Assessing the Basic Skills Test: the student viewpoint

Jayne Butler
What is the BST?
Basic Skills Common Scale

- Year 3  5 skill bands
- Year 5  6 skill bands

- Introduced in 1996.
- The scale is reported from 25 to 80
BST magazine titles

1997  Timeline
1998  Year of the ocean
1999  Our Earth
2000  Sydney 2000
2001  People and Places
2002  Changes
2003  Sights and Sounds
2004  Reaching for the Stars
Now you are going to write your own description.
Look at the drawing of William Wild Thing.
Describe what William Wild Thing looks like.

• You should write in sentences.
• You should pay attention to spelling and punctuation.
• You should also make sure that your writing is only about describing William Wild Thing.
• You have been given time and space to plan your writing.

Start writing task 1 here.

William Wild Thing
Data on Disk Software

• Developed to provide schools with greater flexibility and functionality when analysing results.
• Introduced to NSW schools in 1999
• Features include:
  – Complete BST report package
  – Fully encrypted data for each school
  – Backward compatible data sets.
Schools chief sounds alarm over reports ban

By STEPHANIE RAETHE
Education Writer

Bans on annual school reports by the main teachers' union could turn parents off the public education system and create schools for the "haves and have-nots", the State's education chief warned yesterday.

The Director-General of School Education, Dr Ken Boston, said the reports played a critical role in the quality of public education at a time when the public system was faced with increased competition from private schools.

His warning came as the stand-off between the NSW Teachers Federation and the State Government over annual school reports and basic skills tests continued.

The union has defied an order by the Industrial Relations Commission to lift its bans on the tests, which are scheduled to be held on August 6.

The commission issued a second order yesterday calling on the union to lift the bans.

The Department of School Education has offered to hold five days of talks on the reports if the union agrees to lift the bans on the sections of the reports to which it is opposed.

The union has banned the tests and the reports because it believes the test results will be used in the reports in a way that will allow schools to be ranked and compared.

Dr Boston said yesterday there was a risk that the public education system would "go to water" in the face of increased competition and refuse to communicate with parents or give them information about their schools' performance.

He said he was concerned students would desert the public system and switch to the private system for all the wrong reasons.

"The risk is we could become a residualised system, still a large system, but basically a system for the haves and have-nots," said Dr Boston.

"They [the union] are trying to walk away from the public accountability and the expression of what we do that will sell us so well and do what the private schools will not do — talk about specifically what their achievements are.

"If we say we are not going to give parents honest assessments of what the schools are doing, identify areas for improvement, then parents will vote with their feet."

The union has written to the Premier asking him to intervene in the dispute. However, Mr Carr indicated yesterday that he believed the IRC was the appropriate place to resolve the issue.

Mr Carr said the State Government would not back down in its support for testing or reporting.

Dr Boston yesterday produced existing local school reports which included the kind of information about basic skills tests results which is opposed by the union.

He said the union executive was out of touch with what was happening in schools, and he encouraged teachers to ignore the union bans.

"I cannot believe there will be vast numbers of professional teachers who will be prepared to break the law on the say so of the members of the Teachers Federation executive," he said.

The deputy president of the NSW Teachers Federation, Ms Sue Simpson, said the union's executive would consider the latest order from the Industrial Relations Commission and called on Mr Carr to intervene.

PAGE 15: Government schools must embrace competition.
By boycotting the basic skills tests teachers are putting at risk the future of public education
Date: 25/07/1997

Who advocated that Government schools must embrace competition?
1997

Talks continue to break stalemate on skills test
Date: 29/07/1997

Testing times for kids but everyone benefits
Date: 06/08/1997
The student viewpoint
Row over basic skills testing flares again
Date: 07/08/1997
Basic skills test forces 200 000 students to play games

Date: 03/08/2000
Getting your head around tests its not exactly child’s play

Date: 06/08/2003
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Year 3 sample literacy results

Year 5 sample literacy results

Sample distribution
## Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Just ok</th>
<th>Worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about doing the <strong>BST</strong> today?</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Data collection points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey 1</td>
<td>Practice Test</td>
<td>July 30 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2</td>
<td>Basic Skills Test</td>
<td>August 6 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 3</td>
<td>Report distribution</td>
<td>September 24 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### How to Show Your Answers

The examples on these pages show you how to mark your answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print your name here:</td>
<td>Last Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>(First Name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print the name of your school here:</td>
<td>School Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District Code</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Are you a boy or a girl?
   - boy
   - girl

2. How old are you?
   - 7 or younger
   - 8
   - 9 or older

3. Are you an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander person?
   - yes
   - no

4. Does anyone use a language other than English in your home?
   - yes
   - no

5. How often do you speak English in your home?
   - never
   - sometimes
   - usually
   - always

6. How many years have you lived in Australia?
   - 1 or 2
   - 3 or 4
   - 5 or 6
   - more than 6
   - born in Australia
A. Alan wrote about his family. He drew rings around the parts that he thought might be wrong. For each one, colour in the bubble next to the correct word or punctuation mark. The first one has been done for you.

