

The National Literacy Strategy and Setting: a policy for inclusion?

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Declaration

I declare that all the material in this thesis which is not my own has, to the best of my ability, been acknowledged. The material in the thesis has not been submitted previously by the author for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed:

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Never forget what it feels like to be stood in front of thirty children day in, day out, and if you do find yourself forgetting, get straight back into a classroom and remember!

Abstract

Within this study, I look at the rationale for, and the resulting effects of, setting for teaching literacy under the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). The study starts with my own experiences as a teacher and culminates in my role as a Research Associate at Newcastle University. There is, therefore, a crossover from micro to macro scale data collection, with the latter completed as part of a national funded research project. The key issues within this study are setting, inclusion and the NLS recommendations for teaching literacy, and these I relate to the debate about ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional’ teaching methods which have dominated education policy since 1870. A mixed method approach is used to investigate the incidence of setting for literacy, the rationale for its implementation and its impact in the classroom. Although the literature and the majority of the evidence from this study do not support its use, the incidence of setting was found to be high, with the likelihood of implementation linked to the demographic make up of the school roll. Teachers were found to rationalise the move to setting by identifying issues resulting from the increase in whole class teaching in the Literacy Hour, particularly to a diverse range of abilities and the target driven nature of the literacy curriculum. However, the analysis reveals little evidence to support the move towards ability grouping: the impact on patterns of interaction and the effect on value added reading scores show setting to be detrimental, especially to pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Pupil attitudes are also shown to take a more negative turn when setting is implemented, although the trends within this aspect of the study are more complex and point to some interesting findings which need further research.

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CHAPTER 1 – From primary teaching to research: introduction and overview

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and the introduction of ability grouping into English primary schools. The NLS is a curriculum initiative combining an objective driven curriculum and ambitious targets for literacy attainment, while also including recommendations for inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This study will investigate whether it is the traditional basis of the NLS or the increased diversity of need required to be included within the Literacy Hour that have prompted a resurgence in ability grouping and the effect that this grouping arrangement is having on teaching and learning in literacy within the primary classroom.

This chapter establishes the background to the study. Importantly, it starts with my own observations as a teacher teaching the National Literacy Strategy: *Framework for teaching* (DfEE 1998a) to both a mixed ability class and a set class (for definitions of these terms see Section 4.1.1). The chapter will illustrate how my initial perspective developed over the course of this study, from the specific context of the school in which I taught to a wider, more national perspective. Throughout this chapter, the emerging themes and conceptualisations will be clarified, my research questions identified and the resulting structure of the study outlined.

1.2 The personal background to this study

1.2.1 A teacher researcher

In July 1997, I was employed as a teacher of a mixed Year 4/5 class in a junior school in the southwest of England. During this first year of teaching, I became aware of the diverse needs of a mixed ability class of pupils, which in addition to including two year groups also comprised a wide range of literacy ability. Some were working at a secure Level 5, while others were working towards Level 1, and therefore were identified with SEN. Through complex systems of differentiation and extra adult support these needs were met wherever possible. The subject of English was an overarching consideration, in other words it was embedded across the curriculum and the school day; there was some explicit teaching of literacy skills; but the majority was taught alongside other subjects.

In the following year, the school roll grew allowing for single year group classes throughout: I was designated to teach Year 4 and this remained the case until I left a year later. I naively thought the variety of need I had experienced in my first year, teaching across two year groups, would not reoccur; however this was not the case. The spread of abilities within my one Year 4 class was almost as large as before.

It was at this point, in September 1998, that the National Literacy Strategy (NLS)¹ was introduced, affecting all areas of school life. The NLS dictates a daily Literacy Hour, a dramatic departure from the cross-curriculum approach to English previously used. The inclusion of a discrete lesson, namely the Literacy Hour, allowed the option

¹ In that our school was involved in piloting the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS, (DfEE 1999b)) this was implemented at the same time as the National Literacy Strategy. The policy for setting covered both subjects with one teacher taking the lower set in literacy and the upper in maths and vice versa.

of setting to be considered; previously this type of ability grouping would have been too complex. The Hour prescribed 15 minutes whole class text level work; 15 minutes word level work, 20 minutes task time, and finally a plenary of 10 minutes (see Figure 1). This means over half the Literacy Hour is taught to the whole class, which is a dramatic departure from teaching strategies used in the recent past. The *Framework* (DfEE 1998a) and its supporting evidence suggests that this allows more pupils to be taught directly using more traditional methods and thus is a major advantage of the structure (Beard 1998).

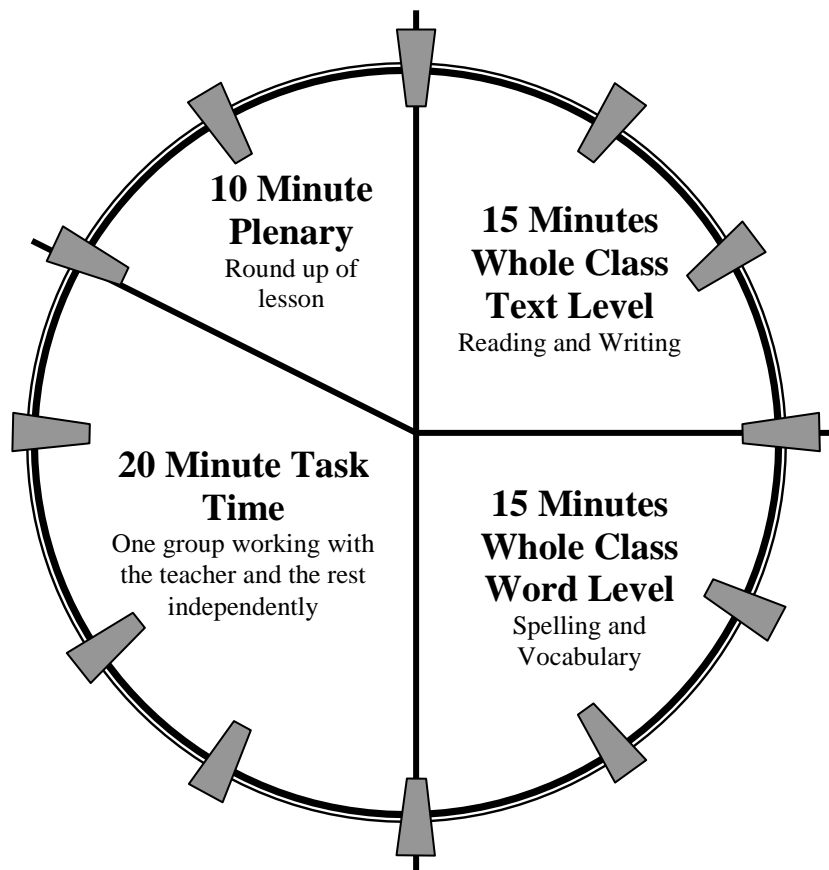


Figure 1. The Literacy Hour clock (adapted from the NLS: *Framework for teaching* DfEE 1998a p.9)

Setting was implemented into older year groups (Year 5 and 6) at the same time as the NLS. It was hoped that this would raise achievement and aid effective inclusion of

pupils at either end of the ability spectrum (the least and most able), particularly during the whole class sections of the Hour. Due to a successful Ofsted inspection and improvement in results from Year 6 Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs), this policy was extended to Year 4 in the following year, the year group in which I taught.

It was at this point that I became interested in researching the impact of setting on the teaching of literacy. My experiences reported here, along with data from the Pupil Questionnaire reported in Chapter 6, have previously been published as a journal article (Wall 2004) which is included in Appendix 2.

Experiencing the National Literacy Strategy and setting

As a teacher, I had a unique perspective on the change and developments in primary literacy legislation occurring between 1997 and 2000: the introduction of a national policy for literacy, the increased prominence of inclusive education and the move towards ability grouping. As such, the basis to this study are my observations and experiences. To facilitate and inform this research project, a written account of my own feelings and interpretations of two consecutive years literacy teaching, one with a mixed ability class and one with a set, were completed and are summarised below.

A brief description of each class follows:

- **Year 1998/1999** – a mixed ability class (31 pupils, including two pupils with statements and three hours of literacy support between them, 34% on the special needs register for literacy and abilities ranging in the class from pre-Level 1 to Level 5)

- **Year 1999/2000** – a lower set (26 pupils, including three pupils with statements with seven hours of literacy support between them, 84% on the SEN register for literacy and abilities ranging from pre-Level 1 to Level 3)

The account was written in two reflective summaries: one at the end of the school year 1998/1999; and the second after two terms in year 1999/2000. It is evidence of the experiences I had to deal with while using the two forms of pupil organisation, representing an ‘insiders’ perspective on the setting process. The full narratives are included in Appendices 5 and 6.

Setting was implemented into Year 4, where I taught, for a number of reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, there was the perceived success in older year groups. Secondly, it had been noted that many year groups within the school represented an extremely wide range of abilities. The impact of this wide range was magnified by increased amounts of whole class teaching required by the Literacy Hour. The consequences are mentioned in my observations:

Teaching a mixed ability class this year was difficult, particularly during the whole class section of the Literacy Hour, because of the huge variety of abilities within the class. I felt that, on occasions, the extremes of the ability range were being missed and this had potential for susceptible individuals to become disinterested and distracted. (Reflective Summary, July 1999)

Over the year, I have felt immense dissatisfaction, believing that the pupils with SEN are not getting the repetition and consolidation that they need and the able children are not developing ideas and being stretched enough. I can recognise that my skill in questioning is getting better and although the whole class is involved up to a point, I feel that I am not optimising the learning of these pupils. (Reflective Summary, July 1999)

I am aware this was the first year after the NLS: *Framework* was implemented and it meant a dramatic change to the teaching approaches used. I also recognise my skills

improved as the year progressed, particularly in managing the whole class; however my concerns about including a wide range of abilities and targeting learning objectives did not diminish. This dissatisfaction led me to believe setting would increase my confidence that I was reaching the needs of all pupils.

I hoped this accurate teaching of lesson objectives as stated in the NLS: *Framework* would be further enhanced under a setting arrangement by increased targeting of resources, in particular, human resources. In my mixed ability class, including two pupils with statements, I received three hours a week of LSA support. However, the year group as a whole received eight hours; this being the quota for a total of three statemented pupils. If setting was implemented, this allocation of support could be directed towards the lower set, meaning greater flexibility in how it could be used to meet the needs of the class as well as individuals. I thought this would be particularly helpful during the 20 minutes task time when pupils with SEN within my class were struggling to work independently regardless of the task I set:

They [the Pupils with SEN] did not have the reading level to understand written instructions or the comprehension skills to understand and retain oral instructions. They were mostly dependent on the direction of an adult to keep them on task and to support their working. Routine activities were developed to promote independence, but I feel they were not the most effective use of the children's time and promoted a limited development of the literacy skills they were lacking. (Reflective Summary July 1999)

My main concern about the move towards lower sets, through watching the experiences of colleagues and my own knowledge of pupils within my mixed ability class, was the issue of behaviour. The school used the two-form intake to separate potentially disruptive groupings during lesson time; however, setting would bring many of these combinations back together.

In the second reflective summary, written after two terms of teaching a lower set, I documented my pleasure at being more confident in thinking that my learning objectives were more effectively matched to the needs of the majority:

Teaching sets has meant that I am more confident that my teaching, particularly during the whole class session that I had a problem with last year, is targeting the majority of the ability levels within the group. (Reflective Summary May 2000)

However, a number of practical issues not predicted were experienced. For example, the physical movement of pupils from one classroom to another, with all of their pens, pencils and books for the lesson, led to a lot of disruption, particularly at the start of the year. Parents' evenings also became complicated with the majority of parents needing to see two teachers in the year group to get the full picture of their child's development, this ended up being very time consuming.

There were the expected problems with behaviour and I found these were exacerbated by the fact that most of positive role models had departed into the upper set. This also worked in relation to academic work. Pupils who might have sparked off debate with ideas and questions had also mostly been placed in the upper set. That is not to say my lower set did not have good discussions, but it was more likely to be teacher-led rather than led by peers. The lack of role models, both academic and behavioural, appeared to be a major disadvantage of setting:

The biggest problems I have found are the lack of positive role models in the lower ability sets. In fact it is the negative role models that have their example copied and if I am not careful predominate. The grouping policy followed in the NLS for the work tasks often exacerbated this further as again certain combinations were difficult to avoid. (Reflective Summary May 2000)

The targeting of extra adults went some way to easing this situation. I had seven hours of LSA time allocated to my literacy set, based on three pupils' statements of special needs, plus time allocated from the SEN co-ordinator to withdraw pupils to work specifically on Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets. However, the recommendations from the NLS state the withdrawal of pupils should be kept to a minimum (DfEE 1998a); this meant I was limited in the ways I could use this extra help. It tended to be limited to the 20 minutes task time when the LSA would assist a group with their differentiated task or withdraw a group or individual to work on their targets.

In contrast, the time dedicated to whole class teaching when I was required to minimise withdrawal and keep the class together, had little scope for the accurate targeting of the pupils with SEN and meant trained adults were used inappropriately and it often seemed a waste of valuable assistance. Complicated routines were built up around this support to try and make best use; however there was a narrow line between the support being useful and causing disruption in the lesson.

I documented the impact ability grouping appeared to have on pupils, particularly those pupils of lower ability. Although the school aimed to keep the nature of the groupings hidden, pupils were very aware of the composition and the implications:

There does seem to be some evidence of self-esteem effects, particularly on the lower ability pupils when setting has been implemented. One child who was in my mixed ability class last year and is now taught in Year 5 in a set, said to me:

“Miss Wall, you told me I was worth something, but now I am in the bottom of the bottom...” (Year 5, boy, SEN) (Reflective Summary May 2000)

I did worry a polarisation was occurring within the sets, with the more able group being expected to work conscientiously and to a high standard, whereas the lower set was synonymous with special needs leading to low expectations for the group. This, together with the emphasis of government legislation on either able and gifted pupils or those with SEN appeared to mean that the average pupil did not appear to get much of a look in. For example, in my narrative I wrote:

In the higher ability sets there is a willingness to work and a high standard of suggestion, which alongside natural enthusiasm is a breath of fresh air. In contrast when teaching the lower ability set, I possibly don't expect as much and I'm happy if they are on task and achieving much smaller goals. But I wonder whether the speed with which I am encouraged to cover work by the successes of able children and the NLS Framework is disadvantaging those at the lower end of the upper set, leaving the average children behind. Or, more scarily could it be a consequence that the opposite occurs and the quiet willingness to work brings complacency from the teacher. (Reflective Summary May 2000)

An unexpected advantage was the access pupils had when sets were implemented to two teachers. The teacher whom I taught with was male and this meant pupils in my class felt able to talk to him about things they might not have felt comfortable talking about with me, and vice versa. The downside of this was that I found I did not know my class individually as well as in previous years. Time was so pressured with changeovers to sets there did not seem to be the same time to talk to pupils about life outside school. This I found very disappointing.

I documented my experiences for two years as a teacher and these elements are undoubtedly important to this study. However, my role as a Research Associate has also provided a complementary perspective.

1.2.2 A Research Associate

Following my experiences as a teacher, I was employed to work as a full time Research Associate on a Nuffield Foundation sponsored project investigating how pupils with a special need in literacy were being included within the Literacy Hour. There have been a number of publications arising from this project:

- Hardman, F., F. Smith and K. Wall (2002) An Investigation into the Impact of the National Literacy Strategy on the Literacy Learning of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools. Newcastle, University of Newcastle
- Hardman, F., Smith, F. & Wall, K. (2003) 'Interactive Whole Class Teaching' in the National Literacy Strategy. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, **33**(2): 197-215
- Hardman, F., Smith, F., Wall, K., and Mroz, M. (2005) Teacher-pupil dialogue with pupils with special educational needs in the National Literacy Strategy. *Educational Review*, **57**(3): 299-316

The latter two articles are included in Appendices 3 and 4 as they have particular relevance to this study. This role has allowed me access to a different perspective on the debate surrounding ability grouping within the National Literacy Strategy and a different perspective on potential research methods. As a Research Associate, I was able to develop my initial research into the impact of setting on the teaching of literacy by increasing the scale of the research to encompass a larger, less context specific, national sample: thus moving from the micro- to the macro- level.

1.3 The wider background to the study

In the opening to this chapter, I have outlined how my experiences as a teacher led to the identification of the key themes for this study: how and why a policy of setting for the Literacy Hour is believed effective for teaching and learning within the primary school, and to what extent it manifests itself in classroom practice. It is now important to start linking those issues with existing research and commentary surrounding the NLS and setting. However, before outlining my research focus and research questions, it is necessary to briefly look at the background of the National Literacy Strategy, the method of implementation and its structure. By doing this, I will make explicit links to my own experiences as a teacher, and provide a rationale for this research project.

It is also important in this section of the thesis to explicitly state how various terms are to be used within the study and the conceptualisation process behind them. These terms are:

- Literacy
- Ability grouping (specifically the terms, setting and streaming)
- Inclusion (including Special Education Need)

Obviously, these aspects will be dealt with in more depth as part of the literature reviews (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), but it is important to define them as a basis for later discussion.

1.3.1 Literacy education and the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy

According to the NLS, literacy:

...unites the important skills of reading and writing. It also involves speaking and listening... (DfEE 1998a p.3)

The National Literacy Strategy represents the latest initiative in an area of fierce debate throughout the history of education, whether in the political arena, in the academic world, or in the media. There are a number of reasons why the literacy curriculum has been so contested. To begin with, as indicated in the quote above, literacy is a composite subject made up of reading and writing plus speaking and listening. These are modes of language use that interrelate to the point where they are inextricably linked (for example, Corden 2000a), thus an examination of them individually, although possible, should always consider, and will inevitably influence the others. Secondly, to be illiterate arguably places an individual at a severe disadvantage (for example, Olson 1986), making the laudable, but emotive aim of abolishing underachievement and raising standards synonymous with political ideals for curriculum development. Finally, over the years, a theoretical debate has dominated literacy pedagogy: whether a 'whole language' or a 'basic skills' approach is best (as outlined in Chall 1983). These two different perspectives are often described as being at opposing ends of a scale, the former labelled as progressive in nature and the latter as traditional; however, it is important to ask how they manifest themselves.

The National Literacy Strategy is the latest in a long line of legislation aimed at raising standards in literacy (see Chapter 2). The NLS was initiated by the Literacy

Task Force, which was established under David Blunkett, the then shadow Secretary of State. The Task Force was set the aim,

By the end of a second term of a Labour Government, all children leaving primary school ... will have reached a reading age of at least eleven. (The Literacy Task Force 1997 p.13)

This aim was announced very publicly at the beginning of New Labour's first term in power. Government policy specified that:

80% of all 11 year olds will reach the standards expected of their age in English (i.e. level 4) in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum (NC) tests... (*ibid.* p.13)

This focus on improving standards arose from international comparisons of pupils' reading which concluded that British pupils were underachieving when compared to pupils in other first world countries, such as Finland, France and New Zealand (Beard 1998). One of the reasons given for this underachievement was low expectation; therefore the improving of expectations was seen as fundamental to any strategy for raising standards, thus standards and targets of attainment were a key facet of the policy.

The National Literacy Project was the precursor to the NLS and it was the perceived success of this project that led to the sweeping introduction of the Strategy. The HMI report on the Project stated, "Pupils, in general, made greater than expected progress over the five terms of their involvement in the Project." (HMI 1998). However, in the same report, and Sainsbury *et al.*'s review of the project, it was concluded that pupils with SEN were making significantly less progress than their peers (HMI 1998; Sainsbury *et al.* 1998). At the same time concerns were voiced about the

appropriateness of a national strategy for meeting the needs of all children of primary age (for example, Fisher 2000b).

Regardless of this, the *Framework for Teaching* (DfEE 1998a) was published and distributed to all LEAs, schools and teachers. It was not compulsory that schools implemented the NLS, however, those that chose not to were required to justify their own methods (Literacy Task Force 1997). Large amounts of money were invested in training and resources; this together with Ofsted inspections and national targets meant that most schools followed the new initiative. The *Framework* was marketed as a solution and therefore necessary. As a result, by 2000 the majority of primary schools in England had implemented the Strategy as it was laid out in the *Framework* (HMI 1999; Beverton and English 2000; Smith and Whiteley 2000).

Earl *et al.* (2000) completed an independent review of the NLS two years after its start, concluding that the method of implementation was excellent. They described it as a two-pronged approach: firstly, support in the form of money, invested in professional development to encourage the use of the Strategy; and secondly, pressure to enforce the Strategy (Earl *et al.* 2000). From a policy orientation it was efficient, but the impact on teachers was debatable. It was reported that many teachers felt like they were 'between a rock and a hard place', unable to escape or use their professional judgement (Dadds 1999; Anderson *et al.* 2000; Smith and Whiteley 2000). However, a survey of teacher opinions in regard to the implementation of the Strategy showed that the majority of the teaching profession had a positive attitude towards the NLS (Fisher and Lewis 1999). This was reaffirmed by other reports such as HMI (1999)

and Earl *et al.* (2000), but was not reflected in the press (see for example Haughton 1997; Hopkins 1997).

Having outlined the background to the National Literacy Strategy and introduced some of the ideas surrounding the literacy curriculum, it is now important to examine the other key areas under investigation, ability grouping and inclusion.

1.3.2 The use of ability grouping

Ability grouping is a generic term used to describe many different types of organisation based on pupils' perceived ability. There are various issues with the definitions applied within the field (as highlighted and examined in Chapter 4); however this thesis is explicitly examining the concept of setting. I use setting to mean the regrouping, across two or more mixed ability classes, of pupils within a single curriculum area according to ability. This is the form in which ability grouping has re-emerged in the modern era; largely arising from criticisms levelled at ability grouping across the curriculum (streaming) which pervaded primary school pre-Plowden Report (DES 1967). It is claimed that setting means the more accurate grouping of pupils' by their subject-specific ability levels and that mixed ability teaching can be used in other areas of the curriculum therefore minimising any teacher or pupil effects.

Setting has been recommended by senior Government officials (cited in Budge 1998) and bodies (for example, Ofsted 1998b) as a means to effectively teach the Literacy Hour during the last six years. Indeed within class ability grouping is part of the

recommendations laid out in the NLS: *Framework for Teachers* (DfEE 1998a). The NLS has certainly opened up the way for setting in a way that the subject of English was never predisposed to in the past: the introduction of a specific lesson a day, the Literacy Hour, means that ability grouping specific to the subject is seen as a straightforward proposition.

These factors and the influence of high ranking education organisations, such as Ofsted (1998b), certainly acted to encourage the decision to implement setting in the school where I taught and the research literature says that this is mirrored in many other schools (for example, Hallam *et al.* 2003). But ability grouping is not without its critics; research examining the use of streaming in the first half of the Twentieth Century often indicates a negative impact on children's self-image (for example, Schwartz 1981 and Willig 1963, both cited in Hallam and Toutounji 1996). In the light of this debate, this study seeks to investigate further why setting is being used by the modern day primary schools within the context of the NLS, and examine what its effects are when it is implemented.

1.3.3 Defining inclusion

The National Literacy Strategy is the first policy document to combine recommendations for the way in which literacy should be taught with those on the inclusion of pupils with SEN (the context to which is elaborated on in Chapter 2). The following statement, taken from the *Framework*, illustrates this:

The Literacy Hour should be implemented throughout the school to provide a daily period of dedicated literacy teaching for *all* pupils. (DfEE 1998a, p.8) [my emphasis]

In my reflections on my experiences as a teacher, the importance of the relationship between the NLS and inclusion was highlighted. I described how the need to include a wide range of abilities was seen as being a key reason for the introduction of setting. Due to this perceived link, it is important to define what I mean by the term inclusion.

Researchers, such as Ainscow (1997 and 1998) and Booth (1985a and 1994), have advocated inclusion. They suggest it is a "...concept which views children with disabilities as true full-time participants and members of their neighbourhood schools and communities" (Knight 1999). However, I would argue in the modern school, which is inundated with documents regarding targeting able, gifted and talented pupils (for example, DfES 2000c and Ofsted 2001), as well as those directed at the less able and pupils with SEN (for example, DfEE 1998b), a looser definition is needed. Thus, the word inclusion becomes more equated with meeting the diversity of need represented by the primary population at either end of the ability spectrum. This more expansive definition is crucial in my examination of the implementation of setting in the Literacy Hour.

The historical development of legislation surrounding the provision for pupils identified as having SEN shows how the associated language has changed over time, as have the connotations which go with the term (this will be fully explored in Chapter 2). In 1978, the Warnock Report (DES 1978) used the idea of a continuum to describe special need or needs: with severe, often on-going, needs at one end of the scale and more temporary and minor needs at the other. This idea of special need is one that is kept to within the content of this thesis. It is one that matches the way in

which the term SEN, and the legislation that went with it, was applied within the context of the school in which I worked. It therefore, influences my own philosophy and experience of teaching.

1.4 Focusing the investigation

As demonstrated by my own experiences, teachers' beliefs and professional ideology are an important aspect of how to assess the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and a policy of setting. However, it is likely that what teachers believe, which is affected by their professional and pedagogical beliefs, and what they actually do in the classroom are two separate constituents. It is therefore apparent that alongside investigation about the teachers' perspective there needs to be an analysis of the actual delivery of the curriculum within the classroom and its measurable impact (this can be seen in Figure 2). The classroom practice of teachers, therefore is a prominent part of my study; however, there is an additional element that has emerged from my experiences as a teacher: the pupils.

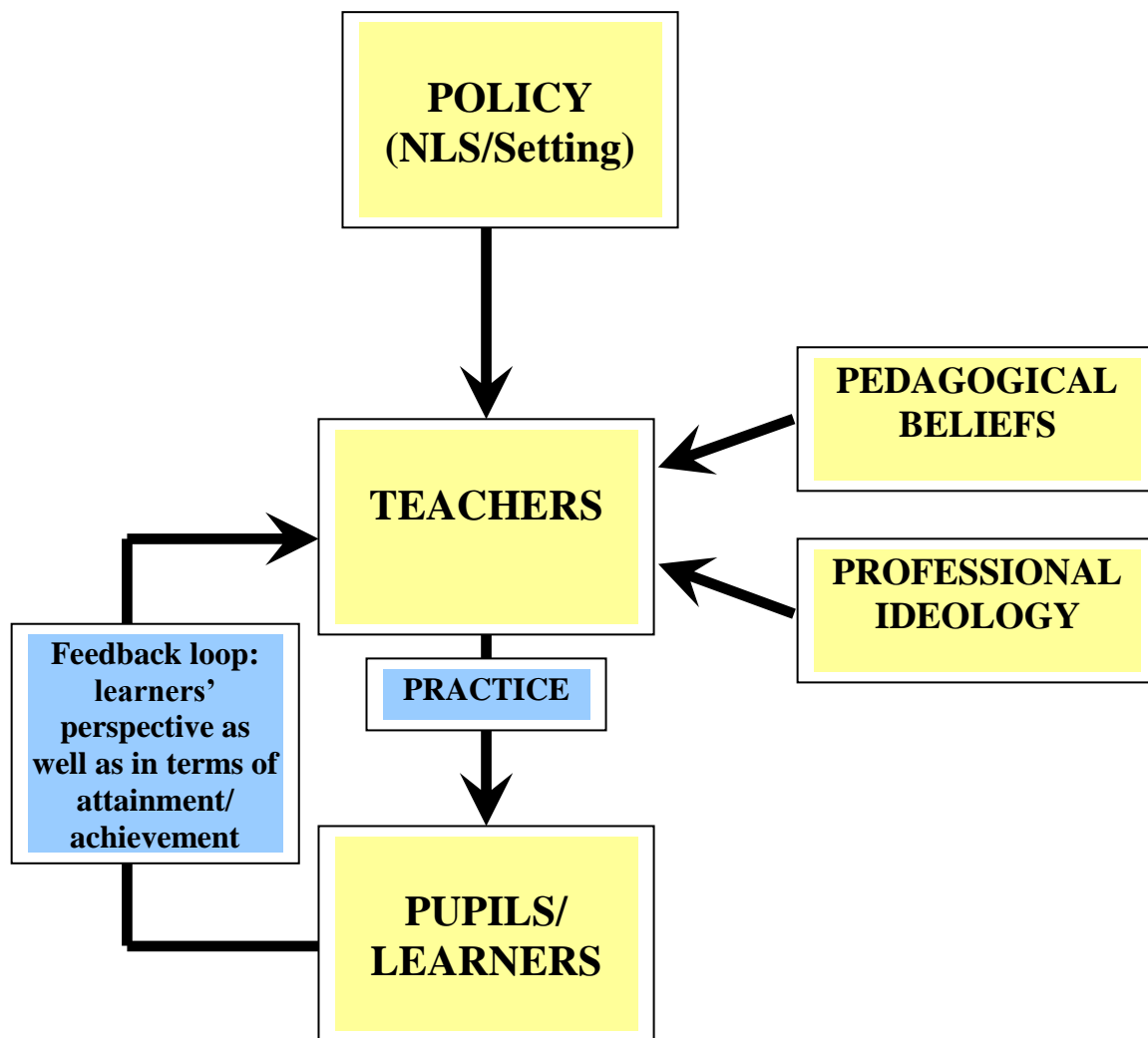


Figure 2. Top-down policy implementation process diagram

The research into ability grouping has frequently documented the effects of ability grouping on pupils' self esteem and attitudes; therefore, this study must also investigate these potential effects within the context of the NLS. The feedback loop between the pupils and the teachers, whether directly as attitudes or indirectly through the outcomes of the teaching and learning process (for example, attainment or achievement), is surely going to be paramount in influencing the success or failure of any policy.

1.4.1 Research questions

There are two themes therefore emerging which will need to be examined within this study. Firstly, why is setting re-emerging in English primary schools: is it the requirement to include pupils with SEN in the whole class teaching of the NLS, the traditional focus on a target driven curriculum, a combination of the two or something new? Secondly, what are the effects of setting in the Literacy Hour on teachers, pupils, and the teaching and learning process, in those schools that have already implemented it?

From these themes I have derived my main research question, which is:

How are different grouping arrangements of pupils (mixed ability or set) affecting teaching and learning in the National Literacy Strategy?

From this I have derived the following sub-questions to explore the different themes I have identified in this opening chapter:

1. How do pupils' perceptions of the National Literacy Strategy differ under mixed ability and set organisational groups?
2. What beliefs and attitudes do teachers hold regarding the use of mixed ability and set classes to promote effective teaching of the Literacy Hour?
3. What impact are the different grouping arrangements having on:
 - teacher-pupil interaction?
 - pupil attainment?
4. What strategies are teachers using to address the need for inclusion in the Literacy Hour?

1.5 Format of the study

The structure of this thesis is illustrated by Figure 3 on the next page. In order to contextualise the study three literature reviews have been included to set the scene and explore the issues developed within this study. As previously stated, the National Literacy Strategy is a key policy document in that it combines legislation regarding the curriculum alongside that of Special Educational Needs and therefore, in Chapter 2, I will track the historical developments, with regard to literacy and provision for pupils with SEN, that have led up to this landmark policy. A key element of this will be to examine the changing ideologies that are reflected in the policies. Through this examination of trends over time, I find within the context of the NLS a contradiction has resulted between the more progressive philosophies of inclusion and the traditional elements (i.e. an increasing drive to raise literacy standards; the prominence of testing and targets; and more whole class ‘direct’ teaching). Pupils with SEN are synonymous with low achievement and yet the NLS requires them to be included within the Literacy Hour, while at the same time setting demanding targets for attainment inextricably linked to testing.

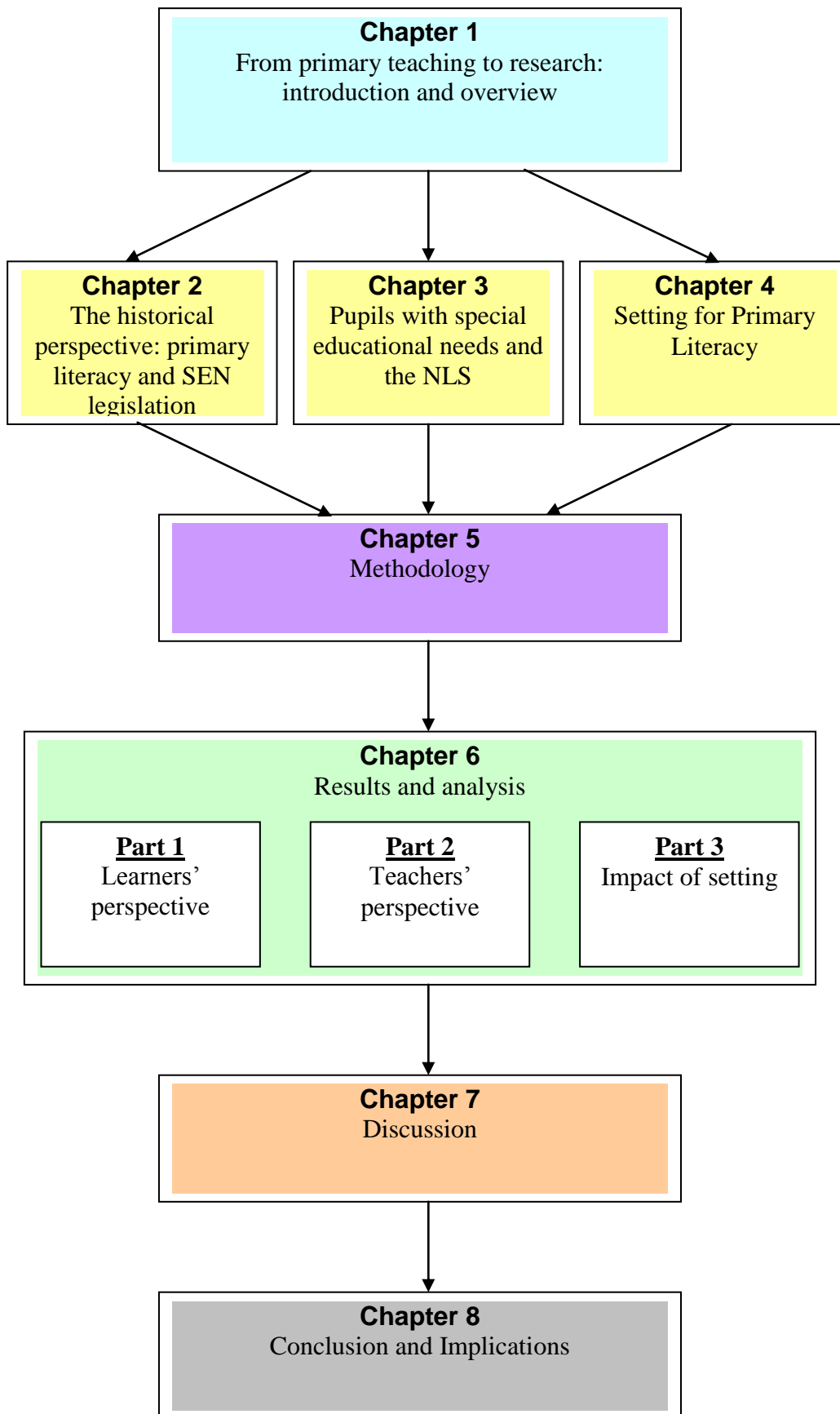


Figure 3. Thesis structure

Having identified the tensions within the NLS between traditional and progressive philosophies of primary education, Chapter 3 takes this issue further by exploring the practical teaching side. Questions are asked regarding how policies such as the NLS and the Literacy Hour are being implemented within primary schools. It investigates how teachers are attempting to address both inclusion and raising standards. The arising conflicts and arguments are examined in the light of commentaries and research evidence published since the inception of the NLS in 1998. A key issue that arises from the discussion is whether there has been an undermining of teachers' professionalism due to the level of prescription in the NLS. It appears that there are many strategies employed by teachers to adapt curriculum for effective inclusion and that ability grouping is likely to be one of them.

The third literature review, in Chapter 4, uses synthesis tables to investigate the historical development of setting. Many reviews of ability grouping have been conducted over the last 50 years and these are used as a basis for my own analysis. The tables enable me to draw further conclusions regarding trends in education policy, as discussed in Chapter 2, and link them to those associated with the occurrence of ability grouping in primary schools. Through this process the circular nature of education policy is explored. The chapter then goes on to explore whether this new wave of ability grouping, within the context of the NLS, is the same as in the past. I hypothesised that there were crucial differences, such as the link between curriculum advice and the teaching of SEN pupils. The question is asked whether setting now is more synonymous with inclusion rather than, as in the past, testing. Thus, the context for my research questions is established and described.

Within Chapter 5, the methodology, I establish the three areas that my research will focus on (the teachers' perspective, the learners' perspective and the impacts of setting) and the research process adopted to investigate each of these aspects.

I argue that a multi-method approach is the most appropriate for a thorough and convincing investigation of such a wide-reaching policy as the NLS. The rationale for the different data collection tools is given and their use is explained: three questionnaires (one to pupils and two to teachers), computerised structured classroom observations and value-added reading scores. I argue that by using these different research tools, and triangulating the qualitative and quantitative data, more reliable and convincing conclusions are achieved.

Using the same three-part structure, the results are presented and undergo detailed analysis in Chapter 6 and they are then discussed in Chapter 7. Finally, in Chapter 8 the conclusions of the study are summarised and the implications and recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and educational research are considered.

CHAPTER 2 – Contextualising the study: the historical development

2.1 Introduction

The National Literacy Strategy is the latest in a string of government-initiated policies to influence, and in some cases revolutionise, teaching and learning. In Chapter 1, I outlined how this study and the focus of my research questions have their origins in my own experience as a teacher. To set my experiences into a historical and political context, this chapter discusses the developments that led up to the introduction of the NLS, some of the manoeuvrings which led to its content, and the debates and potential tensions that are embedded within the *Framework* and Literacy Hour.

In the previous chapter, it was identified that within the NLS there is a tension between ‘traditional’ literacy approaches with more ‘progressive’ ideologies, namely inclusion, and I suggested the combination of these two aspects in the same policy document act to make ability grouping more likely. These two themes will be tracked through the legislative history of English education.

The tensions between traditional and progressive ideologies will be linked to the somewhat comparable debate between basic skills approaches to teaching literacy and whole language approaches, as well as to the drive towards increased inclusion. The development of my belief that there is a relationship between ability grouping, inclusion and an objective driven curriculum for literacy will be focused on.

Some commentators argue primary literacy education has, during the time frame under discussion, come full circle, from traditional methods, including regular testing of pupils, to progressive, child-centred methods and back again (Richards 2001). This is shown in diagrammatic form in Figure 4.

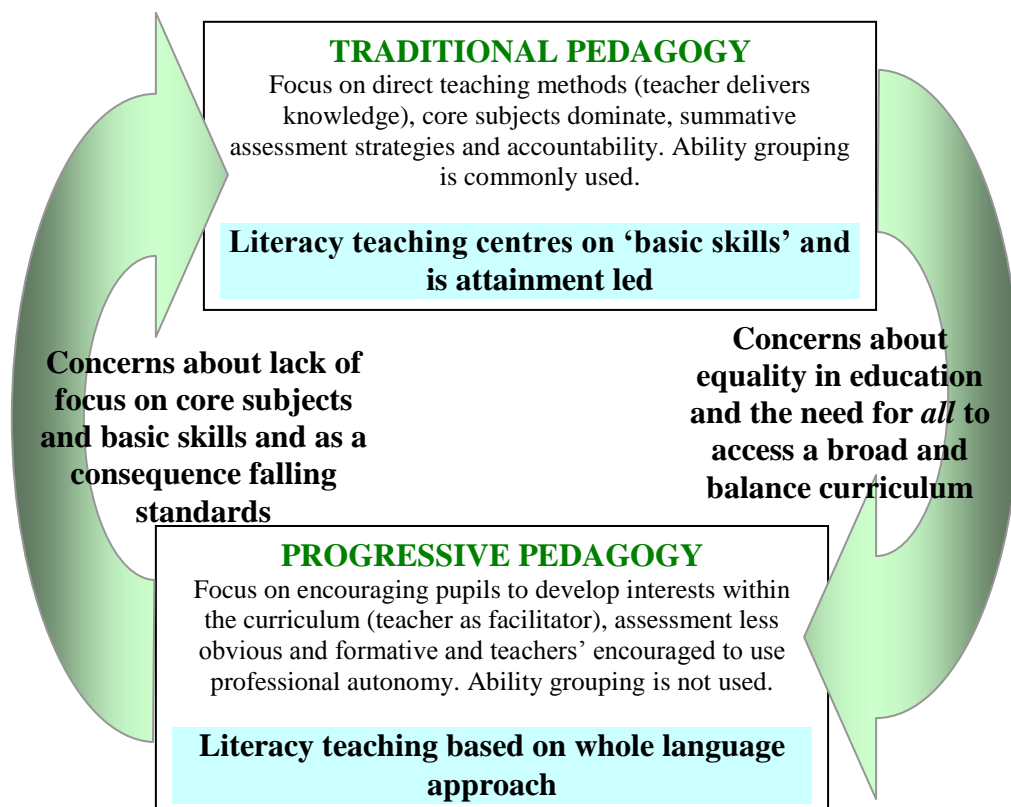


Figure 4. Cyclical development of education legislation

I will argue, however, that no policy can ever be reinstated in exactly the same format as before. The contexts within which these strategies have been introduced are separated in time by nearly a century, a century of the most rapid and dramatic economic, technological and ideological change. There is a need to critically analyse legislative development and ask whether we can ever truly reintroduce strategies of

the past into the context of the present, and whether the associations that are made, for example, the link between testing and ability grouping, are therefore applicable and appropriate.

A key element to the changing context lies in the NLS: the fact that recommendations have been made regarding a literacy curriculum and inclusion. This is a point that has been made before, but by tracking the development of SEN legislation on to the literacy policy development framework, I will explore this fundamental shift in policy.

The question that arises is whether all pupils can be included in an education system that strives to eliminate underachievement. Pupils with SEN will often not achieve the standards perceived as epitomising successful education. A conflict, therefore, arises between the ideal of inclusion and the need to consistently achieve more ambitious targets (Dyson and Slee 2001). More importantly to this thesis, one must question whether the goals of inclusion and raised literacy standards are achievable through the NLS, and how setting helps to resolve these seemingly contradictory policies.

2.2 1870-1959: A traditional foundation

This historical review starts with the Elementary Education Act of 1870 (The Forster Act), which established free, state education for working class pupils from the age of five up to twelve. The Act made attendance of pupils up to the age of ten compulsory, and, in the two years until they were twelve, optional. It included some recommendations for groups of handicapped pupils, and therefore, because of this,

represents the start of an intention to provide education for all. Indeed, during Forster's introductory speech to the House of Commons on the 17th of February 1870, this is exemplified:

What is the purpose of this Bill? Briefly this, to bring elementary education within reach of every English home, aye, and within reach of those children who have no homes. (cited in Maclure, 1973 p.104)

The curriculum, however, was limited and largely dictated by a policy of testing and payment by results, introduced in 1862. The tests focused on the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic and, because pupils' failure to meet standards resulted in non-payment of teachers, by default the three Rs became the focus of the school day.

There were many criticisms of the system; however:

...literacy rates climbed steadily until, by the end of the nineteenth century, some 97% of the population were literate. However, it should be remembered that definitions of what constitutes 'literate' continue to change. (Wyse and Jones 2001 p.6)

It is interesting that just as in the Twenty-First Century the role of literacy and numeracy were central in the primary curriculum and teachers were restricted due to the emphasis placed on testing and having to teach to the test. While there are similarities, inequality in the Victorian system was rife with state schools being the domain of the lower working classes. This was not a curriculum meant for all.

These inequalities were acknowledged through the commissioning of the Newbolt Report in 1921 highlighting concerns regarding the literacy levels of conscripts during the First World War (Hardman 2001). It emphasised the position of literacy at the core of the curriculum for all ages. The Report suggested "...every teacher is a teacher of English because every teacher is a teacher *in* English" (Shayer 1972 p.70). Thus,

English was seen as an entitlement for all pupils. There were a number of recommendations including the development of creative language and a reassessment of the position of oral work ('speech training'), focusing on how it fed into written work, but the majority of the curriculum was still taught using 'direct' teaching methods (a term which has been used in association with the NLS) to the whole class.

More generally, social class divisions previously entrenched within the system were starting to be challenged; a sense of education equality was further developed. This Report consolidated the 1870 recommendations for pupils with SEN, stating that handicapped pupils should be educated in special schools or classes. This is a long way, in ideology and time, from the comprehensive system seen today, but it is important to track this legislative shift over the mid to late twentieth century to understand the situation within which this study is set.

In the interwar years, a spark of the progressive movement which would dominate 1960s and 70s policy, can be seen. The Hadow Reports comprised of three documents: the first, issued in 1926, focused on secondary education; the second (published in 1931) on primary education; and the third looked at infant education (1933). Maclure (1974) asserts these reports set the groundwork for the psychological and pedagogical thought that would change elementary schools into the modern day primary.

In terms of literacy, the Report advised 'activity and experience' (Board of Education 1931) to facilitate learning; this represented a dramatic change from the firmly

established direct teaching and rote learning. It also started to introduce some of the characteristics that might be typically associated with a 'whole language' classroom (see for example, Marsden 1993; Pollard 1995). Building on recommendations in the Newbolt Report, oracy was promoted; talk was encouraged again as a precursor to writing. Although some grammar should be taught, the teaching of grammar unrelated to the rest of the literacy curriculum was rejected. This is an interesting proposal considering recent criticism of the NLS and its policy of compartmentalising the literacy curriculum into word level, sentence level and text level work (see for example, Graham 1998; Dadds 1999; Frater 1999, whose arguments are discussed further in Chapter 3).

Pupils were encouraged to read independently at home. Also, in the 1933 Report into infant education, imaginative play was recommended alongside drama, rhymes and games. As Wyse and Jones (2001) point out:

The Hadow Reports read as remarkably progressive documents for their time, and the principles of child-centred education that are explicit in many of their recommendations continued to inform thinking in primary language teaching for the next 50 years. (*Ibid.* p.8-9)

The Hadow Report was the first policy document to recognise literacy as a complex part of the curriculum which could be taught in different ways. The recommendations gradually filtered through into regular guidelines from the Board of Education and the amount of pedagogic control which teachers' enjoyed increased. The way was paved for the progressive movement to develop over the central period of the Twentieth Century. This report marks the start of the debate regarding the best way to teach literacy; a debate that still rages within the pages of the NLS.

In contrast to the progressive suggestions of the Hadow Reports, the Spens Report (1938) had a very traditionalist slant. It recommended a tripartite system of secondary education and stated:

Since the ratio of each child's mental age to his chronological age remains approximately the same, while his chronological age increases, the mental differences between one child and another will grow larger and larger and will reach a maximum during adolescence. It is accordingly evident that different children from the age of 11, if justice is to be done to their varying capacities, require types of education varying in certain important respects. (The Spens Report cited in Maclure 1973 p.195)

Entrance to the three different types of secondary school was dictated by psychological testing in the form of the 11+ examination. This was later emphasised by the report of the Norwood Committee in 1943 (Gordon *et al.* 1991). A direct parallel can be drawn between the 11+ and the SATs which were introduced in the 1988 Education Reform Act; it could be argued that while the 11+ tested pupils, the SATs are testing and judging schools; nevertheless the potential impact is comparable.

The implementation of the 11+ influenced primary literacy teaching in two ways. Firstly, educators, parents and pupils became very aware of the importance of passing the examination. This meant a preoccupation in the classroom with teaching the content of the test: "the curriculum of primary and elementary schools was subordinate to the needs of the examination..." (Brehony 1990 p.124). This had the knock-on effect of streaming (Sukhnandon with Lee 1998; Jackson 1964). Ability grouping was commonly introduced so those most likely to pass were focused on, being primed for the examination. This placed those not in the top stream at a disadvantage compared to their peers (Galton 1995). This is particularly pertinent to

this study in considering whether ability grouping is a method of enabling inclusion, or a way of achieving ambitious targets.

The 1944 Education Act importantly introduced secondary education for all (Simon 1994) and this resulted in the official separation of primary and secondary education. The term primary school was "defined as 'full-time education suitable to the requirements of junior pupils' (i.e. pupils under 12 years of age)" (Dent 1944 p.16). The three-layered system, suggested by the Spens Committee, was firmly established and the 11+ was firmly entrenched as deciding who should go where. Wyse and Jones state:

...the 11+ continued to restrain the primary language curriculum, particularly with the older children, in spite of the fact that more progressive child-centred measures were gaining ground with younger children. (Wyse and Jones 2001 p.9)

With the formalisation of the tripartite system and the 11+ examination, it is somewhat surprising that this Act represents the first major legislation regarding pupils with special educational needs; although this is maybe where its thrust of 'education for all' manifests itself. It included advice for Local Education Authorities (LEAs) of their duties in regard to the whole school-age population:

...to afford for all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes. (DES 1944 para. 8)

This Act defined eleven categories of handicap: blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially deaf, delicate, diabetic, educationally subnormal, epileptic, maladjusted, physically handicapped and those with speech defects. The nature of this education provision was made clear in guidance from the Ministry for Education in 1946: most commonly

it took the guise of special schools, but it was conceded that integration into ordinary schools could play a role (Hegarty *et al.* 1981).

From this early legislation and the attempt to categorise educational need, it is already possible to see the issue of diversity emerging, particularly when combined with policies advocating testing. We can begin to understand the balancing act necessary to provide simultaneously for an individual's very specific needs and, on the other hand, the requirements of the majority. It also indicates the relationship between the inclusion of pupils with SEN and those who are classified as able: the common element is diversification of need within the classroom.

The 1944 Education Act included little curriculum advice in terms of literacy (Wyse and Jones 2001; Pollard *et al.* 1994); however its recommendations influenced teaching generally. Pollard (1995) suggests explicit assumptions of partnerships at all levels of the education system gave teachers the freedom to use their professional judgement without restriction. Of course, the perceived consequences of this professional freedom (discussed later within the progressive movement) are arguably presented as reasons why testing, teacher accountability and top-down policy are important monitoring strategies, and are deemed necessary as part of education improvement in the late Twentieth Century.

2.2.1 Summary

During this time period a traditional ideology was dominant. Key features of the time were a focus on the core curriculum and a reliance on testing as a form of assessment.

The attainment of schools, teachers and pupils was measured wherever possible and prioritised. The impacts of these different elements can be seen in the literacy provision, with direct teaching of basic skills dominant and a need to focus on the content of tests an ever present consideration. A consequence of this need to pass tests appears to be the common use of ability grouping, in the form of streaming (this will be discussed further in chapter 4), although in later years this would be criticised as not being compatible with beliefs about equality.

However, the roots of the progressive era are apparent in later legislation. The language starts to be about partnerships, sentiments regarding education equality were on the increase, and provision for pupils with SEN was growing, even if this was commonly outside of the mainstream system. The foundations of a revolution in the literacy curriculum are also evident, with an increasing awareness of the complexity of literacy and the potential this has for different teaching approaches. This, in itself, would impact on the choices to be made by teachers in the classroom. The path to progressive ideologies was clearly laid.

2.3 1960-1988: The growth of progressive ideologies

The Hadow Reports in the 1930s gave hints as to the direction which education policy was going to take from this point. Within the time period 1960-1988, the popular education ideologies moved towards being more progressive and the drive for inclusion was intensified.

The first step towards a more progressive approach to primary education was dissatisfaction with testing procedures, namely the 11+ as indicated by the Newsom Report (1963). It drew attention to the large numbers of children who failed the selection process and therefore did not get the same opportunities as their peers (Galton 1995). It was the first report to highlight inequalities in the education system and marked the beginning of the demise of the 11+. The conclusions of the reports and the evidence cited in Chapter 4 remind us that it is important to investigate whether these same inequalities exist within the SATS, Literacy Hour and grouping by ability.

As a reaction to these perceived inequalities, the Plowden Report (1967), entitled '*Children and Their Primary Schools*', was commissioned in order to monitor the extent to which recommendations of its forerunner, the Hadow Reports (1926, 1931, and 1933) had been put into practice. It provided a detailed picture of English primary schools at the time. 'Informal' assessments were completed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and were fed into the Report (Thomas 2001). The child-centred strategies and progressive techniques advised in Hadow were focused on and formed the major thrust of the committee (Wyse and Jones 2001; Arnot *et al.* 2001; Galton *et al.* 1999; Gordon *et al.* 1991). Due to this progressive slant, it has often been cited as one of the most influential post-war pieces of legislation prior to the 1980s (for example, Pollard *et al.* 1994; Wyse and Jones 2001).

The fundamental philosophy behind the report's recommendations was an emphasis on the individual, a departure from previous educational legislation, making it a minor

landmark (Alexander 1994). The Committee noted numerous possibilities could create differences between pupils:

...policy makers and administrators must act in a world where other things are never equal; this, too, is the world in which the children grow up ... The outlook and aspirations of their parents; the opportunities and handicaps of the neighbourhood in which they live; the skill of their teachers and the resources of the schools they go to; their genetic inheritance; and other factors still unmeasured or unknown surround the children with a seamless web of circumstance. (DES 1967 p. 50)

It was concluded that diversity of need was too great for pupils to be neatly assigned to streams (implications for use of ability grouping, discussed in Chapter 4) or types of schools, and,

Any practice which predetermines the pattern and imposes it upon all is to be condemned ... There is little place for the type of scheme which sets down exactly what ground should be covered and what skill should be acquired by each class in the school. (DES 1967 p.198)

Teachers were asked to adapt their teaching methods according to the needs of the pupils, making sure that they met the requirements of the extremes of the population, and therefore all of the pupils in between (Rogers 1980). This was a major thrust of the 'child-centred' movement associated with the progressive ideology.

In terms of literacy, one of the Plowden Report's main consequences was the promotion of more integrated approaches as a means of providing more meaningful learning:

Children's learning does not fit into subject categories. The younger the children, the more undifferentiated their curriculum will be. As children come towards the top of the junior school, and we anticipate they will be there till 12, the conventional subjects become more relevant; some children can then profit from a direct approach to the structure of a subject. Even so, subjects merge and overlap and it is easy for this to

happen when one teacher is in charge of the class for most of the time.
(DES 1967 para.555)

In terms of the strategies used to teach English, talk took a prominent role: "Spoken language plays a central role in learning" (*ibid.* para. 54) and "The development of language is, therefore, central to the educational process" (*ibid.* para. 55). The effective teaching of reading was described as being a mixture of approaches (Wyse and Jones 2001). Teachers were encouraged to increase the range of children's literature in schools and to move away from categories of books with a specific purpose, suggesting the use of children's librarians and collaboration with bookshops, publishers and authors. Teachers were advised to provide the starting point and enthusiastic support for pupils to follow their own interests. Many of these recommendations are reflected in the NLS: *Framework*, although controversially many of these activities are now 'side-lined' out of the Hour itself (an argument followed up in Chapter 3).

In terms of pupils' writing, the report starts:

Perhaps the most dramatic of all revolutions in English teaching is in the amount and quality of children's writing ... In the thirties, independent writing in the infant school and lower junior school rarely extended beyond a sentence or two and the answering of questions ... Now it is quite common for writing to begin side by side with the learning of reading, for children to dictate to their teachers and gradually to copy and then to expand and write for themselves accounts of their experiences at home and at school. (DES 1967 para. 601)

The Report goes on to talk about pupils writing best from their own experience and emphasises maximising individuals' strengths, for example, opportunities for gifted story tellers (*ibid.* para. 602) or disciplined scientific writing for the more able children (*ibid.* para. 606). Above all else, the Plowden Report gave teachers

autonomy: the freedom to teach what their class needed, when it was felt to be appropriate (Hayes 2001).

The Plowden Report can also be credited with the final abolition in most areas of the 11+. It was felt that the more pupils were coached for the 11+, the more the value of the tests was nullified (DES 1967 para. 416). It was also felt that a child's achievement is linked to the context within which they are taught (*ibid.* para. 419); that tests can be biased towards different genders (*ibid.* para. 420); and can be limited in what they aim to test (*ibid.* para. 422). Linked with the conclusions above were strong recommendations to encourage the elimination of streaming from junior schools. There were a number of reasons given for this:

- the system of streaming favoured girls, who the Report felt were more mature than boys and therefore better able to cope;
- streaming serves as a means of social selection;
- teachers' attitudes and practice can be affected by the method of organisation, although there was little to support the case for or against streaming in terms of pupils' attitudes and achievement;
- the means of selection will be unavoidably inaccurate; and
- the younger pupils are the more difficult it is to assess them.

These recommendations are interesting, as setting has emerged as the successor to streaming. Many of its advocates have focused on these ideas and suggested that they are resolved by this new approach to ability grouping, for example, more accuracy in assigning pupils to groups and issues of social discrimination (see Chapter 4).

The Plowden Committee has been criticised for being 'inadequately conceived' and doing little more than 'projecting infant practice upwards' (Beard 1999; Peters 1969). This seemingly unquestioning acceptance of progressive methods as the most effective way of delivering the curriculum could appear extremely short sighted (Pollard *et al.* 1994).

Over the next couple of decades, the influence of the progressive perspective on primary schooling peaked before more traditionalist methods began to surface once again. It is important to remember, however, that this was a time when teachers were encouraged to use their professional judgement and to adapt the curriculum to the needs of their class. This era, I will argue later, is why a top-down policy such as the NLS could never be accepted and delivered unchanged into the classroom; today's teachers were either already teaching during this time, or they were being taught. The legacy of the Plowden Report, therefore, is that teachers have experienced how policy developments can be modified and used as a *tool*; the question now is whether they have the confidence under a top-down curriculum model, such as the NLS, to go through the adaptation process.

