

## **A framework for English? Or a vehicle for literacy?: English teaching in England in the age of the Strategy**

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*ABSTRACT: This article considers the evolution and impact on schools in England of the “Framework for English” since its introduction in 2001, a national initiative that follows on from the National Literacy Strategy, which focused on primary schools. Whilst acknowledging that the Framework is part of a whole school policy, “The Key Stage Three Strategy”, I concentrate on its direct impact on the school subject “English” and on standards within that subject. Such a discussion must incorporate some consideration of the rise of “Literacy” as a dominant term and theme in England (and globally) and its challenge to a politically controversial and much contested curriculum area, i.e. “English”. If the Framework is considered within the context of the Literacy drive since the mid-1990s then it can be seen to be evolving within a much changed policy context and therefore likely to change substantially in the next few years. In a global context England has been regarded for some time as at the extreme edge of standards-driven policy and practice. It is hoped that the story of “English” in England may be salutary to educators from other countries.*

*KEYWORDS: English, literacy, Framework for English, Literacy Strategy.*

### **PREAMBLE**

Education in England has increasingly become subject to a very labour intensive system of command and control. To an international audience this system will be recognisable but also potentially bewildering. It seems important, therefore, to explain some of the key elements in this system before making reference to them.

- *The National Curriculum:* The National Curriculum was introduced in 1989. This is a mandatory, that is, legal framework that prescribes all school subjects, for example, English, for pupils aged 5-16. Each curriculum area has a document to work from.
- *Levels:* Levels are the descriptors of students’ progress; in English they are divided into levels for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. As the Government has set national targets for level achievements at different ages, these levels have become hugely, politically significant and have dominated much of school life.
- *The National Literacy Strategy:* Originating in 1997, this is not statutory but “advisory” and consists of an elaborate matrix which includes not only documents but also an army of “consultants” and “advisors”, policies and targets, and so on.
- *National Numeracy Strategy:* This is a parallel strategy to the Literacy initiative but on a much smaller scale and with almost no political significance.

- *The Literacy Hour*: From its beginning the NLS required all teachers to run a Literacy Hour everyday. They were given guidance in the form of the diagram of a clock with the exact number of minutes that they should spend on each section of the “hour”. Teachers have reported that inspectors often used a stopwatch when observing teachers.
- *The Progress Units*: These were sets of materials designed to be used by teaching assistants with small groups of pupils who were failing to reach the expected levels.
- *The Framework for English* (for ages 11-14): This is also advisory and was designed to follow on from the NLS, beginning in 2001, and is similarly a matrix, characterised by its focus on large numbers of teaching objectives.
- *SATs (Standard Assessment Tests)*: These are taken by all pupils at the age of 7, 11 and 14 in English, Maths and Science. Children achieve Levels, these are totalled for each school and the results published annually in the press and other places. They are not adjusted to reflect the economic or social catchment of individual school.
- *Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education)*: This body’s remit is to inspect the standards of teaching and learning in all schools in England. It has the power to recommend the closure of “failing schools”.

## INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to review the Framework for English, entering its fourth year from September, 2004. It and its parent, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), have now been established in England for long enough to mean that for newer members of the English teaching profession the Framework is all they have known. My research clearly indicates that older members of the profession, who have many other “reforms” with which to compare it, when asked about their views, have typically been strongly negative about some aspects both of the Framework and the NLS (Goodwyn, 2003). This will be discussed in detail below.

However, there is much controversy and debate about large-scale initiatives such as the NLS and the Framework, principally because they now have such a high political profile and because we seem to have very little hard evidence to draw on that comes from a truly independent source. The evidence of Ofsted, for example, will be considered and questioned below. There is some contrast here with the National Numeracy Strategy, which has run in parallel with the NLS, which has been challenged in a rigorous and evidence-based way from the beginning by the research team at Kings College (see below).

