

Managerialist discourse, the literacy standards debate, and the Shaping of the English National Literacy Strategy

***A paper presented at AARE, University of Queensland Australia, 1-5th of December,
2002***

Work in progress

Janet Soler (Open University,UK)

Contact details, Email : j.m.soler@open.ac.uk, ph: (1908) 659 116

Abstract

A considerable body of literature argues that there has been a shift from a liberal humanist discourse in schooling towards a managerialist one in the United Kingdom. In England, this debate has had a profound impact, moving schools away from the liberal humanist understandings of the 1970s and early 1980s and towards stronger linkages between the curriculum, the labour market and national economic performance. Along with this managerial discourse comes a technicist/rationalist notion of learning and a view of the individual as a subject to govern and/or be governed.

Historically, literacy has long been a key site for such struggles. Following the early 1990s cries for 'a return to basics in education', literacy now occupies a central role in educational thinking. It has been key to the development of New Labour's electoral platforms in 1997 and 2001, and to the educational policy initiatives that have proliferated during the New Labour administration.

This paper traces examines the links between the changing narratives in public debate over literacy published in the press during the early 1990s. This public debate is seen as an important aspect in the emergence of a new dominant narrative in the literacy curriculum and pedagogy which came to replace the dominant 1960s and 1970s child centred ideals with a technicist view which stressed basic skills of literacy and numeracy controlled by market mechanisms.

Introduction

A considerable body of literature argues that there has been a shift from a liberal humanist discourse in schooling towards a discourse of management (see for example Ball, 1994, chapter 5). Underpinning these arguments is a debate over the purposes of schooling, and questions about learning and teaching in the context of the post-modern, globalised nation state. In England, this debate has had a profound impact, moving schools away from the liberal humanist understandings of the 1970s and early 1980s can be seen to be linked to a technicist/rationalist notion of learning and a view of the individual as a subject to govern and/or be governed. This, in turn, has led to an emphasis on the politics of governance and surveillance (Ball, 2001; Carter and Burgess, 1993).

Critiques of the 1988 Education Reform Act have noted the central role conforming to national standards and surveillance by national testing have played in changing the 'narratives of the pupil' and have argued that examining this process through a Foucauldian notion of 'moral technologies' highlights the way in which 'government policy is bringing about a shift in, and reorganisation of schooling through and emphasis upon testing and grading and the publication of league tables of school performance (Carter and Burgess, 1993, p.233)

In the decade following the introduction of the National Curriculum the literacy curriculum and its associated pedagogies has been exposed to "a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish" (Foucault, 1983, p.184). Improving literacy standards became a central part of New Labour's educational thinking. It has been key to the development of their electoral platforms in 1997 and 2001 and the educational policy initiatives such as the The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (see DfEE, 1998) that have proliferated during the Labour administration. Recent reviews of the literacy and numeracy strategies have drawn attention to the implicit notions of governance and surveillance and the adoption of technicist, prescriptive less flexible pedagogical approaches. There has also been a rejection of progressive, child-centred ideals and reflective practice and in the key documents designed to present or implement these policy initiatives (see for example Coldron and Smith, 1999; Fisher, 2000; Hilton, 1998) .

These commentators draw attention to the technicist, assessment orientated agenda embedded in the the NLS to counter previously held progressive, child centred professional ideals by reducing the individual child to a invisible 'normal' individual who is constructed around quantifiable norms. They also note the potential conflict between the previous rhetoric in documents such as the Plowden Report (1967) with its emphasis upon teaching as an art and the tendency in the NLS to endeavour regulate teacher behaviour and deconstruct their professional identities and professional control through a pressure to teach to a prescriptive curriculum which emphasises testing and grading to raise literacy standards.

Coldron and Smith (1999) argue that there are three 'significant general features', which arose from their analysis of the key documents which implemented the national literacy and numeracy strategies. These significant features are: a 'central concern' over the 'behaviour of teachers in the classroom'; an 'assumption abroad that change was necessary' which was

accompanied by a common consensus that literacy standards were low and falling; and finally that it was possible to address bring about change and address falling standards through the 'science' and 'technology of teaching' rather than changing practice through 'reflection' and 'reflective practice' (Coldron and Smith, 1999, p. 306-307).

