

Based upon fieldwork conducted in 1996, Galton *et al.* (1999) asked whether classroom practice had changed in English primary schools over the previous two decades and if so to what extent. The book outlined the results of a replication of the previously very influential ORACLE research study conducted in the late '70s. Based mainly on a combination of systematic observation schedules (with 58 classrooms observed in the '70s study and 28 in the 1996 one) and measures of pupils' academic progress using standardised tests of reading, language and mathematics, the research team re-visited many of the same schools they had researched in the '70s. They found that: "Two decades of classroom research, curriculum reform on an unprecedented scale, and a shift in educational thinking which has produced calls for a return to whole class teaching and more subject specialisation has had almost no impact on the way in which teachers organise the pupils" (pp.41-42).

The layout of classrooms with children sat together in groups remained remarkably similar over the two decades. The introduction of computers to the classroom — clearly a potentially major change between the '70s and the '90s — had had very little effect by 1996 on the organisation of teaching and learning (p.46). Writing and listening to the teacher still dominated most lessons and the patterns of teacher-pupil interaction were remarkably similar over the previous two decades (p.174). In speculating on why there should have been so little change to classroom practice, they suggest that:

The National Curriculum was, in effect, a technical innovation that was imposed on teachers, with little or no guidance as to how to implement it. In this situation, it is hardly surprising that teachers draw upon familiar, tried-and-tested practice. (p.52)

Galton *et al.* adopted a very different methodology from our own research. The 1996 study was based on the quantitative analysis of 6663 observations of 29 teachers and 8562 observations of around 600 pupils from 28 classes in 14 primary schools, where observations were carried out every 25 seconds in a pre-determined sequence (p.33). However, the picture of primary classroom practice they convey is remarkably similar to that portrayed by our qualitative methodology in the original ATL research conducted in 1992-94 (Webb and Vulliamy, 1996). Moreover, later qualitative case-study research we carried out between 1994 and 1996 for the York-Finnish Project, involving extended periods of fieldwork in six English primary schools, continued to portray the manner in which teachers were mediating the curriculum reforms by accommodating them as far as possible within their traditional approaches to teaching and classroom organisation (see, eg Webb and Vulliamy, 1999a; Vulliamy *et al.*, 1997).

A similar picture emerges from the findings of the PACE research, a large-scale study combining quantitative and qualitative data (collected between 1989 and 1997) into the impact of the Education Reform Act on primary schooling (Osborn *et al.*, 2000). All these studies suggest that, despite massive changes to the work of primary school teachers brought about by the demands of the "new managerialism" and the strictures of an audit society with its consequent

“performativity” culture, primary teachers had up until 1996 not made any fundamental changes to their classroom practice nor to their values concerning what “good practice” was. The main change had been a gradual shift in curriculum planning from the pre-national curriculum use of topic webs, through subject-focused topic work (the early stages of the national curriculum) to, by the mid-’90s, separate subject teaching with fewer attempts to maintain an integrating link between them (Vulliamy *et al.*, 1997; Osborn *et al.*, 2000).

In this chapter we argue that the decade intervening between our two ATL research studies, unlike the previous two decades intervening between the Galton *et al.* studies, has seen profound changes, not only in primary teachers’ classroom practices but also in their values concerning desirable practice. Three recent innovations, discussed in earlier chapters, have come together to help solidify such profound changes: guidance on teaching provided by the NLS and NNS; the growth in the use of ICT (and particularly interactive whiteboards); and the dramatic increase in the use of teaching assistants. We begin by comparing the 54 lessons we observed in the 50 schools in 1992-94 with the 51 observed in 2003-05. This suggests that those features of primary classroom teaching, such as classroom and organisational strategies (including pupil seating), which had remained so constant between 1976 and 1996 have subsequently undergone major changes. We then examine how changes in teaching approaches initiated by the NLS and NNS have permeated teaching in subjects other than English and maths, using the field notes from one of our observed history lessons to illustrate the significance of these changes for general patterns of teaching and learning. This is followed by a section investigating the extent to which the teachers in our 188-interview sample themselves view the changes in their practice as significant and, if so, giving their evaluations of the gains and losses.

Classroom and curriculum organisation

In the 1992-94 study, field notes were made of the 54 lesson observations in order to describe in detail the range of experiences offered to pupils in KS2 and to look for common patterns. These were classified into different lesson patterns based on organisational strategies combined with approaches to curriculum organisation (see Table 7a). Details of the manner in which such a classification was made can be found in Webb and Vulliamy (1996, ch.2).

In the 2003-05 study, 51 lessons were observed (in 5 of the schools it was not possible to do any classroom observations whilst in a few schools more than one lesson was observed). The lessons encompassed all areas of the curriculum, with the exception of music but with a bias towards literacy (16 lessons) and numeracy (10 lessons). Using the same classification system, our observations indicated a dramatic increase (from 50% to 94%) in the pattern of lessons defined as “whole class” and the total disappearance of patterns such as the use of carousel and menu systems that had been particularly identified with the “integrated day” approach to primary school teaching (see Table 7b).

