JANE MEDWELL, DAVID WRAY, HILARY MINNS, VIVIENNE GRIFFITHS & LIZ COATES

9TH EDITION
PRIMARY ENGLISH
TEACHING THEORY & PRACTICE

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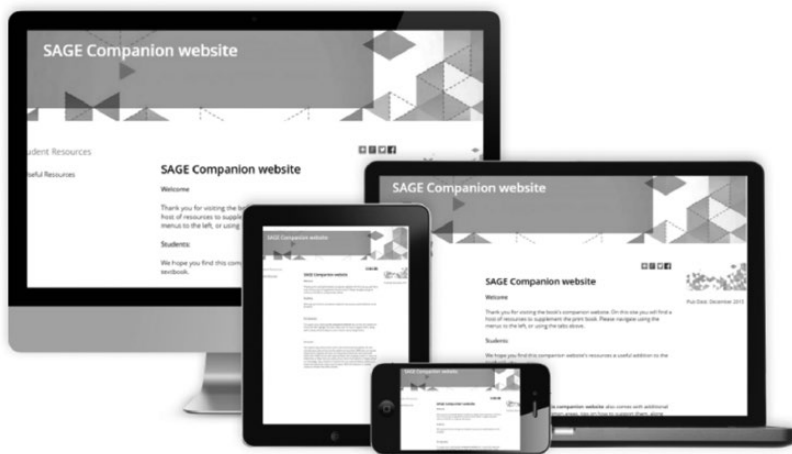
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About the authors

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INTRODUCTION

About this book

This book has been written to address the needs of primary trainees on all courses of initial teacher training in England and other parts of the UK. In order to become primary teachers, teachers are required to have developed a defined set of professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding and professional skills. Such teaching skills are required to meet the Teachers' Standards (2013) and the principal aim of this book is to help beginning teachers become confident in these skills. The book will also be useful to Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and other professionals working in education who have identified aspects of their English teaching that require attention.

This book has been written with the Teachers' Standards firmly at its core. These (DfE, 2013a) came into force on 1 September 2012, and define the minimum level of practice expected of all teachers at the beginning of their careers. At the time of writing this book, changes are underway in the operation of these Standards and, indeed, the concept and definition of Qualified Teacher Status itself. The 2016 Government White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016b) proposed that the Government would 'replace the current "Qualified Teacher Status" (QTS) with a stronger, more challenging accreditation based on a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom, as judged by great schools' (p. 13). Currently there is no further information about what such 'more challenging accreditation' will involve, although the White Paper does refer to 'advanced subject knowledge and pedagogy that is rooted in up-to-date evidence'. This book and its companion volume, *Primary English: Knowledge and Understanding* (Medwell and Wray, 2021), will, therefore, focus heavily on these two issues, with the 'advanced pedagogy' required by effective teachers of primary English being the focus of this particular volume.

The other development with significant implications for the beginning teacher of primary English (in England) is the National Curriculum for English (and Mathematics and Science)

which maintained schools (but not academies, free schools or independent schools) have been required to follow from September 2016. A revised Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, which details the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) set nationally for children from birth to five years old, also became statutory in April 2017 (DfE, 2017). This framework is mandatory for all Early Years' providers, including maintained schools, non-maintained schools, independent schools and all providers on the Early Years Register.

This book therefore also includes information on the programmes of study for National Curriculum English, and on the ELGs for children in the Early Years. Each chapter addresses pedagogies in the particular areas of English that primary teachers need to cover. We have also attempted to make clear links between approaches to teaching and the knowledge you, as a teacher, need to implement these successfully.

Features of the main chapters of this book include:

- clear links with the Teachers' Standards;
- references to required English knowledge and understanding;
- research summaries that give insights into how the theory of English teaching has developed, including seminal studies on oracy and literacy;
- examples of practice in the classroom to illustrate important points;
- suggestions for embedding ICT in your practice;
- reminders of how planning for teaching English fits in with the bigger picture, across the curriculum and with other aspects of school life;
- reflective tasks and practical activities for you to undertake;
- a summary of key learning points;
- suggestions for further reading.

For those undertaking credits for a Master's degree, we have included suggestions for further work and extended study at the end of each chapter in a section called 'M-Level Extension'. The book also contains a glossary of terms.

Each chapter addresses the teaching of particular areas of English, such as reading and writing. The subject knowledge that primary teachers need in order to become effective teachers of English and literacy is addressed in the companion volume, *Primary English: Knowledge and Understanding* (Medwell and Wray, 2021). However, the authors of this book have also attempted to make clear the knowledge you will need in order to carry out successful English teaching.

What is primary English and why is it taught?

There is a good deal of consensus about what we want children to achieve in primary English, but it can still be difficult to define primary English as a subject. For the purposes of this book, we feel that primary English is about children acquiring the skills, knowledge and attitudes to become empowered readers, writers, speakers and listeners.

