

# **The Teaching of English: Research Evidence and Government Policy**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Publication.

## **Abstract**

Government policy on the teaching of English since 1997 has been dominated by the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) Framework for Teaching (FFT). Government claims about the evidence base for the FFT first appeared after its implementation. The commentary in this submission reflects on the contribution that five papers and a book have made to the examination of the evidence in support of the FFT.

Two main priorities influenced the selection of publications for this submission: a) a body of work which was coherently linked; b) publications which were regarded by independent indicators as representing a high level of national and international significance. The philosophical framework for the submission was informed by modern variants of Socratic philosophy. Although qualitative methodology is my main area of expertise an interest in the positivist paradigm allowed for reflection on a range of methods evident in the primary sources that were critically reviewed. The substantive paradigm for the work reflected exploration of education policy in the context of linguistic theory.

A critical overview of the field published in a book was followed by a series of papers which examined key areas in relation to government policy on the teaching of English. An analysis of evidence on the teaching of phonics to support reading linked psychological and educational research to show that phonics teaching had a specific but important contribution to make. A review of the research on grammar teaching revealed inadequate evidence for the view that grammar teaching supports the development of children's writing. The increased government control of the curriculum for schools and university education departments was explored in the context of Shulman's theories of subject knowledge definition and acquisition.

As a culmination of early work the evidence base for the FFT was further examined by looking at school-effectiveness research, inspection evidence and

child development research. I concluded that the FFT was inadequately supported by evidence and that significant changes were needed to improve teaching and learning in the future. It was suggested that one of these changes could include greater concentration on formative assessment of literacy which has had limited emphasis in policy documents.

# **The Teaching of English: Research Evidence and Government Policy**

## ***Commentary and Critical Review***

The research work represented by my publications listed in Appendix A demonstrates an engagement with one dominant theme: the critical exploration of the links between research evidence and government policy on the teaching of English, particularly since 1997. In a book and five peer-reviewed papers (details in appendix B) I explored this theme through a combination of wide-ranging reviews of the field and in-depth examination of a number of key topics including the teaching of reading with phonics; the teaching of grammar; policy for teacher training; and assessment of literacy. The analysis of these topics was unified by critical examination of the evidence base for the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) Framework for Teaching (FFT) which has strongly influenced primary pedagogy and subsequently secondary pedagogy in England in the period from 1997 to the present.

The following table shows the links between key government policies and my publications.

Table 1: Links between Government Policy Publications and Work by Wyse

<b>Date</b>	<b>Government Policy Documents</b>	<b>Related Publication by Wyse (see appendix A)</b>	<b>Related sections in this critical review</b>
1996	National Literacy Project Framework for	Wyse and Jones (2001)	1. <i>Early work on the NLS</i>

	Teaching (National Project for Literacy and Numeracy, 1997)		
1997	National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching (Department for Education and Employment, 1998)	All except Wyse and Jones (2002)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Early work on the NLS</i></li> <li>2. <i>Phonics</i></li> <li>3. <i>Grammar</i></li> <li>5. <i>Evidence from Inspections, Language Development and School Effectiveness Research</i></li> <li>6. <i>The Assessment of Literacy</i></li> </ol>
1998	The grammar papers (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998) Grammar for Writing (Department for Education and Employment, 2000)	Wyse (2001b)	3. <i>Grammar</i>
1998	Circular 4/98 (Department for Education and Employment, 1998)	Wyse and Jones (2002)	4. <i>Policy for Teacher Training</i>
1999	Review of research and other related evidence (Beard/Department for	All except Wyse and Jones (2002)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Early work on the NLS</i></li> <li>2. <i>Phonics</i></li> <li>3. <i>Grammar</i></li> </ol>



	Education and Employment, 1999)		5. <i>Evidence from Inspections, Language Development and School Effectiveness Research</i> 6. <i>The Assessment of Literacy</i>
1999	Target setting and assessment in the NLS (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999)	Wyse (2001a)	6. <i>The Assessment of Literacy</i>

The structure of the latter part of this critical review is chronological in line with the release of key government policy documents and my subsequent publications related to these documents.