Table 7a Per cent of lessons with different class and curriculum organisational strategies in 1992-94 study (N=54)

Whole-class teaching	50%
Two groups	6%
Carousel within subject/topic	9%
Carousel across subjects and topic	15%
Cooperative group work	7%
Menu	9%
Individual work	4%

Table 7b Per cent of lessons with different class and curriculum organisational strategies in 2003-05 study (N=51)

Whole-class teaching	94%
Two groups	0%
Carousel within subject/topic	0%
Carousel across subjects and topic	0%
Cooperative group work	2%
Menu	0%
Individual work	4%

It should be noted that our definition of a lesson with a whole-class pattern (derived from the 1992-94 study) included both lessons involving teacher-pupil interaction throughout and lessons where, following a teacher’s introductory input of around 15-20 minutes, a considerable amount of time within the central part of the lesson might be devoted to pupil activities carried out either individually, in pairs or in groups. A further classification indicated that in 23 of the 48 whole-class lessons, over half of the lesson time was devoted to such pupil activities, with the teacher going around helping individuals or groups. At the other extreme, 6 of the 48 whole-class lessons involved the teacher teaching or asking questions of the whole class for more than three-quarters of the lesson.

A comparison of the lesson observations shows how aspects of previous patterns of classroom and curriculum organisation have been subsumed within the dominance of the whole-class pattern derived from the NLS and NNS. For example, in the central part of one whole-class history lesson on Tudor houses, a carousel system was utilised so that, in turn, three groups of pupils moved around three activities: making Tudor houses out of card, making model furniture and working in a small computer room adjacent to the classroom searching the internet for information under the supervision of a classroom assistant.

In one of the small schools, a mixed age KS2 class was divided into two separate groups of Year 3/4s on the one hand and Year 5/6s on the other. In the 1992-94 study, where a single class teacher managed such a KS2 class by teaching each group in turn, this was classified as an example of a “two groups” pattern. However, in the 2003-05 research (and reflecting the rapid recent rise of support staff within schools), a teaching assistant taught the Year 3/4 group a science lesson throughout, at one end of the classroom. At the

other end of the classroom, the teacher taught the Year 5/6 group a literacy lesson on using the internet (via wireless-based laptops), to research information to help write “an information text in the form of an attractive wall poster about a particular aspect of the Romans” (excerpt from pupil worksheet). Thus, with the help of the teaching assistant, two different “whole-class” lessons could be taught simultaneously within the same large classroom.

In our 1992-94 fieldwork all the classrooms observed had pupil seating patterns whereby mixed-sex groups of pupils were seated together around separate tables. This same pattern of seating was found both in Galton *et al.*'s late '70s fieldwork and in 27 of the 28 classrooms in their 1996 study. This is despite (as they note) a number of research studies summarised in Hastings *et al.* (1996) suggesting that such seating arrangements lead to the highest levels of off-task behaviour (Galton *et al.*, 1999, p.172). We found the same prevalence of such seating arrangements in our 1994-96 fieldwork for the York-Finnish Project (Webb and Vulliamy, 1999a).

However, our 2003-05 fieldwork indicated a widespread change in classroom seating arrangements. Of the 45 classroom-based lessons observed (5 of the 51 lessons were in an ICT suite and one was a PE lesson in the main hall), only 26 (58%) used the established seating arrangement with pupils doing individual work but seated in groups around tables. In 18 classes the tables had been re-arranged so that pupils were seated in rows, and in one classroom the horseshoe formation of seating that has been recommended by some researchers (eg McNamara and Waugh, 1993) had been adopted. Interviews with the teachers suggested two reasons for such changes. Firstly, they felt that with more whole-class teaching with the teacher at the front, including the use of an interactive whiteboard at the front of the classroom, no pupils should have their sides or back to the front. Secondly, they thought that pupils concentrated more and behaved better when seated in rows than when grouped around tables.

The Hastings *et al.* (1996) literature review on primary classroom seating arrangements concludes that “changing the seating arrangement to rows improves time on-task and reduces levels of distraction, with most pronounced benefits for those who normally spend least time engaged with their work” (p.41). They are careful to add, however, that:

To replace groups with rows as the standard form of classroom organisation would, of course, be to miss the point entirely. Rows are as unsatisfactory for collaborative group work as group seating is for individual task work: children should engage in work of both types. (p.41)

Our isolated observation of one lesson in each school does not permit us to say the extent to which those classrooms that had moved to seating in rows also used this flexibly for other lessons where collaborative group work was involved. It seems doubtful that the classroom furniture was regularly moved around for different activities. However, our observations showed that when group work (and especially group discussion activities) was required within a

row-seating classroom, this was achieved by asking the pupils in one row to turn their chairs around and face the row behind them.

During the late '60s and '70s many new schools were built on open-plan principles that were felt to be more appropriate for team teaching and an integrated day approach to curriculum planning (Bennett *et al.*, 1980). Of our original sample of 50 schools, 7 were seen to have open-plan classrooms when we observed them in 1992-94. However, each of these schools had been modified to provide separate classrooms by the time of our 2003-05 fieldwork. Headteacher interviews suggested that the move towards more whole-class teaching, especially following the introduction of the NLS and NNS, meant that open-plan classrooms were no longer appropriate.

