Edited by
Patricia Driscoll, Andrew Lambirth and **Judith Roden**

Second Edition

The Primary Curriculum

A Creative Approach

SAGE

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The **Primary Curriculum**

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Frances Templeman. She was much loved and her work lives on in the colleagues and teachers she inspired.

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Patricia Driscoll is a Reader in Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. She has worked in the field of languages for over 25 years in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Patricia teaches on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and has led a bilateral exchange programme for student teachers from England and mainland Europe. She has also conducted both small- and large-scale studies in language learning and teaching in schools. Patricia's recent publications include: 'The sustainable impact of a short comparative teaching placement abroad on primary school language teachers' professional, linguistic and cultural skills', *The Language Learning Journal* (Special Edition for Teacher Education), 2014; 'The role and nature of the cultural dimension in primary modern languages', *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 2013, 26 (2), pp. 146–60; *A New Era for Languages in Debates in Modern Languages Education* (eds Driscoll, Macaro and Swarbrick) (Routledge, 2014); *The Final Report of Language Learning at Key Stage 2: The Longitudinal Study* (2006–2009), London, DCSF.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book that aims to introduce readers to the primary curriculum and the best ways to teach it; but it is not only about that. Primary education is unique in that the activity of teaching young children requires practitioners to also be dedicated carers. This demands a special kind of attention from teachers in the classroom. The education of the very young has been called an 'act of love' (Freire 1993). This view is central to the belief that teachers need to enjoy the company of young children and recognise that their charges are people in their own right, who want to be looked after carefully as well as taught effectively. Good teachers care for the children in ways that are unique to all other jobs and professions. A teacher's job is not *only* about transmitting culturally valued knowledge, to raise standards of achievement in tests and examinations and prepare them for the world of work. The best teachers are those who recognise 'intersecting axes' (Alexander 2010: 409) in which the heart and the head – the child and the subject – are both part of the education matrix. Children want teachers who possess 'equity, empathy and expertise' (Alexander 2010: 408). So, along with a good knowledge of the subjects to be taught, teachers are also fair and empathetic, and know about the demands of teaching a single national curriculum to children in a culturally rich and diverse community. To teach the curriculum well teachers will need to know their children and the families from which they come, and the knowledge and experience the children already possess and bring with them to school.

This book offers an introduction to teaching and learning the primary curriculum in this context and with the knowledge that one can only be a successful teacher of primary-age children if a good and equitable dialogue is formed with the children in the class and the community. Readers will find that the writers discussing the subjects of the curriculum in this book do so with all this in mind.

The writers of this book want their readers to be excited about their future professional career. They want their readers to be determined to be the best teachers they can be and to gain the confidence they need to succeed. Ovid, the Roman poet, said 'People are slow to claim confidence in undertakings of magnitude' and this is true of the experiences of those in the teaching profession. Teaching is an extraordinary job and can make differences to people and their lives – both positive and negative. It is little wonder that teachers are slow to claim confidence in what they do. In this book we offer forms of professional knowledge that will assist readers in gaining more confidence.

Teaching the knowledge found in the primary curriculum is based upon the idea that 'knowledge is personal as well as public, dynamic rather than static, and to an extent recreated in every learning encounter' (Alexander 2010: 413). It is with this perspective that this book wishes to engage its readers and begin the process of developing them into professional and knowledgeable practitioners.

Curriculum

Universal education is still a relatively new idea and practice in the UK. Newer still is the notion of a National Curriculum. It was the 1988 Education Reform Act that introduced a National Curriculum for England and Wales. The 1944 Education Act had introduced universal state education, but 'what' was taught and 'how' the curriculum was delivered tended to reflect earlier content and practice. Legally, schools could teach what they liked, except for Religious Education which was a required element of post-Second World War education in the UK. Sometimes the content of the curriculum was guided and influenced by Local Education Authority priorities.

In 2009, the Cambridge Review found strong support for the notion of a National Curriculum amongst the profession. They concluded that 'having a national curriculum is now generally accepted as beneficial, particularly if it succeeds in establishing a clear, basis entitlement for children's learning across the country's ... primary schools' (Alexander and Flutter 2009: 16). Despite this, the nature and role of a National Curriculum continues to be contested. There are pertinent questions that need to be raised over issues of power. Who selects the curriculum content? Does it represent and affirm particular ideologies of specific social groups of people? Does it disempower the values and attitudes of those it does not represent (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Hill 2001)? A curriculum can never be politically neutral and this should not be forgotten as readers digest the chapters in this book. There are references to the political

nature of the curriculum in many of the chapters. We would like to think that readers, as new teachers, will question and approach all the work in this book in a critical fashion. Education at its best is based on enquiry and is not just about turning learners into 'little living libraries' (Bruner 1963: 66). New teachers' own learning and development can be no different. A critical and questioning perspective needs to run through all the work of a teacher and we hope this book will enrich this approach.