The Framework for English cannot be understood without some examination of the longer life of the NLS itself. There is just as much debate about the latter’s success, but there is a good deal more evidence to go with the opinions, including a three-year evaluation by an independent, international team from the Ontario Institute of Education headed by Michael Fullan.<sup>1</sup> This evaluative strategy begs the question of

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<sup>1</sup> The appointment of the team from the Ontario Institute of Education could be seen as a very intelligent appointment indeed. Michael Fullan has a very high reputation as a key figure in the school improvement field. However, the NLS and NNS are about raising standards in quite specific content

where we will benefit from comparably independent evidence? I think it reasonable to say that one outcome of the intense politicisation of education in the 1990s has been to reduce the credibility of Ofsted as a source of evidence (see, for example, Wyse, 2003). Its evidence is not open to external critique and its moderation practices are private and not accountable outside Ofsted. This point should not be misinterpreted as anything other than a factual statement. Ofsted do supply a great deal of information that stimulates our thinking (and I include a good example below). But the current organisation cannot be compared to the HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectors) as a genuine source of independent critique and advice; this is a very real loss to the educational community in England. Ofsted's views on the NLS and the Framework will still be highly important and influential. However, as they will form a basis for how teachers are to be judged and therefore I will make reference to them below.

The article is structured around four key themes, the origins of the Framework, its purpose, its impact so far and, more speculatively, where does it seem to be going?

## **FROM “FALLING” STANDARDS TO LITERACY TASKFORCE**

Notions of “standards of literacy” and political power have become increasingly and confusingly imbricated. The National Literacy Strategy started life in the mid 1990s as one of the last acts of a very right-wing government, in response to a very typical Conservative neurosis that claimed that reading standards in primary schools were falling. There was no valid research evidence for this claim. Indeed, the independent, that is non-governmental organisation, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), data demonstrated as clearly as such studies can, that standards in reading had been stable between 1948 and 1996 (Brookes, 1998)<sup>2</sup>. But the claim was linked to a perception that one major impact of the National Curriculum introduced in 1989 had been to reduce the amount of time primary school pupils spent on what used to be called Language. The imposition of a secondary style, subject-driven curriculum in primary schools certainly meant that primary teachers spent much of their time teaching other subjects rather than English. (More recently, “Literacy Across the Curriculum” in secondary schools has been paraded as crucial to the success of the Key Stage Three Strategy.)

The New Labour bandwagon was determined to capture Middle England, and waving the banner of “Education, Education, Education”, made the NLS its centrepiece, setting up a “Taskforce” to ensure its assault would be victorious. The use of aggressive, military language has been one consistent element of the political rhetoric surrounding the Strategy. Various Local Education Authorities (LEA's) bid for funds to trial the NLS, but long before such trials had produced any evidence, the political decision was made to go ahead on a massive scale.

There are three key points for reflection here, one positive, two negative. Firstly, the decision to go ahead was not based on a deficit, falling standards model. It was, by

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areas, not school improvement per se. It is also not easy to find out why they were chosen and whether any other independent organisations had the chance to bid for the contract.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that this evidence was essentially ignored is a salutary reminder of how little attention is paid to educational research evidence in the formation of policy.

1997, a concerted attempt to raise expectations and standards of literacy. For example, by 2002 it was decided that every child, with the exception of those with an identified special need, should be able to reach level 4 in reading. Secondly, this target was not, however, based on the pilot projects nor on carefully considered research evidence. The review of research was conducted during the implementation stage and published in 1999 as a justification for the Strategy (Beard, 1999). Beard, however, comments that “Some critics of the NLS have noted the apparent anomaly of the *Review of Research and Other related Evidence* being published after the decision was taken to implement the strategy. Such criticisms fail to take account of the fact that school effectiveness is clearly being drawn on in both reports” (Beard, 2002, p. 42).

One does not have to be a critic of the NLS to see that it simply was an anomaly. The publication of the review was in itself a reaction to one of the most immediate and fair criticisms of the whole enterprise, which was that it had no explicit research base. Equally the fact, and it simply is a fact, that the research review came essentially four years after the basic idea of the NLS has made it look like a retrospective and therefore partial justification. It has been argued that the National Numeracy Strategy was more thoughtfully constructed (Brown *et al*, 2003).

Thirdly, the review was the work of a single individual, Roger Beard. In his review he acknowledges the support of others but anyone with any knowledge of the scope of a field such as “literacy” will take some convincing that it is a sensible expectation to entrust one individual, however personally expert, with such an enormous and complex task. Not surprisingly, the research has been contested, (see, for example, Wyse, 2003). Roger Beard has continued to write in support of the research base for the strategy, principally arguing that school effectiveness research is the key supporting evidence. His voice remains a lone one, however, and there is certainly no sign of any chorus of support from the research community. The research review for the secondary strategy is discussed below.

