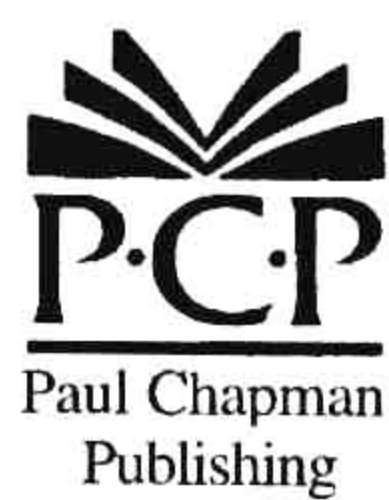




# Teaching and Learning Communication, Language and Literacy

Ann Browne



© Ann Browne, 2007

First published 2007

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Paul Chapman Publishing  
A SAGE Publications Company  
1 Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd  
B1/I1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area  
Mathura Road, Post Bag 7  
New Delhi 110 044

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2006934091**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN- 978-1-4129-0208-3

ISBN- 978-1-4129-0209-0 (pbk)

Typeset by Dorwyn, Wells, Somerset

Printed in Great Britain by Athenaeum Press, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

Printed on paper from sustainable resources

**Teaching and Learning Communication,  
Language and Literacy**

---

## About the author

Ann Browne is a senior lecturer in education at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK where she works with trainee and practising teachers. Before working in higher education she taught in a number of schools in Manchester and London. Throughout her career she has been primarily interested in language and literacy and the education of young children.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Marianne Lagrange for her patience and help during the writing of this book.

I am grateful to the many children, students and teachers that I have worked with. Their curiosity and endeavours have prompted me to reflect on and learn about the best ways of teaching young children.

In particular, I would like to thank the staff and children of Angel Road First School, Norwich, Davies Lane Primary School, Waltham Forest, and Hillside Primary School, Norwich who contributed some of the examples and illustrations which bring this book to life.

# Introduction

Children in the Foundation Stage are embarking on their life in organized learning environments. They enter pre-school settings and reception classes with curiosity and anticipation. Adults who work with children at this early stage have a special part to play in introducing young children to communication, language and literacy. To fulfil this important role they need to understand how children learn, the subjects that are to be taught and how to bring these two elements together to provide young learners with a stimulating and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

In this book I have attempted to cover all these elements. The book begins with a chapter which examines how children learn, the importance of play as a context for learning and teaching strategies that are appropriate to help children acquire knowledge, understanding and positive attitudes to learning. It is against this backdrop that the chapters on speaking and listening, reading and writing should be read. The chapters that are concerned with the curriculum for communication, language and literacy contain sections on subject knowledge. This is intended to help practitioners to understand what it is they are planning for and teaching. They also contain an indication of how children's learning develops in each of these aspects and include examples of activities that can contribute to children's development. Teaching is part of the plan, teach, assess and evaluate cycle that contributes to effective learning, and so the book ends with chapters on assessment and planning.

Equal opportunities is an important issue throughout education but perhaps has a particular significance in the Foundation Stage where children are forming attitudes and opinions about themselves and the world they live in. Research suggests that attendance at pre-schools and nurseries tends to benefit children's educational success and can compensate for the

inequalities in some children's lives. As communication, language and literacy are often seen as the basis for success in and out of school, topics related to equal opportunities are explored within this book.

This book has been written for anyone who wants to know more about how to contribute to young children's learning. I hope that it conveys some of the shared excitement and enjoyment that are possible as adults and children work together in the early years.

*Ann Browne*  
*August 2006*



# Contents

About the author	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction	ix
1 Setting the scene for communication, language and literacy	1
2 Speaking and listening	19
3 Reading	46
4 Writing	81
5 Inclusion	117
6 Working with parents and other adults	136
7 Assessment	151
8 Planning for communication, language and literacy	175
References	211
Index	219

# Chapter 1

## Setting the scene for communication, language and literacy

---

### Introduction

Each phase of schooling, the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 has its own distinctive characteristics and concerns. Some of the defining characteristics of the Foundation Stage are explored in this chapter and they provide the background to the teaching and learning of communication, language and literacy.