In this latest edition of our book, the authors are writing at another time of curriculum change in England. The Conservative-led Coalition government introduced a new National Curriculum in 2014. This curriculum too has many critics, some of whom are writing in this book. These criticisms have included its over-prescription, leaving little room for teacher and school flexibility. There have been questions about the relevance of some aspects of the curriculum, e.g. not enough notice has been taken of what is known about how children learn or allow sufficiently for individual differences. Some of the programmes of study are said not to be age-appropriate, risking a sense of failure and disengagement amongst some pupils (Primary Umbrella Group 2012). However, the task of the authors of this book is to introduce new teachers to working with the National Curriculum in a practical but critical way. We are updating our book in the light of the new changes. All the authors have amended their chapters to take into account the needs of our readers who must thoroughly acquaint themselves with the curriculum.

Structures

For convenience, the subject chapters in this book have been organised in a uniform manner. All the writers conceptualise the subject and area of the curriculum they discuss in a clear introduction at the start of each chapter.

Each author then introduces what we have called 'the state of the art' for teaching of each subject. This will enable readers to know what they can expect to find in the schools.

The authors then present what they consider to be innovation in the teaching of their subject. The rationale for this section is to offer teachers and student teachers an understanding of what is considered as innovative practice. This is then complemented by a section on what creativity may look like in the teaching of their subject.

Lastly, all the authors provide an introduction to the crucial area of assessment.

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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH

Andrew Lambirth

Chapter Aims

This chapter will:

- introduce the ways literacy in the English curriculum has been conceptualised by different theoretical traditions and how these perspectives influence the ways literacy has been taught

- describe and critique the state of the art for the teaching of reading, writing and speaking

- discuss innovation through the widening of the conceptualisation of literacy in response to the rise in digital technology

- present ideas for how teachers' creativity may be nurtured

- offer an introduction to assessment of English

Introduction

Teaching is a job for professionals. A professional teacher is passionate about education, and is determined to ensure the educational well-being of the children in their class. The professional teacher's practice is honed from an understanding of rigorously researched theoretical knowledge, generated in schools, universities and other research institutions or associations (Carr and Kemmis 1997). Teaching is not a job for amateurs, or for those who just want to be told how to do it. Teaching professionals are *educational activists* (Sachs 2003) and enthusiastic about knowing more from their reading, discussions and debates with children, colleagues and academics on how they can enrich the learning experience for their students. They take a critical approach to everything they hear about teaching and make well-informed choices about how they will teach. This chapter is aimed at those who aspire to this level of professionalism in the teaching of English. To this end, I will be providing a starting point by introducing the issues, perspectives and concepts that I feel new teachers of English must know at the start of their professional careers. Readers will also need to be critical of my approach too. All educational positions have an ideological source. Teaching is never just 'common sense' – it always has a theoretical foundation and it is not politically neutral.

The National Curriculum 2014 states: 'The overarching aim for English in the National Curriculum is to promote high standards of literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the written and spoken word, and develop a love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment' (DfE 2013: 1). Literacy is central to the National Curriculum for English in primary schools. Literacy is complex and its teaching continues to be contested between teachers, academics and policy-makers. To help you become familiar with the arguments, I begin by offering a number of important perspectives on definitions of literacy and how it should be taught within the National Curriculum for English. These different definitions and teaching approaches will act as the foundation to an understanding of the perspectives on teaching reading, writing and speaking that you will encounter in the schools you visit.

