

Curriculum and Assessment in English 3 to 19: A Better Plan

The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework

This is one of a group of six documents which together form the statement *Curriculum and Assessment in English 3 to 19: A Better Plan*. The others are: *Summary and Introduction*; *The Essentials of English*; *The National Curriculum for English from 2015*; *An Alternative Curriculum for English 3 to 16*; *Assessment and Examinations in English 3 to 19*.

The statement sets out an alternative to current statutory requirements for the teaching and assessment of English 3 to 19. It represents the views of the National Association of Advisers in English, the National Association for the Teaching of English and the United Kingdom Literacy Association. It has been written by John Richmond, with contributions from Andrew Burn, Peter Dougill, Angela Goddard, Mike Raleigh and Peter Traves. The statement is produced with support from the organisations just named and from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education.

The National Association of Advisers in English works to promote the highest standards of English teaching through the involvement of its members as advisers, inspectors, consultants, ITE lecturers and subject leaders in UK schools.

The National Association for the Teaching of English works to promote standards of excellence in the teaching of English from Early Years to University.

The United Kingdom Literacy Association aims to support and inform all those concerned with the development of language, literacy and communication.

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Introduction

This document discusses the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2014d).

The framework proposes ‘seven areas of learning and development’. ‘Communication and language’ is one of three ‘prime areas’ within the seven that ‘are particularly crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive’ (*ibid.*: section 1.3). ‘Communication and language’ is described thus:

Communication and language development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations. (ibid.: section 1.5)

Quite rightly, the framework says that ‘All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected’ (*ibid.*: section 1.3). There are plenty of opportunities for speaking and listening within the other six areas.

A good basis for the development of spoken language

Each of the prime areas has its set of early learning goals. Those for communication and language are:

Listening and attention: children listen attentively in a range of situations. They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity.

Understanding: children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions. They answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events.

Speaking: children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners’ needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are about to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events. (ibid.: section 1.12)

This is a perfectly acceptable and enabling framework for the development of children’s spoken language up to the age of five. It is important to note that the learning goals are just that: ambitions to aim for by the end of the school year in which a child is five. The process by which, for example, a child sorts out ‘past, present and future forms’ in verbs is a dynamic one, likely to involve uneven steps towards correct usage, and certain to be different, and to advance at different rates, from child to child. The introduction to the framework acknowledges this as one of four overarching principles: ‘...children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates’ (*ibid.*: Introduction, paragraph 6).

An inadequate basis for the development of literacy

Unfortunately, the enlightenment shown in the framework with regard to spoken language is not maintained in its requirements for reading or writing. It has this to say about reading:

...children read and understand simple sentences. They use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately. They also read some common irregular words. They demonstrate understanding when talking with others about what they have read. (ibid.: section 1.12)

This is an interesting paragraph. The only *specific* approach to reading that the government is prepared to countenance is phonics. Somehow, children also ‘read and understand simple sentences’. ‘They also read some common irregular words.’ And ‘They demonstrate understanding...’ How they come to do these things remains unspecified. Not even the briefest attempt is made to name other routes into reading. We outline these in *An Alternative Curriculum for English 3 to 16*.

The requirements for writing are no more satisfactory:

...children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible. (ibid.: section 1.12)

That is all. So far as the government is concerned, everything to do with the earliest beginnings of writing proceeds from phonics. No other understanding of the purpose of writing – for example, to communicate meaning to a reader – has any place in the government’s view of the beginning writer.

In sum...

The government has got it right with regard to the teaching and learning of the spoken language at the Early Years Foundation Stage, but seriously wrong with regard to literacy.

Reference

Department for Education (2014d) *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage*. London: Department for Education. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf Accessed 7 October 2015.

English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19 – Principles and Proposals

Curriculum and Assessment in English 3 to 19: A Better Plan draws heavily on the series *English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19 – Principles and Proposals*, published in 2015 by Owen Education and the United Kingdom Literacy Association.

The ten booklets in the series are:

English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19 – Summary: John Richmond, Peter Dougill and Mike Raleigh

Talk: John Richmond

Reading 3 to 7: John Richmond

Reading 7 to 16: Peter Traves

Writing 3 to 7: John Richmond

Writing 7 to 16: John Richmond

Grammar and Knowledge about Language: John Richmond

Drama: John Richmond

Media: Andrew Burn

English 16 to 19: Angela Goddard.

All are available, price £12 each (£11 to UKLA members), from the United Kingdom Literacy Association at <http://www.ukla.org/publications/shop/>

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