

The Nature of School:  
An Ethnographic Case Study

by

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## ABSTRACT

Schools are a particular kind of institution. For more than two decades ethnographic research has taken as problematic only certain segments of school and schooling. This study considers the case of a newly formed comprehensive school and examines how it went about defining itself. Two aspects of school emerged during the process of 'becoming': 'sameness', that which is common to secondary schools; and 'difference', that quality which helps us differentiate between schools. The latter may be compared to the Effective School movement's use of 'ethos' and 'climate'. The study attempts to determine the source and nature of 'sameness' and 'difference', and goes on to establish the relationship between them. As the title suggests this thesis considers holistically the taken for granted notion of 'school' and gives a tentative answer to the question 'What do we understand by the term 'school'?

Every institution captures something of the time and interest of its members and provides something of a world for them; in brief, every institution has encompassing tendencies. When we review the different institutions in our Western society, we find some that are encompassing to a degree discontinuously greater than the ones next in line. Their encompassing or total character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant. . .

(Erving Goffman, Asylums, page 15)

Much of our daily activity is organised around routines which have been mapped out before us and which we do not question. Without this high degree of predictability society would be unable to function. Yet somehow, within the 'straight-jacket' of rules, regulations and expectations, society creates individuality - in people, buildings and institutions.

A school is a particular kind of institution whose legislative aims and objectives and organisational rules have, during more than two decades of ethnographic research, been taken for granted. This thesis is about the nature of school and addresses the question: 'What do we understand by the term 'school'?'

The study considers the case of Deangate School, a newly formed Comprehensive school in the North of England, and examines how it went about defining its own reality. The process of 'becoming' is complex, yet by exploring significant events, influential forces, and the meanings actors place on interactions, we will be in a position to understand the nature of a school.

By nature this thesis offers a tentative rather than definite concept of the nature of 'school'. In addition it attempts to be exploratory, proffering a foundation for future debate, rather than suggesting solutions to what is an enigmatic but important question for educational research.

#### Initial Personal Interest

My initial interest in the topic of this thesis stems from my work as a teacher and a longstanding enthusiasm for educational research. The latter element evolved out of a desire to make sense of my own practice. I undertook an M.A. at the Centre for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia. Following the course I returned to teaching and over a period of eight years attempted to put my new skills as, what Lawrence Stenhouse has called a 'teacher as researcher', to good use. I practised my new craft with difficulty (see Cosgrove 1981; Walker 1985), but as skills and confidence grew I took on board not only classroom concerns but also departmental and eventually school-wide issues.



My 'teacher as researcher' role led to my involvement in a broad cross-section of school based research in a variety of schools. Gradually, and in a rather primitive way, I became aware of differences and similarities underpinning classrooms, staffrooms and institutions. The statement: "All schools are the same but different", echoed in teaching folklore, assumed significance for me. This awareness prompted questions of worthiness of the issue as a research topic, and particularly the meaning of 'sameness' and 'difference', in an institutional setting.

In order to address these questions I turned to the literature, and was surprised and disappointed at the general lack of information available and the extent of knowledge that had been generated in this area. The survey revealed a number of points. Firstly, that school 'difference' was considered mainly in terms of 'organisational climate' and 'school effectiveness'. Secondly, 'difference' between schools was the domain of quantitative rather than qualitative research. Finally, the 'sameness' of schools was explored by qualitative research methods, usually case study, but in a fragmented, piece-meal fashion. The nature of a school as a holistic concept was not considered problematic.

### A Review of the Literature

Here, because of the lack of research material specifically reflecting the nature of school, I will examine some of the literature which impinges, directly or indirectly, on the

statement: "All schools are the same but different", and since the issues underlying this are germane to this thesis. It will become clear later that much of the literature focusses on either 'climate', 'ethos' or 'atmosphere' in order to establish a boundary of study for school 'difference', or takes as problematic that which is taken for granted, in order to explore the notion of 'sameness'. Much of the literature related to the topic of this study is concerned with 'differences' between schools.

### The 'Difference' between Schools - Definitions

Researchers' interest in school 'difference' is best viewed geographically and thematically rather than chronologically. The predominant theme of the 1960's and early 70's in America was the measurement of organisational climate. This phenomenon was treated as problematic by Cornell (1955) who defined it as:

. . . a delicate blending of interpretations (or perceptions as social psychologists would call it) by persons in the organisation of their jobs or roles in relationship to others and their interpretations of the roles of others in the organisation.

(page 222)

This concept was taken up by Argyris (1958) who studied inter-personal relationships in a bank and pointed to 'climate' of the organisation as a major determinant. Apart from descriptive case studies of single organisations by Whyte (1949), Iannacone (1962), and Willower and Jones (1963), the primary concern has been with the measurement of

organisational climate and thus the domain of quantitative research. Texts, like much of the research in this period, were concerned with 'social engineering' and prescriptive. Katz and Kahn (1966) are typical of such work and sought to define organisational climate in terms of the sum of certain factors in a 'total culture':

Every organisation develops its own culture or climate, with its own taboos, folkways and mores. The climate or culture of the system reflects both the norms and the values of the formal system and the reinterpretation of the informal system. Organisational climate reflects also the history of the internal and external struggles, the types of people the organisation attracts, its work processes and the physical layout, the modes of communication and the exercise of authority within the system. Just as society has a cultural heritage so social organisations possess distinctive patterns of collective feeling and beliefs passed along to new group members.

(pages 65-66)

Educational researchers 'borrowed' Argyris's term 'organisational climate' and used it to describe the 'differences' between schools. It is significant that such a term, with its industrial and commercial overtones, was seen as applicable in a school situation. Social engineering and comparing schools with commercial institutions are not without problems. For example, social engineering fails to account for the human qualities of teachers and pupils as Richardson (1975) points out:

(pupils) are being educated in all sorts of ways by other institutions, including of course his own and other people's families. Nor are children, like the goods that come out of a factory, just material products. They are human beings. As human beings they cannot be merely moulded or fashioned or manufactured by those who operate the school.

(page 14)

Much of the research into school climate was conceived in terms of serving the needs of administrators. Hence studies were designed to 'discover' tools of control rather than understanding climate for its own intrinsic worth or to add to a body of knowledge. Halpin and Croft (1963) saw Argyris's term 'organisational climate' as reflecting the difference in 'atmosphere' between schools, which they describe in an introduction to their work:

As any teacher or school executive moves from one school to another he is inexorably struck by the differences he encounters in Organisational Climate. He voices his reaction with such remarks as: "You don't have to be in a school very long before you feel the atmosphere of a place."

(page 4)

It is possible that researchers, teachers, parents and pupils would agree in general that each school is imbued with a particular 'atmosphere'. Numerous researchers have used the term (see Owens 1970, and Sinclair 1970). However, researcher arrogance has meant that only their perspective, their definitions and their descriptions are expressed in the literature. Here Howard (1974) gives an example:

The term 'climate' as used in this paper, might be defined as the aggregate of social and cultural conditions which influence individual behaviour in the school - all of the forces, to which the individual responds, which are present in the school environment.

(page 12)

Much later, as researchers became aware of the complexity of climate, definitions became tighter, but in doing so they failed to capture the overriding social-emotional tone (such as used by Halpin and Croft) which earlier descriptions had captured. An example of later definitions is given in the work of Evans and Hopkins (1988), who define climate as:

The dynamic social structure of each school . . . the interrelationships of norms and beliefs that characterize a school and the institutional patterns of relationships, groupings and behaviours of administrators and teachers in a social system. . .

(page 216)

### The 'Difference' between Schools - Significant Quantitative Studies/ Instruments

Before reviewing significant studies of school 'climate' two points are worth bearing in mind. The first is that individual researchers agree on the meaningfulness of the metaphor but each makes their own sense of it. Secondly, the vast majority of researchers favoured a quantitative approach and sought evidence which would be beneficial to administrators. In retrospect the choice of methodology and limits imposed by such research must be questioned in terms of appropriateness and validity. It is clear that many

researchers measured school climate in their own terms, by selecting factors but without justification for their choice. It is also apparent that researchers failed to take into account those elements their instruments were insensitive to or unable to measure. The difficulty of the task later led to strong doubts within the academic community as to the worthwhileness of such work.

Halpin and Croft (1963) and Stern (1963), provided instruments designed to measure schools' organisational climate. Stern's Organisational Climate Index (OCI) was complex, difficult to apply and mainly concerned with intellectual climate. On the other hand Halpin and Croft's Organisation Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) was simpler to use (64 items compared to 300) and gained favour not only in America but in many other countries.

Halpin and Croft's work relied heavily on leadership behaviour studies previously conducted by Halpin at Ohio State University in the 1950's and which led to the Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). It is not surprising therefore, that their OCDQ is limited to aspects of teachers' and principals' behaviour. Halpin and Croft justify exclusion of pupils by suggesting that teacher/principal interaction "spills over on the students" (see Halpin, 1966, page 131). Halpin and Croft applied the

OCDQ to 71 elementary schools and identified six clusters or climate types: Open; Autonomous; Controlled; Familiar; Paternal; and Closed.

The theoretical framework provided by the LBDQ plus Halpin and Croft's primary interest in administrative techniques necessarily produced an instrument which placed emphasis on the principal, hierarchy and teachers, and this approach was questioned by many. Thomas (1976), for example, points to two basic assumptions underpinning OCDQ:

1) . . . how the leader really behaves is less important than how the members of his group perceive him to behave. Perceptions of leader behaviour will determine the behaviour of the group members and hence provide a measure of organisational climate.

2) . . . an essential determinant of a school's 'effectiveness' as an organisation is the principal's ability (or his lack of ability) to create a 'climate' in which he and other group members can initiate and consummate acts of leadership.

(page 446)

Both assumptions may be questioned. The first in that it is prescriptive of process and simplistic in terms of interactive possibilities. The second is again prescriptive and fails to take account of alternative causal models.

According to Thomas the OCDQ has been used in over 200 studies in the United States, Australia, India, Papua New

Guinea and Britain. Despite such widespread use, few attempts have been made to validate the instrument (see Andrews 1965a for early work in this area).

Other researchers in the quantitative tradition agreed with Halpin and Croft's analogy: "Personality is to the individual what 'climate' is to the organisation" (page 1), but sought to improve on the range of measures included in their study. Tagiuri (1968) defined 'climate' in terms of environment, ecology, milieu, social system and culture. These new dimensions reflected a growing consensus that school climate should be viewed in terms of the total quality of the environment rather than the interaction between the principal and teachers. Insel and Moos (1974) followed a similar pattern to Tagiuri's and included as factors: ecology, behaviour setting, organisational structure, average personal characteristics and functional dimensions of specific situations.

The difficulty of agreed definition, composition and measurement of the whole school, led some researchers to consider only particular areas of schooling. These workers include Coleman et al (1961), Bidwell (1972), who measured particular dimensions, and Barker (1963), who measured affective and cognitive behaviour outcomes. The move towards limiting the elements of climate foundered because it was realised that such an approach was artificial.



Pace and Stern (1958), and Stern (1963), developed an instrument called the College Characteristics Index (CCI), which measured environmental pressures perceived by pupils. The interest in student performance as a function of congruence between school pressure and student need is in contrast to Halpin and Croft's approach. It reflects considerable conflict and confusion as to 'proper' elements of school 'difference' which permeated the research scene in the 1960's. Like OCDQ, CCI underwent many modifications (see Stern 1970). Astin and Holland (1961) developed Environmental Assessment Technique (EAT) which used a similar student centred approach to CCI. Later Epstein and McPartland (1976) developed Quality of School Life (QSL) scales, again attempting to reflect pupil attitudes and their relationship to climate. A range of workers including McPartland (1971), Scheever (1981) and Epstein (1981), suggested a correlation between student participation in school matters and attitude to schooling. Whereas Halpin and Croft and others had viewed 'organisational climate' as a fixed entity, Epstein and McPartland and others, reflecting on QSL scores, suggested that climate was capable of change and therefore dynamic in nature:

The quality of School Life scale is currently being used as a research instrument in a longitudinal study of differential satisfaction of students in open and traditional elementary, middle and high schools. Results reported elsewhere show QSL scores to be sensitive to changes in school organisation. Students may actually increase (original emphasis) their QSL scale or subscales over time in innovative settings

which have been designed to upgrade the quality of school life . . . The analysis to date suggests that the maturational influence may not be an inevitable artifact, but may be due to the nature of the school environment, and therefore subject to change.

(pages 26-27)

The work by Epstein and McPartland reflects the trend begun in the early 1970's, towards measuring the effects of schooling rather than the difference between schools or organisational climate. This significant movement will be discussed later. An interesting point here is that whereas effective schooling research has tended to emphasize and therefore measure a narrow range of school outcomes, i.e. academic performance, QSL scales attempt to take account of a range of outcomes.

Halpin and Croft's OCDQ was, for more than a decade, the prime instrument for the measurement of school climate. Modifications and improvements of the OCDQ continue even at the time of writing. Its 'band wagon status' (Thomas, 1976, page 455) diminished and was replaced by more refined versions. In Britain the desire to measure climate never reached the dizzy heights of American enthusiasm. However, important work was carried out by Finlayson (1973), who included in his design pupils' perceptions of peers and teachers. Finlayson's School Climate Scales were developed and used in conjunction with research into cognitive, affective and the social nature of comprehensive schooling. Although the instrument was more sensitive and took into

account a wider range of factors than the OCDQ, it was used only sporadically in Australia and no follow-up work took place in Britain.

The OCDQ is still in use at the present time, albeit in a modified form. Perhaps the reason for its enduring popularity lies in its ease of application and its claimed ability to differentiate between common sense, observable, school climates, i.e. to give a 'pigeon-holed' measure of school differences. The present application of the OCDQ is in 'bolt-on' mode or hybrid form. This is illustrated in the work of Evans and Hopkins (1988).

#### Some Weaknesses of Measuring School 'Difference'

Weaknesses of the OCDQ and similar instruments are well documented. Many problems, practical and theoretical, inherent in attempting to apply a statistical approach to factors which were subjective, and sensed by intuitive impression, are highlighted within that critique.

Despite early enthusiasm for Halpin and Croft's work, Carver and Sergiovanni (1969) raised doubts as to its application. They applied the OCDQ to Secondary schools (the OCDQ was designed for use in elementary schools) using Andrews's (1965a) work as validation. Their findings did not concur with Halpin and Croft's results. They concluded that:

. . . the OCDQ lacks sufficient potency to adequately map organisation climates of large high schools.

(page 81)

Thomas (1976) reviewing the instrument's rise and fall wrote:

. . . despite the many studies that have involved the use of this instrument, the picture that emerges is far from clear . . . A marked decline in the use of OCDQ has subsequently occurred. Probably the inconclusiveness of the overall findings of OCDQ-based research, together with the perceived short comings of the instrument, are the main reasons for this reduction.

(pages 455-456)

The work of Halpin and Croft and many of those who sought to measure organisational climate, based their constructs on the belief that schools are little different from commercial organisations. Thus organisational perspectives such as clear goals, identifiable personnel, and relationships and interactions based on accepted status or position rather than alternative truths and centres of power and influence, were taken on face value and not considered problematic. The nature of teaching and the abstract nature of school goals were ignored by those seeking to measure climate because their frame of reference was organisational i.e. consistency, stability and predictability. The reality that pupils are members of the institution in their own right and not mere products of schooling; that schools are a complex mix of plural values, attitudes and conflicts, are not addressed. Strivens (1985) sums up OCDQ and similar instruments by stating:

A large number of doctoral theses and some funded research made use of the scales to explore a bewildering variety of preconditions and outcomes. However, results have generally been highly contradictory and, in particular, attempts to link school climate with aspects of academic achievement have been almost entirely unsatisfactory.

(pages 48-49)

Fundamental weaknesses have plagued all statistical approaches to measure school difference. Conceptual difficulties led to problems of agreed definition and therefore composition of climate or character. Researchers have been seduced into searching for common sense relationships between, for example, pupil satisfaction or academic achievement and school climate, which has shown to be difficult to predict and impossible to link with causality. Rather than consider a holistic approach, researchers have attempted to identify relationships between factors deemed important by outsiders. The reason for this rather narrow factional approach was that researchers deemed a holistic approach too complex and brought in factors to which their instruments were insensitive. Those employing quantitative techniques often seek only to measure those aspects of school differences that their instruments were capable of measuring, and by nature schools are complex, unstable and dynamic environments. Thus they failed to reflect the reality of the 'chalk-face', and therefore failed to establish factors or elements which embodied the nature of school differences.

Anderson (1982), whose paper explores in detail the various forms of quantitative instruments, sums up their failings as:

The failure of many early school studies to find significant school effects is seen as the result of poor models, inadequate measures, too few variables, or the wrong variables.

(page 372)

But Anderson goes on to suggest changes aimed at overcoming such problems by putting forward a model which included a wider range of variables in order to "capture climate" (page 408), and variables "most open to purposeful change" (page 408). Her notion of social engineering and call for more extensive measures fails to address conceptual weaknesses raised earlier. Anderson seeks to redefine reality and the complexity of social interaction in terms of hard data. The desire to reduce complexity of a topic which is not easily defined or statistically measured, means that such instruments, in this particular case, are invalid and inappropriate.

However, Anderson does tentatively concede that inclusion of in-depth observation and interviews alongside or in addition to a statistical approach, might be helpful. Finlayson (1973), in putting forward his model for measuring school climate, strikes a prophetic note in his concluding remarks:

. . . it can be concluded that these scales provide a basis on which some quantification of the way in which

some social patterns of social behaviour in schools are perceived by pupils and staff of these schools. Much further research however, is necessary to identify the factors determining such perceptions and the extent to which these perceptions can be regarded as corresponding to social reality.

(page 26)

More than a decade later Finlayson (1987) argued against the use of the metaphor 'climate' and the use of statistics in this area. Commenting on Anderson's (1982) paper he wrote:

She (Anderson) suggests that researchers like herself, who hope that improved statistical designs will be the means of trapping the climate beast, are hunting a phoenix, born of the ashes of past school effects research . . . The difficulties of measurement, variable selection and control, and statistical analysis are so overwhelming that (they) have given up the search for school climate as a holistic entity.

(page 167)

It is remarkable, considering the volume of research into school climate, the paucity of knowledge gained. The body of work has indicated a limited number of narrowly defined outcomes of school climate, plus a number of primitive instruments which give a dubious and 'rough and ready' guide to a school's atmosphere. These had added little to the understanding of administrators, who were seen as the primary beneficiaries. There is little agreement amongst researchers as to which variables constitute climate possibly because almost any variable chosen will, due to its ubiquitous nature, reflect climate in some way. In treating

schools as sources of data and emphasising the need for careful specification of causal models (Anderson), researchers deny that choices, freedoms, unintended outcomes, plural values, conflicts and emotions, exist in schools, which may contribute to its character. Finally, there is no justification for drawing a boundary around schools. There is no evidence to suggest that history, social climate, culture, political or economic factors do not influence school climate.

### Do School 'Differences' Have an Effect?

During the mid 1960's and early 1970's several large nationally funded studies indicated that schools did not have a significant effect on pupils' education. These high profile studies led academia to question the worthwhileness of researching into school climate i.e. differences between schools. In America quantitative studies continued to seek the elusive climate 'beast' and its outcomes. This work led to school effectiveness research which became more prominent in the late 1970's.

Here I want to examine the path taken by educational research in Britain. The 1960's and early 70's witnessed a plethora of educational experiments in England and Wales. Educational innovations, including curriculum changes and various strategies of compensatory education (see Stenhouse 1980, Schools Council 1973) were in evidence in this period. Reynolds (1982) described the era as: "The Rise and Fall of the Liberal Dream" (page 216). From the early 1970's



onwards, critics were blaming schools for the ills of society, yet paradoxically theory claimed that schools did not significantly effect pupils, either academically or behaviourally.

In the 1960's the tone of educational research was dominated by the studies carried out by Coleman et al (1966) and Plowden et al (1967), and later by Jencks et al (1972). The Coleman Report was concerned with the equality of educational opportunity. It found substantial differences between pupils' verbal ability levels and also differences between pupils' ability prior to and post schooling. However, Coleman decided that these differences were probably due to social composition of school intake and concluded that school effect was small. Jencks (1972), using Coleman's data, in an attempt to measure precisely the variation in outcomes attributable to schools, reported dramatic results. The report states:

Equalizing the quality of high schools would reduce cognitive inequality by 1% or less.

(page 109)

He concluded with a much quoted statement:

Qualitative differences between high schools seems to explain about 2% of the variation in students'

educational attainment.

(page 159)

Other studies carried out during this period reported similar findings and drawing the same conclusions as Coleman and Jencks. Plowden (1967) pointed to the family as the prime causal factor of school outcomes; Averch (1971) reported no significant relationship between pupil outcomes; Stevens' (1967) review of the literature made similar comments; Cooper (1966) claimed that the school's role was minimal; and Tyerman (1968), working on truancy, opted for the home as prime determining factor. Rutter (1983) looking back at the tenor of this research writes:

Many people also came to believe that school social systems were a fruitless area of research (Hauser, Sewell and Alwin 1976). These pessimistic views were reinforced by Jensen's (1969) claim that "compensatory education has been tried and it apparently has failed"; by Bowles's (1977) assertion that "educational inequalities are rooted in the basic institutions of our own economy."; and by Bernstein's (1970) urging that "education cannot compensate for society."

(page 1)

Schmuck (1984), commenting on the main body of work which negated the effect of schools in influencing pupil outcomes, strikes a similar note:

When the social scientists were asked to account for differences in student outcomes, they answered in very

different ways but few saw the school's climate as being relevant. Jensen, of course, firmly proposed heredity. Coleman and Plowden turned to the family. Jencks wrote about plain luck. None placed the school in even second place.

(page 23)

Despite evidence to the contrary, many researchers and teachers believed that schools did affect student learning. Questions were raised concerning methodologies employed by Coleman, Jencks, Jensen and others. Reynolds (1982), reviewing the work of Coleman and Jencks, pointed to a number a weaknesses:

. . . these used . . . only a very limited number of measures of the school environment in their analyses, thereby increasing the chances that the school would have less influence than other influences upon pupil life for which many more measures were included - the Coleman analysis used only one measure of school environment (volumes per student in the school library) for their analysis of reading ability.

(page 220)

A Bristol University group (Wilby 1977) who replicated Coleman's research, except that where Coleman used tests of verbal and numerical ability, '0' level results were used. They found substantial variances between schools and concluded:

The results show that a multitude of interesting variables contribute to pupil achievement and that, among these, the characteristics of individual schools and individual teachers may play a more important role

than previous studies have suggested.

(page 31)

Whilst in Britain researchers were unconcerned with results of Coleman, Jencks and Plowden, and turned their attention elsewhere, in America researchers appeared to be galvanized by statements such as Coleman's:

Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context.

(page 325)

A new generation of studies - Weber (1971), Brookover et al (1978), and Edmunds (1979) - challenged Coleman's hypothesis, and was the beginning of the 'effective schooling' movement in America.

In Britain, the realisation that schools can make an important contribution to pupils' education, came later and was influenced by its own body of research. As early as 1967 Power, in a study of delinquents in London, demonstrated that some schools prevented delinquency whilst others appeared to contribute to it. Power was aware of some limitations in methodology in his initial study but unfortunately permission to carry out further research was refused. Farrington (1973), in a subsequent study on a similar topic, dismissed Power's work, suggesting that some schools were receiving more 'delinquent prone' pupils than others.

The intellectual climate in Britain began to change in the mid 1970's. Reynolds et al (1976), in a provocatively titled article 'Schools do make a Difference' initiated the 'effective school' movement in Britain. His study concentrated on a group of nine Secondary Modern schools, taking note of outputs in the form of examination results over a number of years. Their analysis of the data led to the statement:

Few teachers, academic or educationists currently believe that schools in themselves can do much to combat social disadvantage, or help educational failures become educational successes . . . In our opinion . . . on the basis of our analysis so far, the belief that a school can only be as good or as bad as the character and ability of the children entering it, is simple wrong . . . What goes on in school between nine and five is (original emphasis) an important determinant of the type of child that emerges at the end of the process.

(page 225)

About the same time Rutter (1976) produced work which supported the findings of the Reynold's group. Both were criticised by the academic community (see Musgrove 1981) Rutter et al (1979) in their famous study 'Fifteen Thousand Hours', argued that schools did have an effect on pupils. This piece of research was important because it developed a methodology designed to evaluate the effectiveness of schools which took account of the characteristics of pupils entering those schools. They employed a rigorous statistical model employing multiple indicators of school effectiveness

such as scholastic attainment, classroom behaviour, absenteeism, attitudes to learning, continuation in education, employment, and social functioning. As with studies employing similar methodologies, their work was criticized (see Perspectives 1, 1980 also Tizard et al, 1980), but generally acknowledged as well conducted and sound. The factors identified in the Rutter study as being related to effective schooling, were referred to as influential rather than causal, indeed the study refrains from using 'cause', preferring 'influence' and 'evidence of effect'. The Rutter study demonstrated that certain factors were influential in effective schooling but it did not suggest that by combining the individual factors an effective school would result. This important point was missed by many. Heads, for example, photocopied parts of the report related to significant factors and handed them to staff (see Young in Tizard et al, 1980). The dynamic relationship between process factors and outcome variables was not explored by the Rutter study. The link between factors was seen as a major feature of effective schooling and the notion of 'ethos' was worked to encompass the relationship:

Because schools are complex institutions, in which pupils influence teachers as well as the reverse, there are likely to be many determinants of behaviour. Further, different pupils may be influenced by quite different teacher actions. Because, however, of the stability of the performance measures, it is likely that an influence more powerful than that of any particular teacher, school policies, or indeed,

behaviour of dominant pupils is at work. This overall atmosphere which pervades the actions of the participants we call the ethos.

(Mortimore in Perspectives 1 1980, page 68)

### The Notion of Ethos

In discussing the correlation between process measures and pupil outcomes Rutter et al considered ethos to be the most important factor (see page 182). The Rutter et al study was important not only in terms of its findings but because it was seen as valid 'scientific' research. This respectability added weight to their results and especially to the notion of 'ethos' as a worthy area of research in its own right.

Mortimore, one of the 'Fifteen Thousand Hours' team, conducted a similar study of Primary schools (Mortimore et al 1988) with the benefit of further methodological refinements (see Gray 1981a, 1981b) and analysis (see Goldstein 1984). As with the Rutter work, process and outcome factors which influenced the effectiveness of sample schools, were seen as indicators of ethos (in Mortimore's study 'climate' appears to be preferred to 'ethos'). Once again, the process factors are seen as 'pieces of a jigsaw' of what constitutes an effective school and ethos is employed to describe the over-arching dynamic relationship between them.

Mortimore et al expanded on the understanding of ingredients which constituted and aided development of an effective

ethos. Their description of a 'positive school climate' parallels the findings of early climate research (e.g. Halpin and Croft 1963), and later American studies (see Purkey and Smith 1983; Trisman et al 1976; Moos 1978; Brookover 1979). A culmination of over a decade of effective schooling research led to the awareness of the significance of ethos in a school.

At the International Congress for School Effectiveness 1989, held in Rotterdam, 'ethos' had been supplanted by 'climate'. Perhaps the reason for this exchange in terminology is rooted in political expediency - 'climate' has overtones of measureability and control whereas ethos may appear intangible and therefore less appropriate for quantitative styles of research. The papers presented at the conference indicated an important change in application of ethos. Rutter used the term as an over-arching link between influential process factors whereas the Rotterdam Conference inferred that ethos was a factor in its own right and did not indicate its interrelationship with other factors. Some papers included ethos as one of a range of factors that constituted an ingredient of an effective school but under a modified guise, for example: "An orderly atmosphere conducive to learning" (Scheevens, Creemers 1989, page 1); whilst others saw ethos as a broad category encompassing a number of 'characteristics' (see Stoll, Fink, 1989). Researchers indicated that a particular kind of ethos lent itself to effective schooling and 'safe', 'orderly' and 'positive' were often used to describe them. Where reports outlined key



functions or correlates within the climate dimension, there was little agreement (for example compare Young 1989, and Hallinger 1989).

As a result of the effective schooling studies, considerable interest in ethos was generated. The term exhibited 'band wagon' status and was increasingly used in a broad spectrum of publications including basic education textbooks (e.g. Kelly 1987), popular magazines (e.g. Neustatter 1987), and academic texts (e.g. Weindling and Earley 1987, Everard 1986, Evans, J. 1974, Measor and Woods 1984, Woods and Hargreaves 1984, and Fullan 1982). But effective schooling research had done more than merely establish ethos as acceptable and popular. It established ethos as a significant factor in school improvement and signalled the importance of further study in this area. Since the majority of research was quantitative, and consequently researchers had measured those elements of schooling their instruments were sensitive to, many underlying questions, for example, how ethos comes to be established, maintained and changed, were left unanswered.

#### Ethos and Qualitative Research

One would have expected qualitative research to have played a substantial role in exploring the nature of ethos, but this has not been the case. In the 1970's sociology of education had begun to make inroads into territory preciously held by educational psychologists and social psychology. A series of case studies emerged which explored

the nature of schooling. Hargreaves (1967) set a pattern which many have followed. His work illuminated the relationship between streaming and social class and described how streaming itself may lead to subcultures. Hargreaves suggested that pupils in top streams adopted accepted behavioural and academic norms whilst those in bottom streams developed an anti-school sub-culture because they had been labelled as failures. Keddie (1971) also focused on 'failures'. In her study of unstreamed classes she puts forward the notion that teachers stereotype pupils by determining social background and thereby, unwittingly, stream pupils. Lacey's 'Hightown Grammar' (1970) produced similar findings. He observed how the homogeneity of unstreamed first year boys was lost in the second year which streamed. Lacey interpreted this as a result of working class pupils reacting to failure. These studies and others (e.g. Ball 1981 and Burgess 1983) necessarily take for granted large aspects of schooling and concentrate and treat as problematic, those areas they considered worthy of investigation. Although these studies have, generally, sought participants' understandings, much of the work emphasises pupils' perspective. They have increased our knowledge of the forces at work which shape the day to day life of classrooms, but by setting their own briefs, do not account for holistic forces within and outside of school, which contribute to the understanding of what makes schools different from each other.

A quite different approach which emphasises external influences, is used by neo-Marxist writers such as Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Willis (1976). They suggest that attitudes and values of a capitalist society are transmitted and confirmed by a form of hidden curriculum operating in schools. This body of work forms an addendum to studies by Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball. Reynolds (1985) sums up the neo-Marxist perspective in writing:

What went on in the school was now simply determined (original emphasis) by outside factors such as the social class system. It was the political, economic and wider social systems not the school that became the focus of interest for many sociologists of education. Research using the school as the unit of analysis all but ceased.

(page 4)

The belief, widely held during this period, that schools do not significantly effect pupils outcomes, is reflected in the work of neo-Marxists. The results of research carried out by the effective schooling movement has indicated not that education can compensate for the inequalities of society (Bernstein 1970), but that schools are, or can be, a major influence on pupils. However, the neo-Marxist work does raise two significant issues: What are the external forces which help shape schooling?; and to what extent are taken for granted activities involving interactions between hierarchy and teacher, teacher and pupil, changeable?

Neo-Marxists have failed, or were unwilling to balance political arguments with alternative paradigms. Their work, although offering an alternative perspective of influence on schooling, emphasised the external forces resulting from class struggle and negated the existential world of classroom and staffroom. Questions about how individual schools make decisions and how conflicts are resolved are left unanswered. Insights into day to day lives of teachers and pupils may be gleaned from journals or collected papers (e.g. Hammersley 1984), but they focus, necessarily, on the specific at the cost of generality. It is, perhaps, a general problem of case studies that large-scale holistic accounts of schooling are difficult to achieve.

Very little qualitative research has focused directly on 'ethos'. Often the word is used in the literature as a catch-all phrase, or used superficially as acknowledgement that schools do differ, or in reference to public schools. And where 'ethos' is reflected on it is in relation to another factor, not as an end in itself. I do not dismiss such work but question the validity of pursuing segments of 'ethos' and its relationship to other aspects of schooling when little is known about the 'beast' in the first place. However, the work of Budd (1982) which is of this genre, does raise interesting issues. Budd chronicles a change in headship at a middle school and subsequent change in school climate. The new 'brush' changes school philosophy, syllabuses, timetable, communication, assembly, punishment, and class seating pattern, and the new school organisation

and management has dynamic effects on school climate. Budd employed a pre- and post-event questionnaire approach, supplemented by participant observation and semi-formal interviews. The staff reacted to increased routinization and what they saw as depersonalization. What is interesting in this work is the way organisational change is perceived by participants and the reactive process which followed. New strict rules and regulations were seen in terms of its effect on the socio-emotional tone of the whole school. Budd describes how the staff made some concessions but resisted passively across a broad front, and how simmering discontent surfaced during two 'watershed' clashes between Head and staff. The combination of change in socio-emotional tone and subterranean tension appears to have affected teachers' and pupils' lives for Budd reports:

. . . the undeniable link between work, 'climate' and job satisfaction suggests that further enquiry would be worthwhile and productive.

(page 31)

Budd is unable to relate how the knock-on effect of new Head, change in organisation, and loss of job satisfaction, impinges on pupils lives, but his general impressions are conveyed at the end of the paper:

The school secretary . . . while observing the children at lunch-time remarked: "I don't know what's the matter with them, they're too noisy, they weren't this bad when Mr Greenwood (past Head) was here - and he didn't bother" - illuminative insight, or flippant

aside?

(page 43)

Budd's study is interesting for three reasons. Firstly he has identified a factor which is capable of changing school climate. Secondly, he has gone some way towards understanding the process of change. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, he has gone beyond looking for 'climatic clues' in terms of generalizations, preconceptions, casually acquired, idiosyncratic observations, which are all too often used to indicate the 'difference' between schools.

Measor and Woods (1984) chose to concentrate their search for ethos in the classroom. During an eighteen month period of observation in one school they were able to identify a range of interactions and patterns of behaviour, which they considered to play a significant role in the school's ethos. The study does not take account of outcomes of ethos, nor is it comparative. The range of factors contributing to ethos is narrow and after reading the article one is left with an understanding of a narrow band of ethos indicators which are static. The sparseness of a dynamic process, identifying the breadth and extent of these factors, is caused by a lack of contextualization.

Measor and Woods concentrate on the 'middle ground' between teacher and pupil culture. In their study they report concurrence between intended and actual ethos. The special

relationship, they suggest, between teacher and pupil was by design and strategy if not explicit policy. They observed staff acting within a strong disciplinary framework yet primarily their concern was:

. . . to penetrate, sometimes to indulge, the value systems of the pupils and to incorporate them into their own teacher styles and curriculum material.

(page 27)

Measor and Woods categorize the main features of the school's 'middle ground' ethos as: (1) adopting and tolerating modified appearances; (2) utilising a common language; (3) employing humour; and (4) role distancing, and draw a number of conclusions. They suggest that 'middle ground' is, in this case, not a blending or creation of new cultures, but rather "an overlapping of penumbras, with teachers exhibiting wares and appropriating those expressive elements of the satellite pupil cultures that will increase their chances of capture into the teachers' field of gravity" (page 38). Those who contributed significantly to the school's culture were teachers in their late twenties and early thirties. An interesting point, and one reiterating in Budd's work, is the origin of ethos. Measor and Woods point to the Head as prime instigator of the 'middle-ground' approach: ". . . it was spearheaded by the Headmaster, inspired by his example and direction and largely controlled by the appointments to staff that he made" (page 38).

'Middle ground' does appear to illustrate the sort of positive climate which could lead to high academic and behavioural standards described by Rutter et al (1979) and Mortimore et al (1988). However, the lack of contextualization and factionalism employed by the study raises important questions. The Head leading by example and direction does not identify how he imbued staff with a 'middle ground' approach. Measor and Woods claim that young staff were the main protagonists of 'middle ground' strategy. Surely this led to a degree of conflict as older staff failed to apply similar strategies which in turn would influence the whole school ethos? But these are minor issues. The main question on the agenda is: How do we know that 'middle ground' is an ethos factor; could it not be an indicator of another feature of schooling? This possibility is worth considering.

It seems plausible that the main features identified by Measor and Woods - tolerating modified appearances; common language; employing humour; role distancing - are common features of schooling. The special relationship they describe between teacher and pupil is described elsewhere (Hargreaves, D. 1977, Westbury 1973). Measor and Woods have described similar interactions themselves, but under a different title (see Changing Schools 1984). Woods (1984a) in a discourse on the 'hidden pedagogy of survival' describes 'fraternization' of teachers with pupils as:



A prominent survival strategy is to work for good relations with the pupils, thus mellowing the inherent conflict, increasing the pupils' sense of obligation, and reducing the desire to cause trouble. . . . Fraternization takes many forms. Young teachers, especially, by their appearance, style of dress, manner, speech and interests frequently identify strongly with the pupils.

(page 54)

'Fraternization' and 'middle ground' appear to have very similar meanings. Woods also sees 'having a laugh' as institutionalized laughter (page 105):

In their (pupil) lives, laughter has a central place either as a natural product or as a life-saving response to the exigencies of the institution-boredom, ritual, routine, regulations, oppressive authority.

(page 120)

'Institutionalized laughter' is very similar to 'employing laughter', one of Measor and Wood's identified features of 'middle ground'. Their study does, therefore, raise the question of how everyday interactions in schools may be differentiated from features contributing to ethos, and the relationship between them. It may be that a special emphasis, by design of chance, or prioritising by key individuals or groups, raises taken for granted aspects of schooling to the status of ethos forming factors.

