

TEACHERS' ANECDOTES:

ACCESS TO CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

THROUGH NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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through Narrative Analysis

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Abstract

Teachers often tell anecdotes about children or classroom events. Such accounts are regarded as oral narratives of personal experience which are a natural part of teacher-to-teacher talk in occupational culture. In this thesis, models of narrative analysis are reviewed from the disciplines of sociology and sociolinguistics, psychology, literature and anthropology. In the empirical work, nearly one thousand narratives told by primary teachers were elicited in interviews or recorded in teachers' meetings. These are analysed in terms of their content and tellers' perspectives, both of which are considered elements of teachers' culture. Through narrative analysis a picture of primary teaching is built up, as portrayed by teachers. Particular narrative themes focussed upon include children who stand out, breakthroughs in learning, teachers' planning and teachers' experiences of disaster, humour and 'awkward' parents. Based on the analysis of these themes a number of models of teachers' cultural perspectives are suggested. The study proposes that narrative analysis can be used to study the cultural perspectives of occupational groups, in this case of teachers.

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PART I

BACKGROUND

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

Teachers talk a great deal to each other about their work. In informal staffroom discussion, anecdotes are often used to share recent classroom experiences. Here the term 'narrative' is used to describe this aspect of teachers' talk. The term 'anecdote' in the title avoids fictional connotations of 'narrative', while the term 'narrative' lends appropriate seriousness to the apparently trivial term 'anecdote'. The main purpose of this research is to study the personal accounts of primary teachers in order to examine their cultural perspectives. Whereas it is common to dismiss 'anecdotal evidence', here a substantial sample of anecdotes are the evidence.

A narrative is an account of past events or actions. The term 'teacher's narrative' refers to a teacher's oral account of past personal experience of teaching in the classroom. Such narratives occur most naturally when told by a teacher to others in informal staffroom conversation, but they are also told by teachers in meetings, at conferences, in academic settings and in interviews. The narratives under study here were mostly collected in research interviews. Some were gathered in teachers' conferences, discussion groups and staff meetings. In the interviews teachers were asked brief questions and asked to give examples from their classroom experience, in effect inviting them to tell narratives on certain themes

(see Part 3).

Teachers' narratives encapsulate typical episodes of classroom life as experienced by the tellers. By studying a large number of these narratives told by a substantial sample of teachers it is possible to identify some of the main perspectives and attitudes conveyed. It is claimed that studying primary teachers' narratives is one way to build up a picture of teachers' perceptions of primary teaching. British research on perspectives in the classroom (Hammersley, 1977; Woods and Hammersley 1977; Woods 1980; Woods 1983 a) takes a 'perspective' to be the matrix of assumptions by which someone makes sense of their world. In this view, perspectives are not simply reflections of reality but are constructed in the course of social interaction in terms essentially given by a culture. Culture is the framework for perceptions of others and for the interpretation of classroom interaction. It can be examined through teachers' narratives, which are cultural products. Narration is a cultural process.

The Parts in this work are arranged as follows: Part I gives some background of primary education in the 1970s, stresses the importance of teacher-to-teacher talk and sets the scene for the study of teachers' narratives in Chapter 1. The theoretical background for the narrative analysis will be presented in a literature review in Part II which has four chapters. Chapter 2 will examine narrative from the points of view of sociology, sociolinguistics and conversation analysis. Here teachers' narratives, as told in the staffroom, for example, are