The Black Papers represented a backlash to the Plowden Report and the perceived swing towards progressive teaching methods (Rowland 1999). For example:

The schools currently reflect an analogous impoverishment as a result of the impact of progressivism - which is, after all, only pedagogic manifestation of a general cultural debilitation. (Bantock 1975 p.20)

This series of papers written by academics and well-known writers, whom, Galton (1995) argues, had limited experience of state schooling, expressed concerns about the move to comprehensive secondary education and the effect this would have on the primary sector. They also pointed out what they perceived to be the negative effects of the "...climate of permissiveness, which, it was claimed, became most overwhelming in that decade [1960s]" (Gordon *et al.* 1991 p.88).

The Black Papers represented a slow accumulation of support for the idea there was a crisis in the education system and a breakdown of authority in society (Gordon *et al.* 1991). This perceived lack of authority was attributed to pupils becoming distracted from the three Rs (Ranson 1990). Evidence for falling standards was cited as student riots, parental unease and failure to achieve in 'the basics'. This standpoint, particularly after Callaghan's Ruskin speech (discussed on page 54), steadily gained status in the political arena during the 1980s when associated recommendations started to appear in policy documents.

In the middle of this backlash, in 1970, the Education (Handicapped Children) Act coined the phrase 'special education' bringing all handicapped pupils, however severe, into this framework under the jurisdiction of the LEAs. Under the more progressive ideologies of the time, diversity of need was beginning to be recognised, although by grouping all 'need' together this could be seen as contradictory. This is the point where SEN legislation seems to start move in the opposite direction to the calls for a return to more traditional methods.

Margaret Thatcher commissioned the Report of the Bullock Committee in direct response to an NFER study in 1972 concluding standards of literacy had fallen since 1964 (Gordon *et al.* 1991). Poole (1978) describes the timing of the Report as opportune: when public interest in primary schools was heightened by criticisms of falling standards and adverse media coverage were at their optimum. This increase in public interest has never really waned and is arguably one of the reasons why the present Government have felt the need to make such revolutionary legislative changes.

The aim was to investigate all aspects of English teaching throughout schools. The view taken was that English went beyond subject boundaries and was cross-curricular (Hardman 2001), thus reinforcing the view that literacy was not a discrete subject, but underpinned all education which is ironic given the direction of more recent policy initiatives like the NLS.

The Report made 333 summary recommendations and approximately 32 of these were relating to pupils with 'Reading and Language Difficulties'. In reaction to these statements, Kenney (1978) asked, 'What can the teacher do to help the child compensate for his particular learning disorder?' (p.49), the answer is stated as being with the teacher providing flexibility, for example:

Every teacher should have a planned reading programme to cater for the various levels of ability of the pupils. If it is the policy to withdraw pupils for special help they should continue to receive support at the appropriate level on their return. (DES 1975 p.540)

The onus therefore was on the teacher to be reactive to an individual's needs, a legacy that remains into the Twenty First Century; the Report summarised:

If the success of remedial measures is to be broad and lasting, a recognition of certain factors is essential:

- the particular nature of each child's difficulties must be seen in relation to his whole linguistic development;
- the teacher's relationship with the pupils should be such as to give them constant encouragement through the stimulus of success;
- remedial work is not for the inexperienced or indifferent teacher, but for the teacher who combines a high level of teaching skill with an understanding of the children's emotional and developmental needs;
- remedial help in learning to read should wherever possible be closely related to the rest of the pupil's learning;
- there should be every effort to involve parents and help them understand the nature of their children's difficulties.

(DES 1975 p. 540)

The shift represented by the Bullock Report was towards the practical processes of inclusion being placed on the teacher's shoulders. There was to be a reliance on the teacher's professionalism to provide for the increasing diversity of abilities within the mainstream primary school.

In terms of primary education, the Bullock Report made explicit much of what was stated in Plowden, emphasising the process of learning (Wyse and Jones 2001), for example,

Language should be learned in the course of using it, and about, the daily experiences of the classroom and the home, but within this framework

teachers might find support in some language programmes and in guidelines or checklists. (DES 1975 p.520)

Extensive reading and writing are the basis of language growth, but pupils should receive specific instruction in such practical matters as punctuation, structure of words, some aspects of usage, and certain technical terms helpful for the discussion of language. (*ibid.* p.528)

A major finding of the Report was whilst standards in overall reading performance had not fallen; there were key areas of underachievement relating to lower socio-economic groups. They encouraged teachers to see links to language across the curriculum and recommended a national system of monitoring achievement in reading and writing (Gordon *et al.* 1991). The suggestion of monitoring was described as 'light':

As a general rule a school would be selected only once in several decades, and a child would be unlikely to be involved more than once in his school life. Indeed, many children would complete their school days without ever encountering the monitoring process. (DES 1975 p.42)

As Galton *et al.* (1999) point out, this statement has a hollow ring to it when you consider the current policy of Ofsted inspections.

The Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College is important because it coined the phrase 'The Great Debate' and was the pivotal date when what was being taught in schools was given serious mass consideration (Basini 1996). In the speech, Callaghan called for a debate on educational trends and noted unfavourable international comparisons. According to Callaghan's memoirs (cited in Gordon *et al.* 1991), the origins of the speech were in his visits to schools where concern had arisen in four areas, one of which was the teaching of basic skills and the three Rs. The resulting speech is credited as stopping the tide of progressivism seen as

'ruling' exclusively in schools (Galton *et al.* 1999) and dictating the future of education policy. This debate is crucial to the critical examination of the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and inclusion (developed in Chapter 3).

The first focused enquiry reviewing provision for all pupils with special needs was set up in 1974. The Warnock Committee published the resulting report in 1978 and paved the way for recommendations in the 1981 Education Act. Barton and Landman (1993) and Dyson and Slee (2001) describe this legislation as a 'watershed' in policy, representing the point of change between post-war and contemporary special needs policy.

Highlighting the Report's standpoint in terms of the inclusion debate, this statement of intent ends the first chapter:

1.10 Our concept of special education is thus broader than the traditional one of education by special methods appropriate for particular categories of children. It extends beyond the idea of education provided in special schools, special classes or units for children with particular types of disability, and embraces the notion of any form of additional help, wherever it is proved and whenever it is provided, from birth to maturity, to overcome educational difficulty. (DES 1978 p.6)

The Report used the idea of a continuum to describe special educational needs, with minor and sometimes temporary needs at one end, and the most severe, on-going needs at the other. This contributed to the idea that every child has a basic right to educational provision and in some commentators' view signalled the general acceptance of the concept of integration (Booth 1985b). It proposed special provision

may need to be supplementary to the general education of a child and need not only be a separate or alternative branch of the school system. Therefore a system including special schools and mainstream alternatives was recommended. Warnock stated two percent of the school population would have a 'statement' of special needs and a further 20 percent would be perceived as having special needs of some kind. As Bagley and Woods (1998) state, The Warnock Report made it generally accepted that a large proportion of the population would have special needs at some point in their school career.

However this report, which arguably influenced the national trend of integration that has pervaded the primary curriculum over the last 20 years, has been accused of being 'woolly'. In fact Mary Warnock herself states, "People have said we fudged the issue of integration, but we fudged it as a matter of policy" (cited in Booth 1985b p.57). The problems have been suggested to lie in the necessary reform needed for successful inclusion: the elaborate reorganisation of schools and the education system, and the conceptual changes needed in attitudes of professionals. It could be argued that many of the issues are just as pertinent at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century.

While SEN legislation was moving towards inclusion and an increased awareness of diversity, policy relating to literacy was continuing to swing back towards more traditional ideas. Throughout the 1980s there was a succession of documents, including *A Framework for the School Curriculum* published in 1980, the HMI series *Curriculum Matters* (1984) and in 1985, the White Paper entitled *Better Schools*, all

of which moved towards increased central prescription of the curriculum. One of the key outcomes was the introduction of subject specific timetabling recommendations; literacy was beginning to re-emerge as a discrete subject, rather than being implicit across the curriculum.

Within the White Paper, *Better Schools*, there was a preoccupation with testing and standards. International comparisons and predictions about literacy kept the subject as a central concern of the policy makers:

But the Government believes that, not least in the light of what is being achieved in other countries, the standards now generally attained by our pupils are neither as good as they can be, nor as good as they need to be if young people are to be equipped for the world of the twenty-first century. (DES and Welsh Office 1985 p. 3)

However, regardless of this traditionalist slant, progressive ideologies remained evident. It was recommended that subjects were taught in such a way they were relevant to the child's experiences, and that teachers be flexible in their methods of instruction so the curriculum could be differentiated to meet a range of ability and need (Galton 1995).

Published in March 1988, the Kingman Report aimed to shift the balance of the curriculum "towards the study of language and towards the teaching of standard English, without entirely destroying the progress made since Bullock" (Fox 1990 p.33). This was almost symbolic in trying to establish the middle ground between the extremes of 'The Great Debate': rejecting a return to "old fashioned grammar teaching and learning by rote" (DES 1988a p.3), but also objecting to the idea "any notion of correct or incorrect language is an affront to personal liberty" (DES 1988a p.3). The

Kingman Report represented a mixture of the traditional and progressive, however the ideas presented were never put into practice (Fox 1990).

2.3.1 Summary

It has been argued that from the 1960s through to the 1980s progressive ideologies were thought to dominate in the classroom, with literacy being taught across the curriculum following a whole language approach. Teaching and learning were seen as child-focused. The philosophy was strongly towards education equality: the right for all pupils to have equal access to curriculum content.

The drive for inclusion was gaining momentum and the needs included under the SEN heading were seen as a spectrum encompassing a wide variety of disorders. Many of the new recommendations were becoming firmly entrenched in the teachers' domain: the responsibility for identification of need and also for flexible provision for those requirements. Indeed, responsibility for this, and the manifestation of the literacy curriculum in the classroom, depended on teachers' professional knowledge and their confidence in applying it. Teachers' autonomy and professional status appeared to be at an all time high.

During the latter years, however, a tendency towards more traditional approaches can be seen. Much of this backlash was fuelled by unfavourable international comparisons, a popular belief that standards were falling, and a mistrust of progressive methods in the classroom. While equality continued to be a common theme and the power of pedagogical decisions were seen as remaining with the

teacher, the move towards top-down curriculum recommendations and the need for more formal testing were emerging.

2.4 1989-present day: The re-emergence of traditional ideologies?

With more traditional approaches beginning to emerge, the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) was arguably the most radical piece of legislation since the 1944 Act (Alexander 1994). It was produced as a direct result of pressure exerted by certain portions of the media, politicians and academic authors promoting the perception there was a crisis within the public education system (Murphy 1990). This crisis was blamed exclusively on progressive teaching methods that the popular press insisted dominated classrooms.

The Act prescribed curriculum aims set within a legal framework to which teachers and schools must adhere (Pollard 1995). Many traditional functions were removed from local education authorities and schools, and were centralised (Wragg *et al.* 1998). This study however is concerned with the removal of power from the individual teacher in the classroom: Wallace (1990) and Dadds (2001) suggest teacher autonomy, and therefore professionalism, were weakened to the detriment of the education system.

The Education Reform Act proposed a broad and balanced curriculum for *all* pupils, consisting of nine subjects and religious education. The Cox Report represented the findings and recommendations of the working group set up to advise on the position

of English (DES 1989); it fed directly into the recommendations made for the teaching of English in the National Curriculum. The chairman of the committee charged with writing this report was Brian Cox, who was co-editor of the Black Papers, thus many feared an influence from the far right of the political spectrum. In its initial form the Report was remarkably liberal (Hardman 2001) and owes a lot to its forerunners, the Bullock and Kingman Reports. However, in its statutory form, published in March 1990, the assessment procedures were far more prominent, placed before the programmes of study, reflecting the political pressure to shift the emphasis towards a more traditional approach to teaching and assessment.

Literacy was reinforced as being fundamental in the curriculum; the Report states:

The overriding aim of the English curriculum is to enable all pupils to develop to the full their ability to use and understand English (DES 1988 p.10)

This echoed the sentiments of the Bullock Report of 1976. However, it goes on to elaborate, in developing individuals' mastery of spoken and written language teachers must extend the range of varieties in which pupils are competent. Two sections are included representing a dramatic departure from the progressive legislation of the previous decades. The first is a section on the teaching of Standard English, stating, from the age of eleven "...all children have an entitlement to learn and, if necessary to be explicitly taught, the functions and forms of Standard English (DES 1988 p.13). The second section related to the teaching of 'Linguistic Terminology', maintaining pupils' education should include the learning of knowledge about language, although they insist it should "...consolidate what is known intuitively." (DES 1988 p.17).

Some of the elements that made up literacy teaching prior to the Hadow Reports began to re-emerge.

Guidelines were produced for each subject as part of the National Curriculum, outlined in programmes of study and attainment targets; firstly, for Key Stage 1 pupils and a year later, Key Stage 2 (for example, DfES 1990). Each child was seen as progressing through the objectives in a linear fashion. Learning was viewed as a progression from one stage to the next, even though there is much evidence to the contrary (Pollard 1995) and no account was taken of the diverse nature of the population for whom they were planning (Tomlinson 2001). This complicated organisational system, so dramatically different to what had gone before, resulted in complaints from teachers as to how difficult it was to work with; the arrangement being very similar to "a set of checklists" (Hardman 2001).

Assessment arrangements were set up to see whether pupils were attaining prescribed standards:

Pupils' performance in relation to attainment targets should be assessed and reported on at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. ... different levels of attainment and overall pupil progress should be registered on a ten-point scale covering all the years of compulsory schooling. ... assessment should be a combination of national external tests and assessment by teachers. In order to safeguard standards, the latter should be compared with the results of the national tests and with the judgements of other teachers. (DES 1988 p.1)

The notion of assessments, with public results, ended up being the philosophy underlining the whole Act. The reinstatement of assessment, particularly in the primary age phase, gave the Act its real traditionalist punch: centring teaching goals

on the academic with personal and social development on the periphery (Pollard *et al.* 1994). As Murphy (1990) summarises:

At the heart of debate over national assessments is the conflict between those who believe that the essential aspects of achievement are by definition simple, and those who believe that both the nature of educational achievement and the context within which it needs to be interpreted are by their nature complex. (Murphy 1990 p. 47)

The Education Reform Act of 1988 reinstated testing procedures under the guise of monitoring and improving standards, and centralised the curriculum whilst keeping aims of entitlement for each child to access a broad and balanced curriculum. Much of the structure, such as assessment procedures and isolation of subjects, lends itself towards a more traditional ideology, although much of the content and the emphasis on discovery learning are more progressive. This was arguably a crucial step on the way to the National Literacy Strategy.

From a special needs perspective, there was much debate over whether the integration of pupils with special needs was compatible with a prescribed curriculum; although the pressure remained for policies to state "...unequivocally that access to the National Curriculum was a right for children with SEN" (Shaw 1996 p.81). The result was a paragraph in the document, *National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice*, "All pupils share the same statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, including access to the National Curriculum." (DES 1989 para.8.1). It appears the above statement, alongside whole school approaches and greater autonomy allowed by other provisions of the 1988 Act, might combine to revolutionise special needs education.

On the other side of the balance affecting school provision for integration was the implementation of competition between schools, league tables and inspections. All of which influenced the educational ethos away from equality and did not encourage attempts to provide for the diversity of need within the primary population (for example, Riddell and Brown 1994; Russell 1990; Clark *et al.* 1999). The result was almost the opposite of what had been hoped for; in fact causing resurgence in exclusions and referrals to special schools.

Chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, a Committee was requested to evaluate the implementation of the National Curriculum (Dearing 1993a; 1993b). The review was officially sanctioned, and to many this meant it had a hidden agenda (Campbell 2001). Both documents, the interim and final reports, are explicit in endorsing the purposes of the National Curriculum (Galton 1995), for example, the Interim Report states:

The National Curriculum and its assessment arrangements were introduced as the key initiative to raise standards. I am clear that these policy initiatives were well-conceived and are beginning to produce results. (Dearing 1993a p.1)

The Review was designed to 'slim down' the curriculum because of the issues teachers had expressed with using the bulky organisational structure of the original. The recommendations stated in the Report include,

The primary purpose of the review at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 should be to slim down the National Curriculum; to make the Orders less prescriptive; and to free some 20% of teaching time for the use at the discretion of the school. (Dearing 1993b p.7)

They achieved this by focusing on a core curriculum and then setting aside optional material for the school to use. Assessments were also slimmed down to just the core subjects, and changed from time consuming assessment tasks to more easily

administered tests, although the credibility was dubious (Campbell and Neill 1994). The core was made up of English, mathematics, science, information technology and religious education. They were made up of very similar attainment targets to the 1988 version although in English, 'spelling' and 'handwriting' were incorporated into 'writing'. Galton (1995) argues,

Although ... the final Dearing report still argues that the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1 and 2 should embrace the concept of entitlement across the whole curriculum, in practice there would seem to be a tacit acceptance that what mattered most was to change the way in which English, mathematics and science would be taught in the future. (Galton 1995 p. 44)

In hindsight this is an astute comment considering the development in terms of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies of the late 1990s.

During the early 1990s further SEN legislation was produced, building on the recommendations of the 1981 and 1988 Acts, paving the way for the *Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of SEN* (DfEE 1994). The importance of this document lies with the identification of guidelines for schools to promote educational integration. This shifted the focus of identification and a proportion of the national procedures into the domain of the school and, in particular, it set them at the feet of the class teacher. The deliberation as to whether mainstream schools and teachers were suitably resourced, and the curriculum content applicable to the increased diversity of need, is one that is still relevant in the NLS (see Chapter 3).

The paradox of the 1988 Act remained: policies were asking simultaneously for increased inclusion and for schools to operate in the market place and to publicly raise

standards. In other words, schools were being asked to achieve ever higher standards of attainment, to be utilised in judging the school, while being 'forced' to include more and more pupils with increasingly diverse special needs. Could these educational aims, however morally justified, be ever truly compatible? Or, as Slee (2001) has argued, would these policies be so discordant as to reinforce the very barriers they were trying to remove, even if hidden within individual schools:

The relatively recent advent of mass compulsory schooling merely elaborated the processes of social stratification and exclusion through a range of dividing practices in the school. (Slee 2001 p. 172)

This debate has remained pertinent, if not more so, in the modern legislative context.

The 1997 Green Paper on Special Needs (DfEE 1997) was the first relevant paper produced by 'New Labour' after their landslide victory in the 1997 General Election. There was a great expectation these publications would say something new in terms of special needs education; however, in retrospect many have expressed disappointment that there appeared to be little change from the proposals made 20 years before by the Warnock Report (Dyson and Slee 2001; Croll 2001; Lloyd 2000). The conflict between the policy of inclusion and other legislation recommendations remains:

The new key features of Labour policy which have emerged in relation to SEN, namely inclusion and raising educational standards, may therefore remain problematic, due to the way they are conceived currently and the context in which they are implemented. (Bines 2000 p.21)

In the General Statement of Inclusion (in the National Curriculum Handbook for Primary and Secondary Teachers in England) policy makers outlined their intended definition of inclusion and it resulted in many of the direct moves towards inclusion

of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools throughout England and Wales. It provided a framework for effective inclusion and gave three principles:

1. setting suitable learning challenges
2. responding to pupils' diverse learning needs
3. overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils

Many of these aspects can be seen as coming from the teacher and therefore the relevance of teacher professionalism and knowledge becomes paramount.

2.5 The current situation

At the beginning of the chapter I asked whether current literacy policy had truly gone full circle, and whether we could apply the traditional policies of the past to the modern context and draw the same parallels and conclusions. It has become apparent from discussion within this chapter that to do this would not be accurate. Important themes which have arisen, such as the development of teacher autonomy and the drive towards inclusion, have impacted on the modern context in a way that makes the current education system a very different environment to that of even 50 years ago.

The cyclical model of policy development, therefore, needs to be modified and I would suggest a spiral or pyramid of change and development, each new policy building on what has gone before (see Figure 5). The National Literacy Strategy can be seen as combining both traditional and progressive ideologies. On the one hand, it is a document delivered to schools in a top-down manner. It has a prescribed structure

through which objectives are taught and is coupled with publicly acknowledged targets which are measured through a system of testing. The literacy content also has traditional elements, with the teaching of basic skills as a central theme.

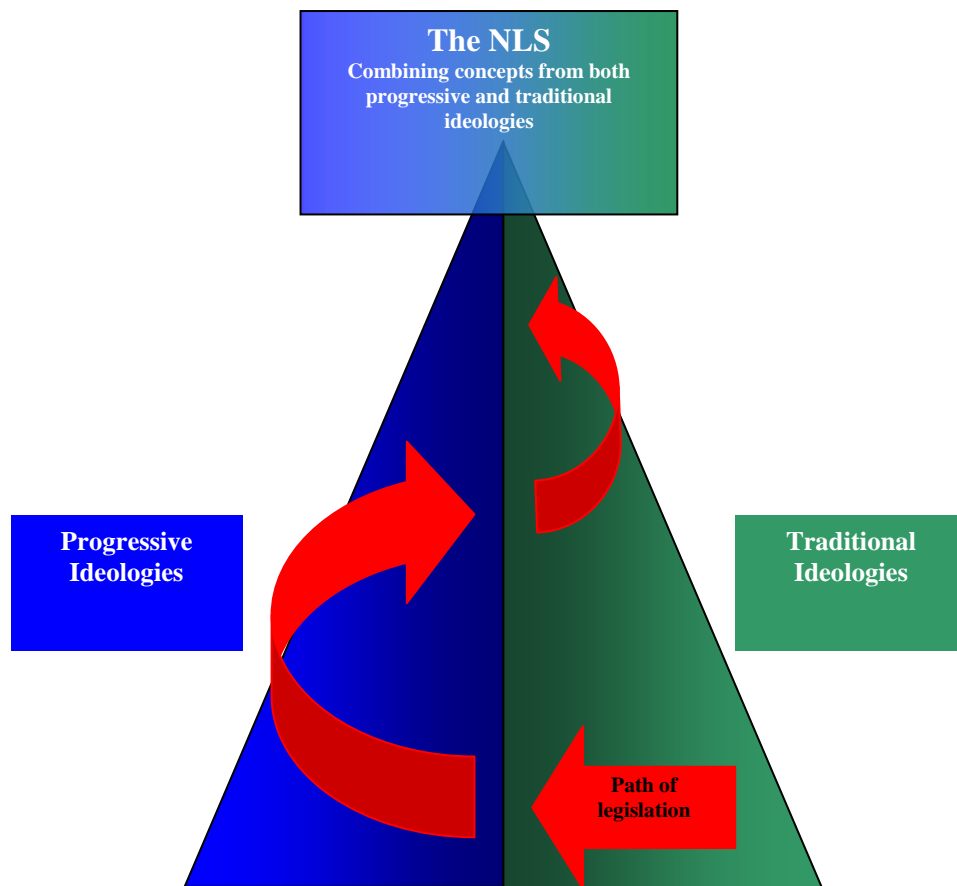


Figure 5. Development spiral of education legislation

In contrast, the document has a strong sense of education equality, recommending all pupils should be included in all aspects of the Literacy Hour. It recognises many of the whole language approaches of its predecessors, even if many are sidelined out of the Hour itself (see Chapter 3 for further discussion).

However, the question that now has to be asked is whether these contrasting ideologies can be effectively brought together into one piece of legislation and,

possibly more importantly, into practice in the classroom. Although the sentiment of Government policies in terms of SEN pupils has changed towards inclusion and equality in mainstream schools, has the structure and content of the NLS effectively made this possible? The introduction of the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies has increased the centralisation of the curriculum alongside the drive for improved standards, while simultaneously calling for inclusion (Wearmouth and Soler 2001). It is pointed out,

In stressing teaching for diversity as opposed to one approach for all [in the General Statement for Inclusion], these aims contradict the pedagogical framework of the Literacy Hour. (Wearmouth and Soler 2001 p.114)

The recognition of underachievement is synonymous with SEN (Bines 2000) and yet have we really changed the teaching and learning context in order for successful inclusion to occur? What is the task being presented to the classroom teacher, when faced with pupils' increased diversity of need and escalating prescription in the primary curriculum? Will ability grouping emerge as a possible strategy to aid these processes?

2.6 Summary of the historical legislative context

To summarise, this chapter has focused on what lessons can be derived from the past regarding the implementation of an objective driven literacy curriculum, inclusion and setting.

I have described three fairly discrete historical periods since compulsory primary schooling was introduced. Within these periods, I have illustrated the movement from

traditional to more progressive ideologies, and the historical tensions that exist between these perspectives. I have outlined how literacy teaching has followed a similar dichotomy with traditionalists advising the teaching of literacy basic skills and progressivism advocating whole language approaches.

It is this pedagogical historical context that has led me to argue that the National Literacy Strategy creates conflict in the way it tries to embrace these contrasting perspectives. Within its recommendations for literacy teaching there is advice on the teaching of basic skills alongside whole language approaches, together with a traditional focus on targets and objectives alongside the promotion of equality and inclusion. As part of this study, I will argue that it is these tensions and conflicting ideals that are resulting in schools and teachers implementing setting; although the reasons why this association might have been made will be explored further in Chapter 4.

The next chapter, however, will follow up on how these tensions manifest themselves in the classroom. I will look explicitly at the NLS and the inclusion of pupils identified with SEN. I discuss some of the ways a prescribed top-down curriculum conflicts with a policy of inclusion within the context of the primary classroom. Debates surrounding the creation of flexibility in the curriculum, professional knowledge of teachers, and targeting objectives will be examined.

CHAPTER 3 – Examining the contradiction: inclusion and the NLS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the legislative context from which the National Literacy Strategy has emerged was described. I argued that among the many potential tensions within its pages a critical point in education policy had been met: a pedagogical conflict between the aims of inclusion and a structured literacy curriculum. In other words, the conflict of traditional and progressive ideologies. Within this chapter I will take these arguments into the classroom and look at how the recommendations in the NLS manifest themselves in practice, particularly focusing on the challenge to include pupils with SEN within the Literacy Hour. Elements of this chapter have previously been published as part of a journal article included in Appendix 1 (Wall 2003).

To investigate thoroughly the impact of the National Literacy Strategy within schools and on teachers, I initially base my arguments within the research into policy implementation. I then consider current research trends and commentaries on the introduction of the NLS, questioning how teachers are putting the recommendations into practice, with particular reference to pupils with SEN. I ask whether a national policy is appropriate and look at the possible consequences of its implementation. Central to this discussion is an examination of the inconsistencies which result from the combination of traditional policies on the teaching of literacy and inclusion.

A further aspect to be discussed within this chapter relates to the basic skills/whole language debate introduced by Callaghan (see page 54). The NLS represents a return to a basic skills curriculum, even though many of the whole language teaching approaches, used in the mid to late Twentieth Century, are still apparent. Questions are asked about the appropriateness of the literacy recommendations and the extent to which they support inclusion.

Mention of setting is largely absent from this discussion, reflecting the available literature; however, I will make clear the way in which the issues raised might have influenced, and arguably encouraged, a policy of setting before a full discussion of ability grouping in Chapter 4.

3.2 Policy implementation

In the previous chapter, I have described the politics of *how* and *why* we have got to this point of top-down curriculum initiatives, but now it is important to look at possible impacts of the implementation of such policies. Initially this will be done by looking at the theory surrounding policy implementation.

Reflected in all educational policies are theories of teaching and learning: Piaget (1959, 1975), Dewey (1959, 1997), Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (1963, 1996) being among the most prominent. However, alongside these theories of learning are influences relating to “purpose” or “the purposes public education is intended to serve” (Moore 2000); in other words the popular perceived rationale for the policy. The relationship between these elements, the theories of learning and the purpose of

the legislation, must be understood: they might match or conflict. These are the important underpinnings of any policy implementation and as such are central to this study. It is important to highlight the potential split between government and teacher objectives and difference in meaning that might be derived from the guidance and which can influence the policy in practice. Thus, complex issues lie in how policies manifest themselves in the classroom:

In practice, teachers may find that the 'official' purposes of state education (or even some elements of particular purposes) match their own purposes and preferred style while others do not, and that, even when there appears to be a strong element mismatch, ways can be found to make appropriate accommodations (Moore and Edwards 2000). (Moore 2000 p.38)

I would argue these themes are central to teacher professionalism and knowledge and need to be paramount to all implementation theories.

A distinction has been made between policy and its manifestation in the classroom. Whatever might be philosophised about the policy, the way it is taught in the classroom is firmly in the hands of teachers and therefore they will have power over its success or failure. Research into teacher effectiveness (for example, Reynolds 1998) shows the delivery of policies by teachers will vary according to the context within which they teach. One of the most important issues regarding the implementation of a national policy such as the National Literacy Strategy is the complexity and diversity of the system on which it is imposed. Thus, many factors can influence the way in which it is organised and delivered to pupils within each classroom.

Similarities have already been drawn between the National Curriculum and the NLS, thus Helsby and McCulloch's (1997) three phases of policy implementation identified through studying the introduction of the National Curriculum in the 1990s are useful:

1. **Innovation:** the introduction of the policy where classroom teaching is derived from the document text.
2. **Control:** this phase is characterised by monitoring and conformity, with school inspections and testing checking on fulfilment of policy objectives and directives.
3. **Settlement:** teachers begin to search for flexibility within the legislation to re-establish some of their professional values.

The impact teachers have in this model is undeniable. In fact, in the latter stages, teachers are seen to reinstate previous values and continue to operate long-established systems under a different organisational routine. This finding has been backed up by many researchers, for example, Pollard *et al.* (1994); Leat (1999); and Galton *et al.* (1999). The inconsistency that over the past 20 years teachers have felt they have been through a period of intense change, yet researchers can find little evidence of that change within classrooms (Leat 1999, Galton *et al.* 1999) is interesting and relevant to this study. As Ruddock states,

...teachers' experiences over the past ten years or fifteen years is a curriculum that is ever changing. But observers over the same period, in different education systems where curriculum reform has been actively pursued, offer judgements that are difficult to square with the everyday experience of teachers. (1990 p.5)

Regardless of the outcomes, it is obvious that teachers' values and judgements are fundamental to the process of policy implementation within different contexts. It is

therefore necessary to examine methods of implementation used within the NLS as well as the associated impacts.

Having briefly looked at the research into previous policy implementation, it is important to look explicitly at implementation of the NLS and Literacy Hour. After six years of the Literacy Hour being implemented in English primary schools, there is little empirical research evidence available as to its effectiveness. Surveys of teacher opinion have been conducted and indicate mixed views (for example, Smith and Whiteley 2000; Smith and Hardman 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999). Many critical commentaries, both academic and professional, also come to varied conclusions, often on political grounds. These sources will be used to look at how the NLS has been implemented and provide evidence of the extent to which teachers and their practice have been changed by its guidelines. In particular, the relationship between the use of setting and the NLS will be examined.

3.3 Implementing the National Literacy Strategy

It is argued that the NLS will raise standards by generalising teaching methods and content for literacy across all primary pupils. Fears about standards have been critical in instigating the return to more traditional methods (an argument developed within the historical context previously discussed in Chapter 2). In the words of Roger Beard, who wrote the 'National Literacy Strategy: Review of Research and other Related Evidence', "The National Literacy Strategy provides a steady and consistent means of raising standards of literacy over a long period of time." (1998 p.4). Confidence in the policy was reflected in the way it was introduced (Earl *et al.* 2000).

The rationale behind the NLS is well-matched to the system of 'education in the market place' operated by the Labour Government of the time (Goldstein and Cuttance 1988; Tooley 1997). Thus, schools are identified as a product to be *consumed*, with information, such as inspection reports and assessment results, published to inform parents' and pupils' choices. Thus, education is becoming an increasingly public concern. In Chapter 2, the increased public interest in the education system was documented, particularly in the backlash to the Plowden Report (Section 2.3); this concern is still very evident, but now there is even more of a vested interest.

The generation of a national strategy means the Government can categorically say schools have been informed of 'best practice' and have the knowledge and skills to act upon it, thus standards should improve (Beard 1998). In theory, the decisions regarding content and structure have been removed, thus judgements and weaknesses can be attributed to the individual institution. This is a considerable presumption which takes no account of contextual factors; after all, the decisions regarding the matching of teaching strategy to objective to individual pupils surely represents the professional nature of teaching (Davis 1999; Galton 1999). But this traditional philosophy of 'blame' appears to sit well with the Government's overall position on education.

Extensive training for teachers was included in the NLS implementation package (DfEE 1998d). The literature from the Department of Education and Employment

maintained that the training packs were suitable for language co-ordinators, teachers, support staff, parents and governors (Literacy Task Force 1997); however, due to a 'cascade' model of training, indications of great variability between schools and teachers in the level of training received has been found (Fisher and Lewis 1999).

If the training model was inconsistent, then the same could be said about the content regarding inclusion. The number of references to pupils with SEN was minimal. In fact, the additional guidance specific to these pupils (DfEE 1998b) was produced six months after implementation and, at six pages, could not hope to cover the myriad of needs covered by the SEN heading, leaving too many questions unanswered (Byers 1999). Due to these inadequacies, teachers have been documented as feeling they were left to make 'best sense' of the requirements (Fisher 2000a).

The justification for implementing a national strategy was promoted as meaning a reduction in time spent on planning as a proportion is completed centrally. It was argued that teachers would be spared from 'reinventing the wheel' in each individual school (Slavin 1996) and therefore be able to concentrate more on *how* to teach rather than *what* to teach. For example, this should mean more time to match learning objectives to pupils' needs (Literacy Task Force 1997) and a better accuracy of differentiation (Gross *et al.* 1999). In contrast to this official rhetoric, surveys of teacher opinion indicate that rather than freeing up time teachers are worried about increased paper work, detailed planning and the need to produce extra resources (Fisher and Lewis 1999; Smith and Whiteley 2000).

Another advantage promoted by advocates of the Strategy is the increased consistency of pedagogical language from one classroom to the next, from school to school and across LEAs. In theory, paperwork associated with planning and teaching should be reduced or made easier by the ease of document and resource transferral and application. John Stannard, Director of the NLS, views consistency as a major strength (Stannard 1999). It is argued that common language enables senior management, teachers, support staff, parents and external agencies to work on a more integrated level (Gross *et al.* 1999; Landy 1999).

The rationale provided by the policy makers is all very well, but the prescriptive nature of the NLS means the teachers' professional autonomy and identity is undermined (for example, Beverton and English 2000). The fact that schools have to follow the NLS guidelines or be required to justify their own methods of teaching literacy (Literacy Task Force 1997) has meant that the majority of schools have implemented the Strategy as it was laid out in the *Framework* (HMI 1999; Beverton and English 2000; Smith and Whiteley 2000). Removal of professional identity might also result in an over-reliance on the Strategy (Dadds 1999). The rejection of previously used and possibly more developmentally appropriate methods (Fisher 2000b; Lingard 2000), particularly specialist techniques relating to pupils with SEN could result. In other words, teachers may perceive the recommendations not as supportive and advantageous to their job, but in a negative way which could inhibit their professional practice. Indeed, the close links with target setting and the associated pressure to achieve results could increase stress levels further.

This review of the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy so far has many similarities to the characteristics that Helbsy and McCulloch (1997) describe in the first two stages of their model of policy implementation: innovation and control (Section 3.2). It is now crucial to look at the NLS and Literacy Hour in practice within schools, and the implications of this, to explore the extent to which teachers' will put into operation the third stage of the model: 'settlement'.

3.4 A literacy curriculum for *all*?

In recommending a national strategy and assuming commonality, generalisations have to be made across the school population (Corden 2000a). When making assumptions about the nature of the population being aimed at, there is a risk that the population extremes will be missed at either end of the ability scale. The NLS prescribes a pedagogy for all pupils regardless of ability, culture, ethnicity or socio-economic background across the primary age range, from age four to eleven (Fisher 2000b). Already there is evidence that some pupils are finding the Literacy Hour ineffective; for example, Dehaney (2000) described the problems pupils with semantic pragmatic disorders have in a complex language environment, such as the one represented by increased amounts of whole class teaching. This raises the question whether this 'one size fits all' curriculum is a gross simplification, and in practice puts a lot of pressure on teachers.

There are two arguments here. Firstly, whether the needs of all pupils across the primary age range can be met by the objectives of a national strategy (Fisher 2000b);

and, secondly, whether the structure is suitable for all needs across a year group or an individual class (as suggested in my own experience, see Section 1.2.1).

The problems associated with assumptions about commonality of population and need were picked up in the first official review of the NLS (Earl *et al.* 2000). They felt that the tight structure of objectives and lessons gave the impression that individual differences could be ignored. They were particularly worried in the early stages of implementation that teachers were unwilling to deviate from the *Framework*, particularly to account for individual pupil needs. This was mirrored in a paper by Graham Frater (1999), an ex-HMI, who felt that the strategy did not "provide explicitly, consistently or comprehensively for the reading difficulties of the most disadvantaged children" (p.10). It was hoped that, over time, teachers will become increasingly adept at working flexibility into the Literacy Hour (for example, Graham 1998).

This touches on the inclusion argument that has dominated special education for the last twenty years (referred to in Chapter 2), which focuses on whether the needs of all individuals can be satisfactorily met within a mainstream classroom (for example, Leadbetter and Leadbetter 1993; Ainscow 1994; Stakes and Hornby 1996; Knight 1999). Grainger and Tod (2000) state: "inclusive education seeks to give every child a 'chance' and needs to acknowledge the fact of difference: historically, philosophically and practically" (p.21). For this reason, a common conclusion of researchers is that flexibility is the key to successfully teaching pupils with SEN in mainstream classroom. Therefore, one has to question, whether there is sufficient flexibility to

adapt organisational structures and content is available within a national strategy, and more specifically, whether teachers are predisposed to use it.

3.5 Is the structure appropriate?

One possible reason why the argument about diversity is so paramount may be because of the emphasis on whole class teaching within the NLS: the requirement that this type of organisation be used for over half the Literacy Hour. This appears to be a significant change from approaches prior to the Strategy. Advocates of the NLS argue this 'direct' teaching method is essential for aiding pupils with SEN, especially with their reading, as it increases the time available to be taught (Beard 1998; Stannard 1999). But this could mean, as I document from my own experiences (see Section 1.2.1), due to the variety of need to be found in a mixed ability classroom, that there may be a mismatch between the level taught and an individual child's level of understanding at some point. Teachers appear to be finding this change in structure challenging and their concerns about the effective targeting of objectives have been documented (Smith and Whiteley 2000; Smith and Hardman 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999). This discussion will be followed up in Chapter 4, when I will ask whether setting will remove these differences and enable more accurate teaching.

A major consequence of objective-driven whole class teaching may be boredom from the more fluent pupils and anxiety from the less fluent. This was suggested by Hanke (2000) who researched pupils' perceptions of the different sections of the Literacy Hour. She concluded there was widespread concern associated with speaking to the rest of the class, making this type of learning experience very difficult for some

pupils, concluding teachers' class management must take this into consideration. This means, "the challenge of ensuring that inclusion in literacy hour activities is meaningful for all pupils, rather than tokenistic, remains" (Byers 1999 p.10).

As stated previously, research evidence from the 'inclusion debate', highlights the importance of flexibility. The NLS, however, dictates a rigid structure to the daily Literacy Hour and a plethora of objectives to be achieved by *all* pupils. This structure is seen to be beneficial for some pupils with SEN, by providing a daily routine (Gross *et al.* 1999; DfEE 2000a). But this same structure is accused of not allowing the flexibility needed "to cater for the diversity of students' needs" (Knight 1999 p.3). It is suggested that teachers need to be able to develop the curriculum to be responsive to pupils' needs, but as argued previously, the dramatic reduction in teacher autonomy might not be conducive to this (Dyfor Davies *et al.* 1998; Dadds 1999; Fisher *et al.* 2000). As Ruth Dehaney succinctly puts it, "If greater inclusion is to be achieved, the conflict between a more flexible content to accommodate pupils' learning needs and rigid structure needs to be resolved" (2000 p.40).

There are ways in which teachers are beginning to work around the structure of the Literacy Hour. For example, the support of another adult, a Learning Support Assistant (LSA), is seen by many as essential for successful implementation of the Strategy (Gordon 1999). However, this could lead to its own problems (see Section 1.2.1). The group time presents itself as an opportunity, with the LSA directing the learning of a specific group (Lingard 2000). The *Framework* itself suggests an extra adult, if suitably trained, can teach a parallel group during the whole class session if

the needs are great enough (DfEE 1998a). The Hour can be developed to encompass complex systems of support. But as Corbett (1999) points out, the more complex these systems become, the less influence the structure has. For example, time could be wasted with groups transferring from one area of the school to another and pupils might not know what to expect from one Literacy Hour to the next, previously stated as an advantage of the Hour's structure. However, the more there is of this type of support, the more complex the timetable needs to be to target the support effectively and to make best use of personnel. This could be one link to why the use of setting has been promoted (as will be discussed in Chapter 4).

Prior to the NLS, much of the support available for pupils identified with SEN was intensive group work with another adult, SENCO or outside agency support (either withdrawn or inside the classroom) and intensive focusing of teaching resources. The advent of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, which require pupils to be in the classroom, has meant the amount of time for these activities has been dramatically reduced as they are pushed to other times of the day (Hunt and George 1999; Landy 1999). The NLS recommends support at other times of the day in two forms: firstly, prior preparation, for example, introduction to texts before the lesson, and secondly, revisiting topics, for example, revision of objectives that have been missed or misunderstood (DfEE 2000a). But this eats into time set aside for other curriculum areas, perceived as more 'fun' by some pupils, such as PE, topic, art and music. This could be seen as punishment for needing extra help by being withdrawn from subject areas where reading and writing are not as necessary for success. It could also be argued that school is hard enough for pupils who experience limited success in the academic school subjects without this added burden.

The timetabling of the daily Literacy Hour, and the recommendation that, alongside the daily Numeracy lesson, it should dominate the morning timetable when pupils are at their most receptive, is also having an impact. The other subjects, which are recognised as having an important role in literacy development, especially speaking and listening and extended writing (Fisher 1999), are having dedicated time significantly cut. The *Framework for Teaching* does emphasise that literacy teaching should continue to be focused on in the other areas of the curriculum (DfEE 1998a). However, teachers are documented as feeling negative about the reduction in time for other subjects and the difficulties of maintaining a balanced curriculum (Anderson *et al.* 2000). It is obvious that there are important decisions that teachers need to make for effective inclusion to occur. As will be discussed in Chapter 4 it is one of the reasons why setting has emerged as a possible solution.

To conclude this section, it becomes apparent that there are two main concerns about the structure of the NLS. Firstly, whether there is the flexibility within the Literacy Hour to provide for the requirements of a diverse primary school population, especially the numerous and complex needs of pupils identified with SEN and secondly, whether the dominant position of the Literacy Hour within the primary curriculum has been to the detriment of other subjects. Stannard argues that over time the NLS will be developed by teachers and evolve to suit different school contexts (1999) and there is some indication that this is happening (Dean 2000; Fox and Corden 2000b); it could be argued that setting is one of those adaptations that can help teachers deliver the curriculum effectively while keeping to the prescribed objectives and structure of the NLS. It seems that once again teachers are being asked

to develop the Strategy, to make it best fit the needs of their class at a time when professional knowledge and self-belief is being undermined. The next section will consider the content of the Hour and how this further complicates the debate, placing further responsibility on teachers' shoulders.

3.6 Is the content of the National Literacy Strategy suitable?

The focus on literacy and its increased prominence within the primary curriculum has met with little criticism (for example, Frater 1999), but the nature of its resurgence is fuelling debate. The content of the NLS is inextricably linked to the structure of the Literacy Hour (detailed in Section 1.2.1). The three sections of word level, sentence level and text level work are paramount. The arguments surrounding this partitioning of the subject and the focus on basic skills are initially outlined in this section. Then the implications for the whole of the primary curriculum are considered.

The Strategy promotes literacy teaching based on phonic knowledge taught with a multi-sensory approach. This is relatively new thinking about the practice of literacy education in terms of the trends of the last fifty years (Earl *et al.* 2000), previously discussed in Chapter 2. The NLS has been credited with many advantages for literacy learning: for example, its exploration of texts and the importance it gives to non-fiction texts and information retrieval skills (Lewis and Wray 1999; Neate 1999). Arguably, one of its most significant contributions is the requirement of inclusion (for example, Grainger and Todd 2000), and as previously discussed it means that, "additional support will become an integral part of the hour" (Piotrowski and Reason

2000), and teachers will have to be flexible within the hour to meet pupils' special needs.

The three sections encourage literacy to be broken down into its component parts, asking practitioners to use them like building blocks to develop literacy learning. This sounds like a logical simplification of a complex structure; however, it has caused some of the fiercest criticism, and some of the highest praise. The new emphasis on phonics marks (for example, Wyse 2000) the latest shift in the on-going debate: basic skills versus whole language teaching approaches (see Section 2.3). Beard (1998) insists the shift to phonologically based teaching has been firmly based in research over the last twenty years. But, as will be shown, the evidence promoting a whole language approach is equally well established.

In debating whether effective literacy teaching is based on a 'skills approach' or a 'whole language approach' many researchers feel that the balance has moved too far away from the latter (Graham 1998; Dadds 1999; Frater 1999). The Literacy Hour itself is dominated by the basic skills and although the importance of creating a literary environment is recognised, a lot of the activities to generate this, such as individual reading, library time and extended, meaningful writing, are 'demoted' to elsewhere in the curriculum. Conversely, much praise has come from supporters of the special needs perspective who promote a skills approach because it breaks complex literate processes into manageable chunks (Gross 1999; Gross *et al.* 1999; Watson 2000). Judith Piotrowski and Rea Reason have suggested "the influence that

special education has had on the development of the NLS curricular framework has perhaps not been recognised enough" (2000 p.51).

Currently within primary mathematics, effective teachers are promoting connected and relational understanding (Askew *et al.* 1997; Suggate *et al.* 1998). This is seen as a bottom up approach to teaching: effective teachers are building links between the ideas and areas (the building blocks) of mathematics. Teachers should be able to direct pupils' learning through this network of concepts and links (for example, Ernest 1991; Davis and Pettitt 1994). At a time when the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies (DfEE 1999b; 1998a) are spoken about as if they were one and the same thing, the fundamental question here is whether literacy can be taught in the same way as mathematics.

Scott Thornbury, a tutor of English as a foreign language, states, "an approach ... appropriate to the teaching of maths, does not seem to fit comfortably with language" (2000 p.15). The main reason he gives is that while English can be partially 'atomised', his experience indicates it does not seem to aid language acquisition. Further question marks are raised in light of Alison Sealey's research at Warwick University. She has shown where the NLS has attempted to partition the skills of literacy, discrepancies have arisen with definitions and examples that must lead to teacher confusion. For example, she points out:

Both clauses and phrases are important in grammatical descriptions; indeed they are arguably more salient than 'words' and 'sentences', but the NLS seems uncertain about the status of the phrase... I am convinced that explanations in the NLS...will cause difficulties for both pupils and

teachers if they try to apply a coherent system of analysis to authentic examples of language in texts. (1999 p.9)

This can be seen across the *Framework* and other recommended textbooks, especially within the realms of teacher training (*ibid.*). If the 'experts' cannot agree on the definitions of the building blocks, then how can young pupils be expected to understand the relationships and become competent language users? A possible implication could be that language is too complex to accurately and effectively partition.

However, the basic skills should not be discounted, and it is not the intention to dismiss them completely, but it is important to advocate the use of professional knowledge to identify where they are appropriate. Research has shown these skills are particularly important in Key Stage 1, where phonics teaching has been proven to improve the ability of pupils to decode (Wyse 2000). This could be seen as positive support for the current Key Stage 1 Intervention Pilot (DfEE 2000b). In the same overview, Dominic Wyse shows clearly how there is a vast body of evidence in the context of struggling readers, but that this should not be presumed to be the case for all individuals. He states, "there is significant evidence that individual pupils differ in their pedagogical needs and that some pupils acquire the necessary phonological understanding prior to starting formal education" (2000 p.362).

If basic skills have their place in the NLS, then it is important that links are made clear between the concepts taught. The NLS does emphasise that phonics teaching should be based within the context of the Hour and not isolated (Gordon 1999). But the very structure of the Literacy Hour causes this segregation; the whole class shared

text work, followed by the whole class word work suggests a separation that could manifest itself in teachers' planning and consequently in pupils' minds. Therefore, we are warned that the lists of skills to be learnt within the *Framework* are at risk of driving pedagogy (Dadds 1999), and that by isolating different facets of literacy, teachers might miss the opportunities for "reading, writing, speaking and listening to enrich each other" (Frater 2000 p.110). It seems that we are returning to the idea that the NLS is creating conflict by crossing boundaries, that of progressive and traditional ideologies of pedagogy *and* strategies for teaching literacy.

Another conflict resides in the balance between reading and writing. The evaluation of NLS implementation stated that "the teaching of shared reading was the most successful part of the hour" (HMI 1999 p.2). Indeed, there seems to be evidence that reading standards have been improving over the last two years, although this statement needs to be viewed sceptically, as the year groups on which these statements are based would have had early literacy experiences without the guidance of the Strategy (Stainthorp 2000) and recent research questions the validity of comparisons based on the SATS results (Hilton 2001). Historical experience relating to the 11+ could also be of relevance here (Chapter 2): when tests and standards are prioritised then teaching can become dominated by a preoccupation with the content of these same tests. It does not necessarily mean the curriculum is effective.

When researchers surveyed teachers, it was found they also felt that reading was successful but worried about the lack of emphasis on writing (Smith and Whiteley 2000). This could have been exacerbated by implementation of the Literacy Hour

coinciding with the National Year of Reading, which resulted in many new initiatives (Robinson 2000). The Strategy was complimented for giving non-fiction texts equal weighting with fiction, which evidence shows could help to motivate under-achieving boys (Lewis and Wray 1999). The priority given to reading can be seen most clearly in the image associated most commonly with the Literacy Hour: the teacher sharing a big book with the whole class.

As a result, based on Ofsted inspection data, there has been concern regarding writing. It is claimed evidence shows it to be the weakest element of literacy teaching and learning (HMI 2000). Writing has consequently become the new focus of training and initiatives. Chris White (2000) has shown, using two case studies of teachers using the NLS, that different results can be achieved because of different classroom cultures, perceptions of their roles and their understanding of the objectives. His paper concluded that, in the case of writing, a prescribed set of practices could not, on their own, develop pupils into enthusiastic writers. The Literacy Hour does not include enough time for extended writing, especially if the structure is applied rigidly. The *Framework for Teachers* recommends finding time outside of the hour for extended writing (DfEE 1998a), but this adds to the restrictions placed on an already tight timetable and, as Campell suggests in his article, it appears that "the hour is not enough" (1998). It would seem likely that the burden is on teachers to start adding more flexibility into their literacy week to include the necessary writing element (Fox and Corden 2000). It seems ironic there is no space in the NLS for extended writing, when this is one element of what the pupils are tested on in their end of year assessments.

To conclude, the NLS has brought a welcomed prioritising of literacy within the primary curriculum. The content of the Literacy Hour has a basic skills bias and this, alongside a promotion of a multi-sensory approach, has a foundation in the Early Years and in research related to pupils with SEN. However, it is important that these basic skills do not become isolated by the structure of the Hour. Teachers must be aware these skills are taught in context and with adequate opportunities for open-ended exploration of concepts and links between them. Ironically these are many of the characteristics of the whole language classroom.

So, for the NLS content to be effective, practitioners must achieve the goals of inclusion; balance between reading and writing; and the teaching of basic skills in a whole language classroom. This means a lot of skill, professionalism and a flexible approach to using the Hour to suit individual, group and topic needs.

3.7 Where does literacy education go from here?

Since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy education has undoubtedly undergone a period of transition. The implementation of a national strategy for literacy has been quick, radical and prevalent throughout English schools. As a result, evidence shows that on the surface teachers have radically changed their methods of teaching to correspond with NLS guidance; however, issues have arisen (particularly regarding inclusion) indicating verbatim application of the NLS is not enough.

The arguments surrounding both the structure and the content have reinforced concerns regarding inclusion. The generalised nature of a prescriptive national policy,

with targets and objectives fundamentally underpinning it, has meant the discussion keeps returning to the role of the teacher in adapting and shaping the policy to fit the diversity of the primary population and education system.

The structure advocated by the NLS: *Framework* is a dramatic departure from the literacy teaching of just ten years ago (discussed in Chapter 2). Teachers are currently being advised to impart the majority of literacy education through a highly structured daily lesson, affecting the whole of the primary curriculum. Within the Literacy Hour, a predominance of whole class teaching means targeting learning objectives and the inclusion of pupils with a range of abilities is difficult (Smith and Whiteley 2000; Smith and Hardman 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999). One piece of governmental advice for solving this problem is the introduction of setting. But as my own experience recognised (Section 1.2.1), ability grouping does not necessarily bring about homogeneity within a class. Therefore, questions will need to be asked whether ability grouping complements the aims of inclusion and is appropriate for the teaching of literacy and whether teachers have the skills and confidence to use it effectively in the modern context.

The structure of the Literacy Hour acts to put a strong emphasis on basic skills; physical sectioning of the hour into '15-15-20-10' and intellectually breaking down literacy into text, sentence and word level seem to ensure the partitioning of language. There is no doubt the teaching of basic skills is fundamental to the strategy. With regard to pupils with special needs, basic skills have been shown to have a strong foundation within this tradition and so commentators have supported this emphasis

within the NLS as inclusive practice (for example, Piotrowski and Reason 2000). But important whole language teaching techniques, the legacy from more progressive approaches to literacy teaching and the research that backs them up, also need to be considered. Commentators such as Frater (1999) and Campbell (1998) state the Literacy Hour is 'squashing' whole language techniques into other times of the day. The NLS: *Framework* does emphasise that basic skills should be taught within the context of the Hour and, "...to tackle texts from individual words upwards and from the text downwards"(DfEE 1998a p.5).

There are fears the prescribed structure and content of the NLS: *Framework* will suppress teachers' professional knowledge, but I have discussed the different debates surrounding inclusion and how adaptation is going to be necessary (Wearmouth and Soler 2001). As many researchers have pointed out, a teacher successful at meeting the needs of his/her class before the implementation of the Strategy, is likely to carry on doing so within the constraints that are offered (Gross *et al.* 1999; Landy 1999; Timlin 1999). But this also leaves the counter-argument: those who struggled, will also continue to do so (Westwood *et al.* 1997; Frater 1999; Dehaney 2000; Fisher 2000a; Lingard 2000).

Therefore, in concluding this section, it is important to reflect on the critical role teachers have in implementing any policy, particularly a national strategy which through its very nature requires generalisations. In Chapter 2, I stated that, due to the years of progressive education policy, when teachers had relative autonomy over pedagogy, they should have the skills and the experience to do this. However, the

nature of a traditional top-down policy implementation model which is currently being used appears to undermine some of this confidence and therefore could be detrimental.

3.8 Summary

Within this chapter, I have developed arguments relating to effective inclusion and the recommendations for literacy in the classroom. This has extended my own reflective commentaries by giving the more general picture regarding the practical issues and considerations which are prevalent in classrooms when implementing the National Literacy Strategy. This has moved the debate forwards from the historical perspective given in Chapter 2, adding the practical dimension to that of the legislative backdrop.

I have looked briefly at theories of policy implementation, focusing on how teachers have been observed taking ownership of the legislation, in particular, the National Curriculum. I then went on to suggest that all the evidence indicates that a similar process is occurring within the context of the NLS. Indeed, this process is going to be essential in combining the recommendations from different ends of the political and education ideological spectrum found within the NLS.

The different considerations which could be influential in moving a school towards ability grouping are also beginning to become apparent. These were initially highlighted within my own experience but have now been discussed in light of current research and commentaries. The demands of a national strategy, the Literacy Hour's structure and content, the increased emphasis on whole class teaching and the

demands of inclusion all seem to have some potential impact or influence on the decision to use setting.

In Chapter 4, I am going to return to some of the arguments previously discussed, namely the movement between traditional and progressive ideologies, but I will explicitly link these more general educational trends with those within a comparable history of ability grouping. This will add a further aspect to the developing argument as to the link between the National Literacy Strategy and setting.

CHAPTER 4 – Historical trends in ability grouping for primary literacy

4.1 Introduction

Up to this point in the study reference has been made explicitly to ability grouping and, therefore, setting. This chapter aims to focus the discussion back to my research questions. This will be done by revisiting the historical trends identified in Chapter 2, and relating them directly to similar tendencies identified in the use of ability grouping for primary literacy over the past 100 years. I will also keep in mind the practical classroom implications of ability grouping and draw comparisons with the arguments which were highlighted in the examination of how pupils with SEN are included in the NLS and Literacy Hour: the discussion completed in Chapter 3.

Research into ability grouping has an extensive research base; but it is complicated and contradictory. There are many different types of ability grouping and therefore some confusion about definitions; clarifying where this study is located within this uncertainty and defining the focus will be the first component of this chapter. Following this, I will discuss methodological issues influencing this field of research.

