FORUM, Volume 49, Numbers 1 & 2, 2007

New Labour and Education: an evidence-based analysis

MAURICE GALTON

ABSTRACT This article looks at the evidence concerning performance and progress in the primary school over the lifetime of New Labour's tenure in government since 1997. It examines the claims made by New Labour that the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been an outstanding success and have changed the ways that teachers teach. On the evidence of the author's own research and that of other independent researchers this claim appears contentious. Attainment targets are still to be reached, pupils' attitudes to core subjects and liking of school have declined, and teacher stress has increased. Far from changing teaching so that it has become more 'interactive', whole-class teaching appears to have become more didactic and less challenging. The article concludes by arguing that the latest revisions of the Primary Strategy, while attempting to deal with some of the problems identified by the research, will also fail unless the continuing emphasis on accountability and testing is also reappraised.

Given the emphasis on education in its 1997 election manifesto, New Labour made a fairly unpromising start when the new Secretary of State for Education began by naming and shaming 'the 18 "worst schools" in the country'. As reported by Liz Lightfoot, the then education correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*,

> Special consultants with proven records of turning schools round are to be sent in. Their £400-a-day fees will be paid by the Government. David Blunkett, the Education Secretary, gave warning that those who failed to raise standards would be closed and re-opened under a new name and possibly a new head teacher and change of staff. (21 May 1997)

Supporters of the then recently elected government tended to attribute this initiative to the political climate which required New Labour to be seen to be as tough on standards as its predecessor. They argued that as the government gained in confidence it would begin to roll back some of the more regressive

legislation passed during Conservative rule; measures which a recent survey indicated had demoralised teachers (Galton & Fogelman, 1998).

This article therefore seeks to examine the relevant research evidence in order to judge how far the aspirations of these supporters have been fulfilled. Are primary teachers happier and more satisfied with their job? Are pupils doing better and do they have greater aptitude towards learning? Have, as it is claimed, teaching methods improved? Has all the money which has gone into the system, and to give credit where credit is due, a lot of money has been injected into primary schools, produced the desired results?

Reforming the Reforms

Writing in the introduction to a book setting out views of what it was hoped New Labour would achieve in the field of education, Sheila Dainton (1998), a senior official in the Association for Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), expressed the hope that the promised review of the National Curriculum would be the last for a very long time. As set out in the opening paragraph to this chapter, Mr Blunkett's start was not auspicious. Although committed to the review, and frequently reminding primary teachers of their statutory duty to develop a 'balanced and broadly based curriculum' and to promote the 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils' (DfEE, 1997, p. 3), Mr Blunkett nevertheless announced a number of measures which it was claimed would ensure that primary teachers continued to focus on basics in order to meet the government's challenging literacy and numeracy targets. The retention of Chris Woodhead as Chief Inspector was also not calculated to reassure the profession. Despite numerous warnings that the previous decade had produced a profession suffering from 'reform fatigue' (Campbell, 1998, p. 96), New Labour, in their first year of office, according to Tomlinson (2005), produced seven major bills and policy statements. As far as primary education was concerned, the most significant of these initiatives included the setting up of the Standard and Effectiveness Unit inside the Department for Education and Skills, the launch of the 'New Deal' with the Summer Literacy Schools Initiative, the White Paper *Excellence in Schools*, in which the National Literacy Strategy was announced (including a decision to devote one hour a day to literacy in all primary schools) and the Schools Standards and Frameworks Bill. This was followed in the second year of office in 1998 by the setting up of Educational Action Zones, the National Grid for Learning and the Numeracy Taskforce, the publication of homework guidelines, the launching of Sure Start programmes for children from birth to three years old in areas of deprivation and the creation of Specialist and Beacon schools for inner cities. This raft of government initiatives, new Acts, new bodies (mostly consisting of nominated quangos or task forces), new Green and White Papers, has continued apace throughout New Labour's rule. As far as primary schools were concerned, most commentators (Chitty, 2004; Tomlinson, 2005; Walford, 2005) would agree that the important events concerned the introduction of the National Literacy

and Numeracy Strategies, designed to ensure that all primary pupils met agreed targets, and the priority given to the disadvantaged through the Educational Action Zones, which were later incorporated into the framework of Excellence in Cities.

Brehony (2005) has attempted to evaluate the impact of these policies, in their broadest sense, on primary schools. He notes that the thinking behind the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies appears to have had its origin in the 'third way' developed by President Clinton and the Democratic Party in the United States. While under previous Conservative rule, central government had attempted to mandate teachers to adopt certain teaching methods; in promoting these new strategies (particularly the Literacy one) New Labour took matters considerably further.

One of the final acts of the Conservative government was to set up the National Literacy Project in 1996. The Framework for Teaching endorsed by the project incorporated a dedicated literacy teaching time of an hour per day and a structure of class management that shunned individualised approaches in favour of whole-class teaching. The emphasis on the 'back to basics' policy advocated by the then Chief Inspector, Chris Woodhead, meant that there was an increase in the mechanics of reading and writing with greater emphasis on both phonics and grammar.

Both Professor Michael Barber, with responsibility for literacy, and Professor David Reynolds, who headed the National Numeracy Taskforce, were products of the school improvement movement. In the same way that the Literacy Taskforce emphasised grammar and the mechanics of writing so the Numeracy group gave a similar priority to calculation skills. In both cases the focus was on whole-class teaching largely based on the various reviews by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), including one by Reynolds himself (Reynolds & Farrell, 1996). Other writers, however, have challenged the claim that both the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies represented the best 'evidence-based practice' (Brown et al, 1998) while Alexander (2004, p. 22) points out that the evidence regarding best practice in literacy, for example, was only compiled after the Literacy Hour was made a statutory requirement when Beard (1998) finally produced his review.

