

Chapter 2

The Research and Writing of Professor Maurice Galton: His Contribution to the Field

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Abstract This chapter provides an overview of the influential contribution of Professor Maurice Galton to knowledge about life in schools and classrooms, through his research and numerous publications over some five decades. It identifies the various themes examined by Galton in his research studies, many of which have had a major impact on educational policy and practice, and other researchers, not only in the United Kingdom but also in other countries worldwide. The chapter goes on to place Galton's work in context by examining the various changes in attitudes to teaching and learning which have taken place over the past five decades during which time he has investigated life in classrooms principally in England and Hong Kong.

Keywords Pedagogy • Classroom practice • Teaching styles • Pupils' attitudes and attainment

Introduction

Maurice Galton's research and publications have made a significant contribution to our understanding in a number of educational areas and influenced other researchers in their investigations. As reported in this volume, Galton's investigations into Nuffield Science (Eggleston et al. 1975) not only led to the methodological development of the first UK home-grown systematic observation system, the Science Teacher Observation Schedule (STOS), but also the ability to look more deeply and objectively into classrooms (in this case Science) to see what teachers were actually doing in their lessons. One of the clear findings was that in the implementation of the Nuffield curriculum, the teachers' classroom actions as observed and recorded were often different from what they reported they had done. From this emerged the notion of a *perception gap in teaching*. Later in his account of returning to teach in a primary school, he relates his own experience of this phenomenon (Galton 1989)

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when frustrated by the failure to recover a set of large darning needles, a task the teacher had repeatedly emphasised was a priority before leaving him to it, he shouts at the children that he will cancel their play unless the needles are found. Yet on writing up his daily diary, he had no recollection of the incident until the next morning when the teacher with the class next door teased him about his behaviour. It is a feature of all his writing that 'he tells it as it is', even if this sometimes reflects critically on his own practice, and this has been a recurring feature of his work which explains why it tends to resonate with teachers.

This early classroom-based study was followed by another at the University of Leicester which Galton co-directed with Brian Simon. The Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) programme had its genesis in Simon's concern for how *disadvantaged* students would be engaged and perform in primary classrooms once streaming was discontinued and mixed ability grouping became the norm as the comprehensive education movement gained strength. The ORACLE study resulted in five data-rich volumes which were presented in a manner that made them accessible to practitioners, policymakers and researchers (Galton et al. 1980; Galton and Simon 1980; Galton and Willcocks 1983; Simon and Willcocks 1981; Delamont and Galton 1986).

Even today, the ORACLE study remains one of the most cited in contemporary educational research, and the first volume, *Inside the Primary Classroom*, was recently selected by the British Educational Research Association as the outstanding publication of its decade. ORACLE again showed clearly that teachers' classroom behaviour was not always congruent with how they recalled or talked about it. For example, teachers reported the use of working groups but the observational data described it as pupils seated together, but with very little constructive engagement as a group. The line of research into group work fitted with both the then existing national policy guidelines and the observed practice of children sitting either around tables or at desks pushed together to allow shared participation. The investigation led to a publication that not only described the group work in the primary classroom but also aimed 'to provide teachers with a set of principles which should enable them to increase the effectiveness of collaborative group work in the primary classroom' (Galton and Williamson 1992).

The utility of observational techniques was shown in subsequent studies in small rural schools (Galton and Patrick 1990). In the context of the introduction of the new National Curriculum, the authors showed how the sharing of teacher expertise through clustering meant many small schools, previously thought to be inadequate in curriculum provision, were in fact able to adjust and benefit from the curriculum changes which were predicated on the sharing of teacher expertise.

