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**OPENING THE STAFFROOM DOOR:
ASPECTS OF COLLABORATIVE INTERACTION
IN A SMALL LANGUAGE SCHOOL**

VOL 1

KEITH RICHARDS
Doctor of Philosophy

THE UNIVERSITY OF ASTON IN BIRMINGHAM

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The University of Aston in Birmingham

Opening the Staffroom Door: Aspects of Collaborative Interaction in a Small Language School

Keith Richards
PhD 1996

Summary

The aim of this study is to provide a detailed picture of the staffroom world of a group of experienced and successful teachers. Working within a constructivist paradigm, the study draws on three different qualitative research perspectives (life history, ethnography, and discourse analysis) presented from what is defined as an *expositional* standpoint. Data, collected over a period of fifteen months, are drawn from three different sources: interviews, fieldnotes, and recordings.

It is argued that previous studies of staffroom life, which have relied entirely on interviews and/or observation, have failed to capture many of the subtleties of teacher interaction and its social and professional achievements. This research offers a detailed picture of a collaborative culture, its antecedents and the interactional norms and routines which help to sustain it.

The view that the staffroom is necessarily a 'back region' is challenged and it is argued that the primary interactional endeavour in collaborative cultures may be the generation of involvement rather than the maintenance of a professional front. The function of humour and storytelling as involvement mechanisms are explored and the role of active and passive imagery in teacher decision-making is established.

Previous studies have argued that staffroom talk is essentially trivial and preoccupied with the maintenance of discipline. This research suggests that staffroom exchanges have considerable pedagogical relevance and that teachers of EFL are more concerned with issues of classroom participation than matters of discipline. It is further argued that these teachers are primarily interested in the human dimension of their work and that this aspect has been for too long neglected in studies of foreign language teaching.

The assumption underlying the research is that a greater understanding of teachers' lives and professional interaction can inform teacher development programmes and provide a basis for effective professional development in the broadest sense. Its findings contribute to such an understanding.

KEY WORDS: ethnography; life history; discourse analysis; TESOL; EFL

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Chapter 1

Perspectives on the staffroom

1.1 Introduction

I have never entered a strange staffroom without feeling like an intruder. However warm the welcome and sincere the invitation to make myself at home, I always have a strong feeling of not belonging. There is something very private about a staffroom, and the spoors of professional intimacy which mark its territory intrude upon the visitor's ease, suggesting shared routines and understandings inaccessible to the outsider. And yet, for this very reason, staffrooms provoke inquisitiveness, perhaps because if there is a key to understanding what happens in the public spaces outside it is to be found here.

'Teaching', says Liston, 'is a messy affair' (1991: 60), and there is no reason to believe that what happens in staffrooms is any tidier. It would be foolish to hope for algorithms here which would solve the problems of the classroom, but in the life of the staffroom there might be pointers to the ways in which teachers think about their work and make decisions on pedagogical matters. If such insights are to be gleaned, it is important to try to understand the culture of the staffroom in order to open a door on a world which up to now has been relatively unexplored.

1.2 Previous studies of staffroom culture

In 1980 Hargreaves lamented that 'the occupational culture of teachers has been a surprisingly neglected topic in the sociology of education (1980: 125), and fifteen years later was still describing school culture as a 'neglected' and 'poorly understood' concept (1995: 24). This picture is perhaps an unduly pessimistic one, and in the period separating these two observations there were at least a

few important studies of staffroom cultures, most notably those by Little (1982, 1990) and by Nias and her associates (1989). However, these studies, like those investigating teacher thinking (e.g. Elbaz, 1983; Beattie, 1995b; Woods, 1996), rely on interviews with teachers, supported in some cases by classroom and staffroom observation. Such an approach provides the basis for characterisations of school culture and general conclusions about teacher beliefs, but it does not offer the opportunity to explore structural features of such cultures. To do this it is necessary to pursue other forms of investigation.

There have been three full-length studies of staffroom interaction, two relating this to classroom interaction (Hammersley, 1980; Woods, 1979) and one concentrating on the staffroom alone (Kainan, 1994). All three have explored the culture of staffrooms and all three produce results which are in many ways similar, although the method, argumentation and presentation of Kainan's study all raise serious questions which undermine its claims to significance. All these studies, and many shorter ones (e.g. Hammersley, 1981, 1984; A. Hargreaves, 1981, 1984; Kainan, 1992, 1994a; Corrie, 1996) tend to confirm the 'egg crate structure' identified in Lortie's (1975) seminal study, in which there is a lack of any 'significant sharing of common understanding and techniques' and evidence of 'mutual isolation' in staffrooms (p. 73).

The results of these studies paint a depressing picture of teacher behaviour in the staffroom. Whether it is the competitive culture of Kainan's school with its grumbling, bickering, status-seeking and self-promotion, or the bunker mentality identified by Hammersley, where 'paradigm-saving' talk by an 'old guard' fearful of changes in the profession 'is structured in such a way as to deflect blame for worsening pupil performances' (1980: 150), there is little here to inspire faith in the professional image of teachers. It would seem that Little's re-evaluation (1990) of her earlier optimistic view of collaborative cultures in

schools (1982) represents an all too common picture, and one confirmed by subsequent research. Corrie, investigating the professional cultures of six different schools could find only one which could be described as genuinely collaborative:

'On the one hand, staff collaboration with colleagues is espoused and, on the other hand, competition between colleagues for promotions, status and pay is becoming the norm.'
(1995: 90)

While, on the surface at least, there appears to be overwhelming evidence to suggest that teachers are not really concerned with what happens in their classrooms or with their students as individuals rather than 'types', none of the staffroom studies so far published has relied on recorded data; instead, fieldnotes and interviews have provided the basis for analysis. Neither Kainan nor Hammersley even raised the possibility of introducing a tape recorder into the staffrooms they were studying, accepting that this would not be allowed by the teachers there. Hammersley offers an honest and insightful discussion of the potential consequences of this:

'While I tried to note down literally what was said, I may have made many mistakes. While I can claim that even where I did not get the words exactly right I probably got the sense of what was said, that unfortunately builds in a reliance on the interpretations on sense I made on the spot. Also important here is the relevance of context. I often wonder now in reading this data whether anything was said before or after the recorded exchange which would modify interpretation of it; once again there is reliance here on my on-the-spot decision. Even more important, it is possible that on some occasions, rather than simply not remembering the exact words used, I may have forgotten whole sentences or stretches of conversation which came between one utterance and the next in the recorded exchange.'
(1980: 304-305)

This suggests that there might be aspects of staffroom talk, inaccessible to the observer, which the analysis of recorded data would reveal. This particular study takes up that challenge.

1.3 Approaches to investigation

In order to penetrate as deeply as possible the structure of a particular professional culture, the approach adopted here will draw on three distinct but related research traditions: discourse analysis (based on the analysis of talk in interaction); ethnography (based on participant observation); and life history (based on interviews). It will be necessary to give particular attention to establishing the basis for incorporating these three perspectives, and the research methodologies appropriate to each will be fully explored. Once these foundations have been laid, it will then be possible to illuminate aspects of teachers' professional lives which have so far remained unexplored.

There is a growing body of research into institutional talk, much of it from the perspective of conversation analysis (e.g. Drew & Heritage, 1993), some of it drawing on different discourse traditions (e.g. Willing, 1992), but all of it task-related. So far, there seems to have been no work on talk *about* work, even though many researchers have recognised how important this is as a constituent in professional cultures. For example, Nias *et al.*, who claim that '[s]chools have cultures which affect their staffrooms more than their classrooms' (1989:12), conclude, on the basis of interviews and observation, that 'everyday talk was the medium through which shared meanings first evolved and then were continually and implicitly reinforced' (*ibid.*, p. 79). It would seem that from this perspective, too, there is a case for careful analysis of staffroom discourse.

This discourse, however, needs to be set in its cultural context. Work in the conversation analytic tradition has sought to 'complement' ethnographic approaches in order 'to get inside the "black box" of social institutions to gain access to their interior processes and practices' (Drew & Heritage, *op cit.*), but no attempt has been made to bring the two together within the same institutional context. This may have more than a little to do with the tendency of researchers

to work within particular traditions, but old barriers are breaking down and there is a growing willingness to explore different strategies of research within a single paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a). There is perhaps no better time to draw together different approaches in order to develop a more rounded picture of a professional culture.

Drawing together the analysis of recorded institutional talk and the description of a culture based on the interviews and fieldnotes does not represent a significant methodological challenge: the latter can be used as a basis for identifying elements which might repay closer scrutiny at the level of discourse analysis. However, there is a further dimension which has a serious claim on our attention if we are to understand staffroom culture. When teachers join a school they bring with them professional experiences, and within the context of that school share professional lives with colleagues. Such lives provide not only a background to our understanding of a particular culture but a source of illumination. Research into the life histories of teachers is by now well established, with a number of rich traditions adding to our understanding (e.g. Huberman, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993; Goodson, 1991, 1992, 1994; Pinar, 1980, 1981, 1988), and at least one study has addressed ways in which it can be associated with ethnographic research in order to enrich our understanding of particular situations (Smith, 1994). There is good reason, then, to make use of this approach in research which seeks to understand as fully as possible a professional culture.

1.4 The need for staffroom research

That there is a pressing need for such research in EFL¹ was brought home to me within a month of beginning this project, when I came across the following:

'[Teachers] know that 95 per cent of their pedagogical decision-making is based on hunches and only five per cent maybe on research. It shouldn't be that ratio. It should be 50-50.'

(L. Selinker, Professor of Applied Linguistics, in an interview with the *EFL Gazette*, January 1994.)

'[An idea or proposal in an academic journal] has to feel right. I can't do anything if it doesn't feel right.'

(Louise, experienced EFL teacher at the Pen, in an interview as part of this research, February 1994.)

It is ironic that any response we might currently choose to make to these statements must be based largely on intuition: we know virtually nothing about the way EFL teachers go about their work, what they know and what they think. It seems odd that so much attention has been lavished on the process of language acquisition, the nature of needs analysis and course design, methodological issues, classroom events, and matters more peripheral to the business of language teaching, and yet the teacher, the nexus of all this, has been largely ignored. There are signs that attitudes are changing (e.g. Freeman & Richards, 1993, 1996; Hayes, 1996; Richards, Li & Tang, 1995; Woods, 1996) but there is still no research evidence on which we might draw when addressing the stark contradiction represented in the two statements.

The first statement (as quoted in the *EFL Gazette*) makes a claim for a greater reliance on research in pedagogic decision-making, presumably because such research provides a better foundation for claims than do mere hunches, and yet the claim itself seems to be based on an intuition about what teachers 'know'. It rests, in other words, on exactly what it seeks to call into question. At a deeper level, it arises from a conception of educational knowledge which insists that theory and practice be clearly separated, with the former representing a 'higher' level of knowing which bestows legitimacy on practice.

The view of knowledge implicit in Louise's statement is very different. Here is an experienced teacher saying that when she responds to 'theory' it is her own feelings which determine whether or not she will try something out in practice. The conception of knowledge underlying this position would hold that, instead of trying to separate hunches from theory, we should try to understand how teachers arrive at their hunches; in other words, we should look at practical decision-making. In order to do that, we must look to the classroom and the staffroom. In this research I have chosen to concentrate on the latter, partly because there is already a healthy body of literature based on classroom research (e.g. Allwright, 1988; van Lier, 1988; Brumfit & Mitchell, 1990; Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Edge & Richards, 1993), and partly for the same reasons as Nias and her associates:

'we made the deliberate decision not to address the issue of the relationship between staffrooms and classrooms, believing that the time and personnel that we had available would be best employed in attempting to understand schools as settings in which adults work.'

(Nias *et al.* 1989: 2)

In what follows, the staffroom is the focus of the research and the aim is to explore the relationship between a particular collaborative culture and the interactional norms which underlie it. More broadly, this opens up a so far unexplored area in EFL. The discoveries which emerge are set against findings in 'mainstream' education, but their real value may lie in the extent to which they open a door on a world which has so far been understood only at the level of intuition and personal anecdote.

1.5 Looking ahead

In opening a door on this world, the research also contributes, as a case study of a particular school, to what Stenhouse has described as the archaeology of the future:

'It is an exciting possibility that current interest in the careful study of cases might produce a national archive of such case records. If we had such an archive now, we could understand in much greater intimacy and depth the recent history of our schools.'
(Stenhouse, 1980: 5)

EFL long since came of age, and the future will doubtless see histories of it. The teachers in this study belong to the post-war boom generation, growing to maturity in the sixties, a decade which is seen as the seed of so much that is evil in the eyes of educational conservatives. This is by no means the only aspect which makes their case interesting (the rest are discussed in Chapter 3), but it is enough; and if, as one of them believes, history proves that they are also the first and last generation of English native speakers who will be able to make a career in EFL as a mature field, its value may be enhanced. The contributions which this project hopes to make, however, extend beyond the field of EFL, as the following summary of its parts indicates.

In order to draw together three different research traditions, it is necessary to establish at the outset the foundation for such a synthesis. Since none currently exists, Chapter 2 is dedicated to the task. It seeks to establish a research perspective within the constructivist paradigm which will justify the approach adopted here, thus contributing to the growing literature on approaches to qualitative research.

In order to draw on the three perspectives in the way proposed, it is essential to address the methodological issues which each of them raises. This forms the subject of Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 presents a life history of the Pen teachers. The value of this lies not only in its contribution to an understanding of their staffroom culture but in its

potential value as part of a growing body of knowledge of teachers' lives and beliefs.

Chapter 5 is the hub of the project, consisting of an ethnographic description of the Pen staffroom. From it emerge distinct and potentially important differences between this staffroom and others which have been studied, especially in terms of its relationship to the school as a whole and to talk about students in particular. It represents a contribution to current work on the subject of staff collaboration and collegial institutions.

The aim of Chapter 6 is to show how humour is the norm rather than the exception in the Pen staffroom and to suggest that the mixing of business and pleasure is an important factor in sustaining the collaborative culture of the school. It expands on work already undertaken on staffroom humour and represents a contribution to studies of humour in general.

Chapter 7 focuses on staffroom stories and demonstrates that what has in the past been dismissed as trivial talk is revealed on closer inspection to be pedagogically interesting and culturally important. Insights are offered on the professional concerns of EFL teachers and significant differences between their world and the 'non-foreign language' teaching world are highlighted. Attention is also directed to the importance of involvement mechanisms in the maintenance of a collaborative culture, something so far neglected in the literature.

The final chapter highlights some of the main findings of this investigation, indicates its implications and suggests where further exploration of this almost virgin territory might be directed. Like all first steps into a new region, the ones in this research are tentative, but the landscape they have exposed is an alluring

one. If something of its attraction is conveyed in what follows, this alone would make the project worthwhile.

Note

1. The acronyms '(T)EFL' ('(Teaching) English as a Foreign Language') and (T)ESOL ('(Teaching) English to Speakers of Other Languages') will be used interchangeably in this thesis. The latter is by now predominant, but the former is the term preferred by members of the Pen staff.

Chapter 2

Research Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

This project draws together three distinct strands of research in order to develop a depth of field which allows different features of professional life to be displayed in the same staffroom picture. Such an enterprise demands careful justification if it is to be set alongside the more precisely focused products of the traditions on which it draws, since the decision to draw freely on different areas might suggest a lack of serious commitment to any of them.

Although some qualitative researchers have claimed to be eclectic (e.g. Davies *et al.*, 1985: 291), Baudelaire's challenge hangs in the air, an admonishing presence:

'It has never occurred to the eclectics that man's attention is the more intense as it is restricted and limits its own field of observation. It is a question of grasp all, lose all. ... An eclectic's work leaves no memory behind it.'

(Baudelaire, 1846/1965: 97)

The approach adopted here is emphatically not eclectic, and in the remainder of this chapter I shall attempt to counter such a perception by precisely defining the approach and highlighting its distinctive strengths, taking my cue from recent developments in the broader context of qualitative research. I hope to show that, far from diminishing the value of its discoveries, the multidimensional perspective established through the approach here is richer than the sum of its parts and stronger than any individual element within it. In order to do this it will be necessary to achieve four aims:

1. identify the paradigm in which the research is located;
2. justify the form in which it is presented;

3. define the position of the researcher;
4. establish that the research methodology is appropriate and adequate.

It will be the task of the next chapter to address the final aim, but the first three are the subject of what follows. Having first identified a problem facing any attempt to orient research within the wider qualitative field, the chapter will address issues of definition and conceptualisation in order to locate the precise context in which this research is to be considered, before turning to matters of presentation and arguing that an analysis of current trends in qualitative research indicates a shift from an *representational* to an *expositional* orientation. Arguments for the advantages of the latter will in turn involve a brief consideration of the place of the researcher in the process of research and representation. The chapter will end with an outline of the research itself.

2.2 Here be dragons

A story of three preludes to three more maps:

‘There have never been so many paradigms, strategies of inquiry, or methods of analysis to draw upon and utilize.’

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 11)

‘The quest for a useful organizational map of qualitative methods is not unlike the quest for the holy grail. The methods derive from multiple disciplines and from 20 or more diverse traditions, each with its own particular language.’

(Miller & Crabtree, 1992: 13)

‘But as comprehensive and clarifying as these catalogs and taxonomies may be, they turn out to be basically incommensurate, both in the way the different qualitative strands are defined and in the criteria used to distinguish them. The mind boggles in trying to get from one to another.’

(Miles & Huberman, 1994: 5)

An examination of the catalogues, maps and taxonomies which seek to represent this world (e.g. Wolcott, 1992: 23, 30-34; Jacob, 1987: 34-35; Miller & Crabtree, 1992: 23-24; Lazaraton, 1995: 460) evokes images of medieval compendia, the

aura of scholasticism and an urge to reach for Occam's Razor. And yet the territory exists and intellectual coordinates are essential if anything is to be positioned within it. Part of the problem with the above approaches has to do with the conceptual crossed wires which inevitably arise from radically different representations. In what follows, I respond to this by attempting to orient this particular research in terms of a single cartographic image, gradually decreasing the scale of the representation. At the very largest scale, the general territory is described, within this a particular region is identified, and finally a locality. Each has its particular local features as well as those deriving directly from its broader setting.

2.3 The qualitative world

A natural starting point is to establish what constitutes qualitative research before moving on to consider how its territory might be divided up without sacrificing the claims of clarity or accuracy. Fortunately, there is now fairly broad agreement on the core elements which define it. Simple distinctions between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' in terms of words and figures which were acceptable ten years ago (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1984: 15, criticised in Hammersley 1992: 161-3) have given way to more sophisticated and wide ranging characterisations (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994: 6-7, where their earlier distinction emerges as the observation that '[m]ost analysis is done with words'), and the claim that the term 'qualitative inquiry' has been used as synonymous with 'naturalistic methods', 'ethnography', 'field methods' and other, similar, terms (Smith, 1992), looks back to a form of shorthand which is becoming less and less acceptable.

While no single characterisation is ideal, the definition offered by Denzin & Lincoln seems to represent a convincing synthesis of the key elements in qualitative research:

‘Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials — case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts — that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of unconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand.’

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 2)

This succinctly represents what this research project seeks to achieve, and any expansion here would add nothing of substance to the description; development of points raised in the above definition is to be found, appropriately contextualised, in succeeding chapters.

2.4 Paradigmatic divisions

The rather crude division between qualitative and quantitative research mentioned above is historically less salient than that between ‘naturalistic’ and ‘positivistic’ approaches to research, and qualitative research has in the past been defined in terms of its rejection of what were at the time dominant positivistic assumptions (see, for example, Guba & Lincoln’s polarisation of ‘rationalistic and ‘naturalistic’ forms of inquiry, 1982). The situation now is so much reversed in the world of social inquiry that, as Hammersley & Atkinson point out (1995: 3), ‘positivism’ has become little more than a term of abuse. Today’s ‘sharp battles’ (Shulman, 1986: 22) are fought within qualitative research and under different colours (but see Phillips, 1987, for a defence of the post-positivist position). Battlefield histories are available from a number of sources (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, Chapter 1; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 7-11) and will not be considered here. Neither will the advantages of qualitative research, which by now have been well rehearsed (see Miles & Huberman, 1994:

10, for a succinct summary). However, before moving to the paradigmatic divisions within social inquiry, it will be worth pausing to consider the slightly anachronistic position of research in the area of TESOL.

A recent issue of *TESOL Quarterly* (1995, Vol. 29, No. 3) dedicated to qualitative research served not so much as a reflection of a flourishing tradition in this area but as a claim for more attention, even though the case for qualitative research had been advanced seven years earlier in the same journal (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Reporting an informal survey of four major TESOL journals (*Applied Linguistics*, *Language Learning*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, and *TESOL Quarterly*), Lazaraton pointed to the 'domination of the psychometric model' (1995: 456). She noted some signs of a growth in the number of articles employing qualitative techniques appearing in the *TESOL Quarterly* but could find only three examples in the previous ten years in the other three journals. Part of her explanation of this reads like similar complaints from the time when qualitative research was seeking to establish itself in education generally — that suitable training is not available and that those in a position to accept qualitative work respond to it from a positivistic perspective — while Davis in the same volume (1995: 427-428) points to the resistance of Second Language Acquisition researchers to qualitative research.

Qualitative research in TESOL, then, is not well established, and it seems particularly important in view of the level of misunderstanding and prejudice which exists there that the basis of any such research should be carefully established. It is this which makes careful mapping essential.

Such mapping necessarily invokes the issue of paradigms, associated particularly with the work of Kuhn (1962), although, as has often been pointed

out, Masterman (1970) identified at least 22 different uses of the term in his work. Again, Lincoln is one of those to offer a useful working definition:

'A paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world", the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness. If there were, the philosophical debates reflected in these pages would have been resolved millennia ago.'

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 107)

What seems to be particularly important here is that arguments about the precedence of one paradigm over another are not susceptible to resolution, although, as Kuhn observes, one may supplant another. It is also clearly the case that in social science a number of paradigms coexist, something which Shulman (1986: 5) has suggested represents paradigms in their weaker sense. It is perhaps also worth remembering Peshkin's qualification:

'No research paradigm has a monopoly on quality. None can deliver promising outcomes with certainty. None have the grounds for saying "this is it" about their designs, procedures and anticipated outcomes.'

(Peshkin, 1993: 28)

A survey of the literature suggests that there are three dominant paradigms in the social sciences, all of them susceptible to subdivision: positivism, constructivism and critical theory. These will now be considered in turn, drawing particularly on Schubert, 1989, and Guba & Lincoln, 1994, who specifically address their papers to the issue of paradigms. Their terminology differs but the division is essentially the same.

Positivism

This (represented by Schubert as 'Empirical/Analytical') is now usually divided into positivism and postpositivism, the latter representing a move from naïve to

critical realism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Its experimental or manipulative methodology is not relevant to the current research.

Constructivism

This is sometimes referred to as 'interpretivism', although there are differences between the two (Schwandt, 1994). Schubert categorises it as 'hermeneutic', although this seems to be more properly a means of characterising its methodology, which focuses on the progressive refinement of social constructions through interaction among those involved in the research (Guba & Lincoln 1994: 110). Since this is the paradigm within which the current research is located it will be the subject of the next level of mapping.

Critical Theory

To this Guba and Lincoln add '*et al.*' and Denzin and Lincoln in the same collection include feminist, ethnic, Marxist and cultural studies approaches under this head. Researchers within this paradigm criticise other approaches to research for reifying social structures as a result of failing to recognise that knowledge is historically situated. For critical theorists, research, which is ultimately concerned with action rather than discovery, is value-laden, and they often seek to exploit its emancipatory potential. The Pen research is not located within this paradigm, although it recognises its importance. In fact, it is this paradigm which represented a particularly influential reaction against the positivistic approaches which dominated TESOL for so long, as the work of Carr & Kemmis (1986) filtered into language teaching via a growing interest in action research, much of this initially associated with migrant programmes in Australia (e.g. Burton, 1992; Burton & Mikan, 1993). There are also encouraging recent signs of a growing recognition that language teaching itself is not value-free (e.g. Edge, 1996; Pennycook, 1989; Pierce, 1995; Toohey, 1995).

Although these three interpretive paradigms provide a practical tripartite division of research, before moving on to the location which is most relevant to this project it is necessary at least to point out why an alternative approach to mapping the territory based on research traditions was not attempted. It would have been possible to seek a particular research tradition within which to locate this research, but this would have presented serious problems, not least because it does not fit comfortably within one single tradition. Furthermore, those who offer analyses based on this usually produce radically different lists of traditions (compare, for example, Jacob, 1987: 34-35; Lazaraton, 1995: 460; and Wolcott, 1992: 23) and the relationship between traditions and research strategies is not always clear. This research will be located within a particular paradigm — constructivism — and within this it will draw freely from the many strategies available, bearing in mind Wax's warning of a quarter of a century ago:

'Strict and rigid adherence to any method, technique or doctrinaire position may, for the fieldworker, become like confinement in a cage. If he is lucky or very cautious, a fieldworker may formulate a research problem so that he will find all the answers he needs within his cage. But if he finds himself in a field situation where he is limited by a particular method, theory, or technique he will do well to slip through the bars and try to find out what is really going on.'

(Wax, 1971: 10)

2.5 The concerns of constructivism

Having established the region in which this research is located, it is necessary to sketch out the main features of the landscape. What follows does not attempt to explore philosophical and conceptual issues underlying constructivism in the way that, for example, Schwandt (1994) seeks to do. Instead, I focus on the basic position which a constructivist perspective adopts, with a view to considering matters of justification and representation and narrowing down yet further the coordinates of this research.

The fundamental tenets of constructivism rest on the belief that reality is socially constructed and that any investigation of it involves the elucidation of the ways in which meaning is constructed by those involved in the research. The findings of such research are therefore 'created' interactively rather than 'discovered' from a privileged perspective. Schwandt provides a more extended representation of the position:

'Proponents of these persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor's definition of a situation, for *Verstehen*. The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors. That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action.'

(Schwandt, 1994: 118)

Apart from accusations deriving from crudely interpreted solipsism, there are a number of criticisms which have been directed at constructivism, and I should like to argue that an adequate response to them depends on attending to modes of representation much more closely than has hitherto been the case. The strategy I shall adopt will be to consider these criticisms, indicating what sort of response might be made to them, and then, through locating this particular research more precisely within this paradigm, to develop a case for the expositional approach adopted here as a response to the challenges which have been laid at the door of constructivism. The headings under which the following criticisms appear are to be found in Schwandt (1994: 130-131), although the responses he considers follow different lines from the one offered here.

The problem of criteria

'The issue is deceptively simple: What is an adequate warrant for a subjectively mediated account of intersubjective meaning?' (*ibid.*) Given the constructivist

view of reality and meaning, this is an understandable criticism, and one response to it has been to redefine traditional criteria for judging the adequacy of research. Guba and Lincoln (1982, 1994) suggest two key considerations:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. <i>trustworthiness</i> : | credibility | (paralleling internal validity) |
| | transferability | (paralleling external validity) |
| | dependability | (paralleling reliability) |
| 2. <i>authenticity</i> : | fairness | |
| | ontological authenticity | |
| | educative authenticity | |
| | catalytic authenticity | |
| | tactical authenticity | |

What seems particularly interesting about such reformulations is their dynamic, which is very different from that of the terms they seek to replace. Validity and reliability can be assigned to or withheld from a piece of research, and whether a piece of research is or is not reliable and valid will not depend on the presence of someone to assign them; their existence is invoked through the fact that the research meets certain criteria. However, credibility, transferability and dependability crucially *do* depend on the presence of an external agent, and on what can be *made* of them. The point about credibility is that it should be credible *to* someone, transferability implies the capacity to be transferred *to* something, and dependability means that it can be depended *on*. The significance of this line of justification lies in the fact that it establishes a fundamental link between the research itself and responses to it, extending the act of *construction* into *reconstruction*. 'Reconstruction' here stands for 'constructing anew', rather than simply reassembling elements so as to reproduce as closely as possible an original form: the researcher constructs and the reader constructs anew. In such a relationship, representation emerges as a key element in the cycle of research and response, rather than as the culmination of a linear process.

The lack of critical purchase

This criticism derives from the identification of the researcher as a passionate participant and argues that, because the inquirer cannot distance her or himself from the research process, he or she is unable to engage in critical evaluation of it. The charge is both ill-founded and misdirected. It is ill-founded because it rests on the assumption that the researcher can be separated from the research process, an assumption which has been rejected even in the hard sciences and which only the most naïve positivist could be expected to hold to. Hence, any 'critical distancing' is likely to be at least partly illusory, and, in the absence of clear criteria to determine the extent to which it obtains, more dangerous than helpful. Furthermore, the charge is misdirected because, recognising this, constructivism does not seek to establish critical distance; instead it invites criticism from the reader to take place in the active process of *reconstruction* which establishes the adequacy of such research. The responsibility of the constructivist lies not in establishing the comforting illusion of critical distance but in creating the conditions of representation which will allow adequate evaluation to take place.

The problem of authority

This charge comes from a very different direction, claiming that constructivism involves the exercise of too much rather than too little power. It argues that 'defining interpretation as act of inscription vests authority and control in the anthropologist as inscriber and suppresses the dialogic dimension of constructing interpretations of human action' (Schwandt, *loc. cit.*). The response to this must be to ensure that the locus of power shifts by using modes of representation which transfer a sufficient degree of control from the researcher/writer to the reader.

The making of epistemological claims

The argument here is that constructivism is able to make psychological but not epistemological claims. If knowledge does not exist objectively but only as the property of individual minds, then how can it be publicly shared? Again, this criticism rests on the assumption that the researcher's findings are established independently of the researcher and made available to others. In terms of a perspective which reifies knowledge, sharing is naturally seen in terms of making such knowledge publicly available. However, what constructivism offers is a constructed representation which is made available to those who may wish to respond to it. Any 'knowledge' which derives from this is the property of an individual mind, having been interactively constructed. The importance of representation in this process is again clear.

Before moving on to consider this process of representation more fully, it is worth pausing to locate this research more precisely within constructivism. First, though, it is necessary to comment briefly on the place of research strategies and methods. One of the strengths of the constructivist position is the freedom it allows in terms of the methods used for gathering data, allowing these to be defined and developed in terms of the purpose of the inquiry. As far as strategies are concerned (Denzin & Lincoln's term is preferred to 'research traditions'), this research draws on three: participant observation, biographical method and discourse analysis. These, and the methods associated with them, will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

In terms of precise orientation within the constructivist field, the approach adopted here represents a development of ideas in Eisner's work on educational connoisseurship. His position, most fully represented in Eisner, 1991, is summed up well by Schwandt:

'His methodology is concerned with how inquirers develop an enhanced capacity to perceive the qualities that comprise the educational experience and, further, how they can develop the skills to render those perceptions in representational forms that portray, interpret, and appraise educational phenomena.'

(Schwandt, 1994: 129)

The important insight in Eisner's work lies in its emphasis on the importance of representation and the significance of form:

'the selection of form through which the world is to be represented not only influences what we can say, it also influences what we are likely to experience'

(Eisner, 1991: 8)

The development and nature of connoisseurship, including the nature of aesthetic knowing, will not be the focus of this study, and the approach to representation will not parallel Eisner's own, but a fundamental belief in the *art* of teaching and research, and in the importance of form and representation identifies this work's intellectual debt to him. I came to Eisner very late in the research process, but found in his work eloquent elaboration of crude ideas which had been forming in my own mind since relatively early on, as the following diary entries show:

'We have a very rigid view of what a thesis should look like, but why does it have to? Why can't I choose to present mine in a wholly different way if I'm confident that I can deliver the goods I'm expected to deliver? In fact, if I design the presentation to fit the argument and purpose, it should be a much better way of delivering the findings of my research. So I'll do it.'

(D—3/5/94)

'The dynamics of research and representation are interesting and it's a pity I haven't paid more attention to them in this diary.'

(D—27/9/94)

'The bright spot, though, was reading Eisner's The Enlightened Eye, a wonderful case for qualitative inquiry. And I trust it because I find so many echoes there.'

(D—30/3/95)

In a sense this research represents a departure from Eisner's, but it does so only to offer another dimension. I have chosen to rely much more explicitly on the ethnographic tradition than does Eisner, and my arguments for exposition are different from his, but I would hope that the two might be seen as complementary. Rather than produce a formal summary of Chapter 8 of *The Enlightened Eye*, in which he discusses methodological issues, I offer the following comments as the most pertinent to the approach adopted here:

'[A]ll forms are influenced by style, and since style is personal, an inevitable personal dimension enters into qualitative work — a dimension that conventional research methodology typically tries to minimize.'

(p. 169)

'[M]y conception of method also implies that it is as unreasonable as it is unwise to expect qualitative research proposals to take on the kind of finality and specificity we often see in research proposals using quantitative methods.'

(p. 170)

'Qualitative studies of classrooms, teachers, and schools are usually expressed in stories. ... we seek not a mirror but a tale, a revelation, or a portrayal of what we think is important to say about what we have come to know.'

(p. 189)

The only point Eisner makes here which I would wish to qualify is the claim that power of veto should not be assigned to others. As far_h the researcher's interpretation goes, I agree that it would be unwise to yield such control to others, but in matters of data it may be necessary. The second volume of this thesis consists of transcripts of staffroom talk which I have allowed the Pen teachers to censor. The (few and brief) extracts which have been removed appear as gaps in the text and in all cases I concur with the teachers' decision. There are cases where information or comment made publicly available might compromise professional effectiveness, and I would submit that what I have gained from the permission to tape staffroom talk so far outweighs what is lost in these fragments that it would be hard to raise serious methodological objections to the decision.

Another difference between what Eisner advises and what appears here lies in the somewhat loose interpretation of 'story' which might be applied to this work. This will now be considered in the wider context of the case for the importance of representation in qualitative inquiry.

2.6 Forms of representation

This section will conclude with a description and defence of the form of representation chosen here, but first an attempt will be made to establish that there is a growing recognition of its importance in qualitative research, and that this recognition is associated with new conceptions of the role of the researcher.

In their discussion of the future of qualitative research, Lincoln & Denzin (1994) refer to the 'Crisis of Representation':

'The basic issue is simple: how best to describe and interpret the experience of other peoples and cultures. The problems of representation and legitimation flow from this commitment.'

(Lincoln & Denzin, 1994: 577)

Other papers in the same collection (e.g. Atkinson & Hammersley, Harper, Marcus) make a similar point. Marcus (1994: 567), for example, argues the case for 'messy texts', which confront the problems of representation by eschewing conventional forms and refusing to 'assimilate the object of study, whereby the deep assumption seeps into a work that the interests of the ethnographer and those of his or her subjects are somehow aligned' (*ibid.*). The features of such texts which seem particularly relevant in the context of the approach adopted here are that 'there is a sense of whole without invoking totality, that emerges from the research process itself' and that 'they insist on an open-endedness, an incompleteness, and an uncertainty about how to draw text/analysis to a close' (*ibid.*).

The roots of this position can be traced back at least ten years (see, for example, Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Eisner, 1989; MacDonald, 1988; Atkinson, 1990; Rose 1990). Rose's vision of the future and the development of 'heterophonic ethnography' is perhaps the most explicit:

'I would argue that the future of ethnography — whether in sociology, anthropology, psychology, critical legal studies, planning or folklore — will be polyphonic, heteroglossic, multigenre construction and will include:

- (1) the author's voice and own emotional reactions
- (2) critical, theoretical, humanist mini-essays that take up and advance the particular literature or of the human sciences and particular disciplines (perhaps an ethnography will develop one or two ideas that provide coherence to the entire book)
- (3) the conversations, voices, attitudes, visual genres, gestures, reactions, and concerns of daily life of the people with whom the author participates, observes and lives will take form as a narrative and discourse in the text — *there will be a story line*
- (4) poetics will also join the prose
- (5) pictures, photos, and drawings will take up a new, more interior relation to the text — not to illustrate it, but to document in their own way what words do in their own way
- (6) the junctures between analytic, fictive, poetic, narrative, and critical genres will be marked clearly in the text but will cohabit the same volume'

(Rose, 1990: 17)

An emphasis on new genres, new media and the poetic use of language is a feature of many of these representations (Eisner, for example, offers a similar description, 1991: 3, 244), and Van Manen (1988: 451) has indicated what may be required in terms of a response to such a text: 'One must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it.'

This response, as I have suggested, seems to have been prompted by a recognition of the implications of constructivism, and the growing interest in forms of representation is perhaps a reflection of what could be described as a more general move from an *presentational* to an *expositional* orientation. The

traditional presentational orientation privileges the writer as interpreter, presenting the research and interpretive process as complete and seeking to make the process of representation itself as transparent as possible. The metaphor which best captures this perspective is photographic display. The picture having been taken and suitable justification as to its representativeness offered (together with relevant details of camera, settings etc.), the technicalities of the darkroom discussed, and framing and display parameters decided, the picture is offered for viewing. Although there is a whiff of the darkroom about the process, the value of having a suitable technical vocabulary and established procedures available cannot be gainsaid. However, the move away from this approach derives from a number of concerns:

1. *Conceptual developments in constructivist thinking*

Relevant aspects of this have already been discussed

2. *A growing awareness of the need to overcome methodological constraints*

Initially, there was an understandable need to establish a firmer methodological basis than that evidenced in Alfred Kroeber's advice to a doctoral student seeking advice on fieldwork (quoted in Erickson, 1986: 140): First find your indians (i.e. don't study the wrong group by mistake); pads of paper and pencils are very useful; be sure to take a frying pan but don't loan it to anyone: you may not get it back. However, the constraints of even something as well established as triangulation were felt by some researchers:

'Such a position [triangulation, strictly interpreted] while overcoming the problems that stem from the use of single methodologies appears to place certain limits on the number of approaches that can be used ... I suggest the term *multiple strategies* to allow the researcher to use a range of methods, data, investigators and theories within any study and so overcome the problem of bias. However, in using this term I have a further aim; that is not only to see different approaches used alongside one another but also to see them integrated with the course of an investigation.'

(Burgess, 1984: 146)

Greater methodological freedom and an increase in the options available inevitably fractured old certainties and this in turn brought with it deeper reflection on the role of the researcher in the process.

3. *The place of the researcher*

At first, including relevant biographical and experiential details was essentially a 'bolt on' device, conceptually necessary but structurally redundant. Hence we find Hammersley in Chapter 6 of his 1980 thesis, 'The researcher exposed: a natural history', acknowledging the current fashion to include such accounts. However, with methodological freedom came a growing recognition of the intimate connection between writing and fieldwork:

'There is, in the final analysis, no difference between writing and fieldwork ... the crisis of representation moves qualitative research in new, critical directions' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 10)

Denzin & Lincoln draw particularly on the work of Weinstein & Weinstein (1991) and Nelson *et al.* (1992) in describing the work of the researcher-as bricoleur, the natural inhabitant of this new world. The *bricoleur*, as the concept is used in its postmodernist sense:

- is a jack-of-all trades: 'The meaning of *bricoleur* in French popular speech is "someone who works with his (or her) hands and uses devious means compared to those of the craftsman" ... the bricoleur is practical and gets the job done' (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991: 161; quoted in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 15);
- 'produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 2);
- exercises complete freedom in his or her choice of methodological tools, inventing or piecing together new tools if necessary;

- uses such tools 'as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation' (*ibid.*);
- 'works within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' (*ibid.*);
- understands that research is an interactive process and that the researcher's own biography and beliefs will influence interpretation and representation, the latter also being influenced by the traditions within which it is framed;
- presents the product of research as 'a bricolage, a complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world of phenomenon under analysis' (*ibid.*).

There is an attractive utilitarianism about this representation, but its pragmatic appeal is established at the cost of directing attention towards the researcher and away from the interaction between the researcher and her or his audience. The assumption of methodological freedom carries with it responsibilities in the exercise of such freedom and a recognition that the line between confronting subjectivity and slipping into self-indulgence is a narrow one:

'The danger is putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates, so that the work becomes narcissistic and egotistical. No one is advocating ethnographic self-indulgence.'

(Bruner, 1993: 6)

It also seems to be the case that, while the richness of presentational opportunity has received increasing attention in the literature, the conceptualisation of such representation has not been addressed. The next section offers a way of conceptualising representation which builds on the strengths which underlie the concept of researcher-as-bricoleur but emphasises the relationship between world, interpretation and audience.

2.7 Exposition

Like the artist, the qualitative researcher must find a balance between public and private worlds, logic and value, fact and feeling:

'My subjectivity is functional and the results it produces are rational. But if they are rational only to me and no one else, not now or ever, then I have spawned illusions and my views are bound to be ignored. When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries. If, somehow, all researchers were alike, we would all tell the same story (insofar as its non-denotable aspects are concerned) about the same phenomenon. By virtue of subjectivity, I tell the story I am moved to tell. Reserve my subjectivity and I do not become a value-free participant observer, merely and empty-headed one.'

(Peshkin, 1985: 280)

In the *presentational* form of representation such considerations are subordinated to a *logical arrangement of elements* determined by the rationality of the research process. In an *expositional* form of representation, however, constructive integrity is preserved through the *creative juxtaposition of elements* informed by experience of the research process. The term *exposition* embraces the 'act of exposing: a setting out to public view' and 'a public exhibition' (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*), but in what follows I use the term *exhibition* to refer to the actual presentation.

There are a number of advantages in conceiving the relationship between reader and writer in expositional terms:

It maintains the integrity of the constructivist relationship between researcher and audience.

Because the 'exhibits' stand alone but in a dialogic relationship to one another, the audience is free to consider them individually and thematically, creating through interaction with them an interpretation of their overall significance.

The researcher will also consider ways in which the reader might be brought more closely into contact with the world which is being represented — for example, through access (mediated by transcription) to the voices of those who feature in the research. There is no claim for interpretive precedence over the collection as whole, although the assignment of titles, the naming of themes and the arrangements of exhibits will all be significant; the aim of the researcher is to achieve not a coincidence of interpretation but creative dialogue, and excessive specification will tend to promote the former at the expense of the illuminative potential of the latter.

It foregrounds the significance of choice.

Presentational forms of representation disguise the importance of this aspect by consigning description of the decision-making process to a section on research methodology and by emphasising the importance of developing a line of interpretation. In an exhibition, although many individual exhibits will represent specific lines of interpretation, their presence and placement overtly reflect the deliberate choices of the researcher. The significance of any individual exhibit and of the collection as a whole is a matter for the audience to determine.

It recognises the importance of selection and arrangement

The presence of separate exhibits linked in different ways (by theme, subject, form etc.) emphasises that selection and arrangement are important in research.

It encourages exploration and experiment

Experimentation in presentational research adopts either a low-risk strategy and is confined to a sideshow, safe but relatively insignificant, or a high-risk strategy which, unless it is conspicuously successful, pays for its significance by threatening the achievement of the whole enterprise. An expositional form of

representation does not confront the researcher with such a stark choice. He or she is free to experiment with individual exhibits or arrangements in terms of technique, material, media, form or content. If things go wrong there may be parts of the exhibition which are unsuccessful, but the overall impact may still be significant.

In this research, most of the chapters are very conventional in terms of form and content (c.f. Mulkay, 1985), but there are unusual elements which are designed to add additional dimensions to the work. If they fail, they can be passed over without jeopardising the exhibition as a whole.

Such exhibitions are open to audiences of all kinds

The challenge of bringing together research and teaching cannot be set aside in the light of the achievements of action research, considerable though these may be. Action research offers an important route to professional understanding and development (see Carr, 1989, for a review of its first decade in Britain and Somekh, 1995, for a valuable position paper on its methodology), but a belief in its importance does not commit us to holding that the roles of teacher and researcher should be integrated (Hammersley, 1993). Even if we assume that all teachers have the time and motivation to undertake action research, this still does not mean that there is no place for larger scale projects conducted by those with appropriate skills and opportunities. What matters is that such projects should be perceived as relevant to the work of teachers, and this is where an expositional form of representation can be particularly valuable.

By opening up the outcome of these projects to teachers in an accessible form, we offer an expansion of their research horizons, a broader contextualisation of action research and the possibility of a relationship between teachers and

researchers that is built on respect for differences as much as on shared concerns.

It does not privilege particular forms of understanding

Because understanding of expository representation is constructed on the basis of interaction with its exhibits, it might take virtually any form. Some responses will be cerebral, others instinctive; some readers will be moved by arguments, some by identification with experience or emotion, some by beauty, others by sympathy; and while some exhibits may hold the attention of all, others will touch more privately and selectively. So long as the exhibition stimulates thought and/or action it will have achieved something.

In this way, the expository route offers a way to connoisseurship through increased exposure. The experience of a good exhibition is transformative, but even less successful presentations will have educative potential. It is in the nature of exhibitions that they invite both personal and public critical response, and, where the exhibition as a whole is of interest, those who are practised in detecting weaknesses in technique and conceptual flaws will find forums for informed evaluation.

These, then, are some of the arguments for expository representation; it is now time to turn to the example offered here.

2.8 An outline of this research

In expository terms, this research is relatively conventional, and any of the elements taken by themselves would not seem out of place in traditional representations. However, they are treated as individual exhibits and designed to stand alone; furthermore, no effort is made to establish an overarching account in terms of which they are expected to be interpreted. United by a

common theme, they offer different perspectives on the world of the Pen staffroom, which the reader is invited to explore. The narrow aim of this research is fulfilled in terms of explicit references linking staffroom culture to interactional norms and routines, but the achievement of its broader aim, to bring into view aspects of EFL teachers' professional world as yet unexplored, depends at least in part on the expositional arrangement of its parts.

In what follows, I offer first a summary in conventional terms, drawing on the description of the research process offered by Denzin & Lincoln, and then my own comments on the selection and arrangement of exhibits.

The Research Process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a: 12)

I find this a useful template for description because of the levels of analysis which it offers, and have taken the list as presented by the authors highlighting in bold the elements relevant to this project. In terms of how we orient ourselves to the different levels, it seems to me that we must *recognise* what we are, *commit* ourselves to a paradigm, *develop* research strategies, *select* methods and *practise* our art. This is what I have tried to do in the project described here.

Phase 1: The Researcher as Multicultural Subject
history and research traditions
conceptions of self and other
ethics and politics of research

The first two have been briefly dealt with in this chapter; ethical issues will be raised in the next.

Phase 2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives
positivism
constructivism
feminism
ethnic models
Marxist models
cultural studies models

The nature of this research positions it clearly within a constructivist paradigm.

Phase 3: Research Strategies

study design

case study

ethnography, participant observation

phenomenology, ethnomethodology

grounded theory

biographical method

historical method

action and applied research

clinical research

The design of the study has been sketched here and will be filled out in the next chapter.

The ethnographic element in the study will appear in Chapter 5, the ethnomethodological element in Chapter 7 and the biographical element in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 is something of a hybrid of its neighbours. However, it is important to emphasise that these terms, are loosely interpreted and regarded as to some extent overlapping. More precise orientation will emerge in the next chapter.

Phase 4: Methods of Collection and Analysis

interviewing

observing

artefacts, documents, and records

visual methods

personal experience methods

data management methods

computer-assisted methods

textual analysis

There is a convenient, if crude, match between the three here and the strategies identified above, but again overlaps are to be expected:

interviewing	-	biography
observing	-	ethnography
textual analysis	-	ethnomethodology

Phase 5: The Art of Interpretation and Presentation

criteria for judging adequacy

the art and politics of interpretation

writing as interpretation

policy analysis

evaluation traditions

applied research

Criteria for judging adequacy have been briefly considered here and will receive attention in the next chapter. The case for the art of representation as interpreted here has been made; the remainder of the argument is in the exposition itself.

Exhibition notes

In this section I summarise some of the interests, concerns, decisions etc. which have influenced the form of the research. As such it represents a personal view of aspects of the project, but one which has inevitably influenced the way in which it is represented.

The subject of the exhibition is the world of the staffroom, its theme is stories. The former represents a deliberate decision arising from an interest in the neglected world of the EFL teacher, while the latter emerged naturally during

the research process, reflecting a striking feature of staffroom life but also perhaps my own interest in the power of narrative.

In terms of development, a perspective on the nature of the research itself emerged at a fairly early stage in data gathering, as the following diary entry illustrates:

'All "research" discovers, but some research sets out to inform and other research sets out to illuminate. In applied linguistics the research which informs hasn't really contributed a great deal to teachers and their work, so it surely can't be wrong to give illuminative investigation a try.

'There is also the undeniable fact that even the most avid supporter of action research would have to admit that many teachers simply don't have the time to do it justice, or at least feel that they don't. What is wrong about using other people's lights when they're travelling our way?'
(D—3/3/94)

Precise aims, however, arrived later on the scene, and latest of all was the development of a 'research question'. In the event, it was not one that I addressed directly, although awareness of it was valuable. Illuminative research does not simply answer research questions; it also provides a source of light.

'What's really driving me at the moment is that I have discovered things that I really want to say. Naturally, they're intertwined, but it's worth offering them as a list:

1. I want to talk about the value of the research methodology I've adopted.

2. I want to extend our understanding of the staffroom world and the teachers who inhabit it.

3. I want to highlight aspects of this which previous researchers have missed.

4. Most of all, I want to persuade others that more research is needed in this area.'
(D—8/9/95)

Structurally, the exhibition depends on the three research perspectives on which it draws: life history, ethnography and discourse analysis. The first receives particularly close attention in the next chapter because the landscape there has yet to settle, and anyone wishing to move around the territory must accept that maps and tracks will take them only so far. Ethnography receives a more conventional treatment, while discourse analysis is given attention which is inversely proportional to the space it occupies in the thesis. This has much to do with the relatively straightforward methodological issues in discourse analysis but also reflects the degree of attention which different models receive in the analysis itself. In the Denzin & Lincoln description above this area is marked as 'ethnomethodology'; however, the work here more properly belongs in the field of discourse analysis, a wonderfully catholic movement which seems to have the assimilative power of mediaeval Christianity, with ethnomethodology as one of its appropriated pagan shrines.

The structure of the thesis is built around these three elements, and I have tried to treat each of them separately, allowing their complementarity to emerge from their presence in the same research space. The order of presentation begins with conventional methodological groundwork, then moves from life history to a broad description of staffroom life in a particular year, and finally to a detailed analysis of interactional aspects of this. If read in this way, it emerges as a progressively focused account of a professional context: temporally, lives lead up to it, it is lived and described, and then analysed; spatially, it begins with the big picture (lives), isolates a particular area (a year in the professional life) and then brings the microscope to bear on individual elements within this (staffroom exchanges). However, the slightly unusual presentation in Chapter 4 allows an alternative reading route for readers who wish to follow it.

The chapter on humour sits slightly awkwardly in this neat (perhaps suspiciously neat) arrangement. It brings together ethnography and discourse analysis, but does not serve as a bridge between the chapters which flank it. Its emergence was a product not of deliberate planning but of a growing realisation that interactional realities in the Pen staffroom were set against a background of humour, and that interpretation of them demanded an understanding of this context. The importance of background is powerfully captured in a statement attributed to Delacroix: 'Give me mud and I will make the skin of Venus out of it if you will allow me to surround it as I please.'

In terms of presentation, there are two other features which require a formal introduction:

1. *Extracts from my research diary*

This is a narrow-lined A4 diary ruled down each page to allow two-thirds of the space for 1994 entries and the remaining third for a parallel 1995 entry, although the extracts here do not appear in this form. With the exception of weekends in 1994 and two periods (12/5/94—24/7/94 and 7/6/95—7/7/95) when travelling made it impossible, I kept this every day as part of my commitment to openness in the research process, and I have tried to select extracts which reflect relevant aspects of the decision-making process. These are introduced in immediately recognisable form, so that any reader who feels that they are irrelevant can bypass them easily.

2. *Transcribed staffroom exchanges*

Volume 2 consists of a transcription of staffroom talk. This is included not only because it allows the reader to judge the legitimacy of my own analysis but because it represents an artefact in its own right.

These represent relatively minor — and hardly radical — additions to a fairly conventional text, but they are nevertheless important reminders of the purpose which underlies the overall structure of the thesis. It has been suggested (Young, 1996) that we can distinguish between the arts (by which he means literature, the visual arts and music) and sciences on the basis of *immediate demonstration* or *showing*, and *systematic demonstration*. Although at first sight the products of qualitative research seems to fall comfortably under the second head, as Young's arguments develop it becomes tantalisingly apparent that in some respects they sit equally well in either camp. It would be encouraging to imagine that, beyond the force of systematic demonstration within individual chapters here, the juxtaposition of different 'exhibits' will exercise its own attraction, consonant with the aim of works of art:

'Artworks cannot, by themselves, prove anything, but the hope is that by prompting and guiding our thought, they will lead us to a conclusion about some matter.'
(Young, 1996: 265)

What follows is not art but the product of research, where there are necessary limits to creativity in matters of representation. Issues of 'proof' need to be delicately handled within the context of particular research perspectives, and it is to these that I shall now turn.

Chapter 3

Methodological Issues

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the three research perspectives (indicated by the underlined sub-headings) which are adopted in this thesis: life history, ethnography and discourse analysis. Although the use of three strategies fits the classical definitions of triangulation and fits comfortably into what Denzin (1970) has called 'between method triangulation', this was not specifically the aim of the research. I was aware of this as an option from the start, but prefer instead to think in terms of Burgess's 'multiple strategies' discussed in the previous section. The chapter begins with ethnography, subsuming under this the more general methodological issues which apply to the other two perspectives.

3.2 Ethnography

The terminological complexities of 'ethnography', 'qualitative research', or 'naturalistic inquiry' are widely acknowledged (see Ely *et al.*, 1991:2-4 for a brief summary of the literature), and 'ethnography' might be taken, loosely, to refer to a range of strategies and techniques. Drawing on Burgess's useful basic distinction between ethnography as the study of a culture and ethnography as the use of observational method (1985:7), I position what follows firmly in the latter camp. In Wolcott's terms (1988:202), I am not 'doing' ethnography, but 'drawing upon ethnographic approaches'.

3.2.1 Sampling

That qualitative research typically focuses on a small number of samples, or even individual samples, is by now generally accepted. The claim that the

sampling process should be theory-driven (Kunzel, 1992: 33), however, is perhaps more open to question. It is certainly the case that there will be many instances where responses at the level of theory will drive the need to undertake qualitative research, but it is also true that the desire for knowledge itself may in some cases serve as a more powerful influence on sampling decisions: the simple recognition of an important gap in an otherwise well-fleshed picture is surely stimulus enough.

Such was certainly the case here. Stimulated by the work of Hargreaves and Fullan on teacher development and Huberman on teacher careers, I began to collect life history interviews from teachers around the world. This exposed me to a number of staffrooms, and my fascination with the worlds they revealed grew ever stronger. I tried to explain this in a paper presented at about the half-way stage of data collection for this project:

‘I often visit schools in Britain and overseas, and it’s from staffrooms that I get the scent of strangeness — but I know that to the teachers who use them they’re an almost invisible part of the professional life. The same can’t be said of classrooms, which have belatedly received such welcome but consuming attention that all seriously committed teachers recognise the importance of trying to understand their workings. What interests me, though, is the classroom’s chief protagonist and the world in which he or she lives. As far as English language teaching is concerned, this is *terra incognita*, the invisible continent.’
(Richards, 1995a)

Eventually this prompted me to track down other research on staffroom culture, which proved to be very sparse. At this stage I wanted very much to open up the unexplored field of teacher lives and thinking in EFL and to do so in a modest way via the exploration of a particular staffroom. Geertz’s use of Santayana’s observation that ‘one compares only when one is unable to get to the heart of the matter’ (1983: 233) was at least reassuring, and by now I felt that without a firm reference point of the sort which in-depth staffroom exploration would provide, the comments in my life interviews would ring fairly hollow.

Tempting though it was to follow Huberman's line and apply it to EFL teachers, I wanted to know more about their professional world first.

It does not take much exposure to staffrooms to realise that any search for typicality is bound to be fruitless, but there did seem to be certain criteria which would be important in the light of what I wanted to achieve. They were fairly simple and are ranked here according to importance, with the most important first:

1. The school chosen should be a professionally successful one. Professional success is, of course, difficult to pin down exactly, but I take it to be axiomatic that a combination of the following is a reliable indicator of success: recognition by one or more of the bodies offering quality assurance (e.g. ARALS, FIRST); a very good rating in British Council inspections; happy and successful students; evidence of solid recruitment based on word of mouth from satisfied clients; a stable core of well-qualified staff.

In choosing a successful school rather than an unsuccessful one, I was influenced less by an assumption of commonality in this category, along the lines of Tolstoy's assertion that all happy families resemble one another but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, than by the hope that it might be possible to identify features of staffroom exchanges which might at least prove worthy of consideration by those seeking school improvement, and by the purely practical consideration that a successful school would be much more likely to allow me access to its private world. I couldn't imagine, for example, being allowed to tape interaction in an unhappy environment (which accounts for Hammersley's understandable decision not to attempt to introduce a tape recorder into the staffroom he studied, 1980).

2. The core staff of the school should be very experienced. I felt that this was important because if I could focus on teachers who had plenty of experience in EFL, their life history interviews might be particularly revealing and could provide a background to future research on teachers at different stages in their careers. I also wanted if possible to capture insiders' views of the development of EFL over the last couple of decades.
3. There should be other less experienced staff, too, preferably some at the start of their teaching careers. I thought that the interaction between them and the experienced staff might be particularly interesting.
4. The staffroom should be small enough and intimate enough to make audio taping a practical possibility.

In terms of sampling, this approach seems to fit most of the criteria identified by Miles & Huberman, who say that qualitative sampling:

- tends to focus on small samples of people;
- tends to be purposive rather than random;
- is usually not wholly prespecified, but can evolve once fieldwork begins;
- involves the establishment of *boundaries* of the case and a *frame* 'to help you uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes or constructs that undergird your study';
- is often theory-driven.

(Miles & Huberman 1994: 27)

It also seems clearly to correspond to the 'extreme or deviant case' in the list offered by Kuzel (1992: 38), based on Patton (1990), where the aim is to learn from 'highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest'. However, such lists tend to mask the complexities involved in choosing, and since I encountered this one long after having made the sampling decision, as a justification it is decidedly *post hoc*.

