Introduction

This paper outlines some of the main influences on the National Literacy Strategy

which was implemented in English primary schools in 1998. The paper draws upon a

Review of Research and Other Related Evidence (Beard, 1999) and has been prepared

with an international audience in mind.

What is the National Literacy Strategy?

The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was established in 1997 by the incoming UK

government to raise standards of literacy in English primary schools over a five to ten

year period. (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own curricula and

Education Departments and are not formally affected by the NLS.) The Strategy was

the result of the work of a Literacy Task Force which had been set up by the Shadow

Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, in May 1996. The

Task Force published a preliminary consultation report in February 1997 (LTF, 1997a)

and a final report in August 1997. In its final report (LTF, 1997b) the Task Force set

out the details of a 'steady, consistent strategy' for raising standards of literacy which

could be sustained over a long period of time and be made a central priority for the

education service as a whole.

What are the Main Strands of the National Literacy Strategy ?

The main strands of the Strategy include the following:

1. A national target that, by 2002, 80% of 11 year olds should reach the standard expected for their age in English (Level 4); (The proportion reaching this standard in 1996 was 57%.)

2. A *Framework for Teaching* (DfEE, 1998a) which (i) sets out termly teaching objectives for the 5-11 age range and (ii) provides a practical structure of time and class management for a daily Literacy Hour.

The *Framework* notes that further literacy work should be productively linked to other curriculum areas and that additional time may also be needed for:

- reading to the class (e.g. in end of day sessions)
- pupils' own independent reading (for interest and pleasure)
- extended writing (especially for older pupils).

3. A programme of professional development for all primary teachers, centred on a *Literacy Training Pack* (DfEE, 1998b). This *Pack* is made up of course booklets, overhead transparencies and audio and videotapes to support three in-service training days in 1998-9 and further training in after-school sessions.

4. Other community-based elements of the Strategy include a media campaign and a series of events in a National Year of Reading (1998-9), Summer Literacy Schools and a range of recommendations for other agencies and institutions.

How Did the National Literacy Strategy Come About?

There were a number of influences that shaped the nature and structure of the National

Literacy Strategy. It may be helpful to see some as 'predisposing' influences,

implying

that literacy teaching in England was in need of radical change. Over the previous

thirty years, standards in literacy in England had not increased in line with the hopes

and expectations of policy makers. The teaching of early literacy had become largely

individualised and appeared to be out of line with the practices suggested by school

effectiveness research. The teaching of early reading often largely comprised hearing

children read books in an order suggested by commercial publishers. Accumulating

inspection evidence suggested that there was often relatively little 'teaching' per se.

Furthermore, England (and Wales, according to Brooks *et al*., 1996) appeared to have

a long tail of under-achievement, which seemed to call for the kinds of direct

interactive teaching approaches which had been successful with 'at risk' pupils in the

USA and Australia.

If these were the influences that predisposed the Literacy Task Force towards the

possible structure of a National Literacy Strategy, then the 'precipitating' influence

was the early success of the National Literacy Project (NLP) which had been set up by

the previous government in its final year of office. The NLP reflected many of the

implications of the school effectiveness research and shared several of the priorities of

the overseas literacy research with at risk pupils. The NLP was also led by a senior

member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, John Stannard. He was not only very familiar

with the inspection evidence of recent years but also with the findings from the school

effectiveness and overseas literacy research. He saw these influences as having major
implications for school improvement and for changing the way that literacy was
taught in English primary schools (Stannard, 1997).

All these influences are set out below to show the time-scales involved.

Circa 1988-97
'Predisposing Influences':
International Comparisons of Reading Standards
School Effectiveness Research
Accumulating Inspection Evidence
Literacy Research Evidence

1996

'Precipitating Influence':

The National Literacy Project

- Literacy Hour in 15 LEAs

- Draft *Framework for Teaching*

(Termly objectives at 'text level',

'sentence level' and 'word level')

1996-7

Literacy Task Force

- National Targets

- NLP appraisal

- National Professional Development Strategy
- National Year of Reading (1998-9)

National Literacy Strategy

for 1997-2007

National Targets

Literacy Hour encouraged in all primary schools

Framework for Teaching sent to all primary schools

NLS *Training Pack* sent to all primary schools

National Year of Reading (1998-9) etc.

