Chapter 1

Primary Teaching in Contemporary Settings

Let us begin with brief descriptions of two recent visits to primary school classrooms that took place in the second half of the spring term. In the first school the Year 6 children have just been informed about the allocation of places in the local secondary schools to which they will transfer next autumn. Some of the class are clearly upset because they have not been given their first choice school and will therefore be separated from close friends at the start of the autumn term.

In this school it is readily apparent that there is an extremely strong emphasis on attainment in literacy and numeracy. On one of the Year 6 classroom walls a large triangle with several horizontal lines inserted is mounted. Above the diagram the title reads 'How many of these can you use correctly?'. On the smallest line, near the apex of the triangle, is written 'a comma = Level 1'. The next line states that 'comma + full stop = Level 2'. The third line has 'comma + full stop + speech marks = Level 3'. The class is divided into three groups. On the first table, which is set aside for those who already have reached Level 4, a former member of staff, recently retired, has been brought in for the second half of the year, and is working quietly with children on the use of speech marks. On the second table, children who are at present rated at Level 3 but thought to be able to reach a good Level 4 by May, are having work handed back to them by Mrs Clarke, the class teacher. She explains to one boy that linking several adjectives in his description would move his piece of writing into a Level 4 category and, as an example, suggests that he changes the sentence 'He walked along a narrow path' to 'He walked along a narrow, tree-lined, grassy path', remembering at the same time to add the commas. To a girl on the same table, she suggests that it would be a good thing to include some reported speech in the opening paragraph of her story so that she can demonstrate her knowledge about when to use speech marks. Under her guidance the girl adds an opening sentence:

> 'I think it's going to be a fine day,' said Tania's mother, looking up from her newspaper.

The third group, whom Mrs Clarke later describes in conversation as 'the no-hopers', is being looked after by a classroom assistant. These are children who will not reach Level 4

by May and are engaged in learning a list of spellings and the meaning of the words. Mrs Clarke says this is 'pretty much her standard lesson.' At the end of the visit the head teacher speaks admiringly of the improvement in the Year 6 national test scores since Mrs Clarke came to the school three years ago.

In another Year 6 classroom, not five miles away, Mr Vincent, the class teacher, has arranged the desks in two U-shapes. Children sit in friendship groups unless Mr Vincent decides that the chosen membership does not facilitate good working habits, in which case children are moved to another group. Because my visit is part of research into transfer from primary to secondary school, Mr Vincent decides to use the idea of transitions as a stimulus for the lesson. He tells the class that they are going to think about the future. Pupils are to construct a timeline of how they hope to develop as people over the next 20 years.

Before the class begin their task, Mr Vincent illustrates what he wants each pupil to do by telling them about his own youthful wishes and future hopes. He tells them that at their age he had three big ambitions: to go to college and be a teacher; to play football in a professional team and to go to Australia. Sadly, he has only managed to fulfil two of these three goals so far. He asks the children to guess which of his ambitions he has yet to achieve. One boy calls out to the accompaniment of general laughter:

> 'Professional football player. You were useless trying to save our penalties last week.'

The children then spend time in the groups discussing various ideas before they are instructed to draw their own timelines and to write their accounts with reasons for their choices. There then ensues a lively class discussion where each pupil is asked to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Mr Vincent makes great efforts to open up the discussion by not always responding immediately whenever a pupil finishes speaking. Sometimes, however, he is drawn into making a response by the surprising nature of the answers. For example, Donna tells the class that her three ambitions placed on her timeline are, first, to go to college, second, have two children and third, to get married.

> *Mr Vincent*: Don't you mean getting married and then having two children?
> *Donna* (with great firmness) 'No. I don't.'

Afterwards Mr Vincent explains to me that although he was influenced in his choice of topic by the research theme, he often chooses to do things 'out of the blue' and not to follow the normal literacy hour lesson. In the course of this conversation he expresses the view that:

> 'I don't think it is helpful for children of this age to have their creativity and imagination stifled by having to follow set prescriptions. Learning is best done by doing. And I don't think that banging on about full stops and commas and different kinds of writing genres helps children to develop their minds.'

