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Teaching English, Language and Literacy

Third edition



Dominic Wyse, Russell Jones,
Helen Bradford, Mary Anne Wolpert

Teaching English, Language and Literacy

Are you looking for one book that covers every aspect of the teaching of English at primary level?

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- developing reading, including choosing texts, and phonics teaching
- improving writing, including grammar and punctuation
- language and speaking and listening
- planning and assessing
- working effectively with multilingual pupils
- understanding historical developments in the subject
- the latest thinking in educational policy and practice
- the use of multimedia
- maintaining good home-school links
- gender and the teaching of English language and literacy

All the chapters include clear examples of practice, coverage of key issues, analysis of research, and reflections on national policy to encourage the best possible response to the demands of national curricula. Each chapter also has a glossary to explain terms and gives suggestions for further reading.

This book is for all who want to improve teaching English, language and literacy. Designed to help inform the practice of students on teacher training courses, but also of great use to those teachers wanting to keep pace with the latest developments in their specialist subject, this book covers the theory and practice of teaching English, language and literacy.

Dominic Wyse is Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education at the Institute of Education (IoE) at the University of London.

Russell Jones is Senior Lecturer in Education and Childhood Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Helen Bradford is an Affiliated Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

Mary Anne Wolpert is an Affiliated Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

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Third Edition

Dominic Wyse, Russell Jones,
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Preface

This third edition of our book is the most significant rewrite since its inception, and a fitting way to mark the tenth anniversary (plus a bit more) of *Teaching English, Language and Literacy*. When Dominic and Russell had the idea for the book, they were new lecturers in Liverpool searching for a comprehensive introduction to their subject. When they discovered that such a book didn't exist, they put forward a proposal to Jude Bowen who was then a commissioning editor for Routledge. Reviews were very favourable so the rest, as they say, is history.

The most significant change for this edition of the book is the addition of two new authors, Helen Bradford and Mary Anne Wolpert. Their experience leading the outstanding PGCE English course at the University of Cambridge, and their complementary practical teaching experience and academic interests, have brought vital fresh perspectives.

The overall structure of the book has changed. This resulted in two entirely new chapters, including one on reading comprehension written by Helen. The other new chapter is the extended one on children's literature written with new material from Mary Anne who also brought together sections on texts for children which were in different places in the second edition. Another part of the structural changes is a stronger signal about the place of language in relation to literacy, hence the language chapters now appear earlier in the book. Dominic's work in the years since the last edition included the development of new theory on the teaching of English, language and literacy (Wyse, Andrews and Hoffman, 2010; Wyse, 2011[1]) which has resulted in major revision of the theoretical framing of the book that is explicit in Chapter 2, 'Learning and language'.

Every chapter has been updated and many have had substantial changes to reflect new research, new theory, new practice and rapidly changing

1 Wyse, D., Andrews, R. and Hoffman, J. (eds) (2010) *The Routledge International Handbook of English, Language and Literacy Teaching*. London: Routledge.
Wyse, D. (ed.) (2011) *Literacy Teaching and Education: SAGE Library of Educational Thought and Practice*. London: Sage.

government policies. The longer chapters of the book are the most obvious examples but every other chapter includes new material of some kind.

English is one of the most fascinating, controversial and challenging subjects of the school curriculum. The fact that English is the language we speak also makes it a subject that is closely linked with our identities, which is one of the reasons that it often engenders passionate views. Another reason that it is important is that all teachers have to be teachers of English because learning takes place through talking, reading and writing. In the early years and primary curriculum, great stress is put on English because it is a bridge to all other learning.

This book is a comprehensive introduction to the ideas, concepts and knowledge that are part of the study of English teaching. *Teaching English, Language and Literacy* is written for trainee teachers, their tutors, for more experienced teachers and for other students of education. The partnerships between providers of teacher education and schools have maintained the need for a book that offers a comprehensive overview of the subject to enable teacher mentors to update their professional knowledge in specific areas when appropriate. It is designed as a reader that will enhance and consolidate the learning in early years and primary English programmes and as an essential guide to the teaching of English. The book's hallmarks have always been that it is:

- aimed at teachers with a view to **informing their thinking and practice**;
- **a comprehensive** account of teaching English, language *and* literacy;
- **critically evaluative** in style, e.g. in relation to government policy;
- built on an **explicit theoretical framework**;
- rooted in **research evidence** and multidisciplinary theory.

The book is divided into five parts: I. 'Introduction'; II. 'Language'; III. 'Reading'; IV. 'Writing'; and V. 'General issues'. The bulk of the book consists of short chapters that cover the variety of aspects that make up the English curriculum. All of these chapters include clear examples of practice, coverage of key issues, analysis of research and reflections on national policy. The short chapters are complemented by five longer ones. The first of these addresses the important subject of the history of English and English teaching. The second signals our appreciation of the importance of texts for children. The other three look at children's development in language, reading and writing, and relate this development to teaching approaches. The structure of the longer chapters allowed us to tackle some of the most important aspects of the English curriculum in depth and at a higher level. Part V is made up of issues that tend to be applicable to all three areas of language, reading and writing. The exception to this structure is 'Learning and language', which is located in the introduction because this theoretical chapter frames our thinking throughout the book.

One of the important features of the book is its comprehensive scope. The subject of English is an area that boasts an impressive array of scholarship and practice. While there are many books that have addressed the modes of reading, writing and speaking and listening separately, there are very few which address the complete subject area. By doing this we have accepted that inevitably some parts of the subject are touched on only briefly. In recognition of this, you will find more than 100 descriptions of recommended books and papers for further reading which appear in the 'annotated bibliographies' for every chapter. A novel feature of these bibliographies is a system of coding which allows you to judge the reading level and the balance between theory and practice:

⋆ Mainly focused on classroom practice
⋆⋆ Close balance between theory and practice
⋆⋆⋆ Research- and theory-based

L1 Introductory reading
L2 Intermediate reading
L3 Advanced reading

We are fully in support of the idea that teaching should be an evidence-informed activity, and so each chapter in the book is underpinned by our reading of research. In addition to our references to papers, books and official publications, we also make reference to a range of websites. This is always a tricky business. This revision of the book took many months to complete and in that time information and communications technology (ICT) has continued to develop. In the light of this we have chosen sites that we hope will stand the test of time.