The Traditional View of Literacy – Cognitive–Psychological Perspectives

Literacy education has often been conceived as learning that must have a steady and linear trajectory of development. Based on cognitive–psychological theory (Ehri 1987, 1995), this perspective contends that children need to be introduced to certain skills and knowledge in literacy at specific ages as it is assumed that all children should be taught to progress in similar ways. This is thought to be true for the teaching of reading, writing and speaking. Governments in the UK and in the advanced Western industrial nations are heavily promoting the general approach and the National Curriculum for English 2014 reflects this perspective. The curriculum conceives literacy

as a set of discrete skills that can be learned and taught in a number of different contexts. This is contested: for example, Street (1984) described this model of literacy as *autonomous*. This means that for cognitive–psychologically influenced perspectives, literacy is a neutral 'package' of skills (Street and Street 1991) that can be simply transferred from one person to another. It is a value-free literacy applied to all, despite the different needs and experiences of those who are expected to learn it. Street and Street (1991) argue that with this way of perceiving literacy, language is treated:

> as if it were a 'thing', distanced from both teacher and learner and imposing on them external rules and requirements as though they were passive recipients. (Street and Street 1991: 144)

It is argued (Goodman 1996) instead that language is a natural phenomenon, learned in home environments very early, and is linked closely to identity and culture (Gee 2004); therefore children already possess linguistic skills before they begin school. However, cognitive–psychological approaches often appear to treat the teaching of literacy as if it were an entirely new set of skills that children come to school lacking.

It is important to understand why government policy-makers favour this cognitive–psychological approach. During the 1980s there was increasing anxiety over perceived rising levels of illiteracy in the United States and the United Kingdom. There was widespread belief that post-industrial society had led to fundamental changes in working practices and a change to the structure of the labour market. Concerns were voiced that workers may no longer have the capacity to contribute effectively to the demands of a growing service sector that was replacing manufacturing industries (Lankshear and Knobel 2003). In addition, English Ofsted (1996a, 1996b) inspection reports of schools claimed to show a decline in standards of reading and writing. According to these reports, far-reaching educational reform had to be implemented to improve functional literacy levels in primary schools. Children's development in these basic literacy skills needed to be tracked very carefully along a defined trajectory and initially in England and Wales; Statutory Assessment Tasks (SATs) were introduced as the measure of children's literacy success. Rigid efficiency in education like this is, of course, also less costly than more progressive measures that tend to need more time and resources. In addition, some argue that contemporary 'efficient' measures label those children who are unable to learn at the rate required as 'inadequate in some way' (Larson and Marsh 2005: 5) and who are often from homes in deprived circumstances (Larson and Marsh 2005). Yet, it is this approach that one will currently witness in many primary schools in England today. Many advisors and school senior managers, driven by policy from current governments, encourage and indeed demand a cognitive–psychological model to teach reading, writing and speaking. However, in my view, professional teachers need to take a more critical approach and be aware of alternative arguments about literacy in the English curriculum and decide how best to teach their children in the contexts within which they practise. Cognitive–psychological influenced methods are now enshrined in law; however, teachers must be professional

and know what educationalists, teachers and researchers, who should be mainly independent of governments, are finding out about how children learn.

Literacy as Social Practice – 'Progressive' Measures

Barton and Hamilton (1998) have shown that literacy is not the same in all contexts. How people use words and utilise print varies depending upon the social environment where it is used. Literacy is not just the one promoted in schools. Literacy is a social practice and it is sculpted by the social, cultural, economic and political contexts within which it is found.

> Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned … Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (Barton and Hamilton 1998: 3)

According to this model, literacy is situated only within social contexts and is formed and shaped through interaction between people. Literacy is not then merely an autonomous, discrete set of skills; it is 'alive', changing and dynamic. There is not one *literacy*, as portrayed in curricula, but many *literacies*, each intrinsically forming part of a specific social context and culture.

Culture is about how groups of people make meaning. Our culture is made through our histories and our experiences (Hall 2003). It was Bruner (1996) who wrote that our minds could not have been created without a culture. Our thoughts and the meanings we make derive from the culture within which we reside. Learning and thinking are always situated and are dependent upon the tools available within that specific social environment. The most important intellectual tool is language. Language is the symbol system that allows us to make meaning and to create our own identities within a culture.

It follows from this socio-cultural perspective that school literacy learning uses language in ways that are not neutral or autonomous, but have an ideological and cultural source. The literacy of school and curricula, according to this socio-cultural perspective, is based on a reductionist definition of literacy. It purports to offer a neutral set of skills and knowledge that are free from cultural domains. In doing so, it arguably marginalises and penalises those from different literacy cultures and normalises the middle-class literacy experiences that are privileged through school assessment (Larson and Marsh 2005). From this perspective, it may help us understand the consistent patterns of underachievement found in certain socio-cultural groups, as we begin to recognise that education and literacy learning are part of a culturally based process. It would follow from this that school literacy practices advantage those children who use school forms of literacy at home and disadvantage those who use words differently. As teachers we need to be aware of these arguments, and if we agree, we need to begin to plan our

teaching in a way that attempts to intervene to disrupt these social reproductive processes which seem to lead to consistent patterns of underachievement.