Some of the main features of each of these influences will now be briefly discussed in turn.

International Comparison of Reading Standards

Standards in literacy among English primary school children have remained largely stable 1948-1996 (Brooks, 1998). Compared with other countries, English reading standards are similar to those in a 'middle' group of countries. In the middle and upper parts of the range of scores, children from England performed as well as those in countries much higher in the rank order. However, England has a long 'tail' of under-achievement (Brooks *et al*., 1996).

The comparison of literacy standards between countries raises various issues about cultural and linguistic biases (see Elley, 1994, and Purves, 1992, for a discussion of

these issues). The study of literacy standards within countries, but between different points in time, raises additional issues. The National Curriculum assessments (SATs) are criterion-referenced and can accommodate shifts in the distributions of performance without re-standardisation being necessary (TGAT, 1988). At the same time, the specific level descriptions have annually to be translated into different test formats to avoid the difficulties created by excessive 'teaching to the test'. This re-writing raises further questions about year on year comparisons. As Level 4 in English is being used as a national target for 80% of eleven year olds by 2002, there is a concomitant need for the body which oversees the national testing, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), to be rigorous in ensuring the consistency of Level 4 requirements (LTF, 1997a, p.7; Sainsbury and Twist, 1999).

School Effectiveness Research

The NLS reflects the implications of school effectiveness research. School effectiveness is generally gauged by the further progress which pupils make than might be expected from consideration of the school's intake. The measures are normally in basic subjects, especially reading and numeracy, and examinations. The most valid research of this kind is longitudinal, so that cohorts can be followed over time. Leading researchers in the field stress that the outcomes from their work are not appropriate for the production of 'blue-print' schools (e.g. Mortimore, 1991).

A meta-analysis by Jaap Scheerens has identified two characteristics of school effectiveness which are found in multiple studies (Scheerens, 1992):

(i) **structured teaching**:   making clear what has to be learnt

dividing material into manageable units

teaching in a well-considered sequence

encouraging pupils to use hunches and prompts

regular testing for progress

immediate feedback.

(ii) **effective learning time**: Whole class teaching can often be superior to individualised teaching because, in the latter, the teacher has to divide attention and the net result per pupil is lower.

Similar factors are found in a meta-analysis of the effective classroom (Creemers, 1994; see also Reynolds, 1998 and Teddlie and Reynolds, 1999).

An earlier British study is generally seen as a landmark in school effectiveness research (Mortimore *et al*., 1988). Subsequent investigations have confirmed the importance of primary school provision:

- once pupils begin school, the school itself can have a greater influence than background; and

- this variance may be greater in primary schools than in secondary schools (Sammons, Hillmore and Mortimore, 1995);

- positive primary school factors affect examination attainment at the age of 16+ (the end of compulsory schooling) (Sammons, Nuttall, Cuttance and Thomas, 1995).

The NLS takes up the implications of Scheerens' analysis in several ways. Firstly, it stresses the importance of direct teaching by the use of whole class teaching in the first

half of the Literacy Hour and the maintenance of direct teaching with groups, and then with the class again, in the second half. Secondly, it maximises effective learning time by ensuring that there is a dedicated Literacy Hour during each school day, with further suggestions on providing for additional literacy learning time during the rest of the day (DfEE, 1998a, p.14). Thirdly, it draws directly on the National Curriculum in the content of the *Framework* and assists the related 'opportunities to learn' by adopting a clear objectives-based approach for each primary school term.

Accumulating Inspection Evidence

Important issues for the teaching of literacy are raised in the annual reports on the teaching of English which are produced from school inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Since it was set up in 1992, Ofsted has inspected all government maintained schools in England every four years; more often if schools are deemed by Ofsted to be 'failing' overall. The inspection reports provide broad indications of how different aspects of the National Curriculum for English are being taught. Taking 1989 as a starting point (the first year of the National Curriculum), there has been a pattern of findings which provides strong support for many elements of the NLS.

