

English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

Principles and Proposals

Grammar makes sense

Grammar and Knowledge about Language

John Richmond

owen EDUCATION

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

owenEDUCATION

UKLA

The United Kingdom Literacy Association

All material here © UKLA and Owen Education March 2015.

ISBN 978 | 910543 06 1

ISBN EPUB 978 | 910543 07 8

ISBN AER 978 | 910543 08 5

ISBN ONL 978 | 910543 09 2

Contents

Preface: English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19	3
• Purpose	3
• Key principles	4
• The booklets	5
• The National Curriculum	5
1. Grammar and knowledge about language – summary of main points	6
2. ‘The Grammar Question’	7
• Grammar – not simply to do with writing	7
• The positive role of grammar teaching	8
• Halliday’s three kinds of language learning	8
• The myth of grammar teaching	9
• Competence precedes analysis	10
3. Snapshots from the past	12
• Plowden on grammar	12
• Bullock on grammar	12
• Katharine Perera on grammar	13
• More reviews of ‘the Grammar Question’	14
4. ‘The Grammar Question’: government answers since 1984	16
• <i>English from 5 to 16</i>	16
• The Kingman Report	16
• The Cox Report	17
• The first National Curriculum for English	17
• The Language in the National Curriculum Project	18
• Grammar in the National Literacy Strategy	18
5. The relationship between competence and reflection	20
• The use of terminology	21
• Grammar teaching which <i>can</i> help writing	21
• A theory of the relationship between grammar and writing	23
6. Grammar in the National Curriculum for English until July 2014 or July 2015	24
7. Grammar in the National Curriculum for English from September 2014	25
• Key Stages 1 and 2	25
• Assessment in grammar, punctuation and spelling at Year 6	26
• Key Stage 3	29
• Key Stage 4 and GCSE English Language	30
• Grammar in primary and in secondary: the wrong way round	30

8. An alternative curriculum for grammar and knowledge about language 5 to 16	32
• ‘All grammars leak’	32
• Teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge	32
• Grammar within knowledge about language	33
• Key Stage 1	34
• Key Stage 2	34
• Key Stages 3 and 4	35
9. Conclusion	37
References	38

Acknowledgements

My principal acknowledgement is to Ronald Carter, whose authoritative understanding of grammar and its place in education has influenced me over many years, and whose detailed and supportive criticisms of the booklet’s text during the course of its production have vastly improved it. I thank Martin Cragg, Peter Harris, Helen Sawa and Peter Traves for their careful reading of drafts and for valuable suggestions, Bronwyn Mellor for her careful proofreading of the final text, and John Hardcastle, through whose good offices I obtained a Visiting Research Associateship at the University of London Institute of Education in 2014, which gave me access to the Institute’s library and its comprehensive collection of books and research papers.

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 to 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, in that 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 their language, 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 acquisition and development of language and literacy in children and young people.

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



Key principles

We believe that the best work on the acquisition and 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 good 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. There are particularly close links between this booklet and those on early writing and on writing from age 7 to age 16. 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 appropriate 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 Grammar and knowledge about language – summary of main points

- Competence in language precedes analysis of language, not the other way round. Competence in language is implicit knowledge of language, brought about by a host of influences which affect the learner, consciously and unconsciously, and by a range of kinds of instruction and intervention by the teacher.
- The teaching of grammar is a valuable and interesting activity, so long as it is pitched at an appropriate level of difficulty for the learners in a class, so long as it occurs in the context of the study of worthwhile texts, and so long as it engages learners actively in investigating language in use. Grammar teaching out of the context of pupils' broader language learning is useless.
- The principal benefit of grammar teaching is on learners as readers and as people who discuss texts, including their own.
- There is now some evidence that appropriately pitched grammar teaching, involving the study of worthwhile texts and engaging learners actively in investigating language in use, can have a beneficial influence on writers' developing competence (especially in the case of writers who are already more able), in that appropriately pitched reflection on language can feed back into competence.
- The teaching of grammar sits best within the overall study of language as a phenomenon. To understand grammatical concepts and terminology is to understand one aspect of language as a system shared by its users. The knowledge about language which children and young people should acquire is broader than that, however, especially in the secondary years. This broader knowledge could be categorised in five ways, each of which interact with the others:
 - variety in and between languages
 - history of languages
 - language and power in society
 - acquisition and development of language
 - language as a system shared by its users.
- The government's new legal requirements on grammar teaching will at some point need to be changed to make their demands on primary-school pupils more modest and realistic, and to shift some of these demands to teaching post-11, where requirements are greater and more explicit than they currently are in the new orders for Key Stages 3 and 4.