# EFFECTIVE TEACHING: SOME CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGIES

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## Introduction

Research into effective teaching and schools began to influence the educational policies of the last conservative government. New Labour has embraced the trend with great enthusiasm. This tradition抯 conceptions of education, educational research and social science are not shared by the educational research community as a whole. Indeed many of its key ideas have been severely criticised. (See for instance, Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson 1998 or Galton et al 1999.) Some of the standards required of Newly Qualified Teachers ( DfEE Circular 4/98) together with the 憁odel of Teacher Effectiveness?outlined in the Hay McBer Report commissioned by the Government and published in June 2000 are firmly rooted in the 慹ffective teacher?ideology. This is equally true of the OfSTED criteria applied to observations of teaching (OfSTED 1995). A select but crucial subset of 4/98 standards purport to identify effective teaching skills and characteristics. Many of these relate to teachers working with the whole class whether with primary or secondary pupils and regardless of the subject. There are close parallels in Hay McBer. Here are three illustrations. (1) Students are required to demonstrate that they can (provide) 慹ffective questioning which matches the pace and direction of the lesson and ensures that pupils take part?(4/98 Annex A B k vi). Hay McBer comments that 慹ffective teachers ask a lot of questions and involve the pupils in class discussion. In this way the pupils are actively engaged in the lesson..?(1.2.7) (2) Students are required to demonstrate that they can (provide) 慶lear instruction and demonstration, and accurate well-paced explanation.?(4/98 Annex A B k v) Hay McBer speaks of 憁 great deal of direct instruction to whole classes..? (3) Students are required to demonstrate that they can 慹nsure that the introduction of any new topic incorporates the essential features of the mathematical concepts which pupils must ultimately acquire.? (4/98 Annex D l I) Hay McBer says that the 慹ffective teacher communicates the lesson content to be covered and the key activities for the duration of the lesson? Teaching styles recommended by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies bear all the hall marks of effective teacher research. Reynolds and others believe in a technology of practice, and that internationally there exist 慻reat teacher-effectiveness knowledge bases? Britain, we are told does not sufficiently utilise these but the Teacher Training Agency is improving matters (Reynolds 1999b). Political fortunes might be linked to the viability of a technology of practice. If certain teaching methods maximise learning, then government would like to be seen as responsible for extending their use. Even if much of pupil progress is causally linked to socio-economic background the latter is largely beyond political control. The government has recently 憀earned?that schools also 憁ake a difference? Hence it is now 憄ersuading?the education system to emphasise certain approved methods. This state-driven policy is unlikely to be dented by empirical criticism of research into effective teaching. Flawed statistical techniques, small sample sizes, inadequate control of relevant variables, to name but a few of the ills commonly detected by empirical researchers in their colleagues?projects could all be remedied. After all, 慏riving up standards?with the help of a technology of practice is such an appealing idea. Philosophical criticism has the potential to inflict more permanent damage, and that is the objective of this paper. I show that much of the technology of effective teaching (TET) involves mythological constructs. The phrases purporting to refer to these constructs do not and could not refer to real teaching competencies, skills or qualities. Correlations and causes Before penetrating to the heart of this mythological thinking we must note a classic criticism of the 慹ffective teacher?research paradigm. This tradition often equates correlations with causes, and indeed causes flowing in a particular direction. Robin Barrow explained the point very effectively nearly two decades ago (Barrow 1984). Astonishingly the myth is still alive and well, namely that if we discover associations we are automatically discovering causal processes which flow from aspects

of teacher performance to pupil progress. Yet it may be very difficult or even impossible to establish either that causes are not either wholly or partially running in the opposite direction, or that there is no independent cause of both the choice of teaching method and the rate of pupil progress. Causal language is prominent in the Hay McBer report from the beginning. 慗e found three main factors within teachers?control that significantly influence pupil progress: teaching skills, professional characteristics and classroom climate? However Hay McBer捤 language sometimes describes correlations only. For instance, it remarks that 慺eaching skills, professional characteristics and classroom climate will predict well over 30% of the variance in pupil progress.?