The ORACLE methodology was again used in replication studies, often in the same schools, in the 1990s. The findings were contrary to what was being reported in the popular media at that time, which was asserting there was a general movement in classroom pedagogy to more student-centred or 'progressive' teaching styles and that this was contributing to the United Kingdom's poor showing in international league tables of attainment. The observation data showed, in fact, that the classroom practice, two decades after the original ORACLE, was very similar to

that in the initial study. For example, teachers were typically using similar proportions of closed and open questions and increased instructional statements, and this demonstrated a narrowing of pedagogy across all curriculum areas. In reporting their classroom behaviour, teachers' perception once more conflicted with the observers' accounts (Galton et al. 1999b). Hargreaves and Galton (2002) also demonstrated improvements in the process of transition from primary to secondary school since the original ORACLE research.

An important addition in Galton's research interests occurred with a move to Cambridge University in 1999 where after completing further studies of transfer (Galton et al. 1999a, 2003) he began his collaboration with John MacBeath looking initially at teachers' work lives. This shift in research focus occurred as Prime Minister Blair's Government introduced changes that impacted markedly on teachers' workloads and on their morale as statutory decisions about the curriculum and teaching methods appeared to de-professionalise teachers and imply that they were not to be trusted to work professionally in their classroom (Galton and MacBeath 2008).

Research into teachers' work lives was also being conducted in countries including Australia (Gardner and Williamson 2004; Williamson and Myhill 2008), and they also reported increased workloads and the changing nature of the work. The common strands of externally imposed curricula, work from reform agendas and so together resulted in work *intensification* that it was argued would be likely to have an impact on the quality of teachers' work and on retention rates.

In seeking to understand how teachers as professionals went about their work, Galton revisited a number of issues that were raised in his work as a consultant for the Council of Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, namely, how to prepare primary teachers through a developmental framework (Galton and Blyth 1989). The consultancy provided numerous opportunities for visiting schools and other educational institutions to appreciate that pedagogy was given greater priority across the various continental European members of the council compared to the situation in England and, in addition, to explore the different approaches to teacher preparation and continuing professional development (Galton and Moon 1994).

The drawing together of several of the themes from the research into teachers' work lives with earlier research into the patterns of classroom processes and interaction added greatly to our understanding of these matters in the contemporary context (Galton et al. 2003, 2009). Other classroom research-based studies have involved students' intrinsic motivation, their liking for school and their enthusiasm for particular curriculum subjects, such as mathematics (Pell et al. 2007). Typically, there has been a decline in these areas in England, but the most notable falls have been among the most able. Galton's recent research on the impact of class size reductions in Hong Kong has shown a similar negative result in learning disposition, a combination of motivation and subject attitude (Galton and Pell 2012; Galton et al. 2015) and the broad themes of engagement, motivation and commitment in a cross-cultural comparative context have aided our understanding of student disengagement, a prominent feature of contemporary western classrooms. Again, there are also important implications for teachers as they attempt to adopt new policies

and cope with shifting curricula foci and the use of ICT and increased record keeping, etc., all of which have had a significant impact on their work lives.

In his more recent work, Galton has begun to examine ways in which disengaged pupils can be remotivated by providing more creative opportunities that allow students to pursue their own interests and thereby exercise a degree of control over their learning. His recent research has focused on the use of artists (or creative practitioners to include film-makers, photographers, etc., besides visual and literary artists) to change teachers' classroom practice in ways that increase pupils' intrinsic motivation and engagement. This initiative, part of the UK government-funded Creative Partnership programme, brought ten practising artists into schools to work with disaffected learners during the course of an academic year. Galton (2010) reported that the artists did not respond to student classroom misbehaviour as might a typical teacher with a critical comment or a reprimand, but rather they were more likely to cite an example from their own lives to share a personal understanding in a way that teachers did not. In this way these creative practitioners demonstrated that while not condoning unacceptable behaviour they demonstrated that they understood the motives which caused it to take place. Thus, talking out of turn was not always a deliberate attempt to disrupt the flow of the teacher's conversation but was sometimes the result of overenthusiasm. Galton sees this sharing of more personal understanding, attitudes and experience – of being one's authentic self in enhancing the classroom relationship – as a way of fostering and promoting relationships and changing the classroom climate to one more conducive to learning. More recent work in collaboration with another Cambridge colleague, Ros McLellan, has extended these studies of the impact of creative practitioners on pupils' wellbeing (McLellan et al. 2012). Based on the work of Deci and Ryan (1985) and their self-determination theory (SDT), Galton and his colleagues have shown that if teachers model the kinds of practice exhibited by their artistic mentors, then pupils will develop functioning (eudaemonic) forms of wellbeing which foster a climate of cooperation or 'school connectedness' (McNeely et al. 2002). This in turn reduces the need for 'assertive discipline' approaches which are currently so popular and enables schools to establish a 'noncontrolling' climate which Deci and Ryan (2005) argue is essential to the pursuit of creative learning.