The most important part of reading a book like this is that it will enable you to become a better teacher. No book can offer a magic solution to becoming an effective teacher. Learning to teach – like most learning – requires practical engagement with the subject in partnership with experienced people. However, in order to establish direct and explicit links with practice we use case studies, analysis of resources, reflections on children's work, teachers' thoughts, examples of teaching, and each chapter concludes with 'practice points' which have been written to focus attention on some of the most important practical ideas of which you should be aware.

This book covers a wide range of essential knowledge. If we consider technical vocabulary alone, there are many definitions supplied in the 'glossaries' that are a feature of every chapter. So if you are unsure about the meaning of a particular word as you are reading, you do not need to reach for a dictionary because most of the key words are defined for you at the end of the chapter. Another aspect of knowledge that has been played down in recent years is the knowledge of issues. This is, we feel, vital to both effective teaching and success in the education profession. In order to maintain the tradition of English as a

vibrant subject, we hope teachers will continue to fully engage with the issues and ideas that are explored in this book.

Note

Throughout this book the following icons are used to assist the reader:

→ Recommends the reader looks at another chapter in the book.
☞ These words are included in the glossaries at the end of each chapter.

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Dominic and Russell would like to thank the many students, teachers and colleagues who have shown appreciation for their work critically reflecting on government policy on the teaching of English, language and literacy. They would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Charles Sarland and Roger Bainbridge to the first edition.

We would also like to thank all the Routledge staff who have been involved in making the book such a success, including Alison Foyle who commissioned the third edition.

Finally, we would like to record our appreciation for the outstanding reflections from the reviewers who commented on the second edition. Most of their recommendations have been acted on as we worked to refine the book.

Part I

Introduction

Chapter 1

The history of English, language and literacy

One of the important aspects of historical knowledge is that it enables us to better understand the present. This chapter briefly examines three significant historical angles: the history of English as a language; the history of the teaching of English; and the history of national initiatives to improve the teaching of English. We conclude in the present by looking at the National Curriculum and the phonics screening check.

The three words 'English', 'Language' and 'Literacy' in the title of this book are significant because they are central to many of the debates that have raged about the teaching of English in primary schools. During the 1970s and 1980s, the teaching of 'language' was the focus. The job of primary schools was to foster the development of children's language through reading, writing and, to a lesser extent, talking. This focus included the need to support multilingual children's development in English and other languages. The teachers who coordinated the subject were known as 'language coordinators'. The teaching of language in primary schools was seen as different in many respects from the teaching of English conducted in secondary schools.

With the coming of the Education Reform Act 1988, 'English' was re-established as the main focus for primary education. The subject was, however, still to be concerned with the teaching of the three language modes of reading, writing and talk. 'Speaking and Listening' became of equal importance to Reading and Writing for the first time, and this was prescribed by the National Curriculum. Coordinators were now to be called 'English' coordinators. The advent of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) ☞ in 1997 resulted in a heavy focus on 'Literacy'. You will probably have guessed that subject leaders were renamed 'literacy coordinators'.

The first part of this chapter looks at some of the historical aspects of the subject that have shaped its development. It is important that all teachers have a historical perspective on their work; at the very least, this can give you a

means to critically examine modern initiatives and to check how 'new' they really are.

We start with a brief look at some of the significant moments in the development of the English language and reflect on their continuing relevance to classroom teaching. This is followed by reflections on the history of the *teaching* of English. We conclude with an outline of some of the major national projects that have been undertaken and finish right up to date with a look at the phonics screening check.

The English language

English, like all languages, is constantly changing. When the editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* was interviewed in 1998, he commented on the fact that 'phwoarr' had just been included in the dictionary, defined as an exclamation of sexual attraction. Each time publishers produce new editions of dictionaries, new words – and new meanings for old words – are added in recognition of the constant evolution of language. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has a large team of people who are constantly searching for new uses and new additions to the language. The online version of the dictionary is a spectacular resource. As well as recording language change, dictionaries play a major role in the standardisation of the language. It is interesting to note that American Standard English is represented by specific dictionaries such as those published by Merriam-Webster but British Standard English is, for example, represented by the *Oxford English Dictionary* or *Chambers Dictionary*. The significant influence of publishing has also resulted in standard reference works that lay down particular conventions. So if you have ever wondered how to reference properly using the 'Author–Date' method, try *The American Psychological Association (APA) Style Guide* (or for a simplified version, try *The Good Writing Guide for Education Students* (Wyse, 2012). For teachers, the idea that language is always changing is an important one. If we place too heavy an emphasis on absolute and fixed 'rules', we may be teaching in a linguistically inaccurate or inappropriate way (→ Chapter 21). Effective teaching needs to be built on an understanding of those features of the language that are stable and those that are subject to constant change.

This process of change is by no means a recent phenomenon. Human beings' creation of alphabetic written language was a highly significant development. All alphabets were originally derived from the Semitic syllabaries of the second millennium. The developments from both Greek script and the Roman alphabet can be seen in the use of the Latinised form of the first two letters of the Greek alphabet in the word itself, 'alphabet'. 'Alpha' was derived from the Semitic 'aleph' and 'beta' from 'beth' (Goody and Watt, 1963). Historically, the alphabet has been at the heart of some of the most enduring debates about the development of written communication, for example whether the alphabet simply emerged from logographic or pictographic forms. In Harris' (1986)

examination of the origins of writing, he called this particular idea of emergence an evolutionary fallacy, arguing that the alphabet was 'the great invention' because its graphic signs have almost no limitations for human communication, unlike logos or pictographs. The continuing development of writing, for example through internet and electronic text forms, is further testament to written language's extraordinary capacity to adapt to, and be part of, cultural change.

