

Contribution of Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy to longer term outcomes

(Input by Geoff Bateson to 19/6/08 Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy day, Birmingham)

Let's see – who is here today?:

- The city's Family Learning team: who engage with the term-by-term planning and supporting of Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes in Birmingham ... and we should just remind ourselves that this is the biggest such programme anywhere ... and which the team have grown/nurtured from next to nothing to where it is now.
- ... and schools, centres and adult learning providers from across the city: who engage in the day-to-day delivery of the programmes as part of their whole planned set of opportunities for children and parents to improve their skills, attitudes and relationships.

For both of these sets of people what happens in each classroom, in each session, is important ... the progress being made by each and every individual is of ongoing professional concern – getting things right; making things work – these are at the forefront of what we do.

It's that combination of the robust framework and flexibility of classroom delivery; that drive for success and the concern for individuals; that underpinning accountability and professional adaptability of teachers that has given Birmingham's family literacy, language and Numeracy its national reputation.

- ❑ I want to start with something that might seem a long way from all of that: The Machinery of Government, the city's aspirations for 2026 and the Treasury's intentions to 2020 – and work back from there to see just how important Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy work is to Birmingham in particular.

For the Treasury, Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy is hidden in a bigger set of departmental budgets and is probably just another rather distant/not fully understood vehicle that adds to the raft of ways the Government believes will lift the national platform of skills.

Government mechanisms are changing (we used to have the Local Education Authority, we now have Children's Services; we still have the Learning and Skills Council but will soon have a different adult funding organisation) and will continue to change, so funding may arrive down different routes and so on. Whatever the mechanisms, the government's view (through the Department of Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills) is the longer-term one to 2020 ... and beyond ...

by which (i.e. in 12 or more years time) the national intention is:

- that the vast majority (90-95%) of the population (adults and children) will have the skills, attitudes, behaviours:
 - to be economically resilient
 - to be socially and emotionally resilient
 - to be cohesive, as communities that are inclusive of others but which also challenge those people not moving themselves on.
- and that Local Authorities will do this by ironing out the current large differences between groups and areas of the city
 - will stretch many to reach somewhere around KS3/GCSE equivalent skills levels
 - will more rapidly accelerate those still developing the fundamental skills to function well in communicating (in words and numbers) in a range of contexts
- and that, on the way to doing all this, there will be improvements in family relationships; people will gain more confidence; people will more positively interact with public services
 - and there will be reduction in the likelihood of those antisocial behaviours and attitudes which take up a lot of public money that could be more usefully invested in better universal public services – better health; better education; better environment
 - ...
 - with the increased likelihood of children and young people (...and their parents ...) doing things like talking to each other, reading for enjoyment, being creative/inventive ...

Put like that, those long-term intentions begin to sound very familiar to anyone who (like us) has been involved in Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy. ... I can see people's minds going: "But that's what we do ...".

It's true (... maybe we could do a bit more to make sure that adult skills get recognised; maybe a bit more 'stretching' ...a bit more focusing on crossovers to home activities, and so on) – but, nevertheless, what the Treasury is expecting to happen in the future is already being put into place by the provision represented here today.

Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes are doing what they should be doing and are doing it well

- Let's just go back a step and think of that timescale again, just for a minute: '2020 and beyond':
The latest adult skills report says that by 2020:
95% of adults will be able to use numbers, think shapes etc at Entry 3 (KS2/KS3);
and 95% of adults will be able to communicate effectively using words at Level 1 (KS3/D-G at GCSE)

The youngest of those in the frame will be 16+ in that future time (2020 – in 12 years time) i.e. are in Children's Centres and primary schools now.

The oldest of those in the frame will be coming up to 60 in 2020 i.e. are aged around their mid-forties or under now.

i.e. the very people being targeted by Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes.

So, not only are family literacy, language and Numeracy activities in Birmingham doing the right stuff (and doing it well) but are key to developing the very age groups who the Treasury want to count as 'successful operators' in that future time.

Through the work being done by those here today (with the current children and parents of Birmingham) we are already writing some of that success into the city's future (not just as their individual futures, but as the collective future as a city).

So, all of us should be both a bit grateful, and a bit proud, of being part of something that when it works as well as it does can have leverage on the future of Birmingham as a whole.