

Maurice Galton
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Debbie Wall
with Anthony Pell

INSIDE THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

20 YEARS ON



INSIDE THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM: 20 YEARS ON

Primary education has been subjected to huge change in recent years, and the quality of pupils' learning comes under regular scrutiny by both the press and the politicians.

Out of all the hype and hot air comes this book, a calm and clear look at the situation based on detailed research. This volume follows on from the massively influential ORACLE study of groupwork and other aspects of practice in primary classrooms. The majority of the schools originally studied are revisited, and the same tests and methods of observation employed.

This a unique opportunity to make a real comparison between how things were and how they are now. The following topics are covered:

- different teaching styles
- impact of National Curriculum on the way in which days are structured in schools
- pupils' experiences past and present
- standards in attainment

Everyone involved in primary education needs to read this book if they want to take part in the ongoing debate.

Maurice Galton, Chris Comber, Debbie Wall and Anthony Pell are all based at the University of Leicester. **Linda Hargreaves** is at the University of Durham.

INSIDE THE PRIMARY
CLASSROOM:
20 YEARS ON

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Chris Comber and Debbie Wall with
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This book is respectfully dedicated to Professor Brian Simon, who began these studies of primary classroom practice over twenty years ago. His determination to portray the reality of the lives of children and their teachers with intellectual honesty has been a continuing inspiration to us all.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMMA	Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association
APU	Assessment of Performance Unit
AT	Attainment Target within National Curriculum subject
CATE	Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
ICL	International Computers Ltd
DES	Department of Education and Science
Df EE	Department for Education and Employment
EDSI	Education Department's Superhighways Initiative
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
ERA	Education Reform Act
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
INCSS	Implementation of the National Curriculum in Small Schools (project)
KS1	Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum, relating to children aged 5–7
KS2	Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum, relating to children aged 8–11
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NC	National Curriculum
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
OMR	Optical Mark Reader
PACE	Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (project)
PRINDEP	Primary Needs Independent Evaluation Project
PRISMS	Curriculum Provision in Small Schools (project)
RTBS	Richmond Tests of Basic Skills
SATs	Standard Assessment Tasks
SCAA	School Curriculum & Assessment Authority

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SCENE	The Rural Schools Curriculum Enhancement Evaluation (project)
SEAC	Schools' Examination and Assessment Council
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
TGAT	Task Group on Assessment and Testing
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

CONTRIBUTORS

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Maurice Galton is Professor of Education at the University of Leicester and former Dean of the Faculty. He co-directed the original ORACLE project with Professor Brian Simon and directed the recent replication study reported in this volume. He is author of numerous publications dealing with aspects of primary classroom practice, including some that concern small rural schools and the effects of class size. He has acted as a consultant to the Council of Europe and is also involved in a number of international studies comparing practice in the UK with that in countries around the Pacific Rim.

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INTRODUCTION

This book reports the findings of an observational study of primary classrooms. There has, of course, been other similar research in recent years. What makes this study unique, however, is that the present observations have been carried out in some of the same schools which were visited twenty years ago when the ORACLE project, the first large scale observational study of primary school classrooms to be carried out in this country, was undertaken. The ORACLE study (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) was completed over five years and followed what are now called 'Key Stage 2' pupils, over the last two years of their primary schooling and into their first year after transfer. At the time, the results were of great significance and have continued to be so. Among its most important findings, ORACLE highlighted the consequences of children sitting together in groups while working individually. A number of teaching styles were also identified and were shown to be linked closely to different types of pupil behaviour. The relationship between these patterns was remarkably stable across the two years of observation. ORACLE also demonstrated that certain pedagogic styles, including one associated with individual teaching, were more effective than others. Studies conducted in the following decade have largely confirmed these findings.

