Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

Professional learning paper: significant aspects of learning

Assessing progress and achievement in literacy and English

The work in progress on significant aspects of learning was reviewed in June and July 2015 in the light of feedback from practitioners, schools and education authorities and in the context of developments in national education policy. This has led to a number of changes both in the overarching paper and in each of the papers related to an area of the curriculum.

Within each of the curriculum area papers changes include:
- the addition of two sections which set the context for the work on significant aspects of learning
- the addition of references, wherever appropriate, to the relationship between significant aspects of learning and the development of skills for learning, life and work, literacy and numeracy and digital competencies
- changes (usually minor) to the definition and illustration of the significant aspects of learning in that area
- the use of a common format in the presentation of the significant aspects of learning
- the insertion of hyperlinks to texts referenced in the paper.

This preface has been added to each paper. Feedback from practitioners made it clear that the original papers lacked a clear initial statement of context and purpose.

Preface

This paper is one element of a suite of resources which support assessment of progress and achievement. You are recommended to read this paper in conjunction with the following:

- *Monitoring and tracking progress and achievement in the broad general education*: bit.ly/edscotapasal
- *Assessing progress and achievement overarching paper*
- *Literacy and English progression framework*
- *Annotated exemplification of work* in Literacy and English: bit.ly/edscotsallit

This resource supplements two closely related sets of documents:

- the Literacy across Learning Principles and Practice paper and Experiences and Outcomes which can be found on the Literacy across learning homepage at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/learningacrossthecurriculum/responsibilityofall/literacy/index.asp
- the Literacy and English Principles and Practice paper and Experiences and Outcomes which can be found on the Literacy and English homepage at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/curriculumareas/languages/litandenglish/index.asp

> The introduction to each paper has been revised as necessary to make clearer links to the principles and practice paper which identifies the key aims of learning in the relevant curriculum area.

Introduction

The Literacy and English Principles and Practice paper summarises the educational rationale underpinning literacy and English and outlines the importance of literacy in developing learners' educational, emotional and social skills:

Language and literacy are of personal, social and economic importance. Our ability to use language lies at the centre of the development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, our learning and our sense of personal identity. Language is itself a key aspect of our culture. Through language, children and young people can gain access to the literary heritage of humanity and develop their appreciation of the richness and breadth of Scotland's literary heritage. Children and young people encounter, enjoy and learn from the diversity of language used in their homes, their communities, by the media and by their peers.

Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life, lays the foundations for lifelong learning and work, and contributes strongly to the development of all four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.

The Literacy and English framework promotes the development of critical and creative thinking as well as competence in listening and talking, reading, writing and the personal, interpersonal and team-working skills which are so important in life and in the world of work.

It identifies key features of assessment:

Assessment in literacy and English will focus on the responses of children and young people to the language and to the ideas and information that they find in texts, and on the development and application of their skills in listening and talking, reading and writing.

Teachers will see evidence of their progress through children and young people's growing skills in communicating their thinking and using language appropriately for different purposes and audiences. Much of the evidence will be gathered as part of day-to-day learning.

This paper builds on these statements by making use of significant aspects of learning to support practitioners in carrying out dependable valid, reliable and challenging assessment of progress and achievement in literacy and English. This paper provides:

- a description of the significant aspects of learning within literacy and English
- an outline of what breadth, challenge and application look like within literacy and English
- information on planning for progression through curriculum levels, using breadth, challenge and application.

> The overarching paper in this professional learning resource contains a section on 'What are the significant aspects of learning?'. Feedback suggested strongly that it would be helpful to practitioners as they refer to and use the curriculum area papers to have a slightly abridged version of this section included in each curriculum area paper.

What are significant aspects of learning?

Significant aspects of learning have been identified for each curriculum area. Each significant aspect of learning brings together a coherent body of knowledge and understanding and related skills, as outlined in the principles and practice paper and detailed in the experiences and outcomes. Each significant aspect of learning:

- is common to all levels from early to fourth
- can provide sound evidence of learning in accord with the principles of *Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment*
- supports the practice of holistic ('best fit') assessment
- can be effectively used to inform assessment of progression within a level and achievement of a level
- can be used to plan further progression within a level and from one level to the next.

