

The primary curriculum: a creative approach (2nd edition)

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Reviewed by **Rebecca Bannocks**

(ex-UEL Primary PGCE)

The editors of this book have over 50 years' experience of teaching between them. The book has 13 chapters, each being an introduction to a subject taught at primary school. The majority of chapters, though not all, provide references for further reading. The references and suggestions for further reading at the end of the English chapter are not as up to date as those in subsequent chapters. As English is such an integral part of the primary National Curriculum (2014) it would have been beneficial to the reader had the author considered recent literature on the teaching of English. However, I am interested in this book mainly for the chapter on mathematics, so this review focuses on 'An introduction to mathematics'.

The author of this chapter, Gina Donaldson, has 11 years' teaching experience, a degree and MA in Mathematics and Education and is now a senior lecturer and Primary Mathematics team leader at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her wealth of experience in mathematics is evident throughout the chapter, as she is able to explain complex mathematical ideas in a way that is accessible to not only experienced teachers, but newly qualified and trainee teachers also.

The chapter's aims are clear and well laid out (as they are in all the chapters), namely to provide new teachers with a framework to understand and critically evaluate experiences of mathematics and to challenge one's own principles of what good practice in mathematics is, based on an understanding of theoretical ideas and research findings. In my opinion, Donaldson achieves these aims.

She does so by encouraging the reader to reflect on their own experience of being taught mathematics, in particular, what the focus of mathematics was. I found this particularly useful, as Donaldson explains that 'the staging of the [curriculum] content is based on the view that mathematics is a set of knowledge and skills, which is generally hierarchical ... [H]owever, mathematical learning might not always develop in a linear fashion' (p. 30). She goes on to explain that an alternative way to consider the content of the mathematics curriculum is with regard to the skills of problem-solving and mathematical reasoning. I found this particularly useful as, whilst reading this chapter, I experienced some training on mastery in mathematics and I found that Donaldson's explanation of mathematical reasoning, instrumental understanding and relational understanding really helped me to understand how I can develop mastery in mathematics in the children I teach.

Throughout this chapter the author makes strong links between research and the Early Years Framework and the National Curriculum. Points raised by Donaldson are also consistently supported by a range of sources and case studies. Furthermore, Donaldson's classroom experience is evident as she highlights the various difficulties teachers face when teaching mathematics and she provides insightful and helpful suggestions to support teachers.

A great deal of information is presented throughout the chapter, and it would have been even better had some sections, such as learning through play and assessment, been covered in more detail. However, this chapter is only an introduction to mathematics.

This book is a valuable resource for trainee teachers, newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers who want to reflect upon their experiences of learning and teaching mathematics. I intend to continue using it to develop my practice across all areas of the primary curriculum.