Changing teaching methods across the curriculum

For teachers trained since the implementation of the NLS and the NNS the teaching approaches advocated through the strategies were second nature. As one young teacher explained: "I don't know any different because I've been trained to do it that way and I think you become comfortable towards it — standing up and giving input, then the task, then the plenary at the end of it for any lesson." However, most teachers trained before the strategies' implementation felt their practice had been changed and improved by implementing them. Across the curriculum, as in literacy and numeracy lessons, teachers specified lesson objectives, made use of instructional introductory sessions and plenaries, did more whole-class teaching and had greater interaction with pupils, particularly through teacher questioning. Consequently, teachers maintained much tighter control over the direction and pace of lessons than previously. These changes were viewed as helping teachers focus on pupils' learning:

I think there is an increase in whole-class teaching. I actually think it has helped teachers to focus and think about how they teach and, certainly I think over the last two years, there has been this emphasis on thinking about how children learn. (Headteacher, 250, July 2004)

I would think certainly now we have to say what the lesson objective is about, what you are looking for and the plenary... before you perhaps did it but maybe didn't do it as well, whereas now it is a lot more focused so I would say that I do that now in all my lessons regardless of what it is. Having that objective on the board at the front has been very useful and I think as a teacher it makes you a lot more focused. So that certainly goes across other subjects. (Year 4 teacher, 190, June 2005)

The literacy skills of acquiring, evaluating and reporting information were also drawn on in the teaching of other subjects:

Say in history we might share some text as well. Whereas before it might have just been the books open and looking at information so some of the ideas from the literacy hour are definitely used in other subjects. The things that we do in the literacy hour, so it might be report writing or instructions — a lot of those ideas are

used within other curriculum areas. So in technology the evaluations of products that they have made — a lot of those things we have also covered in the literacy hour. (Teacher, 580, Jan 2004)

However, while utilising these skills in context demonstrated their purpose to pupils, an overemphasis on them in other subjects could deter from adequate concentration on subject-specific content.

Box 7a contains a description based on observation of a Year 6 history lesson. This lesson illustrates the transfer of teaching methods advocated by the strategies to other subjects. It also shares the structure of the Year 4 numeracy lesson presented in Box 2a in that it is comprised of a focused series of linked tasks with the teacher directing the pupils' activity throughout. However, owing to the objectives and content of the lesson, it contains more open-ended questions and opportunities for discursive pupil responses, encourages them to ask questions and contains greater diversity of tasks for pupils. The teacher was using a Smart Board that had only been fitted the previous day and so the teacher and class were becoming familiar with its possibilities, although they were already accustomed to using a data projector. This reflects the increased use of ICT, particularly interactive whiteboards, described in chapter 4. The lesson demonstrates how resources downloaded from the internet can make lessons more informative, experiential and exciting. The photographs of evacuees and examples of their writing built on knowledge from previous lessons and helped pupils to empathise with the evacuees. As was often the case in the lessons observed, a TA was present and she occasionally interacted with the teacher to emphasise points in addition to supporting a group within the class.

Box 7a Year 6 history lesson on evacuees during World War II

The class history topic for the summer term was Britain since 1930 and the class had been concentrating particularly on World War II. In their literacy lessons they first carried out research in the library and on the internet to get newspaper articles on the home front. Secondly, they had just finished looking at World War II personification poems in a literacy lesson, which were displayed at the back of the class. These poems described the sounds, sights and smells associated with the blitz in London and the feelings of those under attack. In mathematics the class was tackling code breaking within the problem-solving strand of the NNS. In music they had been learning the songs of the time and in art they had been looking at propaganda posters and producing paintings expressing their views of war. They were reading *Goodnight Mr Tom* as a class novel and this has introduced them to the notion of evacuees.

There were 28 children sat around five tables positioned so they could see the whiteboard. A TA was sat with five pupils of lower ability in order to aid their understanding of the lesson content, help them to participate in the activities and discussion, and to support them in the writing task.

11.00 am The objectives for the lesson were shared with the children at the outset. These were that they would:

- use a range of information sources to identify and describe the likely feelings and experiences of a child evacuated during World War II
- identify and explore the social and cultural issues in a character's (evacuee's) story, discuss the feelings of the character and their reactions to these issues
- write a letter home as if written by an evacuee.

11.05 am The teacher introduced the lesson by asking the children questions about their previous work and the class novel to establish that they are clear about what is meant by the term evacuee and why, during September 1939, nearly 800,000 children were evacuated from cities to the countryside. She then went on to tell them how the evacuated children were parted from their parents, journeyed to the countryside and were allocated to their new wartime homes. She gave examples of how some were ill-treated while others enjoyed their time in the countryside. The children made comments based on the novel such as how Mr Tom gave the evacuee so much food that he was sick.

11.14 am The teacher then brought up a photograph of two evacuated children on the whiteboard and handed out individual copies of it. She asked the class to look at the photograph in pairs for a few minutes and pick out "what it tells us about what it was like to be an evacuee".

11.18 am The teacher asked them what they had learned. The children's comments on the photograph generated discussion about why the evacuees had name tags and gas masks on, what they might have packed in their luggage and what their expressions suggested about how they were feeling. Feelings of loneliness and anxiety about where they were going were then explored through an extract of an evacuee's letter brought up on the whiteboard (from the Imperial War Museum's letters and documents web page). The TA joined in the discussion.