The main historical overview of research into ability grouping is done using synthesis tables. A tabulated format was chosen to clearly summarise the many relevant studies completed over the last 70 years and their outcomes. Through using this system, a comprehensive perspective on reviews and meta-analyses completed by other researchers is provided (Harlen & Malcolm 1999; Sukhnandan and Lee 1998; Hallam

& Toutounji 1996; Kulik 1992; Slavin 1987). This examination of the research in the field of ability grouping for primary literacy highlights those studies with a positive, negative or inconclusive outcome. By looking at when these different outcomes occurred, the overlying trends are identified. These tables therefore set the scene for this study and make explicit links to the debates outlined in Chapter 2 and 3.

Finally, I examine the ability grouping debate in the 5 years since implementation of the National Literacy Strategy; I consider the appropriateness of a policy for setting in literacy lessons during the primary age phase, and whether this leads to effective inclusion (themes which extend those introduced in Chapter 3).

4.1.1 Defining and focussing this literature review

This area of research is complex. This is partly due to methodological issues, identified in the next section, but also because of the numerous definitions used within schools and internationally in the research literature. In Chapter 1, I started to exemplify what I meant by setting, but the field of ability grouping is a wide one, therefore it is important to define terms which will be used in this literature review (Table a).

Table a. Key Terms and Definitions of Ability Grouping (from Sukhandon & Lee, 1998)

UK Term <i>(USA equivalent)</i>	Definition
Streaming <i>(tracking)</i>	The method of assigning pupils to classes on the basis of overall assessment of their general ability. Pupils remain in their streamed class for the majority of subjects. (GB.DES.HMI, 1979)
Setting <i>(regrouping)</i>	The (re)grouping of pupils according to their ability in a particular subject. Setting can be imposed on a whole year group or on a particular band at a time. (GB.DES.HMI, 1979)
Banding <i>(no equivalent)</i>	The year group is divided into two, three or four bands differentiated by ability. Each band contains a number of classes, which may vary according to ability or size. (GB.DES.HMI, 1979)
Within-class grouping <i>(no equivalent)</i>	This approach involves dividing a class into small groups and instructing each group separately. (Sorenson and Hallinan, 1986)
Mixed ability grouping <i>(heterogeneous grouping)</i>	Teaching groups include pupils of widely ranging abilities. The spread of ability in such a group depends upon the ability range for which the school provides. (GB.DES.HMI, 1979)

My research focus combines the *primary age phase*, *setting* and *literacy*. These are three areas not commonly studied in combination. Streaming has a more extensive research base within primary education and setting has arguably developed from negative findings within this field. Therefore, to develop the discussion comprehensively, I will first look at the history of streaming and then focus on the research into setting: the relevant definitions are marked in pink on the table above.

To identify the consequences of setting for literacy, it is important to recognise streaming means that subject specific effects are difficult to isolate. Never the less outcomes, such as grades and test scores, can be acknowledged. Although setting is

subject-specific, the research is also more complex than is immediately apparent, with many studies focusing on just one aspect of literacy, most commonly reading, making implications for the NLS difficult to extrapolate.

Although my literature review focus is very specific, more general reviews and meta-analyses of the ability grouping literature have been completed, for example: Harlen & Malcolm (1999), Sukhnandan and Lee (1998), Hallam & Toutounji (1996), Kulik (1992) and Slavin (1987). It would be pointless to 'reinvent the wheel' by doing the same for the literature prior to the mid-1990's. Therefore, I will be using these reviews, while keeping my own focus in mind, to structure the background history of streaming and setting.

4.2 Methodological issues regarding research into ability grouping

Methodological issues intrinsically influence discussion of ability grouping. The school is a complicated system with many factors impacting upon it. To complete successful research into an organisational system it is necessary to keep the majority of input factors constant. This is all very well in theory, but when you are imposing this on a system, such as a school, which is so complex and reliant on human nature and therefore naturally inconsistent, problems occur. Although investigation into schooling is necessary, it has to be balanced with the priorities and needs of the pupils, who only have one chance at childhood education. This is the case with all research into education, but the research into ability grouping has these complications and more.

As previously highlighted, there are a variety of different types of ability grouping. To discover the effects of an ability group type it has to be used exclusively and this is rarely the case. This is particularly an issue with streaming: teachers are likely to employ additional types of grouping within different subjects areas and so impacts are difficult to isolate. It is also a factor that will affect research into setting for the Literacy Hour. The National Literacy Strategy: *Framework* advises that pupils should be grouped by ability within classes; one has to ask whether when setting is also used whether conclusions can be reliably made. Plus, having highlighted the different definitions, we need to be sure that all researchers and schools are talking and researching the same types of grouping.

The nature of experimentation in education means simplifications are often made. In studies of ability grouping simplifications of group make-up are common. Pupils grouped by ability are presumed to be homogeneous (either within specific subjects or in intelligence across an age range) and pupils grouped randomly are presumed to be different: the nature of school catchments means this is not necessarily the case, as illustrated by my own experience (Section 1.2.1).

There are also issues with sample characteristics, different schools can allocate students to groups for a variety of reasons; this should be constant before accurate conclusions and generalisations can be made. Indeed, similar factors can affect the matching of control to experimental groups: the nature and rigour of pre-tests and measurements taken to identify and match samples vary from study to study providing equal variety in experimental/control relationships.

The synthesis tables which follow illustrate the variety of studies that have been completed into ability grouping. They vary in scale, aim, purpose and length, all of which can affect interpretation of results and comparisons that can be made with other studies in the field. Alongside this, there are many variations in the samples looked at; these include the focus age group, the number of individuals and schools included, gender issues and type of school (i.e. private, public or state). This adds to the complexity of the issues.

With regard to the implementation of any policy (as discussed in Chapter 3) the teacher has the potential to have a significant impact and can influence the outcomes of any study. Different teachers' attitudes, perceptions and levels of motivation will sway the outcomes. Plus, teachers' levels of experience will influence the techniques, allocation of resources and types of instruction that they utilise, again altering conclusions. Researchers need to manage these possible differences or they need to have a sample big enough for the differences to be minimised.

A further problem, one step removed from contextual factors of the class or school, is that the majority of research into ability grouping has been completed in the United States and the UK. This means that there are many variations in context over time and space; resulting in a variety of different education philosophies underpinning the policies and studies and the different organisational structures need to be accounted for. As policy implementation theories suggest this can have fundamental impact on how a policy manifests itself in the classroom (discussed Chapter 3). However,

research must be completed and comparisons are no less interesting when the possible discrepancies are recognised. It could be argued that since the implementation of the NLS, disparity in factors surrounding methods of teaching and the content and structure of lessons has been reduced within the English system, thereby making comparisons across schools more accurate.

4.3 Streaming: the perceived advantages and disadvantages

Streaming is the grouping of pupils by ability throughout the curriculum and was common within English primary schools before the late 1960s. As previously discussed, the Plowden Report (1967), with its heightened sense of educational equality, marked the beginning of the end for this type of organisation (DES 1967).

There are many advantages and disadvantages to be considered when discussing the impact of streaming. Below I have included a summary based upon concepts and ideas introduced in reviews by Slavin (1987), Hallam and Toutounji (1996) and Sukhnandan and Lee (1998).

4.3.1 Advantages of streaming

The advantages credited to streaming include:

- Streaming is seen as 'administratively attractive' making teaching easier to groups of similar ability pupils.
- The idea of homogeneously grouped classes allows teachers to adopt more whole class 'direct' teaching techniques and, in theory, means that teachers can

target their teaching to the majority of the class for more of the time, thus raising attainment (an interesting parallel to the language used in the NLS).

- It is believed that by using a system of ability grouping, like streaming, the individual needs of the child will be more accurately met within the classroom context.
- Advocates of streaming believe that when it is employed pupils of different abilities will receive a curriculum specifically tailored to their needs.

4.3.2 Disadvantages of streaming

The disadvantages attributed to streaming, and that largely contributed to its decrease within primary schools, include:

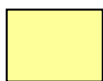
- True homogeneity is a myth and it can cause teachers to overlook individual differences within streamed groups, resulting in very little differentiation within the group.
- Streaming should, theoretically, mean a positive differentiation of resources towards groups with a specific need, but school and teacher variations can mean that the full benefit of this might not be realised.
- Pupils grouped at the less able end of the spectrum tend to be removed from positive academic and behavioural role models, and as a consequence some teachers might become reluctant to teach these groups.
- There is a chance that the different ability groups can become polarised and that these extremes can be stereotyped, bringing different pressures to bear on pupils.

- The process of streaming is often based on test results (which arguably have numerous failings) and teacher judgements (which are not necessarily neutral).
- Streaming results in ability grouping across subject areas, but ability is not necessarily constant across the curriculum or time - there needs to be flexibility between different groups.
- Grouping can discriminate against certain members of society who are disadvantaged due to gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

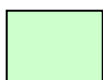
4.4 History of research into streaming

This section of the literature review is provided in the format of a synthesis table. It looks specifically at the country and age phase within which the research was completed and gives a brief description of the study and findings. The data has been put together using a variety of criteria; these can be found in Appendix 7.

The table is colour coded so that the trends in research can be identified. Each study is coloured according to their findings in relation to this study's focus (ability grouping for literacy):



Yellow, if they find in favour of streaming (if positive effects are found for the subject of literacy, regardless of other findings in other subjects, the study is included as positive);



Green if they find in favour of mixed ability classes (if negative effects are found for the subject of literacy, regardless of other findings in other subjects, the study is included as negative); and



Blue if the researcher can not conclude either way.

If a study finds positive effects for some members of the school population and not for others, for example if a polarisation effect occurs, then the study is marked as inconclusive. In reviewing the research, I have tried to summarise whether the researchers would recommend streaming to a school when reflecting on their findings.

Table b. Synthesis table: research into streaming

Country	Age Group	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA	All	Rock (1929)	Review of articles he considered "scientific". Found no consistent significant differences between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
USA	All	Miller & Otto (1930)	Review of 20 experiments. Found methodological issues with many of the experiments. Concluded evidence is contradictory, particularly if there is no adaptation of teaching materials.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966) (Slavin 1987) (Kulik 1992)
USA	All	Billet (1932)	Reviewed 142 articles from 1917 to 1928. Concluded ability grouping just reduced heterogeneity and there were many contextual factors which would impact on success/failure	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
Australia	All	Wyndham (1934)	Studied research and literature on ability grouping in the USA. Found slight gains in achievement when using ability grouping and recommended more research into pupils' attitudes	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
USA	All	Cornell (1936)	Reviewed published studies. Stated that results depended on the philosophy behind the policy, the accuracy with which grouping was undertaken, the differentiation of content, method and speed and the teacher's techniques.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966) (Kulik 1992)
USA	Primary	Breidenstein (1936)	Multi-year study which found effects near zero	(Slavin 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)

Country	Age Group	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA	Primary	Hartill (1936)	Researched class assignment in 15 New York City Elementary Schools - 5 th and 6 th grade - assigned to heterogeneous or ability grouped class for 1 year and then swapped. Found low-IQ students did better in ability-grouped classes, high-IQ did better in heterogeneous classes, and average-IQ students did equally well. Overall achievement gains were identical	(Slavin 1987) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)
USA	Primary	Rankin, Anderson & Bergman (1936)	Compared students matched on attainment in 3 different programs: ability grouping within grades, 'vertical grouping' and heterogeneous classes. Teacher attitudes towards heterogeneous classes were more negative due to range of ability included. Found small achievement gain for ability grouping in comparison to heterogeneous classes.	(Slavin 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
USA	All	Otto (1941)	Summary of existing studies. Concluded evidence slightly favours ability grouping. Teachers prefer teaching homogeneous groups. Evidence favours low ability pupils and could be harmful for able pupils.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
UK	Primary	Blandford (1958)	Compared results over 3 years in 5 streamed and 6 non-streamed schools. Criticised because non-streamed schools were small (1 class per year). Found range of scores in attainment was greater in streamed schools i.e. brighter pupils did better and lower ability pupils did worse than counterparts	(Barker-Lunn 1970) (Hallam and Toutounji 1996) (Gregory 1984)
UK	Secondary	Rudd (1958)	Compared 2 groups of pupils in the same secondary school. Found no difference in attitudes or attainment. However this was just one school and might not be representative.	(Barker-Lunn 1970)
USA	All	Ekstrom (1959)	Review of 33 experimental studies. Found no consistent pattern for the effectiveness of homogeneous grouping relating to age, ability level, course content, or method of instruction.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)

Country	Age Group	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA	All	Goodlad (1960)	Reviewed literature since 1930s. Concluded there were minor positive effects for ability grouping on achievement, particularly the less able pupils. High ability pupils benefit if the teaching materials are adapted. Studies of ability grouping in subject areas are contradictory.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
USA	Primary	Wallen & Vowles (1960)	Comparison of two elementary schools. No significant differences found. Teachers had significant effects on success.	(Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)
USA	Primary	Research Committee of the Indiana Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development(1960)	Propositions: Ability grouping does not produce raised achievement alone; it may have negative effects on pupils in lower and middle bands; it does not appear to greatly effect the achievement of brighter pupils; may prevent the development of general education skills; it encourages a 'milieu which emphasises the attainment of academic goals'.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
UK	Primary	Daniels (1961)	4 year study of streamed and un-streamed junior schools matched for IQ. Reported teachers in un-streamed schools were more positive about their work. Found that pupils in the un-streamed schools were achieving higher than their counterparts in streamed classes. The standard deviations from the mean were smaller in un-streamed schools particularly in English and reading.	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998) (Slavin 1987) (Gregory 1984)
USA	All	Eash (1961)	Examined research on grouping in terms of achievement and self-concept. Found that ability grouping alone is not enough. Negative effects on lower abilities due to a lack of mental stimulation. Ability grouping in the younger year groups is not advantageous.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
USA	Secondary	Wilcox (1961)	Effects of grouping on 1157 8 th grade pupils in 16 schools. Reported differing effects for different subjects when no curricular development: significant positive effects on attainment in mathematics and science, no significant effect in social studies and significant negative effects in English attainment.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
UK	All	Daniels (1962)	Survey of British and American research. Claimed any positive effects of ability grouping was due to the streaming of teachers, i.e. highest bands got highest qualified teachers and vice versa	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
USA	Secondary	Drews (1962)	432 9 th grade students. Teacher effects managed for as each teacher taught an ability group and a homogeneous group with adapted English curriculum. Found average students are not advantaged by either type of grouping based on teacher, peer and self-ratings, high and low ability students preferred to be with students like themselves.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
Sweden	Primary	Svensson (1962)	11,000 4 th Grade pupils were monitored until 9 th Grade. The age at which high-ability pupils were ability grouped had no effect on attainment at 15. Low ability pupils attained more in non-streamed groups.	(Sukhnandan and Lee 1998) (Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966)
USA	Primary	Morgenstern (1963)	Students in 4 th to 6 th grade; found slight positive effect from ability grouping	(Slavin 1987)
UK	Primary	Willig (1963)	Studied the social implications of streaming in junior schools. Found social skills and attitudes to peers were better in non-streamed classes	(Hallam and Toutounji, 1996) (Gregory 1984)
USA	All	Borg (1964)	Up to 4,000 pupils in Grades 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were studied for 4 years. Concluded there was little difference between ability and homogeneous grouping. Found homogeneous grouping more favourable for low-ability pupils.	(Goldberg <i>et al.</i> 1966) (Kulik 1992)
UK	Primary	Douglas (1964)	Study followed 5,000 pupils born in March 1946 through primary school. Found little evidence of transfer between streams. Evidence of streaming reinforcing social class structure. Pupils in lower streams achieved relatively less when compared to those in the upper streams. Pupils took on the characteristics of the stream they were in.	All

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
UK	Primary	Jackson (1964)	Sampled schools large enough to implement streaming and found 96% did so. Streaming reinforced social class divisions, as objective tests were not used to allocate pupils to streams. Streaming compared to non-streaming had little effect on high and middle ability pupils and streaming meant negative effects for low ability pupils. Non-streaming had social advantages for all pupils.	(Barker-Lunn 1970) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998) (Gregory 1984)
USA	Primary	Borg (1965)	Compared achievement in two districts of Utah. Criticised because only 2 districts and so effects could not be isolated to grouping strategy. Found ability grouping beneficial for high-IQ students, neutral for average and negative for low-IQ students, but effects had disappeared by junior high.	(Slavin 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
USA	Primary	Goldberg, Passow & Justman (1966)	Longitudinal study of approx. 2000 pupils in 45 New York elementary schools. Homogeneous grouping had no effect on achievement. Mixed ability grouping produced the biggest gains in attainment. There seemed to be no consistent effects from grouping based on pupils' interest or attitudes to school or on their opinions of their peers.	(Barker-Lunn 1970) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998) (Slavin 1987)
USA	Primary	Justman (1968)	Studied 3 rd grade reading achievement. Found slightly in favour of mixed ability classes. Low and middle achievers gained most.	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
UK	Primary	Barker Lunn (1970)	Comprehensive study of 36 streamed with 36 non-streamed junior schools. Found no comprehensive evidence favouring streamed or un-streamed schools. Any significant effects were equally balanced between the two types of grouping.	(Gregory, 1984) (Hallam and Toutounji 1996) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Slavin 1987) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA	All	Findley & Bryan (1971)	Review of the literature on ability grouping in the US between 1920 and 1970. Concluded research available was still inconclusive. Streaming negatively effected achievement of low and average ability pupils.	(Slavin 1987)
UK	Primary	Ferri (1971)	Followed up pupils from streamed or non-streamed junior schools two years later. Found no differences between 2 types of grouping in performance at secondary schools.	(Hallam and Toutounji 1996) (Gregory 1984)
USA	Primary	Cartwright & McIntosh (1972)	Compared 3 methods of grouping in Grades 1 & 2 in a Honolulu school: self-contained heterogeneous, self-contained ability grouping and flexible. Found achievement in reading and mathematics greater in heterogeneous classes than ability grouped, and slightly greater in heterogeneous than flexible in English and not mathematics. However sample size was small.	(Slavin 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
USA	Primary	Marland (1972)	Found there was evidence of bright pupils attaining higher standards in streamed groups.	(Gregory 1984)
UK	Primary	Esposito (1973)	Found ability grouping is of benefit to high ability pupils and has negative effects on low ability pupils.	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Slavin 1987)
<p>Throughout the 1970's there were a number of studies, particularly in the UK, that although not specifically looking at streaming, had an effect on this line of research. For example, Davie, Butler and Goldstein (1972) and Fogelman (1975), both looked at 7 years old pupils and found that social class and family size affects academic attainment. Therefore, pupils from a lower social class and/or a bigger family were likely to achieve lower than their counterpart from a higher social class and/or smaller family. There were factors operating on these pupils that had nothing to do with the grouping system that was employed in the primary school (cited in Gregory, 1984, Harlen and Malcolm, 1999).Essen, Fogelman and Ghodsian (1978) found that there is little change in academic performance between the ages of 7 and 16. Any movement that there is, was found to be most likely before 11 years old, the transfer to secondary school (cited in Gregory, 1984).</p>				

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
UK	All	Newbold (1977)	Banbury School Project. Teachers with direct experience of mixed ability teaching had more positive attitudes towards it.	(Hallam and Toutounji 1996) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
UK	All	Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher & Vile (1981)	Researched teacher attitudes towards different forms of grouping. Found attitudes varied depending on the perceived role. Mixed ability teaching was viewed more positively where resources were readily available. However, when external examinations loomed teachers were increasingly unhappy with mixed ability teaching. Found teaching methods in mixed ability classes were often not appropriate for range of abilities present.	(Hallam and Toutounji 1996)
USA	Primary	Schwartz (1981)	Research done in 3 elementary schools and 1 junior high all using streaming by ability. Provided evidence of a link between teacher expectations, attitudes and pupil behaviour: low stream classes were characterised by disruptive behaviour and were consequently avoided by teachers.	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Hallam and Toutounji 1996)
USA	Primary	Evertson (1982)	Comparison of low and high achieving junior high schools. Found instruction in lower groups tended to be of a different quality to that found in other groups.	(Hallam and Toutounji 1996)
UK	Primary	Leiter (1983)	Found no correlation between ability grouping and achievement in reading and mathematics. But there were insignificant effects positively for reading and negative for mathematics achievement.	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
UK	All	Gregory (1984)	From point of view of educational psychologist. Review of literature researching into ability grouping in primary schools. Concluded that evidence is highly equivocal and inconclusive.	(Hallam and Toutounji 1996) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999)

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA	Primary	Kulik & Kulik (1984)	Meta-analysis of 31 studies investigating the effects of ability grouping on achievement. Found a small benefit for grouping classes rather than non-grouped. Programs specifically for high ability pupils were very successful. The effects on self-concept were negligible.	(Slavin 1987) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)
UK	Secondary	Kerckhoff (1986)	A study in British secondary schools to identify whether ability grouping meant a gain for all pupils or whether the results were divergent (high ability pupils gaining and lower ability pupils disadvantaged). Found support for the latter.	(Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)
USA	Primary	Slavin (1987)	Meta-analysis and review of 14 studies of streaming. Found for pupils of all abilities and for reading and mathematics, non-streaming had no effects on pupil achievement in the elementary school. The evidence is inconclusive.	(Hallam and Toutounji 1996) (Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)
UK	Primary	Simpson, Cameron, Goulder, Duncan, Roberts, & Smithers (1989)	Investigated teacher practice and ability grouping in primary schools. Found there was little advantage of ability grouping unless teachers catered for individual differences. They found there was a mismatch between the ability of the child and the work that was being set.	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999)
UK	All	Lee & Croll (1995)	Compared attitudes to streaming in 2 education authorities. Had difficulty finding primary schools which used streaming, although more likely in the bigger schools. 40% of head teachers interviewed held the view there was a role for setting in the primary school; 1/4 believed it would benefit the most able and 6.5% thought it would benefit the less able. There was little interest from other groups. Concluded that the support for streaming was showing itself as setting	(Harlen and Malcolm 1999) (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998)

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
UK	All	Hallam & Toutounji (1996)	A research review of literature on ability grouping. Suggests returning to streaming is not a solution to raising under achievement and possibly setting with its subject focus, would be of more benefit. It is an area needing further research and development.	(Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
UK	All	Sukhnandon with Lee (1998)	A review of literature. Found a lack of evidence to support streaming and recommended further research into different forms of ability grouping and the effects on pupil achievement particularly with the effects of the National Curriculum and the resurgence of testing procedures.	(Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)

Within the synthesis tables, sixteen studies were found to be negative towards streaming; interestingly most of these studies do not appear before the 1960s. Representing the opposing viewpoint, there are seven studies which conclude positively. These studies are fairly polarised over the time period with few positive studies completed around the time of the Plowden Report (DES 1967) when ideologies of education equality dominated (see Chapter 2).

Overall, the findings from these studies are inconclusive, with 25 studies unable to find convincing evidence. Of these studies, a number found differential gains across the population; in other words, streaming had different, either positive or negative, effects for high, average or low ability pupils. Four studies, all completed prior to 1965, found positive impacts for lower ability pupils in contrast to their peers, while six studies found positive effects for high ability pupils. This overall finding corresponds to meta-analysis work by John Hattie which states “...there is a close to zero effect from tracking [streaming]...” (2002 p.463).

However, with regard to inclusion, impacts are quite varied, but depending on how the policy is implemented there does seem to be some evidence that ability grouping could affect inclusion of pupils at either end of the ability spectrum. This may link to the relationship I suggested between the drive for inclusion and the reintroduction of ability grouping. However, the fact that all positive impacts for low ability pupils were found before 1965, before the Plowden Report when inclusion became more of an issue in primary schools, could indicate some issues with changing definitions of ‘low ability’.

4.5 Setting: The perceived advantages and disadvantages

Setting involves grouping by ability for a specific subject. Within the available literature, setting has most commonly occurred in mathematics and reading in the primary school. This can be across one year group or several year groups depending on the context. As mentioned above, setting is seen by some as evolving from the perceived disadvantages of streaming, particularly those relating to social disadvantage (because setting is for a specific subject then mixed ability teaching can be used elsewhere to maintain social equality) and accurate group assignment (attainment in the specific subject will determine which ability group a child enters rather than using a perceived 'general' intelligence). These were identified by the Plowden Report (see discussion in Chapter 2).

4.5.1 Advantages of setting

Based on the work of Slavin (1987), Sukhnandan and Lee (1998) and Hallam and Toutounji (1996), setting is said to incorporate the following advantages:

- The nature of intelligence is perceived as more complex now than in the past, there is some agreement different individuals are more or less 'suited' to different subjects and approaches to learning, therefore setting can begin to account for this.
- Due to more accurate group assignment in specific subjects, homogeneity of each set will be increased allowing more accurate targeting of lessons.
- More accurate targeting of lessons will mean positive increases in achievements at all ability levels.

- Because pupils are put into sets for individual subjects rather than the whole curriculum, any negative affects this might have, on self-image for example, could be lessened by other subjects taught in mixed ability groups; although this could depend on the underlying rationale for implementing ability grouping in the first place.
- Because setting is based on attainment in just one subject then grouping could be more flexible.
- Subject specific ability grouping should allow more accurate resource allocation.

4.5.2 Disadvantages of setting

Based on the work of Sukhnandan and Lee (1998) setting is said to incorporate the following disadvantages:

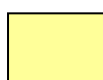
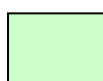
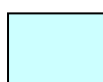
- Setting within one subject could have curriculum-wide implications as generalisations are made based on those ability groups in mixed ability lessons, particularly literacy which can be seen as integral to most other lessons.
- Just because group allocation is based on attainment in one subject does not automatically mean it is accurate, the means by which grouping is decided needs to be carefully considered.
- Perceived homogeneity of groups can still cause individual differences to be missed within the one subject.

- Setting can encourage stereotyping of sets: the high ability groups as competitive and the low ability as badly behaved and with negative self image, both of which can be harmful to individuals and can perpetuate disadvantage.
- Teacher allocation to sets is an issue, it has to be questioned whether higher qualified teachers should teach higher sets.
- Polarisation of sets, and therefore the abilities, can occur within one subject just as easy as when grouped across the curriculum.

4.6 History of research into setting

The research into setting will be put into context with another synthesis table. The same format as above is used. The only change to the criteria for research included in the review is that the studies will specifically focus on setting: its advantages, disadvantages and effects within primary literacy. The criteria used to select studies for this synthesis table are included in Appendix 7.







The colour coding of the table is the same as before:

-  Yellow for research finding in favour of setting for literacy;
-  Green for a negative result; and
-  Blue for piece of research that does not conclude either way.


A quick glance at the table reveals that research into setting is scarce and has not been given as much attention as other forms of ability grouping. This was surprising given

its increasing popularity and derivative relationship with streaming (as highlighted in the previous section).

Table c. Synthesis table: research into setting

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
<p>The Joplin plan was mostly seen in elementary schools during the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was first described in 1954 by Floyd (cited in Slavin, 1987). It involved pupils being regrouped by ability for reading across grades, so that, for example, an able Grade 2 child could be taught alongside less able Grade 4 pupils. Each class should ideally consist of 1 or 2 reading levels. Research is included in this synthesis table because of the link to primary age literacy. Studies that look specifically at the Joplin Plan or similar across grades system are marked with a red star:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p>				
USA 	Primary	Russell (1946)	Completed before the Joplin Plan was first described Students were regrouped for reading in Grades 4-6 without regard for grade level. Students were matched to students in schools which did not regroup. No differences were found between the two groups.	(Slavin, 1987)
USA 	Primary	Hart (1959)	Grades 4-5 regrouped into 9 reading classes. Gains on the California Achievement Test were strongly in favour of the Joplin approach	(Slavin, 1987)
USA 	Primary	Ingram (1960)	Students in Grades 1-3 were regrouped into 9 reading groups Results supported the non-graded approach	(Slavin, 1987)
USA 	Primary	Morgan & Stucker (1960)	5 th and 6 th Graders were matched and randomly assigned to 4 Joplin and 4 control classes. Results were significantly in favour of the Joplin Plan for high and low achievers in 5 th grade and low achievers in 6 th grade. Though small class sizes meant able 6 th graders did not get extension they needed.	(Slavin, 1987)
USA 	Primary	Skapski (1960)	Some doubt as to method but found significant gains for the very able pupils when included in Joplin classes. Improvements for less able were also high but not as large.	(Slavin, 1987)

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA	Primary	Provus (1960)	Studied 11 classes in suburban Chicago set for mathematics. Found a positive achievement gain for all pupils, however this was much higher for able pupils than average pupils and least able pupils had the least positive improvement compared to other abilities.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA	Primary	Koontz (1961)	Studied separately grouped pupils for mathematics, reading and language. Students changed classes 3-4 times a day. Found effects were negative, particularly for reading compared to heterogeneous classes.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA ★	Primary	Rothrock (1961)	Compared Joplin classes to heterogeneous classes that used within class ability grouping. Found significantly positive affects in favour of the Joplin Plan	(Slavin, 1987)
USA	Primary	Balow & Ruddell (1963)	Found positive effects for middle and low ability pupils when set in both reading and mathematics. Some doubt expressed by reviewers over pre-test scores.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA	Primary	Davis & Tracy (1963)	Studied students set for mathematics in two schools in North Carolina. Only two schools, but found setting detrimental for the achievement of all pupils. But, criticised because of a lack of curriculum adaptation.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA ★	Primary	Green & Riley (1963)	Compared Joplin Plan to traditional methods used in the same school in the previous year. Students in Joplin classes gained significantly more.	(Slavin, 1987)
USA ★	Primary	Halliwell (1963)	Compared a plan almost identical to the Joplin Plan. Regrouped students in Grades 1-3. Results indicated higher reading achievement in the Joplin classes than in the same school the previous year	(Slavin, 1987)
USA ★	Primary	Hillson, Jones, Moore & Van Devender (1964)	Studied a non-graded plan similar to the Joplin Plan. Randomly assigned students and teachers to regrouped or traditional classes. Found reading scores on 3 standardised tests were higher for Joplin students	(Slavin, 1987)

Country	Age Range	Researchers and Year	Summary of Method and Findings	Review or meta-analyses cited in
USA 	Primary	Moorhouse (1964)	Compared a school using the Joplin plan to one using traditional grouping. Some doubt over rigour of pre-tests, but did find significantly higher gains for pupils in school using the Joplin Plan	(Slavin, 1987)
USA	Primary	Berkun, Swanson & Sawyer (1966)	Found evidence supporting setting for reading when compared to self-contained groups. However criticised for pre-test differences between experimental and control groups.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA	Primary	Moses (1966)	Studied setting for reading in 54 classes in rural Louisiana. It held constant time and instructional materials in matched experimental and control classes. Found no consistent differences.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA	Primary	Morris (1969)	Studied a program using setting for reading and mathematics. After 3 years found achievement was higher in the set classes compared to heterogeneous classes. When the control group were included in the policy of setting for a further 2 years, found that the experimental group had increased their advantage.	(Slavin, 1987) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA	Primary	Becker (1977)	Project Follow-Through in America: DISTAR program Taught groups of 6-10 economically disadvantaged primary aged pupils and brought them back to the norm for age in 4 years.	(Gregory, 1984) (Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
USA	Primary	Mason (1995)	571 schools in 12 states. Setting more common as a student becomes older and more common in 'traditional' schools where a subject timetable operates.	(Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)
UK	Primary	SOIED (1996)	Survey of ability grouping in Scottish schools. Advised setting in English and Maths for older year groups in primary schools as it reduces time spent on organisation and management allowing more direct teaching.	(Harlen and Malcolm, 1999)

Of the 20 studies included in the synthesis table, 14 were found to be positive, three negative and three were inconclusive. Research into setting started in the 1950s but is limited in its scope. The majority of studies have been completed within the American education system, with only one being completed in the UK, half of which have focused on the Joplin Plan.

In Hattie's meta-analysis of tracking, the Joplin Plan focusing on reading had an effect size of 0.45 (2002 p.454), higher than any of the other material he looked at in the field. He attributed this success to flexibility and careful, repeat assessment of pupil performance. However, some caution should be expressed with regard to the focus of this thesis:

- The Joplin plan looked exclusively at reading and, as previously discussed, this is only one element of literacy.
- The Joplin plan advises ability grouping for reading across age groups. It has to be asked how appropriate this is with a national policy as prescriptive as the NLS, especially with regard to yearly learning objectives and targets.

It is clear that there is a need for further research into setting, within the UK context and focusing on the whole literacy curriculum in the primary school.

4.7 The current situation: setting for the Literacy Hour

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, research into ability grouping in primary education had all but died out by the late 1980s and during the early 1990s it was scarce: mixed ability teaching tended to dominate classroom practice (Lee and Croll

1995). The literature related to this subject is mostly in the form of reviews and meta-analyses. Most of these reviewers agree that there is not enough evidence to promote a resurgence of ability grouping without further consideration (Slavin 1987; Hallam and Toutounji 1996; Sukhnandan and Lee 1998; Harlen and Malcolm 1999; Ireson and Hallam 1999). However, there was also some agreement that setting might be a means of solving some of the negative connotations associated with streaming.

In 1998, Ofsted published a survey of setting in primary schools stating that its use was on the increase. This has been followed up by the work of McPake *et al.* (1999) and Hallam *et al.* (2003), both of whom completed surveys on the use of setting, the former in Scotland and the latter in English schools, indicating growing trends towards ability grouping in primary schools. Alexander noted similar trends with regard to international comparisons, stating:

We observed no streamed classes in any of the 5 countries studied, and indeed most teachers were strongly opposed to the idea, especially in Russia. We observed only a limited amount of setting, usually in mathematics or language lessons, and then only in England. (Alexander 2000 p.363)

The next section will look at possible reasons *why* there has been an increase in the use of setting. It will then continue the debate on whether this is appropriate in today's primary schools, particularly from the perspective of literacy teaching in the National Literacy Strategy. It will be argued that it is more complicated than 'to set, or not to set' and that different aspects of literacy are more or less suited to ability grouping.

4.7.1 Why is there a resurgence of ability grouping in primary schools?

Many would agree that the Education Reform Act of 1988, introducing a national curriculum and extensive assessment at age seven and eleven, began a shift in education ideology (for example, Richards 2001; Wyse and Jones 2001). I have argued, in Chapter 3, that it is debatable as to whether this change of perspective extended to teachers at 'the chalk face', but a governmental desire for a market-led education system ensured that these policies proceeded regardless (Galton *et al.* 1999).

Richards (2001), in the introduction of his book 'Changing English Primary Education', names the period 1988-97 as the 'age of regulation' (2001). He describes strong government intervention in the primary curriculum and assessment processes. Alongside policy developments of the late 1980s/ early 1990s, came an increase in literature criticising mixed ability teaching. Commentators were specifically worried about the extremes in the school population: it was suggested that the needs of the least and most able pupils were being missed, specifically when associated with large class sizes (for example Galton *et al.* 1980; Reid *et al.* 1981). Bearne argues that as a consequence, the Education Reform Act "...formally welcomed the idea of differentiation" (1996 p.1); that it became the 'buzz word' of the classroom. It could be argued that ability grouping is in fact a form of differentiation, and that the call for more traditional methods of teaching speeded up the move towards setting. Other educational commentators have made this link explicit, for example:

In recent years, there has been a move away from issues of equality back to concerns over standards, accompanied by demands for a return to traditional, homogeneous forms of grouping. (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998 p. 53)

Trends that back up these comments can be traced in the synthesis tables (Tables b and c). Studies in the United States and England prior to the late 1960s saw academic achievement as a positive outcome of ability grouping (for example, Wyndham 1934; Otto 1941 and Goodlad 1960, all cited in Goldberg *et al.* 1966; Morgenstern 1963 and Borg 1965, both cited in Slavin 1987). However, post-Plowden, the focus changed to the effects on issues of educational opportunity (Alexander 2000). For example, in Jackson's study the focus was on the reinforcing of social barriers by streaming (Jackson 1964). This is a reflection of a different set of priorities dominating the policy rationale of the time.

Despite these developing trends, however, the evidence of the time regarding setting was contradictory (Slavin 1987; Harlen and Malcom 1999; Hallam and Toutounji 1999; Sukhnandon and Lee 1998). For every study concluding one way, there is another with opposing evidence. For example, in the United States in 1963, Balow and Russell found positive effects of setting in elementary schools for both reading and mathematics. However, in the same year in the same country, Davis and Tracy found negative effects of setting for all pupils in elementary school mathematics (both cited in Harlen and Malcolm 1999 and Slavin 1987).

Add to this the number of methodologically sound studies that have been unable to make conclusive judgements either for or against streaming and/or setting, then the arguments become even more difficult to define either way. For example, Barker-Lunn's (1970) comprehensive UK study into streamed and un-streamed junior

schools, is praised by the reviewers for its method, but it could not reach a conclusion.

Slavin states,

If there were any consistent effect of ability-grouped class assignment on student achievement, a study the size and quality of Barker-Lunn's would be very likely to find it. (Slavin 1987 p.305)

Goldberg *et al.* also completed an extensive study in the United States in 1966. It is also praised for its research rigour; but, again, no significant results were found either for or against ability grouping. Their report concludes:

Ability grouping is inherently neither good nor bad. It is neutral. Its value depends on the way in which it is used. Where it is used without close examination of the specific learning needs of various pupils and without recognition that it must follow the demands of a carefully planned curriculum, grouping can be, at best ineffective, at worst, harmful. (Goldberg *et al.* 1966 p.168)

And here lies an important aspect for the ability grouping debate: school context and individual needs may be affecting the research and be responsible for some of the inconclusive data and need to be considered if an effective ability grouping policy is to be implemented.

The argument is further complicated by the fact that currently setting rather than streaming is being advocated (Lee and Croll 1995; Ofsted 1998b; McPake *et al.* 2000; Hallam *et al.* 2003). It is possible that some subjects, or parts of subjects, are more suited to certain types of grouping. For example, Ireson & Hallam state, "...ability grouping is more salient in English than mathematics or science." (Ireson and Hallam 1999). Leiter also found subject specific results. He concluded differently for reading and mathematics: in reading low ability pupils made the largest gains when ability grouping was used, and when it was used for mathematics lessons the opposite

occurred (Leiter 1983). This is more contradictory evidence and in need of further investigation.

Another area of research has been the reasons teachers and schools give for employing ability grouping. There are a number of studies exploring teachers' perspectives of ability grouping, but few are from the modern era. Few look specifically at teacher's attitudes towards setting as opposed to other types of ability grouping, and there are issues about country specificity: with fewer studies being completed in the English context. The work of Daniels (1961), Jackson (1964) and Barker Lunn (1970) show positive attitudes towards teaching ability groups, although their research is specific to streaming. Interestingly, Barker Lunn (1970) found that the attitude of teachers towards ability grouping or mixed ability depended on pedagogical standpoint and beliefs; teachers who favoured mixed ability teaching were more child-centred, while teachers using streaming favoured more traditional approaches. This link is interesting when considered alongside the synthesis tables and the trends which I identified within them.

Within the current context of the national strategies the only research I can find looking at teacher attitudes to ability grouping is the work of Ireson and Hallam (2001). Their research was undertaken within Key Stage 3, older than the focus of this thesis, but their findings are interesting. They came up with a number of conclusions with regard to teacher's beliefs about ability grouping:

- Setting benefits the more able child, ensuring that they make maximum progress;

- The able child is less inhibited by peer pressure in set classes;
- Grouping practices affect pupils' self-esteem;
- Setting has a damaging effect on the self-esteem of those in the lower sets;
- Setting stigmatises those perceived as less able;
- Mixed ability grouping leads to better social adjustment for all pupils;
- The effects of different grouping policies on motivation are less clear;
- Mixed ability classes provide the less able pupils with positive models of achievement;
- Where classes are set there are more discipline problems in the lower ability classes.

(Ireson and Hallam 2001 p.126)

It will be crucial to return to these findings as they are major themes of this thesis.

At a time when the link between raising standards and the implementation of ability grouping is being re-established it has to be asked whether the modern climate of primary education is better suited to the implementation of ability grouping. Setting is arguably a more subtle type of ability grouping with many apparent advantages, but it is still relatively unstudied. It is therefore important to look at whether ability grouping is an appropriate way of raising standards in primary literacy and whether it is in keeping with ideas of social equality and inclusion.

4.7.3 The National Literacy Strategy and Setting

The context into which this new wave of ability grouping has been introduced is quite different to even seven years ago. Primary literacy has been radically altered by the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy: *Framework for Teaching* (DfEE 1998a). This policy can be seen as a direct consequence of the 'New Labour' Government's desire to raise academic standards. By prescribing objectives to be achieved by each primary year group, and by dictating the method of imparting this knowledge, the daily Literacy Hour, it was hoped ambitious targets of attainment would be met. Some would argue that this is possibly the ultimate in education regulation and governmental influence in primary schools. However, as already pointed out, these are characteristics past education systems that seem to go hand in hand with ability grouping.

Despite the lack of supporting research evidence, ability grouping is on the increase in primary schools. The NLS: *Framework* itself recommends ability grouping, but within the classroom rather than across class groups (DfEE 1998a). The current Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has also endorsed ability grouping:

The modernisation of the comprehensive principle requires all pupils to progress as far and as fast as they are able. Grouping children by ability can be an important way of making that happen. (cited in Budge 1998)

There are a number of studies documenting the growing trend of setting in modern primary schools. In 1995, before the implementation of the NLS, Lee and Croll found that, in the wake of the Education Reform Act of 1988, teachers were increasingly using some form of ability grouping (Lee and Croll 1995). Since 1997 and the introduction of the NLS and NNS (DfEE 1999b), the incidence has continued to rise

(Hallam *et al.* 2003). The Ofsted report, 'Setting in Primary Schools', found a two percent increase in the number of set lessons in primary schools between the school year 1996/97 and 1997/98 (Ofsted 1998b). In Scotland, where the Literacy Hour does not dominate, the same trend is apparent (McPake *et al.* 1999).

In this chapter, the changes in regulation have been outlined, with the suggestion that certain ideologies tend to go hand in hand with ability grouping. With regard to debates surrounding literacy education and inclusion, the Plowden Report is of fundamental importance (DES 1967). In the first half of the century, literacy was dominated by a strong skills focus, often taught in subject-specific lessons. But through the 1960s this changed: literacy teaching began to lose its focused approach and to pervade the school day, being taught alongside and within other subjects, it became more of a cross-curricular approach. Presently, alongside the increase in education regulation, the 'skills' of literacy are being refocused on in the classroom: the NLS centres on the teaching of 'basic literacy skills'. This raises the question of whether this has increased the implementation of setting.

Research into the incidence of setting at the turn of the twentieth century shows that it is more likely to occur in mathematics than literacy (Ofsted 1998b; McPake *et al.* 1999; Hallam *et al.* 2003); but the question needs to be asked why this is and what it is about mathematics that makes ability grouping more likely. There are two factors here; firstly, mathematics is more likely to be taught in isolation as a specific subject lesson. It has already been pointed out that during the latter half of the twentieth century, literacy tended to pervade the whole curriculum with literacy teaching going

hand in hand with other subjects under the heading of topic (Wyse and Jones 2001). This would have meant that subject specific ability grouping would not have been possible in the same way. The fact that the NLS makes use of a daily literacy lesson means that setting could be considered as an option.

Secondly, the nature of the subject must be considered. Mathematics follows a 'building block approach': with mastery of one set of skills leading to the next (Askew *et al.* 1997). The Literacy Hour also emphasises this same 'skills approach', using a similar building up of knowledge, but it is criticised for this very point. It is debated whether literacy can be broken down in this systematic way (Thornbury 2000). Many researchers emphasise the importance of literacy skills, such as, imaginative writing and independent reading ('whole language' literacy), that are not included in the Literacy Hour. Teachers have to timetable these aspects elsewhere (Frater 2000). Are subjects, or parts of subjects, possibly with a skills focus more appropriate to teaching in ability groups? Conversely, as Lyle would argue, are parts of literacy reliant on mixed ability teaching?

There is a growing body of research which suggests that when learners work alongside more advanced peers they can 'borrow' understanding from their learning partners (Wray and Medwell 1991) with according to Vygotsky (1962) 'what a child can do in collaboration today, he can do by himself tomorrow'. (Lyle 1999 p.288)

Some of the recent research has been looking away from the affects on pupils, either attainment or self-image, and have slanted their research towards the affects on teaching style and school ethos. One of the findings is that teachers who have homogeneously grouped classes are more likely to favour traditional methods of instruction and to use whole class teaching methods (McPake *et al.* 1999). This would

correspond well with the Literacy Hour with its 40 minutes whole class teaching and 20 minutes task time.

The NLS is the first document to include both curriculum advice as well as detail on inclusion, arguably one of the major criticisms is that the Literacy Hour, as a result, is difficult to teach to a wide range of ability. The emphasis on whole class teaching, mentioned above, dictates the whole class should be inclusively taught together. Teachers themselves have found this 'teaching to the average' a large worry (for example, Fisher and Lewis 1999; Anderson *et al.* 2000; Smith and Whiteley 2000). Setting is seen as a solution to this: by grouping by ability it is argued that whole class instruction will target more of the class (Ofsted 1998b).

Over the history of research into setting there is an equal amount of indecision over whether it is a type of organisation that works best with the least or the most able. Kulik (1992) appears to see setting as a method benefiting the most able, allowing them to be stretched beyond their peers. However, in other cases it is a method for directing resources and extra support to pupils who are most in need, often those with SEN (Aylett 2000). Again it seems to come down to context and the institutional-wide needs of the pupils. As Rolnick advises to SEN co-ordinators:

Some children might find setting suits them very well whilst others within the same set would prefer to be in a mixed ability class. There is no perfect form of grouping and schools must therefore make their own choice, based on detailed knowledge of their specific circumstances and children. (Rolnick, 2001 p.32)

Many of the reviewers, who cannot conclude either for or against ability grouping based on past research, do not advise a complete dismissal of this strategy of

organisation. However, they prescribe caution to the would-be institution as they contemplate the issue of setting. Sukhnandon and Lee (1999) state that schools must look at their own context to make decisions about the types of ability grouping that are suitable for them. Commentators and researchers also point out that simply grouping by ability without an adaptation of the curriculum is not likely to work (Goldberg *et al.* 1966; Gamoran 1986). This does not favour the NLS, which is accused of inflexibility in structure (Anderson *et al.* 2000) and content (Dadds 1999).

If it is accepted that setting is an answer, it is likely to be one of many. Schools that choose to implement it must think about the context within which they work: their underlying philosophy of education, and the age and nature of the pupils they teach. They must also think about the nature of the subject in which they aim to set: are all the component parts of that subject appropriate to ability groups. Teachers must not forget that concerns with setting remain, and they need to be carefully considered before it is introduced, for example, about grouping those with learning problems together (Eder 1981), labelling of young pupils (Thornton 1999), differential group instruction (Rowan and Miracle Jnr 1983) and polarisation of the experiences and abilities (William *et al.* 1999).

So to conclude, the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, with its daily Literacy Hour, has meant that setting for literacy is seen as a feasible organisational option for literacy teaching. However, research is still not conclusive as to whether it is an appropriate option in all schools and for all parts of this complex subject. While there may be enough positive studies for it to be worth considering. The gaps in the

evidence leave many questions unanswered. Some research suggests certain parts of literacy are more appropriate to the implementation of setting, possibly those with a skills approach. In contrast, there are also studies promoting the view that there are areas of literacy that should only be taught in mixed ability groups. Responsibility for good decision-making must rest with the teachers. The Ofsted report into the incidence of setting observes that in some schools literacy is being split by the use of different grouping arrangements as suggested above, but suggests, "...it will be difficult to reconcile with the introduction of the Literacy Hour" (Ofsted 1998b p.9). It also must be considered that pupils are all individuals and it is difficult to find an organisation system that works for all of them, all of the time. Teachers are in the best position to understand which methods for which curriculum components, organisational strategies are the most appropriate.

4.8 Summarising the literature reviews

So far within this study I have discussed the different factors influencing on the National Literacy Strategy and setting. At this point it is important to summarise the emerging trends from all three literature reviews before moving on to setting out the empirical framework which this study is going to use.

The over-arching theme within all three literature reviews has been the relationship between traditional and progressive ideologies, whether within the classroom or in policy generation. In Chapter 2, I argued that literacy education has, over the history of legislation, changed focus: starting initially from a traditional, basic skills focus, moving through a period of more progressive whole language approaches and then

returning to a more traditional skills based approach in the National Literacy Strategy. This current context is characterised by an emphasis on basic skills, the partitioning of language, the explicit use of a subject specific literacy lessons and a target led curriculum. I have made a case that these characteristics of a traditional pedagogy have been linked in the past with ability grouping.

This association between traditional ideologies and ability grouping was demonstrated earlier in this chapter. The synthesis tables showed that support for ability grouping in primary schools is more common when traditional ideologies dominate educational thinking and policy agendas. In periods of more progressive philosophy the trend is reversed: ability grouping is less common and research is more likely to find against its use. It is going to be important to ask whether these associations stand within the current context or whether the influencing factors, as I have suggested within the literature reviews, are more complex than that.

One factor which I have argued could have affected the introduction of ability grouping is the move towards a policy of inclusive education. Alongside the ‘cyclical’ or ‘spiralling’ changes in literacy legislation, I have shown that there was a more linear progression towards inclusion and a political desire to provide an education for *all* children. I have argued that this has meant a contradiction has occurred within the recommendations of the NLS, through combining traditional approaches to the teaching and assessment of literacy with the progressive ideal of education equality and inclusion. It will be important to ask whether it is the nature of this paradox,

rather than simply the dominance of traditional approaches, that has sparked a new wave of ability grouping.

Adding to this complexity is the new form that ability grouping is taking within its current resurgence: setting rather than streaming. It would appear that setting is a consequence of much of the criticism directed at streaming, although the former is far less well researched. It could be argued that many of the problems associated with ability grouping in the past were due to streaming and that setting addresses many of the concerns raised. Thus it is important to ask whether setting in the primary curriculum means that the potential divide between the more progressive and traditional objectives of the current policy have been bridged.

I have argued that there are certain aspects of the NLS which make setting more likely. These include the structure of the NLS and the Literacy Hour. When discussing the history of the literacy curriculum in Chapter 2, it was apparent that having been taught cross curricular, within the current education context literacy is returning as a discrete subject. Also the structure of the Literacy Hour itself, which prescribes the reintroduction of more traditional teaching strategies, such as direct teaching to the whole class, has increased teacher concerns that they are not meeting the needs of *all* their class (Chapter 3). These structural issues and their impact on the decision to use ability grouping require further exploration, particularly considering the historical associations that have been made between traditional approaches to teaching and the occurrence of ability grouping discussed earlier in this chapter.

I have also pointed out that the structure of the content of the NLS also increases the likelihood of setting. The connections that are being made between teaching and learning in maths and literacy, following the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, make the use of ability grouping more likely. For example, the way in which literacy content has been partitioned into word, sentence and text level work appears to have links to theories of mathematics teaching and learning. In that the majority of research into ability grouping has been completed in mathematics, this skill focused approach to teaching and learning might be seen as more suited to, or more likely to be associated with, ability grouping.

I have also pointed out that there is a legacy of progressive ideologies within the current context and therefore any traditional strategies that are being reintroduced are impacted upon by beliefs from the other end of the spectrum. In examining the proposed associations between traditional and progressive ideologies, the role of the teacher in making decisions about the organisation of their school or class has become apparent. The role and beliefs of the teacher were very apparent in Chapter 3, the argument kept returning to the role of the teacher and the influence they had over how different policies manifest themselves in the classroom; this is important for the NLS and ability grouping.

These three literature reviews have revealed the complexity of the debate surrounding the NLS and setting. I have indicated that it will be important to empirically examine why ability grouping is re-emerging in the current context, and what the effects of this are within the classroom. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Methodology of the study

5.1 Introduction

Having explained the background to the study, this chapter outlines the research design used to investigate my chosen research questions. As Patton (1990) asserts, the choice of research design must be fundamentally linked and appropriate to the subject under investigation. Therefore, having restated my research questions, I will critically examine the methodologies of the studies conducted within the chosen area of study. Then I will use this as a background to explain how and why a multi-method approach has been used to investigate the policy of setting in the National Literacy Strategy. The choice of approach will be linked directly to a discussion of the reliability and validity of the study. This is followed by a justification of the chosen data collection tools and a detailed description of each research technique, including the way in which the data was collected and how it was analysed. This chapter concludes by looking at ethical considerations, particularly related to including pupils in educational research.

5.2 Research questions

Having identified the issues which need further investigation, it is now important to restate my research questions. The main question I intend to answer is:

How are different grouping arrangements of pupils (mixed ability or set) affecting teaching and learning in the National Literacy Strategy?

I have also derived the following sub-questions to explore the different themes I have identified:

1. How do pupils' perceptions of the National Literacy Strategy differ under mixed ability and set organisational groups?
2. What beliefs and attitudes do teachers hold regarding the use of mixed ability and set classes to promote effective teaching of the Literacy Hour?
3. What impact are the different grouping arrangements having on:
 - teacher-pupil interaction?
 - pupil attainment?
4. What strategies are teachers using to address the need for inclusion in the Literacy Hour?

5.3 Critique of methods used in the field of study

My choice of method is directly linked to study of research within the field of ability grouping and primary literacy. Therefore it is important to reflect explicitly on empirical studies which examine this area and take a critical look at the methods applied.

With regard to using ability grouping for primary literacy, there is only one recent example of empirical research combining these two elements, and this is by Lyle (1999). However the focus of this research is not setting, instead it focuses on mixed ability grouping as an alternative to the trend of ability grouping. The method used is a comparison of video footage, and the resulting transcription, of two groups of pupils

from the same school, one of low and the other of high ability, being interviewed about their attitudes to working in different organisational groupings. Findings were in favour of collaborative learning in a mixed ability classroom with reference made to the importance of the teacher as facilitator to learning.

On reading Lyle's research for the first time I was impressed by the importance that was placed on talking to pupils. However, Lyle's methodology could be criticised for having only one data collection tool, particularly when conclusions are made with regard to the role of the teacher. Concluding remarks also make reference to attainment and yet there is no evidence to support statements about the progress made by the pupils, only the pupils' individual assessment of their own learning. Arguably this is important in building up pupils' self-esteem, but some summative evidence would have been more empirically rigorous. Finally, Lyle's research is relatively small-scale and this makes it difficult to generalise the findings across the primary population.

I have incorporated the element of listening to pupils into my research. After all the pupils' perspective is largely missing from the literature into ability grouping. However, I also intend to try and fill the gaps by asking teachers about their beliefs regarding setting and the practicalities using the National Literacy Strategy with sets and mixed ability classes, thus extending the scope of Lyle's study.

Within more recent educational research the exploration of the pupils' perspective has become a growth area. The United Nations convention (1989) on the Rights of the

Child appears to have initiated this drive. There are two studies researching pupils' perceptions of the Literacy Hour, one by Veronika Hanke (2000), and the other by Hancock and Mansfield (2002). The latter, more recent study, looked at the pupils' perspective using small scale informal interviews with a sample of 48 pupils between the ages of six and 13. This methodology of interviewing was productive, although the authors document the trouble some pupils had in talking about the curriculum in an unstructured format, and the surprise expressed by the pupils that there was interest in their opinions. However, the sample was recognised as opportunistic, with interviews taking place under a variety of different circumstances, for example, over the telephone, during after-school clubs or at home. This is a time consuming exercise but the results show the power of talking to pupils, and the value in considering their perspective when evaluating practice.

Hanke (2000) investigated the perceptions of pupils as young as five years old (Year 1) on the different sections of the Hour. This research was important within my own methodological thinking for three reasons. Firstly, the age of the pupils; this study showed that even very young pupils could talk and express themselves regarding their experiences in school. Secondly, the method incorporated child-friendly data collection tools using drawing and tasks motivated by the researcher's experience of working with pupils. Thirdly, this research highlighted the fact that pupils' thoughts and feelings towards the Literacy Hour might not be uniform and therefore attitudes to different aspects of the Hour should be an important part of my own exploration.

A key problem, I perceive, of all the studies mentioned previously is the reliance on one data collection tool, and this can be seen with a further three published studies regarding the implementation of the NLS. These were all questionnaire surveys and were included in my literature review in Chapter 3: Smith and Whiteley (2000), Fisher and Lewis (1999) and Smith and Hardman (2000). All were completed on a relatively small scale, with the largest sample being 104 respondents, and in terms of geographical spread, each is limited to one LEA. However, information gained through these questionnaires was interesting and relevant, documenting how teachers felt with regard to the NLS, how they were delivering the Literacy Hour into their classrooms and their perceptions of the future. Smith and Hardman (2000) supplemented their questionnaire with a number of specific case studies. I felt that this more qualitative data complemented the more quantitative analysis of the questionnaire and meant that triangulation of results occurred. This was an influential study with regard to my own methodology.

As Chapter 4 showed, within the field of research into ability grouping, there have been many studies focusing on this area. However, as already pointed out, a lot of this research is out of date, documents practice in other countries or is not directly addressing the area of interest in this thesis: setting for primary literacy. Yet a number of reflections are needed on the methodological implications of these studies.

On examining the studies focusing on setting, the first impression is that there is only one completed in the UK, and this was Scotland, which does not have the National Literacy Strategy. The majority of studies focus on achievement in reading and

mathematics to assess the success of the setting process, many are small scale studies of single classes or schools, and very few talk about effects, other than attainment, on pupils. These are all issues which I feel need to be addressed within this study so that an accurate picture of the success of setting for literacy with the NLS can be ascertained.

It has become evident that research exclusive to the field of study is limited; however, important methodological issues have emerged. The criticisms I have directed at the available research are often related to the use of just one research tool or the examination of just one perspective. This argument is partly linked to the influencing factors I have already identified within my literature reviews on the topic of setting and the National Literacy Strategy: the teachers' perspective, the pupils' perspective and the impact of the policy on classroom practice. Thus I would argue that there is an inherent limitation because of the focus on one of these areas and the use of one research method. I therefore decided that I would use a multi-method research design. The rationale for which is presented in the next section.