Subsequently, national targets were set such that by the year 2002 80% of 11-year-olds would reach the expected standard for their age in English and 75% would reach this level in mathematics. In successive years, however, considerable concern has been expressed about the rigidity of the Strategies. Schools struggled to come to terms with the question of how to fit the rest of the curriculum into the timetable, given that mathematics and English now took up 10 hours of the 25 hours of primary schooling per week. According to Brehony (2005, p. 39) anxieties were expressed elsewhere in government, 'that an overly dirigiste approach to the management of teachers and an overly explicit classroom pedagogy would do little to release the creativity and innovation which the knowledge-based economy would require'. Others such as Bentley (1998), then a director of the think-tank DEMOS (heavily influential

in New Labour's thinking), also expressed similar concerns and argued that the emphasis on qualifications in schooling should be reduced and that the skills needed for what he termed the new knowledge economy should be integrated into mainstream teaching. Out of these concerns came the publication in 2003 of *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). At its launch the then Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, said that targets would be dropped in 2004 in response to head teachers' complaints about excessive pressures and that there would be more autonomy for teachers in the way that they managed their classrooms. However as Alexander (2004) has also pointed out, the central dilemma of how teachers were to exercise this autonomy in a regime of targets and performance tables was left unclear. Although it has been argued that teachers have grown in confidence, and that their approach to literacy and numeracy has become more flexible (Office for Standards in Education, 2002a) there is little sign from surveys of teacher opinion that work in primary school is less stressful as a result of these later initiatives (Galton & MacBeath, 2002). Typical of the 'mixed messages' delivered to primary head teachers was the view expressed by one of Ofsted's more recent Chief Inspectors, David Bell, in his 2003 Annual Report (Ofsted, 2004). There, the Chief Inspector argued that pressure on primary schools to improve literacy and numeracy was producing a two-tier curriculum while at the same time continuing to pressurise teachers by expressing concern that the test scores at Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11 years) were at a standstill.

Meanwhile the Standards Unit, under Professor Michael Barber, had employed a team led by Michael Fullan from the Ontario Institute, to evaluate, at considerable expense, the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Barber argued that this would ensure a different perspective and a detachment which would not be possible among English researchers (Brehony, 2005, p. 36). Three reports (Earl et al, 2000, 2001, 2003) were produced. Despite a long and distinguished publication record on school leadership in which Professor Fullan has argued for strong teacher communities that 'are highly intellectual as well as highly caring' (Fullan, 2001, p. 133), his evaluation team saw 'top down, large scale reform' as an interesting experiment and appeared to endorse the imposition of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies on schools. Furthermore, the evaluation reports claimed these twin strategies had dramatically changed the ways that teachers thought about classroom practice. The evaluation team, however, were less forthcoming in estimating whether such changes in pedagogy had brought about improvements in pupils' learning. It was left to other British researchers, the ones whom Professor Barber had claimed were not able to bring sufficient detachment to the evaluation process, to undertake this assessment, as and when independent funding allowed.

Testing in the National Curriculum

When New Labour first set out as a national target that 80% of 11-year-olds must reach the expected standard in English by 2002, the then Secretary of State, David Blunkett, promised to resign if this result was not achieved. By the end of 2001 however it appeared that the upward trend in scores on the National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 2 had begun to reach a plateau and this trend has been confirmed in recent years, as Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate.

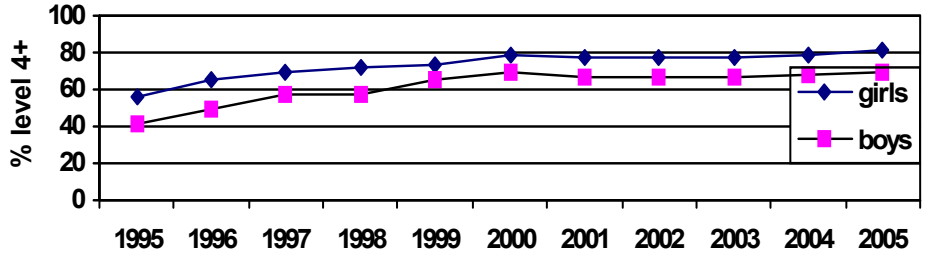

Figure 1. KS2 National Curriculum results (English) 1995-2005.

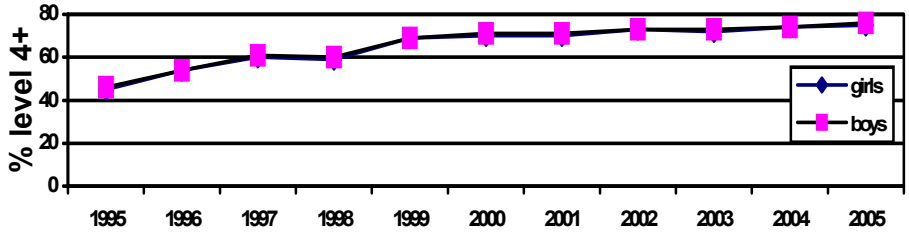

Figure 2. KS2 National Curriculum results (Mathematics) 1995-2005.

The June 2006 results continue this trend. In English girls reached their target in 2001 (80% of girls gained Level 4 or better), dipped below in 2002 (79%) but have increased slightly in each year until in 2005 84% reached the target. For boys, however, it has been a different story. The gap between boys and girls has remained steady at around 10% so that in 2001 the figure was 70% while by 2005 it had reached 74%. Consequently, overall only 79% of Year 6 primary pupils have achieved Level 4 or better in English. In mathematics less progress has been made although the gap between boys' and girls' achievement is negligible as Figure 2 illustrates. By the 2005 tests 76% of boys had achieved Level 4 or above compared to 75% of girls. The corresponding results for 2001 showed 71% of boys and 70% of girls reaching these levels. Thus in both cases the trend has been for the numbers of pupils reaching the required level to have risen between 1995 and 2000 and then to plateau.

Earl et al (2003) have put forward the view in their evaluation that some of these earlier gains may have been attributable to a 'Hawthorne Effect', whereby any new innovation, however valid, brings about an initial gain in output because of the expectations surrounding the reform. However, Tymms & Coe (2003, p. 648) have also argued that the evidence for a massive rise in standards of literacy and numeracy during the initial period of the strategy is 'largely illusory'. Using their own specially constructed tests, Performance Indicators in Primary Schools data on reading and mathematics in over 100 schools were collected annually from 1995 (Tymms & Fitz-Gibbon, 2001). The scores for reading showed little change while in mathematics there were modest gains. Brown et al's (2003, p. 670) findings from a five-year study of mathematics (1997-2002) support those of Tymms & Fitz-Gibbon (2001) in concluding that there is little evidence that the National Numeracy Strategy has been an 'indisputable success as judged by a rise in attainment'. Brown and her colleagues, however, go further than other critics in suggesting that 'in some cases research evidence was disregarded for political reasons' because the government needed to justify the expenditure of over £400 million on implementing these twin strategies. Tymms (2004) in a later article summarising the various independent studies suggests that any improvement may be attributable to less stringent marking criteria.