Very little qualitative research has taken as problematic the sociology of school organisation. Those that have (e.g.

King 1984) concentrated on theoretical functions rather than explore the significance of everyday schooling. Richardson (1973) employs a perspective typical of the belief that organisational structure operates from an ordained right and consensual norm. Hence her study, although covering intertesting managerial ground, fails to get under the 'skin' of the institution in question. Those who work against or disagree with hierarchy are seen as deviant rather than proposing an alternative agenda.

Ball (1987) in a compilation of studies and data, describes the 'dark underlife' of school organization. He argues that behind-the-scenes negotiation and interpersonal influence are as important as the explicit, formalized structures of schooling. Ball uses as his key phrase 'micro-politics', to describe a wide range of concerns and interests of teachers at all levels of Secondary schools and in doing so partially rejects traditional organisational theory. Ball's study does highlight fundamental weaknesses in present theories of sociology of organisations of schools, and points the way to further research. The weakness of his work with regard to both 'difference' and organisational theory, which Ball acknowledges, lies in his use of data. In drawing together data from mixed sources he is necessarily restricted to a discussion of elements of micro-politics of organisation. What is missing, because no one case is pursued in depth, is the interactive qualities of identified elements and therefore a summative view of the many knock-on effects. The vectorial aspect of process is dependent on a holistic model

of schools and underpinnes any serious approach to understanding 'difference', 'sameness', and consequently the nature of school.

In the same way that much research has focused on differences of ethos or climate between schools and ignored 'sameness' so others have focused on 'sameness' and ignored 'difference'. Goffman is a prime example of the latter. His publications on the 'taken for granted' topic reiterate 'sameness' in a number of areas: 'Presentation of self in Everyday Life (1956); Encounters (1961); Behaviour in Public Places (1963). Of special interest to this study is his analysis of unquestioned aspects of 'sameness' in institutions. Goffman's 'Asylums' (1968) is particularly relevant. Institutionalization manifests itself in everyday life (see Berger P.L. and Luckman T, 1967), and in this study 'sameness' is used in a parallel but more specific sense. Here the term 'institution' will be used to note the generic category of 'school', and institutionalization used to note the 'sameness' of schools. In 'Asylums' Goffman establishes the notion of total institution by describing the power of rules, regulations and expectations of inmates. Goffman's views and theories along with case studies which explore everyday events in schools go a long way towards an understanding of 'sameness' and will be referred to later in the thesis, where appropriate.

Very little is known about how a school goes about defining itself. Published work on the evolution of institutions

emphasises financial growth or management strategies and does not touch upon sociological aspects. Katz and Kahn (1966) focus upon the social psychological make-up of organisations and describe outcomes of institutional development, for example:

Every organisation develops its own culture or climate, with its own taboos, folkway and mores. The climate of culture of the system reflects both the norms and values of the formal system and their reinterpretation in the informal system.

(page 66)

However, Katz and Kahn do not discuss how individuals and groups, by interaction over a period of time, negotiate their institutional culture. Nor do they enter the murky, but important, realms of institutional philosophy to debate reasons for institutions developing a culture. Gehlen (1950), a biologist and philosopher, developed an interesting theory of institutions which suggest that humankind needs to build artificial structures - what Katz and Kahn term culture or climate - which act as stabilizers. Berger and Kellner (1965) reviewed the work of Gehlen and reinterpreted it in anthropological and phenomenological terms, making his theories more accessible to sociologists. Gehlen's work does give an insight into the reasons for institutions' existence and also the initial cultural agreements which forms their basis.

## Rationale for Thesis

Despite twenty years of ethnographic research of schools and schooling in Britain, the taken for granted element has always been the institution itself. This study assumes that 'school' comprises of 'sameness' and 'difference' and the nature of school is constituted by the dynamic relationship between them. A review of the literature has highlighted two issues. Firstly, the lack of specific focus on the nature of school. It was seen that past research reflected on the major factors of 'sameness' or 'difference'. This study will take a holistic approach in attempting to understand the nature of school. Secondly, the importance of selecting an appropriate research method. This thesis will employ an ethnographic strategy which takes as significant the plural realities and alternative meanings of participants who prescribe to, and construct, the nature of of school. It is only by lengthy immersion in a school going through the process of defining itself, that the nature of a school may be understood. An in-depth exposition of the methodology employed in this study will be given in Chapter 2.

In choosing and applying a particular methodology a number of issues regarding the framework for this study are established. However, at this stage, further clarification of concerns and more specific focus arising out of the literature review are required.

In the search for 'difference', researchers, both quantitative and qualitative, have either selected certain

common sense elements which they considered contributed to 'difference' and measured those elements, or taken large aspects which the researcher deems important. This study does not assume school 'difference' or 'sameness' is a 'thing' which is constant and static, composed of a set of key elements, or found in a particular area, or residing in a group or individual. In focussing on participants' perceptions, this study aims to be sensitive to inmates' worlds and understandings, how they influence and are influenced. Therefore, awareness of beginnings and sources of influence will not be premeditated as they have been in past studies, and due consideration will be given to agencies operating outside the school domain, for example historical, economic and political factors.

I am aware of the considerable scope and scale of the topics in hand. The primary concerns of this thesis: 'The nature of school', 'sameness' and 'difference', are considered holistically because in separating them into elements, knowledge of their interactive qualities, so important in understanding how a school goes about constituting itself, would be lost. This study is, as stressed at the beginning of this chapter, intended to be exploratory rather than definitive, holistic rather than fragmentary.

The work of Measor and Woods (1984), referred to earlier in this chapter, highlighted the problem of differentiating between features which contribute to 'difference' and those that constitute 'sameness'. This study, in describing a

school 'becoming a school', is faced with the same dilemma. There is a need to identify the 'sameness' of school and the 'difference' between schools. There is also a need to map the relationship between 'sameness' (i.e. everyday school) and 'difference' , and therefore due consideration will be given to identifying their boundary, their domain of influence, if and how they are changed, their sources and their nature. Past case studies have rendered aspects of a school as problematic. However, this thesis, in order to explore the relationship between 'sameness' and 'difference', attempts to render all aspects of schooling as problematic. It is by taking this stance, being sensitive to the process of everyday schooling, whereby taken for granted features, by purposeful enterprise or serendipity, contribute to a school's 'difference' and 'sameness', that a comprehensive understanding of the nature of a school may be achieved.

The literature on school 'difference' does establish two important points. First, there is a consensus that climate/ethos/atmosphere exists in schools and is an expression of 'difference' and uniqueness. A broad cross-section of writers, from both 'organisational climate' measurement school and 'effective schooling' research have introduced their work on ethos/climate with similar observations. Finlayson (1973) for example writes:

Parents, teachers and visitors to schools become aware of the 'tone of the school' soon after entering it. They intuitively gain impressions from a number of

cues - the way pupils behave towards each other, the way pupils answer queries addressed to them, the way pupils move about the school and how they conduct themselves in the playground, the way teachers address the pupils, the way visitors are received, to name but a few.

(page 19)

Second, that the study of 'difference' is important and worthy of further research. The work on school effectiveness (see Rutter et al 1979, Mortimore et al 1988) addresses the question 'Do Schools Make a Difference?', and all subscribe to the belief that schools do make a difference.

If we compare the perspectives of climate measurement studies and work by the effective schooling movement, we again see similarities. Both groups describe superficial, observable, displays of 'difference'. Thomas et al (1973) for example, states:

That every organisation, once fully developed has its own feeling, tone, atmosphere, organisational climate, has been known for some time. Some interpersonally astute school inspectors could spot it the moment they entered the staffroom.

(page 306)

Similarly Gray and Nicholl (1982), in describing differences between two schools in their study, state:

. . . we were in each school for several days and this enabled us to form some subjective impressions about the use and care of the buildings, the display of



children's work and the ways in which teachers and children related to each other.

(page 264)

These descriptions illustrate two important facets of school 'difference'. Firstly, that the majority of work to date has prescribed what constitutes 'difference' and in imposing that prescription rarely take account of, or only partially take account of, participants' perspectives. This study gives prominence to phenomenological observation over empirical observation, so that participants' understanding may be fully explored. Secondly, the quotes are indicative of the limited scope of research into school 'difference' to date. The emphasis to date has been on observable manifestations; researchers sought to measure outcomes of 'difference', and have not concerned themselves with the dynamics or process by which 'difference' is derived. Therefore this thesis, with its particular concern for understanding the nature of school, necessarily seeks to explore the nature of 'difference' and attempts to illuminate its evolutionary process.

Although, as a starting point, those who attempt to measure organisational 'climate' and those involved in the effective school movement, have tacitly acknowledged agreement on descriptive observable 'difference' phenomena, each ascribes to a different definition. This is due to differences in two areas. First, those measuring 'climate' are restricted to measuring those elements of school differences to which

their instruments - essentially statistical - are sensitive, whereas school effectiveness research has employed a more sophisticated statistical approach plus empirical observation (see Rutter et al 1979 page 55). The second difference was one of primary interest. Organisational 'climate' researchers were clearly intent on measuring 'climate' and school effectiveness has taken as its main concern the assessment of educational outcomes. The definitions of school 'difference', in each case, are reflective of their respective interests and disciplines. The two approaches are by no means alone in this. Katz and Kahn (1966) employ a social psychological definition, Shipman (1968) sees 'difference' in terms of culture and sub-cultures and Measor and Woods (1984) in terms of symbolic interaction. This re-emphasises the importance of choosing an appropriate discipline and methodology.

It is clear that an understanding of the nature of school 'difference' is best achieved by a qualitative approach. Some of those involved in studies into effective schooling have noted the limitations of a statistical approach in exploring the nature of social relationships which are so critical to an understanding of 'difference'. Strivens (1985) suggests substituting 'culture' for 'climate', thereby incurring methodological changes and evoking "the skills of the ethnographer in exploring the elusive nature of a school's 'atmosphere'." (page 54); Finlayson (1973) calls for further research into relating 'hard data' to 'social reality' (page 26); and Gray and Jones (1985)

advocate a methodology which would explain factors (the effective school movement see 'difference' as the pivotal factor.) that lead to differences in pupil outcomes:

Our preference is for a combination of 'detective' work and the methodology of case study (based on interviews and observations).

(page 113)

Research into organisational 'climate' failed because the singular statistical approach was inappropriate. Effective schooling studies, although highlighting the importance of school 'difference', did not study 'difference' directly or take account of factors their instruments could not measure. 'Difference', by its nature, is not susceptible to a quantitative approach nor statistical analysis.

### Summary

This thesis is concerned with understanding the nature of a school. In order to address this issue the question 'What constitutes school?' requires exploration. Teacher folklore has it that 'All schools are the same but different', and this belief was invoked earlier in this chapter in an attempt to clarify the two essential ingredients of a school's nature. The 'sameness' of schools being pervasive may, to some extent, be found in any treatise on education. Therefore, if this aspect of schooling is to rise above mundane tautology, an approach which reflects the everyday experiences of key actors and key groups, needs to be articulated. This aspect of the study will be taken up later

in this section. The second element, and central to this thesis, is school 'difference'. Much of the literature referred to earlier in this chapter has used terms such as 'ethos', 'climate' and 'atmosphere', to describe the unique qualities of institutions. What is striking about these studies is that they fail to establish any sense of 'sameness' in schools before embarking on a study of 'difference'. Rutter et al (1979), for example, parades as self evident a whole host of school based norms, and in doing so renders them unproblematic. This thesis attempts to establish an in-depth understanding of 'sameness' and 'difference' of Deangate School before exploring their dynamic relationship.

The methodology employed to achieve the above aims will be considered in detail in Chapter 2. Past studies, although not considering the nature of school holistically, have reflected on its elements, i.e. 'sameness' and 'difference'. There is a consensus in this body of work that both elements exist but because of methodological differences they perceive them quite differently. It is clear that an interactive approach, which takes into account internal and external forces acting on a school, is suited to understanding what constitutes the nature of a school. What is also apparent is the importance of data collection in one school in which participants are setting about the task of defining the institution in which they work, i.e. a newly formed school. It was fortuitous that Deangate School, the focus of this study, was in that position. Thus, by an

extended period of participant - observation, I was able to establish meanings participants attached to relationships, events, rules and regulations. By reflecting on the school's day-to-day life, an understanding of those features which may be regarded as contributing to 'sameness', was established; by reflecting on participants' and group biographies, values, attitudes and priorities, the power invested in each, and exploring the evolutionary process and key elements, 'difference' was established.

Finally, the data collection and analysis for this thesis were carried out prior to the passing of the 1988 Education Act. Therefore, there is an apparent datedness to the study in areas pertaining to the Act. However, there is nothing in the new Act which alters the underlying process although it may alter the minutiae of the experience.

### Overview

The composition, in order and structure, of this thesis is aimed at satisfying two important facets of articulating a case study. Firstly, the content is organised in a naturalistic, story telling way, with emerging characters, themes, plots and sub-plots. Here the need to portray significant issues and thematic concepts, which are elemental in the process of understanding the nature of a school, is paramount. The substantive chapters are illustrative and the outcome of progressive focussing. They constitute an ethnographic account of important factors arising out of the field data, arranged so as to give a

focused rendering of the evolution of Deangate School. Secondly, the thesis is organised in a logical and progressive fashion. Thus the structure may be viewed as three related stages. Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 are foundation chapters aimed at building and understanding of essential background information. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 are substantive chapters where key issues and concerns are discussed. Chapters 9, 10, and 11, draw together the main themes generated earlier and attempt to establish a theoretical basis for understanding the nature of a school.

### Chapter 2 - Methodology

The chapter opens with a justification of the ethnographic case study approach adopted by this thesis. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and principles of the nature of the research activity. The latter considers problems of procedure, timing, decisions taken during data collection and progressive focussing. The chapter ends by describing and justifying some of the more unusual forms of evidence and their presentation used in this study.

### Chapter 3 - Context

Here, 'context' is not considered solely in a passive sense but as contributing, in some way, to attitudes, values and priorities of participants. Although case studies need to be set against a 'backdrop' - and this aspect is included in the chapter - emphasis is given to the significance and dynamic qualities of contextual features. For the first time

in the thesis two forms of data collection and illustration, photography and cartoons are used, and therefore suggestions on how they should be 'read' are given.

#### Chapter 4 - Taken for Granted

This chapter explores the notion of 'taken for granted'. Researcher, teacher and pupil all, to varying degrees, take for granted familiar settings, and in order to understand what is meant by 'sameness', everyday schooling at Deangate is necessarily rendered problematic.

This chapter, by providing examples of taken for grantedness at various events and in a variety of situations, demonstrates the intended use of a theme which is central to this study. The chapter also illustrates how, by going behind the ready-made standardized scheme of schooling, assumptions may be queried and subterranean beliefs influence social interactions at Deangate School.

#### Chapter 5 - Formal Teacher Interaction

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, are substantive case record chapters, which form the central body of the thesis. Chapter 5 continues the theme of rendering aspects of the school normally taken for granted as problematic, and is concerned with formal teacher interaction.

An important 'building block' in the establishment of a new school is the formal interaction taking place between teachers at all levels, especially 'meetings'. As in all

studies employing a phenomenological perspective, an attempt is made to understand the meaning attributed by participants to formal events. Analysis of the data led to a focus on 'evolution', 'process' and 'performance and micro-politics'. These provided a tentative structure with which to understand the principle but hidden or suppressed elements of formal interaction at Deangate School.

### Chapter 6 - Communication

Whereas Chapter 5 reflects formal interaction, Chapter 6 considers informal interaction. The data, in addition to the issues raised by Measor and Woods (1984) discussed earlier in this chapter, led to a focus on 'the classroom', especially important as an 'interface' between staff and pupils; 'the hierarchy' and their communication throughout the school; and 'the staffroom', with its special character and forms of communication.

The focus on classrooms was particularly significant in that it highlighted the power of taken for granted expectancies of society and especially schools, and yet bore little in the way of a school 'trademark' or character with the exception of humour.

The hierarchical communication in Deangate was particularly informal but mediated by 'hustle and bustle'. The emphasis was on an interpersonal style of communication whose key function was implementing school policy.



The content of staffroom discussion and 'geo-politics' (see Ball 1983), reflected much that was central to the school's character. This section of the chapter describes the humour, influential communication networks outside of the hierarchy, and most importantly, the staff's two prime concerns.

#### Chapter 7 - School and the Outside World

This chapter takes up and develops some of the issues raised in Chapter 3 - Context. Here 'Outside World' is viewed in terms of 'near influences', which impinge directly on the daily life of Deangate School, and 'wider influences' which outlines and explores pressure mechanisms of a more general and subtle nature.

Consideration is given to teachers', pupils' and parents' perceptions of external influences. The chapter builds up a composite picture of external pressures and internal reactions, which go some way to explaining why and how those in the case study school are adopting certain stances. No specific conclusions are drawn but an insight into beliefs and attitudes of those associated with Deangate, particularly teachers' feelings with regards their status in the community and political ambience at the time, are explored in depth.

#### Chapter 8 - Major Perspectives, Critical Events

The previous case record chapters, although noting casual aspects of Deangate's 'difference', has tended to focus on the taken for granted or 'sameness' because of its generic

qualities. This chapter redresses that imbalance by discussing the role of participants in the formation of Deangate's character.

The interpretive structure divides the chapter into four parts - 'History', 'Individuals', 'Groups', and 'Evolution'. This is a useful framework in which to organise and represent significant elements which contribute to Deangate's character, but throughout a theme of values, attitudes, beliefs and perspectives, predominate alongside a sense of the milieu in which 'critical events' took place.

Finally, in this chapter, a stance is taken on the appropriate use and meaning of the commonly used terms 'ethos', 'tone', 'atmosphere' and 'character'. These terms are assigned meanings which are seen as proper, and arising out of analysis of data recounted in earlier chapters.

#### Chapter 9 - The Nature of 'Sameness' and 'Difference'

This chapter returns to the statement: 'All schools are the same but different' and unpacks some of the meanings behind it. The chapter is in two parts. Part One considers the nature of 'sameness' by taking as problematic context, structure, control, and school ceremony and public face. Part Two explores the nature of 'difference' by reflecting on significant issues and factors identified in earlier chapters.

## Chapter 10 - What is school?

This chapter seeks to establish an understanding of complex relationships within and between 'sameness' and 'difference'. The first part explores the source of 'sameness' and 'difference' by examining issues raised at the end of Chapter 9, whilst the second part focuses on priorities operating within them. Part Three discusses the prime ingredients which influence the act of school definition. Part Four draws together issues raised in Parts One, Two and Three, to describe the evolutionary process by which 'schoolness' unfolds. Part Five seeks to 'tease out' aspects of the nature of school by comparing and contrasting findings with analogous studies.

## Chapter 11 - Conclusion.

The final chapter of the thesis reiterates the main findings and discusses the implications. Particular reference is made to the effective school and school improvement movements and the concept of change.

This thesis has taken as problematic a new school going through the process of defining itself in order to gain some understanding of the nature of a school. With the focus of concern established, the overall research strategy, theoretical perspectives, the choice of methods and specific techniques of data collection and analysis, need to be considered. Chapter 2, in three sections, outlines the research stance and discusses relevant theoretical issues and detailed tactics employed in this thesis. Section one, **Overall Research Strategy**, outlines competing strategies, the chosen strategy, and the reason for that choice. Section two - **Theoretical Problems and Issues**, considers the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative methodology and how the choice of strategy relates to the study in hand. This section also discusses the implications of the chosen methodology for specific tactics and techniques of data collection and analysis. Section Three - **Methodology into Practice**, explores aspects of access, data collection in the field, the difficulties of progressive focussing, and the various forms of evidence used in this study.

### Section One - Overall Strategy

In order to make a contribution to a defined body of knowledge a thesis must be undertaken in a clear, logical, and rigorous fashion. The academic community, in an attempt to aspire to these ideals, recognises, two broad but

distinct research strategies, each of which perceives the nature of enquiry differently. One approach aspires to quasi-scientific precision in design and hypothesis construction and is noted for its emphasis on measurement and statistical analysis. This strategy is known under a variety of headings, for example hypothetico-deductive or agricultural-botanical paradigm (Kuhn 1970). From this point onwards I will use the term **quantitative** to represent the experimental approach of the scientist to the natural world for the sake of convenience, whilst recognising its use may be potentially misleading. Quantitative research, associated with positivism, nomothetics, and sociological survey (McCall and Simmons 1969), emphasises objectivity, deductive reasoning and empirical evidence in order to validate postulates and hypotheses.

The second approach, often known as the anthropological model or open-ended enquiry, draws upon subjectivity, inductive reasoning, and emphasises process and participants' meanings. I have used the term **qualitative** to describe this research strategy, which is associated with symbolic interaction, participant observation, illuminative evaluation and ethnography.

The differences between the two strategies has been described as hypothesis testing versus the ability to penetrate fronts (McCall and Simmons 1969), and the way each asks questions i.e., leading (quantitative) or probing (qualitative), (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). A detailed

discussion of their differences is to be found in the work of Bruyn (1966) or Rist (1977). Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, and research design may, arguably, combine the advantages of both in a single strategy (Burgess, 1984a). Many studies justify methodological choice by exposing the weaknesses of one strategy whilst extolling the virtues of the chosen one. Here, rather than resort to post-positivist philosophies of Popper and Feyerabend, I wish to explain my preference for a qualitative approach in terms of appropriateness.

Quantitative and qualitative strategies are ontologically and epistemologically different. The positivist methodological thesis is based on an operational definition of concepts, the value-free ideals of science, and the assumption that humans respond mechanistically (Cohen and Manion, 1980) to situations encountered external to the individual. A qualitative approach assumes humans are the initiators of their own actions and interactions, and being the product of individual cognition, are unique. These key differences lead researchers to select topics or frame research questions with a preferred strategy in mind. Tradition dictates that the research question is followed by the selection of appropriate strategy. More often than not, the choice of research topic is influenced by a favoured methodology and certainly there is a dynamic relationship between them. What is important however, is that the overall research strategy and the topic in hand are compatible.

There are two principle reasons for choosing a qualitative approach for this study. Firstly, a quantitative approach assumes that enough is known about the topic to justify the selection of variables and a hypothetical statement about their relationship, before field testing takes place. On the other hand a qualitative approach does not assume that sufficient is known to recognise or make statements about important variables before entering the field. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) describe this difference in approach by stating:

You are not putting together a puzzle, whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture which takes shape as you collect and examine the parts.

(Page 29)

A quantitative approach to this study is inappropriate because of the paucity of knowledge of the primary research issue, ie the nature of school, and its constituents 'sameness' and 'difference'. Therefore there is no justification in assuming which variables are critical, or what models constitute a plausible relationship between those variables. Indeed, Chapter 1 demonstrated how researchers employing a quantitative approach to the study of school 'difference', have, in the past, tested a bewildering array of variables and models with an equally bewildering array of outcomes. There is no reason to believe that similar studies of 'sameness' and school constitution would not yield a similar outcome.

Secondly, and the principle reason for choosing a qualitative approach, is the nature of the topic itself. A quantitative approach emphasises objective, empirical data. Thus credence is not given to those aspects of school which may contribute to an understanding of the nature of school or how a school defines itself, i.e., its folklore, prejudices, the values and beliefs of participants which may be based on individual or group histories or experiences, chance encounters or formal events. By adopting a qualitative approach with its emphasis on subjectivity and meaning attributed by participants, an understanding of significant factors and the social interactive processes which constitute the nature of a school, will be gained.

#### Section Two - Theoretical Problems and Issues

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a range of methodologies all of which adopt similar strategies and are located within the interpretive tradition. Such methodologies are ethnography (Goetz and Le Compte, 1984), symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1968). Although each approach seeks, in keeping with the qualitative tradition, to penetrate the gaps between words, deeds and meanings, there are differences between them. These differences are adequately explored in detail elsewhere (see Meighan, 1981; Cohen and Manion 1980).

This study employs an ethnographic case study approach. Ethnography has, like other methodologies working within the qualitative tradition, a concern for social meaning. The



approach seeks to understand, from the participants viewpoint, meanings of interactions, activities and events. Ethnography takes its theoretical orientation from phenomenology. Phenomenological enquiry is particularly influenced by the work of the philosophers Husserl and Schutz, which emphasises intersubjective understanding (or 'Verstehen' in the Weberian tradition) and multiple realities. A phenomenological inquiry begins with silence (Psathas, 1973) since the research does not assume knowledge of meanings attributed by participants (Douglas, 1976). The inquiry treats taken for granted assumptions of day to day actions as problematic (Schutz, 1964), to provide the necessary critical distance in order to fully explore 'meaning'.

Ethnography operates from a cultural framework. Spradley's (1960) definition of culture - "the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behaviour" (Page 6) - highlights the connection between culture and phenomenology peculiar to ethnography. This combination is beneficial to the study of institutions for as Ball (1983) points out:

Institutions have their own culture, their own rituals, symbols and meanings. Acquiring and sharing and dealing with this culture is the essence of doing a case study.

(page 79)

Ethnography is particularly appropriate to a study of the

nature of a school and a school defining itself because its strategy aides understanding of "socially constructed reality" (Berger and Luckman, 1967) which is inherent in the process of institution building.

An ethnographic case study approach parallels earlier anthropological enquiry (e.g. Malinowski, 1922). Medicine, Law, and Psychology have traditionally employed a case study approach. Sociology has come to look on the technique more favourably over the last two decades, 'Boys in White' (Becker et al, 1961) and 'Street Corner Society' (Whyte 1955) are two eminent examples. Sociology of education has also come to use ethnography. Rist (1973), Wolcott (1967), and Spindler and Spindler (1982) are American examples, whilst in Britain the work of Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970), Ball (1981) and Burgess (1983) are well known.

Naturally, as with any methodology, ethnography has strengths and weaknesses. Its major strength is its use of an in-depth naturalistic approach in gaining an insight into intersubjective meanings and multiple realities. Case study, being strong in reality, is capable of recognising the complexity of social truths and placing actions and events in context. Finally, case studies are written in an 'illuminative' style (Parlett and Hamilton 1972) which bestows a three-dimensional quality to the story being told (Nesbitt and Watt, 1982). This form of presentation is immediately intelligible to a wide audience and gives readers access to source data and theory construction. The

latter point was of particular concern to Stenhouse who proposed an archive of case records, i.e. frozen data (Rudduck, 1985), which would allow for case study data to be open to critical examination and possible re-interpretation.

A major difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that the former treats each case as empirically distinct whilst the latter assumes that differing cases may be brought together to produce a universal law. The differences stem from their contrasting research strategies. In crude methodological terms the choice is theory first or theory later. This fundamental difference highlights a problematic area of ethnography and is the source of two contentious issues - external and internal validity.

**External validity** raises the question of generalisability. Can behaviour of participants in one context be said to be typical of behaviour of participants in other contexts? There is a wide range of viewpoints on this matter (see Bracht and Glass 1968). Since the sample in ethnography is unique, it is not generalisable. However, others (Cross and Vulliamy, 1984) claim that case studies are potentially generalisable on the grounds that similar cases are comparable, i.e. intuitive generalisations may be made since basic social phenomena transcend the uniqueness of single social settings. This point is emphasised by McDonald and Walker (1974, quoting Leach):

When we read Malinowski we get the impression that he

is stating something of general importance. Yet how can this be? He is simply writing about the Trobriand Islanders. Somehow he has so assimilated himself into the Trobriand situation that he is able to make the Trobriands a microcosm of the whole primitive world.

(Page 2)

McDonald and Walker take the point further claiming, like Freedman (1980), that by concentrating on social processes, generalizations may be made not only between similar settings but across different settings:

Clearly representativeness is an important consideration. In fields where individual variation within a class is limited, as in medical diagnosis or in social anthropology of non-literate peoples, case-study is widely accepted as a valid basis of generalisation, and adopted with confidence.

(Page 2)

However, the question of generalisation of case study work is peppered with contrasting views. Simons (1980) stresses the uniqueness of case study work to such an extent that generalisation becomes questioned; Atkinson and Delamont (1986) argue strongly, indeed emphasise the need for, case studies to be generalised; and Burgess (1984a) erects a personal hobby horse by questioning basic assumptions made by those employing 'grounded theory' and in particular their interpretations of 'theory'.

This study has worked from the premis that case studies, where appropriate, may be generalisable. If case studies are not generalisable they contribute little to theory, and like one-night stands, are interesting but transitory and insubstantial experiences. Atkinson and Delamont (1986) defend this position by invoking the support of other disciplines:

We are certainly not dealing only with a series of self-contained, one-off studies which bear no systematic relationship to each other. The studies of social anthropologists, for instance, have consistently reflected the shared theories and methods of major schools and movements (such as structural-functionalism or culture-and-personality theory). The accumulated literature of anthropology represents the massively successful working-out of a number of related, evolving 'paradigms'. Anthropologists do document the particularities of given cultures and communities; but they do much more than that. The same can be said of relevant traditions in sociology, such as symbolic interactionism.

(Page 249)

Likewise, this thesis uses generalisations made in other areas, for example Gehlen (1950) and Schutz (1964) to make sense of relationships between issues or categories generated. This is accomplished by comparing and contrasting methodologies and evidence. Where the findings of this study contrasts with such generalisations, the issues explored or refuted (as was the case with an aspect of Gehlen's (1950) work).

On the whole, I have worked from the understanding that generalisations to and from this study, given that such activity is undertaken critically, is acceptable. Thus insights gained from studies employing a similar ethnographic tradition of institutions and exhibiting the same general process, for example, Becker et al (1961) and Goffman (1968), are used in this thesis.

A second issue that requires to be addressed is reliability in terms of replicability and internal reliability. Quantitative research places great stress on whether a study can be repeated giving the same or similar results. Clearly, ethnography, because it treats each case as unique, does not employ concepts of duplication or reconstruction. This stance is justified by arguing that its strength in internal validity more than compensates for its weakness in replicability. Ethnographers claim that an objective approach gives invalid results for two reasons: (1) The researcher asks questions which they believed gave the answers to the topic in hand and (2) it is possible that those being researched feed researchers with answers they think the researcher wanted. Whilst acknowledging that ethnographic case studies have reliability problems (in the classic standardized test sense), Le Compte and Goetz (1982) suggest that traditional quantitative research emphasises reliability at the expense of validity. Walker (1980) on the other hand takes a different stance. He sees the reliability issue as "the relationship between events and presentation" (Page 44). Walker claims that since case studies emphasise

multiple perspectives, aim to present data in such a way that it is open to multiple interpretations thus passing on responsibilities for the question of reliability to the reader, the issue of reliability is not a critical one.

A second methodological difference between quantitative and qualitative research hinges on their use of settings. A quantitative research strategy uses experimental studies which recreate 'real' situations in the laboratory or surveys which seek to illicit participants' view via pre-ordained questions or interviews. Ethnography considers these settings to be artificial (reiterating their belief that quantitative research sacrifices internal validity for reliability). Whereas the positivist research creates and controls the research situation, the qualitative research chooses 'natural settings', and this has important implications for case study work. A major claim of ethnography is that by employing naturalism, internal validity is considerably increased. The researcher is the prime research instrument in this case, and endeavours to seek out participants' views. Increased validity stems from additional time with groups and individuals thereby ensuring greater intimacy and the possibility of greater accuracy. However, the adoption of a naturalistic stance is not a guarantee of validity, and researcher bias and participants' reaction to the presence of the researcher in the 'natural' environment, need to be taken into account.

The choice of an ethnographic case study approach for this study has implications for overall tactical and procedural decisions. In order to attain ecological validity (Brunswick, 1956), internal validity, and an understanding of participants perspectives, qualitative researchers must submerge themselves in the culture under study. A naturalistic approach involves playing the role of **participant observer**. In practical terms, Lutz and Iannacone (1969) describe participant observation as one of three roles:

1) "The participant as observer": In this case the research already has his group membership before he undertakes a study and therefore his role as observer or researcher would be unknown to his subjects.

2) "The observer as limited participant": The observer would join a group for the expressed purpose of studying it. The members would, perhaps more than likely, know the researcher's intent in joining the group.

3) "The observer as non-participant": That is without group membership. Here the presence of the observer may not even be known to the group and if it were know, he would still be outside the group.

(Page 108)

The role adopted for this study was the second case. The role of participant observer brings with it two major



issues. The first is the effect the research process has on findings; the second is the effect the researcher has on participants. This point was raised earlier and is worthy of further discussion.

The above issues are concerned with reactivity (Patton 1980). **Procedural reactivity** (Hammersley, 1979) raises a number of problems which cannot be eradicated but which are possible to minimise. The first of these problems is brought about because qualitative research stresses the generation of theory at the expense of theory testing. In reply to criticisms ethnographers justify their approach by claiming that **grounded theory** (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) itself ensures validity of theory, although this is questioned by some (see Hammersley, Page 7, 1983). Clearly any theory must be validated by testing for negative cases or conflicting evidence. Burgess (1984b) suggests the use of 'multiple strategies' to check findings. One of the recognisable dangers of participant observation is that it tends to encourage slovenly methodology and over-creative theorising. Whereas Burgess (1984b) celebrates the freedom the role brings:

Strict and rigid adherence to any method, technique or doctrinaire position may, for the field worker, become like confinement in a cage . . . 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.

(Page 143)

Although an unstructured methodology (see Hammersley, 1983, Wax, 1971) may provide access to otherwise unattainable data or theory, this should not detract from the necessary safeguard of a cross-examination and explanation of the process of discovery.

As a result of taking an ethnographic stance the researcher becomes the research 'instrument'. The effect participation has on a 'natural setting', referred to as **personal reactivity**, (Hammersley, 1979), is the result of two influences. Firstly, a researcher enters the field with preconceptions and biases stemming from past experiences, discussions with colleagues or pre-entry reading on the research topic. It is difficult to assess the extent of such influences on participants but by being sensitive to their effects, by constantly confronting bias and recording assumptions and subjective reactions, the reactive effects may be limited, or at least taken into account.

A second concern is the influence the presence of the researcher has on those being researched. The 'observer effect' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982) is a problem common to qualitative and quantitative research. If collecting data means becoming obtrusive there is a likelihood the researcher will end up studying the effects of their methodology (Douglas 1976). The ethnographer seeks to explore participants' meanings and therefore endeavours to 'blend in' and by adopting a non-threatening stance gain

access to their world. In reality, because schools are places of conflict and where a variety of social interaction between researcher and researched take place, case study work is fraught with danger. There is a possibility, for example, that participants may act differently from how they usually act. Also, by the nature of the role researchers play, they will necessarily present false fronts and there is no reason to believe that participants will not do likewise; and one cannot discount the possibility of personality clashes between researcher and researched or at least participants picking up negative 'vibes' and reacting accordingly. These dangers need to be taken into account during the data collection phase.

Ethnographers then, are required to be sensitive to the influence of procedural and personal reactivity. There is a need to note the reactive effects which facilitate an explicit reflexive account.

Because qualitative research does not pre-structure a study, replication is not a viable option. Therefore, ethnographers employ a strategy of **triangulation** (Cohen and Manion, 1980), to assess the validity of findings. The prime objective is to guard against the many problems arising out of single case, single method, single set of data, and a single investigator. (Burgess, 1984, page 144). There are many ways of applying the concept of triangulation (see Denzin, 1970, 1978; Douglas, 1976). The technique is known to those involved in historical research because it enhances not only

case validity but also the scope and clarity of constructs developed. The principle behind triangulation is that an array of data collection techniques are used so that data collected in one way may be used to check accuracy of data collected in another way. The array includes triangulation, where different data relating to the same phenomenon are compared; theory triangulation, in which alternative theories are applied to a phenomenon; investigator triangulation where different members of a research group study the same or different aspects of a phenomena; and finally method triangulation, in which data produced by different methodologies are compared. Triangulation and reflexivity are the ethnographer's principal means of assuring the validity and reliability of their work.

Qualitative workers, coming from a variety of social science disciplines, and viewing the social world in a variety of ways, collect different data. Ethnographers are associated with social anthropological perspectives, and data collection tends to centre around acculturation, rituals, traditions, and socialisation. So in one sense ethnographers begin the journey of theory development prior to entering the field by restricting (necessarily so) data collection to correspond with their particular theoretical persuasion. Therefore data are collected, in the first instance, in a pre-planned and semi-structured way. Later, as observations are made and reflected upon, the flexibility of a case study approach comes to the fore, and data collection is altered

and becomes more progressively focused. But **progressive focussing** and **data analysis** as Becker (1970), Lofland (1971) and Spradley (1980) have pointed out, is complex, being a mixture of methodological rigour and creative abstract ideas. The researcher enters the field, attempts to make the familiar strange in order to see afresh that which is taken for granted, and compares and contrasts emergent ideas with 'foreshadowed problems'. The dialectic relationship between data and theory generation is at the heart of an ethnographer's difficulties in the development of theory. A qualitative research process is, in essence, a matter of constant oscillation as the research moves from data or 'first order constructs' (Schutz), to theoretical constructs and back again. There is a constant interplay between methods, findings and theory. To aid progressive focussing, data is coded into categories of a topic, context, or process base. These categories deepen or change as data are sifted and interpreted and interesting or unusual patterns emerge.

Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that categories emerge from raw data, it is commonly believed that an eclectic approach encompassing a reflecting on 'foreshadowed problems' and creative imagination, is advantageous and a more accurate portrayal of theory generation. Progressive focussing requires decisions to be made. Those choices influence the direction the research takes and it is, therefore, important they are described. Progressive

focussing was particularly difficult in this study and will be discussed in section three.