viewed in terms of social interaction and performance. The chapter will include the main model of narrative analysis to be used in this study, the Evaluation model. Chapter 3 gives this model a cognitive dimension by a detailed consideration of some psychological models of narrative, with an emphasis on schema theories and the role of memory. This is important because teachers' narratives must be viewed in terms of recalled events experienced by tellers. Some key notions from structural approaches to literature are presented in Chapter 4 in order to enrich the definition of narrative and consider time and point of view in greater detail. A cultural dimension is added in Chapter 5 by outlining anthropological work in narrative analysis. Cultural variations of narrative structure and performance are presented in order to suggest that teachers' narratives have cultural dimensions, some of which are likely to be culturally or occupationally specific. Part III presents the results of the empirical work. Chapter 6 will describe the teacher sample, the interviews and the method of analysis which will be used. Chapters 7-13 will present the analysis of teachers' narratives. Some quantitative analysis of the interview narratives in Chapter 7 is followed by detailed analysis within the themes of children who stand out in their classes (Chapter 8), breakthroughs in children's learning (Chapter 9), teacher's planning (Chapter 10), accounts of disasters and humour in teaching (Chapter 11), and of problems with parents (Chapter 12). Teachers' perspectives on these topics, it is suggested, are important aspects of teachers' culture, though not the only ones. The final

chapter in Part III analyses some of the spontaneous narratives (Chapter 13). Part IV discusses the results and draws conclusions in Chapter 14.

Extensive use of quotation is made for two reasons. First, the purpose is to explore teachers' perspectives through their narratives. Evidence for statements about these perspectives is best presented by systematically arranging narrative extracts and by quoting whole narratives. Rather than relegate all this material to appendices, which would have meant cumbersome cross-referencing, the narrative quotations have been kept in the text in Part III. This has resulted in long chapters. Second, the quotations are the teacher's voices, giving their picture of teaching as they see it. It is appropriate that they should be heard.

This study therefore suggests that firstly, narratives are interesting linguistic texts to analyse in their own right. Their content is what teachers talk about, which is a reflection of their concerns. This itself is one aspect of teachers' culture. Secondly, narrative analysis can be a tool to study specific groups of tellers, in this case primary teachers. Access to teachers' cultural perspectives can be gained through a study of the narratives they tell. On both counts, a study of teachers' narratives is new and seems worthwhile.

CHAPTER ONE

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### THE CONTEXT FOR STUDYING TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

Chapter one considers briefly the context of primary teaching in the 1970's and then moves on to introduce aspects of teachers' culture and staffroom talk. These sections constitute a background for introducing and justifying the principal topic: teachers' narratives.

#### I. The Context of Primary Teaching.

It is likely that the broad national context is an important influence on the thinking and talking of primary teachers. This is almost certainly the case in times of national public debate and in periods of obvious rapid changes in the educational system. The period from the mid 1970's up to the late 1980's were such a time.

The following list indicates some of the outstanding events in primary education during the mid 1970's to the 1980's. Will teachers' concerns about this national context of primary education influence in any way the narratives they tell? This point will be taken up in Chapter 14.

There is general agreement about which events of the 1970's were outstanding for their impact on primary teachers (Bennett 1976 pp.1-10; Bernbaum (ed) 1979 pp.1-14; Galton et al 1980 pp.39-42, 56-58; Richards (ed) 1982 pp.7-21; Pollard 1985 pp.16-20). These can be

summarized as the following:

- The series of Black Papers, 1969-1975, which included a widely publicised critique of primary school 'progressive' methods, was seen by many as a 'backlash' against educational developments of the 1960's.
- Public perception of falling standards. Research which might have answered critics was not widely known to the public, nor even known to many teachers (Richmond 1978 p.14; Cane and Schroeder 1970). This perception was linked with a 'back to basics' movement emphasizing the 3R's and educational achievement.
- The rise of 'accountability' with, for example, the creation of the Assessment and Performance Unit in 1976 to monitor standards. This was seen as part of an increasing demand for control of teachers by outside agencies (Whiteside p.102 in Bernbaum (ed), 1979). The involvement of parent governors, the later movement towards target levels, the testing and assessment of primary pupils were also seen by some teachers as part of this process of reducing teachers' autonomy.
- The William Tyndale primary school dispute of 1974-1976 led to further widespread criticism of teachers in the press. This seemed to be generalized to all teachers. For example, there was the Times leader headlined 'Wild Men of the Classroom'. That the William Tyndale case made a deep impression on many primary teachers can be

deduced from the massive coverage of this affair given in the teachers' press. The Teacher and The Times Educational Supplement between 1975 and 1977 had weekly headlines serializing the court case, headlines which acquired something of the character of a logo. Popular accounts also soon appeared (Gretton and Jackson 1976; Ellis et al 1976).