My co-director at the time, Professor Brian Simon, and I ended the first-volume of the five-volume ORACLE series, *Inside the Primary Classroom*, by expressing the hope that the findings 'would make a modest contribution to the debate on primary education which should now be carried out in a more conciliatory and informed manner, with less conviction on either side that they hold a monopoly of truth'. Sadly, particularly for primary teachers and their pupils, this has not happened. In particular, since the coming of the National Curriculum, there has been an endless campaign of denigration of primary teachers and their methods in the media and elsewhere which has led one commentator to refer to the period as 'a reign of terror'. According to these critics, standards are continuing to fall, because teachers are teaching badly as a result of 'slavish adherence' to harmful ideologies.

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These are the same old shibboleths that were current some twenty years ago when the first ORACLE study was undertaken.

What better, therefore, than to return to many of the same schools that were used in the original ORACLE study, to carry out the same kinds of observation on teachers and pupils, and to give pupils the same tests of attainment? Armed with these findings, it then becomes feasible to examine, in as careful a way as possible, what has happened to primary teaching over the two decades, particularly in the light of the changes brought about by the National Curriculum. It may be, as Professor Brian Simon once said, that to have a serious debate about primary teaching of this kind would be like 'crying for the moon', but at least studies such as the present one can provide the evidence whereby those wishing to engage seriously with the subject have the means to do so.

The writing of this book has not been an easy task, partly because there is still a mass of data available that would allow us to explore our findings in more detail. We intend to do this through a further series of published research papers. Here, we have tried to bring together our most important findings that relate specifically to the current debate about primary pedagogy. The mode of working was for each of us to take responsibility for the first draft and then for others to work on those drafts until a final version was completed. In particular, I must take responsibility for the first and final chapters. These are more to do with policy matters than the middle five, which deal specifically with the research. I make no apology for expressing my feelings at the way in which primary teachers have been unfairly portrayed during the last decade. As a classroom researcher for more than twenty years, I think I may claim to have seen a wider sample of primary teaching than those who criticise these teachers. I retain nothing but admiration for the vast number of men and women who spend long hours, both inside and outside the classroom, educating young children. In Chapter 1, therefore, I examine the way in which this criticism of primary teachers has developed over the last two decades and in the final chapter, having summarised our findings, I attempt to look forward positively to the future, a future which should take account of what is happening elsewhere in the world and not focus on a rather narrow vision of primary classroom practice.

Chapter 2 examines whether the National Curriculum has brought about changes in the structure of primary classrooms and observes that little appears to have altered. Chapter 3 examines how far the overall pattern of teaching has changed and notes, in particular, the consequences of the increased shift to whole-class teaching, the result of pressure from critics and the media. Chapter 4 then looks at the primary classroom from the typical pupil's point of view. Here again, we find that, although children are working harder, the way in which they receive attention from the teacher is very similar to that of twenty years ago. One positive outcome has been the increase in task-related activity within groups. Twenty years ago most talk in groups was social; now

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it has much more to do with the task in hand. Chapter 5 explores how far teaching styles have changed and ways in which these styles influence pupil behaviour. Finally, in Chapter 6 we compare the performance of today's pupils with those of two decades ago in standardised tests of reading, mathematics and language. This has a bearing on the current debate about falling standards, and we consider this in Chapter 7.

This book could not have been completed without the help of a number of people. First, we should like to record a debt of gratitude to the primary teachers and to the pupils who generously gave of their time and allowed us open access to their classrooms. Our thanks are also due to our families and friends, who have been very tolerant of our obsessive concern to turn the ticks recorded during our observation of classrooms into a meaningful analysis of contemporary primary practice. Dr Tony Pell painstakingly carried out the statistical analysis on our behalf. We also have to thank both Chris Rouse and Lynn Smolinski, who have prepared the manuscript and kept track of successive drafts, and also Roy Kirk, our librarian, for hunting down some of the more obscure references. Lastly, we acknowledge the help of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) who provided a grant for the study.

Our story begins with Donna, who was one of our original ORACLE pupils but who now has a child of her own in the same school where she was observed two decades ago. Her daughter, Hayley, and her classmates represent the future. We hope that this book is a small contribution to making it a better one.