Data may be collected in quite different ways and reflect different theoretical persuasions but qualitative research tends to generate **substantive theory** in the first instance (that is theory of a particular setting or topic) and progressing to formal theory which is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967):

By formal theory we mean that developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological enquiry, such as stigma, deviant behaviour, formal organisation, socialization, status incongruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility.

(Page 32)

The development of theory is essentially concerned with generating ideas by reflecting on the interplay between substantive and formal theory. But in order to obtain a conceptual stage, data are perceived problematically, structured by one or more theoretical perspectives, and 'worked' for significant elements, patterns and relationships.

Use is also made of relevant literature. In this thesis the relationship between emergent issues were explored by comparing and contrasting them with findings of studies employing a similar methodology of institutions and which exhibited the same general processes. This approach is not

unusual, Goffman (1968), for example, in his famous studies of 'total institutions', used data from military camps, hospitals and prisons to support and make sense of his substantive theory. Thus, this study uses shared theories from studies of other schools and from other institutions, in order to make sense of emergent patterns, categories and issues. Specifically this study has used the work of Schutz (1964) since it pertains to all institutions, including schools, and acts as a suitable framework for understanding everyday activities; and Gehlen (1950) whose theory of the nature of institutions contributed to an understanding of the priorities of inmates in an institutional setting.

Woven into the collection of data and the task of interpreting and making sense of data is the need for relevancy, validity and reliability, described earlier in this section.

### Section Three - Methodology into Practice

The selection of methodology has practical implications for a study of the nature of a school. In this final section I will describe the concerns, issues and problems, encountered during the data collection and analysis phase of this study. Specifically, this section will consider access, conduct in the field, the organisation of data collection, progressive focussing, and aspects of evidence peculiar to this study, ie cartoons, graffiti and photography.

Prior to entering the field two fundamental decisions were made. The first was the choice of school and in this respect the study was fortunate in being able to select a school which was about to 'define itself'. The second was to proceed without the benefit of background reading and therefore, 'foreshadowed problems'. This was not a matter of choice. Whereas some research was available, albeit in a fragmented state, on taken for granted schooling, very little was available which gave an insight into the nature of school, 'sameness', or 'difference'.

Access to Deangate School was considered to be a key phase of the research process. Contact was made with the Headmaster after clearance had been obtained from the Chief Education Officer. An outline of the proposed research was discussed with the Head, Mr Walters, and assurances were given that I would not seriously disrupt lessons and would endeavour to make a positive contribution where possible. The head, acting as 'gatekeeper' gave permission to approach those further down the hierarchical ladder. Following additional negotiation with staff, pupils and ancillary workers, I established a tenuous foothold in the school. 'Staying in' (Benyon 1983) was a matter of prolonged and continuous negotiation.

Ethnographers seek, as far as possible, to carry out their research in natural settings. Nisbett and Watt (1982) point out a key factor in achieving this:



In case study you as a researcher have the luxury and dilemma of being your own 'chief instrument'. Ultimately the success or failure of your efforts will depend on your ability to develop good personal relationships.

(Page 20)

There is a strong social stratum operating within schools and this causes difficulties in establishing good personal relationships. At Deangate it was difficult to obtain empathy with the hierarchy, staff and pupils, because to be associated with one group inhibited close liaison with another. Playing the role of researcher rather than teacher gave limited access to the pupils' world but being an adult and associated with teachers must have undermined the pupil confidence and affected the quality of data. My main task was to establish my confidentiality credentials, that I was neutral and had no particular 'axe to grind'. Over a period of time and a lengthy period of self discipline my 'black hole self' i.e. everything goes in but nothing comes out, was established. Of course an alternative approach to access, described by Hammersley (1979), was open to me:

to enter in some guise, keeping . . .  
researcher identity secret . . .

(Page 95)

but although secret research minimises procedural reactivity there were obvious reasons for not taking that route: personal ethical qualms; a secret research role restricts access to some participants and data; and in a new school

arranging to be a teacher or alternative role was not an acceptable long term option.

Being a past secondary school teacher assisted my acceptance by staff and hierarchy. As a participant observer one can chose to use one's personality to get close to participants, or, as King (1979) describes, be someone else. (here he describes his stance with an infants' class):

. . . I kept standing so that physical height created social distance . . . I did not show immediate interest in what the children were doing, or talk to them . . . most importantly, I avoided eye contact; if you do not look will not be seen.

(Page 22)

I chose to be myself but an unthreatening, careful self. Humour was important in Deangate and I became the butt of many jokes, to such an extent that I was awarded a 'be nice to the researcher day' (it lasted about 30 seconds). Perhaps, after all the role playing, self discipline, and textbook strategy, significant acceptance to Deangate's community was granted only after my 'own goal' in the staff v 4th form soccer match.

Over an extended period of contact with the school my 'membership' increased. Success here, and because I enjoyed the school so much, enhanced the possibility of over-rapport (see Burgess 1984a). The feeling of 'going native' was one of great comfort which was escaped by striking up new relations and making positive moves to seek out negative or

contrasting perspectives. Data collection took place over four years. The initial fifteen months being full-time participant observation and the remainder taken up following established trends and checking cyclical activity (Ball, 1983).

An ethnographic approach necessarily entails collecting and handling large amounts of data. Since data collection and analysis run concurrently a systematic approach is important. This study employed a traditional approach by collecting **descriptive, methodological and analytic** field notes. Files were also kept on photography, including a negative file, contact sheets and notes; documents generated within the school and sent to the school; and contemporary documents, for example union journals, publicity material and newspapers - all commonly found in the staffroom or readily available to pupils.

The sheer volume of data generated during fieldwork meant that in order to render field notes serviceable, codes, in the form of cryptic words in margins or colour codes, were required. These codes changed as on-going analysis progressed. Becker et al (1961), Whyte (1955), and Lofland (1971) each devised a coding system to suite their needs, but the objective was the same - to facilitate the manipulation of large amounts of data and clear thinking.

Descriptive field notes, included descriptions of physical settings, activities and accounts of particular events. The

object of collecting descriptive field notes is depicted by Bogdan and Biklen (1982):

The goal is to capture the slice of life. Aware that all description to some degree represents choices and judgements - decisions about what is to be put down.

(Page 84)

In methodological field notes, rapport with participants, issues connected with interviewing, photography etc, and general personal reflections were made. It was here where the effects of participant observation were recorded along with reflexive accounts in order to ensure the provision of valid and reliable data. Although I am confident, on the whole, in the quality of data compiled during my stay at Deangate, there was one area of concern. The Head, Alan Walters, was always willing to answer questions, include me in hierarchical meetings, even pass on details of sensitive issues, but there were occasions when the reflexive field notes recorded doubts. Alan Walters usually gave honest answers but there were times when he was less direct and more guarded and it is these occasions, when the researcher senses normal intimacy has been excluded, that the quality of the data must be questioned. The Head of Deangate is a key actor in this thesis, but only where there is confidence in data he provided and triangulation to support prime themes, has his evidence been included in the analysis. One suspects that a study of any school will need to take account of Heads who feel 'ownership' of their school and

who feel protective towards it. It would be unusual if it were otherwise.

The ongoing dialectic relationship between descriptive data and abstract ideas was recorded in the analytic field notes. Here sensitising concepts (Blumer 1969) were formed, initial questions worked and reworked to provide substantive and overarching theory. Analytic fieldnotes were used to discuss promising theoretical ideas, connections, patterns and themes. They helped to give direction and focus to the study by drawing on one of case study's great strengths - flexibility.

Emergent issues need to be explored and their relationship understood in order to generate an overarching theory of the nature of schools. This thesis utilises insights gained from Gehlen's (1950) work on institutions. Whilst one cannot be independent of other literature, there is a need to recognise the danger of taking 'off the shelf' theories and using them (knowingly and unknowingly) as frameworks for data collection. Sharp and Green (1975) were alleged to have conducted their research within a pre-ordained framework of Marxism, and is an example of putting the theoretical 'cart' before the issues based 'horse'. In this thesis it will become apparent that issues derive from data and that literature is applied, where appropriate, to tease out and give meaning to the relationship between them. The nature of 'difference' was established initially followed by 'sameness'. Gehlen's theory, a theory applicable to all

institutions, was employed to make sense of the relationship between 'sameness' and 'difference'. Gehlen's theory contributes only partially to an understanding of the nature of school, and it is clear it does not overwhelm the overarching theory put forward by this study.

During my first term at Deangate I undertook to record as wide a collection of data as possible. However, the requirements of reflexivity, triangulation, the limitations of one researcher covering one school and a research topic which addressed broad concerns, required a narrowing down of research activity. Progressive focussing was particularly difficult in this study because without 'foreshadowed problems' with which to compare data, the direction the study took was especially complex and one could ill afford to make significant decisions based on tenuous evidence. The three major groups involved in defining the school were the hierarchy, the staff and pupils. After one term the hierarchy and the staff were deemed to be most powerful and made decisions which affected the whole school's character. Pupils, being mainly recipients rather than prime movers, accepted, in a time honoured tradition, the power of consensus from above. Parelius and Parelius (1978) support this view:

At the top are the teachers, given their authority by the community outside the school. At the bottom are the children, relatively (but not totally) helpless under their yoke.

(Page 15)

The process of self definition carried out by a new school is ubiquitous and interconnected, it is affected by and affects everything taking place in that school. In one sense no matter where a researcher probes, acts of definition will be taking place, but the essence of progressive focussing was to discover and pursue major, rather than minor, contributing factors.

Now I want to turn to the issue of evidence. Data were gathered by a variety of techniques including observation, interview, and the examination of documents. A thorough explanation of these methods is undertaken elsewhere (see for example Burgess 1984a). Peculiar to this study, and perhaps not widely used elsewhere are (a) the use of **cartoons** and **graffiti** and (b) **photographs**, as evidence.

The use of cartoons as evidence is unusual in educational research but the point at issue is their validity and representativeness. The cartoons included in this thesis were pinned to a noticeboard in the staffroom specifically allocated for comments, jokes and cartoons. The site is significant since staffrooms are the 'inner sanctum' where teachers can be themselves, where fronts are dropped and hence the likelihood that 'real' feelings and beliefs are expressed. Initially I was sceptical of the representativeness of the cartoons, thinking that only one or two junior staff were using the noticeboard. Observation showed that at least six teachers used it, including a broad

cross section of staff, and many more regularly consulted it. Cartoons were especially useful as supporting evidence for they not only attested to topical concerns of staff but contributed to Deangate's humour, a major facet of its 'difference'.

Like cartoons, graffiti are used and discussed in the text. Because graffiti are mainly private acts of disclosure they are a powerful form of evidence. Staff express it on paper (see photograph 2) as do pupils (see photograph 33), who also use desk tops (see photograph 1). Desks particularly, are places of free expression of feelings about school and life. They contain symbols of love, hate and death. Seifert (1978), in one of the few studies of desk top graffiti writes:

They (desk tops) contain defiant but also apocalyptic messages . . . They can bring home to adults some of the feelings of those who suffer education.

(Page 5)

Graffiti represent a faction of a school's society. Its inclusion in this study gives due recognition to its power as evidence.

If we consider that sociology and photography are about the same age (Becker 1975) and that each has developed individually, jointly, and been linked with other disciplines, one wonders why sociology of education has failed to reap the benefits of mutual cooperation. If



photography is to come to play a significant part in informing and extending our understanding of social interaction within a complex institution like a school then three things are necessary:

1) the derivation of an appropriate, experience based, set of guides for the continuing development of this approach to information gathering.

2) the exploration of a variety of ways in which photographs can be used as a vehicle for assisting the understanding of what makes a school.

3) a clarification of strengths and weaknesses of the visual image as evidence.

Here I wish to discuss point three since it is a fundamental issue and requires elucidation. Protagonists have put forward a number of models of using photography with a discipline of words. Weston (1975) a photographer believes images should stand alone; Arnold a writer turned photographer (see Manchester, 1989), and Arbus (1962) a photographer turned writer, have shown that two skills within a single individual is a powerful combination. Agee and Evans (1969) have shown that the individual skills of photographer and writer may be combined successfully. Though each proffers a role model each work sensitises us to the difficulty of combining words with pictures. White (1975) brings us to the crux of the problem:

. . . a poet can write a few words under it (a photograph) which will change how you see it. In this case words and pictures affect each other . . .

(Page 30)

Photographs, like any research tool, are open to bias and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Goffman (1979), like Sontag (1977), believes that photography is unacceptable as a way of objectively 'knowing' because it distorts that which it claims to illuminate. They believe the act of taking a photograph, of aiming, framing, manipulating light and camera angle, distorts the objective. This need not necessarily be the case, as the work of Sander (1977) (see Beloff 1985, Roberts 1951) demonstrates. The camera itself is not to blame - McCullin was right to state:

I only use a camera like I use a toothbrush. It does the job.

(Beloff, 1985, page 111)

and Becker (1975) sees the camera as:

. . . a machine that records and communicates much as typewriter does. People use typewriters to do a million different jobs . . .

(page 3)

It is the image maker and the image interpreter who control and give meaning to photographs. It is a myth that the camera simply records. Candid photography is as prone to bias as the flattery of the studio photograph. The photographer is continuously making choices and any choice

is bias because it means selecting some evidence and rejecting others. The photographer will necessarily interact with subjects and will be aware not only of the context of taking but also his/her relationship with them. With knowledge and skill the photographer can manipulate an image to suite their needs. Hence reformers (e.g. Hine, 1967), artists (e.g. Cartier-Bresson, 1952), and documentarists (e.g. Smith 1975), used photography for different ends as Becker (1975) has suggested. In the same way, an ethnographer may use photography with the discipline required of a prime research instrument to: make statements about research findings; as a can-opener (see Collier and Collier 1986); as cultural inventory (Roberts 1951); and as a tool to gain knowledge, (see Walker 1985).

In this study photographs have been used in a variety of ways. A majority of the photographs are presented as visual evidence and supported by text to make them contextually complete. However, there are images which are visually more dynamic and purposely suggestive, for example photograph 32, 'The Ritual of Knock and Wait'. The picture was taken at the 'critical moment' (Cartier-Bresson, 1963) and I have chosen to include within the frame the 'big brother' painting in order to invite the 'reader' to question the relationship between inside and outside of the Head's office. Becker (1980) writes: "Artists create mood deliberately; scholars, by accident." (Page 26), and it was my intention to 'create mood'. The reason for doing so is explained by Leongard (1987):

Unless there is something a little incomplete and a little strange we won't take an interest in it.

(Page 62)

The objective then, is to make the familiar strange in order that the viewer questions that which is taken for granted. One of the difficulties of 'reading' photographs is to recognise the meanings we bring to them by nature of our own knowledge and experiences. Beloff (1985) supports this point:

We don't see we perceive. Yet ordinarily we ignore this point. By their nature we accept our partialities as normal, natural, even universally valid.

(page 17)

Photographs are used for the first time in Chapter 3 and it is here that ways of 'reading' a photograph are explored in more detail. It is important to note that the images used in this thesis are not meant as an optical extra, but as evidence in its broadest sense and as a vehicle for encouraging the reader to question events, issues and concepts, which are often taken for granted.

Cartoons, graffiti and photographs are unusual forms of data. However they, like other data, are obliged to conform to validity and reflexivity requirements discussed earlier in this chapter. And, alongside more traditional forms of data associated with an ethnographic approach, are used to construct an holistic picture of a new school going through

the process of defining itself, by contributing to an understanding of multiple perspectives and providing evidence out of which substantive issues and theory are generated. Such data are imperative if rhetoric, fronts, and taken for grantedness, which glaze insightful perception, are to be stripped away. Only valid data combined with reasoned but perceptive progressive focusing will be useful in investigating the process of a school becoming a school. The object of observing a new school defining itself is to obtain an understanding of that process and hence the nature of a school.

#### Summary

Chapter 2 discussed the overall research strategy. In section one, theoretical perspectives, i.e. qualitative and quantitative research, were discussed and the choice of strategy explained. Section two explored theoretical problems and issues and reflected on the implications of the chosen methodology for specific tactics and techniques of data collection and analysis. In section three issues of access, methods of recording data and coding techniques were explained. The problematic areas of progressive focussing and two forms of evidence, cartoons and graffiti, and photographs were explored, and their contribution to the ethnographic stance discussed.

Introduction

Any new school will need to lay down foundation stones, define parameters of action, and give its own special meaning to commonly held beliefs about school and schooling. Participants' objective is to construct the social reality we know as 'school'. The object of studying a school going through the process of defining itself is that it represents a unique period in a school's evolution, when a complex mix of individuals and groups with possibly different needs and expectations, with different status and differing degrees of influence, come together to create a new institution. It is the period when the 'sameness' of schools is best observed because significant assumptions are made explicit by participants, and 'difference' is initiated as significant influences and key individuals and groups interact to create a school with its own particular character.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum. Case studies need to be set against a background, a context, so that the reader has reference points of time, place and situation, in order to 'locate' the school. To state context objectively is convenient but insubstantial and often misleading. This chapter includes a certain amount of background information but emphasis is given to reporting the school's reaction to contextual features. Contextual chapters of theses tend to be bland providing descriptive information before embarking on the thesis proper - a sort of *entre* prior to the main

course. This chapter may be no different but it is worth noting that in this case context, especially historical context, makes an important contribution to Deangate School's 'difference'.

Chapter 3 is divided into three parts; part one gives a brief description of Deangate's facilities and organisation; part two outlines Old City's reorganisation onto comprehensive lines; and part three considers national external influences - teacher action and major Government initiatives of the period.

Although much of the data for this chapter was collected in a conventional qualitative fashion, two additional approaches were used and worth noting. Firstly, this is the first occasions in the thesis where photographs are used. I have added a postscript to this chapter which will aid the viewer in 'reading' them. Secondly, I have included a number of cartoons which were placed on the staffroom noticeboard at particular times and are illustrative of teachers' feelings and views, and are therefore worthy of inclusion.

### Part One - The School

Old City, situated in the north of England, was founded by the Romans over 1900 years ago. Today it thrives on an abundance of overseas tourists, who squeeze through the narrow cobbled streets from spring to autumn, and well established medium sized industries. It is perhaps the most un-Lowry like city of the north.

Photograph 1  
THE FRONT OF THE SCHOOL





Deangate school is located on 11 acres of land just inside the eastern boundary of the city. Close to the school are two new housing estates, Fox Hill and Baldwick, which ensure a predominance of lower middle class pupils. Nearby is Grant Hall, an estate built post war where the majority of working class pupils live. Closer to the city centre are terraced houses recently renovated and much sought after by the upwardly mobile, running parallel to council houses in a more depressed state. The area is proliferated with public houses and small local corner shops.

Deangate is a voluntary controlled co-educational comprehensive school of 660 pupils (growing to 720 after one year) aged 11-16 years. Originally it was a boys' Grammar school founded in 1546, which moved to the present site in 1963. The facilities were expanded in 1974 by private subscription to include an open air swimming pool and chapel. In 1984-85 the Authority added a new sports hall, roof to the swimming pool, suites for craft/design and home economics, and relocated quarters for music and drama.

Architecturally the school is a complex mix of add-on blocks located around a central rose garden. The pupils are allowed on the grass areas surrounding the school in the summer months, but restricted to red square (for the lower school) and black square (upper school) during winter. Deangate's frontage is quite attractive with a neat winding road edged with small trees leading to the main entrance (see photograph 1). Like most schools Deangate has less

Photograph 2  
THE BLACK HOLE



attractive aspects like 'the black hole' situated at the rear of the school (see photograph 2).

The school opted for a six form entry (changed to 5 form entry one year later), with pupils coming mainly from six neighbourhood junior schools. The pupils were mixed ability for the first year, with some subjects streaming from the second year onwards. The fourth year were divided into a yellow band (ex-Secondary Modern) and a blue band (ex-Grammar school) for 1985-86, in order to follow exam courses begun prior to reorganisation. The fifth year pupils were in-situ ex-Grammar school boys. One notable feature of pupil composition was the gender imbalance. In September 1986 the school consisted of 482 boys and 244 girls. In September 1987 the ratio was similar but numbers had increased to 750.

In the first three years pupils follow a general curriculum. At the end of the third year they choose from a range of options which course (usually examination courses) they would like to follow in years four and five. Alongside these are a group of compulsory subjects, including English, Mathematics, Religious Education, Careers and Physical Education. Link courses at the City College of Arts and Technology provided additional options.

The academic staff at Deangate consisted of: the headmaster; three deputy heads responsible for staffing/curriculum, upper school and lower school respectively; and 32 teachers on a variety of scales.

## Part Two - Reorganisation

In the 1950's moves were made by Old City LEA towards a comprehensive system of education. Official government support was given in 1964, followed a year later by DES circular 10/65 which was a declaration of intent, and gave guidance on a variety of acceptable forms of comprehensive schooling. In 1967 Old City presented a proposal for reorganising its schools on comprehensive lines to the Secretary of State for Education. However, like many authorities around the country, Old City was caught up in a perpetual 'stop-go' situation as political favour ebbed and flowed, and financial cuts took their toll. Throughout the 1970's, Old City witnessed a considerable amount of general unsettledness coupled with a degree of resentment, brought about by the comprehensive debate. Political beliefs for and against the comprehensive system were stated forcefully in local newspapers, and did not dissipate once the changes had been effected. In 1971 schools on the periphery of the city (under control of 3 other Education Authorities) became comprehensive, but Old City, for a number of reasons, dragged its feet. In 1974 a number of small Authorities were reorganised to form the larger North County Education Authority. A working party set up in 1976 by the new Authority suggested two possible schemes; a middle school scheme and a sixth form college scheme. But it was not until September 1985 that reorganisation of Old City schools actually took effect, when 14 secondary schools were rationalised into 7 co-educational 11-16 comprehensive schools and a sixth form college. Old City's experience of

reorganisation was little different from many other Education Authorities. Here is one example of many who had experienced similar birth pains:

Darlington had a bitter battle of the type with which everyone is familiar: see saw control of councils, plans voted in and voted out, . . . a Labour Party with leaders of the over-my-dead-body school but a rank and file that became progressively more pro-comprehensive . . . active grammar school old boys and girls with direct lines to the Conservative Party, and a local press making a splash of the issue.

(Kenneth Rudge, 1970 page 36)

All Old City's 'new' schools were re-shaped according to North Country Education Authority's plans, each set about 'becoming a school' against a backdrop of national and local changes.

Old City teachers were informed by the County Council that they were to lose their positions prior to reorganisation. They were asked to apply for positions in new comprehensive schools, specifying which particular posts and schools they would like, in a descending order of preference. Posts were filled in an order of priority - first the Headteachers, followed by the Deputy Heads and later Heads of Department and scaled teachers, depending on a staffing structure laid down by the County Education Office. Newly appointed Heads, County Councillors and officers of the Local Education Authority formed the interviewing panel. It was acknowledged that some bargaining and trading had taken place behind the

scenes, but the Headmaster of Deangate denied that positions were 'pencilled in' before interviews. The staff, from Deputy Heads down, felt sure this had been the case.

The Head appointed staff based on a number of priorities, but a key feature in his choice was that they would "make a good team". Teamwork was an important factor, by which the Head hoped the school would develop along lines he envisaged. Prior to reorganisatin, Deangate was a long established boys' Grammar School. Although staff of the new Deangate School were an amalgam of all Old City schools, the pupils were a mix of the old Grammar School and two nearby Secondary Modern Schools. The new Head had a long standing association with Deangate School, which began as a pupil and later an assistant teacher, Head of Department and Deputy Head. The first Deputy Head of Deangate was also a senior member of staff in the old Grammar school of 25 years standing. The other two deputy heads came from Secondary Modern schools in Old City. Of the remaining staff of thirty two, six came from the old Grammar school, ten from other Grammar schools in the city, and sixteen from Secondary Modern schools.

It was difficult to estimate the effect reorganisation had on Deangate. During the initial phase staff often expressed personal feelings. Many missed old friends with whom they had worked in their previous school, but also talked of a strong desire to 'make an effort' to establish relationships for the sake of their new school. Others saw the change in

terms of career - some were clearly unhappy at being passed over whilst others moved up the ladder and were therefore pleased with events. Members of the old Grammar school mentioned a change in staffroom atmosphere, from 'gentleman's club' to a more happy and light-hearted ambience. This, they suggested, was due to the introduction of women. A number of staff missed teaching sixth form pupils - "When I realised that I wouldn't be having any sixth form work, which I really enjoy, I cried" explained a Head of Department. Perhaps the teachers and pupils who suffered most emotionally during the changeover period, were those from a small 'friendly' secondary modern school situated close to Deangate. From their new comprehensive school, they watched their old school being demolished and the land sold to developers.

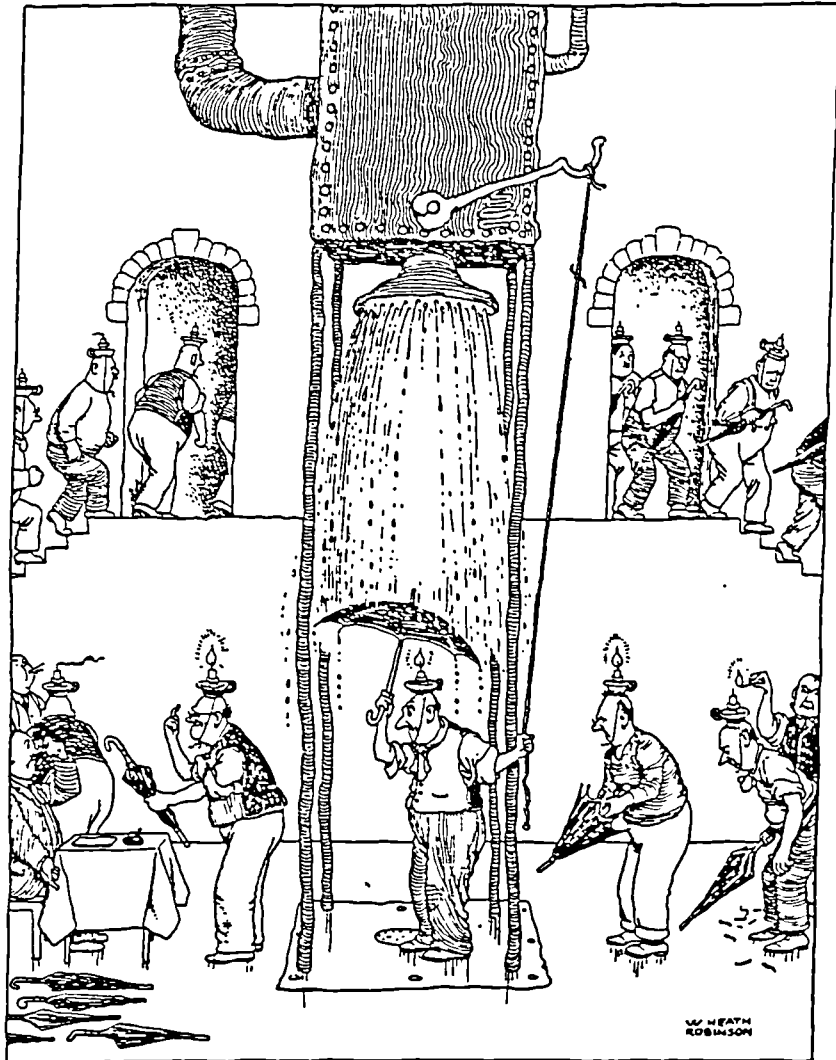
Teachers found themselves under considerable stress. During the year prior to the changeover, they were involved in three operations: their normal teaching load made difficult by uncertainty and numerous building programmes; the logistical problems of reorganisation; and the establishment of their designated school - its rules and regulations, structure and curriculum. Heads of Department were especially under pressure to adapt, change and innovate. The Head of Science explained "Most of the summer holiday, about four weeks, I spent at the school unpacking and sorting." Finally, the consensus amongst staff was that they had been let down by the North Country Education Authority. Teachers' negative feelings stemmed from what they saw as inadequate

provision during reorganisation - lack of advisor help; failure to provide extra teachers during the changeover period; poor preparatory training; and the loss of pastoral and administrative posts, which they attributed to a 'mean' LEA.

The school opened in September 1985 but the first of many designate-staff meetings took place in July 1984. Almost half of the agenda was taken up by practical aspects of reorganisation, the remainder discussing the aims of the school and defining its structure. Later working parties were set up to establish guidelines on discipline/pastoral care assessment/pupil profiles. Senior and middle management also held meetings during this time. The Head attended meetings of designated Heads and sector meetings which brought together Secondary and Primary Heads located in a prescribed 'sector' of Old City.

Training in preparation for comprehensivisation came from the Local Education Authority and from within the school. The staff were given three and a half days training by the LEA, consisting of one day at a local College of Education and a two and a half day residential course at the LEA's training centre. The day conference consisted of lectures from visiting 'experts' with previous experience of 'reorganisation', 'partnership and roles', and 'problems of transition for staff and children'. During the plenary





TESTING THE WATERPROOF QUALITIES OF UMBRELLAS  
IN AN UP-TO-DATE BROLLEY WORKS

session teachers asked few questions. A teacher who made detailed notes of the occasion wrote:

Teachers at this meeting seemed punch drunk and unaware of what was coming in the not too distant future! In the plenary session the advisors/officials only had vague answers.

The two and a half day residential course had a slightly better response from teachers - "The period at Leagrant (LEA training centre) was quite nice, good to be together. . . after that time at least we weren't strangers anymore, so it was good socially" (teacher).

Although the two courses had brought the designate staff closer together they had failed (in teachers' eyes) to prepare teachers for imminent comprehensivisation (see staffroom cartoon). During the year prior to reorganisation the Head of Deangate encouraged his middle managers to create 'social occasions' of meetings by holding sherry parties and making available wine and snacks. This not only encouraged socialisation but enhanced communication, and common practice in reorganisations of the 1960's and 1970's - Galway (1971) mentions tea parties and Halsall (1970) sherry parties. The Local Education Authority's approach to training provision - using conferences, case histories, school visits where teachers use the experience of others, was also common practice in the 1970's (Johnson 1976, Galway 1971, and Halsall 1973).

There is no doubt that some pre-comprehensive modes of education continued following reorganisation. The effect of combining a Grammar school and Secondary Modern school was manifested in a number of ways but here I will consider three major aspects - **the curriculum, mixed ability teaching and pedagogy, and external influences**

### Curriculum

Prior to reorganisation Khaner (1981) carried out a survey of Heads' and Deputy Heads' perspectives on the future of the curriculum in Old City schools. His study shows that curriculum planning in all the schools prior to reorganisation was made difficult by the protracted stop-go approach to comprehensive schooling. Schools felt constrained by the uncertainty of impending change. One of the Heads quoted by Khaner explained:

We've been struck in this kind of limbo for about five years which has been an enormous problem to us.

(page 34)

Heads and Heads of Department of Old City schools were not keen to undertake curriculum change in their schools. Khaner interviewed the Head and Deputy Head of Deangate Grammar School and commented:

The fact that Old City might go comprehensive in the future had not had any effect on their present curriculum . . . They were prepared to assume that a high proportion of the existing staff would be in some key positions and that professional judgements made by

existing staff would have been sufficiently sound for and new colleagues to accept them.

(page 31)

The uncertainty of the period coupled with the assumption that key Grammar School teachers would retain their posts in the new comprehensive school (in fact many moved to the Sixth Form College) meant little or no preparation time was given to the introduction of a comprehensive curriculum prior to reorganisation. It must also be borne in mind the implications of Deangate's new Deputy Head, responsible for the timetable and curriculum, being a long standing past member of staff of Deangate Grammar School, and hence steeped in the traditions and doctrine of a Grammar School curriculum. The cumulative effect on the curriculum of similar combinations is described in a number of research reports. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (DES 1977) suggested that there were notable difference between comprehensives which were originally Grammar schools and those which were Secondary Modern schools. The notion that a school's origin has an effect on it's subsequent development is also raised by Halsall (1970) and Nicodemus (1976). Ball (1984) takes the argument further suggesting:

. . . the 'deep structure' of the comprehensive school curriculum continues to reflect the basic assumption of the tripartite system . . . high status subjects and courses which provide access to higher education derive from the traditional academic grammar school curriculum and are reserved for pupils whose 'success'

at school has shown them worthy.

(page 14)

Holt (1980) adds a further ingredient of teacher autonomy which has emerged in terms of subject specialisms and suggests: "the comprehensive school curriculum shaped up as a muddled variant of what served the former grammar school." (page 189). Bearing in mind the above points, we can say that Deangate's curriculum was an outcome of academic tradition, bastardised by a pedagogical mix of Grammar and Secondary Modern teaching. The acceptance, without question, of a clearly defined course of study which gave priority to a traditional grammar school curriculum, is an aspect of 'sameness' and an indicator of the nature of school.

#### Mixed Ability Teaching and Pedagogy

The second issue which Deangate grappled with was the wide range of pupil ability, backgrounds and expectations. Staff had to choose between, or in some way combine, streaming banding and mixed ability teaching. During pre-reorganisation meetings the staff opted in favour of a mixed ability approach, and to review their decision "in the light of experience" (Head). In the second term of the school's existence, after distributing a questionnaire, the Head decided to move the school in the direction of broad banding. This was controversial and a number of Heads of Department, mainly those with a secondary modern background, objected strongly.

The conflict between rigid setting and mixed ability teaching is an on-going debate with a long history. In the early 1960's many saw comprehensivisation as a move away from setting and towards mixed ability teaching. Even in the late 1960's broad banding was viewed as a failure by pro-comprehensive groups. However, by the early 1970's the move towards more flexible grouping was in evidence (see Rubenstein and Simon, 1973). Benn and Simon (1970) pointed out that 20% of all comprehensive schools used strict streaming in 1968 but by 1972 the figure dropped to 5%. By the late 1970's broad banding was the common pattern in schools (Pedley 1978). Deangate, although initially adopting an 'ideal' of mixed ability, later opted for the conventional broad banding. The outcome affected curriculum and timetable mechanisms and is reflected in Burgess's (1970) observation:

At any rate it is thought that children of all kinds of ability can collaborate best in physical education, the arts, handicraft and home economics, where it might be difficult for them to do so in mathematics - called by the Robbins' Committee 'executive subjects'.  
(page 105)

The main reason for the change to broad banding given by Deangate's Head was - "We are not trained for mixed ability teaching." However, his decision still left a fundamental problem facing the teachers which Halsall (1973) outlines:

Teachers may find unstreaming difficult to cope with

because of teaching habits ingrained over the years.

(page 18)

The underlying problem of 'ingrained habits' meant many teachers found controlling and maintaining interest of pupils with a wide range of intellectual ability, very difficult. Monks (1970) found that:

Teacher attitudes may be the result of the school they are in or have been teaching in, or their own educational background.

(page 42)

Hence it is not surprising that the ex-Secondary Modern School teachers found the Grammar school pupils demanding and the Grammar teachers found Secondary Modern pupils very difficult to control. Pupils, like the teachers, felt ill prepared for assimilation, and this was reflected in difficulties and conflicts in the classroom. Typical of which was an ex-Grammar school science teacher's experience of teaching a group of low attaining pupils (ex-Secondary Modern):

I can't use my usual techniques - you know chat, introductory discussion and write outside lesson time - that doesn't work with these kids. We use bangs and explosions to get them interested. I think they've been exposed to bad teaching - lots of copying, drawing and colouring in pictures, and now they don't know how to think or verbalise their experience.

The other side of the coin is given by an ex-Secondary Modern science teacher:

The Grammar kids obviously didn't do too much in the way of experiments . . . the secondary modern kids did much more and it shows.

Although many labels changed with reorganisation, fundamental beliefs, assumptions, habits, ideology and approach to structures, continued unchanged.

### External Influences

Considerable external pressure was placed on the school from teaching unions, parents, governors, City Councillors and the Local and County Education Authorities, during reorganisation. Each faction wanted its particular concern to be aired and taken notice of. The juggling of catchment areas and border raids for pupils, which often accompany the establishment of a new school, were also present and added to the confusion. These features contributed to the moulding of the school, either in a direct manipulative fashion, or by subtly created tensions. This aspect of reorganisation is, by its nature, not tidy but complex and messy. I will briefly describe Deangate's reaction to a limited number of external influences.

Deangate felt pressured by community expectations to retain traditional values of schooling and simultaneously make provision to meet the changed role of the school. This issue



is particularly relevant, bearing in mind the school's hierarchy and six members of staff were ex-Deangate Grammar school teachers. Not only are they required to change role, i.e. from Grammar to Comprehensive, they must also come to terms with the old school's proposed change of identity. Even before reorganisation took place, parents in the locality enrolled their children in the City's private schools or in schools which became comprehensive in 1972 and lay just outside City boundaries. The traditional element - the old boys association in London, the parents of ex-Deangate Grammar School pupils and middle class parents, formed a powerful lobby. Gregory (1971) shows that Deangate's situation was not unusual:

The 'community' that makes its voice heard is never the full community, but only a small influential part of it, that nevertheless is happy to pass itself off as 'the community'. Such parents will largely have campaigned against setting up a comprehensive school . . . will be mounting their various pressures on the school's development.

(page 5)

Falling rolls plus the popular concept of parental choice, made the school and the Head in particular, conscious of its public image. Additionally, outsiders, who judged the school on such externals as noise, appearance and published exam results, also exerted their own peculiar brand of influence.