This opinion is in sharp contrast to Mrs Clarke's view. She likes the literacy hour because it gives a firm structure to her teaching and the pupils know what they have to do to succeed. Furthermore, some of the materials produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) are very useful because they:

'Save you the trouble of having to plan lessons. It cuts out the need to think and allows more time for marking.'

Teaching dichotomies

The point in starting with these two brief vignettes is to highlight a fundamental weakness in the current debates on pedagogy. For as long as the subject of teaching methods has been discussed, and you could read a text on educational psychology in the 1960s and not find the word 'teaching' mentioned in the entire index, the tendency has been to polarise issues in terms of two extreme positions. Initially, teachers were said to adopt traditional practices, which it was claimed were based on the behavioural theories of Skinner, or they espoused a 'child-centred', 'progressive' approach which took its inspiration from the earlier ideas of Rousseau and Pestalozzi that were later grounded in the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget by the likes of Susan and Nathan Issacs. At various times this debate about the effectiveness of these teaching methods might have been conducted using alternative terminologies such as 'transmission v. discovery' approaches or, more recently, 'active v. passive' learning. But the underlying assumption with all these dichotomies appeared to be that there was a clear choice to be made and that a teacher must belong to one camp or the other. When most teachers responded by claiming that they used a mix of the two approaches, it was rare to find among practitioners anyone able to explain the rationale for choosing one approach rather than the other on a particular occasion. Furthermore, for many experienced primary teachers and a good number of those responsible for their initial training, such questions about a theoretical basis for the choice of teaching method was a non-issue, since the second 'law of pedagogy' was often expressed by the view that:

'There is no one best way to teach so that teachers choose approaches that they feel comfortable with and which work.'

A scientific approach to teaching?

The above justifications for everyday practice, however, do not operate in other disciplines, particularly in the physical sciences. It is true that in science there are heated debates over the rightness or wrongness of theories, as for example about the origins of the universe, and in much the same way educational psychologists will dispute theories of learning. Part of the outcome of such debates in science, and indeed all disciplines, is to develop new paradigms which will subsume different theories of an earlier generation. But this approach to theorising applies to what one might term 'big science', and involves the most creative thinkers who are working at the frontiers of their specialism. The world of science (and psychology), however, is made up of many other practitioners who are not such expert thinkers and innovators. These people are content to fill in the contours in the hinterland rather than working at the frontiers of knowledge in their specialism. In doing so they make use of any appropriate existing theory or model which solves the problems they have to deal with.

Such scientists are likely, for example, to use a wave theory when dealing with problems concerning the transmission of sound in the atmosphere but a particle approach when the problem involves the transmission of heat by conduction. They leave it to the more advanced thinkers to use increasingly sophisticated models in order to produce more rounded 'intellectually satisfying' solutions. Thus there is a clear distinction between the use of what may be termed 'working theories' which can be used to solve a myriad of problems that explain everyday phenomena operating at a macro level and the search for 'unifying theories' that are required to make sense of our universe at a sub-atomic, micro level.

The tendency to use a 'working theory' approach most often occurs in the case of practical applications. In the same way this book will propose that pedagogy can also have a 'scientific basis' but that teachers need only to adopt a 'working theory' approach when seeking to use ideas about learning as a rationale for choosing one teaching method rather than another. A dilemma such as whether to favour a 'traditional' or 'progressive' stance is therefore to be regarded as a non-question (even if it were possible to define such broad all-embracing constructs in precise operational terms). Neither is it useful to attempt, as has New Labour with their literacy and numeracy strategies, to create an all-purpose, all-embracing unified approach that combines the presumed strengths of different methods in the way that *whole class interactive teaching* attempts to do. The perspective that will be adopted here is that the most appropriate strategy is to take a 'horses for courses' approach in matters of pedagogy. In choosing a particular teaching method we should do so because it works in relation to the tasks which we wish children to perform. Teaching a class the basis of English grammar requires a different teaching strategy to that used in helping pupils to become creative writers. In each case we need to draw on different theories (or models) of learning in our search for the most appropriate teaching approach.