Using significant aspects of learning makes assessing progress and achievement more dependable and more manageable. This structure:

- supports practitioners in planning and integrating learning, teaching and assessment
- ensures that learners and practitioners can draw on a range of meaningful, robust, valid and reliable evidence from all four contexts of learning
- affords learners space to demonstrate the breadth of their learning, effective responses to challenging learning experiences and the ability to apply what they have learned in new and unfamiliar situations
- allows learners to progress by different routes and pathways through the experiences and outcomes

- helps practitioners avoid fragmented approaches to assessment which prevent learners from demonstrating the full range of their knowledge, understanding and skills
- removes the need to rely on evidence derived from single brief learning experiences or end of unit tests
- affords practitioners opportunities to plan and assess within a curricular area the development of the skills, attributes and capabilities required for learning, life and work, including the development of literacy, numeracy and digital competencies
- supports practitioners in making holistic ('best fit') judgements about the achievement of a level either in an individual significant aspect of learning or, drawing on evidence from across the relevant significant aspects of learning, in a curriculum area.

The use of significant aspects of learning will inform:

- moderation activities based on holistic judgements supported by dependable evidence
- monitoring and tracking progress in learning
- quality assurance approaches
- the use of assessment to inform improvement at all levels of the education system.

A number of changes have been made to this section.
- The significant aspects are presented as a bold bullet pointed list.
- The bullet points below the significant aspects of learning have been revised to better reflect the Literacy and English Principles and Practice paper and the experiences and outcomes. Feedback from practitioners suggested that there was some confusion about the purpose of these bullet points and their relationship to the significant aspects of learning. They are now called key themes and their purpose is to demonstrate the range of experiences that should be considered when gathering evidence of progress within each of the significant aspects of learning. A diagram has been included to illustrate this. The key themes broadly equate to the sub-divisions in the Literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes: enjoyment and choice; tools; finding, using and organising information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; and creating texts.
- The text in the final paragraph reinforces the cross-cutting advanced literacy skills children and young people will develop across all these themes.

Significant aspects of learning in Literacy and English

There are three significant aspects of learning in Literacy and English.

- **Listening and talking**

- **Reading**

- **Writing**

Although teaching and learning will often take place across more than one significant aspect of learning, a learner may achieve a level in listening and talking or reading or writing. Progress and achievement within these three significant aspects of learning in literacy and English will be evidenced as children and young people achieve across these key themes[1] (as illustrated in figure 1):

- engage with a broad range of increasingly complex texts, including Scottish and Scots texts

- develop and apply knowledge and understanding of language

- find, use and organise information, including developing critical literacy skills

- use reading and listening strategies to understand, analyse and evaluate texts

- create texts of increasing complexity using more sophisticated language.

---

[1] These key themes are intended to broadly equate to the sub-divisions in the Literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes: enjoyment and choice; tools; finding, using and organising information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; and creating texts.

Figure 1
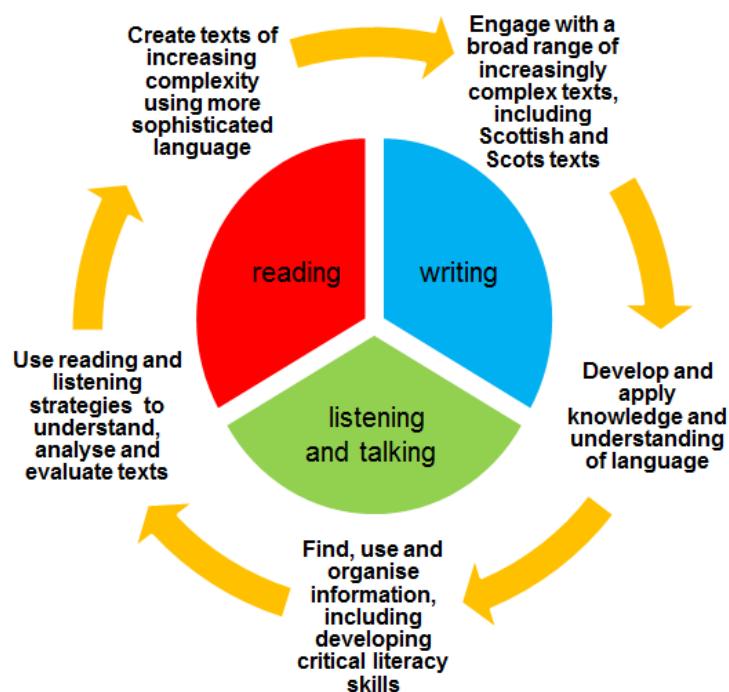
Children and young people will increasingly develop advanced literacy skills as they develop and use higher-order thinking skills within and across these key themes. Creating texts will include engaging effectively with others in different contexts demonstrating a range of verbal and non-verbal communication skills and writing with increasing accuracy, making effective use of spelling, grammar and punctuation.