Language Learning as Natural – Psycholinguist Perspectives

Psycholinguist perspectives, like socio-cultural positions, contend that literacy learning does not begin in school. Kenneth Goodman (1996) argues that children already possess a wealth of literacy experiences and have developed an implicit knowledge of language before they come to school. Goodman (1996) states that what makes language necessary and possible for human beings is our ability to think symbolically. We are a symbolic species (Deacon 1997) and for this reason our engagement and use of language is natural. In other words, we use things to represent other things and language is one of the most powerful ways of doing this. Language enables us to construct complex systems that can represent experiences, feelings, concepts and ideas.

The psycholinguist perspective follows the work of the linguist Noam Chomsky (1965) who stated that humans have an innate predisposition to learn a language. We all learn to speak and construct complex grammatical utterances without any form of tuition. This might suggest that our ability to do so comes from within rather than from any external source of pedagogy. Chomsky stated that humans have evolved to make language development a part of the brain's function. Learning and using language is natural and the psycholinguists take this further than the learning of oral language. Goodman suggests that learning written language is no less natural. He argues that oral and written language both develop from the need for humans to think and communicate through symbols. Written language is developed when needed, when oral communication through face-to-face and here-and-now language is no longer sufficient (Goodman 1996). This is not to suggest that, like oral language, we draw on evolved inner mechanisms to learn to read and write. The use of the written word is a relatively new phenomenon in humankind's development and there has not been sufficient time for such inner mechanisms to have formed. Language development, both oral and written, is natural because humans are a symbolic species with an innate propensity to represent the world through symbols, through language. It is in our nature to want to use language, both oral and written, and to exploit these language tools for a deeper understanding of our surroundings.

Both socio-cultural and psycholinguistic perspectives on literacy teaching reject the idea that all children come to school without a literacy. They honour young children with a belief that from a very young age they bring a wealth of literacy experiences based around their own cultural backgrounds and want to build on these forms of experiences. For these reasons, the pedagogy they propose is very different from more so-called traditional, cognitive–psychological positions on teaching literacy. They would deny that a linear and staged curriculum is appropriate for all children and reject the need for creating conditions in classrooms that enable direct staged

instruction to be the main way of teaching. Socio-cultural and psycholinguistic teachers propose creating conditions that favour more independent learning, honouring children's own interests in the forms of texts and language they encounter at home as well as those texts associated with the school curriculum. They argue that learning a literacy is a cultural process (Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1990) where a community of learners is developed that share multiple perspectives on how language is learned, needed and used (Rogoff et al. 2001).

There are many modern primary school classrooms that use some of the practices that derive from psycholinguist and socio-cultural perspectives. Yet the contemporary pressures of standardised tests that measure children's learning of one form of literacy at selected stages of children's schooling arguably inhibit the freedom of many teachers to work in this way. However, professional teachers need to decide with their colleagues which theoretical position, or positions, they want to take and then work towards creating the conditions, both politically and educationally, to enable them to work the way colleagues know is best for the children in their classes. The National Curriculum is enshrined in law and teachers are bound to teach to it in all state schools, with exceptions among academies and free schools, yet within these constraints teachers can still create learning environments that are right for the children in their classes to succeed and begin to love reading and writing.

The State of the Art in Pedagogy

Reading

Cognitive–psychological models of teaching reading are the current dominant perspectives that drive educational policy across the Western industrialised world. These methods are commonly found in state primary schools in England and the UK. The extent to which this theoretical position is applied will vary from school to school.

The *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading* (Rose 2006), often called the Rose Review, commissioned by the New Labour UK government (1996–2010), emphasised the need to teach children to learn to read through a method called synthetic phonics. The review argues that the teaching of synthetic phonics is the most important strategy to teach young children to read. This approach is likely to be continued in broadly the same ways by successive governments for the foreseeable future and is enshrined in the National Curriculum for English 2014. Yet, teachers need to know that this perspective on teaching reading continues to be contested (for example, Davies 2013).

The psycholinguist Goodman (1967) maintained that children need to draw on three of what he called cueing strategies: grapho-phonic, semantic and syntactic. Grapho-phonic is similar to what the Rose Review advocates that children should be taught first when learning to read – decoding graphemes (letters) into phonemes

(sounds) and blending them to sound out the word. The National Curriculum for English 2014 demands that this cueing strategy is taught first and in isolation to others.

