page 3) from *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* to help support his students’ critical thinking skills and to provide background material for a class debate on the issue of felling native trees in private ownership. After using the framework from the guidelines to identify challenging text characteristics, the teacher decided that the text from *Te Ara* was likely to challenge all but his most able year 8 learners. He therefore decided to approach this text through shared reading, using an electronic whiteboard.

For the shared reading sessions, the teacher planned a range of scaffolding and specific teaching strategies to address the *Te Ara* text’s technical vocabulary, long and complex sentences, and large amount of historical detail.

The class followed up the shared reading by co-constructing a wallchart showing the timeline of the main events. They used this timeline for reference, along with the information they gained from the other texts, when they prepared their debate.



FRAMEWORK FOR ESTIMATING TEXT

Title and source: “Logging Native Forests: Confl...”
(from *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia*)

Author: Nancy Swarbrick

Factors affecting text difficulty	Reading year level
<p>Age appropriateness</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age of the main character(s) • prior knowledge assumed by the text • maturity required to deal with the themes • familiarity of contexts, settings, and subject matter • likely interests and experiences of readers. 	8
<p>Complexity of ideas</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implied information or ideas (requiring readers to infer) • irony or ambiguity • abstract ideas • metaphors and other figurative or connotative language • technical information • support from illustrations, diagrams, graphs, and so on. 	8–9
<p>Structure and coherence of the text</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flashbacks or time shifts • narrative point of view • mixed text types • connections across the text • examples and explanations • competing information • length of paragraphs • unattributed dialogue • use of headings and subheadings. 	7
<p>Syntactic structure of the text</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence length • the balance of simple, compound, complex, or incomplete sentences • use of passive voice or nominalisation • repetition of words or phrases • changes in verb tense. 	8–9
<p>Vocabulary difficulty</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unfamiliar vocabulary • technical and academic terms, non-English words, and proper nouns • sentence-level and/or visual support • contextual clues • the use of a glossary or footnotes. 	8–9
<p>Length of the text</p>	7–8

Estimated reading year level:

8

Notes: Because of the many sentences, and the large amount of technical vocabulary, this text will be challenging for most students. A shared reading approach and modelling will be used.

¹ The instructional series include Ready to Read, *Junior Journal*, *School Journal*, *Connected*, *School Journal Story Library*, and the electronic storybooks. Reading year levels are listed in their inside front covers and in the teacher support materials, which also include text characteristics. See Update 3 for further information on these series.

T DIFFICULTY

"Acting Views"

Media of New Zealand)

Curriculum level and area: Level 4, Social Studies

Notes

Assumes some familiarity with conservation issues, conflict and protest, political background

ELLs students may not be familiar with NZ political background

Maturity needed to deal with opposing viewpoints (conservationists/commercial interests)

Many complex abstract ideas ("selective logging"; "social and economic interests")

Connotative/metaphorical language ("Public opposition to logging swelled", communities "faded away")

Lots of historical and political information

Support from photos and videos (online version)

Subheadings make structure clear

Chronological structure helps reader make meaning

Features of a report - topic sentences followed by examples

Mostly short paragraphs

Connected ideas - e.g., about protest and conflict

Some long and complicated sentences, including complex and compound sentences

Frequent use of passive voice

Many proper names may be unfamiliar to ELLs

Many terms used in a specialised way, e.g., "privatised", "scenic and recreational value", "confrontations", "deregulation"

A short text for this level, but a lot compressed into it

unfamiliar words, some long and complicated amount of detail compressed into a short text, this is of my yr 7-8 students. Best used with a shared reading of appropriate strategies.

Story: Logging native forests

Page 6 – Conflicting views

The conservation lobby

In the 19th century some people wanted to preserve native forest for its scenic and recreational value. Their influence grew from the 1890s, and conservation organisations were set up around the time of the First World War.

After the Second World War, more people took part in outdoor recreation and began to appreciate New Zealand's forests. There was growing support for scenic reserves and national parks.

In 1952, after a long public campaign, Waipoua kauri forest in Northland was made a forest sanctuary, where logging was banned. In 1954 the Tararua State Forest Park was created. Supporting activities from logging to recreation, it was an attempt to please both conservationists and foresters. By 1970, the Forest Service managed six state forest parks and six forest sanctuaries.

A change of policy

In the mid-1970s, because of conservation concerns, the Forest Service announced a new native forest management policy that aimed at sustainability, using techniques to encourage steady regrowth such as selective logging – evenly thinning out a forest, cutting trees of all ages.

However, selective logging reduced the amount of timber that could be taken and the area of land that could be made available for exotic plantations. Treasury opposed the policy for economic reasons, and the Forest Service did not receive enough funding to carry out its plans. Also, because of the demand for wood, selective logging often went too far and resembled clearfelling.

Growing criticism

Conservationists argued that trees could not be selectively logged without damaging the complex structure of the surrounding forest.

The Forest Service stopped logging kauri, but insisted that other native forests were still needed for timber. This led to a series of clashes in the 1970s, first over beech forests on the West Coast and in Southland, then over the central North Island podocarp forests at Pureora and Whirinaki. Public opposition to logging swelled. The Maruia Declaration, calling for the protection of native forests, had 341,159 signatures when it was presented to Parliament in 1977.

