

English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19

Principles and Proposals



Media

Andrew Burn

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

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Andrew Burn

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.



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 direction – 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:

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

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



1 Media – summary of main points

In the past, media education has often been seen as a form of ‘inoculation’: of protection against the cultural, moral and ideological ill effects of the mass media. More recently, media education has struck a more positive note. Its emphasis is on the value of popular culture, and on the importance of media forms such as cinema, television, comic books, video games, animation, advertising, news media and social media in representing our world.

Media education in the National Curriculum in England has been contained within English. This has provided positive opportunities for teachers and learners, raising the profile of moving-image texts, introducing the idea of multimodal texts, and emphasising the importance of digital media. However, media education’s place within English has also caused problems: emphasising factual media at the expense of fiction; suggesting a ‘suspicious’ mode of reading media texts (in contrast to the ‘appreciative’ mode expected for literary texts); and restricting media education to the reading section of the curriculum, thus making it mandatory to ‘read’ media texts, but not to ‘write’ them.

In the most recent version of the National Curriculum for English, media education has effectively been expunged. It should be fully reinstated. Any adequate media curriculum should equally emphasise ‘reading’ (analysis of media) and ‘writing’ (production of media).

Media education can be a separate subject in the curriculum. That is how it is most strongly represented in the UK in post-14 education, in the form of specialist Media Studies and Film Studies syllabuses. While the popularity of these post-14 courses is welcome, media education 3 to 16 is best located within English. This arrangement allows for a coherent approach to the study and making of texts and meanings across all media, which can extend and strengthen students’ understanding of textual structures, contexts and functions. It is the arrangement most likely to provide entitlement to media education for all young people in the school system.

The study of media, drama and literature together within English allows teachers and students to explore the spectrum of cultural taste, from elite canonical texts through to popular cultural forms, and the increasing tendency for these to collapse into one another. The contrasting modes of engagement with texts characteristic of media and literary studies in schools, ‘rhetorical’ and ‘poetic’ stances respectively, are stronger if united.

A media education curriculum from 3 to 16, involving ‘reading’ the media, ‘writing’ the media, and engaging with the contexts in which media practices occur, must be recursive. It cannot artificially distribute certain kinds of work across ‘ages and stages’, but should suggest how the same work (for example, editing a film) might change, expand, become more challenging and diverse, as students get older, gain more experience and become more autonomous.