### **Selection of Publications**

Two main priorities influenced the selection of publications for this submission: a) a body of work which was coherently linked; b) publications which were regarded by independent indicators as representing a high level of national and international significance. Table 1 indicates the links between the selected publications and government policy documents about the teaching of English at primary level which is the overall focus for the submission. The other main strand of my work on the study of childhood (e.g. Wyse, 2000a; 2003a; 2001c; 2003c) has resulted in fewer publications to date so was not suitable as the focus for the submission.

The status of three of the articles (Wyse, 2000b; 2001b; 2003b) in the journal ranking system of the Social Science Citation Index (Institute for Scientific Information, 2003) is significant. These articles were published in Britain's highest ranking educational research journals. A hallmark of these journals is the rigour of their peer-review processes with high rates of rejection a common feature. One aspect of this rigour is that it enables the author to be confident that the methodological and substantive issues raised in the paper have been subject to searching critique and therefore represent a high level of quality.

Wyse (2001a) was included as an example of empirical work which analysed a feature of government policy to complement the methodology of the critical reviews which are the main aspect of the submission. Another reason for its inclusion was the specific way that the methodology enabled early evidence-based reflection on what was a recent policy. Of the six books that I had published Wyse and Jones (2001) was the most substantial work and the one which was most closely related to policy on the teaching of English. Wyse and Jones (2002) addressed government policy on the training of teachers in relation to the teaching of English and children's literature so fitted well with the coherence of the submission. Appendix B details my contribution to the works in the submission and the independent indicators that provide evidence for the status of the publications.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The Socratic concept of intellectual endeavour based on the critical interrogation of fundamental beliefs remains important to my way of thinking about educational theory and research and is a key feature of the submission. Recent approaches that have influenced my thinking in this way include Gould's (1996) critique of intelligence testing and Coles's (2000) work on the scientific evidence related to the teaching and learning of reading. Kuhn's (1962) seminal work suggests that such thinking is necessary for the restructuring of knowledge leading to paradigm shift.

Postmodernism has been a philosophical influence, for example through the work of Denzin (1997) and Stronach and MacLure (1997). However, overall the philosophical orientation of my work reflects a more tentative stance to postmodern thought such as that advocated by Delamont, Coffey and Atkinson (2000). Methodologically this orientation has linked with my interest in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and the use of qualitative data analysis software (such as WINMAX Pro or QSR6) which supports simultaneous analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Theoretically this is an approach advocated by Gorard (2002) and practically explored by Miles and Huberman (1994). My receptiveness to a range of methodologies has meant that as part of the submission I was able to mount critiques of quantitative work which, in my view, are sometimes privileged by policy makers above other forms of research. My expertise in qualitative methods includes understanding of the paradigm debates which have highlighted the inadequacies of positivist research. The use of this expertise in the critical exploration of evidence to support policy had the limitation that it may have inclined the analysis of qualitative work to be less searching than that of quantitative work.

The substantive paradigm for the work reflected exploration of education in the context of linguistic theory. Communication of meaning is at the heart of language and this is reflected in the most effective ways to help learners develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening. Following Crystal's (1997; 2004) frameworks I view semantics as the driving force behind language acquisition. Linguistic 'rules' are derived from analysis of language conventions in use not through a fixed corpus based on Latin grammar. The publications which are part of the submission reflect such theory through my concerns about approaches to the teaching of English, such as extreme forms of phonics and traditional school grammar, which strongly emphasise word-level and sentence-level teaching above text-level teaching.



The way that 'error' is conceptualised remains a dominant feature of my theoretical understanding. Kress (1982) argued that the term 'error' is linguistically questionable in the context of children's development of language where expression of meaning is the driving force. Shaughnessy's (1977) and Bartholomae's (1980) work is seminal in showing how the misconceptions revealed in the writing of older students reveals logical understanding in their attempts to compose standard English. Although Goodman's (1969) view of the reading process has been repeatedly questioned by recent work in psychology (E.g. Stanovich and Stanovich, 1995) the idea that children's misconceptions (or "miscues") reveal insights into their language is one that attracts broad consensus. This theoretical position resulted in a commitment to research which was able to look positively and perceptively at children's development. The limitation of this stance was that I was less predisposed to accept at face value critical interpretations of children's achievements in reading, writing and speaking and listening.