Whatever the actual rationale, by 1998, the Literacy Hour was firmly in place in the great majority of primary schools. It has never been statutory; only the National Curriculum has that legal status, The Framework for English is the same. This point is important because it actually meant that the NLS appeared to require *advocacy* to persuade schools to accept it and the use of a different kind of pressure to the coldly legal. The wording, “The Strategy recommends that every primary school adopts the Framework, unless it can demonstrate through its action plan, schemes of work and test performance that its own performance is at least as effective” (Beard, 2003, p. 5), places the onus on schools to prove the NLS wrong or suffer the very real consequences of a poor inspection report. Very few took such a risk.

## **THE RISE OF LITERACY, LITERACY (WITH A CAPITAL “L”) AND LITERACIES**

It is useful here to step back from the immediate political process and just reflect on where the huge stress on Literacy had come from. Why, after all, suddenly invent something called the “Literacy Hour”? Some of this territory is likely to be very familiar to readers of this journal, but it needs covering in relation to “English” as

another key term. Why, for example, was it the “Literacy hour”? Why not the “English” hour? After all, the National Curriculum for English is statutory for ages 5-11 and the tests at ages 7 and 11 are “English” tests. Or why not the “Language Hour”, given that primary practitioners always used the term “language work” to describe what they did from the 1960s to the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989? And yet we have a “Framework for English” not “Literacy”, introduced in 2001. It is essential, then, to reflect here on the emergence of Literacy as a term in relation to subject English, something that is happening in many Anglophone countries, reflecting the global rise of the term “Literacy”.

For three quarters of the Twentieth Century, the issue and the term was consistently “illiteracy”, especially amongst adults, and developed and undeveloped countries shared a mission to eradicate it. In the 1980s, perhaps driven by a perceived economic imperative, the term Literacy starts to be used, conceptualised as something that all productive adults would need to have in order to function usefully in society. Kathy Hall describes this as the context of “policy influence” in the 1990s, where the business world “argued for a curriculum geared to economic competitiveness, and objected, somewhat mockingly, to principles of child-centred education” (Hall, 2001, p. 156).

What made this linguistic “refinement” especially powerful was that it was always presented in association with the notion that economically competitive and successful modern societies needed much *higher levels* of literacy than in the past. Yet another linguistic dimension here involves the very rapid development of a plethora of additional definers, perhaps the most influential of which has been “computer” literacy. An authoritative ERIC review by Roger Sensenbaugh was very clear about this paradigm shift in definitions of literacy and literacies as far back as July, 1990 (Sensenbaugh, 1990)<sup>3</sup>. Conceptualisations of literacy thus very rapidly became more complex and sophisticated but also confusing and even conflicting. And the trend

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<sup>3</sup> This quote from the digest gives some idea of this change. A number of phrases incorporating the word literacy have been used in the documents entered into the ERIC database in the past few years. These phrases include computer literacy, scientific literacy, literacy acquisition, emerging or emergent literacy, visual literacy, cultural literacy, and literacy instruction. Closely allied to these “literacies”, are terms referring to computer uses in education, second language acquisition, influence of the home environment on students, the whole language approach, and literacy in business and industry.

#### THE BROADENING SCOPE OF LITERACY

Out of this proliferation of literacies, one important aspect for reading, English, and language arts teachers concerns teaching methods which incorporate the broadening scope of literacy. A common theme in these documents is that literacy is more than just being able to read and write; it is the ability to comprehend, interpret, analyze, respond, and interact with the growing variety of complex sources of information. Calfee (1986) discusses the concept of literacy and how programs should be designed to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds acquire literacy. He includes a description of current curricula and presents tentative recommendations for policy changes at all levels. On a more practical level, McCracken and McCracken (1986) discuss stories, songs, and poetry as part of the repertoire of instructional techniques for developing literacy.

Some documents report on the implementation of a comprehensive program of literacy education (Snow, Palladino, and Engel, 1987) while others provide the programs themselves (Graves, 1982). Milz (1987), for example, discusses how teachers can implement the deeper understanding of literacy development that research has offered.

continues, a recent example in England being cineliteracy (British Film Institute, 1999), following on from media and also visual literacy.