(1.1.8, my italics). Prediction, of course is compatible with causal influences proceeding in either direction, or with a joint cause of skills, characteristics and climate on the one hand, and pupil progress on the other. Often the language taken literally describes an association, but the obvious subtext is that the teachers are 慸oing the causing? Note, for instance, 態ffective teachers set high expectations?and 慭he effective teacher communicates the lesson content to be covered? Concerning teaching skills it suggests for example that effective teachers 憄resented information to the pupils with a high degree of clarity and enthusiasm and, when giving basic instruction, the lessons proceeded at a brisk pace? Now consider for a moment the 慿inds?of pupils who are going to progress creditably, for it is with such pupils that this teaching 憇kill?is associated. Might not certain classes make it easier than others for the teacher to 憄roceed at a brisk pace?or to 憄resent information with enthusiasm? Researchers may claim to control for relevant factors, and to have established that 憇imilar?groups of students have different rates of progress. They can argue from this point that it must be teaching styles and methods causing different rates of progress rather than that particular 慿inds? of pupils are influencing the frequency with which one teaching style is used rather than another. Relevant factors for which researchers typically attempt to control are supposedly measured by proxies of socio-economic deprivation such as the proportion of pupils on free school meals, and previous attainment as captured by base-line tests or SATs. However, experienced teachers may well suspect that certain stable motivational and socio-economic features of individual students are not picked up by standard research measures, that over the years these features can vary from group to group which are otherwise comparable, and in particular that relatively persistent group effects can result from these factors. Informally teachers will speak of the 慶hemistry?of the group and it is arguably of special significance in primary schools where classes are often stable and taught by one generalist teacher for a year or more. Such group phenomena may not only affect pupil progress directly but also influence the teacher捤 selection of one teaching style rather than another. In the 1980s a certain primary school was pursuing the Calculator Aware Number Curriculum. Part of the recommended style for CAN schools at that time is quite nicely captured now by phrases from Hay McBer. These include ?.a range of teaching approaches and activities designed to keep the pupils fully engaged..?�籲ndividual work and small group activities were regularly employed.??the active style of teaching does not result in passive pupils..?(Hay McMber 1.2.7) However, all these elements in the effective teacher捤 armoury were temporarily abandoned by the school in the face of a one in thirty years 慶lass from hell?whose peculiarly dreadful properties were identified as early as reception. These children failed to make the expected progress throughout their years at the school. All the teachers resorted to formal whole class didactic methods where the pupils were as 憄assive? as the teachers could contrive. They could only control the group by resorting to these seemingly 慽neffective?methods. This of course is a mere anecdote; we do not know the baseline scores or socio-economic indicators for this class. Perhaps the teachers could have found a more educational and enlightened solution to their problem. Nevertheless it illustrates just one possible explanation of an association between teaching style and pupil progress where the causes are not all operating in the conventional direction. Groups of children vary from one year to the next in many more ways than those captured, if captured at all, by measures of previous attainment and indices of socio-economic deprivation and it may be precisely these varying features that influence their teachers?choice of methods. Has research into effective teaching really succeeded in proving the direction of the causes or that there is nothing else influencing both teaching styles employed and pupil progress? Could it do so in principle? If for instance we thought that causes sometimes run from pupils to teachers we might take an unorthodox view of the Hay McBer 慺indings?that certain factors 慸o not allow us to predict卐ffectiveness? (1.1.6) These factors include information about a teacher捤 age and teaching experience, additional responsibilities, qualifications and career history. We might say that these features could not in principle be consequences of pupil personalities, motivation and behaviour in the way that lesson 憄ace?might be and so that is why correlations have not been discovered. Pupils may metaphorically age their teachers, but not literally. The deeper mythology To