Teaching primary English involves ensuring children learn the skills and processes of literacy and using spoken language, but these are not always defined simply. Literacy can be construed as having the skills necessary for effective reading and writing, but this raises many questions. What degree of expertise must one achieve to be 'literate'? Are some people more literate than others, and what do we mean by this? Does literacy involve reading certain texts and not others? What about media literacy – the ability to 'read' and be critical about media such as TV, social networking and other internet sources?

The National Curriculum takes a broad view of literacy, aiming for all children to be able to read and write a full range of texts. They should learn not only to decode and encode written English, but also to be critical about what they read so that they can identify the stance of the author and the intended effects on the reader. The National Curriculum aims for children to read a wide range of texts, including electronic texts. In writing, too, the aims of the National Curriculum are not only for children to be able to write in a technical sense, but also for them to be able to write to express themselves and achieve their purposes for writing.

In spoken language, it is also important to recognise that children need to be able to listen not only to the literal sense of what is said, but also to listen critically and evaluate the veracity, relevance and intent of what they hear – to become critical listeners. The National Curriculum aims to empower children to become critical speakers, too, so that they are able to speak appropriately and effectively in a whole range of situations, whatever the purpose of their speech.

To use reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, children need a great deal of knowledge. They need to know about the technical aspects of speaking, listening, reading and writing if they are to be able to use them effectively. These 'technical aspects' include a vast range of specialised knowledge, for instance knowing the sounds of English, knowing about word order in sentences and knowing how to listen for the key points from a text. The most important and complex knowledge children must gain is knowledge and understanding about how to orchestrate their skills and understanding about reading, writing, speaking and listening effectively. To do this, children need to know about successful texts – these can be written examples of literature or non-fiction, spoken discussions or reports. If children have clear, effective models they can analyse why these are effective and begin to make their own texts effective. All this knowledge is part of primary English.

In addition to skills and knowledge, primary English also involves attitudes. We aim for children to find reading fiction an enjoyable experience so that they will be motivated to do more. We aim for children to find non-fiction persuasive, interesting or useful. We aim for children to enjoy learning from listening and to be motivated to speak powerfully and coherently. These are only a few of the attitudes towards the use of literacy and spoken language that we aim for children to develop. Texts by themselves will not develop useful attitudes in children. It is the way the texts are treated by teachers and children that develops attitudes.

Primary English is about empowering children with a range of skills, knowledge and attitudes for schooling and life. Primary English involves studying and creating spoken and written texts. English texts and language are worth studying for themselves and also as a gateway to every other subject in the curriculum.

The Teachers' Standards

In this book we are focusing mainly on the skills needed to plan, manage, monitor and assess learning in English, including literacy. The current Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013a) make it plain that, among other things:

> *A teacher must:*
>
> 1. *Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils*
> 2. *Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils*
> 3. *Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge*
> 4. *Plan and teach well-structured lessons*
> 5. *Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils*
> 6. *Make accurate and productive use of assessment.*

Curriculum context

A new set of requirements for the primary curriculum for maintained schools in England and Wales came into force in 2016 and this sort of change may very well happen several times in your career as a teacher. Although the National Curriculum is not a legal requirement for academies and free schools, these, like their state school equivalents, will generally follow the programmes of study set out in the official documents (DfE, 2013c). You need to know about the current curriculum and a good deal about what your children have already learnt and how they have been taught. Here we have included a brief summary of information about the primary National Curriculum programmes of study and the ELGs for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

English in the National Curriculum

English in the National Curriculum is organised on the basis of five key stages: Foundation Key Stage (part of the Early Years Foundation Stage) for 3–5-year-olds; Key Stage 1 for 5–7-year-olds (Years 1 and 2); and Key Stage 2 for 7–11-year-olds (Years 3 to 6) refer to primary and Early Years teaching. The components of the Foundation Key Stage are set out as Early Learning Goals, which set targets for the end of the Foundation Stage, and stepping stones, which set out how children can achieve ELGs. Key Stages 1 and 2 include programmes of study, which set out the English that children should be taught. These programmes are organised over four age phases:

- Key Stage 1 – Year 1;
- Key Stage 1 – Year 2;
- Lower Key Stage 2 – Years 3 and 4;
- Upper Key Stage 2 – Years 5 and 6.

Within each age phase the material to be taught is split into five strands:

- Reading – word reading;
- Reading – comprehension;
- Writing – transcription;
- Writing – composition;
- Writing – vocabulary, grammar and punctuation.

There are also requirements for the teaching of spoken language which span Years 1 to 6, and two statutory appendices – one about spelling and one about vocabulary, grammar and punctuation – which give an overview of the specific features that should be included in teaching the programmes of study.

The National Curriculum is intended to be a minimum statutory entitlement for children and schools have the flexibility and freedom to design a wider school curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils and to decide how to teach it most effectively. As *The National Curriculum in England* (DfE, 2013b) itself puts it:

> *The national curriculum is just one element in the education of every child. There is time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year to range beyond the national curriculum specifications. The national curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons to promote the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as part of the wider school curriculum.*

> *Para 3.2*

All schools are required to set out their school curriculum for English on a year-by-year basis and make this information available online.