Maximising a school's performance can be achieved in several ways. The first relies on excessive coaching and the ability to teach children the various techniques required to score maximum marks on the test. In adopting this approach there is likely also to be an attempt to concentrate resources by dividing pupils into homogeneous ability groups. A second way of implementing such a policy is to provide 'booster' classes for pupils who need to catch up on their peers. Gray et al (2003) found that the majority of primary head teachers invested heavily in booster sessions with two thirds operating this strategy from Year 3 although in a more limited fashion. However, analysis of school data suggested that this was not always an effective policy. The assumption underlying the boosting strategy appeared to be that children should make steady progress in 'equal sized steps' from year to year. If test performance on the intermediate optional tests did not improve in this way then it was deduced that additional work was needed. However, Gray and his colleagues found that only a minority of pupils (39% in English and 46% in mathematics) conformed to this pattern. For other children progress occurred in increasing steps while for others it decreased and for others it went up and down from one year to the next. Yet these different pathways appeared to have only a minimal impact on the total progress which pupils made as they proceeded through Key Stage 2. By far the greatest effect was the 'Year 6 push'. Gray and his colleagues concluded that there are other more effective ways of improving performance than merely concentrating the main effort in Year 6. They suggested that schools should pay more attention to these different pathways to progress in the period before Year 6 in order to create 'more flexible and sustained approaches' which would ensure 'greater continuity for

their pupils long before they encountered the demands of the Key Stage 2 assessments' (Gray et al, 2003, p. 42).

A third and less reputable way of improving test scores is to cheat. While falsifying results cannot be justified, it is surely a measure of the pressure that some head teachers experience, caused not only by concern for their own standing should their school be seen to be failing but also by considerations of the effect that failure can have on some pupils. Cheating on the tests appears to have increased under New Labour according to Brehony (2005, p. 38), who cites the case of one head teacher who was jailed for three months for forgery (Woodward, 2003). The same article alleged that the practice of cheating is probably more widespread than has been identified through prosecutions. According to Nichols & Berliner (2005) high-stakes testing in the United States has resulted in nearly half of students in one Gallup poll admitting that they cheated at least once on tests. In a review of press reports over a five-year period up to 2005 Nichols & Berliner identified over 60 major cases of fraudulent behaviour. In one case reported in the *New York Times* 36% of the schools in one downtown district were involved in passing crib sheets to students prior to going into the examination.

Nichols & Berliner (2005) point out that when the stakes are high the use of performance indicators inevitably leads to corruption. This is true not only of education but of business and other academic fields such as medicine. In their review these researchers cite numerous instances where in the pursuit of bonuses for high performance company managers have found ways of manipulating the figures in order to maintain their increments.

Teachers and the Primary Curriculum

The net effect of New Labour reforms on primary teachers has been to increase their workload (Galton & MacBeath, 2002). On average primary teachers now work between 52 and 55 hours a week and head teachers considerably more. The average teaching day has been extended and lasts six hours and 30 minutes (including break and lunch time) because many schools now tend to start classes before nine o'clock and cut out the 15-20 minute afternoon break. It appears therefore that the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours has driven schools to increase teaching time in their attempts to maintain a broad and balanced curriculum. Much of lunch time is also taken up with curricular activities under the guise of clubs and other optional events, in an attempt to compensate for subjects that are squeezed in the official timetable. Consequently there is little time left in the school day for preparation and marking and such work now has mainly to be done at home. In previous decades teachers always worked a full day, generally arriving one hour before school begins and staying for up to two hours after school finishes (Hilsum & Cain, 1971). This non-contact time was generally spent in preparation, informal meetings with colleagues and in mounting classroom displays. Now time after school is largely taken up by subject or year group meetings which plan and coordinate future

work. Marking and preparation has mostly to be done at home in evenings or at the weekend. Most teachers now devote about five and a half hours of their weekend to schoolwork in contrast to Hilsum & Cain's sample who spent around three hours. Today's teachers also tend to spend at least one hour on each weekday working at home.

When questioned about their situation teachers mostly complained about the burden of additional paperwork, particularly work concerning assessment and planning. Many teachers said that they were frustrated because they perceived the paperwork concerning lesson plans, targets and so on, as unnecessary. Even more significantly, they felt that it indicated a lack of trust by those in authority so they also found carrying out these tasks very stressful. As one interviewee with 10 years' experience of teaching said:

> When you are an experienced teacher you don't need to write down tons, you know. You need to know where you're going and what you're trying to do and have something to remind you. It's as if we have to justify everything we do with a child now. (Galton & MacBeath, 2002, p. 33)

Teachers also complained that the more structured and formal demands of non-teaching time in school restricted the amount of informal talk amongst staff. Now, according to one teacher:

> You don't tend to talk to your colleagues much after school. Everybody's just too busy. It's heads down as soon as the children have gone because you know you've jobs to do but there was, [a time] you know, [when things were] a bit more relaxed and you did use to have a bit of a chat about things in the past. (Female teacher, 20 years' experience: Galton & MacBeath, 2002, p. 33)

A constant theme running through the interviews was the teachers' concerns about the effect of increased assessment. There was now more homework given but this homework was marked away from the pupil, unlike the classes of 20 years ago where work would be corrected alongside the child. Now the majority of teachers set homework on at least two occasions each week, but in Key Stage 2 classes only around 7% of teachers managed to mark all or most of the work in the pupil's presence while just over a quarter managed to mark little or none. Of the work that was marked elsewhere at home only a fifth of the teachers reported that they were able to provide individual feedback. In mathematics, for example, the corrected books would be handed back at the beginning of the lesson and questions worked through on the board as part of a class activity (Galton & MacBeath, 2002, p. 49).