Fisher's (2000) comments highlight the way in which early childhood educators are facing difficulties with the NLS emphasis upon literacy standards which fails to acknowledge the dominant child centred and child development orientation of early childhood educators. Hilton (1998) argues that 'the National Literacy Strategy is a deskilling initiative which itself is based on unsubstantiated claims that its proposals are more effective than other methods'. She sees it as enshrining 'a mythology that teachers do not teach literacy effectively and need to be retrained to do so' and notes that 'there are no research findings of any validity whatsoever to support it' (Hilton, 1998, p.4)

This paper traces examines the links between the changing narratives in public debate over literacy published in the press during the early to mid 1990s which helped facilitated a commonsense consensus that literacy standards were low and the a notion that the purposes of schooling were changing. This public debate is seen as an important aspect in the emergence of a new dominant narrative in the literacy curriculum and pedagogy which came to replace the dominant 1960s and 1970s child centred ideals. The child-centred vision of primary teachers, which focussed upon the individual child, learning through play, child development, and readiness for learning was challenged by a technicist view which stressed basic skills of literacy and numeracy controlled by market mechanisms.

The media debate which developed in the early 1990s helped ensure that this latter narrative would become imbedded in the subsequent New Labour directive to the Literacy Task Force that a national literacy strategy should be developed aimed at 'substantially raising standards of literacy in primary schools in England over a five to ten year period' (Literacy Task Force, 1997, preface).

Initiating the narrative: the public outcry over 'The biggest drop in literacy standards for 40 years'

The English National Literacy Strategy has been introduced against a background of an increasing external control exercised by the over the curriculum and teaching styles. During the late 1980s and 1990s, England revised the National Curriculum first introduced in the 1988 Education Reform act. This act introduced a prescriptive and detailed curriculum with statutory national testing in the primary school at age 7 and 11. It also initiated an inspection system which was controlled by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). In this paper I will argue that the public debates over 'falling reading standards' in the early 1990s contributed to the forming of a particular context and set of constraints that continued the process Ball (1990) has identified as implicit in the implementation of the National Curriculum. The public acceptance that standards were falling and that steps needed to be taken to replace the use of 'progressive' methods with a formal, skills based focus upon the basics in literacy helped continue the process where teachers were 'reduced to agents of policies which are decided elsewhere' (Ball, 1990, p.171).

The public debate over declining standards gained nationwide coverage and a subsequent widespread public outcry over 'falling literacy standards' in June, 1990. *The Times Educational Supplement* carried a front page story reporting that Martin Turner, an educational psychologist at the London Borough of Croydon, had found that reading standards among seven-year-olds had shown 'the biggest drop in reading standards for more than 40 years'. Moreover 'secret data collected by a cross-section of nine local education authorities' had indicated that 'average reading scores fell from 100 in 1985 to

96.80 in 1989 (Clare, 1990a, p.1). Turner's revelations led to newspaper reports in all the national English Newspapers announcing that there had been a dramatic decline in reading standards.

This announcement was immediately followed by political action through the proclamation of the need of a 'national debate about how schools teach children to read'. It also activated support for the introduction of national testing. Critiques of the then dominant Whole Language/Real Book approach reading method and national testing were also justified by the potential economic impact of such a dramatic fall in reading standards. The public debate also prompted the Education Secretary, John MacGregor to express concern over the methods of teaching reading and the economic implications of falling reading standards (Clare, 1990b, p.4).

The claims also gave added support to national testing. Local authorities were seen to be suppressing information and data because lent renewed support to the Government's plans to introduce national tests at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16. It was argued in the *Guardian* that data released by Turner and the other psychologists in the reports, showed that parents had a right to know how their children were progressing (*Guardian*, Leading article, June 30, 1990).

The claims that the drastically falling standards were due to incorrect methods of teaching literacy also lent support to the view that the teaching practices needed to be changed and teachers' behaviour more carefully monitored through the introduction of national testing. Articles in the national newspapers pointed out that without national tests there it was not possible to provide genuine comparative results as some authorities in this period had not carried out any testing of seven year olds. The authorities that had carried out testing had used different methods which made comparisons difficult. Although tests were being used at a greater rate than ever before they were not co-ordinated and most external tests are not linked to the normal work of teachers (*Guardian*, Leading article, June 30, 1990).