11.28 am The teacher gave out another photograph of a group of evacuees, mainly boys, getting on a bus. She asked the class to look at the evacuees' expressions and to suggest a name for one (reminding them to think of a name that was popular then) and a word to describe how that evacuee appears to be feeling. Volunteers then went up and wrote their suggestions on the whiteboard, eg "Ivor confused", "Lucy anxious", "Oliver distressed", "Bob nervous". The teacher showed them how to write on the board with the special pen but without their hands touching it. While they experimented, the TA and the teacher discussed in front of the class the difficulties of trying to write in this manner.

11.35 am Next the teacher asked the children to imagine they were on the bus and to think about the questions they might have asked the child sitting next to them and to write these on their whiteboards. She said they could have three minutes to do it. After just over three minutes she asked one of the boys to read his out: "What is your name?"; "Where do you live?"; "What did your mummy pack for you?". "Could you build in some questions about feelings?" asked the teacher. "But if you didn't know them you'd want to find out who they are first" the boy replied. The teacher agreed and then asked for

other questions. Responses from the class included: “What is your dad’s job?” and “Is anyone in your family fighting in the war?” Only one child asked about feelings: “How do you feel about being evacuated?” The teacher explained how some of their factual questions could be turned into questions for opinions and feelings such as: “Is your dad fighting in the war? How do you feel about it?” She suggested that they work in pairs to come up with more questions on feelings. Three minutes later the class volunteered more ideas: “Does the war frighten you?”; “Are you scared of being evacuated?”; “Would you rather be put with a family on your own or with someone else?”

11.45 am Next the teacher placed two chairs facing the class and explained that they were seats in a train taking evacuees to the countryside. She produced a suitcase, labels and a gas mask and further explained: “We are going to do some role play to help to give you some ideas of what to put in your letters.” She asked for volunteers. Four pairs of children in turn took on the role of evacuees, with the teacher helping two pairs by joining in and asking more questions such as “How did you feel when you left home this morning?” The TA drew the teacher’s attention to the fact that one of the boys on her table had told her he would like to participate in the role play and he was one of the final pair of children. The children were asked for their comments on the role play and agreed that two boys, where one pretended to be very young and answered in a timid nervous voice, were particularly realistic.

12.00 am The teacher brought up another letter extract on the whiteboard and read how some evacuees felt as they huddled together in the local school waiting to be chosen and taken away by their host families.

12.04 am The TA gave out the paper while the teacher explained that they were to write a letter home to their parents describing their train journey, where they were staying and who with, and their experiences and feelings during the first day. She stressed to use the terms that they had learned such as evacuation, host family and billeting officer. She reminded them of the conventions for setting out a letter and told them to invent a home address. One of the children asked whether they had postcodes during the war. The TA asked her group whether they had any thoughts on this. They were uncertain and so she explained her recollections of the introduction of postcodes. The teacher asked the class if they were clear about what they had to do. She told them they had 10 minutes to begin their letters but that they could finish them after lunch.

12.14 am The teacher asked for two volunteers to read out the beginning of their letters before they tidied away for the lunch break.

As in the Year 4 numeracy lesson (see Box 2a), the plenary in the above lesson was rushed and reflects the criticism of plenaries made by a literacy coordinator:

The plenaries were sort of “read out what you have done”. No, that is being very general and very damning but, as a sort of generalisation, that is what it was like. So I asked [the head] if I could have half a staff meeting and we could just go through how to use the objectives to plan a sort of coherent lesson and we just all sat down and brainstormed ideas for plenaries. (Literacy coordinator, 185, June 2003)

Her view of plenaries in lessons across the curriculum reflects those concerns about plenaries expressed by teachers in chapter 2.

Interestingly, a pilot study (Jeffrey, 2003) focusing on four teachers in Year 5 and 6 classes found evidence from pupils for teachers' beliefs that changes in practice, such as those illustrated in Boxes 2a and 7a, were beneficial for pupils. Jeffrey identifies the explanation of teacher intentions to pupils as a major development for pupil learning that is a direct result of the strategies. He found three significant factors contributed to the clarification of those intentions: "These were clear teaching and learning objectives, the incorporation of a significant amount of direct teaching as opposed to independent learning, and the highlighting of specific technical vocabulary and concepts attached to each subject" (p.492). In particular, "making learning objectives explicit, albeit an initiative of the reforms, opened the door to learners' awareness of teacher intentions" (p.492).

This contrasts with findings on pupils' experiences prior to the strategies where pupils "had a relatively limited conception of these intentions, based on inference rather than confident knowledge" (Pollard *et al.*, 2000, p.178). Consequently, "a concern for children was to find out as precisely as possible 'what she wants' and to respond to well-known idiosyncracies" (p.178). Pollard *et al.* also found that pupils "had little or no language that helped them to discuss learning processes" (p.178) whereas Jeffrey (2003) observed the technical language to which pupils had been introduced within lessons being "re-incorporated in evaluations by learners and in some cases creatively" (p.493). However, he cautions that while the pilot project showed "learners to be aware and articulate, we did not find much evidence of teachers incorporating learners' perspectives in an evaluation of their teaching and learning practices" (p.502).