It was during the fifth century that the Anglo-Saxons settled in England and, as always happens when people colonise, they brought changes to the language, a process that resulted in 'Old English' being established. The few texts that have survived from this period are in four main dialects ☞: West Saxon, Kentish, Mercian and Northumbrian. The last two are sometimes grouped together and called Anglian. West Saxon became the standard dialect at the time but is not the direct ancestor of modern Standard English ☞, which is mainly derived from an Anglian dialect (Barber, 1993). If you take the modern word 'cold' as an example, the Anglian 'cald' is a stronger influence than the West Saxon version, 'ceald'.

In the ninth century, the Vikings brought further changes to the language. Place names were affected: 'Grimsby' meant 'Grim's village' and 'Micklethwaite' meant 'large clearing'. The pronunciation of English speech was also affected, and it is possible to recognise some Scandinavian-influenced words because of their phonological form. It is suggested that 'awe' is a Scandinavian word and that this came from changes of pronunciation to the Old English word 'ege'. One of the most interesting things about Scandinavian loanwords ☞ is that they are so commonly used: sister, leg, neck, bag, cake, dirt, fellow, fog, knife, skill, skin, sky, window, flat, loose, call, drag and even 'they' and 'them' (Barber, 1993).

In more recent times, words from a range of countries have been borrowed. Here are a small selection of examples: French – elite, liaison, menu, plateau; Spanish and Portuguese – alligator, chocolate, cannibal, embargo, potato; Italian – concerto, balcony, casino, cartoon; Indian languages – bangle, cot, juggernaut, loot, pyjamas, shampoo; African languages – banjo, zombie, rumba, tote. However, for many of these words it is difficult to attribute them to one original country. To illustrate the complexities, consider the word 'chess':

> 'Chess' was borrowed from Middle French in the fourteenth century. The French word was, in turn, borrowed from Arabic, which had earlier borrowed it from Persian 'shah' 'king'. Thus the etymology ☞ of the word reaches from Persian, through Arabic and Middle French, but its ultimate source (as far back as we can trace its history) is Persian. Similarly, the etymon of 'chess', that is, the word from which it has been derived, is immediately 'esches' and ultimately 'shah'. Loanwords have, as it were, a life of their own that cuts across the boundaries between languages.
>
> (Pyles and Algeo, 1993: 286)

The influence of loanwords is one of the factors that has resulted in some of the irregularities of English spelling. David Crystal (1997) lists some of the other major factors. Above we referred to the Anglo-Saxon period; at that time there were only 24 graphemes (letter symbols) to represent 40 phonemes (sounds). Later 'i' and 'j', 'u' and 'v' were changed from being interchangeable to having distinct functions and 'w' was added, but many sounds still had to be signalled by combinations of letters.

After the Norman conquest, French scribes – who had responsibility for publishing texts – respelled a great deal of the language. They introduced new conventions such as 'qu' for 'cw' (queen), 'gh' for 'h' (night) and 'c' before 'e' or 'i' in words such as 'circle' and 'cell'. Once printing became better established in the West, this added further complications. William Caxton (1422–92) is often credited with the 'invention' of the printing press but that is not accurate. During the seventh century the Chinese printed the earliest known book, *The Diamond Sutra*, using inked wooden relief blocks. By the beginning of the fifteenth century the process had developed in Korea to the extent that printers were manufacturing bronze type sets of 100,000 pieces. In the West, Johannes Gutenberg (1390s–1468) is credited with the development of moveable metal type in association with a hand-operated printing press.

Many of the early printers working in England were foreign (many came from Holland in particular) and they used their own spelling conventions. Also, until the sixteenth century, line justification ☞ was achieved by changing words rather than by adding spaces. Once printing became established, the written language did not keep pace with the considerable alterations to the way words were spoken, resulting in weaker links between sound and symbol.

Samuel Johnson's dictionary, published in 1755, was another important factor in relation to English spelling. His work resulted in dictionaries becoming more authoritarian and used as the basis for 'correct' usage. Noah Webster, the first person to write a major account of American English, compared Johnson's contribution to Isaac Newton's in mathematics. Johnson's dictionary was significant for a number of reasons. Unlike dictionaries of the past that tended to concentrate on 'hard words', Johnson wanted a scholarly record of the whole language. It was based on words in use and introduced a literary dimension, drawing heavily on writers such as Dryden, Milton, Addison, Bacon, Pope and Shakespeare (Crystal, 1997: 109). Shakespeare's remarkable influence on the English language is not confined to the artistic significance of his work; many of the words and phrases of his plays are still commonly used today:

> He coined some 2,000 words – an astonishing number – and gave us countless phrases. As a phrasemaker there has never been anyone to match him. Among his inventions: one fell swoop, in my mind's eye, more in sorrow than in anger, to be in a pickle, bag and baggage, vanish into thin air, budge an inch, play fast and loose, go down the primrose path, the milk

> of human kindness, remembrance of things past, the sound and fury, to thine own self be true, to be or not to be, cold comfort, to beggar all description, salad days, flesh and blood, foul play, tower of strength, to be cruel to be kind, and on and on and on and on. And on. He was so wildly prolific that he could put two in one sentence, as in Hamlet's observation: 'Though I am native here and to the manner born, it is custom more honoured in the breach than the observance.' He could even mix metaphors and get away with it, as when he wrote: 'Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.'
>
> (Bryson, 1990: 57)

Crystal (2004) makes the point that although spelling is an area where there is more agreement about what is correct than in other areas of language, there's still considerable variation. Greenbaum's (1986) research looked at all the words beginning with 'A' in a medium-sized desk dictionary which were spelled in more than one way; he found 296. When extrapolating this to the dictionary as a whole, he estimated 5,000 variants altogether, which is 5.6 per cent. If this were to be done with a dictionary as complete as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it would mean many thousands of words where the spelling has not been definitively agreed. Crystal gives some examples including: accessory/accessary; acclimatize/acclimatise; adrenalin/adrenaline; aga/agha; ageing/aging; all right/alright.