Finding a school which would meet the criteria I had established was far from easy, and I deliberately decided not to impose a distance criterion. In the event, it took over three months to find what I was looking for. It took a chance meeting in Mexico to point me in the direction of a school which, it turned out, was less than a quarter of a mile from my home. In choosing to investigate an EFL staffroom, I was aware of the dangers inherent in choosing a situation with which I was familiar (Wolcott is particularly insistent on the advantages of more 'distant' settings, e.g. 1994: 178), but in view of the location, Werner Schoepfle's (1987: 170) warning seemed almost ironic: 'The closer to home one is, the subtler are the parts [of the culture] and the easier they are to overlook or misrepresent.'

Nevertheless, the Pen school fitted my criteria perfectly, having a core staff of five who had been teaching together in EFL for between 15 and 17 years (a combined TESOL experience of, perhaps uniquely, over 80 years) and a regular but not rapid turnover of temporary staff, most at the start of their careers. The school met all the criteria for success: it was a member of FIRST, had an excellent British Council assessment report, a solid student core recruited on the basis of word of mouth, and students who were clearly happy and demonstrably successful. I therefore arranged to see the principal in order to begin the process of negotiating entry.

3.2.2 Generalising from a single case study

As Hammersley & Atkinson have pointed out (1995: 42), where a case has intrinsic interest, generalisation may not be a primary concern, and since this a 'first case' in the field of EFL staffroom research and its aim is primarily to open up the territory, no attempt will be made to draw broad conclusions. This should not be interpreted as timidity arising from someone who has 'cut their methodological teeth on the positivist's biscuit' (Peshkin, 1993: 25), but as the

product of a deliberate decision arising from a consideration of issues of generalisability in the context of qualitative research.

Schofield (1990) sums up well the case for reconceptualising generalisability in this context, identifying three important considerations:

1. There have been a number of arguments for rejecting generalisability as traditionally conceived (e.g. Denzin, 1983: 133-134; Guba & Lincoln, 1982: 238), and there is general agreement now that to treat research as generalisable in terms of its ability to produce universally applicable findings does not represent a realistic goal.
2. The rejection of generalisability is not equivalent to the rejection of the idea that discoveries in one situation can be used to help form judgements in other situations.
3. All researchers seem to agree that what matters most is thick description. Data-rich description seems to provide the best basis for productive outcomes.

The author admits that '[c]arried to extremes or taken too seriously, the idea of choosing on the basis of typicality becomes impossible, even absurd' (1990: 211) and recommends it only as a guiding principle. Nowhere, however, does she offer a definition of 'typicality', and it does seem that in the absence of a traditional definition, the search for adequate criteria for such a definition might be a wild goose chase. Donmoyer (1990) has suggested that there has been a move from conceiving generalisability in mathematical terms to thinking of it more in psychological terms, and, whether or not the latter is an accurate

characterisation, it does seem that the notion of typicality is easier to represent in terms of the former.

Perhaps it is less contentious to think in terms of what any individual case might have in common with other cases, dropping claims of typicality altogether. For example, it is likely that there will be common features of any staffroom talk, some of which will be predictable. So when I have asked different groups of teachers (this has involved to date well over 200 teachers from at least a dozen countries) to write down four or five things which they talk about in their staffrooms, students have always featured, and materials and timetable concerns have also been very common. Conversely, because this is a small staffroom, it is reasonable to suppose that different sub-groups are unlikely to be a significant feature here, although they may be an important aspect of lives in other staffrooms. The relationship between one staffroom and others, then, is likely to be an example of Wittgensteinian family resemblance rather than a matter 'typicality', which depends on the assumption of features common to all.

Schofield's arguments on the subject of 'What may be' are more convincing, even though they do not seem applicable to this research. She argues that there can be particular value in choosing something which is at the 'leading edge' of change or which highlights features which are likely to differentiate the present from the future. This work seems to fit into the third category, which involves 'locating situations that we know or expect to be ideal or exceptional on some *a priori* basis and then studying them to see what is actually going on there' (1990: 217). Schofield recognises the importance of the special case, but she does not go as far as Maxwell (1992) and Freidson (1975, quoted in Maxwell), who actually argue that a case can be important precisely because it is special. However, it does not seem necessary to go this far in defending the choice of the Pen school. This is an example of a 'successful' school which is unusual because of the

shared experience of its teachers, who were responsible for setting it up and who still have a genuine voice in the decision-making process. This is a world which is sufficiently 'special' to offer valuable insights and sufficiently 'normal' to make such insights relevant to other settings. It seems unnecessary to look beyond these features to abstract ideas of generalisation in order to justify the selection of this particular case.

3.2.3 Negotiating Access

My initial contact came via a telephone call to Jenny, the principal. She is technically the vice-principal of the Pen, the principal being the principal of both this and its sister school, but I have chosen to use the term 'principal' because in terms of her function in the Pen it is less misleading than her actual title. My initial meeting with her lasted about an hour, and at the end of it she agreed to my coming to the Pen in the role of participant observer, subject to the approval of the teachers there. In terms of Dingwall's 'hierarchy of consent' (1980, in Burgess, 1984c:258), there were few stages to go through: the principal of the Pen schools had first suggested that I approach Jenny, Jenny had recommended a meeting with the teachers with her as part of the group, and from then on all my dealings were with the group as a whole. At least this provided me with the opportunity to meet the teachers face-to-face in order to discuss the project, avoiding the awkwardness which can arise from crossed lines (see, for example, Burgess, 1984: 41).

A Friday lunchtime meeting was arranged, during which I introduced myself and explained that I was interested in studying the way teachers work together and talk to one another. I emphasised that if they invited me to join them I would remain only as long as they were happy for me to be there. I explained that I would like to do some teaching in the school and to interview them about their lives and work, suggesting that eventually I might also ask if I could tape

some of their staffroom talk, although I would fully understand if they felt that this would not be appropriate. We discussed the likely products of the research and I left them with some examples of my own work on teacher development to think over their response.

The teachers responded positively to my request but asked for another meeting. This allowed me to meet one of the teachers who had been absent from the original meeting and gave them the chance to ask more probing questions about the nature of my work. I replied honestly but in general terms, keeping the subject of the study as 'teachers' lives, work and talk'. I sought to reassure them that if at any stage they felt that my presence was an intrusion, I would withdraw from the school without any recrimination on my part. I also reassured them that if I did eventually tape anything, they would have the right to decide whether this could be made public. I also promised to show them any work based on this research which might be published or presented at conferences. I did not agree to the right of veto on such work, but I did say that I would check it with them for accuracy and take into account whatever other responses they might make.

The process of negotiating entry shades imperceptibly into that of gaining acceptance, and further, into project definition itself (Burgess, 1984c: 260). In terms of acceptance, but with consequences for data gathering, there seem to be two points which represented important steps forward. The first was about six months into the research, when the teachers announced that they no longer thought of me as a 'spy' from the 'other place'. Kate, who had been my original contact, was the principal of the two schools and I had mentioned her name when introducing myself to Jenny. The teachers had naturally assumed that I was a friend of hers and that therefore anything they said might get back to her. What I also discovered later on was that the school's recruitment had fallen to its

lowest in 1993 and that the staff were worried about the consequences of this, so my arrival seemed suspiciously coincidental. This is not the first time that prior events have influenced a researcher's reception (Parry, 1992: 68), but it did confirm the wisdom of allowing 15 months for my 'year's' stay in the school.

The announcement that I was 'one of them' was not a sign of sudden conversion but confirmation of a growing ease in their behaviour which had gradually developed as we got to know one another. If confirmation were needed, it came in October, ironically just as Louise was to learn of her redundancy, which came as a direct consequence of the downturn in business. I asked if I might be present at their staff meetings, and everyone readily agreed. They were happy for me to do so and to take notes on the proceedings, which they asked if they might use to back up their own minutes. When they saw the amount of detail in my notes, they remarked that I 'may as well have used a tape recorder', and when this comment was repeated at the next staff meeting I took advantage of the opportunity to back up my notes with a tape recording (M—11/11/94). After this, the use of the tape recorder became naturally accepted and there were no objections when I introduced a 'permanent' microphone to tape break talk after Christmas.

3.2.4 Participant observation

As Burgess points out (1992: ix), each fieldwork setting offers a learning experience, not just about a particular culture, and about research methodology and techniques, but about oneself. This last, 'crucial element', is not part of my story here, but it underlies the discussion which follows. As Stenhouse has noted (1984: 218), it is a 'classic position on fieldwork' that 'you learn by getting your hands dirty', and such was the case here. Advice on data collection and analysis is now plentiful, but a visitor to the world of participant observation must rely on travellers' tales and a few tips

My role in the Pen was clear enough. In terms of Gold's (1958) basic typology (discussed in Burgess, 1984: 80ff.), I was clearly a 'participant-as-observer', teaching in the school and developing relationships with the teachers there, but making no secret of the fact that the research was my prime concern. I was therefore an 'active participant' (Wolcott, 1988: 193) or 'active-member-researcher' (Adler & Adler, 1994: 379), with a job to do in addition to my research, taking an 'overt' rather than 'semi-overt' or 'covert' role (Whyte, 1984: 30). There are obvious advantages to maintaining a covert role (see, for example, Friedman, 1990), but in my case this would have been impossible: even if I could have sworn Jenny to secrecy, 'passing' as a part-time teacher at the school would have involved me in a degree of deception which it would have been impossible to maintain, and, quite apart from my own ethical reservations, I could hardly ask Jenny to undermine the collaborative culture of the school which I was hoping to study.

The degree of 'overtiness' is something which perhaps should not be rigidly determined in advance. Ideally, I should have liked to keep all my notes and 'findings' to myself, but I had to balance the importance of not influencing the nature of staffroom interaction against the need to become a trusted member of staff. I soon discovered that this was an 'open' environment and decided that strategic 'openness' would offer an acceptable compromise. Although my note-taking was covert, I would occasionally make a comment about an idiosyncratic aspect of someone's behaviour or interactional style. The teachers seemed to enjoy this and I was careful to release only details which would not bear on any analysis I was likely to undertake. The following extract, recorded when I was out of the room and three of them are explaining my work to two new arrivals, provides what seems to me to be a reasonable picture of the teachers' understanding of my research a year after my arrival ('basically' and 'sort of' in

Harry's speech also incidentally provide examples of the sort of innocuous features I mentioned to them):

- Harry: Basically he's e:r (1.5) he's doing research for a (.) PhD.
 Paul: Yeah.
 ...
 Harry: About e::m (0.5) how teachers operate.
 Paul: Experienced teachers.=
 Harry: =He's in the er the language (.) the language department at Aston (.) University. (0.5) He's a linguist, (°supposedly.°)
 Annette: So he's here to (.) to er tape the staffroom.
 Harry: He's been: around for er about a year now. (1.0) °With us.°
 And e:m
 [
 Paul: I mean (.) basically how- how people who have been teaching for a while how they (.) cooperate with each other, how they work. Really.
 Annette: >How they work.<
 ...
 Harry: He records off- off the cuff
 [
 Paul: (out) of: the ordinary (.) yes it's the off the cuff comments that he keeps watch for and he comes back to y- back at you () and says 'I've noticed that
 [
 Harry: Yes he (sort of) 'I- you- you said' hehheheheh 'Youwah!'
 (T—8/2/95: 0039-0075)

Using Burgess's terms for role development (1984: 85ff.), I was presented as a newcomer when negotiating access, entered the school on terms of provisional acceptance and moved to categorical acceptance within six months. Personal acceptance came with this, and by the summer, I was referred to as 'one of us', but as 'our researcher' (once by Harry as 'our tame academic') rather than as a 'teacher'. My role always demanded some explanation when visitors were introduced, and only three weeks before the end of my stay Jenny explained to a visitor that 'Keith's been attached to us', that 'Keith's researching us' and that my subject was 'how a quality organisation operates' (T—22/3/95: 0601).

A number of researchers have stressed the importance of observation and the power of perception (Wolcott, 1994: 154; Eisner, 1991: 234), and in this respect I admit to a bias. Just as Wolcott admits to feeling 'at a decided advantage' with ethnographic techniques' (1992: 42), so I am at my most confident when dealing with spoken interaction. My attention was drawn to interactional aspects, verbal and non-verbal, perhaps at the expense of other features, and, more seriously, an awareness that eventually I would be taping staffroom interaction encouraged laziness in writing up fieldnotes. Even though I could justify this in terms of the participant observation forming a 'context' for the detailed analysis of interaction, it is something which I would fight harder to resist if I were faced with the same situation in the future. I also admit to failing sometimes to take Wolcott's advice to talk little and listen a lot (1990: 127). I am a naturally talkative person and cannot believe that the field is the best place to attempt radical character transformation. However, I sought opportunities to 'busy' myself with things in order to listen, and tried (successfully for the most part, I believe) not to express my views on teaching and teacher development.

3.2.5 Data collection

Matters of data collection are necessarily influenced by the position which the researcher adopts at the outset. Rather than survey the many arguments which have been advanced on this subject, I shall attempt to represent as succinctly as possible the position which I adopted, referring to arguments which were particularly influential. This will be followed by a brief description of the business of data collection itself.

1. *Data gathering was not influenced by any hypothesis*

The constraints which hypotheses impose have long been recognised (e.g. Dalton, 1964: 53-54), as has the importance of not specifying questions too far in advance (Agar, 1981: 69-70). I interpret Wolcott's claim that it is 'impossible to

embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit' (1982: 157) very broadly: I was looking *at* the ways in which experienced teachers worked and talked together in the staffroom, but not *for* anything in particular. Given this open approach, there seemed little need for prior instrumentation (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 36).

2. *Data gathering was not influenced by theorising*

My research was 'grounded' in the sense that theory emerged from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 17), but not in the sense of 'grounded theory', where data collection and theorising are interwoven (Bryman & Burgess, 1994: 6). It perhaps most closely resembles the 'dredging' described by Hammersley (e.g. 1984a: 56).

3. *Data gathering was progressively focused*

With the dredging came refinement. Originally I had considered comparing staffroom with classroom interaction (as Hammersley, 1980, had done), but it soon became clear that the staffroom was interesting enough in itself and that teacher biographies might throw more light on interaction there than would classroom data. Similarly, ideas of exploring teacher knowledge were soon cast aside, making the interviews concerning lessons and decision-making largely redundant. However, I continued with these for a time because they distracted the teachers' attention to some extent from my interest in the staffroom, filled me in on recent events and threw up insights which I was able to use in the life interviews. The 'mutability of questions' (Ely *et al.*, 1991: 31) which this reflected was one of the most interesting aspects of the data gathering process.

4. *The setting was the staffroom*

The temptation to go outside the staffroom was resisted. Although what happens there is affected by what happens outside (Burgess, 1984: 97, for

example, includes what happens in the time period before break begins in his list of what to focus on in the mid-morning break), I decided that I would bring into the staffroom with me the same immediate background as those present, i.e., what I had encountered in my prior lessons and heard in the corridor. I knew, for example, that a lot of 'business' in the first period was conducted between Jenny and Helen in the latter's office, and that this would certainly throw light on unfolding events, but other teachers did not have access to this and therefore even when the opportunity occurred I made no attempt to explore that setting. Most 'events' in the staffroom are versions of, or responses to, events outside it, and it seemed perfectly appropriate to allow staffroom events to speak for themselves.

5. The time period was restricted

Because of work commitments, I was able to attend the school regularly only one day a week. This meant that, with the exception of a month in the summer of 1994 when I was there on most days, I was present only at particular times. However, the school is used to part-time teachers, and the total time spent in the 15-month period of data gathering (12/1/94—12/4/95) was 57 days, approximately equivalent to a full term in many schools and very close not only to the 62 days which Hammersley (1980: 305) spent in his staffroom but also the average of 60 days used by Nias and her associates (1989: 5). Doubtless some things were missed because of this, but I was at least able to confirm that the tape recordings taken in the final few months were not atypical. My decision to focus on the morning break for these was also the product of my experience during the previous year. Table 1 summarises the data gathering process.

6. A diary was kept throughout the period of data gathering and analysis

The value of a research diary is well attested (e.g. Burgess, 1981) and widely recommended. In this case, it provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on the

process of data collection and the wider context in which decisions relating to it were made.

1993	Oct - Dec	<i>Negotiating entry</i>		
1994	Jan - Jun	Fieldnotes	Interviews (f/t* lessons)	
	Jun - Oct	Fieldnotes	Interviews (p/t 'life')	
	Oct - Dec	Fieldnotes	Interviews (p/t 'life')	Recording (staff meetings)
1995	Jan - Apr	Fieldnotes	Interviews (p/t life)	Recording (staff meetings) (preparation day) (morning break)
	Apr - Dec		Interviews (f/t 'life')	
		*f/t = 'core' teachers; p/t = temporary teachers		

Table 1: Timetable of Research

7. *The data were treated as motivated but unanalysed*

Observation, by definition, involves volition, and I tried always to be aware that data gathering was a motivated process. At the most basic level, I recognise that '[w]hat may be generated as "data" is affected by what the ethnographer can treat as "writable" and "readable"' (Atkinson, 1992: 6), although I was never conscious of writing with a future reader in mind (*ibid.*, p. 20). The 'motivated' nature of this process also represents a strong reason for denying Erickson's claim (1986: 149) that what is gathered constitute merely 'resources for data', so that the term 'data' must be restricted to the product of formal analysis. I discovered, too, that the form in which fieldnotes appear may have a significant influence on their content. When I decided to use two columns in my typed up notes, one for description and one for comment (equivalent to a division into 'observational', and 'theoretical' + 'methodological' notes in Schatzman & Strauss's terms, 1973: 101 ff.), I found that an empty comment column, taking up

one third the width of the page, invited far more analytical comment than I had produced in the previous straightforward layout. I also discovered that some comments which before might have appeared in the diary were now part of the fieldnotes.

My approach to taking fieldnotes had much in common with other researchers. I took them in secret (Hammersley, 1984a: 53), relied on scribbled down words and phrases during bouts of activity (Waddington, 1994: 114) and wrote these up as fully as possible afterwards, transferring them to my final version on a processor. I used lesson preparation as a cover for note-taking, always ensuring that there were large and legible lesson plan notes on paper where less legible script (often disguised as points or under false headings) was the basis for my expanded fieldnotes. This at least avoided the need for frequent visits to the 'men's room' (Whyte, 1984: 86), but it did mean that I had to intersperse genuine notes with lesson plan details.

Perhaps because of this, but more likely as a result of an awareness that eventually I would be able to rely on taped data, I never developed that 'fluency' which some researchers claim (Ball, 1984: 73). I am, anyway, deeply suspicious of long 'verbatim' exchanges which are not based on tape recordings. As we have seen, Hammersley, for whom taping was not an option, provides a detailed and honest account of the problem of relying on notes:

'Noting down what was said on the spot was very difficult, being done in a surreptitious and hurried manner ... While I tried to note down literally what was said, I may have made many mistakes. While I can claim that even where I did not get the words exactly right I probably got the sense of what was said, that unfortunately builds in a reliance on the interpretations on sense I made on the spot. Also important here is the relevance of context. I often wonder now in reading this data whether anything was said before or after the recorded exchange which would modify interpretation of it; once again there is reliance here on my on-the-spot decision. Even more important, it is possible that on some occasions, rather than simply not remembering the exact words used, I may have

forgotten whole sentences or stretches of conversation which came between one utterance and the next in the recorded exchange.'

(Hammersley, 1980: 304-305)

Writing up brief notes into intermediate fieldnotes was completed, wherever possible, during free time in the school, and I made no secret of this. On one occasion, when my work was well advanced, Jenny showed particular interest in what I was doing, so I showed her the (purely descriptive) account. Her response was identical to the student who snatched Fox's notes (1990: 18): 'He writes down *everything!*' Everything is relative.

My plan was to cover as many relevant features of the setting as possible, and I use Burgess's list (reordered) as a basis for describing my emphasis (1984: 96):

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>Space</i> | One of my first tasks was to measure and make a plan of the staffroom. |
| <i>Objects</i> | This was followed by a full list of its contents, including the files and systems used. In the event, this was welcomed as a valuable contribution by my colleagues at the school and submitted as part of the descriptive documentation in the two inspections which took place during my time there. |
| <i>Actors</i> | No selection was involved here. This was a small staff and there was plenty of opportunity to conduct all the interviews I needed to. |
| <i>Activities</i> | The staffroom setting meant these were relatively limited, so it was easy to identify routines and rituals which marked the passage of time. This was the main function of the fieldnotes. |
| <i>Acts</i> | Most of these were interactional, captured crudely through fieldnotes and in detail on tape. |

<i>Events</i>	Although there were staffroom events, the most interesting aspects of staffroom life lay in the way other events were represented there.
<i>Time</i>	Decisions relating to this have already been discussed.
<i>Goals</i>	These were interactionally accomplished in a variety of ways and emerged from an analysis of the data.
<i>Feelings</i>	These were noted, but for the most part interaction in the staffroom was 'expressive' rather than 'emotional'. It was easy to describe theatrical and ritual responses, much less easy to determine the emotions which lay beneath them, and I kept speculation for my 'comments' column.

3.2.6 Data analysis

Aim

The basic aim of analysis in this project, to which all other aims are secondary, is summed up by Guba & Lincoln in reference to a heuristic methodology:

'The ultimate pragmatic criterion for this methodology is that it leads to successively better *understanding*, that is, to making sense of the interaction in which one usually is engaged with others.'

(Guba & Lincoln, 1991: 164)

Approach

The approach to analysis is that of immersion, one of the four identified by Miller & Crabtree (1992), the others being quasi-statistical, templates and editing.

Behind these two simple summaries lie a number of concerns, confusions and compromises which demand consideration here. The process of data analysis and interpretation seems to be something of a 'mystery' which involves even the

best researchers in a feeling of being 'at sea' (Hammersley, 1984a: 60-62), and is essentially a messy and frustrating process:

'In effect the fieldwork experience may be thought of as a *rite of passage*. It involves a personal confrontation with the unknown and requires that the aspirant come to grips with the use of theory and method in the context of a confused, murky, contradictory and emergent reality.'

(Ball, 1984: 71)

One of the most fundamental challenges is presented by the sheer weight of data (Bryman & Burgess, 1994c: 216; Ely *et al.*, 1991: 141). The dangers which this presents are well documented by Scott (1985), who points to the time wasted in gathering data at the expense of insights, the tendency to measure success in terms of quantity, and the final despairing feeling that she and her colleagues could no longer tell where the data ended and their lives started. In the case of my own data, fieldnotes presented something of a problem, but the transcription process provided a natural immersion in the world of the staffroom which was of considerable help in dealing with the other data. Transcribing over 400 pages of conversation in about six months is a task which, if treated as merely mechanical, would challenge anyone's sanity. But as an opportunity to 'tune in' to a particular world, finding its patterns, catching its cadences and eventually hearing its music, it represents an opportunity which is as rewarding as it is exhausting.

Once attuned to this world, it was necessary to express this in some form of categorisation which would make analysis possible. Analysis is not a distinct stage or a discrete process (Bryman & Burgess, 1994: 217; Tesch, 1990: 95) and there is a sense in which it is to be found at all stages in the research process. At some stage, however, some formal sense has to be made of categories, emerged, emerging or still skulking in the undergrowth. 'Establishing categories from qualitative data', laments one researcher, 'seems rather like a simultaneous left-brain right-brain exercise' (Ely *et al.*, 1991: 87). My own technique depends on

the use of four highlighter pens and six felt tips all of different colours, in addition to black and red pens and a pencil. This set usually supplies enough combinations to cover the different elements, providing a useful initial three-tier hierarchy (highlighter—>six sub-categories—>additional notes). In the case of fieldnotes, the use of the pens grew out of a categorisation developed on the torn off pages of shorthand pads. I find these more flexible than file cards, simply because the latter seem somehow more 'permanent' or 'valuable' and I am reluctant to discard or change them — with unfortunate results for my willingness to allow categories to change and develop naturally. When analysing transcripts I rely on pens alone and immersion in the data for long periods, drawing on the acquaintance which has developed through the process of transcription. Finally, the results of the analysis of both transcriptions and fieldnotes are summarised on a large, multicoloured diagram, more useful as process than product. Whether this approach is in any sense 'standard' I cannot judge; the process of coding is a strange heuristic, perhaps the most personal and yet unnatural aspect of the qualitative process, and it would seem that no two approaches are the same (see, for example, the wide range of approaches evident in Bryman & Burgess's summary of the fieldwork of contributors to their collection, 1994b: 218-219).

Throughout this process, theory sits on the sidelines, shouting encouragement and advice when needed but taking no part in the struggle on the field. In the very early stages of this research I included some of the fieldwork data in a conference paper and afterwards became engaged in discussion with another delegate for whose work and commitment to passionate research I have the deepest respect. She seemed very interested in my data and in the project on which I had just embarked, and said towards the end of our discussion that she would be most interested in seeing some of the outcomes when I came to 'theorising it'. The voice which spoke this was not hers, the utterance was not

part of our conversation, it was the echo of an old challenge: 'What theories will you test' (Ely, 1991: 215), 'What's your theory?' (Wolcott, 1992: 8). The simple truth is I don't have one and I don't much want one.

There are three reasons for not putting my faith in any particular 'theory'. The first is that I fear its allure, its centripetal pull, sucking in elements which would be best left to float free in order to trouble our understanding and prompt new questions. If there were good evidence that the price for this was worth paying perhaps I would feel differently, but as yet, like many others, I am not convinced that there is such evidence:

'It has been my experience that the application of theory in qualitative studies is often difficult and rather thin. There are several reasons for this. First, much of the theory that is available to educational researchers is either too general or ill-suited to the phenomena being described. The fit is not comfortable. Second, the particular features of the situation often require a more customized and context-specific interpretation that the theory available can provide. Third, most qualitative studies are undertaken not as hypothesis-testing enterprises, but as efforts that provide ex post facto explanations. That is, although researchers may have a general theme in which they are interested, the focus is usually to study until they have immersed themselves in the context. The task is more a matter of exploring what they have seen than of searching for qualities to test a theory.'

'theory that can adequately provide a convincing explanation of the social or pedagogical scene in education may be scarcer than we believe.'

(Eisner, 1991: 238 & 239)

The second reason for treating 'theory' with circumspection is the nature of the contribution which this research seeks to make. Sometimes research is prompted by a desire to enter into a particular debate in order to clarify, extend or challenge positions there, in which case theory may be to the fore from the start. Had I been interested in the process of socialisation for new and temporary teachers, for example, it would have been natural to have engaged with relevant issues here from the start. Even when my interest in the concept of a collaborative culture grew, my aim was not to challenge or extend the theory

itself (it seems to me to apply uncannily well to the situation in the Pen), but to *understand* more about how collaboration was sustained, and with it professional commitment. A number of factors seemed relevant, but there was no single theory under which they might all conveniently be grouped.

This leads naturally to the third reason for resisting the temptation to seek out any particular theory. The process of analysis and interpretation is intimately bound up with theory, and it seems to fulfil a valuable function:

'Theory can serve both analytically and interpretively. It is probably employed more often analytically, for the purpose of providing structure. For interpretation, theory provides a way to link our case studies, invariably of modest scope, with larger issues. I suspect it is this linking power, rather than explanatory power, that makes theory so popular with individual researchers. This seems especially true in the field of education, where little theories are a dime a dozen, big theories are borrowed from the social sciences, and no overarching rival theories ever arose to replace the preoccupation with learning theory dominant at midcentury.'

(Wolcott, 1994: 43)

If the research has anything to say at all, it will naturally touch on broader issues, but this does not mean that it has to be subsumed under a larger, 'borrowed', theory. I have tried in this thesis to draw on whatever theories seemed helpful in order to deepen my understanding — and representation — of the way in which a particular collaborative culture functions. Part of the process has involved proposing a few 'dime a dozen' ideas of my own, but these are part of a richer and more important picture, not the distillation of its worth.

The process of analysis and interpretation, however approached, requires some form of control or checking to identify possible weaknesses and distortions. No system is perfect, but I have used two tools to check my own procedures. The first, an ongoing check, has been provided by Erickson's list of five types of evidentiary inadequacy: inadequate amounts of evidence; inadequate variety in

kinds of evidence; faulty interpretive status of evidence; inadequate disconfirming evidence; and inadequate discrepant case analysis (1986: 40). At the end of the process I also applied the more detailed checks suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994: 245-287).

3.2.7 Writing

In that this plays a key role in the representation of data, it seems to deserve a place in methodological discussion. Any process of writing is also a process of data reduction (Werner & Schoepfle, suggest at a ratio of 10:1, 1987b: 24), which inevitably prompts analytic and interpretive insights. This particular writing was not the product of a 'seven-year itch' (Casey, 1992: 202), but came hard on the heels of data collection and analysis, the timetable being as follows: Jan 94—April 95, data collection; April 95—December 95, analysis; January 96—May 96, writing; June—October 96, 'lying fallow'; November 96, final editing. I ignored Wolcott's advice (1990: 128) to start writing early and have adopted instead a more concentrated approach. Since writing for me must also include rereading (very quickly) all my notes and copies of papers as well as relevant data, the approach involves continued — and almost continuous — immersion.

Much of what has so far been discussed applies not only to ethnography but to the other research perspectives adopted, and it is to the second of these that we now turn.

3.3 Life History

Academic interest in life history research stretches back, patchily, for not much more than half a century, but during the time that serious interest in it has developed different schools and perspectives have evolved, enriching but also complicating our attempts to explore the educational landscape: descriptively, Huberman's 'scientific object of study' (1989a: 347) and Pinar's 'building the

space of mediation' (1988a: 28) may offer considerable dimensional depth, but their different conceptual orientations represent a stiff challenge to any attempt to establish functional complementarity. A map of the territory is needed.

Such maps are available, and Huberman's own historical and conceptual descriptions (e.g. 1989a, 1993) are valuable, as are other historical overviews (e.g. Goodson, 1980). Rather than attempt to summarise what are already concise representations, I shall concentrate in this section on addressing aspects of life history research which are directly relevant to the histories offered in the next chapter, *viz*:

1. the advantages which life history investigation offers to the qualitative researcher in education — thus providing a justification for the inclusion of these findings;
2. definitional and terminological issues — thus clarifying the reference and scope of the terms used;
3. methodological considerations — thus justifying the approach adopted;
4. approaches to life history research — thus locating this particular research in the broader field of life history studies.

Clearly, the last of these will overlap to some extent with the overviews already mentioned, but the focus here will be on contemporary rather than historical positions.

3.3.1 The case for life history research

The simplest and most dramatic justification for undertaking life history research in EFL would consist of simply setting the complete absence of work in this area of education against the flourishing body of work in mainstream

education. Recently, voices have been raised urging investigation into teachers' knowledge and thinking (Richards & Freeman, 1993; Richards, 1995), but as yet there is to my knowledge no published literature based on research into the lives of EFL teachers (but see Hayes, 1996), and it is still possible to read papers dealing with teacher change (Bailey, 1992) which approach their task synchronically and fail even to consider the relevance of life history research. Since there are few comprehensive treatments of the arguments for life history research in any context, it is worth taking the trouble to summarise the different lines of justification which are available.

Although MacLure (1993a) aims simply to account for the fashionable status of what she calls the 'biographical attitude', her basic categorisation provides a better basis for discussion than more random lists (e.g. Dex, 1991). In what follows I develop my own, more justificatory, position around the terminology which she provides.

1. Methodological

MacLure argues that life history (she uses the term 'biography', but see below) offers methodological and theoretical advantages to qualitative researchers, promising 'greater explanatory power ... and thereby offering better theoretical linkages between individual agency and social structure' (1993a: 312). She also claims that it adds 'virtue and validity' to such research, providing a defence against the charge of the 'interpretive "theft" of other people's subjectivity' (*ibid.*).

There seems to be little, if any, evidence in the literature of explicit reference to the second claim, but the former is common enough. Crudely put, it argues that life histories offer another string to the ethnographer's bow:

'They are a natural extension to ethnography, for they offer historical and subjective depth to an approach which tends to suffer from rootedness to situation and, as practised, large measure of inference about people's construction of meaning. They are best used, I would argue, as an adjunct to ethnography, rather than as an alternative to it, for each lends the other a degree of rigour otherwise lacking.' (Woods, 1985: 13)

Other writers have chosen to emphasise the historical (e.g. Bogdan, 1974) or temporal (e.g. Dex, 1991) dimensions which such research introduces, but their orientation is basically the same. It seems clear that there are advantages in introducing life history to ethnography, and the methodology section below will explore these in more detail, drawing evidence from the current study.

There is, however, a second and stronger line of justification for life history research which depends on attacking ethnographic analysis at a more fundamental level. Huberman, for example, seems to be arguing here not that life history research can add to the explanatory power of ethnography, but that it is a prerequisite of an adequate ethnography:

'When one overlooks people's lives to focus on events ... or on the institutional theatres of those events, one is taking the actors out of the play and assuming that the scenery is animate enough to carry the plot and account for the denouement.' (Huberman, 1988: 120)

It is possible to accept the force, and importance, of Huberman's charge while denying its relevance to most ethnographic work: an adequate analysis of events must include consideration of the participants in them, whose actions reflect in part past experiences, and in this respect the actors are not omitted. The lack of proper focus on this aspect may be seen as a methodological limitation but it is not necessarily a fundamental flaw. All that is left of the 'strong' case is a position, similar to that advanced by Connelly & Clandinin (1990), in favour of narrative, that since life history is an inescapable part of the picture anyway we should at least recognise this and pay due attention to it.

2. *Self-revelatory*

MacLure suggests that life history research fits in comfortably with current views of professional development with its emphasis on 'a reflexive search for self-knowledge and self-improvement' (*loc. cit.*). However, I have chosen to group this under the category 'emancipatory', reserving 'self-revelatory' for claims which make explicit reference to this aspect.

Pinar claims that a focus on 'lived experience' is the very basis for ethnographic understanding, arguing that ethnographers such as Wolcott 'collapse onto the surface of what they study, and in so doing, risk triviality' (1988b: 139) in their pursuit of comprehensiveness and impartiality. Ethnography for Pinar represents a struggle against what is routine and taken-for-granted, a struggle in which attention to self and situation is essential:

'To become more truly qualitative in their focus and method, ethnographies must relinquish their obsession with the obvious and mundane, and become exigetical, must excavate layers of intention and experience which antedate and live below the text which is daily life, of which language and event are deposits.'
(Pinar, 1988b: 139)

Pinar's objection seeks to represent as investigatively flawed what is arguably no more than expositionally impoverished. The blandness of surface representation is a feature of 'investigative' modes of representation, where lines of interpretation are offered on the understanding that the reader has the right to challenge the evidential and conceptual grounds upon which they are based (and these will include assumptions about forms of discourse). Expositionally, this approach is necessarily impoverished when compared with the depth of engagement and exposure which Pinar advocates. But the illumination which lived experience provides tends to be particular rather than general, while attention to self and situation may draw us away from the broader context of our actions: what may be more 'truly' qualitative might be less recognisably

ethnographic. Nevertheless, Pinar's claims, and the perspective from which he argues, represent the case for self revelation in research at its most forceful.

3. *Administrative*

MacLure claims that managers and policy makers are able to exploit an interest in workers' lives in order to 'support the idea of a kind of niche-marketing of reform, tailored to the perceived identities and needs of the clientele' (*loc. cit.*). This represents a potentially important focus for investigation, although not an argument for the value of research into life history as such. Nevertheless, life history research can clearly be used to inform administrative decisions made at all levels, and in so far as it is able to perform this function there is a case to be made for it. Some of the points made in the final chapter of this study illustrate the link which can be established here.

4. *Emancipatory*

Arguments can also be advanced for life history as a form of personal as well as political emancipation. MacLure (*loc. cit.*) claims that teachers can use 'personal testimony and life history as oppositional strategies for combating the punitive abstractions and reductions of dominant discourse', and, by insisting on the validity of the personal voice, refuse to 'play the generalising games of the powerful'. The development of a critical perspective through 'uncovering biography' has also been urged by Britzman, who demonstrates how it can be used to 'interrogate school culture' (1986: 454).

5. *Developmental*

This category is not mentioned by MacLure, but it seems important to include it. Although it may embrace any of the last three categories, the claim here is that life history can have an explicitly developmental function and that it can serve a valuable professional role in this respect (e.g. Woods, 1987; Clarke, 1992).

These, then, are five areas in which claims for the value of life history might be made. Taken separately, they may be open to challenge, but seen as a group they represent a powerful case for life history research. In what follows, the emphasis will fall heavily on the first category, but the opportunities represented by the others nevertheless remain open.

3.3.2 Definition and terminology

Having offered at least a *prima facie* case for life history research, it is time to establish the terminological parameters for what follows. In order to do this it will be necessary to consider definitions of life history which have been proposed in order to demonstrate that terminological differences are not merely a matter of philosophical niceties, that when Nias (1992), for example, criticises Holly and MacLure (1990) for using 'story', 'narrative', biography', 'autobiography' and 'life history' interchangeably she is making a substantive point.

That these terms are sometimes treated as synonymous even where definitions are being offered is evident in the literature (see, for example, Kholi, 1981: 61), but it is equally apparent that many researchers are at pains to draw distinctions between them. The definition offered by Watson & Watson-Franke offers a valuable starting point:

'As we see it the "life history" is any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or in part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person.'

(Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985: 2)

In terms of distinguishing between this and autobiography or biography, it seems clear that the latter are treated as wholes, are written and are not necessarily collaborative. In fact, this distinction is not usually drawn since the

relevant genres are by now well established (but see Connelly & Clandinin, 1987: 136). A much more important distinction, and one which will be adopted here, is that between life history and life story, in which the collaborative element, features strongly:

'The distinction between the life story and the life history is therefore absolutely basic. The life story is the "story we tell about our life"; the life history is a collaborative venture, reviewing a wider range of evidence. The life story teller and another (or others) collaborate in developing this wider account by interviews and discussions and by scrutiny of texts and contexts.'

(Goodson, 1992a: 6)

This process of collaboration seems to be fundamental, as it involves the incorporation of other relevant evidence such as background, life style, life cycle, career stages, critical incidents and relevant features of the contemporary situation (Goodson, 1994: 36). This distinction has been differently but succinctly drawn by Connelly & Clandinin (1990: 2), who distinguish story as phenomenon from narrative as inquiry, and it seems to be reflected in Bertaux's definition of life history as 'sociologically read biography' (1981: 2).

One further terminological distinction which is relevant to what follows is that between 'narrative' and 'story'. Within the context of life history research this is important for the reasons already indicated, but when teachers' stories are considered in Chapter 6 the two terms are used interchangeably, partly because distinctions are less consistently drawn in that research context, and partly as a reflection of the fact that in that context the difference of perspective is incidental rather than fundamental: from the point of view of the teller these are stories, while to the analyst, with an eye to structural features, they are narratives. The difference between this situation and that which obtains in life history research should by now be clear.

3.3.3 Methodology

Unsurprisingly, given the variety of approaches to such research, there is keen argument on a number of methodological points. In what follows I attempt to represent the main issues as fairly as possible while arguing for the position which is adopted in this research. The discussion will follow a conventional structure, beginning with consideration of the sample and moving through data collection and analysis to representation.

Sampling

In terms of the size of sample, researchers will inevitably, and quite properly, argue for the appropriacy of their sample over the alternatives. We find Huberman, for example (1989: 40) arguing that his sample of 160 strikes a golden mean between the 'diminutive' and 'gargantuan' samples used previously. The choice of loaded adjectives is interesting, but of more relevance is the methodological claim that this approach is able to 'benefit from the tools of clinical and ethnographic interviewing while having the possibility of making statistical inferences to a larger referent population' (*ibid.*). This 'added value' position is one which seems to be typical of many life history approaches, including this one.

In fact, despite the occasional claim to the contrary (e.g. Floden & Huberman, 1989), any size of sample is acceptable provided that appropriate justification is provided, and the general preference in life history research seems to be for small rather than large samples. The sample used in this study is therefore not particularly small seen in this context, although its homogeneity calls for comment. These teachers, and the researcher, belong to the same generation, one which arose out of the post-war baby boom and is loosely described as the 'sixties' generation. They might also be described as the 'EFL-boom' generation, and as such might be seen as potentially representative: their stories offer at least

a starting point for a broader survey of teachers who began their EFL careers in the early or mid-seventies. Furthermore, the EFL experiences of the Pen staff over the last 15-17 years offer a rare opportunity to consider parallel professional lives in the same context.

Whatever advantages accrue from this, there are concomitant disadvantages, not least those arising from any presupposition that the generational factor is necessarily significant. The concept of 'generation' is a relative and essentially subjective term (Sikes, 1985: 28) which often serves as no more than a convenient shorthand. It is certainly not a single category: the 'EFL-boom' generation of language teachers does not comprise entirely 'sixties' generation children, and even if it did, differences in upbringing, background and experience would be significant factors. Even so, and while accepting that, strictly interpreted, "age" is a hollow variable, a sort of receptacle for the interplay of multiple, differentially powerful determinants' (Huberman, 1985: 31), it does represent a useful organising device; and since some changes do seem to be clearly age-related (Levinson *et al.*, 1978; Sikes, 1985, 1992), its relevance to the larger picture should not be overlooked:

'Teachers of a similar age and sex share similar experiences, perceptions, attitudes, satisfactions, frustrations and concerns, and the nature of their motivation and commitment alters in a predictable pattern as they get older. There are variations relating to the ethnic group of the teacher, and such differentiating characteristics as type and location of school, subject area, and managerial regimes but even so, aspects of professional life cycle are common to teachers working in different education systems in different countries at different times.'

(Sikes, 1992: 40)

The concept of generation, then, might provide a useful peg, but it still gives rise to methodological difficulties. The most obvious one is that the length of time which this particular group of teachers have spent together may well have resulted in a gradual smoothing away of awkward corners, so that the public representation of their positions in this context may be more harmonious than

their individual reality. If their shared view of their career trajectory is indeed very different from their individual views of this as propounded outside the school, then what appear as common features of this particular generation may be no more than a 'single' and somewhat artificial representation. Data collection techniques are designed to overcome this, but ultimately it is hard to establish how far they have been successful, especially where the researcher is of the same generation and may be sending out signals which encourage the 'party line'. Because it is important in any analysis to avoid over-determination of any single frame (Huberman, 1989a), every effort will be made here to avoid excessive recourse to generational categorisations of life events. Fortunately, the form of presentation of the life history in the next chapter allows a healthy degree of transparency as far as the analysis is concerned.

Data collection

Few researchers comment on the importance of negotiating entry, but Connelly & Clandinin's (1990) emphasis on its importance seems justified in the light of much broader agreement on the centrality of the collaborative relationship between teller and researcher. In this case, the fact that the main interviews were conducted after over a year's fieldwork preceded by careful negotiation of entry suggests that the groundwork was adequate. In fact, the intimacy of the relationship thus established may be a factor of particular methodological significance. Nias has shown how data collection 'simple to the point of naïvety' and 'crude and simplistic' analysis (1989: 392) nevertheless produced valuable results because of the opportunity to get close to teachers through fine grained observation of their life in schools.

At the heart of any life history research is the 'prolonged interview', which usually consists of a series of interviews (Sikes *et al.*, 1985: 13). The length of such interviews can vary from anything between a couple of hours to totals well

into double figures. Woods (1985), for example, mentions between two and fifteen hours, while Huberman (1989) settles for a consistent five hours over two sessions. The formal life interviews in this research lasted about three hours, but supplementary material collected in other interview sessions extended some by a further two or three hours.

The nature of such interviews has been a matter for much discussion (see, for example, Tagg, 1985) and a number of issues emerge, not least the importance of collaboration:

'Narrative inquiry is, however, a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds ... A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories.'
(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990: 4)

The importance of reciprocity as a data gathering technique should not be underrated (Everhart, 1977), but there are potential drawbacks which do not seem to be widely acknowledged. Huberman's anecdote concerning the background of researchers is illuminating in this context. He tells (1993: 25) how the backgrounds of interviewers were reflected in the analyses they produced, so that while someone with a clinical background produced an account rich in psycho-dynamic detail, a sociologist colleague accentuated data which reflected institutional aspects of school life. It is one thing to recognise that the role of the researcher must be accounted for (Measor & Sikes, 1992: 212) but quite another to specify precisely how this is to be done. I have been able to find no specific advice on the matter in the literature. However, it seems especially important in this particular project, since my own age, background and sympathies so closely resemble those of the teachers in my study. I have relied mainly on three techniques, in addition to those recommend elsewhere, in order to minimise the distorting effects of reciprocity in this research:

1. A comprehensive research diary has recorded my own feelings, sympathies, reactions and responses in an attempt to identify at least some of the areas where distortion is likely.
2. I appear as a named participant in all of the transcripts of staffroom interaction. This has allowed me to analyse examples of alignment and incitement which I might otherwise have missed, and it allows readers to examine my own, unpremeditated, pronouncements for themselves.
3. I have chosen a mode of presentation which allows me to make explicit comments about my own experiences and responses where these seem relevant to the unfolding stories of the Pen teachers.

As Woods observes (1985: 16), there is a sense in which life history interviews are not interviews at all but a form of participant observation, and many approaches to life history analysis rely on sources other than the interview itself (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, for a range of data gathering techniques including fieldnotes, journals, letter writing and (auto)biographical writing). Woods (*op. cit.*) argues that triangulation is important in order to overcome two important challenges to authenticity: that the informant may not be telling the truth and that the truth as perceived by the informant does not represent what they truly believed or felt at the time. The first problem can be overcome fairly easily, by ensuring the reliability of the informant, considering the plausibility of the account, checking, etc., but the second is more difficult to overcome. Woods suggests that attention to, amongst other things, other accounts, other evidence and internal inconsistencies can be valuable. In the case of this research, the shared experiences of the participants provide a natural cross-checking

mechanism, not only for the events themselves but also for observed reactions to them.

The fieldnotes and transcripts provided here are also very valuable, as the example of Paul's 'moment of enlightenment' illustrates. In his interview, he mentions the profound effect which a book by Penny Ur had on his development as a teacher. There is no reason to doubt the veracity of the claim, but the strength of particular influences can be hard to determine, and in interviews examples can seem particularly salient: what is in reality merely illustrative can easily assume an exaggerated importance. However, in this case there are many examples in the meeting and breaktime transcripts of Paul referring to Penny Ur in the course of discussion, and this suggests that his assessment of her influence on his development is not exaggerated.

Woods (1985: 16) suggests an approach to interviewing based on 'progressive focusing' over a number of interviews, since this allows the interviewer to identify missing details, points needing correction (inconsistencies, non-sequiturs etc.) and points that are worth following up, so that subsequent interviews can be effectively focused. The fact that the core life interviews in this study have followed previous interviews and have themselves taken place over between two and four sittings has allowed elements of this technique to be incorporated, although no effort has been made to pursue this systematically.

A further option which is open to the researcher is respondent validation, which Measor *et al.* (1992: 219) claim is also an important ethical safeguard. This has been used here, but at a cost. Presentation of the Pen teachers' stories, in a context where all had expressed a desire to read the finished thesis and where so much depends on the continued effectiveness of the team, demanded a sensitivity to the likely effects of particular statements and interpretations, and

this has inevitably influenced their representation. I have attempted as far as possible not to distort the picture, but inevitably in such a situation selection tends towards the middle ground, producing a blander and more consensual picture than might in reality be the case. Although the single narrative approach to presentation perhaps exaggerates this impression, this disadvantage must be set against the fact that the juxtaposition of different statements on the same subject can also highlight differences which might otherwise not be apparent.

The above discussion has not been framed explicitly in terms of validity, since, as Van Maanen has pointed out (1988), stress on reliability and validity has led to the criteria of apparency and verisimilitude being undervalued. From an expositional standpoint the latter seem particularly important, and the perspective of life history, with its emphasis on narrative, demands new emphases:

'Narrative research does not produce conclusions of certainty, the ideal of formal science with its closed systems of mathematics and formal logic. Narrative research, by retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human existence, operates in an area that is not limited by formal systems and their particular types of rigor.'

(Polkinghorne, 1988: 175-176)

Analysis

The decision about the form which data is to take is likely to reflect the researcher's orientation. Huberman's (1989) analysis, for example, is based on categories, for which his 25-page summaries seem perfectly adequate; however, full transcripts are likely to be needed by researchers working in the same tradition as MacLure:

'the analytic framework applied to the interview data derives from work in the analysis of discourse, and resists the construction of categories which abstract talk from its conversational context.'

(MacLure 1993a: 314)

If this is the case, the physical representation of the data is likely to be more substantial. Woods (1985) mentions transcripts of between 100 and 5-600 pages, although he does not indicate whether these are actually transcribed by the researcher. In this research, the data consist of selected extracts, transcribed by the researcher. The procedure began with uninterrupted listening to an individual's story during which brief notes were taken. This was then followed by more careful listening, during which extracts were transcribed and linking notes taken, then a further listening for the purposes of checking and adding extra passages. This produced a much shorter transcript than any of those mentioned by Woods but perhaps a more 'authentic' one. These are stories which are spoken and designed for the listener, and it seems only proper to bear this in mind in the process of analysis. That working from a transcript produced by a third party is not the same as immersing oneself in the spoken reality of an exchange is something recognised and respected by conversation analysts, and it is surprising that in a field where many researchers insist on the importance of the discourse it receives no emphasis in discussions of research methodology. Riessman's experience with her coinvestigator indicates how important it is not to rely simply on transcriptions:

'Early in the divorce study, when my coinvestigator went back to check the accuracy of the transcriptions, she discovered utterances on the tape that did not appear in the typescript. In response to our query, the transcriber said she left out asides, talk that "wasn't in answer to the question." Yet these seeming irrelevancies provided context essential to interpretation and, not infrequently, the asides were narratives, the heart of the matter. The edited transcriptions had to be redone.'

(Riessman, 1993: 57)

In order to distinguish between transcription that depends on immersion in the *oral* record and an analysis which is based primarily if not entirely on attention to the written representation of this, it might be useful to refer to the former as *warm transcription* and the latter as *cold transcription*. I have argued for the advantages of the former, but it might be argued that, whatever advantages this

method offers in terms of authenticity of channel, the process of selection which leads to the selective transcript is hidden and therefore less open to challenge. Such a charge would hold water if the cold transcript data were themselves offered in full, but the presentation of research findings always involves selection. The charge would also have more force if the research itself were less interpretive, but as things stand warm transcription, which depends on careful listening by an ear attuned to the contours and nuances of the speech of those interviewed, is likely to be more reliable than a selection of extracts based on cold transcription, selected from the printed version. In the case of this research it would also have been very wasteful not to have exploited the sensitivity developed through the prior transcription of over 400 pages of staffroom talk using a fairly sophisticated notation system.

Selection implies analysis, and the range of options here in life history research is fairly broad, from systems based on categories and standard statistical measures to those emphasising shared storytelling. This research follows Woods (1985) in beginning with categories, but does not follow him into going on to introduce 'middle range' sociological concepts. The basic categorisation is apparent in the organisation of the joint narrative and the use of sub-headings reflects my own labelling of the relevant categories, but the story itself is offered as a whole and with a minimum of editorial comment, leaving aspects of analysis to appear in a separate column which is physically, typographically and conceptually distinct. This separation allows a certain latitude in terms of analysis, and I have drawn freely on life history analysis, using any source that offers illumination. Central to the analysis, however, are links with other parts of this thesis, where key concepts are explored more fully.

This mode of analysis and representation responds to some of the challenges which face the life history researcher, but others remain and demand

consideration. Woods' two problems mentioned above are merely aspects of the broader problem that the researcher's access to events and responses to them is via the teller's representation of these. Any account, however detailed, is nevertheless a 'distilled view' (1983: 252) of events, and the process of distillation is not accessible to the analyst. A number of problems derive from this, many associated with 'the illusion of causality' (Crites, 1986): a series of events viewed retrospectively will have the appearance of causal necessity, while the teleological pull of the future will also exert its influence. To some extent, the sorts of safeguard indicated by Woods will help us to identify distortions in the pattern of stories, but beyond this our only protection is awareness of the part which causality plays: the 'illusion' is, after all, fundamental to the way in which we structure and represent experience.

More subtle problems arise from the status of such accounts. MacLure, for example, has drawn a distinction between 'sacred' and 'mundane' texts (1993), the latter being the routine and pervasive biographical accounts which permeate our social lives, in contrast to the former which are presented in research as 'contemplative, dispassionate, complete and coherent':

'...the accounts of themselves that people give in interviews are no less worldly, no less rooted in judgement, circumstance, prejudice and desire, than in any other, everyday situations in which they talk about themselves.'
(MacLure, 1993: 374)

Pursuing a line which embraces many of the arguments already considered, she concludes:

'Interviews, therefore, are not time out of life. They are not contemplative spaces where deeds can be dispassionately described without "prejudice". So the research for narratives that truly and transparently reveal what really happened looks pretty much like a red herring.'
(MacLure, 1993: 376-77)

Her response is to argue for the application of 'some form of discourse analysis' in order to shed light on the ways in which selves are theorised in discourse, avoiding the assignment of 'categorical' identities to speakers and retaining the richness inherent in the accounts themselves. This is an attractive position, and one which, I hope, finds sympathy in this research, but there seem to me to be two important considerations which MacLure does not address.

The first, and most obvious, is that this approach brings with it the danger of devaluing the 'merely descriptive' (1993: 383). There is a story here of the Pen School and of the teachers who came together to make it, and to deprive them of this story, with all the jigsaw neatness and polished smoothness which time and the telling have produced, is to deny an important element in their professional being. MacLure is surely right to point to the dangers of assigning 'categorical' identities to teachers, but if 'science teacher' represents an individual's deliberately chosen professional definition we have a methodological and ethical obligation to recognise this, whatever subsequent light we seek to shed on that representation. In this study, the Pen teachers are revealed in different contexts and examined from different perspectives in *my* representation of their world. Their trust and generosity have surely earned them the right, somewhere in this, to their own representation.

Unfortunately, this raises the second consideration which MacLure's analysis fails to address. Put simply, it is this: the research interview is a distinct speech event (Gumperz, 1982; Hymes, 1986; Saville-Troike, 1989) with its own rules of interaction and interpretation, understood public outcomes and more subtle personal goals. What derives from it may be illuminating, but we should be wary when transferring our understandings from this context to others. Teachers of English are articulate beings, usually well able to produce accounts, explanations and rationalisations in circumstances congenial to this, but the

invitation to do so is something which may be peculiar to the research interview. This, like the past (to use L. P. Hartley's powerful formulation), is another country: 'They do things differently there.'

The effect of comparing speech events can be demonstrated through a consideration of Elbaz's (1983) oft cited representation of teacher knowledge, based on extensive interviews with a single teacher, Sarah. Elbaz identifies five dimensions of practical knowledge, the situational, the personal, the social, the experiential and the theoretical, and suggests that teachers' knowledge can be described in terms of an organisation which is essentially hierarchical, operating at three levels: rules of practice (very specific statements about what to do and how to do it in common situations), practical principles (principles of conduct in which the teacher's own purposes are evident and which provide a basis for reflecting on, and profiting from, experience), and image (the least explicit, something which refers to all of an individual's teaching seen from a particular perspective). This representation is an intuitively convincing one and yet I found no evidence of it in my own analysis of staffroom talk, where 'systems' and 'little teaching points' feature much more prominently. This is not a matter of mere translation; it is fundamental to the different tasks confronting the teachers. Faced with the task of representing their thinking to a researcher, they may well conceptualise it along the lines which Elbaz describes, but in the press of everyday professional life what they seize on and actually *use* is something very different. It is therefore instructive to set the two side by side.

This is not to say that features which emerge from interviews are abandoned in ordinary professional conduct, it is rather that we need to recognise the power of context to influence representation. MacLure, for example, provides a convincing example of how Kathy, one of her interviewees, uses 'people' to refer to two groups, one of which she identifies with and one of which is in opposition

to her. In terms of the research interview, such neat oppositional representation is possible, but it may not carry over into practice quite so crisply. In my own data, for example, 'the school' and 'we' are terms which are used almost synonymously, with no distinction drawn between staff and principal. The only example in the data where such a distinction is drawn illustrates the powerful influence which strategic convenience can exert. In a staff meeting where the principal, Jenny, is absent, Ed has been arguing that as social organiser he should be allowed to control his own budget. This is not part of the formal agenda and has taken up a disproportionate amount of time already. The rest of the group have shown considerable sympathy with his position but have made it very clear that what he proposes is unacceptable. When he insists he should have free access to petty cash, Paul responds with, 'Wo:::::: you've no chance in this place' (M—11/11/94: 3134), which prompts laughter from all except Ed. What is interesting is the use of 'this place', a usually derogatory formulation and one which certainly distances Paul from the school as an institution. When Ed persists, Paul distances himself more explicitly:

'Well this is () between whoever wants to be social organiser and the school to sort out. Isn't it.' (M—11/11/94: 3306-3310)

He then formally separates those present from the management of the school, repeating this when Ed persists with his claim on access to the petty cash:

'I think it's important that we (each) make it clear to senior management.
(1.0) I don't think there's anything we can sort of' (M—11/11/94: 3324-3331)

'I think it's something you're going to have to sort out with senior management.' (M—11/11/94: 3482-3)

There are no other examples of such distancing in the data, but as a technique for closing down a topic which is effectively 'going nowhere' it is — eventually — effective. To an outsider unfamiliar with the world of these teachers, perhaps

to someone analysing only this meeting, this might be taken as an indication that there is a division between management and staff, even that relations between 'the school' and staff are not particularly close; but to anyone who has observed these teachers over time and come to know them, it is in fact an example of the gap between Ed and his colleagues which was beginning to open up at this time.

In providing this example I am not suggesting that the sort of analysis proposed by MacLure is not valuable, I am seeking merely to emphasise the danger of claiming too much for the sort of discourse analysis she proposes. The interview situation is not a natural one, and discourse orientations in any single situation might not necessarily be reliable guides to behaviour in other situations. There may be considerable variation in how we do in fact represent ourselves and our relationships, and motivations in life interviews are less discernible than those which emerge from observation over time. The best safeguard we have against distortions within the interviews is evidence of other interaction, which is precisely what this research offers. Identity is a complex and unstable concept, and the more perspectives we can establish on it, the greater the opportunity we have to trace its shifting forms. Whatever precautions we take, however, the challenges to developing adequate accounts remain powerful ones which should circumscribe the claims we make:

'Autobiographical data and narrative are subject to incompleteness, personal bias, and selective recall in the process by which narrative is constructed. The fallibility of memory, selective recall, repression, the shaping of stories according to dispositions, internal idealization, and nostalgia or rumor all present the possibility of biased data.'