The key point is that defining illiteracy really was simple, and politicians and educators could easily agree that it should be eradicated. This comfortable consensus hides the point that agreeing what *literacy* is and, even more importantly, what people should use it for is profoundly contentious. To some extent this was all foreshadowed by the work of Paulo Freire and others when they were combatting illiteracy. To them the whole point of helping adults to be literate was so that they could “read the world” and so become politically highly active. In this conceptualisation, literacy is fundamentally to do with redistributing power and Freire’s highly influential work has given rise to the critical literacy movement in education (see Goodwyn, 2002c).

As a term, then, Literacy has taken on a much more controversial and contested status. A vague consensus can still be contrived around the notion that being literate “is a good thing” but it has become extremely clear how ideological a construct it is (and always was). The moment one moves from a statement like “being literate means being able to read and write” to a question such as “if you are able to read and write, what should you read and write about”, then one enters the ideological arena and there is no going back. Literacy, as a word and as a contested concept, therefore becomes in the 1990s hugely important to all governments.

Inevitably, the term Literacy now can have a very positive kudos and one of the results of this aggrandisement is to challenge the identity of well established professional groups. I have discussed this elsewhere in relation to secondary English teachers (Goodwyn, 2003). A very clear and specific indicator of this move towards what I have called “capital ‘L’ Literacy” is the recent decision (July, 2003) by the United Kingdom Reading Association to become the United Kingdom Literacy Association. Their website contains a brief but telling explanation of “our name change”, the key to which is that although “the word ‘literacy’ does not have exactly the same meaning for everybody...the term...is intended to reflect the widely accepted view that the process of reading cannot usefully be treated in isolation....”

This view is indeed the one espoused by the Framework for English and can be argued to be “widely held”. I would also suggest that to adopt the word “Literacy” is to accrue some power by association. It is now the politician’s watchword and might be seen as a “savvy” move on the part of the association. Their journal is also changing its name to *Literacy* from 2004. An emergent theme is clearly the aggrandisement of “Literacy” towards the potential status of a school “subject” with the possible dislodgement of “English”. Not surprisingly, although paradoxically, this form of aggrandisement has made some experienced English teachers feel that “Literacy” is now a threat to English (Goodwyn, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE “LITERACY HOUR”**

The primary schools of the late 1990s were absolutely dominated by the implementation of the Literacy Hour and a huge and unparalleled training programme was created to support it. Secondary schools were certainly stirred by all this, and research demonstrated that they were gearing themselves up for the anticipated

demands on them as the first generation of newly “literate” children would soon be arriving (Goodwyn, 2002c). Their major efforts were to review their attention to literacy across the curriculum and to pay much closer attention to the work of their feeder primary schools, this latter initiative often involving the English department. At this stage, secondary schools viewed the NLS as an essentially positive development (Goodwyn, 2002c). A presciently early study by HMI (Hertrich, 1997) certainly identified some valuable trends and issues, reporting that:

- Secondary schools are at a comparatively early stage in the development of pupils’ literacy but successful practice is already evident in some;<sup>4</sup>
- There is no “quick-fix” solution for deficiencies in literacy (Hertrich, 1997, p. 2).

The report still makes very useful reading, and its characteristics of good practice section remains a useful tool for any school and English department. Its impact on the design of the Framework was clearly only modest at best. This was an opportunity lost. After that survey, Ofsted concentrated on the NLS, simply reporting on English in their normal way as part of the annual report until the introduction of the Key Stage Three Strategy itself.

Somewhat ironically the revisions to the statutory National Curriculum for English, completed and implemented in 2000, were barely noticed as departments prepared themselves for the Framework for English, the purely advisory status of which would be in place from September, 2001.

The NLS and NNS were evaluated annually by a team from the Ontario Institute of Education, led by Michael Fullan, their final report appearing in January, 2003. Their outsider’s perspective is helpfully clear: “Although the Strategies have made a good beginning in a relatively short period of time the intended changes in teaching and learning have not yet been fully realised. After four years, many see NLS and NNS needing to be re-energised ...” (DfES, 2003, pp. 8-9).