The curriculum, learning, teaching and classroom organization are important concerns in every phase but they are realized in ways that are particular to the age and needs of the pupils. The curriculum for the Foundation Stage, although separated into areas of learning, reflects the way in which young children's learning rarely fits neatly into one area of the curriculum. In the Foundation Stage the boundaries between different subjects are blurred and even in a single activity learning can take place in a number of curriculum areas. The concern with learning is perhaps more important to early years practitioners than to any other educational practitioners. Adults who work in the Foundation Stage are concerned with creating a bridge between the way children have learned at home and the way they will learn in the more formal and densely populated nursery and reception classes. They want to continue, as far as possible, the beneficial practices of the child's first educators, which have resulted in successful and rapid learning and confident learners. Play as a means of learning is most apparent in the Foundation Stage although it is also seen in Key Stage 1 and sometimes Key Stage 2 classes. The integrated curriculum, the awareness of children as learners and the centrality of play mean that nursery and reception classes are organized in ways that are distinct and different to the other key stages.

## The curriculum explained

Each of the four curriculum bodies in the UK – the Qualifications and Assessment Authority (QAA) in England, The Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum and the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment – have produced guidance about the curriculum for children aged between 3 and 5. There are minor differences between the practices and outcomes that are emphasized but for the most part the sort of curriculum that is advocated in each country is very similar. Although most of the references in this book will be to the English guidelines, readers across the UK and in other countries too should be able to relate the ideas to their particular situation.

## Integrating learning

In May 2000 the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000b) was published. This sets out what children aged 3 to 5 are expected to learn in nursery settings and reception classes in England. The guidance covers six areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. This book is concerned with the second area, that of learning, communication, language and literacy. However one of the characteristics of learning is that it often ranges across and goes beyond individual subject areas. For example, learning about numbers will involve being able to use number names and may take place through joining in with number stories, rhymes and songs as well as discrete mathematical activities. So, although children's increasing understanding of number is an aspect of mathematical development, their learning will be supported by experiences in language, literacy and music as well as other areas of the curriculum. These cross-curricular links are an important facet of the curriculum in the Foundation Stage. Although the subject of this book is communication, language and literacy, in keeping with early years practice, links with other areas of learning will be explored.

## The statutory curriculum

The curriculum guidance for communication, language and literacy covers the education of children from 3 to 5. It is intended to cover a two-year

period, the year that 3- and 4-year-olds spend in nursery settings and the year that 4- and 5-year-olds spend in reception classes. The guidance is arranged as a series of learning objectives ordered by difficulty. There are four levels of difficulty, three of which are known as stepping stones. The final level contains the Early Learning Goals. The four levels are not age specific, but the first two sets of objectives are likely to be covered in the nursery and the final set of stepping stones and the Early Learning Goals will shape the curriculum in the reception class. Not all children spend time in a nursery or other pre-school setting and so, for some children, their first encounter with a planned curriculum will be in the reception class where their learning objectives will be taken from level 3 of the stepping stones, although objectives from the earlier levels may also be applicable. The final level of objectives, the Early Learning Goals for communication language and literacy, lead into the National Curriculum programme of study for English at Key Stage 1 (DfEE/QCA, 1999).

## **Communication, language and literacy**

The curriculum for communication, language and literacy broadly covers learning in and about speaking and listening, reading and writing. However the words *communication* and *language* encompass far more than oral communication or speaking and listening. They serve as a reminder that reading and writing are also communicative and social activities. They suggest that language is a key element of thinking and learning, and that language development should be considered when planning for learning across the curriculum. Therefore, to develop within this area of learning, children will need to learn about speaking and listening, reading and writing as well as learning to read and write and to extend their oral abilities.

## **Children as learners**

### **Learning at home**

By the time children enter the nursery or reception class they have already learned a tremendous amount. They have learned to operate socially within their own immediate and extended families. They have learned about their home and community environment. They know how to communicate with others, ask questions, act on instructions and understand explanations. Most children have experience of stories through encounters with books or via television and videos. They can manipulate physical objects as they play and meet some of their own needs. This list could continue for some time.

Suffice to say, young children have made rapid gains in learning in all the areas of learning that constitute the curriculum for the Foundation Stage, even though they have not followed a planned curriculum.