Many of Greenbaum's words were pairs but there were some triplets: for example, aerie/aery/eyrie. And there were even quadruplets: anaesthetize/anaesthetise/anesthetize/anesthetise. Names translated from a foreign language compound the problems, particularly for music students: Tschaikovsky/Tchaikovsky/Tschaikofsky/Tchaikofsky/Tshaikovski.

The teaching of English

The establishment of state education as we know it can be conveniently traced back to the 1870 Elementary Education Act. Prior to that, the education of working-class children in the United Kingdom was largely in the hands of the voluntary sector: church schools, factory schools and, in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, schools run by the oppositional Chartist and Owenite Co-operative movements. The 1870 Act led to the establishment of free educational provision in elementary schools for all children from the age of five up to the age of 12. Education up to the age of ten was compulsory, but if children had met the standards required they could be exempted from schooling for the final years. State schools and voluntary sector schools existed side-by-side from that date, a distinction that is still found today. Class differences were firmly established: the elementary and voluntary schools were schools for the labouring classes and the poor. The middle and upper classes expected to pay for the education of their children; secondary education

in the form of the grammar and public schools was not available to the bulk of the population.

The curriculum in the voluntary schools and later in the elementary schools was extremely limited. Writing meant copying or dictation (DES, 1967: 5601). Oral work involved such things as the children learning by heart from the *Book of Common Prayer*, which included: 'To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters' and 'to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me' (Williamson, 1981: 79).

The elementary schools emerged at a time when the government exerted considerable control over the curriculum through the 'Revised Code' established in 1862 (→ Chapter 11), better known as 'payment by results'. This was administered through frequent tests in reading, writing and arithmetic – the three Rs. If the children failed to meet the required standards, the grant was withdrawn and the teachers did not get paid. Under such conditions curriculum development was impossible because schools had to focus so much on the tests in order to get paid (Lawson and Silver, 1973).

Though the code was abolished in 1895, and the statutory control of the curriculum relinquished in 1902, the effects lasted well into the twentieth century, leading one inspector to comment that 30 years of 'code despotism' meant that 'teaching remained as mechanical and routine ridden as ever' (Holmes, 1922). Despite these criticisms, however, the introduction of universal compulsory education meant that literacy rates climbed steadily.

'English' as a subject, 1900–39

At the start of the twentieth century, the term 'English' referred to grammar only; reading and writing were not even seen as part of the same subject. A major landmark in the development of the subject was the Newbolt Report on 'The Teaching of English in England' (Board of Education, 1921). George Sampson, a member of the Newbolt committee, writing in the same year (1921), had identified the following 'subjects' still being taught in elementary schools across the land: 'oral composition, written composition, dictation, grammar, reproduction, reading, recitation, literature, spelling, and handwriting.' (Shayer, 1972: 67) The Newbolt Report sought to change that and to bring together:

> under the title of English, 'taught as a fine art', four separate concepts: the universal need for literacy as the core of the curriculum, the developmental importance of children's self expression, a belief in the power of English literature for moral and social improvement, and a concern for 'the full development of mind and character'.
>
> (Protherough and Atkinson, 1994: 7)

This was how English became established as a subject in the secondary curriculum, and placed at the centre of the curriculum for all ages. Famously the

Newbolt Report suggested, of elementary teachers, that 'every teacher is a teacher of English because every teacher is a teacher in English' (Shayer, 1972: 70). The committee recommended that children's creative language skills be developed. They recommended the study of literature in the elementary schools. In addition they recommended the development of children's oral work, albeit in the form of 'speech training', which they saw as the basis for written work. Finally they challenged the nineteenth-century legacy of educational class division, placing English at the centre of an educational aim to develop the 'mind and character' of all children.

Change on the ground was slow to occur but it was happening. The old practice of reading aloud in chorus was disappearing, silent reading was being encouraged and, in the 1920s, textbooks were published that encouraged children's free expression and that questioned the necessity for formal grammar teaching. However, even though the Newbolt Report contained evidence of the uselessness of grammar teaching, the committee had the strong feeling that self-expression could go too far, and that the best way for children to learn to write was to study grammar and to copy good models.

The Hadow Reports

The years 1926, 1931 and 1933 saw the publication of the three Hadow Reports on secondary, primary and infant education respectively; the second (Board of Education, 1931) focused on the 7–11 age range. It had a number of specific recommendations about the curriculum in general and English in particular. Famously, it stated: 'We are of the opinion that the curriculum of the primary school is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored.' (Board of Education, 1931: 139)

In English, oral work was seen as important, with an emphasis on speaking 'correctly'. 'Oral composition' – getting the child to talk on a topic of their choice or one of the teacher's – was included. 'Reproduction' involved getting the child to recount the subject matter of the lesson they had just been taught. Class libraries were encouraged and silent reading recommended, although not in school time except in the most deprived areas. And the aim? 'In the upper stage of primary education the child should gain a sense of the printed page and begin to read for pleasure and information.' (ibid.: 158)

As for writing, children's written composition should build on oral composition and children should be given topics that interested them. Spelling should be related to the children's writing and reading: 'Any attempt to teach spelling otherwise than in connection with the actual practice of writing or reading is beset with obvious dangers' (ibid.: 160). The abstract study of formal grammar was rejected, though some grammar was to be taught. Bilingualism was addressed in the Welsh context, and teaching in the mother tongue was

recommended. Welsh-speaking children were expected to learn English and, strikingly, English-speaking children were expected to learn Welsh.