- The widely discussed 1976 Ruskin College speech of Prime Minister Callaghan, calling for a 'Great Debate' over education with warning against 'modern' methods in primary schools. This was succeeded by well-reported regional conferences launching the 'debate'. There followed the publication of a long series of DES and HMI Consultative and Discussion documents over the next few years which developed a state conception of how education should be organized and what should be taught. These developments culminated in the National Curriculum of the 1980's (Fowler 1988).

All the above events created "an unprecedented level of uncertainty" for teachers ( Salter and Topper 1981 p.1, p. 231) in the worsening economic situation and subsequent limiting and cutting of educational budgets. Generally, there was a retreat from the optimism in education of the 1960's to a decline in the value and scale of education (Bernbaum (ed.) 1979). This was further emphasized at school level by demographic changes leading to falling primary rolls and early retirement or redeployment of some



staff.

In summary, primary teachers in the 1970's felt that they were under great public pressure and criticism. Teaching had been given a poor public image. Little publicity was given to teachers' own views and experiences. Few researchers were asking what teaching was really like. Even fewer were asking the teachers themselves. "Few attempts have been made to portray the subjective reality of teaching from the standpoint of, or in the words of, teachers themselves" (Nias 1989 p.19).

Essentially the present research asks teachers about their own experiences. Through an analysis of their narratives, it examines primary teachers' own evaluations of those experiences. The most natural and common occasion when teachers share experiences with each other is in informal gatherings in the staffroom. Such staffroom talk can usefully be regarded as a part of teachers' culture.

#### II.i. Teachers' Culture and Teachers' Talk.

As members of an occupational group with common qualifications, training, social background and conceptions about their work, teachers are often assumed to be members of a cultural group. That is, teachers are assumed to share certain patterns of knowledge, attitudes, norms and values. Hargreaves (1980 p.125) states that the occupational culture of teachers is "a surprisingly neglected topic". Teachers' informal culture, he says, will include a group understanding and solidarity to face the social situation of the school and the public at large. His assumption is that there is a sufficient degree

of cultural uniformity among teachers to make generalizations. On the other hand, Zeichner et al (1987) and Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1985) cite studies questioning this assumption of uniformity because of differences of age, experience, social background, different schools, and so on. They speak of the cultures of teaching. However, an alternative interpretation is that they are referring to sub-cultures. In this study it is assumed that there is a sub-culture of British primary teachers, which will be referred to more briefly as 'teachers' culture'. This assumption is held by Alexander (1984), Pollard (1985) and Nias (1989).

There are two further reasons for suggesting that, whilst individual differences are acknowledged, teachers' culture has a strong element of stability and uniformity. First, there is the element of early professional socialization. It can be argued that, unlike other professions, prospective teachers have, as pupils, spent years observing qualified practitioners at work, at an impressionable age, in emotionally charged relationships with them (Acker 1967 p.89). Thus even neophyte teachers have a long-standing background awareness of at least some aspects of teachers' culture. Second, there is the tendency for new primary teachers to become like experienced teachers. Hanson and Herrington (1976) show how new entrants are 'brought into line' by school experience.

Hargreaves (1972 p.404-407) identifies 6 themes in teachers' culture: autonomy, loyalty, mediocrity, cynicism, anti-intellectualism and categorization. These

themes find expression in staffroom conversation. Each theme can be linked with other research on teachers' culture, for example with Pollard's list of 7 'interests-at-hand', i.e. primary teachers' concerns (1985 pp.20-35).