The initial media attention was followed by Turner's publication of a report titled 'Sponsored Reading Failure: An Object Lesson' (1990) which aimed to justify the earlier claims. This report published 'findings' that claimed to substantiate the assertion that reading standards had suffered a serious decline by the early 1990s. Turner went on to claim that reading standards were declining because of the introduction of whole language/real book 'new methods' based approaches to teaching reading and the lack of 'phonetic methods' (Marks, 1990)

It can also be argued, however, that the analysis of the evidence in his pamphlet shows that these claims were based upon 'a fairly small number of children chosen only from those authorities which showed a decline' yet the media reports and statements made by Turner and the other LEA representatives misleadingly implied that the claim was 'based upon a large and representative sample' (Stierer, 1994, p.130). The claims can also be seen to be based upon false assumptions related to the way the reading tests were interpreted, the standardisation of differing scores, and underpinning assumption that the data and the psychologists' agenda was politically neutral and scientifically objective and rigorous when their analysis was 'bound to be guided by their assumptions and preconceptions' related to particular views about how children should be taught to read. (Stierer, 1994, p.131).

Stierer has argued that there could be alternative explanations for Turner's data. He noted that the standardised tests used to gather this evidence 'no longer reflect the psychometric conceptions of reading built into the tests so that children who have been taught by the real book/whole language method may not do as well as children who have been taught in traditional ways which the traditional tests are designed to measure (Stierer, 1994, p.135-6).

Other education researchers also expressed doubts regarding Turner's findings and conclusions. Researchers were reported as arguing that there was no scientific evidence that standards are falling and warned 'that single, small surveys, which have yet to come under public scrutiny, provide not firm basis for general conclusions' (Braid, 1990, p.2).

In January, 1991 the inspectorate and the NFER published separate reports on reading standards. The inspectorate argued that there had been little change in primary school standards over twelve years (Meikle, 1991, p.34). The inspectorate reported the views of head teachers who noted the impact of the national curriculum which was seen to encroach on the priority formerly given to reading. They also noted the impact staff turn over, class sizes, lack of funding for books and reduction in the specialist support services for slower learners and bilingual children (Macleod, 1991, p.3). The NFER did find a decline in standards but argued that as the 'tests reflected a narrow and outdated view of reading, the data is meaningless' (Bald, 1991, p.19).

Doubts regarding the efficacy of the Turner's data, however, did not prevent his claims being 'taken seriously in the Tory Party'. A revamp and reshuffle of junior ministers in the weeks following his revelations was linked to 'the current panic about schools' (Economist, July, 1990, p.49). The Education Secretary also announced that Inspectors visiting primary schools in the following months would focus upon the teaching of reading (Financial Times, UK News, July 26, 1990, p.10). In September, two months after the revelations were published; the Education Secretary ordered new investigations into reading standards in primary schools. The inspectorate and the School Examinations and Assessment Council were to report to him on the assessment of standards by December. A meeting was also arranged between the Education Secretary and Martin Turner to discuss the evidence published in Turner's 'Sponsored Reading Failure: An Object Lesson' (1990) which had just been published by the 'rightwing think tank, the Independent Primary and Secondary Education Trust. Turner had already met with the Labours education team. Jack Straw, the Labour spokesman, had been reported as stating there were serious grounds for concern (Bates, 1990c, p.3).

The narrative develops: Challenging 'progressive' education and regulating through national testing

By early 1991 Kenneth Clarke was overtly using the concern over reading standards that had been generated by Turner's report to support national testing. He argued that 'it was deplorable that reading standards were unsatisfactory in one of five primary schools'. He reminded parents that they needed to 'find out about their children's reading standards, and to participate in helping improve them' (*The Times*, Home News, 1991, January 10, p.3).

Commentators recognised that the psychologists' revelations offered the Labour Party an opportunity to find a 'fundamental issue which would strike at the heart of the electorate. The issue of 'educational standards' could provide 'the killer punch against the Tories' and help Labour regain power', as it was 'more punchy than constitutional reform and would steal the Tories' threadbare clothes from off their backs' (Phillips, September 28, 1990, p23). This potential for the debate over reading standards and teaching methods to attack the Conservative Party was recognised with Jack Straw's claims that 'the findings are an indictment of the government's record and that it was a national scandal that one child in five was not receiving adequate reading lessons'. He called for national testing arguing that the Conservative Government 'has wasted many years after quite scandalously abandoning the system of national monitoring of reading standards in 1988. What we need to have is regular and consistent monitoring of standards, so that when there are problems ministers know about them' (*The Times*, Home News, 1991, January 10, p.3).