### **Methodological Critique**

The first part of the data acquisition task was to identify publications that offered an evidence-base for the policies in question. Having acquired the key publications, areas were selected for further analysis. These areas were often selected because of their historical significance to the subject, such as the teaching of reading using phonics; the teaching of grammar; children's literature and child development and/or because they reflected more recent political emphases: for example objective-led teaching and teacher assessment.

No educational research was excluded a-priori from the critical reviews of the submission. The advantage of this comprehensive approach was that it enabled me to include reflection on small scale qualitative research. This narrative approach to literature review was not systematic in the same way as the Government Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) reviews or

meta-analysis (Glass, 1977) therefore it could be argued that the outcomes of my papers were influenced by some research that was less rigorous than the standards demanded by formal systematic reviewing.

Peer-reviewed research papers and other primary sources were the main type of data that were analysed. Use was also made of a much smaller number of meta-analyses and narrative overviews of the field to enhance my analysis. These were not used uncritically and in all cases resulted in further acquisition and analysis of primary sources cited by the overviews. For example, primary sources were acquired in relation to the following overviews: all those studies cited by Hudson (2000); most of those related to phonics, grammar and school effectiveness cited by Beard/DfEE (1999); primary age phase studies cited by Hillocks (1984); many studies post 1940 cited by Weaver (1996); and those related to objective-led teaching cited by Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995).

Having read evidence in support of the policy documents, key word searches of the British Educational Index, the Australian Educational Index and the American Index Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) were used to identify other related research. Primary sources were acquired through inter-library loan. A decision was made to prioritise peer-reviewed research journal articles. This was based on the fact that these publications have the highest standards of academic quality. One outcome of this approach is that although a significant number of books and other publications were consulted it is possible that some data was not reviewed because of the emphasis on research papers.

Thematic annotated bibliographies were compiled to analyse the extent to which the cited evidence related to the policy statements. This accumulation of key findings and critical issues provided an in-depth view of the evidence. The personal selection of such data does allow for the possibility of bias. This possibility was counteracted by a clear commitment to analysing sources that

were cited in defence of policy in addition to those which offered an alternative perspective.

The conceptual and methodological frameworks that I have described guided my thinking for the work in the six publications that I explore individually below.

## **1. Early Work on the NLS**

In 1999 I and a colleague, Russell Jones, started work on a major review of the research on the teaching of English. The resulting book (Wyse and Jones, 2001) was a critical synthesis of research and other evidence offering a comprehensive analysis of the field. The work was original in that it was the first to critically evaluate the evidence base for the NLS by analysing research, theory, previous policy and what was then emerging practice. The book included a forward written by Professor David Wray from the University of Warwick who is one of the country's leading literacy experts. Wray underlined the methodological significance of the work. He acknowledged that it is very difficult to achieve comprehensive analysis of the field because it requires an almost 'encyclopaedic knowledge of this vast area'. He cited one text from the 1980s and one from the 1990s as comparable and concluded that Wyse and Jones (2001) was 'comprehensive, up-to-date, critical and authoritative'.

The implementation of the FFT in 1997 heralded a radically different policy for the English primary curriculum than had been seen in the past. Until the advent of the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 primary education was not regulated by a national curriculum. The ERA brought with it increased political control of schools and university education departments and their curricula. The original national curriculum as a whole was widely regarded as unwieldy which resulted in Sir Ron Dearing leading a group which produced a slightly reduced version in 1995. The current national curriculum was published in 1999.

In 1988, for the first time, the national curriculum prescribed a series of programmes of study for the teaching of all subjects as well as attainment targets. The English document was established under the chairmanship of Brian Cox who produced a document which was broadly welcomed. This was a significant achievement in view of the fact that the subject of English regularly attracted passionate arguments and sharp disagreements about how it should be taught and learned.

In 1996 the national literacy project (NLP) was set up by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Eighteen Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which had problems in reaching targets for statutory reading and writing test scores were invited to take part. One of the most significant aspects of the project was the establishment of an objective-led FFT. The original intention of the NLP was that it was to be a five year programme. Schools which had received support for two years would then be expected to continue the methods for a further three years so that evaluations of the project could reflect on the extent to which improvements were sustained without continuing intervention. However, in 1997 the incoming Labour government saw the introduction of the NLS, including the FFT, as an important part of its education policy. This was before any evaluation had taken place.