### II.ii.a Autonomy

Most teachers work in the privacy of their own classroom, isolated from other adults. This provides a high degree of freedom for them to do what they believe is right in the classroom without outside control. Hargreaves (1980 p.404) comments that autonomy includes freedom from control by colleagues, so that many teachers are sensitive to being observed while teaching lest they be judged or evaluated. Observation may imply evaluation. This may mean that it is difficult for teachers to talk about their own mistakes (see Q.8 in the interview schedule, Chapter 6), or about those of others, because of loyalty. On the other hand, this isolation may encourage the sharing of experience through staffroom talk. Pollard (1985 p.27) identifies two threats to primary teachers' autonomy which routinely emerge in staffroom talk: the head and parents (see Q.6, Chapter 6).

### II.ii.b. Loyalty

This refers to the loyalty of teachers towards each other, which inhibits criticism of colleagues. The isolation from peers means a lack of feedback, either positive or negative comment from others. Such feedback, if given, might help teachers judge their own

effectiveness or consolidate their professional self-image. In fact, however, explicit criticism and praise are inhibited. It can be suggested that this will give some impetus to talking about classroom events in the staffroom to overcome isolation, and that some staffroom talk is designed to elicit praise or commiseration. This indirect feedback may come from sharing admissible (ie. common) problems, when grumbling or joking for instance about recognisably difficult pupils (Hargreaves 1980 p.143).

Thus the individualism of teachers, which rejects formal evaluation, is counterbalanced by the solidarity of staffroom expression of common difficulties. This, in turn, elicits informal sympathetic evaluation through casual talk. It is in this sense that King (1978 p.73) remarks that infants' school staffrooms were used "as a confessional when things had gone wrong".

#### II.ii.c. Mediocrity

Mediocrity focusses on teachers' avoidance of appearing to be too keen or of working too hard. When teachers talk about successful teaching the themes of 'mediocrity' and modesty may mean that teachers tone down their own role in bringing about success (see Q.5, Chapter 6).

#### II.ii.d. Cynicism

This is often humourous cynicism which derides belief in successful innovation or achievement of objectives. Staffroom talk revealing cynicism is likely to be

targetted at the kind of national trends outlined in the last section, or specifically focussed on such issues as salaries, duties, the school hierarchy, teachers' status and so on. Two other aspects of this are discussion about workloads, which for some years have been seen by teachers to be increasing, and conserving energy when working under pressure (Pollard 1985 p.26).

#### II.ii.e. Anti-intellectualism

A pragmatic, on-the-job attitude avoids consideration of abstract theory. Jackson comments (1968 p.143-148) that teachers' talk is noteworthy for the "absence of a technical vocabulary and is characterized by conceptual simplicity". This links with the theme of 'anti-intellectualism'. It might be expected that the primary staffroom is replete with adult intellectual conversation from intelligent, well-educated professionals who had been working alone with young children and who are relieved to be at last among peers. This does not seem to be the case, however.

Jackson (ibid p.144) remarked that "not only do teachers avoid elaborate words, they also seem to shun elaborate ideas" but that this might be essential for teachers' survival in the face of the great complexity and the immediacy of classroom events.

This notion of the low level of teachers' talk fits the lack of theoretical reference, the high percentage of opinion and the relatively large proportion of reference to personal experience found in teachers' discussions by Davies and Ashton (1975). Perhaps the lack of theoretical

reference is not surprising in view of Cane and Schroeder's (1970) demonstration of teachers' unfamiliarity with research.

Keddie (1971) analysed teachers' talk in terms of an 'educationist' context and a 'teacher' context. The first is influenced by theory and is how things ought to be in school. The second is based on classroom practicalities which often constrain ideals or theories. "It is the world of is in which teachers anticipate interaction with pupils in planning lessons, in which they act in the classroom and in which, when the lesson is over they usually recount or explain what happened" (p.135). Sharp and Green (1975) found a similar contrast between the progressive doctrine of child-centredness and the reality of classroom constraints which often forced primary teachers to act in ways that ran counter to the theory.

There is, then, a general view that primary teachers draw on their practical and personal knowledge rather than on abstract theory. Staffroom talk has a relatively low intellectual level (Pollard 1987 p.105). Teachers' descriptions of classroom activities which are discussed in the staffroom may be stories or narratives, rather than analytical accounts. As Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1985 p.513) put it, "Caught up in the demands of their own work, teachers cannot solve problems in general; they must deal with specific situations. Thus their descriptions of teaching sound more like stories than theories because they are full of the particulars of their own experience."

