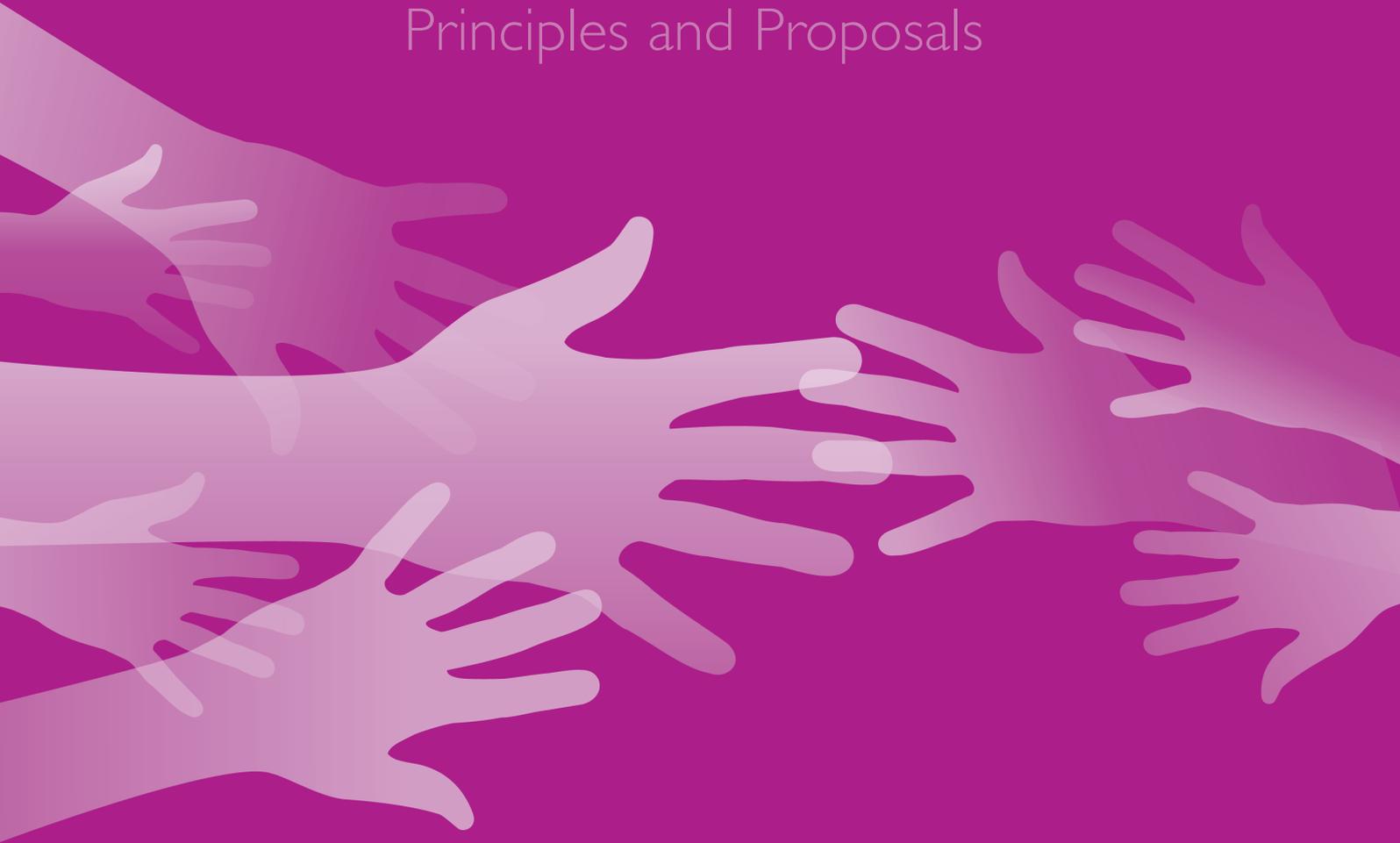


English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

Principles and Proposals



Drama

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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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 judgment. 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. Those between this booklet and the booklet *Talk* are particularly close. We recommend that the two be read consecutively.

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.

This booklet is different from the others in that here we criticise not only the detail of the government's requirements for drama within the new National Curriculum for English, but also – a larger matter – the fact that drama was not given the status of a foundation subject when the National Curriculum was established, and has not achieved that status since. In chapter 7 we make favourable reference to the approach taken in Australia, a country which has made another choice. In chapter 8 we offer the outline of what a drama curriculum could be. We believe that our outline amounts to something better than the collection of references to drama within the new National Curriculum for English. It could be taken as a replacement for those. But we would prefer to see it as a basis for the future establishment of drama as a free-standing subject.

Notwithstanding this drama-specific criticism, 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 Drama – summary of main points

- Drama's potential contribution to learning and to the life of schools is diverse and enriching. It is a means of enhancing learning in a range of curriculum subjects and areas. It has the potential to develop qualities of empathy and respect for difference in children and young people. It enables active and collaborative learning.
- Drama has close links with literature and with narrative generally, and therefore has a special significance within English, language and literacy teaching.
- Drama is a practical art form, with its own techniques, conventions, vocabulary and technology. Like all other forms of learning, it is affected by and may be realised via digital and electronic technologies and media.
- Drama is often a separate curriculum subject in secondary schools – sometimes organised as part of an arts 'cluster' – and is a popular examined subject at GCSE and A-level. It is also a prominent feature of a school's extra-curricular cultural life.
- There is a weakness at the heart of drama's official relationship with the statutory curriculum in England. This stems from the failure of the UK government, when the National Curriculum for England and Wales was introduced in 1989 and 1990, to grant drama the same status as was accorded to art and music: that of foundation subject. The situation today remains as it was then, despite strenuous efforts by organisations and individuals representing drama teaching to persuade successive governments to grant drama foundation-subject status.
- Statutorily, drama sits within English. The references to drama within successive versions of the National Curriculum for English since 1989 have never amounted to a coherent and rigorous description of the subject. They offer no sense of progression and development. The references in the new National Curriculum for English are no more adequate than those in previous versions.
- Educational drama has a long theoretical history. During the second half of the 20th century, expert thinkers extended our understanding of drama as a mode of learning, and showed how this understanding can bear fruit in effective classroom work. A debate (and sometimes a dispute) developed between those who preferred to emphasise learning *through* drama and those who preferred to emphasise learning *about* drama. The former were less concerned with drama as *product* than with the multiple benefits of drama as *process*. The latter, while not denying the value of drama as process, wished to assert that drama is an art form which can be taught, and that drama activity will and should often have an outcome in performance. There is no need to decide in favour of drama as process or as product. It is both.
- This booklet offers an outline curriculum for drama, which could be seen as an alternative to the collection of references to drama in the new National Curriculum for English, or as a basis for a future curriculum for drama as a free-standing subject.