(Butt & Raymond, 1989: 413)

Representation

The mode of representation adopted here is in part a response to Bertaux's call (1981a) for new forms of discourse, but it responds more directly to the expositional trend in research which I have already discussed. As we have seen,

there are substantive differences between life stories and life histories, differences which reflect the process of production and representation. In Chapter 4 the life stories of the Pen teachers will be told as far as possible in their own words, appearing in a column on the left of the page, accompanied by comment and analysis in a different font in the right hand column. But the relative status of the two columns should not be misunderstood. What lies behind the process of representation in the left-hand column, apart from the planned and unplanned elicitation and joint construction which produced the original spoken texts, is a process of editing, synthesis and arrangement which represents the different life stories as a single whole — as a 'shared' life history. Compared with this, the overtly *post hoc* 'interpretive' comments in the right-hand column are mere adumbrations.

The reader is free to approach the text in whatever way seems appropriate, but the recommended route is as follows:

1. the left hand column in Chapter 4 should be read first, the reader reacting independently to the teachers' shared story;
2. Chapter 5 will then offer the chance to explore the culture in which these teachers work, drawing on observations over one year of their professional life;
3. Chapters 6 & 7 will provide a fine grained analysis of their interaction and storytelling, laying bare some of the more microscopic elements in their social world;
4. the reader can now return to the teachers' story, this time reading the comments to the right of the text. These point to aspects which will by now have been encountered, thus reorienting the story for the reader, who is now familiar with staffroom life in the Pen, and establishing multiple perspectives on the lived experiences of the teachers;

5. the final chapter of the thesis can then be read in the light of understandings generated through this.

3.3.4 Approaches to life history research

In the following chapter, the contents of the right-hand column reserved for comment and analysis will draw freely on such research findings as are available on the life history of teachers, so it is important to establish what traditions this will involve. What follows is a brief summary of the relevant areas, based on the six 'clusters of life-course' inquiry identified by Butt & Raymond, omitting one of their categories but replacing this with two others. The omitted 'cluster' is that which involves the exploration of the sort of cultural contexts within which individual lives evolve, work which Butt and Raymond suggest is 'similar' to life history studies. However, while it is clearly relevant to the subject of this research, its focus is manifestly not on teacher lives as such and it is therefore not considered here.

1. *Phases of professional development.*

The name particularly associated with this line of research is that of Huberman (e.g. 1988, 1989, 1989a, 1992, 1993) although Levinson's model (1978) has provided the basis for other studies (e.g. Sikes *et al.*, 1985). The aim of such research is to establish what phases, if any, characterise teachers' careers, and Figure 1 summarises its findings. In fact, Huberman is at pains to point out that not all phases are susceptible to equally clear delineation. While the first phase is fairly predictable and the stabilisation phase almost universal, 'individual trajectories later in the career cycle are very diverse' (1989a: 351), which makes the later phases somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, Huberman's findings have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the professional life cycle of teachers and thrown light on aspects such as career satisfaction and response to change, while more specific areas have provided a useful focus for

other research (see, for example, Measor, 1985, on critical incidents, and Prick, 1989 for a study of satisfaction and stress among Dutch teachers focusing particularly on the 'mid-life' period). Although this particular project is not concerned with teachers' life cycles as such, some of the comments of the Pen teachers' life history will draw on its findings.



Figure 1. The human life cycle: a thematic model
(M. Huberman. 1993: 13.)

2. *Studies emphasising conditions under which teachers work.*

Butt and Raymond sum up the focus of this fairly diverse group very effectively:

'The particular focus of this work is to draw, from qualitative life histories of individual teachers in particular groups, commonalities related to their lives and careers. ... Though the work includes individual case study data, these are primarily examples of collective conditions; the prime interest is in collective phenomena and improvement.'

(Butt & Raymond, 1989: 404)

The leading figure in the field is Goodson (e.g. 1980, 1991, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1994; Ball & Goodson, 1985), who is emphatic about the importance of this work:

'In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical that we know about the person the teacher is.' (Goodson, 1980: 69)

The emphasis of the research, as formulated in one of its earliest representations (Goodson, 1980) is on redressing the perceived imbalance which arises from an excessive focus on situation and occasion by establishing a link between individuals and their strategies. As a result, it is concerned to sponsor the teacher's voice (e.g. McDonald, 1988) and appropriate development (e.g. Goodson 1991, 1991b), and is closely linked to other research referred to in this summary, (e.g. Sikes, 1985; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985; Woods, 1985). Particularly interesting in the context of the way this particular research is developed and presented is the claim that there are three levels susceptible to historical study:

1. Individual life stories.
2. History at the group or collective level (e.g. professions, categories, subjects and disciplines).
3. 'History at the relational level, the various permutations of relations between individuals and groups; and the way these relations change over time.' (Goodson, 1991a: 117)

3. *Reconceptualist research*

Research here is concerned with the 'architecture of the self' (Pinar, 1986) and is particularly associated with the work of Pinar (e.g. 1980, 1981, 1988a, 1988b), although other perspectives are also relevant (e.g. Grumet, 1980; Hankiss, 1981; Johnson, 1983; Polkinghorne, 1988). Although the work is directed as much at students as teachers, the emphasis on the relationship of private and public self

is important, as is its concern with its philosophical and psychoanalytic roots. Although little of this appears formally in the analysis of the life history in the Pen project, it is relevant as an illuminative and sensitising presence during the periods of data collection, as these entries from my research diary indicate:

'Pen today and a really good interview with Annette. We seemed to be getting behind things, opening up territory which will throw light on all sorts of things...'
(D—22/2/95)

'The other interesting incident was confirmation that last week's (sic) interview with Annette had gone as well as I had assumed. Before we began this week she asked me for reassurance about my use of data because she'd realised after last week's session that she's said far more than she'd ever planned, expected or wanted to, and that she felt that it had been a session with her analyst.'
(D—8/3/95)

4. 'Lived experience'

Butt and Raymond, who quote the *Journal of Phenomenology and Pedagogy* as a source of work in this area, point out that although the conceptual roots of this are different from those of reconceptualist approaches their focus is very similar. I have not drawn explicitly on work in this area for the purposes of the Pen project.

5. *The nature and development of teacher knowledge*

Butt & Raymond locate their own work in this area, citing Clandinin & Connelly (1986) as researchers working in the same field. I have, however, located them in other categories and include instead Woods (1987), Woods & Sikes (1987), and Elswood (1993). The authors describe their approach elsewhere (Butt *et al.*, 1992) as 'autobiographic praxeology', a description which does not seem to have entered the mainstream. Their work is obviously generally relevant to the Pen research, if only because it seems to represent a synthesis of the first two categories identified above:

'Teacher thinking, actions and knowledge are of vital importance in the endeavour to understand how classrooms are the way they are. How teachers' thoughts, actions and knowledge have evolved and changed throughout their personal and professional lives will help us to understand how classrooms have come to be the way they are and how they might become otherwise. In considering how to approach these issues it was essential to ask what methodology could carry, in the most authentic way, the *teacher's voice*.' (Butt et al., 1992: 57)

In fact, the Pen interviews revealed little in the way of such development, and that which did emerge was represented most strongly from the current standpoint of the teller, raising serious problems of the sort of causal and teleological bias indicated earlier. Where teacher knowledge is referred to in this study the sources used are not explicitly concerned with life history (e.g. Calderhead, 1987, 1988; Elbaz, 1983; Leinhart, 1988; Louden, 1991; Shulman, 1986, 1987). To a certain extent this reflects recent developments in TESOL, where an interest in teacher knowledge is growing (e.g. Freeman, 1991, 1992; Freeman & Richards, 1993; Richards, 1995), but not in the context of life history.

6. *Life histories as narratives*

Although neither this category nor the next appear in Butt & Raymond's summary, they seem worthy of separate categorisation. In the case of this category, although the applications of the research are shared with those of other categories, its explicit focus is on descriptive and transformative power of narrative, which it regards as central to the educational enterprise:

'The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion transfers into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories.' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990: 2)

Connelly & Clandinin (1986, 1987, 1988, 1990) are particularly associated with this research, a development of their work on teacher knowledge (e.g.

Clandinin, 1985). Work here, like that in the previous category, seems to have touched TESOL, as evidenced by the selection of 'stories' as the theme for its 28th Annual Convention in 1995 (see also Clarke, 1992). The theme of the 'exposition' of this research is 'narrative', which will appear in a number of guises.

7. Life history in teacher development and reflection

While this does not appear in Butt & Raymond's analysis, it seems important to include it since so much work falls explicitly into this category, which embraces a number of approaches. The power of biography in socialisation, first raised by Lortie (1975), has been further explored by Zeichner & Grant (1981), drawing on the work of Lacey (1977), while the emancipatory potential of biography has been explored by researchers such as Britzman (1986) and its role in stimulating reflection on practice has been highlighted by others (e.g. Clarke, 1992; Knowles, 1993; Powell, 1985). The Pen research described here provides a basis for such work, which will form the next stage of the project (see Chapter 8).

3.4 Discourse Analysis

The third research perspective adopted in this project, along with ethnography and life history research, is that of discourse analysis. The term *discourse analysis* is used here because its approach is much broader than that of conversation analysis. McCarthy sums up the scope of discourse analysis very effectively:

'Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. It grew out of work in different disciplines in the 1960s and early 1970s, including linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Discourse analysts study language in use: written texts of all kinds, and spoken data, from conversation to highly institutionalised forms of talk.'
(McCarthy, 1991: 5)

Although techniques and terms of conversation analysis, derived from its ethnomethodological roots, are used here, the analysis draws freely on other forms of discourse analysis (Schiffrin, 1994, offers a useful treatment of most of them), as is becoming increasingly common in the field. The analysis of stories, for example, features in McCarthy's (1991) overview of discourse analysis, and the same model as the one used here (that of Labov) appears in his and Carter's later treatment of the subject (1994).

The relation between discourse analysis and fieldwork is also generally acknowledged to be a close one:

'The information as recorded by the fieldworker is then primarily talk based not only because this is what occupies the vast majority of the ethnographer's time but also because, as noted above, understanding the concrete activities taking place in the field is grounded largely upon what members have to say about what such activities mean to them.'

(Van Maanen, 1983: 43)

In the chapter which corresponds most closely to the 'ethnographic' (Chapter 5), discourse analysis plays its part, while ethnographic insights contextualise the discourse analysis which follows. One way in which these two perspectives can illuminate one another is demonstrated by the example of the 'student complaint' which is analysed at the end of Chapter 5, where only the close analysis of a transcript on the basis of what is known about pre-sequences is able to reveal the subtle ways in which a problem is despatched before being formally raised. Similarly, no amount of textual analysis will account for Ed's anomalous defence of a student (T—1/3/95: 0792), which can only be explained by reference to the personal relationship to the student which he has attempted to conceal.

Methodologically, discourse analysis presents a far simpler picture than the two research strategies considered so far and the issues can be quickly dealt with. They fall into three distinct areas: recording, transcription and analysis:

3.4.1 Recording

Having obtained permission to tape staffroom talk subject to the conditions already discussed, I screwed a pressure zone omni-directional microphone to the staffroom wall in a position where it would be best placed to pick up conversations taking place around the room. This was then attached to a Coomber 2020-1 recorder and recordings were made on standard 90-minute Fuji DR-Ix tapes (for issues in recording see Wallbott, 1982, 1983). Before taping, and while the staffroom was still empty, I checked that the tape was working, with the result that a full record was obtained, except for brief segments while the tape was turned over and in one case a longer section of about a minute when a tape snarled.

For ethical reasons, before starting the recording I demonstrated the power of the tape by asking Helen to go into the photocopying room attached to the staffroom and whisper something quietly. I taped this using the microphone positioned behind those present, then played it back on full volume and the staff were able to hear what had been inaudible when originally spoken. They were left in no doubt as to the power of the microphone.

Powerful though it is, an omnidirectional microphone is indiscriminating, and passing traffic or the gurgling of a sink will compete on equal terms with quiet conversation. Because the microphone was positioned near the sink where coffee was made, the sound of a boiling kettle, running water and clanking cups was occasionally distracting, but it never seriously interfered with the audibility of the conversations I was trying to tape. Parallel conversations, however, were

a different matter and sometimes segments of speech were missed. Fortunately, parallel conversations were less common than might be expected and as a result there are relatively few gaps in the transcripts.

The consequences of Labov's 'observer's paradox' are inescapable when taping is overt, but at least the presence of a recorder and microphone at all times lessened the effects of this. There is no doubt that occasionally speakers were aware of the microphone, but usually when it was too late — thus affecting the exchanges immediately following the recognition but not the 'significant' exchanges before it. Overall, I could see no evidence, on the basis of comparison with the previous year's observation, that interactional behaviour in the presence of the tape recorder was anything other than 'normal', although my 'presence' (actual or in the form of a tape recorder) may have encouraged the avoidance of certain topics. However, since this is an inevitable consequence of any overt fieldwork, it does not represent a serious limitation.

'First of all, I wasn't able to remind everyone that I was taping the exchange during first break, although I was there virtually throughout, and about three-quarters of the way through Paul noticed that the tape was running. He said that this was the first time he hadn't been aware of it and the nature of the interaction did change, but the fact that he and all present except perhaps Harry were genuinely and completely unaware means that I have something with which to compare other examples of staffroom talk.'

D—8/3/95

'Jenny, who's fresh from her trip, wasn't aware of the tape at all and apparently let something slip (I haven't listened to the tape yet). I reassured her immediately but it did seem to be pretty convincing evidence — if any is still needed — that there is some form of self-censorship which cuts out certain topic when the recorder or I am present. This doesn't affect the nature of the interaction, which is what really interests me, but it does mean that there is a sense in which I'm not getting a full range of topics.'

(D—22/3/95)

3.4.2 Transcription

This deserves particular attention in the literature because so much ultimately depends on it. As Ochs observes, in her seminal paper on the subject: 'What is on the transcript will influence and constrain what generalizations emerge' (1979: 45). The form of the transcription here (full details precede the transcriptions in Appendix 1) is standard, with the exception of the use of italics to indicate words uttered while laughing. Jefferson has developed and used much more detailed transcription systems for laughter (e.g. Jefferson, 1984), but these are unnecessary for the degree of delicacy required here. Transcriptions should contain no more detail than is necessary for the purposes of analysis (Ochs, 1979: 44), but it is not always easy to decide in advance what this might be. I have included markers for speech which is quicker and/or quieter than surrounding talk, but in retrospect cannot think of an example where a point of analysis has depended on this. Timing of pauses in periods of one-tenth of a second is standard in conversation analysis but I have never found this necessary, usually opting for quarters of a second. Here I have used a cruder system, marking pauses of less than half a second as micro-pauses ['(.)'] and timing anything longer in half seconds. Overlaps, vowel lengthening, latching, emphasis and loudness are all standard, as are single brackets for uncertain transcription (empty brackets for untranscribable speech) and double brackets for non-verbal elements. The result is nowhere near as 'cluttered' as standard conversation analysis, but a degree of familiarity is perhaps required for easy reading. However, a few readings of the extract provided earlier in this chapter would provide a sound preparation for what follows.

Layout can influence interpretation (Ochs, 1979: 47 ff.), and the presentation here is standard. I should like to have used a different form of presentation to indicate interpolated comments and response tokens in order to provide a better sense of who holds the floor, but technically this would have presented too

many problems. As it is, the use of latching signs to connect continuous speech over alternating lines in cases of extended overlap is complicated enough:

*Speaker 1:	So as I'm speaking you decide to interrupt	me with=
		[
Speaker 2:		And why=
Speaker 1:	=not a thought of the consequences when it comes to=	
Speaker 2:	=shouldn't I?	
Speaker 1:	=matters of transcription.	

(*Invented data)

Issues of 'folk transcription' and non-verbal elements are more obviously problematic. Stubbs (1983: 229) has made a powerful and I believe convincing case against what he calls 'folk phonetics', and although this is still standard in conversation analysis, I avoid it here. Words are transcribed using standard orthography except where departure from normal pronunciation is deliberate or particularly marked. The phonetic alphabet is used only when necessary and in the context of a discussion on this subject.

The provision of non-verbal information would be highly selective, if not idiosyncratic in the absence of a videotape, and the introduction of a video recorder into the staffroom would have been too intrusive. There are examples of the fruitful and consistent use of non-verbal information in discourse analysis (e.g. Goodwin, 1981), but they are rare and limited, and the search for a 'complete' analysis is of no practical relevance here. Birdwhistell's (1970) celebration of reducing the transcription time for *one second* of recording to ten hours puts the enterprise in its proper perspective, and while cruder analyses might have a valuable part to play in the analysis of classroom data (Erickson, 1992, for example, makes a convincing case for ethnographic microanalysis), it is hard to see what relevance they might have here. Any necessary non-verbal information is included in double brackets, while explanatory detail appears in square brackets.

It is generally agreed that the process of transcription is never complete: today's 'final' version will sound different tomorrow. However, a line must be drawn somewhere, especially when a large amount of transcription needs to be done in a limited time. In this case, a transcribing machine was used for the initial transcription, allowing difficult passages to be repeated as many times as necessary, sometimes at a slower speed. This first version was then set aside for at least a week before being compared to the tape, played this time on the machine which had been used for the recording. Where differences were minor and decisions straightforward, transcription stopped here, although the transcript was read through again to check for minor errors. However, more problematic versions were checked against the tape a third (and in one case a fourth) time.

3.4.3 Analysis

The nature of analysis will depend on what purpose it is intended to serve, although in all cases immersion in the transcript is essential; only then will patterns and sequences emerge. I have used counting and tables where this helped to focus the analysis or reveal broader patterns, and some of the results of this are presented in the relevant chapters, although most examples (e.g. a detailed count of all instances of supportive response tokens in two different staff meetings) were discarded when they had served their purposes. Two important considerations have been that 'nothing that occurs in interaction can be ruled out, *a priori*, as random, insignificant, or irrelevant' (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984: 4) and that 'it is sequences and turns within sequences, rather than isolated sentences or utterances, that have become the primary units of analysis' (*ibid.*, page 5), but the basis for all analysis is summed up by Sacks:

'A first rule of procedure in doing analysis, a rule that you absolutely must use or you can't do the work, is this: In setting up what it is that

seems to have happened, preparatory to solving the problem, do not let your notion of what could conceivably happen decide for you what must have happened.' (Sacks, 1985: 15)

As far as the effectiveness of the analysis goes, a full transcript is available in the Appendix, against which all my conclusions can be checked.

3.5 Conclusion

Three different research perspectives (or 'strategies') have been considered and the results of their application will now be presented. The presentation might be crudely represented as one of progressive focusing (Figure 2). The order of presentation in this thesis does not quite follow the scheme represented here because 'humour' and 'stories' are transposed, but since the former constitutes a context in which the latter can be understood this seems to be a reasonable representational decision.

Broad		Presentation	Coverage	Time
↓	Life history	Description (Teachers)	Life events	Lifetime
↓	Staffroom life	Description/ Macro-analysis	Daily events	One year
↓	Stories	Micro-analysis/ Interpretation	Stories/ exchanges	Minutes
↓	Humour	Micro-analysis/ Interpretation	Conversational exchange	Moments
Narrow				

Figure 2: Progressive focusing

In fact, the relationship can be seen as cyclical rather than linear: lives represent a background against which the school year can be understood, and this provides a context for an examination of the humour and storytelling; in turn, these help explain the nature of staffroom life, and that, to some extent influences the perception of 'lives'. Structurally, each segment stands alone;

ontologically, they are interdependent. The order of reading is perhaps unimportant — exhibitions can be ‘read’ backwards.

This structure is developed upon the theoretical basis which has now been established: the previous chapter attempted to establish the geographical coordinates of the Pen research and this one has surveyed the methodological landscape. But these are no more than settings, as yet unpeopled. The subject of this, and of all qualitative research, is to be found in what follows, as we move on to explore the lived world of the staffroom. The significance of this move finds an artistic reflection in Auden’s preference:

To me art’s subject is the human clay,
And landscape but a background to a torso;
All Cézanne’s apples I would give away
For one small Goya or a Daumier.’

(W. H. Auden, ‘Letter to Lord Byron’)

Chapter 4

Parallel Lives

4.1 Introduction

As far as possible, the text of this chapter is provided by the words of the Pen teachers themselves, with my commentary appearing separately on the right of the page. However, their roads to the Pen school are various and meandering, so in order to avoid unnecessary complexity I offer the following summary of their lives up to the point where they are finally together in the Pen (the school where they first met is referred to as 'the school over the water', the title they always use):

Year	Jenny	Paul	Harry	Annette	Louise
1966	Graduates in her native country: French, German, Latin				
1967	First year of teaching				Graduates in English Literature
1968	Returns to home city to teach in a 'trouble spot'.				Takes job in a 'traditional girls' grammar school'
1969	Moves to a 'go-ahead' school.				↓
1970	↓				Takes a career break to have children.
1971	↓				↓
1972	↓			Graduates in German & Spanish.	↓
1973	Sets off on journey to Greece.		Graduates in English Literature.	Takes job as bilingual secretary.	↓

Year	Jenny	Paul	Harry	Annette	Louise
1974	Arrives in England and takes job in a 'dreadful' school.	Graduates in History & Politics.	MA in African Studies.	Joins British Tourist Authority. Job takes her to New York	↓
1975	Decides to leave teaching. Intro to TEFL course.	Office job, then childcare officer in community school.	Odd jobs and 'bumming around'. Takes job teaching English in Sudan.	↓	↓
1976	Starts work at the 'school over the water'.	PGCE course for FE teachers.	↓	↓	↓
1977	↓	Dole, cabaret.	Returns to England. Factory work. IH Intro to TEFL course	Returns to Britain and moves into conference organisation.	↓
1978	↓	Starts work at the 'school over the water'.	Starts work at the 'school over the water'	↓	↓
1979	↓	↓	↓	Takes a secretarial job in Manchester.	Supply teaching.
1980	↓	↓	↓	PGCE course. Starts work at the 'school over the water'.	↓
1981	↓	↓	↓	Returns to secretarial work	↓
1982	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1983	↓	↓	↓	Returns to work at the 'school over the water'.	↓
1984	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1985	↓	↓	↓	↓	Starts work at the 'school over the water'.
1986	Full-time contract at the 'school over the water' terminated'. Helps found Pen school.	Full-time contract at the 'school over the water' terminated'. Helps found Pen school.	Full-time contract at the 'school over the water' terminated'. Helps found Pen school.	Resigns her part-time post at the 'school over the water'. Unemployed.	Resigns her part-time post at the 'school over the water'. Unemployed.
1987				Joins the Pen.	Joins the Pen.

4.2 Drift*

'I suppose we all sort of drifted into EFL' (Harry)

'It wasn't a positive choice, but it was a fairly passive kind of, "Okay, if you think that's good for me," and the scholarship for teacher training was very generous and I wasn't thinking much beyond the perspective of the end of training.' (Jenny, on her decision to choose teaching as a career, in response to the urgings of her teachers.)

'I basically wanted to get a job, a sort of career ... I was sort of inventing my life as I went along.' (Paul)

'Maybe I was thinking in terms of the limited opportunities that a working class kid from Liverpool is supposed to have when he goes to university: become a teacher or join the civil service.' (Paul, on taking a job in the civil service.)

'I think I had something sort of vaguely educational in mind. But I think I'd gone off the idea of being a normal teacher by then.' (Harry, on applying for a teaching job in the Sudan.)

'I'd done the degree really not having anything particular in mind, of what to do afterwards. I didn't know what I wanted to do, so in fact I still didn't know in the end.' (Annette)

'I suppose my career's very much been dependent on what my husband's done. He's the major earner in the family.' (Louise)

4.3 'The road not taken'

All of the Pen teachers except Paul spent time in 'mainstream' education, both in England and overseas. Their stories portray a sad contrast between the two environments.

In 1967, Louise went straight from university into the staffroom of a 'traditional girl's grammar school'. She found little there to inspire her:

'I found that many of the older people on the staff, who I regarded then as being tremendously old — but probably younger than I am now — a lot of

This 'drift' into EFL may have been a feature of this particular generation, as Jenny seems to recognise (4.4 [part 4.4 below]). The teachers see the coming generation as very different (4.10).

This seems to bear out Huberman's claim that '[c]areer development is ... a process, not a series of events.' (1989: 32)

Harry's contrast between 'normal' and 'EFL' teaching is common to all the Pen staff and some of the differences are highlighted below. Chapter 7 explores an important pedagogic aspect of this as revealed in staffroom interaction.

'many young teachers do not see themselves as committed to a life-long career in teaching' (Sikes, 1985: 30)

***Note**
In the transcript of interviews, the few changes and clarifications suggested by the teachers appear in square brackets.

them were very set in their ways. Though for the first year I kept my head fairly well down and continued teaching much the same way as they had done, I wasn't very satisfied with that and tried to develop it a bit more, based on my own experience of being a student and how some teachers could absolutely kill literature and kill language. And I didn't do anything particularly adventurous but I did try to develop a teaching style, to make it more appropriate for the people there and I suppose generally make it more satisfying to me as well, to feel that I was doing something more worthwhile, within the constraints of an O-level syllabus, for example.' (Louise)

This is a common metaphor, but it is nevertheless interesting to consider it in the light of the fundamental 'active/passive' division identified in Chapter 5.

Jenny also began teaching in 1967, after a year on a postgraduate teacher training course, one of the conditions of which was that she 'went country' for a year. She found herself with a group of young teachers in a delightful seaside town, where 'it was more like a holiday'. After a year she returned to her home city in order to marry. Her first year there was spent in a school which was a known trouble spot, but where she found the teachers very supportive. This was followed by a move to a selective boys' grammar school in the centre of the city, where she was to spend three professionally rewarding years:

Jenny's career, like Louise's, conforms to the 'classic' path, as opposed to a 'gradual' (Harry) or an 'outside' (Annette, Paul) path (Huberman 1988:123). Because of the 'drift' into EFL, the career trajectories here are far from typical. The following (very crude) summary, based on Huberman, is perhaps legitimate ('SoW' = 'School over the water'):

'It had a fantastic group of people working there who were quite left-wing, quite interesting, quite revolutionary, at a time when Australian education was very much in change ... We were on a high of we were going to change the world, not just Australia ... I was very radical then because Australia seemed to be a very middle class, complacent society. I just wanted out. We did change it and that's the point — as we changed it — that I left to travel, because I always wanted to travel.' (Jenny)

Launching career (SoW)
Stabilising (SoW)
New challenges (Pen)

The head of department became a lifelong friend:

'very intelligent, very humanitarian, very much building a team, respecting his team, respecting everybody in his team, realising the value of what every member of his team could contribute and drawing it out of them, always making team

Early choices are part of 'intrinsic' critical phases (Measor, 1985), which feature on career paths. Although no attempt will be made in what follows to identify other phases, critical incidents will be highlighted.

The influence of experienced colleagues on beginning teachers is well attested (e.g. Grant & Zeichner, 1981).

decisions and building up a high quality professional group. And I think if I ever think of myself as a leader I always try to be like him ... because what he built was very powerful and very academically strong.' (Jenny)

Despite her happiness in this school, the lure of travel drew her and her husband to England via Bali, Thailand, India and a year in Greece. The year she spent teaching in a 'dreadful' comprehensive school following her arrival in England destroyed not only her illusions about the country but her faith in teaching:

'I used to wake up every morning feeling sick that I had to go in that day. [One Latin group were a] glimmer of light ... The rest were animals ... we were no good for each other ... so I thought, "This is silly. They have no interest in me, I have no interest in their life really — it's too narrow." ... I found it very dispiriting. These people [teachers] were just survivors. Most of them had lost any spark. ... I hated every minute of it. [At the end of a year] I didn't want to teach any more.' (Jenny)

Her immediate reaction was to try 'silly little courses' in the hope that they might point her towards new opportunities, but one of them was introduction to TEFL course which rekindled her interest in teaching and led her into EFL.

The contrast which Jenny found between the English and Australian state systems is reflected in the very different experiences of Harry and Annette. Harry, too, began his teaching overseas, in Sudan. He was surprised to get the job, teaching English to 'Higher Certificate' level, having applied more in hope than expectation, and remembers his response to the news that he had been called for an interview:

'I then had to get an atlas and go and look up where the Sudan was.' (Harry)

The school was in a village 40 km north of Khartoum, where the great Khartoum to Cairo highway came to a dusty end. Conditions were less than ideal: classrooms held sixty or more students in rows of desks bolted to the floor, and the gaping holes in the roofs allowed birds to fly

Differences between EFL and 'mainstream' teaching have already been mentioned, and none seems more important than that of discipline. The implications of this important difference on the way teachers discuss students will be explored in Chapters 5 & 7, and it may also account for aspects of Pen staffroom humour discussed in Chapter 6. It is interesting to note that Jenny's experience is that of a teacher with six years of teaching behind her. Peterson's characterisation of such experiences as 'reality shock' (1964, quoted in Sikes 1985: 31), seems singularly inappropriate.

In order to develop here some of the differences between EFL and the mainstream, the Pen teachers' experiences will be considered in the light of the 3 recurring cultural myths identified in Britzman's study of student teacher socialisation (1986). The first is that everything depends on the teacher, which arises from the 'power struggle' in the classroom. Since this is what Pen teachers have specifically rejected, it is not surprising to find that there is no staffroom evidence that they 'tend to judge themselves, and others tend to judge them, on the basis of their success with this individual struggle' (1986: 449).

in and out freely. In the end he 'quite got used to it', with support from a dedicated head of department and access to an old roneo machine. At first, though, it was very much a case of feeling his way:

'I suppose I was a bit nervous but I think I always felt that it wasn't quite the same as going into an English classroom and teaching English, or anything, because you always hold the trump card. Maybe this still holds true today. You walk into a classroom and it's your language, it's not their language ... So you're actually not laying yourself on the line to the same extent. ... Looking back on it now, I think I had no idea what I was doing. ... It was a major revelation to me when I discovered that they didn't have much idea about what I now know are called phrasal verbs or multi-word verbs. I actually thought they were prepositions at the time. I seem to remember, "This is a preposition problem." And I started typing out lists from my head of what I thought were common. If I look back at them now I'd probably realise that it was actually quite a mish-mash and they weren't all the same thing at all ... But in a sense that didn't matter.' ... That's one of the satisfactions is working out problems and a way of teaching.' (Harry)

When Annette decided to give up secretarial work and become a teacher, she registered for PGCE course. Unable to decide whether this should be in English or a foreign language, she enrolled on a course which offered training in English as a foreign language and German. In fact, she found little difference between them:

'Teaching a foreign language is very similar, whatever the language, I think. Each language has got its own different problems et cetera, but the actual method of teaching is the same.' (Annette)

The difference for her lay in the extent to which discipline was an issue. Her experiences in the state system were not happy ones:

'I think I was a bit of a soft teacher for a secondary school. I just felt frustrated and wasn't able to teach, because I was concentrating on the discipline side. ... I was too kind. Everyone said — afterwards

This provides a good example of what Huberman has described as the leitmotif of career entry: 'survival and discovery'. This is characterised by 'continuous trial and error, preoccupation with oneself and one's adequacy...' (1989: 349).

Harry's 'working out a way of teaching' compares with Louise's search for a style (4.3). It is interesting to note, too, that 'working things out' remains a key characteristic of Harry's style (4.6). There is no evidence in the Pen teachers' stories of Britzman's second cultural myth, that teachers are 'born' into the profession and that social factors and institutional context are relatively unimportant (1986: 451). Everything here points in the opposite direction.

people said this to me — “If you’re a new teacher, the one thing you’re not is kind to the students. [Otherwise] they take advantage of you. You’ve got to present a really stern face, and not try and be friendly for at least the first term.” Whereas I went totally the opposite way. I was trying to be friendly and get a rapport with them in the hope that then they would be willing to learn. But I don’t think that worked.’ (Annette)

According to Sikes (1985: 31), this sort of advice is typical in mainstream education. It also reflects a new teacher’s ‘concerns with discipline and management which eat away at instructional time’ (Huberman, 1989:349)

In EFL, however, where there were no discipline problems, she found that she thoroughly enjoyed teaching:

‘You got a feeling that you were actually doing something constructive, that you were teaching them something that would be useful for them, and have the reward of seeing the progress that they made. ... I love teaching, I love being in the classroom, and I think yes, I think that does give me the biggest buzz still. I don’t like what I would term the academic side of things. I’m not an academic, I’m very much a practical person. ... I still get as much of buzz from teaching as I used to and I still enjoy it as much.’ (Annette)

The focus on students (for further discussion see Chapters 5 & 7) and denial of academic expertise are not consistent with acceptance of Britzman’s second cultural myth of the teacher as expert, and its associated belief that teachers must be certain in their knowledge (1986: 450). A willingness to declare linguistic ignorance, the frequency of staffroom discussions on linguistic issues and the ways in which disagreements are negotiated (see Chapter 5) point to a culture where expertise and exploration are intimately associated.

Louise’s decision to move into EFL also arose from a dissatisfaction with supply work and with the options available in secondary education:

‘It’s very hit and miss and it’s not really teaching, in a sense. You go in and you take care of a class, and it could be any subject. ... While I was doing this supply teaching I thought, “This isn’t very satisfactory. There aren’t many career openings, it seems, in secondary school education.” So I started going to evening classes to prepare for the RSA certificate for Teaching English as a Foreign Language.’

This was to lead in 1985, via more supply teaching and covering for maternity leave, to her joining her Pen colleagues in ‘the school over the water’.

4.4 ‘The school over the water’

All the Pen colleagues began their EFL work in the school over the water. It was a small, easy-going school run by a ‘cerebral’ (Harry) philhellene co-director with a love of

strong drink and narcoleptic tendencies. His desk filing system was perhaps unique: he had a habit opening the drawer to retrieve butter from the 'B' file, carving a generous pat for immediate and unaccompanied consumption. Cheese under 'C' and paté under 'P' (etc.) were similarly treated. Despite the events which were to unfold, he seems to be remembered with mild affection by the Pen staff.

As far as Jenny was concerned, the DoS was a different matter: he confirmed all her prejudices about 'northern men' and their attitude to women. But since he had little involvement in teaching, it was easy to reach an acceptable 'stand off'. Besides, her arrival in February 1976 at the age of 31 brought back all her love of teaching:

'I couldn't believe it, it was paradise: small groups of 12 students, highly motivated, polite, interested in the world because they were foreign therefore they wanted to travel. They seemed to have the same kind of interest I had in the world.' (Jenny)

Paul joined the school two years later, in 1978, as a summer replacement for Jenny, who was in Greece teaching on a summer school with the co-director. When she returned he was told that his services would no longer be required, which surprised him because feedback up to that point had been very good. Jenny, who knew that there was work available and had received excellent reports about Paul, went to see the co-director to ask for an explanation. It transpired that the co-director had made a mistake, and instead of being dismissed Paul was offered a probationary term on full-time status.

Like Jenny, he was not impressed by the DoS, whose response to any of his questions about teaching or materials was, 'Fine.' Harry, who joined the school shortly afterwards and did his first day's teaching with a hangover after the previous night's 'crash course' in the pub with the co-director and DoS, also felt that the latter was of little help. The DoS regarded himself as a 'man's man', and after Harry eventually joined Paul and Jenny on a permanent contract he was privately told that he was the clear choice of those available anyway, because he was male.

Not surprisingly, neither Annette nor Louise received

The pedagogic significance of this congruence of interests between teacher and students is one of the key findings of Butt & Raymond's comparative study of two teachers' lives (1989: 412). However, as Sikes (1985: 41) reminds us, the 'extent to which teachers want to share their interests and identify with pupils obviously differs', and cross-cultural aspects of TESOL further complicate the issues. It would therefore perhaps be unwise to read too much into Jenny's experience here. However, in the light of experiences already discussed, her reference to 'highly motivated, polite' students is clearly significant.

much help from the DoS, although his relations with Annette were friendly enough:

'When I was a new teacher I think I asked the director of studies for ideas or suitable materials, he'd just give you a book and say, "That one's the one to use." He tried to be very helpful — in his own way he was being very helpful ... I think the role of course director has changed a lot in the past eight years and I think course directors now are much more involved in what the teachers are doing and therefore I felt it was fine. I didn't ask why hasn't he helped me, I thought that was fine. ... I think he was a good teacher.' (Annette)

Annette had joined the school in 1983, and Louise was to join her at the beginning of 1985. She formed a strong impression of the teachers who were to become her Pen colleagues:

'It was such a nice atmosphere working with them. I got on with them immediately. I was much more inexperienced then, far, far more inexperienced, and I very much followed coursebooks — I think we were using *Streamline* and other things — and, you know, you just followed the format. And it was a slightly different timetable then because the lessons were that much shorter — there were only thirty-five, forty minute slots and you had things labelled "conversation". It was quite a different scene, but they were people I got on with immediately. ... They were the sort of people you could talk to and, yes, they were free about talking about what they were doing, and so you could pick up from comments because they'd always been people who'd discussed their work. So you could pick up on what they were saying and listen in, and I used to keep quiet, and listen, and sort of follow and think, 'Ooh yes, that sounds good.' ... I was always made to feel included. It was never, "Oh there's somebody new. We're a group; there's somebody trying to join us." They were very welcoming, without being over-effusive. ... There were other people there. There was a chap who was the course director, and he, to a certain extent, guided me on what to do, but then I would ask the others because I found he tended to use the same things. And I wanted maybe to do

Although anathema to the Pen teachers, this situation may be far from uncommon: 'there is overwhelming evidence that teachers generally receive very little direct assistance and advice from their superiors (Zeichner *et al.*, 1987: 30). This aspect of staffroom life is not explored in this study (although references to it are to be found) but the experience of one new teacher fairly represents the situation: 'I've found the staff very supportive ... If one person's got a problem the whole staff will rally round.' (I—SW)

'The context in which new teachers worked and the many people with whom they interacted all influenced, in important ways, their professional development.' (Cole, 1991: 417) If Cole is correct, Annette's experience here may have influenced later decisions (e.g. to leave the SoW and to join the Pen staff on the RSA course). At the very least it is hard to dispute Cole's claim that for new teachers, 'feeling like a valued member of a group means a lot' (1991: 421).

something a little bit more varied.' (Louise)

They felt that they had a good social life at the school: they talked, did the crossword together, and spent Wednesday lunchtimes and afternoons in a local pub:

'We socialised between lessons and at lunchtime we often went out drinking together, particularly on the day, I think it was Wednesday — we had a half day on Wednesdays at that school — and nearly always we all went to the pub for Wednesday lunch, and it turned into quite an extended session. But we rarely talked about school or teaching or the students. ... We did the same in lesson breaks. We would very rarely talk about materials or what we were teaching, so we never really knew what we were doing. There was no idea of team teaching...'
(Annette)

The atmosphere, professional as well as social, was undemanding:

'I think EFL was very different in those days. We were very much refugees from the real professions. We'd all either had bad experiences in the state school system or in similar regular kind of professions ... I thought "This world seems less constrained." A bit hippyish in those days, I think, and so it felt that we enjoyed being on the outer edge of the professions, I think. ... I think none of us looked forward to promotions and a professional life, we just felt this is what we're doing now, we're very much living for today kind of people, don't know what'll come of it.' (Jenny)

'What I liked about it was that it was sort of relatively easy. It was relatively easy to mark time at that time as well. I mean I think all of us sort of became aware that you could do this job better over the years, when you actually started to take responsibility for your own actions in the classroom, and when you realised that maybe, you know, it was okay to talk shop in the staffroom.' (Paul)

In fact, the opportunity to do the job better was to arise quite unexpectedly. They had been aware for some time that things were not quite right financially, and by the

There may be no clearer demonstration of the importance of school culture than this. Within a year or two this same group of teachers would spend much of their breaktime discussing matters directly related to their teaching. Even if one accepts that the RSA course (4.8) may have had an influence here, the difference between SoW talk and Pen talk is striking: the data collected in this study does not correspond at all to the description which Annette presents here.

This lack of competition and career ambition may in part account for the non-aggressive nature of staffroom humour identified in Chapter 6.

This supports the claim that school culture rather than individual character is the most important determinant of staffroom interaction. Paul is suggesting here that it was understood in the SoW that it was not 'okay' to talk shop. The 'marking time' there also needs to be contrasted with the dynamism of the new Pen.

end of 1985 they felt that the writing was on the wall. A letter posted to arrive just before Christmas day invited all the permanent staff (Jenny, Paul and Harry) to a meeting on 4 January 'at which redundancies would be made' (Jenny). Only Paul, who did not receive his until later, was spared the unseasonal news, but his marriage was breaking up at the time, so none of the group spent a happy Christmas.

The meeting was an embarrassing one for all concerned, the co-director having been forced into this move by his co-director and the bank. None of them remembers details of the meeting, although Jenny can recall clearly how it ended. The co-director stood up and said, 'Well, farewell lady and gentlemen.' He then added, 'Oh, could you please pack your things and be off the premises in half an hour.'

Jenny, Paul and Harry told the temporary teachers at the school what had happened at the meeting and, with one predictable exception, they decided to resign:

'[It was] unbelievable. That was a bit of humanism I thought. ... Absolute loyalty to one another. It was fantastic, it was unbelievable. ... The people in EFL ... are basically good human beings.' (Jenny)

'I'd got to know them [Jenny, Paul and Harry] already, although I'd only worked with them for a short time. There was no way I was going to continue, so I said they could keep their job. I wasn't interested. I said that in fact when I was rung up. And they said "Of course, we'd like you to continue working." And I'd heard about what had happened to the others, and particularly someone like Harry at the time, his wife had just had another baby. I mean, it was just an awful time and I thought it was so mean, and I said, "Well," you know, "why not Harry? Why not give Harry my job. I don't want it." And then, so that brought that to an end.' (Louise)

The decision was not a light one, as its effects on Annette make clear:

'I was left very much out then because that school asked me if I'd go back and work and basically the

This is one of the three most obvious 'critical incidents' (Measor, 1985, Goodson, 1991b) in the teachers' joint lives, the other two being Annette's failure in the RSA and Louise's redundancy. The first two gave rise to significant decisions which served to establish important bonds among all the teachers; the effects of the last are less clear.

The way that EFL is set apart in this way is interesting. It reinforces the impression that these teachers see it as something quite distinct from other educational groupings. A study of this perception, perhaps comparing perceived and actual differences between EFL and 'mainstream' education, might throw interesting light on the former.

others asked me if I wouldn't go back and work there, because otherwise the school would just carry on as normal. And so I decided not. I said no that I wouldn't go back and I was then left unemployed and no redundancy payment or anything to cover it. So it was actually a very difficult time because I lost out financially a lot. I went on unemployment benefit for the first time in my life and that was horrible. I hated doing that. And then I was just waiting for more work here, which eventually happened.' (Annette)

The group was to be reunited eventually, but first a new school would be established over the water.

4.5 Setting up the Pen

Things move surprisingly quickly, and the gap between leaving the school over the water and welcoming students to a newly established school in July 1986 was less than six months. In fact, the foundations had already been laid. Through attendance at regional teachers' meetings and work as examiners, the core team had already encountered Kate, principal of an internationally known school in a nearby city. She had followed the fluctuating fortunes of the school over the water with interest and had said, 'Well, if it ever does crumble, phone me first.' It did, they did, and within a matter of hours all four had met in a local pub to agree arrangements for setting up a new school.

In committing herself without the backing of her co-principal, colleagues and board, Kate was going out on a limb on behalf of the Pen teachers. However, the agreement held and the three teachers received their first salary in April, prior to opening the school on 1 July 1986.

Jenny found the premises in only three or four days and, after persuading the local estate agent that it was worthwhile tracking down the lost keys, was shown around:

'It felt right immediately as I walked through the door. ... Even though it was very stained and dirty and unpleasant it was a nice warm building. I liked it. ... The building itself felt friendly, felt good.' (Jenny)

This shared move represents a problem for career analyses along established lines. It is clearly unusual and produces a rather unnatural 'experimentation and diversification' phase (Huberman, 1989: 351).

The importance of 'feel' in decision-making has been emphasised by Lesko (1986: 26).

The cost was only £76,000, with a 48-year lease, and she was allowed £15,000 to prepare it for opening. This was to cover everything, including repairs, decoration, furnishing, equipment and books, but an inspection from a local builder established that the only structural work necessary was the installation of appropriate lavatories, so the bill for repairs and decoration came to only £12,000.

While Paul and Harry concerned themselves with timetable issues, Jenny furnished the school in 'Mediterranean style':

'I think I was thought to have very strong ideas ... I knew exactly what I wanted and would brook no opposition. That was the image I was giving ... I had in my head this idea that it must look like a very up-market bank in Europe. It must have that kind of feel to it. ... I think when it opened up I was proud of it. It was my baby.' (Jenny)

'She [Jenny] wanted it right, and she has a very clear vision of what is right.' (Paul)

Only Harry and Jenny found the prospect of starting a new school 'exciting', but all three were stimulated by the opportunity which 'more freedom at the grassroots' (Harry) gave them:

'It was good fun because it was all up for grabs, not just the teaching but everything around the school. We obviously mixed a lot with the students.' (Harry)

They were conscious of their desire to establish something which was very different from the school they had left:

'We weren't really aware of much in the world except teaching general English at that point. ... I think by then we knew we were growing away from over the river. We noticed they'd had the same timetable since the school opened. Nothing ever changed, teaching materials never got renewed, anything new was treated with suspicion, nobody went to professional meetings or Teachers' Club meetings because "just namby-pamby people did that." So we were getting a discomfort in that environment. And so it was a breath of relief that

At the time of writing the process of replacement is beginning as the original furnishings show signs of wear. Huberman (1992: 139), has pointed to the importance of this aspect: 'School buildings, like schoolteachers, have life cycles of their own, with phases never to be recaptured.' The physical arrangements of the Pen and their cultural and interactional implications are considered in detail in Chapter 5.

'Effective head teachers are those who have clear visions for their schools...' Corrie's observation (1995:91) reflects a widely accepted claim and one which seems to apply here.

The time given over to discussions of materials and timetable matters in staff meetings represent an explicit rejection of this culture.

we could come here and do the things we believed in. ... Any idea of student-dominated teaching was anathema over there. We were much more into the student as autonomous learner and their own setting, their own learning styles, which was a thing that had been laughed at, or were laughed at as concepts over there. So we just felt that was terrific that nobody was going to hold us back on the teaching side. We could let all our ideas free and we could just experiment for a bit. We didn't even have to decide on a style that we went along with, we just had all the freedom in the world.' (Jenny)

This idea of freedom is obviously very important, its potency increased by the element of ownership, widely recognised as a key factor in successful change (Bailey, 1992: 256).

'We felt that we knew exactly what we wanted to do with the timetable, and we knew how we would do it because we'd sort of all been doing it ourselves, because we'd all come to the realisation that in order to teach effectively and to make the job at all meaningful then you had to do this kind of thing anyway. ... What was good about it was we could get rid of all the dross, all the anti-intellectualism that was associated with the staffroom in the other place. ... We wanted it to be very very user friendly. We wanted there to be real and genuine concern for the welfare of the students. I mean, yes, where does being nice to your neighbour start basically? Through self-interest, I suppose because if you're not nice to your neighbour he'll beat you over the head. Yeah, I mean I don't know where this great beneficent character comes from, but I think we just felt it sort of, it's like natural law or whatever, you wanted to do your best for the students and not be too cynical about things.' (Paul)

This sensitivity to the ethical dimension is something which Kagan, in his comparison of pre- and in-service teacher narratives (1991: 259), identified as a characteristic of experienced teachers. In the light of perceived differences between EFL and 'mainstream' teaching, it is worth pointing out such important similarities.

'I think There was probably broad agreement on basic things. We were fairly go-ahead in terms of methodology but we probably all recognised that there's an inherent conservatism as well. ... We weren't committed, I don't think, to any particular ideology. We were probably all fairly practical, and we all — as I said before — have this conservatism I think, where we tended to shy away from the trendy and ... we tend to pooh-pooh it and talk about the fringe methodology. I think we've all been fairly chalk face sort of (teachers). So I don't think were that committed to developing ourselves methodologically. I think there was just a general

This (personal) view seems to lend weight to Huberman's claim (1992: 136) on behalf of a 'craft model' of teaching: 'Essentially, teachers are artisans working primarily alone, with a variety of new and cobbled-together materials, in a personally designed environment.'

feeling that we were going somewhere. We'd been marking time for quite some time.' (Harry)

In fact, they initially experimented with process syllabuses and students setting the agenda, but something more structured emerged:

'I think out of that chaos you come back to where there's got to be a structured view to a certain extent, otherwise the student flounders for one, and they feel that the teacher isn't secure.' (Jenny)

Annette joined the Pen as soon as work was available, in January 1987, and by summer of that year was working more or less full time. She was offered a permanent position a year later:

'I knew I wanted to be permanent here. It was my main aim. And I thought Jenny was doing a brilliant job because she had suddenly, almost overnight, from being just a teacher — because none of us were ever more than teachers, we weren't even course director or anything — Jenny suddenly became a manager, part of the management.' (Annette)

Louise's arrival in March 1987 was more fortuitous:

'I didn't live in Quillham then and I was in town and I saw the building here, and I just walked in to find out if they had a job. I didn't know who was here, I'd lost touch with them then. Even though I knew them fairly well, we'd just lost touch. And, lo and behold, who should I see but Jenny ... and of course — absolutely amazing — that was it. And they had some work for me, and that was it. ... They'd maintained their feelings and attitudes as a group, so I knew I could work with that because I'd been so at home with them as a group before.' (Louise)

By Easter 1987 the school was well established, student numbers were rising and all the members of the team were together.

4.6 'Myself as teacher'

As a team, they share a fundamental faith in the

The move to a more explicit pedagogic structure was paralleled by the formal ratification of an organisational structure with Jenny as leader (4.8). The recognition of the need for this general shift was important: 'Organizational theorists have described schools as "loosely coupled" organizations in recognition of the large part played by the system of expertise in them and the resulting decentralization of day-to-day decisions (e.g. in the classroom); but even loosely coupled organizations need to be held together or they drift into anarchy.' (Handy & Aitken, 1986: 99)

From someone who had been away from the important changes taking place, this is important evidence that fundamental 'feelings and attitudes' had remained unchanged.

importance of the classroom and the relationships which are established there, but beyond this their views of teaching and of themselves as teachers differ widely:

'I like the interplay, I like working with people ... If people regard themselves as friends of each other, they're going to support each other, or they can involve in verbal high jinks with each other, and it's all part of developing things. If they can latch on to a certain breadth of behaviour, social, linguistic or whatever, within a classroom, then I think that it allows them to be experts within that classroom, or to develop that expertise within that classroom. ... I need to be creative. I need to be creative on a writing or performing level. ... And my job is — if there's anything unfulfilled in me it's that aspect — to me imperfect because it doesn't have that. I sometimes say to people it's not really what I want to do. But I'm very lucky to be able to do something which I enjoy, which I'm quite good at. It gives me opportunities, and actually mixing with the people is the best thing, communicating with people.' (Paul)

'What satisfies me about my job is the tremendous opportunity to come into contact with so many different people and to try and establish some sort of relationship with them, some sort of rapport with them, to understand what they want out of the course and to see if I can supply it, within certain constraints.' (Louise)

Beyond this, however, they differ widely. Paul and Harry, for example, are particularly close in terms of the group as a whole, but as teaching personalities they could hardly be more different. For Paul, with his theatrical background, performance is very important:

'It's much safer to be an actor than to be a teacher. You're much less vulnerable because [as a teacher] you have things coming back your way which you have to deal with. You can feel threatened, it makes you feel uncomfortable with people. But when you go on stage as an actor, everything is sorted out, you're ahead of the audience. ... I now perform ... and I suppose that is a skill that I've used. But it became part of my repertoire as I became more at ease with what I was doing. ... The thing about me

This idea of student-as-expert stands in stark contrast to the view of teacher-as-expert which was the first of Britzman's myths. It also throws valuable light on the frustration which interference in this communication process engenders on the part of the Pen teachers (see Chapter 7).

Several of the teachers in Nias's study of primary school teachers described teaching as 'communication with another human being' (1988: 202). The similarity to Paul's formulation is striking.

is that it's performance I'm interested in. It really is performance and anything related to it.' (Paul)

Harry sees performance as a potential distraction:

'I'm fairly casual in class and very cards on the table, "Let's work this out together" sort of thing. That really suits my personality. ... Regardless of what sort of methodology is involved in what you're doing, you shouldn't let the methodology take over ... People often do and I have done — probably everybody has done — allowed the methodology, the performance aspect, to take over from — because you forget the idea of actually what you're supposed to be doing, you're teaching them how to learn the language.' (Harry)

Annette and Louise share an interest in one-to-one business teaching and in identifying the specific needs of students, although change seems to be more important to Louise than to Annette:

'What I enjoy doing most at the moment is probably the one-to-one or small group work with a specialist group. I've decided that I do enjoy general English but I like the challenge of something that I haven't been doing for as long. ... I suppose my main interest in it [teaching business English] is that it tends to be one-to-one, so you really do get involved in the person and what they need. And my experience to date has been very positive, fortunately, with the people I've been training.' (Louise)

Annette is very conscious of her own experience as a language learner:

'Because I've got the enthusiasm in me, most the time, and it's very rewarding if there's the enthusiasm the other way. ... I get that also with the business one-to-one, when you feel that and know what the student's needs are because we've discussed it. We've analysed the needs. And in one-to-one you're really concentrating so much on their specific needs and they realise that and so they can see why you're doing a particular activity. And so if you're having a meeting role play or something

This sense of 'being yourself' in teaching is something which also emerged in Nias's study of primary school teachers (1988: 197).

The difference between Harry and Paul on this matter of 'performance' is marked and is only one aspect of the creative tension which arises from their differences (4.7).

Nothing emerges more strongly from the data (fieldnotes and transcripts as well as interviews) than the overwhelming importance of the person to these teachers. It is a point to which I return frequently in the chapters which follow, but one which cannot be overstressed.

and you've been doing ways of interrupting and arguing against a point, it's brilliant to see the way they respond, because they're being as antagonistic as possible in the politest possible way they can think of because they know that's what you're practising. ... Because I always enjoyed learning languages and I enjoyed going to countries, visiting other countries and staying with host families et cetera, experiencing all the things our students are doing, and I had very good and very bad experiences, so all those have stayed in my mind and have coloured the way I teach and approach teaching now. ... To have a good rapport with your group, whatever group it happened to be at that time — that to me was fundamentally important. And then I think you can tell if you've got a certain point across, and that made you think, "Okay that lesson went well, so yes I've been a good teacher," inverted commas.' (Annette)

An explicit statement, here, of the influence of personal experience on teaching, — a commonplace in educational life history research.

Jenny who, as principal, is in the classroom less than her colleagues, is very conscious of the challenge which teaching represents:

'I think professionally as you go on you've got more to lose professionally every time you step in a classroom. And I think I find this with a lot of quite mature teachers as well, that there's more riding on every entry into the classroom ... every gap of being in the classroom makes it that much harder when you go back because you get into a role again of it being okay once you're used to it. ... It's very much new people, I think. And you know that you're on trial for at least the first day of the course and then once you feel that the bridges are built, you've been accepted and they trust you, then the feeling of trust comes in and you feel okay. And you go from there.' (Jenny)

This is something of a contrast with the foregoing contributions, perhaps because Jenny spends less time in the classroom than her colleagues. The comments of the other Pen teachers do not support Goodson's claim about anxiety in teaching (1991b: 38): 'We must, I think, constantly remind ourselves how deeply uncertain and anxious most of us are about our work as teachers.'

4.7 Thriving on difference

The Pen staff are aware that their strength as a group derives as much from the differences between them as from their similarities:

'It might be something to do with the slight difference in our personalities, I think. That there's enough difference for a conflict of a certain kind all

the time. I think that's quite good, that we can strike ideas off each other and don't just completely, blandly agree. I've seen a lot of staffrooms where everyone just sort of ((pronounced intake of breath and pause)). I think that's quite unhealthy. And I think we all have come to this with a curiosity about the world anyway — the world in general. Maybe a sort of childlike interest in new ideas, and I think that's still there.' (Jenny)

'Yes, I think it has been a very important factor in that we get on very well. I mean obviously there are frictions occasionally and they're all actually very different people with very different political views, lifestyles, whatever. But as colleagues we get on extremely well. We cover up our differences or we laugh about our differences.' (Annette)

'That's what I say, that's what so good about working here, the fact that we do get on so well even though we do have different ideas. We respect each other's ideas.' (Louise)

If Jenny is excluded — and such exclusion is to some extent a natural consequence of her position — the remaining colleagues fall into two neatly paired groups, divided by more than gender, dress and teaching specialism.

Annette and Louise work together as the 'business' team:

'The fact that we know each other very well is useful because we can rely on each other. We know each other's way of thinking about things and we usually discuss — before a new client comes we discuss — the sort of areas they might need, negotiate a timetable with that person — 'timetable' is not exactly the right word — which aspects we're going to cover, and try to prioritise their needs in agreement with them. And then we usually allocate areas, and say, "Well I'll do this," or "Would you like to do that?" And then see how it goes. But the feedback is almost constant: every breaktime or lunchtime we'd say, "Well I did that. It didn't go well because" or "I need more time because." We tend to have specialist areas — things that we've done a lot of before. So we tend to do that. The

'Collaborative cultures require broad agreement on educational values, but they also tolerate disagreement, and to some extent actively encourage it within those limits.' (Hargreaves, 1992: 126)

This point is worth emphasising in the context of a successful school. Hargreaves has pointed out that 'the culture of teachers is interwoven with the structure of their social relationships with one another' (1994: 425).