The reports and commentaries contain comments which indicate the need for (i) many schools to strengthen the ways in which some aspects of literacy are taught and for (ii) substantial in-service support to be given to develop teachers' professional knowledge related to these aspects. In particular, there are recurrent comments on the need for the following to be strengthened in many schools:

i.   the use of direct teaching, related to clear objectives and including skilful questioning;

ii. the provision of effective learning time;

iii. the appropriate balance of teaching methods and range of tasks provided;

iv. the use of systematic phonics;

v.   the teaching of writing, including provision for a range of writing tasks and the diagnosis of pupils' weaknesses and related learning needs;

vi. the extension of reading skills beyond the initial stages;

vii. teachers' subject knowledge in literacy teaching.

The National Literacy Strategy incorporates a variety of features to accommodate these:

i.   **Teaching Approach** There is provision for extensive and consistent direct teaching of literacy, related to an objectives-based curriculum *Framework* and which also delineates the range of questioning that teachers can use when working with children in this way. There is detailed guidance on training pupils how to work on their own so that the teacher can focus on a group at a time.

ii. **Effective Learning Time** is provided for through a dedicated Literacy Hour, together with indicators of how at least three more aspects of literacy development can be fostered at other points in the day: individual reading, reading to the class and extended writing.

iii. **Balance and Extension** are major features of the National Literacy Strategy *Framework for Teaching*. There is provision for consistent attention to the different levels of language and literacy learning by the systematic use of the text-sentence-word level sub-sections in the *Framework*. The sub-sections provide for a comprehensive mapping of each part of the National Curriculum, 'Key Skills', 'Range' and 'Standard English and Language Study'. Illustrative details are included, particularly to encourage attention to the role of different skills and types of text in assisting the extension of literacy throughout the primary years.

iv. **Phonics** Similarly, there is provision for consistent and systematic attention to the teaching of the English alphabetic writing system, in both reading and writing. The specific phonics and spelling work in Years R to 2 is also set out in an appendix (DfEE, 1998a, pp.64-65). This emphasis reflects the intention of the incoming government in 1997 that it would 'encourage the use of the most effective teaching methods, including phonics for reading...' (Labour Party, 1997, p.8).

v. **Writing** There is detailed attention to the compositional and presentational aspects of writing through the 'text level' work in composition; the 'sentence level' work in grammatical awareness, sentence construction and punctuation and revision; and the 'word level' work in spelling, vocabulary and handwriting. The *Framework* (p.14) also notes that extended writing may need to be tackled in independent work outside the Literacy Hour, thus recognising the central role of reading and writing in many subjects across the curriculum.

vi. **Teachers' Professional Knowledge** The National Literacy Strategy supports staff development opportunities on an unprecedented scale, in that three full days of training (plus after-school sessions) are provided for the staff in every primary school. The *Training Pack* and its audio-visual components structure this training through carefully timed activities, discussion opportunities and source material. The *Framework* includes a Glossary of terms used. The NLS appears to reflect the belief that 'there is a link between the investment in staff development and the learning of children' (Joyce and Showers, 1995, p.17).

Literacy Research Evidence

The NLS has clearly been influenced by the work of Bob Slavin and his colleagues in the USA. Slavin presented a paper at the launch of the Literacy Task Force Consultation Report (Slavin, 1997). His work at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk in Baltimore has consistently supported several features of educational provision now adopted by the NLS:

• a fast-paced, structured curriculum;

- direct, interactive teaching;

- systematic phonics in the context of interesting text;

- a combination of shared and paired reading and writing;

- early interventions for pupils who have not made expected progress after one year at school.

These are very similar to the approaches adopted by the NLS, with the exception of the last one. The evaluation of the National Literacy Strategy may indicate whether it needs to be extended to provide additional systematic intervention for children at risk after one year of schooling.