5.4 Research design

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study started while I worked as a primary teacher and was taken forward as I became a full time Research Associate. The resulting research design has had to incorporate aspects of both these positions, making it both practicable and relevant to the job in which I was involved at the time. Within this section I will describe how a multi-method approach (Bryman 2001) was developed

and the strategies that were used to make sure the different data collection tools came together to create a coherent study.

5.4.1 A multi-method approach

A multi-method approach is relatively new in the field of social sciences and receives a varying amount of support from educational researchers. Using this approach has the advantage of encouraging the researcher:

...to think of research methods as techniques of data collection or analysis that are not as encumbered by epistemological and ontological baggage as is sometimes supposed... (Bryman 2003 p.454)

It avoids the criticisms directed at studies using a singular method of data collection (see the previous section) and takes into account the complexity of schools and the education system (Chapter 3).

The length of time and different contexts over which this study extends meant a single longitudinal data collection tool, such as an ethnographic examination of the NLS in one school, was not possible and that a leaning towards a multi-method approach was to a certain extent inevitable.

In addition, the three part structure under which I have developed my research questions, the teachers' and learners' perspectives and the impact in the classroom, implies some form of multi-method research design (as introduced in the previous section). The research design was chosen to incorporate aspects of different

approaches and paradigms to improve validity. Therefore, a variety of different data collection tools including both quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

However, it is important to make sure that the different elements are carefully planned. As Bryman points out:

It is important to realize that multi-strategy research is not intrinsically superior to mono-method or mono-strategy research. It is tempting to think that multi-strategy research is more or less inevitably superior to research that relies on a single method on the grounds that more and more varied findings are inevitably a 'good thing'. (2001 p.454)

Therefore it is not enough to simply collect data using a variety of different research tools, the researcher must think about the study as a whole, the different ways in which aspects are conducted and designed, and whether the different methods are appropriate to answering the research questions. Before outlining the research design of the current study, it is important to look at the different classifications of multi-method research and use them to explain how the different methods will develop and combine to effectively answer my research questions and make empirically sound conclusions.

5.4.2 Classifications of multi-method approaches

Hammersley (1996) classified multi-method research in three different ways:

Triangulation: This refers to the use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or vice versa.

Facilitation: This approach arises when one research strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other research strategy.

Complementary: This approach occurs when the two research strategies are employed in order that different aspects of an investigation can be dovetailed.

(Bryman 2001 p. 447)

Hamersley's theoretical framework provides a useful way of classifying the relationships between data collection methods. This taxonomy of multi-method research will be used to identify how this study comes together.

Bryman (2001) also draws attention to Morgan's (1998) version of a four-part classification of multi-method approaches (see Figure 6), based on two criteria:

The priority decision: How far is a qualitative or a quantitative method the principal data gathering tool?

The sequence decision: which method precedes which? In other words, does the qualitative method precede the quantitative or vice versa? (*ibid.* 2001 p.448)

		Priority	
		Quantitative	Qualitative
Sequence	Preliminary	1	2
	Follow-up	3	4

Figure 6. Morgan's (1998) classification of multi-method approaches to research (adapted from Bryman 2001 p.448)

Morgan's classification system further clarifies my multi-method research design. In terms of this framework, I have completed an investigation based on a type three multi-method approach. The study is principally quantitative; however, qualitative research preceded and facilitated it. The qualitative research provides direction to the data collections and an in-depth understanding of the social context being studied. Morgan's framework allows me to incorporate the concept of progression into my research design, which adds further clarity to the process.

I feel an important aspect of Hammersley's and Morgan's work is the fact that different research components must fit together in a coherent manner. It is therefore important at this stage to use these two frameworks to show how this study combines these different aspects into a coherent research study.

5.4.3 An explanation of my multi-method approach

A diagrammatic version of this study can be seen in Figure 7. It shows how the research developed from my role as a teacher to that of a Research Associate. The diagram also shows the inter-linking of different data collection tools and how they have been used to cross validate each other.

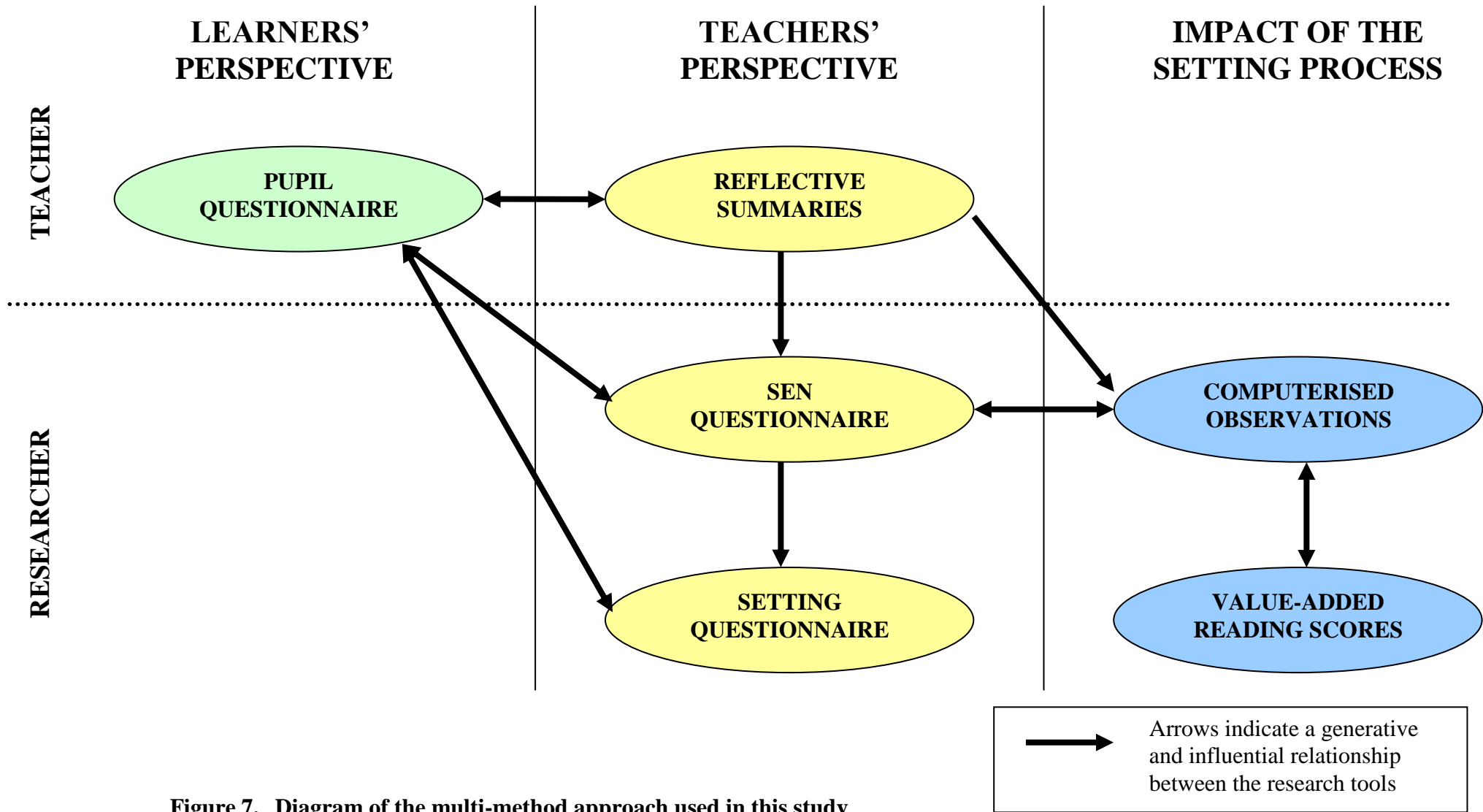


Figure 7. Diagram of the multi-method approach used in this study

The qualitative data collected while I was a teacher was used in a generative way and was central and intrinsic to the whole project. Key to this aspect of the study is the Reflective Summaries documenting my experiences in the classroom while implementing a policy for setting in the National Literacy Strategy. The findings from this part of the study impacted on all the other elements. These reports, as Morgan's (1998) type one multi-method classification suggest (Figure 6), helped to generate the research questions, but also provided a foundation which was used to interpret the more quantitative data from the two questionnaires examining the teachers' perspective. They were therefore, using Hammersley's (1996) term, 'complementary' to the study.

The other data collection tool which was implemented during my time as a teacher was the Pupil Questionnaire. This arose out of my desire to understand what the pupils' perception of setting and the National Literacy Strategy was.

The two questionnaires investigating the teachers' perspective, one focusing on inclusion of pupils with SEN and the other on setting, were administered in the order they are represented in Figure 7. This meant that the findings from the first, on SEN, influenced the construction and focus of the strand on setting. The Setting Questionnaire came about due to an absence of data regarding *why* teachers set. It was therefore a reactive process. In this sense there was a certain amount of 'facilitation' (Hammersely 1996) between these two research methods. In the analysis, these questionnaires complement each other, and will impact on the interpretation of other methods also.

All the samples for the study, except those from the school in which I taught, are derived from the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) database at Durham University (Tymms 1999a), which includes schools covering a diverse range of socio-economic groupings. A national, random sample was used for the SEN Questionnaire and sub-sets of this sample were used for the observations and attainment data analysis and the Setting Questionnaire. This can be seen in Figure 8.

The Computerised Observations were intended to study interaction practices in the classroom and to compare them with teachers' perceptions of their classroom practice, an aspect which was discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, this element of the study is closely linked to the questionnaires. The data from this section also complements findings from the Pupils' Questionnaire: for example, the relationship between interactions in different sets and the attitudes of pupils of different abilities. These aspects will also be triangulated with the value-added reading scores.

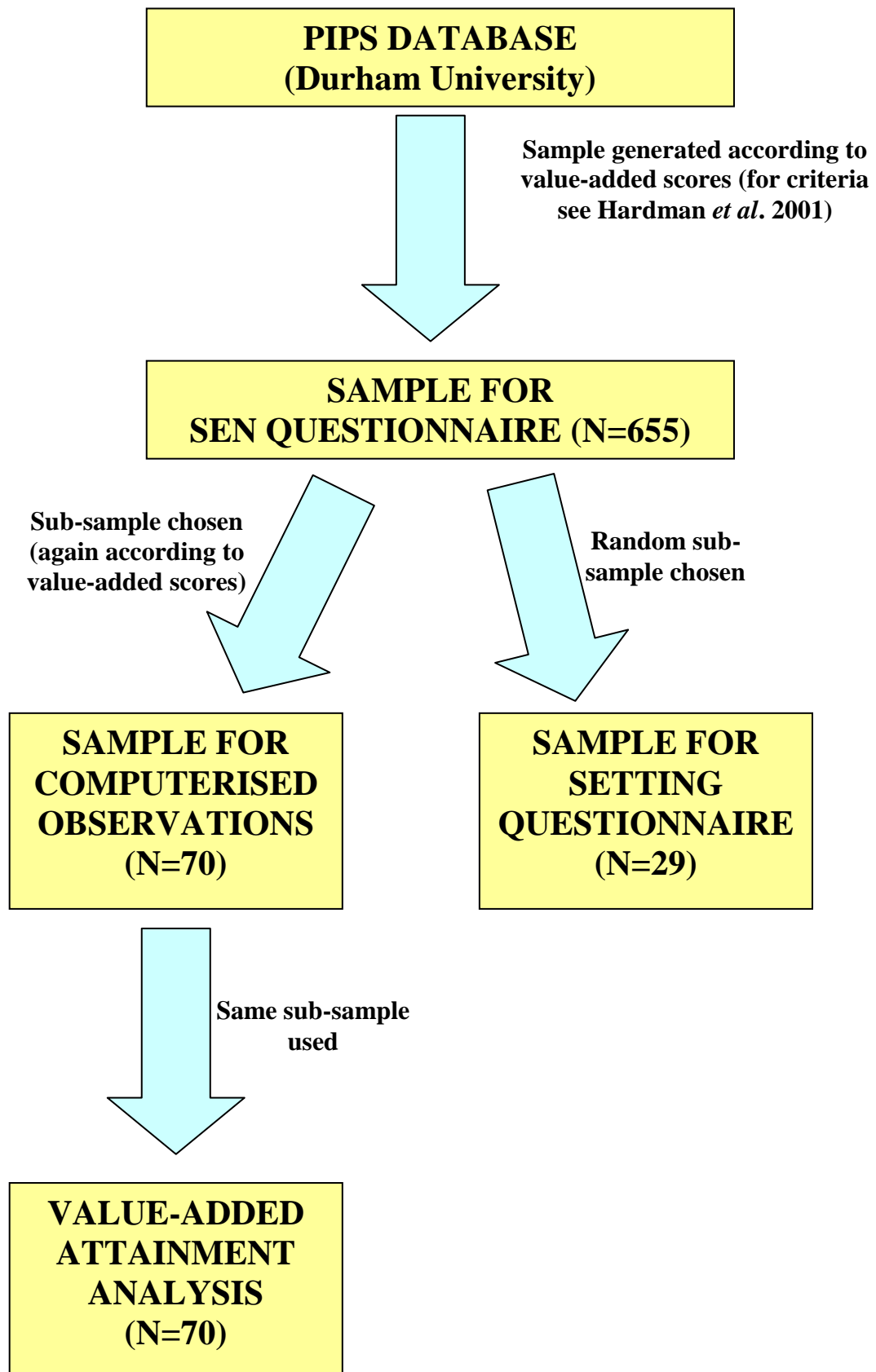


Figure 8. Samples deriving from the PIPS database

5.5 Reliability and validity

Having rationalised why I have chosen a multi-method approach for this study, I will discuss the different aspects of validity and reliability and how they relate to my research design.

There are a number of different issues relating to reliability and validity that must be considered when analysing the data. It is first useful to define these two concepts.

Firstly I will look at reliability:

Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable. (Bryman 2001 p.29)

Reliability refers to the extent to which a test or technique functions consistently and accurately by yielding the same results (Verma and Mallick 1999 p. 202)

In other words, reliability looks at the extent to which the findings could be replicated if the procedures and processes were repeated.

If the individual data collection tools used in this project had been analysed alone, then each method has a different level of reliability. The nature of the school is complex and this will affect the reliability of the results achieved. For example, the Reflective Summaries, based on informal observations reported in Chapter 1, rely on personal observations of two years in teaching and have relatively low reliability as they could be affected by observer bias and the influences of context and historical circumstance (i.e. dependent on a set of conditions which are never going to be repeated); whereas the SEN Questionnaire, which extended over a large sample of

teachers who did not personally know myself or the details of the research project, might reveal trends which are more likely to be replicated, as subject error and subject bias will be minimised across the sample, resulting in a higher reliability. Thus by using a multi-method approach, reliability is increased by the nature of the information collected.

The triangulation of results, the complementation of methods and the facilitator relationship between the qualitative and quantitative data are all important in raising the reliability of the study as a whole. No one method is relied on, with its associated advantages and disadvantages, to answer the main research question, and therefore the reliability of the research project as a whole is increased.

A similar conclusion can be made in relation to validity. However, before discussing the issues I will give a definition:

Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research. (Bryman 2001 p.30)

Therefore, validity is concerned with the accuracy and appropriateness of the different methods chosen to answer the research questions. There are four main types of validity that are often referred to in social research; they are:

- *Measurement validity* - the extent to which a chosen measure of a concept reflects the concept which it is supposed to
- *Internal validity* – relates to the issue of causality; to what extent can the causal relationship between variables be truly attributed

- *External validity* – is concerned with generalisation of the findings; can the findings be applied outside of the research context
- *Ecological validity* – asks the extent to which people’s everyday life has been affected by the research process and therefore has consequently influenced the findings.

All the different types of validity have had to be considered as part of developing the methodology for this study. The multi-method approach means that the individual methods all vary in their level of validity. For example, the Computerised Observations should be considered with regard to measurement validity; I need to ask whether this structured form of observation really measures differences in classroom patterns of interaction. Internal validity is important because I have suggested a causal relationship between how the pupils are ability grouped and their attitudes to the Literacy Hour (see Chapter 4). I have argued elsewhere about the complex nature of a school as an organisation and the many different factors which can impact on the classroom and therefore the pupils (see Chapter 3). I need to ascertain to what extent I can be sure my findings are not impacted upon by some ‘other’ element.

External validity will be a criticism of the more small scale elements of this research project, for example, the Pupils’ Questionnaire, the Reflective Summaries and, to a certain extent, the Setting Questionnaire, although the geographical scale, if not the numbers, was extensive. Finally, ecological validity needs to be considered in relation to all the methods used, but I feel it is particularly important with the Computerised Observations, where the effect of an unknown observer in a teacher’s lesson needs to be considered.

It has been explained that validity is an important concept and the different types have been examined in relation to the concerns that they highlight with regard to the different methods of this study. However, each of these methods is not required to stand alone and this is important to remember. There might be concerns with the Pupils' Questionnaire regarding internal, external and ecological validity, but it will be analysed alongside complementary data from the Computerised Observations, the value-added reading scores and questionnaires used to gather the teachers' perspective. To use another example, the Computerised Observations have issues regarding the measurement validity and ecological validity, yet the findings will be compared to the Setting and Pupils' Questionnaires, and will be triangulated with the pupils' comments and my own observations.

This is the important element when considering the validity and reliability of a multi-method approach: the different elements do not stand alone and the relationships between them need to be considered. This is where Hammersley classification system is very useful (discussed on page 148-149). The different associations, whether it be triangulation, complementation or facilitation have the effect of compensating and strengthening the case for each of the individual tools. This has been expressed in diagrammatic form in Figure 9.

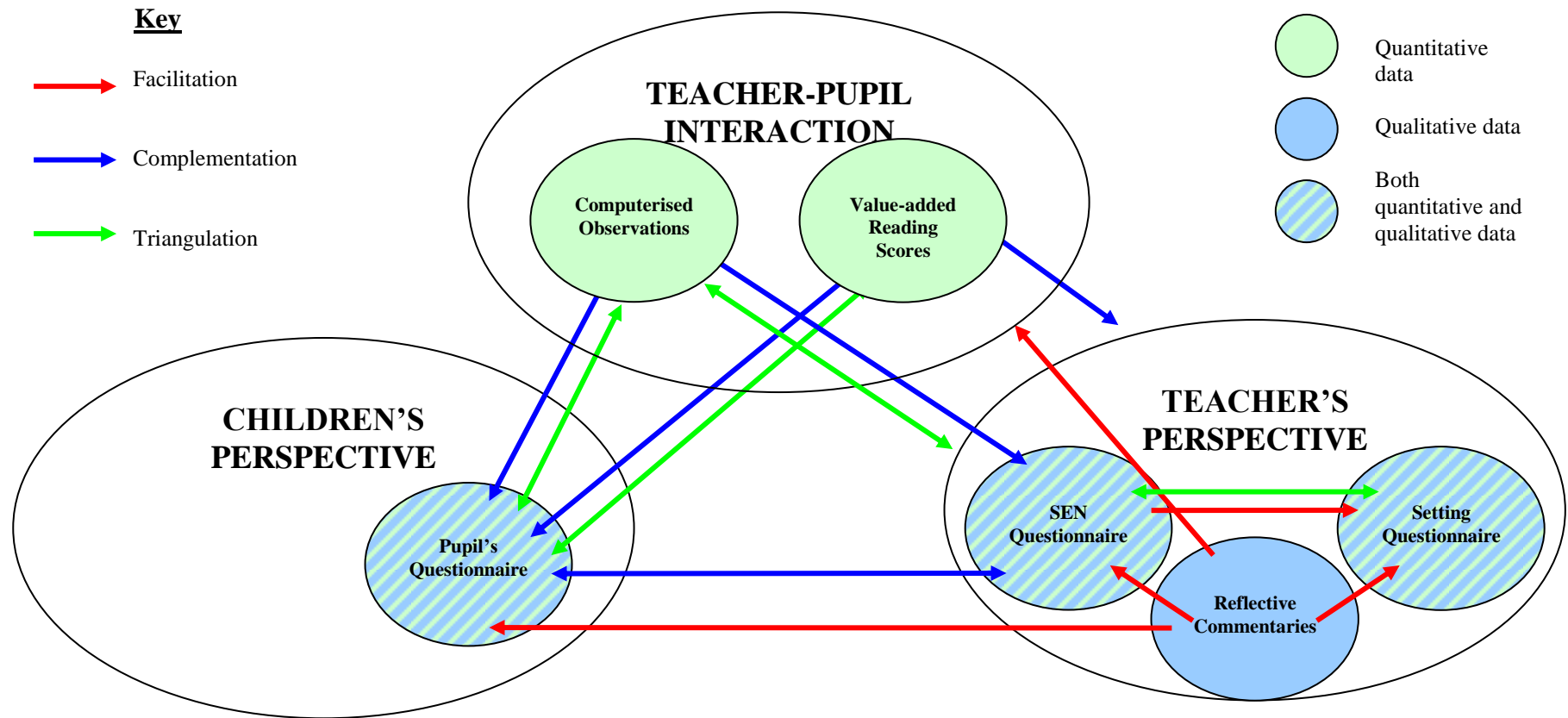


Figure 9. Facilitation, complementation and triangulation in the research design

Cohen and Manion (1998) point out that a methodology using a multi-method approach can raise issues regarding validity, although they go on to emphasise that this is particularly so in purely ethnographic and qualitative research. This research project avoids this by mixing quantitative and qualitative data sources, and using them in different ways, as discussed in relation to Morgan's (1989) multi-method model (see Section 5.4.2).

5.6 Justification of research tools

The research tools used in this study have been influenced by the fact that I am evaluating a national policy. The national spread of the NLS and its influence on the policy of setting, means it is important that any findings of this study can be generalised. Thus, a relatively large sample size was needed to make extrapolation of the findings easier. In order to triangulate the quantitative findings, a qualitative approach is also used and offers the possibility of greater contextual understanding.

5.6.1 Pupil Questionnaire

The importance of the learners' perspective has been illustrated by research (Lyle 1999; Hanke 2000; Hancock and Mansfield 2002) and by my own reflections and conversations with pupils. It is also important because of the number of studies, highlighted in Chapter 4, which conclude ability grouping impacts on pupils' self-esteem: who better to ask than pupils themselves how they feel regarding this process.

The aim of this element of the research was to find out what pupils thought of the Literacy Hour under different organisational groupings. I was in the unique position

as a practising teacher (as described in Chapter 1) of being able to track pupils over two successive years, when setting was used as an organisational strategy for the National Literacy Strategy, so that any attitudinal changes could be monitored.

Rationale

Interviews, either one-to-one or focus group, were not chosen to study the pupils' perspective for a number of reasons. Admittedly an interview has the advantage of being more flexible and adaptable, to take advantage of interesting responses and explore underlying motives (Robson 2000). However, the time commitment required would have been considerable. In addition, I had to contend with the circumstances under which I had to undertake the data collection. As a teacher, the only available time of day not committed to curriculum coverage, in which I could talk to pupils, was in the lunch hour, but many pupils, and myself, would have resented giving up this valuable time.

Another consideration that ruled against interviewing pupils was the numbers I wanted to sample, the whole school, and to interview this number, even in groups, would have been impractical and created such a volume of qualitative data that the findings would have been complex and time consuming to analyse.

The final reason I chose not to use interviewing was because I wanted to separate the research strategy as much as possible from the teacher-pupil relationship, fearing this might affect the attitudes of pupils. I felt that if I were doing the interviewing their feelings towards me would influence the findings, whether positively or negatively.

Indeed, Hopkins (2002) notes that it is "...frequently difficult to get younger pupils to explain their thoughts and feelings." (p.110). By choosing a questionnaire, which in most cases the pupils could complete independently, I hoped to reduce any possible effect.

Design

The questionnaire could not ask pupils directly about ability grouping because the school where I was teaching had a policy of not making the ability grouping process explicit to the pupils. The upper and lower sets were never mentioned by these terms and were referred to by the teachers' names instead. Individual staff members were not comfortable with me questioning the pupils explicitly on their feelings regarding the setting process, and therefore I had to take a more 'concealed' route to finding out their attitudes. This was done by asking the pupils about the Literacy Hour and the different aspects of teaching and learning within it; with the intention of comparing these more general feelings across the different organisational groupings over time.

As I wanted to measure attitudes to the Literacy Hour, its different sections and then make comparisons, a 5-point Likert scale was chosen as the most simple and clear way of doing this (Likert 1932). To add interest to it and to increase the pupils' motivation to complete the questionnaire, the Likert scale used smiley and sad faces (see Figure 10). This is an adaptation of a scale used by the Minnesota School Attitude Survey for pupils in Grades 1 to 6 (cited in Annastasi, 1990). The wording was also made appropriate to the target population. I thought it important to use a 5-

point scale rather than a 4-point one to prevent a forced choice scale and pupils 'manufacturing a response' (Robson 2000).

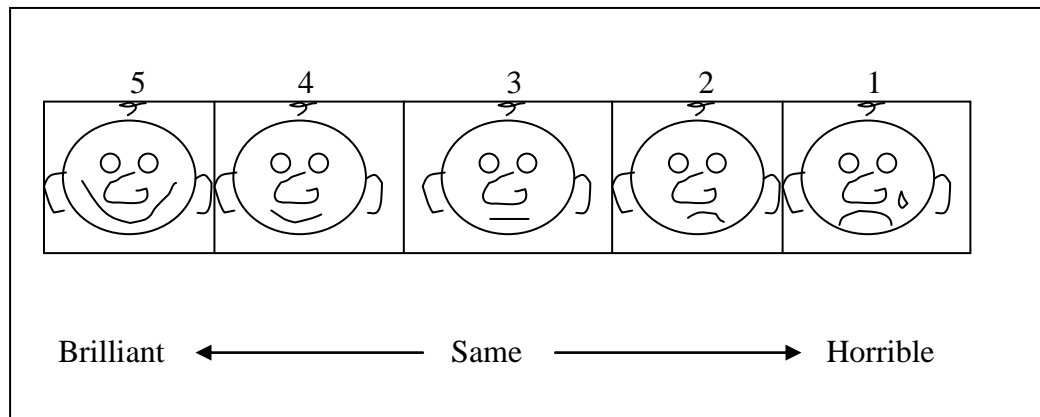


Figure 10. Adapted Likert scale for the pupils' questionnaire

I recognised the need for some qualitative data to triangulate with the more quantitative results associated with the Likert scale. Therefore, alongside the Likert scale were lines upon which the pupils could, if they chose, write a comment in answer to the question (see Figure 11). If the pupils were made to feel they were not being judged then the comments might be enlightening about why the attitudes were what they were. 58% of pupils filled in some kind of response to every question on the questionnaire, a further 32% added a written response to one or more of the questions. This meant only 10% of the sample did not write any comment at all. Support was given to those who found writing difficult; this is discussed later.

1. Do you like the Literacy Hour?

Figure 11. Layout of the questions

The instructions were simple, short, typed in a large font and included cartoon figure decoration. The questions were phrased in a positive manner and were all closed except the last one; this was because they are easy for respondents to complete, particularly pertinent with pupils, and they are easier to interpret for analysis. They were ordered so general questions about literacy and the Literacy Hour were first and then they became more specific, about the sections of the Hour and literacy skills. This was so questions relating to pupils' general feelings, more important for answering the research questions, were filled in first and were more likely to be completed with care and attention. The questionnaire is included in Appendix 8.

Organisation

When the questionnaire was administered, teachers were asked to read the instructions with the pupils and answer any questions. To avoid any social desirability bias (Bryman 2001), teachers were asked to emphasise to the pupils it was not judging them, but the method of teaching, and their opinions were important. Anonymity was also explained to encourage them to write down their true feelings and it was

emphasised that the teacher would not be 'upset' by what they read: it was important they were honest.

Prior to administering the questionnaires they were marked with the class teachers' initials. Apart from this all that identified the questionnaires was the gender and year group. After they were completed the teacher was asked to mark the questionnaires with an ability rating which was colour coded so that if the children did see it they would not understand its meaning. These ability groups were:

SEN – pupils on the school's SEN register because of a difficulty with literacy

Able – pupils identified by class teachers as literacy high achievers (also on the SEN register, but at the other end of the spectrum of need)

Average – neither of the above

The pupils filled in the questionnaires while they were in their literacy classes, either mixed ability or set. When filling out the questionnaire, the teacher or learning support assistant helped those pupils who normally needed help. The adult would read the question and/or act as scribe if the child wanted to write down a comment, but did not alter the pupils' words.

The questionnaire was administered to the whole school twice: first in July 1999 and then in July 2000. There are two classes missing from the sample, one from each year. In the school year 1998/1999 a Year 6 class did not complete the questionnaire and in 1999/2000 it was a Year 4 class. This was an inconvenience and means that the data is slightly skewed in each sample, but could not be avoided. The sample also includes one class, of 24 pupils, from the first year, which did not mark the questionnaires with

the pupils' gender. These problems arose from asking individual teachers to administer the questionnaire, as to have done it myself would have taken school-wide organisation to cover my class and this was impractical.

The main advantage of school-wide sampling was that I could track three cohorts of pupils who changed from mixed ability teaching to sets in the summer of 1999 and any changes of attitude which might have resulted. These cohorts are summarised in Table d.

Table d. Summary of three cohorts

Sample	School Year 1998-1999	School Year 1999-2000	Characteristics
1	Year 3 Mixed ability	Year 4 Set	Same pupils, but different teachers and pupils are a year older
2	Year 4 Mixed ability	Year 4 Set	Same teachers, same aged pupils, but different pupils
3	Year 4 Mixed ability	Year 5 Set	Same pupils, but different teachers and pupils are a year older

Each of these cohorts has its advantages and disadvantages, but each balances out the other and when looked at together provide a broader picture of the impacts of setting on pupils' attitudes.

Analysis

Analysis of the questionnaires started with the coding of the pupils' responses. This process identified a disadvantage of changing the normal numbered Likert scale into 'child-friendly' faces: the pupils' drawings all had 'artistic quirks'. So to assess the reliability of coding, a neutral observer was asked to code a random sample of ten questionnaires and this was compared to my coding of the same ten. The inter-rater agreement was 87.3%. There were also some unanswered questions i.e. there was no recognisable face drawn in the box, these were coded as missing data.

The optional comments written by the pupils on the questionnaire were analysed using Nu*Dist software for managing qualitative data (Richards and Richards 1995). It should be noted these comments were not completed by all pupils, and in some cases the response was limited to a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Support was offered to pupils identified with SEN to help them write down their thoughts, but it is inevitable that the comments are skewed towards the more able and average pupils rather than those at the lower end of the ability spectrum. This fact should be kept in mind when reading these results. The qualitative findings were triangulated with the quantitative data.

5.6.2 Questionnaires to teachers: SEN and Setting

The main aim of this element of the research study was to gather extensive information, in terms of number and geographical spread, regarding teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceived practice associated with teaching and learning during the NLS and the links they made with ability grouping. The SEN Questionnaire was

designed as a means of getting a broad spectrum of data from across the country regarding the implementation of the NLS for pupils with SEN. However, having identified a potential association between inclusion and ability grouping (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), this link was apparent within this questionnaire.

SEN Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to gather this data as a simple and practical means of gathering information from a sample covering the South, North, East and West of England. As May (2001) points out: "Virtually all surveys aim to describe or explain the characteristics or opinions of a population through the use of a representative sample" (p.89). Teacher interviews would have been uneconomical considering the numbers involved and the national spread of the sample; self-completed questionnaires were deemed the most efficient, in terms of researcher time and effort (Robson 2000). An example of this questionnaire is included in Appendix 9.

The questionnaire included an initial section aimed at collecting sample information and then went on to explore current trends of practice at two levels:

- at the whole school level, including strategies such as setting, and employment of support staff; and
- at the classroom level, the way these policies were being adapted by individual teachers.

The questionnaire predominantly comprised closed questions, although there were two open questions inviting the teachers to elaborate on their experiences and expand on their beliefs.

The nature of the primary school is such that individual teachers take on a number of roles and are required to adapt a large variety of strategies to effectively deliver the curriculum. This meant that many of the questions on the questionnaire were of a multi-response nature. However, where possible, this was avoided as such questions are very difficult to analyse. Analysis of the closed questions was completed in SPSS where a variety of statistical tests were applied.

Table e. Blank timetable

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Morning Break				
LUNCH				
Afternoon Break				

Of the two open questions, one included a blank timetable (Table e) on to which teachers were asked to add any sessions of literacy focused teaching, for example, Literacy Hours, story time, extended writing and silent reading. The aim of this question was to investigate the extent to which the Literacy Hour was supplemented by other activities (see Campbell 1998 and issues discussed in Chapter 3) and therefore to see how easy a policy of setting would be to implement for literacy. The

data from this question was analysed using a frequency count of different aspects of literacy taught in sessions during the school week.

The questionnaire finished with an open-ended question which asked: 'What changes (if any) would you like to see to the Literacy Hour, on a day to day basis, to help the learning of SEN pupils?' This question was analysed using content analysis; the categories used can be seen in Table 1 in Chapter 6.

Due to this questionnaire being associated with a sponsored research project, money was available to send out a total of 2750 questionnaires in January 2001 to a random national sample of teachers selected from the PIPs database at Durham University. No reminders were sent out due to the large scale of the survey. The return rate was below 25% (n=655), but this still meant that, at the time of publication, this was the largest survey of teacher opinion and the NLS completed.

Setting Questionnaire

Having partially analysed the data from the SEN Questionnaire, it became apparent in the winter of 2003 that this data was not going to answer all the questions I had regarding the teachers' perspective, particularly with regard to *why* teachers implement setting. The literature reviews show that the majority of research in the area of ability grouping (Chapter 4) has focused on the impacts, either on attainment or self-esteem, and few had looked at teachers' rationale for ability grouping. I felt this issue was fundamental to my research and so wanted to investigate further.

Therefore, another questionnaire was designed to collect this data. Again, interviews were discounted as being too time-consuming and expensive. The Setting Questionnaire was designed and administered in the spring term of 2003. The questionnaire was designed for postal administration to a national sample of teachers drawn from the original SEN Questionnaire sample (see Figure 8). A smaller sample size was inherent due to economic considerations as no money was available to increase the scale.

A postal questionnaire needs to be easy to complete and attractive to aid the return rate (Cohen and Manion 1998). The questionnaire was kept to a maximum of five pages, of which each teacher only needed to complete three, an important aspect considering the pressures already existing on teachers' time. Questions were largely closed, with answers indicated using tick boxes. To aid presentation, and to prevent it ending up at the bottom of a pile of paperwork in the staff room, various formatting techniques such as multi-coloured pages and different fonts were used to make the questionnaire eye-catching.

The questionnaire had to be dual purpose so as to gather information from schools who were using setting and those who were not. This was achieved by using a universal front cover and then coloured pages to indicate the sections of the questionnaire each individual needed to complete. All teachers completed the first question (Do you set for literacy?) and then, according to the answer they gave, clear instructions directed them to the coloured pages relevant to them. The full questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 10 exemplifying the organisational structure.

The first page was designed to gather factual information regarding the incidence of setting in schools. It aimed to replicate research from Ofsted (1998b), Ireson and Hallam (2001) and complement the SEN Questionnaire regarding the incidence of setting for literacy. However, this questionnaire also looked for subject differences by examining, for example, whether schools set more in maths and science.

In order for comparisons to be made between schools that did and did not set, the two components of the questionnaire were designed to be similar; however, there were some differences. For example, in the section where Likert scales were used to get teachers to rate a variety of reasons for implementing setting, the question wording is different and there are some differences in the statements that the teachers were asked to rate.

Due to the complex nature of this questionnaire, it was piloted (n=10) with teachers completing questions while I was present. This brought up a number of issues regarding the size of font used for instructions, which needed to be bolder and more noticeable, and the need to make the literacy connection explicit. In the pilot version, I presumed teachers would read the title and first question, and would then know that the rest of the questions were related to setting for literacy rather than numeracy. The resulting change was a simple one, with the literacy link made explicit throughout the questionnaire in bold type.

Once these changes had been made, the questionnaire was sent out in February 2003. A return rate of 48% without reminders was achieved, leaving a total sample of 29 (see Table f). The sample size is admittedly small compared to the SEN Questionnaire, but it was meant to collect complementary information and, due to the timing of its administration, was meant to facilitate further questioning in the area.

Table f. Sample for Setting Questionnaire

Number of questionnaires	Pilot	Main	Total
Sent out	10	40	50
Completed	10	19	29

Sample issues with both teacher questionnaires

There are certain issues which the postal questionnaires threw up, which need to be highlighted at this point. In both the teachers' perspective questionnaires a postal system was used. The questionnaire, with an accompanying letter, was sent to a contact teacher at the school. This was either someone who had been part of the original SEN Questionnaire sample, the head teacher or the coordinator in charge of administering the PIPS tests. However, there was no control over who actually completed the questionnaire and how representative they were of teachers in the school. This is particularly pertinent with regard to the Setting Questionnaire where I did not ask teachers about their experience or position in the school. However, in

terms of gathering teachers reasoning for or against setting, I feel this is not a great issue.

5.6.4 Computerised Observations

As discussed in Chapter 3, there is considerable research to show that there is a mismatch between the intentions of policy makers, the perceptions and beliefs of teachers, and the practice observed by researchers in classrooms (Bernstein 1974, 1990; Helsby and McCulloch 1997; Reynolds 1998). The aim of this element of the study was to explore whether setting was having an impact on teacher-pupil interaction in the elements of whole class teaching required by the Literacy Hour.

In connection to this, researchers within the field of ability grouping, for example Goldberg *et al.* (1966) and Slavin (1987), state grouping by ability will be ineffective without curriculum adaptation. In Chapter 3, I talked about the generalised nature of the content and structure of the NLS, and the concern that teachers were being restricted in their practice by its prescriptive nature (Dadds 1999). In order to explore the extent to which teachers were adapting the curriculum by altering their patterns of interaction according to the set which they teach systematic observation was used

I have previously cited the research of Galton *et al.* (1980/1999), Pollard *et al.* (1994) and Reynolds (1995) who have explicitly stated that the effect that policy has on teachers' behaviour in the classroom is minimal, even when there is a feeling of great change. This prompted the question, to what extent will teachers' perceptions of the NLS and setting be reflected in their practice.

Rationale

It is recognised there are other characteristics of classroom practice apart from teacher-pupil interaction that have a significant impact on the implementation of a policy with such large scope as the NLS. However, one of the most substantial changes brought about by the introduction of the Literacy Hour was the increased amount of whole class teaching. It is this aspect that is seen by researchers as a dramatic departure to previous routines (for example, Smith and Whiteley 2000; Smith and Hardman 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999). The increased use of 'direct' teaching is seen by supporters of the NLS as being one of its main advantages with regard to inclusion (Beard 1998; Stannard 1999). Therefore, the interaction that goes on between pupils and teachers during whole class teaching and in teacher-led groups is paramount and should throw light on the pedagogical impact of the NLS and setting.

Non-participant structured observations were chosen because direct observation of behaviours in the classroom was desired. Behaviours were compared to a predetermined schedule based on the work of Galton *et al.* (1980/1999) and Good and Brophy (1990). The observations were carried out using a computerised observation system developed by members of the Nuffield project research team (Smith and Hardman 2003) known as the Classroom Interaction System (CIS). This system enabled real-time coding of the interaction and was quicker than traditional pencil and paper methods (for example see, Hopkins 2002).

Observation schedule design

The software used (Noldus Information 1995) aided this process by allowing the recording of:

- the behaviours of multiple actors;
- a variety of different behaviour types;
- the number (or frequency-count) of each behaviour; and
- the duration of different elements of the Literacy Hour

A small calculator-sized computer assisted in making the researcher as unobtrusive as possible. The computerised system logged, for each teaching exchange, the actor, the discourse move and who the receiver was. It therefore primarily focused on the three part, *Initiation-Response-Feedback* (IRF), structure (Sinclair and Coulthard 1992) and gathered data on teachers' questions, whether questions were answered (and by whom) and the types of evaluation given in response to answers. It also recorded pupil initiations in the forms of questions or statements.

The observations schedule focused on the quality of teacher-pupil interaction. Seven different behaviours were coded (the definitions for which are included in Appendix 11):

- Question (whether open, closed, uptake or repeat);
- Answer (and how that answer was evaluated – praise, accepts, criticises, probes);
- Explain;
- Refocus;

- Read;
- Write; and
- Direct.

These behaviours were coded as events rather than states of tangible duration. The other aspect coded was the length of different stages of the Literacy Hour; this was recorded as a state. The computerised system enabled the coding of multiple actors. The observations focused on the behaviours of the teacher, four SEN pupils, ‘other’ pupils (all individuals not identified as one of the four SEN pupils) and the whole class. The teacher chose the four pupils with SEN who were focused on; they were all pupils on the school’s SEN register because of their literacy learning and, where there were more than four pupils in an individual class; it was the four with the most severe special needs.

Due to the fact that the teachers knew the focus of the observation was pupils with Special Educational Needs in literacy it is important to be aware of the Observer Paradox (Labov 1994). There was a chance that teachers would alter their normal interaction behaviours with the class by focusing more on the SEN pupils thereby confounding the findings. It is particularly important that this is kept in mind when reading the analysis of pupil participation.

Observations were carried out within the teachers’ class ‘live’: the observer needed to code the observed behaviours as they happened. This has a number of implications

which are important to highlight at this point in the methodology. An instantaneous judgement of the teachers' intentions had to be made by the observer, for example, whether a question is *intentionally* open or closed. If a teacher asks, "Name a capital city?" Then this can be taken on face value as an open question, and would be coded by the observer as such; however, the class might have previously been doing a project on India and therefore the children are predisposed to answer, "Delhi". The conundrum lies in whether the teacher really intended it to be open and would accept answers from around the world, or whether the teacher had expected the children to answer in relation to their project, and therefore would only accept the Indian capital city, thus making it a closed question and the coding incorrect. No observation system can hope to gather information about the intentions behind the behaviours without asking the actors themselves or taking into consideration their responses to the pupils' answers, and this would have sacrificed the real time element important to the computerised observation schedule. However, by checking schedule definitions and reliability of its implementation then it can be hoped that error will be minimized.

Sample

Observations were completed in a national sample of 70 lessons; the full spread can be seen in Figure 12. Teachers were chosen randomly from the PIPS databases at Durham University and were targeted with a letter asking teachers to express an interest in the research. From the positive replies 70 were chosen on the basis of their value-added scores (an aggregate of pupils' PIPS scores in reading for their class). The sample was made up of classes from across the primary age range, covering the teaching of Reception to Year 6. All the teachers had a positive rather than negative

value-added score; in other words they had had a positive impact on the literacy attainment of the pupils in their class during the previous year.

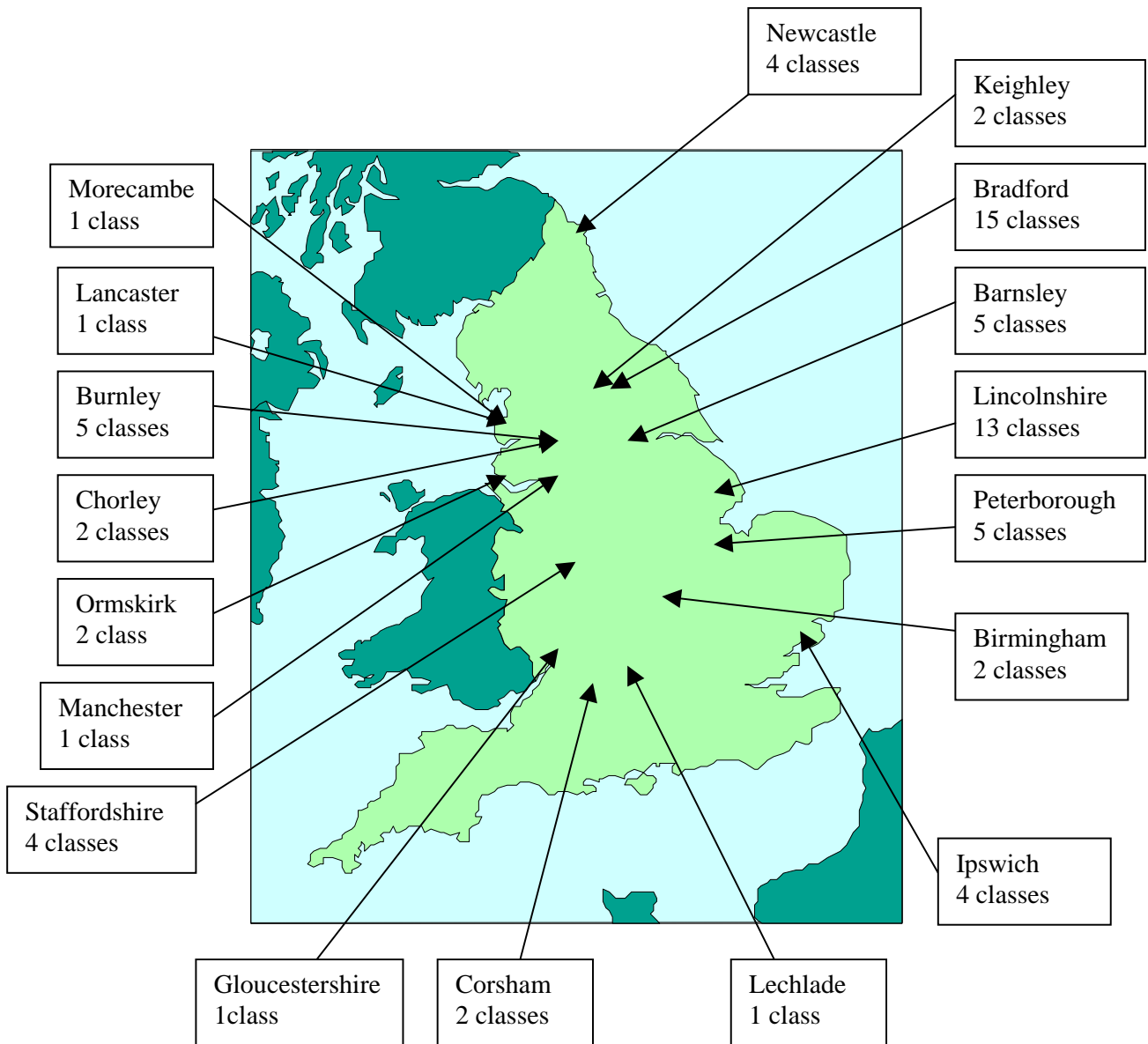


Figure 12. National distribution of observations

Analysis

Three different researchers were involved in completing the 70 observations throughout the spring term of 2001. Therefore it was important to check inter- and

intra- reliability, in other words, whether the observation schedule was used consistently across the three researchers and whether each individual was consistent over time. Statistical tests found "...an inter-rater correlation of 0.86 and an intra-rater reliability of 0.78" (Hardman *et al.* 2001 p.13), which is a high level of reliability.

The data from the computerised observations were transferred from the Observer Software (Noldus Information Technology 1995) to SPSS where the data was analysed statistically. Many different variables were available to be examined within this data set; however, I looked explicitly at the impact of setting on the structure of the Literacy Hour and the patterns of interaction between teacher and pupil in the whole class and group based sessions.

5.6.5 Value-added reading attainment data

This study has been carried out in a context characterised by an educational policy that focuses on target setting, testing and the publication of results, as discussed in the literature reviews. Therefore, it is essential that the attainment of pupils in different organisational groupings is examined and any impacts explored. The importance of attainment within literacy has also been identified as part of the field of research into ability grouping, in Chapter 4; by focusing on attainment in reading it will allow my findings to be comparable.

Value-added reading test scores from the PIPS databases at Durham University (see for example, Tymms 1999a and b; Tymms and Wylde 2003) were collected for classes where Computerised Observations took place. SATS data could have been

used, but due to their summative nature and the criticisms which have been directed at the associated procedures and content (for example, Hilton 2001), value-added test scores were deemed more reliable and informative. Thus, analysis of the progress made by pupils with SEN in literacy could be compared to their peers in setting and mixed ability classroom arrangements over the year.

Each pupil was either labelled as 'SEN', the four pupils identified with the most severe SEN in literacy focused on as part of the observations, or 'other', the rest of the class. The pupils identified as SEN were the same individuals focused on in the observations, therefore the same criteria applied (see page 174). T-tests were used to compare the mean progress of pupils with SEN in sets and mixed ability classes to their peers.

5.7 Ethical considerations

It has previously been established that the education system is multi-faceted and extremely complex; therefore the ethical considerations relating to it can be equally intricate and subtle. Many of the predicaments that researchers find themselves in come from the 'costs/benefits ratio': finding a balance between thorough investigation and the privacy of their subjects (Cohen and Manion 1998).

This section will explore the different data collection methods and the ethical considerations that were intrinsic to their conception and administration. Of particular importance is the inclusion of pupils in the research: what were the ethical considerations associated with the Pupils' Questionnaire and the observations?

Due to the fact that a multi-method approach was chosen, many of the ethical issues surrounding the research were characterised locally within the different data collection tools: they were situated ethics. This is explored in the next section alongside a discussion of each of the data collection tools used. A further section will then look explicitly at pupil participation in research.

5.7.1 Situated ethics

This section will focus on the ethics situated locally and specifically to particular practices, thus they cannot be universalised. Educational research is a social practice and this means that dilemmas and considerations have to be weighed up and solutions will be difficult to find in relation to a fixed and previously designated ethical code (Simons and Usher 2000). Situated ethics are particularly relevant to the elements of this research project based in school.

This study is an evaluative one. I am evaluating the National Literacy Strategy and within its confines the policy of setting and its appropriateness for successful inclusion. In evaluating an initiative, such as the NLS, there are certain political considerations, Simons (2000 p.39) states:

Ethics in evaluation are those principles and procedures that guide right action in the field ... Underlying any such action is a complex professional judgement that is guided by ethical principles, to be sure, but also appeal to the basic values of the researcher and his or her sensitivity to the balance that needs to be maintained in research studies between participants 'right to privacy' and the generation and sharing of public knowledge.

In my role as class teacher I had a unique ‘insiders’ perspective on the policy implementation, access to a lot of evaluative information and a loyalty to the school, other teachers and the pupils. I had to make judgements regarding the research methods I employed, the appropriateness of the comments I made and the information I used. There was considerable conflict between the public’s ‘right to know’ and an individual’s (or institution’s) ‘right to privacy’ (*ibid.* 2000).

Considerable negotiation took place at the start of the study while I was working in the school regarding how the evaluative material would be reported and the academic and political arena into which it would be published. Anonymity was assured with regards to the school and the individuals; names have been changed and references to individual teachers and pupils avoided. In commenting on my own experiences, I kept opinions and experiences of the other members of staff to a minimum.

In relation to the Pupils’ Questionnaire, negotiation was involved with teachers more than with individual pupils. It was the teachers who acted as ‘gatekeepers’ for their class, only agreeing to have their class complete the questionnaire after they had been satisfied it was an ethically sound activity for the pupils. One of the direct consequences of this was the decision not to ask the pupils explicitly about the ability grouping process (discussed on page 162), but to mask that research question under the guise of more general attitudes to the Literacy Hour.

As part of the process of administering the questionnaire pupils, were told that it was in no way judging them and that they should be honest about how they felt. It was

made explicit to the pupils that the questionnaires were anonymous. The coding that was placed upon them regarding the ability of the child was completed away from the individuals and was intentionally ambiguous.

The rationale for the questionnaire was ‘fudged’ slightly and the pupils were told that their opinions of the Literacy Hour were important and that the school wanted to know what they thought. It was not mentioned that ability grouping was also under scrutiny. This decision could be seen as a form of deception (Bryman 2001), but it was felt, after discussion with the whole staff, that to make the ability grouping explicit would have had more serious and worrying consequences than keeping the true aims of the questionnaire hidden.

The sample of teachers used in the Computerised Observations, although initially based on the school’s involvement in the PIPS project at Durham University, and on the individual’s value-added test score, were volunteers with involvement being down to each individual teacher. The nature of the education system at the current time meant that the research team had to be flexible around such diverse events as Ofsted inspections, illness and school productions. Therefore, full consideration was given to the different circumstances in which teachers were working during the project, with the intention of reducing ‘harm’ (Bryman 2001).

With regard to the two questionnaires exploring the teachers’ perspective of setting and the National Literacy Strategy, the principle ethical considerations were providing information for teachers regarding the purposes of each questionnaire and the right to

privacy of the sample (Bryman 2001). The latter was achieved through making both questionnaires anonymous: no school names and no teacher names were asked for. Informing teachers of the rationale behind the questionnaires meant a balance between informed consent and not placing undue influence over the respondents' answers.

The observations could be criticised ethically for being exploitative, with the power definitely being on the side of the research team within which I worked; in other words, it could be seen as serving the purposes of the researchers rather than the observed teachers and their classes (Hammersley 1989). With regards to information about the project, prior to the observations detail had to be kept to a minimum to negate any undue influence on the teachers' practice. However, teachers were kept involved in the research process by means of newsletters and graphical feedback of the observation data (see report: Hardman *et al.* 2001). The intention was for the teachers to feel part of the study and involved in the findings in order to address the balance of power issues discussed by Hammersley (1989).

A further important ethical consideration during the carrying out of the observations was the individual's right to privacy (Cohen and Manion 1998). In an education system which focuses on accountability and regularly publicly judges teachers and schools, the information gathered could be seen to be particularly sensitive. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the teachers when they were initially contacted: no mention of individuals or institutions would be made public in any form.

The final aspect of this research project I would like to discuss in this section is the use of quantitative pupil data, in the form of value-added reading scores. In Jones' paper (2000) the American Statistical Association's (1998) *Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice* are quoted as saying that the quantitative researchers and statisticians should:

Present their findings and interpretations honestly and objectively: avoid untrue, deceptive or undocumented statements; collect only the data needed for the purpose of their enquiry; be prepared to document data sources used in an enquiry; known inaccuracies with the data; and steps taken to correct or to refine the data, statistical procedures applied to the data, and the assumptions required for their application. (Jones 2000 p.151)

I have tried to keep to these points within this research project, particularly in relation to the value added data. As part of a multi-method approach, undue emphasis was not placed on any one set of findings and the data were presented clearly and honestly with full details of statistical analysis.

On the opposing side however, the study required named data from the PIPs database to examine attainment under the different organisational groupings. Therefore there needed to be negotiation surrounding its use. Again guarantees of anonymity, through use of the means (rather than individual data), were important in making this element ethically sound.

5.7.2 Researching the child's perspective

Research is gradually beginning to show the value of looking at the pupils' perspective of educational change (Hancock and Mansfield 2002). The view taken of

pupils is changing from seeing them as incomplete adults to social actors in their own right (Scott 2000).

Including pupils in research, however, and investigating their attitudes to school has certain considerations which it is important I make explicit. Permission is a key issue with regard to any research, but it is particularly pertinent with pupils. Graue and Walsh (1998) state:

In relationships between adults and children, adults are most often the knowledge holders, the permission granters, and the rule setters. In research with children, children are the knowledge holders, the permission granters, and the rule setters – for adults. Research with children turns part of the world upside-down... The researcher who works with children must carefully consider what it means to work in this upside-down world. (*ibid.* p.56)

These statements were even more salient considering my role as a teacher in the school: too often school pupils appear to be required to play a game of ‘guess what the teacher is thinking’ and therefore asking for their opinions, changing the locus of control, is out of the ordinary and more difficult. This was something that I, as a teacher and researcher, had to be very aware of as I was asking for the pupils’ opinions and attitudes. In order to address these issues the teachers administering the questionnaire emphasised the importance of the pupils’ views and the fact that all teachers would be interested in what they really thought about how literacy was taught. Issues surrounding educational research were also talked about in the older classes where understanding was greater, regarding the need for different opinions to be heard when evaluating teaching and learning.

Thus, the context of asking pupils questions can be difficult and the role of researcher should be carefully managed. Greig and Taylor (1999) argue there are issues concerning the reliability of the answers gained from pupils, stating that there is an “... inability to predict the answer a child will give...” which they say makes “...children’s minds special” (p.64). This must be age related, with increasing accuracy as the child gets older, although they also become increasingly adept at “...controlling what they reveal” (Scott 2000 p.102). However, it is important to recognise that you can not always trust what an adult is saying and there are all sorts of influences which might act upon an individual when answering a question. In contrast, it would be argued that pupils are often too honest, therefore to ask them is to get a truer picture. It is enough to say that, as with any questionnaire, whether from adults or pupils, answers should be treated with a certain amount of caution when analysing and discussing the findings.

The use of a Likert scale was aimed directly at reducing any random effect and giving pupil answers a structure from which they could express their attitudes. Validity was improved by splitting the questions into small manageable parts, with the majority written in a format which would be accessible to pupils with a reading age of 9 years (using the Flesch & Kincaide scale in Microsoft Word). However it did include terms associated with the Literacy Hour which would be familiar to the children.

Chapter 6 – Examining the results: initial analysis of the key themes

6.1 Introduction

I have established through my literature reviews, my experience as a class teacher and my research questions, that there are two main perspectives, the pupils' and the teachers', to assessing the effective implementation of any policy. Therefore I base the majority of this results and analysis section around these perspectives. However, having argued in Chapter 3 that it is not enough to look at what teachers' *believe* to be happening, the third section of this chapter will look at the impacts of setting on teacher-pupil interaction and on value-added attainment data: the impacts on classroom processes. Through this three-part structure, I will explore my main research question:

- **How are different grouping arrangements of pupils (mixed ability or set) affecting teaching and learning in the National Literacy Strategy**

The first section (Section 6.2) will look at the learners' viewpoint and explore the subsidiary research question:

- How do pupils' perceptions of the National Literacy Strategy differ under mixed ability and set organisational groups?