There are minor changes to the text in this section to:
- add more detail about what breadth looks like
- signpost the skills described in the challenge section as advanced literacy skills
- include references to skills for learning, life and work.

What do breadth, challenge and application look like in Literacy and English?

Well-planned learning, teaching and assessment provides opportunities for learners to experience breadth, challenge and application across the significant aspects of literacy and English. Learners should take an active part in planning, managing and assessing relevant and challenging learning experiences across the curriculum which will support them in developing the understanding and skills which are embedded in the significant aspects of learning.

Breadth

Learners will have opportunities to achieve in the significant aspects of learning in literacy and English when they:

- communicate and collaborate across learning, in listening, talking, reading and writing
- engage with and create a broad range of texts, fiction and non-fiction, printed and multi-media, spoken and written, including Scottish texts
- extend and enrich their use of vocabulary, including Scots
- explore, discuss and use a wide variety of word patterns and text structures
- develop critical literacy in a wide range of contexts.

Learners will regularly draw on their own experiences and interests when learning in and beyond the classroom. Practitioners will encourage learners to extend this range of contexts; these will include Scottish and Scots texts. The definition of texts provided in the principles and practice paper identifies the broad range of types of texts on which practitioners can draw. The choice of texts from this range will take account of learners' interests, their cultural identity and the background of the school and learners.

Challenge

Learners will demonstrate their achievement through meeting challenges in terms of increasing:

- independence and reduced level of support, including peer/teacher support and support from resources such as writing frames, wordlists and dictionaries
- length and complexity of text and task
- use of higher-order questions and critical skills
- confidence in taking the initiative (including asking for help) and sustaining communication.

Challenge in literacy and English will involve engaging with a wide range of more complex texts which are suitable to the reading age of each learner. When learning to read, learners should be given opportunities to read for pleasure and challenge themselves with more advanced texts. It is also important that learners engage with digital texts from an early age and foster critical skills. Challenge involves developing advanced literacy skills: using a wider range of language, engaging in critical, analytical and evaluative activities and asking and answering higher order, open-ended questions. Learners should be encouraged to produce work which is appropriate to purpose and audience and maintains high levels of technical accuracy.

Application

Coherent planning which provides breadth and challenge across the significant aspects of learning should also provide opportunities for learners to apply their learning in new and unfamiliar contexts. Learners should apply their understanding, skills and capabilities in a wide range of new and unfamiliar situations in all curriculum areas, in interdisciplinary work, in the life and ethos of the school, and in personal achievements in and out of school. These will include planned opportunities to apply literacy skills across curricular areas and in real and meaningful contexts.

Applying learning involves communicating to wider audiences, both within and beyond the place of learning, including within working environments. As a result, learners will better understand the importance of literacy in employment and will develop important transferable skills for learning, life and work.

The text in this section has been developed to provide more detail about what breadth, challenge and application looks like across the key themes within each significant aspect of learning. The text now aligns more clearly with the learning statements in the revised progression framework.

Planning for progression through breadth, challenge and application

Learning in Literacy and English should be developed in an integrated way across the three significant aspects of learning as children and young people engage in a range of activities to develop their knowledge and understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities. The following illustrates progression in each of the significant aspects of learning in literacy and English.