### **How children learn**

How have they learned so much in such a short space of time? They have learned from the adults around them, their environment and their experiences. Adults have provided them with models of behaviour that can be imitated, explanations of events and experiences and answers to questions. Family members and friends have treated the child as a cognitive being who can, will and wants to learn about the world and how to operate within it, and through their actions and interactions they have shared their own knowledge in ways that are appropriate to a young child's developing understanding. Many of the adults' interactions will have arisen from the child's curiosity about the world and their desire to learn about it. However, young children do not learn only from others. They will have learned by listening, looking, touching and engaging in playful activities with toys and objects. Their learning will have come from a number of sources. They will have developed knowledge, skills and understanding through a variety of learning strategies.

Much of a young child's learning will have taken place in an immediate context. Questions will have arisen from what is seen or touched. Explanations will have been given in relation to what the child is doing or using. As Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner all agree, young children learn in practical, concrete ways and their learning is located in directly purposeful and relevant situations (Wood, 1988). Abstract learning that is not directly related to the child's own purposes or the immediate and tangible environment, generally occurs after the age of 3 and children need to be led gradually into this next stage of learning. This is when the skills and understanding of those who work in the Foundation Stage are crucial as they begin to lead children away from the familiar and help them to explore the unknown.

Young children are active learners. They interact physically with the world that they live in and play their part in initiating teaching sequences as they try to do something or ask questions. They construct their understanding by taking in information and relating it to what they already know. Learning, particularly young children's learning, is usually mediated through social encounters and interactions. It is a social activity. In addition, what and how children learn is situated in a particular social or cultural context. Different communities and families within that community

will emphasize different things. For example, in some homes politeness and good manners may be very important. If this is the case, it is likely that children will learn to be courteous.

The combination of these ideas, that children actively construct understandings and that learning takes place in social settings, has led to a view of learning that is known as social constructivism (Hiebert and Raphael, 1998). The features of social constructivism are helpful when thinking about the organization of an early years setting and when planning the curriculum. Children will need access to, and opportunities to develop or construct, their learning by engaging in new experiences and then relating this new awareness to what they already know. To do this they will need opportunities to predict outcomes based on their existing knowledge, to evaluate new experiences and to compare new and old information. They will need to be able to ask questions and to follow avenues of enquiry that interest them. They will need opportunities to engage in meaningful exchanges with adults and other children as well as opportunities to see others demonstrate or use skills. They will also need opportunities to appreciate what their teachers value and to understand why those behaviours or practices are important.

## **Dispositions and attitudes**

Thinking about learning is not just about understanding how learning takes place but is also concerned with what should be learned. Children learn skills and knowledge but they also develop feelings and attitudes to what they learn. Katz has called these attitudes 'dispositions' (Katz and Chard, 1989). It is important that children are disposed to be curious, to explore and to enjoy their learning. These dispositions are present in young children when they first enter Foundation Stage settings but they may be damaged if the learning experiences that are provided for them are too easy, too difficult, dull or repetitive. Inappropriate activities may teach children that they are unsuccessful as learners or that learning at school is boring. Positive dispositions grow from experiences that children enjoy and are interested in. They also allow children to be in control and to experience success. In a review of the research about successful learners, Desforges and Abouchar (2003) found that children who believe in their own ability to learn and whose parents have high aspirations for them are the children most likely to succeed at school. If practitioners can help children to feel confident and have high expectations for the children they work with this will have a significant effect on children's achievement.

## Using our understanding of learning to inform teaching

When adults understand how children learn before they embark on planned learning in the more formal setting of a nursery or reception class, they can appreciate the learning strategies that children already have. They can then incorporate these strategies into the learning opportunities they provide and the teaching methods they employ. The following lists suggest some principles which practitioners use to inform their planning for communication, language and literacy.

Young children:

- learn actively through looking, listening and doing;
- are motivated to learn;
- are curious and willing to explore the unfamiliar;
- learn through taking risks;
- learn through practice;
- can attend with intensity for considerable periods when they are interested;
- learn in collaboration with others;
- learn through asking questions;
- can take the initiative in learning;
- learn things that are relevant and enjoyable to them;
- remember things that are important to them;
- learn about the things that are prioritized by those around them;
- learn when they feel secure and confident;
- learn in different ways; and
- learn at different rates.