Statutory assessment of English attainment occurs at various points in the primary phase. From 2015 onwards the statutory assessment of primary pupils, in English, has involved the reporting of assessment at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This assessment includes teacher assessment and some tests. In 2015 a new national assessment regime was introduced which dispensed with the former National Curriculum levels and sub-levels (see DfE, 2015). A full description of all the current required assessment in primary English will be found in Chapter 16 on Assessment later in this book.

The Early Years Foundation Stage and the Early Learning Goals

The Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2017) describe what most children should achieve by the end of their Reception year. These goals were updated in 2020 in the document *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five*. EYFS Reforms Early Adopter Version (DfE, 2020b). This document sets out the updated Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), statutory in all settings from September 2021. This document identifies features of good practice during the Early Years Foundation Stage and sets out the Early Learning Goals in three prime areas and six specific areas of learning. One of the prime areas is that of

Communication and Language (including 'Listening, Attention and Understanding' and 'Speaking') and one of the specific areas is Literacy (including Comprehension, Word Reading and Writing).

There are thus five areas within the Early Learning Goals which specifically concern us in the present book. These are:

- listening and attention;
- understanding;
- speaking;
- reading;
- writing.

English also includes exploring and using media and being imaginative. Specific reference will be made to these Early Learning Goals where relevant in the book.

At the end of the EYFS (the end of Reception), all providers of Early Years care and education complete the Early Years Foundation Stage profile, which summarises and describes children's attainment at the end of the EYFS. It is based on ongoing observation and assessment in the three prime and four specific areas of learning, and the three learning characteristics.

Outcomes

By using this book to support your developing teaching skills you will be able to teach primary English and Communication Language and Literacy successfully. We hope that your own reading and writing of texts in English and about English will fuel your enthusiasm for teaching English and, especially, that you will develop a lifelong love of the excellent children's literature available to children today. This is part of your stock in trade. Your enthusiasm is an invaluable asset for a teacher and can bring English alive for children. We hope you will design challenging, stimulating and engaging activities for children which will teach them the richness and power of English.

Statutory documentation

To support you in understanding the curriculum context, you may find it helpful to refer to some of the following documentation, which underpins the material in this book:

DfE (2013a) *Teachers' Standards*. London: DfE. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665520/Teachers__Standards.pdf

DfE (2013c) *English Programmes of Study: Key Stages 1 and 2*. London: DfE. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335186/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_English_220714.pdf

DfE (2014b) *The National Curriculum in England: Framework for Key Stages 1 to 4*. London: DfE.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4

DfE (2015) *Final Report of the Commissionon Assessment without Levels.* London: DfE. https://assets. publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/483058/ Commission_on_Assessment_Without_Levels_-_report.pdf

DfE (2017) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.* London: DfE. https://assets. publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596629/EYFS_ STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf

DfE (2019a) *Early Years Foundation Stage: 2020 Assessment and Reporting Arrangements (ARA).* London: Standards and Testing Agency. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/ uploads/attachment_data/file/843068/2020_EYFS_assessment_and_reporting_arrangements_.pdf

DfE (2019b) *Key Stage 1 Teacher Assessment Guidance.* London: Standards and Testing Agency. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/849017/2020_key_stage_1_teacher_assessment_guidance.pdf

DfE (2019c) *Key Stage 2 Teacher Assessment Guidance.* London: Standards and Testing Agency. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/849018/2020_key_stage_2_teacher_assessment_guidance.pdf

DfE (2020b) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five.* EYFS Reforms Early Adopter Version. London: DfE. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/896810/EYFS_Early_Adopter_Framework.pdf

2

LEARNING ENGLISH

Teachers' Standards

A teacher must:

2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils

    *   demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching

3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge

    *   have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings
    *   demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject

This chapter will consider general trends in the way children learn language and draw parallels between literacy and oracy learning. It looks at how you as a teacher can best support children's development as language learners and teach children the range of skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to become effective readers, writers, speakers and listeners. Later chapters focus on how these general strategies are used for different aspects of literacy and oracy teaching at the different primary age phases.

Most of us learnt our first language so early in our lives that we do not remember doing so and therefore we are able to take this immense learning achievement for granted. When we look

at teaching language to others, however, we need to review and establish what it is important to know and be able to do in language. It is important that children use language effectively, automatically and without having to give undue attention to it, but it is also important that they, and you as their teacher, are able to take a close look at language and examine ways of using it more effectively.

REFLECTIVE TASK

1. List six things you have read and four conversations you have taken part in during the past 24 hours.

   Are you surprised by the range of topics covered?

2. You are in an airport in Greece but you do not speak, read or write Greek. You need to find your way to the car hire area.

   Why are you 'lost'?

   What is language?

   What can you do?

   What do you know about Greek?