The inadequacy of independent evaluation of the FFT, in particular the lack of analysis of its methods compared to other methods, remains one of its main weaknesses. This is linked with the questions that have been raised as to the extent that it was informed by research. Two years after the implementation of the FFT a document putting forward an evidence base (Beard/Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1999) was published. In spite of the timing of this publication it was a significant attempt to show how the FFT was informed by research.



Beard/DfEE (1999) argued that a very wide range of research had influenced the methods and structure of the FFT. Two of the dominant influences were school effectiveness (SE) and school improvement (SI) research. This was partly a reflection of the academic interest of Michael Barber who was head of the new Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DfEE. John Stannard, a member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, who led work on the NLP also cited 'school improvement work into literacy development as well as evidence from inspections' as significant influences on the FFT (Reid, 1997). Beard/DfEE highlighted two areas which were to receive significantly more attention than they had in the past: phonics and grammar. Other areas, such as the assessment of literacy, received little attention except in relation to discussion of standards as represented by the statutory tests.

## **2. Phonics**

The renewed emphasis on the teaching of reading using phonics approaches was something that followed heated debate throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Arguments about code-emphasis versus meaning-based approaches to the teaching of reading have a long history. Phonics is a subject that has aroused strong emotions even leading, in the USA, to what were called the 'reading wars'.

Wyse (2000b) was built on a theoretical acceptance that psychological research on the teaching of reading had not had the influence on teacher-education that it should have done (see the special edition of *Research in Reading*; Oakhill, Beard, and Vincent, 1995). The paper was methodologically significant because it synthesized a wide range of quantitative and qualitative studies from psychology and education in order to inform its critique. This approach to synthesis reflected Gorard's (2002) emphasis on combining critical analysis of both qualitative and quantitative evidence, something that has been highlighted as an important part of theory generation and capacity-building in educational research.



Beard/DfEE (1999) argued that the recommendations of research reviews, in particular the American review by Adams (1990), formed the justification for the phonics element of the FFT. Adams's (1990) work was originally based on a national project commissioned by the American Government, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which she led. Adams recommended that phonics approaches should have a much greater prominence in early reading pedagogy.

In Wyse (2000b) I examined such reviews and other research in order to evaluate Beard/DfEE's justification. Whereas Beard/DfEE (1999) accepted Adam's work, and other reviews, uncritically, I examined a range of alternative views to those put forward by Adams. By examining seminal work; evidence from skilled readers; teaching method evaluations; and longitudinal work I concluded that the evidence to support the prescription of phonics teaching in the FFT was inconclusive and particularly weak with respect to year 3 and year 4 children's reading development.

In addition to the greater concentration on phonics evident in the objectives of the FFT, the NLS has also emphasised the teaching and learning of grammar. Although there is convincing research evidence to support the significance of phonics teaching, when used appropriately with children aged 5 and 6, the same kind of evidence does not exist in relation to the teaching of grammar.

### **3. Grammar**

In Wyse (2001b) I carried out a substantial review of literature on the effects of the teaching of traditional school grammar, transformational grammar and sentence-combining approaches. This work included analysis of international evidence from USA, New Zealand and the UK. The international comparative analysis was one of the methodologically significant aspects of the work. Another

aspect was the analysis of use of language in national reports on statutory testing outcomes and inspection reports. My reflections on major studies from the USA also developed a new critique of T-unit methodology (a T-unit consists of a principal clause and any subordinate clause or non clausal structure attached to or embedded in it). A narrative approach to literature review was taken in view of the fact that 'meta-analysis' and the kind of 'systematic reviews' as recently defined by the EPPI initiative make it methodologically difficult to consider qualitative evidence.

The English Review Group based at the University of York, which is part of the EPPI initiative based at the University of London Institute of Education, secured the finance to carry out a *systematic review* on the teaching of grammar to be carried out during 2004-2005. In their preparatory statement (EPPI English Review Group, 2004) they suggest that only three extensive reviews of the literature have been carried out during the twentieth century, with the latest being Wyse (2001b). My work also led to the design of a piece of empirical research which focussed on children's syntactic choices during writing, the outcomes of which have been accepted for publication in the *Cambridge Journal of Education*.