The various factions of pro and anti-comprehensive sought to further their cause in the media during the years prior to

reorganisation and subsequently maintained that pressure in the post comprehensive period. A prominent protagonist of the anti-comprehensive movement in the City later became a member of Deangate's board of governors. The staff had reservations about a governor who had on several occasions publicly stated he was against comprehensive education. Their reservations are echoed by Wilson (1971) writing about his staff's feelings in similar circumstances:

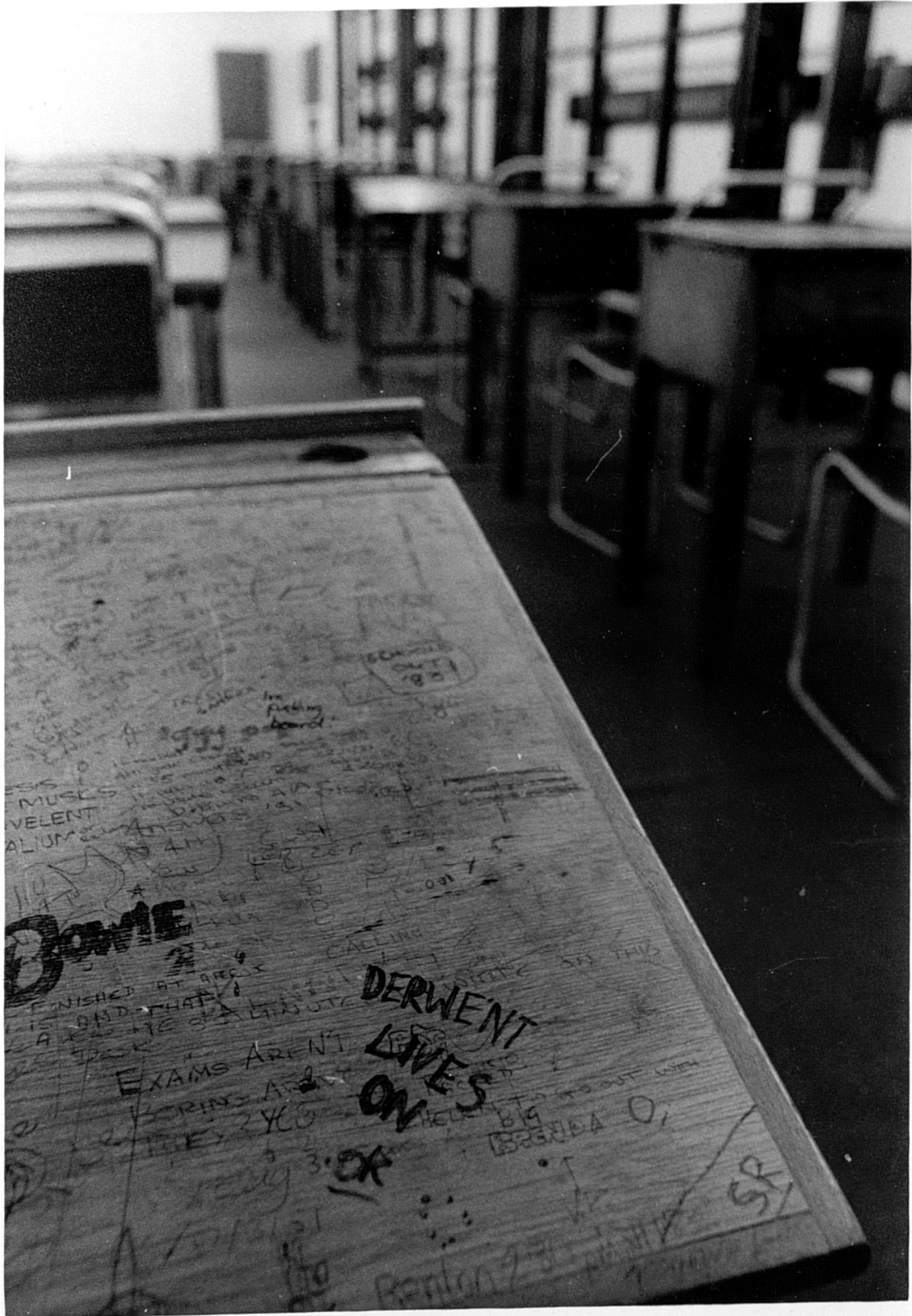
We cannot see how a person who is strongly opposed to comprehensive education can adequately perform his duties . . . their (governors) main object must be as stated in circular 10/65, to fight for the school/s within their control. Therefore, to meet this aim one must have the school's interest at heart, which in turn implies agreement with the school's principles.

(page 12)

Deangate's anti-comprehensive governor later became known as Ghengis Khan to the staff, because of his right wing pronouncements at board meetings.

### Pupil Concerns

So far I have considered reorganisation in terms of organisation, control and influence, mainly from the staff's perspective. Because of the inherent power structure in schools this invariably means teacher or parent views. Now I want to relate some pupil concerns and reactions to comprehensivisation. Although external factors established a formal framework within which participants in school acted,



Photograph 3  
DERWENT LIVES ON OK

pupils appear to be the only group without an input. Pupils were forced to internalize 'going comprehensive', yet it was they who played an important interactionary role in the process of establishing a school.

The Head's projected ethos for the school was of a caring community and he sought to promote an atmosphere of 'family'. The outcome of this stand was two fold. Firstly, prior to reorganisation, the Head personally interviewed all the pupils who were to form the school's new intake. Secondly, it led to the hierarchy playing down mutual hostility between various groups of pupils. For example, when asked by a HMI: "What's the state of the battle?" (between Grammar and Secondary Modern Pupils) a Deputy Head replied: "What battle?" and went on to describe the friendly atmosphere in the school, despite evidence of conflict between pupil factions. Hostility was concentrated in the first year of the school's existence as pupils, perhaps out of loyalty to their previous school, reacted against their new institution and new peers. This was not surprising since the assimilated co-educational Secondary Modern schools saw the in-situ Grammar school boys as "stuck up". Conversely, the Grammar school boys saw them as "trouble makers" and "undisciplined".

Books, walls, notices and desks became the object of Secondary Modern pupils' graffitti. Photograph 3, 'Derwent Lives On', being typical (Derwent was one of the assimilated schools). This sort of defiant gesture became less

noticeable during Deangate's second year. The 5<sup>th</sup> form boys, of the old Grammar school, lamented the change brought about by comprehensivisation:

. . . the school spirit has gone . . . smoking was discreet but now they do it on the school steps . . . lots of kids take days off . . . bikes are tampered with and lots more stealing goes on.

(pupil comment)

Pupils were full of doubt and uncertainty during reorganisation. Although Deangate's staff worked hard at making them feel at home in their new environment, many were unaware of the extent of anxiety felt by pupils. There is no doubt too that teachers themselves were mentally drained by reorganisation and had little in reserve to give to pupils despite the concern many felt. Young (1969) in a study of two merging schools points to similar difficulties and suggested that teachers saw solutions in terms of problems as **they** saw them whereas pupils saw a radically different set of problems and solutions.

By the third term pupils appeared more settled. The anxiety of the changeover had passed and peer group relationships had been established. (See Blyth and Cooper 1971, and Woods and Measor 1984).

The importance of contemporary history in determining the character of the school is demonstrated by the number of points which impinge on the early development of Deangate.

Firstly, a major factor was reorganisation itself which forms a significant context for self definition. The new school emerged 'phoenix like' from the ashes of the old Grammar school and the effect of this is explored further in Chapter 4. Secondly, traditional antagonism which lies between Grammar and Comprehensive schooling had infested itself in the school. A manifestation of this antagonism formed the basis of a major event described in Chapter 8. Finally, considerable displeasure was generated by some staff who believed they had been 'passed over' during reorganisation and, as will be demonstrated later in the thesis, this affected staffroom atmosphere and taken for granted meeting protocol.

### Part Three - National External Influences

Deangate's teachers and parents of pupils were mainly preoccupied with the change to comprehensive schooling, but external factors also made an impact on their lives. During the last decade British education has undergone major surgery and in an era of rapid change it is difficult to identify which particular issues are important to, or representative of, a school defining itself.

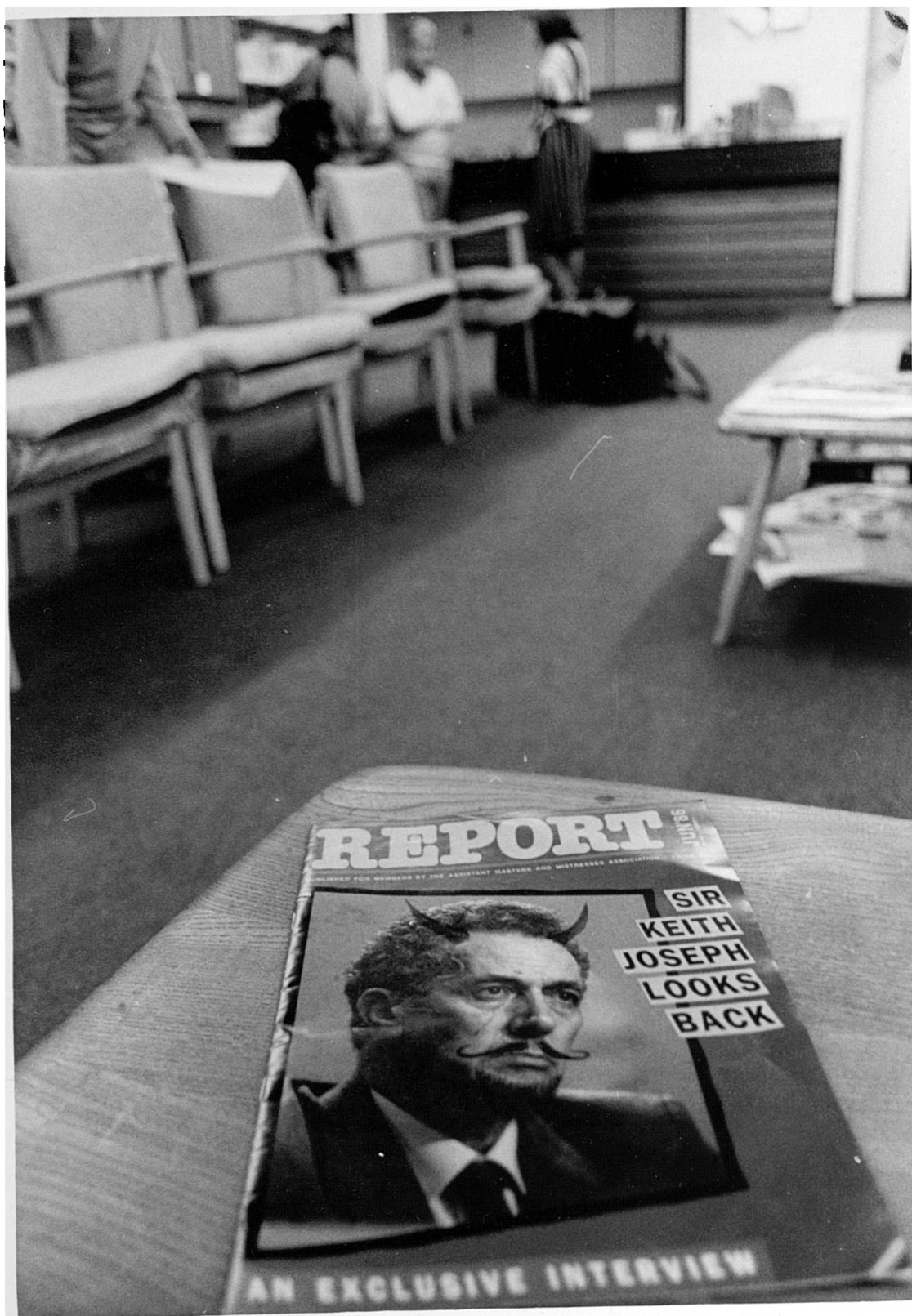
Parents with pupils in the lower school were concerned with discipline, standards, values and citizenship, whilst parents with children in the upper school were looking to subject options and qualifications. Teachers' concerns varied considerably. Debates in the staffroom included cover

arrangements, comparisons with other countries' education systems and the lack of science and technology teachers.

However, I will consider only two contemporary external elements which effected teachers, parents and pupils - the teachers' action and Government education initiatives. They are chosen primarily because of their predominance during the period of self definition. Teachers' action and Government policy were closely linked and made complex by basic ideological differences on both sides. Often, reasoning and sound logic were overshadowed by disillusionment and emotion bordering on anger. The manoeuvring by those involved made objectivity or any form of reasoning difficult to attain. Each group raised assumptions to the level of truths, and judgement was coloured by ulterior needs and motives.

### Teacher Action

The long and often bitter conflict between unions and Government took place between June 1985 and May 1986. Its influence on Deangate surfaced many times in a variety of different ways and situations. During the first two terms of the school's existence, very few meetings of any sort took place. The lack of staff and Head of Department meetings inevitably led to difficulty in communications, especially between the hierarchy and grass root teachers. Planning, decision making, organisation and information were all affected. Relationships between teachers, the Head, pupils and parents, were placed under considerable pressure, and



Photograph 4  
STAFF GRAFFITI



each reacted in a variety of ways. The 'corporate togetherness' the head was so keen to promote was held in abeyance, and only slowly emerged during the third term. The dispute also undermined the relationship between the school and the LEA and added to the low morale of teachers. Teachers saw themselves as under-recognised, under-rewarded and under-regarded.

The teachers considered that Government officials - Sir Keith Joseph, Chris Patten and later Kenneth Baker - were feeding public dissatisfaction. During morning breaks at Deangate, staff would often read out passages from newspapers quoting speeches which they saw as particularly unpalatable. For example the following comment by Kenneth Baker was read aloud in the staffroom:

Examination results, absenteeism, low expectation of teachers, in many ways the system was failing the children. It was not a matter of resources but a question of what was taught and how it was taught.

Guardian 13 January 1987

The majority of staff at Deangate were in favour of the action. During their day to day conversations, they took care when voicing opinions for fear of creating friction between the various unions in the school. Teachers displayed anger even at the sight of a newspaper or magazine photograph of either Sir Keith Joseph or Kenneth Baker. Other signs of annoyance were in the form of graffiti (see photograph 4) and satirical cartoons on noticeboards. By

March 1986, with the end of the strike near, teachers looked forward to a return to normal practice.

During the teachers' action the Head's relationship with the staff became closer. He empathised with their cause, to the extent of supporting them when the LEA threatened legal action. The union representatives were especially pleased with the way the Head had acted. One union representative commented - "From what he says he's right behind us . . . he's very supportive." The Head and his three Deputies were under considerable stress during the action, due mainly to extra responsibilities. Deangate's Head became more resentful of the Government's stance as the action extended into the new year. He announced to his Deputy Heads:

The Government are used to the notion that we will endeavour to keep the schools going and our good will which was there, but is receding.

Although the Head was annoyed at being taken for granted, his main concern was that the school, especially his notion of teamwork, should come through the action unscathed.

Pupils and parents were also affected by teacher action. Many pupils who were unable to stay at school during lunchtime, walked around the local shops for amusement or bought snacks from the local bakery. Pupils sent home because of half day strikes, went to the cinema, "slept more" and generally "mucked about". Some pupils were indignant that teachers should strike in their time, whilst

others took advantage of the situation and played truant. Parents' domestic arrangements, especially working parents, were disrupted and alternatives had to be organised. Lack of parents' evenings and extra curricular activities meant little interaction between teachers and parents. Parents considered 'good' schools to be the ones where after school activities continued as normal. The Head, aware of this, often stated with pride, how members of the staff were continuing normal practices when unions had asked them to refrain. Parents' comments on the action were conflicting. Some reported no side effects, but others considered that the rhythms of schooling had been damaged along with the image they held of the teaching profession.

After the action when normal practice was resumed, parents' feelings and pupils' work appeared to recover quickly. Teachers may be unique in that they take industrial action yet increase productivity at the same time. One of the more pervasive outcomes was that parents became more aware of the changes taking place in education. It is difficult, and outside the brief of this thesis, to assess the effect the action had on teachers at Deangate. Certainly it further damaged their sagging morale. The teachers, although supposedly back to normal, harboured a simmering resentment against the Government. In a sense the antagonism between school and Government is on-going.

## Government Education Initiatives

The teachers' action was not simply a disagreement over wages. It represented the tip of the iceberg of their relationship with the Conservative Government. The teachers at Deangate were unhappy with the type of policies the Secretary of State for Education pursued.

To some extent education has, from the teachers' point of view, been in the 'dog house' since James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in 1976. Direct political control over the content of schooling is taken for granted in many European countries. In England and Wales however, teachers have enjoyed considerable professional freedom and it is this autonomy which is now being challenged. Politicians have for many years argued the need for efficiency, accountability, standards and school assessment, and stressed that schools are failing to provide a workforce which meets the economic needs of the country.

Now I want to move to the particular and discuss Deangate's teachers' reaction to the themes I have raised. Sir Keith Joseph, the Secretary of State for Education until June 1986, considered that state education in Britain had been too complacent and had failed to deliver "a high quality mass education." (AMMA 1986). Unfortunately for Sir Keith and his fellow Government officers, improving quality in schools became synonymous with criticising teachers:

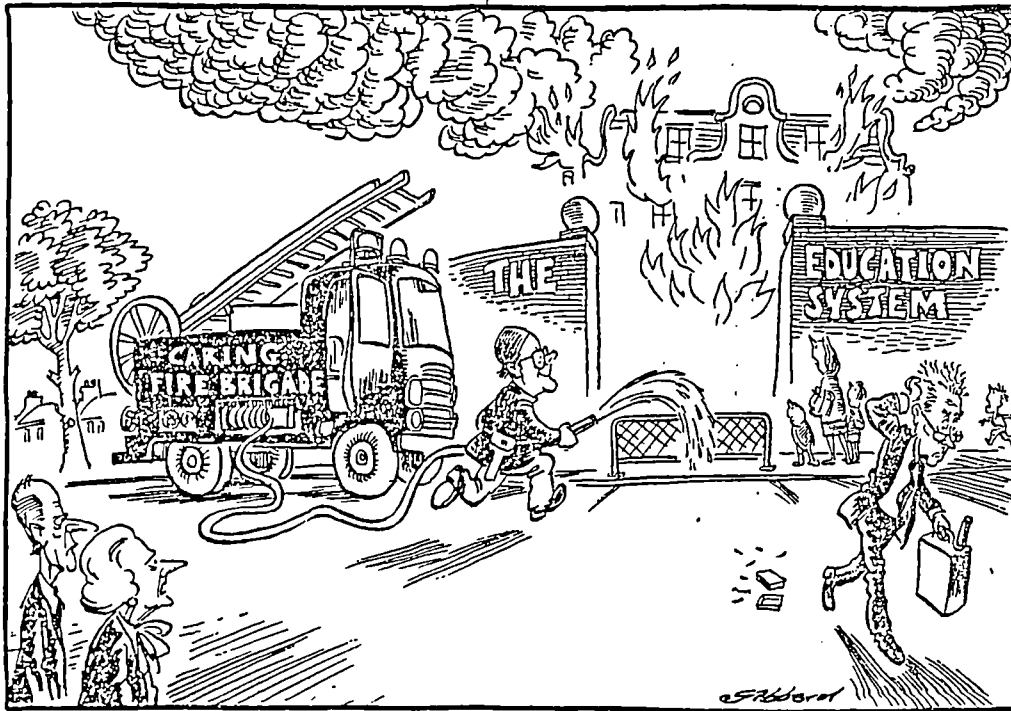
. . . Sir Keith Joseph and Mr Bob Dunn have spent a great deal of time feeding public dissatisfaction and (in effect) telling their constituents why it would be a mistake to pour in more good money until existing faults have been remedied.

(Times Editorial, May 1986)

One of Sir Keith's aims was to raise standards and effectiveness in teaching by centralising education. His philosophy that the economy should improve before the purse strings of education could be loosened was a sensitive issue with teachers, especially as other professions appeared to be succeeding where they had failed. An NUT Christmas card on the staff noticeboard illustrated this:



In May 1986 Sir Keith Joseph was replaced by Kenneth Baker and the occasion marked by another cartoon on Deangate's noticeboard.



"It's galling having to admit it, but a little wetness has its uses!"

Kenneth Baker continued the thrust began by Sir Keith Joseph. After further negotiation with the unions and legislation, the teachers' action came to an unhappy end. Teachers at Deangate disliked the Government's overall ideology, its increasing manipulation of the curriculum and centralised control, but above all they disliked the way it was forced upon them.

The staff's morale was low. Teachers felt pressured by the rate of change in their work. During preparation for GCSE a teacher remarked - "The extra work is difficult to accept when we are in a survival situation now." The effect of national external influences on Deangate School is difficult to ascertain. Teacher action and accompanying strikes meant that (because of lack of 'official' meetings) the first two terms of the school's existence were artificial. But teacher action does provide a yardstick by which teacher and hierarchy values and beliefs could be gauged. For example, the Head put teamwork at a premium and above the external forces which he interpreted as endangering relationships in his school. The significance of this point will become apparent later in the thesis.

The effect of Government initiatives is particularly difficult to assess. Certainly as a result of Government publicity teachers felt under-recognised, under-rewarded, and under-regarded. But status was not the only issue at stake. Staff believed long held professional freedoms were under threat. The call for accountability was gaining currency as were other fundamental changes in the education system. Teachers appeared to be hanging on, in an almost 'trench-warfare' manner, to their autonomy. The effect of Government initiatives and other external activities will be considered in more detail in Chapter 7 - School and the Outside World.

## Summary

This chapter places the school in context, by discussing relevant contextual features from a predominantly school based perspective.

Part one gave a brief description of Deangate School, outlining its location, facilities and organisation. Further details of the school, especially its structure and organisation will be given in later chapters where appropriate. Part two was concerned with Deangate's comprehensivisation, and sought to illuminate a number of issues - staff concerns during the changeover period, meetings and initial structures, training prior to reorganisation, the curriculum, mixed ability teaching and pedagogy, external influences and pupils' views. The school's experience of turning comprehensive was compared with studies of similar reorganisations over the last twenty years. Such comparisons suggest that Deangate's experiences of comprehensivisation were similar to those of other schools and therefore not unusual. Part three attempted to place the school in a political context by considering two significant national concerns and locating those concerns in a local setting. The two elements selected, teacher action and Government policy were not considered critically (see Hunter, C. in Ball, S.J. 1984), but from the multiple perspective of teachers, the LEA, parents and pupils. Control of education, its economics and ideology, are all shown to be fundamental concerns to those in schools and especially causal in the Government-teacher conflict.



In one sense context reflects broad culture and in a narrower sense it reflect subcultures which determine parameters of action. In a more overt sense, context sensitises us to a number of issues worthy of further consideration. Certainly aspects of 'sameness' and 'difference' are present. The significance of the past is flagged as worthy of further examination, especially the influence of the old Grammar School since the Head's and a Deputy Head's political and doctrinal affiliations may be instrumental in forming Deangate's 'difference'. The power of the past is also evident in participants' inability to modify teaching styles, learning habits and fundamental beliefs, which may contribute to the 'sameness' of schools.

The nature of 'sameness and 'difference' and the relationship between them is at the heart of understanding the nature of school. This chapter sensitises us to the possibility that 'sameness' is by no means fixed and may be 'long term transitory'. Teachers, for example, have for many years held dear a sense of autonomy, that they are the professionals and ultimately are the guardians of 'good' education. However, over the last decade government, parents, boards of governors and external accountability instruments have made inroads into an aspect of 'sameness' previously taken for granted.

Though clearly it is too soon to make predictions as to the nature of 'difference' at Deangate, this chapter tentatively raises a number of interesting points. A number of likely

contributory features were evident. Firstly the Head's sensitivity to the feelings of certain influential external audiences, particularly parents who are 'clients' to a school operating within an open market. Secondly, the Head's special concern for teamwork, which was given priority over Government educational initiatives and teacher action. Finally, the change from a predominantly male staff to a mix of male and female staff, affected the atmosphere of the staffroom, thus altering its 'difference'. This raises a second issue - is 'atmosphere' equatable with 'climate' or 'ethos', terms used in past research to describe the 'difference' between schools, or do they hold differing meanings?

To some extent context is not merely a backdrop against which the school acts, but an integral influencing feature helping to shape its nature. This chapter has raised issues and themes which will be considered or reiterated in later chapters.

### Postscript - Photographs

This is the first chapter in which photographs are used. Therefore I will give a brief description of their intended function and a pointer to how they are to be viewed.

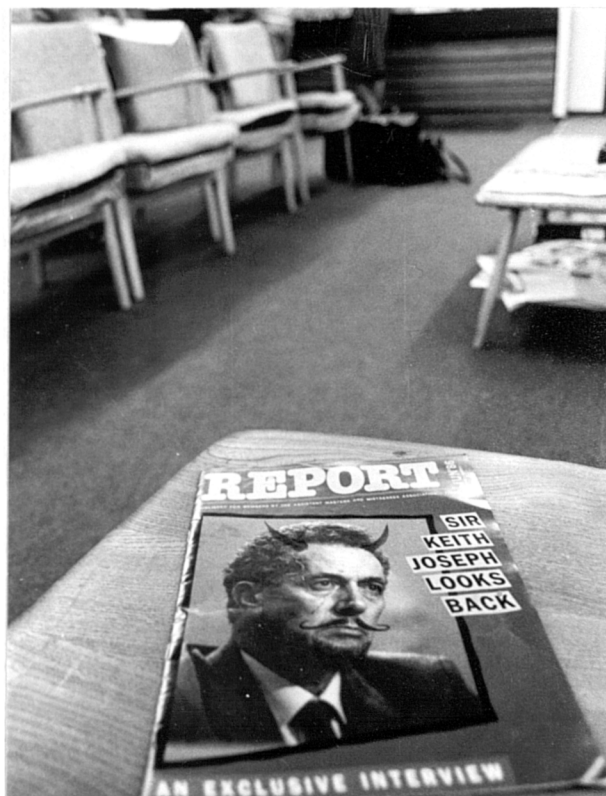
The traditional use of photography in research has been as an optional extra: adding interest or entertainment or, in extreme cases, using illustration to relieve the boredom of the written text. Occasionally researchers (see Walker and

Wiedel, 1985) have used the photographic image as a tool - to seek, from members of the school community, their interpretation, views, attitudes and opinions on the meanings which the photographer has captured.

Although some photographs here are used descriptively, and I have used them occasionally to seek views, the predominant aim in this thesis is to go beyond those accepted norms of 'optional extra'. Other academic disciplines have used photography in many different ways: to tell a story; as archaeology of everyday life; as historical evidence; as another way of telling; and even to articulate an experience. And these are the ways I intend to use them here. All photographs in the thesis are visual statements about everyday events which are part and parcel of schooling and consistent with the themes 'taken for granted' and 'what constitutes school?'. The photographs here are not unique, and equivalent images are to be found in schools throughout England and Wales.

To illustrate how the photographs are to be 'read' I will select a number of photographs and make observations describing what the image means to me. Obviously different people with different backgrounds and experiences will interpret them in a variety of ways. Visual statements must communicate and the richness of that communication is enhanced by the observer's own knowledge and understanding.

1. One of the teacher's unions used a photograph of Sir Keith Joseph on a front cover of their journal. It was at the end of Sir Keith's reign and teachers' action was at its height. A Deangate teacher expressed his feelings for Sir Keith by spending his morning tea break converting the Secretary of State into a devil. The clear personal statement the teacher made was representative of the animosity many felt at the time and for me the photograph evokes memories of teachers' feelings during the action. I would classify this photograph as a mix of 'another way of telling' and 'an articulation of experience'.



2. Reorganisation was particularly traumatic for teachers and pupils of Derwent School, one of the Secondary Modern schools to be assimilated. Pupil graffiti was to be found everywhere usually in spray-paint. This photograph is salient for a number of reasons. Firstly because of the

situation - an exam room (hence the rows of desks in the gymnasium) which was invidious to a group of Secondary Modern pupils for whom exams and tests only underlined their sense of failure. The desk itself is interesting. Like an archaeological dig it has layers of evidence, layers of graffiti, with 'Derwent Lives On OK' clear bold and recent, supplanting names of fading rock stars and past feelings and loves of the Grammar School era. For me the photograph is of the 'historical evidence' - 'archaeology of everyday life' type.



3. The photographs of the exterior of the school are an attempt to go beyond the usual objective views often taken on a summer's day and when pupils are not present. Each photograph in this group is meant to show a facet of the buildings and environment. Hence the inclusion of the front or public face of the school balanced by the rear view and its 'black hole'. Therefore these photographs go beyond

straight reportage, are meant to be informative of alternative viewpoints and are based on my knowledge of the built environment and its uses.



The photographs in this thesis are used as evidence in its broadest sense. Although they are used in a variety of ways, for example to tell a story or articulate an experience, the prime objective is to lift the veil that is taken for

grantedness. The photographs will be used in conjunction with more traditional forms of ethnographic data, but the reader is required to treat the images as evidence and therefore 'read' them with the same care and attention as they would a manuscript. To obtain most from the images the reader will be required to 'read' them for their objective and subjective meaning, bearing in mind their perception is coloured by their own experiences, knowledge and understandings.

In Chapter 2, I made a case for determining the nature of a school by following a new school going through the process of defining itself. I also made the assumption that a school's nature is an outcome of 'sameness' and 'difference'. In order to comprehend the significance of these features there will be an attempt throughout the thesis to render 'school' as problematic. This chapter illustrates, by selecting certain topics and issues, the breadth and influence of taken for grantedness and how it contributes towards our understanding of the nature of Deangate School.

One of the main benefits gained from participant observation by a researcher is insider knowledge of the plural society within. However both actors and observers are prone to take 'school' for granted for different reasons; the teachers, because of their day to day business, have difficulty in finding the time to engage in the luxury of critical thinking and authentic choosing; the pupils are on the whole unconcerned with school practice, except in terms of its direct impact on them; and the researcher, who has in the past chosen to be selective in his concern for 'school', has the problem of being a 'stranger and a friend' in order to question the previously unquestioned. The observer has the very real problem of avoiding, what McNamara (1980) calls 'outsider arrogance', if he/she is to avoid being seen by



participants as a 'gate crasher'. All three groups take for granted their familiar worlds. Alfred Schutz (1964) writes of such people:

. . . accepts the ready-made standardized scheme of cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within the social world.

(page 238)

A major task of this study is to go behind 'the ready-made standardized scheme'.

The series of case records which follow, will take certain taken for granted aspects of school, render them problematic and then familiar again. They illustrate the nature of notion 'taken for granted'; when participants themselves, through day to day repetition, create taken for granted situations; when researchers ignore phenomena because ostensibly they appear inconsequential (and I suggest that this may not be the case); and when aspects of school are overlooked because 'it has always been that way'. A cross section of school will be rendered problematic: **Tradition; Day to Day; and Place.**

### Tradition

Schools develop their own particular traditions, usually in the form of rituals, opinions or customs. Pupil traditions of English Public schools are good examples of tradition in its tacit form, for example, at Winchester School junior

boys can be distinguished in public as they alone are expected to carry their umbrellas unfurled. Another example is pupil argot - part of their sub-culture. The accepted theoretical view of school traditions is that they serve to create a compact school community, develop a sense of 'esprit de corps' and instil a degree of loyalty in both staff and pupils.

I will consider the case records of two overt forms of tradition at Deangate's School - Speech Day and the Carol Service. Both are examples of similar events held by Secondary schools throughout England and therefore an integral part of the 'taken for granted' aspect of school. As both are annual events I was able to collect pre and post event data on two occasions. The twelve month gap during which the school developed, meant both events were in a sense 'thermometers of evolution'. Evidence was collected by tape recordings of actual events, semi-structured interviews and casual conversations.

### Speech Day

Speech Day, like many of Deangate's overt traditions was based on the old Grammar School tradition. The Headmaster, as a past pupil, teacher and Deputy Headmaster of the old school, knew the event intimately. Speech Day was organised by three people - the Head, a Deputy Head and the school secretary. All three were past members of the Grammar school. The Deputy Head was instructed by the Head to make the occasion "as its always been". Invitations were sent to

'Old Boys', local dignitaries, staff and parents. The Headmaster, on the night, spoke of the highlights of the school year, the curriculum and his understanding of 'Education'. The guest speaker addressed himself to the relevance of education in today's world and personal memories of the old Grammar school. Only a small section of the school were present - the prizewinners and their parents. The small group of pupils in white shirts, shifted uncomfortably in their seats, parents sat patiently waiting for their proud moment, and the Deputy Head announced embarrassed prizewinners who invariably tripped down steps on their preordained route to the spotlight. Such scenes are part and parcel of many people's experiences of school, either as a pupil, parent or teacher.

In the past these occasions have been drawn upon in order to generate theory on the transition of values and norms held by society and school. Such general statements of course do not identify the values and norms of this particular school or how they were arrived at. This is a basic concern of this study and gives reason for treating Speech Day as problematic.

Most of those involved in Speech Day acknowledged it was not an accurate representation of the school. As the old Grammar school's magazine points out, it was the school's public face:

The function of Speech Day is still something of an anomaly - all parties concerned seemed to put on a

face of respectability and properness, which everyone else accepts as such (does anyone really believe that the floral decorations lining the corridors are really a permanent fixture?)

The Head enjoyed ceremonial occasions and thought certain traditions of the 'old school' should be maintained. He did not discuss with his present staff the format of the new school's first Speech Day, or involve them in its organisation. He took it for granted that Speech Day would follow the familiar pattern of past years and invited staff to participate by formal notice. Only eleven of the staff of thirty eight accepted his invitation, and many of those did so out of sense of duty. The school secretary was quite upset by this:

I've never been so depressed. What are the parents going to think if only eleven teachers turn up? I don't think they (the teachers) care about the school. It was a lovely occasion (past Grammar school Speech Days) . . . The staff wore gowns and prefects wore gowns and caps. The Head must be disappointed.

The Head put staff disinterest down to teacher action. His 'ears' in the staffroom, the three Deputy Heads, either did not know of staff dissatisfaction, did not care, or most probably were aware but for some reason did not pass the knowledge on to the Head. Certainly staff had the opportunity to explain their grievances at both staff and Head of departments meetings, but chose not to. There appears to have been a lack of communication on both sides.

Teachers during informal conversation told me they were 'miffed' at the lack of consultation. A Deputy Head (ex Secondary Modern School) summed up staff feelings about the school's first Speech Day by stating:

The Speech Day was the same as it was in Grammar school days. The Head, Steve and Mary knew what they were doing, but they were the only ones. They told me what was expected of me but I didn't really feel involved in the organisation of it. The staff didn't feel involved either but then all they knew about Speech Day was a notice on the staff notice board and an invitation. There were no moves to get them involved or tell them what it was about, again the assumption that we know. We want our own Speech Day not the remnants of the old Grammar school.

Staff were correct in their assumption that Speech Day would follow the old Grammar school format. The guest speaker spoke of the sporting relationship between his school and the Grammar school and especially of its 'scholarship and good manners'. The Head spoke in a similar vein - "I would like to welcome the new members to the school . . . to continue the traditional values of the school." The point I am making is that both speakers had inadvertently used the occasion to state implicitly that the new Comprehensive school was not 'new' or even a phoenix but a continuation of the 'old school'. Verbally and structurally Speech Day reinforced this. This contradicted the Head's statement, often used in rhetoric to visitors, during school meetings and notably in his first Speech Day address: "This is a new school. We, the staff, made a pact not to mention what

happened in our previous school." The Head often stated that teamwork and democracy were important to him, yet he had put those to one side in this enthusiasm to perpetuate the tradition of Speech Day. In his overriding concern for continuation, he had taken for granted the school's recent influx of the staff, parents and pupils, and their values and concerns. It was not until the school's second year that staff pressed for their opinions to be considered, and the Head agreed to possible amendments. I will return to this issue but first I would like to compare and contrast Speech Day with the school's Carol Service.

#### Carol Service

Carol Service was also a traditional feature of the old Grammar school and like Speech Day implanted by the Headmaster in the calendar of the Comprehensive school. Its setting, the Cathedral, was unavailable to the other six schools in the area, which added to the prestige of the occasion. The Carol Service was high on the Head's list of priorities. He refused to move it from its position on the school's calendar to make way for school exams - "The Carol Service is where it's always been. It was booked for that time a year ago.", and during an interview disclosed:

I believe there is a place for the traditional and ceremonial. I think it's part of our national heritage and therefore the thought that to have our Carol Service in the city's Cathedral is something I would almost go to the wall for . . . I think it's important that youngsters are exposed to that sort of laudable tradition.

From a researcher's point of view, these two cases are informative in a number of ways. They demonstrate values held by the Headmaster and point to possible priorities. Also they give insight into the relationship and communication between the Head, his deputies and the staff. Finally they inform on staff and pupil perceptions of traditions. Each of those issues is concerned with the way participants construct their social world.

Let us consider two questions. Firstly why did staff participate in, and thereby accept the Carol Service yet reject Speech day? Speech Day conflicted with their values - they sought less emphasis on rewarding successful academic pupils with more consideration to be given to less able pupils. They were also unhappy with the lack of consultation, and ill feeling developed causing many to boycott the occasion. In comparison the Carol Service, although a past Grammar school tradition, also belonged to a greater 'external' tradition, with which they could associate. Finally one of their own number, the music teacher, actively sought their involvement and was instrumental in creating an atmosphere of enjoyment, a factor not found at Speech Day. My comments are based on data gained from 'natural' settings, but raise questions about the degree and type of inference that is acceptable to the research community. The private mind of individual teachers is a complex web of reason and emotion. Perhaps teacher attitude in choosing the Carol Service over Speech

Day, was related to a value response and as such made purely on an enjoyment/fulfilment basis. Then 'value' is equated to the question - 'Is it worth doing?' The limitation of empirical observation becomes evident here and the need for phenomenological observation becomes clear. The phenomenologist's concern for subjectivity of the individual, his biography and the way in which he constructs his social reality, gives meaning to events, is an important perspective. A phenomenological observer will reach the parts that empirical observers cannot reach.