The 'information exchange', 'joint planning' and 'concurrent implementation' evident here represent three of the four levels of collaboration identified by Cousins, Ross and Maynes (1994). The fourth, and deepest, joint implementation, also features in their work, although not as prominently.

division tends to come more on the skills. I think we're both happy to do any aspect of language.' (Louise)

Paul and Harry also see their relationship in terms of the interaction between them, and find it slightly odd that this does not extend beyond the confines of their professional world:

'I think Harry's quite important to me because I think we enjoy talking to each other. I think we do, so it's quite complex. ... We understand each other completely here, Harry and I. Our banter suggests, I mean, you know, we really should get together and write a script, I think. We were doing it the other day as well; we turned into a double act. We seem to understand each other completely and yet we don't have any dealings outside.' (Paul)

'We actually have very little contact with each other outside work. It does sometimes strike me as odd, particularly, say, with Paul. We get on very well at work and yet we never go out for a drink unless it's sort of from work. We don't really share any sort of social life at all. It's sort of odd. ... We don't bring any extra baggage to the school ... It's particularly perhaps surprising that I never see Paul outside school, because we do get on.' (Harry)

Some of the differences between them emerged when in 1987 a leading publisher proposed that they write a coursebook together. The initial team comprised Kate, Jenny, Paul and Harry, but Kate pulled out fairly soon after the start. Jenny followed because she felt she was writing a different book from the other two, who she felt were on the same wavelength. This was not how things seemed to them. In fact, they both enjoyed the work and found it stimulating because 'we come at things very differently' (Paul). Harry's account, which might stand for Paul as well, reveals the extent to which it led him to reflect on their different characters and teaching styles:

'One of the reasons why it was quite slow going is that we discovered that our styles were completely different, even to the extent of writing rubrics ... It was partly style — language style. We used to get bogged down, we used to have things that there

Analysis of their interaction (Chapter 7) bears this out.

This exclusion of the outside world is striking and features equally emphatically when staffroom topics are analysed (Chapter 5). There is no evidence of the 'lifestyle' influences which Goodson regards as important (1991b) in either life stories or staffroom interaction, although Paul's references to acting are clearly relevant. The reasons for this unusual exclusion of private lives (I can find no other example of it in the literature) and its significance are difficult to pin down, but it may have much to do with the way that this small group of teachers manage to keep their professional exchanges 'fresh'. It is apparently not uncommon for comedians who work closely and very happily together on stage to lead completely separate social lives for similar reasons.

were long arguments about. To this day probably we could look at some of the material and pick out "Paul wrote that bit and Harry wrote that bit," because mine tends to be more direct and more spoken in style, as if I'm talking to a student. Paul's tends to be more formal, more like an exam — instruction. And I think that's probably a reflection of our teaching styles as well. I think Paul tends to instruct more. He probably has more sort of authority, stage presence, than I do. He probably stands up more than I do while he's teaching. I tend to sit down more ... and my style is more sort of on a level and "Come on chaps." ... My tendency was to do things which I thought were interesting from a linguistic point of view, which was a fault of them actually, because they depended on students having an interest in the language itself, rather than just being able to speak it. And obviously a lot of students haven't. If there's a choice between teaching above a class's head and teaching below I will always tend to go above. Paul I think tends to go below. Paul has to make sure that everything's right, that they're getting it right. So that's probably I think one of my faults is that I tend to overestimate people's, students', abilities and fascination with the language. I think this is why I prefer teaching more advanced groups, more adult. ... I think our methods of working were different as well, in the sense that Paul would always like to get something right before he committed it to the screen, or to paper ... where I'll tend to bang things down and worry about them later. When I've got the idea I'll go with the class. So we used to have these sort of long discussions. ... I think that's one of the reason why it probably wouldn't have ended up as a successful course book. Because we knew what we were going to do with it, but it was probably a bit idiosyncratic ... We weren't professional writers, we were teachers.' (Harry)

Whatever the project, fundamental to all the relationships in this group is the extent to which they can depend on one another for support:

'We all get on well together. We work very well together as colleagues and there's always been this idea of trying to support each other. ... We've never

The sensitivity, depth and subtlety of this evaluation is perhaps not surprising in the context of such a close professional relationship, but it is still worth remarking upon. Wideen, discussing the development and implementation of a school improvement plan at 'Oceanside', identifies an 'information-rich' environment' as a instrumental factor (1992: 145). In the context of the Pen it might also make sense to talk of an 'understanding-rich' environment.

socialised much out of school hours. It's always been in school hours except at school functions really. ... If ever anything goes wrong, everybody rushes to help, whether it be through illness or having to leave school suddenly for either illness yourself or a member of the family. Everybody rushes in to cover your classes. If you can't find or don't understand — let's say if you can't find a piece of missing materials that you want — everybody again will do everything they possibly can to locate them or find out which book they're in if you're not sure of that. If you're having problems with one particular student, everyone's usually very supportive and tries to help you work things out with that student, not to interfere until you should interfere. In all ways really.' (Annette)

This mutual support has been forged and tested more than once in the history of the Pen.

4.8 Lines of development

In the ten years since the establishment of the school in 1986 the EFL world has changed significantly, and what emerges from a review of the Pen during this period is a picture of events which reflects the growing drive to professionalism through emphasis on qualifications and quality assessment.

The first significant change, which may well have reflected what was happening in the school anyway, was prompted by the need to demonstrate to British Council inspectors that the school had a clear management structure.

At first, there was an alternating DoS arrangement, which worked well on an interpersonal level but created administrative problems:

'We found it wasn't efficient to have this ongoing thing because we spent as much time enlightening the next person who was taking over as we ever did doing anything. It was consuming so much time that we could have better used that we decided, "This is silly really. One of us has got to take this job on properly and see it through." It was too bitsy, we weren't achieving anything. And I think this is where bossy boots just said, "I'll do it." ... I feel a bit guilty that perhaps I did say, "I want it." ... We

The attitude of the Pen staff seems to lend support to Nias's claim (1988: 201) that a staff or class as a family 'were valued more because they were seen as having a shared sense of purpose than for their affective ties'. This perhaps explains to some extent the nature of the Pen 'family' and its lack of outside contact.

The Pen staff constitute what Gherke (1991: 424) has called 'a helping community', comprising 'a group of teachers, administrators, and support staff members in a school who have helped themselves to such a degree and in such ways that they all see helping as an inherent part of their roles with newcomers and oldtimers' (1987: 110). This is certainly reflected in Annette's comment on the group as a new teacher (4.4).

In Hargreaves' (1995) terms, this represents a clear shift from a rotational maintenance structure to a delegative-rotational structure with the head as *primus inter pares*, characteristic of a collegial culture. The egalitarian-participative political structure remains unchanged.

did spend hours previously tossing around ideas and never coming to a decision. I remember thinking, "This will ease the process so much if I just say 'Fine, that's what we'll do.'" ... I feel easier if I've got a difficult decision to make if I can go and say "Just give me your feelings on this. What should I do in this situation?" I value that as well.' (Jenny)

In fact, the emergence of Jenny as (vice-)principal was 'a natural thing to happen' (Paul) and had to some extent been reflected in the timetable:

'It was fairly sort of collective at the beginning, although I think probably from the very beginning Jenny was probably more concerned with the admin side than either myself or Paul. I think the seeds of the present situation were actually there. They just sort of fell in.' (Harry)

The knowledge that qualifications would also be important in a forthcoming British Council (henceforth BC) inspection, prompted Kate in 1990 to offer all Pen staff the opportunity to study for an RSA Diploma. She would fund them and provide the teaching (on Friday afternoons, with some weekend sessions), and her daughter and a friend would make up a group of seven.

All of the group recognised the generosity of Kate's offer and are very grateful for it to this day, but beyond this and the universal feeling that the examination itself is at the very least 'suspect', there is little agreement about the contribution which the course made to them as individuals and as a group.

For some, it was an enjoyable experience:

'I think staff and management were working really well together then. And I think I was certainly very grateful of the offer, and I think all the other staff were too. And we all started to work towards it with great enthusiasm and we worked very very well as a team together.' (Annette)

'I quite enjoyed the opportunity to do a bit of reading around, get a bit of academic background,

It is interesting to note the extent to which Jenny's style reflects that of her first head of department (4.3) — the result of a conscious attempt to adopt him as a model.

'Sharing in decision-making gives teachers a greater feeling of ownership which is essential for school improvement.' (à Campo, 1993: 123) It also reduces the likelihood of 'educator burnout' (Berg, 1994: 187).

In terms of age (admittedly a contentious measure), this change took place at a time (30-40) when career decisions about 'management' or 'teaching' are settled (Sikes, 1985: 48). The coincidence may be fortuitous, but it nevertheless reinforces the sense of 'naturalness' which the Pen teachers seemed to feel.

that sort of stuff ... I've always had a touch of the academic about me although not enough to actually keep going on it.' (Harry)

Others found it a 'big burden' (Jenny):

'I was glad to have done it because I got it out of the way, I didn't fail it and I now am properly qualified, and that is the only reason.' (Paul)

The team-building aspect was important, and this was associated with an increased confidence in what they were doing:

'You do it [teaching] on gut feeling. You haven't got the formal "yes" behind you to say you're doing the right thing. ... It gave us professional confidence and again it built the team.' (Jenny)

For some, this made little difference to what they were actually doing in the classroom:

'I don't know if it made me do any things that I hadn't done before in purely operational terms ... but it made me more aware of why I was doing things. So this idea that virtually everything you do in a classroom is informed by some sort of theoretical background whether you know it or not — and having done the RSA basically you know why you're doing things rather than doing things for no apparent reason.' (Harry)

Others felt that it did bring about changes:

'I'm certain it really did change a lot of the things I was doing in the classroom. It made me think afresh and it was really valuable from that point of view. The things I read and agreed with I was very happy to try in class.' (Louise)

Perceptions of the course are coloured to some extent by the nature of the examination at the end:

'I think we all probably look back on it as one of the worst times of our lives. Maybe from my point of view because of the exam itself, the pressures of it. None of us had done that kind of exam for a long

This general formulation is interesting. There is no evidence here or in staffroom talk of a tendency to slip into prescriptivism via the invocation of theory which other researchers have found (e.g. Kagan, 1991: 260). In fact, the most concrete evidence of the course in everyday talk is in the use of technical terms by teachers who are ostensibly wary of 'jargon'.

long time, probably since we'd left university, and I think we all felt the pressure of if we failed, which always seemed a possibility ... if you failed it basically proved that you weren't qualified to do what you'd been doing for the last God knows how long.' (Harry)

The fact that Annette failed both the practical and the theoretical elements is also a significant factor in their perceptions of that time. Ironically, she was the only one who had not needed to do the course, because she already held an EFL qualification. She had undertaken it to share the experience with her colleagues, but as the year wore on it became increasingly apparent that she was falling badly behind:

'My personal mistake was I should have said to Kate, "Yes, I would love to do the course but I don't want to take the exam." Because at the time I had a very small baby and I had terrible problems with this child screaming every night, and I never ever, for the whole of the year we did the course — the academic year we did the course — I never had more than two consecutive hours' sleep any night. So there was a sort of, even from the beginning I wasn't going to pass that exam, or it was going to be something I couldn't cope with. ... I was a zombie. I could hardly stay awake to do my teaching, never mind to do any studying in the evening.' (Annette)

The result was not unexpected, but nevertheless:

'It wrecked us. ... We felt responsible for Annette then.' (Jenny)

'We were all devastated for her because we are such a close group. And therefore we were all feeling quite jubilant but obviously didn't want to show it.' (Louise)

Support from colleagues was an important part of the process of responding to the idea of failure:

'That was awful. I think that was probably the worst part of my career, almost one of the worst things in my life. ... I was devastated. ... I would say I've only just started to get over it now. ... I felt

that I was a bad teacher. Up to then I'd felt that I was a good teacher and I suddenly felt that this was the judgement on my teaching and that it meant that I was not an adequate teacher. And so that really threw me. I failed the practical — that was almost even more devastating. ... That really had such a big effect on my whole life, I think, failing that — the first exam I'd ever failed in my life. And that was another thing where the support of the rest of the teachers was vital.' (Annette)

At least one of the group thinks that Annette was not the only person to suffer:

'An adverse effect was, with hindsight, the fact that all of us doing it together had its strengths for us, sharing, but I think it had an adverse effect on the school in so far as the focus tended to be away from [the] students and on us — not so much on students. And I'm concerned that they suffered a bit of the time. All of us made an effort, I think, not to let them suffer, but I think it's inevitable to a certain extent.' (Louise)

If this is true, there is a certain irony in the fact that the course achieved its immediate objective: the BC inspection rated the school very highly. While Pen teachers recognise the necessity for such inspections, they are more sceptical about the validity of their findings:

'I resent them because you spend most of your time preparing for inspection. For about three months you're preparing for inspection. Teachers are always thinking of "What kind of lesson can I do?" as well. I don't like them because they disrupt my normal patterns. ... Inspections don't really pick up what goes on in the classroom. ... They don't experience the normal running of a school. We have to do it as well but I find it so tiresome ... I resent the intrusion although I see it's necessary.' (Paul)

'It's a bit like a driving test: not only doing things but be seen to be doing things. Particularly in a school like this which is (a) small and (b) everybody knows each other because we've been together for such a long time, things tend to get done without — I mean you probably know this now that they do get

What emerges strongly again is the sense of the group as a whole and the support which it provides. For the most part such unity is valuable, but Chapter 5 also examines a case where excessive familiarity proves disadvantageous.

It is interesting to see concern for the students in a situation from which, according to conventional wisdom, they stand to benefit.

This, and Harry's comments which follow, seem to reflect the effects of traditional performance appraisal approaches, which 'tend to be narrowly focused, concentrating for the most part on classroom performance rather than on a broad reflective examination of teaching life.' (Hickcox & Musella, 1992: 162)

done, but somebody coming in for just one day and taking a snapshot wouldn't. ... It's just one of those hoops you've got to go through, I suppose. I mean, I can see the point of it.' (Harry)

In spite of the mixed feelings about the RSA course and inspections in general, most regard end of this period as, in some sense at least, a culmination of what they had been working for:

'Whereas previously we'd only socialised as a staff and not talked about work things very often, we suddenly found ourselves talking about work related things. And so we started working together much more together as a team. And I think that was also at the same time as we were doing the RSA, because of the British Council stiffening of regulations we suddenly had to start producing more reports on our systems and improving our systems, so that again got us working together and talking shop, as it were, in every break time and every bit of free time. And school numbers at that time were very good, so we all felt the school was really going in the right direction and that we wanted to improve our teaching, to improve our systems, and we wanted to get good grades in our next British Council inspection. And I think that the pinnacle of the school was when we had that first British Council inspection. I think we got straight 'A' grades, except that I think we got a 'B' for premises because we didn't have a no smoking rule then, and it was a complaint that the common room was always full of smoke and it was not very pleasant for students. We felt it was brilliant, it was the best we could ever have hoped for, and I think that was the high point. And it was from then that things gradually happened that eroded that.' (Annette)

4.9 Hard times

Erosion is never attributable to a single factor, but there may be a particular element which stands out. In this case it is the downturn in the global EFL market which has led Pen teachers to a point where they sometimes look back on a golden age.

Recruitment at the Pen began to dip in 1991-92 and

This suggests that the sort of interaction represented in the data of this study has not always been characteristic of the group but is an outcome of the RSA. The other teachers do not agree, but the comment is worth noting. Such talk was certainly, and significantly, not a feature of the SoW. Little's finding seems relevant here: 'In successful schools, interaction is consciously and steadily focused on practice' (Little, 1982: 334).

Annette's comments on the interactional effects of the inspection point to an incidental benefit of the 'technical-rational' approach to evaluation, with its 'attention to record-keeping and written reports' (Hickcox & Musella, 1992: 162).

reached its nadir in 1993. Following the RSA course, Kate's daughter and her friend were taken on by the Pen, and when the fall in recruitment came they were the first to go. Inevitably, this made relations between Kate and the Pen more strained than they had been in the past, and continuing difficulties over recruitment have exacerbated the problem. The loss of two 'temporary' teachers may seem insignificant in itself, but it was the harbinger of other changes, and Paul at least feels that they 'lost something' when the teachers left.

The falling intake had its effect on the atmosphere of the school:

'Everyone here's affected because they don't get the ideas, the feedback, the social side. It is very sad when that happens. But it was different, it used to be. If I go back '88, '89, '90 we were buzzing most of the year, not as full as the summer but we had a core of 25 or 30 people [students], which is different. There was always someone in the common room, always someone to talk to.' (Louise)

This coincides (again, perhaps coincidentally) with that period in the life cycle when most people reach their professional 'peak' (Sikes, 1985: 48).

One serious consequence of the dip in recruitment was its effect on the relationship between the Pen and its larger partner. They have never been close:

'As far as the Inkham school is concerned we've never really had that much contact. It wasn't really hunky dory right from the beginning, actually.' (Harry)

However, the Pen teachers understand why their sister school in Inkham regards them as something of an 'inferior' partner: .

'Four of us know exactly what it's like because in the other school we had a sister school called "English in Chatford". We had no real contact with them and we felt they were dragging us down all the time. If you don't have real contact with people it's easy to do that. ... They probably don't realise that we have expertise ourselves. Again, that's symptomatic of this kind of set-up, and when we go down there we're friendly to each other. ... I don't have much contact with Inkham.' (Paul)

There may also have been resentment in Inkham about the money which was spent in establishing the Pen:

'Resentment because I think it was felt that a lot of effort was going into this school and "Why should they have this effort put into them?" And that caused problems. ... I mean I don't know how much of this was really felt by them, but this is how I interpreted the mood. There was never any feeling of being their colleagues at all.' (Louise)

Such feelings were inevitably brought to the surface in the lean times of the early nineties, and decisions made in Inkham had repercussions in Quillham. One of the most obvious changes was the removal of time which could be allotted to the work of an 'academic manager'. This was a revolving responsibility which allowed one of the team to dedicate time to academic and professional development within the school. It had been singled out for particular praise in a BC inspection, and the removal of this post was seen as a threat to professional development at the Pen:

'It's vital to us staying fresh. ... It's very easy to not bother to read that article because, while you're reading in isolation, if you're not really going to get together and talk it through... If you've got somebody whose focus is our professional development, who's sort of keeping us on our toes and saying, "Have you read-" and you say, "No I haven't but I will, for the next academic staff meeting," you get that much more out of it than if you just sort of read it one evening before you got to sleep. ... It's terribly important to us as professionals, otherwise we do feel that we get into the daily grind of the full five hours a day every day.' (Jenny)

This, however, was merely a first step. When recruitment fell further, the management at Inkham decided that a member of staff would have to go. In the absence of volunteers, a 'last in, first out' policy was implemented and Louise was made redundant. No one at the Pen was given any warning:

'It was an awful balancing act to take people's financial lives in the one hand and people's sense of

This recognition seems vitally important in an age range (40s-50s) where the choice is between 'stagnating' and 'generating' (Erikson, 1959).

The importance of having time to keep up with professional developments (via an academic manager in this case) in order to resist what Apple (1988: 106) has called the 'dynamic of intellectual deskilling' is something which all the staff emphasise. It is also interesting to contrast the Pen situation with the revelation in Weiss's study of US high schools (1995) that only principals read journal articles.

their worth in the other. And I'm still not sure that we all see eye to eye on how it turned out, that one. Because there were so many issues that it raised, so basic.' (Jenny)

'I was surprised. I was sort of expecting it and yet it did throw me a bit. Now I can see, and quite honestly I can see there's plenty of work here coming in, so I don't feel anxious about it. ... I think I was handled fairly because I was the last person employed and the first to go. I was treated more generously than the basic package; I was treated very generously financially.' (Louise)

Louise is now also prepared to take other work and may be said, in Nias's terms (1989: 394), to be 'redefining her career'. In this respect her professional situation differs from that of the other Pen staff.

In fact, this coincided with Annette's decision to reduce her teaching load, so through a mutually advantageous readjustment of workloads, Louise has been able to remain at the Pen on what she describes as a 'long term temporary' basis.

At the time of writing recruitment is showing a healthy upward trend and the Pen staff believe that relations with the sister school are improving. Views of the future are, however, mixed.

4.10 Looking ahead

'The big thing is, is somebody going to rationalise us?' (Paul)

This reflects a shared view that the school may need to specialise more in the future. Annette and Louise already specialise in business, and the latter had already seen the writing on the wall when in September 1992 she paid for herself to register for a week's business English course:

'And I thought, "Well, what's happening here? We're not getting these large groups of general English students." And I thought, "I've got to do something for myself as well. I want to keep an interest going." And I decided that if I wanted to keep a job that maybe business English was an area that needed exploring.' (Louise)

Harry is more suspicious of ESP:

'I've always regarded ESP as a little bit of a con, in the sense that you know English is English really.

The reference to an outside agent is significant. The power of the Inkham management is tacitly recognised at the Pen but features little in day-to-day business (see the brief discussion of 'two schools' in Chapter 5). It is clear, however, that there are serious underlying concerns against which the findings of this otherwise optimistic study need to be set.

Not so much nowadays, I guess, but a lot of the early ESP books you'd just have your normal present continuous drill but you'd say "I am/he is going to the bank" instead of "He is going to the chippie." ... This seems to be the way the market is going: more individual courses, more closed group courses for people with the same interest or profession or whatever ... I would think that you've still got to have the sort of background of the basis being what we do now, just the sort of general English, mixed nationality.' (Harry)

Perhaps the future lies in what Paul calls 'English for Whatever Purposes', where they can exploit their strengths of flexibility and the ability to deal with students who pose particular problems:

'We're small enough to see them as individuals, I suppose.' (Paul)

Of the profession as a whole, there is a sense of achievement but also a feeling that limited opportunities are available within it:

'I think it's [EFL teaching] heading in the right direction. I think teaching English as a foreign language is more advanced than teaching any other foreign language is — far more advanced. And I think we do a much better job than say teaching French or German or Spanish in the secondary school. And I think we are leaders, and I think other foreign language teachers could do well to look at the systems and methods that we use. ... Yes, it's nice to be in the forefront, nice to feel that you're in the forefront' (Annette)

'We're not moving on. The promotion positions aren't there. Everybody's stuck where they are, waiting for people to die off so that the new lot can come after us, the real professionals come on, perhaps after us.' (Jenny)

'The trouble with the profession, I mean even more so than in state school teaching, I think, is that beyond becoming a director of studies or whatever, or opening your own school or something like that, what do you do except stay being a teacher?' (Harry)

The sense of pride in EFL teaching manifest here may have something to do with the apparent willingness (noted earlier) to set it apart from other teaching.

This concept of 'real professionals' is interesting in the light of the Pen teachers' dedication. Subsequent comments suggest that Jenny is drawing on a distinction here between her 'drift' into EFL and much more deliberate and serious career aspirations.

Harry, though, is happy to be a teacher:

'If you weren't happy with it then there wouldn't be any other reason for doing it.' (Harry)

This goes for all of the teachers in the Pen, although if the school had to close and the group was forced to split up, Paul, who has had comedy scripts accepted by the BBC and who is currently working with a friend on a film script, would try to make a living through his writing:

'I'd want not to find another teaching job.' (Paul)

This attitude may be typical of a passing generation:

'Somebody once said to me ... "I think our generation is probably going to be the first and last to make a career out of EFL." There's something in that, you know. You know, before, it was a sort of fly-by-night thing, something that you did to fill in the time until you got proper jobs, and a good way of travelling. There might still be a premium on native speaker teachers I guess, but only as a back-up perhaps. It's not a secure prospect.' (Harry)

'Going around other schools I have seen a new generation coming on that is much more committed to it than we were when we first started our work. We were the hippy dropout generation who weren't quite sure what we were going to do ... and we've grown into it and made it our own I suppose really. But there's a much more serious group I think coming along behind us who are going to publish before they're thirty, who are going to own their own school before they're forty.' (Jenny)

In the meantime, there are new challenges:

'I'm very happy to stay in EFL. I think EFL has made a lot of progress in recent years, but unfortunately I think it's starting to go backward in a sense now, in that the admin and the bureaucracy is getting to be too much. One example is I think that observation — peer observation — is a wonderful idea, and the British Council encourages it and we do a lot of it now in the school, but the fact is you have to write quite a detailed report of every

This is not inconsistent with his choice of teaching. Ginzerg points out that 'occupational choice is a lifelong process of decision-making in which the individual seeks to find the optimal fit between his career preparation and goals and realities of the world of work' (1972: 172).

This takes up her earlier point about 'real professionals'. What seems most interesting here is the sense that they have 'made' EFL 'their own', whereas, by implication, the new generation are entering a much more fixed world. Jenny's prediction is in line with Hargreaves' (1994) observation that a 'new profession' is emerging in teaching generally. It would be a pity, though, if 'seriousness' replaced entirely the sense of enjoyment felt by the Pen staff, so eloquently represented in the humour of their staffroom (see Chapter 6).

lesson you've observed and that takes a long time to do. I think peer observation is wonderful but it's the report writing afterwards. I think, "Who is going to look at this report?" And I think the answer is the British Council inspectors might give it a cursory glance every two years when they do the inspection. The admin for inspections has grown and grown and grown. It's ridiculous now. All the systems that you have in operation in the school have to be written down and explained on paper, and that takes hours and I think it's a waste of everybody's time. And that's what makes me sad about EFL is the admin taking over. ... I think there is a movement towards trying to limit it by some people now, because I think I'm not the only one who thinks that the report writing, the admin et cetera is getting in the way of teaching.' (Annette)

It is hard to think of an epitaph for the Pen which might be properly understood in the very different world which Jenny and Harry anticipate, but Paul's modest description points to an achievement the significance of which at least some will comprehend:

'We are a small, struggling school who've built up a faithful following.' (Paul)

If this is true, it represents a sad departure from the person-centred concerns of the professional world which the Pen staff inhabit. It would be encouraging to think that teachers in the future would be able to associate with the picture presented in this study.

Chapter 5

The Pen staffroom: aspects of a collaborative culture

5.1 Introduction

Having made the point earlier that I feel uncomfortable in strange staffrooms, it is only fair to admit now that I found the Pen staffroom one of the easiest to come to terms with. The metaphorical if not the physical staffroom has been the locus of the shared professional life of these teachers for so long that its surface is worn pebble smooth, polished by the long unconscious enactment of shared routines and rituals. Hargreaves captures well the implications of this in cultural terms:

'Through culture people define reality and so make sense of themselves, their actions and their environment. A contemporary reality-defining function of culture is often a problem-solving function inherited from the past: today's cultural form created to serve an emergent problem often becomes tomorrow's taken-for-granted recipe for dealing with matters shorn of their novelty. By examining the reality-defining aspects of culture, it should be possible to detect the fundamental problems of that social institution, to which over time it has developed the routinised solutions that become "the way we do things round here".'

(Hargreaves, 1995: 25)

What follows is a description of the Pen culture, as a prelude to a more delicate dissection of some of its key features. The chapter will open with a physical description, in recognition that 'structural realities at the level of building and the district often shape and mold the nature of classroom relationships, perhaps even more than researchers realize' (Schlechty, 1976: 69). This will be followed by a brief consideration of the annual and daily rhythms of school life. The Pen staff, whose lives featured in Chapter 4, will then be introduced and their relationship with students and with the school as an institution will be explored.

With the institutional background thus established, attention will then turn to specific 'reality-defining aspects' of staffroom life:

- The description of staffroom life will begin with a physical description of the room itself and the topics which feature in talk there.
- The conventional argument that school staffrooms are 'back regions', where 'actors' can relax from their institutional 'performance' will be challenged. The existence of an open staffroom door, it will be suggested, has considerable cultural significance in this context.
- Four aspects of collaborative interaction will then be explored: co-operation and control; disagreement and its resolution; shared views; and shared knowledge.
- A consideration of the Pen as a collaborative culture will then offer a wider setting for these different aspects of staffroom interaction.
- Finally, attention will return to talk about students, which features more than any other topic in staffroom talk and which exemplifies aspects of the collaborative culture. This will also serve as a link to a more precisely focused analysis in the chapters which follow.

5.2 The school building

In choosing this building and adapting it as they did, the Pen teachers aimed to create the atmosphere of a home rather than a school. To a large extent they have succeeded in this, and in their report the FIRST auditors make a particular point of stressing the warm and friendly atmosphere of the school. It is located on a main road, its Georgian front consistent with the houses and offices which make up the immediate neighbourhood. With the exception of the sign to the left of the door, there is little to indicate that this is not a substantial town residence: downstairs windows are curtained, upstairs windows have blinds, and the front door, with its bell in the middle, is typical of many in the town.

Unless the visitor is arriving at the beginning or end of the morning or afternoon periods, it is likely that he or she will have to ring the bell, to be greeted by either Jenny or Helen.

The illusion of domesticity persists at least as far as the hall, with the students' common room to the left and the office to the right. The common room is a large lounge, with a television, the day's papers and ornaments from around the world marking its ordinariness. Only the presence of 'office' chairs instead of armchairs and a discrete coffee vending machine point to its institutional function, and for the Christmas meal even these 'disappear'. However, in Helen's office opposite the atmosphere unmistakably institutional: computer, typewriter, fax machine, filing systems and office furnishings predominate over the more intimate decor and soft furnishings.

Stairs facing the visitor on the right of the hall lead up, twisting left, to classrooms above, while the hall itself becomes a corridor extending for a deceptive distance into the back of the school. The staffroom door, positioned opposite the other entrance to the student common room, is off to the right about a third of the way down the corridor. For most practical purposes it is the first door to the right after the office and stairs, the others being doors to the cellar and a walk-in safe, the latter a magnificent iron creation adorned with Victorian maker's name and 'strongroom' handles. Jenny and Helen have a way with its massive weight which belies their slight frames, and the emergence of the petty cash box or video camera from its dark interior always seems humorously incongruous. It is introduced to the visitor with the accompaniment of a gentle allusion to its ironic presence in contrast to the lighter and mildly irreverent atmosphere of the school as a whole. The key to it is made freely available to all staff, but must be borrowed from Jenny or Helen.

Teaching rooms are small, reflecting the emphasis on small classes and reinforcing the informal feel of the school. There are two on the ground floor, located to the left of the corridor past the common room, two on the first floor and a further two on the top floor. All are equipped with whiteboards and tape recorders, and overhead projectors are distributed as required. Notice-board space is fairly generous and the extent to which it is utilised varies from room to room, although all have a standard phonetic chart. Furnishings are functional but in good condition and all rooms are carpeted.

Other relevant aspects of the accommodation are recorded in my fieldnotes (entries relating to the staffroom appear under the relevant heading below):

'The front part of the school (Helen's office and the students' common room) is Georgian but just after the turn of the century the Council bought it and extended it considerably. The extension has a flat roof and as a result leaks are not uncommon, though it's been an exceptionally wet winter and I couldn't see evidence of any. The school is plainly but attractively decorated and well maintained.

'Apart from their common room with its collection of various gifts from the students (the current group, from Abu Dhabi, have provided a massively heavy camel of the 'fairground prize' variety, a crudely labelled vase and a hurricane lamp), there is a games room which contains a pool table and a dartboard. At the moment, smoking is confined to the games room, but Jenny is considering extending the ban to the whole school (though she doesn't seem certain about this). Students also have access to a modest but comfortable and apparently well-used self-access and reading centre. The system operates entirely on trust and so far there have been no problems — in fact, the collection of books is getting bigger rather than smaller.

'Next to the self-access centre is a sort of 'reserve office' which Helen sometimes uses when she needs some peace to deal with pressing work, and which can come in handy as an 'overspill' area for staff. The room contains the school fax and computer, though Jenny is in the process of buying a new computer which Helen will have in the front office. Almost opposite the office is the second staffroom where Paul, Louise and Annette are based, though Paul in particular ('He's all over') is more likely to be found in main staffroom. In the second staffroom is Kate's desk for when she visits. It's as basic as any in the school. "Kate has a democratic desk," Jenny explained. "She prefers it that way."

(F—26/1/94)

The 'democratic' arrangement was changed during 1994, when Jenny moved permanently to her 'reserve' office and Paul moved from the second staffroom to her desk in the main staffroom. After the move, Jenny continued to spend most of the early morning in the main office with Helen, morning breaks in the staffroom, and the rest of the time moving between these and her office. All of the taped data and most of the fieldnote data in this study relate to the 'new' situation.

5.3 Rhythms of school life

Core teachers are divided on the subject of whether the Pen academic year has a starting point, but all are agreed on the annual cycle and the absence of any sense of 'terms'. Table 2, which excludes all short courses, including business courses and those for overseas teachers of English, gives a reasonable picture of the annual schedule.

Holidays tend to be taken in the first half of the year so that the core staff are available during the busy summer period, although Annette, who has family commitments in the summer, is an exception. The year of my visit was slightly different from the norm because the quiet 'holiday' period was busier than expected:

'We talked over the way the year normally worked out and Jenny explained that 1994 looks as if it might be a bit different. The usual pattern is a fairly quiet build up to Easter, then a gradual increase in business to the summer peak, falling off in the autumn to a quiet time again in the winter. This year, though, the early part of the year is turning out to be busier than expected' (F—26/1/94)

In the absence of 'terms', the largest definable academic unit is a course, and the activities associated with these tend to cluster at the beginning and end. Administration and placement aside, all courses begin with a 'preparation day'

on Monday, followed by the arrival and placement of new students on Tuesday. After the welcome meal and a chance to assess the accuracy of the placement, a staff meeting on Friday settles outstanding issues of grouping and highlights potential trouble spots. After this, the course settles down into its weekly rhythms, marked by the Friday afternoon staff meeting when students have left for home. The end of the course is marked by a farewell meal.

Course	Dates	Weeks
Spring Course I	11 January - 4 February	4
Spring Course II	8 February - 4 March	4
Spring Course III	8 March - 31 March	4
Summer Course I	April - 6 May	5
Summer Course II	10 May - 10 June	5
Midsummer Course I	14 June - 1 July	3
Midsummer Course II	5 July - 22 July	3
Midsummer Course III	26 July - 12 August	3
Midsummer Course IV	16 August - 2 September	3
Midsummer Course V	6 September - 23 September	3
Autumn Course I	27 September - 21 October	4
Autumn Course II	25 October - 18 November	4
Autumn Course II	22 November - 16 December	4

Table 2: 1994 Pen Course Dates

The daily rhythm from a staffroom perspective is remarkably consistent. The first lesson begins at 9.30, although most of the staff are in the school by 9.00. The staffroom is quiet in the time preceding the first lesson as staff settle down to the business of making final preparations for the lessons ahead. Exchanges are intermittent and tend to be brief, although sometimes longer discussions do develop, especially when Jenny has brought in a problem which has just arisen. The morning break, from 10.40 to 11.00, tends to be the liveliest time in the staffroom, as all the staff gather for their morning tea or coffee. The five minute break between the last two morning lessons and the ten minute break between

the two afternoon lessons afford very limited opportunities for talk and exchanges here tend to be brief, although there is a sense sometimes in the afternoon of conversations unwillingly truncated as the classroom beckons. The lunch break, between 12.55 and 2.10, is usually less lively than the morning break. It is rare to find everyone there even for short periods, and at times it can seem very quiet. Sometimes long conversations do develop, especially on topical matters, but the lunch hour is inevitably a more leisurely, less involved and less coherent affair than the morning break. Interactionally, it would often be possible to pack almost a week of lunchtimes into a single morning break, which is why the latter forms the focus for the recording on which much of the following analysis is based.

5.4 The inhabitants of the school

The Pen teachers have already been introduced through their professional life histories, and no further review is necessary here. Where specific links between staffroom culture and stated beliefs or past experiences are important, these will be pointed out, but as far as possible biographical issues will be left out of the accounts and analyses which follow. The collaborative norms which will be explored are rooted in the past, but if the life histories in Chapter 4 have been effectively drawn the arterial connections should be sufficiently clear. The focus in what follows is firmly on the present.

The first thing which is likely to strike a visitor to the school about the Pen staff is their appearance:

'Louise, like Jenny [and Annette] is smartly dressed. Well made up, comfortable but serious blouse, short dark skirt and black tights. Attractive and friendly clothes, but definitely appropriate to business. Paul and Harry present a much more casual picture: crew neck jumpers, jeans (denims for Harry) and open-necked shirts. The contrast is clear but not stark.'

(F—12/1/94)

This difference is to some extent a reflection of personal preference, but it is also in line with the division of responsibilities in the school. Harry and Paul teach general English, which tends to attract younger and more academically or socially oriented learners, while Annette and Louise concentrate on business English and attract corporate clients, many on a one-to-one basis. As principal, Jenny deals with both sets of clients. The division is, coincidentally, also along gender lines and, less coincidentally, territorial: Annette and Louise are based in the upper staffroom, where business materials are kept and where they discuss aspects of their shared professional interest in this area, while Harry and Paul have their base in the 'general' staffroom.

Into this contrasting set come temporary teachers, most of them young. During my stay women slightly outnumbered men, although the balance was fairly even. All of them joined the main staffroom in the 'visitors' desks and, unsurprisingly, all were positioned sartorially between the two groups of core staff. Most of the temporary teachers stay between three and six months, moving on to more permanent posts, often overseas, but at least one teacher returns every summer. She came at first because she needed summer work, but that was in the early days of the Pen; now she teaches for one month out of her two month summer break because she enjoys it and likes to renew her links with the staff.

During my stay, the post which raised most problems was that of social organiser. A long-established and very successful social organiser had resigned on leaving Quillham just before my arrival, and for a time the search for a replacement was high on the list of Jenny's priorities. Eventually, the post was attached to the offer of teaching at the school and was occupied, with varying degrees of success, by different temporary teachers. In the case of one, Ed, it was a source of particular dissatisfaction, but most seemed to accept it as part of their

deal with the school. Weekly films and visits to pubs and places of interest were perhaps less onerous than longer visits at the weekend, but if any of the incumbents were unhappy with the demands on their time, none of them expressed these within my hearing.

Supporting the social programme as well as all other activities in the school is Helen, the administrator/bursar, who occupies the front office. Over the years she has built up a very close relationship with Jenny and the two of them spend a lot of time together in the office. Helen is by nature and experience a forthright character, given to sharp judgement and plain statement, but she has a good sense of humour and the relationship between her and the rest of the core staff seems to be a productive one. In Jenny's words, she 'sparks' well and, although a part of the team, can provide a different perspective on things: 'Helen can meet everyone here on their own level, on equal terms, and give as good as she gets.'

Much of Helen's work involves dealing with students and their sponsors. The school has a policy of accepting only adults and prides itself on its ability to deal with unusual and 'difficult' cases as well as clients with more conventional needs, so the students make an interesting mixture. Most are young and from the Far East, the Middle East and Europe, with Japan often providing the largest contingent. However, during my stay there no one group predominated and there always seemed to be a healthy mix of nationalities and backgrounds. In addition to these 'longer term' students, full classes from Eastern and Western Europe would appear for courses of between two and four weeks. Naturally, such classes tended to be more homogeneous in all respects (with the unfortunate exception of linguistic level in some cases) and their arrival usually made an obvious impact on the balance of the school.

5.5 The relationship between the staff and 'the school'

Although the focus of this research is on the world of the staffroom, the relationship between its members and the institution of which they are a part cannot be ignored. There is a sense in which the 'school' extends no further than the confines of the Pen building, where barriers are definitely and deliberately drawn, but occasionally an external 'school' is introduced to the Pen staffroom where it functions in different ways. For the purposes of clarification, these two 'schools' need to be considered.

The 'Pen' school is a fusion of the physical, personal and pedagogic, the product of a group of dedicated professionals who believed that it was possible in establishing the school to put into practice their educational ideals. And despite a move to a more formalised system than was originally envisaged, the school as it exists now remains true to that original conception. There is, of course, no guarantee that the students who spend time there will have views consonant with those of their teachers, but there is at least some evidence that the warm and easy-going atmosphere remarked on by so many visitors, inspectors and temporary teachers will rub off on the students. The following example of a statement by a temporary teacher is not insignificant in this respect:

Judith: "They're very easy going, though. They've been *here* for a long time." This 'here' was interesting because it was slightly stressed. The effect wasn't in the slightest pejorative, but suggested that the school generates an 'easy going' atmosphere. (F—28/7/94)

The Pen school, Quillham, is fiercely proud of its distinctive character, and when, on my first visit, I asked if appraisal was Pen school policy, there came the immediate riposte from the two teachers present of 'No, we're the Quillham school!' (F—12/1/94). The life histories of the Pen teachers have revealed their views on the relationship between the two schools, and there is a clear distinction between them. However, it should be remembered that Kate, who

arranged financial support for the Pen Quillham venture, is technically principal of this as well as Pen Inkham (henceforth 'the Pen Inkham' or 'Inkham', to distinguish it from 'the Pen', which will be used as shorthand for 'the Pen Quillham'). There are inevitably similarities between the schools, and it is unlikely that Kate would have provided support for teachers whose ideas were radically different from her own.

The important issue, however, lies not in whether there are cultural differences between the two schools, but in where decisions are made. From the outset, Kate recognised the Pen teachers' right to freedom in terms of pedagogy and agreed to a considerable degree of independence in decision-making, and the Pen staff are still grateful for the extent to which she was prepared to back their venture, even in the face of opposition from Inkham. However, in financial terms, there is no illusion about the fact that power is in the hands of Kate and her financial administrator at Inkham, and ultimately the future of the Pen depends on decisions taken there. Some of the effects of this (most notably Louise's redundancy) have already been noted, and although the focus of this investigation does not lie in this direction the relationship cannot be ignored. There are effectively two 'schools' in the Pen: the school which exists within the Pen building and the other wider Pen organisation which has the power to influence decisions taken there.

For the most part, this distinction is an irrelevance; when the Pen teachers have in mind 'the school' or 'the Pen', they think of their own school and the culture which exists within it. However, in some matters, Inkham cannot be ignored. Discussions of equipment, funding and holiday entitlement all inevitably prompt consideration of how closely the purse strings might be drawn, and speculation about the future is cast in the light of what the thinking in Inkham might be. This needs to be recognised but it seems to be significant mainly in

view of the light it sheds on the way in which the Pen teachers identify so closely with their own school. There is only one example in the data where anyone in the Pen core staff distances himself or herself from the school, and the strategic use of the difference here is significant.

The incident is an extended one, and Paul's contribution needs to be considered in its interactional context. In a staff meeting where Jenny is absent, Ed has asked if he can 'butt in' to introduce 'something completely different' to do with his dissatisfaction with the post of social organiser, and when Paul has suggested delaying the item until 'AOB' has rejected this. His complaints are nevertheless heard sympathetically until he suggests that he should have control of the petty cash, which is Helen's preserve:

Ed:	... And (em) (0.5) that means access >I assume< to petty cash, that means (.) doing <u>e</u> verything.=
	[
Annette:	Mmm
Paul:	Wo::: you've no chance in this place.
	[] [
Annette:	No Hah
	[
Harry:	HEHEheheheh=
Annette:	=°Heheheheh°
Ed:	E:m: (0.5) because basically it involves too many <u>people</u>
	(T—11/11/94: 3130-3140)

The use of 'this place' is unusual, this being one of only two occurrences in the data (the other arises later in this sequence). It distances Paul — and, since they join in with laughter, Annette and Harry — from the school, and the expression 'this place' might even be taken as mildly pejorative. The strategic purpose of the claim is clear: further debate along these lines is pointless, since nobody at the meeting is in a position to alter the ways in which things are done in 'this place'.

This strategy becomes more explicit as Ed develops his argument, which is declared 'AOB' by Paul (3136) in spite of Ed's claim to the contrary. There is considerable sympathy for the difficulties associated with the job and its lack of reward (3211-3400), and at one point Paul reverts to 'we' to represent the school. However, when Ed refers again to access to cash, Paul once more invokes 'the school' as a separate entity: 'Well this is- this is between whoever (.) wants to be social organiser (.) and the school to sort out. 'Isn't it.' (3306-3310).

For the most part, the discussion so far has centred on the low profile of the job, the 'hassle' involved and the poor pay, and a two-second pause at line 3400 offers an ideal opportunity to close the topic following supportive statements from the core staff. However, the apparent rapprochement is shattered when Ed returns to 'getting your hands on the old purse strings' (3401-2), and from then on the aim of everyone else present is to demonstrate that what he suggests is not possible. Paul invokes 'senior management' (3324) and 'tradition in this place' (3475), before effectively closing the topic with, 'I think it's something you're going to have to sort out with senior management' (3482-3).

This distancing serves its strategic purpose, but the 'this place' is ambiguous: it may refer either to the Pen or to the wider organisation. The reference to 'this place' may or may not be mildly pejorative, but it does point to an area in the Pen where there is a clear division of responsibility. The teachers are not concerned with the day to day administration of the school; this is Helen's preserve, and there is a sense in which the 'this place' which occurs here is a reference to her 'territory'. Her relationship with the rest of the staff seems friendly enough, although she is significantly closer to Jenny than to any of the other teachers. She is jokingly portrayed as the powerful and threatening presence in the office, and the arrival of her 'black tights' is represented as a source of fear to Harry who is filling in while Jenny is away (T—8/3/95: 0409),

while my own joking reference to being in her bad books prompts from Jenny, 'Now you're in the same boat as the rest of us' (F—26/1/94).

Helen was not one of founding group, and her position in the office physically and socially distances her from the others. So while they do not regard the Pen as something external, she does. The Pen is routinely 'this place' to her, and when she claims that 'everything's a problem around here' (F—23/2/94) she is not drawing a distinction between the Pen and Inkham. As a non-resident of the staffroom, she features only peripherally in what follows, but the difference between her attitude and that of the core staff is significant: the staffroom for them is at the heart of *their* school and not a place apart, for her, loyal though she is, it is essentially a sphere of operations in an institution which employs her.

When the culture of the staffroom is considered below, it will become clear that this area is not a hermetically sealed 'back region' and that what is true here is true, at least in some sense, of the school as a whole. There will be elements which usually emerge only in the context of the staffroom, but the collaborative norms of the school and the interactional expectations which underpin them are characteristic of a professional perspective which affects all behaviour in the Pen.

5.6 The staffroom and staffroom talk

The Pen staffroom is small and to some extent this makes avoidance of interaction difficult, especially since there is a single central space around which desks are arranged. However, there are distinct territories within it:

'While I had the staff room to myself I took the chance to do some measuring and sketch out a plan of it [Figure 3]. There are two staff rooms but this is the one everyone uses, probably because of the sink and kettle. The two foci are Harry's desk and Jenny's desk ("Yes, we're very democratic here; I don't have my own office," she said when I confirmed that it was her desk), with desk C for drifters. Jenny and Helen will tend

to locate themselves at Jenny's desk, standing and leaning against it, facing the door. Harry sometimes adopts a similar position at his desk but is at least as likely to be sitting down, half turned to the floor. Annette and Louise tend to locate themselves in the desk C area but Paul is more of a drifter. [Following Jenny's move to her new office, Paul took over her desk.]

'The room is clean and organised efficiently, with the occasional pile but no clutter. It's small enough to be intimate, but with current numbers doesn't seem overcrowded. Tea and coffee are free ("one of our perks") and drunk fairly frequently. Of the three notice boards, C is reserved for notices about courses, conferences etc., while B has timetables and other school information on it. The small one above Jenny's desk (A) doesn't seem to have any particular purpose and may be for personal use. Around B (and Harry's desk) are various postcards and there's a box of thank you letters from students on a shelf above the radiator. The temperature in the room has so far always been comfortable and none of the teachers smoke.

'The shelves (referred to as bookcases on the plan for ease of reference, but not as free-standing as that) hold the range of materials you'd expect to find in an EFL staffroom. Case 5 contains audio and video tapes and these extend round to case 4. They seem to be used fairly regularly. The readers and games on case 4, on the other hand, seem to be relatively undisturbed, like many of the books in case 3. Hanging on case 3 are sheets of paper obviously designed to be used as part of a borrowing system. Quite a number of the sheets have been completed, indicating that the system has been used in the past; however, the yellow and curling pages suggest that it has been out of use for some time. Case 1 has sets of course books and audiotapes and seems to be used regularly.'

(F—26/1/94)

It is not possible to establish a model of breaktime talk, but some patterns do emerge. People tend to drift in at different times, and it may take ten minutes before the last teacher has arrived from his or her class. Not surprisingly, the first act on arriving is to make a hot drink, or accept one if someone at the sink has offered to make it. Opening topics vary, but half of the 10 breaks recorded begin with talk which centres on classes and students. This may be merely a reflection of the preponderance of such topics, or it may be influenced by the fact that teachers are fresh from their lessons. That the latter is the case is suggested by the fact that nearly all breaks begin with talk of 'events' of some sort, the emphasis being on what is topical or has just occurred.

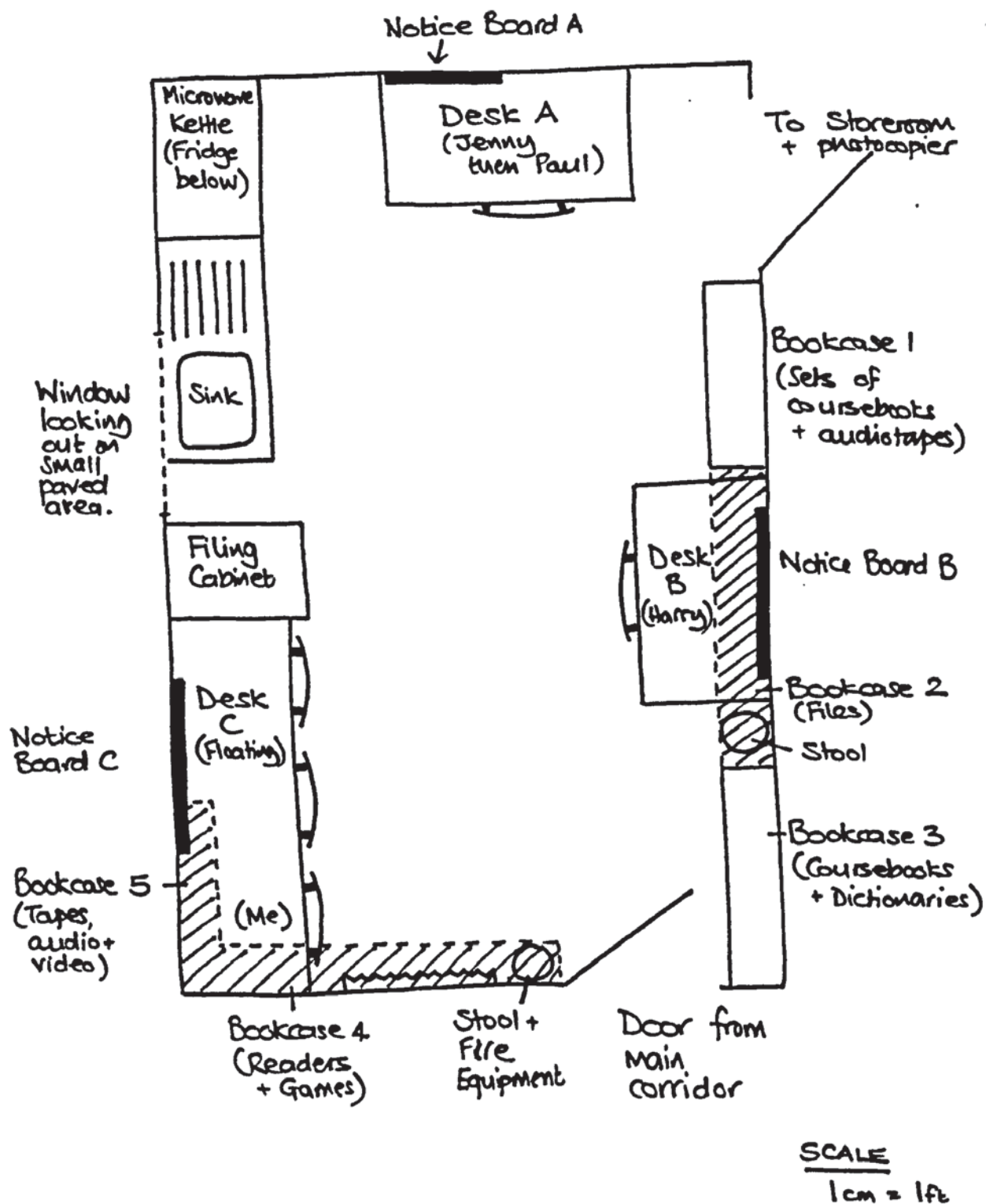


Figure 3. Plan of main staffroom

As the break comes to an end, it may be necessary to settle arrangements which have either arisen from the foregoing talk or been excluded by it. Not surprisingly, then, six of the ten recorded breaks end with arrangements of one sort or another.

The location of talk and the range of topics covered can be described reasonably confidently. It is very rare, for example, for conversations to develop in the photocopying room — perhaps because it is so small — and those which do are usually brought into the staffroom as soon as possible. Conversations at the staffroom 'door' are also rare, the corridor, students' common room or a classroom being preferred places to which students may be taken. Shared discussions take place across the space in the middle of the room, although there are three distinct groupings where separate conversations might develop. The first of these is in the coffee, fridge and sink area, where the 'non-residents' (Jenny, Annette, Louise and Helen) gather, the second is in the corner where temporary teachers have their desks, and the third is around Harry's desk or between this and Paul's desk. Conversation at Harry's desk tends to involve 'business' (discussions with new teachers in his capacity as 'mentor', exchanges with Jenny or Helen etc.), while those between his desk and Paul's range over a variety of topics. Membership of these groups is fluid, although for obvious reasons a conversation in the last two locations is likely to involve one of the inhabitants. Similarly, the most geographically fluid of the teachers tend to be the 'visitors', Jenny, Annette and Louise.

Almost inevitably conversation will include some items of current interest, and Jenny may mention something arising from the morning's mail, fax or telephone contact. The range of topics discussed in the staffroom is relatively narrow and concentrated mainly on issues to do with the school and its inhabitants, as the following tables show.

Date	Students Classes & Teaching	Materials & Equipment	Admin Systems & School	External & Marketing	'Develop- ment'
14.1.94	Class changes		Teachers' handbook First Aid	Marketing report	Report of meeting at Teachers' [T] Club
21.1.94	Staffing	Books for self- access [SA]	Staff rep- resentative First Aid [FA] Tutorial [Tut] sheets	FIRST audit	
11.2.94	Staffing & timetables [TT]		Work shadowing Academic management	FIRST audit	
11.3.94	Staffing Cover Grouping			FIRST audit	
18.3.94	Groups 1st day of course				
8.4.94	Groups New student [NS] S absences Progress NS		Window boxes		
22.4.94			Interview & Comment sheets Health & safety	FIRST event	Conference report
13.5.94	NS	New cassette recorder	Comment sheets	Relations with outside agency	
20.5.94	Staffing NSs	Cassette recorders	Class diary Filing	Financial outlook Audit report	Staff appraisals
27.5.94	NSs Mock exams	Exploitation of SA centre		Visiting delegation	Report on new examination
3.6.94		SA centre & class work	FA course		
13.6.94	TT Cover NSs		FA course Staff meetings	Ideas for short courses	Staff appraisal Report on Regional Ts' meeting
4.7.94	Groups		Tutorials [Tut]	Resumé meeting	
8.7.94	Class changes Cover TT	Quality of some cassette recordings	Tut system Student qu- estionnaires Copyright	Book exhibition Visitors	
15.7.94	TT NS		Filing	Visitor	
19.8.94	Staffing Absences		Key holding		

Table 3a. Staff meeting topics 1994

Date	Students Classes & Teaching	Materials & Equipment	Admin Systems & School	External & Marketing	'Develop- ment'
26.8.94	S eating NS Groups		Changes to report form Course meal arrangements		
9.9.94	Groups Staffing Refs for S				
30.9.94	Groups TT		S tuts Staff holidays		
7.10.94	Report on classes & Ss	SA centre Change to water-based pens			Subscription to <i>ELT Journal</i> Membership IATEFL Prof develop- ment in FIRST
19.10.94	S feedback Course direct- ors reports Social prog		Statistics Exams		
24.10.94	Groups		New social organiser	Invitation for contributions to newsletter	
28.10.94	Groups Class changes TT	Results of qu'aire, FIRST teachers' favourite mats	Pool cues	Newsletter BC inspection	
4.11.94	Tuts feedback Cover NS Syllabus	Pooling mats Water-based pens			
11.11.94		Pooling mats Equipment	Materials files OHT system Social organ- iser's job	Salaries	Financial support for courses Academic manager
25.11.94	S's programme	Materials needed	FA course Christmas card list		Fortnightly materials session
2.12.94		Book order requests & suggestions	Tutorial procedures	Outlook for 1995	Approaches to teaching narr- ative tenses
9.12.94	Staffing Cover TT	Books wanted Mistake in delivery Fault in photocopier Problems with cassette	Needs analysis for tutorial use Teachers' record sheets Date for FA weekend Building Filing Xmas meal arrangements		

Table 3b. Staff meeting topics 1994

Date	Students Classes & Teaching	Materials & Equipment	Admin Systems & School	External & Marketing	Social, News, Current Affairs etc.
8.2.95	Abdullah ² Coverage and topics Approaches to teaching [T- App] Staffing Yumi story	Pool equip- ment 'Headway' Approaches to materials Finding matching materials	Concluding interview with prospective teacher	Teachers' handbook First Aid	Weather My research Response to student laughter outside room
15.2.95	Problem of silent class [C] Composition of class A successful C activity Abdullah ² Adayed Polite requests T-App S problems with vocab				Coffee Chocolates Being taped Food Personal plans A comedian
22.2.95	An unsuccess- ful C activity Mak Changed arrangements with groups TT arrange- ments Clash of Ss Problem with S New S Request to change class 2 Ss	Borrowing a tape Location and use of mats	Arrangements when Harry is away		Coffee Whereabouts of Kate Names ²
1.3.95	Abdullah Reference Letter style Stock phrases Katsuko Grouping in C		Arrangements for S dinner		Food Wine Tape Transport Staffroom behaviour 'Teachers' The way things were Professions
8.3.95	S placement Coverage of material Joke in C Exchange with S André ² S attention New S Abdullah				Ed's job application ² Food Howlers ² Etymology of 'benchmark' Irish dancing ² Helen Taping News item S mimicry

Table 4a: Break talk topics Jan-Apr 1994

15.3.95	Problem with C (levels) ² Problem of groups & placement New student Problem with C Problem with C	Listening centre admin C visit to listening centre	Arrangements while Harry is away		Past links Susan's job application Susan's register
22.3.95	S relationships in C S & film Dominic Forthcoming class Junko Classes & Ss Arrangements for a S		Arrangements for S trips Paul's holiday arrangements	Falling S numbers ² Visitor to Pen	Coffee Shakespeare videos A late night Howlers 'The smell in the fridge' My research 'The disappearing milk'
29.3.95	Discussion of a lesson Abdullah Nature of a C An Argentin-ean group A successful class	Course books Preparing materials	Preparation for staff meeting Lesson records Agenda for staff meeting		Tape
5.4.95	A successful exercise Approaches to teaching a language point Teaching points S interaction New S & C arrangements	Assessment & exploitation of materials Copies of tapes	Records School heating Lesson observation cover		'Locking up' Weather & clothes Kate's presence at a staff meeting Sandwiches ² My research Taping A TV programme
12.4.95	Adapting plans Ria ² Student plans Katsuko Report on S Class size	Teaching materials A book order		Preparations for BC ² inspection Closure of another school	Coffee Kate's visit Children Food
Notes: 1. Recurring topics within the same break are entered only once, but the number of occurrences are marked in superscript. 2. Discussions of linguistic points are included under 'Teaching' only where they have explicit relevance to this; otherwise they appear in the final column.					

