English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

Principles and Proposals

Talk

John Richmond

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English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19: Summary
Talk
Reading 3 to 7
Writing 3 to 7
Reading 7 to 16
Writing 7 to 16
Grammar and Knowledge about Language
Drama
Media
English 16 to 19

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The United Kingdom Literacy Association

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John Richmond

Preface: English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

Purpose

This booklet is one of a series about the teaching of language, literacy and English to children and young people aged 3 to 19. The aim of the series is to inspire and inform debate about school strategy. The booklets draw on seminal studies and development work carried out over many years. They have been commissioned by Owen Education, an independent school-improvement agency.

Owen Education's purpose in producing the series is easily stated. There should, in the second decade of the 21st century, be a professional consensus amongst those who teach English to children and young people, or who teach those children and young people *in* English, as to how to help them most effectively gain confidence and competence in the use of English. We observe that though this consensus *should* exist, in practice it does not. We aim here to describe a desirable, intellectually sound and practically achievable consensus around which those who teach English or teach *in* English could unite.

By 'those who teach English or teach *in* English' we mean three groups of professionals: teachers of children aged from three to 11 in early-years settings and primary schools; teachers of the subject English in secondary schools and colleges serving young people between the ages of 11 and 19; and teachers of a range of other subjects in those secondary schools and colleges, for whom it is essential that students have sufficient confidence and competence as readers, writers and speakers of English to access and benefit from the curriculum in those subjects.

There is a particular urgency in our purpose, since all contemporary commentators agree that, whatever progress has been made overall in raising the achievement of learners in English, language and literacy, there is still a large gap between the highest and the lowest achievers. There are still far too many children and young people who are failing to become competent and confident users of English, when there is no valid reason, in terms of their potential, why they *should* fail. Those most at risk of failure are learners from socio-economically poorer backgrounds.

Without false modesty, we will make a declaration about the limits of our purpose. Nothing written here is the outcome of original research. We are simply summarising and quoting from some of the best that has been thought and written about the development of language and literacy in children and young people.

The previous sentence includes a huge value judgement. What do we mean by 'the best'?

Key principles

We believe that the best work on the development of language and literacy draws on seven basic principles.

1. There is no intellectual achievement more intimately connected to a child's and young person's overall sense of worth as an individual and as a social being than the achievement of competence and confidence in the use of her or his language or languages.
2. The achievement of competence in any aspect of language is prior to and more complex than the achievement of the ability to analyse that aspect of language. Learners nonetheless continually engage in acts of reflection on aspects of the language they encounter and use.
3. The achievement of competence in any aspect of language is principally owed to the enjoyable *experience* of that aspect of language. *Instruction* in an aspect of language has a secondary but nonetheless very significant role to play in this achievement.
4. The learner's brain makes dynamic generalisations from enjoyable experiences of language. These generalisations prepare the learner for new encounters with and uses of language.
5. The motivation for any productive or receptive encounter with or use of language is the desire and need to construct meaning. Producers and receivers of language are both engaged in the construction of meaning.
6. Examples of language and literacy in use in English and of potential value and interest to learners are vast in number and diversity. Some of that diversity should be evident in the selection of examples which teachers present to learners.
7. Learners' experience of language in education should both value and confirm their linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds, and introduce them to cultural and social contexts beyond those they are familiar with.

The seven principles are stated here at a level of generality and abstraction which probably seems high-flown and dry. We shall try to invest them with a living practicality later on. In the meantime, it may be asked: what is so remarkable about them? Are they not self-evident, uncontroversial? The answer is: they should be, but they haven't been. The reason why they haven't been has something to do with the history of the contest for control of the teaching of English, language and literacy in our schools and colleges over the last five decades. It also has to do with the fact that worthwhile professional knowledge can sometimes be forgotten, get lost, in the welter of new initiatives and changes of course – often politically driven – affecting the curriculum.

The booklets

The series sets out and illustrates a comprehensive and rigorous basis on which learners are enabled to gain confidence and competence in the use of English. The booklets are entitled:

English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19: Summary
Talk
Reading 3 to 7
Writing 3 to 7
Reading 7 to 16
Writing 7 to 16
Grammar and Knowledge about Language
Drama
Media
English 16 to 19

There are many connections between the booklets. One of the tenets of the series is that, in essence, there is far more continuity than difference in the development of language from the earliest stages through to adult competence.

The National Curriculum

We believe that the new National Curriculum for English, taking effect from September 2014 or September 2015, contains so many ill-judged requirements, so much legally binding content which runs contrary to the way in which children and young people most effectively learn English (whether as their first or additional language), that we have been driven to offer an alternative. This is set out in its entirety towards the end of the summary booklet for the whole series, and in chapters towards the end of each of the booklets dealing with any part of the 5 to 16 curriculum.