The second question is 'Why did the Headmaster, who valued staff involvement and democracy, choose not to consult staff about Speech Day?' The Head's action brings us to question the consistency of personal values. Mrs Mahatma Gandhi said of her husband:

Most people think one thing, do another and feel yet another. But my husband was one man.

But there are few Mahatma Gandhi's in the world! The Head chose to put to one side not only his stated pact not to mention previous schools, but his relationship with his staff, in order to re-establish two traditions close to his heart. This identifies an aspect of his value priorities, and more importantly, that he unconsciously replaced one set of values with another. What the Head was practising was a form of Husserl's 'bracketing'. That is putting to one side



or 'bracketing out' one set of values in order to concentrate on the task in hand - in this case a preferred value.

I now turn to the participants as a whole and consider to what extent they take the situation for granted. The Head and staff, although disagreeing on the format of Speech Day did not question its inclusion in the school calendar, nor the Carol Service. Both parties assumed those traditions would continue in one form or another. This illustrates Berger's (1963) point about the resistance to change:

. . . each social situation in which we find ourselves is not only defined by our contemporaries but predefined by our predecessors. Since one cannot possibly talk back to one's ancestors, their ill-conceived constructions are commonly more difficult to get rid of than those built in our own lifetime.

(page 101)

We also note that the Head's authority is taken for granted. The Head is all powerful, and has considerable influence over his school. This is an unquestioned foundation stone of British schools. The Head's unquestioned status as potential autocrat is part of a wider assumption that schools should have independence and individuality (which is now under question in the form of accountability and Government control). Once we become sensitized to unquestioned aspects of headship we see that not only is a Head's authority taken for granted but also their role - the ability to hire

teachers; the Head's office is always near the main school entrance; and the Head is the central figure in school ceremony.

Finally, communal rituals like Speech Day and Carol Service, reinforce shared beliefs and pass on to pupils standard values and morals. Although there may be disagreement on the definition of these, it is taken for granted that it is the school's role to transmit them and to mould pupils' characters.

### Day to Day

I now want to focus attention on events which occur at least once during a school week. The rhythm of school is dictated by assemblies, form periods, registration and teaching. They form the bones on which day to day activities are built. I will concentrate on assemblies and form periods, discussing how both are taken for granted and in particular their role in the structure of the school day.

### Morning Assembly

At Deangate three assemblies are held during the school week - whole school, senior school and junior school. Each has its own characteristics but each fits within the handed down 'expected' formula. The whole school assembly is an overcrowded affair with pupils struggling to find a place to stand or sit. Junior school assemblies are notable for their rigid regimentation, strict silence and lively staff

Photograph 5 Staff Involvement in Assembly



were brought down to the main hall after registration and fed in via a preordained entrance. Seating blocks were allocated and pupils told to sit in silence (pupils never did) in the 'pit' - a well in which the main body sat, whilst at the back and sides sat elevated teachers. The Head would make general announcements followed by an oration on a moral/Christian topic. Each assembly varied slightly in content and layout. For example on Monday the whole school assembly began with the reading of sports results in a 'match of the day' format. Another characteristic was on completion of the ritual, certain pupils were asked to meet in various corners of the hall i.e. for 'the trip to Austria', 'the chess club', 'those who travel on the 49 bus to school' and 'the school soccer team'. Thursday's junior assembly was more theatrical, with staff performing short sketches with a moral message (see photograph 5), much enjoyed by the pupils, followed by singing of traditional hymns.

There were two basic elements of assembly: communication by the hierarchy to the whole school for information and organisational reasons; and a strong community and moral message. The Head's community message was often a reflection of a personal philosophy, and phrases like "One of the main aims of this school is to promote a family feeling" were common. Similarly a teaching element would be recognisable as a moral statement: "We are each responsible for our own actions." Sociologists recognise these elements and view

statement such as " . . . and of course Jesus also made this point. . ." This was the signal for a fit of coughing from the pupils - the 'code of reaction'. Another example of the code in action was during a talk by an outsider. An extremely quiet petite lady from the local children's hospice came to thank the school personally for their generous donation. During her ten minute speech her voice could only be heard by the front three rows, yet significantly the remainder sat quietly, even showing signs of respectful attention. Therefore the code could be said to operate in a different way, depending on a combination of speaker status or speech content.

The hierarchy were noticeably agitated during morning assembly. My recordings of these occasions are littered with commands given in forceful, unquestionable, almost military tones. The reason for their strong stance, lies with their fear of loss of authority. The classroom situation is a smaller mirror image of morning assembly, and as Waller (1932) points out, teachers either consciously or unconsciously over-react to pupils questioning their authority:

The teacher must learn to get angry and how to get angry quickly . . . To keep little misdeeds from growing into greater ones, he must learn to magnify them to the larger size originally; this is easy because the more his habits are concerned with the established order the more heinous breaches of it will appear. What is even more important, he must learn that breaches of order committed in his presence or

Photograph 6 Teachers on the Edge of 'the Pit'



when he is responsible constitute direct attacks upon his authority.

(page 388)

The thought of a larger body of students questioning the authority of the hierarchy, and its consequences, is reason enough for the Headmaster and his deputies to react in a forceful way. Teacher folklore quoted by Waller says: "One has become a school teacher when he has learned to fear the loss of his dignity." and this lore is equally applicable to hierarchy.

Staff, aware from their own classroom experience of pupils' ability to disrupt, and fearing its spread to major institutional gatherings, support the hierarchy. When pupils operate their 'code of reaction' they would move forward to the edge of the pit and use teacher control strategies - glaring or "See me afterwards." (see photograph 6).

Data collected over a long period also added weight to the theory that the primary concern in morning assemblies was with control. The observed evolution of assembly format meant moves to tighten control. Staff and hierarchy began to stress designated positions, regiment movement of pupils within the hall, and staff were strategically positioned at checkpoints (entrances) and crossroads. Structure of assembly was altered to emphasize ritual. Changes in ritual were brought about by special happenings or critical events

by which the ritual was questioned. One morning, for example, the Head asked for silence three times after which he sent five pupils to his office, before order was gained and assembly could begin. This event brought about change. Following assemblies began with a Deputy Head asking for silence before the Head moved to the rostrum. The Head also opted to leave by the nearest exit, necessitating a longer walk back to his office. This theatrical touch added to the drama of the ritual and thus emphasized social control.

Finally Woods (1984a) identifies eight techniques teachers use to secure control: domination, removal, negotiation, socialization, fraternization, ritual and routine, occupational therapy and morale boosting. In assembly the techniques employed were predominantly the 'hard' ones of domination and ritual/routine, emphasizing that negotiation and fraternization, the 'soft' options, were considered too democratic and risky to employ. The overriding concern, activity and ultimately function are not, as Shipman states, to promote solidarity and increase the feeling of belonging, but social control.

All evolutionary changes in morning assembly were made to streamline organisation and emphasize ritual, thereby improving social control. These elements took priority over the content or learning element and generated an atmosphere of conflict which was self perpetuating. Consequently the learning element of morning assembly was limited as Webb (1962) points out from his work on Black School:



Only certain rigid work and conduct standards can be conveyed by drilling. And these make or maintain dislike and therefore the need for drilling.

(page 265)

It is not surprising that staff and pupil's response to assembly was one of boredom or neutrality. Morning assembly is a handed down mechanism, 'in-situ' for reasons of law (that the day should begin with an act to worship) with added elements of communication, but at Deangate it had become a time of social control. Because assembly had become a fixed routine in the natural rhythm of schooling, and as such taken for granted, the meaning and unnoticed role change was not recognised by participants. Morning assembly's new role was a statement of appropriate behaviour, with punishments to eliminate the inappropriate. The occasion had become a time of sticks and no carrots, a period of suppression.

#### Form Time

Form time, like assembly, takes place a number of times during the school week. The school community do not question its existence because it has become part of the fabric of routine, an everyday ritual. Whereas assembly shows groups contributing to a scene of conflict and control, during form time teachers and pupils act out their roles in a series of one man shows with teacher as actor. The only rule that applies to form time is that there is no rule, and teachers are seen to interpret their role as form teacher

idiosyncratically. Teachers routinely marked registers, but beyond that and underneath a mountain of external rhetoric, teachers adopted a personal approach. First let us look at the rhetoric behind form teacher role. This came from two directions. Firstly, staff consensus, which defined the role and therefore actions of form teachers, arrived at during pre-comprehensive meetings. This followed the traditional format. Officially then, the form tutor at Deangate was a coordinator/collator of information on pupil achievement and behaviour. They were seen as the people who advised, cajoled and interceded rather than as imposers of heavy sanctions. The form teacher played a prescribed role in the school's adopted discipline procedure and undertook certain administrative tasks. The second direction from which rhetoric came was hierarchical. The Head's policy, stated repeatedly, was: "Tutor time (form time), is prime teaching time." To this end a list of topics was drawn up by deputy Heads, to be covered during form time. Topics for first years included 'healthy exercise', 'teeth', 'cycling', 'bullying', 'being "successful" at school' and 'homework'.

Therefore there were two powerful bodies, staff consensus and the hierarchy, making 'ought' statements. But form teachers 'interpreted' laid down policy, procedures and duties and consequently the 'is' world was rather different. After observing form times and interviews with the teachers and pupils, it became clear that form teachers were 'doing their own thing', and taking it for granted that this should be the case. The Head's "tutor time is prime teaching time"

Photograph 7 Form Time



was accepted in theory by a minority of form teachers and practised by few. Many teachers were scathing:

When I saw the handouts on how to brush your teeth I threw it in the rubbish bin and kept the folders for project work.

Others saw the Head's policy as impractical:

I did some last year but this year I've been too busy. I've collected four lots of money, always reading out notices - it's never ending.

Many teachers said their energies were directed towards teaching and department needs and considered form time an extra. Administration was described as a time consuming task (see photograph 7), but most time and effort was given to occupying pupils in what Woods (1984a) calls 'occupational therapy':

I read from the Bible, usually moral stuff, David and Goliath stuff. Also Islam and sex but lately we've lightened things up having joke telling sessions.

Form teacher.

Another example of 'occupational therapy':

. . . and on Friday we have a reading from the vampire book. The kids love it.

At the extreme of non-compliance with either staff consensus or Head's policy, was a small group of teachers who saw

their role in school as solely teaching specialists subjects:

I'm not interested in pastoral care aspects. I have enough on my plate teaching. Anyway there is not enough time during form time and besides I'm not trained or skilled enough to deal with it.

However at the extreme of compliance we find a group of enthusiasts who adopted both staff consensus and Head's policy. This group would go the extra mile with their forms, carrying out, for example, a programme of induction for first year pupils. The majority of staff look a neutral stance: "I simply get talking to the kids. I know my kids backwards and that's the most important thing."

At Deangate form teachers did not question their right to disregard the Headmaster's stated policy, or that the classroom was a private domain. Although teachers as a body, wearing their official hat, took it for granted that the role of form tutor entailed a number of tasks to be performed, individually they did not question their right to take up or otherwise those 'official' tasks. Thereby setting up a paradoxical situation of conflict between public and private worlds.

### People

Individuals, taken on their own, may appear insignificant as an influence. However if considered collectively or cumulatively, their effect becomes significant. Teachers as

individuals enter a social situation predefined by contemporaries and predecessors. They work with 'in-situ' constraints of timetable, organisation, resources, building and expectations. It is taken for granted by actors and observers that individuals make sense of their role and situation. This section considers how teachers interpret and accommodate their everyday situations.

### Teacher as Actor

Research has found difficulty in portraying teachers negotiating their daily work. Usually the problem revolves around the relationship between 'role' and 'individuality', and research has taken either a theoretical social-psychological type stance or a descriptive atheoretical stance. Waller (1932) suggests that as a control mechanism successful teachers "know how to get on and off his high-horse rapidly" adding to teacher folklore which implies teachers are actors possessing personality separate from role. Bertold Brecht writes:

Observe, if you will, one thing: that the imitator never loses himself in his imitation. He never entirely transforms himself into the man he is imitating. He always remains the demonstrator, the one not involved.

(From: On everyday theatre)

My data suggest that separation of self from actor (sort of dual personality) usually taken for granted by teachers,

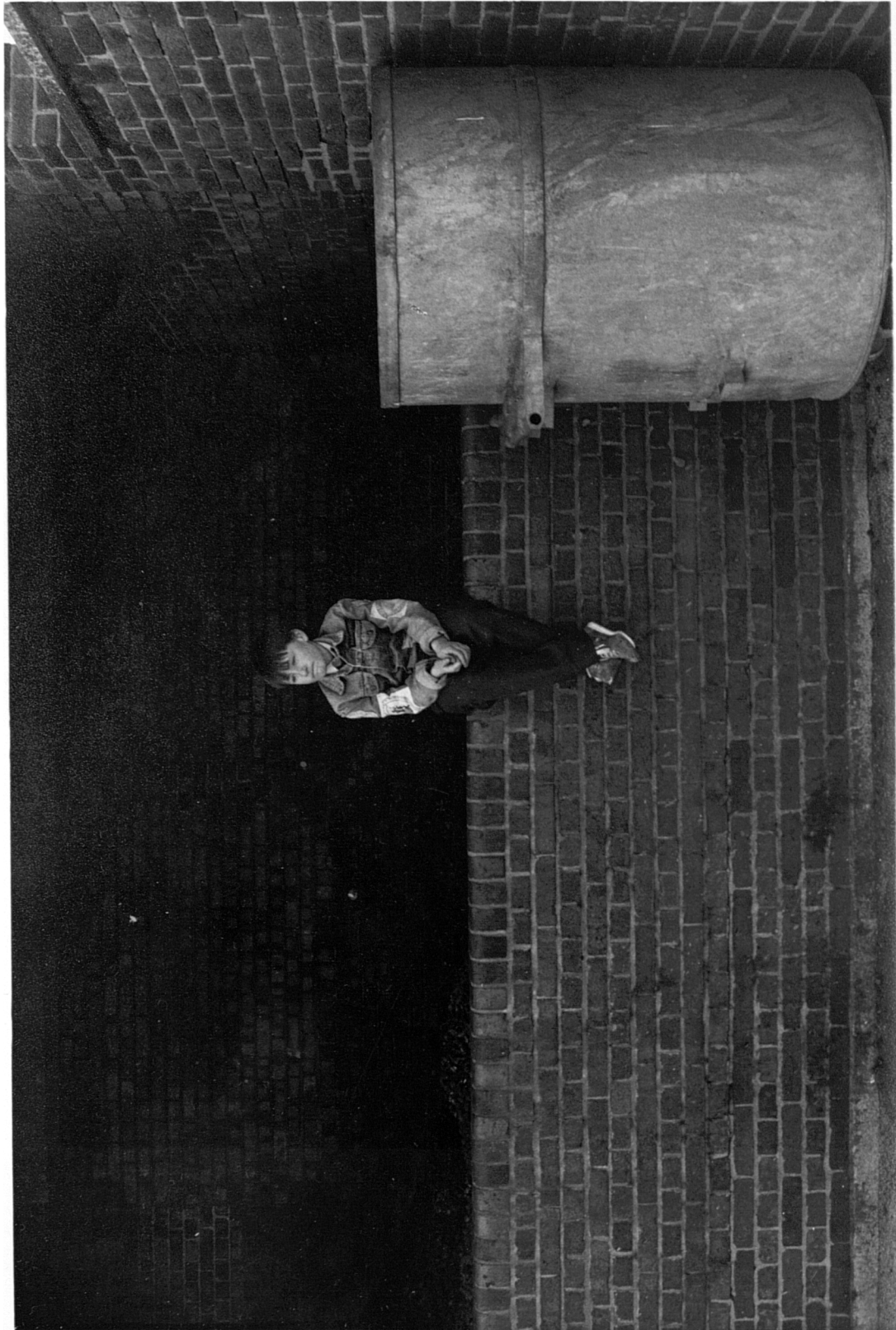
became questionable as they moved progressively away from the private world of classroom to the public world of, for example, morning assembly. Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that as part of their work, Deputy Heads were to silence pupils prior to the Head's entrance. They shouted loudly and aggressively. On a number of occasions, when I was recording the event, the Deputy Heads shouted at pupils then turned to me eyebrows raised and a concerned look and asked "Is that thing on?" pointing to the recorder. As though the act of shouting, although acceptable in a school context, was not acceptable outside that limited environment. Each occasion this reaction occurred I was reminded of Sartre's "Being and Nothingness" (1959) in which he says:

Someone eavesdropping, entirely absorbed in the problem of getting his ear to the keyhole, conscious of himself only in minimal 'non-thetic' way, in which he barely distinguishes himself from his surroundings. But . . . he hears footsteps . . . aware he is under observation. Immediately he begins to exist in a different way; he begins to see himself as an eavesdropper; he experiences himself and the other person together in a feeling of shame . . . the eavesdropper experiences the change that his internal feelings undergo at the moment when he is aware of being watched.

(page 259)

Satre's concern here was to describe the relationship between Beings-in-themselves (non conscious 'things') and Beings-for-themselves (conscious beings). But both

Photograph 8 Pupil on Walkabout





eavesdropper and Deputy Head are unquestioning of their work in private until their actions become public.

### Teacher as 'Deviant'

People differ from each other in their reactions to their social worlds. A person unwilling to accommodate the accepted, is called by 'insiders' a deviant. Deangate's deviant was a man called Amar who disliked the hierarchy, especially the Head, and the comprehensive philosophy: "I think the leadership is very weak . . . school needs to be efficiently run, requires discipline . . . not effective." Amar was a strong disciplinarian and talked enthusiastically about the old Grammar school's 'standard of excellence'. To demonstrate his distaste for the school, he did not attend departmental or staff meetings and spoke negatively about the school to parents. The Head and remainder of the staff accepted this as the acts of a deviant and it was unquestioned. The lower ability pupils who "wasted" Amar's time were ejected because they were "not interested in learning." Small groups of low ability pupils could be seen on walkabout around the school on Fridays (see photograph 8). Once again teachers accepted this and did not question the legitimacy of his acts. It was not until the ejected pupils began interfering with other classes in progress that teachers objected. An aspect of teachers' code had been transgressed. Amar had stated publicly his dislike for the school, refused to attend meetings and ejected pupils but only when his acts of deviance impinged directly upon others, was he deemed to have contravened an unspoken rule



**Photograph 9 A Deputy Head with Gun**

of the profession. At this point the previously unquestioned became questionable.

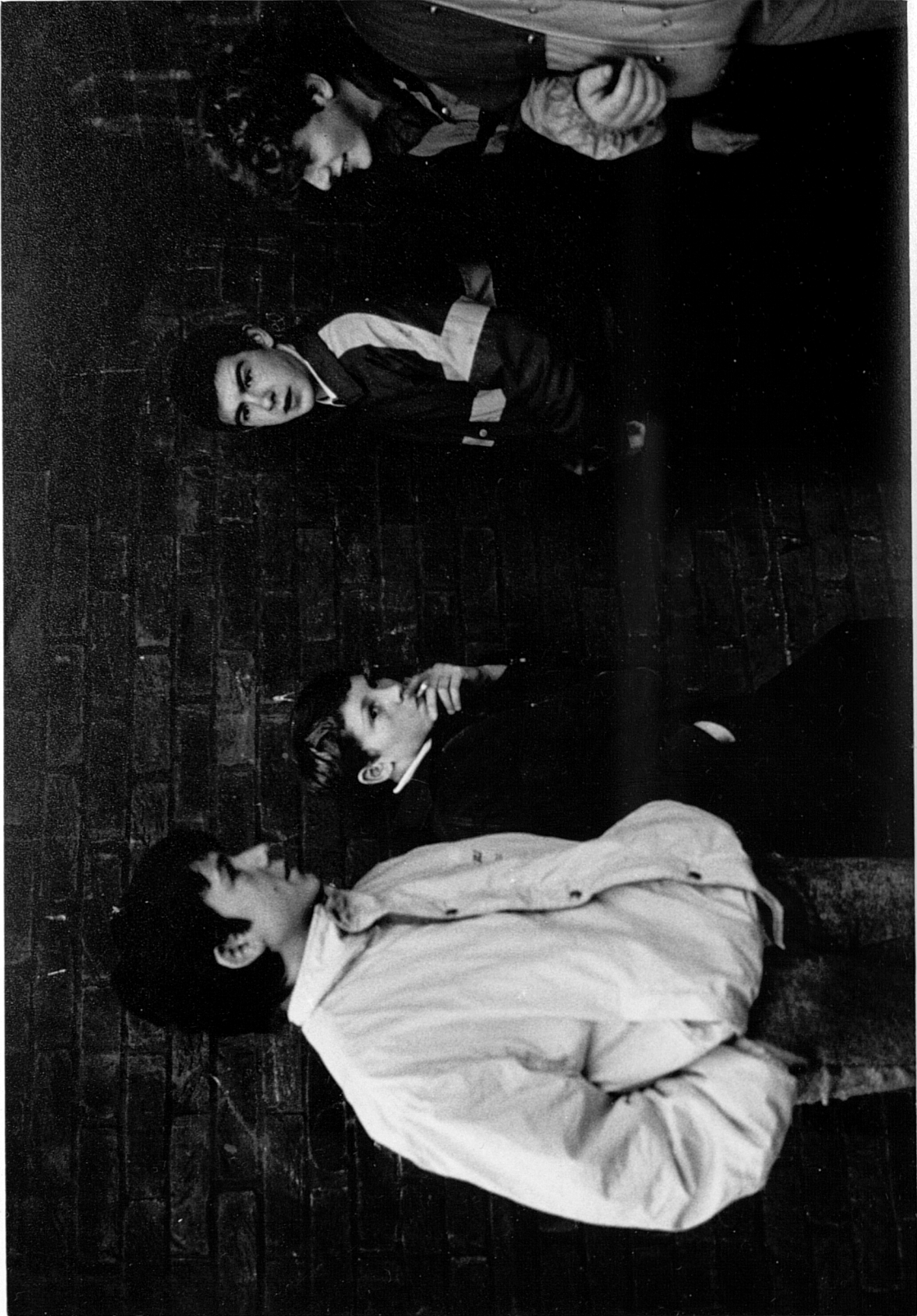
### Place

Finally I would like to consider 'place' in order to examine subjective taken for granted elements of schooling. By 'place' I mean a particular part of space, territory, location, haunt, neighbourhood, nook. I will begin by taking a cursory look at 'place' at Deangate to give an idea of the breadth of taken for granted 'places' in schools. This will be followed by an examination of how past research has used 'place' in schools with particular reference to how observations were made rather than what observations were made.

#### How do we know it's a school ?

How do we come to physically recognise a school? Deangate is surrounded by a sports field and buildings look institutional because of their prefabricated exterior - but still we cannot definitely state that this is a school. We enter the buildings and notice the plastic floor tiles and a rectangular manhole cover (see photograph 9) but still no differentiation between 'institution' and 'school'. What are unquestioned aspects of 'place' in schools lie within approximately thirty metres of the main entrance. They are: the secretary's office, the Head's and Deputy Heads' offices, pupils' work on the walls, a display case with pupils' work, trophies and cups. These basic taken for

Photograph 10  
SMOKER'S CORNER



granted elements, allow us to state that this building constitutes a structure we call school.

### Pupil Space

Other 'places' in the school are clues to the school's atmosphere. Standing in a corridor at morning break one cannot fail to be impressed by the charge of pupils and subsequent 'scrum' around the fire doors. This observation led me to probe the Head who acknowledged: "Yes, we are top of the league in the city as far as breaking fire door windows are concerned . . . we seem to have a problem of too much rough and tumble in the corridors."

Knowledge of pupils' social world is gained by observation of playground activity. Deangate's play area 'red square' was notable for lack of medium or large soccer balls. Pupils explained that big balls take up too much space and interfere with others play 'space', hence a predominance of small tennis balls. Thus, tacit informal rules came about such that red square was designated a small ball area, whilst big ball games took place elsewhere.

At Deangate School (for that matter the majority of schools in Britain) groups of pupils will be found puffing away in 'smokers' corner', before, during and occasionally after school (see photograph 10). Deangate's Smokers' have developed an in-group set of informal rules, a sort of folklore, which all understand. Pupils who smoked a long way from school buildings or in toilets were considered

'wimpish'. Pupils who took risks and were more open in their smoking habits were 'macho'. Smokers' corners tended to be L-shaped, blind spots, and situated such that escape was possible when the designated sentry signalled the presence of a teacher. During the initial months of the school's existence, smokers' corners were located some way from the main building. As the year progressed their position moved to the main building and later to open smoking on school steps and playground. Pupils said they were 'just trying it on' to see how teachers would react to their breaking of school rules using what Woods (1979) calls 'knife edge strategies'. Because Deangate was in the process of becoming a school, both pupils and staff were going through a period of socialization. According to Berger and Luckman (1967) this entails:

. the internalization of institutional or institution based 'sub-worlds' . . . the acquisition of role-specific knowledge . . . and tacit understandings.

(Page 72)

Smokers had organised their social world and were testing out the boundaries of the teachers' world which directly applied to them - rules and regulations. Teachers were also organising their social (and working) world, but were peripherally aware of smokers' corners. They knew who smoked and where they smoked and took their existence in school for granted: "It's a fact of life that its going to happen . . . you'll never get rid of it entirely." The teachers accepted that part of their role was to show disapproval but even by the second year of the school's existence, no policy existed

for unified action. To teachers the key words were unified action and priority:

. . . it's working out a policy that we can all follow. Obviously it has to come when everyone's got things (departments, subject concerns etc.) running that we tackle that sort of thing. (Teacher)

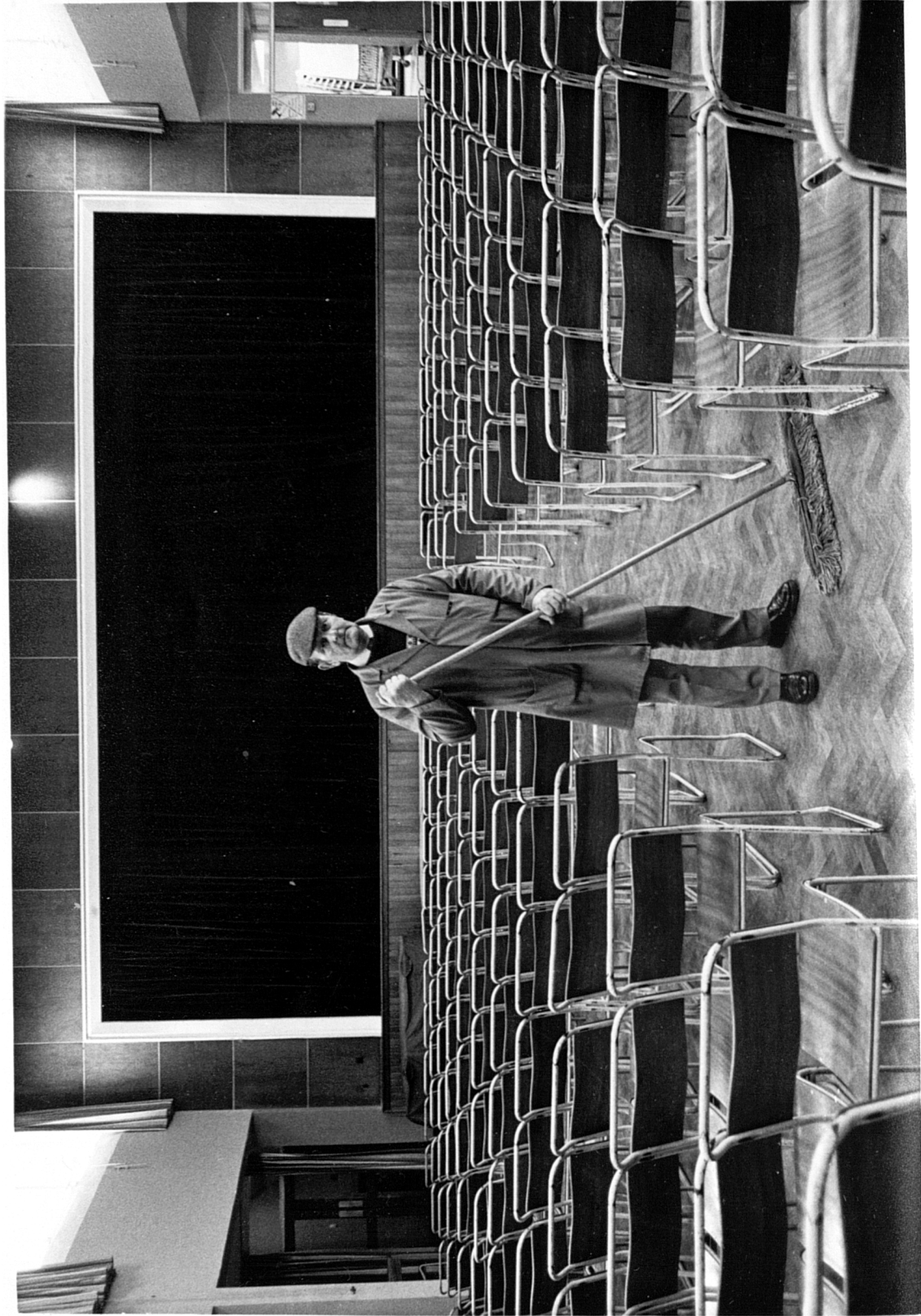
In the meantime teachers adopted an alternative strategy of observing, but made no concerted effort to stop smoking.:

I think its better to find them. If you start closing one (smokers' corner) they'll only go and find another. These are accessible. If you close them down they're going to end way up over there (sports field) and you'll never get to them. If we don't tackle it soon there will be a real problem later.

(Deputy Head)

The first feature we note from this data is the taken for granted element within each group, staff and pupil. It is unquestioned that pupils will smoke and break rules, that staff see as an implicit obligation they should exert influence to stop smoking and finally that a unified effort is required to make such action effective. We are sensitized to the notions of 'implicit obligation', 'unity of action' and 'rules and rule breaking' as unquestioned and therefore taken for granted aspects of school. The second feature, is concerned with how actors make sense of their social world. Pupils have become 'deviant' or 'conformist', organised folklore within an in-group and have tested boundaries of

Photograph 11  
CARETAKER IN THE MAIN HALL





Photograph 12  
MUHAMMED'S FIRST DAY





Photograph 13  
SENT OUT

other in-groups (teachers). Teachers are seen to have priorities (of which dealing with smokers is low), values and attitudes - 'we know where smokers are, it's bad and we will eventually tackle the problem'. Taken for granted 'place' can tell us much about the nature of school.

### A Place as Ritual

Arguably the prime spot in a school from a researcher's point of view is the main hall (see photograph 11). Rows of cheap tubular chairs and curtained stage are surrounded by a vast array of cultural symbols - paintings of past Heads and war memorials which add a historical dimension. These symbols usually mean little to present staff and pupils. Notice in the photograph 12 - Muhammed's first day at school - how he sits in the hall far removed from the culture, values and attitudes which surround him. To him the hall is impersonal, cold and above all institutional.

Pupils are occasionally removed or sent out of classrooms for misdemeanours (see photograph 13). Usually this entails standing outside the classroom door. The hall at Deangate was used for pupil removal but only after prior negotiation between the Headmaster and teachers concerned, or as direct result of confrontation between Head and pupil. For this reason 'sent to the hall' was deemed high on the punishment scale by staff and pupils. Of course the ultimate 'place' to be sent in this form of retribution was outside the Head's office.

## Place and Educational Research

'Place' is taken for granted not only by teachers and parents but also by researchers. Here I want to illustrate how past research, both empirical and phenomenological, has contributed to our understanding of school. However, it must be said that on the whole research has ignored 'place' perhaps because it is seen as inconsequential, which I believe is not the case and which the data in this chapter seem to confirm.

'Place', subjective by nature, involves elements which do not lend themselves to statistical methods, nor necessarily empirical methods of research. Since quantitative research does not study concerns that they cannot measure, very little is found within this particular style. An exception is Rutter et al's 15,000 hours (1979) in which it was suggested that school buildings had little, if any influence, on the quality of education. Qualitative research has in the past placed emphasis on what it considered either key or influential features of schooling. Many categories which fit neither area are rejected as unworthy of consideration. However, ethnographers apply an additional category of 'informative' data into which a concern like 'place' is acceptable. Evan's (1974) work is an example. He considered the varying patterns of Heads' rooms and suggested they represented five degrees of authoritarianism. Under a sub heading of 'Institutional geo-politics' Ball (1983) discusses the distribution within a staffroom of geo-political groups: "There are often fixed seats and corners

for departments or political or social confederates" (page 84). He goes on to consider the playground: "There are those groups who 'hang out' behind bicycle sheds, in the long grass . . ." (page 84). Kohl (1970) takes a more subjective view of 'place':

It is no accident that spacial memories are strong. The placement of objects in space is not arbitrary and rooms represent in physical form the spirit and souls of places and institutions. A teacher's room tells us something about who he is and a great deal about what he is doing.

(Page 35)

What Evans, Ball and Kohl have in common is their concern for information or clues which add to their understanding of selected issues. Obviously such clues cannot be said to offer conclusive evidence, and in some research circles they may not even be considered evidence. However what is important is not what they see but how they see. In the Case Records which follow (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8) I will base evidence on both empirical and phenomenological observation. I intend to use both since they offer a related but different perspective on the same evidence. Empirical evidence perceives a phenomenon as it immediately appears to the senses and adds reason by applying social typology. Although my observations will take a similar vein, I will make, where possible, observations which appear to participants consciousness. This entails seeking actors' interpretations of everyday school.

## Summary

School is taken for granted by both actors and observers. This chapter explored the notion of taken for granted by exploring various aspects of school under the sub-headings: Tradition; Day to Day; People; and Place. The objective of this chapter was to demonstrate not only the importance and the meaning of taken for granted, but also the significance of taking as problematic those aspects of school which are taken for granted. As the thesis unfolds it will be seen that taken for granted may be applied in two ways: to 'sameness', as an instrument which helps us unpack those parts of school not questioned by participants and which form the foundation stones of school; as an aide to understanding the meaning participants give to events and interactions which contribute to Deangate's 'difference'. Both applications will be found in the chapters which follow.

Introduction

In chapter 4 I explored the notion of 'taken for granted' in order to demonstrate that by considering the everyday activities of Deangate School, we come to understand what constitutes school and Deangate School in particular. The intention of this chapter is to continue the theme of rendering aspects of school as 'problematic', by considering formal teacher interaction.

One of the difficulties in a study of the nature of school is deciding what to observe. In one sense it exists everywhere, pervading the very fabric of the institution. In a second sense it may be best illustrated by observing those aspects which are most influential. Bearing in mind the second point I am assuming that in a 'new' school setting about defining itself, teachers are prime actors at the hub of a wheel of influence. It is teachers, individually and in groups, who are primarily involved with the dynamic process of defining roles, attitudes and meanings which fashion the institution and determine its character. Deangate School was in a fortuitous state for a study of this kind. Its newness, its raw state, going through a process of moulding and being moulded, was a great advantage in understanding the nature of a school. In meetings staff, like pupils in the playground, were attempting to establish 'territory', to relate their wants and needs, and to make their 'mark'. The

apparent 'newness' of such occasions is not to be confused with new beliefs or ways of working. Participants come with past experiences of other situations and other schools and already possess values, attitudes and expectations which underpin their actions. This brings me to the second assumption, that formal teacher interaction, especially 'meetings', are not only pertinent, but a rich source of data, where ideology, philosophy, values, priorities and power are exposed and therefore best observed. Although a description of official views (of teachers and of meetings) will be given, emphasis throughout is placed on phenomenological evidence. Hence priority may be given to exploring reasons for actions, of hidden agendas and informal interactions which take place at the periphery of meetings.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In part one, three examples of formal teacher interaction, selected for their illustrative value, are considered - assembly, parents' evening and a job interview. Four basic issues arise out of section one - **evolution, process, performance and micro-politics**. The theme '**process**' will be taken up in part two, and '**performance and micro-politics**' in part three. **Evolution** will be discussed in Chapter 10.

### Part One - Three Examples

Like many schools, Deangate held a large number and a considerable variety of meetings/formal interactions. The



diagram (fig 1) shows the large network of meetings in the school. This is not unusual for schools in general (see Richardson 1973, Evans 1985). Deangate's meetings range from external, historical meetings, to Speech Days and Carol Services. In Chapter 4, when considering the school's traditions I took morning assembly as 'problematic'. Now I want to explore school assembly a little further and also consider parents' evening and a job interview in the same manner.