Table 4b. Break talk topics Jan-Apr 1994

Table 3 uses Pen minutes to summarise the topics covered in staff meetings in 1994, while Table 4 attempts to capture the topics which arose during breaktime talk during the period during which taping took place. The two periods are not contemporaneous because any attempted 'match' of only one break with that

week's staff meeting (which would have been possible) would reveal little if anything of value, and it seems more important to represent staff meeting topics over a complete year than to confine them to a few months.

With the exception of the final column, the two tables seem remarkably similar, although a closer inspection does reveal some differences in emphasis. For example, while students, classes and teaching feature prominently in both tables, the focus in the meetings is on staffing and grouping issues, while talk during the break tends to centre more on individuals. The same might be said of materials and equipment, where the emphasis in the break tends to be much more on issues of use, although there is a degree of overlap. Inevitably, matters of administration and systems tend to arise more in staff meetings than in break talk, and where they do occur in the latter arrangements feature prominently. In fact, discussion usually relates to things which need to be done soon and cannot wait for the staff meeting. External and marketing matters are also more suited to the formal setting of the staff meeting, and in two of the four breaks where they are found (22/3/95 and 12/4/95) they reflect, directly or indirectly, a concern with falling numbers.

The final columns in the two tables are different: social matters as such do not feature as topics in staff meetings and development issues are not matters for staffroom talk. However, social matters are not explicitly excluded from staff meetings and occasionally sneak in under different guises, while 'development' does take place during the break, especially where Harry has assumed his role as mentor and is discussing classroom issues with a young teacher. What is perhaps most interesting about the 'social' topics in break talk is the extent to which they involve the staffroom, the school, or work. If linguistic topics (of which there are two) are excluded because of their connection with work, only 6 of the 51 topics mentioned are 'external': 8/2/95 (weather); 15/2/95 (personal

plans); 8/3/95 (Irish dancing); 8/3/95 (news item); 5/4/95 (television programme); 12/4/95 (children). This seems to be very different to the situation described by Lieberman & Miller:

'The rule of privacy governs peer interactions in a school. It is all right to talk about the news, the weather, sports and sex. It is all right to complain in general about the school and students. However, it is not acceptable to discuss instruction and what happens in classrooms as colleagues.'
(Lieberman & Miller, 1990: 160)

It is surprising how little we learn of the private lives of these teachers from their staffroom talk. It seems very much that, while they are prepared to bring their professional selves to the staffroom and open these up to the students, staff prefer to keep their personal lives outside the picture. Paul's deliberate decision not to tell his colleagues when his marriage was breaking down is consistent with this. He had told everyone else but decided not to 'bring it' to the Pen, introducing the subject only when his marriage was finally over. The staffroom is, in a sense, its own world, and the lives within it 'professional' rather than 'personal'.

To some extent, the 'professional' personalities of the teachers are extensions of their individual personalities, but this does not preclude actions performed within specific professional roles. Sometimes individuals are addressed in terms of their role, as when Jenny asks Harry, 'Is this speaking in your role as academic manager' (P—30/1/95: 0245), and sometimes the concept of role itself is addressed, as when Paul comments on Ed's relationship with a student by pointing out the danger of mistaking the attraction of the role for the attraction of the person.

Such examples notwithstanding, it has been suggested that the staffroom represents a place where professional 'performance' can be temporarily set aside and behavioural distance established. I should now like to argue that there is

good evidence for believing that such is not the case in the Pen and that the symbolic 'absence' of a staffroom door allows open access to the complexities of role and representation which involve those who work together in the school.

5.7 The staffroom as a 'back region'

For all practical purposes there is no door to the Pen staffroom, for the door itself is propped open and ignored. Staff meetings, breaks, casual encounters, serious debates — all the business of teachers outside the classroom is conducted in this small room, visibly and audibly open to the world outside. You could, if you were prepared to tuck yourself tightly into one particular corner and whisper very, very quietly, engage in a truly private exchange, but that would be a strange business; anyone needing privacy should take themselves off to an empty classroom, the second staffroom or Jenny's office and close doors which are designed to be closed.

This most striking feature of the Pen staffroom is probably missed by most visitors to it and certainly taken for granted by its long term inhabitants. Semiotically consistent in terms of this school, it sits uncomfortably with Goffman's analysis of institutional interaction and if featured in any of the other descriptions of staffrooms currently available (e.g. Woods, 1979; Hammersley, 1980; Kainan, 1994a) it would represent an irreconcilable challenge to their common lines of analysis.

Up to now, accounts of interaction in this setting have drawn on Goffman's concept of a 'back region' (e.g. Hammersley, 1980; Hargreaves, 1981), 'a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course ... Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character' (Goffman, 1969: 97-98). This is perhaps not surprising since

Goffman himself mentions the school staffroom as an example of such a region (1969: 115). There is ample evidence that Pen teachers do use their staffroom to make comments about matters which are not for 'public' consumption (locations in parentheses refer to where more detailed interactional evidence of this is to be found in the analyses which follow):

- They characterise students and classes in ways which might give serious offence if heard by, or passed on to, the subjects of these characterisations. We find potentially offensive labelling of individuals, classes and national groups (see especially this chapter), joking at the expense of students (Chapter 6) and stories which reveal their frustrations with students (Chapter 7).
- Assessments of students are commonplace (Chapter 7).
- Personal details of teachers may be discussed.
- Financial and administrative matters are openly discussed.

This fits in comfortably with Goffman's analysis and the sort of interaction identified in other staffrooms, and it raises the possibility that the 'open door' on the back region is in fact metaphorically closed. There is evidence to support such an interpretation. First, it needs to be remembered that the student body here is from overseas and the level of their English is such that they would be likely to have only the most fleeting understanding of exchanges taking place in the staffroom. Second, the position of the room needs to be considered. It is almost opposite the open door to the student common room, but the offset positioning would make it unlikely that much would carry across there, and such snatches as might be caught by students would be hard to make sense of without careful attention and an awareness of the conversational context. Furthermore, this very proximity means that students have no reason whatsoever to loiter in the

corridor: if they are not passing by, there is immediately available a legitimate place for them to gather.

These considerations alone lend only hypothetical support to the evidence from staffroom interaction, but the case for a metaphorically closed door receives more concrete support from an exchange which took place in the summer of 1994. The hot weather had led to someone opening the window above the sink in the staffroom, and while standing at the sink I happened to remark that students seemed to be making good use of a small patio area on the other side of it. This prompted Paul, supported by other members of the core staff, to relate a story of the previous summer. Because of the heat they had left the window wide open, and it was only after a number of days that one of them pointed out that the students outside could hear every word spoken in the staffroom. They found this most amusing and something of a *faux pas* on their part, which strongly suggests that the open staffroom door is not considered in the same way as the open window. In accepting such a distinction, it should also be borne in mind that Goffman recognises that at least some people are prepared to occupy a back region without physically closing it off, albeit to the annoyance of other inhabitants (1969: 103).

In the Pen, however, the open staffroom door is no mere accident; it is a deliberate statement which has symbolic and physical significance. The decision to leave the door open was made at the outset as part of a declared aim to create the atmosphere of a home rather than an institution. The founding team gave careful thought to presentation and decor, and in this context it was important that the staffroom should be as accessible as any other room in the school:

'It would have been odd for us to close the door on people, because when we set this place up it was supposed to be warm and friendly and actually wanting to go out of our way to help students. Sometimes they're a pain — I mean individual ones are a pain — but over all we

want to be accessible. That's why most of us a lot of the time actually stay in the school.' (I—Paul)

Symbolically, the door is an expression of the 'openness' of the school and the teachers in it, a reminder of shared concerns and common interest, reinforcing the informality and relaxed atmosphere which is the mark of the Pen, and, as we have seen, of the lives of the core teachers who inhabit it. Students do not find the entrance a barrier. Some, it is true, wait at the staffroom door and begin their talk from there, others seem perfectly at ease as they wander in to begin a conversation with one or more of the inhabitants. Even those who wait at the staffroom door, though, do not seem to be abashed when interacting with those inside, and there may be cultural factors at work influencing their decision:

'This is one of the not really untypical exchanges, which seem particularly popular with Japanese students, where the student, standing on the other side of the open staffroom door, converses with whichever teachers can see him or her from the staffroom.' (F—29/3/95)

Student visits are not particularly common, perhaps because most business is conducted elsewhere or because there is an understanding that this is the teachers' — rather than the students' — common room, but I saw no evidence in the reaction of teachers in the staffroom that the presence of students was in any sense an intrusion, much less a violation of personal space. There were cases where teachers were annoyed by *what* students were up to, especially where this involved trying to engineer promotion to another group or changes in timetable arrangements, but their presence in the staffroom was never an issue.

The significance of this should not be underestimated, since it represents a deliberate refusal to recognise the 'off-limits' status which is a distinguishing feature of back regions. Goffman (1969: 98) is explicit on the subject: 'In general, of course, the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably

expect that no member of the audience will intrude.' It is interesting to note how much more emphatic are those who have studied the staffroom as a back region:

'In these schools, the main arena is the staffroom, the teachers' collective private area. Its privacy is well respected by headteachers and pupils alike. Pupils are often debarred from knocking on the door, or even approaching its vicinity, by 'out-of-bounds' corridors.'

(Woods, 1979: 211).

'The staffroom is regarded as the exclusive territory of the teachers. It is also regarded as private territory, and there are various rules or customs governing its use. The most important of these is denying entrance to visitors who are not teachers.'

(Kainan, 1994: 15).

The 'openness' which the Pen staffroom door represents offers direct access to the person rather than the institutional representative and implicitly denies the separation of 'team' and 'audience' as envisaged by Goffman, a distinction which has drawn some criticism. Burns, for example, refers to 'the notion, which is perhaps worked a little too hard, of a performance being divided into front region and back region, and of the participants between team and audience' (1992: 136). The same might be said of the crude separation of parties along student/teacher lines which has been a commonplace in studies of school life and which may have deflected attention away from more subtle aspects of interaction within the institution. In the following chapters, I hope to show that the interactional achievements of the Pen teachers lie far more in their ability to generate involvement than in any attempt to maintain a professional front.

5.8 Aspects of collaborative interaction (1): Co-operation and control

Superficially, there is a straightforward answer to the question 'Who's the boss?': nominally, and ultimately, it is Kate, but for all practical purposes it is Jenny. However, this statement fails to capture the cultural reality of the Pen staffroom, where the leader is *primus inter pares*, and where behaviour which explicitly violates this norm is open to direct challenge. The aim of this section is to

provide interactional evidence of the leadership provided by Jenny and Kate and to indicate the collaborative assumptions on which it is based.

That Jenny is the boss is never in dispute, and the life history of the teachers has demonstrated how this emerged as part of a natural process. As the boss, she is responsible for the day-to-day decisions in the school, but her beliefs, her experience in the school she enjoyed so much in Australia, and the history of her relationship with the other core teachers in the Pen, all incline her to an approach which is based on shared responsibility and horizontal rather than vertical relationships.

In terms of staff meetings, Jenny's presence clearly makes a difference. Where she is absent, for example, nomination of topics in line with the agenda is distributed across those core staff who are present, as the following summary of the first staff meeting recorded makes clear:

	Nominates a new topic or returns explicitly to a topic after a drift away.	Closes a topic or indicates that a move a new topic is appropriate	Proposes an approach to dealing with or categorising a topic
Harry	0035; 1428; 1839; 1913; 2116	1185; 1425; 1726; 2761	1485; 2193
Paul	1530; 2203; 2600; 3509		1481; 2188; 3072
Annette	1728; 2576; 2764; 2975	3495	

Table 5: Topic control in staff meeting 11/11/94

What is striking about this is the fairly even distribution of topic control. Although Harry begins by controlling the topics, Annette, who does not feature in this respect for the first half of the meeting, effectively takes over towards the

to the core staff. The meeting has been started by Annette, but up to this point (0224) for all intents and purposes the only ones who speak are Kate and Jenny, despite the fact that Jenny announces that 'I just want to get everybody together in a huddle to (.) think of the things we've forgotten' (0009-0010). There is a very short side sequence involving Paul and Kate, and Louise offers a couple of brief comments at the start, but apart from this the contributions from the staff are no more than the response tokens 'mmm' and 'uhuh'. Kate and Jenny run through the items together and offer their own responses and evaluations, watched by those present. The conversation opens up only when Jenny nominates another speaker (0234).

Lest the importance of this should be overestimated, however, it is important to remember that in the same meeting an overt exercise of authority by Kate (0725: 'Well just- think about it will you.') meets with ridicule from Jenny and Paul (an exchange which is analysed in more detail in Chapter 6). Similarly, jokes at Jenny's expense are as common as those directed at others, and on only my second visit she was the butt of a number of teases about the forthcoming audit. For someone who is happy to spend half a morning break on her knees in the staffroom scrubbing at a stain on the carpet while life goes on around her, such jibes are part of the everyday round, and Jenny is more than able to give as good as she gets. Her role as leader is accepted but circumscribed by the interactional rules which bind the staff together, rules which, as we shall now see, apply equally to the ways in which disagreements among the staff are handled.

5.9 Aspects of collaborative interaction: (2) Disagreement and its resolution

For the most part, discussions in the Pen do not expose basic disagreements among the core staff, despite the differences which their life histories reveal. This may be a reflection of shared fundamental beliefs about teaching, or it may be that the humorous key of so much of the discussion which takes place there

(discussed in detail in the next chapter) obscures aspects of disagreement which might otherwise be more obvious. Nevertheless, the dominant atmosphere in the staffroom, remarked on by visitors and temporary teachers alike, is one of easy-going collaboration. There are, inevitably, some disagreements, and there seem to be accepted ways of dealing with these. The following analysis points to these differences and indicates how they reflect the teachers' attitudes to their professional world.

During my stay at the school I witnessed no examples of heated argument, much less open conflict of the sort described by Kainan (1994: 59-60), although even in her staffroom, riven by inter-group rivalry, personal and professional jealousy, naked vanity and hierarchical struggles, 'conditions of open, crude competition between the sub-groups is almost non-existent. There is a general tendency to refer globally, or to insinuate, and not to enter into direct confrontation or open competition' (1994: 58-59). Interactional features associated with disputing (see, for example, Grimshaw, 1990) are absent from the Pen data and there is ample evidence that interactants seek ways to find aspects on which they can agree, but the way in which they represent their positions depends very much on the subject under discussion.

Where matters of simple fact are in dispute, the closeness of the community makes bald on the record disagreement (Brown & Levinson, 1987) acceptable. In the following example we see disagreement involving most of the core staff, with no suggestion that this is regarded as in any way face-threatening (in this and other extracts included for illustration here, bold lettering is used to indicate relevant items in the text and has no other transcriptional significance):

Kate: And you gave a talk.
Louise: You did, yes.
Paul: No.
 [

Kate: With you.
 Jenny: No that was before that
 [
 Louise: It was Regent's Park wasn't it?=
 Annette: =No.

(M—7/4/95: 0277-0285)

Linguistic disagreements fall at the other extreme. Matters of language are rarely black and white affairs, but even when the issues are clear contributions tend to be heavily hedged or treated humorously, as in the discussion of 'benchmark' discussed in the next chapter (T—8/3/95: 0139-0332), or here:

Ed: Yeah. You see something don't you to denote that between the /t/ and the /l/
 Paul: Now I've always thought, >I mean maybe this is me being ignorant< I've always thought that that (.) that means that you do:n't have to put it in but you can if you want to, because >as I was saying before,<=
 Harry: =I presume it's explained in the front of a dictionary.
 [
 Paul: It's
 Paul: ER if you sa:y (.) people, (.) if you put (.) 'ple' together you naturally >that's what I've< always thought but maybe I'm wrong.
 Jenny: I thought you (said you so-)=
 ...
 Harry: Er Er my guess would be that it's (.) somewhere (.) that it indicates that it's somewhere between (3.5)
 Jenny: Oh
 Paul: 'ple' if you say 'ple',=
 Harry: ='peop/o/l.' People. (
 [
 Ed: Right. I don't think they actually use that little (.) mark as part of the: IPA symbols
 (M—18/11/94: 0600-0633)

Even where a teacher asks for guidance, as when Annette cannot decide whether 'improvement' is countable or uncountable in the context of a letter which she has written, the suggestions offered are heavily hedged:

Paul: I think (.) I think maybe because the of the word 'steady' it becomes slightly unsteady' (T—1/3/95: 0323-0326)

Harry: Think I probably ~~tend~~ to think of (.) 'improvement' (.) un-
uncountable when (you think of) like the process, and 'an
improvement' being like a sort of step up.'

(T—1/3/95: 0392-0397)

It might be argued that this is essentially a matter of not being sure, and there must certainly be an element of this, but there are many other examples of unsureness in disagreement and none are so markedly hedged as those which are linguistic. It seems more likely that knowledge of language is the nearest equivalent to 'content' knowledge in EFL, and disagreement here constitutes a serious professional challenge which would represent a significant threat to face. Matters linguistic feature prominently on the list of popular topics in this staffroom, but they are the ones which need to be the most delicately negotiated. The same does not apply to pedagogic issues, methodological or otherwise. The following extract is fairly typical of discussions which take place on these topics (numbers in superscript relate to the discussion which follows):

- Paul¹: Can't really yet, because he's: (.) °he isn't° I mean on on paper
he's not >necessarily good enough< for my group.
(1.0)
- Harry²: Yeah but (is it a smart)
- Jenny: Well that's the one >we were looking at earlier.<
[]
- Paul³: Yeah but w- we have to talk with- we'll have
to talk with him at least.
- Harry: Yeah.
- Paul⁴: I mean if you look here, I mean he's (.) he's er
- Harry: Yeah.
- Jenny: So I think we-
- Harry⁵: Well that's the bit we-
[]
- Jenny: decided it's either bottom or (.) yours
- Paul: Mm=
- Jenny⁶: =depending on (). Yeah.
[]
- Paul: Mm
- Harry⁷: On the other hand if you look at somebody like er (.) Junko
((last name))'s
- Paul: Yeah=
- Harry: =writing,

Paul⁸: N-no but I mean I- I'm I- (.) I'm keen to avoid my group=

[]

Harry: It's huh

Paul: =being a dumping ground from the top and the bottom

[]

Harry: Oh yeah.

Harry⁹: Yes. Yes.

Paul¹⁰: Because I mean I don't mind looking at it objectively but e:m
(0.5) it's nice to have two wonderful groups and one crap
group in the middle.

Harry: HeheheHEHEheh...

(P—30/1/95: 0411-0450)

Paul begins (1) by suggesting that the student is not really good enough for his group, which draws a delayed response from Harry questioning this position (2). This prompts a slight retreat from Paul, who suggests at least talking to the student (3), justifying this by pointing to the test results they have in front of them (4). Harry begins his response with the disagreement marker 'Well' (5), but Jenny finishes it by representing the choice which faces them and suggesting that the matter may not in fact be closed (6). Harry, though, has further evidence to present, in the form of another student's performance in writing (7). This serves to bring out the fear which lies behind Paul's position: that his group will serve as a 'dumping ground' (a significant image, as we shall see below) for the classes above and below it (8). Harry's agreement with this is immediate and repeated at the end of Paul's statement (9), and Paul closes the discussion by accepting the need to be 'objective', framing the situation in terms which produce laughter in Harry (10).

There is disagreement here, but it does not emerge as oppositional. Even the evidence in support of the two positions is barely touched on and the attempts to accommodate or understand the alternative position stand out [6, 9, 10]. Much of the discussion and disagreement in the Pen staffroom emerges as 'exploratory' rather than confrontational, resting on the assumption of shared objectives. An important outcome of this is the extent to which imagery can be

used to advance or defend a particular position. Most of the imagery which emerges from talk in the Pen staffroom can be subsumed under the polar headings 'active' and 'passive'. Images which are essentially active are viewed positively, while problems tend to be seen in passive or 'inactive' terms. The following extract comes at the beginning of a long discussion on how useful teaching materials might effectively be pooled. In it Paul establishes the contrasting images which will recur throughout the discussion. On the one hand there is the 'heap' of 'pieces of paper' and on the other the 'exploiting' of ideas:

Paul: I- I think what we- a- a good way of looking at it would be: (.)
 >would be< maybe different strategies with materials. 'What I do with this piece of material.' (0.5) E:m (0.5) or 'What I do with this kind of idea, I think, you can imagine what that box is going to look like after (.) two months if we actually start putting *in it*. *You know* It's just going to be a heap of things. SO I- I thought it- it might be an idea just to- (0.5) just to look at different ways of exploiting a piece of material which (1.0) which we may know about, and sort of pooling ideas rather than pooling pieces of paper. (M—11/11/94: 0058-0069)

The image of the 'pile' or 'heap' will be taken up in the ensuing discussion ('heap', 0065; 'pieces of paper', 0068; 'sump', 0115; 'boxful', 0277; 'load', 0284; 'consigned', 0680) and adopted by Annette ('piled', 0700), while 'idea' and associated active verbs will be used even more frequently and generally. Eventually Paul will return to the contrast, pointing to the importance of 'adapting' and 'using' an idea rather than 'putting' something into a box (0815-0826) This will be picked up by Harry, who will implicitly accept the 'sump' idea: 'discover all sorts of things at the bottom of it' (0835), 'that's what we don't want to:' (0841). At this point all three of the core teachers involved in the discussion have accepted the contrast, and when Paul sums up their final position (1138-1142) using appropriately active images ('idea', 'used', 'develop') he reflects something which was established at the outset.

5.10 Aspects of collaborative interaction: (3) Shared views

This active/passive distinction arises from the experiences and beliefs of the Pen teachers and reinforces their shared view of the professional world they inhabit. It is reflected in the importance they attach to employing young teachers with fresh ideas (see below), in their keeping up with developments in their field as evidenced in the journals they subscribe to and the conferences they attend, and in their interest in exploring their own teaching ideas both in casual breaktime talk and in the regular staff meeting slot assigned to this. The relevance of this contrast to foreign language teaching as a whole will be discussed in Chapter 7, but its immediate context will be established here.

The evidence of the Pen staffroom points to a 'practical intelligence that is often both improvisational and efficient' (Stone, 1992: 19) and which presents precisely the sort of representational problems which Connelly and Clandinin highlight:

'The language of image, narrative unity, ritual, cycle, routine and rhythm which help to characterize ways of knowing in school seem, in the pages of theory, ill-defined and ultimately undefinable with precision and exclusivity. The school events in which we participate feel, from the security of the philosopher's pages, unendingly variable and thoughtless.'
(Connelly & Clandinin, 1985: 177)

Particularly striking is the 'ordinariness' of the way in which knowledge is manifested in the staffroom. When Harry talks of the Pen teachers' suspicion of too much enthusiasm and says that they are 'all quite negative to the messianic approach to teaching or anything else' (I—Harry), he is reflecting a tendency to play down the significance of the general in favour of the particular and to emphasise the practical over the theoretical, something which may be typical of teachers in general (Weiss, 1995: 584). This is not to say that the importance of theory is explicitly denied, but it tends to emerge in a negative rather than positive light, reflecting a stance which may be common to many teachers

(Hargreaves, 1984). For example, a book is not bought for the staffroom collection because too much of it is dedicated to theoretical issues (M—18/11/94: 0797-0801), teachers whose theoretical knowledge exceeds their practical grasp are the butts of criticism (F—29/7/95), and when Paul suddenly announces on returning to the staffroom after a successful lesson, 'It just shows that theory does work' (F—10-/3/94), this is offered as something newsworthy rather than predictable.

This attitude to theory does not extend to the use of technical vocabulary, which clearly has a practical function, and the data contains not only examples of linguistic terms used unconsciously (e.g. 'cohesive devices', M—2/12/94: 0380; 'collocation', M—7/4/94: 2226) but cases where the appropriate jargon is explicitly sought (e.g. M—2/12/94: 0420-37). However, this needs to be set against the shared interest in finding 'little teaching points', a particular concern of Jenny, who returns to it repeatedly in the discussion of teaching pronunciation in the meeting of 18/11/94 (0228, 0343, 0465, 0516, 0573 etc.). The Pen teachers pride themselves on keeping up with developments in their field (F—19/1/95), but see this in essentially practical terms.

In the discussion of pronunciation mentioned above, Jenny talks about 'activating' teaching points, and in doing so draws on one side of the polar image which is ubiquitous in Pen pedagogic talk. The importance of metaphor has been recognised both generally (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and in EFL (Thornbury, 1991; Swan 1993), and the centrality of 'image' in teacher thinking has been demonstrated by Elbaz, who describes it as something which 'seems to refer to all of Sarah's [the subject of her study] teaching seen from a particular perspective' (1985: 134). Other researchers, drawing on the work of Clandinin, point to the importance of image as a 'meaning making structure' (Beattie,

1995b: 139) which draws together different experiences and provides a perspective from which to undertake new experiences.

Such studies draw heavily on interview data and invite participants to explore their own image making. Therapeutic and professionally productive though this may be, it encourages conscious construction on the part of the teacher and may not reflect the day to day functions of image in the professional world. Image, as Elbaz admits, is difficult to pin down, but what emerges from the Pen data is markedly different from the more consciously articulated structures derived from interview data. It is hard to detect a 'meaning making' function here; what emerges instead is something which both reflects and reinforces a shared perspective on what is positive and what is negative in pedagogic experience.

If the Pen is in any way representative, the images which dominate teacher talk are simple, powerful and pervasive. The image of 'action' in Pen talk may be crude, but what it lacks in subtlety it makes up for in its power as a cultural marker. Time and again the polar images of 'activity' and 'passivity' emerge as points of orientation in pedagogic discussion, intimately connected with the staff's emphasis on engagement and communication. The following selection provides an indication of the sorts of context in which this imagery is embedded and offers further insight into the pedagogic culture of the staffroom:

- In the staff meeting of 7/4/95 (1919-2038) Paul, Annette and Louise become involved in a discussion of teaching methodology in which 'learning a list' is opposed to 'doing an activity'. Considerable emphasis is placed on the need to 'confront meaning', 'do the task', 'use' and 'search' in the important process of 'developing a conversation'.

- What begins as an essentially linguistic discussion in the break of 1/3/95 (0513-0603) soon develops into a shared attack by Harry and Paul on 'just learning stock phrases' as a substitute for a more considered approach to letter writing, and Harry's reference to 'boxes of useful expressions' (0550) echoes the 'boxful' of materials which featured so prominently in a debate on sharing ideas in the staff meeting of 11/11/94. 'Lists' and 'heaps' or 'piles' (here 'boxes') are characteristic of a passive approach to language learning which depends on the unthinking absorption of information at the expense of 'confronting meaning' and engaging in interaction.
- Paul begins the break of 15/3/95 (001-0023) with the complaint that he is 'wading through mud' (0011) in a class which is 'a sort of dumping ground' (0021). This serves as the prelude to a discussion with Susan on problems of class mix and levels, but it is interesting to notice how the difficult class, which is the product of 'dumping', is represented as something which impedes action.
- Discussions of materials are quite common in staffroom talk and what emerges from them is a forcefully stated belief that authenticity and communicative potential are particularly important. In an extended discussion involving Paul, Harry and Keith during the preparation day on 30/1/95, the importance of choosing stimulating texts which can be exploited for their 'intrinsic worth' is stressed.
- The only example in the data of a teacher adopting a passive line is where Linda, a temporary teacher, advises a new teacher that she doesn't 'obviously have to prepare too much because it's all there for you' (8/2/94: 0247-8), but the involvement of Harry soon moves

things onto a more active line which includes the observation that the material 'does actually communicate' (0281).

In her study of staffroom life, Kainan (1994, Chapter 4) identifies *pour*, *pass*, *teach* and *educate* as important teacher concepts, and considers the first three in terms of responses to materials. Her discussion is conceptually muddy and based on an investigation which began with general interviews and included a questionnaire asking teachers what the 'significance' of the terms was, requiring them 'to arrange these concepts in some kind of order' (p. 105), but what does emerge from this list is a distinction, however crude, between the passivity of 'pour' and 'pass' and the more active 'teach':

'The teacher, who played an almost passive part in the previously-mentioned concepts [*pour* and *pass*], also becomes very active, as far as processing the subject matter, setting the goals, and determining the working methods are concerned.' (1994: 95)

This is particularly interesting when considered in the context of her observation that *pour* 'comes up quite often in teachers' conversations in the staffroom' (p. 90). It would seem that this active/passive distinction is not confined to the Pen but may be a pervasive feature of teacher talk. If this can be established through further investigations it may provide a valuable addition to the growing literature which points to the importance of metaphor in teacher interaction and development (e.g. Tom, 1984: 121-125; Munby, 1986; Provenzo *et al.*, 1989; Bullough, 1991; Thornbury, 1991; Swan, 1993; Hannay, 1996).

5.11 Aspects of collaborative interaction: (4) Working knowledge

Consideration of so much that is shared points naturally to a culture which is collaborative in its disposition. Before moving on to consider this description, however, it is worth pausing briefly to comment on the aspects of professional

knowledge which are manifested in this staffroom, since they add support to the claim that the emphasis here is on what is simple and powerful.

Research into teacher knowledge is growing apace and three 'schools' of research grew to particular prominence during the last decade: work at Stanford, associated with Shulman (e.g. 1986, 1987), which concentrated on subject matter knowledge in the context of secondary schools; Leinhardt's work at Pittsburgh (1988), which was directed towards the teaching of mathematics with a focus on situated knowledge; and work at Michigan, which sought to establish characteristics of knowledge structures (Roehler et al. 1988). Each of these three approaches adopts a position which challenges the claims of the others, often from the perspective of cognitive psychology, but all three agree that what makes teacher knowledge interesting is not so much its content as the way it is structured, used and understood by teachers. The way that such knowledge is constructed dialectically within an institution has been the focus of more recent research (e.g. Beattie, 1995a).

In TESOL, interest in teacher knowledge is of more recent vintage and so far has been concerned chiefly with content knowledge. Richards (1991), provides an interesting description of content knowledge as represented by a survey based on what teachers in Japan said they had learnt on Masters courses. What emerges is a fairly predictable list in which around 90% or more of respondents mention 'theory' courses (phonology/phonetics, transformational grammar, structural linguistics, language acquisition), with 'methods' courses featuring in about 70% of cases. More recently (1996), Woods has explored in detail teacher decision-making, relating this to lesson planning and classroom experience. His work describes a much needed exploration of an important and neglected area.

Aspects of content knowledge do feature in Pen staffroom talk, but much more prominent, appearing again and again, are snippets of practical knowledge, uninspiring in themselves but cumulatively impressive. The following advice offered by Harry to Susan on the subject of what she might teach Abdullah is, in this context, unusually 'heavy' in terms of what it makes overt. It begins with the advice itself (1), states a condition which applies (2), offers examples (3) and justification (4), before adding a qualification (5), and an explanation/justification for this (6). Along the way, Harry draws on knowledge of the student, of materials, of the course and of classroom methodology. In the following transcript, 'Mm' and exchanges from another staffroom conversation are edited out, and superscripts are added, corresponding to points in the description above:

'Well that sort of ¹basic survival stuff is probably worth doing with him ²if he's not aware of it. °You know >³things like<° (.) asking for information:, (.) 'Can you tell me:: (.) what (are the .') °And so on.°
⁴It'll be a break from structural stuff °anyway°. ⁴Presumably comes up in the book anyway °doesn't it. In the 'Headway' (stuff). (3.0) ⁵But not necessarily straight after you've just done 'could' *as a past*. Heheh.
⁶Because it might er ·hhh might cloud the waters a bit.'

(T—15/2/95: 0258-70)

The day-to-day exchanges of the core staff take much more for granted, and it is only in the exercise of knowledge that its extent becomes apparent. There is little opportunity to observe this directly in the staffroom except in the matter of materials (which are kept there) and the intimacy of knowledge displayed by the Pen staff in this respect is impressive. Having observed and experienced many examples like the following during my first year at the school, I decided to put this knowledge to the test:

'What's most interesting is the way that at first Louise and then Paul work from the bookcase next to the door unerringly producing the book or the example required.'

(F—25/03/94)

'I said that TRC III were interested in something on advertisements, which I'd be happy to do. Paul was immediately able to suggest a useful section in (Headway?) Activities (Advanced) which he plucked from the shelf and showed me. It happened to complement perfectly what I had in mind and I thanked him enthusiastically.' (F—28/7/94)

The results of the 'test' supplied ample confirmation of the extent of such knowledge:

'Paul and I then talked about the lesson I was about to teach. There wasn't much to say, but I did ask him if he could suggest a relevant exercise I could use if time permitted. Within one minute he had produced two in addition to the one I was using from the course book. It's hard to over-emphasise how impressive this was. Paul received no warning of my request but instantly pulled a book from a pile on his desk, selected a spot and opened it on the exact page required. He then got up and went to one of the sets of books on the 'take-in shelves' situated diagonally opposite him, immediately retrieved a book and, as he walked back, found the relevant page without recourse to index of contents page. The passages and exercises were exactly what I wanted and he'd found them in less than a minute.' (F—9/12/94)

It is hardly surprising, then, that a common diversion amongst core staff is 'Spot the exercise or extract', where someone provides a clue and those present have to guess the source. The most striking example of this is the staff meeting of 2/12/94, where the identification and comparison of texts occurs at least a dozen times (0044, 0082, 0308, 0346-72, 0995, 1013, 1023-31, 1084, 1288, 1412, 1446).

Such knowledge is supported by a sound acquaintance with the systems and resources of the school, but teachers are always ready to develop new plans and systems in the light of changing circumstances. References to 'systems' and opting for 'Plan A' or reverting to 'Plan B' reflect this, and such expertise seems to be best captured by Leinhardt's description of 'situated knowledge':

'Situated knowledge is contextually developed knowledge that is assessed and used in a way that tends to make use of characteristic

features of the environment as solution tools; it is contrasted with principled, context free knowledge.'

'Situated knowledge can be seen as a form of expertise in which declarative knowledge is highly proceduralized and automatic and in which a highly efficient set of heuristics exist for the solution of very specific problems in teaching.' (Leinhardt 1988:146)

'Leinhardt argues, for example, that 'situated knowledge seems to be more accurately and flexibly used [than principled knowledge], and more quickly assessed than the detached but more generalizable knowledge' (p.148). I wouldn't argue with that, but it does make it hard to pin down in the sort of investigation I'm undertaking. Is it the case, for example, that although we use situated knowledge, we provide accounts in terms of principled knowledge?' (D—5/1/94)

The exercise of such knowledge is effectively illustrated when a teacher fails to arrive on a particularly busy day:

'At 7.50 she [Jenny] received a phone call from Judith to tell her that she couldn't make it today (the first day of the biggest course of the year). Her first response to the news was to burn the toast which, she says, she couldn't have eaten anyway because she was so 'choked up'.

'With one hour to prepare a day's teaching for a new course she quickly realised that whatever she could do wouldn't contribute much to its quality, 'So decided (*sic*) on a strategy that the emphasis would be on a test teach day which means that you're not in your final group. It's a rough-tuned day, working towards fine tuning tomorrow.' The four groups will become five tomorrow.

'Once Jenny had decided on this, it was a simple matter of getting to the school in order to begin the necessary physical arrangements which would be necessary. Hence the activity I'd met on arriving.

'The morning arrangements had been based on the fact that new students always tend to arrive in the morning before the old ones. The order of arranging the classrooms was based on this. All arriving students were shown to the common room by Helen and as soon as it began to fill up or a class was complete it would be moved upstairs. They managed to keep ahead of the developing situation and students were unaware of anything untoward.

'Interesting use of specialist knowledge, this. The problem is that they can't pack all the students into the common room because it will soon

begin to look as if something is wrong, and neither can they rearrange all the classrooms at once. But the fact that they can predict the order of appearance gives them an order in which to deal with the classrooms.

‘The other remarkable — and I think typical — aspect of this is that the students remain completely unaware of the rapid adjustments being made. Outside the staff room door (which is always open) there’s a quiet and relaxed atmosphere which I have yet to see disturbed.’ (F—26/7/94)

Such contextual knowledge establishes the basis upon which the core Pen staff can work comfortably and economically together. The elements in it are simple enough, and it would be easy to dismiss them as trivial, but together they establish a robust and powerful mechanism for collaborative interaction. In the chapters which follow some of the elements in the interactional cement which binds this mechanism will be explored, but first it is first necessary to make clear why this particular culture can reasonably be described as collaborative.

5.12 The Pen staffroom as a collaborative culture

Despite the claims that there is no agreement as to what *collegiality* and *collaboration* represent (Cole, 1991: 425) or that *collegiality* is ‘conceptually amorphous’ (Little, 1990: 509), there does seem to be a reasonable consensus on the criteria which apply if these terms are to be used. In what follows, I begin with a widely recognised description of a collaborative culture, before moving on to consider issues of collegiality. The section ends with a comment on the research methodology which has characterised research in this area and evidence which suggests that it may be flawed.

The work of Nias and her associates, who based their findings on fieldwork in six successful schools which offered ‘a positive model of adult relationships’ (1989: 3), is well known. Their description of a ‘culture of collaboration’ seems particularly apt in the case of the Pen:

'We argue that the culture was built on four interacting beliefs. The first two specify ends: individuals should be valued but, because they are inseparable from the groups of which they are part, groups too should be fostered and valued. The second two relate to means: the most effective ways of promoting these values are through openness and a sense of mutual security.'

(1989: 47)

They argue that although such a culture does not arise from shared beliefs about 'the nature or organization of curriculum content or teaching methods... It leads over time to the formation of a broad curricular and pedagogic consensus, tolerant of difference and divergence' (p. 53). This seems to represent the situation I encountered at the Pen. There are a number of other key features identified by Nias et al. which also apply to this group of teachers:

- A sense of independence and collective responsibility

There is ample evidence of this in the data, as one would expect given the evolution of the school and its organisation.

- Recognition of the need for a high degree of occupational competence

Perhaps the best example of this is that although Ed proved to be less than popular with the Pen staff, there was never any question of his being asked to leave, which has been the fate of teachers who proved pedagogically less than competent. The shortest case in the Pen's history involved a well qualified teacher who arrived on the basis of a strong recommendation and joined the staff after a brief interview, only to demonstrate his incompetence so quickly and conclusively that he had to be removed after the first lesson.

- Hardworking teachers with professional pride

There is ample evidence of hard work and professional commitment on the part of the Pen staff, and in discussing the selection of temporary staff Jenny emphasises that they have to take the job

'extremely seriously'. Paul's statement in a staff meeting discussion is a good indication of the professional pride associated with this position: 'I mean it really upsets me if I give a bad lesson.' (T—11/11/94: 3547)

- The selection of staff who share the school's existing values

It is interesting to compare a comment from one of the teachers in the Nias *et al.* study and a headmaster from a similar study by Corrie with one from the Pen: 'We've got to be looking for someone who will "fit" in with the rest of the staff' (Nias *et al.* 1989: 79); 'I don't think I would have chosen somebody who didn't fit in' (Corrie, 1995: 95); 'It may not be the most important thing but the first thing that springs to mind is that somebody will fit in with us actually, somebody that we can get on with' (I—Harry).

- A sensitive and informal head

Jenny seems to fit this profile. Her handling of staff is friendly and informal, and she seems very aware of the effect that new staff and students are having on the core group.

- Person-centred talk

This is a distinctive feature of Pen talk which will be explored further in Chapter 7.

- The staffroom as 'hub'

The Pen staffroom is without doubt the hub of the whole school. Although information may flow through and be discussed in the office, it is in the staffroom that most of the important discussions take place.

- Humour

The next chapter will focus on this central feature of staffroom culture in the Pen.

The only point of difference seems to be that Nias and her colleagues note that staff in the schools they studied talked about out of school experiences, whereas in the Pen relatively little time is given over to this. However, they add that such talk did not eliminate the distinction between personal and professional lives, and this is certainly true of the Pen.

Something which does not emerge from the Nias *et al.* study or any others on the same subject is the element of challenge which may be important to such a culture. The danger to any system which has evolved interactionally in the way described above is that its very 'taken-for-grantedness' can undermine the collaborative dynamic, with comfortable acquiescence replacing shared exploration. In such a context it is important to introduce an element of challenge, and this is what the Pen teachers seek to do. Jenny, talking of the need to employ young staff with fresh ideas, says, 'It makes you re-examine yourself quite often. "Why do you do that?" You have to think it through again; you can't just assume that there's a pat answer.' This element of challenge is something which is consistent with the other features in the list above and it should perhaps be included as another aspect of collaborative cultures. Its inclusion may be particularly important if such cultures are to be distinguished from other staffroom worlds. Neilsen (1991: 676), for example, has presented as a professional norm what is surely no more than a feature of a particular — and not necessarily typical — culture: 'Teachers who bring their new ideas and practices to the staffroom threaten to stir up a carefully cultivated atmosphere of boredom and faded ideals.'

What has also not been explored in research on collaboration and collegiality is the extent to which this relates to classroom expectations. The point was made earlier in this chapter that features of the staffroom culture tend to carry over into the school as a whole, and collaboration seems to be no exception to this. There is at least *prima facie* evidence that expectations about collaboration apply as much to the classroom as to the staffroom, and a discussion of Argentinean students provides a clear example of this (T—29/3/95: 0213-0409). What begins as a derogatory comment by Paul (0221) moves on to a discussion of 'the culture of the classroom' (0296) where these students are criticised because 'they don't exploit the language' (1313) and there is no cooperation. 'They wouldn't er (.) dream of sharing (.) ideas and opinions with other students' says Annette (0321), and they adopt a selfish attitude exemplified by 'I've got a good idea so I don't want anyone else to know' (0330, Susan).

Such features aside, the Pen culture seems to fit in well with the findings of other studies of school culture. Many of the findings in Stoll's 'extensive longitudinal study of school effectiveness (1992: 106), for example, apply to the Pen. However, perhaps the two best known studies are those by Little (1982, 1990), the second of which reads rather as a lament for the fact that *collegiality* has been appropriated as a term rather than pursued as an ideal, and its imposition on alien school cultures has actually had a detrimental effect. In terms of the features in the 1990 paper (similar to those in the earlier paper), only 'joint work' does not feature in the Pen culture, while storytelling is a strong element, as are aid and assistance, and the sharing of materials, methods and ideas. In the light of the system of peer appraisal based on classroom observation in the Pen it is also worth noting Little's (1990a: 179) claim that 'the presence of observers in classrooms is a common event in schools that promote collegial work.'. In work based on Little's models there are also features which stand out in the description above. The 'hands on' approach of the principal

pointed to by à Campo (1993), for example, is very much a part of the Pen culture, and Cousins *et al.*'s own framework based on Little's 1990 model contains much that is common to interaction in the Pen staffroom.

Hargreaves (1995) has argued convincingly that *collaborative* and *collegial* should be distinguished because the latter has an institutional base to its structure. His description of a collegial school fits the Pen as comfortably as those already discussed, with certain features, such as the principal as *primus inter pares* and the importance of 'fit' for new staff, standing out. Since the focus in this study is on the staffroom rather than the institution, the term *collaborative* is used, although it seems reasonable to identify collegial features where these are relevant.

The real issue, however, does not seem to lie in the distinction between these two terms but in the ways in which conclusions about school culture are reached. It seems that all of the literature on collaboration and collegiality is based on interviews with teachers, which are then used to make claims about interactional aspects of staffroom culture. Corrie (1995), for example, talks confidently of 'shared meanings' and staffroom interaction on the basis of interviews and classroom observation, while Zahorik (1987) is happy to draw conclusions about teacher talk on the basis of interviews where teachers tell him what percentage of time they spend conversing, what proportion of their talk is related to classroom teaching as opposed to social-personal matters, how many times they got or received help from colleagues in specified areas *in a year*, etc. This, more than any terminological niceties, is what casts serious doubt on findings in this area.

In the chapters which follow, as here, I attempt to put interactional flesh on the cultural bones of the Pen staffroom in what is necessarily a selective way.

However, I should like to demonstrate first what even fieldnotes, let alone interviews, fail to capture. I take as an example a problem which may be characterised as 'comfortable acquiescence' and seek to show how the structure of collaboration can lead to a representation of issues in a way which may preclude productive discussion.

The incident to be analysed might be described as 'dealing with criticism', and is interesting because of the way in which the criticism is 'dealt with' almost before it is raised (numbers in superscript relate to the discussion which follows):

- Ed: ¹Does ((name)) know that- you know that (.) you know (like) ((name)) (.) did they know that >they were kind of< coming (.) to a general English type course.
- Jenny: ⁰Uhuh⁰
- Ed: ²Uhuh
- Jenny: As far as I know. ³That's the information they should have been given. (1.0) ⁴Why: (.) did you get the impression the other te-
[
- Ed: ⁵Well
Thomas seemed to give the impression that he (.) wasn't (.) he didn't get quite what he was expecting.
- Jenny: ⁶Did he?
- Ed: Yeah.
(1.0)
- Jenny: O::h. ⁷This could be a fault at the British Council end I suppose.
⁸What did he think (.) he was going to get.
- Ed: ⁹Well I mean he- (.) he just said on- on the Friday >he said< 'I don't- I don't know (.) how much I (.) improved,' >he said< 'partly because I'm (.) slightly out of my depth,' (.) he's-
- Jenny: Mm
- Ed: 'and- and partly because (.) because some of the:' (.) >you=
[
- Jenny: (I understand that.)
- Ed: =know< 'materials w-' (0.5) some of the things about () to him. ¹⁰Which was fair enough (0.5) I suppose ¹¹but I mean (.) anyway (.) the kind of course they're coming on
[
- Jenny: Mmm
(0.5)
- Jenny: ¹²It's probably worth a (.) a note back to (.) the British Council to make sure this gets conveyed.
- Ed: Mmm¹³

Jenny: Er (.) ¹⁴I don't know how well liaison goes on at that end, (0.5) I know some of the (.) mistakes they've made in getting accommodation information through are not that (kind of job but)

Ed: °Mm°¹³

Jenny: But yes it's probably worth finding out to make sure. (0.5)
¹⁵But apparently he went with great (.) thanks and (.)

Ed: Yeah.¹⁶

Jenny: praise and everything.

Paul: Who

Jenny: Despite (.) Thomas

Paul: Thomas. Yeah. ¹⁷Considering he went (.) extremely lazy.

Jenny: [Mm (0.5)

Jenny: °Mmm°

Paul: ¹⁸Er I- I mean i- it could have been: (.) real problems about loss of face, it could have been that.

Jenny: Mmm. I felt

Paul: E:m

Jenny: ¹⁹he was worried about his status ()

Paul: [²⁰But he- he: he he- he didn't work well within the group after- you'd bear me out on this.=

Jenny: [Mmm

Paul: =He he was I felt sorry for anybody working with him.

Ed: [¹³Yeah he [

Jenny: [Mm

Ed: ²¹I think he felt a bit like

(P—30/1/95: 0020-0082)

Ed, a temporary teacher and one who has not really 'fitted into' the Pen culture, introduces the criticism in the form of a general question (1) which serves as a pre-sequence (Levinson, 1983: 345), allowing Jenny to direct responsibility away from the school (3), by means of what might be called 'pre-emptive positioning', before inviting detail of the criticism itself. That such an invitation is required is clear from the echoic 'Uhuh' following Jenny's initial response (2).

The process by which the complaint is actually introduced is an interesting one, especially in terms of the control which Jenny exercises over it. The talk

proceeds in the form of question and answer adjacency pairs, controlled by Jenny, who asks the questions (4, 6, 8). The hedged formulation (5) of the criticism ('seemed to give the impression ... didn't get quite...') is almost invited by the question (4) which prompts it: 'did you get the impression...'. There then follows a challenging 'Did he?' (6) and an attributable silence after Ed's response. Jenny's response (7), when it comes, is preceded by a change of state token, 'O::h' (Heritage, 1984), indicating surprise, something which will be relevant later when inconsistency on the part of Thomas is indicated (15). Jenny's responses so far have been a mixture of challenge and deflection, and her explanation sums this up, first (7) picking up the earlier pre-empt (3) and then suggesting a misconception in the emphasis on 'think' when she directs another question (8) back at Ed. (Another structural interpretation of this sequence is possible, based on treating the criticism (5) and response (7) as an adjacency pair around an insertion sequence and attributable silence, but the asymmetrical relationship between Ed and Jenny still holds.)

Ed's precise formulation of the complaint, prefaced by a disagreement marker, 'Well' (9), is interesting because it relies on direct speech. This allows Ed, after a brief evaluation (10), to distance himself from Thomas's claim with 'but' (11). Even though what follows is incomplete and does not amount to a clear statement, the 'but' has positioned him sufficiently clearly. From this point on, Ed's primary interactional endeavour is that of alignment with his colleagues and therefore against Thomas. This grows in strength, from receipt tokens (13), through explicit agreement (16), to supportive evaluation (21).

Jenny meanwhile suggests an appropriate response from the Pen and then contextualises this misunderstanding in terms of failures 'at that end'. Her final comment (14) leaves open at least the possibility that the fault was not with the Council and attention shifts to Thomas, who left having thanked and praised

them (15). Ed agrees with this (16), which leaves implicit the charge of inconsistency on Thomas's part. Paul now joins in, his first contribution, after having first established Thomas's identity, consisting of an evaluation (17). Jenny agrees with this and Paul (18) offers a possible explanation of Thomas's behaviour. This account is accepted by Jenny, who suggests that Thomas's loss of face may arise from problems of status (19). This has now cast the student in a problematic, if not negative, light and Paul is able to confirm (calling from support from colleagues) that Thomas did not work well within the group (20). Jenny and Ed both agree with this analysis and are now aligned against Thomas. All that remains is to call on a specific example, George, as representative of the rest of Thomas's group. George's position is represented unequivocally:

Paul:	'George (.) seemed very appreciative.'	(0095-60)
Jenny:	'George was incredibly nice to me'	(0102)
Paul:	'he said he he (.) he's <u>really</u> got a lot from the <u>course</u> ... he was very (.) very (.) <u>clear</u> about it.'	(0113-16)

A summary of the moves in this exchange demonstrates just how effectively this challenge to the professional competence of the Pen staff has been dismissed:

1. Presentation

- (a) A pre-sequence allows pre-emptive positioning before the criticism itself is formally requested and presented.
- (b) The criticism is introduced in direct speech, allowing the speaker to distance himself from it and subsequently align with colleagues as they respond to the criticism.

2. Deflection

The pre-emptive positioning is taken up, as responsibility is explicitly shifted to an outside party.

3. Typification

The complainant is typified as a student who has problems or defects which set him apart from other students.

4. Isolation

The complainant is presented as someone who does not fit in with the rest of the group. Hence, implicitly, his views are dismissable as deviant.

5. Contrast

The contrast is made explicit by taking another member of the group and positioning him at the opposite extreme to the speaker.

By the end of this sequence the force of the complaint has been directed elsewhere and its validity undermined. The Pen staff have located the problem giving rise to the complaint outside the Pen, in the British Council, and have effectively identified the source of the complaint itself (Thomas) as being 'outside' the main body of students. The Pen teachers are aligned with satisfied students.

5.13 Collaboration in action: talking about students

This alignment is only to be expected. Talk in the Pen staffroom is concerned with students, and no cultural description would be complete without a closer consideration of this aspect of staffroom life. In undertaking this, the analytical perspective which has thrown light on a 'negative' aspect of collaborative interaction will be turned to more positive account. Talk about students features prominently in all research on staffroom life so far published, but there do seem to be significant differences between the way students are discussed in the Pen and the way they seem to be discussed in other schools. This subject is taken up

in detail at the end of Chapter 7 following a discussion of the way Pen teachers narrate their experiences in class, but at this stage it is at least possible to indicate where the main difference lies.

First, it should be noted that so far there seems to have been no attempt to study the way profiles of students emerge over time. There is no space here to dedicate to such a study, but it is possible to indicate what a potentially rich source of insights such a study might be. Abdullah, a student who appears almost at the beginning of the recorded data (T—8/2/95: 0108-0123), will serve as a useful example, though it should be borne in mind that the taped break is only one break on one day of the week. Counting the period before lessons begin, there are four breaks in a day when mention of him might be made, which leaves 19 other breaks in a week when he might be a topic of conversation.

The convenient labelling which marks Abdullah's introduction as a topic of staffroom talk in the first break is replaced in his next appearance (T—15/2/95: 0098-0108; 0258-0361) by a more considered discussion of Abdullah as an individual. His actions and motivations seem at least as interesting — and certainly as entertaining — to these teachers as his behaviour in class and academic progress. The picture which emerges of this student, as of others, is much richer than a mere academic profile, and the teachers' concerns are with the person rather than with the learner as such. This orientation is reflected in talk over subsequent weeks (T—1/3/95: 0176-0214; T—8/3/95: 0895-0945), culminating in a wide-ranging discussion (F—29/3/95: 0905-0930, 1155-1200; T—29/3/95: 0074-0211) which embraces news of events, assessment of student performance, personality and health, comment on classroom tactics, evaluation of a lesson, and speculation on factors in language acquisition. What is most striking is the extent to which the student features as an individual rather than

as a member of a class, and the emphasis on personal as much as pedagogic matters, an orientation which characterises other discussions about students in the school. Concern here for Abdullah's health, for example, parallels almost exactly the concern expressed for a student who was not eating properly (F—25/8/94).

This interest is particularly important considered in the light of the history of EFL, where the emphasis has been very much on language acquisition and methodological issues. The evidence here is that, interested and experienced in the field though these teachers are, their prime concern is with students as human beings, individuals with personalities and lives outside the classroom. Chapter 7 will discuss more fully where the professional concerns of these teachers seem to be located, but the issue of student labelling needs to be addressed here since it presents a potential anomaly in the picture of Pen culture so far developed.

Much has been made in other studies (e.g. Rist, 1973; Hargreaves, 1977; Hammersley, 1980, 1981, 1984) of the way in which students are 'typified' by teachers: once a label is attached to the student this is used to account for all the behaviour of the student and obviate the need for further discussion. Early assessment of students seems to be a feature of Pen talk also, but on an individual level it seems to be no more than an initial sketch which will later be filled in, amended or discarded as events — classroom and otherwise — unfold. In fact, talk about students in this staffroom might best be characterised as 'gossip' were it not for the fact that it has pedagogic relevance. It has been argued that teacher talk in staffrooms is essentially 'shallow' (Zahorik, 1987) and that serious methodological issues are not addressed, and at first sight this may seem to apply in the Pen. None of the discussions outlined above probes very

deeply, but two factors seem important here, neither of which has been considered by those who advance arguments about superficiality.

The first factor is quite simply the time available: arguments which might be more carefully spelt out for new teachers (for example, T—15/2/95: 0258-70, discussed above) are usually expressed in shorthand form. Experienced teachers who are used to working together not only *can* express things in this way, it would be distinctly *odd* if they did not. Spelling things out every time they are mentioned would violate Grice's (1975) maxim of quantity: be no more informative than is required. The problem for visitors to staffrooms who spend relatively little time there and fail to examine closely the nature of the interaction which takes place is that it is all too easy to mistake such economy for superficiality.

The second consideration is the range of information which is made available and the uses to which this might be put by experienced teachers. We have seen in the example of Abdullah how information about his performance in class is exchanged, along with news of his behaviour outside the school and his personal habits. An experienced teacher is able to make use of such information to form a picture of students which will inform pedagogic decisions relating to them. Much of this, like so much of the tacit knowledge of teachers, is hidden, and thus encourages charges of superficiality. Polanyi has summarised this hidden aspect in professional decision-making:

‘In effect, to the extent to which our intelligence falls short of the ideal of precise formalization, we act and see by the light of unspecifiable knowledge and must acknowledge that we accept the verdict of our personal appraisal’
(1958: 53)

Researchers who have assumed that because explicit discussion of curriculum and teaching methods is not foregrounded in teacher talk, teachers work in

isolation (for a summary of this position and those representing it, see Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986: 508-509) have perhaps paid too much attention to surface features of conversation and failed to consider the implications of Polanyi's insight. In such a context it is hard to establish the absolute value of any snippet of information or glimpse of a someone else's experience, and there is always the possibility of professional illumination:

'The powerful moment, the moving insight (though just from one person or even a handful) is sometimes enough to create dynamic improvement in those who have access to it.'
(Schubert, 1990: 100)

It is true that such talk may not be 'rich', and there is always the danger that professional shorthand becomes reduced to unthinking pigeon-holing, but interaction in the Pen does suggest that 'mere' gossip may serve an important professional function and should not be dismissed out of hand.

Nothing exemplifies better the dangers of reaching premature conclusions about staffroom talk than the issue of 'labelling' students. Such labelling certainly exists, and is to be expected in a 'back region'. There is plenty of evidence that Pen students are a source of amusement and irritation on the part of the staff (see the following chapters), and the staffroom is an ideal platform for expressing personal feelings on this subject. However, the acceptance of this does not represent a commitment to the view that the categorisation of students serves no pedagogical purpose. In fact, there is considerable evidence that the opposite is the case.