A minority of teachers were adamant that their teaching outside the literacy and numeracy hour had not changed as a result of the strategies. They stressed the importance of maintaining a more flexible approach and a practical emphasis to these lessons in order to provide children with contrasting experiences. Also, two headteachers expressed concern that the spread of approaches to teaching advocated by the strategies was having a detrimental effect on children's learning by reducing attention to the differing learning styles of pupils:

If we do too much of the standing in front presentation, or the literacy and numeracy pattern of introduction, teach a bit of the lesson, work in groups, plenary, which is common to everything now, the trouble with that is it becomes too much of a crutch and a routine and children get turned off and bored by it. Also, it doesn't reach all children. Some children need more support through the lesson, some children need more involvement with whatever they are doing. They don't learn by somebody telling them things and they do learn by writing, so we're just trying to find ways in which we can encourage children to learn. (Headteacher, 249, July 2004)

One head reported that, as a consequence of staff believing "that is the format for all lessons", she had focused staff professional development sessions within her school on identifying what the children need, how they are learning and "getting them [staff] back to learning by doing".

Teachers' evaluations of the changes

The evidence presented above and earlier in this report suggests that primary classroom practice has undergone fundamental changes since the New Labour government came to power in 1997. These changes include:

- a move from an activity-based, topic-centred curriculum to an objectives-led, subject-centred one
- a dramatic increase in whole-class teaching
- the virtual eradication in our sample of certain practices, such as the integrated day and open-plan classrooms, often associated with the “progressive” era following the Plowden report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967)
- changes in classroom seating patterns, with much more use of pupils seated in rows rather than grouped around tables
- a massive increase in the use of ICT facilities to teach the whole class as well as smaller groups or individuals within it
- the dramatic increase in the use of TAs within the classroom.

Almost without exception those of our interviewees who had been teaching since the early '90s talked of such changes over this time period as being “massive”. Although we did not explicitly ask teachers to evaluate current practice against that of a decade or more ago, some of them did so and in this section we present the dominant themes. There were three broad areas of practice that elicited such evaluations. These relate to the curriculum (both its content and its mode of organisation in the classroom), teaching methods, and planning and recording.

Curriculum

Many teachers who had been trained in the '70s or '80s were critical of the fact that, when they had begun teaching, they had been given no guidance or help as to what they should be teaching. They viewed the subsequent introduction of the national curriculum in very positive terms:

When I first came there was no guidance as to the curriculum and so I was given a Year 2 class and I am going “well, what do I teach them”? There was nothing because it was pre-national curriculum; we didn't have any schemes of work; nothing at all and I was literally just making it up as I went along. Since then obviously the national curriculum came in and that helped an awful lot because it gave a framework. (Literacy coordinator, 185, June 2003)

When I first started teaching there wasn't a great lot of direction. ... It was very much up to the headteacher and the classroom teacher, so as an inexperienced teacher you were left more or less to your own devices in all sorts of ways. I think it's good now that there's direction and help for new teachers coming into schools. (Deputy head, 131, March 2004)

Allied to this was a widespread view that a move from “teaching what you like” (which often meant teachers avoiding those subjects they found difficult or less interesting) to covering a pre-set curriculum was a marked improvement in potentially covering a broad and balanced curriculum for children:

I suppose the actual balance of the curriculum that I teach is probably better. Before national curriculum I used to teach my maths, my English and then I would do as I wanted really [laughter]. I can remember saying to somebody in my second year of teaching, "what about science, I don't feel that I have done any science?" and I think that is mad now. She said, "oh well we did air and balloons last year" and I thought "well what is that?!" So I think the structure of what I teach is probably better. (Lower KS2 coordinator, 280, Feb 2004)

I suppose you do have a certain amount of swotting up to do, for Hinduism, but I didn't have to do that in the old days because I just did things that I knew about and hoped that that transferred to the children. ... My topics were something like: heat, transport, knights and castles. I can't remember the others but I suppose somebody looking at that list would think, "You're delivering a very restricted diet to these children." But you don't nowadays because somebody's thought about it and you're offering "broad and balanced". (Year 6 teacher, 279, May 2005)

The apparent lack of framework for the curriculum prior to the Education Reform Act was also commented on by later entrants to the teaching profession, who compared their own training with the teaching they had received as primary pupils:

Thinking back to people who taught me when I was at primary school, they could basically do whatever they wanted. You could be taught anything. I think we have got a structure, a framework, to teach to and I think that is a bonus. (PE coordinator, 580, Jan 2004)

Interestingly, similar sentiments were expressed by a teacher who had trained in the '70s in Scotland but who had moved to England in the '80s — a useful reminder that striking differences between the teaching cultures of Scotland and England (eg Menter *et al.*, 2004) are nothing new:

Now I have got a different experience having taught in Scotland initially. In Scotland it was very structured and so I was used to that kind of system. Now when I moved to England ... there was no structure, no planning given, there was nothing, but fortunately I was experienced. I would hate to have thought of someone going in there who wasn't experienced. (KS2 teacher, 33, Feb 2005)

The provision of a framework for the curriculum, firstly with the introduction of the national curriculum and then with the NLS and the NNS, was generally contrasted favourably with aspects of the previous tradition of topic work:

I mean in days gone by I think you would look at a topic web and some of the links to some of the subjects were so tenuous it was ridiculous. You were really forcing the issue and not really doing the subject great justice. (Deputy head, 580, Jan 2004)

Ten years ago, prior to that, you looked at a topic, say like toys, and then you had to look for something from every aspect of the curriculum and all those tenuous little things, that you were like "oh I will cover that because it fits in..." and I have done my maths because it fits in with that. Do you know what I mean? Whereas it was a waste of time basically. (Deputy head, 315, Feb 2005)

Whilst teachers' evaluations of curricular changes over the decade were broadly positive, there was one major exception to this. Some teachers complained that the volume of work laid down in the national curriculum, coupled with the high degree of detail in the pre-specified learning objectives — especially in the NLS and NNS — meant that teachers no longer had the time or flexibility to pursue more spontaneous topics initiated from either teachers' or pupils' interests:

I can remember being very excited about teaching and I don't feel as excited about teaching now. ... I can remember coming into lessons and really very often 10 or 15 minutes before the lesson deciding what I was going to do. I would think I have this really good idea... and we did it and it was excellent or a child would have come in and brought something in and say "can we do this today?" and it was "oh yeah, let's do that then", and they were all really interested and we went off and did it. Now I still find myself looking at my plans and I am sitting there talking to the children and say "we are going to do such and such..." then "oh hang on I have got to look at my plan". I feel awful, but I still do it. I look at my plan ... it is so tightly planned and you feel that if something is going wrong you carry on with it because it is on your plan and that is a negative thing. (Literacy coordinator, 185, June 2003)

In addition, teachers regretted the fact that extra-curricular activities were also constrained:

I think some classes have lost a little bit of that spontaneity and that lively interest that you could put onto something. You know, even leaving out Christmas concerts and things, you feel under pressure. How can we fit it in? When can we practice it? When can we do it? Because you know that if you do a rehearsal then, when are we going to do the literacy and when are we going to do the numeracy? It's hard. (Headteacher, 220, Oct 2004)

A tension between the benefits of a structured framework for the curriculum and the disadvantages of losing spontaneity in their teaching was explicitly recognised by some:

What has changed is that children are guaranteed an all round curriculum these days because, when I first started teaching, if there was something that you didn't like you could avoid doing it. Whereas you can't now ... the national curriculum I think is a good thing because it gives you a framework and then we know that everybody across the country is doing the same objectives and they are covering the same work. What it has changed though is the spontaneity, like if it is snowing outside we are going to do a snow day and those things don't happen like they used to, which is a shame. (Assistant head, 470, Oct 2003)

Viewed as a continuum with curricular prescription at one end and curricular flexibility/spontaneity at the other, as argued in chapter 6, many teachers viewed the primary strategy as a welcome vehicle for attempting to get the best of both worlds:

I think that what we must be careful not to lose is the creativity and the freedom of the old system. When I say that, I don't mean that we should go back to... "oh it is

a topic, what topic shall I have... ooh yes, yes" [laughter]! I think what you have got to try and do is keep the rigour and the structure that these new things give, but also to keep the best of what we had before. So there is a little bit of flexibility, and okay if it snows one day well then you make the most of it, or a happening that you need to cash in on, that you don't feel... I can't do that, I am supposed to be doing whatever it is that you are supposed to be doing. (SENCO, 196, March 2004)

Teaching methods

As argued earlier in this chapter, the introduction of the NLS and NNS has had a marked impact on teaching methods, not only in English and Maths but in other subjects as well. In teachers' reflection on changes to teaching methods over the decade, a central issue to emerge is the desirability of having clear objectives and of sharing these with pupils:

What I feel used to be a failing was that going back a few years I didn't know what I was teaching, the kids didn't know what they were learning and at the end of the lesson we didn't know whether we'd learnt it and nobody bothered to find out whether we'd learnt it. Now I know what I'm teaching, they know what they're learning and at the end of the lesson I'm going to know whether they've learnt it and, what's more important, they're going to know whether they've learnt it. And that's what's improved teaching. (Year 3 teacher, 647, July 2005)

Whilst this viewpoint was widely shared, as evidenced also in teachers' comments about the strategies in chapter 2, it is worth noting that there were examples in our data of some teachers' antagonism at being told how to teach, one of which was explicitly about the sharing of lesson objectives with pupils:

I don't like the constant assumption that you can be told what works best. One moment you'll be told that if you share your objectives with a class they'll do much better, and I don't think that sort of thing has had enough analysis. Someone's had a good idea and it's become gospel. I'm not one for sharing objectives with a class. I think it's a waste of time. It's just an example — I don't for a second believe that they walk out of the classroom having learnt an ounce more because you've done that. (Science coordinator, 300, March 2004)

One consequence of the strategies is that, as already noted, patterns of curriculum organisation associated with the integrated day (whereby different groups of children within a class study different subjects or topics at the same time) had completely disappeared from our sample. The theme of the integrated day was raised by interviewees in only 11 of the 188 interviews, but only three of these were explicitly evaluative (two suggesting that it did not really work and one that, on the contrary, it was more enjoyable for children). In discussing it there was, however, general agreement that it had been more difficult for the teacher to manage a diverse range of subjects and activities within a single lesson.