Galton & MacBeath (2002) also found that art typically received one hour a week and music half an hour at Key Stage 2, a finding supported by other researchers at the Centre for Formative Assessment Studies (2003), whose survey showed that the proportion of time spent on other primary school subjects other than maths and English had fallen by more than 10% since New

Labour came to office. In many cases teachers said that they did not do extended work in design and technology until after the summer tests because it needed a half day to do a proper project. Some teachers who were interviewed reported that the allocations for art and music were stopped for Year 6 pupils because it was necessary to find time for additional booster classes prior to the National Curriculum tests. Teachers argued that the intensity of the curriculum meant that it had to be delivered at pace with little time for discussion. Other teachers claimed that pupils' behaviour in class had deteriorated because the very structured day was not appropriate for some of them. Reflecting on this situation one teacher commented that

> It's very hard when children actually start to say something and you feel I can't go in that direction. I can't be pulled down that track because I'm moving away from what I've actually come to do. You've planned the work, put it down in your objectives and you feel you've got to stay on that particular kind of channel. In the past I'd have gone off tangent and we'd have talked about other things and they'd have drawn on their own experiences. (Female teacher, 20 years' experience: Galton & MacBeath, 2002, p. 40)

Although the recent Workload Agreement, particularly the allocation of non-contact time during the teaching week for planning, has appeared to help reduce some of these pressures, there are increasing fears that this has been at the expense of the pupils' interactions with teachers, since many schools appear to be using teaching assistants to cover for the class teachers' absence (MacBeath et al, 2006).

The Impact on Pupils' Attitudes

It has been customary, as part of studies of transfer from primary to secondary school, to monitor the attitudes and motivation of pupils over the course of transition. This usually means assessing pupils' attitudes in the June before they leave primary school and then repeating the analysis in November and again in the following June at the end of Year 7. When this is done consistently over a number of years, as the following graphs will explore, then trends in attitudes and motivation can be traced over the lifetime of New Labour's custodianship of the English education system. Figure 3, for example, traces boys' and girls' enjoyment of school at the end of Year 6 from 1997 when New Labour came to power until 2002 (Galton et al, 2003). The pupils rated items on a five-point scale (1 = little; 5 = most enjoyment) but here for simplicity scores are expressed as a percentage of the possible maximum. Thus a pupil who scored five would achieve a score of 100% (the maximum possible) and the pupil who scored three would achieve 50% of the maximum.

Figure 3 shows that there are differences between boys and girls but that the trends are similar. When leaving primary school in 1997 the average enjoyment level for boys was 61% of the maximum compared to 67.5% for

girls. By 2001 these values have dropped to 56% and 65% respectively. And by 2002 they have again dropped (54% and 62%). More recently the same attitude questionnaire was administered to another sample of Year 6 pupils in another, as yet, unpublished study of transfer during the 2005 academic year. On this occasion, however, pupils completed the questionnaire at the start of Year 6 in October as well as in June. Although the average June scores for boys and girls are nearer the 1997 level, for both genders they show a decline over the year (from 63 to 61 for boys and from 68 to 65.5 for girls).

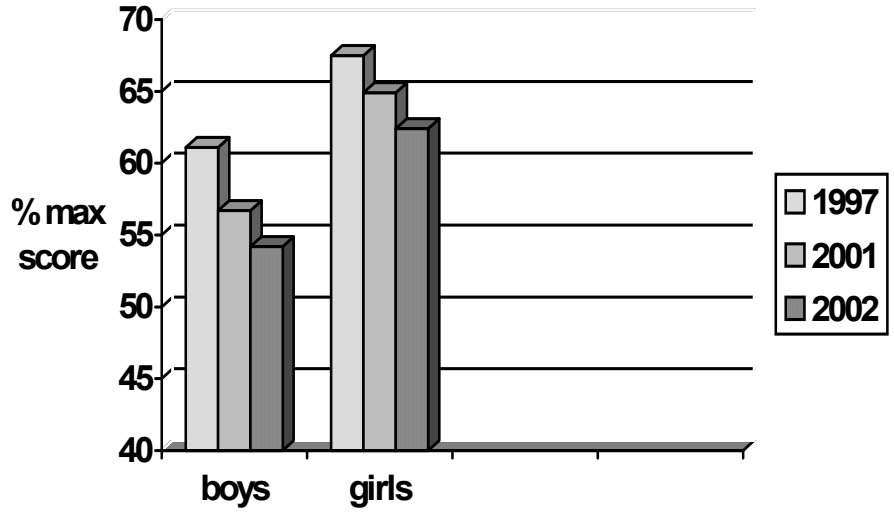

Figure 3. Year 6 pupils' enjoyment of primary school.

A most unusual feature of these attitude results is their inverse relationship to the ability of the pupils. Normally, one would expect that a pupil who was doing well at school would enjoy the experience more than would someone who was doing badly. In statistical terms there would be a positive correlation between attitude scores and attainment scores. However in these studies the reverse is true and the correlation is negative so that pupils with high attainment scores appear to enjoy school less (Galton et al, 2003). Further evidence in support of this finding can be found in a study carried out by the New Economics Foundation which involved over 1000 pupils from one Midland Local Education Authority. In this survey 65% of primary children rated their overall school experience positively. However, when the primary schools were divided into two groups – those who performed well on the Year 6 National Attainment Tests and those that did relatively poorly – then the academically top performing primary schools had significantly less positive attitudes (Berliner, 2004). It appears, therefore, that there is a price to pay in seeking to

raise standards by restricting the curriculum and dictating the way that teachers deliver the Literacy and Numeracy Hours.

The effect on the Year 6 pupils' attitudes towards these core subjects supports the above conclusion, although in this case no data for the 1997 cohort were collected. In Table I scores are again expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score on a five-point scale. For the 2004-05 sample the score at the start of Year 6 is also available.

Subject	Gender	2000-2001		2001-2002		2004-2005	
		Oct	July	Oct	July	Oct	July
English	Boy		42.1		44.1	47.9	44.5
	Girl		51.0		49.0	56.0	53.9
Maths	Boy		54.2		51.6	59.8	48.0
	Girl		51.8		49.4	44.0	42.3
Science	Boy		47.4		43.6	48.5	52.0
	Girl		38.6		38.2	41.3	40.0

Table I. Year 6 pupils' attitudes to core subjects 2001-05.