A similar strategy especially to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils is being implemented in Melbourne, Australia, in the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP) led by Carmel Crévola and Peter Hill (1998). The project is in part a response to the evidence cited in the Commission on Reading of the USA National Academy of Education: that a country receives highest returns on investment in education from the early years of schooling when children are first learning to read and write (see Adams, 1990). Crévola and Hill draw on evidence that schools only have a narrow 'window of opportunity' to make a difference in helping pupils with difficulties in literacy learning. Very little evidence exists for the success of programmes designed to correct reading problems beyond the second year of schooling. However, they draw upon a range of evidence, including Slavin's (e.g. Wasik and Slavin, 1993), that

dramatic improvements are achievable within the context of a fully implemented, comprehensive strategy that involves both system- and school-wide commitment and co-ordination.

Crévola and Hill emphasise that the starting point of all comprehensive early literacy prevention and intervention strategies is attitudinal: high expectations; a belief in the capacity of all students to make progress, given sufficient time and support; and a relentless determination to persist with those who are not experiencing success.

The National Literacy Project

The National Literacy Project (NLP) was set up in the Spring of 1996 in 15 local Education Authorities. It had the following aims:

- to improve standards of literacy in participating primary schools in line with national expectations;

- to provide detailed support to schools and teachers through a structured programme and consultancy support;

- through the national network, to develop detailed, practical guidance on teaching methods and activities, and to disseminate these to the project schools;

- to disseminate the work of the NLP to other, non-participating LEAs and institutions;

- to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme.

Participating schools implemented two key structures, a *Framework for Teaching* and the Literacy Hour. These were earlier versions of what were subsequently to be included in the NLS. The *Framework* provided schools with a means of shifting the emphasis in planning for the revised National Curriculum for English (DfE, 1995) from 'what' to 'how'. This was done by using three strands (text level, sentence level and word level) to provide coverage, balance and progression in literacy teaching. The purpose of this *Framework* was to present teachers not with increased prescription but with a wide range of new and challenging decisions about tasks, activities and methods (Stannard, 1997).

Teaching Objectives

Teachers were given further assistance in this by the use of objectives for each of the three levels of teaching for each term of the seven primary school years. In Y1-6, there were separate, sometimes overlapping, objectives for each of the 18 terms. For the Reception age-range (four year olds, to whom the National Curriculum does not formally apply until they reach the age of five), there were objectives for the whole year. This yearly provision helps to cater for variations in local admissions policies: some pupils begin school at the beginning of the school year when they are become five; others at the beginning of the respective school term.

The use of objectives for curriculum planning draws on the tradition of educational thinking going back to the work of Ralph Tyler. Tyler (1949, p.3) acknowledges that excellent educational work can be done by teachers who do not have a clear conception of goals but who have an intuitive sense of what is good teaching. He

adds, however, that, if an educational programme is to be planned and if efforts for continued improvement are to be made, it is very necessary to have some conception of the goals that are being pursued. These educational objectives become the criteria by which materials are selected, content outlined, teaching approaches developed and assessment procedures prepared.

The NLS extends the use of objectives in innovative ways beyond the programmes of study set out in the National Curriculum. For example, its structured and routinised approach allows teachers to share and explain the objectives with their pupils. This sharing can develop a common sense of purpose in the classroom. It can increase a sense of responsibility in independent working. The recursive features in the objectives can extend the sense of purpose across yearly transitions. Shared objectives, translated into appropriate language, can also help to focus on key points in plenary sessions.

The Literacy Hour

The daily amount of time allocated to dedicated literacy teaching was derived from the Final Report of the review of the National Curriculum and its Assessment by Sir Ron Dearing. Assuming a 36 week teaching year, to allow a margin for the induction of new pupils, assessment work, school events and educational visits (Dearing, 1994, p.30), the Dearing Report recommended that 180 hours of English be taught directly in Key Stage 1 (5-7 year olds), an hour a day in the 36 weeks referred to above. A related recommendation was that another 36 hours were to be taught through other subjects. In Key Stage 2 (7-11 year olds), the figures were 162 and 18 respectively.

