

## FROM THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW'S SUBMISSION TO THE 2011 NATIONAL CURRICULUM REVIEW

### 9 a) English

What knowledge do you regard as essential to include in the Programme of Study for **English**? Please also set out **why** this is essential and at what age or key stage. If you prefer to submit evidence separately on this matter, please send this to:

[NCRReview.DOCUMENTS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:NCRReview.DOCUMENTS@education.gsi.gov.uk)

#### Comments:

The CPR argues that English must be more broadly conceived, and that it must treat oracy with no less seriousness than literacy and thus bring England into line not just with most of the world's more successful education systems but also with psychological, neuroscientific and pedagogical research. The CPR also removes ambiguity about ICT by making it a part of the language curriculum, to be studied responsibly and critically, rather than a mere 'skill'. In the final CPR report a modern foreign language was included in this domain, which we called 'Language, oracy and literacy' rather than 'English', and indeed within a domain-based curriculum this makes sense. However, in relation to the current national curriculum and the way the questions in this consultation are framed, MFL needs to be treated separately.

#### **From the final CPR report, pp 268-71 (discussion of MFL removed):**

This domain includes spoken language, reading, writing, literature, wider aspects of language and communication, [a modern foreign language,] ICT and other non-print media. Though we dispense with the old core/non-core distinction, we do not hesitate to argue that the domain is the heart of the new curriculum. But it stands in considerable need of revision.

#### *The importance of oracy*

It is a recurrent theme of this Review that in England literacy is too narrowly conceived and that spoken language has yet to secure the place in primary education that its centrality to learning, culture and life requires, or that it enjoys in the curriculum of many other countries. The current national curriculum formulation, as 'speaking and listening', is conceptually weak and insufficiently demanding in practice, and we would urge instead that important initiatives like the National Oracy Project be revisited, along with more recent research on talk in learning and teaching, as part of the necessary process of defining oracy and giving it its proper place in the language curriculum.

#### *Re-thinking literacy*

Relatedly, the redesigning of this domain requires, as noted earlier, that the primary national strategy's literacy component be curtailed in its present form and that literacy – in the familiar sense of reading and writing – be re-integrated into the language curriculum. Further, the goal of literacy by the end of the primary phase must be more than functional. It is about making and exploring meaning as well as receiving and transmitting it. That is why talking must be part of reading and writing rather than an optional extra. And it is why engagement with the meanings made by others through literature, and with the language through which such meanings are conveyed, is no less essential. Literacy achieves our listed aim of empowerment by conferring the skill not just to read and write but to make these processes genuinely transformative, exciting children's imagination (another listed aim), extending their boundaries, and enabling them to contemplate lives and worlds

possible as well as actual.

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...

### *The ubiquity – and challenge - of ICT*

While ICT reaches across the entire curriculum, it should receive more explicit attention, and attention of a particular kind, within the language component. In this we differ from the Rose Review, which treated ICT as a neo-basic 'skill for learning and life', or as a tool without apparent substance or challenge other than the technical.

Within the space of a few years schools have advanced far beyond what used to be called 'computer-assisted learning', in which computers, like textbooks, were a pedagogical aid largely within the control of teachers. Now in such matters children are increasingly autonomous. Much of their out-of-school learning is electronic and beyond the reach of either parents or teachers. They exchange messages and information by texting on their mobile phones and through on-line networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook Twitter and Bebo. They seek information from Google and Wikipedia. They download music, DVDs, games and other material pretty well at will, using the mobile phones, PCs and laptops which are increasingly standard property in English households. In such matters, as Hargreaves shows, they are not merely passive 'surfers' who read, watch and listen, but 'peerers' who use electronic media to share, socialise, collaborate and create.<sup>i</sup>