The sample of work cited above, covering almost five decades, indicates that Galton's oeuvre is both wide, in covering important educational domains, and deep in terms of the contributions he has made to our understanding in these areas. While there are many important conclusions and themes in his work, just several, such as the need for schools to utilise the professional dispositions and skills of teachers, the use of classroom observation, allied to informal pupil conversations as a mechanism for understanding and, where desirable, changing teacher and pupil behaviour, and the consistent effort to strive for better understanding of the different perspectives that exist in a school, are major contributions which, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, have clearly influenced other researchers. The key to all this work has been a firm empirical base grounded in observation, both systematic and participant. Less successful as a prophet in his own country, he has exercised considerable influence in the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong where he has worked

since the time of the millennium on the Education Department's attempts to create more active pupil participation in primary classrooms. His 'six principles' of teaching [presenting lesson objectives in terms of success criteria, increasing levels of classroom discourse, use of cooperative learning, replacement of 'corrective' kinds of feedback by 'evaluative' forms designed to teach pupils to identify, correct/improve their work, replacement of assessment as learning (AaL) by greater use of assessment for learning (AfL) and, whenever possible, situating learning activities in meaningful and relevant contexts] have become a necessary requirement for Hong Kong primary schools and training institutions in their bids to the education department for funding professional development courses.

The Context of Research on Teaching 1960–2015

Maurice Galton completed his teacher training in the late 1960s. At that time none of the texts on educational psychology made the slightest reference to pedagogy. In the UK Galton studied at Leeds University under Professor Kenneth Lovell, a noted Piagetian, whose standard work on educational psychology made no reference to teaching, even in the index. The current view was that teaching was an art and not a science and therefore not a proper subject of study for psychologists. In promulgating this view, the American classicist scholar, Gilbert Highet (1951) author of the book *The Art of Teaching*, was essential reading on courses for entrants to the profession, justified the title in the following terms:

Teaching is an art and not a science....Teaching involves emotions, which cannot be systematically appraised and human values which are quite outside the grasp of science. A 'scientifically' brought up child would be a pitiable monster.

Although refugees escaping Nazi tyranny in the 1930s introduced continental Europe's notions of *didactics* to North America, the United Kingdom remained aloof from these initiatives, as Galton's co-director of the ORACLE programme, Brian Simon, contended in his seminal article, *Why no Pedagogy in England?* (Simon 1981). For Simon there were two main reasons for this state of affairs. The first was the influence of the public (private) schools which during the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw as their main task the education of an elite group of Christian gentlemen who would in the future have the responsibility of running the far-flung outposts of the Empire and inculcating 'British' values wherever the Union Jack flew. Thus, a moral rather than an educational imperative dominated schooling in these fee-paying institutions and teaching students to 'fear God, honour the monarch and love their country' was, it was hoped, sufficient to prevent them from fraternising with the locals, particularly the women, since 'going native' and indulging in mixed-race relationships were deemed to undermine their authority and were often sufficient to warrant being sent back to England in disgrace. The climate of opinion which operated at that time and the lifestyle that ensued in isolated Asian outposts are well illustrated in E.M. Foster's novel, *Passage*

to *India*, and in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, the latter being a thinly disguised account of the author's time in the Burma division of the Imperial Police Force.