It will use data collected from the school where I taught using the Pupil Questionnaire.

The learners' viewpoint, I have argued, is an under-explored aspect of the education debate, yet, alongside teachers, pupils have an important and interesting perspective, while also influencing the effective implementation of any policy (Section 1.4). In addition, the ability grouping debate indicates some of the more critical research has stated how the process of ability grouping affects pupils' self-esteem (see Chapter 4). These aspects need to be explored further within the context of setting rather than streaming.

I will then explore the complementary, teachers' perspective. I have argued teachers represent an important element of the policy implementation equation (Chapter 3). Within Section 6.3, I will look at teachers' beliefs about the NLS and why they are using setting. I will also begin to examine the extent to which teachers are adapting policies for effective inclusion. This section will focus on two of my subsidiary research questions:

- What beliefs and attitudes do teachers hold regarding the use of mixed ability and set classes for the effective teaching of the Literacy Hour?
- What strategies are teachers using to address the need for inclusion in the Literacy Hour?

The third and final section of this chapter will focus on the research question:

- What impact are the different grouping arrangements having on:
 - teacher-pupil interaction?
 - pupil attainment?

Having looked at what teachers believe to be happening during the whole class sections of the Literacy Hour, and why setting may have emerged as such a popular strategy, the following section will need to look at the extent to which these beliefs are manifesting themselves within the classroom. In Section 6.4, therefore, I will examine two possible impacts which my literature reviews identified as being important in examining the NLS and setting: the patterns of interaction used during the whole class teaching of the Literacy Hour (Chapter 3) and the attainment of the pupils in literacy, more specifically reading (Chapter 4).

The diagram in Figure 13, on the next page, acts as a reminder of the different research tools I have used and how they inter-relate (as discussed in Chapter 5).

6.2 Pupil perspective

6.2.1 Pupil Questionnaire: sample characteristics

The Pupil Questionnaire was administered twice, a year apart. In the first year the older two year groups were set, with two classes in each reorganised into an upper and lower set, and the rest of the school were taught in mixed ability. In the second year, Year 4, 5 and 6 were set, using the same organisation as before, while Year 3 were still taught in mixed ability classes. In each year, there was one class that did not complete the questionnaire; this can be seen in Table g; however the sample size remains relatively large. In year one, a total of 161 pupils completed the questionnaire, 40% of which were set. In year two, when the setting policy was extended to younger pupils (including my class), of the 146 pupils sampled 74% were taught in sets.

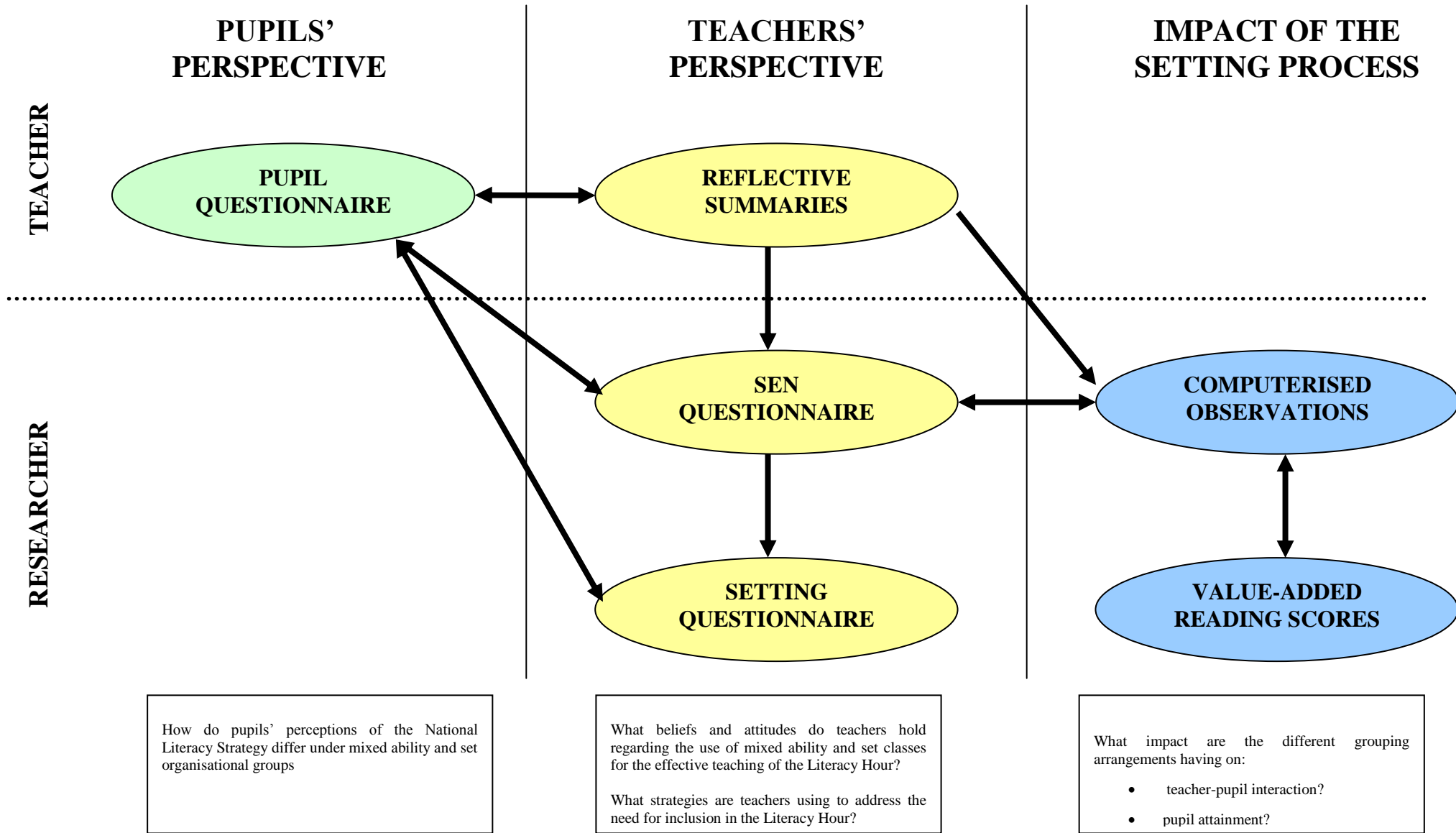


Figure 13. Plan of different data collection tools used as part of multi-method approach

Table g. Summary of sample characteristics

Year Group	3	4	5	6	MIXED TOTAL	SET TOTAL
1998/1999	mixed N=44	mixed N=52	set N=39	set N=26 (1 CLASS MISSING)	96	65
1999/2000	mixed N=38	set N=28 (1 CLASS MISSING)	set N=50	set N=30	38	108

The sample consisted of more males than females (Table h); although one class was not marked with pupils' gender (explained in Section 5.6.1).

Table h. Sample characteristics: gender

Count	gender		Total
	male	female	
1998/1999	70	67	24
1999/2000	80	66	146
Total	150	133	24

It can be seen in Figure 14 that, as might be expected in a normal distribution, the majority of pupils assessed were of average ability, but pupils identified as SEN outnumber those pupils identified as able. This was definitely a characteristic of the school and one that contributed to the direction of this thesis and the introduction of a policy of setting to the school.

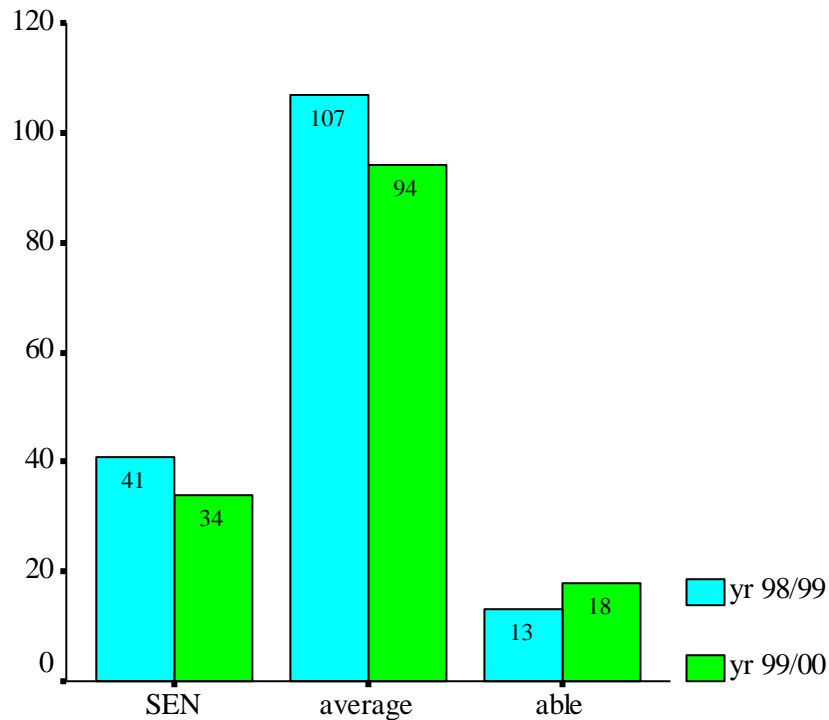


Figure 14. Sample characteristics: ability spectrum

6.2.2 Pupil Questionnaire: results and analysis

The questionnaire asked the pupils about their attitudes to the different sections of the Literacy Hour: the whole class text level work, the whole class word level work, the 20 minute task (either on their own or working with a teacher) and the plenary (see Appendix 8). The questionnaire asked eleven questions in total; however, this analysis will focus on seven of them. This is because pupils found answering the other four questions (questions numbers 3, 4, 5 and 10) difficult as they asked how attitudes had changed over time and they could not identify with these two questions when they were comparing to. This was a flaw in the questionnaire.

Analysis of the cross school trends

It can be seen in Figure 15 that attitudes in general were more positive than negative to all sections of the Literacy Hour, with means always above 3.0, the neutral point (see Section 5.6.1 for the full Likert scale). This was reflected in the comments made by pupils with over 65% of the comments being affirmative.

The least popular sections were those elements taught to the whole class. The lowest scoring section was the 15 minutes whole class *word* work (spelling and vocabulary), closely followed by the 15 minutes whole class *text* work (reading and writing). The plenary section at the end of the lesson taught to the whole class did not follow this same trend, being second most positive.

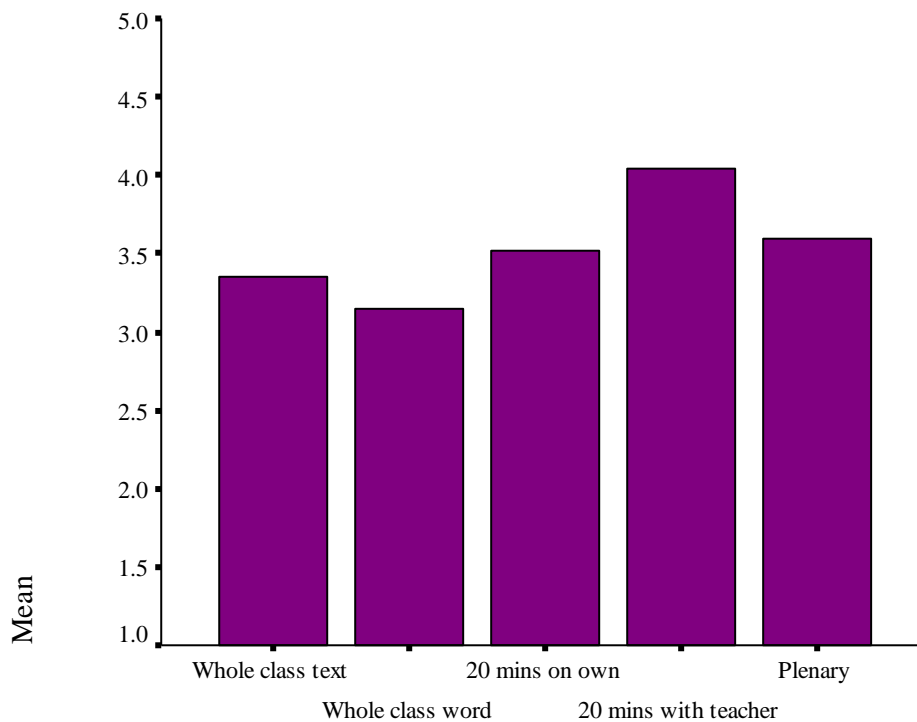


Figure 15. General attitudes to sections of the Literacy Hour

Comments from the pupils implied some of the negative attitudes towards the whole class sections of the Hour were associated with physical discomfort, mentioned by twelve pupils; for example:

I hate the 15 minutes on the carpet because the carpet is hard and it hurts my bottom. (Year 3, boy, 1999)

Six pupils mentioned the work was too hard; a further six said that they would rather start individual work; and five pupils mentioned the length of time being too long, for example:

Yes but sometimes it gets boring if we do it for too long. (Year 5, boy, 1999)

The most common response was that this time was ‘boring’: a text search found 56 mentions in answer to question 6 and 7.

When attitudes towards the different sections of the Hour were analysed in relation to the variable of setting, any differences were found to be slight and inconsistent (see Figure 16), with the most dramatic change being the positive attitudes in sets to the 20 minutes task time without assistance from the teacher. An independent t-test found this to be the only significant change ($t=2.82$, $p<0.05$).

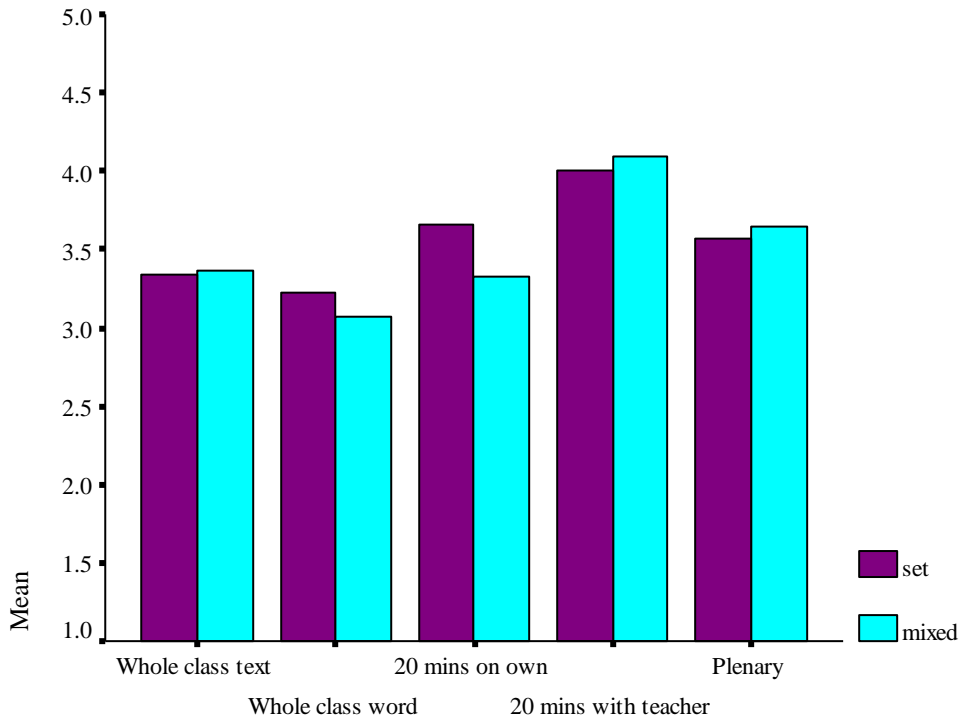


Figure 16. Attitudes to the Literacy Hour depending on organisational group

The comments from the pupils show this difference could have a relationship with the age and/or independence of pupils. A total of 15 pupils mentioned they liked the independent work because it was a challenge to work alone. However, ten of these were in the older two year groups, therefore problematising any proposed association to setting:

Yes it's like a challenge really without the teacher. (Year 5, girl, 1999)

A similar age-related pattern, but in reverse, appears with those not liking this time because they often 'got stuck' and did not get the support they thought they needed (17 pupils mentioned this, with 13 of them being in either Year 3 or Year 4):

No I don't like working on my own because I get stuck. (Year 3, girl, 2000)

If setting as a variable is used to analyse the comments, then the same patterns emerge. There seems to be an indication that independence increases as the pupils get older and that the suitability of setting may or may not be related to this. This will be discussed later, particularly in relation to the different cohorts that changed from mixed ability to sets for literacy in the summer of 1999.

Although the findings relating to the whole class sections were not found to be significant, interesting trends were noted that could relate to the arguments I made in Chapter 4, pointing to the possibility that different elements of literacy are more or less suited to setting. Attitudes to the whole class *text* section and the plenary, elements characterised by more discursive (progressive) teaching, altered very little between the two types of organisation; although in both cases there was a slight trend towards more negative attitudes. In contrast, the 15 minutes whole class *word* level work, characterised by more traditional approaches to literacy teaching, showed more positive reactions when sets were implemented. These ideas will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Analysis of the three cohorts

It is now appropriate to focus on the three cohorts identified as changing from mixed ability teaching to sets for the Literacy Hour in the summer of 1999 (for a summary of the different cohorts and their composition can be seen in Section 5.6.1). I will focus on each cohort in turn and then bring together the emerging trends.

The first cohort, which can be seen to represent the youngest pupils in the school to change to setting, were taught in mixed ability classes in Year 3 (1998/1999) and then sets in Year 4 (1999/2000). Results for this cohort showed significant changes in attitude in response to five out of the seven questions being focused on, as indicated by independent t-tests. All these changes were to the more negative end of the scale after setting had been introduced. Indeed, there were a lot more apparently significant results than would be expected by chance ($p < 0.001$) when so many tests were completed (Sakoda *et al.* 1954). The statistical results for this cohort can be seen in Appendix 12.

Pupils within this cohort were more negative about all aspects of the Literacy Hour when setting was implemented. The general questions at the start of the questionnaire ('Do you like the Literacy Hour?' ($t=5.18$, $p < 0.001$) and 'Does the Literacy Hour help you with your English?' ($t=3.49$, $p=0.001$)) showed highly significant results. When this was triangulated with the comments from pupils, they indicated the same trend: with the number of positive comments decreasing and the number of negative comments increasing between 1999 and 2000.

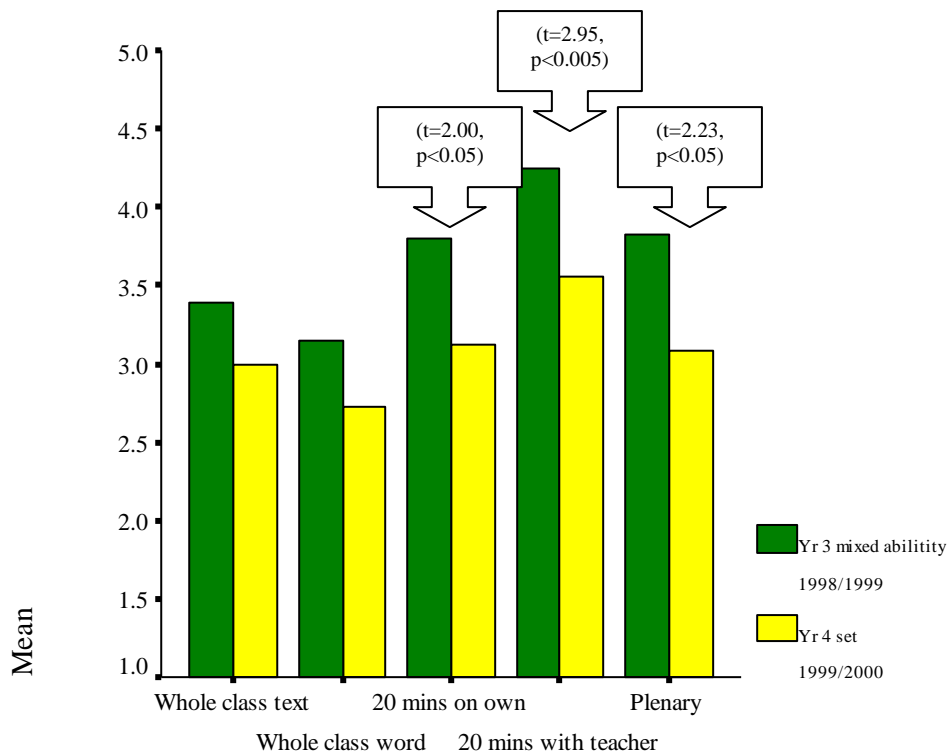


Figure 17. Cohort 1: changes in attitude to sections of the Hour when setting had been implemented

Within this cohort, attitudes to the 20 minutes task time (with and without a teacher) and to the plenary all shared a significant negative change in attitudes when the pupils were reorganised into sets (Figure 17). With regard to sections of the Hour taught to the whole class, which as discussed in Section 4.7.3, was one reason why setting has been perceived as a practical option for teaching the NLS, it is interesting that while the plenary section follows the trend the whole class text and word level sections do not to the same extent. If the probability that the teacher can effectively match teaching objectives to the majority of ability levels within the class is increased by the implementation of setting, then it might be expected that the whole class sections would buck the trend in some way. The non-significant findings to these questions could indicate that while other aspects of the Literacy Hour are regarded more negatively when setting is implemented, these sections are viewed relatively less so.

In summary, with this younger cohort, there is little evidence to support the implementation of setting. The fact that the whole class sections did not show such a negative change is potentially important. It will therefore be interesting to note the attitudes of the other two cohorts to these questions.

Cohort 2 was a complementary to the other two, in that it looked at the same year group over two successive years (see cohort characteristics Section 5.6.1). This was Year 4, the year where I was a class teacher. In the school year 1998/1999 this year group was taught as two mixed ability classes and then in 1999/2000 it was reorganised into a lower and upper set.

The attitudes for this group showed similar negative changes to Cohort 1 when setting was implemented. However this group did not show as many significant changes as the younger cohort: only four out of the seven questions. Having said this, Sakoda *et al.* (1954) would consider it not probable that obtaining four statistically significant results out of seven was due to chance alone ($p < 0.001$). The results for the independent t-tests can be seen in Appendix 13.

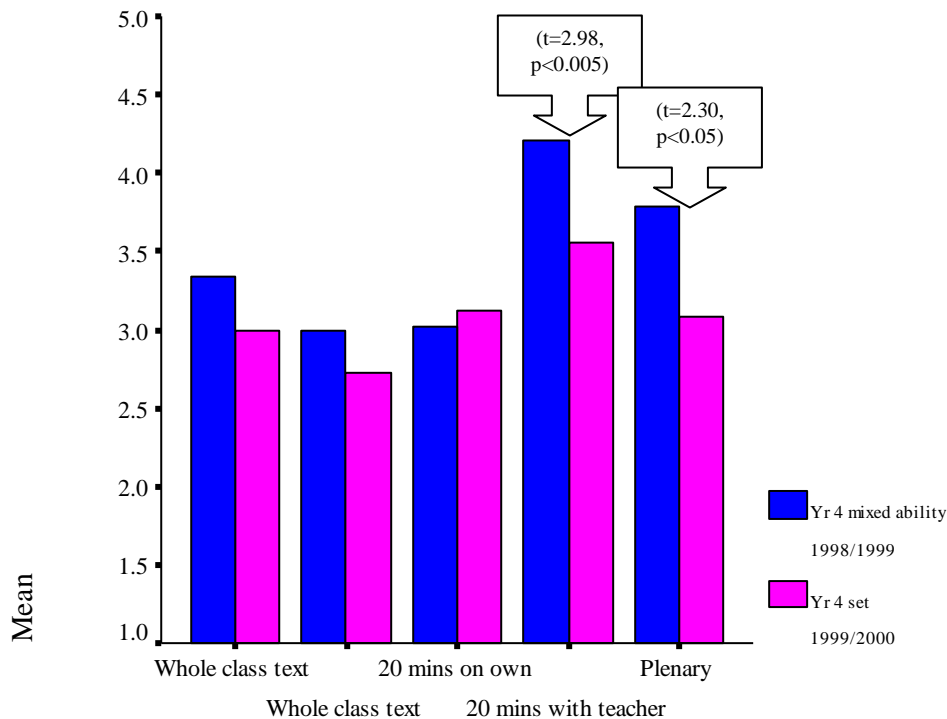


Figure 18. Cohort 2: difference in attitude to sections of the Hour when setting had been implemented

As with Cohort 1, attitudes to the two more general questions at the start of the questionnaire (‘Do you like the Literacy Hour?’($t=3.56, p=0.001$) and ‘Does the Literacy Hour help you with your English?’($t=3.37, p<0.005$)), showed a significant negative difference. A similar significant negative change was found for the group task with the teacher and the plenary (see Figure 18).

Again the results for questions relating to the whole class *text* and *word* level work did not show a statistically significant change. If the means are focused on for these two sections a slight negative change can be seen, following the trend seen with the previous cohort. Comments from the pupils also reflected this trend, with the number

of negative comments to all questions increasing once setting had been implemented, but not on such a dramatic scale as with the younger pupils.

The third and final cohort was older again than Cohorts 1 and 2. This group was taught in Year 4 as mixed ability classes (1998/1999) and then as sets in Year 5 (1999/2000). This cohort showed only two significant independent t-test results (see Appendix 14): question 8a, referring to the 20 minute task without teacher assistance, and question 9, relating to the plenary (shown in Figure 19). Comments from the pupils again reflected a similar trend. Pertinently, only the latter result was a negative change, the pupils in this cohort recorded the *only* significant positive change in attitudes when setting was implemented. However, according to Sekoda *et al.* (1954) there is a high probability that these results occurred by chance, therefore any conclusions need to be tentative; however, this cohort is being analysed along side other cohorts which increases the reliability.

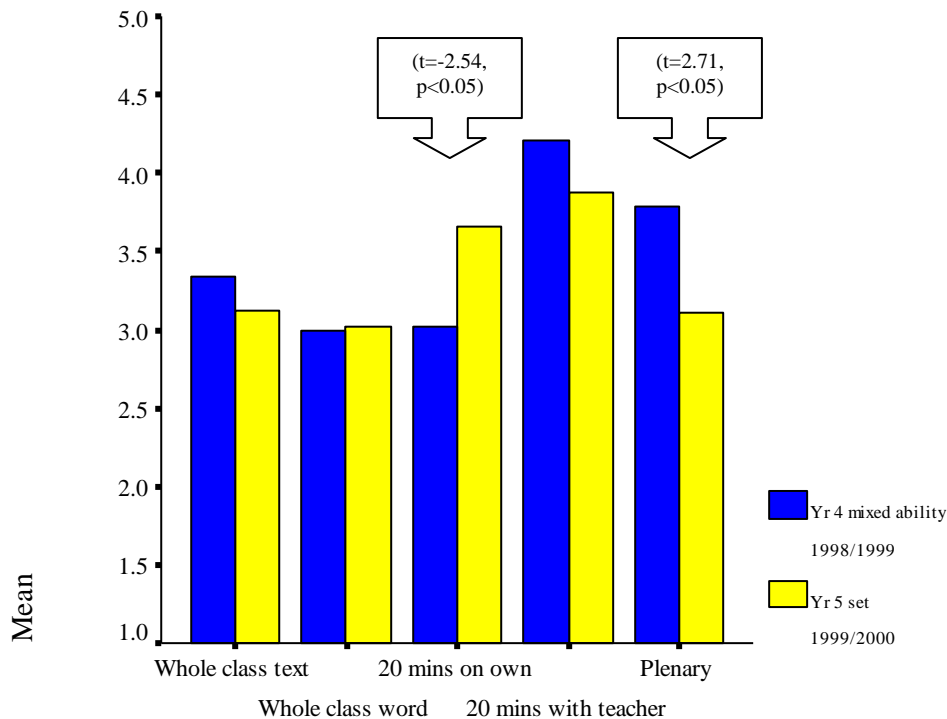


Figure 19. Cohort 3: change in attitude to sections of the Hour when setting had been implemented

It is interesting that pupils in all three cohorts displayed a statistically significant negative change in attitude towards the plenary when it was taught in sets. It is even more noteworthy when compared to the other sections dedicated to whole class teaching: the 15 minutes *text* and *word* level work.

The positive change in attitudes also needs to be looked at further. This question asked about the 20 minutes task time without teacher assistance. I have already speculated that attitudes to this section of the Literacy Hour could be related to the independence or age of pupils, which this result appears to reinforce. This might not appear too surprising, but when this is linked to the variable of setting, it would

appear that maturity and skills to encourage independence will potentially affect pupils' attitudes.

When trends across the three cohorts are examined, there is further evidence for the argument that age and/or maturity is an important factor for the 20 minutes task time without the teacher to be effective for pupils, but also that it should be associated with the use of setting. If we consider the broader picture, and the number of significant results for each cohort (see Table i), it is possible to see that as the pupils get older then the number of questions showing a significantly negative change lessens. Clearly, this is an important emerging finding and it will be followed up in relation to the teachers' perception in Section 6.3.

Table i. Significant changes in attitude between mixed ability and set classes

Cohort	Cohort summary	Number of positive changes in attitude	Number of negative changes in attitude	Number of non-significant answers
1	Year 3 – Year 4	0	5	2
2	Year 4 – Year 4	0	4	3
3	Year 4 – Year 5	1	1	5

The plenary has been the only section of the Hour which, in every cohort, has shown negative changes in attitudes when setting has been introduced, even when the other two sections of whole class teaching do not follow a comparable trend. I do not have any convincing evidence to explain why this might be, but it is important that the

pupils' comments are focused on to give some idea as to their attitudes to this section of the Hour. Comments were mostly positive; however when setting was looked at as a variable, the number of negative comments increased by 3%, whereas the number of positive comments stayed constant. This is not a dramatic difference and so it is worth exploring the meaning of the comments a bit further.

Nearly 10% of pupil comments, in answer to the question on the plenary, stated that it was a time for sharing work and listening to other people's ideas, which they thought was a positive; for example:

Yes because you find out what other groups have done and it's a sharing time. (Year 6, girl, 2000)

This did not vary across the variable of setting, with equal numbers of pupils stating this positive aspect across the organisational groupings. Pupils also consistently mentioned the benefit of seeing other pupils' work as a way of understanding what they needed to do later in the week and as a gauge for judging their own work,

Yes because it gives you an idea of what other pupils' work is like. (Year 4, girl, 1999)

With regard to negative attitudes, many of these stemmed from a dislike or lack of confidence with the 'sharing' theme of this part of the Hour; eight pupils mentioned this:

No I don't because it's really embarrassing when people say stuff. (Year 5, boy, 1999)

A considerable number of negative comments were also linked with not wanting the task time to finish, with nine pupils mentioning the desire to keep working independently:

No not really but it can help with things I don't understand, but I don't like it when we have to stop working for it. (Year 5, girl, 2000)

From these comments it is difficult to decipher why the more negative attitudes are recorded towards the plenary once setting is introduced. However, it could link to previous discussion that discursive elements of literacy, like those the NLS suggest should occur in the plenary, are better received by pupils in a mixed ability class rather than sets (an argument introduced in Chapter and previously in this section).

At this point it is important to reflect on the findings reported so far. The pupils' attitudes appear to show some interesting, and sometimes conflicting, trends. Attitudes in general to the Literacy Hour are positive, although the sections taught to the whole class are the lowest scoring. This is not changed significantly by the implementation of setting, although there is some evidence to suggest that different aspects of literacy might be more or less suited to teaching in sets.

Analysis of the three cohorts that changed from mixed ability classes to sets for the Literacy Hour in the summer of 1999 reveal a possible effect related to the age or maturity of the pupils. The results from the oldest pupils reveal one positive and one negative change in attitudes after setting had been implemented. This is in comparison to the youngest cohort, which showed seven negative and no positive changes.

Across the cohorts there was a consistent trend towards the negative end of the spectrum in answer to the question referring to the plenary. This is in contrast to the

consistent non-significant findings regarding the other whole class sections of the Hour: the fifteen minutes of whole class *text* and the whole class *word* level work.

Analysis relating to different ability groups

In the next section of this analysis I will look at the different ability groups across the school (able, average and SEN); investigating their attitudes to the different sections of the Literacy Hour and to what extent they are impacted upon by the implementation of setting. If the claims made for setting are correct then it could be expected that setting would have a positive impact on the attitudes of the pupils at either end of the ability spectrum; in other words, when the groups are more homogeneously organised the needs of the more and less able will be better catered for and this should result in more positive attitudes.

Initially, as a reminder, I will summarise how these ability groups were arrived at:

SEN – pupils on the school’s register of special educational needs

Able – pupils identified by the class teacher as high achieving

Average – neither of the above

There was some subjectivity in these judgements and therefore some variability between class teachers. Also the special needs register is, particularly at the lower levels, quite flexible and pupils will be moved on and off the register depending on circumstances and achievement. Both these aspects would have affected the groupings; however, it was surprising how consistent this labelling system was across the two years (see the sample characteristic section).

When the sample taught in *mixed ability* classes was analysed looking at the variable of ability (Figure 20), it can be seen that attitudes towards the 20 minutes task time *without* assistance are related directly to ability level: the most able pupils being most positive, then the average and the pupils with SEN expressing the most negative attitudes. This finding was also reflected in the pupil comments, where pupils identified with SEN were more likely to say that they found this section of the Hour very difficult:

Not really, because sometimes I don't know what to do and I can't ask her what to do when she's with another group (Year 5, SEN, 1999)

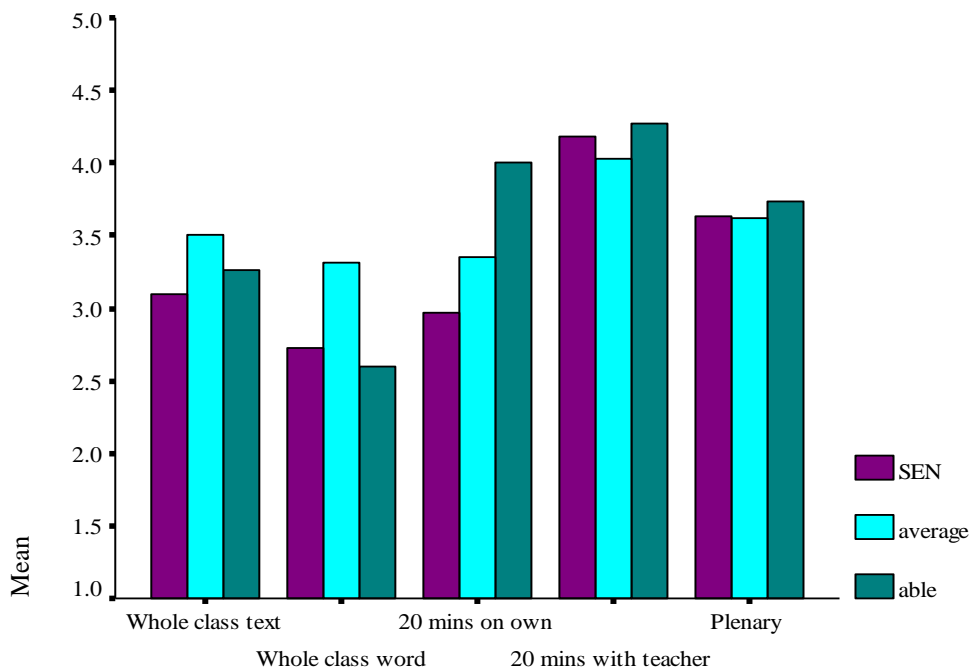


Figure 20. Attitudes to the different sections of the Literacy Hour based on ability in mixed ability classes

It could be suggested that this is a predictable finding: pupils with SEN are likely to be less independent and are, therefore, going to find independent work more difficult

and less rewarding. However, it has important implications regarding staffing during this time, since this could be a time when the use of an LSA would be appropriate. It should also be queried whether pupils with SEN can work independently or should the tasks be better designed to allow for this. Advocates of setting would recommend that it can support these pupils through effective targeting of resources, particularly through extra adults. More pupils in sets mentioned the names of classroom assistants than when they were in mixed ability classes; therefore there could be evidence of this happening. Furthermore, when comparisons are made between those in mixed ability classes and those in sets (Figure 21 below), more positive attitudes are seen from pupils with SEN in sets.

The other interesting trend on the graph of the different abilities' attitudes to the different sections of the Hour in mixed ability classes (Figure 20) are the relatively positive attitudes of the average pupils during the whole class *word* and *text* level work. This would fit in with the evidence from surveys of teacher attitudes (Smith and Whiteley 2000; Smith and Hardman 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999) that during whole class teaching the tendency is to target the majority of the class, the pupils of average ability, to the detriment of the extremes of the ability spectrum: pupils with SEN and the more able.

Next, I will look at the data from the section of the sample taught in sets (Figure 21). The first thing that presents itself in these results is the change in attitude of the able pupils to the whole class text work: they are significantly more negative when sets are implemented ($F=3.21$, $p<0.05$). This section of the Literacy Hour at least does not

follow the predicted pattern outlined previously: that the needs of the extremes of the ability spectrum will be met when setting is implemented. The pupils with SEN show a slight positive increase and the average pupils remain relatively constant in their attitudes to this section. Results for the plenary follow a similar pattern, with the able pupils' attitudes taking a negative turn after setting had been implemented.

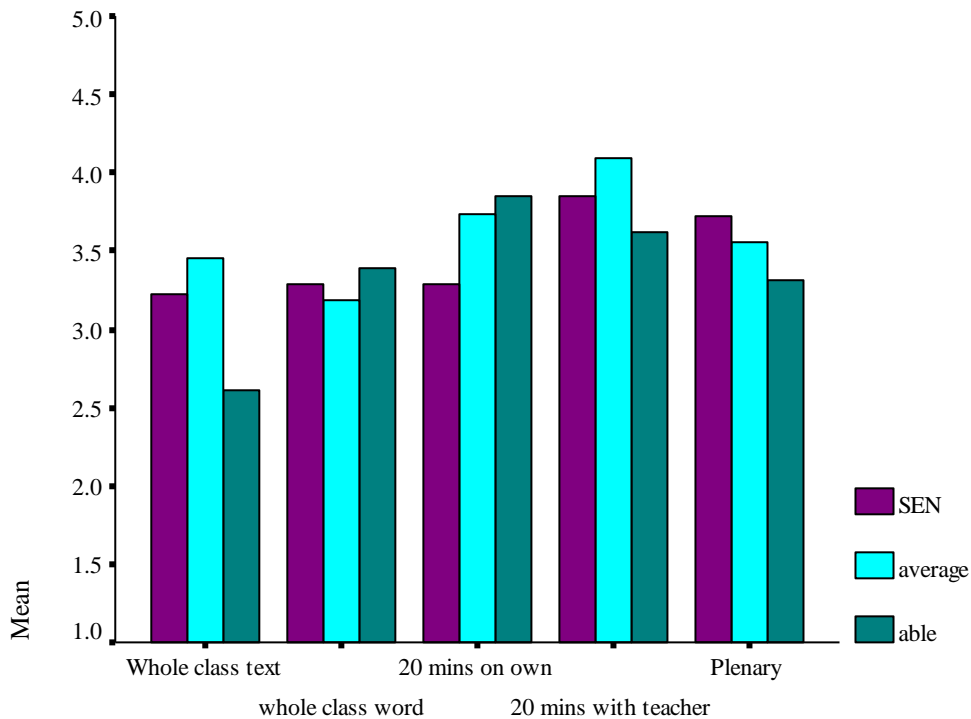


Figure 21. Attitudes to the different sections of the Literacy Hour based on ability in set classes

When we look at the second section of whole class teaching, the 15 minutes word work, the findings are different. The mean attitude of the average pupils drops, whereas attitudes of pupils with SEN and able pupils both increase, although none of these differences are statistically significant. This section of the Hour does fit with the hypothesis that setting might effectively address the needs of pupils at both ends of the ability spectrum. When the different results for the two main sections of whole class teaching are considered, there appears to be further evidence to support the idea

that the *word* level work is more suited to sets and that *text* level work is more appropriately taught to a mixed ability class (see arguments presented in Chapter 3 and in evidence earlier in this section).

When comparing the findings of the pupils with SEN in mixed ability classes to the equivalent pupils in sets, overall a small positive improvement in attitudes can be seen (although not significant). Pupils with SEN seem to have benefited from a change in attitude when changing to setting for literacy. However, it has to be asked, at what expense? The attitudes of the able pupils and average pupils do not show the same positive change.

A two-way ANOVA was used to look at the effects of the two types of grouping arrangement on general attitudes of the different ability groups; these were the first two questions on the questionnaire. Significant main effects were found for the first question: Do you like the Literacy Hour? This was a main effect for ability. However, no results were found to be significant for the main effect of setting or mixed ability grouping. Neither were there any significant interaction effects.

The graph in Figure 22 shows the attitudes for the different ability groupings for question 1. It is possible to see that the significant result ($F=5.06$, $p<0.01$) comes from the negative change in attitudes, not of the able or the pupils with SEN as might be expected, but from the average pupils, while attitudes of pupils at either end of the ability spectrum did not alter greatly.

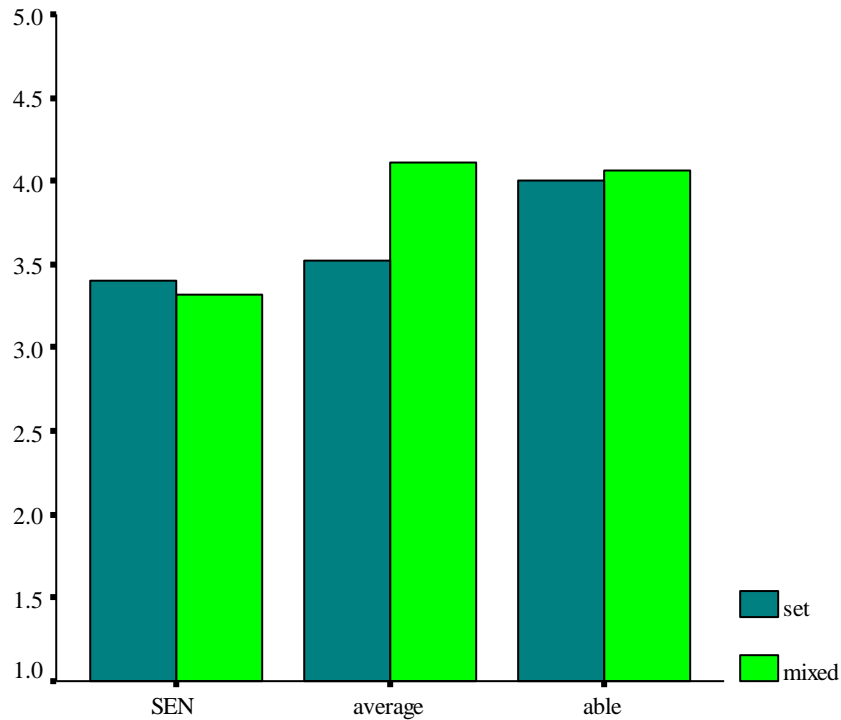


Figure 22. Attitudes to Question 1 in ability groups

This difference in attitude of the average pupils could be for a number of reasons. However, I would suggest that it could be because of the way the school chose to split the two classes into a lower and upper set. Thus the average pupils would either be at the top of the lower set or at the lower end of the upper sets, and therefore, they would not be at the centre of the teacher's priorities. This could have been further exacerbated by the government focus on able pupils and the school focus on pupils with SEN: the average pupils were encouraged to just get on with it.

Another question picked up by a two-way ANOVA with a significant result was question 6, this was one of the questions referring more specifically to sections of the Literacy Hour: the 15 minutes whole class *text* level work ($F=3.21$, $p<0.05$). The graph (Figure 23) shows average pupils have very similar attitudes to this question

across the different organisational groupings and pupils with SEN have attitudes slightly more positive with setting. However, although neither of these results are significant, the important result here is that of the able pupils: there is a significant negative drop in attitudes after setting has been implemented.

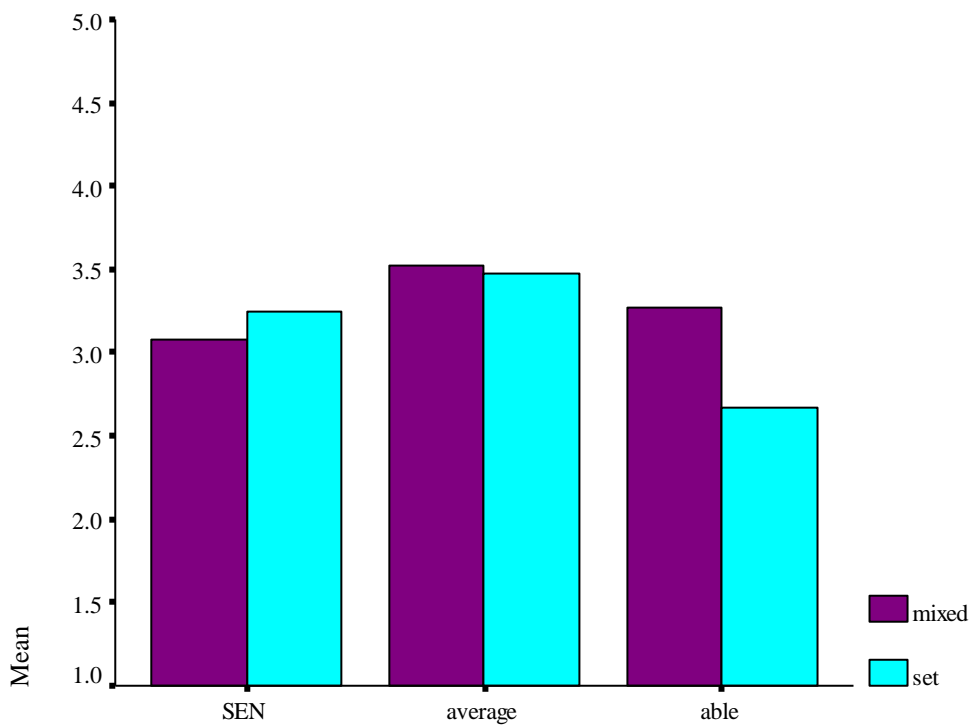


Figure 23. Different ability's attitudes to question 6

This finding contradicts much of the evidence from the teachers' perspective section which will be discussed in Section 6.3.

6.2.3 Summary of the Pupil Questionnaire

Pupil attitudes towards the NLS were relatively positive; although the whole class sections of the Literacy Hour were less well received. However, these whole class sections did produce some interesting results. When setting was implemented attitudes to the whole class sections were not impacted upon, whereas the other

sections of the Hour produced more negative attitudes in sets. There were also varying results depending upon the focus of the work taught in mixed ability or set classes: the whole class word level work received more positive reactions when taught in sets whereas, in contrast, attitudes to the whole class text level work were slightly less positive.

When the three cohorts were focused on to explore the differences in attitudes between mixed ability classes in 1998/1999 and sets 1999/2000, the results showed a possible age difference: the younger pupils showing far more negative attitude changes when taught in sets than older pupils undergoing the same transition. I have argued that the pupil comments indicate independence and an ability to be resourceful, which can be linked to the age of pupils, could be factors to be considered when exploring the effects of setting.

The experiences of children of different abilities were explored to gauge their attitudes to being taught as mixed ability classes and sets. Pupils identified by class teachers as SEN, as might have been expected, found the 20 minute independent task time extremely difficult and this definitely supports the importance placed on using an extra adult support discussed later in the teachers' perspective section. Pupils identified as average were seen to have a much more positive attitude to the whole class sections of the Literacy Hour when taught in mixed ability classes, this could be because teachers direct their teaching, when faced with a diverse range of abilities, at those in the middle of the ability range (as discussed in Section 4.7.3).

In sets, the results showed a dramatic negative change in the attitudes of the able pupils to the whole class *text* level work. This end of the ability spectrum did not appear to have its needs met by setting; however, pupils with SEN were slightly more positive.

6.3 The teacher's perspective

This section presents the results from the two teacher questionnaires. The samples for which were drawn randomly from a national sample on the PIPS database at Durham University (see Figure 8 for the sample derivate).

6.3.1 SEN Questionnaire: sample characteristics

A sample of 655 questionnaires was analysed, this included teachers from every type of school catering for pupils under the age of eleven; however the majority taught in primary schools (77%). Schools varied in the number of pupils on roll (standard deviation = 134), with a mean of 265. The mean number of pupils on the SEN register was 20.1% (standard deviation = 12.6), although this also varied considerably from 0 to as high as 65%. This can be seen in Figure 24.

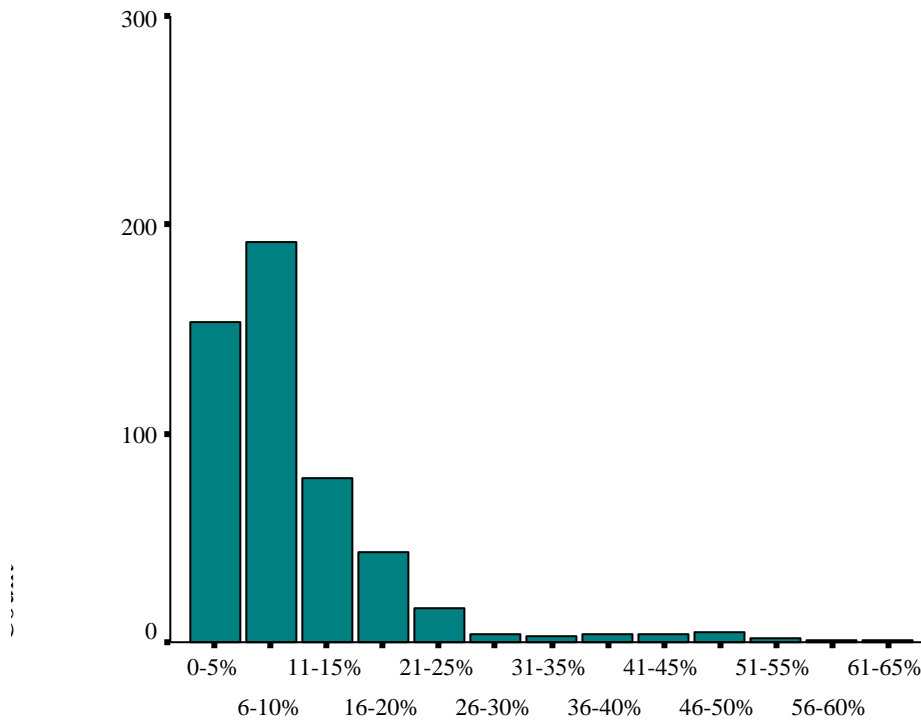


Figure 24. Percentage of pupils with SEN in sample schools

This range was also reflected in the classes taught by the teachers completing the questionnaire (see Figure 25). This begins to indicate some of the issues pertinent to implementing a curriculum policy, such as the NLS, uniformly across the primary school population: there are great variations across both schools and individual classes (see Chapter 3).

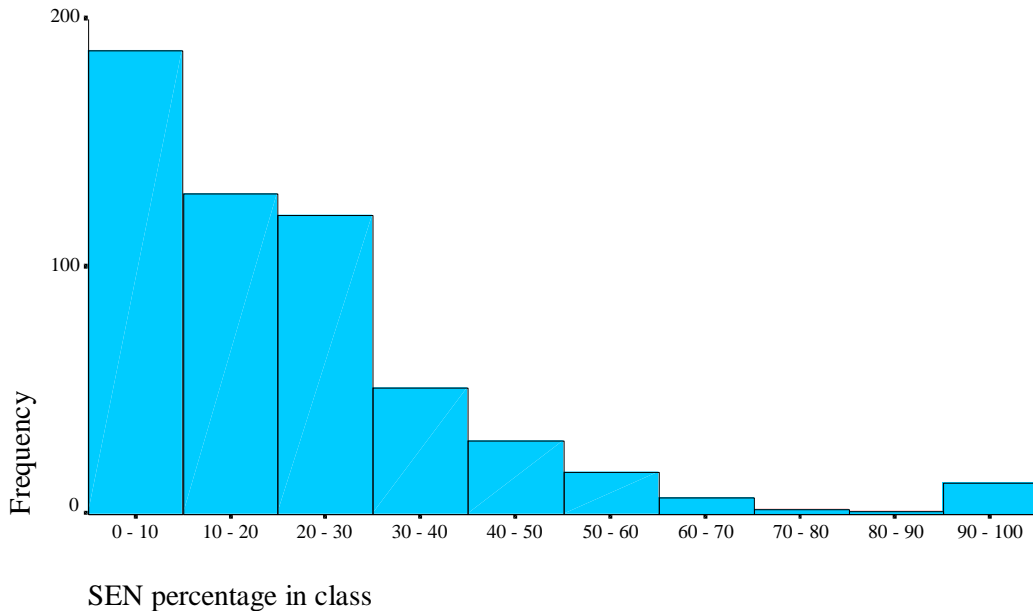


Figure 25. Percentage of pupils with SEN in sample teachers' classes

Although the sample teachers covered the primary age phase, a high proportion taught in Reception (25%) and Year 4 (16%). This is partly due to the PIPS database being marketed as appropriate for baseline assessment in the Early Years. This distribution breaks down as 57% of the sample being based in Key Stage 2. The distribution can be seen in Figure 26, which also shows the number of teachers implementing the NLS to a class including more than one year group; however, no teacher taught across the Key Stages.

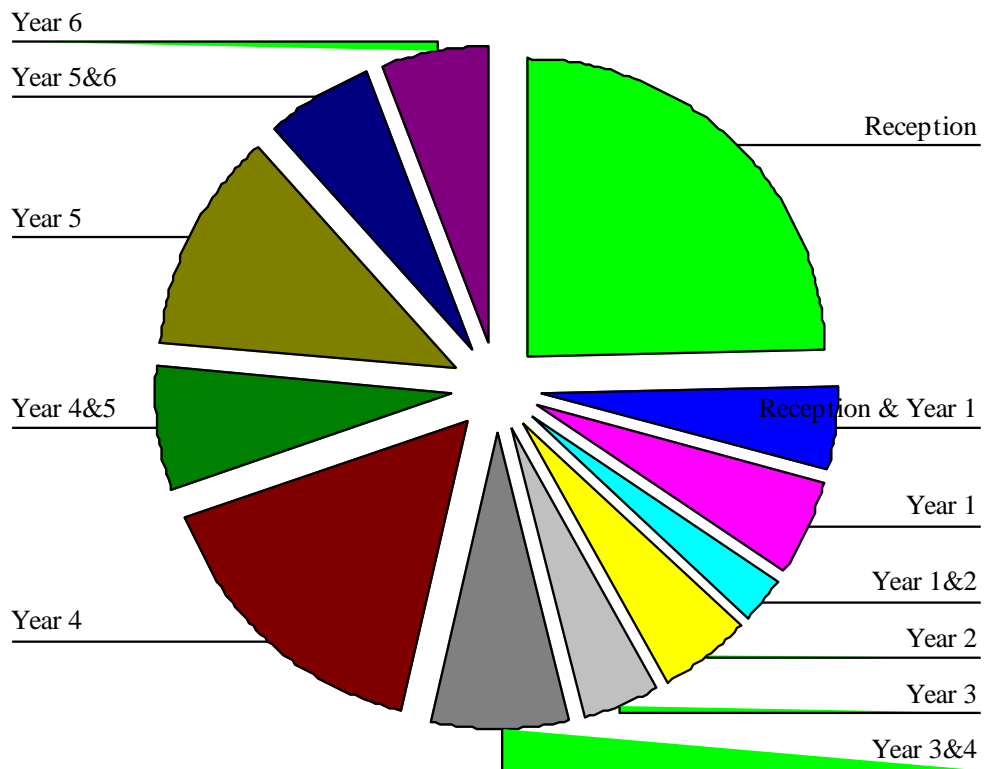


Figure 26. Year groups taught by sample teachers

Teachers within the sample had a range of responsibilities. A large group were on the senior management team for the school (36%), with relatively fewer teachers at the other end of the responsibility scale: only 1% were Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). Most of the sample teachers had been teaching for more than ten years.

96% of teachers said they were implementing the NLS: *Framework*, although less said they were using the four-part Literacy Hour: 21% did not. This was particularly likely for teachers in Reception classes where it could be presumed the Foundation Stage guidelines (DfEE 2000d) were in operation.

Teachers were asked to indicate the type of class they taught for literacy: whether it was a set (upper, middle or lower) or not. This can be seen in Figure 27.