Maurice Galton

TWO DECADES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

Donna Leason was born in October 1965. She now lives on a council estate on the edge of an east Midlands city, the same one where she spent her early childhood.¹ She began school in April 1971 when she was five years and six months old. Her friend Allison, who lived next door, had started school the previous September because she had her fifth birthday two weeks before the school year began. During those first two terms of the school year before Donna started school, there were only twenty children in the reception class, and Mrs Cooper, the teacher, had been able to devote extra time to helping each pupil with their reading and number work.² After the April intake, however, the number increased by fifteen and it became more difficult to give each child sufficient attention.

Donna didn't do particularly well at school and left in April 1982 without bothering to turn up for her Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examinations. In the following September she applied and was accepted for a training course at the local Further Education College, and found a job as a care assistant in a local authority home for the elderly. There she met Neal, who was working as a Community Volunteer, and moved into his bedsit. Hayley was born in November 1985. The couple were given a council house on the same estate as Donna's parents, but Neal moved out and Glen, an unemployed labourer, took his place. Two other children, Jason and Kristen, were born in 1987 and 1990. When Glen also left, shortly after the birth of the third child, Donna decided to 'give up on men and better herself', and in 1992, when Jason had started school, she began a GCSE course at the local community school where there was a 'toddlers' club' for Kristen. She surprised herself by getting an A for English and a B for Mathematics and is now studying A level Biology, and Health and Social Care for an NVQ with a view to taking a degree in social work at one of the local universities.

It is now the 1995–96 school year, and Donna's eldest child, Hayley, has entered year 6 in the same primary school that her mother went to. Donna is a frequent visitor to the school and comes in whenever she has time to help with the poor readers. Unlike her mother, Hayley had the advantage of a full year in the reception class and is doing very well. She will take the Key Stage

2 tests at the end of the year and move to the local high school next to the community college where Donna is finishing her 'A' levels. Although neither of these two schools has done well in the published league tables, Donna has decided to let her eldest daughter go on to the high school because her own experience suggests that the teachers care about the pupils and also because most of Hayley's friends will move with her. There is also another reason. It would cost money to bus Hayley to another school and Donna already finds it difficult to manage on her family allowance and what she gets from Social Security.

This brief biography of Donna offers a useful reference point for our study of *Inside the Primary Classroom: 20 Years On*. What then does this parent notice about her daughter's classroom compared to how it was when she sat there as a child in the 1970s? Is her first impression one of 'busyness', as it was all those years ago when visitors entered the classroom?³ Are the children still seated in groups, either around flat topped tables or desks drawn together to form working surfaces? Will the children still be talking intermittently to each other as they go about their tasks as Donna herself did twenty years ago? Are pupils still free to move around the room when seeking help or a resource? Do some children find ways of slowing down their work rate despite the prevailing air of busyness? In Donna's time a favoured dodge was to move to the back of the queue just before reaching the teacher's desk to have your book marked.

A more detailed examination of this busy classroom may reveal distinct differences between Donna's own experience as a pupil and that of her daughter. In 1976, typically, the teacher would have been moving around the room for most of the time, talking first to one group of children and then another, or to an individual child within the group. Such exchanges would in all likelihood have been very brief, variously concerned with giving information or directions, suggesting how to tackle a problem, asking someone how they were getting on, telling another pupil how to spell a word, correcting a sum, or occasionally giving a cautionary reprimand for disruptive or antisocial behaviour. At other times there may have been quiet periods when Donna was expected to work on her own, either colouring a picture, completing a mathematics worksheet or doing a comprehension exercise from her English book. During these quiet periods, various pupils might be called out to the teacher's desk to have their work marked. One consequence of this teaching strategy was that a different picture of the classroom emerged if a visitor decided to concentrate their attention on one of the pupils rather than on the teacher. Because the teacher's exchanges were for the most part with individual pupils, and with typically between thirty and thirty-five pupils in the class, the proportion of time devoted to each child during a day was necessarily limited. Thus when asked by the visitor to comment on a typical day the teacher might respond, 'I'm exhausted, I've been talking with children all day', while a pupil might say

'I just got on with it. I only talked with the teacher for a few minutes when she either marked my work, said "well done" or "do it again" or told me when I'd finished I should get on with my picture.'