resume the main theme of this paper, whatever the nature of the disquiet felt by teacher trainers about 4/98, or by experienced teachers when studying the Hay McBer Report they are unlikely to reject the recommended approaches out of hand. Indeed, how can we quarrel with suggestions like these? (Your lessons should have 慂ace?and you should draw them to 慶risp?conclusions. (You should set high expectations for your pupils and communicate these expectations clearly. (adapted from 4/98). Surely every teacher should achieve these standards! My answer ultimately will be that we can quarrel with these ideas, and at the most fundamental level, but this needs substantial and detailed argument. In the end we should not reject the good intentions embodied in 4/98 or Hay McBer but with the emptiness of their prescriptions. I have spoken of 憪ythological constructs? The term 慶onstruct?is carefully chosen, and should recall its use in the general theory of assessment and the psychology of abilities. Some tests may be said to possess 慶onstruct validity? They are valid if they measure what they are claimed to measure, and sometimes this is held to be an unobservable underlying 慮rait?or construct. Constructs of such traits in the literature include intelligence, verbal reasoning ability, spatial ability and even fairly specific traits such as spelling ability. Researchers into effective teaching have invented or 慶onstructed?skills or characteristics that students are supposed to be able to come to possess and to 憇emonstrate?in the classroom. These traits are intellectual artifacts. Now it does not immediately follow that such artifacts are in any way dubious. After all, natural scientists have constructed the concept of gravity, the idea of an electron and of a gene. These have turned out to be extremely useful. They pick out significant aspects of the physical universe and enable predictions, explanations and control. (I allow myself this informal way of expressing the matter, thus side-stepping important and crucial issues in philosophy of science which are outside the scope of this paper.) However, my key claim is that many constructs linked to effective teaching cannot in principle be identified with 憆eal?teaching skills or competencies. Hence research into effective teaching is radically constrained in a fashion of which many of its current adherents are blissfully unaware. In Davis 1998 I argued that the emptiness of the constructs is peculiarly dangerous, with the potential that those with idiosyncratic and prejudiced pedagogical agendas may hijack the training and promotion procedures for teachers in a fashion that damages the rights and interests of pupils. Precursors of my argument in contemporary debate In seeking to advance this argument I am not intending to imply that others in the educational community are unaware of it. There are many anticipations in current educational debate albeit in heavily disguised form. I will first briefly rehearse one or two of these contemporary themes. 慔olistic approaches and the problem of atomistic competencies or standards Many involved in Initial Teacher Training will have argued with the Teacher Training Agency over the last year or so about whether the 4/98 standards must be assessed 惷ne at a time?or whether matters can be approached 憪ore holistically? ITT providers?difficulties with the former approach are in part severely practical. It is not actually possible to assess each standard separately and distinctly especially in the one year PGCE courses. No ITT institution when awarding provisional Qualified Teacher Status could truly claim to have taken each standard on its own and carefully weighed the available evidence for each student having achieved it even if such a process makes any kind of sense in theory. Beyond these practical difficulties lies the familiar unease about teaching being broken down into atomistic competencies, as though teaching skills resembled those of apprentice lathe operators or hairdressers. Some regard such skills as 憀ow level? as incorporating little in the way of rich cognitive elements and certainly as requiring no hint of 憆eflective practice? an activity much beloved by teacher trainers. Universities fear (possibly with some justification) that policy makers wish to take one of their established activities, namely the preparation of teachers for the profession academically down market. If universities resist such a tendency they may only too easily be seen as self-serving and irrational. Moreover an excessively 慽ntellectual?approach to teacher training may be held by critics to be part of the explanation for poor standards in schools. It may be felt that 憆eflective practice?was never a particularly transparent notion and that it was used to camouflage educational ideologies opposed to the tough accountability climate introduced at the end of the twentieth century. The critics may conclude that reflective practice should be abandoned in favour of proven technologies of teaching. A particularly important point about these according to their protagonists is that they will ensure that all teachers reach minimum standards of competency in the classroom. As hinted above, one form of opposition to the criticisms just outlined is sometimes termed 憌olistic? Even if we can attach any sense to notions of individual teacher skills, competencies or qualities they actually operate together in complex fashion within students?and teachers?classroom performances, or so it may be argued. A teacher exhibiting 慂ace?when delivering explanations effectively may also be