The third Hadow Report (Board of Education, 1933) drew on ideas current at the time to suggest that formal instruction of the three Rs traditionally started too early in British schools, and recommended that for infant and nursery children: 'The child should begin to learn the 3 Rs when he [*sic*] wants to do so, whether he be three or six years old.' (ibid.: 133)

The report noted three methods of teaching reading that were used at the time: 'look and say', 'phonics' and more contextualised meaning-centred 'sentence' methods. It recommended that teachers use a mix of the three as appropriate to the child's needs. Writing should start at the same time as reading, and children's natural desire to write in imitation of the adult writing they saw around them at home or at school should be encouraged. The child should have control over the subject matter and his or her efforts should be valued by the teacher as real attempts to communicate meaning.

The report emphasised the importance of imaginative play, and noted, 'Words mean nothing to the young child unless they are definitively associated with active experience' (ibid.: 181), and 'Oral lessons should be short and closely related to the child's practical interests' (ibid.: 182). While 'speech training' was important, drama work was recommended for the development of children's language, and nursery rhymes and game songs were encouraged alongside traditional hymns. Stories should be told and read to the children.

The Hadow Reports read as remarkably progressive documents for their time, and the principles of child-centred education that are explicit in many of their recommendations continued to inform thinking in primary language teaching for the next 50 years.

Progressive education ☞, 1931–75

The central years of the twentieth century can perhaps be characterised as the years of progressive aspiration so far as primary language was concerned. The progressive views of the Hadow Reports began to be reflected in the Board of Education's regular guidelines, and teachers were on the whole free to follow them as they pleased. The 1944 Education Act itself offered no curriculum advice, except with regard to religious education, and central guidance on the curriculum ended in 1945. The primary curriculum in particular came to be regarded as something of a 'secret garden' to quote Lord Eccles, Tory Minister of Education in 1960 (Gordon *et al.*, 1991: 287).

The 1944 Education Act finally established primary schools in place of elementary schools, though it would be another 20 years before the last school that included all ages of children closed. At secondary level a three-layered system of grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools was established, and a new exam, the 11+, was devised to decide which children should go where. Like the scholarship exam before it, the 11+ continued to restrain the

primary language curriculum, particularly with the older children, despite the fact that more progressive child-centred measures were gaining ground with younger children. With the reorganisation of secondary schools along comprehensive lines in the 1960s (encapsulated in Circular 10/65), the 11+ was abolished and the primary curriculum was technically freed from all constraint.

In retrospect, the Plowden Report on primary education (DES, 1967) can be seen as centrally representative of the progressive aspiration of 'child-centred education'. Its purpose was to report on effective primary education of the time, and it was concerned to see to what extent the Hadow recommendations had been put into effect. It functioned as much to disseminate effective practice as it did to recommend future change. The child was central: 'At the heart of the educational process lies the child' (ibid.: para. 9); and language was crucial: 'Spoken language plays a central role in learning' (ibid.: para. 54) and 'The development of language is, therefore, central to the educational process' (ibid.: para. 55).

Like its predecessors, the report emphasised the importance of talk; like its predecessors, it emphasised the fact that effective teachers of reading used a mix of approaches. Drama work and story-telling were to be encouraged; the increased importance of fiction and poetry written for children and the development of school libraries were all emphasised. The report applauded wholeheartedly the development of personal 'creative' writing (→ Chapter 11) by the children, characterising it as a dramatic revolution (1967: para. 60.1). On spelling and punctuation the committee was more reticent, noting only that when inaccuracy impeded communication then steps should be taken to remedy the deficiencies (1967: para. 60.2). Knowledge about language was seen as an interesting new area but 'Formal study of grammar will have little place in the primary school' (1967: para. 61.2).

The Plowden Report was followed by the Bullock Report on English (DES, 1975). So far as primary age children were concerned, this spelled out in more detail much of what was already implicit in Plowden. Central to both the reports was an emphasis on the 'process' of language learning. From such a perspective, children's oral and written language would best develop in meaningful language use. A couple of quotes from the Bullock Report will illustrate the point. Of the development of oral language it suggested: 'Language should be learned in the course of using it in, and about, the daily experiences of the classroom and the home' (ibid.: 520). Where writing was concerned: 'Competence in language comes above all through its purposeful use, not through working of exercises divorced from context' (ibid.: 528).

So far as bilingual children and children from the ethnic minorities were concerned, the Plowden Report had already recognised the contribution that such children could make to the classroom, and the Bullock committee was concerned that such children should not find school an alien place:

> No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he [*sic*] crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though home and school represent two totally separate and different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart. The curriculum should reflect many elements of that part of his life which a child lives outside school.
>
> (ibid.: para. 20.5)

Increasing political control, 1976 onwards

The ideas of progressive education remained important – despite increasingly frequent attacks – until the 1970s, when things started to change. Britain was declining in world economic importance and the oil crisis of the early 1970s was followed by an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan which saw the Labour government of the time having to cut back on public spending. Effective child-centred education is teacher-intensive and requires small classes, and the previous decades had seen reductions in class size. That was no longer compatible with the financial constraints of the time and class sizes began to increase again. A more regulated curriculum is easier to cope with in such circumstances.

The National Curriculum itself was established by the 1988 Education Reform Act, which in the process gave the Secretary of State for Education considerable powers of direct intervention in curriculum matters. Following the Act, curriculum documents were drawn up for all the major subject areas. In line with the recommendations of the TGAT Report (DES, 1987: S227), attainment in each subject was to be measured against a ten-level scale and tested at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. As the curriculum was introduced into schools, it became clear that each subject group had produced documents of considerable complexity. Discontent in the profession grew and a slimmed-down version was introduced in 1995. The original English document was prepared by a committee under the chairmanship of Brian Cox (DES, 1989, 1990; Cox, 1991). English was to be divided up into five 'attainment targets': Speaking and Listening, Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Handwriting. These were reorganised into three in Sir Ron Dearing's 1995 rewrite, as Spelling and Handwriting were incorporated into Writing (DfE, 1995).