At some point in the future, government and the profession will have to sit down together and make something better than has been made now, because significant sections of the new orders will prove to be unworkable.

We welcomed the original principle of the National Curriculum, introduced in 1989 and 1990, which was to offer a broad statement of the knowledge, skills and understanding to which all students in state schools in England and Wales were and are entitled. We lament the absurdity of the current situation, whereby a majority of state secondary schools and a growing minority of primary schools – those that are academies and free schools – are not bound by the National Curriculum. Why go to all the trouble of designing a legally enforced National Curriculum and then abandon the principle of general entitlement? This is an incoherent and inequitable position.

John Richmond
Peter Dougill
Mike Raleigh

1 Talk – summary of main points

- The spoken language is the mode of language from which competence in all the other modes springs. Speech, and attention to speech through listening, are the essential means by which children and young people learn.
- The teacher has a crucial role in guiding learners' use of the spoken language, and in setting contexts in which learners can practise and extend their competence in spoken language through acts of learning.
- To be productive, group talk – in groups of whatever size – needs a clear structure and purpose, which it is the teacher's responsibility to provide. That structure and that purpose may be very simple: one open question and a time limit. Or it may be more complex, involving a series of tasks to be undertaken. Sometimes the teacher will be an active participant in learners' talk, sometimes not.
- Group talk may well involve the other modes of language: reading and writing. But it should not become an automatic preliminary to writing. Talk should be regarded as work of equivalent status and seriousness to other kinds of work.
- A key aspect of the teacher's skill is in setting tasks for learners which make demands at the edge of but not beyond the reach of students' existing state of knowledge or grasp of concepts. When that happens, the value of collaborative talk, in terms of insights gained and difficulties overcome, may most clearly be seen.
- Pupil talk should, over time, embrace a range of purposes and take a range of forms, from the more exploratory through to the more presentational, from the more tentative to the more declaratory, from the more collaborative to the more individual.
- Some 17% of the UK school population now speak English as an additional language. These speakers range from new arrivals speaking no or very little English to advanced bi- or multilingual speakers who outperform their monolingual English peers. Support for these learners should take the form of an adapted version of the means by which teachers support the development of monolingual English speakers, not a different kind of pedagogy.
- The teacher's approach to learners who have access to a variety or varieties of English other than Standard English must be based on respect for the language of the learner's culture and community. In the secondary school, it is also possible and quite legitimate for teachers to introduce students to the standard equivalents of non-standard forms they use in their everyday speech. This is best done in the context of the study of language variety itself.
- The government's new legal requirements on the spoken language are insufficiently detailed in the primary years, and over-preoccupied with formal and presentational uses of the spoken language in the secondary years. Chapter 11 offers an alternative curriculum for the spoken language, with more detail at Key Stages 1 and 2, and a better balance at Key Stages 3 and 4 between the more individual and formal and the more collaborative and exploratory uses of the spoken language.

talk is a Unix text chat program, originally allowing messaging only between the users logged on to one multi-user computerâ€”but later extended to allow chat to users on other systems. Although largely superseded by IRC and other modern systems, it is still included with most Unix-like systems today, including Linux, BSD systems and macOS. Similar facilities existed on earlier system such as Multics, CTSS, PLATO, and NLS. Early versions of talk did not separate text from each user. Thus, if each user (Received Pronunciation) IPA(key): /tÉ”Ëk/, /toËk/. (US) IPA(key): /tÉ”k/. (w:cotâ€“caught merger, w:northern cities vowel shift) IPA(key): /tÉ‘k/, /tÃ¤Ëk/. (General Australian, General New Zealand) IPA(key): /toËk/. Rhymes: -É”Ëk. Homophones: torc, torq, torque (non-rhotic accents only), tock (in accents with the cot-caught merger). From Middle English talken, talkien, from Old English *tealcian (â€œto talk, chatâ€), from Proto-Germanic *talkÅnÄ… (â€œto talk, chatterâ€), frequentative form of Proto-Germanic Talk Talk. 2001 Remastered Version. The Very Best Of. Talk Talk. 1997. Laughing Stock. Talk Talk. 1991. Spirit Of Eden. Talk Talk. 1988 1997 Digital Remaster. The Colour Of Spring. Talk Talk. 1986 1997 Digital Remaster. It's My Life. Talk Talk. 1984 1997 Digital Remaster. The Party's Over. Talk Talk. 1982 1997 Digital Remaster. Compilations.