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<sup>4</sup> This report was undertaken by HMI John Hertrich, a highly respected HMI with real expertise in secondary English and literacy, and its main findings were:

- Secondary schools are at a comparatively early stage in the development of pupils’ literacy but successful practice is already evident in some;
- There is no “quick-fix” solution for deficiencies in literacy;
- Considerable efforts are often put into literacy development but many schools do not monitor or evaluate the outcomes of their efforts;
- A multi-strategy approach to literacy development is more likely to be successful than the adoption of a single strategy;
- Approaches that involve curriculum areas other than English, together with work done in English departments, are more likely to be successful than initiatives that are confined to English and/or SEN departments;
- There are other “literacies” besides reading and writing which schools need to develop, for example pupils’ information literacy;
- Literacy development is inextricably connected with the development of the whole young person and is linked to pupils’ perception of themselves and their place in the world (Hertrich, 1997)

Fullan's work has an excellent international reputation in the field of school improvement and change. However, the weakness in appointing him and his team was that it has not been balanced by an equivalent group reviewing the impact on literacy and numeracy from an expert point of view. This weakness can be viewed as potentially crucial as the NLS moves into the secondary phase. Whereas, presumably, almost all primary teachers – there is no exact figure – taught the literacy hour, suddenly one subject group is charged with building on that process. Equally, whereas all primary teachers engage holistically with their pupils, secondary teachers work in a discipline-bounded curriculum. It would have been relatively easy to anticipate the date of the engagement of the secondary phase and to undertake another research review and consultation about the best way for secondary schools to prepare. Such a review could also have distilled from the Fullan team's findings ways to avoid some of the problems of the NLS approach. They were, for example, quite critical of the over-directive nature of the training and of the way a high-status test distorts teaching and learning (DfES, 2003, pp. 6-7).

Instead, the Strategy commissioned a research review by Professor Colin Harrison which was published in 2002 – once more, well after the Framework had been designed and implemented – and entitled *Roots and Research* (Harrison, 2002). This is an exemplary review in itself and certainly should be read by the profession. However, there are two issues which make it less helpful in the current context. Firstly, although it makes a strong and eloquent case for the pedagogical principles of the Framework, it pays relatively little attention to the political realities of a high-stakes testing regime which heavily distorts practice. To be fair, that was not its purpose, but there is plenty of research on this effect and this point is made by Fullan's team (see above).

Secondly, the review conceptualises teachers as extended and supported professionals. For example, the review cites an American study of very successful teachers of English who "...did not take a curriculum off the shelf and apply it to their students uncritically – they used the fairly tightly organised curriculum of the state flexibly, confidently and, where appropriate, critically, working in a system that respected their professionalism and encouraged its continued development" (Harrison, 2002, p. 34). This description *ought* to apply, but that is not the current picture, least of all within a narrowly conceived assessment system and a highly punitive inspection regime. For a full discussion of the very negative initial reaction to the Framework by experienced English teachers, see Goodwyn, 2003. I highly commend the research review and look forward to a school context in which English teachers can make the most of its recommendations. However, English teachers for a number of years have been feeling increasingly professional marginalised. (For an extensive discussion, see Goodwyn, 2001.)

## **WHAT IS IT ACTUALLY FOR?**

The Framework for English is first and foremost a continuation of the NLS. The NLS, as outlined above, is part of a government drive to raise standards of Literacy year on year. The implication, therefore, is that secondary schools were failing to do this in the past. This is curious if by standards we mean something as simply quantitative as examination results. GCSE and "A"-level results improved every year



throughout the 1990s (see QCA data). The SAT, Key Stage Three tests, boycotted for several years by English teachers, continually lack any real credibility as evidence, having been through several changes and having been subject to very dubious marking procedures. The National Association For the Teaching of English (NATE) has consistently opposed these tests and continues to do so. It is notable that Scotland has rejected such a testing regime and that, at the time of writing, Wales is using its relative political autonomy to reduce its testing drastically and to place far more emphasis on teacher assessment. The SAT results (in England), however, are given a paradoxical credibility by being highly public measures of a school's "success" within a competitive, league table format. Additionally, the Government has set national targets, thus making the SATs measures of the effectiveness of the whole system. All these factors make the SATs part of a "high-stakes" testing regime.

The implication above is that the *Framework for Teaching English* (FWE) must be different to the way English was taught in the past – "a fresh approach to teaching and learning" (DfEE, 2001, p. 5). The expectation is that the new teaching approach will be characterised by elements of the successful Literacy Hour. These include a focus on clear objectives, "pacey" teaching using a four-part lesson structure of starter, introduction to main teaching points, development and plenary (DfEE p.17). The emphasis is chiefly linguistic rather than literary and is based principally around the selection of extracts of text or of relatively short, complete texts since "...there is less need to teach all possible angles on the text" (DfEE, p. 15).

