

# English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

Principles and Proposals

Hi diary,

Today was wicked!! I went to this piece of waste ground with my sister. She was scared. She was shaking man!

I found this deep, dark, damp tunnel and crawled in. She was too scared

## Writing 7 to 16

John Richmond

**owen** EDUCATION

# English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

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**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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*I was  
turned  
to stone.*

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**John Richmond**

*Because  
she only  
saved me!*

# 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 judgment. What do we mean by 'the best'?

too scared  
and stayed  
outside,

## 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*

The booklets in the series are designed to be read together. There are particularly close links between this booklet and the booklets *Writing 3 to 7* and *Grammar and Knowledge about Language*. 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 in the summary booklet for the whole series, and in chapters in 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*

*Because  
she only  
saved me!*

# 1 Writing 7 to 16 – summary of main points

- The purpose of the teaching of writing is to develop in children and young people a confident control of the medium and a sense of the pleasure that writing can bring.
- The teaching of writing requires an understanding of all the characteristics and needs of a writer at work, and of the multiple demands that teachers make on learners when they ask them to write.
- Competence in writing – at whatever level – precedes analysis of writing, not the other way round. This is true of language generally. Analysis of or specific attention to conventions of the writing system should take place in the context of the examination of whole, meaningful texts, whether these are texts produced by the student as a writer or those encountered by the student as a reader.
- Learners' developing competence and confidence in handling forms of and purposes for writing will come about as a result of copious reading of high-quality texts – factual, instructional, persuasive and imaginative – which teachers should provide.
- Preparation for writing should often involve oral work in various forms: paired, group and whole-class talk; role-play, improvisation and drama. Oral work in any of these forms can also be an outcome of writing.
- Writers should have opportunities to write for a range of different purposes and in a range of different formats, sometimes individually and sometimes in collaboration with other writers.
- Writers should be familiar with the process of redrafting in order to bring about a better and more satisfying final product.
- Writers should write for readerships which, while including the teacher as a most important reader, are not confined to the teacher.
- Teachers should show learners that they write too.
- The modelling of writing, including the study of how other writers have made successful and pleasure-giving texts, should be a feature of the teaching of writing.
- Recent, fast-moving advances in digital technology have transformed and will continue to transform the possibilities for the production and exchange of writing, and for the combination of writing with other modes, for example images and sound.
- Teachers' interventions in students' writing should be concerned, first, with what the student has written in terms of the content and the overall structure of a piece.
- Teachers' interventions in students' writing should be concerned, next, with the degree of correctness shown in the writer's handling of the writing system: with spelling, punctuation, layout and the grammatical order and forms of words in sentences.
- There is always pattern in error. Teachers' attention to error in students' writing should have the principal aim of developing in writers the self-critical awareness which will enable them increasingly to attend to error themselves. That is, writers should be shown how to make their implicit knowledge of the writing system active in the critical examination of their writing.

*too scared  
and stayed  
outside,*