The General Model of Reading and Writing in the *Framework for Teaching*

The model of reading and writing used in the *Framework* uses a consistent sub-division between 'word level', 'sentence level' and 'text level' work. These distinctions are common in linguistic description:

- The word is the smallest free-standing unit of linguistic description. (Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning but may not be independent e.g. 'un-' or '-ness'; words can also be single morphemes e.g. 'book'.)

- The sentence is the largest linguistic unit within which grammatical rules systematically operate.

- A text (sometimes referred to as 'discourse') is a collection of one or more sentences that display a coherent theme and appropriate grammatical cohesion.

Other more detailed distinctions can be built on these. For instance, phonemes, the smallest sound units which contrast with each (e.g. /b/ or /r/), exist below word level. Clauses are part of sentence level. Phrases exist between sentence/clause level and word level. The word/sentence/text level distinctions are a convenient way of referring to the visual features of what we read and write and are helpful in providing consistent points of reference for teachers and pupils when talking about the processes and products of literacy learning.

In recent years, there have been two substantial changes in how fluent reading is understood: firstly in relation to how the relationships between word recognition and

the use of context are viewed and secondly in relation to the role of phonological processing (see the section below on Phonics and Spelling). For some years several influential writers argued that fluent reading was characterised by increasing use of contextual cues and minimal use of visual cues. In the last twenty years a great deal of evidence has been put forward in support of the opposite view: that it is less-skilled readers who are more dependent on context in word recognition. The word recognition processes of skilled readers are so rapid and automatic that they generally do not need to rely on contextual information - except to decide between homonyms. These changing views of the nature of fluent reading and their influences on educational practice have been discussed by researchers such as Marilyn Jager Adams (1990; 1991); Jessie Reid (1993); Keith and Paula Stanovich (1995) and Charles Perfetti (1995).

It should be noted that, although the skills of the fluent reader are distinguished by fast, context-free, word recognition, where the effective reader does use context extensively is in comprehension. Indeed, Perfetti (1995) concludes that the hallmark of skilled reading is fast context-free word identification and rich context-dependent text understanding.

The Evaluation of the National Literacy Project

The NLP was evaluated by Ofsted and the National Foundation for Educational Research using data from 250 schools. The latter's test results revealed a significant and substantial improvement over the 18 month period. Final test scores had improved by approximately six standardised score points for Y3/4 and Y5/6 pupils, equivalent to 8 to 12 months progress over and above what is expected in these ages.

Girls had higher average scores than boys and made more progress during the project. Children eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language had lower scores,   but all these groups also made statistically significant progress. All ethnic groups benefited equally (Sainsbury *et al.,* 1998).

Some Key Sources in the Field

A range of research evidence has been drawn upon to inform recent developments in literacy education in England. The range includes sources that have psychological, sociological, linguistic and literary perspectives, as well as work in curriculum development. The following table includes some extracts from the associated *Review of Research and Related Evidence* (Beard, 1999) which further illustrate the range of the sources that support current policy and practice in English primary schools.

THE RECEPTION AGE-RANGE	Reception practice is likely to be assisted by some form of collaboration between homes and schools to promote early literacy development (e.g. Hannon, 1995; Weinberger, 1996).
	Researchers have associated phonological development with early success in learning to read for some years (Goswami, 1999). There is a significant connection between children's phonological development and their later reading success, linking oracy and literacy in highly specific ways. Children's phonological development follows a clear pattern, from being aware of syllables, to being aware of onsets and rimes within syllables, to being aware of phonemes (Treiman and Zukowski, 1996).

Children's ability to write their name without a model has been found to be correlated with a number of aspects of writing at 7 years (Blatchford, 1991). In addition, there is a strong link between children's early letter-name knowledge and their subsequent reading development (Blatchford *et al.*, 1987; Blatchford and Plewis, 1990). However, the results on later attainment from the direct teaching of letter names have been largely inconclusive (Riley, 1996).