The renewed policy emphasis on the teaching of grammar was partly prompted by reports on the statutory tests which had begun to emphasise perceived problems with the learning and teaching of writing. One of the solutions to this problem was the publication of the *Grammar for Writing* materials by the NLS team. Like phonics, grammar is another subject that had caused controversy throughout the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the FFT reflected an emphasis on grammar teaching that had not been seen before in English curriculum policy. Previous attempts by governments to introduce grammar teaching in the 80s resulted in the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project and, in 1998, QCA commissioned work to look at the issue of grammar and its link with improvements in children's writing.

Few of the papers in the QCA publication (QCA, 1998) dealt in depth with empirical evidence on the subject although the sixth paper, written by an unnamed author, did look at some research evidence. Previous academic work in the UK had tended to focus on the political and theoretical issues to do with grammar teaching rather than focus on empirical evidence.

I found that there were no studies which showed convincingly that grammar teaching helped children's writing. In fact there was a large body of evidence which said that grammar teaching at best had no effect and at worst was demotivational. A study from New Zealand (Elley, et al 1976: 18) which is generally regarded as the best study to look at the impact of grammar teaching found that

*Transformation and traditional grammar teaching showed no measurable benefits. The RW [Read/Write] group, who studied no formal grammar for three years, demonstrated competence in writing and related language skills fully equal to that shown by the two grammar groups.*

Elley et al dismissed the idea of the introduction of grammar at primary level mainly based on developmental theory: *'it seems most unlikely that such training would be readily applied by children in their own writing. Furthermore the researchers' empirical findings do not support the early introduction of grammar'*.

Only one grammar approach showed significant gains in the statistical T-unit measure which is often applied in studies of grammar; this was sentence-combining. In spite of the mild positive evidence the researchers were keen to point out that sentence-combining should be seen as one specific technique among many that needed to be used to support the development of writing. I also pointed out that most of the studies showing these kind of gains were carried out with university students: the genres of writing that these students are expected to

control are different from those which are normally expected of primary and secondary pupils.

There is no substantial evidential base for the greatly increased grammar teaching that is part of the FFT. In spite of this the government spent considerable sums of money on the *Grammar for Writing* materials which aimed to show how the sentence-level objectives in the FFT could be delivered. It appears that a common perception in the media and amongst politicians, that the reason for poor standards of writing shows the need for more grammar teaching, has been allowed to dominate the primary curriculum, contrary to the research evidence.

#### **4. Policy for Teacher Training**

The statutory national curriculum for schools which was introduced in 1988 was followed by the heavily endorsed prescription of the NLS. University education departments were not immune from centralised curricula. Circulars 10/97 and 4/98 which detailed a curriculum for teacher training reflected the increased central control of education curricular in schools. The two circulars were finally superseded by the *Professional Standards* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Teacher Training Agency (TTA), 2002). Prior to *Professional Standards* a government consultation was established. I gave presentations at the research seminar of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) annual conference; the research day of the United Kingdom Reading Association (UKRA) annual conference; and following a letter to the Times Educational Supplement the head of the Teacher Training Agency invited me to offer my ideas for the new curricula. This sequence of work was subsequently expanded in Wyse and Jones (2002).

In Wyse and Jones (2002) I cautioned against an undue emphasis on a narrow definition of subject knowledge which in previous circulars had over-emphasised



topics such as phonics and grammar at the expense of some arguably more important issues such as knowledge of texts and pupils' motivation. Jones highlighted the particular importance of students' knowledge of children's literature as an essential part of their English teaching knowledge, which had been minimised in Circular 4/98.

The main methodological significance of this paper was revealed in the discussion about Shulman's (1986 and 1987) work which had become influential as shown by the TTA commissioned work on effective teachers of literacy (Medwell et. al., 1998). Shulman's work was used to argue that content knowledge had been neglected in considerations of teacher effectiveness. However, Shulman also made a number of other points that were less well publicised including his view that policy communities had used findings from teacher effectiveness research, which researchers considered incomplete, as sufficient for the definition of standards. Such standards still dominate university teacher-training curricula. My future work was to find that Shulman's caution about 'a slavish devotion to objectives' was another important message that remained largely unheeded.