Syntactic cueing strategies, Goodman (1973) argued, are how readers are able to predict the next word by drawing on their implicit knowledge of language structures and the order of words in sentences and utterances. If a child comes across a word that she cannot read, instead of using grapho-phonic strategies to sound out the word, the teacher asks the child to read to the end of the sentence and then go back and read the sentence again. By doing so, the child can hear the sentence drawing out pattern-markers and inflectional suffixes and cues and predict the word. In other words, the child draws on her own knowledge of language and language structures to read the words.

The third cue that Goodman describes is semantic. Using this cue, like the syntactic cues, asks the child to draw on her own knowledge, but this time, knowledge of the world and the contexts within which the book she is reading takes place. Children know about the world, for example, that grass can be green, the sky can be blue and knowing about these things and the language that conceptualises and describes them enables children to predict the words that are coming up in a text. With the help of more experienced readers, children learn to orchestrate their knowledge (Chittenden et al. 2001) about language and the world by using all the cues together.

However, since the Rose Review and the National Curriculum for English 2014, this way of articulating the strategies needed for children to read is no longer favoured. The teaching of grapho-phonic skills is now the preferred first teaching approach for young children, emphasising a more cognitive–psychological approach.

Synthetic Phonics

Using synthetic phonics, the individual phonemes associated with particular graphemes are each isolated, pronounced and blended together (synthesised) to read and write a word. For example, h/a/t has three phonemes and three graphemes. Children are taught to *segment* words into their individual phonemes. For instance, the word b/r/u/sh is made from four phonemes. Segmentation assists children to spell. A child needs to segment a word they want to spell into its component phonemes, providing a grapheme (letter) or combination of graphemes to represent each phoneme.

Teaching synthetic phonics will also entail instructing the children how to *blend* a word. This means merging the phonemes together to pronounce a word. When reading and confronted with an unknown word, the children are taught to attribute a phoneme to each letter or letter combination and then merge them to sound out the word. Psycholinguists believe that this is not enough and that children need to learn all the cueing strategies from the moment they begin to learn to read. They argue that experienced readers use all three and so children must learn to do this from the beginning. However, present governments insist that using synthetic phonics must be the first strategy that children learn.

Whole-Language Learning

These cognitive–psychological methods are roundly rejected by psycholinguists and socio-cultural teachers of reading. Instead, they broadly use what has been called a 'whole-language approach' to the teaching of reading. This includes teachers introducing the three cueing strategies to children together from an early age within the context of good books. This approach concentrates far more upon teaching the processes as well as the skills, as many argue that children will not wish to read unless they understand the processes that make the activity so enjoyable and worthwhile. Concentrating on discrete skills, as cognitive–psychological models favour, has the danger of making reading appear as a form of labour devoid of any pleasure. While many cognitive–psychological models of reading teach skills in isolation, whole-language approaches emphasise the importance of reading rich literature (Holdaway 1979; Meek 1988), sometimes called 'real books', to allow children to experience the pleasures of reading. Texts are chosen to which children can relate: multi-cultural stories, tales that involve children from different religions, races and social classes. Teachers will also draw on popular culture – the television and film industry – enticing children into reading by demonstrating the pleasure it can give to everyone. Whole-language approaches aim to create stimulating experiences for children to learn to read. They combine direct teaching in different group sizes with opportunities for children to experience the 'untaught lessons' that books can offer; again, this happens from an early age to demonstrate from the start that reading is more than a dry act of labour.

In addition to the three cueing strategies that are taught both formally and informally, teachers from a whole-language perspective teach the processes (Grainger and Tod 2000). These are the processes with which accomplished readers engage and which children need to learn:

- **Predicting** – anticipating what will happen next in the story from what has occurred earlier and how other similar stories often operate.
- **Picturing** – being aware of how reading a fictional text can create pictures in one's mind's eye. These pictures are given to the reader both by the writer's work and by the experiences that children have had in their real world.
- **Connecting** – from an early age children will make connections with events and characters in a text with their own lives and other stories they have read in books or seen in films or on television.
- **Questioning** – good readers tend to generate questions about the texts they read (Benton and Fox 1985). We constantly ask questions of the narrative, the characters and events, demonstrating that reading is not a passive activity.
- **Engaging** – how many of us have cried at the end of a novel or been terrified and had to shut a book? Children also need to discuss how they engage with a text and understand and experience the effects of good writing.