#### II.ii.f. Categorization

This is the characterization or labelling of groups of children. Categorization has been observed by other researchers interested in staffroom talk (see Q.2 Chapter 6). Hammersley (1984 p.203) comments that talk "is undoubtedly the major staffroom activity" and that most staffroom conversation is shop talk. Much of it is "a process of collective sense-making and stock-taking" (p.209) bringing colleagues up to date on pupils, giving current characterizations of 'problem' pupils. King (1978 p.89) remarks that most individual typifications were kept private but the definition of "children in this school" was shared among teachers, mainly in staffroom conversations. However, individual children were mentioned in "affectionate anecdotes about the 'funny things' they said or did" (p.119). (See Q.8, Chapter 6.)

Pollard (1987 p.104) maintains that the notion of 'staff culture' is important since staffroom talk often brings about a degree of cohesion in teachers' views. Such shared understanding can be a defensive resource against the occasional parental complaint (see Q.6, Chapter 6) or unpopular request from a headteacher.

Other important defensive aspects of staffroom talk concern competence and stress (Pollard 1987 p.104). Hammersley (1984 p.212) suggests that through trading pupil news in the staffroom teachers defend their collective sense of competence. They protect their identities where these are under threat from pupils' bad behaviour. Apparently, 20% of teachers rate teaching as being very stressful or extremely stressful (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978). Of the 5 areas which primary teachers

say cause occupational stress, 3 are likely to be spoken about in the staffroom (see interview Q.2, 5 and 7, Chapter 6): non-cooperative children, aggressive children, concern for children's learning (Pratt 1978). Talking to fellow teachers informally in the staffroom is an important strategy for coping with stress by relieving tension (Kyriacou 1981 p.58). Hargreaves (1980 p.144) also comments on how teachers relieve classroom stress in the staffroom by expressing problems, commiserating, joking and laughing. Pollard includes this aspect in the interest-at-hand of enjoyment of teaching, which is emerges in much staffroom talk (see Q.8, Chapter 6). This makes staffroom discussion in primary schools much livelier and more positive than a reading of the previous themes might suggest.

In summary, informal staffroom talk focusses on school issues most of the time and is an important element in teachers' occupational culture. It has been observed as having the following functions. It

- gives mutual support to teachers;
- brings about cohesion of views among staff;
- aids self-esteem, identity and a sense of competence;
- relieves teachers' stress;
- confirms perceptions and typifications of pupils;
- helps coping with problems and crises;
- expresses affection, humour or frustration for pupils;
- shares classroom experiences;
- interprets classroom or school events.



Many of these social-psychological functions of staffroom talk can be, and are, expressed in teachers' narratives.

### III. Teachers Narratives

Teachers' narratives have an important place in teacher-to-teacher talk. Since they occur frequently it is possible to investigate them as a serious topic of educational and linguistic research.

Anecdotes, stories and narratives of personal experience are very common in ordinary talk. They are known to occur trans-historically and cross-culturally (see Part II). They seem to be a common part of the ordinary talk of ordinary people. For example, Tannen (1984) recorded 48 narratives during a dinner party with 6 participants, which gives some idea of the frequency of occurrence of narratives in everyday life, at least on some occasions.

In view of this, it can be supposed that teachers in the course of their talk will tell many narratives. Most of these narratives will probably concern teaching.

Teachers talk a lot to each other, as well as to pupils. The importance of teacher-to-teacher talk has probably been seriously under-estimated and certainly under-researched, considering the wealth of research studies on teacher-pupil talk (eg. Barnes, Britton and Rosen 1969; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Edwards and Furlong 1978; Sinclair and Brazil 1982; Willes 1983). Reference has already been made to the few accessible

studies of teacher-to teacher talk (Jackson 1968; Keddie 1971; Davies and Ashton 1975; Hargreaves 1980; Hammersley 1984; see also further references below).