demonstrating at one and the same time the skills of paying 慶areful attention to pupils?errors and misconceptions, and helping to remedy them?(Circular 4/98 Annex A B 4 k vii ). Indeed, it might not count as 憓ace?unless at the same time attention is being given to pupils?errors. Without the latter, the 憩peed?of the teacher might amount to a precipitous rushing through the lesson plan, even if the brisk atmosphere helps to maintain discipline and keeps pupils 憃n task?at least in the short term. Those seeking TTA support for a 感olistic?approach to the assessment of the 4/98 standards want assurance that they can group standards and assess student performance against each group rather than one by one. ITT providers know that skills and qualities work together and interact with each other in a performance. They fear that attempts to assess some of the standards in isolation might well give a different result from the most professional and stringent assessment of those same standards in appropriate combination with others. For instance, students are supposed to be able to 慳ssess how well learning objectives have been achieved and use this assessment to improve specific aspects of teaching? If demonstrating this standard makes any kind of sense, it must be shown in performances in appropriate combination with a range of other standards. These include whether students can pay 慶areful attention to pupils?errors and misconceptions, and (help) to remedy them?and can listen 慶arefully to pupils, analysing their responses and responding constructively in order to take pupils?learning forward? Any attempt to discover whether the assessment standard is met without considering the many others to which it is intimately related would of course distort the result. For instance, an OfSTED inspector might question the student and examine her teaching file in an effort to catechise her on the assessment standard alone. Depending on the form taken by the inspector捫 questioning, her response may not in fact do justice to the fact, if it is indeed a fact, that her teaching performances are being informed rigorously by her assessment of her learning objectives. She may be 憫oing the right kinds of things?with the pupils in the classroom even if she is not always able to say the right kinds of things to an inspector outside the acts of teaching themselves. It may be objected that OfSTED inspectors are aware of the ways in which standards work together in a performance and that they would not behave in the way suggested. Not all ITT providers would agree that such confidence is well-founded. Moreover there seem to be a number of distinct yet equally natural ways of grouping standards. 4/98 has separate sections on planning, and on teaching and class management in the generic Annex A. This seems perfectly sensible, and arguably if we are trying to group the standards they should be selected from these broad categories, rather than assembling them in a more ad hoc fashion from different categories. And yet it is difficult to see how a teacher could 憁ake effective use of assessment information on pupils?attainment and progress in their teaching and in planning future lessons and sequences of lessons?(under Planning in Annex A) if they are not also 憁atching the approaches used to the subject matter used and the pupils being taught?or paying 慶areful attention to pupils?errors and misconceptions, and helping to remedy them? However, the latter standard is laid down in a different section altogether ( under Teaching and Class Management in Annex A). To anticipate an element of my final argument, some may already be wondering what counts as an individual teaching skill, quality or process. We appear to be able to refer to a specific aspect of teaching performance by stringing together words to form phrases such as 憁ake effective use of assessment information on pupils?attainments..?Yet it is often unclear how one aspect, quality or competence is to be distinguished from another. Barrow (1984) made similar points about earlier 憂ruits?of research into effective teaching. The importance of 慶ontext? Experienced observers of teaching in a variety of classroom and school contexts will have remarked how some students and teachers are excellent in one school or classroom but less so in another. Even veteran teachers in the same school may perform unevenly over the years with different classes. Students judged as failing by the most conscientious professionals armed with extensive 憄vidence?that they are not 憁eeting the standards?on a final placement are sometimes granted an extra period in a different school to see whether they can make the grade after all. On occasion the new school is delighted with the student捫 performance and just cannot understand how they failed before. Sadly the opposite can also occur, with extremely promising teaching apparently demonstrated in one school being followed by 憂ailing? performances in a later placement. Of course we can tell various stories about all this. One obvious approach is to question the judgements and the evidence on which they are based. It may be said that the student apparently failing on a final placement actually had strengths that were missed by her school and university tutors. Or the student who appeared to be starting well and then suffered a catastrophic decline actually had fundamental weaknesses from the beginning but these were not seen. A second account may accept the probity of the judgements. Perhaps the student who failed in her final placement had her mind wonderfully concentrated by the experience, rapidly acquiring teaching