## **5. Evidence from Inspections, Language Development and School Effectiveness Research**

The implementation of the NLS and the National Numeracy Strategy represented one of 'the most ambitious large-scale educational reform strategies in the world' (Earl et al, 2000: 1). As I discussed at the beginning of this review one of the key features of the NLS was its objective-led Framework for Teaching. In view of this it was reasonable to assume that the methods of the FFT had been adequately derived from a research base. The government's case that that the FFT was informed by research was put forward in Beard/DfEE (1999) after implementation of the NLS. The case was challenged in Wyse (2003b).



Methodologically Wyse (2003b) was underpinned by the decision to use the Journal Citation Reports (Institute for Scientific Information, 2003) as one significant indicator of the quality of research papers for review. The suggestion by Reynolds and Teddlie (2001), two leading researchers on school effectiveness (SE), that educational researchers have neglected to engage sufficiently with empirical SE data in their critiques was accepted. Hence the paper engaged fully with empirical evidence in the SE field to critique the idea that objective-led teaching was a necessary feature of effective teaching and learning.

Evidence from national reports on the teaching of English by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) was used as one of the strands of evidence to support the FFT. Through an analysis of the changing nature of recommendations for practice over a 20 year period and the language used in the reports I showed that these were inadequate as valid evidence.

My most serious claim was based on an extensive critical review of empirical SE evidence. One of the most enduring features of educational policy post-1997 has been the notion that the best teaching and therefore the majority of teaching should be informed by short-term lesson objectives. This is reflected in the radical interpretation of the national curriculum programmes of study as objectives in the FFT. Although the publication of the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2003) has mirrored the advent of slightly more flexibility in the delivery of the FFT, one of the principles that remains is this notion that teaching should be underpinned by short-term objectives. My analysis of research evidence found no direct support for this stance. It concluded that the evidence in fact revealed that a much broader range of teaching strategies was needed for effective lesson delivery. This position has since been reflected in more recent government initiatives to emphasise multiple intelligence theories in relation to exploration of a more holistic notion of teaching and learning. However, there is a tension with

the continuing requirement to deliver short-term objectives for literacy and numeracy.

The final major strand of my paper was to examine child language and literacy development evidence in order to ascertain the extent to which the progression of objectives in the FFT related to children's likely development of reading and writing. The evidence is mixed on this issue. The NLS team made an early theoretical decision not to adopt a developmental structure such as the Australian *First Steps* national curriculum and opted for the construction of an objectives-based framework. Some of the resulting objectives of the FFT are developmentally appropriate but there are also some serious divergences from research findings on language and literacy development.

The three strands of critical analysis in Wyse (2003b) reflected a serious challenge to the NLS which, as Earl et al (2001) had shown, had been strongly promoted by government and enforced by OfSTED. In view of this it is perhaps not surprising that the paper caused some controversy.

When the paper was submitted for publication the editors of the *British Educational Research Journal* set a condition that the one critical reviewer be invited to make a response, something that they said was rarely done and only if a paper raised particularly significant issues. The respondent was Roger Beard the writer of Beard/DfEE (1999). Although the choice of Beard as one of the referees could be seen as controversial, his response provided another opportunity to critically reflect on the methodological significance of the paper (a more detailed account of the methodological issues raised by the work can be seen in Wyse, 2004). Beard is one of the country's leading literacy experts. His pivotal role in the analysis of research underpinning the NLS for the DfEE was well-deserved. His work has been highly influential to many, including in the development of my own knowledge in the area. However, his response to my paper seemed to restate information that he had published elsewhere rather

than challenge the new evidence that I put forward.

The specific evidence of change of language in inspection reports that I show was not challenged by Beard except to say that it was 'hardly surprising' in view of his perception of a 1980s 'whole language' orthodoxy. His main evidence for this perception was derived from a piece of research that surveyed university reading lists (Brooks, et. al., 1992). Beard repeats a point made in one of his papers that the popularity of Waterland's (1985) text, as shown by its position at number one in the reading lists, was significant but he has consistently failed to mention that his own balanced and popular book (Beard, 1990) was number two on the lists. This raised the question of the extent that Beard's book may have contributed to any orthodoxy. There is also other research evidence (see Wyse, 1998) which contradicts the idea of a dominance of whole-language philosophies in English primary education as it shows that whole language approaches were only ever used, at most, by 4% of schools across the UK.