- **Listening and talking**

Learners will ***engage with a broad range of texts*** at all levels from early to fourth. The Literacy and English Principles and Practice paper notes the wide range of texts which practitioners should draw on. At all levels learners will select and discuss texts of different types in different media. They will progress from briefly describing their likes and dislikes to giving, and ultimately justifying and evidencing, their personal responses.

As learners progress they will develop their ***knowledge and understanding of the features of spoken language*** which will increase their capacity to understand and produce more complex language and text structures. As they do so, they can increasingly apply this knowledge of language to comprehend what they hear and to support the production of more complex texts.

As they engage with spoken texts, learners will progress from ***finding and using information*** as they respond to brief texts to finding and using information from a wide range of more challenging spoken texts. Learners will develop critical literacy skills, including evaluating sources. They will demonstrate progression as they move from finding and using information through recognising the difference between fact and opinion to identifying persuasive techniques and evaluating sources independently.

Learners will progress from listening to a single text to comparing a variety of complex texts. They will progress from making notes under given headings and using these to create texts to independently making and organising notes from increasingly complex texts.

As learners develop their ability to ***understand, analyse and evaluate texts*** they will increasingly be able to ask and answer a range of questions to inform critical understating such as literal, inferential and evaluative questions. They will progress from identifying the purpose and main ideas of spoken texts to exploring the impact of features of spoken language including verbal and non-verbal communication skills for example, pace, gesture, expression, emphasis, word choice and rhetorical devices.

Increasing challenge may take the form of complexity of content, complexity of text structure, complexity of grammatical and syntactical structures, specialist vocabulary, irrelevance or bias.

Learners will demonstrate their progress in skills in using spoken language as they ***create texts of increasing complexity*** in a variety of ways, including individual talks, presentations, debates and paired and group discussions. Learners will apply verbal and non-verbal skills with greater confidence as they talk and listen for a range of purposes in a variety of contexts. As learners progress, they will present to a growing range of different and less familiar audiences, using the four contexts of learning[2]. These will extend to situations outside the classroom or school. Progress will also be evidenced as they choose more challenging topics and develop complex ideas more fully.

In discussion, learners will progress from turn-taking and articulating ideas, thoughts and feelings to responding, questioning, challenging, summarising and building on the contributions of others. Learners will work more independently to research, plan, create and deliver spoken texts of increasing complexity as appropriate to purpose and audience.

It is important that listening and talking skills are transferred across all areas of the curriculum; therefore, assessing listening and talking in different contexts within the school is important in assessing progression and to ascertain whether a learner has achieved a level.

- **Reading**

The development of a range of reading strategies begins from the early years as learners ***engage with a broad range of texts***. Listening to and interacting with stories being read aloud are important features of developing fluency at this stage. The learner progresses to learning to read, decoding, building vocabulary, developing fluency and understanding. Learners demonstrate progress in terms of the level of the familiarity of language used and in extending their range of vocabulary; they become more confident in reading single words and phrases and progress from this to reading longer texts on less familiar topics. As they progress learners will make use of a wider range of types of text and of genres. They will read texts intended for a variety of audiences and with a range of types of content. As learners progress they will develop their capacity to read fluently and understand more complex structures. This will provide ready and valid opportunities for learners to read less familiar language (in terms of topic, style and structures) and to extend their vocabulary.

Learners will develop their ***knowledge and understanding of language*** such as word patterns, punctuation, sentence structure and grammar. This will enable them to read with increasing fluency and comprehension. As they progress, they will apply this knowledge of language to ***understand, analyse and evaluate texts***. They will read analytically using greater knowledge of language, compare and contrast texts (including Scots and Scottish texts) from a more extensive variety of sources, ask and answer higher-order questions and evaluate critically. This will include the study of literature. Learners will progress from sharing their thoughts about events and characters to discussing characterisation, setting, structure and theme, increasingly supporting their views with evidence from the text. They will increasingly be able to identify and discuss the writer's style and features of genre.

---

[2] The four contexts for learning outlined in Building the curriculum 3 are: ethos and life of the school as a community, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement.