skills which she had not bothered with before. Both the earlier and the later school are 'right' about her performance and qualities. Again, it may be suggested that the student who suffered a catastrophic decline is just one of a small number of cases whose performance takes a drastic turn for the worse during training. Possibly personal problems account for the change; the events in question could also be explained in other ways. For instance, she became complacent having sailed through the first placement and failed to make the effort required to maintain and improve her standards in the later school. Each of these versions makes a basic assumption about judgements concerning the presence or otherwise of effective teaching skills and qualities. It is assumed that they can be straightforwardly identified and that this can be done independently from the contexts in which they are exercised. According to the folk wisdom embodied in this assumption there are contexts on the one hand, and there are skills which may be exercised in them on the other. Hence teacher trainers, headteachers, OfSTED inspectors and any other professionals accustomed to observing and appraising teaching can think of themselves as making allowances for context. 'Given that this is a tough school, catering for pupils drawn from an area with considerable deprivation, then on the basis of the evidence available, Miss X meets the standard which specifies that she is able to 'ensure that pupils acquire and consolidate knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject (s)' (being taught). (4/98 Annex A B 4m) Or again, it might be said of a teacher that she normally has good standards of discipline, but the combination of an extra long assembly by that tedious vicar, children going in and out for the photographer, and Darren being sick in the carpet area meant that she was not seen to advantage.. Seemingly relevant 'skills' are conveniently laid down in 4/98 under 'Teaching and Class Management' Annex A B 4g 'monitor and intervene when teaching to ensure sound learning and discipline' Annex A B 4h 'establish and maintain a purposeful working atmosphere' We begin to question the distinction between performance and context when we remember cases which do not fit either of the versions outlined above. Some students seem to perform remarkably differently in one school in comparison with another even where there are no obvious explanations in terms of fluctuating motivation, unstable competencies, or surface contextual features such as difficult pupils that are somehow interfering with skills that they very obviously possess. We may feel that there is a more intimate link between the teaching performance and its context. It is somehow 'situated' Let us note one or two symptoms of the truth of this claim, before arguing it directly. A recently published study on 'failing teachers' (Wragg et al 2000) drew on evidence from heads, teachers themselves, union officers, LEA personnel, Chairs of school governors, parents and pupils. It discovered that ?.the lack of a universally accepted definition of 'incompetence' may result in different interpretations of the term at different times and in different schools? Indeed according to this study 26 out of 44 'failing' teachers went on to obtain employment as teachers in different authorities and were, presumably 'effective teachers' once more. Now if the notion of a technology of practice made sense these results are quite extraordinary. The 'failing' teachers of this study ought to be paradigm cases of those who lack the technology. If we assessed them against 4/98 standards they should only meet a few if any of those which directly relate to classroom performance. If such assessment could be reliable, valid and in any other sense rigorous and professional it should mean that these teachers should not be 'demonstrating' these standards after all in different schools. To sum up, it is arguable that this study suggests that even what is thought of as a global teaching incompetence is 'situated' or context-specific. Fascinatingly Hay McBer occasionally is on the verge of expressing the true 'situatedness' of teaching skills and qualities. It offers an example of a teacher having 'the professional characteristic of Holding People Accountable, which is the drive and ability to set clear expectations and parameters and to hold others accountable for performance. Such a pattern of behaviour could make it more natural for this teacher to exhibit teaching skills like providing opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning..?(1.1.3) but it goes on to note that 'in other circumstances, with different pupils, in a different context, other approaches might have been more effective?there is 'a multiplicity of ways in which particular patterns of characteristics determine how a teacher chooses which approach to use from a repertoire of established techniques in order to influence how pupils feel? (1.1.4). It might be objected here that the above examples simply demonstrate the well-known difficulty in transferring skills from the contexts in which they are learned to different contexts. The implications for the assessment of students against relevant 4/98 standards, or for the judgements about teachers seeking to cross the threshold are obvious. Evidence should be gathered about performance in a good variety of contexts. This is the common sense approach and it is being used widely within the teaching profession and by reputable initial teacher training providers. The problem about 'failing teachers' is that usually for practical reasons evidence about