At loggerheads

The conservationists' ideals sometimes conflicted with social and economic interests. Many small sawmills still depended on native forests, and people in nearby villages relied on the mills for work. In 1976 it was estimated that native sawmills employed over 2,000 people in rural areas where there were few other job options. At Pureora and Whirinaki, there were confrontations between conservationists and forestry workers. When logging stopped at Pureora in 1982, the small King Country communities of Pureora and Barryville faded away.

From timber to tourism

The West Coast Forest Accord of 1986 aimed to ease the transition from logging native forest in the region. Some native forest was reserved, but clearfelling was to continue in North Westland and Buller until the exotic forests there had matured. This compromise was unacceptable to some conservationists, and there were more protests. In 1999, the government announced that logging would end by 31 March 2002. To compensate locals, a \$120 million fund was set up to create other jobs, such as in ecotourism.

Political change

The Labour government elected in 1984 supported both conservation concerns and deregulation. It separated the commercial and non-commercial functions of several government departments, and in 1987 the Forest Service was disbanded. Exotic forests were managed by a state-owned Forestry Corporation until 1989, and were then gradually privatised. Most of the state's native forests passed into the care of the new Department of Conservation (DOC). DOC was responsible for national parks, reserves and indigenous forests not intended for wood production.

From 1975 to 1987, production of native timber from publicly owned forests declined dramatically. Political changes put an end to the logging of most native forest on public land, and to a way of life for many people.

subheadings

many long and complicated sentences

opposing views

lots of historical and political information

frequent use of passive voice

many complex abstract ideas

metaphorical language

many proper nouns

specialised terms

This text example is from *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. It can be found at <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/logging-native-forests/6>

Text selection and the dimensions of literacy learning

When selecting texts, teachers need to draw on each dimension of effective literacy practice set out in *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8*. They need to consider:

- **what they know about their learners'** literacy strengths, interests, prior knowledge, and learning needs
- their **expectations** for their students' literacy achievement in the context of an appropriate curriculum level
- the learning **partnerships** between themselves and their students and the goals they have agreed on
- how they will **engage learners with the texts**, including by taking account of the difficulty levels of the texts and the characteristics that may support or challenge individual learners
- the purposes for which they intend to use the text, in relation to their developing **knowledge of literacy learning** as a tool for learners to access the curriculum
- the **instructional strategies** and deliberate acts of teaching that they will use and how these will build on their students' lived experiences.

Guiding questions He pātai

- What range of sources do you currently select texts from to meet your students' learning needs across the curriculum? Could you or should you widen this range?
- How do you currently assess the difficulty level of these texts and identify which characteristics will provide supports and challenges for your students? How could the guidelines *Selecting Texts for Students in Years 4 to 8* and the framework support you in this?

> References and other resources

- Fountas, I. C. and Pinnell, G. S. (2006). *Levelled Books K–8: Matching Texts to Readers for Effective Teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Glasswell, K. and Ford, M. (2011). "Let's Start Leveling about Leveling". *Language Arts*, vol. 88 no. 3 (January).
- Ministry of Education (2006). *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5–8*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education (2010). "Levelling the School Journal". *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*, no. 13. Available at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates
- *School Journal* teacher support materials: www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update

Matching texts to readers

Terms like "hard" or "easy" are always relative ... A book is easy or difficult only in terms of a particular reader or even a group of readers.

Fountas and Pinnell, 2006, page 2

Update 13 explains the processes used for levelling the texts in the *School Journal* and other instructional series for years 4–8.

No system of levelling, however, can take account of individual students' learning needs, their interests, and their knowledge of texts and of the world. Characteristics of a text that support some learners can challenge others.

Therefore, when selecting texts for their students, teachers should use the levelling information accompanying the *School Journal* and other instructional series as a guide and starting point. Their final text selections will also take account of their students' prior knowledge, interests, and backgrounds.

Teachers' choice of text will also be influenced by the purposes for which the text is to be used – for example, to access ideas and information related to a particular curriculum area or to foster learners' critical literacy.

Teachers will often decide to use a text for which no indication of difficulty or reading year level is available. As well as helping teachers to establish the relative difficulty of the text and to identify the characteristics likely to challenge their students, the guidelines will also help teachers to choose the most appropriate strategies and approaches for particular groups of learners. The guidelines will also help them to identify those learners who have the knowledge and skills to use the text independently.

Occasionally, teachers may decide to use a text that they know will challenge some learners. In this case, they will need to plan extra scaffolding and support, such as a shared reading approach followed by repeated readings of the text.

Text selection for students in years 1–3

In these early years, it is essential that texts selected for literacy learning are at an appropriate level of difficulty – neither too easy nor too hard in relation to the purpose for reading.

One thing is crystal clear: the teaching can be effective only if the text is right.

Fountas and Pinnell, 2006, page 48

Online support material for Ready to Read is currently being updated and will provide strong guidance on text selection in years 1–3.