In English the boys' average end of Year 6 score is very similar for all three cohorts although the 2005 sample is a different one. A much bigger difference occurs for the 2005 cohort in the course of Year 6 (from 47.9% to 44.5%). In mathematics boys' end of year scores decline steadily from 54.2% in 2001 to 48.0% in 2005 despite the different samples. Again the 2005 Year 6 sample recorded a bigger drop between October and June (from 59.8 to 48.0). Boys' science results are more mixed. There is a decline between 2001 and 2002 (from 47.4% to 43.6%) but in the case of the 2005 sample the average score rises between October and July (from 48.5 to 52.0). This may be connected with the attempt over the same period to place greater emphasis in the National Curriculum Test on the so-called 'process skills' in science. Previously teachers had argued that doing well on the test mainly depended on the pupils' capacity to memorise information (Galton & MacBeath, 2002).

For girls the overall trend is similar but as might be predicted English is preferred to mathematics and science. For the 2005 sample scores decline over the year in all three subjects. For 2001-02 the end of year scores decline from 51% to 49% (English), 51.8% to 49.4% (mathematics) and from 38.6% to 38.2% (science). The scores in science are particularly low and reflect the existence of a downward trend across the whole of Key Stage 2 (Jarvis & Pell, 2002).

The Impact on Pupils' Motivation

A further interesting feature of these subject attitudes scores is their relationship with motivation. In various annual reports on performance at Key Stage 2 Ofsted have regularly commented on the high levels of motivation in primary

classrooms, based on the manner in which the pupils work on their various tasks without distraction. The data available from transfer studies tend to reinforce this view since across the three points in time on which motivation was measured (1977, 2001 and 2002) it has only varied in the case of both boys and girls by the odd percentage point: between 68 and 65% of a possible maximum on a five-point scale. Again, therefore, this is another puzzling aspect of present-day primary schooling since it might be expected that if pupils didn't particularly like a subject they would be less likely to work hard at it.

A partial explanation of this apparent anomaly can be arrived at by examining the motivation scores in more detail. Early studies of motivation, largely based on behaviouristic theories of learning, considered that a pupil's response to a given classroom task was a function of certain drives. Some drives were intrinsic, resulting from the satisfaction and pleasure experienced from the process of learning itself, while others were extrinsic and depended on the existence of clear outward signs of approval (or in some cases disapproval) depending on successful or unsuccessful completion of the learning task. A refinement of this approach was the concept of achievement motivation introduced by Atkinson (1964). He argued that the degree of intrinsic motivation was determined by the probability of successfully completing the learning task. The learner might see little merit in satisfactorily completing a relatively easy task but, while placing greater value on a more difficult assignment, might be reluctant to engage in it if not certain of success. This leads to the proposition (Galloway et al, 2004) that motivation in achievement-related settings is mainly governed not by the prospect of gaining success but of avoiding failure. This in turn offers a different perspective on motivation. The pupil's behaviour when faced with a challenging task is not only a function of the personality, expressed in terms of basic drives, but is also influenced by the manner in which pupils cope with failure. If a pupil attributes failure to a lack of ability he or she may react entirely differently from a peer who believes the result will be largely determined by the amount of effort required (Weiner, 1992). Dweck (1986), who argues that the view the child takes about ability is crucial to motivation, has taken these ideas a step further. If ability is thought of as something fixed, then the likelihood is that pupils holding this view will feel that they can do little to alter the course of events when faced with a task that they believe is too difficult for them. Only pupils with a strong belief in their own competence will be highly motivated. Others with little confidence in their innate ability are likely to display a response known as 'learned helplessness'. In contrast, pupils who accept that through increased effort previous failures can be overcome will concentrate on mastery of the task rather than concern of where they stand in relation to their peers (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Clearly one of the factors which influence these decisions is the culture in which the learning is situated. As Watkins (2003) argues, the current strong emphasis on performance in schools, with their Standard Assessment Tasks, league tables, target setting and so on, militates against a mastery orientation and reinforces those factors which give rise to strategies of task avoidance and teacher

dependence resulting from fear of failure. Such behaviour may be further reinforced in anxious pupils (Covington, 1992). There are also those who worry that demonstrating cleverness in class may have negative consequences for their standing within their peer group (Marsh, 1989).

In the analysis of the results from the transfer studies (Galton et al, 2003), and contrary to the theory proposed by Dweck, there was little distinction between those pupils scoring high on achievement and performance and those on achievement mastery. The tests were also given to the same pupils after their transfer to Year 7 with similar results but on this occasion the opportunity to interview them about their questionnaire responses was taken up. It appeared that the pupils were no longer interpreting items relating to academic satisfaction or achievement performance in the competitive sense that they could outperform their peers. Instead their main concern was to attain the required *level* of performance.

> I need to get Level 5 if I am to get into the top set.

Other pupils were very clear as to the reasons for their motivation. Having said that much of the work they did in Year 7 was very like that carried out in Year 6, they responded to the interviewer's query about why they work so hard by replying

> Because we need our education. We need to get good grades to get a good job and to get GCSEs.

In a similar manner, achievement mastery was not so much about working hard in order to understand something intrinsically interesting, but stemmed from the satisfaction that came when meeting the criteria and fitting them into the work in ways which gained the required level. Consequently, pupils who score highly on the *academic performance* scale also tend to do as well on the *achievement mastery* scale.

However, although motivation, defined in this way, remained strong, there were negative consequences. By focusing on the required level and the techniques needed to achieve success, pupils tended to view any other demands which were superfluous to this goal as irrelevant to their needs. In particular, teachers commented on the reluctance of more able pupils to do more work on a topic once the required level was achieved. In support of this view pupils responded very poorly to an item on the motivation questionnaire such as:

> I try to learn as much as I can.

However, they strongly agreed with items of the type:

> I learn just what I have to know to pass.

> Outside school I am not interested in any of the subjects.

Thus the emphasis on targets, levels, testing has not reduced the tendency for children in primary schools to engage on their tasks. What it does appear to

have done is to have reduced and limited their horizons to merely doing what they need to do in order to succeed in gaining the required levels. In this sense Watkins's (2003) strictures about the negative effects of the current performance culture appear to be corroborated.