During the mid to late 1980s, a number of large-scale projects were undertaken which aimed to improve the teaching and learning of English. The Schools Council, a body responsible for national curriculum development, had been replaced by the School Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC); the SCDC initiated the National Writing Project. This was in two phases: the development phase took place from 1985 to 1988 and the implementation phase from 1988 to 1989, although the Education Reform Act 1988 and the resulting National Curriculum and testing arrangements changed the focus of implementation.

One of the key problems of the time was that many children were being turned off by writing, something confirmed by some evidence from the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU). The APU found that as many as four in ten children did not find writing an enjoyable experience and 'not less than one in ten pupils [had] an active dislike of writing and endeavour[ed] to write as little as possible' (APU, 1988: 170). Somewhat later the National Writing Project gathered evidence that many children, particularly young children, tended to equate writing with transcription skills rather than composition.

The National Writing Project involved thousands of educators across the country. One of the main messages from the project was that writers needed to become involved in writing for a defined and recognisable audience, not just because the teacher said so. Connected to these ideas was the notion that writing should have a meaningful purpose. With these key concepts in place, teachers began to realise that writing tasks which were sequentially organised in school exercise books and consisting of one draft – or at best 'rough copy/neat copy' drafts – were not helping to address the audiences and purposes for writing that needed to be generated.

The National Oracy Project was also initiated by SCDC and partly overlapped with the National Writing Project. During the period from 1987 to 1991, 35 local education authorities were involved in the oracy project. The recognition that oracy, or speaking and listening as it came to be called, needed a national initiative was in itself significant. Since the late 1960s, a number of enlightened educators had realised that talking and learning were very closely linked and that the curriculum should reflect that reality. But these people were in a minority and most educators continued to emphasise reading and, to a lesser extent, writing. The major achievement of the oracy project was to secure recognition that talk was important and that children could learn more if teachers understood the issues, and planned activities to support the development of oracy. As Wells pointed out: 'The centrality of talk in education is finally being recognised. Not simply in theory – in the exhortations of progressive-minded academics – but mandated at all levels and across all subjects in a national curriculum.' (Wells, 1992: 283)

The other large national project that we will touch on is the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project (→ Chapter 16). In 1987, a committee of inquiry was commissioned to make recommendations about the sort of knowledge about language that it would be appropriate to teach in school. The Kingman Report, as it was known (DES, 1988), disappointed right-wing politicians and sections of the press when it failed to advocate a return to traditional grammar teaching. The Cox Report (DES, 1989) ran into similar problems for the same reason, but both the 1990 and the 1995 orders for English in the National Curriculum (DES, 1990; DfE, 1995) contented themselves with general recommendations to use grammatical terms where and as the need arose. Between 1989 and 1992 most schools in England were involved with the LINC project. Its main aim was to acquaint teachers with the model of

language presented in the Kingman Report. Kingman's work reaffirmed the idea that children and teachers should have sufficient 'knowledge about language' or 'KAL' if they were to become successful language users.

One of the strong features of the materials that were produced by the LINC project was that they were built on an explicit set of principles and theories:

Principles:

1 Teaching children should start positively from what they can already do.
2 The experience of using language should precede analysis.
3 Language should be explored in real purposeful situations rather than be analysed out of context.
4 An understanding of people's attitudes to language can help you understand more about values and beliefs.

Theories:

1 Humans use language for social reasons.
2 Language is constantly changing.
3 Language is a cultural phenomenon.
4 There are important connections between language and power.
5 Language is systematically organised.
6 The meanings of language depend on negotiation.

It may have been that some of these philosophies resulted in the politicians of the time refusing to publish the materials. In spite of this, the materials were photocopied and distributed widely and various publications independent of government were produced, e.g. Carter (1990).

The National Literacy Project ☞ was developed between 1996 and 1998. The project's main aim was to raise the standards of literacy in the participating schools so that they raised their achievements in line with national expectations. The project established for the first time a detailed scheme of work with term-by-term objectives that were organised into text-level, sentence-level and word-level goals. These were delivered through the use of a daily literacy hour with strict timings for the different sections. The project was supported by a national network of centres where literacy consultants were available to support project schools.

The National Literacy Project was important because it was claimed that its success was the reason that the National Literacy Strategy adopted the ideas of a Framework for Teaching and a prescribed literacy hour. However, it should be remembered that the schools which were involved in the project were schools which had identified weaknesses in their literacy teaching, and this has to be taken into account when any kind of evaluation is made about the success

of the project. The other important point to bear in mind is that it was originally conceived of as a five-year project; after that time, evaluations were to be carried out. One of the features of these evaluations was that they were supposed to measure the success of the three years of the programme when schools were no longer *directly* involved in the project. In the event, the approaches of the National Literacy Project were adopted as part of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998. This occurred *before* any independent evaluation had been carried out and long before the planned five-year extent of the National Literacy Project.

The only *independent* evaluation of the project carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (INFER) found that:

> The analyses of the test outcomes have indicated that, in terms of the standardised scores on reading tests, the pupils involved in Cohort 1 of the National Literacy Project have made substantial gains. All three year groups showed significant and substantial increases in scores from the beginning to end of the project.
>
> (Sainsbury *et al.*, 1998: 21)

This outcome illustrates definite progress in the fairly restricted parameters of standardised reading tests. It is not possible to conclude that the specific approach of the National Literacy Project was more beneficial than other approaches as this variable was not controlled. It is possible that the financial investment, extra support and a new initiative were the dominant factors in improved test scores rather than the particular characteristics of the recommended teaching methods. One area of concern about the findings from the evaluation was that pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils with special educational needs, pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) at the 'becoming familiar with English stage', and boys made less progress than other groups.