their performance can only be built up while they are in a particular school. Morally speaking we could not wait before taking steps to rid the profession of incompetent individuals until they had been given a chance in several schools. It would be wrong to hold back until it was conclusively established that the sheer lack of competence transferred across a range of contexts. Can 憓erformance?be distinguished from 慶ontext? The constructs of effective teaching lack identity In order to respond properly to this point I now need to deal directly with the conceptual difficulties associated with some effective teaching constructs. Ultimately 憩ituatedness?is a matter of principle. Transfer failure is not a matter of learning deficiencies on the part of students and teachers. It is a symptom of the fact that performance characterisations provided by effective teaching research do not identify just one type of action or process and that the failure to recognise this stems in part from the assumption that we can always distinguish between context and performance. Indeed the very idea of distinguishing definitively between types of teaching performance is itself problematic (see Davis 1998). Small wonder then that what is counted as 憩tructuring information well, including outlining content and aims, signalling transitions and summarising key points as the lesson progresses?( 4/98 Annex A B k iii) or 憩etting high expectations for the pupils and communicating them directly to the pupils?(Hay McBer) may not transfer. What individual teachers actually do at particular times with specific groups of children that an observer might 慨nterpret?as exemplifying either of these alleged features of effective teaching is enormously diverse. Consider 憩tructuring information well..?as applied to a teacher of a reception class who is dealing with the topic of death because Lynn担 hamster has died. Compare possible scenarios here. Imagination does not need to work overtime to conjure up an indefinite variety of teacher-pupil interactions, depending on the personality of the teacher, the particular characters of the reception pupils and their group chemistry, and so on. Moreover the A level maths teacher explaining simple differential equations may also be 憩tructuring information well? So may the geography teacher talking about safety procedures before leading the field trip to a venue in the high pennines. Let us not forget the drama teacher trying to convey to 12 year olds how to set out dialogue in a play scene. Once these basic points are considered what becomes surprising is that any 慨ransfer?occurs at all. My critics will ask me whether I am suggesting that it is wrong to classify all these different teaching activities as 憩tructuring information well? If so, they will continue, my position is wildly implausible. There is nothing wrong in detecting something crucial that all these different teaching performances have in common, and summing it up in the form of a 4/98 standard. My response to this criticism is ultimately that the whole terminology of 憩kills?and 慨ransfer?is in fact misconceived, whilst conceding that so long as such terminology is still embraced it cannot be denied that 慨ransfer?does occur up to a point. Nevertheless I have already noted some significant cases in which transfer does not occur, and suggested that these should incline us to search for deeper problems about this whole way of thinking. The clarity of discourse about skills transferring from one type of context to another is deceptive, to say the least. To develop the argument I need to return to an issue about the classification of actions or performances that I have already discussed in Davis (1998), Davis (1999) and elsewhere. The analysis is so basic and simple that at first sight it is not easy to understand its radical implications. The 慶onstructions?of 4/98 or Hay McBer depend on putting teachers?actions and/or classroom processes into categories. The TTA, with the support of TET research has invented this classification. What is their justification for classifying performances in this manner? What actually is the 憩ame?about the diversity of performances that might be thought to come under the auspices of a particular standard or teaching competence? When someone observes teaching, they are interpreting a performance. This interpretation is informed by the observer担 appreciation of the physical and cultural context of the teaching activity. Interpreting behaviour involves making assumptions about the teacher担 intentions and about the teacher担 beliefs about her context. What is the scope of this term 慶ontext? It covers a good deal, and certainly includes the current cognitive and motivational states of pupils, the teacher担 own relationship with them, wider aspects of the school ethos and basic physical features such as the size and shape of the room and the degree to which she is visible to and can be heard by all her pupils. The fact that the teacher may be waving her arms about, or opening and closing her mouth while emitting various sounds in itself does little to determine what kind of thing she is doing. Judging that the teacher is 憊xplaining? something, let alone 憊nsuring that the introduction of any new topic incorporates the essential features of the mathematical concepts which pupils must ultimately acquire?requires several rich layers of interpretation. The observer担 perspective will depend on a complex interaction between her beliefs about the context, beliefs about the teacher担 intentions, and the physical actions