This kind of analysis, based upon observation of moment-by-moment exchanges between teachers and pupils, has been one of the major strands of research in primary education. It generally involves an observer selecting a sample of 'target' pupils, either randomly or matched by ability and gender, and carrying out several rounds of observation in which each target is observed according to a predetermined pattern at fixed time intervals. In some studies the observation of pupils is also interspersed by extended observation of the teacher in order to give both the adult's and child's view of the classroom.

One of the first British studies to make use of this style of observation was the ORACLE study (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation). This programme commenced in 1975, and over three years, beginning in September 1976, carried out observations in fifty-eight primary classrooms, distributed across three local authorities. In the third year of the observation, the children were followed as they transferred out of their primary or first school into their next phase of education. During each of the three years of observation the children's academic progress was also measured, using standardised tests of reading, language and mathematics. The study was able to identify a number of different teaching styles and to describe the effects of these styles on pupils' behaviour and on the pupils' attainment. Over the three-year period during which the fieldwork took place, a mass of information was acquired. There were, for example, 47,000 observations of the fifty-eight teachers, and 84,000 observations of 489 pupils (Galton *et al.*, 1980; Galton and Simon 1980).

Turning the progressive tide?

The ORACLE study was completed in 1980. In the intervening period up to the present time, there have been a number of other studies either using the same or similar systems of observation. In the early 1980s the Curriculum Provision in Small Schools (PRISMS) Project (Galton and Patrick 1990) used a version of the ORACLE observation system in which the observation categories were extended to include more details about the curriculum. The study involved sixty-eight small schools (schools with less than a hundred pupils on roll) drawn from nine local authorities, during which 188 teachers and their classes were observed. During the same period there was also a study that used observation to examine the problems associated with the one in five pupils who were designated as having special needs (Croll and Moses 1985) and in the mid-1980s, two studies of London schools, one which studied the early years (Tizard *et al.* 1988) and one in the junior age range (Mortimore *et al.* 1988). Following on from this work there was a study of primary

classrooms in Leeds (Alexander *et al.* 1989; Alexander 1995). Taking us into the 1990s, there have been two further studies which have coincided with the introduction of the National Curriculum. One of these was located in small schools (Galton *et al.* 1998). The other, the PACE (Primary Assessment Curriculum and Experience) project, which began in 1989, was designed to track the impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act on primary school practice. PACE has reported its findings on early years classrooms (Pollard *et al.* 1994) and on the junior years in Croll (1996a).

Despite this almost continuous scrutiny of primary practice, there has been continued disagreement about the changes that have taken place over the last two decades. One popular view within media and political circles is that back in the 1970s, 'progressivism' ruled, and it was 'the wild men', although not in those days women, who were bent on destroying our education system.⁴ Depending on party allegiance, it was either the brave intervention of the then Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan (1976) in his Ruskin speech, or else his replacement by a Conservative, Margaret Thatcher, following her party's victory in the 1979 General Election, which halted this progressive tide. Eighteen years of Conservative rule saw the 'new right' gain increasing control of education policy (Ball 1990). Beginning with a series of 'position' papers emanating from the Centre for Policy Studies, the right wing 'think tank', this faction in the Conservative party played a key role in the design of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the introduction of a National Curriculum by the then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker (Baker 1993).

However, a decade after these reforms were introduced there are those who argue that this tide of progressivism has yet to be stemmed. Chief among those expressing this view is the current HM Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, who argues that progressive ideology still dominates primary practice and that the greatest barrier to raising standards is the progressive's contempt for the study of 'all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world' (Woodhead 1995a; 1995b).⁵ A more extreme view has been expressed by the journalist Melanie Phillips (1996), who not only agrees with the Chief Inspector that these progressive trends have brought about a decline in academic standards, but also argues that they are the cause of serious moral turpitude within contemporary society.

