

THE DRAFT CONSULTATION PAPER: ENGLISH
 An initial response for Primary Teachers: **March 2010**
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1	Three strands (language, literature, literacy) are interwoven and inform and support each other. (But see point 14 below.)	√√√
2	Return of literature to its rightful place in the Primary curriculum.	√√√
3	The 'content' descriptions are not intended to be comprehensive. (I would have preferred a description other than 'content' (Curriculum Content is life experience = History, Geography, Science, Health ...). In English-literacy, it is better to refer to skills, behaviours, conventions, ... so there is no confusion about what 'content' means.)	√√√
4	The strands do NOT prescribe approaches to teaching (see page 6 of draft).	√√√
5	Indications all through the document that integrated learning is more effective. Page 6: 'There is a reciprocal relationship between the areas of learning. Increased relevance of learning and deepened understanding occur when English knowledge, skills and understandings are meaningfully applied to other learning areas.' Page 5: notes on general capabilities across the curriculum. Page 6: notes on cross-curriculum dimensions.	√√√
6	All through the strands, we see statements like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use MEANING to make and confirm predictions • use GRAMMATICAL KNOWLEDGE (syntax) to predict • combine meaning, grammar and phonic knowledge when reading. GREAT - there is NO indication that phonics should be taught out of context (despite some idiotic comments from politicians and the media). <p>And when talking about sounds and letters, there are constant reminders such as: 'It is important to relate these tasks to REAL words.' GREAT again. Meaning and context are always essential for deep learning.</p>	√√√
7	P/1/2 grammar: 'It needs to be remembered that students' ability to use grammar will exceed their ability to explicitly reflect on grammar. Young children, for example, will use complex sentences before they can explain how these are structured.' The draft paper sensibly shows that early grammar awareness can be achieved by asking questions such as 'Who or what?' (to identify noun group), 'Is doing what? or Did what?' (to identify verb group) and questions such as 'When?' and 'Where?' to identify the adverbials. ie. Questions to raise awareness, rather than rote learning of terms such a noun, verb, etc. A sensible approach in P/1/2.	√√√
8	Recognition that students learn at different rates and in different stages (despite introducing year levels since the Framing Paper was published).	√√
9	Indications for the sequence for teaching letter-sound relationships not informed by latest knowledge. Close to OK, but could have been better. Might be more detailed help later.	☹

10	Lack of clarity about the move from whole, complete language to words, word parts (onset and rime) and finally individual letters and sounds. It's ALMOST there, but not clear enough.	☹
11	Would have been better if normal conventions had been used to refer to letters and sounds. ie. letters inside single quotes (eg. 'b') and sounds inside slashes (eg. /b/)	☹
12	The document refers to sounds and phonemes as if they are the same thing. (A sound is a set of phonemes, all slightly different.) It's important for teachers to understand that – especially if they are to help students who have English as an Additional Language. In particular, many children in a classroom will hear the vowel sounds differently.	☹
13	Some of the 'content' elaborations are vague. eg. In Year 1, 'recognising most high frequency sight words when reading text.' Which high frequency sight words? Whose list? How many (50, 100, 200)?	☹
14	Overall, the draft document is a little hard to navigate. Language, literature and literacy have been successfully integrated in earlier curriculum documents; they "appear more disjointed" in the national draft (Mark Howie, Pres. English Teachers Association of NSW).	☹
15	The Framing Paper did not use year levels; it organised the curriculum into broader bands. Sensible! However, in the draft consultation paper, we now have year level expectations. For the primary years, this is problematic. Many teachers have multi-age classes or composite classes -- but all classes, including so-called 'straight' classes, are multi-ability classes. Which 'year level' do they address? The draft English paper also highlights the importance of integrated learning. How can teachers develop integrated units, for composite and multi-age classes, and still cover all the content demanded by the national curriculum?	☹

Additional Comments: May 2010

Since writing my initial response to the new Australian Curriculum (English) I've had more time to pull out the details about grammar and phonics (the two topics most commonly discussed in the media).

Brief observations

Grammar Plenty of details to guide teachers about what will be expected.
Based on functional grammar, but adoption of familiar terminology from traditional, Latin-based grammar.
Clear need for significant teacher professional learning opportunities.

Phonics Very few details. Inadequate guide.
Repetition of the need for meaning and grammar to support the learning of graphophonic connections. Good!
Difficult to get any sense of sequence. The sequence that can be detected is not based on current understandings or knowledge of child development.