In as far as most such activities depend on the ability to read and write, they must be counted in part as variants or extensions of literacy. It no longer makes sense to attend to text but ignore txt. Yet the matter is not merely one of skill or access. In the Cambridge Primary Review's soundings and submissions, parents, teachers – and children themselves – expressed concern about the perils as well as the opportunities of the electronic communication and information-handling skills which today's children so effortlessly command and the material to which they have access. However, while policing the more unsavoury reaches of the web is clearly necessary, the issue is not so much what is extreme and self-evidently disreputable as what is mainstream and apparently to be taken on trust. The more fundamental task is to help children develop the capacity to approach electronic and other non-print media (including television and film as well as the internet) with the degree of discrimination and critical awareness that should attend reading, writing and communicating of any kind.<sup>ii</sup> This, we believe, is an argument for treating ICT both as the cross-curricular informational tool which it obviously is, and as an aspect of the language curriculum which demands a rigour no less than should apply to the handling of the written and spoken word, and to traditionally-conceived text, information and evidence.

There is a further concern here. In April 2009, the Secretary of State found himself having to respond to headlines about the Rose Review's apparent advocacy of an approach to ICT which included teaching children about Wikipedia and social networking sites like Twitter, to the detriment of more familiar subjects like history. He said, 'We have a duty to ensure our children learn about history. We also have a duty to make sure they are not left in the technological dark ages.'<sup>iii</sup> However, his apparently gung-ho approach took no account of concerns raised by neuroscientists about the risks of excessive exposure to screen technologies. In a debate in the House of Lords, Baroness Greenfield warned:

The mid-21<sup>st</sup> century mind might almost be infantilised, characterised by short attention spans, sensationalism, inability to empathise and a shaky sense of identity ... If the young brain is exposed from the outset to a world of fast action and reaction, of instant new screen images flashing up with the press of a key, such rapid interchange might accustom the brain to operate over such timescales ... Real conversation in real time may eventually give way to these sanitised and easier screen dialogues ... It is hard to see how living this way on a daily basis will not result in brains, or rather minds, different from other generations.<sup>iv</sup>

These remarks caused a certain amount of controversy, and, in some quarters, ridicule.<sup>v</sup> But warnings about any technology which in an exceptionally short space of time becomes such a prominent and almost addictive aspect of young people's lives should not be lightly dismissed. Further, we believe that this debate confirms that it is right to locate ICT within the language

curriculum rather than as a semi-detached and uncritically-fostered 'skill for learning and life' as in the Rose interim report, for placing it here enables schools to balance and explore relationships between new and established forms of communication, and to ensure that the developmental and educational primacy of talk, which is now exceptionally well supported by research evidence, is always maintained.

#### *Revisiting language across the curriculum*

Finally, we commend renewed attention to the Bullock enquiry's recommendation that every school 'should have an organised policy for *language across the curriculum*'<sup>vi</sup> so as to underline four recurrent concerns of this review:

- Although language, oracy and literacy are conventionally located within the teaching of English, they are no less important in the other curriculum domains. This is why we argue that, properly conceived, this domain is the true core of the curriculum. And it is why it cannot be regarded as the province of the English lesson alone.
- The achievement of high standards in literacy requires not the narrowing of the primary school curriculum and the downgrading of other than 'the basics' which England has witnessed periodically since the 1860s and with renewed force since 1997, but the pursuit of breadth, balance, challenge and high quality teaching across the entire curriculum.
- Language, and the quality of language, are essential to cognitive development, learning and effective teaching in all contexts. A policy of language across the curriculum therefore requires the mapping of the different kinds and registers of language, both spoken and written, which are intrinsic to each domain and for which each domain provides particularly significant development potential.
- If language unlocks thought, then thought is enhanced, challenged and enlarged when language in all its aspects mentioned here, and in every educational context, is pursued with purpose and rigour.

#### **Note 1: LANGUAGE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH**

We commend renewed attention to the Bullock Report's argument that language is so fundamental to all human learning that it cannot be confined to the teaching of English alone. Its components, from the above extract, would be literacy, oracy and ICT. **We recommend that in addition to the programmes of study for English, there be a clear statement on language across the curriculum which requires attention in all subjects to the character, quality and uses of reading, writing, talk and ICT, and to the development of pupils' understanding of the distinct registers, vocabularies and modes of discourse of each subject.**

#### **Note 2: THE CASE FOR ORACY**

On this matter, international evidence is unequivocal:

**Language, and especially spoken language, is fundamental to the development of young children's neural capacities, their thinking, their understanding and their learning.** High quality talk must suffuse every aspect of the curriculum. This is particularly important for children in the early and primary years.