The way in which individual students are assessed in terms of personality, intelligence and aptitude has already been evidenced in the case of Abdullah, and it is a fairly common feature of talk about individual students. Sometimes it shades into typification, as when Paul describes a student as a 'big girl's blouse', or dismisses part of a class by saying 'the rest are crap', but such examples are

rare in this data and should not be evaluated in isolation. In order to illustrate the importance of considering the wider context, I offer the case of the groups of Swiss teachers who appear regularly at the Pen and who as a group represent the *bête noire* of the teachers there. I then suggest, using a day's exchanges relating to another group, that there are cases where labelling can be useful, albeit dangerous.

The 'dreaded Swiss' are almost a running joke in the Pen, and the national adjective has pejorative connotations, as in 'She's typically Swiss' (Paul, F—10/3/95). There is little extended discussion of the problem, merely an assumption that their classes represent a challenge. However, there is some understanding of where the difficulties lie:

'Paul and I talk about the classes and he jokes about my having to teach the dreaded Swiss. Harry concurs. It's not that they dislike the Swiss or that the Swiss are in any way awkward, it's just that they're all teachers and they tend to turn up, fold their arms and adopt a "well, teach me then" attitude. Paul's strategy last time, though, was based on his experiences the year before. Then, asked to make oral presentations at the end, they had for the first time shown signs of nervousness and a lack of their usual assurance. Paul therefore switched the oral presentations to just a few days into the course to break down the barrier of absolutism which had faced him throughout the previous year's course. It worked and he'll certainly do it again.'

(F—4/3/94)

It is interesting to note here that the attitude of the Swiss is essentially passive, and hence towards the 'negative' pole of the 'active/passive' divide which characterises Pen imagery, and it also worth remarking that the subject prompts the outline of a teaching strategy from Paul. There are other characteristics of the Swiss teachers, though, which antagonise Pen staff:

'Jenny came in and announced that she was heartily sick of the "arrogance" of the Swiss teachers. She mentioned the males particularly. Paul pointed out that they were physically big people, and big people can naturally seem arrogant even if they're not. Jenny responded that in this case the comments were from essays and provided a few ripe examples ("I do not see the point of language work because my English is perfect").

Paul agreed forcefully with Jenny's original assessment. The conversation opened out and involved Harry, who has responsibility for the group, and Jan, who had some evaluation forms from them. It was generally agreed that the fact that they're forced to come on the course makes life difficult for all concerned, but the fact of the matter is that sooner or later the Swiss do seem to get up the staff's noses.'

(F—3/8/94)

There is no doubt that the accumulation of examples like this is likely to generate national stereotyping, where certain features are identified which eventually create expectations which individuals seek to confirm (Bochner, 1982). However, the effort here to account for the arrogance should not be ignored. Paul's mention of size (a topic which recurred eight months later when an influx of 'tall' Scandinavians initially created social problems in a school which up to then had been largely filled by much shorter students from the Middle East and Far East) introduces the possibility that Jenny has been misled by the effect of appearances at the expense of more measured judgement and prompts her to provide supporting evidence. But even when this is accepted, the circumstances under which the Swiss attend the courses are offered in mitigation of their behaviour.

This attempt to 'understand' and account for 'unacceptable' behaviour, even in the case of by far the most unpopular group in the Pen, undermines the blunter force of casual derogatory comment and indicates a willingness to explore the sources of social and pedagogic problems. In fact, it is rare to find derogatory comments which do not serve to prompt further discussion, and, as will now become apparent, even national labelling can serve a valuable pedagogic function.

Labelling by national or cultural group is a striking feature of talk about students in the Pen, but what it makes it interesting is its almost exclusive

association with interactional problems. The following exchange is not atypical (the context is a class of mainly Japanese students):

Annette: What er (.) nationality is Grace?

Ed: Spanish but she doesn't sh- not at all doesn't dominate the class.

(T—22/2/95: 0142-0144)

Nationality here is important because the interactional style of Spanish students is very different from that of Japanese students, and it could lead to Grace's domination of class exchanges. It is therefore important to qualify identification of her nationality with a statement to the effect that there is no evidence of such domination. At one time Pen staff maintained a notebook in which they entered linguistic mistakes typical of different national groups, but eventually this was discontinued, partly because a book was published on the subject and partly because cultural factors seemed just as important. The identification of a particular cultural group may therefore be a valuable indication of the need for methodological adjustment.

Pen teachers are sensitive to the effects different students and student groups have on one another, physically and socially as well as interactionally, as problems with a new Polish group illustrate. Harry, who is acting as academic manager in Jenny's absence, explains to Paul and Ed (T—22/2/95: 0463ff.) that Nina, a Japanese student, has complained about two Poles in her class jumping in before she has had the chance to answer a question, even when the teacher has nominated her. Another student, Yumi, is having the same problem. Paul explains how he has coped with the problem and Ed says he hasn't noticed it happening in his class. His repetition of this is met with a significant silence of four seconds before Harry reinitiates the topic, establishing that it is an important one. He says that he has talked to those concerned and suggests that 'it's obviously a cultural thing' arising in part from the fact that Yumi and Nina

tend to work things out before they speak while the Poles are likely to jump in quickly. They all agree that increased awareness is important and finish by discussing the way in which Nina used 'cut in'.

The matter, however, does not end there, and that lunchtime the Polish students are in the staffroom complaining about placement and their reception by the Japanese (F—22/2/95). It also emerges later in the same lunchtime that there are interactional problems within the group itself:

- 'Harry: (to Annette) 'Your Pole is alright, isn't she?'
Annette: Yes. Explains that she's paired with Shafi. Brief exchange on this subject then the focus shifts to the two Polish students who were in the staffroom.
Paul: 'Those two have got status problems.'
Discussion of what this might mean.
Annette: Does she work for him?
Paul: Doesn't know.
Helen: Her card says she's a public relations officer.
Annette: What does the man do?
Paul: 'He's into import or export.'

(F—22/2/95)

Status problems and problems about 'cutting in' are pedagogically of the same significance: both threaten effective interaction within the class. And since effective language teaching depends on such interaction, awareness of and effective responses to such problems are of considerable pedagogic significance. Often, too, interactional characteristics of a particular group will have direct impact on classroom exchanges. The epilogue to the 'Polish' problem illustrates this well:

Annette and Paul turn to the Polish students in Paul's class. Paul says, 'They're from different backgrounds but they're not hung up on status.' He says that, unlike the previous group, they don't think that everything has to be addressed to the teacher. He hates this attitude and ends up with 'a fixed smile all the time.'

(F—29/3/95)

Shorthand representations, then, may not be pedagogically insignificant, and the accumulation of relevant cultural knowledge in all its aspects can be useful. The Pen teachers' characterisations of students and student groups need to be set against the backdrop of more idiosyncratic aspects of student behaviour. Student knowledge and performance often emerge as unpredictable in staffroom talk (this forms the subject of at least one extended discussion: F—9/12/94), but cultural factors may provide a more stable context for lesson planning and strategic classroom responses. The risk of stereotyping needs to be set against the pedagogic advantages of drawing on shared and accumulated experience in this area. The ways in which such sharing takes place will be the focus of the chapters which follow.

Conclusion

'Groups which can interact without misunderstanding do so on the basis of a consensus of meanings manifested in linguistic usage and dependent upon a deeper consensus of values and understandings'
(Stenhouse, 1983: 22)

This chapter has developed a picture of staffroom culture at the Pen, positioning it in the context of similar studies and indicating where the methodological stance adopted here offers additional insights into the nature of such a culture. The analysis has produced evidence which challenges a number of claims currently made about staffroom culture and which extends models already well-established:

1. It undermines the assumption, characteristic of staffroom research to date, that the staffroom functions primarily as a back region. This in turn suggests that the maintenance of a professional front may be less fundamental than previously assumed and that, at least in collaborative cultures, the primary interactional endeavour may be the generation of involvement. It is important to qualify this, however, by noting that

although these features may be characteristic of collaborative staffroom cultures they may not be typical of those EFL staffrooms which are embedded in different institutional cultures. Size and independence may also be important factors: larger institutions and those in the public sector are perhaps more likely to conform to the cultural and interactional norms reflected in the research of Woods, Hammersley and Kainan.

2. It reveals subtle differences in the ways in which disagreements are negotiated in a collaborative environment and underlines the importance of imagery in staffroom debate. Comparison with other studies also indicates that a fundamental 'active/passive' dichotomy may underlie specific metaphorical representations of professional positions. At the very least, it is clear that more work needs to be undertaken to explore actual staffroom debate at the expense of less reliable analysis based solely on interview data.
3. It confirms the findings of Nias and her associates with regard to collaborative cultures and suggests that her list of characteristics might be extended to include an element of constant challenge. Detailed analysis of staffroom decision-making has also indicated that there may be serious drawbacks in collaborative cultures arising from shared assumptions and well-established interactional routines.
4. It challenges previous characterisations of staffroom interaction as essentially 'shallow' and dependent on crude characterisations of students. The subtleties of staffroom talk, especially with regard to student assessment, have been indicated.
5. What emerges most clearly from this chapter is that there are limitations to analyses of staffroom culture which depend solely on fieldnotes and

interviews, especially where such analyses emphasise the importance of interaction and in some cases feel comfortable discussing it on the basis of interview data alone. Nias *et al.* (1989:183) have emphasised 'the importance of the seemingly insignificant' and argued that greater prominence should be given to the mundane, in recognition of the fact that '[o]rdinary, everyday actions drip-feed the culture, and, like the action of water dripping on a stone, shape preferred ways of working together. Perhaps greater prominence, and status, needs to be given to the mundane.' It is hard to see how this can be achieved unless interaction itself is subjected to detailed scrutiny.

Research which seeks to explore the interactional reality of 'ordinary' acts must position itself between the convenient labelling and comfortable dismissal which appear on the surface of staffroom talk and the 'significance' which is articulated in the artificial depths of extended interviews. It must offer an account which pays due respect to the realities of both while exposing their limitations. The fine-grained analysis which this demands means that an element of selection is inevitable. In what follows an attempt is made first to characterise the context in which 'business' is conducted in the Pen staffroom and then to look closely at the way in which classroom realities are represented, thus developing some of the key points made in this chapter. The aim of this deeper analysis will be to identify the mechanisms of involvement which underpin the collaborative culture identified here, and it begins by taking up a point made in an earlier study of professional collaboration (emphasis mine):

'Teachers gratified one another and instilled a sense of belonging in their peers. And while they were doing it, they had *fun*'

(Cousins *et al.*, 1994: 460)

Chapter 6

'It's the way we tell 'em': Staffroom humour revisited

6.1 'There was this stream...'

Embedded in, arising from and flowing through many of the routines and rituals of staffroom life, the stream of humour is perhaps the most distinctive feature in this particular landscape, and no description of life here could even approach adequacy without considering the part which it plays. In this chapter I shall argue that it is not only a source of enrichment and nourishment, but a defining characteristic of the territory as represented by its inhabitants.

In order to develop this case, I shall consider first the only treatment of staffroom humour to my knowledge currently available, pointing out some of the problems in its interpretation of such humour and using these as a basis for considering the nature of humour in the workplace generally. I shall then examine varieties of humour in the Pen staffroom in the light of this, focusing in particular on its function within the collaborative culture and suggesting that it provides a valuable means of developing a critical distance from the systems and routines of professional life in the school. Finally, by considering participants' own views and microinteractional evidence, I shall suggest that humour here is what might be described as a *sanctioned key* in 'staffroom business' and that deviations from this norm must be overtly signalled.

First, though, it is possible to indicate immediately how important humour is to the Pen staff. In order to do this it is only necessary to point to their responses when asked what they look for when assessing a teacher who wishes to work in the school...

'The ones that make it here are the ones that don't take themselves too seriously.'
(I—Jenny)

'It might be something to do with how seriously you take yourself, actually ... The people that do fit in are not necessarily the people that you would expect to.'
(I—Harry)

'I think we do, we send out signals to people — and in a sense I do the same thing as I do in a class. I may make a cheeky comment which is obviously not meant to be- which is "Eh look, this is only a joke." I think we try to relax people, we definitely do.'
(P—Interview)

...setting this against a comment made about a teacher who did not fit in:

'He always looked so bloody miserable. That was the problem with him.'
(I—Paul)

6.2 Being serious for a minute

In his discussion of staffroom humour, Woods (1979) argues for its particular significance, claiming that:

'what appears to be the most trivial and peripheral activity of the school could be interpreted as the most serious and central. For it is through laughter that teachers neutralize the alienating effects of institutionalization; that they synchronize the public and private spheres' (p.211).

What is most interesting about this is that while the evidence of the Pen staffroom seems to bear out the first part of the claim, there is no support whatsoever for the second. Woods is perhaps rather too scathing in his treatment of attempts to explore the functions of humour — a point to which I shall return — but his argument for its centrality and its capacity to generate enjoyment is worth exploring, especially in the light of its relative neglect:

'Interaction, therefore, can be intrinsically satisfying, over and above the instrumental gains that might be got from it and indulged in for sheer delight. It can involve fondness and affection, even when expressing conflict, and the former might in fact predominate. To reduce it to instrumental functions adulterates it. Because it does not lend itself easily to sociological analysis, it tends to get ignored, which is rather unfortunate for institutions like schools many of which have a high

incidence of such interaction. And it takes place mainly in 'off-periods' and in private areas, whether it be staffroom or playground. Perhaps that is why there are so few reports on these areas — they are 'off-periods' also for researchers.' (p. 215)

It is hard to establish, of course, the degree to which satisfaction operates over and above 'instrumental gains', and Woods does not address this issue. Neither does he consider that 'entertainment' may itself be instrumental in furthering broader social goals. He advocates a broader conception of humour, 'which locates it within a conception of man struggling to get on terms with the social forms and structures that assail him' (p. 235) but seems to accept the practical limitations of such a characterisation — it is, as he admits, 'another more transcendent, quality'. What he does offer in support of his case for the importance of humour is evidence of what he calls 'laughter inhibitors', or combinations of factors producing situations for which laughter is no antidote. He identifies three factors (the psychological and physiological state of the teacher; injustice; the undermining of status, or threats to professional equilibrium or personal insults) and produces examples of each, to illustrate situations where laughter was simply inappropriate.

It is important to recognise at the outset the status of Woods' claim here: if he is simply arguing that some factors inhibit laughter then it is hard to see how he might be challenged, but by the same token it is impossible to see how such an obvious truth can constitute grounds for claiming that laughter has special status; on the other hand, if he is claiming, as he seems to be, that there are situations which *by their very nature* exclude the possibility of laughter, and he can show that such situations are signs of a breakdown in order, then the centrality of laughter as a coping mechanism is strongly indicated. Unfortunately, this latter claim is open to question on a number of counts.

The first and most obvious challenge is that there is, *in principle*, nothing which falls outside the scope of laughter. The point is made succinctly by Dundes and Hauschild (1988: 56) at the start of their somewhat disturbing paper on Auschwitz jokes: 'Nothing is so sacred, so taboo, or so disgusting that it cannot be the subject of humour.' It could be argued, however, that a distinction must be drawn between acceptable topics for humour and acceptable situations in which humour can be brought to bear, and that the force of Dundes and Hauschild's claim is directed only at the former. A similar distinction may be drawn along temporal lines: what serves as a subject for humour now was not a subject for humour when it occurred.

But even if attention is directed solely at situation rather than topic with the emphasis on that precise temporal context, it may be hard to establish Woods' claim as true in principle. In presenting three factors which act as laughter inhibitors, Woods establishes the pillars of his case, but in reading them I was reminded of an incident recounted to me as a child by someone who had been a Japanese prisoner of war. At a low psychological and physical ebb, subject to an unjust regime of labour which flew in the face of international agreements and facing threats to life and limb as well as status — all the factors identified by Woods — the POWs still found a place for humour. On one occasion, rounded up, abused and in fear of their lives, they were herded with other prisoners and ordered to strip off. In doing so, one of the new group revealed a pair of blue eyes tattooed one on each buttock, with the legend 'I can see you' beneath them. This ridiculous sight triggered mirth in captors and prisoners alike, a few moments of unexpected and perhaps strange sharing. This power inherent in all humour to generate participation is something to which I should like to return in the next chapter, and it is perhaps what lies behind Woods' arguments.

The power of laughter to relieve tension has been much commented on, and it might be argued that the choice of 'inhibitors' is deliberate: there are indeed factors which *inhibit* laughter even if they cannot prevent it. The problem for Woods' case is that he wishes to argue that the absence of the possibility of laughter is an indication that order may be breaking down, and the presence of 'laughter inhibitors' does not provide sufficiently strong grounds for such a claim. As examples of 'conflicts that arise when its [laughter's] emergence is obstructed' (p. 211) he provides four examples of situations where participants resorted to anger and recrimination but no evidence, beyond the applicability of his three descriptors, of the nature of the relevant 'obstruction'. In the absence of such evidence we are left with the weaker claim that the absence of laughter may be an indication that 'things are getting serious'. Although Woods' characterisation *may* account to some extent for this, there are other equally credible explanations available. Linstead, for example, agrees that humour 'is an essential and important part of organisational life' (1988: 123), but sees ambiguity as the element which provides the possibility of humorous exploration:

'Ambiguity is important both in the sense of practical bargaining in the real-world and in the reordering of the symbolic in the non-real world. It is when ambiguity is lost and the limits and margins lose their potential as a ground for creative redefinition and negotiation that conflict occurs and resistance solidifies and evaporates.' (1988: 144)

I should like to develop Woods' argument for the centrality of laughter in rather a different direction, drawing no conclusions about the effects of the absence of laughter, but suggesting that its presence represents a healthy norm within the staffroom. In order to do this it will be necessary to return to some of the functions which Woods dismisses. First, though, it will be interesting to compare the physical setting of what Woods has called 'the laughter arena' with the Pen staffroom in order to identify some important differences. Humour

serves as a surprisingly powerful descriptive tool, and the contours established through such a comparison will enhance the picture so far developed.

6.3 I'm not saying the staffroom was unusual but...

In the following description, Woods draws on 'several staffrooms of my acquaintance, which all seem of a type':

'the main area is the staffroom, the teachers' collective private area. Its privacy is well respected by headteachers and pupils alike. Pupils are often debarred from knocking on the door, or even approaching its vicinity, by "out-of-bounds" corridors. Headteachers usually knock before entering, limit their visits to urgent matters of business, and conduct themselves discreetly while there. Its boundaries are usually clearly demarcated ... The "properties" of the staffroom often lend it a distinctive character — perhaps old battered armchairs which the teachers who 'belong' to them defend with great vigour, resisting charitable urges from the headteacher to buy "brand new ones"; or stained tea mugs which carry the evidence of many a happy break — both symbols of individuality; and frequently too, signs of vast disorder — masses of papers, books, journals strewn around flat areas — which contrasts strongly with the system and order outside. Above all the staffroom is characterized by a euphoric atmosphere, given off by the reactions of the people in it, whether they be smoking, doing crosswords, playing bridge, conversing or just relaxing.' (pp. 211-212)

This is a description which many will find familiar, so it is particularly interesting to compare it with the Pen staffroom. The first and most obvious difference between this and the Pen staffroom is that the latter is not private. There are none of the clear markers highlighted by Woods: as we have seen, the door is permanently open; students wander past along the main corridor all the time; and students, principal and administrator are free to enter at any time, the last two whether they have business there or not.

This is not to say that boundaries are unmarked. When students do enter, they come with a specific question, usually addressed to a particular teacher, and business is usually conducted at the door or outside the staffroom. Whenever students enter, they remain standing in the vicinity of the door and direct their

attention to the teacher they have business with. Occasionally a student will become the object of the staff's attention, but this is rare and usually confined to someone who has news of general interest to impart.

We can catch something of the staff's attitude to some visitors in Paul's reaction to the student who has called Harry to the staffroom door and kept him talking there for a number of minutes. We hear Harry saying 'See how it goes' before he re-enters the staffroom and says 'God Almighty!' This raises a few laughs and leads to muffled comments from Paul and Susan, prompting the following suggestion from Paul:

- Paul: Can we have a notice on the door, (.) Harry. I mean (.) it really pisses me off that (0.5) this is typical (.) it's a typical Japanese thing, (I mean it's just incredible (.) and everybody needs to)
- Ed: Yeah.
- Susan: Mmm
- Harry: Yeah.
- (1.0)
- Ed: Once the ball starts rolling
- (2.0)
- Keith: () the biggest signs that you can ().
- [
- Paul: 'No you cannot switch.'
- Harry: Yeah.
- Ed: Yeah.
- Keith: () somewhere else.=
- Paul: ='No you bloody well can't.'
- ((General laughter.))

(T—22/2/95: 0680-0696)

This is clearly a case of a situation which finds its resolution in laughter, with a switch from an angry to a mock-angry key. Paul's first complaint is forcibly expressed, involving swearing and racial stereotyping. Paul is addressing his complaint to Harry in the latter's role as academic manager during Jenny's absence, and his anger receives an immediate and sympathetic response from all the Pen teachers present. Following a short pause, Ed then offers an implicit justification of such a response by suggesting that if it is not stopped now the

problem will escalate. Paul's return to the issue picks up on Keith's 'sign' and provides a text for the notice, which also receives the support of others. Having established this, he then recasts the text in humorous form by reprising his original anger as mock-anger: the emphasis and the deliberate inclusion of (milder) swearing achieve the necessary effect. There is also a clear contrast between this and Harry's helpful 'See how it goes' at the end of his conversation with the student.

This example of what might be called *creative redefinition* provides an example of what has been described as the 'control' function of humour (Stephenson, 1951). It is clearly designed to express disapproval of a particular social action but in a way that relieves the tension created by the original formulation of this disapproval. What makes this particularly interesting is the direction which the humour takes: its target is the assumption by students that they can switch classes simply by coming to see a teacher. The objection is to the message, not the presence of the messenger; there is no suggestion here of annoyance with the interruption or the presence of a student at the staffroom door, nor is there any other example of such irritation in the rest of the data. Clearly, the entry of students into the staffroom is not seen as a violation.

This is clearly a staffroom, then, to which staff retire but do not retreat. The rites of respect are observed by student callers, who are seen as visitors rather than trespassers. This sense of collegiality is emphasised in the physical environment of the staffroom. The distinctive 'mess' which Woods describes is surely a signal that the laws which apply beyond staffroom boundaries hold no sway there, but in the Pen there is no such marker: order here is the same as in the rest of the school and desks and chairs are interchangeable with those to be found elsewhere. Neither are there the distinctive spoors which mark internal territory in Woods' staffroom: Harry and Paul have their own desks and new staff take

up spaces elsewhere, but there are no personal artefacts announcing ownership. Even mug ownership is casual rather than fixed, and Paul's formulation in the following exchange is significant:

Keith: So which colour ((mug)) do you get Paul, is it (.) grey or red I can't remember.

Paul: I prefer grey. °Grey for me.°

(T—22/2/95: 0052-0054)

The pragmatic force of the expression of preference may be clear, but the avoidance of the possessive is not accidental: there are a number of grey mugs available and he *prefers* to use one of this colour. Of course, if the norms and expectations established in the staffroom were disturbed sufficiently, those who share it might be provoked to defend their 'place' within it, but Woods' vocabulary of 'belong', 'defend' and 'resist' seems inappropriate here. The Pen staffroom is clearly different from the one he describes, and to appreciate the implications of this difference it is necessary to explore humour more broadly.

6.4 Seeing the funny side

If, as Keith-Spiegel has observed (1969, quoted in Chapman & Foot, 1976: 2), 'humour-related behaviour exceeds all other types of emotional behaviours combined ... by ten or more times' it is perhaps surprising that it has not been more studied. Such studies as there are tend to fall into five broad categories: philosophical psychological, anthropological, sociological and linguistic (for a detailed review of the literature, see Zijderfeld, 1983, where the final category is listed as 'History and Literature'). The first three of these will not form part of this discussion and the last will be drawn on in the discussion of involvement strategies which links this chapter to the next, but for the moment sociological considerations will be to the fore. After a brief note on terminology, I shall present an overview of this important area, focusing specifically on studies of

humour at work and identifying aspects which seem particularly relevant to interaction in the Pen staffroom.

While recognising that no generally accepted definition of humour exists, I shall adopt the very broad definition of the term offered by Long & Graessner (1988: 37): 'Humour is anything done or said, purposely or inadvertently, that is found to be comical or amusing.' Unless otherwise indicated, I shall take 'humour' as a general term, while recognising that the expression can also be used more specifically, as in the following: 'Wit was concerned with ideas and buffoonery with deeds, humour with people' (Muir 1990: xxiv). However, it will not be used in as broad a sense as Fillmore adopts, to embrace friendliness or good-naturedness. Nor will it be assumed that, 'Where laughter occurs it is either as an acknowledgement that something humorous has just been said, or as a prelude to the laugher's decision to interpret what has just happened as an occasion for linguistic fun' (Fillmore, 1994: 272). It is well known that in certain cultures laughter is a sign of embarrassment, while even within our own culture laughter may not be connected with humour and may systematically evoke a serious response (Jefferson, 1984) or be designed for other 'serious' interactional purposes (Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff, 1987). Laughter will be taken as an indication of humour (Sacks, 1992: 745, has demonstrated the importance of 'tying' in the relationship between laughter and that to which it is designed to respond), but the structuring, sequential positioning and content of an utterance will also be considered, as will other factors indicating humorous intent, such as the presence of what is known as a 'candidate laughable' (e.g. a pun or the punchline to a joke).

Identifying humour is one thing, but establishing patterns across cases something quite different. Paton has noted in his summary of research into humour in the workplace, 'no clear pattern of joking relationships and

techniques emerges from the studies conducted to date, but a range of "unofficial conventions" (1992: 2). It is possible to consider these from various perspectives, the most common of which is that of control/resistance (see Powell 1988), also characterised as control/conflict (Stephenson, 1951) and control/social tension (Paton, 1992):

'[The control functions of humour serve to] 'express approval or disapproval of social form and action, express common group sentiments, develop and perpetuate stereotypes, relieve awkwardness or tense situations and express collective *sub rosa* approbation of action not explicitly approved, while humour as resistance represents an acceptable way of expressing hostility or aggression' (Stephenson, 1951: 570).

It is clear from the analysis of types of humour in the Pen staffroom (discussed in the next section) that its more aggressive manifestations do not feature. In view of the lack of inter-group rivalry in the school, this is not surprising, and it is interesting to note that Helen is held up as the 'authority figure' in the school and as such provides the staff with one of their running jokes:

'Along the same lines, though falling neatly into the 'powerful secretary' bracket, was another incident. During the first phase of the morning Helen had asked me to make a few copies of a student information handout and in withdrawing the first sheet from the copier I'd pulled off a map of Quillham. It was very loosely glued and the damage was therefore negligible, so I was able to make a joke about it when I returned it to Helen. Just before I left she popped into SR1 and I jokingly apologised for not actually doing the post office run as I'd promised when I arrived. This led on naturally to my shamefaced admission that with that and the photocopying failure I'd got off to a rotten start, and the general lighthearted confirmation that I must be in Helen's bad books Jenny's contribution was, "Now you're in the same boat as the rest of us."' (F-26/1/94)

Helen's role as someone not to be tangled with is also used as the basis for the following teasing at Harry and Helen's expense. Harry is acting academic manager, so the appearance of Helen's black tights signals 'business':

Annette: Yes it's (.) as soon as those black tights appear round the corner
Harry (.) hehe heheh

(T-8/3/95: 0409-0417)

'irrespective of social location life consists of organising experience in such a way that our sense of it makes us feel comfortable in balancing these two social forces ... The ultimate control is, in fact, the view we hold of social reality and our understanding of our own and other people's place within it, including our resistance to the actions and beliefs of others we dislike and repudiate.'

(1988: 99)

'Talk of Archer's admission of a 'grave error' (Paul) relating to share dealing brought comparisons with the treatment meted out to lesser offenders ("Second World War grave mistake' admits Hitler" — Paul) and Paul brings up the case of the pregnant woman imprisoned for 21 days for stealing — and returning — £380 from the bank where she worked.'

(F-25/8/94)

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all humour here is of a symmetrical kind. It is also the case, as we shall see, that examples of humour from the Pen all appear as situational, or spontaneous, rather than as standardised, or canned (Douglas, 1975). The implications of this now need to be explored, and in order to do this I shall offer four perspectives on humour in the Pen staffroom, two developed in this chapter and two in the next:

1. an analysis of different types of humour, based on a set of standard categories. This will provide the basis for a broad characterisation of humour in this context;
2. an exploration of the interactional elements which suggest that humour is an assumed feature of normal interaction in this staffroom and that deviations from this norm must be overtly signalled;
3. an investigation into the way in which humour is interactively constructed, serving as a mechanism of participation. This will be based on an analysis of the way in which anecdotes are jointly constructed.
4. an examination of humour as a socialising element in the Pen. This will prompt a consideration of an important function which humour might have in the professional world of foreign language teaching. I shall also try to show how this particular function is intimately connected with the ways in which the belief systems of these teachers find expression.

6.5 The things people find funny

Tables 6-9 offer a summary of the different types of humour featuring in the Pen staffroom. The analysis is based on Paton's summary of research into humour in the workplace (1992: 5-6), which allows this analysis to be compared with others which are available. Other categorisations have been offered, but this is

particularly applicable to the workplace and any differences between this and other descriptions are likely to be minor (for example, Long & Graessner include 'teasing' under 'wit', while Paton separates the two). In any case, the mere categorisation of humour is in itself of little value, but it can serve to highlight interesting features, as here. In addition, if Duncan is right and there is 'strong evidence that cohesive and non-cohesive groups possess different humour patterns' (1984: 895), a profile of patterns on humour in this highly cohesive group might be of interest.

The analysis is restricted to transcript data (although in the discussion that follows fieldnotes and interviews will be drawn on where appropriate), partly to allow for detailed analysis and partly because, as Fine has noted:

'Humour is a most delicate flower; a living bud which when plucked quickly dies. However, those engaged in research on humour insist with regularity and stubbornness upon plucking humour from its natural environment — the ongoing flow of social interaction. The naturalistic or 'in situ' approach to humour while employed, upon occasion, has been underutilised as a method of research.'

(1977: 315)

If we accept the distinction between aggressive and non-aggressive humour, what is immediately clear from the tables is that aggressive humour features little in this context (although Gruner, 1978, has argued that all humour is by its very nature aggressive), something which is a predictable feature of a collaborative culture, even though its presence has not been noted before. It is equally clear that the category embracing witticism, banter and repartee is by far the most dominant in the data, and that while anecdotes and funny stories feature in breaktime talk they are less often to be found in staff meetings. Again, there is nothing particularly surprising in this. The function which anecdotes seem to play in the collaborative interaction of this group will be explored in the next chapter, but first there are other aspects of humour which may throw light on the ways in which this highly cooperative group interact.

Graffiti/ Caricature/ Cartoon	Anecdote/ Funny story telling	Teasing	Kidding	Parody- ing	Mimicry	Railery/ Dispar- agement	Wittic- isms/ Banter/ Repart- ee	Fun/ Fooling	Derog- atory/ Nick- names
	8/2 24 8/2 75 8/2 536 15/2 305 15/2 561 22/2 19 22/2 389 1/3 199 1/3 451 1/3 769 8/3 1 8/3 44 8/3 364 8/3 766 8/3 968 15/3 534 22/3 39 22/3 441 22/3 505 22/3 581 29/3 301 5/4 8 5/4 412 12/4 268 12/4 423 12/4 523 12/4 545	8/2 577 8/3 105 8/3 402 8/3 409 8/3 592 22/3 785 12/4 428 12/4 697	8/2 89 8/3 603 15/3 82	15/2 377 15/2 541 1/3 638 15/3 355	8/2 197 8/3 980 15/3 508	1/3 259 8/3 293 22/3 727	15/2 110 15/2 205 15/2 214 15/2 247 15/2 363 22/2 63 22/2 239 22/2 337 22/2 767 1/3 142 1/3 299 1/3 489 1/3 553 1/3 654 1/3 667 1/3 781 8/3 28 8/3 152 8/3 204 8/3 215 8/3 325 8/3 588 8/3 624 8/3 626 8/3 639 8/3 752 8/3 936 15/3 561 15/3 573 22/3 393 22/3 647 22/3 869 29/3 498 29/3 606 5/4 159 5/4 187 5/4 218 5/4 227 5/4 293 5/4 542 5/4 574 12/4 477 12/4 501	1/3 605 15/3 1 29/3 167 29/3 478	8/2 403

Table 6: Types of non-aggressive humour in breaktime talk

Obscenity/ Profanity	Ridicule	Sarcasm	Insults	Derision/ Vituperation	Horseplay/ Pranks/ Practical jokes	Blasphemy
22/2 695	1/3 414 1/3 692	5/4 35	29/3 223			

Table 7: Types of aggressive humour in breaktime talk

Graffiti/ Caricature/ Cartoon	Anecdote/ Funny story telling	Teasing	Kidding	Parody- ing	Mimicry	Railery/ Dispar- agement	Wittic- isms/ Banter/ Repart- ee	Fun/ Fooling	Derog- atory/ Nick- names
	(3) 0608 (3) 0644 (4) 2175 (4) 2569	(1) 0006 (1) 2184 (1) 2550 (4) 0357 (4) 0439 (4) 0487 (4) 1087 (4) 1111 (4) 2475		(4) 1122	(4) 1162	(1) 0911 (3) 0197 (4) 0561 (4) 1033	(1) 0231 (1) 0401 (1) 0669 (1) 0835 (1) 1705 (1) 1772 (1) 1868 (1) 1940 (1) 2592 (1) 2621 (1) 2721 (1) 2771 (1) 2909 (1) 3064 (2) 0110 (2) 0166 (2) 0311 (2) 0797 (2) 1156 (3) 0249 (3) 1340 (3) 1394 (3) 1488 (3) 1695 (3) 2434 (3) 2585 (4) 0412 (4) 0464 (4) 0468 (4) 0470 (4) 0798 (4) 1191 (4) 1237 (4) 1524 (4) 2228 (4) 2394		(1) 2147 (4) 1454
Key: (1) 11/11/94; (2) 2/12/94; (3) 18/12/94; (4) 7/4/95									

Table 8: Types of non-aggressive humour in staff meetings

Obscenity/ Profanity	Ridicule	Sarcasm	Insults	Derision/ Vituperation	Horseplay/ Pranks/ Practical jokes	Blasphemy
	(4) 0727 (4) 2569			(1) 3134		
Key: (1) 11/11/94; (2) 2/12/94; (3) 18/12/94; (4) 7/4/95						

Table 9: Types of aggressive humour in staff meetings

The contribution which non-aggressive humour makes to the maintenance of a collaborative culture like that of the Pen is worth noting:

'On the social level, so called 'constructive humour' helps to maintain the positive face of a group (Martineau, 1972) in that it fosters consensus and solidarity, reinforces intragroup cohesiveness, strengthens personal ties among the participants, relieves tensions and lubricates social relationships.' (Zajdman, 1995: 327)

Aggressive humour

One example of this in the breaktime data has already been discussed (T—22/2/95: 0680-0696; where Paul objects to students seeking to change classes) and is relatively mild, while the two examples of ridicule might easily have been classified as non-aggressive. The first (T—1/3/95: 414) occurs when the staff are discussing a linguistic point in a letter to the father of a Korean student and Harry says 'A Korean *wouldn't notice it!* Heheheheheh'. The point — which is probably reasonably accurate — is not in itself humorous and his laughter meets with no response.

The other example, though, is directed at the British Council at a particularly stressful time during preparations for a forthcoming inspection, and this does receive a ready response:

Annette: >It's this< report writing for observation, this is really just (.)
another thing that one has to do for British Council inspection.
To get the papers.
Harry: Gahhhhhh! hahaha hahahah
[
Annette: Heheheh=
Keith: =Heheh! heh!=
Harry: =Hahah
Paul: °Heh° (T—1/3/95: 0692-0702)

It is perhaps again stretching a point to describe this mild attack on the bureaucracy generated by the preparation for such visits as ridicule, even though the butt is clear enough. In fact, in view of the demands which this

external inspection placed on the staff, it is perhaps surprising that there were not more examples of more aggressive humour directed at it.

In fact, the most direct recipient of open ridicule provides a valuable example of what happens when the collaborative norms of the group are explicitly breached. Kate, as the head of the organisation to which this school belongs, is technically principal of the school and as such has considerable power. She has vast experience in the field and an energetic and forthright personality, characteristics which form the basis of her engagement with the staff of the Pen. Interactionally, in the meeting which features in the data, she is clearly a dominant figure, but this needs to be interpreted in the light of the fact that she has been specifically invited as someone with specialist knowledge of how to prepare for a British Council inspection and of those who will be conducting the investigation. In this role, her contribution is accepted and valued, but when she attempts to 'pull rank' humour is immediately invoked in order to establish the collaborative norms which underpin interaction within the group. The extract begins following a three-second lapse in the talk:

- Kate: You put bits about your liaising with Rockingwell and things.=
Jenny: =Mmm
Kate: Well just=
Jenny: =Mmm=
Kate: =think about it will you.
Paul: hh hh hh hh heh
[
Jenny: heh heh heh ((Suppressed laughter.))
Jenny: Yes miss.=
Paul: =Come on. >Which one of you< forgot that.=
[
Kate: Mmm
Paul: Hahh heheheh
[
Kate: >What's that-<
Jenny: Have you forgotten that you (had a). You've forgotten
to send us any students, °haven't you.°=
Kate: =Mmm

(M—7/4/95: 0722-0740)

Kate's 'Well just think about it will you' is ridiculed as a piece of 'schoolteacher' behaviour which is inappropriate to the context, perhaps because the relatively mild linguistic formulation belies an aggressive delivery, mocked (after a few seconds of suppressed laughter) by an exaggeratedly contrite 'Yes miss' from Jenny and the humorous extension by Paul in 'schoolteacher' role: 'Come on. Which one of you forgot that.' This schoolteacher self-parody is something which occurs elsewhere in the data (see for example T—1/3/95: 0632ff.) and which the Pen team would readily recognise.

In fact, as so often with humorous interpolations, there are undercurrents to the exchange which are not clear from its surface form but discernible from surrounding features. It may not be irrelevant, for example, that this follows immediately after a reference to a recent professional honour bestowed on Kate, and therefore also fits a gentle deflationary tendency characteristic of the Pen staff.

More significant is Jenny's emphatic and repeated 'Mmm', which is clearly designed as a signal that the topic is a sensitive one. The reason for this becomes apparent in her concluding comment which in turn serves to open a side sequence of nine turns before the main topic — the initial submission for the inspection — is resumed. The sensitive issue concerns the distribution of students in 'joint projects' involving the two schools in the organisation, and this is in turn part of a wider concern about relationships between the partners. In view of the degree of concern felt, Kate's failure to heed Jenny's warning signal amplifies the assumed asymmetry in her injunction and provokes the humorous equalisation. Jenny's charge that Kate has forgotten to send students is presented in the context of this re-established equilibrium.

These are examples where power is clearly an issue, but they are directed outside the group; within it there is no evidence that the humour is 'infused with forms of power' (Filby, 1989: 207), nor is this to be expected. In fact, other examples of 'aggressive' humour in the data are thin on the ground and at best 'borderline' cases. The instance of sarcasm, for example, occurs when Harry describes reading TOEFL scores as 'exciting' (T—5/4/95: 0035) and Paul's reference to Ed having 'no chance in this place' (M—11/11/94: 3134) represents an attempt — unsuccessful as it turns out — to use humour to divert Ed from a line of argument which serves no useful purpose. The reference to 'no chance' could be taken ambiguously to refer to Helen's control of finances or to the general rules relating to the control of cash as laid down by the organisation as a whole. As a response to Ed's reference to Helen, it seems to function primarily as the former and elicits laughter which recognises a 'running' joke. Later (3309; 3330) Paul will focus explicitly on the latter in a non-humorous key.

The only other example in the data (T—29/3/95 223) is problematic because of a strong idiosyncratic element and will be discussed later. But this, like the rest of the 'aggressive' examples, is not indicative of a culture where aggression is the norm. For more representative indicators of the interactional character of this group it is necessary to look at the categories of non-aggressive humour. The most important of these is clearly 'Wit/Banter/Repartee', but before this is explored the other categories will be briefly considered.

Teasing

The line between banter and teasing can be a narrow one, and if teasing is considered as something which has to be extended then all of the single comments here would need to be recategorised. It seems clear, though, that comments such as Annette's about Harry's fear of Helen's black tights (T—8/2: 577) can be described as teasing. And whatever the finer points of

categorisation, the distribution of teases is democratic: nobody seems exempt and there is no evidence that anyone has special rights. This seems consistent with the other features of a collaborative environment so far described.

Kidding

There is no evidence of this in the meetings data and only three examples in staffroom talk, two of these directly related to the presence of the tape recorder. Even the third, an announcement by Paul that the students will get what he gives them, seems to be connected with this, since a reference to the recorder soon follows. This category, then, seems to have no particular significance.

Parodying

This provides the opportunity for general participation and two of the examples here are extended sequences. The others are brief, essentially individual, efforts: one is a parody of 'talking in front of the microphone', one of shopping (this derived directly from a professional comedian's performance which is the subject of the discussion) and one of 'serious business' in the staffroom (discussed under 'No, don't laugh, it's not funny' below).

One of the extended sequences (M—7/4/95: 1122-1156) occurs in a staff meeting and begins with Paul and Kate parodying answer machine messages after Paul has suggested that such a machine 'tells you how many friends you've got' (l. 1122). This provides an opening for Jenny and Louise who mimic BT operators. The other extended sequence (T—1/3/95: 0632) is a self-parody of schoolteacher talk prompted by Paul's comment, 'Just like schoolboys'. This willingness to cast themselves in humorous roles fits in with the staff's obvious liking for dramatised anecdotes and their professed determination not to take themselves too seriously. It also offers the opportunity for the sort of participative humour

which encourages involvement in general, an issue which will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Mimicry

Apart from the instance mentioned above, the only clear example of this in the data is where Paul, Annette and Susan attempt to imitate the laughs of particular students (T—8/3/95: 096-1006). The other two examples, one of a student's utterance (T—8/2/95: 197) and one of a hypothetical response (T—15/3/95: 508), are typical of the sort of 'dramatisations' to be found in staffroom anecdotes and are perhaps best considered in this light.

Raillery/Disparagement

Of the six examples in the data, it is interesting to note that half involve self-disparagement: Harry picks up a mistake in his own spelling (M—2/12/95: 197), the school's brochure is mentioned disparagingly (M—7/4/95: 961) and Paul is harsh about the results of his sketch-writing activities: 'I mean when I've stopped doing it means they've stopped using me. But of course I've stopped doing it as well' (M—7/4/95: 961). This is worth noting because it bears out the group's claim that they don't take themselves too seriously and it suggests a willingness to accept criticism. It might also be compared with disparagement of students (excluding representations within anecdotes, which are considered in the next chapter), of which there is only one example in the data, and this an indirect one:

Paul: Thought you were writing on that banana for a minute.
Ann C: Mm (1.0) Yes this is what working with the *bottom group* does
for you. (T—22/3/95: 0727)

Derogatory/Nicknames

There are only three examples of this in the data: one making reference to someone being 'more boring' than someone else (M—7/4/95: 1454), another

expressing reluctance to join a group because of not wanting to 'share a table with posters of 'Baby come back'!' (M—11/11/94: 2147), and the third describing a student as 'our local Kenneth Williams impersonator' (T—8/2/95: 0403).

Witticism/Banter/Repartee

Even if we allow for the fact that this category casts its net very wide, we still confront the inescapable predominance of this form of humour in both staff meetings and breaktime talk. No attempt will be made here to assign examples of such humour to subcategories, but the categorisation of wit offered by Long & Graessner (1988: 39) gives some idea of how much it may be taken to embrace: irony, satire, sarcasm or hostility (categorised as 'aggressive' by Paton), overstatement and understatement, self-deprecation, teasing, replies to rhetorical questions, clever replies to serious statements, double entendres, transformations of frozen expressions, and puns. Within this broad category it seems clear that there are some forms of humour which are recognised as standard by the Pen staff and which are to be found throughout the data. Banter on 'standard' subjects such as food, systems and relationships constitute one such category, as the following examples will illustrate.

The first example combines two sources of humour which provide the opportunity for banter and teasing: food and the presence of the tape recorder. The latter has just been remarked on in a different context and Helen is waiting to take orders for the lunchtime sandwiches. After a 17 second pause Paul initiates a new topic which plays on the presence of the tape recorder and the restrictions it implicitly imposes on the acceptability of certain utterances:

- Paul: °I () am I allowed to say 'tuna and sweetcorn'?
Jenny: Heheheheheh °he:::h°
Harry: Say what?
Paul: 'Tuna and sweetcorn.'

Jenny: ['Tuna and sweetcorn.'
 Harry: Oh right.
 Keith: HAHAAhah yes. (.) You can censor that one if you want.
 Paul: [Em ['A
 dolphin friendly tuna for me please.'
 ((General laughter.))
 Paul: 'On a baguette.' (.) Aren't the French (.) lovely people.
 Keith: Heheheheh
 Jenny: [Heheheheheheheheheh
 (T—5/4/95: 218-233)

In the above example, Paul exploits an opportunity provided by what might be termed *relevantly funny* topic (i.e. one which has provided the basis for humorous comments on many occasions before) in order to set up his humorous contribution. Sometimes, however, a topic is announced as being funny by the manner of its presentation, as here:

Susan: Ooooooh a register.
 Harry: HeheHEH!
 Keith: A class! A class!
 Harry: Oh that's a real er heheh step up in the world when you get a register.
 Keith: Aa::h °yeah°
 Harry: Heheheh
 (1.0)
 Susan: I don't know a- yeah well you see there might be problems I might not be able to count them all if there's a fire.
 Harry: Heheheheheh
 (T—15/3/95: 0561-0572)

Susan has not long been in the school and has been teaching one-to-one classes. Now, however, another student has joined the school and her individual student has become a 'class' of two, requiring a register. The symbolic significance of this provides the basis for her joke, which is taken up by Harry and Keith, allowing her to provide a punchline based on the small size of her 'class'.

Class registers are part of the 'systems', formal and informal, which sustain the collaborative culture of the school and which also provide a ready target for wit and banter. In the following extracts, all from the same staff meeting, the teachers are discussing new systems and arrangements, all of which provide targets for the same type of humorous comment. In the first, discussion of the establishment of a new system for pooling teaching ideas and resources, provides an opening for a comment which highlights the tendency of systems to generate the need for other systems to support them:

- Annette: E:m (.) well we could have that as a pending box. Before you put something in the::re while er well before we had the staff meeting on it,
 Paul: Mmm
 Annette: but ()
 Paul: I (feel) we should have another box. (0.5) A pre-pending=
 Annette: Hahahahah
 = [
 Keith: Heheheh
 = [
 Harry: Hahah

(M—11/11/94: 0664-0674)

In the second example, the staff are discussing the establishment of a 'teaching room for dedicated business English teaching' (l. 1842) and have agreed that this would be feasible only at certain times of the year:

- Paul: But if it's dedicated then (.)
 Harry: Hhhhh YEah.
 [
 Annette: Yes
 Harry: >Sort of semi< dedicated.
 Annette: Yeah::hahahah

(M—11/11/94: 1864-1869)

Finally, teachers are discussing the post of academic manager, which disappeared in the cuts of a couple of years before and has been sadly missed since, cropping up regularly as a source of concern and comment:

Annette: Well I think we ought to look at the staffing section >because<
the first one on that, the: academic manager, (.)
[
Harry: Yes.
Harry: Absolute ()
[
Annette: I think we must (.) absolutely must have one.
Paul: °Absolutely agree.°
Annette: >Plus it must be a< permanent part time position.
Harry: Yeah. (1.5) Permanently rotating.
Paul: HEHE HEhahahah
[
Annette: Hahahahah. Hahah=
Harry: =With a turntable in the middle of the floor, and ·hhh hh
(M—11/11/11: 2612-2625)

Harry's play on words here, made explicit in his follow-up to the original joke, depends on the shared assumption that the position will be a rotating one, as in the past. This enables him to pick up on the juxtaposition of 'permanent' and 'part time', adding the idea of rotation and casting the whole in a humorous light. This seems to be more than the sort of sniping at rituals which Woods (*op cit.*) identifies in his data. As with the other examples here, the jokes enable the group to establish a degree of humorous but at the same time critical detachment from the systems they work within but also seek to refine. As such, humour seems to play a subtle but important role in the developmental dimension of a collaborative culture: by making systematisation *relevantly funny*, the group expose it to a scrutiny which serves as a useful mechanism for exposing distortions of expectation or assumption. The danger of collaborative interaction, as we have seen, is the power which hidden assumptions can exercise on the decision-making process, and for this reason it is important to create suitable distancing mechanisms in order to establish a critical perspective on group decision-making. The introduction of new blood in the form of temporary teachers serves an important role here, as do the two external inspection systems and, to a lesser extent, the weekly meetings; but the ability to establish detachment through humour, which thrives on incongruity, ambiguity

and inconsistency, is an important contributor to the group's own sense of balance. In the next section I shall try to show that humour is in fact at the core of this group's interaction, but first I should like to point to the importance of idiosyncratic elements in humour which perhaps deserve closer attention than they have received in the literature.

The role of the 'joker' has been recognised in workplace humour (see, for example, the part which 'Joshua' plays in the joking sequences described in detail by Handelman & Kapferer, 1972) and features in Woods' data (1988: 221), but the problems raised by individual style in the categorisation and analysis of workplace humour have not been considered. Without wishing to make too strong a claim for the importance of these, I should nevertheless like to point out where problems might lie.

It is only to be expected that different individuals have preferred joking styles, and it is possible to identify these without too much difficulty. The following, all taken from a stretch of 230 lines, illustrate Harry's preference for humorously completing other people's utterances and Susan's use of mock offence or outrage, forms of joking not used by any of their colleagues:

Paul: 'I was a imme- no sooner had I walked into the room than I was immediately struck by'

Harry: Hheheh a brick.

(T—1/3/95: 0551-0553)

Paul: Well I-I- heard you say 'Do it to Susan.'
(1.0)

Susan: I beg your pardon.

(0672-0674)

Paul: Yeah. An::d (.) sh- (.) 'Ye:s but (0.5) I: (0.5) it's difficult for me to:' (0.5) and then she didn't finish the sentence.

Harry: [Express *myself*. Heheheh

(0778-0781)

Also within the same stretch we find explicit reference to a form of joking which has become standard within the group:

Harry: The amount of deliberate misunderstanding that goes on in this
staffroom=
Annette: =Heheh=
Keith: =HEHEH HEHEH!
Harry: Heheh
Paul: What do you mean by that.

(T—1/3/95: 0662-0667)

Examples of deliberate misunderstanding are very common, and the process has even been refined to include a 'follow up' where either Harry or Paul seek to explain to the 'misunderstander' what was 'really meant', this in reference to a teacher of their acquaintance who never realised the humorous intent behind the misunderstanding and went to great lengths to repair it:

'The conversation turns to the forthcoming end of course dinner, which will be held tomorrow evening. This year it's going to be a barbecue.

Keith: 'Ah, al fresco.'
Paul: 'No, outside.'
Harry: 'That's what he said.'

They explain that this is a standard form of joking which they have and that the third element ('That's what I (*sic*) said.') goes back to an assistant DoS at their last school who didn't really cotton on to the joke and constantly pitched in with this unwitting clarification.' (F—12/4/95)

The two also share their own running jokes and understood exchanges often of a 'Pythonesque' nature which serve clearly as markers and reinforcers of group solidarity and are implicitly recognised as such:

'It's not intended as an excluding thing ... I imagine that it's quite a difficult style to break into for some people, but some people — just like that.'
(I—Harry)

Although this aspect of group solidarity is interesting, it is fairly straightforward. Paul's contribution as a humorist, though, is more problematic

Keith: Ah brilliant. (1.0) It's nice when things come out of serendipity
>(okay)< it was your subconscious working °then.°
(3.5)
Paul: Yeah we sometimes team teach like that.
(1.0)
Keith: *Subconsciously?*
Paul: No, by accident.

(T—8/2/95: 0577-0592)

Paul is, of course, also a writer of jokes who has heard his scripts performed on the radio, so this rather more conscious effort to create humorous opportunities is understandable. It does mean, though, that his joking is not simply a part of the normal humorous interplay in the staffroom, and whatever functions the latter might serve may be no more than incidental to Paul's natural, even professional, inclination to test his wit. This explains why, unlike any of his colleagues, he is happy to pursue a joke. In the following example this occurs in the face of an initially unpromising response:

Harry: We need a benchmark °(to)°
(5.0)
Paul: W- what- what does the term 'benchmark' come from?
(0.5)
Ed: Surveying.
Paul: Surveying?
Ed: Mm
(1.0)
Paul: Stand on a bench?
Harry: Walk on a bench, yeah.
(1.5)
Annette: A workbench is it?
[
Paul: You mean- (.) like (.) 'How far is it from here to
that bench?'
Harry: hh hhh=
Annette: =Heheheh
Keith: Heh heh
((20 lines omitted))
Ed: ... And it could have been e:r (.) on a bench.
[
Paul: Heheh *that* guy sitting on the
bench.=
Ed: =Something that doesn't
Annette: Heheheheh yea:h heh

Ed: ((10 lines omitted))
 Could be (.) a clear line ().
 (3.0)
 Paul: Probably a bloke called Mark sitting on a bench.
 Harry: ()
 Paul: 'Can you sit on that bench, Mark.'
 Annette: Hhhheh
 Keith: Hahah (.) hah
 []
 Harry: hah
 Annette: hah
 Paul: hhh ·hh
 Harry: But don't move.=
 Annette: =A:::h (.) heheh
 ((118 lines omitted.))
 Harry: ((Reading definition from a dictionary)) 'A mark on a stone
 post or other permanent feature,'
 (0.5)
 Annette: Mmm
 Harry: 'at a point whose exact elevation and position is known. (0.5)
 Used as a reference point in surveying.'
 Paul: From the Old English 'Can you sit on that bench Mark
 please.' °(isn't it.)°
 []
 Keith: Hehah
 []
 Annette: Heheheheheheheh

(T—8/3/95: 0139-0330)

In this extract we can trace the development of the joke, from the initial playing with the word 'bench', through the idea of a man sitting on a bench to the joining of 'bench' and 'mark' to create a humorous etymology, which is finally contextualised (considerably later) as the completion of a genuine definition: the initial awkward piggybacking of the spurious source on the genuine one is finally realised in a linguistically seamless join which serves to close the topic on a humorous note.

This careful 'construction' of wit stands outside the rough and ready banter and cheerful anecdotage which characterises staffroom humour, but it raises teasing issues for the categorisation of humour. The following extract, described above

as problematic, was categorised as an example of an insult (albeit an indirect one):

- Annette: ...because it sounds as if we may have this group from Italy (.)
er (.) er (.) have to talk to Jenny about it. Well no it was- it=
[]
Paul: Three year olds.
Annette: =sounds as if they'd be fairly similar to the Argentineans.
(0.5)
Paul: Four *year olds*
[]
Annette: E::r
Annette: Heheheheh
[]
Keith: Heheh
Paul: behaving like five year olds.=
Annette: =Heh

(T—29/3/95: 0214-0230)

Superficially at least, the charge that 'the Argentineans' are four year olds is an insult and as such deserves to be classified as aggressive humour, but knowing what we do of Paul's interactional style in the matter of humour, we can see here the deliberate milking of a joke which at first falls flat. The 'group from Italy' is in fact a group of adults, but the organisation referred to normally deals with groups of children, and this is the basis for Paul's humorous exaggeration. When Annette mentions a group of Argentineans by way of comparison, Paul is quick to seize the opportunity to work in a humorous extension to his mention of three year olds, and when this is well received he loses no time in milking the joke by extending it further. What is clearly of most importance here is the joke itself rather than its butt, although the latter is criterial for its categorisation as an insult. Furthermore, the immaturity implicit in the joke is later made explicit by Paul when he discusses with Annette the precise nature of the challenge posed by this particular group: 'It's not necessarily immaturity, it's just that it's the culture of the classroom. ... You know (.) the (.) the: er (.) the idea is to do something as quickly as possible.' (T—29/3/95: 0292-0299).

Judgements of workplace humour seem to be based on fieldnotes alone, and while this method of data collection is for the most part very effective, a closer examination of transcribed talk reveals subtler currents in the workings of humour within a particular setting. This extended treatment of wit and banter in the Pen staffroom has suggested that this category alone embraces casual banter, standard routines and even, at the idiosyncratic level, 'professional' performance, but it has also revealed that in bringing humour to bear on relevantly funny topics related to the school's professional systems and routines, an important critical perspective can be maintained which, together with other distancing mechanisms, maintains a healthy check on the potential weaknesses in a collaborative environment. As we shall now see, it achieves this not as an additional element in the main business of the staffroom but as part of its interactive essence.

6.6 No, don't laugh, it's not funny

Woods rejects functionalist explanations of staffroom humour in favour of a broader account which highlights the intrinsic satisfaction of humour and emphasises 'its ability to transcend the immediate situation and appeal to a broader scale of criteria' (1988: 236). He also suggests that 'some of the staff were as much on the lookout for laughs as the kids' (1988: 216), which, as we have just seen, seems to be the case with at least one member of the Pen team. However, Woods does not provide any evidence beyond individual examples to show that humour is in any sense fundamental to interaction in the staffroom, and his attempt to establish this negatively through the identification of 'laughter inhibitors' founders on conceptual and evidential problems. It may be possible, however, to establish the centrality of humour more soundly by appealing to interactional evidence. If it can be demonstrated that humour is an interactional 'norm' in this context then a case has been made, *ipso facto*, for its significance.

In order to establish this, I intend to show that it is the absence of humour rather than its presence which requires explicit signalling in staffroom interaction at the Pen. I shall first introduce the concept of a 'sanctioned key' and then show how this descriptor can be applied to staffroom humour. More importantly, I shall provide interactional evidence to demonstrate that when humour is inappropriate, this must be clearly signalled. A crude summary of this might be that the participants assume that business and pleasure will be mixed unless 'business' is clearly announced.