By April, 1991 direct links were being made between progressive educational methods and the perceived decline in reading standards. This link was given media coverage after the screening of a BBC 2 documentary, Frank Smith's visit to England, and Prince Charles's reported arguments against 'fashionable' trends in our classrooms. The BBC Documentary featured a primary school which was reported as being 'criticised by Her Majesty's Inspectors' for 'spending too much time establishing "caring relationships" while failing to teach pupils to read and write properly' (Marston, 1991a, p.2). Frank Smith, a main advocate and developer of whole language/real book approaches was reported by John O'Leary writing in *The Times* as occupying 'a place in the demonology of child development once reserved for Dr Spock' and was reportedly accused of 'triggering a national decline in reading standards with so-called "real books" theory of learning'. He was also described as having 'been dubbed the Billy Graham of the reading world, a guru of the left and a crank'. Moreover he was 'an opponent of the national curriculum, testing and the separation of pupils by Identity'. O'Leary also noted that Tim Eggar, the Education Minister, had now taken sides against the whole language/ real book approach and attacked these beliefs. Eggar was quoted as stating that Mr Smith had a long way to go to prove his case. The Education Minister also felt that the real books campaign was a serious attack on standards in schools (O'Leary, 1991).

Two days later Prince Charles was reported as attacking progressive educators in a speech at Stratford-upon Avon:

"Are we all so frightened and cowed by the shadowy 'experts' that we can no longer 'screw our courage to the sticking place' and defiantly insist that they are talking unwitting nonsense?". THE Prince of Wales's own reply to the rhetorical question he posed in his Stratford-upon-Avon speech was a resounding "No". He said it was time to call the bluff of the so-called experts-the trendy educationalists who had become increasingly out of touch with the feelings of ordinary people. But who are they? Where do they lurk? How do they exert their malign influence? And with what consequences?

(Clare, 1991, p.17)

In May, 1991 the national Standard Assessment Tasks (Sats) tests for seven year olds were administered for the first time this Century despite the problems created by complaints that the tests were 'complicated' 'time wasting' and 'unfair' (Judd, 1991a, p.6). The Commons Select Committee who was meeting at the same time to investigate Turner's 'claims that standards of reading were falling because of faulty teaching methods in primary schools' dismissed his claims that phonics was at fault, but supported the need for the national testing of seven year olds as the tests would provide the 'first solid basis for judging standards' (MacLeod, 1991c, p.10)

By mid July 1991 the preceding public outcry over falling standards had resulted in the establishment and acceptance of national testing in primary schools and there was an overt political commitment to raising standards by both of the major political parties. The teachers of seven-year-olds had administered their first national standard assessment tasks, enabling the press to comment for the first time on what they saw as clear evidence of the achievement level for seven year olds on a national scale (*Guardian*, Leading Article, December 20, 1991). The Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party were calling for 'greater accountability from schools' (Marston, 1991b, p.10) and the Labour Party had a formal commitment to initiating a standards council (Bates, 1991).

The release of the results from the national assessment testing of seven year olds also hastened the demise of the inspectorate. In October Her Majesty's Inspectors were given the

news that 'more than half of them' would become redundant due to a decision which had been 'taken by the Prime Minister and the Downing Street policy unit and rushed through Cabinet. The decision had been taken so quickly that Whitehall accounts reported the Queen had asked "What have they done wrong" (Judd, 1991c). Judith Judd writing in the *Independent* argued that they were being penalised for failing to support the right wing agenda of protecting 'traditional standards'. The Inspectorate, she argued, had 'sold out to the progressives' and had become 'slaves to fashionable educational theory and shamefully soft on underachieving schools' (Judd, 1991c).

