

# CELCIS REACH: Prof Sue Ellis| Education conference keynote address

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Sue Ellis, Professor of Education at University of Strathclyde presented a keynote at the CELCIS Education Conference on what a literacy curriculum could look like if we want everyone to have a chance. here she talks about the main points from her presentation.

It's important that readers learn all the cognitive knowledge and skills about how you read and how you write, but it's also equally important that they actually develop a sense of identity about the sort of reader that they are, about the sort of learner that they are, that they develop a very strong set of understandings about the sort of books that they want to read and that they're enabled to become part of strong social network. If you think about the most recent books you read there's a very high probability those books were actually recommended by friends. So, making sure that children in care are part of social networks around reading is just as important as making sure that they've got the cognitive knowledge and skills that are required.

We do that in different ways - it's important that they obviously come to school and that they're happy in school, but it's also important that we have a literacy curriculum which is not so busy and not so skills focused that we actually don't make time and don't make space for children to talk about the books that they want to read, the sort of readers that they want to become and how they are responding to books, the connections that they see between books and their own lives, the sorts of puzzles that they see in books, so that they get an opportunity to bring their life to the book and actually share other people's lives as they come to books as well. So, all of that is something that in a sense children can do for each other but actually it's much harder for a teacher to do. What teachers need to do is create spaces that allow that to happen. Schools can make huge assumptions about why literacy is important and they can assume that everybody assumes that literacy is about enjoying yourself, it's about relaxing, it's about letting your mind drift off. In fact, for lots and lots of communities that's not what literacy about. Literacy is about work and it's about getting a job, or it may not even be relevant at all. So, in the school curriculum we have to work really really hard to make sure that children actually understand the different points of literacy and what reading can do for them, emotionally and socially and intellectually. It's not just about

telling children how to read it's about helping children learn to become readers. Mark Twain famously said that someone who doesn't read has no practical advantage over someone who can't read and I think we need to take that very very seriously in schools. We need a lot more work done on how children in care actually engage with the literacy curriculum, on which bits of the literacy curriculum are really important for them on their out of school literacy experiences and how those can be acknowledged and used as a springboard for learning in school, so that when they come to school they actually find the things that they've learned out of school are acknowledged and celebrated rather than ignored. Gender is really important because we know that different readers respond very differently. We know that it's actually not terribly helpful for schools to separate out books for boys or resources that are good for boys and books for girls, because that actually makes the gender effects wider rather than narrower, but what really matters is that we actually help pupils to think about the sort of books that they enjoy reading, the books that give them the sort of emotional and intellectual satisfaction that they want and we help them find those books and engage with them and through that engagement they will discover a whole host of other books as well.

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