Changes in Classroom Organisation and Classroom Practice

One of the key innovations of the National Literacy Strategy was the implementation of the three-part lesson in which the majority of the session was to be spent in whole-class teaching. The Numeracy Strategy also emphasised a whole-class approach coupled with the use of 'interactive' teaching. This latter concept poses problems in definition since, as Robin Alexander (2005, p. 21) argues, it is associated in the Strategies with 'an officially promulgated view that lessons should maintain a good pace and be characterised by a sense of urgency driven by the need to make progress and succeed'. Alexander quotes Kyriacou & Golding's (2004) evidence that whole-class teaching with pace makes it difficult for the pupils to have sufficient thinking time in order to come up with reflective answers to the teacher's questions. He complains quite rightly that many of those involved in the Strategy do not do what researchers seek to do; namely to separate the organisational component of whole-class teaching from the nature of the discourse that takes place during whole-class sessions (Alexander, 2005, p. 21).

Indeed, many of the claims that the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have brought about fundamental changes in pedagogy are in reality references to changes in organisational practice rather than to the nature of the interactions taking place during classroom talk. Both the official evaluation (Earl et al, 2003) and Ofsted (2002b, c) claim that major shifts in classroom practice have occurred based on their observations that there was more whole-class teaching, increased pace in lessons and greater attention to objectives rather than activities when planning lessons. These conclusions are endorsed in a more recent review by Webb & Vulliamy (2006) for the ATL. These researchers report that over 94% of the lessons that they observed involved whole-class teaching compared to 50% 10 years previously. They argue that the National Literacy Strategy has brought about profound changes, '[n]ot only in the primary teacher's classroom practices but also in their values concerning desirable practice' (Webb & Vulliamy, 2006, p. 109). In support of this view they point to Hargreaves et al's (2003) research on the impact of the National Literacy Strategy. Hargreaves and colleagues found that at Key Stage 2 there was a large increase in the number of questions that teachers asked children so that the overall ratio of teachers' questions to statements in comparison to earlier research (Galton et al, 1980, 1999) was very different. Hargreaves and her colleagues concluded, however, that the teaching taking place during the Literacy Hour was only interactive in a surface sense because the initial questions really extended pupils in ways that required them to provide a sustained interaction in which they elaborated their initial answers.

While therefore it would appear that because of the shift to whole-class teaching more questions are asked in the course of a lesson, the key issue in determining the degree to which classroom practice has changed has less to do with the overall *quantity* of any given interaction and more to do with the *proportionality* since the latter reflects the overall pattern of the exchanges between teachers and pupils. Figure 4 therefore examines five studies where classroom observations have allowed the patterns of questioning to be analysed. The first of these took place in classrooms during the late Seventies (Galton et al, 1980). The second was the replication of that earlier study in 1996 (Galton et al, 1999). In both of these studies systematic observation was used, whereby the researchers took with them into the classroom a set of pre-specified categories of teacher behaviours and noted which of these occurred every 25 seconds. In the third study (Hardman et al, 2003) video recordings collected in 2001 were subsequently analysed. The fourth study conducted in 2002 again used systematic observations (Hargreaves et al, 2003) while the final set of data come from the yet unpublished transfer study referred to earlier.

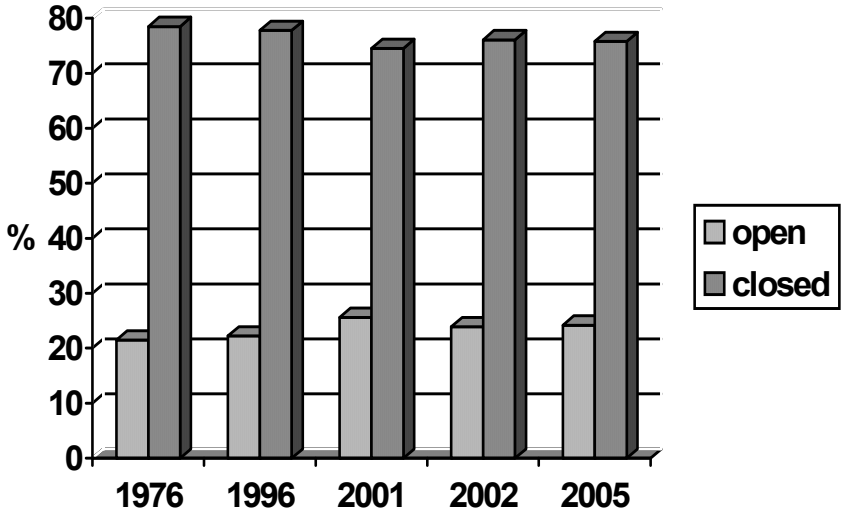

Figure 4. Open vs. closed questions.

The data in the figure display a remarkable consistency across nearly three decades. In the original ORACLE Study (Galton et al, 1980) the ratio of open to closed questions was 21.5% to 78.5%. Thus primary teachers, at a time when it was alleged that 'they told children nothing but left them to find things out for themselves', asked nearly five times as many closed questions requiring a specific answer as more challenging, open ones where more than one answer was acceptable. The replication of this study in 1996, marking the end of the Conservative government's management of education, changed this situation by

a relatively small amount (ratio of open to closed questions: 22.2% to 77.8%). By 2001 when New Labour's reforms were fully established the proportion of open questions had increased by around three and a half percentage points (Hardman et al, 2003) so that the ratio of open to closed questions was 25.6% to 74.5%. However when Hargreaves et al (2003) carried out their observations one year later the ratio had fallen back to nearer the original ORACLE figures (23.9% open to 76.1% closed). The final set of data, collected in 2005 during the present as yet unpublished transfer study, arrive at a ratio of 24.2% to 75.8% in favour of closed questions. These differences collected by different observers using varying methodologies and observation instruments are well within the bounds of experimental error, amounting as they do to variations of around 1.5% from the overall mean. It would appear therefore that despite the pressures on teachers to engage in interactive teaching little has changed in the course of nearly 30 years.

It is not possible to do a similar analysis on the various kinds of statements made by teachers because, unlike the use of open and closed questions, both Hardman et al (2003) and Hargreaves et al (2003) categorised statements in different ways from that used in the ORACLE research projects. In the ORACLE research task statements were coded as either *factual* or concerned with *ideas*. The remaining statements were either classified as giving *directions* about the task or as matters of *routine* (dealing with behaviour, giving instructions about where to sit, when to clear away, etc.). Table II sets out the percentage of different statements as observed in 1976, 1996 and 2005.