In constructing a scientific basis for teaching we can obviously make use of theories of learning derived from psychology in the main, but we need also to couple this knowledge with empirical data mainly derived from classroom observation studies. Interestingly, just as there has been a tendency to polarise the debate about effectiveness of different teaching approaches, so to there has been a similar heated debate about whether teaching is, uniquely, an art or a science and, if the latter, open therefore to systematic enquiry. For Woods (1996) it is indisputably an art. Those who take this position adhere to the view that teachers develop their practice mainly through a process of intuition (Claxton 2000) coupled with regular periods of self-reflection, rather than by making use of theoretically-based knowledge, or what Schon terms *technical rationality*. According to Schon, 'problems of real world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well formed structures' (1987: 3–4). In recent years, therefore, the notion that there is an objective body of knowledge about teaching that can determine effective practice has come under increasing criticism from a variety of perspectives, although as Furlong (2000) argues, the lack of any consensus regarding an alternative approach has helped to create a crisis in teacher professionalism.

New Labour, new pedagogy?

New Labour has sought to deal with this crisis by promoting what has come to be generally known as 'evidence-based practice'. One ex-government spokesman, Michael Barber (2002),

the former head of the Standards Agency, argues that teaching has moved through four main cycles during the second half of the 20th century. The first of these cycles, covering the period up to Mrs Thatcher's election as Prime Minister in 1979, was largely based on teachers' personal intuitions (or as some have claimed, personal prejudices) and was one of *uninformed professionalism*. This was replaced during the 18 years of Conservative rule by *uninformed prescription*, where, for example, the so-called integrated day was always bad and organising teaching by subjects automatically good. When New Labour came to power in 1997 it was therefore necessary, according to Barber, to correct the errors of the previous government so that a period of *informed prescription* was necessary. In the main this involved a somewhat rigid imposition of the literacy and numeracy strategies in primary schools. Now, however, with the decline in standards halted, it has been possible at the start of the new millennium to enter a period of *informed professionalism* where teachers can access, through the Internet, relevant Ofsted reviews and the latest EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information) surveys in order to inform their classroom decision making.

It is a reassuring view of the present situation but, unfortunately, one without much foundation. As Everton et al. (2002) demonstrated, there tends to be a gap of nearly 10 years between teachers' awareness of research and its publication. Furthermore, it is not clear why research which is methodologically strong and which is consistent in its results, the kind which is rated highly in EPPI reviews, appears to hold less attraction for teachers than other offerings such as *learning styles*, or *left brain–right brain training* procedures such as 'Brain Gym' for which the research evidence is far less strong or negligible. In any case the debate between those who view teaching as mainly an art based on intuition and reflection, and those calling for a scientific approach to be determined from evidence-based practice, often fail to recognise that they are referring to different levels of decision making when teaching a given topic to a particular class.

Any theory must have general applications: if it were too specific it would be of little use. In teaching, as in many other practical applications where one is not in total control of the situation, the application of any set of principles (the theory) therefore must be varied to suit the particular set of circumstances defining the given context. For example, there is a body of research strongly supporting the principle that pupils need thinking time when faced with challenging questions. Consider a novice teacher who attempts to put this principle into practice by pausing for at least three seconds after formulating the question and is faced by a barrage of children with their hands up shouting out 'Ask me sir! Ask me!' Quickly losing control, he is told by his teacher mentor that it is essential not to let the pace of the lesson drop off and that questioning should therefore always involve rapid exchanges between teachers and pupils. Elsewhere, in another classroom, a more experienced, reflective practitioner has enacted the same principle by telling her pupils that there are lots of answers to the question she has posed and that she wants them to talk for a few minutes among themselves before she will listen to their responses. The resulting discussion is lively and pupils show evidence of higher order thinking. The difference in approach was not only determined by the depth of the second teacher's knowledge (either from intuition or from previous experience) that longer pauses would result in disruption, it was also conditioned by the nature of this teacher's relationship with her pupils (developed over time) in

that she was reasonably sure the class would concentrate on the task when they were told to talk among themselves. The novice teacher would have been unlikely to have been able to guarantee such certainty and would therefore have been reluctant to relinquish control of the situation. As argued by Anderson and Burns (1989) in their preface:

> Contrary to some people's opinions, evidence does not speak for itself. The translation of evidence into thought and action requires people who understand both the research and the classroom.