Hilsum's observations (1972 p.25) of junior teachers led to the conclusion that they spent 12% of their total working day talking to colleagues compared with 26% of the day actually instructing pupils (Hilsum and Cane, 1971). On a quantitative basis alone these findings imply that teacher-to-teacher talk merits investigation. How much of this teacher talk takes the form of narratives? There is scant evidence with which to answer this question.

Gibson's "Teachers Talking" (1973) records what 128 primary and 84 secondary teachers said on a variety of educational topics. This talk can be analysed as including 40 narratives in direct speech in a total of 276 pages. In addition there were many other narratives which Gibson summarized or reported. This seems a large proportion, since the teachers were talking about aims, methods and attitudes to change. They were not asked to reminisce as such. Huggett (1986) asked 50 teachers, some of whom taught in primary schools, what they thought and felt about their work, pupils and parents. Their main complaint was that their views were never heard. Like Gibson (1973), Huggett's report contains many narratives, but in neither case are they fitted into an interpretive framework.

The only study of teachers' narratives known to this writer is Bennett's (1983) analysis of college teachers' narratives. She found over 100 well-formed narratives in only 6 lunchtime gatherings in the staffroom. Narratives

and narrative-like activity took up 50% of total conversation time (p.2). They covered every aspect of teachers' working life.

Experienced teachers often say that they wish they had kept a book of amusing events, 'funnies' or 'howlers' over the years to share in the staffroom (see Q.8 in Chapter 6). Since collections of such anecdotes are occasionally published (eg. MacPhail 1979; Shipperbottom and Webster 1985), it can be assumed that they are of interest to teachers and others. Nias even reports how teachers' anecdotes told in a pub attracted a recruit to the profession (Nias 1989 p.90).

Further illustration of these points can be drawn from the spontaneous narratives in the present data, ie. those teachers' narratives which were tape-recorded in settings other than in interviews.

These include:

- a 50 minute discussion at a primary headteachers' conference where 9 participants considered the aims of primary education. The discussion included 18 narratives.
- a 2 hour discussion where 5 primary headteachers drew up guidelines for mathematics teaching. There were 4 narratives.
- two 40 minute discussions by teachers at an RE Conference. One group of 25 teachers told 4 narratives as part of their discussion, another group of 8 teachers also told 4 narratives.
- two M.Ed. seminars of 2 hours each, where 10 experienced primary teachers discussed approaches

to curriculum studies. Each seminar included 5 narratives.

The foregoing narratives were all told in the academic setting of a university, where experienced teachers or headteachers had gathered for professional conferences or for curriculum revision for their schools. They were all narratives of teachers' personal experiences in classrooms or in schools. It may be a surprise to find such quantities of narratives in these formal contexts.

There is further evidence to hand of the natural occurrence of narratives in staffrooms. The investigator examined transcripts of tape-recorded curriculum development meetings at a lower school, spread over one academic year. The 28 staff meetings included a total of 64 narratives, or slightly more than 2 per meeting on average. This demonstrates the occurrence of teachers' narratives where staff are well known to *each other* and are discussing curriculum issues in their own staffroom.

In summary: teachers talk a great deal to each other about their work. A recurrent element in teacher-to-teacher talk is the narrative. It has been shown that teachers' narratives are told in formal academic contexts, in conference discussion groups, in curriculum revision groups and in informal staffroom talk. It seems reasonable to conclude that teachers' narratives are a normal part of teacher talk and that, occurring as they do so frequently and in so many contexts, narratives must serve useful functions. These include psychological, social, cultural, educational and linguistic functions.

#### IV. The Functions of Teachers' Narratives.

Although each function is listed here separately, it is likely that any particular narrative serves a complex combination of a number of functions.