Statement Category	Year of observation		
	1976	1996	2005
Facts	15.4	13.8	30.3
Ideas	5.6	9.4	8.4
Directions	52.0	45.8	47.1
Routine	27.0	31.0	14.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.00

Table II. The pattern of teachers' statements.

For both 1976 and 1996 the overall pattern is similar: most teacher talk consists of either giving directions about the task or in routine instructions. Statements concerning ideas are the least used category although there is some improvement over the two decades. But by 2005 the situation has changed. Although task directions continue to dominate, the use of the fact and routine categories has been reversed. There is now less emphasis on routine instructions (14.2% of all statements) and a doubling in the percentage of factual statements since 1976 (30.3% compared to 15.4%). It is possible to see this dramatic increase in the use of factual statements as a consequence of the increased pace of lessons coupled with a change in classroom seating arrangements as reported by Webb & Vulliamy (2006, p. 111). These researchers found that in 45

classrooms visited 18 had the desks or tables arranged in rows and one in a horseshoe shape as suggested by Hastings et al (1996). While therefore the patterns of questioning have remained stable the shift to whole-class teaching seems to have promoted a dominance of teaching as *transmission* (Alexander, 2004, p. 27). Similar conclusions are reached by Smith et al (2004), whose analysis suggests that the rapid pace of teachers' questioning and the predictable sequence of teacher-led recitation, in which the parts are nearly always being played out as a teacher–pupil–teacher interaction, continue to dominate current primary classroom practice. Teacher-directed interrogation of pupils' knowledge and understanding was therefore the most common form of teacher–pupil interaction with teacher questioning rarely going beyond recall and clarification of information. As a result teachers tend to 'exercise close control over the nature, pace and direction of the knowledge pursued in the lesson ... the data suggests that the teaching was mainly interrogative and directive in nature' (Smith et al, 2004, p. 407).

Evaluating New Labour's Record

It would appear, therefore, from the evidence presented in this article that New Labour has been less successful in raising standards than the government and its spokespersons have suggested. Gains, if any, have been limited to the first few years and have been accompanied by a serious deterioration in pupils' attitudes to school in general and to subjects such as English, mathematics and science in particular. Motivation appears to have changed in ways that do not encourage pupils to take up new challenges or to express themselves creatively. Teachers claim that they now work excessive hours in an attempt to deliver a broad curriculum and attribute their feelings of stress to the fact that the present government no longer seems to trust their judgements in curriculum matters. More seriously, primary classroom practice now seems more akin to stereotyped secondary school lessons, dominated by a fast pace, with restricted questioning and a tendency for teachers to control the discourse such that transmission rather than exploration dominates.

Even while publicly dismissing most of this evidence the government has appeared to acknowledge the need to rethink its approach with the relaunch of the 2003 Primary Strategy. The second half of the title, *Excellence and Enjoyment*, would seem to recognise that there is an attitude problem (for both teachers and pupils) while continuing in the first part to perpetuate the view that:

> The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have, according to all those who have evaluated them, been strikingly successful in improving the quality of teaching and raising standards in primary schools. (Department for Education and Skills, 2003, para. 3.2)

And the document goes on to imply that the same methods should be extended to all parts of the primary curriculum. As Robin Alexander (2004, p. 28) comments, however, the strategy is 'ambiguous to a point of dishonesty about

the government's intentions towards primary education'. He contends that despite the rhetoric of 'enjoyment' and 'enrichment' the strategy continues to foster a 'crude instrumentalism of purpose' that has characterised New Labour's time in office. These strictures therefore provide both a warning and a challenge for whichever party comes to power in the next general election.

Note

This article is based on chapter 2 of the author's book, *Learning and Teaching in the Primary School*, to be published by Sage in April 2007.

References

Alexander, R.J. (2004) Still No Pedagogy? Principle, Pragmatism and Compliance in Primary Education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 34(1), pp. 7-33. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305764042000183106

Alexander, R.J. (2005) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: rethinking classroom talk*, 2nd edn. York: Dialogos.

Atkinson, J. (1964) *An Introduction to Motivation.* Princeton: Van Nostrand.

Beard, R. (1998) *National Literacy Strategy: a review of the research and other evidence.* London: Department for Education and Skills.

Bentley, T. (1998) *Learning Beyond the Classroom: education for a changing world.* London: Routledge.

Berliner, W. (2004) Heaven Knows Why They are Miserable Now, *The Guardian*, 27 April, p. 2.

Brehony, K. (2005) Primary Schooling under New Labour, *Oxford Review of Education*, 31(1), pp. 29-46. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305498042000337174

Brown, M., Askew, M., Baker, D., Denvir, H. & Millett, A. (1998) Is the National Numeracy Strategy Research Based?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 46, pp. 362-385. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.00090

Brown, M., Askew, M., Millet, A. & Rhodes, V. (2003) The Key Role of Educational Research in the Development and Education of the National Numeracy Strategy, *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(5), pp. 655-672.

Campbell, J. (1998) Broader Thinking about the Primary School Curriculum, in *Take Care, Mr Blunkett.* London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

Centre for Formative Assessment Studies (CFAS) (2003) School Sampling Project Curriculum Survey: summary of primary school findings, 2001-02, Manchester University: CFAS. http://www.education.man.ac.uk/cfas/mcd/summaries.html

Chitty, C. (2004) *Education Policy in Great Britain.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Covington, M.V. (1992) *Making the Grade.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dainton, S. (1998) Introduction, in *Take Care, Mr Blunkett.* London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Excellence in Schools.* Introduction by David Blunkett, Secretary of State, Cmnd 3681. London: The Stationery Office.

Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools*. London: DfES.

