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**Title:**

**The forced march of the National Literacy Strategy: violence, resistance and personal consequences for those within local education authorities**

**Abstract:** (Your abstract must not exceed 1000 words including the title and references. Please use 10pt Arial font).

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This paper is presented as part of the findings of a doctoral study that has been undertaken as a policy trajectory study into processes of the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) throughout England in 1998. The conceptualisation of policy as texts, processes and outcomes follows that of Bowe *et al* (1992). The focus in this paper is upon people who worked to bring about a 'revolution', a 'sea-change' in the English education system at the meso level, between national policy making and schools.

The English education system was originally created by the 1944 Education Act as a 'national system, locally administered' (Whitty *et al*, 1998:17). Since then, most education in England has been provided by the state in schools which have been maintained and overseen by locally democratically accountable bodies. These Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were redesignated Local Authorities following the Children Act of 2004. The work of LEAs was radically altered as a result of NLS implementation, and the national strategies that followed it. LEA structures were forced to accommodate teams of consultants, funded centrally through the strategy, and trained by national directors.

A small team of directors took the strategy to each LEA, using their powers of negotiation alongside the 'lubrication' of funding. Refusal was countered with violence, forcing strategy requirements into LEA systems. The consequences were profound and long term, highly visible in local authority structures and service priorities today.

The study focused on the cases of three contrasting LEAs with the following research questions explored:

1. How was literacy strategy policy mediated and reinterpreted in specific contexts and how did feedback influence policy development?
2. How were professional identities changed as a consequence?
3. How were individuals supported and constrained by the organisational structures within which they worked?

Interviews took place with three strategic managers, one from each authority, six literacy consultants, two regional directors and four national directors who had been responsible for strategy implementation in 1998. Using some of Fairclough's techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) and a Foucauldian approach to the analysis of data (Foucault 1977), I present an explanation of some of the consequences for my participants in the early years of NLS implementation from 1998 to 2003. Tensions and resistances are explored as the strategy was implemented into a marketised education system (Ball, 2007) with a strong legacy in one LEA of schools opting out of LEA control to attain Grant Maintained status (Fitz *et al*, 1993). Privatisation of some services, alongside the changes in expectations laid down by the Primary National Strategy in 2003, added to this complexity in the case of one of the LEAs that I examined.

In 1998, Consultant teams were newly appointed. They were insurgents, inserted into the different and differing systems of LEAs. Alongside strategy directors, they were resisted and marginalised, divorced and separated from the mainstream work of LEAs. Silos were reinforced, with service leaders resisting attempts to align the work of LEAs in supporting schools. There were examples of extreme turbulence and accounts from individuals who worked within this challenging

space to align powerful, potentially violent forces, to engage schools in a new and untried experiment, bringing a panacea of school improvement and the promise of raised attainment to every classroom within each primary school throughout England. The ways they achieved this, within the smallest capillaries of interpersonal discourse whilst using disciplining technologies to hold others within the strategy's gaze, are explained here. The ongoing struggles and tensions within a system of high-stakes testing are explored and the emotional responses from some of those working in this turbulent arena are recalled.

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