performed by the teacher. Teaching performances are perceived to have many of their key characteristics in virtue of relationships between teachers and their sociocultural and physical classroom contexts. We select from these relationships in order to invent teaching performance categories according to our particular purposes and interests. Membership of these categories is in no sense 慷ntrinsic?to a performance. The question of whether it belongs to a particular category cannot be settled outside a context. Yet the typologies of performance invented by effective teaching research and perpetuated by 4/98 and Hay McBer purport to be applicable regardless of context. They are supposed to be able form the basis of competencies, skills or qualities, enduring features that teachers are supposed to be able to possess in any context. The importance and difficulty of the question about what is common to distinct performances supposedly manifesting the same standards is often masked by the fact that the constructs of effective teaching qualities and skills have built into their characterisation their supposed consequences in terms of pupil learning or response. (See also my discussion in Davis 1999). To support this claim I can only quote some examples, both from 4/98 and from Hay McBer. 慷ntroducing the lesson to command attention..?慷sing skilfully framed open and closed, oral and written questions which elicit answers from which pupils? mathematical understanding can be judged and giving clear feedback to take pupils?learning forward;? 慷sing oral and mental work, in particular to develop and extend pupils?use of mathematical vocabulary and accurate recall of number facts;? (these three from the primary mathematics section of 4/98, my italics). 慍ommanding attention?is an achievement. The standard does not say 慮o try to command attention? Success is built in. Similarly in the second example above the questions must actually succeed in probing understanding, and the resulting feedback must actually take pupils? learning forward. In the third example the oral and mental work must actually develop and extend pupils in the relevant respects. Hay McBer tells us that teaching skills 慳re those 搤icro-behaviours?that the effective teacher constantly exhibits when teaching a class. They include behaviours (my italics) like Involving all pupils in the lesson Using differentiation appropriately to challenge all pupils in the class. (1.2.1) So these so-called skills also are characterised in such a way that pupil achievement or response is built in. Hay McBer抯 use of the term 慴ehaviours? is really very odd. It looks as though that which is the 憇ame?about these performances, which is supposed to legitimate their being placed in a particular category and expressed as a standard is a consequence in terms of pupil learning. There is little or no indication of what else might be shared by all the different performances. We can concede that perhaps certain things are ruled out; thus a teacher cannot be commanding attention if she is not actually there, and her questions cannot be successfully probing pupils?understanding if she has a very severe speech defect or speaks to them in Mandarin. (Well probably not, but once we start thinking? We can also accept that some very broad positive features may be shared. For instance, in the case of some of the standards both the teacher and the pupils must do some speaking. However, we cannot go much further than this. Of course, in theory a precise behavioural specification could be given of required teacher actions. For instance, take two steps forward, speak the following words in a certain tone, and so forth. The technology of effective teaching as so far developed and presented does not involve prescriptions of this kind, however, and in Davis 1999 I have shown how these would be incoherent given inescapable aspects of the role of the teacher. Conclusion To sum up, neither 4/98 nor Hay McBer are actually offering any specific teaching methods. The constructs in terms of specific teacher performances are empty. Where does this leave effective teaching research and the status of any standards based on its results? First, we may be forgiven for wondering whether it is actually possible for research to establish anything about effective teaching methods where these involve recommendations about how teachers should act. We have seen that we cannot conceptualise the categories of teaching performance invoked by effective teaching research outside contexts. So how could there possibly be a rich data-base of knowledge about the kinds of performance that are linked causally to pupil progress since ex hypothesi it would have to characterise those performances independently of contexts? Second, we can ask how anyone can actually assess students against some of the 4/98 classroom performance standards, in particular those listed under 憄lanning?and 憈eaching and class management? The answer is that literally speaking they cannot. What actually happens is a more complex 慼olistic?process. The whole edifice of 憇tandards?as they relate to teaching quality becomes an irrelevant and time-consuming game which is played by ITT providers and students and is unrelated to the real process of supporting and judging the progress of entrants to the profession. Does this mean that judgements that a student or teacher has given qualities or skills associated with effective teaching are worthless? No, indeed, because educational practitioners are still struggling to assess with integrity. The judgements that individual standards relating to teaching