This viewpoint reflects the distinction formulated by the psychologist, Nate Gage, over 30 years ago when he argued that pedagogy was the science of the art of teaching (Gage 1978). In any discipline there must be principles based on theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence. But such principles need to be adjusted to meet the particular conditions in which teachers find themselves.

The science of the art of teaching

Robin Alexander (2000) introduces a further caveat into this debate. He contests both the rather rigid notion of teaching as a science adopted by those such as David Reynolds and others in the school effectiveness movements (Reynolds 2000) who appear to believe that pedagogy can be reduced to a series of laws. However, Alexander also rejects the view of Woods (1996) in arguing that teaching should be regarded solely as an art. He prefers instead the ideas expressed by Gage, that there is a scientific component which consists of general principles that then have to be situated in the context of individual teacher's classrooms. As such it must encompass the kind of knowing and understandings about matters such as the balance between group work and whole class teaching in the course of a lesson. Alexander, however, argues that these latter decisions are much more to do with the accumulated wisdom which teachers acquire as they gain experience that allows them to make judgements about the *fitness for purpose* of particular actions within a particular context. This kind of knowledge Alexander terms *craft knowledge*. Desforges offers a similar perspective but observes that since much of this professional knowledge is 'generated behind the closed doors of an individual teacher's classroom it is rarely written down and consequently it is difficult to articulate'. He contends that:

> Schools could be even more successful than they are now in promoting achievement if we could all learn to share and use the knowledge we have now about learning. I recognise that there is a vast body of knowledge about learning evident in the everyday practices of teachers. This knowledge is difficult to get at and so it is difficult to share. There is also a small but strong body of scientific knowledge about learning to be gleaned from research. This knowledge is easy to get at but difficult to apply. The trick we need to perform is to bring the practical knowledge and the theoretical knowledge together to promote advanced teaching practices. (2003: 15–16)

To conclude this discussion, therefore, there is a certain degree of truth about the statement that teachers know best how to teach, because over time teachers do build up a range of strategies they can draw upon. This situation comes about because these experienced practitioners have used this strategy successfully when faced with similar situations in the past. But teaching is also artistic, in the sense that it is creative, because it is rare that two classroom situations are exactly alike and some teachers are able, partly through intuition, to 'tweak' a particular teaching approach so that it works in a particular context. Some teachers are thus able to teach successfully mainly through a mixture of intuition and craft knowledge. Elsewhere, Galton (1995: 145) has described one such teacher whose practice exemplified theories of motivation of which she was totally unaware. But for others, who do not have such natural talent, teaching is likely to become stultified if too great a reliance is placed upon craft knowledge. This is because when facing new challenges such teachers will have little recourse but to cast their minds back through numerous past occasions in order to determine a maxim or rule which they feel meets the current situation. In such cases those of us who are merely competent and proficient rather than expert need to be able to draw on some principles of teaching. And it is in this sense that there needs to be a scientific basis to our pedagogy.

Our confidence in such principles grows, however, when a form of 'triangulation' is arrived at in which theoretical principles, the empirically observed practice and the teacher's craft knowledge, concur. It is the claim of those who engage in the study of classroom that over the last 50 years sufficient evidence has been accumulated mainly in the United States but also in the United Kingdom about which particular approaches are most suited for certain forms of learning. It is the aim of this book to elaborate on these principles.

At the same time it is important to recognise that compared to other disciplines the scientific study of teaching is in its infancy. Charles Desforges attempts to put the extent of our knowledge about teaching in context by stating that 'we know as much about learning as Sir Issac Newton knew about motion in the 17th century when he set out his celebrated laws' (2003:1). Even so, as Desforges goes on to point out, Newton's laws have proved their worth over time, as in the development of rockets for space exploration. Indeed, there are those who now claim that the ability to see inside the human brain, through the use of various scanning techniques, has brought the study of educational psychology to a point where it is on the verge of a similar scientific revolution to that which took place when Einstein began to replace Newtonian physics by the more comprehensive theory of relativity. Although, therefore, the study of teaching and learning is in an early stage of development, it nevertheless has established some important principles that can usefully ground present-day classroom practice.