During this period the 'reading debate' over phonics versus real books/whole language had continued to feature in the press. Commentators such as Roger Beard, who was at the time a senior lecturer in Primary Education at the University of Leeds, advocated caution and a 'mixed-method' approach which utilised phonics to help children with 'reading fluency and the need to decode unfamiliar words- on which the meaning of the texts often disproportionately depends' (Beard, 1991, p.17). The release of the results national testing of seven year olds in November 1991, however, led to a renewed press condemnation of teaching methods. The results were interpreted as showing that '28 percent of our children can not read'. This led to and yet another attack on the Plowden Report in the right wing press. The apparent decline in reading standards was contrasted with the success of reading in other countries such as France, Germany and Japan. The *Daily Mail* renewed its general condemnation of primary teaching methods and once again launched into a derisory rhetoric against progressive ideals:

The issue goes far wider than reading. The results of these national tests should finally remove the widespread delusion that whatever else is wrong with our education service, our primary schools are the best in the world. It is simply untrue. The fact is that the hare-brained, sentimental concept of child-centred teaching is the principal source of the problems in secondary schools later on. Cosy, "caring", well equipped classrooms are no proof that anything at all of educational value is being achieved.

(The Daily Mail, Leading Article, November 7, 1991)

The league table results for the achievement levels of seven year olds were released in December and was heralded by a Leading Article in the *Guardian* as 'a small piece of history' which for the first time would give 'clear evidence of the achievement levels of seven-year-olds on a national scale' and provide 'education authority members (and parents) with the comparative information they need to monitor the progress of their local school systems- and demand improvements where necessary.'

The *Guardian* supported national testing and a system which would 'identify areas which are under-performing' (The *Guardian*, Leading Article, December 20, 1991), Judith Judd in the *Independent* was more cautious and pointed out that while reading standards could be improved the 'test results show no evidence that standards are declining' as there were no previous tests of seven year olds to compare them with. She also pointed out that the League tables could not account for social and economic differences and therefore was of little use to parents as few could choose where to live. The tables gave little information about local differences. She concluded that the 'most "shocking revelation" was that ministers are in the grip of league table mania' (Judd, 1991c).

'The political wind', however, as Judd and Wilby had pointed out in an earlier *Independent* article was firmly behind national testing in primary schools and the anti progressive lobby (Judd and Wilby, 1991, p.4). It was announced that the testing of seven year olds would continue, and that it would be no longer 'hijacked' by liberal educationalists who had 'insisted

on assessing children through more expensive classroom experiments rather than cheaper more efficient sit-down tests. The Prime Minister pledged that next years tests would be a 'simpler' pencil and paper tests that would concentrate on the '3Rs' and that the emphasis 'should be shifted towards a straight forward exam that could be taken by the whole class at the same time (Abrams, 1991, p.2) .

The publishing of league table results and their perceived support for 'falling reading standards' served to provide further support for an anti progressive stance and the resulting setting up of a government inquiry into 'primary school teaching methods' (Judd and Wilby, 1991, p.4). The Secretary for Education Kenneth Clarke announced the inquiry in early December. in language 'which could not disguise his preference for overturning teaching methods that have prevailed for 30 years:

Mr Clarke was careful to moderate his words announcing the inquiry last week but his language could not disguise his preference for overturning teaching methods that have prevailed for 30 years- group and missed ability teaching, topic work, encouraging children to find out things for themselves. Privately ministers admit that they cannot directly dictate teaching methods. But they can influence, partly by designing tests that require more formal approaches. And official inquiries can be highly influential.

(Judd and Wilby, 1991, p.4)

Conclusion: The discursive shift

The inquiry into primary education resulted in a report on primary school teaching methods which was published in late January 1992. The Report was widely commented upon in the Press and links were drawn between its conclusions and the public debate and political responses which had led to the inquiry. The Education Secretary was stated as having appointed 'Three Wise men' to produce the report: Robin Alexander, of Leeds University; Jim Rose, The Chief Primary Inspector in the Schools Inspectorate; and Chris Woodhead, the Chief executive of the National Curriculum council (Tytler, 1992; Macleod, 1992).

In *The Times* the report was seen to support the Turner's contention that there had been a drop in reading standards in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Daily Telegraph also traced the impetus for the report and its findings to the publication of Turner's claims of dramatically declining reading standards:

The alarm bells began ringing two years ago when Martin Turner, an educational psychologist, produced evidence of a sharp decline in the reading standards of seven year olds. Then came the publication last summer of a five-year study of what actually goes on in progressive classrooms. Not a lot as it turned out: on average, pupils were wasting 40 percent of each school day and not achieving very much in the rest. But it was the results of last year's tests for seven year olds that firmly shattered the primary school myth. One child in four could not read; the same proportion could barely count.