### Assembly

Deangate's assemblies involved ritual, performance (see Goffman 1956) and control. They included elements of tradition, important to the Head, such as the Remembrance Day Service when a minute's silence was observed and the last post sounded. However, at irregular intervals and at the end of each term, the staff made a special contribution. These occasions were important to the pupils and the staff. The importance for teachers to make a success of such occasions is outlined by Yapp (1987): "Make a mess of assembly and you lose a tremendous amount of Kudos. Do it well and the fatter, richer pay scales are almost within your grasp" (page 70). Whereas the day to day importance centred around the Head's performance and the issue of control outlined in the previous Chapter, a second significant feature which contributed to the school's 'difference' was staff involvement especially at the end of term assembly. The two teachers, shown in the photograph 'Staff Involvement in Assembly' (see photograph 5) performed

Photograph 14 Parents' Evening



Photograph 15 Hand Flapping and Eye Contact



regularly. The message they were attempting to put across I found difficult to understand and pupils I questioned afterwards found similar problems. But the content was not significant. The sense of fun generated by them was infectious. The pupils appreciated that teachers were making fun of themselves and saw a side of their personalities normally hidden or suppressed. The pupils could identify with the humorous fun-loving side of their character. As one pupil explained: "It makes teachers look almost human." The photograph shows the joy on the pupils' faces, and at the end of each term when a special performance was given, they left school for their holidays laughing and giggling at the teachers' antics. Therefore, assembly at Deangate consisted of two important taken for granted elements - as an everyday ritual, and as a special occasion instrumental in forming Deangate's special character.

#### Parents' Evening

Both teacher and parent put on a 'performance' (see Goffman, 1956). The two photographs of a parents' evening (photographs 14 and 15) show two aspects which are common to schools. Firstly, the formality of the occasion. Following the Head's words of welcome, parents move quickly to the rows of chairs provided. English, science and mathematics teachers are usually inundated, with smaller queues for religious education and home economics. Secondly, the intensity of interaction. Parents and teachers begin their meetings with handshakes. The teacher then looks through his mark book to ascertain pupil's progress. This is followed by

a complicated routine of hand flapping and intense eye contact, reminiscent of the mating ritual of Great Crested Grebes.

The parents of children who were 'succeeding' at the school attended, whereas parents of pupils deemed to be discipline problems or low attainers often stayed away. If a parent, whose daughter/son was a problem child of Deangate, attended, by the end of the evening they were 'sagging' under the weight of teachers' comments. A middle class parent cabal used the occasion of parents' evening to lobby the Head on issues of homework, standards and the problem of supply teachers.

Naturally as Deangate evolved it introduced and refined its rules, organisation and systems. The initial system adopted for parents' evening was changed during a Head of Department meeting. The idea of an interview timetable, put forward by 'golden boy' (a nickname given by teachers to a new young Head of Department), was originally suggested six months earlier by an inexperienced female Head of Department, but not taken up. The reasons why the proposal was acceptable on the second occasion and not on the first are difficult to determine. Tentatively one could attribute acceptability to the way the idea was put forward, or the status of the teacher concerned. The female Head of Department, unsure of herself, made a suggestion. Jay (1976) makes the point:

The trouble is that suggestions are much easier to

ridicule than facts or opinions . . . a suggestion will provoke the negative reaction . . . if there is any status-jostling going on at a meeting, it is all too easy to use the occasion of someone's making a suggestion as an opportunity to take him down a peg.

(page 29)

On the other hand 'golden boy' presented his **opinion** in a pre-planned speech, from which the meeting could see immediate advantages. A second possible explanation for take up of 'golden boy's' idea could be as Schutz (1963) suggests, that the new male Head of Department disturbed the 'taken for granted world' of Deangate, which was not possible for the in-situ female Head of Department. Thirdly, perhaps it was the school's experience of working without such a system which prompted the move, i.e. a matter of timing.

### Job Interviews

Like many aspects of Deangate's organisation, the approach to interviewing applicants for vacant positions, evolved rapidly then stabilised to become a ritual by consensus. During the school's first year a number of teachers left for a variety of reasons, which enabled the process of interviewing candidates to be refined over a short period. For the position of Head of Biology, Deangate received 111 applications.

The interviewing panel consisted of the Head, a science Advisor, Head of Science Faculty, and a parent governor.

They agreed on questions to ask and a system whereby they alternated, asking a total of three questions each. Most of the questions were concerned with teaching biology or leadership of the department. Although during formal discussion, the panel weighed the pro's and con's of each candidate, other 'hidden' criteria emerged later as a basis for assessment. Later in the staffroom the Head commented: "He obviously involves himself in a school, with soccer and many after school interests.", (speaking of the successful candidate). Personality was important too. The Head said of the applicant from Banbury - "He was too conceited." The parent governor wrote of the same man (in a note passed during the interview) - "I wouldn't buy a secondhand car from this guy." Another candidate lost credibility because, as the Head explained later: "He was not supportive of his own school and tended to run it down . . . now I think that loyalty to his school was very important and I told him he had done his case no good at all." This candidate had contravened the Head's code of professional conduct.

The person appointed fulfilled the requirements of the interviewing panel. The candidate held a Cambridge degree, could offer after school activities, and most importantly, held similar ideologies to the Head. The new Head of Biology quickly became influential in Head of Department meetings; he was asked by the Head to evaluate 'the role of the Head in curriculum change' as part of Deangate's triennial review, and during his first term gave an impressive

performance 'fronting' assembly. No wonder teachers subsequently called him 'golden boy'. Looking across these three examples of formal teacher interaction of assembly, parents' evening and job interviews, a number of tentative issues emerge. In each case 'performance' (see Goffman 1956) as a form of control (assembly), or because or of adoption of a formal attitude (parents evening and job interview), act as a tool of separation, creating distance between individuals and groups. In such situations people use 'masks' to hide thoughts and ideas which they feel are inappropriate. But individuals need such barriers to separate, keep apart. If stripped away we have what Laing (1967) terms 'no thing':

If we take away everything, all clothes, the disguises, the crutches, the grease paint, also common projects, the games that provide the pretexts for the occasion that masquerade as meetings . . . if we could meet. . . what would separate us?

(page 33)

Teachers need to relate, to interact, in order to construct their everyday worlds and 'performance' is a key to that existence, and a necessity. In this sense 'performance' is a traditional element of interaction, taken for granted element, of schooling. In assembly, where staff participation and humour became an established ritual, 'performance' acted as an element, which differentiated



Deangate from other schools. Therefore in this sense 'performance' contributed to 'difference'.

A second issue is evolution. In each of the cases, routines and systems were refined, and the process of refinement was not always based on reason but on perceptions of past experiences. The systems and processes which did evolve in the first two years of Deangate's existence came out of a mix of power and consensus of those involved.

Finally, during parents' evening and job interviews, there operates a hidden agenda. There are layers of interaction, ulterior motives and concealed criteria. These are unspoken and accepted as normal practice. For example, it is acceptable for an interviewing panel to discuss a candidate in terms of leadership ability, pedagogy and knowledge of GCSE in formal discussion in the Head's office, yet in informal settings, the corridors or staffroom, use different criteria in discussing a candidate. This is the arena of social propriety and micro-politics.

Four issues arise out of the cases I have described - **evolution, performance, process and micro-politics.** Evolution will be taken up later in the thesis. Process, performance and micro-politics are considered in Parts 2 and 3 of this chapter.

### Part Two - Process

A major part of this section is taken up with a discussion

of meetings - a major arena for formal interaction. I will describe four of Deangate's key meetings - staff (morning) briefings, staff meetings, managerial meetings and Head of Department meetings.

Very few case studies of schools have considered meetings in any depth. Ball (1987) draws his evidence from disparate sources to provide a basis for analysis of the micro-political framework of school organisation. He draws a distinction between meetings and committees. But in doing so Ball has taken for granted that schools and teachers act in accordance with unspoken rules which differentiate meetings from committees (see Ball, page 237). This was not the case at Deangate where some meetings were conducted like committees and some committees like meetings. The difference between meetings was considerable compared with Ball's definition of difference between meetings and committees. I shall use the term 'meetings' to encompass committees and working parties and concentrate on the process within and between 'meetings'. Specifically I will consider the process of key meetings in terms of their various roles, their inter-relationship and teachers' perceptions of them.

The Head of Deangate decided what and when meetings took place. During re-organisation he stipulated a need for staff briefings, staff meetings, Head of Department meetings and managerial meetings and designated working parties to consider aspects of the new school in more detail. Within

one year of the school's existence the number of meetings had trebled, mainly instigated by or through the Head.

### Staff Briefing

Staff briefing took place each morning before school. The Head gave out information and explanations of the coming day's events. Routine matters were emphasised, imminent dates noted, recalcitrant pupils were asked to be sent to the Head's office and a whole host of reminders reiterated.

Some older teachers did not bother to attend, whilst younger teachers who missed the occasion were admonished by the Head. The overarching feature of morning briefing was the lighthearted atmosphere spiced with occasional humour. The Head often recounted a humorous episode of the previous day and the staff would join in with various 'quips'. This meeting was very important to the Head and that it should take place each morning was not a matter to be questioned or debated.

### Staff Meetings

Staff meetings usually took place twice a term (no set pattern) sometimes more often when important issues arose. Items for the agenda came mainly from the Head and occasionally from staff. The meeting took on a variety of roles - controversial issues were discussed, complaints aired, suggestions put forward and occasionally decisions made. Staff meetings were contentious affairs. Teachers generally complained about lack of consultation or a

decision they did not like, but their dissatisfaction was voiced after meetings in corridors or in the privacy of classrooms. The Head was often nervous during staff meetings, especially if delicate issues were on the agenda, although he maintained an air of calm authority. Only in staff meetings did the Head use his 'squashing reflex' (see Jay, 1976), if a stated opinion was considered threatening to his school.

#### Head of Department Meetings

Head of Department meetings took place at least twice, sometimes three or four times each term. Here a wide range of organisational and routine matters were discussed. Ideas, decisions and methods of implementation were raised, again the agenda coming primarily from the Head. As a smaller group than staff meetings, and a more equitable status, discussion appeared more open and frank.

#### Management meetings

The management meeting took place twice each week, for a period of 35 minutes. The Head and his three Deputies discussed a wider range of issues than the other meetings. There was no set agenda at these sessions and discussion centred around crisis issues, planning for imminent meetings, special occasions or decision making. Although the majority of issues came from the Head, two of the three Deputy Heads also raised points.

Looking across these four meetings, a variety of features can be seen. The most obvious being that teachers expect to attend and take part in meetings, even though they often take place outside official school time. In many European countries expectations are quite different. Two other conspicuous features are 'place' and 'size' of the group. Meetings took place on territory considered appropriate to the consensus. This meant staff meetings and briefings took place in the staffroom; Head of Department meetings on neutral ground - the library; and managerial meetings in the Head's office. 'Place' was also a matter of convenience - the domestic science department, in keeping with the school's sense of fun, claimed they met in the ladies toilet. The size of groups varied, which in turn affected process. Weindling and Earley (1987) report:

The large number of staff present was recognised as an inhibiting factor which meant most people were reluctant to speak.

(page 175)

Their observation of staff meetings was born out by my data of Deangate meetings which were unwieldy and covered a limited range of topics. Richardson (1973) makes the point more strongly:

. . . they are boring and time-wasting because the sheer size of the groups prevents people from speaking effectively in such meetings.

(page 29)

Head of Department meetings involved twenty people, but perhaps because of their experience and similar status these meetings were more open and free flowing, and consequently did not draw the criticisms levelled at staff meetings. Jay (1976) makes the point:

The value and success of a committee meeting are seriously threatned if too many people are present. Between 4 and 7 is generally ideal, 10 is tolerable and 12 is outside the limit.

(page 12)

Only managerial meetings operated within Jay's 'outside limit' yet it did not function as a committee in the accepted (and Ball's, see page 243) sense of the word, but more akin to an informal chat of matters in hand.

Meetings also varied in small ways. Head of Department meetings usually started on time and finished at pre-ordained time, whereas managerial meetings invariably started ten minutes late - "Sorry I'm late I had to deal with a girl in sick bay." (female Deputy Head), or finished early - "I'll have to go in fifteen minutes. I have to take my wife to the station" (Head). The rules of the game changed for morning briefing. As previously mentioned teachers, usually young or new to the school, who missed or arrived late to the briefing were liable to a 'ticking off' from the Head.

If we look outside schools, at industry or commerce, we discover that meetings are given greater significance. Like other organisations, meetings in schools are an integral part of the management structure. But incumbent in school tradition, and taken for granted, meetings are 'fitted in' at the end of the day when teachers are tired or during a non contact period. If such practice is compared with organisations operating outside school culture, with different codes of practice, we can appreciate how idiosyncratic schools are in this respect. Charles Handy (1984) looking at meetings in schools from an industrial management perspective states:

And meetings - the meetings that take up 69 per cent of the time of senior managers in large organisations - when do they happen? On Wednesday afternoons, you are told, after school, at lunch-time, in break or before 9 am: That is, when the staff are not teaching, in what many teachers see as their own time.

(page 18)

Industry may be dismayed at the role meetings play in schooling when compared with their own situations, but teachers do not question this aspect of their professional practice. Only when teachers step outside of school codes of practice are alternative customs observed.

An important issue to arise out of data concerned with meetings, was their role. During the pre-comprehensive period a wide range of meetings, committees and working parties were set up in order to establish basic rules,

regulations and procedures for the new school. Consequently, on paper, Deangate made numerous decisions about discipline, reporting, profiling, and the curriculum. However, although Deangate began its first year with a detailed outline of practice, for example an agreed homework structure, no consensus was sought on the role of the various meetings and committees. Issues like - how often meetings take place; what sort of information should each meeting handle?; a machinery for adding to an agenda; what topics or information should be passed between meetings? None of these were in place but this is not unusual. Richardson (1973) mentions a teacher at Nailsea School who posed the question: ". . . what, in relation to the full staff meeting, is the role of the department Head's meeting" (page 271). Richardson goes on to say that eighteen months later the Head, Denys John, requested that a whole meeting be devoted to a discussion of the role of the senior staff meeting (Nailsea was established eight years previously).

One possible explanation for Deangate not defining the role of its meetings could stem from the atmosphere generated during initial pre-comprehensive meetings. At this time staff worked 'for the good of the new school', and sought to be positive by not probing (see Chapter 3). Also the Head emphasised teamwork, consultation and communication. These may have given those early meetings a false sense of mutuality. As Deangate passed through its honeymoon phase, towards the end of the first year, so problems of 'role' began to surface.



A second explanation for the school's assumption that the role of meetings did not require discussion or to be defined, may be that of an unspoken acceptance of teachers' previous knowledge and experience. However, staff came from a variety of backgrounds, and held differing views on what constituted 'role'. Stated simply Deangate did not consider defining a 'role' policy because the matter was not seen to be problematic.

The taken for granted role of meetings contributed to a number of difficulties. Three principal problem areas were identified: jurisdiction, i.e. which matters should be referred to which meeting; boundary - issues of interaction within and between meetings; and finally in terms of decision making.

The Head cultivated an atmosphere of shared purpose, of teamwork and a sharing of knowledge and experience. Although it was generally understood and accepted by staff that it was the Head's prerogative to make decisions, since some decisions were offered for the staff to make and others were not, staff were confused. Confusion was compounded by their past (but recent) experience of meetings and decision making. Teachers at Deangate often reflected on meetings in previous schools:

At least they're better here than I've known in the past, where everybody express their views and its drawn to a close by the Head who has said 'right this

is the decision I've decided upon', which he'd decided beforehand . . . here what happens is that all your views are aired and generally nothing is decided at the end of it.

But on the whole the staff were confused by the lack of articulated policy of role of meetings. One Head of Department reflected staff discontent when he commented:

I think it should be said a bit clearer just what the point of a staff meeting was for. If it was said that they were for the Head to collect the views of people and not make decision from that then I think everybody would be happier with the situation.

On hearing these comments one wonders why such dissatisfaction was not raised in meetings. It was as though there exists an implicit rule, that says teachers should complain to each other and not to the hierarchy directly. This leads me to other meeting taboos. That teachers did not air their feelings on roles of meetings was only a small aspect of the broader issue of what was acceptable to raise in meetings and what was taboo. Outside of an unspoken boundary lay a host of major and minor concerns which were never raised in a formal meeting. For example Deangate, a new school, had yet to establish, clarify or implement, various rules and regulations decided upon at pre-comprehensive meetings. During the second term, staffroom talk often centred around interpretation of school rules. There was a feeling of lack of unity caused by varied interpretation. Comments like: "We are pulling in different

directions." and "I feel lost in a vacuum. I'm teaching in a vacuum." were heard many times in the staffroom. Another set of problems arose because of difficulty in implementing non-existent, non-functioning or impractical school systems like administration, discipline and exam timetabling. Yet, despite an overwhelming consensus of feeling on these matters, none were raised in meetings. Only much later through informal interaction did they emerge.

The question of what was acceptable to be broached at meetings raises a second issue. If it was taboo to raise certain issues, it was equally taboo to transgress those implicit rules. The breaking of the mould was a rare event. An example of such a happening took place during morning briefing, when the Head was following his usual practice of giving information and explanation of day to day events to staff. However, the morning following an intense Head of Department meeting, the rule was broken. A Head of Department reported to a scale one teacher in his department that broad banding was to go ahead despite his protest. The scale one teacher, an advocate of mixed ability teaching, expressed a desire to raise the issue again during morning briefing. The Head of Department advised him against it saying: "No, the Head wouldn't like that. It's a time when he tells us things not the other way around." The Head was startled by the scale one teacher's questions the following morning, obviously surprised that such an issue should be raised at that time. He deflected the questioning by suggesting the issue be raised at an appropriate committee -

a tactic Ball (1987) describes:

A committee is a cul-de-sac down which ideas are lured  
and then quietly strangled.

(page 243)

The timing of meetings caused concern amongst Heads of Department and the hierarchy at the school. The morning briefing was a case in point. The Head's practice was to meet duty staff in his office in order to brief them before they went out on duty. The Head then carried out a second briefing five minutes later to the remaining teachers. As part of an attempt to tighten up the start of day, it was decided to hold just one briefing in the staffroom five minutes earlier than usual. However, there was a problem of teachers arriving late. Eventually briefing reverted back to its original form. The hierarchy considered it prudent to revert to the original system rather than attempt to change the staff's pattern of behaviour. A similar pattern occurred in other situations. For example the hierarchy originally envisaged a close relationship between Head of Department meetings and staff. The idea being that individual departments would hold meetings during which they would discuss points raised at the Head of Department meetings and raise issues which would go forward to future Head of Department meetings. But in practice problems occurred as a Deputy Head points out:

. . . there was a feeling amongst staff that they

weren't being consulted and that's why we've now put on extra staff meetings following a Heads of Department meeting.

Once again the problem arose because some teachers were not fulfilling their prescribed role, and the solution, to put on extra staff meetings, meant that the hierarchy chose to alter process rather than attempt to change staff behaviour.

Part two took as problematic 'process' aspects of formal interaction. The issues arising contribute small but important pieces to the nature of a school. Meetings reflect, in a micro context, much of what takes place in the school and sensitises us to elements we may otherwise overlook.

It is clear that participants take many things for granted in meetings. For example, power/control of the Head is unquestioned, as are codes of practice, and both are factors of 'sameness'. But we have seen that taken for grantedness can be breached and the timing and reason for breaching has implications for understanding how a school defines itself. Pre-reorganisation meetings were noted for their camaraderie and agreement which continued until the end of the second term. Thus the question which needs to be addressed is one of **evolution** and in particular why, in Deangate's case, did equanimity change to occasional discord: This point will be taken up in Chapter 10. The reason for breaching of taken for grantedness can be seen in terms of **critical events**

With the use of the term 'micro-politics' comes an unwelcome inclination to view actions through tainted glasses. For example, if we prefix 'language' with 'political' we may arrive at George Orwell's (1950) definition:

Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful, a murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

(page 93)

It is not my intention to suggest teachers at Deangate were involved in 'insider-dealings' or machiavellism. Unfortunately much recent research on micro-politics of organisation of schools (e.g. Ball 1987, Hoyle 1982, Sparkes 1987) have emphasized deviousness and drama which bring an unacceptable bias to everyday events and actions of teacher interaction and school organisation. The Deangate staff would not score high in machiavellian tests (see Christie and Geis 1970; Domelsmith and Dietch 1978), and their day to day activities cannot be construed wholly in terms of concealment, calculation or gamesmanship. These words are used too often in contemporary discussion of micro-politics of education. Certainly, as I will demonstrate, tactics and strategies are used by teachers in meetings, but often tempered by functions of 'tact and circumspection' (Goffman 1961, page 69). Teachers at Deangate rarely made predetermined political manoeuvres, and many would disclaim any notion of deviousness. Indeed much of so called micro-

politics are unconscious acts of teachers going about their daily business.

In situations of formality, teachers act carefully and are more guarded in their speech and action. It is a time when impressions are given to and received from others. This element of teacher performance is well described by Samson (in Goffman 1956) in his observations of Preedy, an Englishman on holiday in Spain:

There were alternative rituals. The first involved the stroll that turns into a run and a drive straight into the water, thereafter smoothing into a strong splashless crawl towards the horizon. Quite suddenly he would turn on his legs, somehow thus showing that he could have swum further had he wanted to, and then he would stand up a quarter out of the water for all to see who it is.

(page 17)

Of course in schools, teacher 'performance' rarely runs as smoothly as for Preedy. Interaction with other teachers, pupils, parents, coupled with constraints from outside school, places individuals under pressure and inevitably influences 'performance'. Laing (1967) points to the wide range of influences when he writes:

. . . we are separated and joined by our different perspectives, educations, backgrounds, organisations, group loyalties, affiliations, ideologies, socio-economic class, interests, temperament . . .

(page 33)

Initially, I will discuss **'teacher talk'** since it constitutes a sizable element, in terms of volume if not significance, of meetings. This is followed by **'decision making'**, which at first considers whether decision making takes place in meetings, and goes on to examine **'influences'**, and **'tactics and strategies'**.

### Teacher Talk

Ball (1987) emphasizes 'set pieces' and 'prepared presentations'; Baily (1977) sees committees as 'competition between strong men'; and Sparkes (1987) considers 'rhetorical justification as a strategy' within meetings. The issues they raise are important, but I believe they place too much emphasis on the drama of interaction to the detriment of normal day to day events of meetings, and consequently skew their findings towards an outsider's perspective.

The majority of teachers' meetings at Deangate are taken up, not with power struggles and political manoeuvring, but with 'teacher talk'. The content of 'teacher talk' at Deangate ranged from school uniforms and duty teams to 'should afternoon break be 15 or 20 minutes', and the use of merit points. The function of 'talk' was to act as a clearing house, where tasks were decided and allotted, the trivial daily functioning of the institution debated. Swidler (1979) considers 'teachers talk' in meetings in his school as long and exhausting opportunities to reaffirm



collective solidarity:

Teachers took every opportunity to prolong discussion, suggest new complications, and turn practical decisions into occasions for exploring basic values, goals and commitments.

(page 84)

Folklore would have us believe that 'teacher talk' is an occupational disease. Handy (1984), rather unfairly perhaps, presses home this point when he writes:

Anecdote has it that teachers are poor guests at a party - they continue teaching over the food.

(page 23)

There was a large variety of topics, for example uniforms, which when raised, automatically induced a dozen teachers to give their opinion on the matter. Another dozen, who although not particularly interested in the topic, would be enticed into debate in order to speak against what they considered to be an ill considered statement made across the table. Teachers came to meetings - Staff and Head of Department meetings, and working parties - generally speaking, unprepared. As a consequence much talk appeared just for the sake of it, and ideas were plucked from the air without prior thought. During an interview a teacher acknowledged his sense of frustration in such situations and disclosed a personal tactic he used on those occasions:

I say contentious things just to try to stir it up a bit, which are not necessarily things I believe in.

They were just getting boring and you say something a bit outrageous to see if you can get an actual debate going rather than just a lot of vague generalities.

The prevailing feeling of teachers was that staff meetings were "tedious and boring" (teacher). This staff perspective grew out of what many saw as in depth discussion of minor institutional matters. A consequence of 'teacher talk' was boredom. Issues such as the use of merit points, would be raised at year group meetings, Head of Department meetings and staff meetings, and those teachers involved in all, or even two of those meetings, found the repetition too much.

'Teacher talk', the extended discussion of teacher bound issues, became the predominating pattern at staff and Head of Department meetings acting as foreplay to any decision making, which may or may not take place. Ball (1987) points out:

The ritual of information giving and consultation is asserted over any substantive involvement is decision making.

(page 240)

The information giving came from both Head and staff, whilst consultation was hierarchically initiated.

The Head of Deangate believed in consultation and communication with his staff. Weindling and Earley (1987), in their survey of new Heads, found consultation and communication was mentioned by an overwhelming majority. At

Deangate staff acknowledged the Head's enthusiasm for consultation, but many suggested that certain decisions had already been taken, and that meetings were used to 'rubber stamp' them.

Basic Scale teachers' views of the consultative process was very much influenced by their Heads of Department. They realised that staff meetings being large affairs, limited the range and depth of discussion, and were therefore inadequate platforms to express their own concerns. No overall system of departmental meetings existed in the school at this stage of its evolution. Some departments held regular meetings with minutes forwarded to the Head whilst others held none. Some Heads of Department filtered ideas and information from Head of Department meetings to those in their department. Some failed completely to communicate anything. Even those teachers whose Head of Department did pass information faithfully between upper and lower strata, wanted to state their views themselves, without an intermediary. All these factors contributed to what teachers saw as a lack of quality of consultation, and an indicator of Deangate's 'difference'.

### Decision Making

Micro-politics in schools begin in earnest when decisions are to be made. Promotions, appointments, school policy, curriculum, rules, regulations, and traditions are all outcomes of decisions made under the various influences of micro-politics. Decisions made in schools all too often

become institutionalised, and have an on-going effect. For example, the adage 'the largest determining factor governing the size of this year's budget is last year's budget' can equally apply to schools. For this reason the process of decision making, especially in the early years of Deangate's history, is an important factor in how the school defined itself, and a major factor in determining the ongoing nature of schools.

In this section I will discuss influences in terms of individuals, groups and pressures from various factions, followed by a resume of tactics and strategies used for political ends. But first we need to ask if decision making takes place in meetings. Ball (1987) points out:

A great deal of 'apparent' decision making and policy-making in organisations is focused on official 'moments' like meetings and committees.

(page 237)

Ball goes on to advocate that meetings are symbolic and "celebrate the ideology of participation." (page 237). The data from Deangate and Nailsea (see Richardson 1973, Chapter 6) suggests that although decisions were taken outside of committees, in corridors and 'behind the scenes', decisions were also made consensually in meetings. At Deangate a middle ground existed between 'apparent' and 'genuine' decision making, which was dependent upon a variety of factors. For example, the Head held sacred any traditions of the old Grammar school, such as Speech Day and the Carol

Service (see Chapter 4) and these and others constituted 'sacred cows'. Such views represented the Head's vision of the new school and were, as such, sacrosanct. He saw it as his right to make such decisions to the extent that he took them for granted and they were not a matter for debate. Outside of this no-go area lay issues on which the Head held strong views e.g. uniforms and mixed ability teaching, but was influenced by personal commitment to his communication and consultation philosophies. Also outside lay issues on which he held a neutral position (usually minor in nature). Furthermore, the Head's ideals of teamwork were such that he wanted those philosophies to be observed and not seen by staff as empty rhetoric. For example, the Head was aware during a staff meeting that the caucus were about to vote against a proposal which he strongly supported. The following dialogue took place:

Teacher: "Ok I will put forward a motion. I motion. ."

Head: "Before we do that . . ." (and outlines why staff should not vote on this particular motion).

Teacher: "Then why are we discussing this if there is no point?"

Head: "I have no axe to grind. If there is a second . . ."

The Head withdrew his objection, keen to demonstrate his philosophy of democracy and consultation. As far as Deangate is concerned decisions were made 'behind the scenes', but

many decisions were debated and made, either for reasons of strategy, ideology or because the hierarchy were neutral on certain issues. The range of issues - fait accompli, apparent, genuine - were dependent upon hierarchical perspective and very much under their control

### Influence

I am going to outline features which influenced decision making both inside and outside meetings. Although I organise my findings into groups - 'individuals' and 'cliques and cabals', this is for convenience and not in an attempt to define a model of influence.

The influence of individuals was very dependent on personality and status. Status can be 'ordained' by a person's position in the school's hierarchy. But status as such is not sufficient if certain personality traits are absent. The hierarchy at Deangate, with the exception of one Deputy Head, all enjoyed the benefits of power and influence such positions bring (as long as that status is accepted by staff). I mentioned one Deputy Head who failed to influence meetings to the same extent as the others. Poor communication skills and failure to carry out vital (to teachers') tasks allocated to him, undermined his authority and the esteem of his peers. Therefore, although his expressed views were often analytical and erudite, his opinion carried little weight in Head of Department and Management meetings, where many major decisions were made.

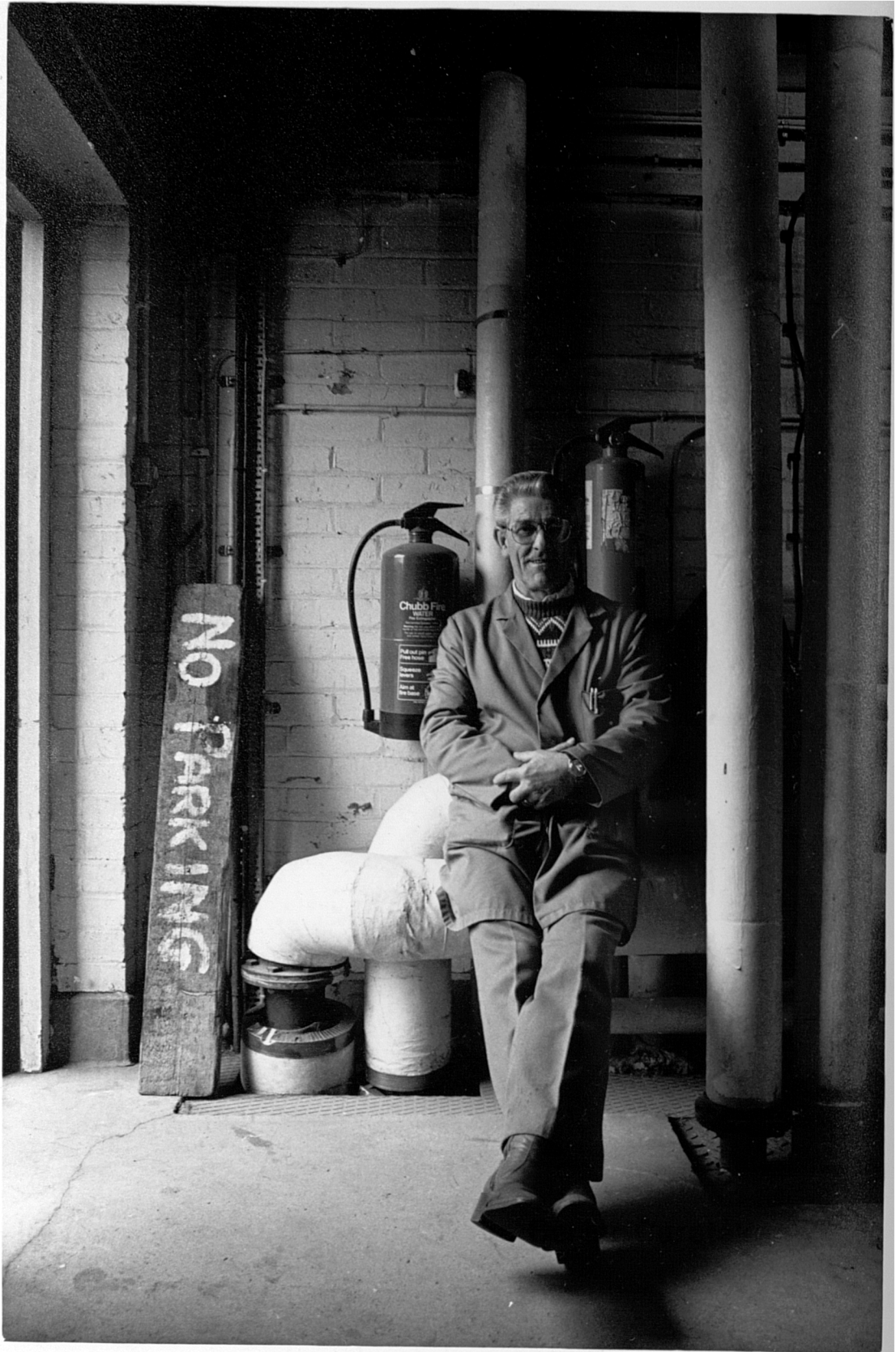
Although authority is 'legitimized' by school position, giving the owner a certain potential status and power, these are dependent on perceived performance and acceptance by staff and peers.

Obviously status is not solely the prerogative of position. Status operates within informal cabals and cliques, across divisions of work and can be subject related. Now I would like to give examples and explore reasons for high status within Deangate's meetings.

John High was a quiet man who spoke quietly and thoughtfully at meetings. A combination of his pleasant manner, his common sense views and his long experience in teaching, made him respected and liked by staff. His status in meetings was one of '**elder statesman**'.

Amar's status (see Chapter 4) was quite different. He was the leader of an anti-hierarchy clique, which sat in one corner of the staffroom. His status was derived from a mix of respected disciplinarian and a strong personality. His status at meetings was '**leader of the opposition**'. Amar only attended morning briefing and occasional Staff Meetings, which limited his influence, but when he spoke people listened and took note.

Brenda Teigh was a young physical education teacher. She was undaunted by large numbers in staff meetings, and spoke out on union and welfare matters (as a '**socialist**' and union



Photograph 16 The Senior Caretaker



representative). Brenda often clashed with the Head at staff meetings. On such occasions the Head's response was to stifle the opposition, and display rare authoritarianism. Brenda raised issues which were staff's unspoken feelings, their 'gut reaction' to hierarchical opinion. Her support came from young or leftwing members of staff. Her status was one of 'young turk'.

Influence in meetings goes beyond status. The concept of 'power' in formal interaction is much broader. Dalton (1959) demonstrated the informal power relationships between production and maintenance workers in industry. Applying a similar approach to schools we can see how the hierarchy are dependent on other specialists (groups and individuals). Teacher folklore states: 'there are two important people in a school - the Headmaster and the caretaker (see photograph 16). Shipman (1968) formally describes the caretaker thus:

His duties are specific and can be determined rigidly . . . This enables him to dictate to staff who want to carry out non routine activities . . . his power is often increased by his direct contact with the Headmaster . . . some schools only seem to run by his permission.

(page 56)

The influence of the caretaker and the secretary was an outcome of their special role and relationship with the Head. Although the caretaker was not present at Deangate's meetings, his name was mentioned many times. His status was 'influence by proxy'.

The influence of school subjects in meetings is a reflection of the status they hold, and is dependent upon a number of factors. Traditional main core subjects like mathematics, English and the sciences, are considered important to any school curriculum, whereas domestic science, woodwork and physical education are thought to be on the periphery of educational requirement. Musgrove and Taylor (1969) in their study of role (role being the dynamic aspect of status) found that status of academic teachers was ranked higher than those of a more practical nature (see also Braverman 1974). Some subject's status is dependent on what society at large see as important to the curriculum. Hence the once popular Latin and Greek were demoted and replaced by a new 'high tech' subject, the once lowly Craft, Design and Technology (see Reid 1984, page 68). Also subjects which are important because of their public relations qualities, for example music and art, were influential. This was particularly noticeable at Deangate because the Head attached great importance to public relations. One must not rule out the Head's personal preference for some subjects over others. At Deangate teachers considered that preferential status was given to Modern Languages and Religious Education. Status 'skewing' of this sort can often be picked up in the distribution of scale points.

The extent to which subjects utilise their status potential is very much dependent on the department members and the strategies they employ. For example the Head of Mathematics (who later left) was a quiet, demure person who rarely spoke

at meetings and claimed only minimal resources. Consequently mathematics failed to be represented and did not assume the status, and therefore influence, normally associated with this subject.

We can take the concept of influence by interdependence further by considering those who 'have the Head's ear'. Steve Black (see Chapter 4), a Deputy Head, was an influential man because he was the Head's right hand man or 'confidant'. Their shared secrets and intimacy, born of a long friendship, was apparent to a majority of staff. Between them they shared responsibility for chairing/overseeing a wide variety of committees and working parties. In this way the Head, who found delegation difficult (a common problem, see Weindling and Early 1987), was able to obtain a spread of control over various meetings.

All leaders have strengths and weaknesses and the Head of Deangate was no exception. He recognised his weak points and endeavoured to enlist the help of senior teachers to strengthen those areas. For example the Head, a past teacher of Religious Education and English, found financial administration an arduous task. The school's financial year began in April, but by May the capitation allowance for each department had yet to be allocated. The Head made tentative moves towards the Head of Mathematics for help, but eventually the task of chairing a capitation committee was given to Dave Haywood, the Head of Geography. When asked why

he was given the job Dave replied: "Because I complained (laugh) and the Head said OK why don't you do it?" However other salient reasons were historically based - Dave was a member of the old Grammar school and a good understanding existed between him and the Head; he had a background of business administration and auditing experience; and in Dave's own words - "I was seeking a challenge of some sort". These reasons, coupled with a similarity in attitudes and beliefs held by Dave and the Head, made him the ideal person to represent the Head in meetings where an understanding of administration and organisation were required. Martin and Strauss (1956) found similar relationships:

The protege may compliment his superior by being strong in an area of activity where his sponsor is weak.

(page 101)

Dave Haywood later became a Deputy Head at Deangate, illustrating a second point made by Martin and Strauss:

Ties of loyalty as well as need compel him to push for advancing his men as he moves up.