What it is to teach

So far, however, we have tended to use terms like 'teaching', 'methods', 'approaches', 'pedagogy', as if they were all interchangeable. It is perhaps useful, at this point, to try to clarify such terms mainly by using the detailed analysis carried out by Robin Alexander (2000). As Anderson and Burns (1989: 4) note, teaching has usually been defined, historically, as the imparting of knowledge or skill. This definition, however, begs the question of effectiveness since it could be that the teacher attempts to impart knowledge but that the pupils do not

absorb this information, or if they do, fail to retain it. In attempting to arrive at a more elaborate definition Good (1973), for example, argues that it is the intention of the teacher that matters, so that as long as pupils make an attempt to learn this is sufficient to indicate that teaching has occurred. Teaching is therefore not only a matter of providing instruction, but it also presumes intent on the part of the teacher that he or she is attempting to achieve some specific goal. For Good (1973), teaching is therefore an *intentional* as well as an *interpersonal* activity or process which leads Anderson and Burns to define teaching as 'an interpersonal, interactive activity typically involving verbal communication, which is undertaken for the purpose of helping one or more students learn or change the ways in which they can or will behave' (1989: 8).

For Alexander (2000: 323–324), a starting position is that teaching is an act of using Method X to enable pupils to learn Y. However, Alexander accepts that this definition subsumes a further set of questions to do with: (a) the nature of the learning task that the pupils are asked to undertake; (b) the activities that the teacher chooses in order to address these tasks; (c) the judgements that teachers have to make about the levels of such tasks which different pupils undertake; and (d) the kinds of outcomes on which the teacher will judge the success or failure of this activity. These judgements are sustained through a series of teacher–pupil interactions. When therefore these further questions are taken into consideration, then Alexander's definition is not so dissimilar from that proposed by Anderson and Burns.

The position taken throughout this book, however, seeks to extend the above framework in arguing that teaching is both an intentional and unintentional activity. This is because only part of teaching involves conscious decision making. This follows from a distinction made some years ago by the psychologist Gordon Allport (1966), who argued that a person's actions consist not only of a coping or rational responses to external events but also of an expressive response based on our emotions. Because teaching is also an emotional as well as an intentional activity (Hargreaves 2001), the approaches that we *intentionally* choose often become modified during lessons so that what teachers think they are doing often conflicts with the impressions of an impartial observer. Thus, as teachers, we may intentionally close down the range of questions we had intended to put to children because we wish to pursue a particular line of enquiry, although subsequently we may maintain, as for example in the Ford Teaching Project (Elliott 1976), that children were given the opportunity to consider a range of possible alternatives. Since all definitions of teaching accept that the interactions taking place between the pupils and the teacher in order to achieve desired learning outcomes is a key factor, then the possibility that these interactions are not always intentional must be considered. The situation is further complicated because once we accept that teaching is, in part, an emotional activity, then so is learning from the pupil's point of view; interactions between pupils and teachers are therefore continually operating at two levels. When we record these interactions (in whatever way) and then ask participants (teachers and pupils) for their explanations of these classroom events, we must be careful, as outsiders to the action, not to assume that these teacher and pupil accounts constitute the only explanation for the observed behaviours. One of the problems of 'top-down' curriculum development as practiced by recent governments in the United Kingdom is that they rarely concern themselves with anything other than the rational, intentional view of teaching, and are thus often unable to comprehend why teachers

fail to put into practice the curriculum as they, the developers, intended. Usually such failures are seen as the fault of recalcitrant teachers with the result, as in the case of New Labour, that more prescriptive forms of curriculum are devised.

