
LEVELS OF ATTAINMENT IN WRITING

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Much testing of language involves specifying attainment levels for various age groups. The report of the Kingman Committee in Britain, for instance, specifies attainment targets at the ages of seven, eleven, and sixteen. There are obvious problems involved in identifying such targets; primarily, the reductiveness involved in such specifying. It should be quite clear that the qualities of writing we value cannot easily be set on a developmental grid. The aspects of writing which are most easily mapped on to levels turn out to be those which describe the use of conventions of writing and certain surface level features. While one might describe patterns of development on a sociocognitive dimension, for instance, the difficulty is essentially with specifying which developments ought to occur when and to what degree.

This session provided samples of writing obtained from writers at several grade levels to question the value and validity of such specifications and to suggest directions in which we might move to meet the demands for such descriptions.