Beard's response to my claim that objective-led teaching is not supported by research evidence was based on a restatement of the work of Bert Creemers and Japs Scheerens that he heavily emphasised in his government review. Beard failed to engage with the numerous other school-effectiveness studies that I analysed. Beard's defence that at this point in his review he was focussing on the pragmatics rather than the justification presumably meant that he accepted the point that the evidence in favour of the current emphasis on objective-led teaching is extremely thin.

Beard makes more incisive observations about the child development evidence that I analysed pointing out that this was worthy of further work. The child-development analysis began as part of a Department for International Development (DfID) project which was being managed by Liverpool University. I was commissioned to carry out a series of research analyses in relation to the teaching of English. In addition I had been carrying out an 8 year longitudinal



study of two children's literacy development. An analysis of multimedia data from this study combined with the literature review for the DfID work enabled me to include the child development section in Wyse (2003b). This is work that continues and a paper which extends my thinking on developmentally appropriate curricula will be submitted for publication shortly.

Following Beard/DfEE's (1999) review, Colin Harrison was commissioned to examine the research evidence supporting the teaching of English at key stage 3 which was part of the key stage 3 strategy (Harrison/DfES, 2003). Harrison claimed that to a certain extent his review updated Beard/DfEE (1999). Harrison did not address SE research or inspection evidence, so there is a lack of continuity between the two reviews, but he did broadly concur with the idea that the phonics element of the FFT is appropriate. Once again there is a lack of critical engagement with some key sources. For example Harrison accepted the findings of the American National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2001) report uncritically in spite of many criticisms expressed by American academics (in particular Coles, 2003). There were only very occasional moments of genuine critical exploration in Harrison's report, such as on the value of grammar teaching. Harrison conceded that there is limited research evidence about the teaching of grammar but then demolished Hilton's (2001) accurate claims, that grammar teaching does not support writing, by highlighting the limited empirical evidence that she cites. Harrison failed to critique the more substantial and relevant review of empirical evidence on grammar teaching by Wyse (2001b) which would have been harder to dismiss.

## **6. The Assessment of Literacy**

One of the key areas where research is needed is in the area of assessment. The statutory tests and associated targets have proved to be a controversial outcome of the ERA 1988. There is a mass of data used by government, LEAs, and schools to inform policy yet clear guidance supported by research on

formative assessment during the literacy hour remains rare, although Paul Black, Dylan William, Caroline Gipps and Carol Fitzgibbon have significant work in the field of assessment more generally. In 1999 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 1999) issued some guidance about how schools and teachers might assess literacy and to-date this represents the only detailed information about assessment during the literacy hour. The publication suggested to me the opportunity for a small-scale study which was reported in Wyse (2001a).

Methodologically the study was novel in that it used English subject specialist final year undergraduates to gather data. A research framework was developed for the students with two main variants: a) student-researcher as participant; b) student-researcher as non-participant. Following the data collection and primary analysis, those research essays by the students which were graded at a minimum of degree class of 2.1 following moderation were synthesized to identify issues in relation to the assessment of literacy to be reported in the paper. Although the use of undergraduate researchers is common in other disciplines such as psychology, its use in education departments is less common. The method proved particularly useful where early evidence was required about a new initiative.

The main finding from the study was that the QCA guidance lacked clarity and required much adaptation in order to create tools that would usefully inform formative assessment in the classroom. Another significant finding was the fact that the children were often unaware about the purposes and nature of target-setting despite its powerful influence on the education system at all levels.

## **7. Research and Pedagogy in Future**

The future direction of policy for primary education has most recently been laid down in *Excellence and Enjoyment: A strategy for primary schools* (Department



for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003) which was the third major national strategy from the period between 1997 and 2003.

A significant problem is the contradictory messages about the literacy strategy that were included in the policy. On the one hand it is argued that: 'The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, though they are supported strongly, are **not statutory** [emphasis added] and can be adapted to meet schools' particular needs.' (DfES, 2003: 16) but on the other hand,

*The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have, according to all those who have evaluated them, been strikingly successful at improving the quality of teaching and raising standards in primary schools. But we need to **embed the lessons of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies more deeply.** [emphasis added]*  
(DfES, 2003: 27).