Teaching and subject knowledge

It follows therefore that if teaching is primarily an interactive process, then pedagogy carries with it a wider connotation. Yet the definitions proposed by Watkins and Mortimore (1999) that pedagogy has its focus on both teaching and learning is little different from the more elaborate definitions of teaching employed by both Anderson and Burns (1989) and by Robin Alexander. Alexander (2000: 541–7) is again helpful here by suggesting that while most definitions of pedagogy encompass both the theory and practice of teaching, there are difference between our (mainly UK and USA) tradition with that of Central Europe. In continental European countries 'pedagogy' is the more general term which encompasses both theoretical and practical aspects of teaching and learning, while the term 'didactics' is used to refer to that branch of pedagogy which deals specifically with what is to be taught and how. In particular, didactics tends to concentrate on different approaches across subjects rather than the general principles of teaching where the term 'pedagogy', is more often used. This has interesting connotations with the situation in England where, until recently, discussions about primary pedagogy (or teaching) generally assumed that the methods recommended were universally applicable no matter what was being taught. However, recently the introduction of the notion of 'subject content pedagogy' (Shulman 1987) has been predicated on the ideas developed by philosophers of education in the 1960s, who argued that the essential characteristic of any disciplines was that it could establish a claim to invoke particular procedures in an attempt to establish or verify the truth of any given proposition (Hirst 1968). Thus for Shulman (1987) each subject has its own special compendium of useful analogies and its own methods of conducting enquiries. Expert teachers are those who developed superior subject knowledge of this kind.

It is important, however, to recognise that Shulman's emphasis on the importance of subject knowledge developed in reaction to the ideas of Harnischfeger and Wiley (1978), who argued that time on task was the main determinant of pupils' learning. Shulman was concerned to defend the traditional view of disciplined knowledge and argued that it was not so much the time that pupils spent on instruction but the quality of the instruction which was the determining factor. Part of the unease of many teachers in today's primary classrooms is that Shulman's views has led to an over-emphasis on subject knowledge in recent government initiatives (including the prescription of specific teaching approaches) to the detriment of more general ideas about learning, which are derived mainly from psychological theories. In this connection, Robin Alexander (2000) observes that continental European countries such as Germany and Russia, although they make a distinction between what might be termed general didactics and specialist subject didactics, nevertheless endeavour to encompass the two in their analysis of teaching and pedagogy in an attempt to incorporate wider issues to do with child development, motivation, and other aspects of social learning.

The present status of pedagogy

In summary, therefore, in attempting to set the scene, it has been argued that teaching must encompass a set of general principles which might be equated to a 'science of teaching' but that these principles have to be adapted to suit different classroom contexts (the art of teaching). Furthermore, we have argued that teaching is not only an intentional activity but also an unintentional one because it works at both a cognitive and an emotional level and the latter aspect gives rise to actions which are often unrecognised by the practitioner. There is a further aspect of teaching which derives from experience of what works in practice, which we may term *craft knowledge*. In seeking to verify key aspects of pedagogy, that is integration of both theory and practice, we should strive to build up a consensus around theories derived from the educational disciplines (mainly psychology), empirical evidence, collected largely on the basis of classroom observation, and teachers' craft knowledge. Finally we need to be aware that while certain aspects of pedagogy may refer specifically to a subject or a discipline, there are nevertheless more general principles, which carry across different subjects and inform our ideas not only about learning but also about other factors which influence pupil behaviour, such as motivation and self-esteem. It is this latter aspect of pedagogy concerning these more general principles of teaching that is the main concern of this book.
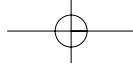
In some areas considerable progress in establishing this consensus has already been made. Classroom research in the 1970s (Good and Grouws 1979 in mathematics and Anderson *et al*. 1979 in reading) established specific rules for effective teaching, which were generalised by Rosenshine (1979) for the Beginning Teacher Education Study (BTES) as 'direct instruction'. Furthermore, in contrast to popular myth that the 1960s had resulted in a revolution in teaching methods so that children 'were left to find out things for themselves', observation studies such as Galton *et al*. (1980) clearly demonstrated that for the most part when teaching mathematics or English, to what were then termed 'junior age pupils', teachers acted as instructors rather than as facilitators in most lessons. There appeared therefore to be general agreement between what theory suggested, classroom research had established and what practitioners were observed to do in the matter of teaching the so-called basic skills of numeracy and literacy. The case for making this approach mandatory, as suggested by Reynolds (2000) particularly in respect of new entrant's to the profession during their training, would seem to be a strong one.