(Tytler, 1992, Features)

In the *Daily Telegraph* 'Kenneth Clarke's three man inquiry into primary education' was also seen to be a 'response to widely felt concern over: the dismal showing in last summer's tests

of seven year olds in maths and English'; the dramatic decline in reading standards, and 'doubts that current primary school methods are effective' (O'Hear, 1992,p.12).

While these newspapers agreed on narrative relating to the genesis of the newly emerged attack on progressivism and support for national assessment, there was an apparent paradoxical move to interpreting the report as condemning the establishment of the national curriculum and its associated move toward national testing as not helping support a strong enough move toward teaching the 'basics'. The report was cited as noting that 'the requirements of the national curriculum and its attendant tests have led to reduced teaching time, especially in the basics' (Tytler, 1992, Features).

David Tytler writing in the *The Times* stressed Kenneth's Clarke's reliance on 'public pressure to reform primary teaching'. He noted that 'the evidence in the report on primary school teaching methods commissioned by Kenneth Clarke had been carefully prepared and that the 'Three Wise Men' used 'the voice of reason' to explain 'what must be done if standards are to be raised'. Clarke was seen as relying on public pressure 'to force teachers to change their ways' as he believed that 'the Report would give them the self-confidence to express common sense views' (Tytler, 1992, Features).

Professor Alexander was quoted as summing up 'the three wise men's judgment as "arguing for a return to common sense" (Tytler, 1992, Features). It was felt that this gave a stronger impetus to the report's implicit criticism of progressive based primary education:

The evidence in the report on primary school teaching methods commissioned by Kenneth Clarke had been painstakingly prepared so that every claim is supported. The language used by the "three wise men" appointed by the education secretary to write the report is moderate, so that when there is criticism of the "highly questionable dogmas" adopted by some primary schools for the past 20 years it is all the more telling.

(Tytler, 1992, Features)

The Report endorsed a change to traditional teaching methods and cautioned against too much diversity in teaching methods (Bates, 1992). It recommended that the 'the best of all practices' should be incorporated into primary teaching and that this was to include 'specialist teachers to teach specialist subjects' and the promotion of 'whole class teaching where possible' (Tytler, 1992, Features). While they did not advocate streaming they did recommend that groups of children should be taught according to their ability as the very able and the less able were seen to have suffered through primary schools concentrating on aiming their teaching at children in the middle ability grouping (Bates, 1992; Tytler, 1992).

The report was also seen to run counter to learner centred ideals in the emphasis it placed the role of the teacher and a subject based curriculum and argued for specialist teachers (Bates, 1992; Tytler, 1992; Daily Telegraph, Leading Article, January 24, 1992). Primary teachers were to be encouraged to use more whole-class teaching 'rather than acting as acting as facilitators moving between groups of children working semi-independently' (Bates, 1992, p.3). While the Report sanctioned whole-class teaching it was interpreted as being against the use of topic work as this approach was considered not to be sharply focussed enough and to lead to superficial learning and teaching (Bates, 1992; Daily Telegraph, Leading Article, January 24, 1992). The Report also critiqued primary school assessment practices as being 'largely intuitive' and 'idiosyncratic' and giving very little real insight into students' abilities (Bates, 1992, p.3).

Summary

The two years following the outcry over falling reading standards which was initiated by Martin Turner and his colleagues in early 1990 brought the rapid development of a changing narrative in primary education. A general consensus developed that reading standards were had drastically fallen. This in turn led to the acceptance of the need for national testing in order to monitor reading standards. The commonly accepted assumption that standards were falling also fuelled attacks on the progressive ideals which had previously dominated primary pedagogy.

The Report on primary school methods which was reported in the press at the beginning of 1992 highlighted the increasing emphasis upon regulating primary pedagogy and the construction of a 'normal pupil' defined by quantifiable norms through national assessment. This stress upon attainment with the its associated requirements that teachers diagnosing and judge ability was to be accompanied by whole class skills based teaching of the basics in particular subject areas. The Daily Telegraph summed up this narrative shift away from libratory child- centred progressivism to a more authoritarian, technicist, teacher centred focus upon ability and basic skills in the quote below:

The immediate value of the Wise Men's report is that it exposes the chief components of the post-Plowden ideology: the topic work that leads to fragmentary and superficial teaching; the persistent belief that pupils should never be told things, only asked questions; the obsessive fear that anything might be deemed elitist, leading to the aims of the most able being neglected; and the conviction that teachers should offer nothing but praise, never pointing out when a pupil is wrong. Such are the child-centred dogmas which, the report urges, teachers must abandon in favour of subject-based instruction in purposeful and orderly classrooms- grouped by ability where appropriate- in above all, the children can concentrate on the work in hand.