The concept of 'key' is by now well known in sociolinguistics and related fields, but it is worth reproducing perhaps the best known definition:

'Key is introduced to provide for the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done. It corresponds roughly to modality among grammatical categories. Acts otherwise the same as regards setting, participants, message form and the like may differ in key, as, e.g. between mock:serious or perfunctory:painstaking.

'Key is often conventionally ascribed to an instance of some other component as its attribute; seriousness, for example, may be the expected concomitant of a scene, participant, act code, or genre (say, a church, a judge, a vow, use of Latin, obsequies). Yet there is always the possibility that there is a conventionally understood way of substituting an alternative key.'

(Hymes, 1986: 62)

Hymes' last point is an important one: as Saville-Troike (1989: 141) has noted, jokes are conventionally jocular, but it is easy to imagine a joke delivered in a sarcastic key. If this is the case, as Hymes points out, the key overrides other considerations in matters of interpretation. Some speech events will embrace a range of keys, while others (for example ritual) might be conventionally restricted to one. Where the key is prescribed in this way, deviations from it are particularly significant and may have serious social repercussions. On the other hand, where more than one key is conventionally possible, proscription rather than prescription may be the rule: 'Don't speak in that tone of voice to your

aunty Ida' makes explicit a transgression in terms of key. It might be possible to consider a range of appropriate descriptions (prescribed/dominant/proscribed etc.) but for the purposes of the analysis here it is necessary to recognise only a *sanctioned* key. By this I mean a key which is recognised as acceptable within a particular speech event. Such sanctioned keys will be common features in such events and will not, conventionally, feature as subjects of challenge (as in the case of aunty Ida) or serve as the basis for social or interactional awkwardness.

An example of a speech event where jocularity is not a sanctioned key is a formal meeting with the Queen, and this provides the basis for a much-told anecdote. Traditionally, the monarch would attend a number of 'important' national events, including the Royal Variety Performance and, a few weeks later, the Cup Final. At the end of the former, stars of the show would line up to meet the Queen, having first been informed of the relevant interactional rules. On one notable occasion, Tommy Cooper, a comedian, introduced a joke into the proceedings, having first prepared the ground very carefully. On being told by the Queen that she had found him very funny, he asked her whether she had really found him funny and, receiving a positive reply, sought further confirmation, to the noticeable discomfort of her attendants and others in the party. At this point, the conversation developed along these lines:

- Cooper: May I ask your majesty a personal question?
(Awkward silence.)
Queen: (Frostily) So far as I may allow.
Cooper: Do you enjoy football, ma'am?
Queen: No, as a matter of fact I don't.
Cooper: Well in that case can I have your Cup Final tickets?
(Laughter)

The awkward silence here and the frosty reception are significant both socially and as part of the setting up of the punchline, but the joke has already been prepared for in the earlier establishment of Cooper's role as a 'funny man'.

Goffman (1974) has described such behaviour in terms of 'frames', which answer the question 'What is happening here' and represent the way in which we structure our experience. Framing is a socially situated activity and frames can be built upon frames to represent levels of reality, so that primary frameworks can be transformed into, for example, make-believe or rehearsal. More complicated transformations are possible through 'keying', which is 'the set of conventions by which a given activity, already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on it but it seen by participants as something else' (1974: 43-44). I shall not use keying in this sense in the following discussion, partly because the concept itself is a slippery one and partly because of problems arising from attempts to apply it (see, for example, Schegloff, 1988: 107-109). However, the concept of 'frame' is a useful one, and the idea of a sanctioned key seems to work as well here as it does with speech events, although the two are not synonymous. In the example above, the humour in part derives from the frisson created by Tommy Cooper's threat to 'break frame'. Where something happens which is so serious that it disrupts the frame entirely and participants are unable to continue with their performance, the result is a scandal or serious social embarrassment.

Schiffrin has suggested that Gumperz's concept of a contextualisation cue can be usefully combined with frame analysis if such cues are seen as framing devices, indicating 'the frame (e.g. serious, joking, business, chat) in which an utterance should be interpreted' (1994: 103). Although it is possible to challenge the notion of 'frame' as presented here — Goffman's exposition indicates something more complex than this — the idea is a powerful one, and of particular relevance to interaction in the Pen staffroom. Gumperz defines a contextualisation cue as 'any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions', having described such clues as 'the

means by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows' (1982: 131). He also points out that '[f]or the most part they are habitually used and perceived but rarely consciously noted and almost never talked about directly' (*loc cit.*). In practice, this can make identification very difficult, especially since such clues are often non-verbal. However, there is evidence of at least one such cue in the Pen data, and it serves an important function in marking a change of frame from one where joking is a sanctioned key to one where it is not.

There are surprisingly few examples of direct address in the staffroom (T—) data, and its occurrence is clearly linked with the announcement of business. The following list contains all examples of direct address in the data, excluding my own (n. 3) and one which is clearly an identifier following a question (1/3/95: 0686: 'Didn't we? Susan?'):

15/2/95	0110*	Sugar spilt in coffee.
	0640	Procedure for using materials
22/2/95	0089	Information about student
	0151	Enquiry about a business course
	0463	Problems with students
	0680*	Complaint about student pestering
	0705	Location and use of materials
15/3/95	0144	Arrival of new student
	0329	Missing materials
	0355*	Harry's absence
	0514	Arrangements for a lesson
22/3/95	0335	Request for something
29/3/95	0410	Observation
5/4/95	0054	Materials
	0602	Student

One of these (22/3/95: 0335) is a simple request for something to be passed to the speaker, one is an indirect apology (15/2/95: 0110) and one begins as an observation but serves as a prelude to a serious discussion, but all the rest are clearly business, having to do with arrangements or problems. With three

exceptions (asterisked) humour is significantly absent from these discussions, and on the occasions where an attempt is made to introduce it this is conspicuously brushed aside.

The three examples where humour is present are, in fact, easily accounted for. In the first example (15/2/95: 0110) Annette has spilt 'a couple of little grains of sugar' in Harry's coffee and the business signalled is that of indirect apology. Harry uses a formulation appropriate to important matters of business to humorous effect in order to downgrade the seriousness of the offence and follows this up with a mock testing of the coffee.

Paul's complaint (22/2/95: 0680) about students asking to change classes is serious business, but expressed with unusual vehemence: 'Can we have a notice on the door, (.) Harry. I mean (.) it really pisses me off that (0.5) this is typical...'. As we have seen, humour is used in this case to balance the ferocity of the original proposal by casting the 'notice' in a humorous light. This must stand as a special case because the point is made with a degree of anger atypical in the staffroom and the humour serves a clear purpose specific to this context.

The final example actually serves to reinforce the claim that the use of direct address (in this data, topic-initially) is a sign that the focus is on 'serious business':

- Susan: Harry, (0.5) can you not go on holiday next week. Please.
Paul: Hhhhheheheh heheheh
Harry: Anne'll be back.
Paul: Why what's the problem?
Susan: I don't think it's (Harry) might get- might get a
comfort blanket or whatever.
[
Harry: Heh heheheh!
Susan: ((In exaggerated baby's voice)) 'Ha::rry, (0.5) what do I do:?'
(T—15/3/95: 0355-0363)

Harry, the acting academic manager in Jenny's absence, has just been addressed directly by Annette on the subject of materials in the listening centre and Susan's parody of 'business' follows a brief lapse in conversation. The parody is signalled by the negative formulation of the incongruous request and by the pause before 'Please.' Paul reacts by laughing and when he follows Harry's serious response with a question about the nature of the problem, Susan takes the opportunity to exaggerate her helplessness by referring to a comfort blanket. Laughter from Harry then prompts another direct address, this time in a baby's voice which makes the parody explicit. Harry as academic manager is now cast in the role of parent and the business is minding the baby. Implicit in Susan's request is recognition of the help which Harry has given to her since she joined the school, but the parody of 'serious business' provides the necessary frame for the joke.

In this parody, a humorous note is introduced at the start and, once acceptance is signalled through laughter, developed more explicitly, but the contextualisation cue of direct address is designed to signal 'serious business' in which humour plays no part. Evidence for this is strikingly provided in the only two instances in the data where an attempt is made to introduce a humorous note:

- Harry: Paul- (.) Paul and Ed. hh ·hhh Well Ed already knows.
 Paul: [Yeah.
 Paul: Yeah.
 Harry: (All that came out) with Nina. E:m (1.0) she was saying that
 the- the two Poles
 Paul: Yeah.
 Harry: particularly:
 Annette: °North and South.°=
 Harry: =Grace,
 Paul: Mm
 Harry: er tend to (.) jump in ...

(T—22/2/95: 0463-0474)

Not all witticisms receive a positive response, but the way in which this is brushed aside is particularly notable. It is delivered quietly, but close attention to the turn within its interactional sequence leaves no doubt that it has been brushed aside. The lengthened vowel at the end of 'particularly' provides Annette with an opportunity to seize the turn at what is not a transition relevant place (Sacks *et al.* 1974), but she is not interrupted; instead, Harry allows her to complete her turn and latches his continuation onto this, allowing her turn space but treating it in the same way as he treats Paul's backchannels. The attempt at humorous interpolation has been effectively swept aside.

An even clearer example of rejecting such an attempt is to be found in an exchange between Annette and Susan:

- Annette: Em:: (.) Su:san, () the beginning of this next lesson
() you and Khaled () for fifteen minutes.
Because I'll tell you why I'm asking that () because I'm
going to take my two into the listening centre, and show them
exactly how it works, and
- Susan: Well I'll come with you then.=
- Annette: =And the sort of materials show them (.) how to use it, (.) yes of
you want to watch, (.) because it might be=
[]
- Susan: Yeah sure. That'll be good.
- Annette: =quite useful for Khaled as well.=
- Susan: =Yeah.
- Annette: () after school
- Susan: Well- it might be a useful thing to do in his ()=
[]
- Annette: Of cou::rse, yes.
- Susan: =because yesterday Harry () with it
really.)
- Annette: Yes well
(0.5)
- Susan: >I said< 'Well did you listen to the tape?' ((Imitating Khaled's
accent)) 'Oh no I no listen to tape.'
- Annette: Oh right.=
- Susan: ='Okay, what did you do?' 'I read something.' (0.5) 'Yeah.
Alright.' HHHH!
- Annette: ()
- Susan: () Hehehah
- Annette: ()

Susan: He usually just takes a quick look at the words and ()
 Annette: [Mmm I see.
 Susan: Yeah. So I don't quite know what to do.
 Annette: [Okay so that might be quite a good idea then.
 Susan: [Yeah that'd be great.=
 Annette: So if we go down to the listening centre (.) with the students, and I'll show you and (Jenny) how it *works*.
 Susan: *Yeah*.
 (2.5)
 Annette: >Thank you very much.<

(T—15/3/95: 0514-0556)

The sequence opens following a half-second pause which marks the end of the previous topic, a discussion between Paul and Susan about a job in Poland from which the latter's application had received no response. The exchanges between Paul and Susan had generated a good deal of laughter and involved dramatisation on Paul's part. The switch to 'serious business' is therefore rather abrupt. Annette offers the opportunity for Susan and Khaled to join her tour of the language centre, an invitation which Susan promptly accepts. But instead of confirming arrangements, Susan takes the opportunity of evaluating this visit ('a useful thing to do') in order to announce an anecdote ('because yesterday Harry...'). She ignores Annette's clear signal that this is not relevant and her attempt to shift it back ('Yes well'), going on to dramatise an exchange with Khaled. Susan's loud exhalation of breath at the end of the utterance and her own laughter in her next turn are laughter tokens, indicating that the imitation of Khaled's accent is offered as a candidate laughable. However, this is rejected by Annette; instead of prompting laughter the joke has produced 'Oh', a 'change of state token' (Heritage, 1984) which indicates the receipt of new information. Since Susan's dramatisation is not designed to provide information but as form of entertainment, this deliberate misreading is marked as 'serious'. Susan then produces a quick, non-humorous summary of the problem with Khaled which

does count as new information and is responded to appropriately by Annette. Finally, Susan offers an 'upshot' ('So I don't quite know what to do.'), allowing Annette to shift back into the original topic and then make arrangements explicit. Annette's brisk closure serves to further emphasise that this has been a 'business' exchange.

There is only one example in the data outside explicitly signalled business where an attempt to make a humorous comment is clearly brushed aside:

- Ed: ... But then in the summer they have these big groups of of (0.5)
er (.) Spanish and Italian students.
Susan: What Italian?
Ed: Spanish.
Susan: Oh the- the Span-
[
Ed: The Spanish.
Susan: (Sounds as) spanky *Italians*.
Paul: Heheh=
Keith: =Heheh=
Ed: =Spanish (.) and Italians (if)
(22.0)
Paul: Oh we're all having a party. (2.5) U::::r
(T—8/3/95: 0020-0033)

Ed is talking about a job he has applied for and Susan mishears his description of the students. Her surprise is evident in the emphasis in her question which initiates the repair sequence, and this, together with the emphasis on the misheard word in her receipt of Ed's clarification, effectively set up the joke when she says what she originally heard. This is clearly designed as a joke and receives a brief but expected response from Paul and Keith. Ed, however, ignores this and treats Susan's turn as a reinitiation of the repair sequence, thus directing attention away from the joke. The very long pause following immediately on this, and Paul's switch to a completely unrelated topic, indicate the social consequences of Ed's decision to ignore the joking frame, or rather to 'reframe' it retrospectively as a repair initiation.

This example seems to support the general claim that joking is a sanctioned key in staffroom interaction. Only one person attempts to squash the joke and this brings the topic to an abrupt end. Furthermore, the person who does this is a temporary teacher regarded by his permanent colleagues as someone who doesn't 'fit it', one of the explanations for this being that he tends to take himself too seriously (Harry: interview). As Coser has observed (1959: 172), 'Those who refuse to join in common laughter are frowned upon, they are "bad sports".' It would seem that the social consequences of failing to recognise that joking is a sanctioned key are potentially serious and that it is important to attend to relevant interactional rules:

'Once a "licence to joke" has been issued, a frame is established around the subsequent activity. This joking frame comprises a set of agreed rules which may govern such aspects as who can participate in the activity and the content and verbal and non-verbal behavior.'

(Handelman and Kapferer, 1972: 485)

The significance of this and the other episode lies in the fact that they provide compelling evidence that there are situations in the staffroom where humour is inappropriate. This is significant because such 'business' episodes are clearly marked and few and far between: a great deal of business is conducted in unmarked staffroom interaction, where joking is a sanctioned key. There are many professional situations where this is not the case (for an example of 'no laughing matter', see Hester, 1996: 262-63), but business and pleasure are not only mixed in this staffroom, there is an expectation that they will be mixed, and where they are to be separated this needs to be clearly signalled.

The physical setting of the staffroom may not be insignificant here. Because it is small, most of the interaction which takes place is group interaction. Occasionally parallel conversations do develop, but these rarely last long, and if someone wishes to signal that a particular conversation is directed towards a

specific individual the use of first name address is an effective means of signalling this. It may also be the case that group interaction encourages humour in a way that dual-party interaction does not. Coser, in her discussion of humour among hospital patients (1959: 177), relates the example of someone who talked about herself when alone with the observer, 'but when patients were present she chose to transform her personal experience into a general one.'

Laughter, Coser points out (1959: 171), 'must be shared; it is socially defined as a prime part of the interactive process, of the give and take of social life.' In this chapter we have seen how it is an integral element in staffroom talk at the Pen and, idiosyncratic elements notwithstanding, how its non-aggressive nature reflects the collaborative culture of the school while at the same time offering the opportunity for critical distancing from the systems and routines which serve to maintain that culture. No attempt has been made to claim transcendent qualities on behalf of humour, but it is to be hoped that its importance has been clearly established.

Humour is, above all, culturally situated, and in a global enterprise such as TESOL one would not expect to find the humorous norms characteristic of one particular environment applying equally well to all others. It has been remarked, for example, that two English business people meeting on a train will probably by the end of the journey have laughed together, whereas it would be most unusual to find German or French business encounters of this kind producing any laughter. Nevertheless, the importance of humour in this particular staffroom, and potentially in many others, should not be underestimated. British, American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand teachers of English are to be found around the world operating in cultures very different from their own, and perhaps drawing on humour as an important

professional resource, yet the subject of humour remains neglected in the study of TESOL. Perhaps it is time to give it 'serious' attention.

Humour in the Pen staffroom is also a characteristic of many staffroom stories, another interactional element which plays an important part in the culture of the school and, as we shall see, in professional exchanges. As with humour, there is a cultural dimension to storytelling, but there are also common structural features which offer a useful basis for comparison across cultures and situations. The exploration of staffroom stories which forms the subject of the next chapter will take this as its starting point.

Chapter 7

Staffroom stories as a professional resource

7.1 The power of stories

In the stories which make up the Pen teachers' accounts of their own lives and in my story of a shared year with them, we can see something of the confluence of experience and belief lying at the heart of their shared professional world. Within this world, though, there are other stories, narratives which touch other lives and lead both tellers and audience alike into the mystery of language teaching. In this chapter I hope, through the following of these teachers' tales, to show how the mystery of *their* work sets them apart from other teachers, and how their modes of — often humorous — sharing represent at the same time a commitment to the seriousness of their profession and a defence against the helplessness it can engender.

There is nothing wrong with making stories, and this far down the line the thing that emerges most strongly for me is that my fieldnotes and recordings from the Pen make a story. I must try to capture that, not least because it's a story teachers know but may not have thought about.
(D—14/3/95)

The power of stories and storytelling is universally recognised, and if storytelling is 'a means by which humans organize and understand the world, and feel connected to each other' (Tannen, 1989: 102-3), this is nowhere more true than in the Pen staffroom. Here stories seem to hold a special place, drawing upon so many of those key aspects of the collaborative culture which bind its members and represent its distinctive character. Little (1990: 515) has described stories as an 'omnipresent feature of teachers' work lives' but pointed out that 'we know little of the contribution that teachers' stories make when

embedded in the wider pattern of professional interaction', and this chapter sets out to address this issue. In order to explore how such features are woven into the texture of staffroom tales, it will first be necessary to examine the structure of narrative, drawing on Pen stories for illustration. Attention will then turn to the interactive nature of storytelling in the staffroom, and this will in turn reveal the special place which stories hold in the collaborative culture of the Pen school.

7.2 The structure of stories

As a working definition, the description offered by Ochs *et al.* seems to cover the ground as well as any:

'Story: Narrative activity which articulates a central problematic event or circumstance arising in the immediate or distant past and the subsequent past, present and future actions/states relevant to interpreting and responding to the problem.'
(1992: 43)

The elements here are clear enough and find a place in all discussions of storytelling, but it is worth pausing to consider their potential significance for the discussion which will follow. The term 'narrative activity' is important, for, as we shall see, the act of telling may perhaps best be described as a 'performance' (cf. Wolfson, 1982) with the roles of teller and audience modulated in significant ways. The reference to past activity is also significant. In identifying stories in her corpus, Tannen made this aspect criterial, on the basis that:

'Narrative is not a discrete category but a prototype. Some verbal events are more narrative than others. The prototypical narrative, or story (I will use these terms interchangeably), recounts events that occurred in the past.'
(1984: 97)

In the context of discussing Pen staffroom data, *narrative*, *story*, *tale* and *anecdote* will all be used synonymously, and Tannen's past location will serve as criterial in the analysis of stories told in the Pen staffroom (Table 10). The importance of temporality in assessing the significance of staffroom stories will become

apparent, but what is immediately clear in this context is that there is an overwhelming preference for 'fresh' stories, recounted while events and the emotions connected with them are still 'hot'. In this respect, the stories analysed here will differ from others discussed in the literature.

The final element in Ochs *et al.*'s definition is in this context perhaps the most important, and the part played by response and interpretation both within the tale and outside it will become apparent. Temporal, descriptive and evaluative elements (Polanyi, 1979, 1981) will all be addressed, but it is the last which raises the most pertinent issues in the context of the Pen. Less attention will be paid to the structure of stories as such, although this aspect — which has been much explored — may serve as a useful starting point for discussion of specific aspects of them.

There have been numerous attempts to analyse stories in terms of 'story grammars', attempts to represent stories as sequences of propositions organised into hierarchical structures (see, for example, Prince, 1973; Rummelhart, 1975), but as yet no generally accepted 'grammar' has emerged (for a discussion of problematic features of the project, see Garnham, 1983). However, Labov's analysis of the structure of personal narratives has been widely used and provides a framework for further analysis. There are two versions of the model (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972/77), the later one a revised version of the earlier, offering the following summary:

- 'a. Abstract: what was this about.
- b. Orientation: who, when, what, where?
- c. Complicating action: then what happened?
- d. Evaluation: so what?
- e. Result: what finally happened?

(1972: 370)

There may also be a 'coda' which brings the story formally to an end. Labov points out that there may be various forms of evaluation, but the essential features are clear enough and other descriptions differ little if at all (see, for example, Fludernick, 1991; Ochs *et al.*, 1992). Stories in the Pen tend to follow this basic pattern:

- (3.0)
- Annette: Because I just let something happen then that I shouldn't have let happen. Abstract
- E:r (.) the:: (.) they've been doing a story about- Orientation
 reading about James Bond, and then >we were-
 < answering some questions on it, and one of
 the questions said em:: (0.5) er (.) >I can't
 remember what the que- >the exactly< question
was but it started with Bond, (.) Bond (.) did
 such and such and they were (.) to say whether
 it was true or false.=
- Keith: =Right.
- Annette: And e:m (.) Shafie got out his dictionary and Complicating
action 1
 was looking up (.) what I thought was an
 important word in the question that he didn't
understand, (.) and he was looking up 'bond'. (.)
- Keith: HA! Hahahah
- [
- Annette: Because it came at the beginning of the Embedded
orientation 1
sentence, (.) er (.) he therefore (.) didn't=
 []
- Keith: Right right right.
- Annette: =realise that that capital letter meant that
 it was a name, (.)
 []
- Keith: Yes.
- Annette: and he's (.) he s- he showed me in his dictionary Complicating
action 2
- Annette: because I- I thought I'd better go and check Embedded
orientation 2
 what he was looking up.
 []
- Keith: Oh right.
- Annette: And then he said 'It's this 'bond', it says Complicating
action 3
 'money' and 'stocks and shares' or something.
 °And° lots of meanings.'
- Keith: Hahaha::h=
- Annette: And I said 'No no,
- Keith: ()=

Annette: =it's it's (.) James Bond,' >I mean< I pointed to
the name on the board and he said 'O::h yes.'
Heheheh
Keith: Beautiful.
Annette: But I thought I should have picked up on that
earlier.
Keith: It's nice though. Real confusions.
Annette: Yes.
Keith: Yeah. Mmm. (.) Heh
(3.0)

Evaluation

(T—22/2/95: 0011-0046)

The story is preceded and followed by three-second pauses which set it off clearly from the surrounding discourse, although 'because' offers a putative link with the exchange which has just taken place (which in fact is entirely unrelated). The story begins with an abstract summing up the nature of the anecdote and moves quickly to an orientation which sets the action in its lesson context. When this is acknowledged by the listener, the teller introduces the complicating action which as far as the hearer is concerned seems to end the tale, at least judging by the outburst of laughter. The teller, however, has not completed the tale and offers further orientation to explain the significance of the dictionary search. Finally, via further orientation, the tale is concluded. The hearer's laughter again interrupts the telling, the conclusion of which is signalled by the teller's laughter tokens: the first, 'it's' repeated while laughing, does not generate the expected response, so another attempt is made via 'I mean', this time concluded with laughter. Although this fails to generate further laughter from the listener, it does produce a positive assessment of the story as a whole: 'Beautiful'.

Norrick has suggested that 'personal anecdotes have no punch line as such' (1994: 425), but this seems not to be the case here. The overlapping explanation which constitutes a rejection of the laughter following 'he was looking up "bond"' is a clear indication that the climax of the story has not been reached yet, while the laughter tokens at the end of the story serve the

opposite function. The punchline of the story may have misfired but it is clearly part of the design. It will become clear from the analysis of other staffroom anecdotes that such punchlines represent an expected and 'worked for' climax.

Other features of the telling of this tale are for the most part consistent with the surface structure identified by Labov (1972/77: 376). He suggests that conjunctions, including temporals, are to be found, and this story exhibits a remarkably consistent pattern (bold text): once the orientation is complete, the story begins with 'And', a conjunction which marks each advance in the plot, while embedded orientations are signalled by 'because' and the final evaluation, which links neatly with the opening abstract, by 'but'. The text also exhibits the simple subjects predicted by Labov, as well as preterite verbs and an underlying auxiliary which is a past tense marker. Labov, however, predicts a range of adverbials, of manner, time and especially location, which do not feature in this text. Neither are they a noticeable feature of other classroom stories in the data. This may be because the classroom is a fairly 'static' setting and the focus is very much on interaction between teacher and students rather than on the specific actions of either. It does, however, point to the fact that the 'drama' in such stories lies not so much in physical as in intellectual engagement. This is something which may in part explain the extended evaluations which usually accompany such stories.

In this respect the text just examined is an exception: the evaluation at the end is brief, amounting to an admission of professional misjudgement on the part of the teller and a redressive assessment of the worth of the story by its recipient. Speculation as to the reasons for this would have to remain very hypothetical, but it is worth at least noting that the explicit focus here is on teacher rather than student failure and that this sets it apart from most other Pen stories.

What also sets it apart from most other anecdotes in this setting is the relatively passive response of the recipient. As Jefferson has shown, it is possible to respond to story telling by using 'continuers' such as 'uh huh' or 'mmm' where the 'user is proposing that his co-participant is still in the midst of some course of talk, and shall go on talking' (1983: 4). Since the 'complicating action' is so brief in this story, even these are not to be found, although the overlapping 'right right right' and 'yes' in the first embedded orientation indicate receipt, and the change of state token in the second embedded orientation acknowledges its relevance. There is in the first embedded orientation, though, an indication of audience interference: the overlapping acknowledgements are intrusive and carry at least the suggestion that this particular orientation is not necessary, that the significance of the student's looking up 'bond' has been recognised and that further explanation is redundant.

Evaluation and participation are two aspects of storytelling which are never far apart. There is always a point to a tale, and the teller will seek to align the audience with his or her own evaluation of its significance. In order to do this it is necessary to 'read' and respond to the audience's reception of the story, while the audience in its turn may seek to appropriate the tale to its own ends, whether these are consonant with the teller's or not. As Goodwin has noted:

'In listening to a story, recipients bring to bear on it their own knowledge of the kinds of events it is describing and the scenes within which such events are embedded.'
(1986: 288)

In a professional context where so many experiences are common and where audience and teller share similar concerns, the likelihood of involvement is so much the greater. It is through such involvement, dramatic, humorous and reflective, that Pen staff choose to address the challenges and condundrums which are the concrete representations of their profession's mysteries.

In the sections which follow I examine the workings of this involvement in the context of story structure, drawing attention to the professional issues which it raises. I then compare these findings with those of other studies of staffroom stories and offer an explanation for the substantial differences which this reveals. Finally, I sum up the distinguishing characteristics of Pen stories, relating these to broader professional issues.

7.3 Shared stories (1): Context

The concept of audience as co-author is not new (see Duranti & Brenna, 1986) and a number of writers have explored the ways in which an audience can serve as a co-participant, influencing the telling and even the outcome of a story (e.g. Polanyi, 1985; Goodwin, 1986; Mandelbaum, 1989; Ochs *et al.*, 1992; Schiffrin, 1990; Norrick, 1994), but so far no attention seems to have been paid to joint storytelling in professional contexts. Yet this seems a particularly worthwhile area to explore, not least because the decision to introduce a story, although it may be influenced by the interactional context, represents a willingness to expose personal experiences to professional scrutiny. The story may be represented as 'objective', but the reality is necessarily different:

'the selection and organization of events into a story is not an objective process; rather, it is strongly constrained by the sentiments which the speaker holds towards the experience.'
(Schiffrin, 1990: 252)

It is likely, too, that the professional story's audience will have similar experiences and sentiments, which may or may not square with those being promulgated. These will inform the audience's response to the story and, whether or not they prompt direct involvement, will ensure that the resulting narrative is 'interactionally constituted' (Mandelbaum, 1989). I have already suggested that such professional stories arrive still warm with the emotions of

the experience they seek to represent, and this is supported by an examination of the point at which 'first stories' are introduced during breaktime talk (Table 10).

Location	Length (lines)	Teller	Subject	Stimulus
8/2 0024	8	Annette	Letting dog out	Context
8/2 0524	24	Harry	A student's demands	Context
15/2 0071	25	Annette	A successful dialogue	Self
15/2 0128	16	Susan	Using a video	Context
15/2 0561	155	Paul	A student's poor strategies	Unknown
22/2 0011	36	Annette	A student's confusion	Self
22/2 0389	21	Harry	Joking about a student's name	Context
22/2 0442	15	Annette	A schoolfriend's strange name	Context
1/3 0023	12	Annette	Telling students about pancakes	Self
1/3 0109	40	Annette	Buying wine for a school meal	Self
1/3 0451	43	Annette	Letters a student had to process	Context
1/3 0769	68	Paul	A 'dreamy' student	Self
8/3 0243	35	Paul	A mistaken impression	Context
8/3 0364	11	Paul	Joking about a student's name	Context
8/3 0762	63	Annette	Problems with pair work	Context
8/3 0960	20	Paul	Joking with a class	Context
15/3 0162	140	Paul	When students are slow	Context
22/3 0034	18	Susan	A jolly student	Context
29/3 0123	11	Annette	The late arrival of a student	Context
5/4 0006	25	Jenny	Showing a colleague the ropes	Self
5/4 0078	30	Louise	A successful task	Context
12/4 0065	23	Louise	A problem student	Self
12/4 0227	58	Annette	A student's confusion	Context
12/4 0482	21	Louise	A problem student	Self
12/4 0503	85	Paul	A problem student	Context

Table 10: Pen Stories

In five of the ten breaks recorded, stories are introduced within 50 lines of the start, and in seven of the ten within 100 lines, while the latest 'first story' appears after only 243 lines, less than one quarter of the way through the break. Admittedly, two of these stories are not professional ones, but the first story in this list (8/2/95) is nevertheless 'news', relating events during a particularly ferocious storm the previous night, and the example on 8/3/95 is followed within less than a hundred lines by a professional one. While this overall pattern is far from conclusive, it is at least indicative of a willingness to relate recent professional experiences. In any case, in a break as short as 20 minutes, stories have little time in which to go 'cold'.

Thus the circumstances — a common background, shared concerns and the freshness of experience — are all conducive to the shared development of stories and the evaluation of the events which they represent. To explore the construction of such narratives I shall now focus on three areas: the initiation of the story, its dramatisation, and its conclusion and evaluation.

7.4 Shared stories (2): Openings

It might seem that the professional value of a story has little to do with the way that it is introduced, but I should like to suggest that this may not be the case and that professionally relevant stories are signalled in advance as being important. There are two aspects which need to be considered here: the way in which the story is introduced into ongoing conversation, i.e. its relationship to what has gone before; and the way in which the story itself is prefaced, i.e. the relationship between the announcement of the story and its subsequent development. This Janus nature of story openings make them particularly worthy of study.

The importance of the interactional setting of stories has been noted by Jefferson:

‘Stories emerge from turn-by-turn talk, that is, are locally occasioned by it, and, upon their completion, stories re-engage turn-by-turn-talk, that is are sequentially implicative of it.’ (1978: 220)

Table 10 provides a very crude breakdown of the ways in which stories in the Pen staffroom are started, which on the surface offers limited support for Jefferson’s claim: there are 25 stories in all, 24 of which have identifiable openings (the ‘unknown’ start took place while a tape was being turned over), and of these exactly one-third (‘Self’) are produced without reference to previous talk or events in the staffroom. Given the convention in conversation analysis that nothing can be disregarded as *a priori* irrelevant or unimportant (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984: 4), this represents a serious challenge to Jefferson’s claim as it

stands. An examination of the relationship between story openings and surrounding talk is clearly called for.

The first step must be to examine the basis upon which these crude categories have been derived. 'Context' is used to represent all those cases where the story emerges as a natural part of ongoing discussion. There are various ways in which this might happen:

- a. The story might be prompted by a comment made by another interactant, sometimes immediately, sometimes after a pause:*

Paul: Lot of rain last night. I was surprised.
(1.5)

Annette: We let the dog out and e:r (.) Tom came down as well so I...
(T—8/2/95: 0022-24)

- b. The prompt might be a more direct invitation to recall individuals or incidents:*

Annette: Do you remember the Thai students we had who had
(.) nicknames (.) that were names of cars. (1.0) Wasn't it
Thai students?

[
Harry: It was- (.) it was (Nonny's) em: (0.5)
m- daughters I think.

[
Paul: It's a nickname I suppose.

Annette: Oh right.

Paul: Nicknames and- I suppose are different because=

Harry: =She started telling me this >(because it)< we were doing...
(T—22/2/95: 0385-0396)

- c. Where other stories have been told, this clearly legitimises further stories on the same theme. There is only one example of this in the data:*

Annette: >Yes there was a boy at my primary school called Goliath. He-
I apparently shouted across the road to him one day when...
(T—22/2/95: 0442-3)

- d. *The most common way of introducing a story is to fit it into a clearly defined topic, perhaps making its salience explicit or picking up on a key word or phrase used by a previous speaker:*

Annette: Mmm. The em:: (.) I remember a lesson something similar to that... (T—1/3/95: 0451)

Annette: >(At least)< you know Mak did a similar sort of thing with me this morning... (T—8/3/95: 0762-3)

Louise: ...and I think it's important that em (.) that the language I use is the language I'd use to other people, and e:m (.) I'm not sort of slowing down and

Keith: Yeah ([

Louise: ().

Paul: What- what I caught myself doing today, is em: (.) I sometimes (.) find myself (.) when I think people are just sort of (0.5) being just slow... (T—15/3/95: 0156-0164)

- e. *A speaker may develop his or her own topic and work the story into this, thus creating his or her own context. Where the story appears near the introduction of the topic and the opening might serve as part of the orientation, the difference between this and 'non-locally-occasioned' topics is blurred:*

Susan: Em (.) we've go- I've got (.) three students down o- er (.) Khalid is the: (.) Saudi guy.

Keith: Right.

Susan: Who I had last week and er- (.) he's now been joined by a Polish woman, and they were sort of together for quite (0.5) for about three two- two or three days, and then this em (.) Thai (0.5) m- guy joined the lesson as well=

Keith: =Right. Oh right there are three now then.

Susan: [But Khaled doesn't (.) like him because (0.5) the Thai guy's English i- (.) I mean his: grammar and stuff is very good but he- his speaking is quite- (.) can't (really understand him)=

Keith: =O:h you can't understand him very easily yeah. >°There you go.°<

Susan: And em- (0.5) you know it was alright today in the lesson... (T—22/3/95: 0019-0034)

Although in such borderline examples the contextualisation is problematic and they may be regarded as shading into self-initiation, the examples of 'self' in the data are much more clear cut, all of them apparently lacking the 'local occasioning' to which Jefferson refers. In one case (1/3/95: 0023) at least the topic has concerned food so there is tangential relevance, and in two examples, both involving Annette, the teller makes an effort to provide at least the *form* of relevance even though the substance is lacking. In one example (22/2/95: 0011, analysed in 'What's in a story?' above) she introduces 'because', which in fact has no anaphoric reference, and in the other example (1/3/95: 0109) she prefaces her story with 'Do you know I was in...', which at least suggests that the 'knowing' has some relevance to previous talk. However, the remaining five cases offer not the slightest concession to relevance, as the following summary makes clear:

Location	Speaker	Previous Topic	Initiation
15/2 0071	Annette	Serving coffee	Shafie and Chul-Soon have just done a brilliant em dialogue
1/3 0769	Paul	Friends and jobs	'Katsuko is still (1.0) a bit dreamy
5/4 0006	Jenny	Throwing something out	(There was) an awful performance yesterday when I was showing Maggi how to <i>lock up</i> .
12/4 0065	Louise	Serving coffee	I understand what e:r Paul means about the (.) getting things out of Ria because..
12/4 0482	Paul	Reports and student numbers	I experienced what <u>you</u> told me today about Ria.

Table 11: Story beginnings

Despite the claim that 'at times the narrative piece may be only tangentially related to the actual problem under discussion' (De Capua & Dunham, 1993: 524), I should like to argue that, in spite of appearances, these stories are in fact

'locally occasioned'. To do so it is necessary to extend the idea of a *sanctioned key* introduced in the last chapter to include the notion of a *sanctioned topic*. In conversation, *ceteris paribus*, there are no rules relating to the significance or otherwise of any particular topic, which is why it is necessary to establish the relevance of any new topic to foregoing talk and why 'unconnected' changes of subject are often explicitly signalled as such (for a discussion of conversation as a distinct speech event and speaker rights, see Wilson, 1989). However, in an institutional context, there may be rules of interaction which will determine the distribution of speaker rights, the range of relevant topics etc., thus constraining the options available to participants in talk (see Drew & Heritage, 1993).

Such rules are clearly detectable in staff meetings at the Pen: grossly apparent examples include occasional long turns (e.g. M—7/4/95: 2064-2109), explicit or implicit reference to a specific agenda (e.g. M—11/11/94: 2975), and seeking permission to take a turn (e.g. 2/12/94: 0454). However, interaction during breaks is for most practical purposes indistinguishable from ordinary conversation: though most talk is about 'shop', there are no rules concerning this, and relationships among those involved are entirely informal. Nevertheless, this is an institutional setting and there is at least one sense in which the professional world makes its presence felt, as this fieldnote entry from one of my earliest visits makes clear:

'Towards the end of this period teachers began returning to the staff room. I was already in there with Judith, both of us at desk 3, when Harry entered and began to make coffee.

'Paul enters: 'Well, they're beaver away, my group.' (To Harry, who has the other general group 23 hours a week.)
Brief discussion about this group; Paul leaves.

'Jan enters: 'We didn't get into Unit 2.' (To Judith, who is sharing the 1-1 Turkish businessman with her.)
Brief discussion of progress.

'What's interesting about these two exchanges is the absence of preliminaries: the staff room is obviously a place where the discussion of business is legitimate and can be introduced by anyone at any stage. The above comments were not preceded by polite enquiries from the addressee or by any attempt to establish context on the part of the speaker.'
(F—2/2/94)

It is this feature which the term 'sanctioned topic' is designed to represent. Where the topic relates to shared professional concerns such as the activity of students or the progress of classes, no interactional 'placement work' needs to be done; the topic will be accepted immediately as of relevance to those present and appropriate responses will be forthcoming, even if these consist of no more than acknowledgement. The fact that teachers are even prepared to enter the room and speak immediately upon these topics without weighing up the talk already in progress — an 'interactional' performance normally confined to young children or the mentally challenged — is an indication of just how powerful this interactional norm is.

In the light of this, the reference to named individuals in the openings in Table 11 is clearly significant. With only one exception, they refer to students, and the exception is that of the Principal, Jenny, who rarely teaches and whose sphere of concern is her colleagues and the running of the school — which makes her reference to a colleague as much a matter of relevant business as her colleagues' reference to their students. It is also worth noting that the examples here cover four of the five core teachers in the Pen, which suggests that the convention is both understood and used by all. In this sense, then, these apparently uncontextualised starts are as clearly 'locally occasioned' as those stories which develop from and are clearly embedded within the surrounding talk.

Sacks has argued that stories are preceded by a story preface, which represents 'an offer to tell or a request for a chance to tell a story or joke' (1974: 340), but the idea of a sanctioned topics — and the nature of recipient responses to the

initiation of these — suggests that acceptance is binding. It is perhaps interesting, if mildly embarrassing, that the only example in the data of such a story being 'refused' is when I was the audience. The story (T—12/4/95) at first receives a normal response ('Yeah ... Right ... Right ... Yeah. Yeah. ... I can believe that yeah.') but shortly after this, following a longer turn from me and agreement from Louise, I abruptly change the subject with 'Which reminds me...'. Significantly, however, Louise will take up this topic later on and it will provide the basis for stories from both her and Paul. My behaviour as an outsider is nowhere more manifest than here.

What the 'outsider' has missed here is a clear signal as to the sort of response which is expected:

'Many stories in conversation ... preceded by a brief preface which offers an initial characterization of what the story will be about. The characterization in the preface provides recipients with key resources that they use to analyze the story as it is being told... In addition, the characterization in the preface provides them with information about the type of alignment and response that is appropriate to the story.'

(Goodwin, 1986: 298)

My lack of alignment here arose from a failure to recognise the significance of the preface as an introduction to a 'student problem' which demands explication and analysis. As the next section will show, such alignment is routinely forthcoming among the core staff at the Pen.

In the case of the story just considered, there is a clear indication that the teller is determined to elicit the sort of response which it receives at its second telling (12/4/95: 482-503-595). There are two other stories in the data which last markedly longer than others (15/2/95: 561; 15/3/95: 162). The start of one of these is unfortunately lost, but in the case of the other deliberate preparation is

evident. The story which begins 15/3/95: 162 is clearly signalled at the beginning of the break when the teller announces:

- Paul: °Ghahhhhd!° (1.0) hhhh (.5) °Oh dear!°
Susan: °Hhhehheheh°
(1.0)
Paul: hhhhh! I think I shall get some duckboards out (.) coming
across my room.
Susan: Dotboards?=
Paul: D uckboards. Yeah.
[
Keith: Duckboards.
(1.0)
Paul: >Talk about< wading through mud at the moment.
(T—15/3/95: 0001-0011)

By the time this is picked up as a problem of 'slow' students, its importance has already been signalled as a significant issue. In both this and the previous example, particular attention has been drawn to the problem and the exploration of it is extended and detailed. This signalling is not simply a case of suspending the introduction of a tale until other exchanges have finished (Schiffrin, 1984: 322), but of announcing an issue as important to the teacher who will eventually tell the tale. In these three extended tales, an evaluative coda explicitly addresses the issue which has been pre-announced, but first the problem they are designed to illuminate is presented and responded to.

7.5 Shared stories (3): Making it real

The last chapter showed how humour in the Pen staffroom serves to establish critical distance between teachers and their professional world. There is a sense in which narrative offers more than this, since it both involves those concerned and establishes the basis for critical evaluation of the circumstances which it seeks to describe. The aim of this section is to explore collaborative aspects of storytelling among the Pen staff, using one particular story as an example. Its purpose is to suggest that involvement in the process of storytelling serves to

reinforce personal and professional relationships. The discussion will focus on the different ways in which such involvement is established and maintained through a process of 'sharing':

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>Dialogue</i> | It will be argued that, apart from its dramatic potential, this allows a form of 'direct access' to the experience of the teller. |
| <i>Tense</i> | The participative potential inherent in tense selection will be considered |
| <i>Routines</i> | The function of interactional routines in storytelling and other contexts will be considered, and a distinction will be drawn between those routines which serve a purely social or interactional function and those which serve to develop aspects of a particular story. |
| <i>Ownership</i> | It will be suggested that there are ways in which a teller and/or audience can establish shared ownership of a story, thus widening its relevance beyond the immediate experience of the teller. |
| <i>Accounting</i> | The importance of 'accounting', or providing explanations, for the behaviour of characters in a story, in 'sharing out' the story will be indicated. |

Involvement is to some extent a slippery concept, especially when it is identified in terms of 'involvement strategies' which may themselves be identified in terms of the 'involvement' which they generate (Besnier, 1994). It is also necessary at least to recognise on the one hand that interactional involvement may vary from individual to individual and that there may be 'distinct differences in their ability to track the flow of conversation' (Villaume & Cegala, 1988: 27), while on the other there is a sense in which all conversation is based on a degree of

involvement (Fais, 1994). For the purposes of narrative analysis, however, it seems legitimate to set aside such issues and to assume that where any of the audience share in the telling and/or evaluation of a story they are 'involved' in it. Whether or not laughter or 'continuers' constitute involvement is perhaps a matter for debate, but if direct participation in the story or its evaluation are to be excluded then it is difficult to imagine what the term 'involvement' might otherwise sensibly refer to.

Norrick has argued that 'the personal anecdote rates high on the scales of involvement and rapport' (1994: 428-9) and has sketched a trajectory for humorous stories which closely resembles that proposed by Labov:

The teller states the basic plot or theme of the narrative, then tells (and retells) the story, dramatising dialogue and stressing different aspects each time. Audience participation can ensue any time after the initial statement of the plot or theme. It usually begins with laughter, but once listeners have laughed, they freely offer comments and invent dialogue of their own. (1994: 427)

The statement of 'the basic plot or theme' corresponds to Labov's abstract, and it is clear that audience participation cannot be expected to begin before this (although there is one example of overlap in the data, T—8/3/95: 0765, its content is untranscribable and may well relate to do foregoing comments). Audience responses in the Pen staffroom data fall into four distinct categories: continuers ('mmm', 'yeah' etc.), laughter, dialogue, and evaluative comments.

To understand just how dramatisation and evaluation function in storytelling in this context, one particular story (T—15/2/95: 0561-0745) will be examined in detail, with reference made to others where appropriate. Because of the need to turn over the tape, the abstract is missing and we join Paul *in media res*:

Paul: Get it on the cheap. He he'd love to sort of () 'I'm dying to really ()'. Often to do with em (.) >things like< (.) like

'dy::ing' (.) to go on holiday,' or 'I'm dying to go to the toilet'
 I'm dying to
 [

Harry: Heheheh
 [

Susan: HehaHAH

Paul: 'I'm dying for a drink.' 'I'm dying (.) °for a smoke.° And other stuff. And (.) for the last fifteen minutes she's not with me and she's- she's going (1.0) and she keeps on slo:wly opening her dictionary, and I say 'What >are you looking for?' >and she=
 [

Harry: hhhh hh

Paul: =says< 'Nothing!'
 ((General laughter.)) (T—15/2/95: 0561-0576)

The theme of this story is far and away the most common one in Pen teachers' anecdotes: problems with a student or, more rarely, a class. Although the beginning of the story is missing, it cannot have taken up much time, since changing the tape is an operation which lasts a matter of seconds, and the rapid introduction of dramatic dialogue is a feature of Pen stories. Sometimes it will follow immediately on the abstract as in: 'Katsuko is still (1.0) a bit dreamy, (.) and I said (.) 'Are you...' (T—1/3/95: 0769). The significance of this readiness to plunge quickly to the narrative problem at the heart of the story has been noted by Ochs *et al.*:

'Shared knowledge of narrative terminology and protagonists (often captured in reduced, shorthand linguistic references) may facilitate the airing of troublesome narrative problems because interlocutors can bypass relevant background details and get right to the narrative problem at the heart of their concerns. (1992: 68)

In the case of the Pen, this 'sharing' involves dramatic representations of student talk as soon as the minimum necessary scene setting has been accomplished. This seems to be possible not only because so much shared knowledge of the classroom can be assumed but because the use of dialogue is a common form of shorthand in the staffroom. We find it outside stories, serving a number of

purposes. The following examples are all taken from the transcript of the first break recorded (T—8/2/95):

a. *descriptions of people:*

'He records ... and he comes back to y- back at you () and says 'I've noticed that.' (0066-73; Paul, of me)

b. *representations of what happens in class or student attitudes:*

'Oh! We've finished that already have we?' (0197; Susan, of a student's reaction)

c. *representations of own thought processes:*

'Okay, let's let's think about doing something else...' (0309; Linda)

d. *a student's own words:*

'I don't know what it is.' (561; Linda)

e. *a students words 'interpreted':*

'I don't know and therefore you need it.' (565; Linda)

But direct speech is more than simply routine or a matter of linguistic economy; it serves as a powerful involvement mechanism, drawing the audience into the story:

'When speakers cast the words of others in dialogue, they are not reporting so much as constructing dialogue. Constructing dialogue creates involvement by both its rhythmic, sonorous effect and its internal evaluative effect. Dialogue is not a general report; it is particular, and the particular enables listeners (or readers) to create their understanding by drawing on their own history of associations. By giving voice to characters, dialogue makes story into drama and listeners into an interpreting audience to the drama. The active participation in sensemaking contributes to the creation of involvement.'

(Tannen, 1989: 133)

It might also be argued that the use of dialogue allows a form of 'direct access' to the experience for the listeners. Although the words themselves may not be verbatim (the difference between examples d and e above demonstrates clearly how words can be refashioned), they are treated as such by the listeners and provide a text for the purposes of comparison and evaluation. Given access to the 'live' example, the audience is able to align this with their own related experience in the classroom and the professional reflections which it prompts, while at the same time framing their evaluation as a response to a precise representation of an event which has been placed before them. In presenting 'the evidence' in this 'direct' way, the teller is not unlike the researcher who (selectively) offers his or her data to the reader for assessment and response.

The dramatisation, of course, has its own dynamic and draws on a number of other performance features. Of those identified by Wolfson (1982: 24), direct speech, repetition, expressive sounds and the historic present are all to be found, although asides, sound effects and gestures are missing. We might also include, though, the opportunity which Paul seizes to include a humorous example, 'dying to go to the toilet'. This provokes the first laugh but does not seem to be intended as the punchline. This comes in the form of an exchange between teacher and student and is clearly designed to produce the general laughter which follows. The formula is repeated in the next section of the story:

- Paul: And er (0.5) and there's this look on her face.' (0.5) You=
[]
Harry: You're (dying).
Paul: =know, and you finish that, and I say (.) 'Okay, (.) you finished a bit late so (.) let's do (.) twenty minutes (longer). And then she's stood looking, really confused and (0.5) there's something going on in her head. (0.5) And (.) I said (.) I said 'What's the problem?' and she says
Harry: She says she has to *get out by ten forty*. heheh ·hhh hh
[]
Paul: 'dy::ing to.' (0.5) And I said 'Well do you understand it means 'want to'.' So she opens

her dictionary I say 'What are you looking for?' >She says<
 'Just checking.'
 Harry: >Heheh< haha hahahah
 [
 Paul: And I say (.) 'What don't you believe me!'
 Susan: hhh hehhh
 Harry: Yeah I often say *that*.
 [
 Paul: 'Just checking' 'Yes, am I (telling you)'
 Keith: Yeahahah

(T—15/2/95: 0577-98)

The student's response to Paul's question about what she is doing is almost a reprise of her first answer ('Nothing' has now moved very slightly to 'Just checking'), but this time Paul has a riposte, which also generates laughter. Prior to this, Harry has responded to the humorous frame by inserting an amusing completion of his own, which effectively serves as no more than an aside. Following the double-barrelled punchline, however, Harry makes another contribution ('Yeah, I often say that') identifying with Paul's experience, thus prompting a reprise from Paul which sets up the next stage of the story.

Before considering this, though, it is worth noting the presence of 'and' (highlighted in the text) in this narrative, since it will signal a return to the story upon completion of the aside which is to follow. It is perhaps also worth remarking on the use of the historical present in the tale, a common feature of Pen stories as of others. It has been claimed that the purpose of this is to make stories more vivid and exciting (Joos, 1964; Leech, 1971; Palmer, 1965), but this view has been challenged as an inadequate explanation of its function. Wolfson (1978, 1979, 1982) has argued that what matters most is the switching between what she calls the 'conversational historical present' and the past tense, since this sets off segments of the story and may call attention to specific parts of it and/or the narrator's interpretation of it. Schiffrin has in turn called into question this analysis, pointing out that such switches are almost entirely confined to complicating actions in narrative, where (a) 'tense is freed from its

main job of providing a reference time' because events clearly occurred in the past, and (b) events are normally understood to have occurred in a particular order, so that 'a specific understanding of the parameters of events within the temporal framework of the narrative is available through the discourse' (1981: 51).

The Pen narratives seem to bear out Schifffrin's claims except in so far as she claims a tendency for tenses to cluster together. There are clear examples in the data where no such clustering is evident. In one story, for example, we find the following string (transcription simplified, laughter and one overlapping comment edited out) which has begun in the present:

"'Yes but I it's difficult for me to" and then she didn't finish the sentence. And actually she's working by herself. You know and because sh- I mean she she looks as if she looks as if she's on drugs. An- and I was worried because...'
(T—1/3/95: 0778-87)

The last shift certainly seems determined by the description of a mental state, where it is important to distinguish between 'now' and 'then', but the other changes seem to conform to no particular pattern. This does not undermine Schifffrin's position but it does point to the significance of particular contextual factors. It is also worth noting that while both Schifffrin and Wolfson examine discoursal features of the present tense, neither consider its strategic potential. It is here that one might wish to locate claims about its capacity to create vividness and immediacy, and in terms of the Pen data there is an even more significant possibility which seems to have been ignored. While many writers have acknowledged the capacity of narrative to exploit displacement, or the ability to refer to past time (e.g. Toolan, 1989: 4) and to involve its audience, the role of the present tense in this seems to have been ignored. As long as what is being referred to occurs in a specific past time, access to it is restricted to those present at that time (usually the teller); but when it is presented in the present tense as a

dramatic re-enactment, contributions from the floor do not appear as anachronistic. This is not to suggest that contributions to a tale presented in the past tense are impossible; it is rather that the *conditions for participation* are more favourable when the situation is cast in the present tense.

In this case, the conditions for such participation are anyway laid down:

Harry: Could get into a real John Cleese routine (that way)
 Paul: ['Just checking. Yes I
 do yes. (I'm) yes that's right.'
 ['°Yes° >(Is that wrong!)' <
 Harry: ['°Yes° >(Is that wrong!)' <
 Ed: Heheh
 [Heheh HAHAH
 []=
 Susan: Hahahah
 Paul: ='Oh I'm sorry I thought I was just'
 ['All these years and he's using it
 Harry: right.'
 Susan: Heh hahahah=
 Harry: 'By all means go and check it, °yeah°.'
 Susan: hh
 Paul: Em,

(T—15/2/95: 0599-617)

From what we know of Paul and Harry's relationship and their explicitly stated interactional routines (apart from explanations offered to me in the staffroom — e.g. F—4/8/94, where they explain the significance of 'bring out the red berries' and its Monty Python referent — both make specific reference to the use of such routines in their interviews, and Harry suggests that this might make theirs 'quite a difficult style to break into for some people'), Harry's opening statement here is a clear invitation to map the classroom exchanges onto those associated with the comedian John Cleese. Implicit, then, is the image of suppressed rage on the part of the 'service provider' which has been generated by perceived 'customer' unreasonableness. We see this clearly in the created dialogue (e.g.

the exclamatory 'Is that wrong!', the stress on 'sorry' in 'Oh I'm sorry'). The importance of such involvement in nurturing and sustaining a collaborative culture is clear enough:

'for many, the shared experience of co-narration is critical to their relationships and the instantiation and ongoing reconstitution of their familiarity.'
(Ochs *et al.*, 1992: 68)

Such routines, which depend on a sequence of related utterances or examples, are not confined to storytelling and seem to fall into two types, one which serves a primarily social or interactional function and the other which also contributes to the development of the topic itself. The first serves to strengthen group bonds through its capacity to involve and entertain and appears as strings of examples on a common theme. Examples in the data include the following:

Answerphone messages:

'You've got (.) no (.) friends.
'Nobody (.) wants to talk to you.'
'You've been away for two weeks and you've got no messages.'
'The (.) suicide (.) pills (.) are (.) in (.) the (.) drawer.'
etc. (M—7/4/95: 1122-1156)

Teacher parody:

'Put it away, Ed.'
'Yes you boy. Let's all see what you're doi-.'
'Let's all have a look at it.'
'Open your books at page twenty two and yes I can see what you're doing.'
(T—1/3/95: 0632-0651)

Howlers:

'Please don't come round because I'm having a pussy flap installed.'
'So I stuck my fingers up him.'
'I shall be wearing a rose in my bottom hole'
'How do I book my back passage to Hamburg?'
(T—8/3/95: 0044-0117)

These might be described as *accumulative* examples: they extend the list of available illustrations but add nothing to an understanding of the context in which they are embedded or the concept to which they relate. In this they are very different from the sorts of examples which occur in teacher stories. Such examples, which could be described as *amplificatory*, expand the story itself, adding new dimensions to its content and context. So in the example above we see represented a student attitude which fails even to recognise the knowledge and experience which the teacher brings to the classroom, preferring instead the authority of a printed source. The teacher's frustration with this state of affairs is also underlined.

The addition of amplificatory examples combines with other supportive elements, such as expressions of understanding or commonality (e.g. Harry's, 'Yeah I often say that') to produce the effect of *making prototypical* the story being presented. Hargreaves (1980: 143) has argued that '*idiosyncratic* problems cannot be discussed, because by their nature they suggest incompetence: to be the only teacher with a problem is to indict oneself.' In the light of this it might be suggested that the effort to make these stories prototypical represents an attempt to avoid the professional consequences of idiosyncratic problems. However, we have seen how the Pen teachers will freely and publicly admit pedagogic failure, and this indicates that an explanation must be sought elsewhere. Perhaps it lies in the practical utility of the story and its attendant evaluation.

If members of the story's audience can add examples of their own to those being offered or can confirm features of the anecdote as in some way typical, then the story may be taken to represent a prototypical situation, so that any solutions to the problems it generates can be interpreted as general rather than individual. In other words, the generative power of the story in terms of professional

relevance is thereby increased: the prototypical situation now serves as a basis for solutions which have general relevance. The importance of this will become clear when the process of evaluation is considered. It begins in the next stage of the story:

- (2.0)
- Paul: And er and (.) so I'm saying (.) 'No:!'
 Harry: HEHEHeheheh (.) °()°
 Paul: And er (.) I say 'Ne- next time (.) just say (0.5) er (.) 'How do you use it?' But rather than sa- s- she just broo:ds on these things and it's so: it's awful because you can see she just- you- you just lose her. For five minutes. And we're doing fairly=
 [
 Keith: Yeah.
 Paul: =basic stuff you see- fairly ordinary stuff not- not at all=
 [
 Keith: Yeah.
 Paul: =difficult. But she gets these obsessions with something.
 Harry: Hehmm
 Paul: And if you point out (.) a different tense to her, (.) >she starts going< (.) hhhh ·hh she goes into (.) think mo:de.
 []
 Harry: hhh
 ((General laughter.))=
 Paul: °You can see it happening.° (0.5) And er (.) you know, (.) 'I have started volleyball training.'
- (T—15/2/95: 0618-38)

The return to the main story is signalled by the introduction of 'and', which is followed immediately by dramatisation. It is interesting to note in this section, though, that the two uses of the adversative conjunction 'but' mark a shift in the story's focus. They are followed by more general statements which seek to represent the state of the student's mind: 'she just broods' and 'she gets these obsessions'. This feature, which seems to be a form of accounting, is something which to my knowledge has not been remarked on in the literature on storytelling but which is pervasive in Pen anecdotes which focus on students, as the following examples, taken from the four weeks following the above story, illustrate:

'I thought I should have picked up on that earlier'	(T—22/2/95: 0043)
'she looks as if she's on drugs ... I thought maybe something her landlady has said to her'	(T—1/3/95: 0786-95)
'They do not listen to each other'	(T—8/3/95: 0785)
'she does that kind of thing in new situations'	(T—15/3/95: 0203-4)

These are clearly not the sort of typification identified by researchers such as Rist (1973), Hargreaves (1977) and Hammersley, (1980, 1981, 1984), where characteristics are assigned to students and allowed to represent them in the place of deeper consideration of their character and circumstances. In fact, in the Pen this accounting is often the first step in a more complex process of exploration and evaluation:

[At this point another conversation begins elsewhere in the staffroom.]