If the integrated day is associated with the "progressive teaching" of the Plowden era, so also is the use of open-plan classrooms and this was raised by interviewees in 8 of our 188 interviews. The general response was that they

were incompatible with the move to more whole-class teaching associated with the NLS and the NNS. In addition, teachers welcomed the end of distracting noise from neighbouring classrooms and the fact that they could decide to involve their class in noisier practical activities when they wished, rather than having to arrange such activities at the same time as all other classes in a previously open-plan area.

The Year 3 teacher quoted above on the importance of sharing learning objectives with pupils summarises both the benefits and the limitations of the strategies' legacy. She fully acknowledged the benefits of a clearer focus and greater structure to lessons, including lesson objectives. However, she strongly expressed her view that, while these may improve teaching, they are certainly not the essence of memorable, motivating and exciting lessons:

I think the strategies gave us the focus because before the national curriculum, before the strategies, there wasn't a focus. All this "Let's do some geography about water" —we'll teach them what a lake is, draw a picture of a lake. The strategies broke it down, the national curriculum broke it down. ... We were told what these little things were that we were supposed to be teaching them. The strategies told us how you teach it and then Ofsted came and said "This is what I want to see", so then you start to do it and then you actually start to see the value of it. I think sometimes it's too prescriptive. As I've often said, when I look back at the teachers who really influenced me, turned my life around, I can't actually remember one of them sharing a learning objective with me: "Why did that teacher turn your life around? Oh I know, it's because she put the learning objective on the board!" We've gone a little bit too much, if you forget to write the learning objective on the board does it really bloody matter? No it doesn't. (Year 3 teacher, 647, July 2005)

Planning and recording

A final theme to emerge in teachers' evaluative comparisons between past and present was the massive increase in the time they now spent on paperwork, associated with planning and recording pupils' progress. Some older teachers, looking back at their early teaching, were surprised at the lack of any such checking measures in the past. For example, the teacher whose summary of the benefits and limitations of the strategies has just been quoted, began her teaching in the late '60s:

When I first started teaching ... nobody checked up on me. I went into that classroom, I did a bit of maths, I did a bit of writing. If I felt like painting a picture I did. If I felt fed up I'd go and play in the yard. I remember feeling horrified once when the head said: "Could you just jot down in a notebook what you've taught this week." "What! I've not got time to be doing that. I'm going out this weekend." No planning, no written planning. (Year 3 teacher, 647, July 2005)

This said, there was universal agreement amongst those teachers who commented that the demands of the audit society had become so great and, in teachers' views, so unnecessary that they impacted very negatively both on the practice of teaching and on teachers' morale:

I think there's too much gathering of evidence because you're constantly having to prove that you're doing things that you know you're doing, the head knows you're doing, but outside agencies don't know you're doing it without seeing a piece of paper to say you're doing it and there's still a certain amount of that. It's feeling the need to have to prove yourself all the time which is still quite demoralising and disheartening. (Year 5 teacher, 279, May 2005)

I have to verify the same information on quite a few different pieces of documentation and it doesn't make my teaching any tighter. I am the same thorough teacher that I set out to be. However, more time, a ridiculous amount of time, is spent on filling in forms to verify what I was doing in the first place. (Year 5 teacher, 180, Dec 2004)

You are having to evaluate everything and I just feel that it is almost like they don't trust teachers' own judgement. It is like you have got to account on paper for everything and it is just so time-consuming. (Year 6 teacher, 275, Oct 2003)

Not only do you have to do a job now, you have to prove that you have done it. So you are spending your time getting evidence and back up to prove that you had a good lesson. You can't just have good lessons now as you have to prove it all the time. So that is ridiculous — it is like Big Brother watching and it has gone over the top now, and the people who are conscientious are worn out. I am thinking of retiring early now. I am 55 and I think that is it, I want a life outside school as it can't all be work. (Science coordinator, 566, June 2003)

Summary

This section has considered the views of teachers on the extent of change in their practice over the last decade and their evaluative comments concerning such change. As a broad generalisation, the changes in curriculum and pedagogy were viewed positively. In many cases (see also chapter 2) interviewees freely admitted that what they now perceived as deficiencies in their prior teaching had been remedied by the guidance associated with QCA and the strategies. The increase in paperwork associated with planning and recording was, however, viewed as very negative with detrimental consequences for both pupils and teachers.

