

From training to teaching early language and literacy

The effectiveness of training to teach language and literacy in primary schools



All teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stages 1 and 2 must know how to teach early language skills, reading and writing effectively.

This survey set out to evaluate how well new teachers are trained to teach language and literacy, including phonics in primary schools. Inspectors followed 50 trainee teachers from their final training placement to the first and second terms of their first teaching posts. Forty-four of these trainees from 10 different initial teacher education providers took part from the start to the end of the survey.

Inspectors found variation in the quality of initial training and induction and considerable differences in the depth of knowledge and level of skills of the new teachers in teaching early language and literacy. Twenty-one of the 44 new teachers had good or better skills. Fourteen of these had received at least good training at every stage of their training and induction with sufficient focus and in depth learning. However, the survey also found that not enough new teachers had consistent high quality training during initial teacher education and induction to ensure that they developed good teaching skills, underpinned by a deep understanding of language development and the acquisition of literacy skills.

Effective training for teaching early language and literacy

The following factors were found to be the most important in ensuring that trainees and new teachers have the best possible chance of developing the necessary knowledge and expertise for teaching language and literacy well.

- Initial teacher education programmes need to ensure that every trainee has a good understanding of how children develop language and literacy skills and a good understanding of the prerequisite early developmental experiences children need to ensure later success.
- There must be ongoing rigorous evaluation of the knowledge and skills of trainees and new teachers specifically with regard to the teaching of language and literacy; training opportunities must be adapted accordingly.
- Trainees and new teachers must receive clear, robust and objective feedback on their performance, specifically about the teaching of language and literacy.
- Trainees and new teachers must be provided with many early opportunities to work alongside skilled colleagues in assessing, planning and evaluating pupils' learning, in order to ensure that from the outset, planning and teaching meet the different needs of all pupils.

Common features of the most effective initial training and induction

- A well-defined initial teacher education curriculum that included: ways of teaching language skills through modelling and skilful questioning; tutoring about the links between language skills and literacy; ways of teaching reading and writing; the use of systematic synthetic phonics and the links with spelling strategies, grammar and higher order comprehension skills.
- Precise audits and subsequent monitoring of trainees' skills; adjustments to tutoring in order to meet trainees' needs.
- Opportunities for trainees to develop a good understanding of effective assessment and how to use this to inform accurate planning.
- A good understanding of the quality of teaching of language and literacy and achievement of pupils in partner schools. This enabled the providers to plan good future placements and centre-based training for trainees.
- New teachers working as part of an effective team enabling good informal monitoring, joint planning and assessment.
- Well-trained school-based mentors with the necessary expertise to assess the skills and knowledge of the trainee or newly qualified teacher, and offer well-targeted support and challenge.
- School literacy coordinators had a high profile within training and induction with clear lines of support and accountability.
- Well-planned observations of literacy teaching during initial training and induction, including observations of phonics and skills tutoring sessions.
- Effective feedback about pupils' learning for trainees and new teachers from tutors, mentors and other school staff. This helped them to reflect on their teaching

skills and evaluate how much pupils were learning in their lessons.

- An understanding of the correlation between the performance of newly qualified teachers and the progress made by all the pupils in their classes.
- Good opportunities within initial training and induction for observing practice in different key stages within a range of schools.

Common barriers facing trainees and new teachers

- Too few opportunities to teach all aspects of language and literacy, and ways of teaching literacy skills across other subject areas.
- Too few opportunities to teach pupils of different ages and those with different needs.
- Observations of trainees and new teachers did not focus on specific areas of language and literacy, including phonics, and feedback was not precise about how pupils' learning could be improved.
- Areas for improvement in feedback did not build upon existing skills, they were not clearly defined and there were often too many.
- Schools did not have an accurate view of the quality of their own provision or the skills of different staff. They struggled to identify what the newly qualified teacher needed to learn and this often led to overly narrow, inward-looking induction.
- Insufficient expertise or capacity to support the newly qualified teacher in developing their teaching of language and literacy. New teachers in these situations were often isolated and lacked experience of different approaches in order to reflect upon and evaluate their own practice.

Characteristics of the best new teachers of language and literacy in this survey

The best new teachers had been well supported and consequently they had:

- a deep understanding of children's language development and understanding of the links between language skills and literacy skills
- sufficient knowledge of language and literacy skills across the age groups. They were able to adapt their teaching for different age groups as well as pupils with a range of abilities and attainment
- good questioning skills which helped pupils develop their thinking skills through talking and listening
- a good knowledge and understanding of phonics and how this supports reading and spelling. They understood how to help pupils use their skills learnt throughout the curriculum.

They also had ability to:

- create interesting experiences and activities that promoted the use of language and children's listening skills
- provide good models of spoken language as well as writing
- use accurate and precise pronunciation, blending and segmenting of words when teaching phonics
- assess learning in language and literacy accurately and understand what to teach next to enable pupils to progress quickly
- use a wide range of well-considered resources to help extend vocabulary and create an enthusiasm for writing
- assess pupils throughout lessons and target their questioning providing sufficient challenge and support for different pupils

- understand how to support pupils with special educational needs and those who are at an early stage of acquiring English
- be proficient in teaching language and literacy skills across the curriculum
- be highly reflective practitioners.

From training to teaching early language and literacy contains further details and case studies of effective practice.

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