Part of the cause of this continued uncertainty about the extent of change in primary schooling over the last two decades, despite the apparent wealth of observational data, stems from the fact that many political and media activists choose to fit the facts around their theories rather than the other way round when they write on such matters. Journalists, by the nature of the profession, tend to oversimplify and generally focus on the negative features of any incident since, to paraphrase the late Lord Rothermere, 'If the reader feels angry, disgusted or worried that's news but if they are merely better

informed that's public relations.' More controversially, however, Colin Richards (1997), a former senior inspector in the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), commenting on the Chief Inspector's annual reports, has argued that OFSTED inspection data have been manipulated for political reasons.

Uncertainty in the interpretation of the research among some academics has, it must be admitted, fuelled this media debate. Differences in interpretation have arisen either because the observations of primary practice have had different emphases, or because different sampling techniques were used, or because the research was carried out in different parts of the country where it could be argued that pupil performance in multi-cultural inner city schools could not be equated with that recorded by pupils from small schools in rural areas. The strength of the study reported in the following chapters is that it represents both the beginning and end of an era, marked respectively by the defeat of one Labour government and the election of another. New Labour now offers educational prescriptions which are almost identical to those emanating from the previous Conservative regimes. Indeed, recent pronouncements have perhaps gone further than the previous government would have dared. For example, the first act of the new Labour government's Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, was to 'name and shame' eighteen failing schools.⁶

Throughout this debate, with its charge and counter charge, the original ORACLE research, although based on observations carried out twenty years ago, still retains a pre-eminent position. While critics such as Scarth and Hammersley (1986; 1987) and Edwards and Westgate (1987) have doubted whether an observer can reliably categorise teachers' questions without knowledge of their intentions, the central findings appear to have stood the test of time, and have been admired for their 'growing sophistication at both policy and methodological level' (Hargreaves 1997). Furthermore, in a review on the lessons to be learnt from primary research, Caroline Gipps (1992) devotes nearly a third of her twenty-seven pages to the ORACLE findings. The research has also been cited by critics of primary practice such as Melanie Phillips (1996) and Chris Woodhead (1995a) as well as by supporters. Moreover, since many of the other studies referred to in the previous paragraphs have tended to confirm many of its findings, ORACLE has remained the most authoritative source of data on primary practice, until, perhaps, the recent PACE studies (Pollard *et al.* 1994).

What better, therefore, than to repeat the original ORACLE study, using exactly the same instruments, the same attainment tests and the same schools? For if ORACLE findings have, by and large, been accepted as one of the most authoritative statements on primary classroom practice in the pre-National Curriculum period, then it should be difficult for either present critics or supporters of primary education to dispute its replication using the same methodology and the same schools. Some minor changes in the

research design have been necessary; for example the observation schedules have been expanded to provide more detailed information, attainment tests have been modified to replace words which were commonplace in the 1970s but have now either changed their meaning or have become politically incorrect, and some of the secondary-phase schools have changed their age of entry. At present-day values, the full 1975 ORACLE programme would cost over a million pounds. The grant for this replication study was just over £50,000. Not every school in the 1975 sample could, therefore, be included, and six rather than eight target pupils were observed during each teaching session. However, before describing these changes in more detail and setting out the main purposes of this research, it may prove useful to place primary schooling in a contemporary context. This includes, in particular, the effects of 'globalisation' associated with the growth of the 'Tiger' economies around the Pacific Rim and the resulting changes to our personal lives in this post-traditional society (Giddens 1994). Primary schools not only have to reflect and interpret existing societal characteristics, but also have to anticipate future trends, since children now entering school are being educated for work and leisure well beyond the millennium. Given that the period between 1975 and the present has been one of rapid change politically, educationally, economically and socially, this is not an easy task. In reading the remaining chapters of this book, which deal specifically with changes in primary practice, these varying contexts need to be continually borne in mind.