**The current NC concept of 'speaking and listening' is far too weakly framed and ignores the crucial agency of the teacher in the quality and degree of cognitive**

challenge afforded by the talk in which pupils engage. It needs to be replaced by requirements which are much more stringent and intellectually challenging.

**Britain has never taken oracy as seriously as many other countries, including those which outperform it in international surveys of student achievement.** In many countries language in all its aspects – rather than literacy alone - is regarded as the core of both the curriculum and teaching, and there is a strong tradition of oral pedagogy and oral assessment. In Britain, and especially England, talk has been viewed as having a mainly social function - as being more about participation and ‘confidence-building’ than learning - and its cognitive potential has been neglected.

**Research evidence from process-product studies in Britain and the United States shows that high quality talk is a key factor in securing measurable gains in student engagement and performance. Cognitively-challenging talk raises standards.** So, for example: high quality talk secures a greater level of student engagement and time on task than in lessons where the talk lacks this prominence or rigour and children spend most of their time on written tasks; oracy is intrinsic to the fostering of literacy, not separate from it; in classrooms where teacher-student talk affords high cognitive challenge, students’ test score gains are higher than in those classrooms where talk follows the familiar default of loosely-structured conversation or closed questioning; problem-solving talk in early maths produces later test score gains in English; probing questions and structured discussion not only investigate and advance children’s understanding but also provide the teacher with the evidence on which assessment for learning depends.

And so on: these are just a few examples of evidence which is now pretty decisive: *oracy, rigorously pursued, raises standards in literacy and across the curriculum.* **The vital condition, however, is the character and quality of the talk, and this is why merely commending ‘speaking and listening’, and confining it to the requirements for national curriculum English, will have relatively little impact. There is plenty of conversation in England’s classrooms, but there is rather less talk which – in the words of Nystrand, a leading American researcher – ‘requires students to think, not just report someone else’s thinking.’**

**We would be happy to supply a full bibliography to support these arguments if requested.**

9 b) Considering your response to the above, should the Programme of Study for **English** be set out on a year by year basis **or** as it currently is, for each key stage?

Year by Year

Key Stages

Not Sure

Comments:

In line with the CPR's proposals we would prefer the PoS to cover the primary phase as a whole. However, year-by-year guidance might also be helpful. For reasons which are explained later, we wish the KS1/2 structure to be reviewed.

**From the CPR final report, p 273:**

In mapping the domains, each panel would work towards:

***An expanded statement of the essential features of the domain (statutory)***

- the overall rationale and scope of the domain
- those of the 12 aims for primary education which are most effectively pursued within the domain, and how they can be securely embedded within it
- the knowledge, skills, dispositions and modes of enquiry and exploration with which the domain is chiefly concerned
- what, in general terms, a child should be expected to encounter, experience, know and do within the domain by the time he/she moves on to secondary education.

***Programmes of study (non-statutory)***

- progression in the identified knowledge, skills and dispositions through the primary phase
- more precise intermediate and terminal indications of what children should encounter, experience, know and do, possibly year by year and certainly for the end of the primary phase
- particular aspects of the specified knowledge and skill which require regular attention and/or practice
- how the domain builds on the EYFS curriculum and leads on to the secondary curriculum
- how the identified problems in current arrangements can be avoided
- priorities for ITT, CPD and resources.

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- i Hargreaves (2008a)
- ii For a detailed discussion of the role of film and television in the teaching of English see the report of the 1993 BFI/TES Commission of Enquiry into English (Bazalgette 1994).
- iii For example, the *Daily Mail*, 6 April 2009.
- iv Baroness Susan Greenfield, quoted in *The Guardian*, 24 February 2009
- v For example, 'Baroness, you are being a complete twit about twitter', Catherine Bennett in *The Observer*, 1 March 2009
- vi DES (1975): 514