(page 110)

So far I have discussed the influence of a number of individuals in meetings. It may appear that control and influence are distributed in a random pattern or at best a systematic unevenness. But in each case the individual is representative of a group, or is characterised by a dominant personality. John High as 'elder statesman' represented the

'middleground' of the staffroom; Amar spoke for the disaffected and Sheila Teigh as 'young turk' represented the low status and leftwing teachers. Steve Black and Dave Haywood represented the Head directly or indirectly by shared ideals and attitudes. Each individual acted as a mouthpiece of a faction of the school.

Groups and their 'champion' will emerge in a school. They will be representative of shared interests which in turn will be determined by a mixture of experience, expectations, official positions and perspectives. That this happens in schools is a matter of 'sameness'. Their detailed nature will vary from institution to institution and, in any particular institution, they might even change over time as personnel change, issues of relevance to groups change, or experience and expectations change. However, their detailed nature, which would include their *raison de etre*, reflects school 'difference'. Therefore, in determining groups and their champions we determine a specific aspect of Deangate's character.

There was a significant difference in extent, frequency, intensity and arena of influence. For example 'young turks' operated solely in staff meetings and Amar's influence was territorially bound to one corner of the staffroom except for occasional 'commando raids'. Only the hierarchy had access and influence to all meetings, either directly or indirectly, via representatives. This important factor, coupled with the 'taken for granted' notion that the Head

makes decisions, differentiates influence of hierarchy from influence of individuals.

Although individuals with influence were representative and symbolic of values, attitudes and beliefs of groups within the staff, these and other groups formed **cliques, cabals and factions** for reasons of increased power. Such groups may form a tight 'clique' which remains subterranean for long periods. Temporary groups are formed out of a shared concern or perspective on a particular topic and disband after the issue is resolved. Some groups are used by individuals to gain ends that are private.

Although groups came to form long term partnerships occupying an almost institutional status, the vast majority were temporary and the product of short term need. Teachers were aware that an individual in a meeting rarely carried sufficient weight for an issue or point to become accepted. By forming temporary coalitions chances of success were increased. Some combinations were more likely to succeed than others. For example two 'young turks' were less likely to achieve a goal than a combination of a 'young turk' and 'elder statesman'.

A number of researchers (Ball 1981, Denscombe 1980a, Woods 1983) have suggested that a strong teacher subculture exists founded on ideology and subject. They also suggest that they function from a need to control rather than from educational conviction. Meetings at Deangate were often the arenas of

struggle for power, which was unevenly distributed amongst subject groups. Sparkes (1987) demonstrated how a low status subject (physical education), low in terms of prestige, wealth and authority, used 'rhetorical justification' to raise its profile so as to play a more influential role in the school and particularly meetings. Grace (1978) examined the influence of the English department, who by their size, unified approach and being "the most trendy and progressive" (page 193), wielded considerable power. Subject groups realise that status means bargaining power (see Goodson 1987), and subject Heads at Deangate, aware of this factor, were key figures in departmental self promotion. They were particularly keen to be represented on crucial committees and working parties. A common statement in departmental meetings was: "We must get someone on that capititation committee." The importance of a high profile and representation in significant arenas was of paramount importance to 'empire building' departments.

In considering the influence of key individuals, cliques, cabals and subject specialisms, it may appear that each operates in isolation, working for its own ends. This was not the case. Although the groups were identifiable in a meeting environment, acting in a self contained way, they occasionally performed in a dynamic fashion, creating temporary alliances, split allegiances or behaved antagonistically towards each other.

## Tactics and Strategies

In the last section I outlined a variety of influences on meetings. Those individuals concerned, took for granted tactics and strategies employed to gain ends or saw them as 'other peoples ploys'. 'Teacher talk' was concerned mainly with the mundane - parking facilities, staff coffee and house points, and less with school policy, curriculum and mixed ability teaching. Although overlapping occurs, 'tactics and strategies' take over where 'teacher talk' leaves off. At this point 'performance' becomes more pointed and calculated. In Goffmanesque terms 'front stage' management and 'backstage work' become prominent. As the importance of issues and decisions escalates so the 'understage work' begins in earnest.

A number of ploys, familiar to those conversant with committee strategy, were used at Deangate. The act of 'referring the matter to committee' (or working party) was used for diluting authority and delaying decisions, and typical of manoeuvres employed. A number of standard techniques were used. The chairperson would lean forward, fix eyes, raise eyebrows and suggest 'we have to move on' if a member of staff was too verbose. Another device was to pick out a phrase and ask for alternative opinions: "A drop in standards - that's interesting George . . . Jim, do you think standards are dropping?"

Lobbying took place before meetings, usually in offices or classrooms. The object of prior consultation was not as a



means of avoiding genuine misunderstanding, but as Gronn (1983) points out, in order to sway, consolidate or capture the votes of the undecided.

Those in positions of power were able to control many aspects of meetings. At Deangate the agenda was drawn up by the Head and placed for a short time on the staff noticeboard, just prior to meetings taking place. A Deputy Head commented on the speed at which it was taken down:

It goes up on the board and if you miss it it's gone and that's it. I often haven't seen it (laugh). I think as well it ought to go into people's pigeon holes so that they know what's coming up and they can have actually thought about it.

The statement also identifies the issue of mastering papers beforehand. Teachers were often ill prepared for meetings, perhaps because of their day to day business, commitments, or saw meetings as outside of their teaching role. The hierarchy however, were not only prepared with their arguments, but primed with facts and sources. For example when staff expressed their dislike for the assessment and reporting system in the school, the Head was able to quote the pre-comprehensive working party and subsequent staff meeting which had voted in favour of the present system, thus pre-empting the teachers' argument for change.

The hierarchy employed a rising scale of tactics, depending on the importance of the matter in hand. When the Head

wanted a certain idea accepted by staff, or to neutralise a staff move he was against and yet retain his ideals of consultation, the Head would employ alternative strategies. These were often successful and repeated on many occasions. For example, the Head at the beginning of a staff meeting, would call upon a senior teacher or member of the hierarchy, whose views corresponded to his own, to make a pronouncement on the topic, less senior members of staff were then more likely to feel inhibited. This approach, of working down the pecking order became more overt when the Head used Steve Black, his confidant, in a leading role. In such situations (Staff meetings, Head of Department meetings, Board of Governors meeting, parents evening), the management team would be defending or proposing an issue, and would present their case formally, outlining their arguments. Usually this was Steve Black's job since he was articulate, persuasive and on good terms with staff/parents/governors. When the Head wanted to consult staff and did not have an axe to grind, he would work up the pecking order.

Before leaving this section on tactics and strategies, it is worth noting that very few of the staff saw themselves as political. Even the hierarchy, invested with power and more active in the use of tactics, would claim their actions were unpremeditated. Obviously some members of staff were not politically inclined or astute, but progressively up the hierarchical ladder the more adroit they become. But micro-politics do take place in meetings. As Ball (1987) points out: "It is where we find set pieces and prepared

presentations, where arrangements are discussed in advance." The impression that hierarchy and certain members of staff were devious, is misleading. The Head of Deangate was liked for his honesty, openness and sincerity. The atmosphere in meetings was a 'soft' form of political manoeuvring rather than the dramatic, covert action portrayed by Ball (1987), Sparkes (1987) and others. However, it is probable that the hierarchy did prepare for meetings especially when the agendas included topics of importance to them. It is equally probable that lack of foreknowledge, coupled with limited scope for the cultivation of cabals etc., meant that staff were unprepared at meetings and could rarely act effectively.

### Summary

This chapter was divided into three parts. Part one considered three cases of formal teacher interaction, illustrating how the elements of evolution, process, performance and micro-politics, operate and affect everyday situations. Part two expanded the notion of 'process'. Here, the taken for granted 'role' of meetings was shown to cause ambiguity which led to misconceptions, stress and rumbling discontent among staff. Also in this section, two examples of how the hierarchy, rather than attempt to change teacher behaviour, decided to alter their own modus operandi. This is an interesting issue which will be taken up in Chapter 8. Finally part three concentrated on 'performance and micro-politics'. A complex mix of 'teacher talk', decision making, influence and tactics were described and examined.

There are many problems, inherent in taking topics like 'process' or 'micro-politics' in isolation: the holistic impression may be lost; and by looking at formal and informal interaction separately, a crucial dialectic may be forfeited. Therefore I will end this chapter with some general observations.

Of all Deangate's meetings, the staff meeting was the most controversial. This was not surprising considering the large numbers involved and complex heterogeneous structure, and its disparate demands. It was here that the Head was most apprehensive and sought on occasions to control information and employ 'tactics and strategies' to retain power in a battleground of competing interests. The Head and his three deputies always collectively faced the staff. The hierarchy rarely acted in such tight formation in other formal interaction situations.

Richardson (1973) comments on the content of meetings at Nailsea School:

. . . an agenda-sheet may at times create a smoke screen that obliterates the very problem currently being debated in the 'informal' encounters of the staffroom.

(page 154)

This was a particularly disturbing factor at Deangate. Even in a school where democracy and openness were lauded, important concerns lay outside the boundary of

acceptability. It was normal practice to discuss such topics in corridors or quiet corners. The opportunity for the presentation of ideas and views did exist in meetings but staff found that mechanism counter productive to their needs and hence resorted to corners and corridors. Even in a school like Deangate which valued democracy, it was taken for granted that many issues important to staff were not to be raised at the meeting designated to fulfil that need.

The staff meeting for the Head, represented a 'no-win' situation. Johns (1980) sees the present generation of Heads as using a 'sell and consultation' style of management. Deangate's Head, following this trend, emphasised consultation and communication, but the staff saw some decisions offered to them as 'rubber stamping jobs', others as 'maybe' decisions and a few 'genuine' decisions in which they could take an active role. But staff disagreed amongst themselves which was which. Jago (1987) sees Heads as "forced by their staff into the very tyranny their staff condemn." (page 186). She quotes one senior teacher in the school:

I would have preferred to be told either come up with ideas on this or that or this is what you should do. Most Heads run schools as either despotism or pseudo-democracy. Teachers prefer despotism because it saves them thinking.

(page 186)

Even at Deangate, where I believe the Head genuinely

believed in staff involvement, it was clear that 'all decisions are equal, but some decisions are more equal than others'. Those decisions which the Head left to staff were seen as "passing the buck" or they would say: "He's incapable of making decisions. He puts them off all the time." (teacher comment). It is difficult to ascertain what were genuine staff concerns and what was informal grumbling which may have been a vehicle for preserving and exercising their integrity having failed to do so in a public forum.

The micro-politics of formal teacher interaction is riddled with complexities and clandestine influences. Pettigrew (1973) sees influences in terms of power. His terms - 'technical gate keeper', 'political access' and 'assessed stature' point to a power base via control. At Deangate the Head was the dominant figure through which most information passed and to whom key questions were addressed. The Head's power came from his unquestioned authority and high status. Within the Head of Department meeting 'personality', an enigmatic quality, was an important ingredient for those seeking to influence. C. Wright Mills (1951) describes a person with political skill:

Now the stress is on agility rather than ability, on 'getting along' in a context a associates, superiors and rules, rather than 'getting ahead' . . . ; on who you know rather than what you know; on techniques of self display and the generalized knack of handling people. But the most important single factor is 'personality', which commands attention . . . by charm

. . . force of character or demeanour . . .

(page 260)

Teachers come to political awareness out of pursuit of victory, because of personal interests, or they believe in a just cause. Heads of Departments and hierarchy used tactics and strategies in an arena of competing interests and desires. There was no real indication of covert action or a concerted effort to exercise power by the Head. There were particular decisions made by him on issues close to his 'heart', and perhaps a belief in a long term goal, but no evidence of orchestration of means - manipulation of meetings - in order to achieve those ends. The hierarchy's use of micro-politics was pragmatic and adhoc and this is indicative of Deangate's character.

Awareness of the political dimension developed out of what Schutz (1962) terms 'biographical situation'. Success in meetings was dependent upon 'institutional bias' (Bachrach and Baratz 1962) - an orchestrated consensus of hierarchy ideology and external constraints and pressure. Those Heads of Department particularly sensitive to the political game, chose their words accordingly, described by Sparkes (1987) as 'strategic rhetoric'. Staff, aware of the Head's enthusiasms, talked in 'buzzwords' like 'work orientated' and 'technology' in order to gain acceptance of ideas, which would lead to greater prestige and ultimately power. All this is 'understage' work. As Ball (1987) points out:

Micro-politics does not finish at the end of the

agenda, it does not stop at the committee room door; it is an on-going dynamic process. It is multi-faced, indexical and obscure. It intervenes when least expected, it underpins the fleeting encounter the innocent-sounding memo, the offhand comment.

(page 245)

Micro-politics, when used by skilled 'players', is a powerful tool. Its influence will be felt in the following Chapters and is of special significance in Chapter 8.

Finally, this chapter has raised awareness of certain key individuals and groups within Deangate, and if this evidence is combined with the Head's and staff's priorities discussed in Chapter 4, it gives insight into the beginnings of Deangate's 'difference'. Also, key individuals and groups worked to a time-honoured blue-print for formal meetings. It may be said that school meetings are both similar and dissimilar to their counterparts in industry and commerce. Micro politics, for example, are similarly employed, whereas in schools, formal meetings take place after work or during lunch breaks in what teachers see as their 'free time' and therefore quite different from industry and commerce. Thus we have a feature of 'sameness' which is to be found across schools and yet separates them from other forms of institution.



Introduction

In Chapter 5 I explored formal teacher interaction because it was in meetings that teachers, the prime actors, were involved in the dynamic process of delineating roles, attitudes and meanings, which were instrumental in defining the character of the school. This chapter follows a similar theme but in doing so assumes that staff may present an alternative 'face' outside of formal situations. Whereas in Chapter 5 I identified aspects of formal communication, here I will attempt to disclose the private and informal 'faces' of communication.

Wherever one looks in a school the communication is clearly inherently complex. This is mainly due to the problem of an observer differentiating between the overt and covert actions, interpreting participant's meanings and the multiplicity of perspectives present. Beattie (1988) quoting Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, illustrates the problem of volume of communication when he writes:

No matter how one may try one cannot not communicate. Activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating.

(page 38)

Any attempt to give a holistic account of communication at Deangate School would inevitably have been a very partial account, since it is not possible for an observer to describe the totality of any given situation. Therefore I have concentrated on certain areas and places which my initial data collection and later progressive focussing has shown to be important to the central concerns of this study. Emphasis is placed on the taken for granted concepts and understandings of participants (as it is throughout this thesis).

With these points in mind, this chapter addresses limited but essential ingredients of communication at Deangate School. It is in three parts. The first - The Classroom - considers communication from a verbal, non verbal, noise and proxemic viewpoint. Here, the issues of 'how' and 'what' observations are made, initially discussed in Chapter 2, are explored more fully, and has as its primary concerns taken for grantedness and Deangate's own particular styles and methods of classroom communication. Part two - Hierarchical Communication - looks at members of the hierarchy and in a sub section - The Character of Hierarchical Communication - considers interaction across the hierarchy and between hierarchy and the staff. In part three - The Staffroom - the perceptions, actions and reactions of staff are observed and related to hierarchical perspectives highlighted in part two. Communication in the staffroom was considered relevant because it was considered to be the territory most likely to produce an illuminating contrast between formal

communication outlined in Chapter 5 and informal communication the focus of this chapter.

### Part One - The Classroom

Prior to the 1960's educational sociologists generally limited their concern to the study of the education system as a whole. The 1960's saw a move away from macro to micro research, to the 'private' world of classrooms. With the emphasis on classroom interaction came methodological problems and the adoption of partisan positions by researchers who tended to use either systematic observation techniques (see Flanders 1960) or a range of anthropological techniques (see Stubbs 1976b). Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses and point to the complexity of classroom interaction. Making sense of classroom communication, because it is very complex, contradictory and rich in bizarre meanings, is problematic for observers in terms of data collection and analysis (although many observers do not see this as problematic). My own problems were compounded by a concern for taken for grantedness plus a need to relate classroom communication to Deangate School in particular, in order to assess the extent, if any, of the relationship which existed between the two.

Sociologists appear to have either taken classroom communication in isolation, being content at leaving contextual features at the classroom door (see McNamara's critique, 1980), or like Bennett (1976) looked across

schools, thus failing to give due consideration to particular school effects. Finally a number of researchers have, in my view, been guilty of applying preconceived perceptions to classrooms which have led to distortions. The tactic employed is described by Sharrock and Anderson (1986):

It is often come to be conceived as a mark of sociological artfulness to show what goes on in any social setting is almost anything except its official business.

(page 91)

The data for this section were collected via open and semi-structured interview techniques, and a variety of approaches to observaiton including time-lapse photography (see Walker and Adelman 1975). Running concurrently with this phase and throughout my stay at the school, I kept detailed notes of teachers' and pupils' views outside of the classroom in order to gain insight into the relationship between the school - its influence and pressure - and classrooms.

I will reflect upon communication in classrooms in terms of four sub headings: **verbal; non-verbal; noise; and proxemics**, viewed from a mix of ethnographic/taken for granted school particular frameworks. But before doing so I will consider classrooms in terms of a major concern of this thesis What is the nature of School?, in order to establish some sort of common denominator of classroom practice and place. Burgess

(1987), quoting Spindler, points to a problem faced by ethnographic researchers:

I sat in classes for days wondering what there was to 'observe'. Teachers taught, reprimanded, rewarded, while pupils sat at desks squirming, whimpering, reading, writing, staring into space as they had in my own grade school experience, in my practice teaching in a training programme and in the two years of public school teaching I had done before World War II.

(page 91)

Spindler is illustrating two basic problems. Firstly, the point I raised in the introduction to this chapter, that communication, even within the confines of a classroom, is so pervasive that it becomes evasive unless considered within a framework. Secondly, the very real difficulty of taking observation beyond what one has been conditioned to see or researchers can be 'blinded' because they are uncommonly habituated to the scene before them.

In terms of architecture, teaching spaces are remarkably similar, born out of standardization of the school environment (see Meighan 1981). Even devoid of pupils, at midnight, anyone entering a classroom on seeing the wall adornment, blackboard and seating arrangement, would, without difficulty, know what the place was used for. The room even smells like a classroom because cleaners use the same floor polish and wax to clean plastic chairs and tiled

Photograph 17  
THE CROWDED CLASSROOM



flooring, that is used throughout the institution. Cleaning smells are mixed with other odours - body odours in the physical education changing room, chalk dust in classrooms, wood and varnish in the craft block. A person blindfolded could sniff their way around a classroom and make a confident guess as to where they were.

Before considering verbal, non verbal, noise and proxemics of communication, I would like to make some fundamental observations on classrooms which have some bearing on issues raised later. The following taken for granted truths, although simple, shroud vital issues and are far from trite.

Many of the issues and points raised in this section on classrooms stem from the fact that classrooms are crowded places and this is in part responsible for the quality of classroom life. It is a basic assumption that 20-40 pupils spend most of their day side by side. They are expected not only to sit for long periods of time in the 'crowd', but to concentrate on their work and are frowned upon if they attempt to interact with each other beyond an unnatural minimal amount. Adults are used to, accept and therefore overlook, the concept of 'social solitude' which is the state pupils are often forced to work in. Also, if we consider that pupils have no choice but to attend school, to be a 'good' pupil entails pretending to be alone when in fact they are in a 'crowd' (see photograph 17), and not a crowd of strangers but friends and whose urge to communicate is therefore emphatic. It is not surprising that such a

formula for classroom life leads to conflict. Research on classroom interaction is concerned with coping strategies of pupils and teachers, which are themselves the outcome, in part, of crowded classrooms.

At Deangate the following 'outcomes' were common to the classrooms I observed: The teacher acted as 'gatekeeper' and managed the structure and organisation of the classroom, monitoring and attempting to control all its phases; interruptions were common and a stop-go situation was the norm; some pupils were always waiting for others as some worked faster than others and were asked to keep themselves occupied (work in 'neutral') as others continued; large groups were given the same task which brought inevitable delay; pupils' work went unchecked, raised hands ignored, questions put to one side and mistakes uncorrected as teachers spread themselves around small groups and individuals in need; finally some pupils were resigned to their 'crowded' existence, some showed restraint, whilst others did not suppress their personal feelings and created social distractions. These are, in part, outcomes of pupils working in a 'crowded' environment involuntarily for long periods of time, under unnatural constraints.

The combination of internal and external architecture, internal organisation and social setting, which I have described up to this point, are taken for granted in schools and are the resultants of an unquestioned social tradition. Denscombe (1980) expands this point and identifies a source:



Familiarity, however, can dull the senses to the particular effects of such arrangements and the setting can become so taken for granted and commonplace that it comes to be regarded as a natural and inevitable feature of the organisation of schooling. Though such a belief may be reasonable for the staff and pupils who operate in them, for whom the prospects of changing the situation are remote, it should be recognised that closed classrooms have not always been the norm, and that they entail specific socially approved assumptions about curricular and pedagogic arrangements (Bernstein 1971; Young 1971). They reflect and reinforce assumptions about subject boundaries and the responsibility of individual teachers.

(page 68)

Thus the setting for classrooms used at Deangate, born of socially approved assumptions, acquired an unquestioned stature as it has at many schools, and was a significant influence on communication in the classroom. This aspect of Deangate's 'sameness' was particularly strong.

### Verbal Communication

The most obvious feature of classroom communication is that the teacher is the prime actor and the pupils his/her audience. The most obvious characteristic of teacher talk is that there is so much of it, and that it is predominantly talk as public performance. The structure of communication is outlined by Edwards and Furlong (1978) who suggest:

Classrooms are crowded places. Yet despite the presence of thirty or so potential communicators, what

has been called a 'central communication system' is frequent and often prolonged. What this means is that everybody else listens (or gives the appearance of listening) to a single speaker.

(page 11)

The amount of teacher talk varied in Deangate's classrooms but was approximately equivalent to the Bullock Report (1975) findings (paragraph 10.4) of three-quarters of the time of normal class talk. Much of the teachers' communication was directed quite explicitly towards discipline and control rather than lesson content. Delamont (1976) suggests one quarter of teacher talk is taken up with control issues, but at Deangate, taking into account implicit tactics, the proportion was significantly higher.

A teacher's most obvious function, identified by the structure and method of communication, is one of control. Firstly, control in Bernstein's sense of selection, organisation and pacing of knowledge (see Bernstein 1973), and secondly in a discipline sense (see Denscombe 1985). I would now like to consider control mainly in the second sense (although both senses are interdependent). Classroom control was transmitted from teacher to pupil in a number of ways, only a few of which I will now illustrate.

Deangate's teachers used a variety of verbal strategies to control a lesson, which were common to all practitioners. Staff knew each other's skills and ability despite working in 'closed' classrooms. Staffroom and corridor gossip showed

that information concerning an individual's strength and weaknesses, especially where discipline was concerned, was common knowledge. It was known which teachers were high in 'academic engaged time' (see Rosenshine and Berliner 1978), and which were infamous for continually shouting: "I said be quiet."

Other tactics used to control lessons were direct ordering, joking and pacing of lessons - all the skills one would expect of a ringmaster - were used in order to gain or maintain discipline. The majority of staff had learnt the professional skills of pacing and phasing a lesson so that they ran smoothly. Pupils arriving late to a lesson were dealt with without disturbing the rest of the class, and the day's work was introduced, developed and brought to a suitable conclusion within the allotted time span. The structure, inherent in each lesson and inculcated in pupils from Junior school, was a taken for granted aspect of every lesson. With the structure came time honoured phrases. Stubbs (1976c) describes a teacher who turns to his class at the start of a lesson and says: "Right! Fags out please." (page 152). No one was smoking and the phrase was simply a way of telling pupils that the lesson proper was about to begin. Other commonly used phrases by the staff during a lesson included: "Don't shout out", "Put your hands up before you answer", which were communications about communications (what Stubbs 1976c calls meta-communication). The object of such instruction was to establish with pupils

the rules of classroom discourse, which smooths the way for discussion and interaction in a 'crowded' classroom.

In addition to keeping a firm hand on the structure of a lesson, Deangate teachers used other strategies to maintain their authority and control. As Stubbs (1976a) points out:

Teachers have to devote a great deal of time and effort simply to keeping in touch with pupils.

(page 152)

This arises out of the nature of teaching and teachers' constant need to direct and channel pupils' actions. A typical 'keeping in touch' tactic was the inclusion of jokes in a lesson. Some Deangate staff rarely joked, whilst others maintained a high level of repartee with their classes. The utilisation of jokes has been studied in detail elsewhere (see Torode 1976) but my observations at Deangate, showed an emphasis on 'having a laugh'. By using humour both teacher and pupil displayed the need occasionally to depart from the intended lesson content, to relieve the boredom; for teachers a shared joke helped maintain contact with the class and to 'appear human'. Many of the jokes in this category were jokes with two meanings or 'in' jokes shared by those 'in the know'. Humour, based on either school or classroom based culture, was prevalent at Deangate and outsiders - researchers, visitors, inspectors, cover teachers - found access to this world very difficult. Walker and Adelman (1976) comment on this point:

What we miss is the subcultural experiences of the group and its associated private and personal meanings - in short its restricted code.

(page 139)

It was the shared humour running through the school's daily life, in classrooms, staffroom and even on formal occasions, which gave Deangate a special shared identity - an important facet of its 'difference'.

Perhaps another outcome of 'crowded' classrooms was the emphasis given to the written word over the spoken. Even though pupils could read with apparent fluency, when comment was required of them a vacant look would appear on their faces, as either comprehension of the lesson's content was beyond them or their ability to relate their understanding deficient. This is not meant in any way to be a comment on the quality of teaching at Deangate, more a questioning of what has become the norm of teaching and learning in a classroom environment.

The pupils' perspective of being 'talked at' rather than 'talked with', of too much written work and not enough discussion, coupled with the observation that teachers 'steer' pupils towards giving 'right' answers, was common across the school. Possibly lack of time available to teachers was in part responsible but the outcome of events described was pedagogic repetition. There seemed to be a constant need to go over the same ground as though teachers

Photograph 18 Daydreaming



were hoping that recurring messages would bridge the gap between lesson content and pupil understanding. A constant reiteration and regurgitation was in process day in and day out in a vain attempt to reduce the distance between what was said and what was meant, what was taught and what was learnt.

If pupils did not discuss issues with the teacher, with whom did they communicate? Obviously much depends on the individual teacher but the pupil has two choices. Either they exist in a state of 'suspension' (see photograph 18) as Jackson (1968) suggests:

No one knows for certain how much time of the average pupil's time is spent in neutral, as it were, but for many students in many classrooms it must be a memorable portion.

(page 15)

or they can communicate with classmates. Pupil-pupil talk is more private than teacher-pupil talk and consequently more difficult for an observer to collect data. From my limited information on this issue I will make two points. The first is concerned with content of pupil-pupil conversations. They rarely talked about the 'proper' content of the lesson. Secondly, pupils developed and used their own in-group language or argot in the classroom. Multiple expletives in a sentence was acceptable in pupil-pupil conversations. This form of communication became so noticeable throughout the school that it was eventually raised at a Head of Department

meeting. Once again staff saw both serious and humorous sides of the situation and pinned the following cartoon to the 'No Comments' noticeboard:



### Noise

Listening to the sounds emanating from a classroom can tell us about the content of the lesson, pupils' actions, the teacher's pedagogic style and about his/her control over the class. Some teachers prefer a slight babble in their classrooms, others want to be able to hear a pin drop, whilst a third group find shouting and chattering acceptable. Teachers need to win control of classes since it is not an automatic right, and to maintain that control they need to implement all sorts of strategies. The 'noise' from the class informs the teacher (and others) to what degree s/he is being successful. There are clearly two thoughts in teachers' minds when exhorting pupils to "keep the noise down". The first is explained by Denscombe (1985):

. . . quiet settings are seen as both more congenial and less fatiguing contexts than noisy ones in which



to conduct the days labour.

(page 148)

The second is that certain noise - too loud, too sharp, jeering, hoots, taunts, ridicule - will be interpreted as poor class control, and contravene what appears to be an unspoken consensus amongst staff on what is 'acceptable' noise. The 'quality' of noise is important to a teacher, especially a new teacher, or in Deangate's case a new school where judgements about status and ability are being made. Denscombe (1985) quoting Leacock's research makes a similar point:

. . . a new teacher soon learns that it is their success in maintaining quiet order, in the narrow sense, which is first noted and which is apt to be the school administrator's first measure of performance.

(page 157)

How Deangate's staff came to such a consensus is difficult to know and outside the concern of this thesis, but that it did operate and was common knowledge to all teachers in the school was clear. There appeared to be a number of accepted rules which governed noise. One unusual observation made by staff was that absolute silence was acceptable even though many saw such practice as pedagogically unsound. One may suggest, perhaps cynically, that silence did not affect those outside of the classroom whereas excessive noise did.

Some teachers commented that classes coming to them who had been allowed to be loud were more difficult to calm down to their own acceptable noise level. Pupils, however, said they were well aware of what was acceptable to different teachers and adjusted their behaviour accordingly. The staff consensus on noise made allowances and this suggests a set of rules based on context rather than decibel level. Craft, music and physical education lessons all operated outside of the school norm yet had their own interpretation of what an acceptable 'quality' of noise. The staff consensus also made allowances for notoriously difficult classes and 'outsiders' i.e. cover teachers. However the consensus did not stretch to patently bad practice such as a staff member failing to turn up on time for their class, a common failing of one Deputy Head, or where noise level was so high that it impinged upon their lessons.

Clearly it is difficult to relate one school's noise 'consensus' to another's, but an indication was given by visiting cover teachers and incoming staff that Deangate was, relative to other schools in the City, above average in terms of decibels and boisterousness, in the 'accepted noise' league.

#### Non-Verbal Communication

Research into classroom interaction has in the past concentrated on linguistic or socio-linguistic forms of communication, implying that they are sufficient representatives of peoples' behaviour. Non-verbal messages

are passed by teachers and pupils via gesture, posture and facial expression. Moreover non-verbal communication can be true reflections of thoughts and feelings as Cohen and Manion (1981) quoting the work of Eric Fromm point out:

Psychoanalysis teaches one to be sceptical of what man says (original emphasis), because his words usually reveal, at best, only his consciousness: and to read between the lines, to listen with the 'third ear', to read his face, his gestures, and every expression of his body.

(page 181)

Each culture has its way of communicating non-verbally. Laver and Hutchenson (1972) tell us that Abyssinians say 'no' by jerking the head to the right shoulder; the Maori say 'yes' by raising the head and chin; the Sicilians say 'no' in exactly the same manner (page 208). The teachers and pupils employ similar conventions, which operate at a macro cultural level and many which operate solely within the micro environment of a classroom, to inform and confirm verbal messages. It is the micro-cultural non-verbal forms of communication which are common to the classroom, that concern us here.

Pupils are particularly interested in teachers' actions, physical posture, strategic position, face and eye state, all which convey the teacher's interest and emotion at any given time. Over a period pupils become aware of how far to 'push' a teacher and what sort of tactics trigger certain reactions from them, in the struggle for control. At

Deangate, teachers, although not always, controlled and stage managed their emotions by giving out false clues, eg facial anger and aggressive pointing, which are normally considered to be 'automatic' responses. In this way the teacher is warning/informing the class as to his/her state of mind, knowing that they cannot rely on 'action' from the institution's authorities or bureaucratic procedure. This form of acting - of sending out early emphatic warnings - is part of a teacher's arsenal of management techniques. Another technique employed by teachers in the struggle for control is one of evaluation. Teachers assess at a glance who is looking out of the window daydreaming (see photograph 18) and who is hiding behind a book pretending to work. A teacher often knows, as if by instinct, which pupils hold the 'correct' answer to their question and which do not. All of these are examples of the teacher evaluating intuitively the on-going lesson, keeping a 'finger on the pulse', maintaining a 'feel' for how the lesson is progressing. These techniques are not innate but gleaned and honed by experience: not part of teaching practice or learnt from a book but they are in common use and taken for granted by teachers and pupils.

### Proxemics

Proxemics - the study of how mankind, unconsciously usually, structures micro-space and commonly used in ergonomics - is important here because it tells us a great deal about the nature of teaching, the conduct of daily transactions, and parallels iconically, features found in verbal and non-

Photograph 19 Teacher Moves Class Sits



verbal communication. Up to this point I have considered teachers in terms of an actor 'performing'. Now I will consider the 'stage' (another Goffman term) which describes the location in which classroom interaction takes place.

In terms of human topology, the classroom is a pre-defined 'space'. The classroom 'space' at Deangate reflected institutional norms found in most schools: blackboards at the front, windows on one side facing playgrounds or 'outside', a back wall, and a side-wall with a door (nearly always closed) leading to a corridor. Almost all classrooms at Deangate adopted the common twin desks in rows separated by gangways, all facing the blackboard. The teacher's desk, either centrally placed or to one side, faced the pupils. This arrangement supported the time honoured tradition of 'teacher moves class sits' (see photograph 19), and at a glance one can see who has authority.

Teaching spaces at Deangate were either allocated, solicited or taken, depending very much on the hierarchical position and status of the teacher or the traditional use to which the room was put. Teachers in a high status position (rather like senior executives located on an upper floor, literally 'climbing the ladder') enjoyed the better rooms and timetabled to stay in what became 'their' room. At the other end of the status/room allocation scale were supply teachers who got what they were given and taught in a variety of rooms around the school emphasising their marginality. Teachers, on the whole, looked upon their classrooms as

Photograph 20 Relaxed Classroom Atmosphere



private domains or a form of fixed feature territory. Those entering that space, e.g. researchers or other staff, violated that territory. Deangate staff admitted that they reacted in two distinct ways. The first was by way of a professional front - yes it was ok, they had nothing to be concerned about; the second was an emotive response of increased tension - depending on who entered the room.

Within the classroom, the way in which the teacher organises space, both in terms of formal and interpersonal space, reflect very much his/her teaching style. For example, photograph 20 shows a teacher at work. The teacher's close, casual relationship with pupils went hand in hand with his relaxed style of teaching and complemented the teaching space. Note the proximity and casual body attitudes of both teacher and pupils and how this contrasts the formality in photograph 19 - teacher moves class sit.

#### Classroom as 'Private' and 'Public' Space

The relationship between the classroom as 'private' space, emphasising teachers' autonomy, and as 'public' space being influenced by societal norms needs to be explored at this stage.

Looking across verbal and non-verbal communication, noise and proxemics, it is possible to identify three themes. Firstly, societal norms are central to all that takes place within the classroom. They predominate to such an extent that true 'alternatives' to teachers and learning are not



possible because as an aspect of 'sameness' they are invisible and not on the agenda for change. Deangate adopted those classroom norms and worked within the prescribed framework. If we consider some of those taken for granted norms and render them problematic, we observe the following: that classrooms are 'crowded' with pupils who have little choice but to attend; that conflict and problems of control are assumed as normal but major aspects of classroom interaction; that teachers, in exerting authority, engage in an oppressive use of power which is antithetical to their (and society outside world) democratic ideals; that teachers typically fail to give due recognition to the extent to which students are expected to conform to the expectation of others, to subdue personal feelings in the interest of the common good. These common, but unquestioned assumptions, on which classroom teaching is based, are responsible for much of the day to day communication in classrooms. They are the common denominators that represent "sameness" in classrooms. Secondly, it is clear that the coercive influence of unquestioned societal norms is so compelling that conformity predominates. No doubt teacher's own personal 'style' and the lesson content do impinge upon classroom interaction and teachers do establish unique relationships with each individual class. But, at Deangate, societal norms and private, individual classroom 'style', were unaffected by plans or rules designed by the heirarchy. Any form of classroom atmosphere particular to, or a sub-

culture of Deangate, came out of private and individual classroom practice.

Finally, the single characteristic feature running across the school's classrooms was humour. Humour was not an outcome of any pre-conceived plan or hierarchial thrust, but coincidental and unexpected. Comments from teachers, pupils and visitors, all point to humour as an unusually common feature of classroom interaction, and thus a feature of Deangate's 'difference'.

### Part Two - Hierarchical Communication

In the last section I considered communication in the classroom. Out of the data arose taken for granted features rather than elements of Deangate's character. In this section the balance is redressed, not by any predetermined scheme on my part, but by the nature of the data which highlighted unique characteristics of interpersonal communication at the school.