The 1975 version of primary education

When ORACLE began, English primary education was still thought by many people to be the 'best in the world'. It was also assumed to have had a stable and uniform structure, the result of the reforms enacted some thirty years previously following the passing of the 1944 Education Act. Then, in the mid-1960s, the post-war consensus that had sustained this stability started to break down as more radical ideas began to dominate educational debate. In primary education the key event was the publication of the Plowden Committee's Report (1967) which critics described as 'a progressive's charter'.⁷

A more accurate picture, as described by Brian Simon in the first volume of the ORACLE research output, *Inside the Primary Classroom*, was that after the 1944 Act and into the 1970s, periods of change were followed by yet more periods of change, 'a state of almost continuous transition' (Galton *et al.* 1980:42). In the 1950s separate infant and junior schools were merged into 'all through' primary schools.⁸ Then in the late 1960s, as the comprehensive movement expanded, a three-tier system catering for five to eight and five to nine year-old children was created to feed eight to twelve and nine to thirteen middle schools as a way of utilising existing

accommodation. These new structures ensured that the primary curriculum was subject to frequent if largely uncoordinated review. The greatest issue, however, was the continuing debate throughout the 1960s on the virtues of selection and of the 11+ examination which was a consequence of this selection process. Following the Plowden (1967) report, which set out a blueprint for the future of primary education (based in part on the optimistic view of that time, that more education for more children equalled greater national prosperity), the shift to comprehensive education and the demise of the 11+ consequent on the end of selection, led to a rapid de-streaming in primary schools. This was sharply illustrated in the work of Joan Barker Lunn (1970), who in the late 1960s began an evaluation study with a countrywide sample of primary schools in which she compared streamed junior classes with unstreamed ones, only to find that by 1970 her streamed sample had been reduced to a point where it was no longer possible to make any valid comparisons.

Throughout this period concerns were expressed by both the media and politicians concerning this rapid shift to comprehensive education and the effects upon primary schools. The debate centred around the publication of a series of 'Black Papers' in which academics and well-known writers such as Kingsley Amis argued, amongst other things, for retaining the grammar schools and the reintroduction of streaming. At the centre of the debate about primary schooling was a concerted attack upon methods such as discovery learning, which it was claimed was widely used by teachers, some of whom were 'taking to an extreme the belief that children must not be told anything, but must find out for themselves'. According to one Black Paper writer, this *laissez-faire* approach,

now favoured in infant and primary education encourages a regrettable laxity in systematic work: the modern child is encouraged to read fluently and talk glibly in terms commensurate with his tender years; but his introduction to the hard process of learning and mastering what might be called the mechanics of this subject, is put off too long.

(A.Hardie in Cox and Dyson 1969:57)

Black Paper authors were not in favour of group activity since, according to these critics this pernicious doctrine led to the teacher acting as a kind of 'peripatetic adviser'. Taking his criticism further, Hardie (Cox and Dyson 1969:58) claimed,

A conscientious young teacher faced with several groups of children all engaged in different activities (and probably one or two unable to read) finds herself [*sic*] helpless in a chaotic situation, and eventually seeks refuge in a nervous breakdown.

Referring to this situation as ‘progressive collapse’, a phrase used by the editorial writer of *The Times* (27 September 1968) to describe the disintegration of a tower block of council flats at Ronan Point, Cox and Dyson (1969) refer to an education college lecturer who claimed that students wrote *his* for *is*, did not know the difference between *their* and *there* or *where* and *were* and could neither punctuate nor spell.

Initiating reform: a great debate?

