

Start reading ahead

Liz Taylor lays out what literacy co-ordinators should be doing to prepare for the new demands and contexts of the upcoming primary curriculum...

The new primary curriculum (qcda.gov.uk/curriculum) is intended to free teachers from some of the more prescriptive teaching approaches of the past decade.

From 2011, literacy teaching will be part of the statutory *Essentials for learning and life*, and will also fall within the area of learning for *Understanding English, communication and languages*.

As subject co-ordinator, you will need to liaise carefully with your headteacher to consider where your role might next take you. Although there is still a year to prepare for the full roll-out of the new curriculum, there is also the possibility that things may yet again change after the election.

So what is the best approach to take in developing school-based literacy policy and practice in the meantime?

There are several principles that the main parties share.

- Schools and teachers need to be given more freedom in how, where and in which context language and literacy skills – and knowledge – should be taught.
- 'Rigour' in teaching basic language and literacy skills must be retained.
- Teacher assessment practices require further support.

1 Making sure you're ready

In preparation for the new area of learning, it is important to become familiar with its subject content.

This may not be as challenging a job as it sounds. There are only so many ways a curriculum for language and literacy can be designed, and you may soon discover that there is much material with which you are already familiar from the current curriculum, the frameworks for literacy and the national strategy units of work. One difference is that there is more emphasis on embedding ICT and on non-print texts.

You need to become familiar with the implications of teaching literacy within and across

all the areas of learning, before embarking on the process of whole curriculum design.

One concern that may arise in designing lessons or schemes of work that draw on both literacy and other areas of learning is how to manage a balance in content, so that one or other curriculum area's set of learning objectives does not consistently dominate the other's.

Teacher collaboration in planning for the medium and longer term will be critical – and it will be important for the literacy co-ordinator, with the support of the head, to set up opportunities for staff to engage in dialogue about the working of such plans, including where language and literacy understanding and skills are best placed.

2 Supporting colleagues in adapting to change

As schools move to a more flexible approach to teaching English and literacy within and across different areas of learning, or embedding such knowledge and skills in lively and creative projects, there will be many challenges to meet in terms of managing change.

As a starting point, it is useful to reflect on what is already working well in your school in terms of teaching English, language and literacy skills, and what areas might need specific attention over the next year or so.

A number of schools already use DVD and video to support the teaching of literacy, set up creative writing/poetry projects or organise local area or history topics in order to enrich their curriculum. Others are undertaking initiatives such as Every Child a Writer, and Talk for Writing to support inclusive practice.

Where teachers can generate or research their own ideas, and are confident in using and developing, for instance, reading, talk and writing in other curriculum areas, the challenge will be exciting and rewarding. However, some teachers will find this broader approach difficult and may become anxious about change.

3 Modelling good practice

As literacy co-ordinator, you will be in a better position to help colleagues if you can share your own developing ideas. It's therefore important to model practice as well as encourage collaboration in lesson planning.

You might also consider putting together packs of project material as you and colleagues experiment with your own ideas, to act as a springboard for talking about how best to plan stimulating and interesting topics. This is one way of opening discussion and sharing ideas on how to organise a broad and balanced way of working that also supports the enrichment of language and literacy activities.

An ongoing challenge for the literacy co-ordinator is researching resources for teaching. There are a number of commercial publications for teaching literacy, and a range of texts to choose from to support the teaching of literacy within other curriculum areas for children at KS2. However, it is worth noting that finding such texts is more of a challenge (for children at KS1) as their reading skills may be more varied. Wayland publishers and Scholastic are good places to start.

4 Meeting National Standards

There is some uncertainty about the future KS2 tests, with possible alternatives in the pipeline. But as yet there is no definitive model.

A significant part of the literacy co-ordinator's role is the monitoring of pupils' progress in literacy as they move up through the year groups. This role will further develop with the ongoing introduction of Assessing Pupil Progress.

The APP assessment criteria have been devised to support periodic teacher assessment, and form a basis for the moderation of assessment judgements

There is a growing bank of material on the national strategies site (nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk) to help with the implementation of APP, but it is worth considering its longer term use with care. For instance, APP support for teacher assessment in English will be most effective where teachers have

been involved in ongoing and significant discussion over interpretation and application of the criteria.

This will take a while to embed in school practice, and the literacy co-ordinator may find that work in this area needs to be carefully managed so that it doesn't take up a disproportionate amount of teachers' time, but rather be used effectively to support and complement their knowledge of assessment and teaching in English.

5 Building on success

So what do you need to do to become or continue to be an effective literacy co-ordinator?

- Know your subject and try to stay one step ahead of curriculum change.
- Recognise the particular strengths and needs of the children in your school in literacy and language, so that these can be developed.
- Spread the load. It is important to find colleagues to support you in this vital and wide-ranging job; for instance, there might be another teacher in the school who can take a lead on the teaching of phonics – or can support other teachers with teaching drama or poetry across the curriculum.

Liz Taylor is PGCE tutor in primary education at the Institute of Education London

“Teacher collaboration in planning for the medium and longer term will be critical – and it will be important for the literacy co-ordinator, with the support of the head, to set up opportunities for staff to engage in dialogue about the working of such plans”