Daily Telegraph, Leading Article, January 24, 1992

The Report on Primary school methods can therefore be seen to represent a discursive shift away from the progressive vision of literacy teaching as an 'art', which envisaged teachers working 'intuitively' and being 'sensitive' to the 'imaginative needs of their children' (Plowden, para 550, p.10). This ideal was being replaced with a vision of literacy teaching as 'best practice' through regulation, performance, and technical skill in the 'basics'. This discursive shift would ensure that it would be the latter vision which would become the dominant discourse underpinning the development of subsequent literacy policies and pedagogical initiatives such as the National Literacy Strategy.

References

- Abrams, F. (1991) Pupils Face Testing Tomes in 'Slimline' Seven-plus. *The Sunday Telegraph*, December 1, p.2.
- Ball, S. (1990) *Politics and Policy-Making in Education: Explorations in Policy Sociology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ball, S.J. (1994) *Educational Reform: A Critical and Post-Structural Approach* (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Ball, S.J. (2001) 'You've been NEFRed!' Dumbing Down the Academy: National Educational Research Forum: 'A National Strategy-Consultation Paper': A Brief and Bilious Response, *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(3), pp. 265-268.
- Barber, Michael. 1996. *The Learning Game: Arguments for An Education Revolution*. London: Indigo.
- Bald, J. (1991) Education: Two New Lessons in Learning to Read; Latest Evidence Confirms Doubts About Some Teaching Methods, says John Bald. *The Independent*. January 10, 1991 p. 19.
- Bates (1990a) Schools Must Do Better, Says HMI Chief: Inspectors Find up to 80 pc of Work Satisfactory, But Report Points to Serious Shortcomings in Key National Curriculum Subjects. *The Guardian*, February, 6, p.3.
- Bates, S. (1990b) Claims on Children's Reading Disowned: Authority Says Psychologist Not Backed By Evidence, *The Guardian*, July 3, p.16.
- Bates, S. (1990c) Macgregor Orders Reading Inquiry: Psychologist Blames Bad Teaching Methods for 'Worst Fall' In Standards, *The Guardian*, September 7, p.3.
- Bates, S. (1991) Leeds Pounds 14 m Project Fails to Improve Teaching, *The Guardian* August 3, [http***](#)
- Bates, S.(1992) Teachers told to rethink methods. *The Guardian*, January 23, p.3.
- Beard, R. (1991) Letter: Balance Required in the Reading Debate, *The Independent*, November 30, p.17.
- Berlinger, W. (1990) Reading Standards Not Declining, Say Officials, *The Independent*, July 1, p.2.
- Braid, M. (1990) Education Experts Doubt Fall in Literacy Standard, *The Independent*, August 20, p. 2.
- Broom D.(1988) 'Inspectors of Schools say Teaching is Sub-Standard, *The Times*, July 27, p.2.