3. Read this passage:

   Impairments in _____ are overtly manifested in children who exhibit errors in their speech production that are _____ for their age. Phonology is an aspect of linguistic _____ concerned with both the rules governing the ordering of _____ into meaningful units and the _____ phonetic qualities in which meanings are transmitted (Grunwell, 1990). Language _____ include phonological impairments that occur either in isolation or with other _____ problems (Bishop and Edmundson, 1987; Leonard, 1982).

   The relationship between _____ skills and reading has received a great deal of attention in light of the body of research that has indicated that deficits in phonology can be directly linked to _____ disabilities (see Catts, 1989). During the _____ phase, the first stage of formal reading instruction, there is a heavy _____ on a phonological processing method to access _____. Words are broken into graphemes, graphemes are converted into phonemes, and phonemes are blended into _____ to form words. To perform this process successfully, adequate _____ awareness (phonics) skills are required (Blachman, 1989; Catts, 1989; Snyder and Downey, 1991). Children with reading _____ have been found to be poor in tasks that tap _____ awareness: these include sound counting, sound deletion (say 'dog' without the 'd'), sound _____ (reversal of phonemes) and sound _____ (e.g. categorising words by their beginning sounds) (Blachman, 1989).

   Can you get the full meaning from this passage? If not, why is this?

   What strategies do you use to work out the meaning?

Language is functional and meaning orientated

If you look at your list of readings, you will find that all the reading you did was meaningful and had some purpose – to provide enjoyment or amusement, to inform you or to persuade you. When you try to read a sign, you have an expectation of the meaning and function (or purpose) of the sign. In the third task above, you may have been able to supply missing words on the basis of the meaning – your existing knowledge of the subject or ability to work out a plausible meaning. This is called using semantic cues for information. By recognising the purpose of a text, we can make appropriate language choices.

REFLECTIVE TASK

The work of Halliday (1978, 2004) and his theory of 'Functional Systemic Linguistics' has been very important in recent years in informing practice in literacy teaching. Halliday's emphasis has been on looking at what language lets us do in the world – its function. Halliday's work has introduced a range of important insights, many of which have been a strong influence on the teaching of literacy and oracy.

- It has emphasised that language is not just a means of communicating. It is also a way of making meanings and understanding the world. Language is a way of achieving what we want in our culture.

- Halliday looked at the ways language is related to problem-solving, thinking and understanding. He emphasises that ways of using language are at the heart of understanding the ideas and concepts of any knowledge area – this has real implications for how we use language in teaching. For instance, if we want children to think and learn problem-solving like mathematicians, they need to learn and use the language and ideas internalised by mathematicians. You, in learning to become a teacher, will learn the language of teaching. This is not just jargon, it is a crucial tool in enabling you to think and problem-solve as a teacher and learn the concepts and ideas shared by other teachers.

- Halliday has given the world the concept of 'texts' – meaningful chunks of written or spoken language. He argues strongly that the level at which we operate in the real world is not the word or the sentence but the level of the whole text. We, as teachers, need to respond to texts in terms of their success or failure at achieving their purpose for a given audience.

- Halliday has emphasised 'genre'-forms of language – which are valued in different contexts. This has led to the study of appropriate genres to be taught to children.

- Halliday has developed awareness of the relationship between author, purpose and linguistic choice. By making the linguistic choices involved in constructing a written text, or by uttering a spoken text, we are using our knowledge of the purpose of the text and the range of language elements available to us. As teachers, we want to teach children to be aware of how language choices change as the audience and purpose of a text change. So, children writing a newspaper report for other children will make different language choices from those writing a letter to the local council. Halliday's work has given many authors a framework for considering how texts work and how children might best learn to create and respond to texts.

Language is a code

Language might be described as the set of symbols we use to represent our immediate lives as well as experiences and ideas far away from us. Language even lets us represent abstract concepts (such as language or thought). It is certainly a very flexible and creative code. The basic units that carry meaning in English are phonemes and graphemes. At the word and sub-word level, around 44 basic sound units (phonemes) and the 26 letters of the English language, along with spaces, pauses, punctuation marks and intonation, can be combined in a multitude of ways. You cannot read Greek signs if you do not know the basic units of Greek code. In reading, we call using the links between known symbols and sounds using graphic and phonic cues. In the second task above, you did not know these basic facts about the Greek language and so you could not extract the full meaning from the Greek signs, but there are probably many things you could understand about a Greek sign. As an English user you knew the function of signs and expected them to contain useful information. You had a concept of word and letter, and even though you could not read the words, you knew in which direction the text proceeded. In a more sophisticated way you knew that there were likely to be sentences and that the word order would be significant. These insights were not enough to allow you to understand the Greek text fully, but they do remind you that all these ideas are important for young children who will understand some, but not all, aspects of the sophisticated code of language. (For more on phonemes and graphemes, see Chapter 3 of our companion volume *Primary English: Knowledge and Understanding* (Medwell and Wray, 2021).)

There are also sentence-level codes that help us to understand language. In the third task above, you probably guessed some of the missing words because you knew so much about the sentence structure around those words that you could predict from the syntax. The code of language at sentence level is called grammar and it is a very powerful way of making meaning. Although spoken language is actually clause driven rather than reliant on the full sentences of writing, this also has a clear grammar and syntax. We call using known syntactic structures in reading using syntactic cues.