Dweck, C. (1986) Motivational Approaches Effecting Learning, *American Psychologist*, 41, pp. 1040-1048. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.10.1040

Dweck, C. & Leggett, E. (1988) A Social-cognitive Approach to Motivation and Personality, *Psychological Review*, 95, pp. 256-273. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.95.2.256

Earl, L., Fullan, M., Leithwood, K., Watson, N., Jantzi, D., Levin, B. & Torrance, N. (2000) *Watching and Learning 1: OISE/UT evaluation of the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategies*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications and Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Earl, L., Levin, B., Leithwood, K., Fullan, M. & Watson, N. (2001) *Watching and Learning 2: OISE/UT evaluation of the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategies*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications and Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Earl, L., Watson, N., Levin, B., Leithwood, K. & Fullan, M. (2003) *Watching and Learning 3: final report of the external evaluation of the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategies*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications and Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Fullan, M. (2001) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3rd edn. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Galloway, D., Rogers, C., Armstrong, D., Leo, E. with Jackson, C. (2004) Understanding Motivation, in: H. Daniels & A. Edwards (Eds) *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Psychology of Education*, pp. 89-105. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Galton, M. & MacBeath, J. with Charlotte Page & Susan Steward (2002) A Life in Teaching? The Impact of Change on Primary Teachers' Working Lives. A Report commissioned by the National Union of Teachers concerning the workloads in primary schools. Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

Galton, M. & Fogelman, K. (1998) The Use of Discretionary Time in the Primary School, *Research Papers in Education*, 13, pp. 119-139.

Galton, M., Gray, J. & Rudduck, J. (2003) *Transfer and Transitions in the Middle Years of Schooling (7-14): continuities and discontinuities in learning*. Research Report 443. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Galton, M., Hargreaves, L. & Comber, C. and Wall, D. (1999) *Inside the Primary Classroom: 20 years on*. London: Routledge.

Galton, M., Simon, B. & Croll, P. (1980) *Inside the Primary Classroom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Gray, J., Hussey, S., Schagen, I. & Charles, M. (2003) The Primary Side of the Transfer Divide: heads' perceptions and pupil progress, in M. Galton, J. Gray & J. Rudduck, *Transfer and Transitions in the Middle Years of Schooling (7-14): continuities and discontinuities in learning*. Research Report 443. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Hardman, F., Smith, F. & Wall, K. (2003) Interactive Whole Class Teaching in the National Literacy Strategy, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2), pp. 197-215. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057640302043

Hargreaves, L., Moyles, J., Merry, R., Patterson, F., Pell, A. & Esarte-Sarries, V. (2003) How Do Primary School Teachers Define and Implement Interactive Teaching in the National Literacy Strategy in England?, *Research Papers in Education*, 18(3), pp. 217-236. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267152032000107301

Hastings, N., Schweiso, J. & Wheldall, K. (1996) A Place for Learning, in P. Croll & N. Hastings (Eds) *Effective Primary Teaching: research based classroom strategies*. London: David Fulton.

Hilsum, S. & Cane, B. (1971) *The Teachers' Day*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Jarvis, T. & Pell, A.W. (2002) Effect of Challenger Experience on Elementary School Children's Attitudes to Science, *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 39(10), pp. 979-1000. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tea.10055

Kyriacou, C. & Golding, M. (2004) A Systematic Review of the Daily Mathematics Lesson in Enhancing Pupil Confidence and Competence in Early Mathematics. A review conducted for the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) and Coordination Centre, University of London Institute of Education.

Lightfoot, L. (1997) Help Squads for the Worst 18 Schools, *Electronic Telegraph*, 726, 21 May.

MacBeath, J., Galton, M., Steward, S., MacBeath, A. & Page, C. (2006) *The Costs of Inclusion: a study of inclusion policy and practice in English primary, secondary and special schools*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education for the National Union of Teachers.

Marsh, H. (1989) Age and Sex Effects in Multiple Dimensions of Self-concept: pre-adolescence to early adulthood, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81, pp. 417-430. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.81.3.417

Nichols, S. & Berliner, D. (2005) *The Inevitable Corruption of Indicators and Educators through High Stakes Testing*. Education Policy Research Unit (EPSL-0503-101-EPRU). Tempe: Arizona State University.

Office for Standards in Education (2002a) *The Curriculum in Successful Primary Schools*. London: Ofsted.

Office for Standards in Education (2002b) *The National Literacy Strategy: the first four years, 1998-2002*. London: Ofsted.

Office for Standards in Education (2002c) *The National Numeracy Strategy: the first three years, 1999-2002*. London: Ofsted.

Office for Standards in Education (2004) *Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2003-04*. London: The Stationery Office.

Reynolds, D. & Farrell, S. (1996) *Worlds Apart? A Review of International Surveys of Achievement Involving England*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Smith, F., Hardman, F., Wall, K. & Mroz, M. (2004) Interactive Whole Class Teaching in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(3), pp. 395-412. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141192040001689706

Tomlinson, S. (2005) *Education in a Post-welfare Society*, 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Tymms, P. (2004) Are Standards Rising in English Primary Schools?, *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(4), pp. 477-494. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141192042000237194

Tymms, P. & Coe, R. (2003) Celebration of the Success of Distributed Research with Schools: the CEM Centre, Durham, *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(5), pp. 639-654. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141192032000133686

Tymms, P. & Fitz-Gibbon, C. (2001) Standards, Achievement and Educational Performance: a cause for celebration? in R. Phillips & J. Furlong (Eds) *Education, Reform and the Stat: 25 years of politics, policy and practice*. London: Routledge.

Walford, G. (2005) Introduction: education and the Labour Government, *Oxford Review of Education*, 31(1), pp. 3-9. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305498042000337156

Watkins, C. (2003) *Learning: a sense-makers' guide*. London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

Webb, R. & Vulliamy, G (2006) *Coming Full Circle? The Impact of New Labour's Education Policies on Primary School Teachers' Work*. London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

Weiner, B. (1992) *Human Motivation: metaphors, theory and research*. London: Sage.

Woodward, W. (2003) Ex-head Jailed for Exam Forgery, *Guardian*, 8 March. http://www.education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0.90010.html

---

MAURICE GALTON was a former Dean of Education at the University of Leicester before transferring to the Faculty of Education at Cambridge University. He is mainly recognised for his work with the late Brian Simon on the ORACLE study but more recently has undertaken research on transfer from primary school, workloads of primary teachers and the use of group work in the lower secondary school. His current research, supported by the Arts Council, concerns the pedagogy of visiting artists in schools. He is the author of numerous books on primary teaching. *Correspondence*: Maurice Galton, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 184 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8PQ, United Kingdom (mg266@cam.ac.uk).

HSS

Human Scale Schools

A ground-breaking project helping large secondary schools across the UK develop human scale principles and practices.

To find out more about the Human Scale Schools project and how to apply for a grant go to **www.hse.org.uk** or contact **simon.richey@gulbenkian.org.uk**

Human Scale Education

because people matter