By far the more important determinant for the lack of interest in teaching was, however, in Simon's view, the extension of education beyond the elementary level for a select number of children at the age of 11. In this initial period of universal education, it was customary for 'virtuous persons' (mostly females) to be selected by the local clergyman to work in the village elementary school, since many of these were the responsibility of the established Church of England. Once installed, these apprentice teachers would learn on the job but spend their Saturdays at the local training institution. While at college, besides taking courses in arithmetic, English, Art, Religious Education and so forth, these novices would also share their triumphs and failures of the previous week with their tutors and colleagues, with the aim of identifying plausible, practical reasons to account for successful practice. Thus, students accumulated pedagogic wisdom alongside increased subject knowledge.

Once it became the norm for a limited number of pupils to continue education beyond age 11, mainly on the grounds of academic performance, then alternative explanations for a student's failure to learn, other than the use of an inappropriate teaching method, came into use. Now, a student's lack of certain intellectual qualities could be blamed for his or her lack of success. This viewpoint was strengthened by the introduction of the psychological construct of 'intelligence', the development of tests to measure it and the attribution of its general component to nature rather than nurture. Added to this the idea of *readiness*, allied to Piaget's stages of development, reinforced such attributions, since the pupil's failure to grasp certain concepts might best be explained on the grounds that the child had yet to reach the stage of formal reasoning. With such paradigms firmly established, it became feasible to search for alternative reasons, other than the use of an inappropriate pedagogy, to account for the failure of an individual to learn, such as their social class or ethnicity. This then was the dominant educational climate in England when first with James (Jim) Eggleston, and then with Brian Simon, Galton began in the 1970s to study by means of direct observation teachers and teaching.

In the United States and among scholars from Australia and New Zealand, who had studied for their doctorates at American Universities, the study of teaching was not completely neglected as was the case in the United Kingdom, although the first educational psychological textbook to contain a substantial section on teaching was not published until 1975 by Gage and Berliner. Previously, work by Anderson (1939) and its development by Flanders (1970) had raised the possibility of a 'law of teaching', since the analysis of practitioners' observed classroom behaviour appeared to result in a constant ratio between *indirect* (asking) and *direct* (telling) types of interactions, and these studies gave rise to the first meta-analysis in the *Study of Teaching* by Dunkin and Biddle (1974). These authors reviewed over 100 studies, 60 of which made use of the Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) to determine *i/d* ratios of one kind or another. The results were somewhat equivocal. While naturalistic FIAC studies tended to suggest that students whose teachers had high *i/d* ratios (i.e. asked more questions) did better on tests of

attainment and improved their motivation and attitudes, experimental studies where teachers were randomly assigned to use high levels of either indirect or direct teaching showed little or no difference. The situation was further complicated by the fact that one of the FIAC categories, *accepts feelings*, could be included in the indirect section of the ratio implying that it was not possible for a teacher who was lecturing to do so in a warm, friendly manner. Not all studies, however, included the *accepts feelings* category in their i/d calculations, and this made Flanders' claim that asking was a preferred form of teaching to telling less plausible. From the English perspective, however, FIAC was never in great demand, because following the growth of mixed ability classes at primary level in the late 1960s and the use of individualised and group forms of instruction as a means of coping with this move away from streaming, FIAC's use was somewhat limited, since it was rare for teachers in England to instruct the class as a whole. In the case of ORACLE, the two observation systems, *The Teacher Record* and *The Pupil Record* (Boydell 1974, 1975), were designed 'in-house' at Leicester University's School of Education, although the latter was highly reflective of Medley and Mitzel's (1958) *Observation Schedule and Record Instrument* (OScAR).