At a whole-text level the codes of language include the ways in which written or spoken text types are structured for their purposes. As an experienced language user you would know the purpose of a sign or of the texts you have written.

Children learning language

Interesting insights into how children acquire their early knowledge about the workings of literacy can be gained from considering some of the processes through which they learn their first spoken language. While learning to talk is not the same as learning to be literate, both processes clearly have much in common because spoken language has much in common with written language. Written language also differs in important ways from spoken language, and awareness of these differences is in itself an important feature of becoming literate.

The table below, adapted from that given in David Crystal's *Encyclopaedia of the English Language* (1995, p. 291) summarises some of the differences between spoken and written language.

Differences between speech and writing	
Speech is time-bound, transient and part of an interaction in which both speaker and listener are usually present.	Writing is space-bound, permanent and the result of a situation in which the writer is usually distant from the reader.
The spontaneity of most speech makes it difficult to plan in advance. The pressure to think while talking produces looser construction, repetition and rephrasing. Long utterances are divided into manageable chunks, but sentence boundaries are often unclear.	Writing allows repeated reading and analysis, and promotes the use of careful organisation. Units of discourse (sentences, paragraphs) are usually easy to identify through punctuation and layout.
Because participants are typically in face-to-face interaction, they can rely on such cues as facial expression and gesture to aid meaning. Speech tends to rely on words that refer directly to the situation, such as 'that one', 'in here', 'right now'.	Lack of visual contact means that participants cannot rely on context to make their meanings clear. Most writing therefore avoids the use of expressions that pin it to the here and now.
Many words and constructions are characteristic of speech, such as long, conjoined sentences, vocabulary which may have no standard spelling (whatchamacallit), slang and grammatical informality (isn't, they've).	Some words and constructions are characteristic of writing, such as multiple use of subordination in the same sentence, and the use of precise vocabulary.
Speech is very suited to social functions, such as passing the time of day, or any situation where casual and unplanned discourse is desirable.	Writing is very suited to the recording of facts and the communication of ideas, and to tasks of memory and learning.
There is an opportunity to rethink an utterance while it is in progress. However, errors, once spoken, cannot be withdrawn.	Errors and other perceived inadequacies in writing can be eliminated in later drafts without the reader ever knowing they were there.
Unique features of speech include intonation, contrasts of loudness, tempo, rhythm and other tones of voice.	Unique features of writing include pages, lines, capitalisation, spatial organisation and several aspects of punctuation.

How is learning written English different from spoken English?

Some of the processes by which children learn spoken language apply to the acquisition of literacy. Children, from the moment they are born, are surrounded by spoken language. One of the most noticeable facts about babies is that people talk to them long before anyone could expect these babies to understand what is being said, and the remarkable thing about the way people talk to babies is that they generally do it meaningfully. Of course, there is a certain amount of 'goo-gooing', but, more often, the talk will be similar to 'Who's going to see his Grandad? Yes, he is. Oh, there's a clever boy.' Many babies spend almost the whole of their waking lives being played with, play which almost inevitably is accompanied by talk. This talk may not be in totally adult forms but is invariably meaningful. In addition to this, young children are also surrounded by talk that is not directly addressed to them. Again, such talk is invariably meaningful and much of its sense is obvious from its context. Children, then, begin life bathed in meaningful talk.

Because the talk that surrounds them is meaningful, young children are receiving continual demonstrations of the purposes of spoken language. If an adult says to a child, 'Who's dropped his ball then? There we are. Back again', and returns the ball, the adult is demonstrating the connection between talk and the action it refers to. When the child says, 'Daddy blow', and the adult responds with, 'Yes, Daddy will blow the whistle now', the demonstration is not only of the connection between language and action, but also of an appropriate form of speech. Children receive millions of demonstrations of meaningful talk, not only directed at them, but also taking place around them. From these demonstrations, they have to work out how the system of language works so that they can begin to take part in it.

Of course, the simple fact of witnessing demonstrations of language would not be sufficient to turn children into language users unless some other factors were also present. First among these is engagement – that is, the desire on the part of children to take part in the language behaviour they see around them. This desire arises because children witness the power of language in the world and want to share in it. They see, for example, that if you can ask for a biscuit rather than just scream loudly you are more likely to get what you want. They also see that using language in ways that achieve the effects they want is not something so difficult that they are unlikely to master it. On the contrary, language is presented to them from the very first as something they can do. This produces a crucial expectation of success, which we know to be vitally important in actual achievement. There is plenty of evidence that children, both in and out of school, achieve very much what they are expected to achieve by other people. It is likely that this works because children internalise others' expectations about them and come to hold these expectations of themselves. The most familiar example of this concerns children whom adults label as 'not very clever' and who come to believe this of themselves. Because they do not believe they can 'be clever', they stop trying to be.