It seems particularly regrettable, though not surprising, that no serious attempts were made to evaluate what pupils thought of the project. Sainsbury *et al.* admitted that:

> The reading enjoyment findings are less easy to interpret. The survey showed that children do, on the whole, enjoy their reading, with substantial majorities of both age groups expressing favourable attitudes both before and after involvement in the project. These measures, however, did not change very much, indicating that the systematic introduction of different text types that was a feature of the project did not have any clearly apparent effect on children's enjoyment of reading these varied text types. In the absence of a control group, however, it is difficult to draw any more definite conclusions.
>
> (ibid.: 27)

The National Literacy Strategy 1997–2006 and the Primary National Strategy Framework for Literacy, 2007–10

The Literacy Task Force was established on 31 May 1996 by David Blunkett, then Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment. It was charged with developing, in time for an incoming Labour government, a strategy to substantially raise standards of literacy in primary schools over a five- to ten-year period (Literacy Task Force, 1997: 4).

The Literary Task Force produced a final report that suggested how a National Literacy Strategy could be implemented. The recommendations heralded some of the most profound changes to English teaching. The single most important driving force behind the strategy was the introduction of target-setting: specifically that by 2002, 80 per cent of 11-year-olds should reach the standard expected for their age in English (i.e. Level 4) in the Key Stage 2 National Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs). Despite all the many changes to the curriculum since 1997, target-setting, and the associated publication of league tables, remain in place and now have an even more dominant effect on the curriculum and children's daily lives.

Earlier in this chapter we mentioned the important contribution of Brian Cox in relation to developing the guidance for the subject of English in the National Curriculum, a document that achieved a remarkable consensus in such a contentious area. Cox was extremely critical from the inception of the National Literacy Strategy: the policy on reading 'is too prescriptive, authoritarian and mechanistic', there should be 'more emphasis on motivation, on helping children to enjoy reading' (Cox, 1998: ix). Other contributors to the book were equally critical: Margaret Meek (1998: 116) criticised the 'repeated exercises in comprehension, grammar and spelling' and Bethan Marshall (1998: 109) suggested that 'the bleak spectre of utilitarianism ☞ hangs over our schools like a pall'. The words of an inspector in 1905 quoted by Marshall are another reminder of the history of the reading debates:

> A blackboard has been produced, and hieroglyphics are drawn upon it by the teacher. At a given signal every child in the class begins calling out mysterious sounds: 'Letter A, letter A' in a sing-song voice, or 'Letter A says Ah, letter A says Ah', as the case may be. To the uninitiated I may explain that No. 1 is the beginning of the spelling, and No. 2 is the beginning of word building. Hoary-headed men will spend hours discussing whether 'c-a-t' or 'ker-ar-te' are the best means of conveying the knowledge of how to read 'cat'. I must own an indifference to the point myself, and sympathise with teachers not allowed to settle it for themselves . . . 'Wake up, Johnny; it's not time to go to sleep yet. Be a good boy and watch teacher.'
>
> (Marshall, 1998: 115)

Most political education initiatives are introduced following claims that standards are falling, and the National Literacy Strategy was no exception. However, in spite of regular claims by the media, teachers, business people, politicians, etc., there was no evidence that standards of literacy had declined in England as Beard (1999) pointed out; something that Campbell (1997) also commented upon:

> On the current moral panic over the impact of the reforms on standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy, there are two things to say. First, no-one can be sure about standards in literacy and numeracy because of the failure – unquestioned failure – of the national agencies (NCC, SEAC and now SCAA) to establish an effective, credible and reliable mechanism for the national monitoring of standards over time since 1989.
>
> (Campbell, 1997: 22)

One of the first attempts to evaluate the strategies was commissioned by the New Labour government. Earl *et al.*'s (2003) evaluation of the NLS and NNS (National Numeracy Strategy) included collection of data from schools as follows: a) two postal surveys (in 2000 and 2002), each to two samples of 500 schools, one for literacy and the other for numeracy. Parallel questionnaires went to head teachers and teachers; b) a postal survey to all literacy and numeracy consultants in LEAs (Local Education Authority) across England in 2002; c) repeated visits to ten selected schools (with various sizes, locations, pupil populations, levels of attainment) and their LEAs: four to six days in each school. The research team interviewed head teachers and teachers, observed literacy and mathematics lessons, and analysed documents; d) interviews with literacy and numeracy managers and consultants from LEAs of the ten selected schools. The researchers also attended training sessions and staff meetings in some of those LEAs; and e) observations and interviews in 17 other schools (including special schools) and LEAs. Three of these were one-day visits to schools early in 2000, while the others were single visits as part of shadowing regional directors or HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate), or attending meetings locally.

Earl *et al.* (2003) found that the strategies had altered classroom practice: in particular greater use of whole class teaching, more structured lessons and more use of objectives to plan and guide teaching. Teachers' views about the strategies were more variable than head teachers', who were more likely to be in favour. Head teachers and teachers were more supportive of the NNS than they were of the NLS. For the most part, both teachers and head teachers believed that the NNS had been easier to implement and had had greater effects on pupil learning than the NLS. Overall, Earl *et al.* reported a wide range of variation in teachers' opinion of the NLS ranging from positive to negative.

Non-government-commissioned research explored a range of issues in relation to the strategies. For example, a series of research studies all reported

that the recommended pedagogy of the NLS literacy hour was resulting in rather limited teacher–pupil interaction, which was tending towards short initiation-response sequences and a consequent lack of extended discussion. Observation schedules were used in studies such as those by Hardman *et al.* (2003), English *et al.* (2002) and Mroz *et al.* (2000). Mroz *et al.* (2000) noted the limited opportunities for pupils to question or explore ideas. English *et al.* (2002) found that there was a reduction in extended teacher–pupil interactions. Hardman *et al.* (2003) found that the NLS was encouraging teachers to use more directive forms of teaching, with few opportunities for pupils to explore and elaborate on their ideas. Skidmore *et al.* (2003) used audio recordings of teacher–pupil dialogue combined with video of non-verbal communication to support their finding that teachers were dominating interaction during the guided reading segment of the literacy hour. Parker and Hurry (2007) interviewed 51 Key Stage 2 teachers in 2001 and videotaped observations of the same teachers in class literacy sessions focusing on teacher and pupil questions and answers. They found that direct teacher questioning in the form of teacher-led recitation was the dominant strategy used for reading comprehension teaching and that children were not encouraged to generate their own questions about texts. Lefstein's (2008: 731) extended case study of one primary school found that open questions were suppressed as a result of 'teacher knowledge and policy support, conditions of teacher engagement with the curricular materials, and the durability of interactional genres'.