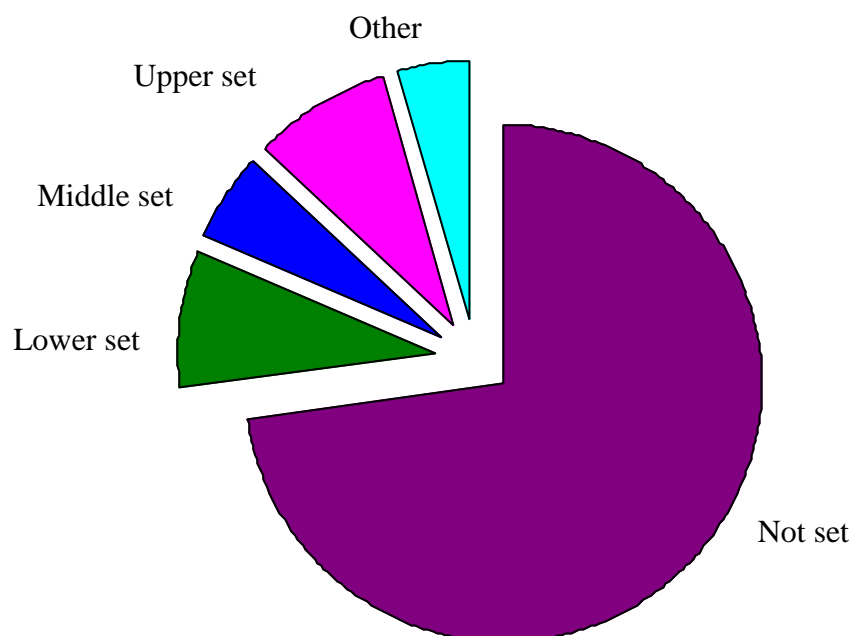


Figure 27. Type of literacy class taught by sample teachers

The majority of teachers taught their own class for literacy (71%); 24% of the respondents taught a set, and this was fairly evenly spread across the different types: 9% taught a lower set, 9% an upper set and 6% a middle set. The latter might be expected to be lower as few schools would have the numbers on roll and the resources to form more than two sets. The teachers who indicated 'other' on the questionnaire (5%) largely taught a withdrawn SEN group while the rest of the year group were taught in mixed ability classes; this could be considered a type of setting, particularly for the pupils with SEN who are taught in a group matched on ability.

6.3.2 SEN Questionnaire: results and analysis

Initially, I will look at the strategies indicated by respondents as being used by the whole school. I will then focus on how the sample teachers aided the inclusion of pupils with SEN during literacy in their own classes. In each of these sections, I will focus on the use of setting and how it compares to other possible strategies. Then, I will look at the timetabling of the Literacy Hour and the potential impact of setting. Finally, I will look at how teachers reported they would change the NLS: *Framework* and Literacy Hour for effective inclusion and the extent to which setting features as a strategy.

Whole school organisation

Teachers were asked to indicate, from a list, which strategies were used in their school for assisting the inclusion of pupils identified with SEN during the Literacy Hour. The results are shown in Figure 28; it should be recognised that because respondents could indicate more than one, the figures do not add up to 100%. Setting was indicated as used in 37% of schools. However, it was not the most common strategy, with a number of other strategies being more frequently employed, such as, support staff, the use of the Additional Literacy Strategy (ALS) and extra support for Year 6. Although it has to be pointed out that many of these strategies are government-led initiatives, with associated funding, which may have increased the likelihood of schools putting some of these strategies into action.

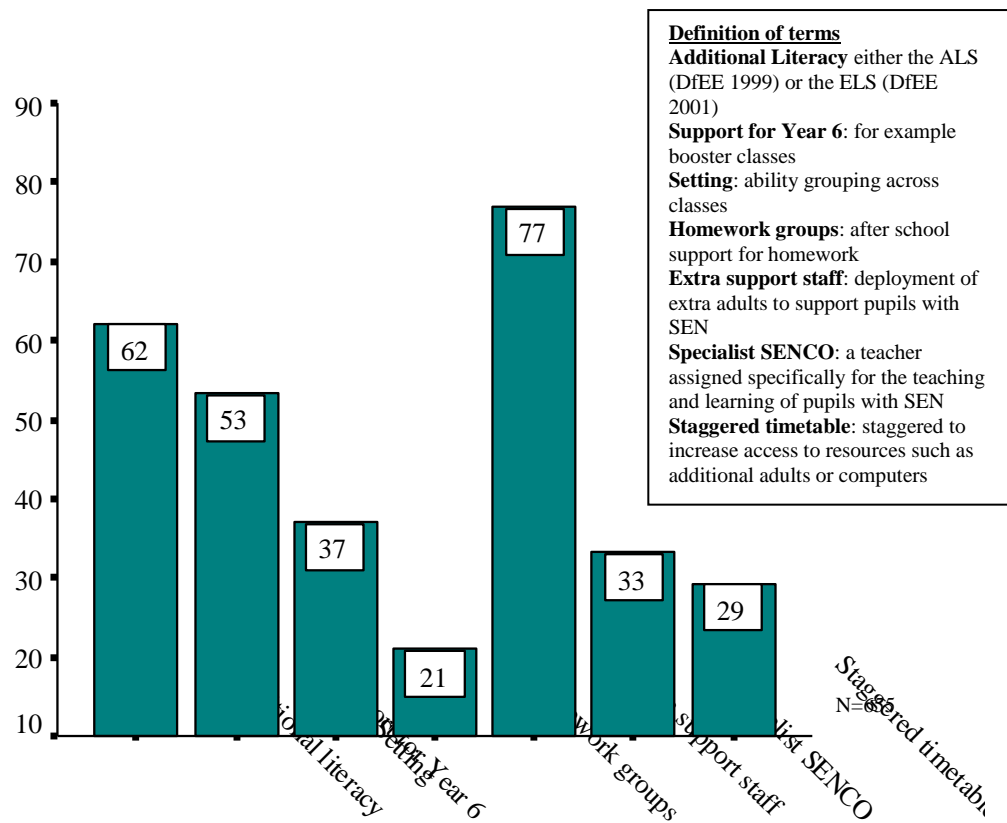


Figure 28. Strategies used to include pupils with SEN in the Literacy Hour

The preference showed for using an extra adult is pertinent when contrasted to the use of setting. There are issues with the allocation of this support regarding funding. This could come from an individual child’s statement of special needs or school funds. It is also affected by how this support is used, and, as I documented in Chapter 1, it could be used to complement a policy of setting, targeting the needs of the lower sets (discussed later in this section). The fact that any of these strategies could be used in tandem does cloud the findings, indeed when the number of strategies indicated by schools was calculated, the mean was four per school.

So, 37% of schools indicated they used some form of setting, this is less than in the Ofsted survey of 1998, which found half of all primary schools used setting. In this report, Ofsted also stated that setting was more common in the older year groups, most often in Years 5 and 6; as it was documented in my case study school. Figure 29 shows the occurrence of setting reported by the teachers in this survey.

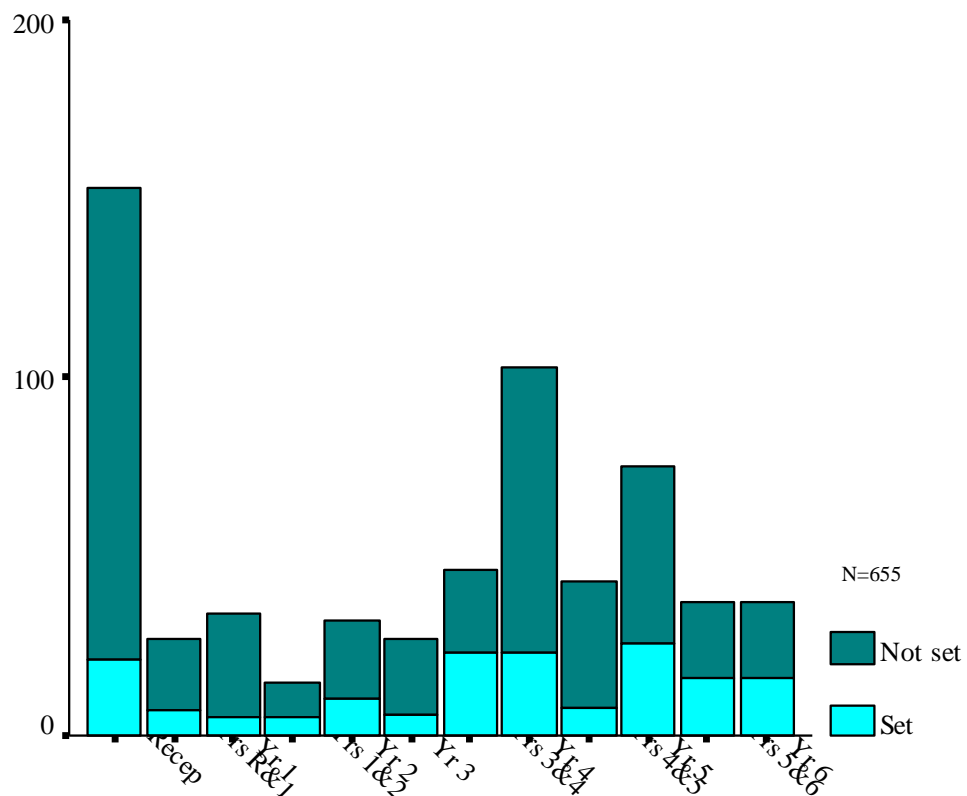


Figure 29. Occurrence of setting across the age phase

It is possible to see that setting is being used in all year groups across the primary age phase. It is important to note that 14% of Reception classes are using setting; this is more than is recognised in other up to date published research (Ofsted 1998b and Ireson and Hallam 2001). However, when the proportion of Reception classes using setting is compared to the proportion of classes in other year groups, it is significantly less (using a proportion test from Chambers 1964); thus agreeing with the Ofsted

survey that setting is more common in the older year groups (the calculations are included in Appendix 15). Having said this, the finding that setting is not restricted to the older year groups is particularly interesting considering the evidence from the pupil questionnaire (Section 6.2) regarding the appropriateness of setting depending on the age or maturity of pupils.

The final aspect investigated within this section on whole school organisation is whether there is any correlation between the percentage of pupils on the school roll identified with SEN and the likelihood of a policy of setting. Figure 30 shows no apparent relationship and this was confirmed using a statistical test comparing proportions (Chambers 1964), which showed no significant difference between schools with less than 25% SEN and those with 26% or more pupils on the SEN register and the likelihood of using setting. This could be an indication that setting is not being implemented to achieve inclusion of just SEN, but rather in support of my more expansive definition (outlined in Section 1.3.3): setting is likely in schools with a wide spread of abilities. In other words, setting appears more likely in schools where there are large numbers of pupils with SEN *and* pupils identified as more able.

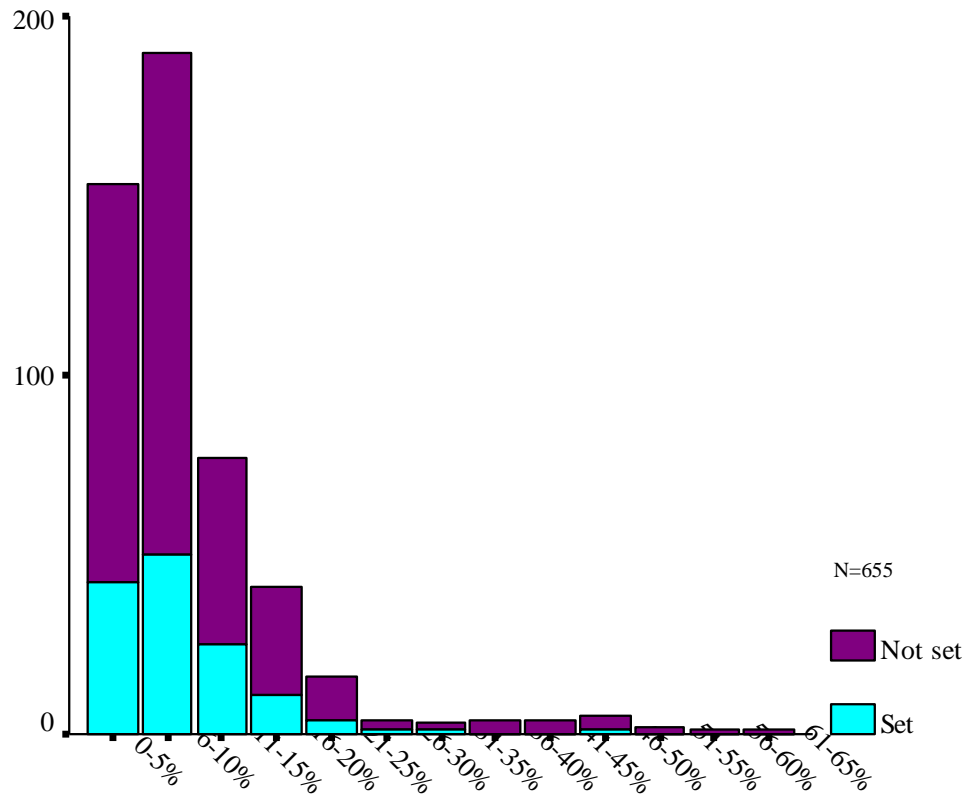


Figure 30. Percentage of SEN on the school roll and setting

Classroom organisation

Having looked at whole school organisation, I am now going to focus on teacher reports of how they organise their classrooms. As stated in the sample characteristics section, the number of pupils identified with SEN varied considerably across each class. When the variable of setting was superimposed on the data, this went some way to explain why some teachers had a class completely made up of pupils with SEN, while the majority of classes were between 0 and 25%: if a teacher has a set class they are more likely to have a higher percentage of pupils on the SEN register. This is illustrated in the Figure 31 below.

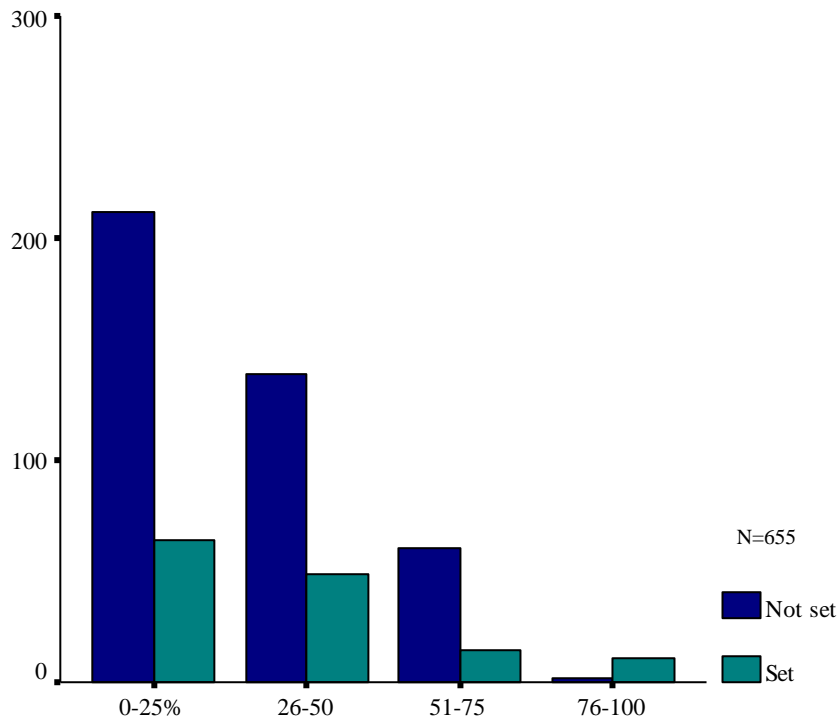


Figure 31. Percentage SEN in each class categorised by setting

It is argued that setting allows the targeting of resources, particularly additional support, to the pupils that need it most. This was certainly the case in my own experience (see Section 1.2.1). This could be particularly important for those teachers who have indicated teaching a class made up predominantly of pupils with SEN. To follow this aspect up, in Table j and Figure 32, it is possible to see the relationship between the percentage of pupils with SEN in the class and the amount of additional support provided.

The results are quite surprising with only minor correlation between the two factors: percentage of SEN and hours allocated. There is an average difference, between classes with 0-25% and 75-100% SEN, of fewer than two hours support time. Therefore, there seems to be little evidence to support the hypothesis that setting is

being used to effectively target the resource of extra adult support towards the needs of pupils with SEN. It would appear that the distribution of these hours is influenced by other factors.

Table j. Comparison of percentage SEN and hours of adult assistance

Count		Hours of adult support		
		0-5 hrs	6-10hrs	11-15hrs
Percentage SEN in class	0-25%	232	37	3
	26-50	152	29	1
	51-75	61	9	2
	76-100	7	6	1
Total		452	81	7

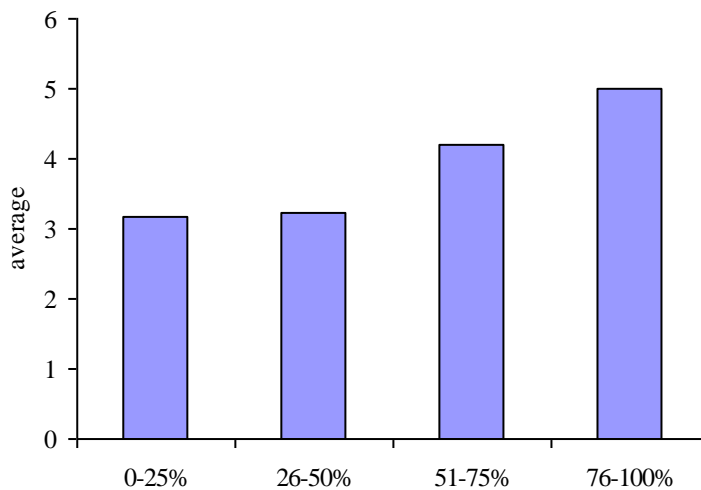


Figure 32. Relationship between average number of support hours received and percentage SEN in class

When teachers were asked to what extent they valued this extra assistance, the results were almost unanimous: 86% said it was ‘*very helpful*’ or ‘*essential*’ to their teaching. So it was important, considering the analysis of the allocation of support hours reported in Table j, to look further at how this support was used: whether in class or withdrawing pupils.

Teachers were asked to indicate the number of hours support they had from:

- staff trained in SEN: non-teaching staff with qualifications explicit to the teaching of pupils with SEN;
- specialist SENCO: a member of teaching staff, with no class of their own, employed and trained to work with pupils identified with SEN;
- general assistant: a non-teaching member of staff with no training in SEN; and
- Other (including nursery nurses and parental help)

They were also asked whether this support was used during the Literacy Hour, in or outside of the classroom. The results are shown in Figure 33.

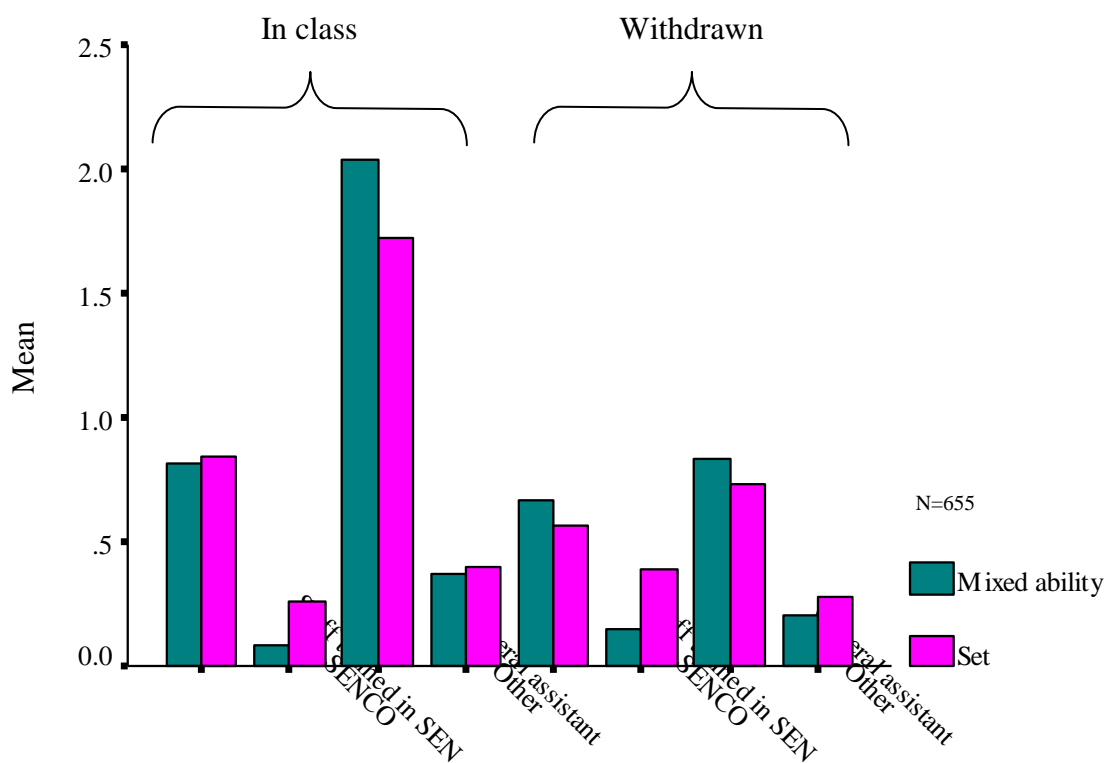


Figure 33. Use of adult support hours and the variable of setting

The analysis suggests staff with fewer qualifications, the general assistants and those classified as ‘other’, were less likely to withdraw pupils from the classroom. Staff trained in SEN were almost equally likely to be used in and out of the class, and the SENCO was more likely to withdraw pupils. When setting was looked at as a variable, it can be seen that the SENCO was more likely to give input when setting was implemented and the use of a general assistant was less likely. It was necessary to look at whether the latter result could be accounted for by the age of pupils: was a general assistant more common in the younger years, where setting was less common?

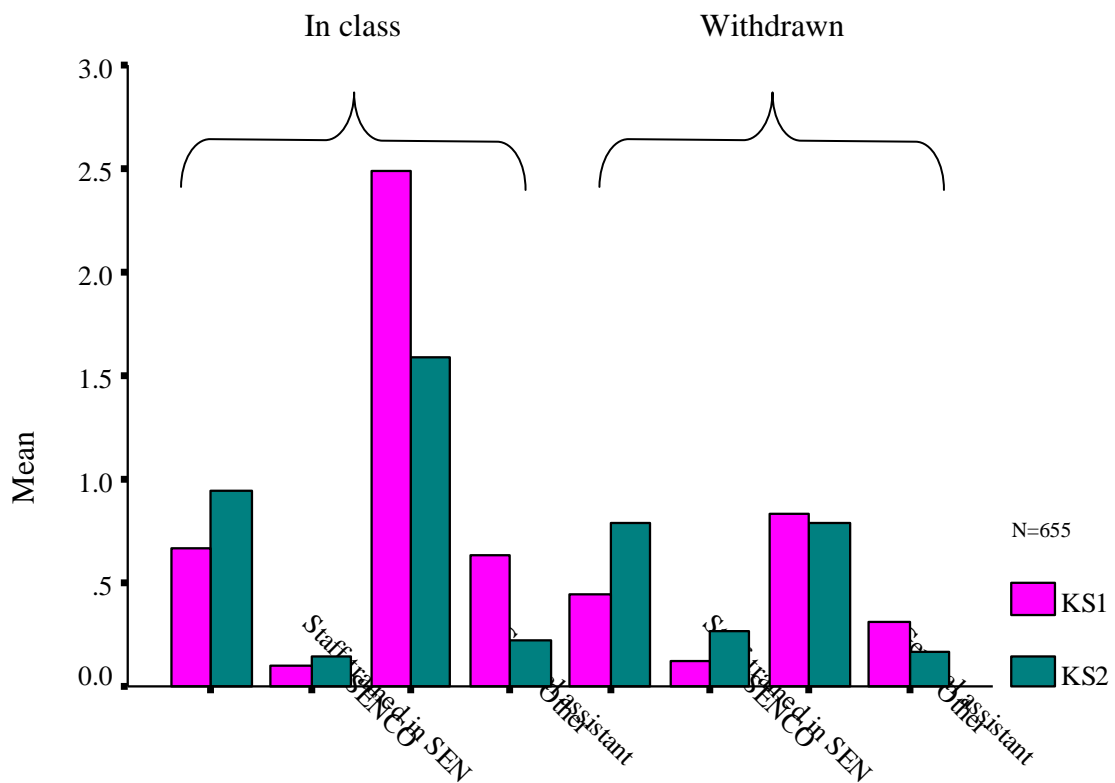


Figure 34. Use of adult support hours and the variable of Key Stage

It can be seen in Figure 34 that more qualified members of support staff were likely to be used in the older year groups. This may be because by Key Stage 2 pupils identified with SEN are likely to be further behind their peers, particularly in relation to the learning objectives set out in the NLS.

Finally, teachers were asked questions relating to how they targeted pupils with SEN and whether this affected the decision to set. It is often assumed that the increased homogeneity of sets means more group targets may be used, resulting in less differentiation and greater confidence that teachers are meeting the needs of pupils with SEN (Chapter 4). When teachers were asked to say how they used targets it was possible to see that those who taught a set were less likely to have individual IEP targets in favour of more group targets (see Figure 35), but this difference was not significant (as tested using an independent t-test).

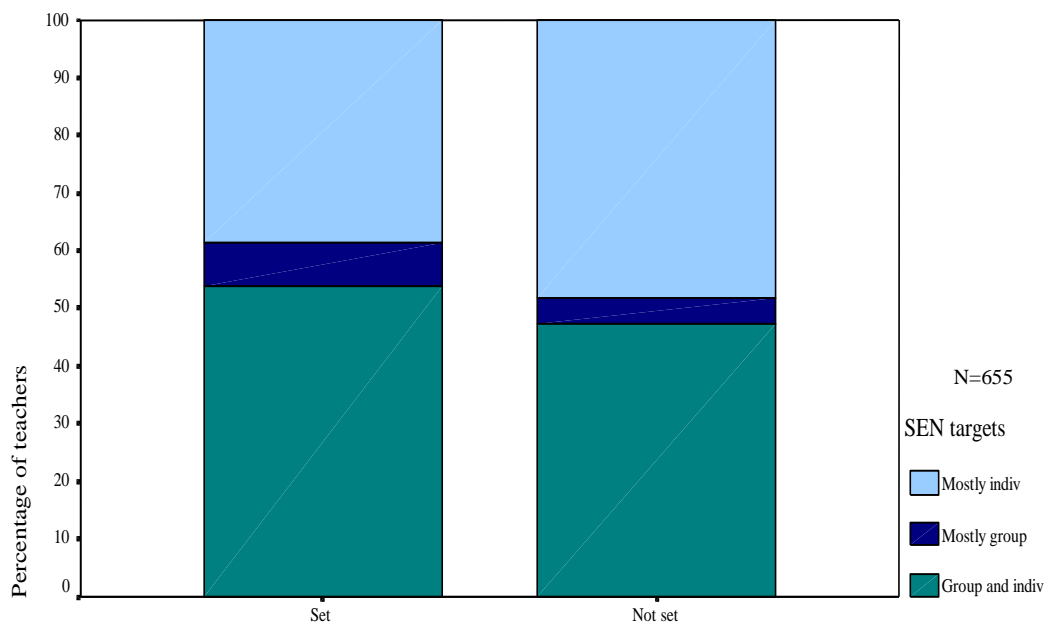


Figure 35. Types of targets used for pupils with SEN

Teachers indicated that they were equally likely to differentiate regardless of the grouping strategy (Table k).

Table k. The decision to differentiate

Count		Do you differentiate your teaching during LH?		
		No	Yes	Total
Set?	Set	4	165	169
	Not set	7	456	463
Total		11	621	632

Figure 36 shows differentiation strategies used by teachers varied little between those who taught mixed ability groups and those who taught sets. With each of the differentiation strategies the teachers were given, apart from providing ‘additional information’, there was a very slight increase in the likelihood they would be used in a mixed ability class, but this was not significant.

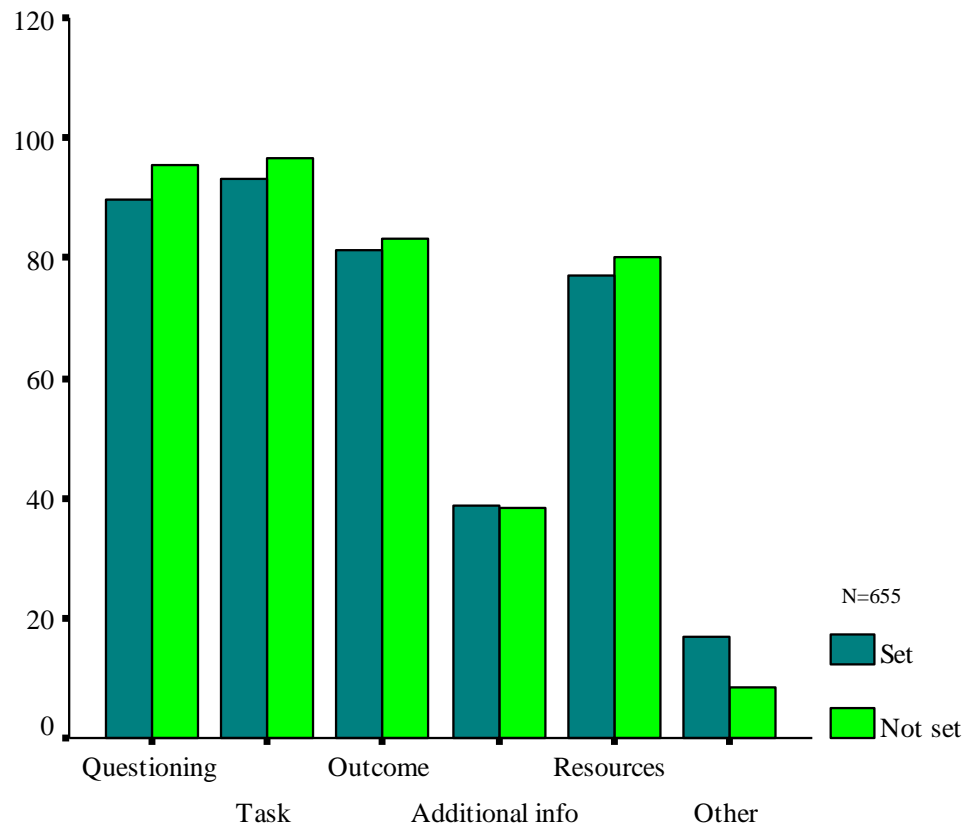


Figure 36. Differentiation strategies

Teachers were asked to rate the percentage of their teaching they felt was directed at the IEP targets of the pupils with SEN in their class. When the variable of setting was analysed, results showed there was a greater percentage of teaching directed at pupils with SEN when setting was implemented (Figure 37). An independent t-test showed this difference to be highly significant ($t=4.62, p<0.001$). It is argued that setting increases teachers' confidence that they are targeting pupils' needs (see Section 4.7), and this finding would appear to support that assertion.

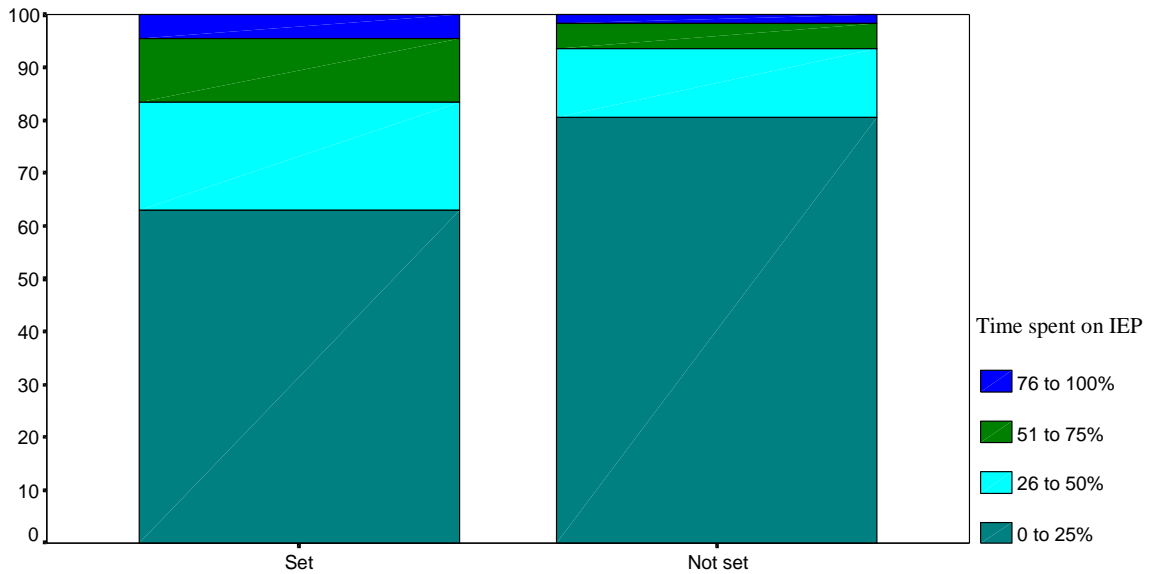


Figure 37. Time spent on meeting IEP targets

Timetabling of literacy

The teachers, in this section of the questionnaire, were asked to complete a blank timetable to show when all the different aspects of literacy were taught during a normal week. Six per cent of teachers did not complete this question, leaving a sample of 616. Its purpose was to investigate when the Literacy Hour was timetabled each day and if there were any extra sessions. The findings were analysed specifically in relation to the variable of setting, this study's focus.

The majority of Literacy Hours were timetabled for morning sessions, with 95% before lunch. Therefore, alongside the daily numeracy lesson, maths and English would dominate the morning. Consequently, if setting was in operation the majority of the morning would be spent in some form of ability grouping. This is further supported by the findings of the Setting Questionnaire (Section 6.3.4): if a school set for literacy, they were likely to do so for numeracy as well.

The results of the timetabling exercise also showed that teachers widely assumed that the Literacy Hour was not enough. It was common for extra sessions of literacy-based activities to be included elsewhere on the primary timetable. These extra sessions included the teaching of:

- handwriting;
- extended writing;
- spelling;
- quiet reading;
- story time; and
- Extra literacy support for pupils with SEN.

These sessions were commonly fitted into the timetable in small slots of time, for example, while the register was being taken or between the Literacy Hour and assembly; however, the important point here is if a policy of setting is used, to what extent is it applied to these additional aspects. This aspect will be developed in the discussion (Chapter 7).

Changes to the NLS to aid inclusion of pupils with SEN

The final question on the SEN Questionnaire was open ended and investigated teachers' views on changes that should be made to the NLS and the Literacy Hour for the benefit of pupils with SEN. Forty four per cent of the total sample of teachers did not answer this question, leaving a sample of 367. The answers to this question were analysed using a content analysis. Eighteen mutually exclusive categories were used under four headings; these are shown below (Table 1).

Table 1. Categories used for content analysis

Code (second-level):	Sub-code (first-level):
More teaching resources	1. More money
	2. More (trained) staff
	3. More differentiated resources
	4. More time
	5. More guidance
	6. Adaptation of ALS
NLS should be more flexible	7. Spread segments through the day
	8. Withdraw pupils with SEN
	9. Shift the focus (structure)
	10. Shift the focus (content)
	11. Trust professional judgement
	12. Flexibility works in Reception
NLS needs to be more realistic	13. More realistic targets
	14. There's too much to cover
NLS success is context-specific	15. It works when setting is implemented
	16. SEN like the structure
	17. Doesn't work with pupils with SEN
	18. Doesn't work with mixed year groups

The results show that setting was not mentioned by many teachers as a way of improving the teaching of the NLS for pupils with SEN: only 4% of teachers mentioned setting stating that it was a useful tool for aiding successful teaching of the NLS. Teachers who mentioned setting were significantly more likely to mention the need for realistic targets ($F=9.206$, $p<0.01$); but this was the only significant relationship found using an independent t-test and therefore the reliability has to be questioned (Sakoda *et al.* 1954); however, it is consistent with data collected as part of the Setting Questionnaire discussed in the following section (Section 6.3.4).

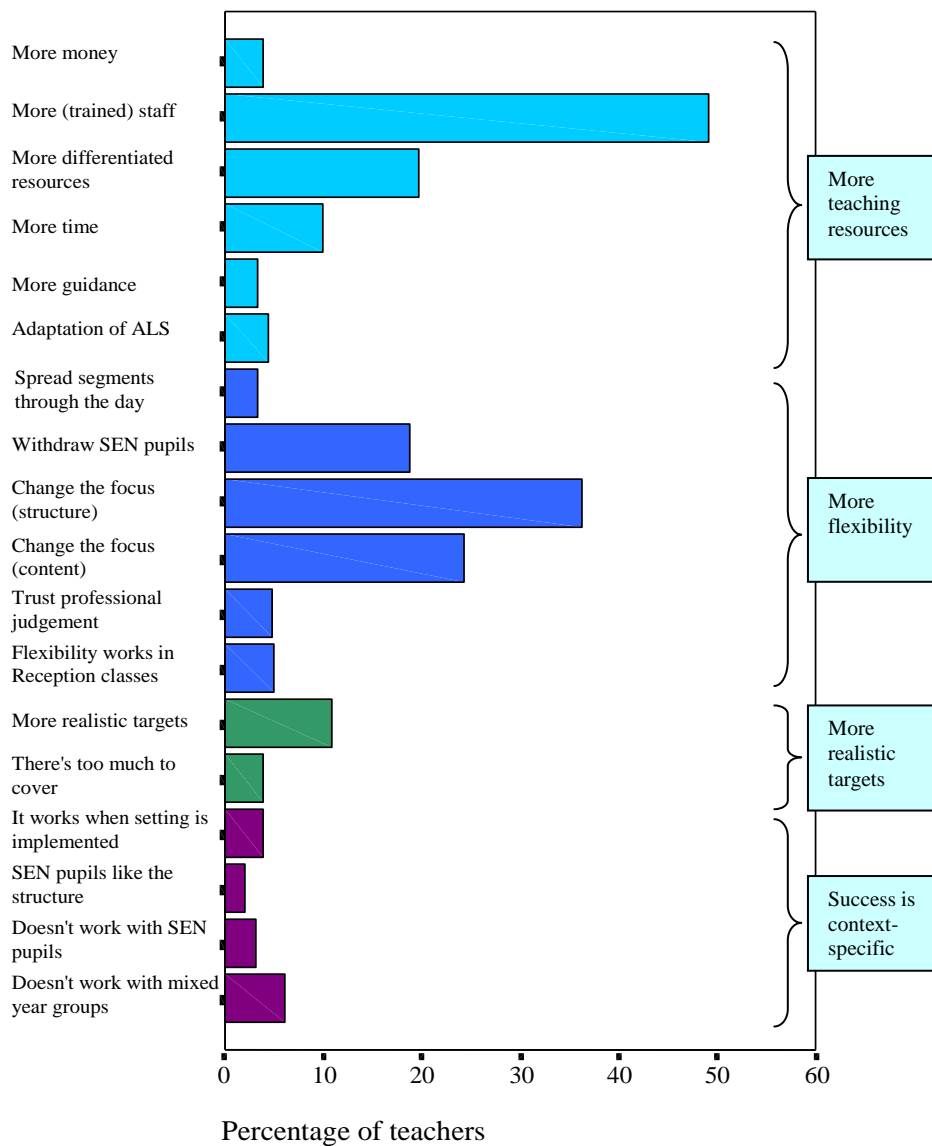


Figure 38. How teachers would change the NLS to benefit pupils with SEN

Summary of SEN Questionnaire

The SEN Questionnaire collected a wide range of information from a large, national sample of teachers. The results show that the use of setting is less than reported by the 1998 Ofsted survey and Hallam *et al.*'s study (2003). Setting was more commonly

used at Key Stage 2; however it was also used in the younger years. Most individual teachers did not appear to think setting was of benefit to pupils with SEN: there appear to be a number of other strategies employed by schools before setting, especially those associated with additional government funding. The use of extra adults was a very common and popular strategy, but was not used to complement setting.

Overall, the findings suggest there is no relationship between the percentage of pupils on the SEN register and the occurrence of setting: those schools with a relatively high population were unlikely to use setting. When teachers were asked about the changes they would make to the NLS and Literacy Hour, there appears to be some evidence of a link between ‘realistic targets’ and setting, which could add evidence to the claim of some that setting aids targeting of learning objectives (Section 4.7), or that setting is likely to be associated with a traditional curriculum dominated by target and testing (Section 2.5).

When teachers were asked about teaching specifically directed at pupils with SEN, setting was found to have a significant effect on how IEP targets were organised: group targets were common in sets, whereas individual targets were more likely in mixed ability classes. Although teachers did indicate that they felt they were meeting the needs of pupils identified with SEN in sets, with a greater percentage of their teaching targeted towards IEP targets.

The Literacy Hour was seen as being the main method for teaching literacy, although teachers felt the need to supplement the Literacy Hour with many other literacy activities at other times of the day. This finding means that the implementation of sets and, in consequence, the researching of their use for literacy becomes complex.

6.3.3 Setting Questionnaire: sample characteristics

The questionnaire was sent out in the spring term of 2003 to a national sample of 50 schools, one questionnaire per school. These schools were chosen because they had already taken part in the earlier studies (see Figure 8). This close association meant that a return rate of 58%, without reminders, was achieved (N=29).

6.3.4 Setting Questionnaire: results and analysis

Teachers completed different sections of the questionnaire depending on whether they indicated setting was used in their school for literacy or not. This was dictated by the first question.

Results showed that 59% of schools did use setting for literacy. This is significantly greater proportion (Chambers 1964) than that found with the SEN Questionnaire reported previously. However, the smaller sample size could have impacted on the result, as well as the fact that this was a questionnaire explicitly about setting and this could mean an increased likelihood of schools using setting completing it due to a vested interest in the research. In 1998, Ofsted found that primary schools were more likely to set for numeracy and these results support this. But it is only a slight difference: with 72% of schools setting for numeracy (four schools chose to set in

maths only). This is interesting considering the discussion in Chapter 3 about whether literacy would be treated in the same manner as numeracy. Evidence here suggests that some schools feel that numeracy is more suited to setting than literacy.

Two schools indicated their policy of setting extended outside of the Literacy Hour and daily maths lesson. In one school it was used for science lessons and in the other it was used more extensively across all National Curriculum subjects and RE. It could be argued the latter school is moving towards streaming rather than setting with such an extensive ability grouping policy.

The majority of schools that indicated they used setting did not extend the policy into other areas of the curriculum beyond literacy and numeracy. It would be interesting to explore reasons for this finding, whether, for example, a desire to keep negative effects to self-esteem to a minimum, or the government focus on literacy and numeracy meant it is not considered as important for those other areas. I would suspect it is a mixture of both; however, since science is also tested in the Year 6 SATs, along with numeracy and literacy, it is interesting to note how rarely sets are used in this subject. This could suggest that the link of setting to testing processes is wrong.

The size of school, as measured by the number of pupils on the school roll, did seem to influence the likelihood of setting being introduced within the sample: 14 out of the 17 (82%) schools operating a policy of setting had over 200 pupils.

When asked which year the policy of setting was implemented, results were interesting (see Figure 39). It can be seen that 41% of the schools which used setting for literacy had implemented the policy in the same school year that the NLS was introduced, in 1998/1999. Only three schools had used setting for literacy before this date and since this point the number of schools making the decision has remained fairly constant. It is interesting to note that even in the last school year included in the survey, four years after the implementation of the Literacy Hour, schools were still choosing to set; it does not appear to be a strategy on the decrease.

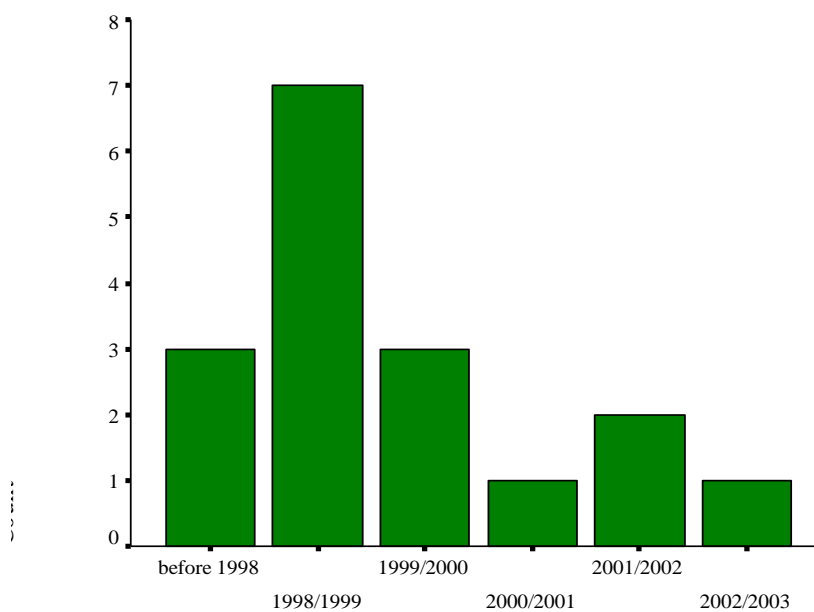


Figure 39. Setting for literacy by school year

It would appear from Figure 40 that setting for numeracy has also been influenced by the introduction of the NLS, with most schools introducing setting in the same year as the NLS was introduced, a year before the NNS came into being in September 1999. This finding might indicate a change in ethos spurred on by the introduction of the NLS and the dedicated Literacy Hour; it could also be related to objective driven

curricula, an increased focus on testing and accountability with Ofsted inspections, or the need for increased inclusion.

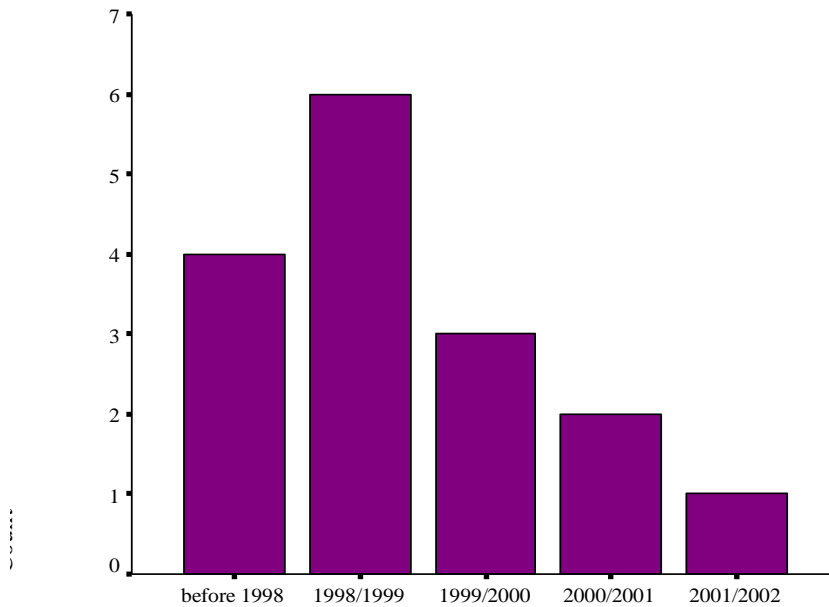


Figure 40. Setting for numeracy by school year

Teachers were asked to indicate in which year group setting was implemented. As can be seen in Figure 41, setting for literacy, just as in the SEN Questionnaire, was across the primary age phase right down into Reception classes. It was more common in Key Stage 2, but 20% of 4 year olds included in the sample were being set for literacy.

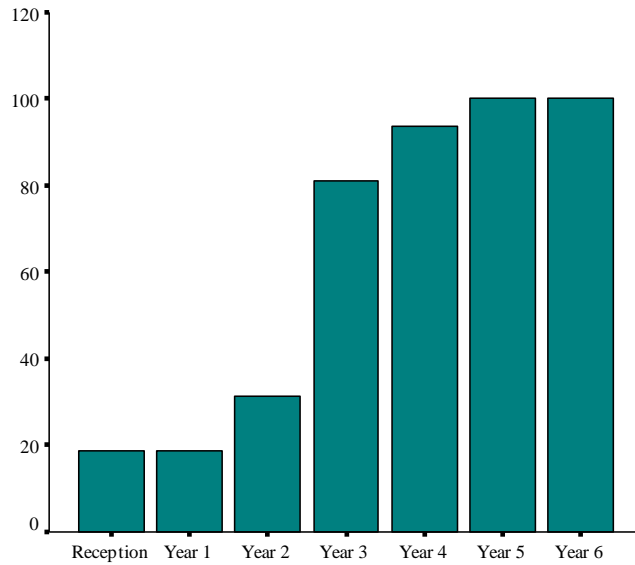


Figure 41. Setting for literacy across the primary age phase

In numeracy the pattern was very similar, with most setting arrangements being used at Key Stage 2, however it was also used in the Early Years.

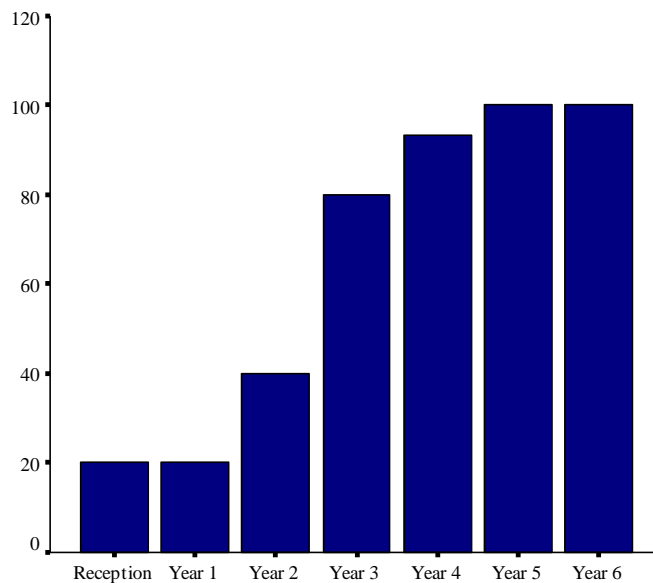


Figure 42. Setting for numeracy across the primary age phase

The second group of questions asked teachers about why their school had or had not implemented setting for literacy. The teachers were given a list of possible reasons

and were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert scale, how important they were in their decision making process

For those schools operating a setting policy, it can be seen that the decision covered many different aspects of curriculum delivery (Figure 43). The most common factors were: targeting learning objectives; challenging able pupils; improving teaching quality; and targeting a range of abilities. Through setting, teachers often claimed they were meeting the needs of pupils, reflecting the findings of the SEN Questionnaire. It also might explain why setting was more likely to be implemented at the same time as the NLS: because teachers saw it as a strategy for dealing with a diverse range of abilities during whole class teaching.

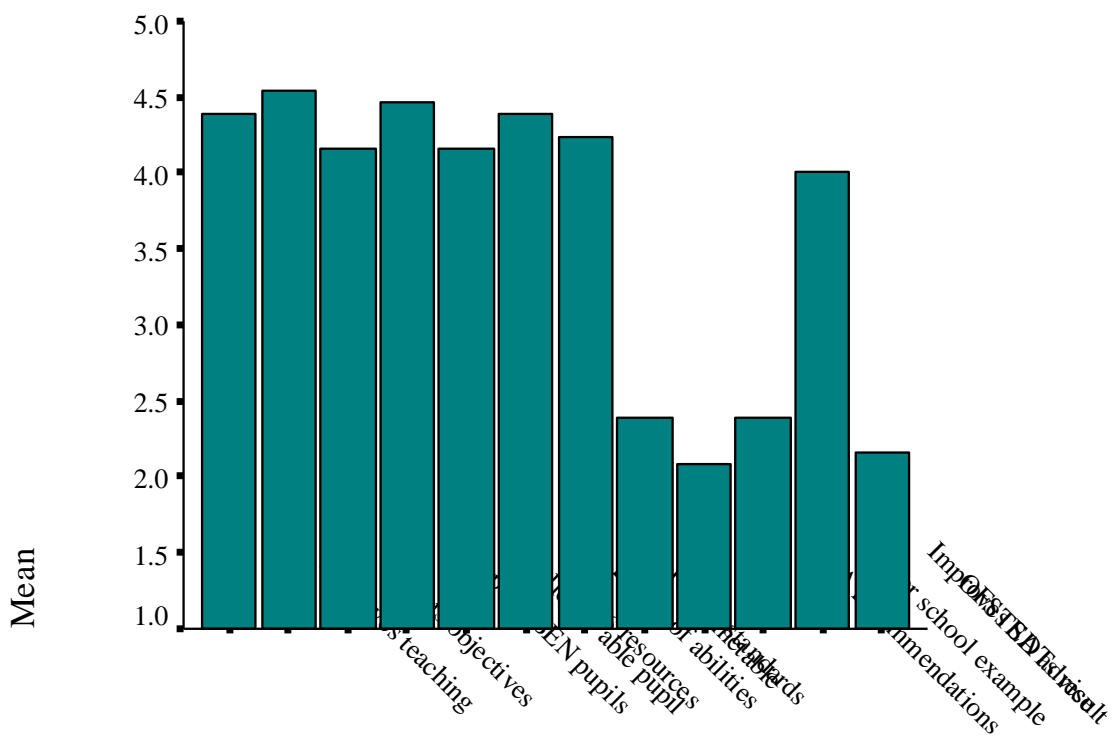


Figure 43. Reasons for schools choosing to set for literacy

The findings show setting to be a decision relatively unaffected by outside influences, such as Ofsted, the LEA and other schools. The teachers indicated they were more influenced by considerations associated with the demographics of the school and the challenges of teaching the NLS.

So what about schools who choose not to set? Again teachers were asked to rate a number of statements on a five-point Likert scale; however this time they had to consider the effect of a theoretical setting policy for literacy in their school (Figure 44).

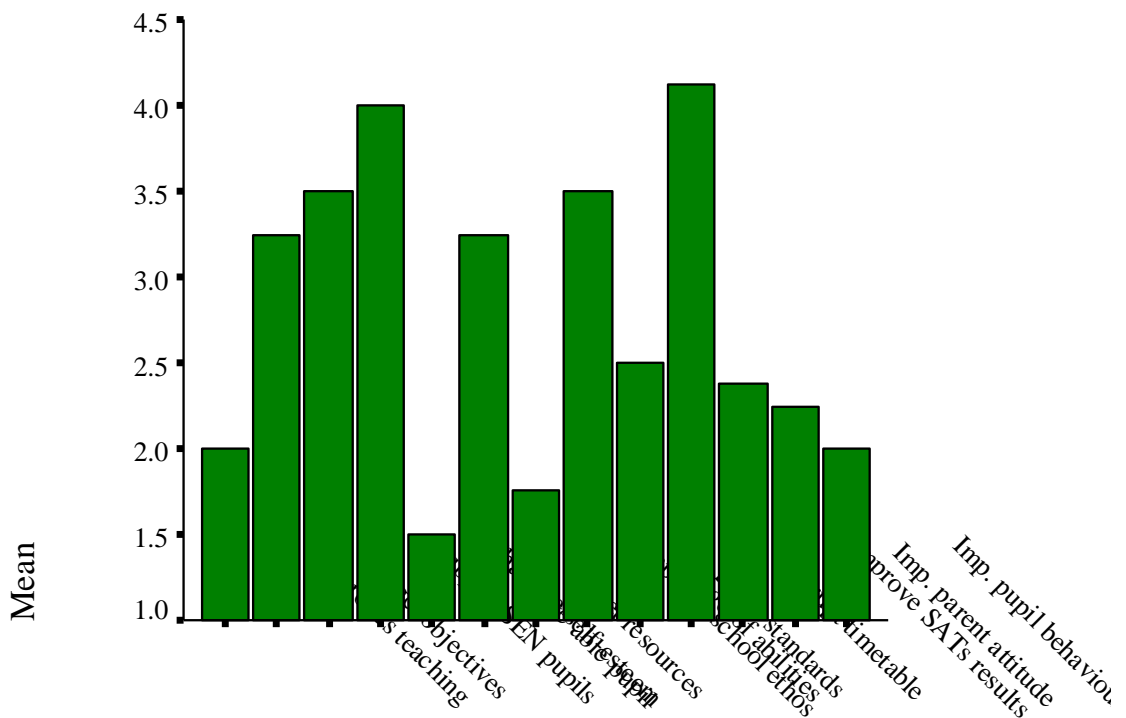


Figure 44. Reasons for schools choosing not to set for literacy

This graph shows teachers considered pupil self esteem, school ethos and disruption of the timetable to be the most likely consequences of introducing a policy of setting. This fits in with most research which is critical of ability grouping, contributing to its demise in the second part of the Twentieth Century, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In contrast to the schools choosing to set, there is a strong belief that the quality of teaching will not be improved by setting. However, these teachers did appear to agree with the statement that setting could help deliver the curriculum to a wide range of abilities and stretch able pupils.

6.3.5 Summary of Setting Questionnaire

The Setting Questionnaire has highlighted a number of issues regarding the implementation of setting. As with the SEN Questionnaire, setting has been found to be a strategy commonly used to organise pupils for literacy throughout the primary age phase. The introduction of setting appears to have been strongly influenced by the implementation of the NLS and, in particular, the specification of a daily hour of literacy. If a school sets for literacy then this is very likely to cross over into numeracy; the introduction of the NLS appears to have been a catalyst for setting in both English and maths.

With regard to why schools implement setting, it appears pupils with SEN are not a prime concern: I have suggested this might be because other strategies are considered to be more appropriate. Raising standards and achieving SATs targets are not rated as highly as might have been expected. However, the targeting of learning objectives to

a wide range of abilities does seem to be seen as an advantage of setting for teachers whether or not they are implementing it in their school. This could be related to the introduction of the NLS and the subsequent increase in whole class teaching.

6.4 The impact of setting

It is all very well asking teachers and pupils about their perspectives of the National Literacy Strategy and setting, but it is also important to look at the impact of such policies on learning outcomes and classroom practice. This section, therefore, will report on evidence of the impact of setting for literacy on value-added attainment data for reading and teacher-pupil patterns of interaction.