The claim that the NLS Framework for Teaching has been strikingly successful by all those who have evaluated it is simply not supported by evidence, as my work has shown. The evaluations from the University of Toronto Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) confirm this. The first report was guarded in its comments about the impact of the pedagogy of the literacy strategy:

Clearly it would be naïve to conclude that the instructional and other practices included in NLNS were the sole causes of the gains being made [in test results]. For example, as we have discussed in several other sections of this report:

- There is, at best, uneven evidence that such practices can be counted on to 'produce' numeracy and literacy gains;

(Earl et al, 2000: 36)

The second report affirmed this position by the claim that ‘the strategies themselves are a unique blend of practices whose effects, to our knowledge, have never been carefully tested in real field settings.’ (Earl, et al, 2001: 81) The idea that the literacy strategy has been completely successful is also questioned in the final report: ‘we recognise...that both strategies have been contentious’ (Earl, et al., 2003: 34). My contribution to this debate was recognised when I was invited to be interviewed by the lead researcher and writer for the OISE team who subsequently cited my work on the NLS in the third report.

## **8. Conclusion**

My work has shown that the FFT is inadequately supported by evidence. Increasingly it is felt that it hinders creative approaches to teaching and learning because of its prescriptive nature. The continuing emphasis on the FFT in the primary strategy is not even supported by the government’s own evidence. The government’s rhetoric about empowerment and creativity which is a feature of the primary national strategy, and their desire to raise standards, will only become a reality if the FFT is subject to some radical rethinking. The Primary National Strategy has presented another model of the curriculum which needs close examination. New models of how the teaching of English might be structured, in the light of the fact that teaching and learning strategies should be more varied, need to be developed and these should build on understanding of children’s development, in addition to what we know about effective teaching.

The book and papers that are part of this submission represent five years attention to what amounts to a radical national experiment with the primary English curriculum. Throughout all of these publications I have analysed government policy by comparing it with empirical evidence showing that government has a long way to go if it is to claim that policy on the teaching of English is informed by empirical evidence.

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## **Appendix A – Publications submitted for PhD by Publication**

**R = Refereed; S = Single Authored; P = Principal Author; J = Joint Author**

Wyse, D. (2000b) Phonics - The Whole Story?: A Critical Review Of Empirical Evidence. *Educational Studies* Vol. 26 (3): 355-364. **R S**

Wyse, D. (2001a) Promising Yourself to do Better?: Target-Setting and Literacy. *Education 3-13* Vol. 29 (2): 13-18. **R S**

Wyse, D. (2001b) Grammar. For Writing?: A Critical Review of Empirical Evidence. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol 49 (4): 411-427. **R S**

Wyse, D. (2003b) The National Literacy Strategy: A Critical Review of Empirical Evidence. *British Educational Research Journal*. Vol. 29 (6): 903-916. **R S**

Wyse, D. and Jones, R. (Eds.) (2001) *Teaching English, Language and Literacy*. London: Routledge-Falmer. **R P**

Wyse, D. and Jones, R. (2002) Circular Arguments: Teachers and Texts. *Changing English*, Vol 9 (1): 77-84. **R J**

## **Appendix B – Information and quality indicators about publications in relation to contribution from Dominic Wyse**

Four out of the six publications are single authored peer-reviewed publications. Two are co-authored peer-reviewed publications. Three of the journal articles are in the highest ranked British research journals demonstrated by their impact factor in the top 93 international education journals listed in the Journal Citation Reports (Institute for Scientific Information, 2003):

*British Educational Research Journal*

*British Journal of Educational Studies*

*Educational Studies*

The Journal *Changing English* was one of the top ten journals cited by grade 5 and 5\* rated educational departments in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2001 (Thornton, 2003). I took the lead role in the editing of this article. *Education 3-13* is a peer-reviewed education journal which is influential with educational academics and practitioners alike.

I acted as lead writer and final editor for the book *Teaching English, Language and Literacy* (Wyse and Jones, 2001) which involved writing most of the introductory chapters in addition to those on reading and writing and most of the general chapters in the final part of the book. RoutledgeFalmer is a very well respected publisher of academic educational texts. The publisher was first in the top ten publishers cited by 5 and 5\* education departments in the RAE 2001 (Thornton, 2003).



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