These claims and counter claims will sound very familiar to readers of today’s popular press. What can be said of the debate at the time, although as with the current one it was often characterised by ignorance and prejudice, was that it was generally conducted in good humour, respect for each other’s views and a degree of give and take. Perhaps nothing illustrated this state of affairs so well as the situation at the University of Leicester where in the School of Education, a leading Black Paper writer, Professor Geoffrey Bantock, worked alongside Professor Brian Simon, founding editor of the progressive journal *Forum* and a strong advocate of comprehensive education. This atmosphere of reasoned debate pervaded not only the world of academia but also that of the leading broadsheet newspapers, where the writings of educational correspondents such as Peter Wilby and Virginia Makins were both highly respected and frequently quoted. At the core of the debate, as described elsewhere by Galton (1989) and more recently by Alexander (1995; 1997), was a clash of ideologies which could be traced back to the eighteenth century. Then, the elementary school curriculum had been principally designed to meet the economic and labour needs of an expanding industrial society. In contrast, reformers arguing for an experiential and developmental curriculum placed greater emphasis on allowing each child to realise his or her full potential. At one extreme this curriculum was to be open and negotiable, while at the other it was to be structured to accommodate children’s psychological and physiological development (Blyth 1984). Opposed to the ‘progressive’ approach were the classical humanists, whose prime aim was to induct children into the best of the cultural past, usually through the study of discrete subject disciplines. It was this latter approach that the Black Paper writers were concerned to defend.

Evaluation studies during the 1970s, however, showed that it was hard to find examples of a curriculum based exclusively upon either of these contrasting ideologies. Rather, through a process of hybridisation (or mixing) these contrasting strands of primary education became interwoven, with certain strands gaining prominence in different schools (Kliebard 1986). Only in a few isolated examples, as in the case of the William Tyndale School in London, which became something of a *cause célèbre*, were attempts made to put a more extreme version of progressive ideology into practice, that is until

inspectors from the Inner London Education Authority were called in, and the headteacher and his deputy dismissed (Auld 1976). Despite the claims that intermittently surface, often as a justification for more repressive legislation, the evidence would suggest that there never was a primary revolution (Simon 1981a).

Support for this view emerged during the 1970s with the publication of an educational report entitled *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* by Neville Bennett (1976). Taking schools in Cumbria and Lancashire, Bennett sent questionnaires to 871 primary schools, to which 468 'top junior' teachers responded. Bennett grouped their responses into twelve distinct teaching styles along a continuum from formal to informal. At the extreme informal end were teachers who favoured integration of the subject matter, allowed pupils choice of work and in many cases a choice of seating. Intrinsic motivation was favoured and tests, grading and homework 'appeared to be discouraged' Bennett (1976:45).

At the other extreme in the most formal group, no teacher favoured an integrated approach, subjects were taught separately to the whole class and followed up with individual seat work. No pupil was allowed a choice of seat and every teacher curbed movement and talk. The most formal teachers were above average on the use of all assessment procedures, and systems of reward such as stars and grades were common. However, of the 468 teachers included in the clustering, only 14 per cent were located in the two most extreme informal groups, and even within these groups there was considerable variation. For example, only two-thirds of these informal teachers allowed children to sit where they wished, a fifth gave weekly spelling tests, and only just over half allowed pupils an element of choice in what work they could do. The main factor which defined the informal category was 'above average' use of integrated subject teaching (Bennett 1975). Over the years the words, 'above average' have tended to be forgotten and 'trendy' or 'woolly' primary teachers have frequently been accused of believing that 'knowledge is unimportant and subjects are artificial impositions' (*Daily Telegraph* 27 January 1995).⁹ In Bennett's study, however, to become an 'above average' user of integrated subject teaching you would only have had to devote just over 19 per cent of the time (four and three-quarter hours of a twenty-five hour school week) to project and topic work. Typically, over two-thirds of the time was devoted to single-subject teaching. If these descriptions of teaching, collected during the early 1970s, constitute the evidence that a revolution was taking place in English primary schools, then the claims are not very convincing.

Bennett then went on to take a smaller group of teachers from the extremes of the continuum and also from the middle to enable comparisons to be made between the effectiveness of the formal, mixed and informal teaching approaches. His conclusion (Bennett 1976:96-7) was that, overall, pupils in the formal classroom made significantly better progress in English than those