- Carter, B. & Burgess, H. (1993) Testing, Regulation and Control: Shifting Education Narratives, 1(2), pp. 233-245.
- Clare, J. (1990a) Tests Reveal Fall in Standard of Pupils' Reading. *The Daily Telegraph*, June 29th, p.1.
- Clare, J. (1990b) Macgregor to Investigate Reading Crisis *The Daily Telegraph*, June 30, p. 4.
- Clare, J. (1991) Who Was He Talking About? Prince Charles has Warned Against 'Fashionable Trends' in Our Classrooms *The Daily Telegraph*, April 24, 1991, p. 17
- Coldron, J. & Smith, R. (1999) The Construction of Reflective Practice in Key Policy Documents in England, *Pedagogy, Culture and Society: Journal of Educational Discussion and Debate*, 7(2), pp. 305-320.
- Daily Telegraph, Leading Article (1992) Primary Concerns, January 24, *The Daily Telegraph*, p.16,
- Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Standards and Effectiveness Unit. 1998. *The National Literacy Strategy: Framework for Teaching*. London: DfEE.
- Dominion, Editorial (1961) Students Who are Poor Readers, July 22. *The Dominion*, p.9.
- Economist (1990) Britain's Schools; Trying Harder. *The Economist*, July 28, p.49.
- Financial Times, UK News (1990) Reading Probe, *The Financial Times* July 26, p.10
- Fisher, R. (2000) Developmentally Appropriate Practice and a National Literacy Strategy, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(1), pp. 58-69.
- Foucault, M. (1983) The Subject and Power, in: L. Dreyfus & P. Rainbw (Eds) *Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Gow, D. (1987) Ilea Plans Reading Tests at Seven. *The Guardian*, November 6, p.5.
- Guardian*, Leading Article, The Right test for Schools, June 30, 1990.
http://web.lexisnexis.com/executive/?_m=29522bdeb060cb1b36da18d2d9ece819&wchp=dGLbVtblSIWW&_md5=2e71a4815b47bafd852f28d37835147e
- Guardian*, Leading Article, Testing, Testing, Decemember 20, 1991.
http://web.lexisnexis.com/executive/?_m=29522bdeb060cb1b36da18d2d9ece819&wchp=dGLbVtblSIWW&_md5=2e71a4815b47bafd852f28d37835147e
- Hilton, M. (1998) Raising Literacy Standards: The True Story, *English in Education*, 32(3), pp. 4-16.

Judd, J. (1991a) Revision Expected as Teachers Slate School Tests. *The Independent*, May 5, p. 6

Judd, J. (1991b) Pupils 'Getting Less Attention', *The Independent*, July 11, p. 5.

Judd, J. (1991c) Major Settles an Old Score; Tories Want a Return to Traditional. *The Independent*, October 20, p.19.

Judd, J. (1991d) Education: These Results Still don't tell us what the Real Score is. *The Independent*, December 19, p.19.

Judd J. and Wilby P. (1991) Major Rings the Bell on Playtime; The Prime Minister wants more Sitting on the Old School Bench. *The Independent*, December 8, p.4.

Kliebard, Herbert M. (1987). *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

The Literacy Task Force. (1997). *A Reading Revolution: How We can Teach Every Child to Read Well. The Preliminary Report of the Literacy Taskforce*, London: Institute of Education.

Macleod, D. (1991) Clarke Condemns Reading Levels in Primary Schools *The Independent* January 10, p.3.

Macleod, D. (1991b) Curriculum 'Captured by Real Books Theories', *The Independent* April 24, p. 3.

Macleod, D. (1991c) Mps Dismiss Claims of Reading Crisis in Primary Schools, *The Independent* May 17, p. 10.

Macleod, D. (1992) Straw Criticises Fall in Reading Standards, *The Independent*, January 24, p.4.

Marks, J. (1990) Across the Teaching Divide, *The Times*, September 3, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/executive/>

Marston, P. (1991a) Caring School 'Fails on Reading Standards', *The Daily Telegraph*, April 17, p.2.

Marston, P. (1991b) Reading: the Secret is Out Bought to Book. *The Daily Telegraph*, July 18, p.10.

Meikle, J. (1991) Reports Fuel Debate on Poor Reading, *The Guardian*, January 10, 1991, p.43

O'Hear, A. (1992) Education: End of the 7-year war? *The Daily Telegraph*, January 23, p.12.

O'Learly, J. (1991) Reading Guru Wins Real Notoriety *The Times*, April 22, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/executive/>

Phillips, M. (1990) Commentary: Educashun Still Isn't Working *The Guardian*, September 28, p.23.

The Plowden Report. 1967. *Children and Their Primary Schools*. London: HMSO.

Stierer, B. (1994). Simply Doing Their Job? The Politics of Reading Standards and 'Real Books'. In B. Stierer & J. Maybin (Eds.), *Language, Literacy, and Learning in Educational Practice : A Reader* (pp. 128-138). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

The Times, Home News (1991). Inadequate Lessons Deplored By Clarke, *The Times*, January 10, p.3.

Turner, M. (1990). Sponsored Reading Failure: An Object Lesson. Warlington, Surrey: IPSET Education Unit.

Tytler, D. (1992) Let Common sense take over. *The Times* January 27, Features section.

http://web.lexisnexis.com/executive/?_m=29522bdeb060cb1b36da18d2d9ece819&wchp=dGLbVtbISiWW&_md5=2e71a4815b47bafd852f28d37835147e