Meanwhile, Gage (1978) had attempted to resolve the debate as to whether teaching was a science or an art. His definition of pedagogy as the *science* of the *art* of teaching suggested as did Simon (1981) that teaching had to be based on firm principles, mostly drawn from psychological theory (the science) but that in implementing these precepts teachers had to take account of the particular contexts in which they operated. The makeup of the class, the school environment and even the odd incident such as a wet lunchtime, when pupils couldn't 'let off steam' in the playground, were all factors which could determine whether, for example, the class was likely to engage in a profitable working arrangement in groups. Accepting this definition there are still formidable difficulties in putting pedagogic theory into practice, largely because as Desforges (1995) argues researchers find it difficult to express their ideas in terms that are meaningful in the context of an individual teacher's classroom and teachers find it difficult to generalise from their individual experiences. It is here that Galton has perhaps made his most important contribution for whenever he speaks to teachers he has often been able to create a feeling on the part of the audience that he has been in each of their classrooms and understands the problems they face in their particular circumstance. Sitting in classrooms for over four decades has provided an array of anecdotes about pupils which he uses with great effect to illustrate his ideas.

Unlike in Hong Kong, Galton's influence on educational policy has been limited in his native England where apart from his work on transition from primary to secondary school, around the time of the millennium during Tony Blair's Labour Government, few of his ideas have been incorporated into educational policy. Appointed to the National Curriculum's short-lived Primary Committee, shortly after the election of Mrs. Thatcher as prime minister in 1979, he was dismissed along with other members because the draft report's recommendations for the integration of core subjects into humanities topic went against the then Secretary of

State for Education, Kenneth Baker's strongly held view that subjects such as History (his own special interest) should have a separate slot on the curriculum.

However, his experience was not unique as can be seen in the treatment of his later colleague, Robin Alexander, under Baker's successor, Ken Clarke. Alexander was appointed in 1991 to make recommendations on the appropriate use of different teaching methods and their relative effectiveness (Alexander et al. 1992). Alexander's contributions to this so-called *Three Wise Men's* report (he was responsible for most of the drafting) as discussed in Alexander (1997) were continually undermined by one of his two colleagues, the chief inspector of schools, and often edited to provide interpretations and inferences which were almost the opposite to the originally intended meanings. Neither was Alexander better served by the 2008 Labour Administration under Gordon Brown where the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) attempted to undermine his well-researched Cambridge *Primary Review* of the curriculum by hurriedly setting up their own internal rival study because Alexander's wide ranging inquiry was seen as 'a potential threat' according to one senior member of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), part of the internal review 'expert' team, who was interviewed by Bangs et al. (2011: 82). Following the replacement of Labour by the Coalition Government during 2010–2015 and the appointment of Michael Gove as secretary of state for education, matters deteriorated further in that the two other distinguished academics, Professors James and Pollard, who were appointed to conduct yet another curriculum review, felt the need to resign because their advice was ignored in the final report. In short, the history of educational policymaking in England is one where governments of all persuasion have rarely been influenced by research evidence unless that evidence was in accord with their own preferred ideology. No wonder one ex-chief inspector, another interviewee in Bangs et al. (2011:145), gave as his opinion that in England, 'there was nothing rational about decision making' in any of the governments under which he served.

Against this background, therefore, many of the problems, which attracted the likes of Galton into classroom research, still remain unresolved. There is still no consensus as to what to teach and how best to teach it. Neither are there accepted models of how teachers acquire expertise over time such that they cease to use 'maxims' to solve problems and instead become 'improvisational' thinkers (Berliner 2002). Without such models, the organisation and delivery of initial teacher training and of further professional development programmes are often dependent on the personal predilections (and sometimes prejudices) of the tutors at a particular institution. Systematic of this lack of pedagogical underpinning is the failure of the UK's TLRP (Teaching and Learning Research Programme), one of the biggest research initiatives, to fund any serious study on models of teaching or the development of teacher expertise, it being left to the programme directors to attempt a retrospective interpretation based on the numerous idiosyncratic studies. Consequently, many of the themes addressed by Galton and his colleagues over the past decades are reoccurring ones and are addressed in many of this book's chapters. It can be reasonably expected, therefore, that his work will continue to be cited by future generations of researchers for the foreseeable future.

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