Learners will *find and use information* from a variety of texts. As they progress they will find, select and use information with increasing independence from a wide range of more complex written texts. They will develop critical literacy skills, including the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, recognise persuasive language and evaluate the reliability and relevance of sources with increasing independence. Learners will progress from making notes under given headings and using these to create texts to undertaking independent research, synthesising information from a range of complex texts.

Reading skills will be transferred across all areas of the curriculum; therefore, evidence of achievement should be drawn from different contexts across the school to ascertain whether a learner has achieved a level.

- **Writing**

Learners will create an increasingly broad range of texts to suit different purposes and audiences. They will progress from mark making, formulating words and building sentences to creating more complex texts using a wider variety of language, making more sophisticated use of punctuation, grammar and structure. Learners will review and edit throughout the writing process, making effective use of layout and presentation to support meaning. Opportunities to write at length should be embedded across learning.

As they *engage with a broad range of increasingly complex texts*, including Scottish and Scots texts, they will use these experiences to inform their own writing. It will support them develop their own style, selecting subject, purpose, format and language to suit the needs of a variety of audiences. They will *develop and apply knowledge and understanding of language* in terms of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and aspects of figurative language such as similes, metaphors and onomatopoeia.

As they *understand, analyse and evaluate texts* of increasing complexity and sophistication, they will use this knowledge and experience to develop their own writing skills. They will move from using familiar to less familiar language and demonstrate a widening range of vocabulary and the ability to use more complex structures.

Practitioners should provide opportunities for learners to *create texts of increasing complexity* across a variety of contexts such as report writing, argumentative and discursive writing and personal and creative writing. They will write in different genres, including reports, instructions and recipes, e-mails, poetry and narrative prose. These different types of text will require learners to write with increasing accuracy, making effective use of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Writing becomes more sophisticated as the learner develops and uses a wider vocabulary, adopts spelling strategies and uses punctuation to enhance meaning and communicate more sophisticated ideas. Learners will become more independent as they progress, planning and creating their own texts for a range of audiences with less teacher input at all stages of the writing process. They will be able to use their knowledge of language to build their understanding of the ways in which words can be derived.

As they progress, learners will become more independent in *finding, using and organising information,* making notes, planning, researching and writing with less teacher input. As they do so,

they will develop and use higher-order thinking skills and will be supported in their development of critical literacy skills, including evaluating sources on which they draw as they plan, research and write.

In order to achieve a level the learner should be able to write in a variety of genres and apply their writing skills in different contexts across the curriculum.

> This section has been condensed to avoid repetition of text included in the section above.

Further specific advice related to assessment in Literacy and English

Opportunities to moderate listening, talking, reading and writing should be planned, either separately or in a more integrated way. Practitioners could, for example, look at examples of writing from other curricular areas, focusing on the learning and teaching approaches to examine whether skills for writing have been transferred. Reading skills might be moderated alongside writing as practitioners scrutinise the planning, learning and assessment involved in reading to create a new text. Moderation of talk might involve looking at planning to ensure success criteria are consistent and that the learner can transfer skills to different curricular areas.

Learners may progress at different rates in different components and can achieve a level in one component of Literacy and English before doing so in others.

> There are no changes to this section.

Responsibility of all: Literacy across learning

Practitioners should gather evidence of achievement in literacy where it is integrated and forms a substantial part of learning. Listening and talking permeates all areas of the curriculum: whenever a learner presents to an audience, either formally or informally, verbal and non-verbal communication skills could be assessed as well as the content of the talk. In reading and writing, learners may, for example, create an extended piece of writing which involves researching and note making. Here, practitioners could assess learners' skills in finding and using information, in employing the tools for writing (punctuation, spelling and grammar) as well as in the understanding of content.

> This section has been reworded to stress the value of using all elements of the professional resource: overarching paper, relevant curriculum area paper(s), progression framework(s) and annotated exemplification.

Next steps

Practitioners are encouraged to use this document to support professional dialogue through quality assurance and moderation activities. It may be used by individuals to inform reflection on practice and plan for improvement in approaches to supporting learners in their progress and achievement.