performance have been achieved can indirectly convey a good deal to the community of professionals who are the audience. However virtually none of this will be captured by the literal description of these standards. Education professionals have to proceed regardless of the fact that there is little surface meaning to the characterisations of teaching quality with which they are burdened. As I remarked earlier, this situation has its dangers. The emptiness of the standards means that they may be caught up in an accountability process in which external agencies may give standards a 憗eaning?that reflect political agendas whose educational implications have not been properly researched and argued. Certainly the experience of ITT providers over the last few years has been that one OfSTED team may not 憽nterpret?the standards in the same way as another. This possibility is built into the very fabric of 4/98. Even if it could be established that OfSTED is not ever politically motivated in any way, inconsistency was virtually inevitable. Third, what precisely is the 熱ffective teaching?paradigm advising teachers to do in the classroom? It may be argued that the State is entitled to lay down the kinds of intentions teachers ought to have for pupil learning outcomes, though evidently these must be based realistically on pupil potential and must also take account of a range of basic moral and value questions. Needless to say, researchers into effective teaching have no mandate to lay down such intentions though they do not always seem to be aware of this point. Suppose then that one of the teaching intentions required of teachers by government is that they 憼tructure information well?and a teacher wonders how she should do this 熱ffectively? Effective teaching research could not in principle offer us any help. We have to use our professional judgement in our particular context in the light of our knowledge of the group of pupils we are teaching. If we are experienced teachers we will be well aware that we will reach an indefinite variety of different solutions to this particular problem from one day to the next even with the same pupils. It may be objected that there must be something wrong with these arguments because they 憹rove?far too much. Surely there are some perfectly clear recommendations from effective teacher research which those with common sense can understand perfectly well. For instance teachers particularly in primary schools are being advised to offer their pupils more interactive whole-class sessions and that pupils should be spending less time working on their own. Everyone knows what this means! I have to accept that the negative element in this guidance is reasonably clear. What is being discouraged is so much time being spent by pupils working on their own, rather than in direct contact in a large group with the teacher. However it simply is not clear what interactive whole class teaching means, since it can legitimately cover an indefinite variety of different actions, strategies and processes. It is quite obvious moreover that there are plenty of possibilities for interactive whole class teaching that all would agree are very unlikely to promote pupil progress and some of which would be distinctly immoral! Teachers have to make choices from a vast number of interactive whole class teaching repertoires. Further, there will still be occasions when for all kinds of good reasons pupils will spend significant amounts of time working on their own and the proportion of 憽nteractive whole class teaching?will be modest. It does not follow from the argument in this paper that students cannot learn from experienced teachers. At least some of the latter have knowledge about advancing pupils?learning that most beginning teachers lack. The debate here has been about a particular way of conceptualising, researching and assessing effective teaching. Questions about the proper conceptualisation of teaching expertise remain, and have scarcely been touched in this paper. Ironically, we can agree with David Reynolds where he speaks of the 憂eed for a blend of methods?(Reynolds 1999a) especially since he seems to suggest that the particular blend selected 憼hould depend on factors such as student age, ability and, most crucially, the task to be performed or the subject to be learned?(Reynolds 1999a). Some would wish that he had made a few more factors explicit, such as the level of student motivation, the teacher抯 personality, what has taken place for the pupils just before the teaching under consideration and general aspects of the school context and climate. It is a very important point that this list could be extended almost indefinitely.

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