The answer to the question of whether the NLS Framework for Teaching and its pedagogy was effective is made difficult to answer because it was not subject to rigorous large-scale experimental trial. However there is now a significant amount of evidence in general about the effectiveness of the NLS: Wyse *et al.* (2010) summarised this in their research for the *Cambridge Primary Review* by analysing studies of primary classrooms and trends in national test outcomes. Although reading showed slightly better gains than writing according to some sources, the overall trend in national test scores can be explained as modest gains from a low base as teachers learned to prepare pupils for statutory tests followed by a plateau in scores as no further gains could be achieved by test coaching. Overall, the intense focus on testing and test results in the period of the NLS resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum driving teaching in the opposite direction to that which research indicates will improve learning and attainment.

In October 2006, the new *PNS* (Primary National Strategy) *Framework for Literacy* was released. The main elements that had been a feature of the NLS were still part of the PNS Framework. Teachers were offered a little more flexibility in some areas, such as in the teaching of writing, where longstanding criticisms finally and belatedly began to have an effect on policy makers. But overall the PNS Framework was little changed from the NLS. However, in 2010 a new period of radical reform began.

Control or freedom? 2010 onwards

The election of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 in the UK brought with it radical, and in some cases immediate, change. A new National Curriculum for primary schools that the previous New Labour government had started to implement in 2010, published on an extensive fully functional website, was simply taken down and archived along with all the PNS resources and most other educational materials that had been developed during the New Labour terms. The ideological rationales for the rejection of previous materials were the dual promises of more freedom over the curriculum for teachers, and less bureaucracy. At the same time the new government announced yet another review of the National Curriculum (the third government-commissioned review of the primary curriculum in a period of less than ten years – for the first book-length analysis of this and other national curriculum developments in the countries of the UK, see *Creating the Curriculum*, Wyse *et al.*, 2012).

Some new freedoms over the curriculum in England became available to an extent, but paradoxically at the same time even more control over key and influential elements of schooling were being placed in the hands of the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Schools (Wyse, 2008 and 2011 feature analysis of the implications for teaching of such control). In relation to the teaching of English, Language and Literacy a number of worrying developments took place. One was the decision to limit externally marked statutory assessment of writing for pupils aged 10–11 to the areas of spelling, grammar and punctuation; compositional aspects of writing were to be assessed by teachers. But even more troubling was the growing dominance of a single method of reading teaching called 'synthetic phonics'. As you will see in Chapter 9, phonics teaching has a long history of debate. One of the trends we have identified in successive editions of our book is the growing level of control over the teaching of reading. The influence of synthetic phonics has become so pervasive that it is part of teacher training, the vetting of publishers' teaching resources, selection of advisors to government and many other areas of policy. In opposition Nick Gibb MP was at the forefront of these trends and, as the Minister for Schools for the coalition government, intensified this work supported by Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove.

The most questionable development of all was the decision to implement a 'phonics screening check' for all six-year-old children in England. As you will see in Chapter 14, we are not against early identification of children who struggle with reading, and have clear ideas how they can best be supported. But we are very much against the likely distortion of the curriculum and the effects on children, parents, teachers, schools, and teacher trainers that such a national testing regime is likely to have.

The government response to a 'consultation' on whether the phonics screening check should be implemented was startling. The first problem with

the consultation questionnaire design was that it did not include the question: do you think a phonics screening check should be implemented for all six-year-old children in England? The only question in the consultation that that came close to addressing the most important issue of whether the test was desirable overall or not was this one: 'do you agree that this screening check should be focused on phonic decoding?' (DfE, 2011: 12) The response rates were: Yes: 28%; No: 66%; Not Sure: 6%. This clearly showed a majority negative response to the main element of the phonics screening check. But in an extraordinary interpretation of the outcome of the survey the Minister concluded that '28% of respondents agreed the check should focus on decoding using phonics. 20% respondents argued that children learn to read using a variety of strategies, including using visual and context cues, and the check should take into account these alternative strategies' (op. cit.: 4). Therefore, 'Taking into account the consultation responses, findings from the pre-trialling and the academic evidence, we propose *to continue to develop the phonics screening check*' (op. cit.: 6, emphasis added). Surely this kind of interpretation and the resultant policy changes are undemocratic and unacceptable?

So the paradox of policy from 2012 was that some schools (particularly those that engaged with other government agendas such as becoming free schools or academies) were to have some freedom over the curriculum that was lacking during New Labour's time in government. But at the same time, the Department for Education and its Ministers were securing even greater control over early years and primary teaching.

Our predictions in relation to the impact of the policies on phonics are that:

- Schools will try to mitigate the worst effects.
- The curriculum will be narrowed (reading, and generally).
- League tables of schools' phonics screening test results will be compiled leading to high-stakes testing pressures.
- Gains in statutory test scores attributable to the increased emphasis on phonics are unlikely because there are other more important issues that will be squeezed, such as reading comprehension, an emphasis on which perhaps would have been much more likely to produce positive impacts.
- The overall outcomes for children as a result of such policy changes will be negative.

In spite of the potentially serious consequences of such policies we have not lost hope! In fact, such changes make us more determined than ever to fight for more appropriate curricula, pedagogy and assessment for the teaching of English, language and literacy that we hope we convey throughout this book. We are not the only people who are ready to challenge inappropriate policy. At the time of finishing this chapter, three of the members of the expert group on the National Curriculum in England had made clear their strong unhappiness with the government's response to their report, and the leaders of three of