The Reception age-range warranted a separate section in the *Review* because its teachers have to strike a balance between promoting early progress and avoiding an inappropriate emphasis on academic provision for children so young.

Concerns about inappropriate provision are valid but they have also to be related to the findings of a three year study of 33 schools by Barbara Tizard *et al*. (1988). Children made relatively more progress in literacy learning between beginning school and the end of the Reception year than they did in any of the following three school years (see also Ofsted, 1998).

SHARED READING

Shared reading, in which teacher and pupils simultaneously read aloud a large format text, has been especially promoted in the writing of Don Holdaway (1979, 1982). He was particularly interested in developing methods which resembled the visual intimacy with print which characterises the pre-school book experience of parents reading with their children. Interestingly, Holdaway's early work did not involve commercially produced big books. Instead it involved the teacher transcribing popular texts in bold print onto large 'newsprint' paper or overhead transparencies. (Holdaway, 1979, p. 66).

In subsequent publications, Holdaway elaborates further on some of the key principles in successful shared book experience:

- the texts used need to be those which children enjoy

- the teacher needs to present new material with wholehearted enjoyment

- the ancient satisfactions of chant and song can be used to sustain the feelings of involvement among pupils

- teaching-learning sequences can be developed to revisit favourite poems, jingles, songs and stories; to attend to words, letters and sounds; to use a new story to model and explain word-solving strategies; to link shared reading to independent and group reading and writing (Holdaway, 1982).

GUIDED READING

'Guided reading' is an approach in which the teacher works with a small group of pupils who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). The teacher (i) introduces a text to the group; (ii) works briefly with individuals as they simultaneously read their own copy at their own individual pace; and (iii) may select one or two points for the whole group to consolidate or extend their reading experience. The ultimate goal of guided reading is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully. It has several advantages over hearing children read on an entirely individual basis. It substantially increases the time which children actually spend reading. It creates a helpful social context for reading and responding to texts. It allows the teacher to make considered decisions in drawing the children's attention to significant points of interest.

SHARED WRITING

Shared writing, the joint construction of a text by teacher and pupils, has attracted increasing attention in educational publications. It has built upon research which has revealed the complexity of the writing process (Hayes and Flower, 1980; Hayes, 1996) and the recognition of the value of teachers modelling what is involved.

After over a hundred experiments into the psychological aspects of writing, Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia (1987, pp. 362-3) make a number of recommendations:

- pupils (and teachers) need to be made aware of the full extent of the composing process;

- the thinking that goes on in composition needs to be modelled by the teacher;

- pupils will benefit from reviewing their own writing strategies and knowledge;

- pupils need a supportive and congenial writing environment, but will also benefit from experiencing the struggles that are an integral part of developing writing skill;

- pupils may also benefit from using various 'facilitating' techniques to help them through the initial stages of acquiring more complex processes e.g. listing words which may be used, points which may be made or the wording of final sentences etc., in advance of tackling the full text.

GUIDED WRITING

Guided writing is a pragmatic aspect of managing children's independent writing in the Literacy Hour. It allows the teacher to support and encourage pupils who are tackling a similar task and to monitor their use of the range of skills and processes in writing (Hayes and Flower, 1980; Hayes, 1996). Close observation of pupils gives teachers information on the way pupils are composing

a text, the fluency of their transcription skills (grammatical order, handwriting and spelling) and how far they are re-reading and revising. As in guided reading, the sense of shared context assists the teacher in exploiting common concerns and to draw upon the key links between reading and writing.

Meta-analyses of research evidence suggests that provision for writing development is most effective if writing is undertaken when teachers and pupils discuss and tackle targeted writing tasks in a spirit of inquiry and problem-solving (Hillocks, 1986; 1995). The potential of guided writing is further explored in Beard (2000).

PHONICS AND SPELLING

The National Literacy Strategy *Framework* follows the recommendations of such reviews of research evidence as that in *Beginning to Read* by Marilyn Jager Adams which was commissioned by the USA Congress (Adams, 1990). Adams' conclusions were that teaching approaches in which systematic code instruction is included along with the reading and writing of meaningful text results in superior reading achievement overall, both for low-readiness and better prepared pupils (Adams, 1993, p. 213).