The FWE has, therefore, been conceptualised as somehow new and different. This view is highly contested by more experienced teachers, as the discussion below suggests. To support this "fresh" approach, the FWE has been characterised by features that parallel the introduction of the NLS. One key feature has been a "one-size-fits-all" approach to training; regardless of the experience and seniority of English teachers, they have all been treated as beginners and also essentially as novices (Goodwyn, 2003). All the training has been "packaged" and is contained in folders, videos and OHTs, making it "feel" impersonal and anonymous. It has been accompanied by an impressive range of supporting material, much of it readily accessible on the web. The Fullan team were very clear about the failings in this approach and that however high the quality of material, teachers had to have ownership of the teaching itself. There is evidence<sup>5</sup> that the trainers rapidly adjusted their approach by adopting a much more professionally dialogic style. It is possible, however, that the way the initiative was launched somewhat paradoxically ensured its partial failure, a hypothesis more research will be needed to test.

A second feature has involved the re-invigoration of the role of LEAs, all of whom have appointed consultants to provide the training and to follow it up into schools. There is now a highly developed national network of such consultants and the anecdotal evidence is that this has become an effective and valued support for teachers in school. Forthcoming research (see below) should provide more systematic evidence that this is the case.

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<sup>5</sup> However, this "evidence" for me has come from talking to teachers in schools, at meetings and so on and also from the consultants themselves. I have not seen in print any statement about this as a planned change. Equally, I am not aware of any evaluative evidence upon which to make a more evidence-based comment.

A third feature involves the adaptation of the Literacy Hour to the secondary English curriculum. The notion of a four-part lesson is put forward as the key to raising standards. Lessons that used to have beginnings, middle and ends, now have “starters” and “plenaries” and less certainty about the middle. This stems from the attention to Starters as either discrete mini-lessons operating in some way over a series of whole lessons or as openings to lessons that build on this activity-driven introduction. Professional debate continues about the soundness of either approach, but there can be no doubt about the beneficial effect on publishers’ profits as collections of starters now abound. Currently, I can find no real research evidence (apart from my own) about the degree to which the Literacy-hour type format has been genuinely adopted.

There is Ofsted evidence which states somewhat vaguely: “Most English departments were making considerable efforts to change previous practice, where necessary, and adopt aspects of the strategy” (Ofsted, 2003, p. 5). However, they also state more precisely “The implementation of the English strand was going well in a third of schools”; elsewhere it is “satisfactory” (p. 5). Whether this is reliable evidence or not, it is far from positive.

## **IMPACT**

If the Framework’s main aim is to raise quantifiable standards, then it has had some very modest success. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) figures suggest that the increase in all schools of “mean KS3 points for English” is 0.57% (Ofsted, 2003, p. 28). The Ofsted report of March 2003 is mildly positive: “The Strategy has had a slow but increasingly positive impact on attainment in English in most schools inspected. It has not produced widespread improvement in end-of-key-stage test results in the pilot schools” (Ofsted, 2003, p. 5). The 2004 report states: “The impact of the Strategy is being felt in almost all English departments visited through improvements in lesson planning, including the use of specific learning objectives. These improvements are leading to greater purposefulness in lessons and providing more challenge for pupils....The Strategy is having an increasingly positive, though gradual, impact on attainment in English in most schools visited. There was an increase of two percentage points in the proportions of pupils gaining level 5 and level 6 in the national test results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2003” (Ofsted, 2004, p. 16). The official position would seem to be that the Framework has made a slight difference, but it seems evident that there is a great deal of anxiety about how slight this difference is at school level.

Each year of the FWE has shifted emphasis. For example, Guided Reading (2002-3) was rapidly followed by Guided Writing (2003-4) with no evidence that either approach had become embedded in practice. The sheer volume of supporting publications and training videos seems to suggest fear of failure far more than level-headed confidence about success.

The first year brought great waves of hostility towards the training and especially to the idea that this was all new and different. During the second year there appeared to

be a more flexible and supportive approach. For Year Three we have no real evidence as yet but this should be provided in the year 2004-5.

## CONCLUSION

There is clear evidence that the FWE is perceived as valuable by newer entrants to the profession (Goodwyn, 2003). It is a highly structured approach with clear objectives for short and medium-term planning and teaching. It remains unpopular and unsatisfactory to many of the more experienced teachers who find it narrow and rigid. They especially disapprove of the lack of creativity for pupils and the over-emphasis on textual extracts. Much of the additional material generated by the FWE is seen as valuable and in tune with good practice (Goodwyn, 2004).