My name is Alan.
I have two brothers
and one sister. My sister
is called Lauren.

B. Here is some writing about THE PET MOUSE. Some words have been left out. Choose the best option to fill in each gap. Colour in a bubble to show your answer.

The Pet Mouse
At school, we keep a pet mouse.
We take turns at weekends
to take her home.

C. Joe wrote this sentence and drew a ring around the word that he thought was spelt incorrectly. Print the correct spelling in the box.

When the children went to the
beach, the sun was hot.

D. Read this sentence and answer the question:

We ran all the way to the park.

Which word in the sentence is a verb?

- We
- ran
- park
Report distribution September 24 2003

Individual Student Report

Aspects of Literacy

In Aspects of Literacy, Natalie’s score placed her in skill band 3.

The percentage of students across the state achieving each skill band in Literacy is shown in this Table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band 1</th>
<th>12% of students</th>
<th>Band 2</th>
<th>16% of students</th>
<th>Band 3</th>
<th>28% of students</th>
<th>Band 4</th>
<th>28% of students</th>
<th>Band 5</th>
<th>18% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The mark like this shows her result.

Comments on Natalie’s performance in the Literacy test:

This year there were 62 questions in the Aspects of Literacy test. There were 35 questions that tested skills in Reading and 27 questions that tested skills in Language.

In this test, Natalie performed competently in some aspects of Literacy.
She did better in Language than in Reading.
In Reading, she attempted 32 of the 35 questions and correctly answered 21.
In Language, she attempted 27 of the 27 questions and correctly answered 23.
In Reading, she:
• did better on questions about stories and poems than on questions about factual writing.
• did better on questions about interpreting whole texts than on questions about finding and using specific information in a text.
• did better on questions about pictures and layout features than on questions about the main part of a text.
• correctly answered 2 of the 5 questions involving making connections in a text.
• correctly answered 4 of the 6 questions involving locating directly stated information in a text.
• correctly answered 4 of the 6 questions involving making inferences.
• correctly answered 2 of the 7 questions involving identifying the meaning of words.
In Language, she had similar results in spelling and grammar.
TEST CONFIDENCE

How do students feel about doing the BST?
Representation of three waves of data

Test confidence-all students

- Confident
- Just ok
- Worried

BST mean achievement

- Practice
- Test
- Results
Test confidence – all students

BST mean achievement

confident just ok worried

- practice
- test
- results
Test confidence by grade

- Yr 5
- Yr 3

BST mean achievement

confident  just ok  worried
Test confidence by gender

- girls
- boys
TEST EFFORT

Were students prepared to do their best?
Test effort – all students

- Best effort
- Unsure
- Not best effort

BST mean achievement
PERCEPTION OF DIFFICULTY

How easy or difficult do students judge the BST to be?
Test difficulty – all students

BST mean achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>practice</th>
<th>test</th>
<th>reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

easy | unsure | hard
TEST USEFULNESS

How useful is the BST in demonstrating learning?
Test usefulness – all students

BST mean achievement

- show learning
- not sure
- not show learning

- report
- test
- practice
MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

How do students rate multiple choice questions?
Multiple choice questions

Multiple choice questions - all students

BST mean achievement

- quite good
- just ok
- not very good

- test
- practice
SELF PORTRAITS

How do students represent themselves as test takers?
Self image as a test taker

CONFIDENCE

distressed

worried

contented

low achievement

high achievement
Self portraits and BST achievement

Self image and Literacy score
\[ r = -0.03 \]

Self image and Numeracy score
\[ r = -0.11 \]

Self image and test confidence on the test day
\[ r = 0.16 \]
Year 3 girl
Year 3 boy
Year 5 girl
Year 5 boy
RECALL OF RESULTS

How well do students recall their skill band results?
Recall of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OPINION OF THE TEST

What do students think?
Talking to students and parents before the test day

It is important that students and parents understand the purpose of the tests.

Action

Explain that:

- the tests are another way of finding out what students can and cannot do so that future programs can help them
- all students do the tests at the same time
- there is no pass/fail mark in the tests
- the tests indicate what an individual student can do and that is why the students cannot talk to each other or ask teachers to help with the answers.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

• Test confidence – There is a decrease in confidence with a decrease in achievement.

• Effort – Most students are prepared to do their best.

• Perception of difficulty – Lower achieving students perceive the test as more difficult.

• Test usefulness – The perception of the test as useful is fairly uniform across achievement.

• Test purpose – Older students articulate a clearer understanding of the purpose of the BST.
Ruby
What is the status of the Basic Skills Test?

- fad
- fashion
- fixture
- fossil