The adults who enable children to learn in informal situations at home:

- give children time;
- provide experiences and materials that stimulate children;
- provide children with models of how to do things;
- provide opportunities for children to practise and apply their skills;
- respect and attend to children's questions;
- provide answers to questions;
- provide explanations about social practices and activities;
- expect children to learn and acknowledge their learning;
- provide an environment in which it is safe to take risks; and
- respond and provide for children in ways that are appropriate to the child's understanding and interests.

## Play

### **Play as a context for learning**

Play can provide children with valuable learning experiences. Although children can and do learn in other ways, play is an established and accepted part of the early years curriculum. It has become such a key part of provision in the Foundation Stage because it is pleasurable and practical, and so is attractive to young children. It gives children the opportunity to take control as they engage with activities and materials, and to decide how the resources will be used. They can express and explore their own ideas without pressure or censure. In play, adults are usually participants rather than being in charge of the activity or the outcome. Play is voluntary and in play situations children are able to take risks. During play there are no judgements about right or wrong answers or ways of doing things. Play provides a context within which children can construct meanings and understandings and develop positive attitudes to school and learning.

### **Play and work**

Not all play situations give rise to play. If children do not know what to do with the materials, if they find the materials or the activity dull or unappealing, or if the adult controls the situation leaving no scope for personal interpretation or creativity, play will not take place, or at least it will not be regarded as play by the participant. Play is as much an attitude of mind as it is an activity. Reading books can be an enjoyable activity that is undertaken voluntarily. Readers are personally involved, they interpret what they read in ways that link to their own experience and understanding. Yet reading is often thought of as work in school. Think of the delight that young children have in their nightly bedtime story and how some children choose to pour over a picture book long before they can read. Amongst our friends we probably all know someone who enjoys solving mathematical problems like those to be found in the weekend newspapers or tackling crosswords or other word games in their leisure time. Indeed, there are magazines dedicated to word and other puzzles. Yet letters, words and numbers in school may be considered dull and hard. Perhaps we need to examine the distinction that is often made between work and play. It might not be as straightforward as it seems. Work can be play if the conditions for play are met and the participant approaches the activity with eagerness and with an expectation of enjoyment. In addition to thinking of ways in which play can be used to foster learning, perhaps we could also give more time to consider-



ing how to present learning as an engaging and enjoyable pursuit, and how to reflect the qualities of play in learning experiences.

### **Structured and unstructured play**

Some purists might take exception to this blurred distinction between play and work believing that play should have no real purpose or goal and that children's play should be completely free from adult involvement. This point of view has led practitioners to question the play provision that they make for young children. They are sometimes anxious about structuring children's play by planning for it in ways that will develop children's learning. They worry that by interfering in children's play they will be devaluing play and transforming play into work. This is not a very productive debate, particularly if one accepts that work and play can overlap and if one acknowledges that all play is structured by the materials that are available to the participants. For example, the sort of clothes that are available for dressing up, whether in school or at home, will shape children's role play and exploration of other identities. When children put on yellow hard hats they are likely to become builders, firefighters or miners but are unlikely to consider themselves doctors or shopkeepers. We know, from children's productive learning experiences out of school and from the research, that young children learn well when they are actively interacting with others (Wood and Bennett, 1999). Without planning, careful selection of the number and type of resources and without adult interaction it would be very difficult to provide challenging, fresh and stimulating play opportunities for a class of 20–30 young children.

Accepting that all play is structured has implications for practitioners. It means that they need to take care when they make choices about the play opportunities they provide and how these are to be resourced. They need to provide resources that will appeal to children and to ensure that resources are changed regularly in order to provide children with a variety of play opportunities. The choices that they make will affect what children learn, so practitioners need to be aware of how the resources will support the children's play and guide their learning. Then these likely outcomes need to be matched to what would benefit the children.

### **Free and directed play**

Rather than thinking about structured and unstructured play it is perhaps more productive to think about free and directed play. Free play is 'the opportunity to explore and investigate materials and situations for oneself' (Moyle, 1989: 14). Directed play is led by an adult who shows children