In the case of spoken language, however, every child is expected to be able to master it (unless some medical condition makes this impossible). Asking any parent, 'Do you expect your child to learn to talk?' is likely to produce only a very puzzled response. The question seems ludicrous because the answer is so obvious. Because the adults around them believe so firmly that they will become talkers, the children themselves come to believe they will do it, and they do, generally effortlessly.

When children are learning to talk, it is highly unlikely that the adult expert talkers that surround them will decide to administer a structured programme of speech training. Adults who have tried to be even a little systematic in helping children to develop language have found that it simply does not work. The following much quoted exchange between child and caregiver is an example of what can happen.

Child: Nobody don't like me.

Mother: No, say 'Nobody likes me'.

Child: Nobody don't like me. [Eight repetitions of this dialogue]

Mother: No, now listen carefully: say 'Nobody likes me'.

Child: Oh! Nobody don't likes me.

(This exchange comes from the work of David McNeill.
It is quoted in Crystal (1987), p. 234.)

Instead of this situation, in which the adult has tried to take responsibility for what the child should learn, it is much more usual for the child to take the responsibility. Learning to talk is the child's task, which can be supported by adults but is not sequenced, structured or taught by them. The majority of adults implicitly accept this and rarely try to force the pace when children are learning to talk, but instead take their lead from the child's performance.

During this learning, nobody expects children to perform perfectly from the very beginning. If children had to wait until they had perfect control of all facets of spoken language before speaking, they would not produce any speech until at least nine or ten years of age. What in fact happens is that children produce spoken language forms that are approximations to adult forms, and these approximations gradually become closer and closer to the desired end product. 'Baby-talk' is not only accepted by caregivers but is actually encouraged by being received with amusement and pride. It is also usually responded to as a meaningful utterance, and elaborated by the adult into a more fully developed form. When a child says, for example, 'Daddy, you naughty', the adult is much more likely to respond with something like, 'Oh, fancy saying Daddy is naughty. He's a good Daddy', rather than, 'No. Say "Daddy, you are naughty."' The adult responds to the child's attempts at fully fledged speech forms by interpreting and adding meaning rather than by correcting them. Approximations are accepted and responded to by adults, and gradually children realise for themselves that they are approximate and how to make them more 'adult'.

Any learning, to be effective, requires a great deal of practice on the part of the learner, and learning to talk is no exception. For the vast majority of children this is no problem at all. They are constantly surrounded by talk and are expected and given chances to join in with it. Even when by themselves they carry on practising, from early babbling in which language sounds are practised to later oral accompaniments to actions such as play. Significantly, this practice occurs for completely different purposes than to help children learn to talk. Adults rarely hold conversations with babies and young children because they know this is good for their language development. Nor do children talk to themselves when playing because they think this will make them better talkers. Both activities occur for more fundamental, human reasons. Conversations take place because there is something to converse about and children are included in the conversation that accompanies everyday action from very early in their lives. Children talk to themselves because this is how they represent their actions to themselves and how they reflect on these actions. This kind of talk becomes more and more elliptical and eventually fades altogether, occurring inside the head as 'inner speech'. It is the beginning of thought.

For all the importance of the above processes in children's growing capacity to produce meaningful speech, none of them would work were it not for the fact they all operate in a two-sided situation. Children are immersed in language, receive a myriad of demonstrations of it, are expected to try to emulate these and are given freedom and opportunities to do it at their own pace and level of approximation, but the crucial factor is that all this happens in the context of real dialogue with other people. Adults talk, not just across children, but also to them; they expect children to talk back to them and, when they do, adults respond. This constant interaction is at the heart of growing language use, and it is the need for interaction that comes first. Relationships need to be developed and things need to be achieved together. Language comes into being as a means of helping these things happen. It is therefore learnt as a means of coping with the demands of being human.

Because of the interactive nature of language learning, the process inevitably involves response. Children respond to adult language, and adults respond to children's attempts at language.

Such response not only reaffirms the relationship that forms the context of the talk, but also gives children feedback about their language and, perhaps, a more elaborated model on which to base future language.

The development of insights into literacy

The same processes that underpin the development of spoken language can also be seen to underpin the development of children's early insights into and use of literacy.

The vast majority of children are surrounded by literacy from their earliest years. Here are just a few of the manifestations of this:

- they consume things from packaging covered in print, from soft drink cans to chocolate bar wrappers;
- they wear print, from clothes labels to T-shirt slogans;
- they accompany their parents shopping in printed surroundings and come into contact with signs, from 'Car Park' to 'Play Centre', and printed packages, from cereal boxes to juice cartons;
- they watch print on screen: on television, smart phones and computers;
- they see print used in their homes, from shopping lists to telephone directories, and recipes to newspapers.

This environmental print is not there simply by accident, but because it communicates messages. Children are thus surrounded by meaningful print. They are also continually being given demonstrations of people using this print. They see adults:

- following instructions on packages and making their food;
- reading newspapers, magazines or books, and reacting with laughter, anger, sadness, etc.;
- consulting telephone directories, and dialling numbers guided by print;
- reading computer screens and bank machines;
- finding their way around supermarkets by following the signs;
- and so on, ad infinitum.