There never has been much support amongst English teachers for the SATs, and pressure has grown since the introduction of the Framework for their status and influence to be at least reduced, many would prefer them to be removed entirely. NATE has actively campaigned for some time to have them abolished. Equally, the Progress Units are seen as unrealistic and ineffective.

There are a number of developments, not obviously related, that suggest the FWE will not continue much longer in its current form. For example, the Key Stage Three Strategy is to become essentially a secondary strategy, almost certainly reducing the intense focus on KS2. The Key Stage one SATs (i.e. tests for students aged 7) look set to be quite radically overhauled, putting much more emphasis on teacher assessment, hinting that the high-stakes testing regime may have passed its peak. National concern about the growing disaffection with formal schooling amongst young people is reflected in various government initiatives. At the same time, the future emphasis on 14-19 seems likely to change some of the educational goalposts quite considerably. The Government obsession with target-setting is proving to be a hostage to fortune and may well be replaced by much less numerically determined measurements. There is a new Ofsted inspection framework for schools which, early signs suggest, will be more conciliatory and dialogic. Teacher recruitment and, even more, retention remain problematic, a situation which may well be exacerbated by the potential destabilisation by “top up fees” for trainee<sup>6</sup> teachers.

The Framework for English is thus evolving in a markedly different policy context to the one in which it, and perhaps more importantly, the NLS was originally conceptualised. There is very little evidence that the essential aim of the FWE is being achieved – but everyone does want education to improve. All this suggests, at least to me, that English teachers will find a gradual reduction in prescription and more flexibility at both medium-term planning and lesson-planning levels. On recent trends the primary phase tends to foreshadow what will happen to secondary schools. Currently the primary testing regime is being reduced and there is a “new” emphasis on “creativity” and the “enriched curriculum”. English teachers seem likely to regain

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<sup>6</sup> “Top up fees” are a hugely controversial government reform that will mean all undergraduate students in England will be charged an additional fee for their courses, currently expected to be £3,000 per year from 2007. This fee may also apply to post-graduate taught courses such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education, the most common route into teaching.

more ownership of the subject, and the new Ofsted inspection framework may endorse rather than challenge this increase in professional autonomy.

But will English be renamed “Literacy”? It seems profoundly unlikely that English will change its name or its spots over the next decade at least. At the most recent NATE debate (annual conference, January, 2004) the motion that English should change its name was easily defeated (NATE NEWS, 2004). The discussion was witty and light-hearted and my interpretation would be that the idea that English should be renamed is merely entertaining and not a serious proposition. It might be noted that for the Reading Association to adopt the term Literacy suggests a sensible realignment and expansion of scope. For English to become “Literacy” would suggest to many of its experienced teachers the surrendering of the whole purpose of the subject (see Goodwyn, 2003). At present, the term does not feature very “visibly” in relation to the professional field of English. For example, a content analysis of the secondary jobs section of the Times Educational Supplement during March 2004 found no advertisement for any secondary job to teach literacy. The term literacy appeared several times, typically three per edition and on each occasion it referred to whole school issues. Five jobs as second in department specifically referred to the role including being whole school literacy co-ordinator. No head of department role included this brief, offering some support to my thesis that English is, in a sense, resisting literacy as a defining label. However, perhaps the newer members of the profession have different views? It remains to be seen.

Research to be undertaken<sup>7</sup> in the summer and autumn of 2004 will try to establish just how far the Framework has made a real impact on English teaching and, if it has, what is actually different. It will seek the views of the profession about the way forward over the next three years. It will invite the views of Literacy consultants as well as Heads of English and classroom teachers to ascertain if there is real common ground or whether a no man’s land has developed with both sides perhaps digging in? At this stage, I suspect not. No government will continue to set targets that it cannot reach – at least not during a time when it cannot afford to blame the teachers. Indeed, it needs them more than they need government approval at present. We can expect to see gradual and probably piecemeal change leading to a continuation of a Framework for English (not Literacy) but a more flexible and teacher-oriented one.

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<sup>7</sup> The research will be undertaken by the University of Reading between May and July 2004 and will essentially try to get at the views of English teachers themselves as well as other key players. It will be reported at a number of conferences and published versions will appear in 2005.

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