6.4.1 Effects on teacher-pupil interaction: sample characteristics

The observation sample covered classes across the primary age phase: Reception to Year 6. 54% of the teachers taught in Key Stage 2, with a further quarter in Reception. Most of the teachers taught a mixed ability class, but 26% taught a set. The distribution of this is shown in Figure 45 below.

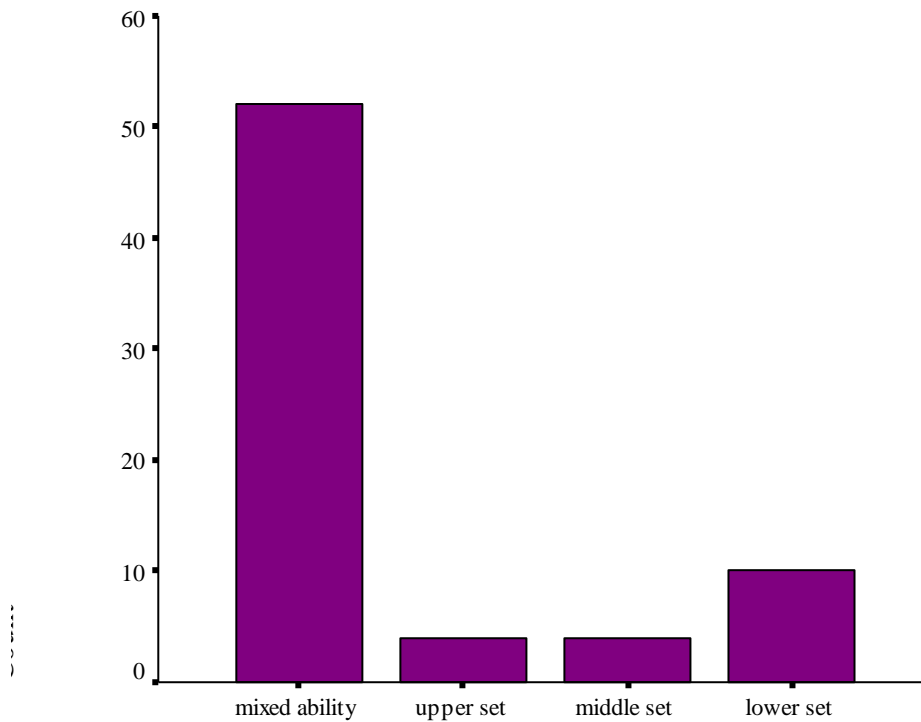


Figure 45. Class composition of sample teachers

Classes included an average of 54% male pupils. The classes ranged in size from ten to 33 pupils, with an average of 29% pupils identified with SEN (standard deviation = 22.89). The way setting affected these statistics can be seen in Figure 46. Lower sets were likely to be smaller classes and also, as might be expected, to have a greater percentage of pupils with SEN. However, it is also interesting to note that larger classes in upper and middle sets appear to counter balance this reduction in pupil numbers in lower sets.

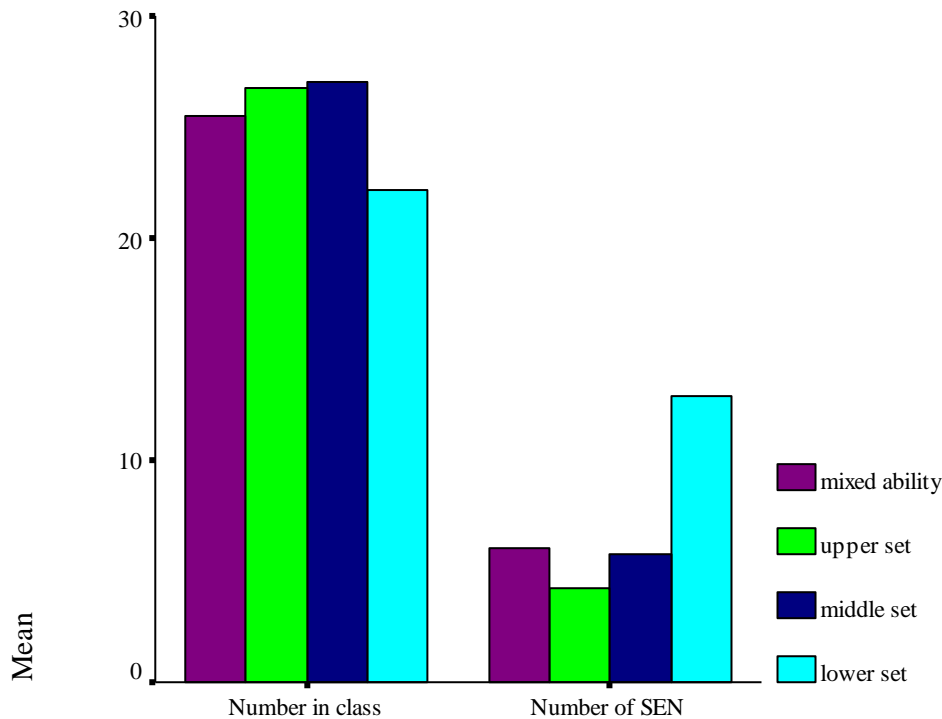


Figure 46. How setting affected class composition

6.4.2 Effects on teacher-pupil interaction: results and analysis

The average length of 70 Literacy Hours observed was 57 minutes (standard deviation = 11 minutes). Sixty four per cent of the teachers followed the prescribed format of the Literacy Hour; however others included more than one group session or separated the whole class section into two or more teaching inputs. No significant differences in the length of the Hour or the different sections were found when the variable of setting was investigated using a One-way ANOVA. It might have been expected that teachers with a set would have more freedom to ‘play’ with the structure of the Hour, to make sure it fitted the needs of the class, but this was evidently not the case. The sample as a whole was found to spend slightly more time on the group work than prescribed by the *Framework*. This extra time was made within the Hour by reducing

the plenary to an average of five minutes (see Figure 47). No significant impact could be found for the variable of setting on the duration of any of these sections.

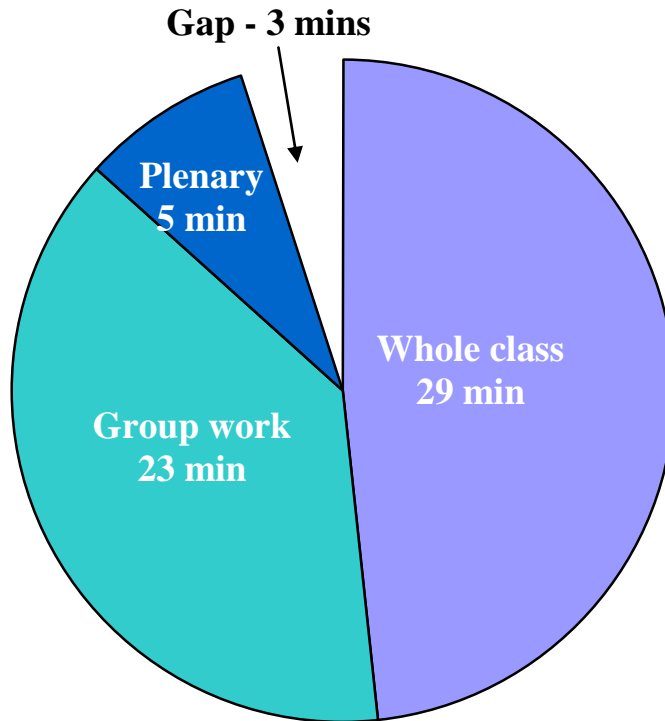


Figure 47. Stages of the Literacy Hour

Teacher-initiated patterns of interaction

Next I looked at teacher-initiated patterns of interaction and how setting influenced this. All the averages in this and the next section (looking at pupil initiated behaviours) will be per hour, i.e. the number of occasions each behaviour occurred within the Literacy Hour. Percentages would have been inaccurate, as the duration of each event was not recorded.

Figure 48 shows the profile of teacher-initiated behaviours in a typical Literacy Hour, the definitions of each of the behaviours is included in Appendix 11. It shows closed

questions were most frequently used by teachers, followed by direction and explanation. The least frequent behaviours were uptake questions, writing and answering a pupil question (all with an average of less than four per hour).

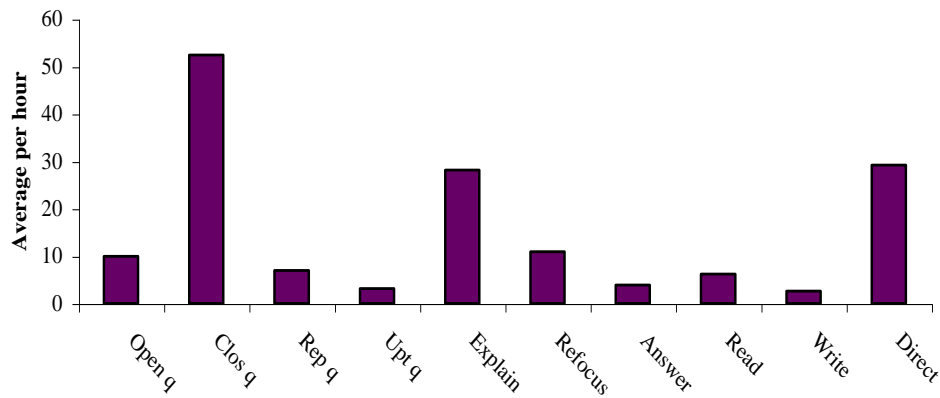


Figure 48. Profile of teacher initiated patterns of interaction in a 'typical' Literacy Hour (n=70)

It is now important to separate the whole class teaching from the group time. I have argued that whole class teaching time is of central importance to this thesis as it is the time when most direct teaching is completed. This is where the majority of teacher concerns reside in relation to whether or not they are meeting the needs of a diverse spread of ability, and whether or not they should implement setting to addressing the range of need.

When a comparison of teacher-initiated patterns of interaction in the whole class teaching and the group time is looked at (Figure 49), it can be seen there are a number of important differences: the whole class teaching is characterised by more explaining, reading, repeat, open and uptake questions, whereas the group time has

more direction and teacher answers. All these differences were found to be very significant ($p < 0.001$) using an independent t-test.

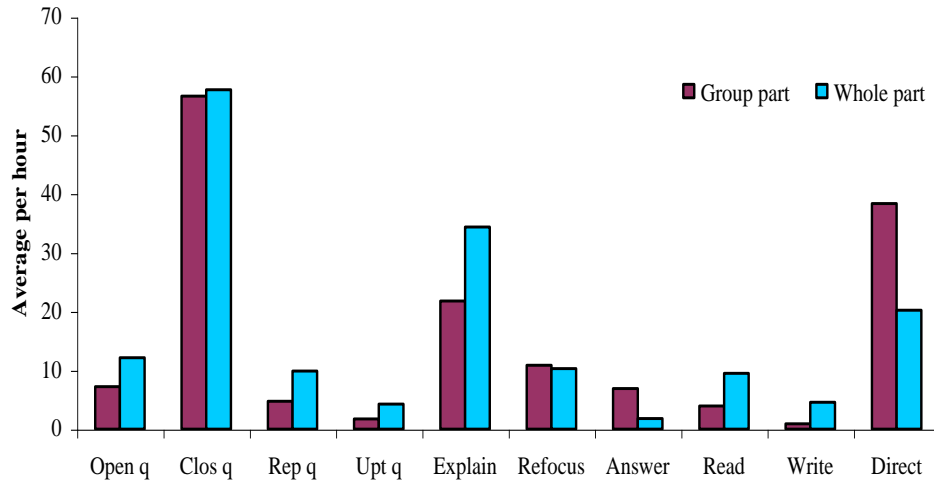


Figure 49. Teacher initiated patterns of interaction in the whole class and group time

Next I focused on differences between teacher-initiated patterns of interaction in sets and mixed ability classes. Firstly, I will consider profiles across the whole Literacy Hour (Figure 50). Teachers with an upper set were shown to be significantly more likely to ask uptake questions than those teaching a lower set or mixed ability class, and were also more likely to demonstrate writing (as tested using a one-way ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc).

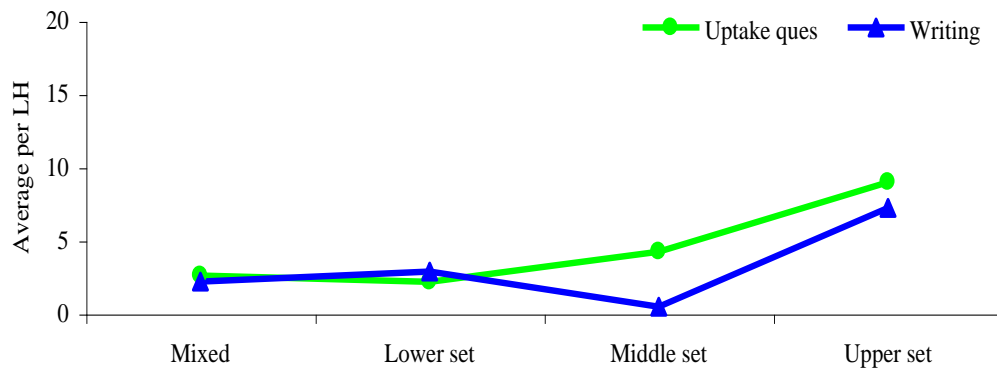


Figure 50. The affect of setting on the interaction profile of the whole Literacy Hour

The most interesting observation of the analysis was the similarity between mixed ability classes and lower sets. It appears that pupils in upper sets benefit from setting by engaging in high order patterns of interaction. This finding appears to back up results of the teacher’s perspective section that setting might be a positive strategy for able pupils. It would appear that pupils with SEN receive similar patterns of interaction whether taught in a set or mixed ability class.

I can hypothesise a number of possible reasons for the differences in style of interaction. Uptake questions represent a high order pattern of interaction and maybe for classes including pupils with SEN it is not felt to be appropriate to use complex language; this would relate to the arguments of Dombey (1998) and Lewis (1998) discussed in Chapter 3. It could be that teachers teaching an upper set feel more confident to follow up pupils’ ideas, using their answers to direct the discussion .For example, this could be due to the children being better able to respond to complex interaction or the decreased levels of misbehaviour (discussed later in this section) mean they are more able to follow ideas through to their conclusion.

In relation to teachers demonstrating writing more in upper sets, I am not so confident of explaining the difference. Perhaps, in lower sets, where behaviour could be more of an issue, teachers are unwilling to turn their back on the class to write on the board. It is also, even with the quickest writer, quite a drawn out process affecting the pace of the lesson, which might have negative affects in a lower set where attention spans might not be as long.

Focusing now on teacher-initiated patterns of interaction in the whole class section, it is important to ask what affect setting has in these sections of the Hour.

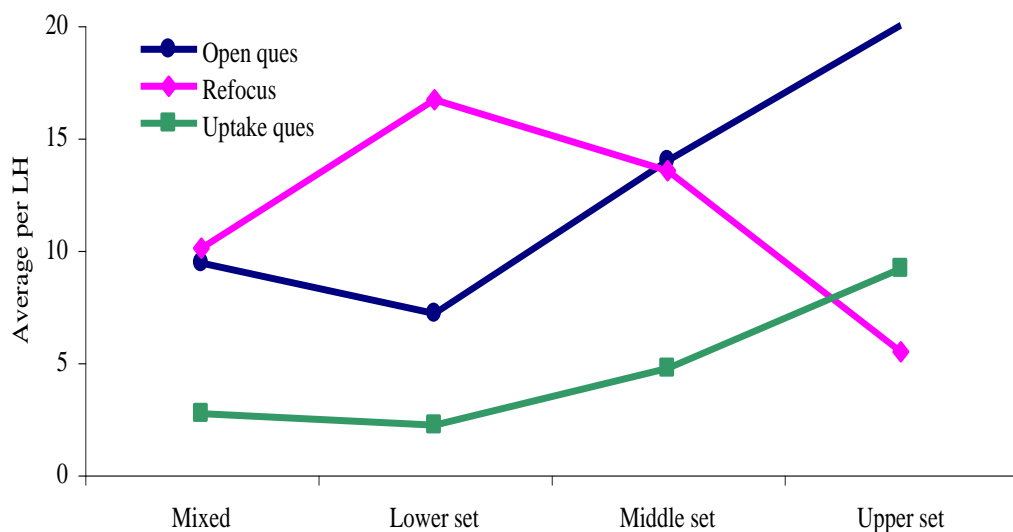


Figure 51. The affect of setting on the patterns of interaction profile of the whole class section

The graph above shows that pupil behaviour appears to be an issue during the whole class section in lower sets. There was significantly more refocusing behaviour in lower sets than in mixed ability classes and upper sets. If teachers have to refocus

pupils to such an extent in lower sets then surely there is an indication that far from benefiting pupils with SEN, setting reduces the amount of direct teaching they receive. This could explain the findings from the value-added scores in the final section of this chapter.

The effect for uptake questions remains: they are more common in upper sets than mixed ability classes and lower sets. However, in the whole class section of the Literacy Hour, a one-way ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc also showed the same significant trend for the amount of open questions asked: teachers with lower sets and mixed ability classes asked less. It is important to ask whether these differences are because of the curriculum content or the fact that pupils with SEN are present in the lower sets and mixed ability classes.

In that the NLS: *Framework for Teachers* recommends that to find learning objectives for pupils not working at the age related norm that is given, the teacher needs to track forwards or backwards to find learning objectives that are applicable. Therefore, one way the effect of the curriculum content can be explored further is by looking at the differences between the Key Stages. It might be expected in Key Stage 1, where content is somewhat similar to that appropriate for pupils with SEN, the patterns of interaction will be similar to that seen in lower sets.

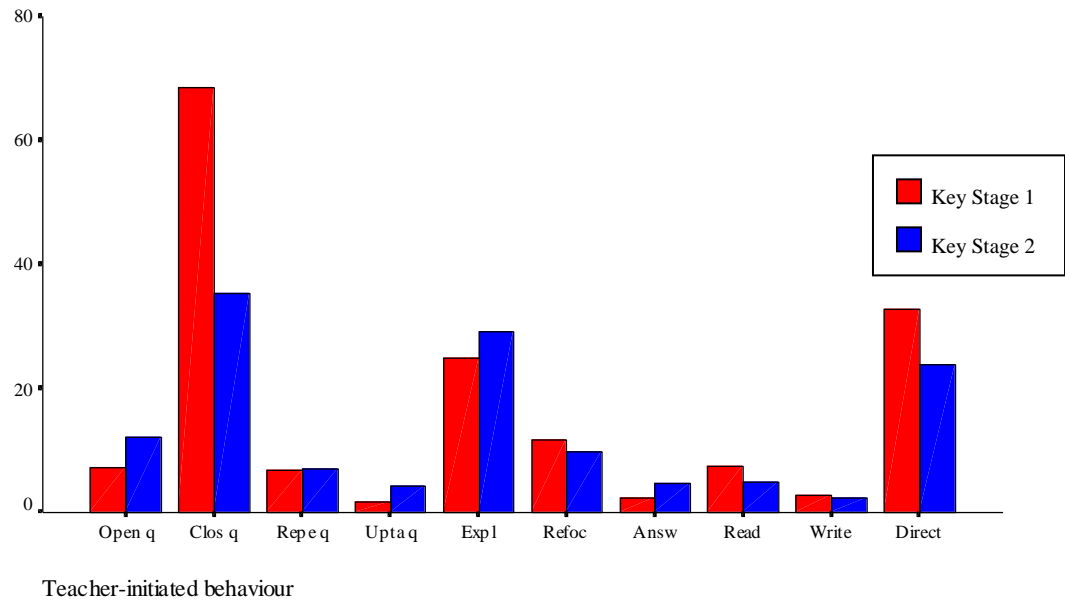


Figure 52. Differences in teacher-initiated patterns of interaction across the Key Stages

Independent t-test were used to show that Key Stage 1 teachers asked significantly more closed questions ($t=4.85$, $p<0.001$) and used more direction ($t=2.80$, $p<0.01$) than Key Stage 2 teachers. In terms of the patterns of interaction likely to be seen in upper sets, open questions ($t=-2.79$, $p<0.01$) and uptake questions ($t=-3.08$, $p<0.01$) were significantly more common in Key Stage 2 classes. There is some evidence therefore, that content might influence the patterns of interaction used by teachers. Any differences which could be attributed to the differences between text, sentence and word level work should be reduced due to the observations being completed over the two 15 minute whole class sessions and the number of observations completed.

From the findings, it seems that setting benefits able pupils more, in terms of the quality of the types of teacher-pupil interactions. Higher order patterns of interaction, which might be appropriate for the content at older levels of the NLS, are less likely

to be used when pupils with SEN are in the class. When pupils with SEN are specifically focused on, an increase in refocusing in lower sets seems to indicate they are better off in mixed ability classes. However, in the observation sample characteristics, it was seen that lower sets tended to be smaller, so it is going to be important to explore whether the disadvantages, in particular the potential of increased issues related to behaviour, of being in a lower set are balanced out by greater involvement of pupils with SEN in smaller sets. These pupil initiated patterns of interaction will be explored next.

Pupil-initiated patterns of interaction

Pupil-initiated patterns of interaction were dominated by answers to teacher questions: making up 86% of pupil contributions (Table m). As discussed earlier, for the observations four specific pupils identified with SEN by the class teacher were focused on and these were coded as ‘SEN’ (see Section 5.6.4). When any other pupil spoke they were coded as ‘other’, and when the class responded as a whole it was coded as ‘whole’. It should be remembered throughout that pupils with SEN also play a part when the whole class speak.

Table m. Pupil-initiated behaviours

Behaviour	Frequency	Percentage
Open question	17	0.3%
Closed question	53	1.0%
Explain	75	1.4%
Answer	4468	85.7%
Read	534	10.2%
Write	65	1.2%
Total	5212	100%

Due to the fact that answering was the most common pupil-initiated move, this will now be focused on. Figure 53 shows that the four pupils with SEN contributed 20% of the time to the lesson. This is a relatively high percentage considering they were just four of them in classes that averaged 25 pupils, particular since there would also be taking part through the whole class route.

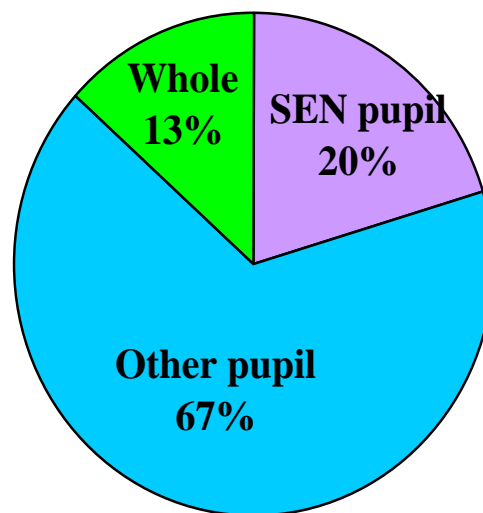


Figure 53. Pupil contributions

When the variable of setting was focused on, no difference could be found between the number of answers given by pupils with SEN in sets and those in mixed ability classes. There appears to be no evidence to support the theory that pupils with SEN will benefit in sets due to increased participation (see argument on the previous page): pupils with SEN seem to play a prominent role regardless of class composition. This could be because teachers focus on them more than other pupils, aware of their needs due to IEPs etc., or that they are more likely to be demanding pupils who draw the teacher's attention. Alternatively, it could be a result of the Observer Paradox (Labov 1994): the teachers were aware of our focus and so steered the lesson accordingly.

Observation summary

In summary, the observations indicate that setting results in differentiated patterns of interaction during the Literacy Hour. However, this differentiation appears to be of most benefit to able pupils because of the higher order patterns of interaction used by teachers. There is some evidence to suggest the content being taught influences the patterns of interaction being used, with higher order patterns of interaction being less associated with content appropriate to younger classes, lower sets and mixed ability classes.

Pupils with SEN appear to gain little from the setting process: there is no difference between the amount they contribute to lessons in mixed ability classes and sets. Indeed, in lower sets, the amount of refocusing teachers' use would suggest there could be adverse effects from the ability grouping process for these children.

6.4.3 Effects on achievement

Named value-added reading data was gathered from the PIPs database at Durham University for all pupils in the observed classes (see Section 5.6.5). An independent t-test comparison was used to compare progress of pupils with SEN (the four pupils identified by their teacher as having the most severe literacy need in the class) and their peers in set and mixed ability classes.

Analysis for the rest of the class (pupils labelled as 'other') shows setting did not have any impact on their attainment ($p=0.76$). Therefore, regardless of the differentiation of

teacher-initiated patterns of interaction there seems to be little evidence of benefit from setting for pupils *not* identified as SEN. However, a word of caution needs to be expressed here, it could be that this group is too large and diverse for an effect to be found; however it adds to the evidence.

When pupils with SEN were focused on the results were very different. The independent t-test showed a highly significant negative effect on pupil attainment when setting was implemented ($F=7.64$, $p<0.001$). This is a significant piece of evidence against setting and can be seen clearly in Figure 54 below.

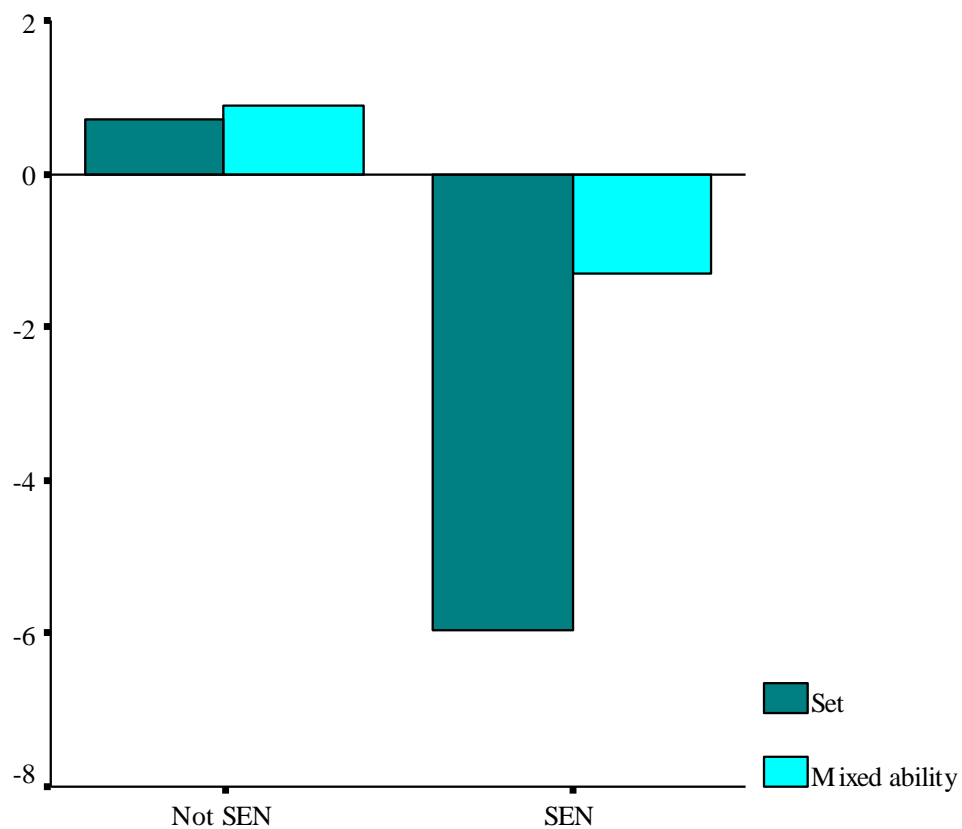


Figure 54. The effect of setting on value added reading scores

It is apparent that pupils with SEN performed significantly worse in sets than in mixed ability classes. There could be many reasons for this, such as the issue of behaviour problems in the lower sets, the positive affects of academic role models in mixed ability classes, or teacher attitudes and strategies applied to teaching and learning in sets. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

6.5 Summary of results

Evidence collected as part of the setting questionnaire indicated that the introduction of setting into primary schools seems to have been in direct relationship to the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy. The actual percentage of schools implementing setting for literacy was difficult to pin down: the two national questionnaires showed setting was used in many primary schools in England, ranging from 37% in the SEN Questionnaire to 59% in the Setting Questionnaire. Setting appeared to be more common in numeracy, although this subject related difference was not as significant as suggested by Ofsted (1998b). However, it was particularly interesting to see the extent to which schools indicated using setting in the younger year groups.

Teachers perceived an advantage of setting to be the better matching of learning objectives to the ability of the pupils and this was closely linked to the diversity of a mixed ability class to which the NLS needed to be taught. Other teachers felt the advantages of setting included challenging more able pupils, raising standards, improving teaching, supporting pupils with SEN, and delivering the curriculum to a wide range of abilities.

Despite the perceived advantages of setting expressed by teachers, grouping children by ability appeared to increase the amount of behaviour issues associated with grouping pupils in lower sets. The Computerised Observations indicated that teachers with a lower set refocused significantly more than teachers with upper sets or mixed ability classes. In addition, evidence from the value-added reading scores of pupils taught literacy in and out of sets showed pupils with SEN achieving significantly less well when taught in sets compared to mixed ability classes.

The Pupil Questionnaire also appeared to contradict many of the teachers' perceptions. Although there was evidence to support setting from the attitudes of pupils in mixed ability classes: the pupils at the two extremes of the ability spectrum, the able and SEN, were more negative towards whole class sections of the Literacy Hour when it could be argued teachers were not effectively targeting their needs. After setting had been implemented it was only the pupils with SEN who appeared to benefit, indicating slightly more positive attitudes. This small change from pupils with SEN was off-set by a negative change in the attitudes from their peers, the average and able pupils.

Although much of the evidence would appear to indicate a decision against setting for literacy, there is some tentative evidence, from the Pupil Questionnaire, that indicates that the decision to set for literacy is not as simple as a yes or no. If the suppositions I made in Chapter 3 are correct and the pupil attitudes are taken into consideration it could be suggested that different elements of literacy might be more or less suited to

the setting process. If nothing else this finding broadens the debate surrounding setting for literacy.

Through the multi-method research design and the three-part structure to my study there are a number of interesting and contrasting issues which have emerged with regard to teaching and learning in the National Literacy Strategy and the decision to set. The next chapter will discuss these findings and link them to the literature discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4; in such a way it will enable conclusions and implications of the study to be made in Chapter 8.

Chapter 7 – Discussion: balancing traditional and progressive influences on primary literacy

7.1 Introduction

This study has:

- investigated, within the context of the National Literacy Strategy, the potential impact of mixed ability and set classes on teaching and learning, with particular attention to teacher-pupil interaction patterns and pupils' reading attainment;
- examined the supposition that setting is associated with greater inclusion of pupils at either end of the ability spectrum and the possible impact of this on pupils' attitudes;
- explored teachers' rationales for introducing setting and their perceptions of ability grouping with relation to the National Literacy Strategy; and
- looked at the strategies teachers¹ are using within the Literacy Hour to include pupils and the extent to which setting influences these practices.

As stated in the methodology chapter, one of the common issues with a multi-method approach is making sure the different elements complement each other to ensure an overall coherence to the study (Section 5.4.1). Table n, therefore, on the next page uses my subsidiary research questions, which represent each of these themes, to structure a tabulated summary of the results from the five data collection methods used in this study.

Table n. Summary of results

DATA COLLECTION TOOL	What impact are the different organisational groupings having?	How do pupils' perceptions to the NLS differ under mixed ability and set organisational groups?	What beliefs and attitudes do teachers hold regarding the use of mixed ability and set classes?	What strategies are teachers using to address the need for inclusion in the Literacy Hour?
Pupil Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils with SEN were slightly more positive in sets • Average pupils and able pupils were more negative when sets were used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes to the Literacy Hour were positive overall, setting did not bring about a consistent change in attitudes • Attitudes to whole class word and text level work were the least popular, setting did not impact upon this • In mixed ability classes average pupils were more positive than their SEN and able peers • Setting made the able pupils significantly more negative regarding text level whole class teaching • Pupils with SEN were slightly more positive to all aspects of the Literacy Hour in sets • Attitudes of average pupils became more negative after setting had been implemented • The plenary received consistently more negative attitudes when setting had been implemented • Pupils with SEN found independent work very difficult • Different elements of literacy would appear to be more or 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils with SEN in sets were more likely to mention the name of an extra adult when taught in a set

		<p>less suited to setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age and/or independence of pupils could impact on success/failure of setting 		
SEN Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was no significant change in the type of target used for pupils with SEN when setting was used Setting did not impact on the likelihood of differentiation strategies being used Setting increased the likelihood of classes with 100% SEN Setting increased teacher confidence that they were meeting the needs of SEN pupils in their class The Literacy Hour was often supplemented by literacy activities at other times of the day 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting was implemented in 37% of schools Setting was being used most commonly in older years, but was evident in younger classes too Larger schools were more likely to set Setting was not evident in schools with high percentages of SEN, instead it was more common in schools with less than 25% Setting was not commonly associated by teachers with the inclusion of pupils with SEN, other strategies were more likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting was not the most common strategy used by schools for inclusion of pupils with SEN There was a small correlation between the number of support hours allocated to classes and the percentage of SEN Teachers valued extra adult support highly and were more likely to use trained support when setting was implemented Teachers were widely supplementing the Literacy Hour with activities such as extended writing and reading Supplementary support for SEN in literacy was completed out of the Hour Whole language approaches were most common outside of the Literacy Hour
Setting Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fears about setting included impacts on pupils' self-esteem, impacts on school ethos and timetable disruption Setting increased teacher confidence that they were meeting the needs of their class Schools not using setting indicated they believed that using setting would not 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 59% of schools used setting 41% of schools started using setting when the NLS and Literacy Hour were introduced Some schools were more likely to set in numeracy than literacy Larger schools were more likely to set Setting was used most often in older years, but was evident in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting was perceived to be useful for targeting a range of abilities Setting was thought to be most beneficial for challenging able pupils and targeting a range of abilities

	improve teaching quality		younger classes too <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools that used setting perceived it to be useful for targeting learning objectives and improving teaching quality • Setting was an internal decision with outside agencies rarely involved 	
Computerised observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In lower sets teachers were more likely to refocus pupils • In upper sets patterns of interaction were more likely to be characterised by high order questioning • Mixed ability classes had similar patterns of interaction to lower sets • Participation by pupils with SEN was not impacted upon by the setting process • Setting did not impact on the length of the Literacy Hour or its component sections • Key Stage 1 classes had similar patterns of interaction to lower sets 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patterns of interaction were differentiated depending on the set that was being taught
Analysis of value-added reading scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting did not impact on the attainment of the pupils not identified with SEN • Pupils with SEN made significantly less progress in sets than their peers in mixed ability classes • A polarisation effect could be seen with the able and average improving and the SEN falling behind when sets were implemented 			

Overall, my findings (shown above) show little evidence to support setting for primary literacy. This chapter will aim to bring together the different aspects from the empirical chapter and, by relating them back to the discussion in the literature reviews, consider the findings by placing them within the context of the research evidence.

Despite the fact that there is little evidence to support ability grouping, there is considerable data to show that the incidence of setting is high across the primary age phase and across the national spread of English primary schools. An examination of this incidence is important to set the scene for the rest of the discussion; therefore, this is where this chapter will start. As part of this discussion curricular subject links will be examined, as will the relationship between the incidence of setting and school and class demographics.

Having examined the occurrence of setting I will then closely examine the teachers' beliefs: how do teachers rationalise the implementation of setting for literacy. This section will explore trends linked to inclusion, traditional philosophies of education and educational equality. These trends in teachers' thinking about setting are then contrasted with the findings relating to the impact of setting on literacy teaching and learning. I will explore whether the associations made by the teachers between ability grouping and literacy are unfounded, whether setting really is facilitating inclusion, and the extent to which setting impacts on pupil attitudes and their attainment outcomes. The tensions between progressive and traditional philosophies, as identified in the literature reviews, will be made explicit.

Finally, having discussed the extent to which setting is being used for literacy, the teachers' perspective of why it is being implemented, and the impact of setting on the patterns of interaction, value added attainment data and pupil attitudes to the Literacy Hour, I will reach a point where the overarching trends that have emerged from the discussion can be summarised and the study concluded. This chapter will finish at a point where recommendations for policy makers, schools and teachers and researchers can be made in Chapter 8.

7.2 The incidence of setting in primary schools

Lee and Croll (1995) state that in the wake of the 1988 Education Reform Act there had been a growth in the incidence of ability grouping in primary schools and that head teachers were seeing it as having an increasingly important role to play in primary education. This research was followed in 1998 by the Ofsted review of ability grouping in primary schools, which found just over 40% of primary schools were using sets in literacy. My data, from the SEN and Setting Questionnaires, completed before April 2003 also indicate a relatively large number of primary schools were employing setting: 37% and 59% respectively. However, more recent research by Hallam *et al.* (2003) has found lower numbers: 17% of schools used setting for literacy in the older years with a decrease down to 1% in Reception classes. While there is variation in the reported figures, the research provides evidence of an acceptance from schools and teachers that setting has a role to play in teaching and learning in the National Literacy Strategy.

The move from literacy being taught across the curriculum to a stipulated daily lesson, the Literacy Hour, appears to have been influential in making setting for literacy an option. In the past, ability grouping has been commonly used and researched in association with the teaching of reading (Sukhnandan with Lee 1998), but not for literacy more generally. This could be because the explicit teaching of reading has been a characteristic identifiable throughout the last century of primary education, whereas other aspects of literacy, writing and speaking and listening, have been arguably less easy to distinguish from the rest of the curriculum. With the instigation of the Literacy Hour, it would appear that the jump to ability grouping for *all* aspects of the literacy curriculum was a relatively natural development.

At this point it is important to highlight this distinction between reading, often taught in a hierarchical progression, with levels to be moved through as mastery of skills is achieved, and the other elements of literacy, writing and speaking and listening, which have often been more discursively taught across the curriculum. It could be argued that there is something about the teaching of reading which lends itself more to ability grouping than these other aspects. These associations will be returned to as this chapter progresses.

While research suggests that setting is being frequently considered and used for teaching the National Literacy Strategy, my findings indicate that these general statistics of occurrence hide some interesting associations and potential relationships. These include a difference in implementation across subjects, particularly between literacy and numeracy, the impact of the age of pupils and also the effect of a school's

demographic composition. To fully understand the complexities of the way that setting is being implemented in schools these aspects need to be examined in more depth, only then can I begin to discuss teachers' rationale for setting and the potential impacts of its implementation.

7.2.1 The incidence of setting and school demographics

Apart from the introduction of the daily Literacy Hour, my experience in school (Section 1.2.1) pointed out the influence that the size of school has on the decision to set. This was backed up by evidence from the SEN Questionnaire which found that larger schools were more likely to use setting. This would seem fairly obvious: within my own experience, the increase to two classes per year group meant that regrouping into an upper and lower set for numeracy and literacy became a feasible option. Logistically having more than one class per year group increases the possibilities of reorganisation by ability across classes and this appears to be reflected in the data.

In addition to the size of the school, the composition of the school roll in terms of the range of ability has also been shown to be important. From the beginning of this thesis, I have maintained that the definition of inclusion which needs to be considered in relation to setting is more extensive than its traditional association with pupils identified with SEN would suggest (as, for example, in the work of Ainscow 1997). I have argued that inclusion in the modern educational context is about diversity of need in the mainstream primary school and therefore includes pupils with SEN *and* pupils who are gifted and able (see Section 1.3.3).

There are two pieces of evidence which I feel support this broader definition of inclusion and its relevancy to the setting debate. Firstly, the findings from the SEN Questionnaire show schools with a larger proportion of pupils with SEN were less likely to set than those with a small percentage (see Figure 30). While, secondly, the Setting Questionnaire (discussed in Section 6.3.4) indicates that teachers rationalise the implementation of setting to target a wide range of abilities and able pupils' needs. In other words, my findings suggest that the greater the number of pupils with SEN on the school role the less likely they are to set, while in contrast if there are less pupils with SEN and, as a result, a more even distribution across the range of abilities represented by the school population, then teachers are more likely to think that setting is an option due to the increased diversity.

The issues of diversity and inclusion are magnified by the demands of teaching the Literacy Hour. If setting is being seen to resolve some of the concerns from teachers, it is important to reflect briefly at this point, on the impact mixed ability teaching and setting have on pupil attitude. Findings from the Pupil Questionnaire showed that in mixed ability classes average pupils were most positive when compared to their more and less able peers (see Section 6.2.2). This positive attitude of the average could suggest that within a mixed ability class teachers were targeting these pupils as 'best fit' in a class of diverse need. This corresponds to the work of Fisher and Lewis (1999), Anderson *et al.* (2000) and Smith and Whiteley (2000). However, in classes where setting was implemented the attitudes of the pupils did not alter as might have been expected: the pupils with SEN indicated unchanged attitudes while the most able and average pupils showed negative changes, and in the case of the former, this drop was statistically significant.

To summarise, therefore, the demographics of a school, its size and make up, appear to have a clear relationship with the likelihood of setting being implemented. However, there seems to be a distinct difference between what teachers' believe about why setting is being used and the impact it has on pupil attitude. This discussion will be extended in Section 7.3 and 7.4.

7.2.2 The incidence of setting across the subjects

My results replicate recent surveys of ability grouping (Ofsted 1998b; McPake *et al.* 2000; Hallam *et al.* 2003) in finding differences in the incidence of setting between subjects. In that the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998a) and the National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE 1999b) were implemented into primary schools in a similar way and in successive years then it is interesting to look at the relationship between these two subjects and the way in which their introduction has impacted on the incidence of setting.

My findings show numeracy is more likely to be taught using sets, although the difference was not as large as expected or as reported in the above studies. The Setting Questionnaire found that schools which set for literacy *always* did the same for maths (see Section 6.3.4). It is important to explore this apparent relationship between literacy and numeracy, and to ask whether there is something about the structure of the lesson or the content as prescribed by the NLS which is making the crossover of setting between literacy and numeracy more likely.

As documented in Chapter 4, the research examining ability grouping in mathematics is more developed and tends to be more extensive than in literacy, particularly in secondary schools (for example, Boaler *et al.* 2000). The subject difference in the application of setting which I have found could be a legacy of this: schools might be historically more inclined to associate ability grouping with mathematics rather than literacy. However, my findings would indicate that the situation is more complex.

The actual difference in the incidence of setting between literacy and numeracy in my data was smaller than reported by Ofsted (1998b), McPake *et al.* (2000) and Hallam *et al.* (2003) and this needs to be examined. Within my literature reviews (in particular Chapter 3) it was argued that there are other similarities in the ways that numeracy and literacy are now taught, as prescribed by the NLS and NNS, which makes the link with setting more likely. I argued, due to these similarities that there could be a tendency to treat the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies as one and the same thing.

Firstly, there is the dedicated daily lesson and the Setting Questionnaire showed that the introduction of the NLS appeared to act as a catalyst for setting in *both* literacy and numeracy. Many schools implemented setting for both subjects in the same year the NLS was introduced. It is impossible to say for certain whether setting in numeracy is a direct response to the decision to set in literacy, but the incidence is high. Maybe it is because considering setting for literacy is fairly radical, but once made, it is easy to transfer this decision to a subject where the precedent is already set. It could also be a pragmatic decision, as in the case of the school where I taught:

implementing setting in both numeracy and literacy meant that with two teachers per year group each got a lower and an upper set across the two subjects.

Secondly, the similarity in a three-part lesson structure between the Literacy Hour and the Daily Maths Lesson is undeniable. I have argued that the increased amount of whole class teaching encouraged within the National Literacy Strategy (Chapter 3) could be critical in the change to ability grouping. It was certainly this aspect that advocates promoted when the NLS was implemented into schools (Beard 1998; Stannard 1999) and yet teachers have been documented as finding this change in teaching approach a challenge (Smith and Whiteley 2000; Smith and Hardman 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999). It is logical to suggest that concerns about the change in teaching approach in literacy could transfer to numeracy: meaning the same fears about the range of ability to be targeted within whole class teaching could exist and therefore the same solutions, in this case setting, considered.

Thirdly, as discussed in Chapter 3, there are similarities in how the subject content of the two strategies is structured. I have argued that, particularly for literacy, the thinking about how the subject should be taught has changed, with a move from the progressive approaches of whole language literacy teaching, common during the 1960s to 1990s, to a more traditional focus on basic skills. This change to a more incremental approach to teaching literacy would appear to have similarities to current conceptual organisation of the numeracy curriculum: the promotion of connected and relational understanding (Askew *et al.* 1997; Suggate *et al.* 1998).

It should be noted at this stage that it remains to be seen the extent to which these subject differences remain after implementation of the Primary Strategy (DfES 2003), which will act as an ‘umbrella’ policy combining recommendations for numeracy and literacy together. The idea of the way the content of a subject is taught and the potential relationship with setting will be followed up later in the chapter.

7.2.3 The incidence of setting and the relationship with pupil age

My results provide evidence to support the findings of Mason (1995, cited in Harlen and Malcolm 1999), Ofsted (1998b), McPake *et al.* (2000) and Hallam *et al.* (2003) that setting is more common in older year groups. However, the findings also show that of the schools using setting, 30% had extended it into Key Stage 1. Within this section I am going to discuss the different factors which could contribute to the fact that older year groups are more likely to be set for literacy, but I will also contribute some thoughts as to why setting appears to be ‘creeping’ into the younger age phases.

There is a legacy of ability grouping extending from secondary schools down to older primary years. This can be illustrated by the fact that ability grouping research is far more developed within the context of the secondary sector (for example, Harlen and Malcolm 1999). In addition, in Chapters 2 and 4, I suggested a link between the central prescription of the curriculum and a preoccupation with testing and raising standards, with the move towards more ability grouping. These are all traditional characteristics arguably more prominent in secondary schools, but now, with the involvement of the national primary strategies, these characteristics are extending into

younger age groups. It is logical to suggest that this extension of secondary practice into the primary school could also relate to the spread of setting.

One key characteristics of current policy, is the predominance of testing. In Chapter 2, I discussed the common associations made between the 11+ examination and streaming after the 1944 Education Act (see Section 2.2): ability grouping was more common in the years leading up to the test. In the current national curriculum, testing has been introduced in Year 6, the same year as the 11+, *and* Year 2. This means that the ‘testing factor’ is equally applicable in the younger years of the primary school as in the older ones. Therefore, the introduction of national testing could be affecting the implementation of ability grouping in the older primary year groups, but also could well be contributing to the rise of setting in Key Stage 1.

Following this line of argument the influence of national testing was not as apparent as might have been expected in the teachers’ rationale for setting (Figure 43) as collected by the Setting Questionnaire. However, this factor could be hidden within a more fundamental line of reasoning. It is important to ask whether the influencing factor for setting can be isolated to just testing, or whether it is the moves towards a traditional primary curriculum more generally, which have increased the likelihood of ability grouping.

Research in 1970 by Barker Lunn found teachers with a more traditional philosophy, “...concentrated more on ‘traditional’ lessons, gave more emphasis to the three Rs and was, at least overtly, more authoritarian” (*ibid.* p.45), and were likely to be more

positive about ability grouping strategies than those with a more progressive ideology.

The latter being characterised by Barker Lunn as

...more 'permissive' views on such things as cleanliness and manners, were more tolerant of noise and talking in the classroom, and disapproved of the differentiation explicit in streaming and the 11+ procedures. (*ibid.* p.45)

This would suggest that schools with a more traditional ethos would be more likely to use ability grouping. Therefore the question to be asked is to what extent the National Literacy Strategy has been instrumental in increasing the likelihood of a traditionally based school ethos. This will be followed up with regard to the structure and content of the NLS later in this chapter.

The relationship between the age of pupils and setting could also be linked to teachers' concerns about meeting a diversity of abilities in their classes. I certainly documented, from my own experience (Section 1.2.1), that an individual's special need took time to be recognised and diagnosed, and as a result as children got older more need was identified within each class. This appeared to be validated by the SEN Questionnaire, which found more qualified SEN support was used in Key Stage 2 (Figure 34). It would appear that there is a greater awareness of pupils with SEN and therefore, the diversity of need, within the older primary years. If this is then linked with teachers concerns over inclusion, then setting may become more likely.

But the question remains, why are some schools extending this policy of setting into the younger year groups. It could be that the procedures for identifying special needs introduced by the Code of Practice (DfES/QCA 2001) and the increased

recommendations for the most able pupils are, in the same way as testing, becoming more apparent in Key Stage 1, thus increasing the likelihood of setting. Alternatively, in that the NLS provides recommendations for across the primary age phase, maybe setting for the Literacy Hour across the primary age phase is also felt to be unproblematic.

The age of the pupils being taught, therefore, does seem to be important, but these arguments are caught up with the other key debates which are arising: namely, the move to more traditional approaches across the primary age phase and the demand for inclusion. It remains to be seen whether the likelihood of setting is linked to the way in which the pupils are taught, or the characteristics of the pupils that make up the class. This idea will be developed later in this chapter in relation to patterns of interaction (Section 7.4.1) and pupil attitude (Section 7.4.4).

7.2.4 Summary

There is indisputable evidence that setting is commonly being used in primary schools for literacy. I have made explicit the potential links between the size of the school, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, and the age of the pupils on the decision of schools to set. Conflicts between the traditional and progressive philosophies are already evident in the discussion and are becoming a recurrent theme in this discussion chapter. I have also started to highlight some of the complex debate which is becoming apparent as influential in this investigation of setting for the NLS, with regard to the potential conflict between the teachers' perspective and the impacts of setting in the classroom. It is now appropriate to examine in more detail what teachers

believe is the rationale for implementing setting: it will be important to ask the extent to which their thinking mirror the trends that have emerged in relation to patterns of implementation.

7.3 Teachers' rationale for setting

Research completed, for example by Daniels (1961), Jackson (1964), Barker Lunn (1970) and, in the modern context, Ireson and Hallam (2001), has investigated teachers' attitudes to ability grouping in practice; however, I have discovered few studies explicitly investigating the reasons *why* schools consider and implement setting. At this point in the discussion, it is therefore important to examine this area of the debate, particularly when the lack of evidence to support setting for literacy is considered.

In Chapter 4, synthesis tables were used to identify trends in ability grouping over the last century, and I argued that there appears to be a strong link between the central prescription of the curriculum, a preoccupation with testing and raising standards and ability grouping. This corresponds to the research in 1970 by Barker Lunn who found teachers with a more traditional philosophy were likely to be more positive about ability grouping strategies than those with a more progressive ideology (discussed in more detail above). The Setting Questionnaire aimed to look at the extent to which this association was apparent in current teachers' thinking.

The most common reasons given by teachers for using setting were: targeting learning objectives, challenging able pupils, improving teaching quality and teaching to a

range of abilities. These findings correspond to research undertaken in Scottish schools by SOIED (1996, cited in Harlen and Malcolm 1999) and by Ireson and Hallam (2001). The results from the Setting Questionnaire suggest that teachers were facing pedagogical conflict arising from the contradiction of inclusion and a target driven curriculum. These two contradictory elements will be discussed and the beliefs of teachers not using setting will also be examined.

7.3.1 Setting as a strategy for inclusion

The examination of the historical literature in Chapter 2 led me to associate setting with the drive towards inclusion, arguing that the contradiction between increasing numbers of pupils with SEN included in mainstream schools and a traditional target and assessment driven curriculum (Dyson and Slee 2001) is potentially key to the decision to set. This association, however, particularly in relation to the inclusion of specifically pupils with SEN, did not appear to be at the forefront of teachers' minds in their rationale for setting. This might have been due to the well documented negative effects on self-esteem and behaviour often associated with the lower ability pupils (Ireson and Hallam 2001; Ofsted 1998b), or, as findings from the SEN Questionnaire indicated, that teachers believed pupils with SEN were being included through usage of a variety of different strategies, such as extra adult support (Section 6.3.2).

Instead of the focus being on pupils with SEN the findings indicate that, as in the research of Kulik (1992), teachers are more likely to associate setting with pupils from the more able end of the ability spectrum. Within the current context, these

pupils are being focused on in governmental advice (for example, DfEE 2000c) and this finding could be a reflection of this increased attention. However, alongside the established research of Kulik, there is also some historical evidence to back up this connection: in Chapter 4, six studies researching streaming were found to have positive gains for able pupils in comparison to four with positive findings towards those who were less able (Section 4.4). It does seem fair to say that if teachers are implementing a variety of different strategies to include pupils with SEN, as indicated in the SEN Questionnaire (Section 6.3.2), then it seems reasonable to suggest that they would also be looking for ways to include those at the other end of the ability scale: it would appear that setting is likely to be seen as one such strategy.

This dichotomy between targeting the needs of those pupils at either end of the ability spectrum is, of course, not nearly as clear as the discussion so far might suggest. This preoccupation with pupils at both ends of the ability spectrum, and how best they should be included in the Literacy Hour, appears to be reflected in the importance placed by teachers on ‘targeting a range of abilities’ in the Literacy Hour. By its very nature, this anxiety of teachers, which is well documented in this study and others (Smith and Whiteley 2000; Fisher and Lewis 1999), means that they are very aware of the diversity of abilities, from least to most able, to be included in the mainstream classroom: it is this *range* that causes concern.

The Warnock Report (DES 1978) introduced the idea of a spectrum of need and this appears to be a concept apparent in teachers thinking about teaching in the Literacy Hour, although the spectrum is arguably wider than maybe Lady Warnock

recommended. This would fit in with the more expansive concept of inclusion I have been using, and also corresponds to the findings I described regarding the incidence of setting and its relationship to school demographics (Section 1.3.3). Therefore, I would argue that although my findings indicate that setting is not explicitly related to the inclusion of pupils with SEN, its association with pupils identified as more able and teachers' fears about meeting a variety of needs is unequivocal. In this way the implementation of setting would appear to be associated with the extended definition of inclusion that I suggest.

The next section will look at the extent to which this pressure to set is increased by the return to a more traditional organised curriculum: to what extent are teachers implementing setting for literacy because of the target driven curriculum that is set out in the NLS: *Framework for teachers*.

7.3.2 The effect of traditional policy

The Setting Questionnaire asked teachers to rate the extent to which different factors influenced their school's decision to set. There were a number of statements which could be associated with more traditional teaching approaches meaning that some indication could be drawn of the extent to which these factors encouraged ability grouping. The relationship that I suggested between more traditional teaching strategies and setting, as indicated by the synthesis tables (Chapter 4), by Barker Lunn's research of teacher attitudes (1970), and the historic trends of education legislation (Chapter 2), is apparent within the teachers' responses, but does not emerge as one of the most important reasons for implementing setting. Teachers rated

two key statements, *'raising standards'* at fifth and *'improving SATs results'*, at seventh out of the twelve statements they were given.

It might have been expected that *'improving SATs results'* would have been rated higher than this, particularly considering my discussion in Chapter 2 and 4 in relation to the 11+ examination. This relatively low rating could reflect a reluctance from teachers to be seen to be *'playing the examination game'*. It could be that stating setting was in a large part to improve SATs results would have certain negative connotations for them. This would be particularly pertinent when considered in relation to the more progressive philosophies associated with the aims of inclusion, which as argued above do appear to be prevalent in teachers' minds. In fact it could be argued that this is a direct illustration of the paradox Dyson and Slee (2001) point out: the conflict between increased awareness of inclusion and a dominant theme of testing.

Raising standards is a common phrase within the current policy rhetoric and therefore the fact that teachers' rate it more highly in relation to setting is not really a surprise, and could still be indication that the traditional *'thrust'* of the literacy curriculum is a factor driving the implementation of setting. Indeed, it could be argued that raising standards does not sound so harsh, or as traditionally minded, and therefore might be a factor more easily accepted by teachers walking this balancing act between different policy recommendations and beliefs.

The other traditional element which I have suggested could contribute to the decision to use setting is the greater emphasis on the teaching of basic skills in the NLS (see Section 3.6 of Chapter 3). No data was collected explicitly from the teachers regarding this hypothesis. However, data from the SEN Questionnaire indicated that many whole language strategies, such as extended writing and story time, were being used by teachers outside of the Literacy Hour (see Section 6.3.2). This corresponds to the arguments of Campbell (1998) who stated that ‘far more than a Literacy Hour is required to support children’s literacy development’ (p.23). Within this scenario, if setting is being used for the Literacy Hour then it is likely to be linked to the more traditional approaches advocated by the NLS: the whole class teaching, the partitioning of language and the objective driven curricula (see Section 6.3.4). This means that those sessions which might be seen as more progressive and deriving from the whole language approaches are likely to be taught in mixed ability classes outside the Hour and possibly not under the influence of setting.

With regard to setting for the literacy this has implications. It could be argued that if the Literacy Hour has brought about a traditional approach to literacy teaching setting is more likely to be used. Outside of the Hour, where whole language approaches are more likely, mixed ability teaching may be felt to be more appropriate. Of course, it is more complex than this as the boundaries between the different ideologies and related teaching strategies are not this clear cut, but I feel it is a useful point to explore, particularly when evidence from the Computerised Observations and the Pupil Questionnaire are discussed later in this chapter.

7.3.3 The perceptions of teachers who do not use setting

For those teachers who did not use setting, their biggest fear if setting were to be implemented was the potential impact on pupils' self-esteem (corresponding to the work of Ireson and Hallam 2003 and Espisito 1973, cited in Slavin 1987). Teachers also worried that setting would disrupt the timetable, affect school ethos and impact on pupil behaviour (again, the latter factor was found to be a common teacher attitude by Ireson and Hallam 2003). These feelings correspond to research into ability grouping in the years after the Plowden Report (DES 1967) when there was widespread concern about education equality and fears regarding pupil self concept (for example, Davie *et al.* 1972 and Fogelmans 1975, both cited in Gregory 1984 and Harlen and Malcolm 1999). This finding is fundamental in indicating the importance of the legacy that remains from the post-Plowden years. These fears would correspond to the arguments I made in Section 2.3 (Chapter 2) that teachers today owe a lot to the era when more progressive thinking dominated: they were either already teaching or were at school themselves.