These are illustrations that print can affect the way you feel, can act as a guide to action, or can be used for the sheer pleasure of doing so. As a result of these constant demonstrations of literacy, most children come to value engagement in literacy. This shows itself in all kinds of ways. Some children learn that there is little point in saying 'I want a burger' unless you are near a place that sells them, which you know because of the signs outside. (American researchers have suggested that virtually every American two- to three-year-old can 'read' well-known burger bar signs!) Others will proudly produce a page covered in scribble and say 'I've written a story'. The three-year-old girl who sat for three-quarters of an hour absorbed in the pages of a book that was on her knee, upside down, had learnt to value the literacy behaviour she had witnessed in adults, even if she had not quite yet worked out how to do it. Any Reception teacher will testify to the fact that most of their new charges come to school wanting to learn to read above all things. Their engagement with literacy is usually high.

EMBEDDING ICT

When teaching children in the Early Years, remember to build on their high levels of engagement by giving them opportunities to interact with a wide range of media and technologies. Include an electronic till, a basic calculator and an up-to-date-looking telephone or mobile in the role-play area. When planning guided play activities, include the choice of listening to a pre-recorded story independently and ensure that all children have a turn at completing programs on the computer – for example, to practise their shape or letter recognition. The digital camera or camera-phone is not only one of the very best recording tools for the Early Years teacher, but also for the pupil who wants to make meaning. Photocopy or scan and print out the children's work to include in a class book or to be sent home to share with parents.

Before they reach school, most children have few grounds not to believe that they will be successful in their encounters with literacy. The majority of three-year-olds will cheerfully 'read' a book, even if what they say does not match the actual printed words. They will also 'write', using scribble or the letters of their name to signify meaning. Because they have received so many demonstrations of literacy in so many contexts, they come to believe that there is nothing to it. Everyone else can do it, so they can too, or even if they are aware they have not quite got the hang of it yet, it is only a matter of time until they do. It is a sad fact that the first time many children begin to doubt that they will master the activities of reading and writing is when their school experience shows them that these things are difficult and failure is possible.

In the early lessons that children learn about literacy, it is unlikely that adults will make too many demands on them to perform in particular ways. The choice of whether to attend to the literacy demonstrations around them and whether to try to copy them or not is left to the children. They therefore, as with spoken language, have responsibility for their own learning. Of course, parents often do attempt more direct teaching of reading and writing with young children than they do of speaking. This is only natural, given the high status of literacy and parents' perceptions that the ability to read and write is linked with success in later life. Most parents will, however, take the lead from their children in terms of how long their teaching will last, when they have done enough and, indeed, what this teaching will consist of. Again, the child has a large amount of responsibility for the process.

Adults also rarely expect the 'reading' and 'writing' of their young children to be perfect. A two-year-old who makes up a spoken story in response to looking at a captioned picture book is more likely to receive praise for this effort than an exhortation to be more careful and get the words right. Similarly, children who present their parents with scribbled 'letters' are likely to have their attempts taken seriously, with the parents pretending to 'read' the message, and not be admonished for their poor handwriting or spelling. In the same way that children are allowed 'baby-talk' that approximates to adult speech, they are allowed 'baby-reading' and 'baby-writing'.

In addition to being surrounded by demonstrations of literacy, many children get a great many opportunities to take part in it, at however rudimentary a level. Almost all children 'write', whether it be with pencil, felt tip, crayon, paint brush or chalk. Most of them also 'read', whether from books, comics, TV screens or advertisements. The three-year-old who proudly displays a new T-shirt with a cartoon character on the front is using the ability to derive meaning from printed symbols. The two-year-old who picks up the tube of sweets rather than the indigestion tablets is making discriminations on the basis of print. Reading and writing, in rudimentary forms, are part of most young children's play activities simply because they are such a significant part of their worlds.

Finally, many of children's early interactions with print take place in collaboration with an experienced adult. This is done so naturally that many adults are almost unaware of it. Some examples will show it in action.

- A mother is shopping with her two-year-old boy who sits in a seat in the shopping trolley. He reaches out and picks up a packet of cornflakes. He says, 'Bix, Mummy.' The mother replies, 'No. We don't want cornflakes. We want wheat biscuits. See. Here we are.' She has given feedback on his interpretation of print and helped him learn more about this process.

- A father is standing at a bus stop with his three-year-old son. A bus draws up and the little boy moves forward. The father says, 'No. We want the bus for Warwick Street. This goes to Haslam Road, look.' He points to the indicator on the bus. He is demonstrating which items of print it is important to attend to.

- A mother is playing 'Shops' with her three-year-old daughter. She asks to 'buy' several things and helps her daughter find each item in the shop. Each time the child finds the right item the mother praises her with, 'Yes. That's the toothpaste.' Again, the child is being helped to make links between objects and their print representations.