Paul: And you say (.) you- you- you notice that () been starting but I've started. And she goes 'Ah no.' (That's) something that just to (). Doesn't (it). But it's not just with (.) difficult things, it's as if she's looking for things to worry about. You get quite frustrated because she just () just tell me in her own way.

Harry: Yeah.

Paul: And then she's stuck and she's a sort of prisoner (.) locked into the text. (3.0) And it rea:lly does (2.0) inhibit her. In many=

Harry: [Mm

Paul: =ways, because if she's- (.) if she's (.) locked onto (.) 'Get out of bed,' when you're basically (.) just trying to say (.) 'Why does- (.) why is it a problem.' And she's just so locked onto a word she can't actually- (.) tell (A) what she under stands

Harry: [>It's not as if there's any difficulty about-< (.) getting out of bed anyway.=

Paul: [No!

Harry: =Getting out of bed yes that's a problem but (.) heheheh!

Keith: Yeah. (.) Eh

Paul: God's it's- this=

Harry: =The actual phrase is ()

Paul: [() You just think 'Oh Christ!'

Ed: It's not so much that she's kind of locked onto it so she's- it's as though she's kind of got- she feels as like as though er- em a precipice in front of her, and then unless she gets that=

Paul: [Yeah.]
 Harry: [Yeah.]
 Ed: cleared=
 Paul: =Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Right. Well that's it.=
 Ed: [in front of her]
 Ed: =she just stops.
 Paul: [Yeah.]
 Harry: Heheheh= (T—15/2/95: 0642-713)

The shift to accounting is clear in this section, but what is even more noticeable is the way in which this settles on a particular image as a representation of the problem. The importance of imagery in argument and as a powerful shorthand has already been discussed (see Chapter 5), and here again it emerges as a key element in the relationship between the Pen teachers and their professional world. Paul represents the problem as one in which the student is a 'sort of prisoner (.) locked into the text', and he reinforces this by the repetition of the word 'locked'. Ed, however, challenges this characterisation and offers instead an image of the problem which presents the student as a person with 'a precipice in front of her'. This is immediately accepted by Paul and Harry, the former embracing it almost enthusiastically ('Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Right. Well that's it.').

The difference between the two images is interesting: where the student is seen as a prisoner, locked into a text, the sense of challenge generated by 'precipice' is missing and the association is with transgression rather than adventure. Whatever the case, it is possible to see where a solution might lie:

Paul: =Yeah but if you really need
 Ed: [And makes sure (.) she knows=
 Paul: [It really is=
 Ed: =(what it is.)]

Paul: =a: a terrible strategy. (.) Because it's quite obvious (.)
 >that- that-< that she can understand.
 Harry: Yeah.=
 Paul: =I- if she:
 Keith: Yeah.
 Paul: If she stopped worrrying about it she could understand it.
 []
 Harry: Mm
 Harry: Yeah.
 Ed: Yeah.
 Paul: A::nd I say you know- i- if you keep (.) (eye) to a=
 []
 Ed: ()
 Paul: =text, you're never going to be able to (.) t- even talk=
 []
 Keith: Yeah.
 Paul: =about things.=
 Harry: =Mm=
 Paul: =You're never going to be able< to find a way of expressing
 yourself. (0.5) I'm always exhausted by the end of it.
 (0.5)
 Harry: () .hhh
 Paul: Yes. Even me.
 (0.5)
 Keith: hhhheheh (T—15/2/95: 0714-45)

The solution in the end seems to lie in the adoption of a different strategy on the part of the student, and the effort of trying to establish the conditions for this leave Paul 'exhausted'. His is the leading role in this final section, but the 'finale' calls for the presence of all the actors: Harry, Ed and Keith all appear on stage to offer appropriate support for the position which Paul has adopted. The play itself, though, is one of a series, and problems such as this one will be explored and analysed again and again in the Pen staffroom.

7.6 Shared stories (4): Evaluation

Central to such stories is the evaluation process, which can sometimes take up far more time than the story itself. The importance of this aspect of storytelling has been recognised by a number of writers in the field, including Labov (1972/77), who distinguishes internal from external evaluation. In the case of

the latter, the narrator stops the narrative in order to tell the listener what the point is, while in the former evaluation might appear in a number of indirect ways. These include embedding, where particular sentiments might be referred to, the teller might quote him or herself as addressing someone else, or a third person's evaluative comment might be quoted; and evaluative action, which involves saying what people did rather than what they said. There is ample evidence of both sorts of evaluation in the Pen data, but the focus of evaluation tends to be on the nature of the problem which the story is designed to represent, and it is this that I should like to explore.

As Jefferson points out, a story can serve to trigger topically related subsequent talk and various techniques can be used in order to display that 'the story is implicative for subsequent talk and thus propose the appropriateness of its having been told' (1978: 228). However, in the case of the Pen such stories are usually on 'sanctioned topics', so such work may not be necessary. What is more striking here is the process of evaluation which accompanies such stories, which can be considered subsequent talk only at the expense of understating its importance and ignoring the fact that it is also embedded within the stories themselves.

I have demonstrated that Pen staffroom stories are locally occasioned in a special sense and suggested that acceptance of them is binding on participants. I have also argued that involvement is important in the process of 'making prototypical' such stories and that the use of the present tense and 'amplificatory examples' are significant features of this. To support the claim that prototypicality — or at least the illusion of it — is important in these stories, it is necessary to consider the topics which they address and the ways in which they respond to these. What emerges from a consideration of evaluation is a picture of teachers in the Pen confronting the challenges of their particular professional

world, and it is this which will provide the basis for comparison with other staffrooms.

I shall explore the evaluation process by beginning with characterisation and moving through accounting and analysis, to a consideration of where the centre of balance in such stories seems to lie. This will then be compared with findings from others staffrooms and significant differences highlighted. The analysis which follows will focus on the story already considered (henceforth the 'dictionary story') and the two other long stories in the data, but will also refer to other stories.

Characterisation

The power of imagery in characterisation is clear enough, and when images occurring in the three long tales are examined a clear picture emerges (S = Student, T = Teacher):

[S]	a sort of prisoner, locked onto a word	Paul	15/2/95
[S]	facing a precipice	Ed	15/2/95
[T]	wading through mud	Paul	15/3/95
[S]	going limp	Paul	15/3/95
[T]	generating a bit of a spark	Louise	12/4/95
[S]	lets it dissolve around T	Paul	12/4/95
[S]	like putting plastic next to a hot fire	Paul	12/4/95
[S]	like jelly	Paul	12/4/95

The clear division between 'active' and 'passive' images which was identified earlier (Chapter 5) is apparent here. The source of the inaction in the dictionary story may be disputed by the participants but the inaction itself is accepted. In the second story the image of the teacher is that of someone attempting to move forward ('wading') but held back by the nature of the class ('mud'), or students who 'go limp'. Finally, in the third story the contrast between teacher and student is brought to the surface in terms of the effects of the active element on

the passive: the teacher generates a 'spark' which produces fire, in the presence of which the jelly-like or 'plastic' student melts, causing the lesson to 'dissolve'.

Not all characterisation, of course, is in terms of imagery; assessments of students are more often presented conventionally by most of the Pen staff. In fact, it is only Paul who seems to prefer imagery as a means of characterising students, and even he will sometimes rely on standard formulations such as 'very bright' (Paul, T—15/3/95: 0254). Characterisations may also be implicit in the presentation of those events themselves:

Paul: Katsuko is still (1.0) a bit dreamy, (.) and I said (.) are you a hundred percent (.) and she said ((non-verbal expression))
(T—1/3/95: 769-770)

The non-verbal expression here, which generates a laugh from the audience, is offered as a representation of the student's dreaminess. In this case the 'dreaminess' is not offered as a characteristic of the student (the 'still' here explicitly signals an extended but non-permanent state), but it is from such representations that characterisations derive and draw strength.

The problem with characterisation is that it can easily become typification, where the qualities assigned to students are treated as defining characteristics which are not susceptible to influence or change. Hammersley argues that such talk is characteristic of a 'discipline-based paradigm':

'This paradigm also combines a belief in immutable individual differences — in ability and perhaps also in character — with an individualistic vocabulary of motive. Thus the characteristics of the pupils referred to in the staffroom represent obstacles to be recognised not problems that can be solved by the adoption of appropriate methods. Indeed, discipline-based teaching places little or no emphasis on method: teaching is a standard activity, all the stress goes on its success or failure and this in turn is related either to immutable pupil characteristics or to incompetence on the part of the teacher.'
(1980: 94)

Explanations of pupil behaviour, Hammersley points out, are not so much explanations as predictions. It is interesting to note that in the description he offers above, emphasis is placed on the importance of methodology, and implicit in this is the possibility of change, of amelioration if not radical transformation, an option which is denied, or at least diminished, in the discipline-based paradigm. And if evaluation in the Pen were to go no further than the crude oppositional characterisation of teacher-pupil relationships represented in the imagery described, there would be no room for manoeuvre or development. However, this imagery itself needs to be interpreted in the context of broader evaluation.

Accounting

Accounting serves to advance the analysis of the problem in so far as it suggests that there is a reason for the events portrayed beyond that which arises from the character of the protagonists as represented in the imagery. If students are really like plastic, then nothing beyond a fundamental change of personality will help them, but if other factors can be identified then there is at least the possibility of progress.

Examples of accounts have already been provided, but it is still worth listing a sample of those which appear in the three stories under consideration:

[S]	gets 'obsessions' and 'goes into think mode'	15/2/95
[S]	goes slow in new situations	15/3/95
[S]	takes no notice or gets embarrassed	12/4/95

With the exception of 'obsessions', all these are well within the teacher's sphere of operation and potentially amenable to influence from adjustments in classroom methodology or teacher behaviour. In terms of the ways in which evaluation is offered, characterisation and accounting seem remarkably similar, but the difference between them lies in the potential of the latter to generate

productive responses. These are to be found in analysis, where the Pen teachers explore those issues implicit in situations which the story represents dramatically.

Analysis

The term 'analysis' corresponds very closely to Labov's 'evaluation', but I have chosen to distinguish it from characterisation and accounting because it is here that the professional dimension of a story can be explored. The term may be deliberately broad, but its significance in the context of other research in the field of staffroom talk will become apparent. Analysis, as used here, refers to explanations which are offered of why things happen as they do and suggestions as to responses which might be made. It may therefore include assessment or even categorisation (for a definition and applications of the two terms, see Hartland, 1994). The importance of analysis in the Pen staffroom, however, is that it represents the teachers' engagement with their professional world, not only in terms of the events described, but also, in so far as the story is made prototypical, in other situations of this kind.

Inevitably, the extent to which analysis takes place will vary from story to story, but what is particularly interesting in teachers' stories relating to students in class is the part which methodological choices play. In shorter stories, especially those with a humorous punchline (e.g. Paul's brief anecdote about referring to a student as 'Thai', T—8/3/95: 364), methodological discussion would clearly be out of place, but in others it can play a central role.

The dictionary story is unusual for long stories in this data set in that it seems to rely heavily on accounting and imagery in the process of evaluation. The student's obsessions and their attendant brooding are, it is true, pinned down by a precise teaching act (pointing out another tense), and the disagreement over an

appropriate image to characterise her state is in itself a form of analysis, but the extent of the explicit analysis is a consideration of the student's reading strategy. The story thus ends on a pessimistic note: the student is adopting a poor reading strategy and the teacher's efforts to deal with this leave him 'exhausted'. The implication of his exhaustion is that he is making every effort to address this problem, although this is not discussed. However, in the other two long stories methodological issues are explored, albeit in different ways.

If methodological decisions are presented in the story itself, further discussion may be unnecessary (as in the case of Annette's successful dialogue, T—15/2/95: 71ff.); but such issues are never far below the surface in staffroom talk, and stories provide a natural opportunity for them to be explored. Analysis in the story about Ria (T—12/4/95: 0482-0595) provides an example of this. The theme is introduced by Louise who describes how the use of 'stimulating questions' has produced 'not a thing', despite her trying to rescue it. Paul offers an amplificatory example in the form of a story, where a lesson from a very successful textbook, which is 'just designed to work' again produces a situation where 'nothing is happening'. His decision, in the absence of the 'psychological' support of other groups, to separate the pair in order to put pressure on each of them to produce something fails when one simply defers to the other. The story begins and ends with the image of melting and jelly, but at the end the student's embarrassment is mentioned and the topic shifts to what she is interested in.

In this story, there is an example of a methodological decision and its consequences, but alternatives are not explored. Analysis here is similar to that in the dictionary story in this respect, and in each case there is an implicit reason for not exploring further: in the case of the dictionary story it is the teacher's exhaustion, and here the fact that within a standard and normally successful framework the teacher has made the only change open to him but without

success. Faced with these apparent lack of methodological options, participants in the Ria story turn their attention to things which do in fact stimulate her, thus addressing the problem as originally characterised by Louise.

Analysis is also embedded in the third story in the set (T—15/3/95: 0162-0301), where the problem is with a small group of students rather than an individual, as Paul reflects on the pedagogic decisions he has made, the students' responses to these and the effects they have on him. At the end of the dramatised story, though, there is a longer analysis, interesting because of the different elements within it. The extract in Table 12 is made up of Paul's explanation of how he's 'just trying to make it work', organised under relevant headings but, with only minor adjustments, presented in the order in which they occur.

The disproportionate amount of time spent in discussing 'problems' needs to be interpreted in the light of the fact that the final part of his analysis identifies what is perceived to be the root cause of his problem: the composition of his class. Implicit in this is the assumption that resolution of the other problems identified here is in large part dependent on a response to this one, something that can only be pursued in the more formal setting of a staff meeting, with the principal involved.

If this final section is removed, what emerges is a balanced assessment of the issues raised by the story in terms of Paul's own beliefs about teaching, his assessment of the situation and possible pedagogic responses (pedagogic, that is, if knocking heads together is interpreted metaphorically). It should be pointed out that this particular analysis is directed at me, and that my role in the Pen staffroom may have influenced its form. Nevertheless, there is nothing here that is not to be found elsewhere in the data, as a brief glance at discussions in the first break recorded (T—8/2/95) makes abundantly clear.

Problems	Beliefs	Assessments	Responses
I've got- one of them is a (a woman who is) practically self taught ... So I've got- I've got- I mean that was one of the problems that was slowing me down (it appeared to be very hard) to cope with this person.	If you start ... giving up. I don't like to do that really (if I can).	(She seemed very ... posing a threat.)	And I had her in the end sitting with Katsuko
she was just looking at her own piece of paper. She's (there) hoping that em		she's obviously very bright	Just a question of getting ...
	I mean you've got to try and encourage them to have a bit of <i>nous</i> about it otherwise they're not going to get anywhere ...	But the thing is you see that it's- this is a an intermediate (thing in itself).	Because I mean Katsuk- Katsuko and Junko are sort of ready to start having their heads banged together you know you could do it with them a bit.
		And so you could make a guess here but (they've become uncertain) today, and the others haven't quite got the strategies so it's a bit...	Still we'll see how ...
I've got two different problems. Well I've got three different problems but of course em it's two elements making three problems. ... If you move- if we move two of the elements you- you wouldn't really have a problem. ... I'm saying it could be- no if if they- if they were the same if they were the same level, that's only one problem. Or if they if they were used to what goes in the classroom that's only one problem, and then so you've got the two people who know what's going on and have got the strategies have got a problem because they're if they're always (coming) up against...			

Table 12: Analysis in a story

The process of evaluation in Pen stories, then, involves characterisation, accounting and analysis, the last of these potentially involving discussion of methodological responses. For the most part such analysis is undertaken by the

teller of the story, but the audience is free to join in the exploration of relevant issues. What is strikingly evident from the evaluations of stories considered here, and a feature of all 'student' stories in the data, is that, unless they are presented as 'success stories' (e.g. T—15/2/92: 0071, Annette; T—5/4/95: 78, Louise), the evaluation at best seeks to identify the source of the problem. The apparent pessimism of their conclusions belies their characteristic humour and throws their undeniable 'entertainment value' into bathetic relief. In fact, this apparent anomaly points to something of profound professional significance which stories, perhaps more than any other form of interaction in Pen teacher talk, bring to the surface.

Where the personal and the professional clash in the evaluation of student stories, as they so often do, it is the former which ultimately triumphs. For all that the teacher brings to bear on the problem his or her experience and expertise, it is not to be hoped that this will stimulate the sort of fundamental cognitive change on the part of the student which might slice through the gordian knot of pedagogic failure. To a large extent the conundrum is captured in the competing imagery which suffuses teacher representation of the problem: the passivity of learners is always capable of nullifying the force of teacher activity. Even reliance on proven methods (as in Paul's approach to the Ria problem), the assurances of an experienced practitioner (as in the dictionary story) or a range of pedagogic responses in order to 'make it work' (as in the third story) is not proof against the power of psychological and interpersonal elements. It is perhaps no accident that stories of success rest on a fairly simple methodological account perhaps climaxed by a dramatic representation of its success or a quotation confirming it, in which student characteristics do not feature. Failure, on the other hand, is represented in precisely the opposite terms: the focus is on the student rather than the strategy.

'It may be that the move from procedures to people is as important as the move from conscious and deliberate action to unconscious and assured action. If this is so then perhaps we need to think again about some of our ideas about teacher training and development, and one of the things we surely have to do is re-examine very critically approaches which focus exclusively on teacher knowledge.' (D—3/2/94)

It is interesting to note how this mirrors the wider context of staffroom talk as a whole. We have seen how, in methodological terms, 'little ideas' have a particular attraction while broader, more 'theoretical' considerations and their attendant generalisations are eschewed, and how individual students feature as a recurrent subject of staffroom talk, even to the extent that certain individuals become the focus for unfolding stories. This emphasis is repeated in staffroom narratives, where much energy is expended on exploring the human dimension in teaching and far less on the exploration of methodological options. If this does not reflect the balance of emphasis in much of TESOL literature, it is at least in tune with recent thinking on learning and learner centred approaches (e.g. Nunan, 1988; Wenden, 1991; Rees-Miller, 1993), which was itself one of the ways in which the group defined its new school as different from the one they had just left:

'Any idea of student-dominated teaching was anathema over there. We were much more into the student as autonomous learner and their own, setting their own learning styles, which was a thing that had been laughed at, or were laughed at as concepts over there. So we just felt that was terrific that nobody was going to hold us back on the teaching side.'
(I—Jenny)

The challenges which these teachers seem to be wrestling with lie at the very heart of their profession and are ultimately not susceptible to resolution. In this respect, they reflect the concerns of their profession as a whole: issues in second language acquisition are the source of heated debate involving participants with widely differing views as to the nature of the cognitive processes involved (see,

for example, McLaughlin, 1990, for a summary of some of the most fundamental disagreements and a rejection of the terms 'conscious' and 'unconscious'; and Lightbown, 1985, for a review of reservations about the pedagogical relevance of second language acquisition research); previously comforting assumptions about the potential of 'scientific' enquiry to solve pedagogic problems have been undermined by challenges to its fundamental assumptions (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Eisner, 1991; Peshkin, 1993; but see also Phillips, 1987) and the weaknesses of a convenient theory/practice distinction have been harshly exposed (e.g. MacDonald, 1988; Clarke, 1994); and the cross-cultural paradoxes which are inherent in the profession of TESOL have been made explicit (Edge, 1996).

Against this background of uncertainty and challenge, these teachers face a further complication. What distinguishes language teaching from the teaching of other 'content' subjects is that the medium is also the object. The language used by the teachers and students in a TESOL classroom is the language which the latter are seeking to learn, and failures of participation here have consequences potentially far more significant than those which face the passive learner of 'content' subjects. It is therefore hardly surprising that we find an emphasis on passivity and non-activity as a source of difficulty for the Pen teachers. However much they are able to refine their practice, success will ultimately depend on the resolution of human rather than technical issues. Their stories are a reflection of this and a sharing of common understanding and support through involvement. When this picture is set against the evidence from stories and news-telling in other staffrooms, it emerges as something peculiar to this staff and their professional concerns in TESOL.

7.7 Other stories, other worlds

It may be true of the Pen staffroom, as Hammersley suggests of the staffroom he studied (1980: 54), that 'staffroom sociability ... seems to involve the creation of a

semi-fictionalised world, a world in which certain features of the pupils are accentuated and amusingly documented', and the dramatisation of classroom events, especially when supported by strongly contrastive imagery, must encourage a degree of exaggeration. And yet there is nowhere here the sort of caricaturing which Hammersley describes, no portrayal which might attract epithets as extreme as 'inveterately violent' or 'ridiculously stupid'. Of course, it might simply be that the Pen students do not provide models for such unpleasant representations, but this would be too simplistic an assumption; an explanation of the narrative world of the Pen needs to be sought elsewhere.

Its stories are from a world far removed from that of the two staffrooms whose stories have so far been examined. Hammersley's 'Downtown' staffroom (1980, 1981, 1984) is marked by the self-preservational polarisation of motive and character which, Hammersley suggests, arises from a 'discipline based culture' with an entrenched commitment to 'traditional teaching'. The teachers in Kainan's staffroom in 'Comprehensive School 11' (1992, 1994a, 1994b) do not seem to be faced with the external threats feared by the Downtown teachers, but theirs is an environment where competition for status and recognition seems intense. It is interesting to note that narratives in these two geographically, culturally and emotionally distant contexts show remarkable similarities, and yet the characteristics which are manifest here are not to be found in the Pen environment. There seem to be four significant areas of interest in these analyses:

1. Discipline and control

Both Kainan and Hammersley emphasise the importance of this in staffroom talk:

'An important feature of staffroom news at Downtown is the predominant concern with the "behaviour" of pupils; in other words with

the features of them relevant to the problem of maintaining "order" in the classroom. Only a few staffroom comments included in the data relate to the "ability" of pupils and their "response" to teaching.'

(Hammersley, 1984: 209)

As Hammersley (1980) points out, the maintenance of discipline is effectively a shared task where teachers cannot allow their common front to slip when dealing with pupils. Kainan offers an even broader characterisation when she claims that 'stories reflect a picture in which there is constant struggle in the school between chaos and order' (1994a: 133).

Interview data reveals that, in common with many of their colleagues in TESOL, the staff at the Pen are all too aware that their situation is very different from that in 'mainstream' education, where discipline represents a daily challenge to teachers; indeed, many of them mention this explicitly and Harry candidly admits that his teaching style would be unsuited to such a system. It would be surprising, then, if matters of discipline *did* feature in their talk, but the same cannot be said of control. Neither Hammersley nor Kainan draw a distinction between discipline and control, but it is clearly important to do so in this case. While Pen teachers may not need to discipline the social behaviour of their students, because the medium of instruction in the target language it is important for them to be *in control* of the interaction which takes place in the classroom (see van Lier, 1988, for a discussion of relevant issues). Much of their discussion of pedagogic matters centres on conditions which promote productive interaction and references to this, with their attendant 'active' images, are a common feature of staffroom discourse. Naturally, then, it is success or failure here that tends to be the focus of many staffroom stories, and in the case of the latter is it students who so often provide the source of the problem.

2. *Pupil failings*

In their emphasis on this, the Pen stories share at least something in common with *Downtown* and *School 11*, but the similarity is to some extent deceptive. Hammersley notes that 'a recurrent topic for comment and discussion in the staffroom is the "failure" of pupils to conform to those [teacher] expectations' (1984: 211), while Kainan insists that the 'villain of these stories is always the student or group of students' (1992: 446). Differences between these accounts and the Pen situation are more than a matter of degree; the motivation which lies behind them seems to be very different, as this section and the following two will demonstrate.

Hammersley demonstrates that the classroom context is accepted as unproblematic, the source of the problems being identified instead as part of a general decline in standards of discipline and behaviour in society as a whole. Since teachers are powerless to influence this they are, *ipso facto*, powerless to influence the behaviour of their pupils. The evaluation of Pen stories often concludes with the narrator's frustration and powerlessness in the face of human elements which will not respond to the teacher's best efforts, but there is never any suggestion that these efforts are not worth making; in fact, the opposite is the case. It would almost seem to be a matter of professional pride that such efforts should be made explicit in the story, which might explain why successful tales are wrapped up quickly with a minimum of evaluative comment while pedagogic failures tend to generate a long evaluative coda. It is only the failures which require justification.

In developing his account of teacher reactions to pupil failure, Hammersley (1980) rejects explanations in terms of the latter's failure to live up to the image of the 'ideal client', but there does seem to be at least an element of this in the accounts offered by the Pen teachers. In fact, the 'John Cleese' routine in the

dictionary story is an explicit enactment of this, and the tendency to see problematic students as unusual or isolated examples supports such an interpretation. As in the case of the complaining student (P—30/1/95: 0020-0125), staffroom talk may actually be structured in such a way as to accomplish such isolation without recourse to explicit statement, although this response is the exception rather than the norm.

3. The unimportance of methodology

Methodological issues, as we have seen, play an important part in teacher talk at the Pen. This is abundantly clear from the data, but it is perhaps worth simply noting as an example that in the first break recorded (T—8/2/95) nearly sixty per cent of the talk is of methodological matters. The selection may be arbitrary and the representation crude, but the emphasis is clear. This interest in matters methodological perhaps helps to explain the enthusiastic discussion of techniques for teaching pronunciation which take up eighty per cent of the staff meeting held on 2/12/94.

These are teachers who take a serious professional interest in the craft of teaching, either in its technical representation (as in the case of the staff meeting) or in its human dimension as explored through classroom experience and character analysis (as in much staffroom talk). In the dramatisation of classroom encounters, pedagogic strategies form part of the texture of the experience which is being represented. If this seems unremarkable, it is worth considering yet again the findings of Hammersley and Kainan:

‘Despite the fact that they face similar problems in the classroom, there is little discussion of the pedagogic strategies and tactics or of curricular issues among the staff, and for that matter very little lesson-preparation takes place.’
(Hammersley, 1980: 51)

The lack of interest in such strategies is a striking feature of the Downtown staffroom, as is the lack of reference to the interactional context in which events are situated. The concern of the Downtown teachers is to preserve their own professional face by attributing pedagogic failure to pupil character. As Hammersley shrewdly observes (1984: 211), teacher behaviour is seen as something which does not warrant comment; indeed, any questioning of such behaviour would represent a threat to the self-preserving conservatism of these teachers.

Kainan's analysis of stories in School 11 is much less subtle than Hammersley's, but her description of staffroom stories is itself revealing. She claims that the structure of stories is always the same, although this claim should perhaps be treated with some caution since we are provided with few examples of such stories, and these very general summaries based on fieldnotes. Her analysis (1992) identifies four stages: a beginning, which describes an unacceptable situation where the teacher is in trouble; an idea, where the teacher decides what to do; a plot, which describes the teacher's fight; and a happy end, from which the teacher emerges triumphant. This basic structure, she claims, is common to all stories, but where they differ is in the 'tricks' they use in the 'idea' stage. The use of the term 'trick' is significant. Unfortunately, as so often in Kainan's discussions, we are offered only the vaguest indication of what such 'tricks' might be. A trick, she claims, 'is the individual personal part that helps teachers with their class' (1992: 448). In the absence of a clearer indication, perhaps some speculation is warranted. It would seem that these teachers are effectively excluding the possibility of serious methodological discussion by reducing pedagogic decision-making to the status of pragmatic trickery, and if this is indeed the case it would seem that the situation at School 11 is not significantly different from that at Downtown.

In the light of this, the interest in methodology in the Pen generally, and its place in staffroom stories in particular, does seem to be significant. It stands in stark contradiction to Hargreaves' claim (D. H. Hargreaves, 1972) that the staffroom is a place where there exists a 'norm of cynicism' about education and educational ideas, with the result that it 'is certainly not a place for serious reflection or discussion about educational theories and ideas' (A. Hargreaves, 1981: 304). In fact, this is something which was explicitly rejected when the Pen staff established their school:

'What was good about it was we could get rid of all the dross, all the anti-intellectual that was associated with the staffroom in the other place.'
(I—Paul)

'We noticed they'd had the same timetable since the school opened. Nothing ever changed; teaching materials never got renewed; anything new was treated with suspicion; nobody went to professional meetings or Teachers' Club meetings because "just namby-pamby people did that." So we were getting a discomfort in that environment. And so it was a breath of relief that we could come here and do the things we believed in.'

(I—Jenny)

4. Threats

This seems to be an important element in the work of both Kainan and Hammersley, although only the latter explicitly recognises it as such. There are clearly two sources of threats in the staffroom situation: external and internal. I should like to suggest that in the case of the Pen only the second source is relevant, and that this helps to account, in part, for the differences between the Pen stories and those in the other data.

Internal threats are those which arise from colleagues in the staffroom and as such operate as constraints which help shape the stories produced in this context. Although the precise nature of the threats might be different, their effect is the same: whatever form the stories might take, there can be no

admission of failure on the part of the teller and no public accusation of failure from the audience. As Hammersley observes, drawing on Stebbins:

'Teachers can only blame two sources for their lack of success: themselves or others. As in other conventional occupations, they choose the latter alternative and thus contend that there is an important aspect of the students' lives or personalities affecting their behavior at school which is beyond their ability to manipulate.' (Stebbins 1975: 64)

In the Downtown staffroom, therefore, it is important for teachers to emphasise pupil failure while at the same time avoiding any admission of incompetence on their part. The reason for this, Hammersley claims, also accounts for why there is no evidence of disagreement in this context: such dissension opens up the possibility of public challenge to their shared assumption as to the rightness of their commitment to 'traditional' teaching and therefore a threat to their professional identity.

Professional identity also seems to be an important factor in School 11, although Kainan represents this in its superficial form as staffroom image:

'The stories in the staffroom give teachers the opportunity to create some image of themselves, an image that will reach the right ears and will change their status ... the staffroom is a place where teachers can show each other what kind of teachers they are, by using the heroic experience stories.' (1992: 447)

Hers is a staffroom where hierarchies are important and competition for promotion is intense, so that personal stories provide teachers with an opportunity to represent themselves to their best advantage. Not surprisingly, then, accounts of failure are few and far between, and these always related by a third party (1994: 112).

External threats are those which originate from outside the organisation in which the teachers work but which nevertheless impinge on their position and status

within it. Kainan does not consider these, but Hammersley relates behaviour within the Downtown staffroom to the wider world outside. He argues convincingly that the solidarity which precludes internal disagreement on matters of teaching is prompted by the need to maintain professional identity in the face of perceived threats from outside. In the face of mounting pressure from 'progressive' views which are influencing change in the educational environment as a whole, the Downtown teachers use staffroom talk, and in particular the exchange of news, as a way of sustaining their existing practice in the face of mounting pressure for change.

An explanation of why the Pen stories are so different from those in the Downtown and School 11 staffrooms can be found in the nature of the threats which teachers there have to face, but I should like to suggest that the picture is a good deal more complicated than this. There are indeed 'threats', but these are embedded within a wider professional and personal context which informs staffroom stories and the response which they stimulate.

The teachers who feature in Downtown and School 11 are not necessarily atypical; admitting weakness is an unattractive option in all but the most supportive environments, and there is evidence in the literature of how this tends to be avoided. Rosenholtz (1989), for example, has pointed out that requests for advice can leave the requester open to suspicion of being professionally unsuccessful and has suggested that consultation occurs only in those school where teachers do not feel threatened. The Pen staffroom is clearly such a place: we find teachers freely asking for and offering advice (e.g. T—8/2/95: 146-566), making their own failures the subject of stories (e.g. T—22/2/95: 0011-0046), openly admitting to failure (M—2/12/94: 0774), and confessing ignorance on linguistic (P—30/195: 342) and professional (M—2/12/94: 2355) points. But this is to represent the situation negatively. The

point is not that teachers are free to do this because of the absence of threats, it is rather that we find examples like these because the culture of the staffroom actively promotes them. This is clear from the interview statements quoted above, which reflect the deliberate attempt, in founding the school, to establish such a culture.

We need to distinguish here between *collaboration* and *collusion*. The Pen school was established as an overtly collaborative enterprise, its systems and procedures all established in this frame or arising from it; and the core group of teachers, whose biographies have brought them almost predictably to this point, know one another well enough to be aware of personal strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, they are aware that the main threat to this culture is the possibility of stagnation arising from the lack of appropriate stimulation ('It's vital to us, staying fresh' I—Jenny); hence their determination to bring in 'new blood', especially 'young blood', on a regular basis. In order for this culture to survive it needs challenge, and to deny personal failing in the pursuit of comfortable solidarity would be to undermine the very strengths which the Pen staff are explicitly committed to develop. In the case of Downtown, the solidarity of the teachers is not collaborative, it is not productive, and it serves only as collusion in the face of an external challenge. As we have seen in the case of the student complaint (P—30/1/95: 20-125), the Pen staff too are capable of structuring their interaction so as to eliminate the very *possibility* of challenge, but this an exception rather than the norm. It is this very weakness that they seek to overcome.

In this respect external threats serve them well. In fact, all external threats boil down to a single, overriding, concern: that numbers will fall to such an extent that the school will become financially no longer viable. There is ample evidence of this in the data:

1. Frequent references to recruitment and the problem of falling numbers. (e.g. M—2/12/94: 2307-2729)
2. The shared experience at the school over the water of having full-time contracts terminated at Christmas because of financial problems. (Life history interviews)
3. A similar experience involving one of the core staff in the Pen school as a result of falling numbers. (Life history interviews)
4. Current threats from the parent school concerning staffing needs and possible amalgamation. (Life history interviews)
5. Concern about the loss of control over their own destiny. (Life history interviews.)

The concern over falling numbers is, of course, fundamental: if insufficient numbers of students sign on for courses at the Pen, jobs will be lost and eventually the school will close, leaving these teachers, all of them settled comfortably in the area, to find their way in a jobs market where opportunities are few and far between and where full-time posts for ordinary English language teachers are desperately hard to come by. It is small wonder that this is their main concern, and in this they are very different from the teachers at Downtown and School 11, where the supply of pupils is guaranteed and jobs (at least at the time when Downtown was studied) are guaranteed. In the Pen, student satisfaction is quite literally a bread and butter issue.

It is precisely this fact which supports the natural inclination of Pen teachers towards professional exploration. They know that many of their students come to the school on the basis of glowing personal recommendation, and they also know that the accreditation offered by organisations like the British Council and FIRST is important in establishing the school's credentials as a place of learning.

They have a vested interest, then, in developing their professional expertise, and they recognise the link between genuine professional concern and self-interest, as Paul's comments on the setting up of the Pen reveal:

'We wanted it to be very very user friendly. We wanted there to be real and genuine concern for the welfare of the students. I mean, yes, where does being nice to your neighbour start basically? Through self-interest I suppose because if you're not nice to your neighbour he'll beat you over the head. Yeah, I mean I don't know where this great beneficent character comes from, but I think we just felt it sort of, it's like natural law or whatever, you wanted to do your best for the students and not be too cynical about things.'

(I—Paul)

However, we have seen how the main source of their interest in methodological matters lies deeper than this. From a pedagogic point of view, there is a significant difference between the defensive front which the Downtown teachers are constrained to present and the collaborative solidarity of the Pen teachers: one depends on unquestioning acceptance of the status quo, the other thrives on constructive challenge. The gulf is recognised by the Pen teachers themselves. Jenny, for example, is critical of 'a group of old hands who didn't want change, were cynical about the whole business [of external auditing] and could see nothing in it for themselves' (F—29/7/94), and they are critical of teachers who make no effort to keep abreast of developments in their field:

'What has surprised them most [about a visitor to the school] is the way that from the start he regarded their negotiated programme as something exceptional. They said they'd had trouble in getting across the fact that all their programmes are negotiated. They pride themselves on keeping up with developments and seemed to think that his ideas were well out of date.'

(F—19/1/94)

7.8 Pen stories

'A story', says Rosenholtz (1989a: 125), 'is constitutive; it makes for collective identification.' The identity of the Pen has little in common with that so far revealed by research on staffrooms, and the stories of the staff here are different; their sources, settings, affective orientations, structural contours and personal

elaborations are many and varied. At the risk of reducing them to simple formulae, it is worth considering what features, if any, they share, bearing in mind that narratives 'can promote the work of an organisation by providing a common understanding of its values and purposes' (Polkinghorne, 1988: 123). There seem to be four distinct contributions which such stories make to the culture of the Pen:

1. They function as 'news' stories, keeping colleagues up to date with developments in the progress of individual students and classes. In a small school, teachers are likely to encounter at one time or another all of the students registered on courses, and exchanges of information are therefore important. Teacher stories add to shared knowledge of the student body.
2. Teacher stories also offer the opportunity to explore a common interest in approaches to teaching and concerns about students who threaten the cooperative foundation upon which foreign language teaching depends. Where students are the focus of attention, such stories provide the opportunity to share the sense of frustration which arises from failure in the classroom. The connection between such talk and classroom performance has been powerfully articulated by Freeman:

'Talking about lessons is one form of action; doing lessons is another. It is a mistake, commonly made by teacher educators and researchers, to construe these two forms of action as parallel, or to see the first, talk, as representing the second, doing. Rather they are both articulations of a conception of practice.' (1992: 14)

In some stories it seems that teachers are going beyond the mere representation of difficulties in the classroom to an encounter with the fundamental challenges which face language teachers, challenges

which arise from the clash of student personality and pedagogic design. In this sense, teacher stories transcend the simple distinction which Freeman draws between 'local language', where 'teachers explain what goes on in their teaching on a daily basis' and 'the professional language of their training.' (1993: 489). Ultimately, the solution to such problems is to be found not simply in methodological innovation but from insights into the psychological springs of individual behaviour. Stories provide the opportunity to release some of the frustration which arises from this, a chance to draw support from others who have faced similar challenges' and the opportunity at least to consider responses to it.

3. In a staffroom where it is important not to take oneself too seriously, teacher anecdotes are a source of amusement and diversion. Some are told simply for humorous effect, while others invoke humour as a source of comfort and solidarity.
4. Above all, it seems that stories function to strengthen the interactional bonds which bind the staff together. Like humour, anecdotes offer the chance for colleagues to share, albeit vicariously, in the experience which is being described. Colleagues' contributions to the dramatisation of events constitute not merely a form of involvement in the events themselves but a representation of these events as prototypical of situations which Pen teachers face, so that the jointly constructed story becomes an affirmation of common understanding and shared professional commitment. Indirectly, such involvement also expresses a commitment to the value of storytelling as a staffroom activity.

Such stories are fragments of a wider story embracing not only the lives of the Pen teachers but those of the students whom they encounter. Some students, like some teachers, like some stories, will enter the folklore of the group, but most are no more than passing encounters, significant only in so far as they touch upon the human and professional concerns of those involved. In representing personal encounters, such stories are a constant but gentle reminder that the locus of teaching, whatever its methodological stripe, is in human engagement.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 'And makes one little roome, an every where'

At the end of a detailed but nevertheless selective exploration of the biographical antecedents, cultural characteristics and interactional intimacies of so small a space, it is important to relate this 'little roome' to the wider world of language teaching, highlighting those aspects of staffroom life from which lessons might be drawn. In what follows I begin by considering possible limitations of the study, before moving on to considering the outcomes of the research and its relevance to the world of TESOL.

8.2 Some limitations

Despite the conclusions which can legitimately be drawn from this research, it does have a number of limitations which should at least be recognised when assessing its worth. The most obvious of these is its focus on a particular school, and although this approach was justified when methodological issues were discussed, it needs to be borne in mind when wider implications are considered. The teachers in this study were exceptional at least in so far as they had been working together for so many years, and this may have revealed aspects of successful collaboration which would not have emerged from a study of a different group. In a sense, this particular staffroom was an opportunity too valuable to ignore. However, the choice of this unusual — perhaps even unique — group means that any conclusions which are drawn might well have been influenced by factors which would not apply so forcefully to other, more typical, groups. In other words, the value of this research will be confirmed only by the extent to which findings here can inform studies of other groups. Its limitation

in this respect lies in the extent to which its value is enhanced by further studies of this kind.

Within the research itself, it might be argued that far too much attention was given to discourse features at the expense of broader ethnographic and biographical elements. This was intended, and is surely justified in terms of the need for such an emphasis in the light of research which has been conducted to date, but the criticism is nevertheless accurate. Perhaps the chapter on humour could have been omitted and more explicit links established between lives, behaviour and discourse, but this would have undermined the 'expositional' perspective established at the outset. It is also unlikely that such links could have been established with any degree of confidence: the life histories presented here may throw light on certain aspects of the Pen culture and hence inform particular assessments of it, but retrospective accounts, however full, are hardly dependable representations of past events.

The focus on interactional detail brings with it a further disadvantage: the need to select. There were good reasons to focus on humour and stories, but these were selected at the expense of other aspects of staffroom life with strong claims on our attention. It would have been very interesting, for example, to have added something to the extensive literature on socialisation, especially in a staffroom where those present fall so clearly into two groups, one comprising teachers sharing extensive experience and the other made up of young teachers with virtually no experience. From a practical point of view, it was also tempting to make use of recorded interviews on the subject of the forthcoming British Council inspection and the meeting dedicated to this (T—7/4/96) in order to throw light on the way different views and discussions of this developed in the preparation period. Such absences need to be recognised, but ultimately they have to be accepted. Their omission is inevitably a limitation,

but whether it is a significant one must depend on the value of what appears in their place.

'My thesis will be no more than a glimpse through the window of a passing train: what is distant will seem still enough, but the closer I get to the world out there the faster it will flee from my sight and melt into blurred impressions.'
(D—5/12/94)

To a reader working in TESOL it may also appear that this research is only nominally concerned with their professional world. The teachers are EFL teachers, it is true, but none of the discussions here draw explicitly on research in this field. Perhaps this is a limitation, but one which derives directly from the particular focus of the study. Had this fallen on evaluation, for example, or on the relationship between staffroom and classroom interaction, there would have been a wealth of valuable research on which to draw. However, the focus is not there, and the territories explored here are virgin ones as far as TESOL is concerned. Apart from its value in opening up a new field, this research has a contribution to make elsewhere. Connelly and Clandinin (1995: 78) make a point which must be apparent to all who have taken the trouble to stand back from their academic concerns: 'Researchers tend to move through their careers by attending conferences with, and writing manuscripts for, a fairly small subset of teaching or learning colleagues.' This is perhaps as true of TESOL as of any other field, but one of the strengths of this discipline is its willingness to draw on related fields in order better to understand its own particular territory. This research is offered in that spirit.

A more subtle problem, deriving from the choice of participants in the research, has been identified by Clarke:

'We have elevated and lionised those few school teachers who are most like ourselves (reflective, analytic, verbally articulate, sophisticated in

their knowledge, liberal and worldly in their values). These are the teachers whose planning, thinking and decision-making we study and, unreflectively, portray as ideals for all other teachers, experienced and novice alike.' (1986: 16)

This is a more serious challenge and perhaps one that has not been sufficiently recognised. I have already pleaded guilty at least in part to this charge in admitting that the teachers here are of my generation and, for the most part, in tune with many of my own beliefs about what matters. However, it is important to emphasise that the criteria for choosing this school were based on its success and the experience of its teachers; the characters and beliefs of the teachers emerged only later.

At the risk of immodesty, it might reasonably be argued that the characteristics identified by Clark may well be factors which help to account for success, whether it be in teaching or research, and since we tend to see the results of only 'successful' research, it is to be expected that the researcher will share at least some of these characteristics with 'successful' teachers. The real force of Clarke's challenge lies in the extent to which we may be 'blinded' to other factors when accounting for success. This particular research has sought to understand the ways in which teachers talk about their work and their professional concerns, and there is behind this an assumption that such talk can be professionally productive, especially in so far as it contributes to professional collegiality. However, this is not the same as claiming that such factors are alone responsible for the success of the Pen school, and, in the light of Clarke's observation, it is worth emphasising that there may be other relevant factors. This is something which further research might explore.

A more serious criticism arising from the similarities between myself and the Pen teachers, and my sympathy for them, is that my analysis may have been biased. The presence of a full transcript of talk in four staff meetings and ten

breaks, in addition to the evidence produced in the text itself, offers the reader a chance to check the balance of the analysis and interpretation, and there is at least one area where some might feel that I have been unnecessarily generous in my evaluation. It might be argued that although these teachers do discuss pedagogic issues, they do so in particular and personal terms, failing to draw on wider educational issues. This is precisely Hargreaves' point (1994: 425), as represented earlier, and, despite their criticisms of the culture of the school over the water for its anti-intellectual stance, these teachers fall clearly into the 'anti-intellectual' category which Hargreaves claims is typical.

To some extent this is a fair point, and perhaps the balance of my analysis is tipped in favour of the Pen teachers, but it misses the direction which my argument has taken. I have not argued that these teachers fall on the 'positive' side of a particular dichotomy or that they are in some way atypical. Rather, I have tried to suggest, through the careful analysis of conversational data, that apparently 'trivial' conversation fulfils a number of important functions, one of which is to confront pedagogic challenges. It is far from certain that discussions of education in general terms *are* pedagogically valuable in this context, especially since the utility of general educational points depends on the extent to which they can be translated effectively into practice. The proximity of staffroom and classroom offers an opportunity to explore, however crudely, this process of translation, and to dismiss as 'anti-intellectual' talk which fails to address general points is to misunderstand one of the most important functions of the staffroom. There is also evidence that such a 'practical' orientation is associated with successful schools:

'In successful and adaptable schools, interaction about teaching is consciously and steadily focused on practice, on what teachers do, with what aims, in what situations, with what materials, and with what apparent results.'
(Little, 1982: 334)

This 'positioning' of the staffroom in terms of 'practical' and 'theoretical' educational issues is an interesting one, and although this research has explored some of the relevant issues, there is a need to understand more about this important relationship. For example, there are clear differences in this data between the ways in which educational matters are explored in staff meetings and the ways in which they emerge in breaktime talk, and an examination of this might reveal more about the ways in which teachers conceptualise their work and its parameters. Along the way differences between different teachers and different contexts will inevitably emerge, and it seems too early to settle for what must be a largely hypothetical categorisation of 'types' of professional talk amongst teachers.

6.3 Staffroom life

The primary purpose of this analysis has been to probe beneath the surface of staff collaboration and collegiality to expose its interactional foundations, on the assumption that '[l]ike most broad images, collegiality shows its peculiar architecture only close up.' (Little, 1990a: 177). At least in so far as the results throw doubt on some of the findings of earlier research into school culture and open new areas of interest, the effort seems to have borne fruit. The following stand out as being particularly relevant in this respect.

The importance of daily interaction

Far and away the most important feature to emerge from this research is a strong case for the importance of studying teacher interaction, preferably through the analysis of taped data. While not undermining the value of what can be learnt from interview data, the findings here point to an important dimension which such approaches are simply not equipped to explore. It is also clear that while fieldnotes go some way towards filling the gap, there are limitations which only the analysis of transcribed recordings can overcome.

It is only through the analysis of such data, for example, that the apparently universal claim that teachers 'display the same anti-intellectual suspicion of talking seriously about education in general terms as opposed to gossiping about the particularities of school life' (Hargreaves, 1994: 425) can be put to the test. The findings of this study demonstrate that the crude division between 'talking seriously' and 'gossiping' is not borne out by the realities of staffroom interaction. If we are truly to understand more about 'the dailiness of teaching' (Lieberman & Miller, 1990: 156) in this context, it is essential that appropriate research strategies are adopted.

Business and pleasure

The importance of humour in staffroom life, as in all organisational interaction, has long been recognised, but idea of humour as a norm, where deviations are explicitly signalled (see Chapter 6.6), is something which is not found in previous literature. It may be that this a characteristic unique to the Pen school, but the insistent recurrence of references to 'fun' and 'humour' in accounts of collaborative cultures suggest that this is unlikely. Perhaps more attention should be paid to this aspect in discussions of collaborative work, and there is clearly space for further research in the area.

Image

The relevance of metaphor and imagery to teachers' conceptions of their practice has also been generally recognised, but so far no attention has been paid to the way this functions in everyday institutional talk. The findings of this study suggest that this might be an area ripe for further investigation. If the crude but powerful binary mechanism of active and passive imagery identified here (Chapter 5.5) is a feature of teacher talk generally, it might provide the basis not only for consideration when planning teacher development programmes but

also for a more detailed and sophisticated model of educational metaphor. Alternatively, if this particular representation is confined to a specific context such as the Pen, EFL teachers, or collaborative environments, and other representations are identifiable in other contexts, this points to the possibility of developing a powerful descriptive tool.

The importance of stories

The analysis of stories demonstrates the worth of such detailed analysis. The analysis here has shown the value of stories in staffroom talk, not merely as a form of 'grumbling' or as a vehicle for humour, but as an opportunity to explore professional conundrums and as a medium for generating the sort of involvement on which collaboration is built (Chapter 7.6). Deal's claim that such stories 'carry values and provide people with direction, courage and hope' (1990: 138), may not be an exaggeration, and this research has indicated some of the subtle ways in which they penetrate the professional world of teachers.

These results are applicable to teachers generally, but there are outcomes of the research which need to be spelt out more explicitly in the context of English Language Teaching.

6.4 Implications for English Language Teaching

To some extent, spelling out specific advantages of this research to TESOL is against the spirit of the research perspective adopted here; it may seem something of an imposition on a reader who will already have drawn his or her own conclusions on the basis of the 'exhibits'. The following, therefore, represent what I feel may be of most relevance to our field, but they have no special status, being based on my own reading of the analysis offered in the foregoing chapters.

The importance of collegiality

The first and most important implication arises from the extent to which this study confirms the growing evidence in favour of collegiality. The implications here are clear:

‘Certain types of structures are more likely than others to intensify and focus norms of good practice: organizations in which face-to-face relationships dominate impersonal, bureaucratic ones; organizations in which people routinely interact around common problems of practice...’
(Elmore, 1996: 20)

This study has described one school where collaboration is the norm and has suggested that this may account in large measure for its success. As yet, the findings of such research seem to have received little attention in TESOL, but there is a case here for serious consideration of how successful institutional cultures might be developed. Such attention would be consonant with a growing commitment to professionalism and increasing competition for students, but the practical implications of it would require careful consideration and public debate. A consideration of a relatively short list of factors which have a beneficial effect on school climate (Hopkins, 1990: 61) indicates how broad such a debate would need to be:

- self-determination of the organisation;
- supportive and actively involved heads;
- a high degree of internal communication;
- timing and opportunity for observation of others;
- staff collaboration as a continuous process.

All of these factors are present in the Pen, and some would be easy to introduce to other schools, while others represent a much more complex challenge if contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1992) is to be translated into the genuine article. It would be possible, for example, to set out to recruit heads who fulfil

the second criterion, and they in turn could offer the space and encouragement for shared observation. However, internal communication cannot simply be imposed, and it is possible to do no more than create the conditions for staff collaboration. Then, even if all these changes are feasible, there are many cultural contexts in which the first factor, organisational self-determination, will not even be admitted for consideration.

The challenge in TESOL is to explore ways of benefiting from the advantages of collaboration through the establishment of school cultures which are attuned to the cultural realities of different national and educational settings. It may be that such settings preclude collegiality and that the cultures which will need to be developed are not collaborative in the sense explored here, but the challenge is one of integration and adaptation:

‘Staff development will never have its intended impact as long as it is grafted onto schools in the form of discrete, unconnected projects. The closer one gets to the culture of schools and the professional lives of teachers, the more complex and daunting the reform agenda becomes.’

(Fullan, 1990: 21)

We know that the ‘imposition of change can lead to low morale, dissatisfaction and reduced commitment’ (Sikes, 1992: 49), and at the end of my time at the Pen the fear of imposed change was already eating into the core staff’s perception of their work and its value. It falls outside the scope of this study to deal with issues of change and innovation, but the outcomes of this research point to the importance of continuing to explore this very important area in the context of a global profession.

The human dimension

The Pen staff are dedicated teachers who chose to be teachers of English to speakers of other languages because that is where they felt happiest and most professionally fulfilled. They are interested in language and will engage in

extended conversations on linguistic topics for amusement or edification. However, their professional concerns are first and foremost with people: pedagogic challenges and the solutions to them are seen in human rather than linguistic terms. An examination of TESOL literature produces a very different picture, one where language use, language acquisition, syllabus and methodological issues are to the fore. Perhaps it is right that this should be so, and the 'human' dimension is something which experience will take care of, but this is not a position reflected in the literature of education outside TESOL. There is a case to be made for placing TESOL more squarely in an educational context, but this is a matter for debate; what is more self-evident is the need to take account of the human dimension in teacher development programmes. If the Pen teachers are typical, and EFL teachers generally conceptualise pedagogic — and linguistic — issues in human terms, then this is something we need to address directly in work directed to professional development.

The value of experience

Economically, short-term contracts seem to make sense — judging by the decisions of leading employers in the field of TESOL. The results of a single in-depth study of a minor language school, albeit a happy and successful one, are hardly likely to sway the decision-makers in such organisations, wary of the future in an increasingly competitive market place. Nevertheless, the value of experience should not be underestimated. Leaving aside any benefits which might be derived from successful teaching, it is clear from this study that a high degree of contextual knowledge is efficient in terms of time. Access to materials, the use of systems and the discussion of professional issues, pedagogic and administrative, are all managed much more economically by these teachers than by less experienced colleagues. In business terms, experienced teachers 'work smarter'. The benefits of this economy surely deserve consideration by those who employ such teachers.

Training

Feelings about the RSA Diploma course which these teachers followed are mixed. It was certainly a demanding time, and at least one of them feels that students were to some extent neglected as a result of it. However, most of them point to the professional benefits which they derived from the course, not least in terms of the sort of interaction which it generated. There is also evidence in this data that elements of the course still feature in their talk, and it is fair to assume that it advanced their shared understanding of their professional context. Perhaps, then — and this must be a tentative suggestion at best — it is worth at least considering more 'in-house' courses of this kind, where groups of teachers from one institution commit themselves to an extended programme of professional development delivered in-house, or at least partly delivered in-house. When these teachers began the course most of them had known one another for a number of years, and it is conceivable that in other circumstances the disadvantages might outweigh the advantages, but until and unless this is established, the option should at least be given serious consideration.

Evaluation

The evaluation of teaching for the purposes of quality assurance is now well-established, and its effectiveness derives from the extent to which it is able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an institution on the basis of a relatively brief visit. The challenges which this represents are well understood, and evaluation in TESOL is a subject which has received serious academic consideration (e.g. Alderson & Beretta, 1992), but a clearer understanding of professional cultures could make a valuable contribution to the development of yet more efficient descriptive systems and perhaps also indicate limitations which have not hitherto been recognised. For example, in an evaluation of the Pen, one of the few criticisms made was that the appraisal system there was based on peer observation, unchecked by further observation from the principal.

A fuller understanding of the collaborative norms of the school would have revealed at once why the criticism and the alternative suggested were inappropriate there.

Staffroom and classroom

There seems to be a strong case for exploring the relationship between staffroom and classroom talk. Although both Woods (1979) and Hammersley (1980) have explored this relationship in the context of mainstream education, their research was conducted, in career terms, almost half a generation ago and in non-collaborative contexts. Such exploration in the context of TESOL has yet to be done, and, as Little observes (1990a: 168), we still 'know relatively little about the specific mechanisms by which collegial relations among teachers operate to the benefit of students.' If we could identify such mechanisms and draw on this in teacher education, the pedagogical benefits could be significant.

More general developments from this research project might adopt the same general approach but apply this to schools with different professional cultures. It would be interesting to compare interaction here, for example, with that which characterises an individualistic or balkanised culture (Hargreaves, 1992). Apart from any direct benefits deriving from such a comparison, it would add to our understanding of the professional world of TESOL. We might then go on, for example, to establish whether the rate of 'educator burnout' is associated with particular school cultures (Berg, 1994). In simple terms, the more we know about teachers' lives and work in TESOL, the better equipped we will be to design effective teacher education and school development programmes.

6.5 Janus

My own research agenda will involve using the results of this project as the basis for collaborative work with the Pen staff, perhaps along the lines of the 'critical

friendship' described by Golby & Appleby (1995) in their account of a teacher and lecturer working together, rather than as a more formal project of the sort described by Roemer (1992). Some of the exchanges transcribed here will provide the Pen teachers with a means of reflecting on their own discussion of practice and may establish the basis for action research projects aimed at professional development within a context now better understood.

I shall return to the Pen school out of more than professional curiosity. Rosenholtz has talked of the capacity of successful schools to 'cherish individuality and inspire communality' (Rosenholtz, 1989a: 221), and it is hard for the researcher to live with the acceptance of one while denying the reality of the other. Collaboration exerts a seductive attraction on those who encounter it, but the establishment of a critical ethnographic perspective depends on active resistance to its centripetal pull. It will be something of a relief, therefore, to return to the school as an active collaborator in the next phase of exploration, ready to learn more from the undemonstrative professionalism of the Pen staff.

It would be encouraging to think that such work could be part of a wider movement towards understanding the professional world of EFL teachers, a world for too long neglected in the unthinking pursuit of instantly negotiable pedagogic currency. Ultimately, what teachers offer in the classroom are their professional selves, and in terms of educational development there can be nothing more deserving of our understanding.

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