- **Evaluating** – having what is sometimes called 'critical literacy' broadly means that readers feel confident to make judgements about the texts they read. Children must be encouraged to evaluate texts from different perspectives – political and aesthetic.

Children are taught to engage in these processes and understand their pleasures while at the same time learning the cueing strategies that are essential for reading too. Both skills and processes are vital in becoming a reader. The pedagogy for whole-language learning is a combination of direct and independent teaching and learning. While cognitive–psychological models of reading are much more a 'drilling and skilling' of children using synthetic phonics, whole-language teachers are enthusing children to read by offering authentic experiences with great books.

Case Study 1.1

Robert is a teacher who defines reading as a search for meaning in texts. He teaches reading using synthetic phonics for those children in his Year 1 class who need it, but is also acutely aware of the need to help children to read using other cueing strategies too. Robert believes that a large proportion of the children in his class have yet to learn the pleasure that can be found in reading books alone and with others. In preparing his class for September when he met the children for the first time, he decided that books and the pleasure of reading would define the layout in his classroom. He set up a well-organised and attractive reading area in his class. He set aside a large corner of the room for his classroom books. He ensured he had a good range of literature and included comics, children's magazines and catalogues in the collection. He divided the books by genre and put them into their own labelled baskets so children knew where to go to find their favourite texts and those that were unknown to them. He provided comfortable seating and brought in colourful posters that promoted reading for pleasure. Every day he set aside 30 minutes for quiet reading and read to the children at least three times a day (sometimes reading three books in one sitting). The reading corner became the centre of the developing culture of reading in his class. The children enjoyed Robert's passion for books and he became known in the school as the 'reading teacher who loves books'.

Writing

Vygotsky (1978) believed that reading and writing are two halves of the same process: mastering written language (Barrs and Cork 2001). What writers must do is to find

themselves 'shuttling between spoken resources and an increasing store of forms inter-nalised from their reading' (Britton 1982, cited in Barrs and Cork 2001: 42). So, from this perspective, reading experiences are integral to being able to write, as well as the belief that one's spoken language resources can also be utilised in written composition. I suspect no one would disagree with these ideas, yet it is how to provide children with these skills and knowledge that continues to be where disagreement lies. Following on from what has been said previously in this chapter, cognitive–psychological theorists would advocate that children need to be directly taught the skills required. This would involve practice through exercises. However, if we wish to avoid teaching a generation of clerks, many will argue, particularly psycholinguists and socio-cultural theorists, that children must be shown how writing will open up opportunities for them to increase communicative repertoires. Children can recognise these benefits of writing if we encourage them to make choices about their writing – form, content and purpose – and allow them to find their personal voice (Clarke 2000).

The National Curriculum for English 2014 emphasises the importance of teaching the structure and language features of writing, arguably at the expense of emphasising the meanings that children can produce for their own personal, aesthetic or practical satisfaction. As you now know, this corresponds with cognitive–psychological per-spectives on the teaching of literacy and this will be a consistent feature of current educational policy. You should expect to be asked to teach writing skills directly to the children in a de-contextualised way, often as exercises to teach specific skills. However, there are some ideas about the teaching of writing that are often generally agreed upon and should be taken very seriously when planning how to teach writing in the primary classroom. I intend to discuss them here.

Writing begins with other forms of symbolising (drawing, modelling, play, drama). If humans are symbolic species, they are attracted to finding ways to express them-selves through the use of symbols. Right from being very young children, we have always attempted to communicate symbolically – for example, 'the gesture is the initial visual sign that contains the child's future writing as an acorn contains a future oak' (Vygotsky 1978: 107). Teachers have the responsibility of introducing children to con-ventional written ways of making meaning through signs. Psycholinguists would argue that teachers can do this best by building on children's natural interest in symbols and celebrating the ways they are using symbols before they come to school. In other words, treat children as meaning makers from the beginning, encourage the early marks they make on paper and treat them as serious forms of writing that convey meaning. The literacy we teach in schools is not entirely new to children: they have used signs before.

The writing process can be divided into two parts and this is how it is presented in the National Curriculum for English 2014. The first of these is *composition* – this is the capturing of ideas, authoring, construction of the narrative, choosing genre and gram-mar. To compose one needs no means of written transcription. It happens all the time: for example, children compose narratives in their games and adults compose to a