Of course, children vary in the quantity of interactions of this kind they experience with their parents. Where they receive a great many, the children are in fact being treated as apprentice print users, an experience which almost certainly helps them develop into independent print users later. The concept of apprenticeship is an important one in trying to understand the growth of early literacy, and essentially involves the actions of an expert being copied and experimented with by a less expert apprentice. Learning takes place naturally and almost undetectably, yet it clearly does take place.

The experience of literacy that children get at home is probably not sufficient to ensure they develop into fully competent experts in all the ways literacy is used in the modern world. While it is true that most children make a start on the process of becoming literate before they arrive at school, there is a great deal that they still have to learn. However, they have made an important start before they ever enter school. Although school has a vital role to play in the development of literacy, a great deal can still be learnt from an examination of the learning processes at work in the home that we have just discussed. The attractiveness of these processes lies in their naturalness. The fact that nobody, parents or children, consciously plans these processes suggests that there is something in them that is fundamental to effective human learning. If this is so, these processes represent a very good place to start in planning the teaching that happens in school. As children learn in school, they do become more independent and more able to deal with abstracts, so they can extend their range of learning strategies, but it makes sense to build on the insights they bring with them from pre-school experience.

Halliday (1978, 2004) emphasised three aspects of language learning: learning language, learning through language and learning about language. Very young children are engaged in doing all these right from the beginning. As their vocabularies expand (learning language) they learn about using language for the social purposes in their environment (learning about language) and in doing so they learn about the world and their place in it (learning through language). We build on this learning when they come to Nursery and school. To do this, we need to teach all three of Halliday's aspects of language.

- Teachers need to offer children more language to learn – more varied text types (spoken and written), a wider range of words, new ways of organising language, and the conventions of standard written English at text, sentence and word levels.

- Teachers need to help children to learn about language – to reflect on and analyse how texts work and to speak and write new texts. By learning about language, children will become more flexible users of language.

- Teachers need to help children learn through language. Children need to learn the language of the subjects they study so that they can learn the concepts of those subjects. Children also need effective oracy and literacy skills so that they can have access to other subjects.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

When you are planning spoken language and literacy work for your class, remember to include activities to promote all three of Halliday's three aspects of language, but not just in your plans for communication and language. Children can be offered more language to learn as they undertake activities in mathematics and personal, social and emotional development. They can be helped to learn about language through widening their vocabulary and accessing information texts as they gain knowledge through understanding the world. They can learn through language as they take part in sessions to support their creative and their physical development.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Cambourne (1988) systematically observed toddlers in experimenter-free settings and recorded their talk with caregivers, friends, neighbours and in a range of different settings. He identified certain conditions in the language-learning environment which he considered 'necessary' conditions for language learning to occur. Cambourne suggests that these conditions are essential for early literacy learning in classrooms. These eight conditions are summarised as follows.

- **Immersion:** Language learning involves being immersed in language. Babies are immersed in language (and involved in it) from birth. In classrooms, children can be immersed in literacy and oracy.
- **Demonstration:** To learn language, children need demonstrations of why they use language, how they use language and what language to use. Demonstrations of talking, listening, reading and writing are essential in literacy teaching to show children at all levels what they can do, why they should do it and how to go about it.
- **Engagement:** Immersion and demonstration are not sufficient conditions for language learning. The child must be engaged and take part or else learning will not occur.
- **Expectations:** Parents give very clear signs that they expect their babies to learn to talk. Teachers need to have clear, high expectations in literacy and oracy learning.
- **Responsibility:** Babies learning to talk initiate much of the talk and take responsibility; similarly, children need to participate in decision-making in school language learning.
- **Employment:** Young children use language long before they have a perfect mastery of it and 'practise' in situations like babbling and pre-sleep monologues; similarly, young literacy learners need plenty of chances to use language for a purpose and to practise.
- **Approximations:** Parents accept approximations from young children and see in them signs of development. Teachers, too, must accept approximations as part of learning literacy.
- **Response:** Parents respond positively and give meaning-based, but usually correct, responses to children's approximations. Feedback is very important in early literacy and oracy work.

Language learning for children with EAL

The conditions of language and literacy learning discussed above are just as powerful for children whose first language is not English but, clearly, they have language-learning experience in one language at home and in another at school. Moreover, much of the literacy-focused activity they may have done in home settings will not have been in English or about literacy in English. These children may have a huge range of positive experiences of literacy in another language and will have a foundation in language about literacy, key stories or rhymes. However, these may not be in English.

Children become bilingual very effectively if they are offered plenty of opportunities to develop their English language skills in ways which are age appropriate for them. Ideally, children will start to become bilingual from very early in their lives and in Early Years settings, through play and interaction with adults and other children. The big challenge for teachers is that children with EAL do not fit one pattern. They may start to learn English at different ages and with different language and personal experiences and this means it is very important to differentiate to meet their needs. In an Early Years setting, this may still mean teaching language through the conditions discussed above and making additional efforts to use gestures, role-plays and play activities to share language. The research evidence suggests that it is spoken language proficiency which is the most important aspect of language learning for young EAL pupils.