It should be noted, of course, that this has been a summary of the views of those teachers who have remained in the profession throughout these changes. In our 2003-05 fieldwork, it was clear from accounts of the prior history of the schools in our sample over the previous decade that some teachers, and especially headteachers, had changed careers, retired early or been forced to leave from sickness or stress. A final point worthy of note is that a few teachers, whilst commenting on the cyclical nature of policy changes where “you find that you are doing the very things that when you started teaching we were told were wrong”, argued that they themselves had remained fairly constant through such externally imposed changes:

I have actually been in and out of fashion so many times [laughter] I can't tell you! I haven't changed a great deal since I started teaching in '71 ... whilst I understood

the Plowden theory, I didn't actually go full pelt into it because I felt it was important to stand and talk to the children. To teach them things and not just tickle around being a facilitator. So, yes, I did love all of that buzz of the primary classroom when I first started teaching and there was a lot of what we called topic work then which has been sneered at, hasn't it over the years? ... But I have never actually favoured any one type of teaching. I think there is a place for everything. There is a place to stand up and talk to children and be more direct in your approach and the numeracy strategy hasn't invented that. It is just part and parcel of what I think most teachers are doing anyway. I don't think that there are teachers who spend all their time teaching in groups and never ever face the whole class. There has been a turnaround and more of an emphasis on that. It has kind of made it okay now to be a bit more didactic but I have never favoured one approach in particular. So I have felt it is appropriate to teach in many different ways. (Deputy head, 391, May 2005)

A similar point was made by a few headteachers in relation to the cyclical nature of imposed whole-school policy changes:

You're a bit of a target when you first become head. Everybody comes in and sort of tries to influence you; the agents for change arrive — in the guise of advisors with a career bent of their own — so they're coming and saying, "Oh you want to throw all the reading books out and do real books". "But reading books work, we've got a very good standard of reading and we're quite happy with them." "Oh, but old fashioned, throw them all out." "Well they may be old fashioned, but they work." So we didn't and we continued with that and I came under quite a lot of pressure for that. I remember at one point saying to one of the advisors, "Well you're talking about books, these are real books, they look real enough to me, they've got print on the pages and pictures and the kids actually enjoy them." ... Phonics is another thing. You tend to find if you hold fast to what you believe in, and you maybe sustain a bit of pressure at times from the fashion of the day, eventually it comes back round in cycles. Now we're at the forefront of phonics teaching because we've always done it and I think secretly probably most of the schools in the country are as well, because a lot of these initiatives, unless they are policed very effectively, really are surface. (Headteacher, 328, July 2005)

Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that a combination of factors, but especially the influence of the strategies, has significantly changed primary classroom practice in the last few years. Comparison with major longitudinal research projects in primary schools in previous decades, such as the ORACLE studies (Galton *et al.*, 1980, 1999) and the PACE research between 1989 and 1997 (Osborn *et al.*, 2000), suggests that patterns of primary classroom practice which survived the impact of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the introduction of the national curriculum have been transformed within a very short period of time. Some implications of this for theories of educational change will be considered in chapter 8. However, before concluding this chapter we need to consider the argument arising from some published research studies on the strategies' impact that the ensuing changes in classroom practice remain at a relatively superficial level rather than effecting deeper changes in pedagogy.

Hargreaves *et al.*'s (2003) research into 30 primary teachers' approaches to the NLS found a massive increase in the number of questions teachers asked children and in the ratio of teachers' questions to statements by comparison with either the '70s or the 1996 ORACLE studies (Galton *et al.*, 1980, 1999). They also found that, whilst there was a very high frequency of lower order factual questions in KS1, at KS2 in contrast "when compared with Galton *et al.*'s (1999) ORACLE made just before the introduction of the NLS, there was an unexpectedly high percentage of more demanding questions, i.e. those which a child answered with some explanation, reasoning, prediction or ideas" (p.229). However, they found that KS2 teachers' greater use of higher order questions did not extend beyond their NLS teaching to their teaching of other subjects such as history or science. Moreover, "even where more challenging questions were dominant in the Key Stage 2 classes, responses were rarely 'extended' in either Key Stage" (p.234). Consequently, they conclude that "teaching in the Literacy Hour, having become 'interactive' in a 'surface' sense, has remained heavily teacher-dominated" (p.234). A similar point is made in Brown *et al.*'s (2003) research into the NNS. They argue that:

*While teachers in interviews are overwhelmingly positive about the NNS, and feel that it has given them more knowledge about the curriculum and ways of teaching it, more control over learning, and much more confidence, their teaching in the classroom seems to have changed mainly in superficial ways, e.g. organisation of lessons and resources used. When the beliefs of the teachers about how children should learn and be taught numeracy (as characterised by Askew *et al.*, 1997) and the way that teachers interact with children, are examined, it appears that in almost no cases have 'deep' changes taken place. (p.668)*

In addition, Smith, F. *et al.*'s (2004) research into the NLS and NNS used systematic classroom observation and discourse analysis to investigate the patterns of teacher-pupil interaction with a national sample of 72 primary teachers. They conclude that "traditional patterns of whole class interaction persist, with teacher questioning only rarely being used to assist pupils to articulate more complete or elaborated ideas as recommended by the strategies" (p.409).

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the ambitious aims for the use of "interactive whole-class teaching" in the strategies to promote higher quality teacher-pupil dialogue and higher levels of pupils' thinking and understanding show little evidence of having been achieved. However, this should not blind us to the evidence of the very real changes in classroom practice that we have documented in this report. Moreover, these research studies were conducted within the first few years of the implementation of the strategies. As illustrated in chapter 2, teachers have since then become more confident in their approaches and blended the strategies with other aspects of effective practice in their teaching. In addition, our analyses of the impact of ICT in chapter 4 and of the use of TAs in chapter 5 suggest that, in combination with the strategies, there may be a greater potential for higher quality levels of teacher-pupil interaction (as witnessed in some of the observed lessons, for example, Box 7a).