Nevertheless, those who conceive of pedagogy as 'the science of the art of teaching' oppose such an approach mainly on the grounds that it is a *technical* rather than a *professional* solution to what over two decades ago Lortie (1975) identified as the 'conservative' nature of teaching. The term *conservatism* was chosen to describe a central feature of the culture of teaching in which practitioners tend to avoid engaging in discussions on matters of teaching and learning beyond a superficial level for fear it may raise fundamental questions about their existing practice. For this reason many teachers are often reluctant to engage in forms of collaboration with colleagues, such as team teaching, unless evidence exists that the colleague's views on classroom practice are similar to their own. This is what Lortie characterised as a culture of *individualism* which in turn leads to *presentism*, the tendency of teachers to concentrate on short-term planning in their own classrooms where their efforts can be seen to have an immediate impact.

The resistance of this culture to change is further reinforced because the ideas, values and beliefs associated with particular practices become identified with the group rather than individuals. Terms such as 'good primary practice', for example, not only come 'to identify but to define, justify and control' membership of the primary teaching community (Alexander 1992: 169). In seeking reward for effective teaching, individuals must demonstrate 'cultural purity' by visibly acting out the ideas and values of the group with which they identify. Hargreaves makes a similar point when distinguishing between the *content* and the *form* of a culture: the former he defines as the system of shared beliefs in a community and the latter as 'the pattern of relationships and forms of association between members of that culture' (1992: 219). For Hargreaves, it is these cultural forms which are most resistant to change.

Those wishing to impose solutions either in matters of pedagogy or curriculum without taking into account the complex nature of the interplay between ideas and structure therefore run the risk that, in all probability, their suggested solutions will be applied uncritically and in ways which cause minimum disturbance to existing practice. Thus in the UK consistent pressure has been exerted upon primary teachers, in recent years, to reduce the amount of individual attention given to pupils and to engage in more whole-class 'interactive' teaching. The consequence of both *individualism* and *presentism* on this injunction can be demonstrated in the replication of the ORACLE carried out two decades later. In the late 1970s, 72 per cent of primary teachers' interactions were with individual pupils and only 19% were with the whole class (Galton *et al.* 1980). By 1996–97, when the replication study took place, the corresponding figures were 48.4 per cent and 35.2 per cent respectively (Galton *et al.* 1999). But when the nature of the teacher–pupil interaction was examined, it appeared that despite a major shift in organisational strategy little had changed. Whereas in 1976–77 teachers made use of 3.7 times as many statements as questions, by 1996–97 this ratio had only been marginally reduced to 3.6. Teachers therefore still mainly talked *at* rather than *with* their pupils and appeared to have taken a line of least resistance and merely 'bolted' existing practice onto the prescribed changes in classroom organisation. Furthermore, these imposed changes had a negative effect on the attitudes of teachers. For the most part, according to Woods et al. (1997) ten years of imposed reform in the UK has resulted in most teachers becoming 'less engaged' and 'committed'. Woods and his colleagues found that while few were actively hostile, other teachers said they conformed to survive and compensated by increasing their interests outside of teaching. Under New Labour these views have, if anything, intensified (Galton and MacBeath 2002). As one teacher interviewed by Woods *et al.* stated, 'There is no reason for me to be here now except to collect a pay cheque' (1997: 67). Such teachers increasingly see teaching as a *technical* activity, where the justification for doing *this* rather than *that* stems from the regulations rather than a pupil's needs. They therefore feel diminished both as individuals and as members of their professional group.

To bring about effective change in a way that enhances the teacher's sense of professionalism therefore requires both the *content* and *form* of the teaching culture to be modified. The starting point must be to switch attention away from the New Labour Government's obsession with performance within national and international league tables and to concentrate,

instead, on attempts to achieve a better understanding of how pupils learn and how this knowledge impacts on teaching. This book was conceived as a contribution to this attempt by some in education to shift the current debate away from its current emphasis on *performance* towards greater understanding of the way that pupils learn and the implications of this knowledge for teaching. However, before moving to a discussion of these issues the record of New Labour will be reviewed in order to substantiate the claim that a shift away from the current policies and practices that operate in today's primary schools is now an urgent necessity.

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