Here I will examine key elements of hierarchical interaction in order to identify significant features of communication between them and the staff. By significant I mean those elements which influence, shape or reflect the character of the school, particularly its interpersonal communication. The hierarchy and the staff are naturally separate from one another. By staking 'private' territory and undertaking different tasks and roles, they create a natural boundary across which both parties communicate. Staff use each

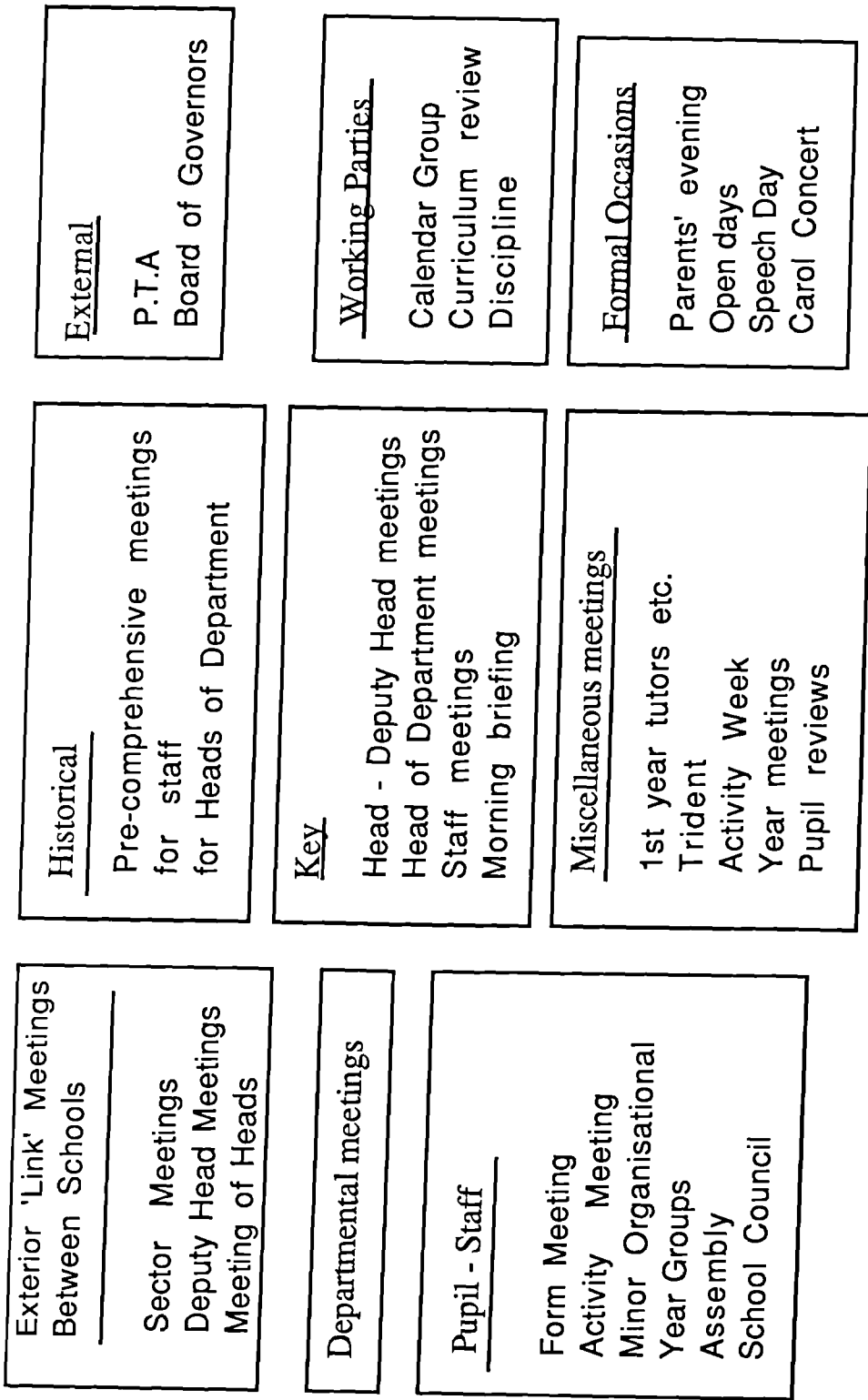


Figure 1 Formal Interaction - Meetings

other's work spaces, corridors, the staffroom, as their 'private' discussion places, whilst the hierarchy tend to restrict their informal and formal 'chats' to offices, corridors or telephone. Their 'private' places and different roles lead to a degree of segregation, although neither party would acknowledge a strong line of demarcation existed between them.

Deangate held a large number of meetings (see Fig 1) in order to collect and pass on information and make decisions. In Chapter 5 I discussed formal teacher interaction by examining process, influence and micro-politics operating within meetings. I suggested that decisions were made before meetings began and 'manoeuvring', and micro-political ploys and power games were common occurrences. Now I want to look at informal communication in Part 2 and Part 3 in a similar way, by exploring what was communicated, meaning, and what was perceived.

### The Head

Of all the people at Deangate, it was Alan Walters who stood 'centre of stage' during the school's formal occasions. He was its 'figure head' who represented the school in the external world and to whom faces turned at formal meetings for signals of support, pleasure or displeasure. Although the Head did not occupy a pivotal position in the school's informal communication system, his individual 'acts' were important to its general ambience. The staff often looked to Alan Walters to define and make sense of their work

situation. It was he who could promote, censor, encourage or ignore individuals, and it was he who defined the importance or otherwise of subject specialisms, committees, curriculum and the school's traditions. And so staff looked to him for signs - the way he dressed, the shape of his eyes and mouth, his posture - always beyond what was said, which would communicate his inner feelings. This was important to teachers since it was their relationship with the Head and his definition of school which shaped much of their working lives. Understanding the Head was important to staff not only in their need to make sense of their situation but in a broader sense - to know how to act and react, to manipulate the situation to meet their own needs. Goffman (1956) suggests that the needs teachers experience is common to all day to day interactions. Here Goffman is describing a group reacting to a new group member:

They (the group in-situ) will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude towards them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him.

(page 13)

It is possible only to briefly address the Head's individual capacity to communicate with the staff. Deangate's Head was

visible and mobile. From the outset he consulted quietly and unobtrusively and operated an 'open door' policy. He believed emphatically in keeping staff informed. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, the staff saw Alan Walters as honest, open and sincere. A teacher summed up the Head's personality adding a word of concern by saying: "He's such a nice bloke that he needs protecting from himself sometimes." I will illustrate with a series of examples the way in which individual members and groups of the staff interpreted the Head's basic characteristics by 'honesty, openness and sincerity'. It is important to note that the following examples of teacher interpretations did not remain private between Alan Walters and the teacher concerned, but became public property through 'the grapevine'. The perspectives individual teachers formed eventually established themselves as in-school folklore and gave insight to others on how to approach the Head with their needs and problems, and how best to interpret his actions (I am using 'acts' and 'actions' in the same way Goffman uses 'sign-vehicles' - as a source of information from which observers glean clues).

One of the earliest judgements made by Deangate's staff was of the Head's values. Alan Walters expressed them on many formal occasions and through his everyday acts. High on his list was the good name of the school. He saw education as moral, concerned with transmitting 'right' values and to this end he emphasises family, citizenship and concern for others.

The staff realised that Alan Walters enjoyed wit and good humour. This was important to a large body of teachers who construed the Head's humorous acts as sanctioning their own brand of fun. This gave rise to numerous individual expressions throughout the school. These were praised and encouraged by the Head.

Earlier in this section I quoted a teacher who stated: "He's such a nice bloke that he needs protecting from himself sometimes." This suggests that the head was too 'nice' for his designated role. During my year at Deangate, I heard Alan Walters criticize members of his staff on only two occasions, and both were carried out in the privacy of his own room. Alan Walters disliked to criticize and preferred to emphasise the positive. His enthusiasm for promoting the positive and playing down the negative was reflected in the content of his private and public communication. Speech Days, school assembly and staff meetings were places where positive, "Food for the troops" as one teacher described the Head's rhetoric, were most commonly asserted. A member of staff who knew Alan Walters for many years expressed his exasperation by stating:

He's too nice. He won't tell the staff or kids when things are not good. He always talks about the good things, when things are going well or we have something to be proud of. He doesn't tell the school when or why pupils are being expelled and they want to know. He always sees the good side of people.

Teachers identified what they considered to be the Head's strengths and weaknesses and some used that knowledge for their own gain. One belief generally held by staff was that the Head was weak in a 1:1 confrontation. It is difficult to know how such beliefs came about, although there was evidence to suggest that staffroom gossip played a part. Although there were many instances where the evidence refutes this commonly held belief, Alan Walter's frailty in such situations became enshrined in staffroom folklore.

Goffman (1956) cites two kinds of communication - expression given and expressions given off - the latter being a more 'theatrical and contextual' approach to communication. It is difficult to know to what extent Alan Walters cultivated 'expression given off' or how such expressions were received. He wanted visitors and newcomers to feel welcome in the school and that staff should feel that he was approachable and friendly. However, Alan Walters used similar acts of welcome and friendship with everyone, not realising that people interpret acts differently. Visitors to the school were given a two handed handshake, a pat on the back, or even an arm on the shoulder for those who visited frequently. These were generally interpreted as acts of warmth and generosity by the recipients. Alan Walters used such actions to demonstrate genuine emotion. As Berger (1963) points out:

One feels more ardent by kissing, more humble by kneeling, more angry by shaking one's fist.

(page 113)



A second form of 'expressions given off' was noticeable from the Head's manner and deportment. The position and status conferred on a Head is almost automatic. The principal in Jackson's (1977) study made a similar point:

Attention was automatically bestowed upon me as a function of my new status. It went with the territory.  
(page 427)

Alan Walters was invited to functions and mixed socially with the dignitaries of the city. The Head wore his cloak of office with pride and acted in a manner befitting his position and status. But again his manner was interpreted by some staff and parents as aloofness. They construed the firm handshake, the sombre suit, the half rimmed glasses on the end of his nose, the emphasis on politeness and properness, as coolness.

The 'expressions given off', both in terms of manner and performance, were ingredients of the role of friendship as played by Alan Walters. He thoroughly believed in the part he played. Goffman (1956) states:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be.

(page 28)

Although at Deangate there were subterranean feelings from staff who interpreted the Head's manner and 'performance' negatively, and whose understanding shaped the character of staffroom folklore, there was no sign of a major conflict between staff and hierarchy. There were three basic reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of teachers found Alan Walters acceptable and wished to maintain the status quo. This is perhaps an indication of the taken for granted relationship between Head and staff. Secondly, the Head's belief in the part he played and thirdly his actions stayed within teachers' beliefs of what constituted 'proper' role. This last point is described by Becker (1965):

Teachers have a well-developed conception of just how and towards what ends the principal's authority would be used, and conflict arises when it is used without regard for the teachers' expectations.

(page 246)

### The Deputy Heads

Each of Deangate's Deputy Heads had a particular way of communicating which reflected their personal traits and interpersonal skills. The combination of their individual styles, the structure of the school administration and teachers' reactions, influenced the character of hierarchical communication. The role of the Deputy Heads was particularly important since it was one of 'go-between'. They interpreted and communicated the pragmatic day to day details of school policy and administration. Deputy Heads also acted as the Head's 'ears' in the staffroom picking up

staff reactions, gossip and needs. Although at Deangate each Deputy Head was designated a number of responsibilities, the staff were unclear as to who was responsible for what, as one teacher explained:

I don't know what each of the Deputies do, where their responsibilities lie and where they overlap, who to go to for different things. . .

This remark was made during the third term of the school's first year. That staff did not know who officially to turn to was immaterial since the Deputy Heads' roles did not match given roles. The end result was that staff chose to discuss their problems with whom they considered best suited. I will expand on this issue soon, but first I would like to outline communication characteristics of each Deputy Head.

#### Robert Lauren

Robert was a very generous affable person. In school he was considered conscientious in his work. He performed well at interviews held for the post of Deputy Head prior to reorganisation and was given the highest possible grading by the interviewing panel. However, early on in the second term my data began to show that Robert was finding the position an onerous one:

. . . 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year examination organisation was a disaster and staff are complaining bitterly. This was originally Robert's job but a few days before the

exams were due to start someone noticed that Robert had yet to start work on the exam timetable. Steve and Paulene (the other Deputy Heads) took the task on. They worked until 2am one night. There are a number of mistakes and they are being chided by staff.

(Notes 22 April 1986)

The story was repeated many times during the year and it was clear that Robert lacked the required organisational skill for the position. However his major problems lay in communication on a personal level with staff. A teacher commented:

You can't hold a logical conversation with Robert. He's in a world of his own. He's good at writing on bits of paper and sticking them up on the board but terrible at communication. . .

These difficulties ultimately led to a lack of trust in Robert by the Head and staff. The Head found delegation to him a problem as his trust, a fragile commodity, was unjustified. Weindling and Earley (1987) found in their survey of new Heads, that coping with a weak member of the senior management team was one of the highest rated difficulties encountered (page 59). Although the Head reprimanded Robert on a number of occasions, he failed to make inroads into his Deputy Head's problems. Also he kept the matter quiet, by following proper and correct procedure reprimanding in private. This was interpreted by staff as: "He's doing nothing about it." (teacher). Like the concept of the Head being weak at 1:1 confrontations, the idea that

Alan Walters failed to discipline staff, especially those of high status, became embodied in staffroom folklore.

The school's solution to the problem of a weak Deputy Head came about slowly and naturally without planning or preconception. Robert was avoided where possible and worked around. Staff simply took their problems to one of the other Deputy Heads even though the matter was Robert's responsibility. Where Robert's work overlapped with another Deputy, that Deputy absorbed the workload. Taking on board weaker teachers' work recurred in many situations throughout the school. That teachers should shoulder the extra work was unquestioned, almost automatic. In industry the weak link would be 'promoted sideways' or moved to a position more befitting their skills. In schools, the staff grumble, accept the situation and adapt as best they can - they shudder and move on.

### Steve Black

In terms of communication skills Steve was the opposite of Robert. He was a social animal who enjoyed discussion with all levels of the school. He was noted for his tact, patience, and willingness to listen to teachers concerns. The keynote of his communication was his 'personal touch' which staff viewed as "quaint but old fashioned" (teacher). Steve was often to be seen walking around the school looking for teachers and often walked into lessons 'for a quick chat' rather than sort out difficulties by more formal

methods. Despite a heavy workload he took time out to help staff in difficulty.

### Paulene Wright

Paulene's style of communication contrasted and complemented Alan Walters's and Steve Black's style. Where they were restrained she was direct, where they prevaricated and consulted she saw issues in black and white terms and made rapid decisions, where they were pleasantly disorganised she was efficient. Their individual communication skills dovetailed well with Alan Walters's penchant for public relations, Steve Black as diplomat and Paulene as pragmatic. Although officially Paulene was responsible for the lower school, she took on board work relating to all levels of the school. This was particularly true of discipline where she dealt not only with recalcitrant girls but also difficult boys. A member of staff explained why he sent pupils to Paulene rather than Robert whose official responsibility 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year pupils were:

I miss the Year Head - someone to send naughty pupils to. I send them to the Head but you can't do that very often since he's your last resort. I don't send them to Robert because he treats them so badly. He shouts at them and looks over their heads.

The point here is that official structures were usurped because the teacher concerned saw a Deputy Head as inadequate.

### The Character of Hierarchical Communication

In the last section I outlined briefly the individual communication styles of Deangate's hierarchy. The key figure was Alan Walters who clearly indicated by his actions and the content of his communication, what he saw as the principal philosophy of the school - that it should be caring, 'family' orientated, and that individuals matter. He was a highly 'visible' Head which pleased staff (they often recalled previous 'cardboard cutout' Heads they had known). Alan Walters was particularly keen to consult with his staff, but with this came the expectation that teachers should act in an autonomous professional manner. Headship is an individual act. Weber (1970) outlined how control was achieved by a charismatic leader; Darling (1967) wrote of "government by notes and directives" (page 65); Halpin (1960) concentrated on the "language of eyes and hands, of gesture, of time and status symbols" (page 85). Deangate's leadership is characterised by the latter perspective, for Alan Walters believed totally in his manner and 'performance' which formed a pattern of proper and appropriate conduct for headship.

Two of the school's three Deputy Heads followed the Head's lead, emphasising face to face interaction, and formalized school policy by talk rather than documentation. Ball (1987) suggests three main styles of headship: interpersonal, managerial and political, the latter consisting of two subdivisions, the adversarial and authoritarian (page 87). Deangate's style of headship was reflected by the summation

of hierarchical communication - strongly interpersonal. All three (the exception being Robert) were at ease entering the staffroom and were often seen out of their offices walking around the school.

My data suggest a link between style of communication and content of communication. Talk was predominantly concerned with people and day to day decisions rather than the curriculum, the timetable, future planning, paper administration or the implementation of school policy. The reasons for this are unclear but there were indications that the intensive nature of Deangate's style of communication meant that little time was available for contemplation or consideration of alternative practice. Indeed the outcome of Deangate's hierarchy's style of 'management by interaction' would loosely be described as 'hustle and bustle'.

Deangate's management practice, as does other schools', was based on a number of taken for granted assumptions, which by industrial management standards would be considered bad practice. The school unquestioningly accepted the day to day practice of role switching, too many purposes and lack of management time. It is not surprising that these assumed practices combined with the schools adopted interpersonal style of leadership/communication led to the 'hustle and bustle' I have described.

The link between the hierarchy and the staff, like the link between Head and Deputies, was based on interdependency.



Hence both parties sought to manipulate the other. The Head sought to control his staff yet instil a concern for teamwork, cooperation and solidarity. The staff looked to the Head essentially for patronage, to give the all important 'nod' to their particular cause. Wolcott (1973), Willis (1980) and others have pointed out that a great proportion of Heads' time is spent in verbal communication. Gronn (1983) goes further by analysing the verbal communication and demonstrating that:

Control is an aspect of administration for which talk is a key resource, particularly for staff relations, and in schools, talk is a potential instrument of control for both principal and staff.

(page 1)

Gronn's analysis, that talk accomplishes administration and used to: "do the work of tightening and loosening" (page 1) of administrative control, was clearly evident at Deangate. However, one interesting alternative to the staff's use of talk was the formal letter. This was employed by a number of staff who wished to make a complaint or felt strongly about a contemporary issue. Perhaps the teachers concerned were intimidated by the Head's verbal strength, feeling that written protests would gain them a better hearing or that such a formal declaration would be taken more seriously. Whatever the reason, the letters, almost without exception, would conclude with something like: ". . . I wanted to put on record my dismay." The Head always replied in a similar fashion.

Staff interpretation of hierarchical action was crucial and at times unpredictable. The Head, for example, often spoke in glowing terms of meetings and events which staff saw as mediocre; he suppressed, too often for the staff's liking, the difficulties the school was facing. The Head's positive approach of looking through rose tinted spectacles may have been due to a variety of reasons but staff inevitably failed to take such considerations into account when forming opinions.

Although the staff made judgements of the Head and his Deputies from general interactions, formal meetings and informal meetings in corridors etc, and observation of individual 'performance', their views were not always based on fact or logic. The staffroom, from time to time, echoed with gossip and rumour, the outcome of which was a staffroom folklore of questionable accuracy. A small faction of teachers were responsible for sowing the initial seeds.

I would like to make two final points. The first concerns the role of history in hierarchical communication. I have described Alan Walters's adopted 'manner', seen by some as aloofness, which may be construed as contrary to his concern for informality. No doubt staff perspectives were influenced to some extent by their own 'histories' which have been echoed in earlier Chapters. Fletcher (1937) states that:

. . . his (the Head's) powers are limited by the traditions of the school as well as by the

personalities of his staff.

(page 236)

Alan Walters, being an old boy, was raised wholly on the traditions of the old Grammar school and based his 'manner' on the appropriate 'manner' of past Heads of the school. An alternative derivative is offered by Gronn (1983):

Most school principals are promoted through the ranks of the teaching service before becoming principals. Prospective principals assimilate these techniques of classroom talk and control as part of their administrative socialization.

(page 18)

Thus a Head, on learning role distancing as a teacher who needs to control pupils, employs a similar tactic as a method of controlling staff, and it is role distancing which parallels Alan Walters's 'manner'.

The second point concerns the implementation of policy. In the first section of this chapter I considered communication in the classroom. A fundamental question raised in this thesis is 'What constitutes the nature of 'sameness' and 'difference'?'. Only 'sameness' was conspicuous in a classroom context, 'difference' playing a minor role in the shape of humour. In the second section of this chapter, I stated that the hierarchy clearly stated school policy and philosophy yet I observed little in the way of implementation of those policies, and little indication that

Deangate's classrooms were different in any way from other schools. I was expecting to see some kind of uniformity, consensus of practice, which would indicate that Deangate staff were implementing agreed top down policy decisions. Although there were indications - the humour and the tentative agreement on noise - these in themselves were insufficient to merit the label of uniqueness, special to Deangate School. The gap between policy decisions made by the hierarchy and implementation was identified in Chapter 4, when it was seen that form teachers did not use form time as 'prime teaching time' but 'did their own thing'. It appears that teachers take a similar approach to their everyday teaching. This important issue will be raised again in Chapter 7.

### Part Three - The Staffroom

There are, arguably, three places in a Secondary school which are central to an ethnographer's understanding of school: The Head's office; the main hall; and the staffroom.

What makes the study of communication in the staffroom so important? The staffroom to teachers is what the playground is to pupils. It is where they are most relaxed - their 'sanctuary', 'safe place', asylum, in the school. Outside of the staffroom teachers are more likely to be guarded in their actions and adapt their speech according to the person(s) they are addressing and the point behind the talk. The social constraints of the classroom or the

principal's office are not present in the staffroom and the ethnographer is more likely to establish true feelings in such atmosphere. It is the place where the smoke screen of official versions of reality are penetrated and the school's alternative, unofficial, version of reality is established.

Sayer (1985) sees the staffroom not simply as a restplace, workplace or social area, but in terms of atmosphere:

It (the staffroom) both affects and reflects the spectrum of staff relationships, the degree of communality, the ethos of the school, morale of the staff. . .

(page 34)

But it is more than that. Unlike other areas of the school, the staffroom witnesses the drama and trauma of everyday life because it was here that teachers dropped their official 'fronts'. Deangate's staffroom saw a marriage break up, deep personal grief, blossoming romance, dances and gay parties. This aspect obviously lies outside the brief of this thesis but it does indicate the extent of the staffroom's 'backstage' role.

Having established the importance of the staffroom to teachers and to this study, I want to illustrate some of its taken for granted features, look at the different forms of communication, and finally to consider Deangate's staffroom humour.

Photograph 21 Deangate Staffroom



### Taken for Granted Staffroom

There are a whole host of features commonly found in school staffrooms. Woods (1983) describes many of them:

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 discretely while there. Its boundaries are clearly demarcated . . . The 'properties' of the staffroom often lend it a distinctive character - perhaps old battered armchairs which 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 evidence of many a happy break - both symbols of individuality; and frequently a sea of vast disorder - masses of papers, books, journals strewn around flat areas - which contrast 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.

(pages 38-39)

The characteristics outlined by Woods are equally applicable to Deangate and, I suggest, to a large number of Secondary school staffrooms. One interesting feature of Deangate's staffroom was its 'L' shape, which led to two distinct groupings (see photograph 21). Around the corner, hidden from the main part of the staffroom, two like-minded groups met - the science department and the disenchanteds. It was in

this area where seeds of discontent were sown and the clique of the alternative culture huddled. The hierarchy were well aware of this 'enclave of dissidents' and were very concerned at the nature of their discussion. By the third year of the school's existence the clique had disbanded and been replaced by more general threat to the school management which I will expand on in Chapter 8.

The two groups I have outlined were the first to stake a territory. As time passed others began to set up niches and meeting places - the corners being most favoured. Ball makes the observation:

. . . within a single staffroom there is a geopolitical distribution of groups. There are often fixed seats and corners for departments or political or social confederates.

(page 83)

Although some staff at Deangate always sat in certain positions, apart from the two groupings I have mentioned earlier, the main body of staff did not rigidly follow a 'political or social confederates' pattern of association but moved within loose 'friendship groups'. This was noticed and mentioned by new staff and cover teachers, one of whom said: "The staffroom's great, none of the cliquishness of other schools and they're so friendly."

Members of the staff were inclined to compare Deangate's staffroom with their previous school. The resident ex



Grammar school staff suggested: "The gentleman's club atmosphere has gone and the women teachers around certainly make it fun." The general feeling of staff was that staffroom atmosphere was friendly and an improvement on their past schools.

In many ways Deangate's staffroom possessed many features commonly found in schools: It was a private place and territorially separate from the rest of the school; it had what Woods calls 'properties' such as battered armchairs and old mugs; there were territories within territories where cliques, clans and confederates met (Ball's geo-political groups); all of which build towards an important and unique staffroom atmosphere which Sayer claims affects and reflects the ethos of the school.

#### Staffroom Discussion

The predominant activity of the staffroom was talk, ranged from politics to sport but often focussing on the school and its pupils. Hammersley (1984) raises the issue of who talks to whom:

One important but neglected area is the structure of social relationships to be found among teachers. This is a key issue in itself, but of course, staff relations are also likely to be a significant factor shaping what occurs in the classrooms.

(page 203)

As I have already indicated, Deangate staff interacted within a loose framework of 'friendship groups'. However these grouping became less significant when important (to staff) issues were raised. Teachers, in groups or as individuals, would seek out 'like minds' or those ears they could 'bend' and who were willing to listen to their grievances, views or gossip. A prime example of a group coming together in such a way was the 'alternative culture' group mentioned earlier in Part Two, who formed a most unlikely confederation. This was not unusual. Many of those who formed pressure groups or mutual interest groups politically active in formulating staffroom views and attitudes, came together not out of friendship but out of mutuality.

Individuals were prominent in establishing staffroom perspectives, myth and folklore. At Deangate such people tended either to be powerful and respected or 'professional gossips'. I differentiate here between gossip as a common everyday activity and 'mainline' gossip, convergent and perpetuated by a professional approach. The hierarchy knew of the 'professional gossips' and who, therefore, posed a threat to the school's stability. Powerful and respected individuals were not seen as a direct threat by the hierarchy because the 'up-front' nature of their communication was viewed as containable by standard cut and thrust of debate. Rumour mongers and 'professional gossips' on the other hand were seen as illicit and acts of

'underground' factions and as such difficult to anticipate or combat. Ball (1987) takes the issue further:

Gossip related to self-interest reinforces and exacerbates basic divisions. It grows at the cracks and gaps in the mutuality of an organisation. It fosters antagonism, accusation, insult, exaggeration and indignation . . . It undermines credibility and reputation.

(page 218)

The 'professional gossips' and rumour mongers were an important informal vehicle of social control at Deangate School. They contributed towards a growing anti-hierarchy movement which gained in favour as the school evolved.

Day to day conversations included discussion of difficult pupils and incidents of deviant behaviour. Hammersley (1984) sums up his article on this subject by stating:

. . . one important function of staffroom news . . . is a kind of collective stocktaking in which teachers compare notes and bring themselves up to date about pupils whom they all face in the classroom.

(page 212)

Deangate's 'news' followed a similar trend. A fundamental feature of teachers' discussion of pupils was the mutual sharing of knowledge. The staff at Deangate on the whole cared about their pupils and liked to demonstrate their concern. This rather conflicts with Hargreaves' (1972) view of staffroom talk:

. . . teachers are not expected by their colleagues to be enthralled by the job or rapturous about the pupils.

(page 405)

Clearly Hargreaves views staffroom discussion as normally cynical. Deangate staff may have made the odd cynical remark but such barbs were directed at external agents (see Chapter 7) or used as a defence mechanism in times of frustration. Usually the teachers sought to foster an atmosphere of professional caring, believing that such an attitude was incumbent in their role.

Staffroom information was passed to, and around staff, in a variety of ways. It was formally announced during morning briefings, pinned to noticeboards or transmitted during informal meetings. The first thing in the morning before school began and quite often at break, staff would cluster around the noticeboard checking or absorbing data and discuss implications. The noticeboard acquired more and more notices until a state of confusion reigned. The hierarchy were guilty of allowing the noticeboard to become overburdened and confusing. The staff for their part, failed to raise the issue with those responsible and the outcome was simmering discontent.

Matters initially raised during informal 'chats' were dissected and expanded upon at great length outside the school. Two principal, regular meetings occurred on a

Friday, one at lunchtime in a nearby public house, and at the end of term at 'POETS' night (piss off everybody tomorrow's saturday). Up to 15 teachers would meet socially and naturally discussion turned to the school. Topical issues such as school policy, organisation and management were debated here and strategy and tactics were planned. It is worth noting that these meetings of extended social groups, by nature were more open and less restrained than gatherings in the sanctuary of the staffroom.

Although staffroom talk and communication in general was concerned with schooling, there were information gaps. Teachers rarely discussed their own subject speciality, its content, method of working, or departmental difficulties.

#### Staffroom Humour

As I have already indicated, humour existed in Deangate's classrooms. But the nerve centre was the staffroom, since it was here that humour was explored, exploited and sanctioned. Humour was communicated in two ways: verbally via jokes, quips, witticism, ridicule and clowning; or visually by cartoons, noticeboard double entendre, bizarre clothing and posters. Humour in a school is so prevalent in staffrooms that it constitutes a taken for granted element of school. Woods (1983) sees humour as a reaction to the task of teaching and suggests that teachers use laughter to:

. . . relax the more stressful elements of their formal role.

(page 41)

Each school interprets and personalizes humour. Thus the character, style, amount, or lack of humour, will be indicative of a school's internal disposition.

Deangate's staffroom humour was identified by its volume, variety and widespread dissemination. The staffroom appeared to have more than its share of jokers and wits, and added to these were a host of laughter makers who, rather than play a 'centre of stage' role, opted for 'fringe theatre'. The butt of the humour varied considerably - the hierarchy, pupils, other staff, 'self', and passing researchers.

Humour was found in different places in the staffroom. The main noticeboard was the central area for serious notices but often infiltrated by light quips. Whereas the main noticeboard was an informal area for lighthearted jest, the 'No Comments' noticeboard formalized staffroom humour. The Head sanctioned humour by making a special place in the corner of the staffroom for teachers to make witty comments. It was here, on the 'No Comments' noticeboard, that humour was institutionalised and staff made very pointed and serious statements about the nature of teaching. I have included a number of cartoons from this noticeboard as evidence of staff feelings and include another now in order to establish the seriousness of teacher intent which underpin the humour (Post Teacher Action Cartoon, over page). Much of the humour was directed at teachers' own situation and reflected their frustration with inspectors, parents, and society in general.



**...AND HOW IS MORALE AMONGST THE STAFF  
HEADMASTER?'**

Post-Teacher Action Cartoon. September 1987

Parental letters (actual letters), regularly pinned to the board, were examples of such frustration. One letter begins:

My son michael come home today very upset he said he had been moved out of a top english group to a bottom one well that to me does not go hand in hand with his report it must be a mistake it will have a bad affect on his way on thinking about school hope you can solve this matter quickly.

Here teachers are venting frustrations but also indicating the gap which exists between parent and staff. The act of

pinning up such letters was an act of unification and exorcism.

Humour in the staffroom was often limited to light-hearted banter whose function was to stave off boredom, monotony and the alienating effects of institutionalization. Humour was acceptable during the report writing periods, when teachers were obliged to comment on 300 or more pupils. At such times teachers would slip in the odd humorous remark. The staff's mistakes and pupil howlers were recounted periodically as part of the institution's storehouse of jokes. Staff embellished their raconteur ability with pupils: "So I said to him - 'of course I'm right. I'm the Art teacher and also I'm right 'cos I'm bigger than you are'." Here teachers were seeking to retain and synchronize private 'self' with the teacher or public 'self' (see Goffman 1956).

Humour, then, is part and parcel of school. It is not a peripheral activity, for as Woods (1984b) points out:

Laughter is the coping mechanism par-excellence. Lack of it might suggest non-survival. Its presence is a sure indication of managing.

(page 202)

Behind the humour are various meanings: The Head, by his approval of humour in the form of a 'No Comments' noticeboard, by individual acts of jocularly and by instigating humour in the school, sanctioned humour at Deangate; the volume and variety of staffroom humour from



teachers appeared unusually high and was commented on by 'outsiders'; and finally the humour acted as a unifying factor, allowing staff to identify and affirm shared difficulties with parents, their role and society in general.

### Summary

In this chapter I have focused on aspects of communication at Deangate School in an attempt to move closer to the question: 'What is the nature of school?' The chapter was divided into three parts: The Classroom; Hierarchical Communication; and The Staffroom.

The first part, 'The Classroom', detailed taken for granted features of classroom interaction and included societal norms and expectations as well as professionally based assumptions of codes of practice. Clearly these features formed a powerful coercive influence together with the teachers' own particular style of teaching. The teachers and the pupils negotiated and interpreted these taken for granted features but conformity and character came from the assumptions themselves and not from any preconceived plan or approach by hierarchy or staff. The teachers appeared to be reacting to, and at the same time overwhelmed by, the taken for granted expectancies of society and institution. Rarely did an individual department stamp its own identity on its classrooms, except in terms of curriculum content and even then some individuals tended to 'do their own thing' to the annoyance of others. The only factor which stood out beyond

mere interpretation of unquestioned classroom assumptions and stakes a claim as being special to Deangate School was humour. The level of humour in classrooms was commented by visitors, pupils and teachers themselves, and came about not by any preconceived plan but out of individual disposition.

In Part Two, 'Hierarchical Communication', I looked at individual members of the hierarchy - how they communicated individually, between themselves, and how the hierarchical team interacted with the staff. The hallmark of Alan Walters' communication was his emphasis of the positive aspects of the school whilst playing down the negative or problematic, and his concern for solidarity and teamwork. Yet despite his friendly easy going temperament, staff (and parents) were aware that he bore the mantle of headship which some described as aloofness.

All but one of Deangate's hierarchy employed a strongly interpersonal style of communication, hence their relaxed manner in the staffroom, the use of christian names and the emphasis on face to face communication. Much of the hierarchy's everyday work consisted of talk - usually short discussions and informal 'chats' concerned with the daily functioning of the school - rather than with long term planning or implementation of school policy. The features common to schooling found at hierarchical level - role switching, too many purposes, lack of management time - were also present at Deangate. These features, combined with the adoption of an interpersonal style of communication, led to

what was described as the 'hustle and bustle' nature of the hierarchy's day to day activity.

Part Three, 'The Staffroom', explored the multifarious features of staffroom communication with stress placed on taken for grantedness and forms of communication. The staffroom contained and mirrored a wide range of physical and social taken for granted characteristics which are commonly found in classrooms. The staff, pupils and hierarchy all recognised the area as a place of 'sanctuary' for teachers who, by their own volition, emphasised the point by personalizing the space and by placing restrictions on its use and access. The physical boundary of the staffroom helped to maintain privacy but also acted to restrict and formalize, to some extent, communication between teachers and the hierarchy. Goffman (1956) suggests:

The work walls do, they do in part because they are honoured or socially recognised as communication barriers giving rise, among properly conducted members of the community, to the possibility of 'conventional situational closure' on the absence of actual physical closure.

(page 152)

Therefore, although the Head and his Deputies had established an affable relationship with the teachers, the physical boundary and social convention restricted their access and effected communication.

The majority of discussion taking place in the staffroom took place within loose friendship groups, hence staffroom news was quickly passed around. It was during informal gatherings and later outside school, that teachers discussed school policy, organisation and dictums laid down by the hierarchy, and strategies to circumvent management decision were mooted. Burgess (1983) observed a similar trend at Bishop McGregor School:

. . . no teacher disagreed with any of Ron's proposals or suggestions, which indicated that they formally and publicly recognised his position. However, outside these meetings it was usual for some discussion and private dissension to take place among teachers in the working staffroom, who would modify Ron's suggestions about routines to be adopted.

(page 68)

One further issue to arise from the analysis of staffroom exchanges was the influence of 'professional gossips' and rumour mongers. A small number of individuals perpetuated what I have termed 'mainline' gossip which acted to undermine the credibility of the hierarchy, especially the Head. Rumours concerning the Head's intentions, preferences and personal weaknesses were launched intermittently by these teachers, often on the slimmest of evidence. Although some of the staffroom folklore concerning the hierarchy was generally accurate, others had their beginnings in incorrect interpretations and fertile minds. The hierarchy were aware of staffroom gossips but felt, justifiably, vulnerable to their barbs.

Despite the taint of negativeness which was present, the staffroom atmosphere was generally warm and hospitable. The room itself witnessed many enjoyable social occasions and often echoed to the sound of explosive laughter. Humour at Deangate was alive and well and prospered among a plethora of laughter makers. Certainly the humour went well beyond the norm for staffrooms and came in many forms and guises. The Head, who by nature enjoyed wit and comedy, sanctioned, by initiating humorous episodes himself, the escapades of the staff. Indeed, humour could be said to have been institutionalised at Deangate.

Finally, I would like to make four observations. Firstly, classroom interaction appeared to be dominated by external expectations, the social structure and culture of society, and taken for granted internal norms. Despite attempts to isolate features or actions special to Deangate School, my data identified only 'humour' as significant and worthy of mention. This may be due to insensitivity on my part or perhaps to the undeveloped nature of the school. However the lack of a unified approach in formal teaching spaces concurs with data from formtimes which I described in Chapter 4 of this study. I stated:

The only rule that applies to formtime is that there is no rule, and teachers were seen to interpret their role as formteacher idiosyncratically. Teachers routinely marked registers, but beyond that and underneath a mountain of external rhetoric, teachers adopted a personal approach.

This suggests that within classrooms at least, teachers 'did their own thing' unified mainly by institutional and societal norms. Thus Deangate's classroom "difference" was constituted essentially by taken for grantedness and serendipity, and 'flavoured' by humour.

My second observation concerns the extent and leverage of taken for grantedness. Obviously my analysis suggests it is most powerful when teachers act individually in the isolation of their classrooms. If this is the case we must question the scope of so called teacher autonomy. When staff came together in the privacy of the staffroom, taken for grantedness was less conspicuous and certainly overshadowed by a unique sense of unity, humour and warmth. As with classrooms, the special spirit and humour was not predetermined. Humour was not born of policy or any organised intent, and although it was aided by the Head's orchestration, it was mainly the product of summative personalities.

Thirdly, obviously humour above and beyond the norm, was a key feature of interaction in the school. It was prevalent in the hierarchy, classrooms and the staffroom, and was ostensibly one of the school's prime internal characteristics.

Finally, as far as the school's weak Deputy Head was concerned there was no question of dismissal, reduction of seniority or moving to a position better suited to his

ability as would be the case in non-school organisation.  
This feature of 'sameness' is found across schools and  
separates them from other forms of institutions.