There is now much more interest in the nature of the English alphabetic writing system: 26 alphabetic letters are used as graphemes, singly and as digraphs (e.g. <sh>) and trigraphs (e.g. <igh>) to represent approximately 44 speech sounds (phonemes). As a recent major survey of English spelling shows (Carney, 1994), the correspondences between phonemes and graphemes are in some cases highly consistent: the phoneme /b/ is represented by the letter <b> 98% of the time. Such research is an important reminder that

phonics teaching needs to be well-informed and undertaken with a sense of proportion regarding the patterns and inconsistencies of the English orthography.

One of the most influential publications on spelling in recent years has been a paper by Richard Gentry (1982). Gentry outlines a five-stage model of spelling development, using data from a case study by Glenda Bissex (1980) of her own son's early writing. The NLS *Framework* brings phonics and spelling together in the word level strand, and by providing different objectives under 'spelling strategies' which allow for the visual and aural aspects of learning to support each other. These strategies also reflect how success in spelling involves understanding other kinds of links between language and literacy. This understanding needs to include vocabulary connections between words which are pronounced differently (e.g. medicine/medical). It also needs to include grammatical influences on words which are pronounced differently (e.g. the use of -ed in kissed, purred and booted). John Mountford (1998) explores these different influences on the spelling system.

LITERATURE AND POETRY

For many years, children's literature has been an area of substantial strength in British education (e.g. Meek *et al.*, 1977; Tucker, 1993; Fox, 1995; Styles, 1998).

Provision of literature for children also needs to be informed by what they choose to read in their leisure time (Hall and Coles, 1999).

The conspicuous structures and forms of poetry arouse interest and invite investigation. Teachers can also explain what to expect from

particular poems and help children to understand the techniques from which poetry is constructed (Morse, 1995).

READING AND WRITING FOR INFORMATION

The EXEL project at Exeter University has been an important influence on the NLS *Framework*. The project has drawn together a range of skills and strategies to form the EXIT model ('Extending Interactions With Text'). The model maps ten process stages and related questions from activation of previous knowledge, through establishing purposes and locating information, to interacting with a text and communicating the information to others (Wray and Lewis, 1997). To assist children in the writing of non-fiction, the project has used a number of 'frames', skeleton outlines of starters, connectives and sentence modifiers, to help to 'scaffold' early attempts to write in particular genres (Lewis and Wray, 1995).

GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

Contemporary approaches to grammar tend to be concerned with the ways in which different words and phrases add interest to texts and reflect particular genre features (Halliday, 1985; Perera, 1988). Recent investigations by Nigel Hall and Anne Robinson (1996) have highlighted how little is known about how punctuation is taught and learned. It is salutary to note that the use of punctuation marks in books for children is often inconsistent from one author to another. Katharine Perera's research has shown very different approaches in authors' practices and how these variations are accompanied by marked differences in how several grammatical structures are presented, including the use of pronouns and reduced forms ('I'll' etc.) (Perera, 1993; 1996).

Conclusion

The National Literacy Strategy is underpinned by evidence from survey, experimental and observational research; analyses and discussions from literary scholarship; and reports from curriculum development projects and school inspections. The relationship between research and practice, in this as in other areas of education, is not a perfect one. It is a relationship which is mediated by many other factors (see Beard, 1999, pp. 11-15).

Overall, however, there is substantial evidence to support the case for raising literacy standards in the United Kingdom and considerable support for modifying the ways in which reading and writing are taught in many primary schools. The success of the NLS will be influenced by a widespread professional recognition of the need for the modification referred to above and a willingness to accommodate the challenges to knowledge and practice which it will bring. The complementary nature of much of the evidence is a clear indicator that, if it is widely and sensitively implemented, the National Literacy Strategy offers a major promise of significantly raising standards and of improving the life-chances of thousands of children.

[5660 words]

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