In contrast to the views of teachers already using setting, there seemed to be little expectation by teachers who were not that an ability grouping policy would improve teaching quality. However, the issue of targeting objectives and including pupils at either end of the ability spectrum was seen as a potential benefit of setting, particularly for more able pupils. This concern with targeting objectives from the NLS: *Framework* to a class of mixed ability pupils corresponds to the rationale of teachers who did use setting (discussed above), the discussion in Chapter 3, as well as research by Anderson *et al.* (2000), Fisher and Lewis (1999), and Smith and Whitely (2000). The common perception, even from these teachers who were not using

setting, was that setting might go some way to remedy this situation and this belief would appear to be wide reaching within the primary sector.

7.3.4 Summary

There appears to be little doubt that teachers are making close associations between setting and inclusion, not specifically with pupils with SEN, but with what they perceived to be a spectrum of need. The traditional thinking that lies behind the structure of the Literacy Hour and the requirement that over half of the lesson be taught to the whole class seems to be accentuating this concern and therefore has acted as a catalyst for the use of ability grouping. In addition, the structure of the NLS: *Framework* with its hierarchy of learning objectives to be taught across each year group could be thought to further amplify this anxiety and thus makes setting more likely.

Parallel links to those that were observed in policy documents in the 1960s, between ability grouping in primary schools and the 11+ examination, were found in the current context, between SATs and setting. Teachers believed that setting would raise academic achievement, although this was not rated as highly as might have been expected considering the historical trends. Common fears among those teachers who were not using setting also followed historical trends. These teachers' beliefs linked closely to recommendations given in the Plowden Report (DES 1967) when streaming was abolished within primary schools during the more progressive 1960s. Fears about the affects on pupil self esteem and behaviour, and negative impact on school ethos were widespread.

7.4 The impact of setting for literacy:

Having examined the extent to which ability grouping is being implemented in the primary school and the beliefs that teachers have about setting for literacy, it is time to discuss the emerging trends relating to the *impact* of setting on classroom practice and how it can affect pupil attitude.

This study examined the impact of setting within the classroom using a number of data collection methods: Computerised Observations examined patterns of interaction between teachers and pupils, value added reading attainment was analysed and pupil attitudes were collected with the Pupil Questionnaire. The overwhelming evidence of the findings are against implementing setting for literacy. This section of the chapter will examine these different effects and place them within the context of the discussion which has gone before, in particular with relation to the teachers' rationale.

7.4.1 Patterns of interaction

Setting was found to impact on the patterns of interaction in the classroom in a number of key ways. The significant differences in teacher initiated behaviours can be categorised into two main types:

- those used by teachers of upper sets compared with mixed ability classes and lower sets; and
- those used by teachers with lower sets compared to upper sets and mixed ability classes.

The data was analysed in two ways: firstly, differences in teacher behaviours across the whole Literacy Hour were examined, and secondly, the sections of whole class teaching were isolated and investigated. The latter analysis meant this contentious element of the Literacy Hour could be focused on and some of the claims made for and against this method of teaching (see Section 6.4.2) could be examined with regard to the patterns of interaction.

Over the duration of the entire Literacy Hour, key differences were found between the behaviours of teachers with upper sets and those with mixed ability classes and lower sets. Pupils in upper sets were significantly more likely to be asked an 'uptake question' than in lower sets and mixed ability classes. An uptake question occurs when a child's answer is incorporated into the next question to the rest of the class (for full definitions of the behaviours see Appendix 11). This is seen by commentators as a high order questioning strategy as it indicates the teacher values the child's input (for example, Galton *et al.* 1999; Hardman *et al.* 2002). When the whole class sections of the Hour were focused on the same significant difference was found.

This finding would appear to indicate that pupils in mixed ability classes and lower sets are missing out on the higher order levels of teaching to which they are entitled. Having said this, researchers, such as Dehaney (2000), have suggested that more complicated patterns of interaction during the Literacy Hour can cause problems for the less able pupils; therefore this could be evidence that teachers were adapting their patterns of interaction in classes containing less able pupils to accommodate this kind of difficulty. Alternatively, it could be that the curriculum content which is being

taught in the different classes is more or less applicable to higher order questioning and therefore this could be causing differences in the patterns of interaction (this is discussed further in relation to differences in interaction between Key Stages below).

All of these potential theories make assumptions that teachers understand different questioning techniques and have knowledge of the needs and characteristics of different groups; that there is some rationale behind what was observed. With this in mind it is important to revisit the fact that the management of the whole class teaching time has become well established as an area of concern for teachers. In addition, the training provided as part of the NLS with relation to this area has also been questioned (for example, Dadds 1999; Anderson *et al.* 2000; Smith and Whiteley 2000). As a result this could mean that what was observed was previous practice scaled up to meet the requirements of the Literacy Hour and any differences between the groups could be attributed to teachers' perceptions that setting is for the able pupils.

A further distinctive behaviour of teachers with upper sets was writing (the teacher demonstrating writing for the pupils). Across the whole Literacy Hour, writing was found to be significantly more likely in upper sets than lower sets and mixed ability classes. There is no evidence to suggest why this latter result occurred. In 1999, Ofsted stated that writing represented an area of weakness in the Hour and it could be that teachers are more likely to try new or more complicated strategies relating to writing with more able, or better behaved (discussed below), pupils in upper sets. Researchers, such as Joyce (1992) have argued that trying out new practice is an

important part of teacher development; it could be presumed that this process is much easier in a less 'risky' environment. However, writing could be more common in upper sets for more pragmatic reasons: to demonstrate writing on, for example, a white board, a teacher must literally turn their attention away from the class for a moment. It could be teachers were less likely to do this with a lower set or mixed ability class where behaviour issues are more likely.

In relation to this last point, my findings showed 'refocusing' to be significantly more likely in whole class sections in lower sets than in upper sets and mixed ability classes (this corresponds to my own experience discussed in Section 1.2.1). This code was used for teacher-initiated behaviours intended to return pupil attention back to the curriculum content (Appendix 11). In other words, it was used when a pupil was noticed to be off task and can be seen as synonymous with issues of behaviour. This provides some evidence to support arguments related to risk: it is logical to assume that the risk is much greater where behaviour is an over arching concern for the teacher.

The possibility of pupils' behaviour being an issue in lower sets is well documented (for example, Jackson 1964; Schwartz 1981, cited in Hallam and Toutounji 1996). It is also well documented that there is likely to be an association between this disruption and negative affects to pupils' self-concept (Eder 1981). These concerns were central to the abolishment of streaming by the Plowden Report (DES 1967). However, it is important to recognise that there could be teacher effects impacting on the findings. In that the Setting Questionnaire indicated that teachers who did not use

setting were most negative about the likelihood of setting improving self esteem, it is possible to see that there is a historical legacy of negative connotations for pupils, particularly from the lower end of the ability spectrum, when ability grouping is used (discussed further in Section 7.4.4). The fact that the Computerised Observations found this significant difference was related to the just the whole class sections, and not the Literacy Hour as a whole, would appear to indicate further detail of the issues teachers are finding with this part of the Hour (see Section 7.3). This could be affecting how lower sets are taught and how pupils at the lower end of the ability spectrum are expected by teachers to behave.

In all cases, apart from the number of refocusing behaviours, the lower sets and the mixed ability classes were shown to be receiving similar input which was significantly different to upper sets (replicating the findings of Rist 1973, cited in Rowan & Miracle 1983). Therefore, there is a suggestion that the patterns of interaction in a class containing all abilities is likely to be at an equivalent level to that of a lower set. This would lead to the inference that there are advantages of setting for the more able pupils (as stated by Kulik 1992; Kulik & Kulik 1984), but conversely it indicates that pupils with SEN might as well be taught in mixed ability classes as the patterns of interaction are similar. In fact, with the increased amount of refocusing behaviours by teachers in lower sets during whole class teaching sessions, these pupils would appear to be better off in mixed ability classes.

It has been shown, therefore, that pupils in different organisational groups were experiencing different teacher initiated patterns of interaction and as a result of this, it

could be argued that the pupils with SEN were being disadvantaged by setting. This finding could be associated with the research of Goldberg *et al.* (1966), which stated that for effective ability grouping there needs to be differentiation of the curriculum (Section 4.7.3). This is not easy under the top-down prescription of the National Literacy Strategy, especially when teachers are feeling their professional status is being eroded (Dadds 1999). Rather than changing the curriculum it could be that teachers are changing their discourse to make setting more effective. Leading on from this, therefore, it could be that the characteristics of the pupils might lend themselves to being taught in a specific way or that the relevant content is better suited to certain patterns of interaction. This is a difficult hypothesis to examine from the data available in this study, however, through a comparison of interaction used in Key Stages 1 and 2 significant differences were found that could add a further dimension to the debate.

When the discourse from classes in Key Stage 1 were examined, it was found that these teachers were significantly more likely to use closed questions and directions with less open questions, uptake questions and teacher answering than their counterparts in Key Stage 2. Therefore, the teaching in Key Stage 1 appears to be of a lower order than that in Key Stage 2; with many of the differences following the same lines as those between upper and lower sets. It is useful at this point to look at an example of how lower sets and Key Stage 1 classes might have similar characteristics which could lead to these findings. For example, the NLS gives learning objectives for Year 1 relating to phonological awareness; however this disappears from the *Framework* by Year 3, the start of Key Stage 2 (DFEE 1987). In that pupils with SEN in Key Stage 2 are likely to be working on targets from Key Stage 1 (a process

recommended in the NLS guidelines), it could be argued that this similarity of content could lead to the similarity in teaching methods which was observed. However, as Ehri *et al.* (2001) point out, phonological content does not necessarily have to be taught in a low order way and can be taught using a variety of active approaches. Therefore, although similarities of content might be likely, the association with specific patterns of interaction, whether intentional by the teachers or not, are not necessarily a natural follow on.

With regard to the characteristics of pupils which might lead to the observed patterns of interaction, there might be reason for teachers to, rightly or wrongly, presume that Key Stage 1 pupils and lower set pupils are comparable. Lingard (2000) states:

The listening skills of lower attainers are poor in situations when they are not being addressed in a very small group or directly as individuals. (*ibid.* p.119)

It could be that suppositions like this about pupils with SEN, and may be about those in Key Stage 1, can result in low order questioning techniques being used so as to allow these pupils to understand and learn the topic being covered.

So far in this discussion I have shown that teacher initiated interaction was differentiated by the setting process. However, this finding could be countered if the proportion of pupil-initiated behaviours increases: if the pupils with SEN in lower sets are more involved in the lesson then this could cancel out the disadvantage that the increased amounts of refocusing would insinuate. Cook (2000), Waldron (1999) and Corden (2000b) have stated that an advantage of whole class teaching for pupils with SEN is that it helps these pupils feel part of the class and participate on a level plane.

In exploring whether the process of setting allowed pupils to participate more in class discussions and increase their inclusion in the learning objectives of the lesson, the evidence suggested that this was not the case: no significant difference was observed between the amount of SEN pupil contributions in set and mixed ability classes. There was also no difference in the way teachers treated these contributions. It appears, in terms of SEN pupil participation, it does not matter whether they are ability grouped or not.

Summary

The reoccurring theme in this study has been the problematic area of whole class teaching and the concerns that teachers expressed regarding this time which are undoubtedly impacting on the decision to set. The results from the Computerised Observations give some indication as to why this might be. The evidence suggests that different patterns of interaction are being used depending on the make up of the class. There is no evidence to say whether this is a conscious decision or not on the part of the teachers, however, the complexity of teaching during this time does become apparent.

It could be that different learning objectives or pupils of different ability need to be taught using different patterns of interaction, but if this is that case teachers need specific skills and knowledge to manage the resulting whole class teaching effectively. Alternatively, if setting is disadvantaging the lower ability pupils and they are not receiving the high order interaction they need, then again the reasons why this is happening and new strategies to compensate for this tendency need to be addressed

in teachers' training. However, this argument has associations with the work of Fisher and Lewis (1999), who suggest that inadequate training was a failing in the Strategy's implementation. If training was improved then maybe teachers would be able to manage the whole class teaching time and therefore better meet the needs of the pupils; although it could be argued that if this were the case then maybe setting would not be the option that it is perceived to be.

7.4.3 Reading attainment data

I have established a potential negative effect from setting on patterns of interaction in the classroom, particularly for pupils with SEN. This section looks at whether this potential disadvantage is reflected in the value added reading scores of pupils.

When the value added reading data were analysed sets were found to cause a polarisation effect. The pupils identified with special educational needs in literacy were disadvantaged by setting: they made less progress over the school year than their average and more able peers. In contrast, when taught in mixed ability classes, all pupils made much more uniform progress across the ability spectrum. In other words, in mixed ability classes, pupils with SEN made as much progress as their average and more able peers over the school year, whereas in sets, the pupils with SEN fell behind.

It is important to recognise that the value-added data only assessed reading. Having previously discussed the complex nature of literacy and the impact this might have on the way that it is taught and learnt (Section 3.6), the limits of this data collection tool should be acknowledged as a way of judging the Literacy Hour and setting. This is a

criticism, however, that could be directed at much of the research investigating setting using attainment data (for example, Koontz 1961 and Berkun *et al.* 1966, cited in Slavin 1987), most of which use only evidence from reading scores and therefore do not cover the full range of literacy learning.

There are obviously some potential issues with this data collection tool. However the highly significant negative difference ($F=7.64$, $p<0.001$) which was found between the attainment of pupils with SEN when setting was used and their peers in mixed ability classes, and the lack of any effect of the grouping arrangement used on their able and average counterparts, is hard to ignore. Therefore, it is now important to look at the available empirical research for explanations as to why this finding might have occurred.

Teacher effect

The Computerised Observations indicated that there was a differentiation of interaction between sets, although at present there is nothing to say why this is happening. There does, however, seem to be evidence of some sort of ‘teacher effect’. As part of Chapter 4, two different types of teacher effect on the ability grouping process were discussed. Daniels (1962, cited in Goldberg *et al.* 1966), Wiliam *et al.* (1999) and Gamoran (1986) documented that teachers could be set in the same way as pupils, with the most able set getting the most able teacher and vice versa. Alternatively, Schwartz (1981, cited in Hallam and Toutounji 1996) provided evidence of a link between teacher expectation, attitudes and pupil behaviours. Here the issue was apparently one of a self-fulfilling prophecy: the teachers expected the

lower set to do badly and to behave inappropriately, therefore, this was what happened. With any of these scenarios an impact on reading score might not be unexpected.

With regard to the former of these two proposed teacher effects, the sample for the value added reading results analysis only included teachers who had proven their proficiency in gaining a positive mean score with their class during the previous year. These teachers had subsequently, in the year of our data collection, been assigned across mixed ability and set classes (both upper and lower) and, although not totally convincing, this would suggest that the ‘setting’ of teachers along with the pupils, as the studies above suggested, was not commonly occurring in these schools. However this would need more research.

Further research would also be needed to investigate the existence of the second type of teacher effect, the self-fulfilling prophecy. Having said this, differences in the patterns of interaction across the different sets did occur, with teachers of lower sets more likely to use refocusing strategies, however I do not have the evidence as to whether this was driven by teacher expectation or by the characteristics of the pupils. This may have the potential to create a vicious circle, with pupil behaviour acting upon the teacher’s behaviour and vice versa. It does seem probable, however, that in classes where behaviour is an issue and teaching and learning time is impacted upon by its management, then attainment would be affected as a consequence.

If the value added reading data is triangulated with the findings of the Pupil Questionnaire (discussed in full in the next Section) the picture becomes more complex. This data collection tool indicated that pupils with SEN were slightly more positive when they were taught in sets compared to peers in mixed ability classes; this contrasts with the negative progress in reading attainment. This positive change in attitude is only slight but can be seen towards all aspects of the Literacy Hour. Their peers, the average and able pupils, do not show any such consistency, particularly between the different sections of whole class teaching, word and text level work. This positive change in pupils' attitudes could be seen to somewhat counter the evidence of the attainment data. However, in an education system where attainment is prioritised, the extent to which slight changes in attitudes can be considered as important should be questioned.

7.4.4 The impact on pupil attitudes

Data collected from the Pupil Questionnaire was used to examine pupil attitude to different elements of the Literacy Hour (see Section 6.2.2) and how setting impacted upon their viewpoint. Other researchers have found that pupil attitudes are affected by the implementation of the Literacy Hour, for example Hanke (2000) and by ability grouping (Esposito 1973 cited in Harlen and Malcolm 1999; Goldberg *et al.* 1966), therefore a precedent has been set within the field. By considering this area of research, and by triangulating it with the value-added data and the Computerised Observations discussed in the previous sections, a detailed account can be given of the pupil level effects of setting for the delivery of the National Literacy Strategy.

Attitudes to the Literacy Hour were positive overall, but the most noticeable result from the pupils' questionnaire was the general increase in negativity towards literacy once setting had been implemented. Data showed all three cohorts switching from mixed ability to set classes in the summer of 1999 (see Table d on page 163) had significantly negative changes of opinion for one question or more. This alone has telling implications about the effect setting had on the pupils in the school and appears to support research indicating the negative effects of ability grouping (for example, Eder 1981).

This is a simplification, however, and when details of the results are studied they appear to hide a number of important differences across the school population and across the structure of the NLS and Literacy Hour. Firstly, the findings show an age difference in the way the pupils react to the setting process (this corresponds to the discussion in Section 7.2.3). Secondly, pupil attitudes show the whole class sections to be the least positive of the Hour, possibly reflecting teachers' concerns about this element. Thirdly, the impact of setting on pupils' at different points on the ability spectrum was found to not be as expected if inclusion was a benefit of setting; and this latter finding appears to indicate a relationship between the type of NLS objective (word, sentence or text level work) being focused on and pupils' attitudes in set or mixed ability classes.

The association with the age of pupils

Mason (1995) noted setting was more common in American schools dealing with older pupils (cited in Harlen and Malcom 1999) and Ireson and Hallam (2003)

documented similar trends in English schools. Within this study, I have also indicated this relationship between ability grouping and pupil age (Section 7.2.3). It was suggested that this could be the result of an historical precedent (ability grouping was shown to be more likely in the older primary year groups and the secondary sector) or due to the way in which content was taught and assessed (for example, a relationship with standardised national tests appeared to be apparent). This section, therefore, will follow up these trends and explore the impact of setting on the attitudes of pupils at different ages within the school where I taught.

The first indication of an age difference was found in pupils' answers to the first two questions on the questionnaire: '*Do you like the Literacy Hour?*' and '*Does the Literacy Hour help you with your English?*' (Section 6.2 and Appendix 8). These questions were designed to gather pupils' attitudes to literacy generally. Of the three cohorts that changed from mixed ability classes to setting in the summer of 1999, the older pupils 'Year 4 mixed ability/ Year 5 set' were the only group that did not show a significantly negative drop. In comparison, the younger pupils in 'Year 3 mixed ability/ Year 4 set' had a highly significant negative change to both questions (see Table i). This age difference appeared to be confirmed by a general look at all questions on the questionnaire: the older cohort was the only group to have a significantly positive change of opinion to any of the questions (see Section 6.2.2); indeed, their answers were seen to be more mixed than the other two cohorts. In contrast, a general comparison across all questions for the younger pupils showed a negative shift in opinion to every question and for five out of seven questions this was statistically significantly.

In examining the reasons why there is this age difference, my experiences teaching a set could help to shed some light (Section 1.2.1). The requirement for pupils to change classes and teachers, I observed, can create disruption which younger pupils find difficult to cope with. It was noted, pupils within my Year 4 class found the transition between sets difficult. Some pupils either forgot to change classes, ending up in the wrong group, or they left behind pencils or homework in the other classroom, only to get annoyed with themselves or suffer the wrath of teachers when having to retrieve them mid-lesson. Hence, although there may be advantages to children knowing more than one teacher and experiencing more than one teaching approach, it would appear some of the younger pupils were ill-equipped to deal with this. Traditionally, a primary age child has had the security of one classroom and one teacher per year: this could be evidence this ‘security blanket’ is being removed too early. However, it could be argued that the skills to deal with these transitions could be taught and learnt.

I would make a further suggestion, that teaching to a mixed ability class allows ability differences to be 'hidden' more effectively among the majority; it should be asked whether younger pupils find the identification of ability through the process of setting more difficult to deal with. The comment from one of my own pupils after he had moved to Year 5 where setting was used highlights this possible effect,

“Miss Wall, you told me I was worth something, but now I am in the bottom of the bottom...” (Year 5, SEN, 2000)

As discussed earlier, the concept of ability grouping impacting on self esteem is not a new one and there have been many studies which have come to the same conclusions regarding the negative effects on self perception of low achieving pupils (see for

example, Eash 1961 cited in Goldberg *et al.* 1966; Willig 1963 cited in Hallam and Toutounji 1996; Esposito 1973 cited in Harlen and Malcolm 1999; Eder 1981). It remains to be seen to whether this impact is exaggerated by the standardised assessment procedures which I have argued often sit side by side with sets. Having said this there are a few studies which report the positive effects: the research of Aylett (2000) describes how schools can challenge disaffection through a policy of setting and using smaller classes. This combination of setting with reduced class sizes was not an option in the school where I taught because of funding issues and although within the SEN Questionnaire teachers indicated smaller class sizes were an option for targeting pupils with SEN, this was not necessarily in combination with sets. Further research would be necessary to follow up what the potential impact would be if these two strategies are combined.

As a school we tried hard to keep talk of lower and top sets to a minimum, but were surprised, possibly naively, that pupils knew with startling accuracy their ability status within the year group. This knowledge of where an individual stands in the 'ability hierarchy' is documented by Devine (1993). There is a danger that this could lead to a self fulfilling prophecy for pupils who believe this standard is true for them and therefore live up or down to it, for example, Eder (1981) and Hallam and Toutounji (1996). The deterioration in behaviour patterns observed by the Computerised Observations (Section 6.4.2) in lower sets could have been an indication of pupils' dissatisfaction with their position in this hierarchy. Indeed, evidence from the attainment data could also be evidence of this self-fulfilling prophecy occurring (Section 7.4.3).

Sharp (1999) documents that setting is most common in Years 5 and 6 and other strategies are more likely to be used in Years 3 and 4: this corresponds to the research of Ireson *et al.* (2003) and Ofsted (1998b). Within my research, there does appear to be a link between pupil age and the adaptability of pupils to setting (Section 7.2.3); yet my research shows schools are implementing setting at an increasingly younger age. I have previously argued that the implementation of setting lower down the age ranges could be due to external pressures linked to policies such as standardised testing procedures; however, the findings from the Pupil Questionnaire indicate that, whatever the pressures, the negative effects on pupil attitude appear to be magnified with younger pupils. More research would be needed to investigate whether this is something that could be countered by school ethos, smaller class sizes or the teaching of skills to support pupils through the process of ability grouping.

Attitudes to the whole class sections of the Literacy Hour

Throughout this study, I have argued that a key impact emerging from implementation of the NLS is the increased amount of whole class teaching (Beverton and English 2000). I have documented how promoters of the Strategy, such as Beard (1998) and Stannard (1999), have argued this increases the amount of direct teaching time; however, I have found evidence of concerns from teachers regarding the targeting of objectives to the needs of the whole class within the Setting Questionnaire (Section 6.3.4) and the research of Smith and Whiteley (2000) Anderson *et al.* (2000) and Fisher and Lewis (1999). It is now important to look at the impact this type of whole class teaching has on pupil attitudes and relate it back to other aspects of the study.

The Pupil Questionnaire revealed the whole class sections were the least popular parts of the Literacy Hour regardless of whether the pupils were set or not. Reasons given by the pupils for their negative attitudes to these sections were varied, but a large proportion indicated feelings relating to anxiety and physical and mental discomfort (Section 6.2.2). These feelings correspond with research completed by Hanke (2000) documenting pupils' perceptions of the different parts of the Hour. She observed a lot of apprehension in regard to speaking out in front of the class and indicated an emotional dimension that was critical to learning in the Literacy Hour.

It could be argued that 'blame' should be directed at teachers for not managing these sections of the Literacy Hour effectively to include all pupils, and to a certain extent this might be true; this is a considerable modification to the way the literacy curriculum is taught and teacher training has been highlighted as patchy (Fisher and Lewis 1999). It is important to recognise that the levels of interaction necessary during extensive direct teaching requires a challenging level of skill that not all teachers are aware of and/or trained in (Alexander 2000; Galton 1999). I have provided evidence from the Computerised Observations that teachers are adapting their interaction depending on the make up of the group they are teaching, this could be contributing to pupils' lack of positive attitudes to this section of the Literacy Hour, they are reflecting their teachers' struggle to incorporate changes in teaching approaches (for example, Smith and Whiteley 2000).

It could also be, as previously mentioned, that the pupils are not used to this increased amount of whole class teaching and do not have the skills to participate as their

teacher and the NLS recommendations might expect (Dombey 1998; Lewis 1998; Lingard 2000). Because the National Literacy Strategy has dramatically increased the amount of whole class teaching, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that alongside teacher adjustment, there is a pupil reaction and adjustment also. With this in mind, the next section will examine whether setting can redress this balance. It will investigate to what extent the attitudes of different groups of pupils on the ability spectrum were impacted upon by setting, with particular regard to the whole class sections of the Literacy Hour.

Setting for inclusion: what do the attitudes of pupils tell us?

Setting has been promoted as a possible answer to the concerns from teachers regarding delivering an objective driven curriculum using whole class teaching to a mixed ability class (for example, Rolnick 2001 and McPake *et al.* 1999). Teachers have been documented feeling that they were had to teach to the average pupil; in other words, to aim for a 'best fit' with the target audience (for example, Anderson *et al.* 2000; Smith & Whiteley 2000). The evidence from the Pupil Questionnaire appears to correspond to this. The average pupils from mixed ability classes were found to be much more positive than their less able and more able peers. If setting does fulfil the brief of improving the targeting of objectives to need, then it might be expected that the attitudes of the relatively unhappy pupils at each end of the ability spectrum would improve. However, within the findings of this study was not seen to happen.

It was considered prior to implementing the Pupil Questionnaire that question 6 and 7 (*'Do you enjoy the whole class reading writing?'* and *'Do you enjoy the whole class spelling and vocabulary?'*) would be important as they related to the majority of whole class teaching time in the Literacy Hour. The results from the questionnaire were interesting, although not necessarily as the predicted: pupil attitudes to these elements of whole class teaching were not affected by the setting process. In fact, of all the cohorts that changed from mixed ability to setting not one had a significant change of opinion, either positively or negatively, to these sections of the Hour. In fact, in the results from the youngest pupils (Year 3 mixed/Year 4 set), these were the *only* two questions that did not have a significant change in opinion.

When the attitudes of pupils of different ability (SEN, average and able) were looked at with regard to these same two questions, the results showed that the pupils with SEN were slightly more positive once setting was implemented, although this was not statistically significant. However, in contrast, the average and able pupils were seen to stay the same or to change negatively. In fact with regard to the able pupils, there was a significantly negative change in their answers to question 6. The potential reasons for this change will be discussed in detail below; however it is important to note that this finding is in direct contrast to studies such as, Kulik (1992) and the findings of the teachers' rationale for setting (Section 7.3) all of which have emphasised the link between ability grouping and benefits for able pupils. No such association was found within the context of this school.

There is a third section of whole class teaching within the Literacy Hour: the plenary. Findings from the Computerised Observations show many teachers are giving this section of the Hour cursory attention or not completing it at all (Figure 47), corresponding to the research of Smith and Whiteley (2000). However, the Pupil Questionnaire provides evidence that the pupils found this session useful. Over the entire school population this was the most popular whole class section and it was rated by pupils with SEN more positively than their average and able peers; the able pupils were most negative. This could be evidence that time taken for revision and reflection, key themes in any SEN curriculum (Piotrowski and Reason 2000) is valued by pupils with SEN. However if the advocates of setting are to be believed this whole class time could be of even more benefit if the classes were set.

This was one area where the results were unanimous; all three samples that changed from mixed ability to set classes had significantly negative changes in opinion towards the plenary (results Section 6.2.2). I would suggest, following my assertions in Chapter 4, that this is an example of an element of the literacy curriculum not suited to teaching in sets. The comments from the pupils indicate that they enjoy this section because it gives them a chance to share ideas and reflect:

Yes because I like listening to people's stories and poems. (Year 4, female, 2000)

Yes because we let each other know about the lesson and our views. (Year 4, male, 1999)

Yes it helps you to speak out to everybody and not to be shy and also improves your language. (Year 5, male)

My contention is that areas of literacy taught in this discursive, shared way are better taught in mixed ability groups. This is born out by the drop in opinions regarding this section by all three sample groups. The quotes from the pupils seem to imply the pupils value a range of opinions and I would suggest the evidence above leads us to the possible conclusion that this is more attainable with mixed ability groups. This will be explored in the next section.

Different elements of literacy: different grouping arrangements

Research from the likes of Kulik (1992), has recommended setting as a strategy to benefit and extend the able pupils. However, my attitudinal data does not support this: the able pupils are seen to be more negative when setting was implemented. The reasons for this finding are inconclusive; it could have be the nature of the school's catchment with pupils who did not encourage or thrive on academic competition and success. Or it could be that there were aspects of teaching which these pupils enjoyed in mixed ability classes that are not apparent in sets: namely, the views and contributions of a diverse range of peers.

The results of question 6 (*Do you enjoy the whole class reading writing?*), however, could be indicating a relationship to the arguments made in Chapter 4 and above, that there is something about the nature of different sections of the Hour, and therefore the component parts of literacy, that makes them more or less suited to setting. Maybe the discussion and exploration of text (the focus of this question), characterised by more progressive, whole language approaches to literacy teaching, are better suited to mixed ability teaching (as promoted by Lyle, 1999) and these able pupils were astute

enough to recognise this. These two pupils' comments, one from a set and one from a mixed ability class, reinforce this point:

Yes I do think it is good because you can tell the rest of your class your feelings. (Year 3, female, 1999)

Yes I do because when the class' feelings come out, like fox hunting, everyone had a view. (Year 5, female, 1999)

This idea that different aspects of literacy are suited to different approaches of teaching appears to be important. This is a novel way of looking at ability grouping in literacy and could point to the potential benefits of using flexible grouping arrangements through the week, for example, setting for literacy on Tuesday and Thursday when the focus is more towards the basic skills (sentence and word level work), and for the rest of the week, using mixed ability teaching with a focus on whole language techniques (text level work).

7.4.5 Summary

Any hypothesised advantages to be gained from setting due to changes in attitude are not apparent in this sample. There are arguments regarding the training given to teachers and their resulting competency with regards to teaching literacy to the whole class. Questions need to be asked about the adequacy of training for teachers regarding this time and the extent to which teachers *and* pupils have the skills to optimise learning during this time. In addition, if setting is being considered as an option, then it would appear that some thought needs to be made regarding how it might affect the pupils and the teaching to the whole class. It is not simply a matter of implementation and reaping the benefits. This study indicates that consideration of the differentiation of the curriculum (Goldberg *et al.* 1966), patterns of interaction in the

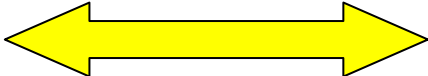
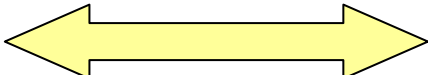
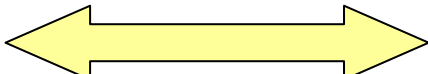
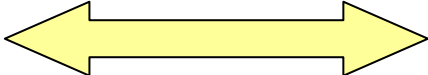
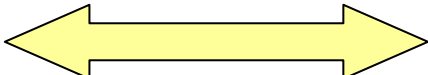
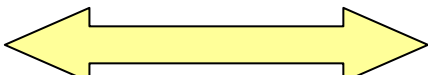
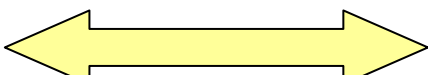
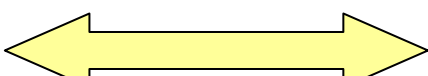
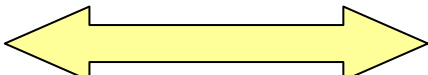
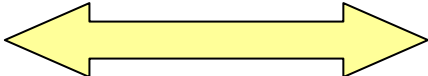
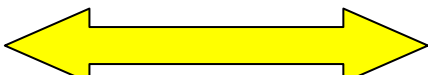
classes (as discussed in relation to the Computerised Observations, see Section 7.4.1), any teacher effects and the skills of the pupils to deal with the setting process would be essential. However, it could be argued that these results represent a 'settling in period', and that if this research were to be repeated in 2006, a change in attitude might be observed as teachers and pupils become more aware of the different strategies needed to make this time effective and better able to cope with teaching and learning in this section of the Literacy Hour. This would need further examination.

During mixed ability teaching the attitudes of the average pupils were more positive than their peers at either end of the ability spectrum, which gives support to the perspective that teachers are targeting their teaching at the average pupil. However, once setting was implemented, when it might have been expected that pupils at either end of the ability spectrum would become more positive as teaching became more closely matched to their needs, there was no corresponding change in pupil attitude. The pupils with SEN were slightly more positive, but not significantly so, and the more able pupils did not show any consistent change in their attitudes. In fact, the more able pupils showed wide differences in attitude towards the two 15 minutes whole class teaching sessions: with the word and sentence level section (characterised by more traditional literacy teaching methods) being slightly more positive in sets and the text level section (the more discursive, whole language based section) being *significantly* more negative once sets were implemented. This led me to suggest that more research is needed to investigate whether there is an association between different ways of teaching literacy and different ability grouping arrangements.

7.5 Examining the trends

The findings from this study reveal large inconsistencies in current practice. The incidence of setting for literacy has been found to be high across the primary school, with the NLS looking to have acted as a catalyst for its implementation, whether through initiating a dedicated literacy lesson, through the target driven curriculum it is associated with or because of the change in teaching method to a predominance of whole class sessions. The teachers, in reaction to many of these features, have stated a belief that setting is a strategy which can support them in teaching the Literacy Hour and have been clear about a connection this has with national standardised testing and the associated pressures. Yet the impact of setting is revealed as negative, whether in the patterns of interaction in the classroom, the attainment data of the pupils or the pupils' attitudes to literacy. This conflict between what is believed and what is happening in the classroom is interesting, although not necessarily a new phenomenon (see for example, Galton *et al.* 1999), and needs to be examined through further research. However, it is important to return to my argument regarding the conflicting educational philosophies and how they might be having an affect on the debate. A diagrammatic representation of this thinking can be seen in Table o on the next page.

Table o. Dichotomy of educational thinking and the associations with ability grouping

GROUP	Setting		Mixed ability
PHILOSOPHY	Traditional		Progressive
POLICY	Top-down implementation		Bottom-up implementation
TIMETABLE	Subject specific lessons		Cross curricular
TEACHING	Whole class teaching		Group work
LEARNING	Building block approach		Spiral curriculum
ASSESSMENT	Standardised national tests		Teacher formative assessment
CURRICULUM	Objective driven		Child focused
LITERACY	Basic skills approach		Whole language approach
NLS	Word/ Sentence level work		Text level work
SEN	“Inclusion”		Inclusion

A key aspect to this conflict, I have argued, is how the educational context into which the National Literacy Strategy has been implemented has impacted on its subject content and on how it is taught. The continuing debate between traditional and more progressive philosophies has emerged as important. The National Literacy Strategy marked a continuing trend towards the reintroduction of elements associated with the traditional educational policies of the early Twentieth Century: a basic skills approach to literacy teaching and a centrally prescribed curriculum associated with ambitious publicly recognised targets. In the past, the latter aspects have been shown to be closely linked to the use of ability grouping. Therefore, in part, it is no surprise that my findings have shown a repeat of this relationship occurring in the current context (as represented by the right hand column of Table o).

The NLS, however, also includes elements which can be attributed to the more progressive side of the educational debate (the left hand column of Table o). In the main, I have associated this with the move towards education equality and the requirement that all pupils are included within the Literacy Hour; although elements of a whole language approach to teaching literacy are also present within the NLS: *Framework*. The struggle that teachers are having in incorporating the different aspects from different sides of the debate is almost definitely contributing to the implementation of setting and can therefore be considered as crucial to some of the issues that are arising.

The breadth the term inclusion has come to represent within this study is one of the significant areas where traditional meets progressive ideals. Teachers believed that

setting was implemented to target objectives and to effectively teach to a wide range of abilities while also supporting the more able and improving standards. Within these beliefs it is possible to see the combination of the two opposing ideologies within inclusion: traditional thinking in the latter two aspects (getting the able through the 11+ was one of the main reasons setting was implemented pre 1967) and the former being more progressive and equating to aims for educational equality that predominated in the years post Plowden.

In Chapter 3, teachers emerged as fundamental to the success or failure of a policy and I think that this study supports this concept. I would argue that from the evidence provided, teachers are essentially pragmatists and when confronted with a policy, such as the National Literacy Strategy, which consists of contradictions like the need to include while attaining significant attainment targets then compromises in their beliefs and practice are inevitable. It would appear that setting is a pragmatic solution to reconciling the recommendations in the National Literacy Strategy and the structure of the Literacy Hour. However, the tragedy of this story is that this pragmatic solution appears not to have worked. Indeed the deepest misfortune is that the people who suggestions of inclusion were primarily aimed at, the pupils with SEN, are the ones for whom it has worked the least effectively. Setting as a strategy for inclusion has operated differentially, the greatest benefits accruing to the highest achieving pupils.

The reasons why setting has not worked are not clear, although I could speculate that there are practical issues in the classroom which could be managed in such a way as

to lessen any negative effects. I perceive these fitting into three categories, training for teachers, training for pupils (which could be connected to age) and the problematising of setting and its relationship to the content of the literacy curriculum. In my final chapter I will make explicit the link between these three areas and the recommendations I would make to schools and teachers, to policy makers and to education researchers from this study.

CHAPTER 8 – Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This study has examined the issues surrounding ability grouping (setting and mixed ability) within the context of the National Literacy Strategy. This topic has been examined using a multi-method approach examining the teachers' and the pupils' perspectives as well as looking at the impacts of the setting process in the classroom. The study reveals that the decision to implement setting is not a simple one and that there are many factors that will affect the way that literacy is taught and learnt within different pupil organisational groupings. I have identified these contrasting factors as being part of a dichotomy (Table o) to illustrate how they inter-relate and increase the likelihood of setting occurring in schools. A real conflict that has become apparent is between what teachers believe about setting and the negative impact it has in the classroom: this is fundamental to many of the recommendations I will make.

Within this final chapter I will make my concluding remarks. Firstly, I will summarise my recommendations for schools, teachers and for policy makers. Next, I will discuss areas which have arisen from this study which could provide a foundation to further research in the area. I will then look at the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology before, finally, giving a resume of the findings and highlighting the study's achievements.

8.2 Implications for schools and teachers

Setting has been shown to be employed as a strategy for delivering the NLS in many schools since 1997. Most teachers appear to be aware of the organisational characteristics of setting and some of its theoretical possibilities. However, with regard to the decision whether to use setting for literacy or not, there are no simple answers. The different ways that teachers and schools are applying the recommendations of the NLS and setting mean that contextual factors need to be taken into consideration when reflecting on the advice; however, my findings do indicate a number of factors which should be prioritised by schools and teachers when contemplating the issue of setting.

The National Literacy Strategy's use of a daily literacy lesson as the main method of delivery has paved the way for setting for literacy to be introduced in an unprecedented way. Historically ability grouping has been used for the teaching of reading, but not for more discursive aspects, such as writing and speaking and listening; these tended to be spread across the curriculum. The requirement within the Literacy Hour that teachers use whole class teaching strategies has been critical in generating concerns from the teachers and has a clear link to the implementation of setting. However, there appears to be many factors which need to be considered when making the decision to set or not.

Logistical issues are one area that is not well considered in the ability grouping literature, and yet this encompasses many important aspects for the smooth running of any school and therefore any policy. Firstly, there is the assumption that a setting

policy applied to numeracy can be equally well used to effectively teach literacy. Although this double use of sets means that teachers can share the teaching of the lower sets more equally across the two subjects (as was done in the school where I taught), it can mean that assumptions about curriculum content and teach approaches are being made across the subjects. This appears to be further exacerbated by the dominance of the National Numeracy Strategy used in parallel to the NLS. As a result, in that numeracy and literacy are likely to occupy most of the morning, it could mean any disadvantages, such as impacts on self esteem and self efficacy, are exaggerated.

Secondly, there are practical matters that need to be considered. These encompass elements such as the transfer of pupils around the school (the success of which appears to have a relationship with age), the possible impact on resources when a number of classes are timetabled to have literacy at the same time in the school day, and the management of parents evenings. These topics can be managed, as relevant skills can be taught to the pupils to make the setting process more efficient, but there needs to be an awareness of what could happen if these aspects are not taken into consideration.

Thirdly, there are organisational issues surrounding the teaching of pupils with SEN. My findings indicate that schools are using setting for including a wide range of abilities, while keeping previous support strategies for pupils with SEN, such as extra adult assistance and withdrawing groups. My recommendation for schools, if they are going to use setting, is to consider using it in combination with these strategies:

setting could aid the targeting of resources (both physical and additional support) towards those most in need and is arguably a method that is not being exploited sufficiently. Setting might not be explicitly thought of as a strategy for the advantage of pupils with special needs, but there are ways in which traditional strategies can be made more beneficial and this might go some way to negate the negative impact of setting I found on these pupils.

My findings have shown that teachers, regardless of whether they are using setting or not, see it as an advantageous method for including a wide range of abilities, but with a particular focus on more able pupils. However, there are real issues regarding this focus of setting and the expectations which are placed on the more able pupils as a result. My findings show that able pupils are the not necessarily the most positive in sets. There is need for further research surrounding why this is, but there are undoubtedly questions regarding the atmosphere of competition which can be created by the setting process and the impact this can have on their attitudes to literacy.

The association that appears to be made between inclusion of pupils at both ends of the ability spectrum and raising standards through the use of setting is also problematic. I have argued that bringing together these two aims can be challenging, agreeing with Dyson and Slee (2001) that the pupils at the less able end of the ability spectrum are synonymous with failure and they are the ones who are unlikely to achieve the ambitious aims of the current national targets for academic standards. I do not have evidence to show whether it is the conflict embedded in teachers' rationale for setting that is causing some of the observed negative impacts; however, schools

should ask themselves why they are using setting and to what extent it is a pragmatic decision to make 'best fit' policy recommendations. In other words, schools should always consider whether there are alternative ways, such as adapting the structure of the Hour or patterns of interaction between teacher and pupils (spoken about below), that would achieve these aims before setting is implemented.

This concept of adapting the Literacy Hour appears to be most applicable with regard to the whole class sections. My findings show this is an area where many teachers have concerns, while also being a time that pupils have indicated as being problematic. Pupil attitudes were least positive to these sections of the Literacy Hour and the setting process did not impact on this as might have been expected. Many children mentioned physical discomfort and made negative comments regarding the length of this time. I would argue that teachers need to incorporate increased interactivity and participation during these sessions and be aware that simply homogenising the group is not enough. This could be taken to mean that further training for teachers is essential to increase awareness of strategies that can be used during this time and to make explicit the choices and knowledge that is paramount to effective literacy teaching. If setting is implemented, which would appear to add a further dimension to the requirements made on teachers' professional awareness, questions need to be asked as to whether teachers are altering patterns of interaction according to the make up of group or the content of the lesson objectives they are teaching, and to what extent this is necessary.

The answer to the question whether schools should set for literacy or not, has emerged as a complex one within this study. Examination of the way in which the content of the literacy curriculum is presented in the National Literacy Strategy has led me to suggest that a blanket policy of setting for literacy is not necessarily a positive thing. I have found some indication that different elements of literacy may be more or less suited to the setting process. If this proves to be the case, I would recommend to teachers and schools that they assess their intentions with regard to literacy teaching and learning and adopt a policy of setting accordingly. I see potential for a mixed model of ability grouping, with setting being used for elements of the Hour which are based around relational understanding and mixed ability teaching be utilised for more discursive elements. This could be done, for example, by teaching literacy for two days a week in sets with learning objectives focusing on the word and sentence level work, and the rest of the week, using mixed ability grouping, concentrating on text level work. This is my vision, but the important factor is that schools do not presume that setting is a simple option which can be implemented without consideration of the subject which is being taught. Further research in this area is imperative.

The final piece of advice that I would like to give to schools and teachers is to be aware of the age of pupils and the impact that this can have on their adaptability to the setting process. My study has shown that younger pupils may not be as suited to the ability grouping process and I have hypothesised that this could be for a number of reasons, including the impact of having more than one teacher, problems with transitions between classes and an inability to deal with the perception of their own position within the overt ability hierarchy created by ability grouping. However, my research has also suggested that there are strategies which can be implemented to help

minimise these affects. I have associated these negative impacts, not only with age but, with ‘learning independence’ and I have argued that skills can be taught to help pupils with the Literacy Hour and the process of setting, and that school ethos can assist in creating robust pupils’ perceptions of themselves as learners.

Having discussed advice for schools and teachers it is now important to extend my recommendation to the next layer up, to the policy makers.

8.3 Recommendations for policy makers

The National Literacy Strategy was criticised by Fisher (2000b) as being a ‘one model fits all approach’, aimed to fit all contexts and ages. The findings of this study have exemplified her comments. I have provided evidence of the wide range of contexts into which the NLS is being applied and, in relation to this, the diverse approaches which teachers are developing to account for these differences: one of which is setting. Having said this, it is important to point out that it would appear that in some schools, setting is also being implemented with the same blanket approach and, as a result, the same issues stand: there are many contexts into which setting is applied and there are many issues which individual teachers and schools need to consider for its effective function. There needs to be adaptability and flexibility built into any policy to account for need.

The assumption of a positive relationship between ability grouping and raising standards is not supported by my research. The recommendations encompassed by the National Literacy Strategy: *Framework for Teaching*, some of which have traditional

leanings and some of which have their origins in more progressive philosophies, can often be contradictory. The policy of inclusion was not apparent when ability grouping and traditional ideologies were previously used. Policy makers have to realise that by bringing together the policies of inclusion and public target setting for schools they are creating conflict for the teacher. And indeed, the proposal that setting could be a possible solution to this conflict appears to be unrealistic.

If there are inherent tensions in recommending setting within the current policy context of primary schools, then this study also provides evidence that there are issues regarding setting for the subject of literacy. My findings suggest that the complexity of literacy teaching and learning means that a comprehensive setting policy for all elements of the subject might not necessarily be appropriate. Some areas of literacy appear to be more or less suited to the process of ability grouping. I have suggested that this has a relationship with the underpinning beliefs about how literacy should be taught: elements of the literacy curriculum associated with the basic skills approaches and therefore likely to be aligned with the building block approach to learning, could be seen to be closely associated with ability grouping, while elements of literacy attributed to the whole language approaches, and the spiral curriculum, could be better suited to mixed ability teaching. If nothing else the complexity of literacy and the resulting issues surrounding a policy of setting should not be underestimated.

There are also issues which have become apparent over the course of this study with regard to the age of pupils and their adaptability to the process of setting. I propose that a policy of setting, if it is to be used, needs to be carefully matched to the

maturity and ‘learner independence’ of the pupils; in other words, it is not necessarily a suitable strategy for all pupils at all ages. This might be one of the reasons why a polarisation occurs between the most and least able when sets are implemented. There does appear to be some kind of causal relationship between the blanket application of the NLS and of standardised national testing across the whole of the primary age phase which is encouraging the increased use of setting in the younger age groups. It is important to ask whether the same suppositions can be made for a five year old pupil and for an eleven year old. If nothing else, the contextual factors and pupil characteristics must be given due consideration and policy makers should allow the flexibility for these considerations to be acted on.

In light of this differing need across the primary education system, this study has highlighted a number of issues with regard to the term inclusion. It is broader than traditionally perceived. There needs to be a broadening of the term to comprise SEN pupils *and* the most able: teachers in the classroom are preoccupied with the range of abilities represented within the classroom and, consequently, the issues of teaching to their diverse needs. This needs to be accounted for in the documentation, instead of applying separate recommendations towards the two extremes of the primary population. They need to be more commonly seen as one and the same issue.

Earl *et al.* (2000) encouraged policy makers to listen to teachers, to “...dissenting voices” and to remember “...the power of learning communities” (pp.40-41). One of the chief concerns with the introduction of the NLS was the impact on teachers’ self-belief and the possible feeling that they would have lost their professional identity;

however, a critical aspect of this study has been the engagement of teachers with the issues surrounding curriculum advice for literacy and recommendations for encouraging inclusion. There is strong evidence of teachers using their professional knowledge to work within the constraints presented by the National Literacy Strategy and this study indicates that a similar engagement is needed when applying a policy of setting. Listening to teachers voices should be a key aspect of any policy generation and implementation.

Teacher knowledge and understanding of the processes involved with teaching literacy are paramount and one of the areas of the Literacy Hour about which teachers have raised concerns is the whole class sections. The change to whole class teaching, although highly promoted by advocates of the Hour (Beard 1998; Standard 1999), does mark a dramatic change in practice for teachers. My research has emphasised this problematic area, indicating that there are issues with the patterns of interaction which teachers are using during this time and how this section is managed with regard to the comfort and interest levels of the pupils. Further teacher training is undoubtedly needed and if setting is to be applied, then there needs to be recognition within this training of the potential impacts of ability grouping and how best they can be managed. There needs to be increased recognition that if there is to be a dramatic change in policy, whether it is regarding how a subject is taught, how the pupils are organised or the way in which assessment is to be carried out, knowledge and training for the teachers is paramount in adapting the recommendations to the context in which they teach.

8.4 Proposals for further research

This study has provided information on the teachers' perspective, the pupils' perspective and impacts of setting for the National Literacy Strategy when different organisational groupings were used. The evidence has highlighted a number of key arguments and implications to do with setting for literacy; however, the research has also prompted a number of conclusions and questions which clearly require further investigation. This is particularly the case because the NLS and setting are relatively new strategies and therefore empirical research is lacking. In this section I will establish the topics which I feel merit further research.

The gap uncovered in this study between what teachers believe about the advantages of setting and its negative impacts in the classroom should be a fundamental concern of any further research. Research has drawn attention to a large deficit within the current practice of setting under the National Literacy Strategy. It has become apparent that there needs to be further examination of the associations which teachers are making between the curriculum recommendations and ability grouping; however there are also elements relating to the different impacts of setting and the ways that teachers might be having an effect. In other words, I would recommend that any additional investigation needs to focus on any teacher effects that might be associated with the setting process and the applicability of setting to the subject of literacy.

With regard to methodology, I feel that the pupils' perspective has been established as an important and enlightening aspect. In particular, the comments from the pupils show remarkable clarity of thinking regarding their experiences of school and

learning experiences. I feel that this is a major strength of the research and it is an area with much scope for further research, particularly in the creation of a methodology for talking to children. With regard to setting, there is definite scope for extended research into pupils' attitudes to the setting process. I could not be explicit in my questioning of the pupils and so had to hide my research focus within a questionnaire asking about the Literacy Hour; and although this was interesting, it has meant that a lot of the associated findings and conclusions have had to rely on interpretation rather than an explicit examination of pupils' views of setting. I think that this would be an interesting area of further research and would certainly extend the debate about ability grouping.

The sample used for the observations only looked at a small group of set classes and so an important extension would be further investigation of teacher-pupil interaction in sets. This could also be usefully triangulated with analysis of videos (with support from the teachers themselves) to gather more information regarding the intention behind different behaviours: are they adapting their interaction patterns according to the needs of the pupils, the content which is being taught or because of preconceptions about the ability level? This type of research could be useful in examining my hypothesis that ability grouping might be more or less suited to different aspects of literacy.

I would also like to examine whether there are 'skills' which can be taught to help pupils deal with setting in the Literacy Hour. And if there are such skills, a significant

constituent of this would be how and when they could be taught and the different contexts which can encourage and support their development.

Finally, I feel that there is scope for extensions to this study with regard to the National Literacy Strategy. It has been accused of impacting on teachers' professionalism and dramatically changing teachers' practice in the classroom. However, previous research into policy implementation has found that teachers will revert back to their original teaching patterns (for example, Galton *et al.* 1999). Over time, it will be important to investigate the long term impacts of the National Literacy Strategy: will teachers' practice begin to revert to pre-NLS characteristics or will they begin to develop confidence with managing whole class teaching to a range of abilities with the Literacy Hour becoming firmly established as a result?

8.5 Reflections on the research process

This study used a multi-method approach; it was deemed the most appropriate for investigating such a complex area. Qualitative research within the school where I taught facilitated the main study and informed the interpretation of more quantitative data in the latter stages of the research.

My reflective commentaries have represented the starting point for this study; they have influenced the path that this research project has taken, most importantly the composition of the research questions, and have been influential in the interpretation of data from other areas of the project. When completing the observations, in 1999 and 2000, I was not sure what importance they would have in the final study, I feel

that this element could have been extended, with increased documentation of the processes occurring in my classroom. I think, in hindsight considering the path that this project has taken, it would also have been beneficial to supplement my own reflections with some more structured observations of the classroom processes in my mixed ability class and my lower set, particularly focusing on the behaviour of the pupils with SEN.

I am pleased with the way that the Pupil Questionnaire worked, although I think it would have been beneficial to shorten it, thus increasing the number of pupils who fully completed it. This might also have reduced the bias towards the more able pupils and increased the likelihood of completion as well as encouraging more written comments. The latter in particular being far more enlightening and influential in the interpretation of the findings than I initially expected. An alternative way of addressing this mismatch might have been the interviewing of a sub-sample of pupils; however I stand by my position that as a full time class teacher my time was too pressured for this.

If the Pupil Questionnaire was to be repeated then there are a number of issues that would need to be considered. Firstly, I have observed, through my time as a researcher that the Literacy Hour is being used more flexibly and therefore asking pupils explicitly about the 15 minutes whole class reading and writing and the whole class spelling and vocabulary would not be appropriate as the distinctions are becoming less obvious with teachers' increasing confidence. It may be that any confusion could be avoided by using illustrations as examples, such as those used by

Hanke (2000) to research young pupils' attitudes to the Literacy Hour, or by asking explicitly what it is like being taught as a whole class.

I would have liked to have asked pupils more explicitly about their experiences of setting and mixed ability thinking, I feel from my subsequent experiences of talking to children about their experiences in school that children could have spoken eloquently on the subject and the information would have provided an important extra angle on the debate. However, this was not possible due to the wishes of the head teacher at the school where I taught and therefore more circuitous methods had to be used, with pupils' attitudes to different organisational groupings disguised behind questions on the different sections of the Literacy Hour.

In the SEN Questionnaire, I would have liked to have asked more about the setting process and how it was felt to benefiting the pupils with special educational needs. This would have made the links between the two teacher perception questionnaires more explicit and triangulation easier. It would also have been advantageous if the Setting Questionnaire sample had been increased in size. With the Computerised Observations, I would have liked to have increased the sample size by completing observations in more classes using setting. The findings at this point are a tentative pointer from which further research is necessary.

Having pointed out the issues with the methods used, it is now time to draw this study to a close by making my final remarks.

8.6 Final remarks

The association that is being made in primary schools between setting and the National Literacy Strategy has emerged from this study as one that is over simplified in schools and in policy makers' recommendations. Setting is not a straightforward way to achieve the dual aims of inclusion and raising standards, and literacy is not a subject that naturally lends itself to the application of ability grouping. The context of primary schools at the start of the Twenty First Century is more complex than that.

The historical perspectives on literacy and SEN policy recommendations and ability grouping have provided a valuable perspective on the complexity of current developments. The review has identified important trends which should be examined with regard to setting and the National Literacy Strategy. For example, the conflict between progressive and traditional ideologies in the NLS which teachers are having to grapple with in the classroom has been identified as an important element in untangling what makes the use of ability grouping more likely.

My findings have indicated that the re-emergence of ability grouping in the primary school is closely associated, in the teachers' heads at least, with a practical solution to the needs of inclusion, in its broadest sense, and with the requirements of the National Literacy Strategy. The present study, however, has shown that teachers' confidence in ability grouping is not borne out by my findings. There seems to be, whether caused by the National Literacy Strategy or the teachers themselves, a disparity between what is presumed to work and what operates well in practice. My findings have shown that setting for the Literacy Hour is not working and in many cases it is disadvantaging the

very individuals that its rationale aims to support: those at either end of the ability spectrum. It is important to ask whether teachers' beliefs about setting would remain as positive if they were made aware of the findings of this study.

The negative affect on the value added reading scores of pupils with special needs, the negative change in pupils' attitudes and the differentiation in patterns of interaction used in sets and mixed ability classrooms, all suggest setting is not working effectively. Having said this, there does seem to be some indication that, if setting is to be used, these negative aspects could be managed, for example, by teaching specific skills to pupils, by examining and becoming aware of the patterns of interaction used in sets, or by applying ability grouping differentially across the literacy curriculum.

This study, therefore, has suggested that if teachers feel that setting is an appropriate way of delivering the literacy curriculum as laid out in the NLS, then critical to making the process effective is thinking about setting as another educational policy, alongside the National Literacy Strategy, which should be implemented inside a critical framework and adapted to the context in which they teach.

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Appendices