##### IV.i. Psychological Functions.

Academic settings and the formal purposes of conferences and meetings do not override the functions of narratives. On the contrary, one psychological function of teachers' narratives seems to be to avoid the abstract. In recounting their personal experiences in narrative form tellers are avoiding the intellectual abstraction often required in academic and formal settings. Teachers' narratives recapitulate personal experience in an intellectually undemanding way. This function fits the anti-intellectual theme and conceptual simplicity of teacher talk referred to earlier. It would also be supported by Moffett's analysis, influential in the teaching of English, that "The lowest verbal abstraction is chronological (narrative), because it conforms most clearly to the temporal and spatial order in which phenomena occur" (1968 p.34). Similarly, Labov and Fanshel (1977) in their psychotherapeutic case study found that narrative was consistently used as a form of argumentation. This avoidance of the abstract is further borne out by findings with engineers that even after being repeatedly told not to produce narratives they gave narrative logs of projects, instead of analytical reports (Brown and Herndl 1986). Recapitulation of the past is easier than analysis of it and is apparently less

challenging if presented as such to one's superiors or colleagues.

Narratives may also relieve teacher stress and tension, either by talking through problems or by laughing at humorous situations.

Teachers' narratives encode their perceptions of classroom events. These perceptions and cognitions are arguably a fundamental part of the definition of teaching. Hirst (1971 p.8), who makes this point, says, "what a particular activity is, what a person is doing, depends crucially on how he himself sees the activity". By telling narratives teachers may be indirectly informing one another of how they see teaching situations, sharing perspectives in a non-intellectual and non-threatening way.

Key processes of memory and the operation of cognitive schemas can be assumed to shape narratives. This is likely to happen through the successive stages of: selective initial perception of events; memory processes involving schemas affecting the short or long term remembering of those events; further processes at work during recall; selection of what is appropriately tellable to a given audience taking into account their existing knowledge; modification during telling according to reception by the audience (see Chapter 3).

#### IV.ii. Social Functions.

Other functions of teachers' narratives at conferences and meetings may be social ones. Teachers coming together on such occasions need to exchange

experiences, in order to overcome professional isolation. They get to know each other, establish solidarity and common membership of teachers' culture. This phatic function may be accomplished, in part, through the exchange of narratives.

In the normal staffroom situation narrative exchanges are used by teachers to share experiences, problems and humour in order to overcome classroom isolation. They establish social cohesion. They may often foster self-esteem, maintain face and demonstrate professional competence to colleagues.

Narratives offer ways for teachers to legitimate their actions to each other. Through telling narratives teachers do not merely report or comment on their work experience, rather they interpret it socially and transform it for each other. (see Schwartz 1984 on narratives in a clinic.)

#### **IV.iii. Cultural Functions.**

Narratives are an important element in teachers' oral culture. The telling of narratives is an expression of shared cultural values and assists the acculturation of new members. As Woods maintains, "In the telling and retelling of certain tales that have become established in the staffroom folklore, key elements in the culture are confirmed and oppositional ones are derided." (1983 b p.75) This cultural confirmation also takes place when new stories or events which have recently occurred are recounted.

#### IV.iv. Educational Functions.

By telling narratives in the staffroom teachers often convey information about particular pupils' behaviour, academic progress and personality. When they hear such narratives other staff vicariously acquire knowledge, understanding and perceptions of pupils. The narratives may feature current pupils, ex-pupils or pupils-to-be, for any particular listener.

#### IV.v. Linguistic Functions

Through narratives, teachers are presenting their own interpretations of their experiences. Each narrative has its point, its *raison d'être*, and the teller highlights this point linguistically. In effect, this point shows the meaning or value the teller puts on the narrative. It evaluates the experiences reported in the narrative. A narrative always includes sufficient background for the point to be understood. Tellers provide sufficient context in a narrative for an adequate interpretation of the events recounted, from the teller's perspective, otherwise the narrative will not make sense to listeners. Thus narratives, as linguistic structures, have built-in tellers' evaluations and sufficient context to be understood. Generally narratives are not difficult to isolate from the surrounding text in a transcription. All this means that narratives are particularly useful for linguistic and educational research.

Narratives also have a role in extending a turn at talk in conversational situations by warding off interruptions. They are carefully introduced into the



structured organization of ongoing talk. (see Chapter 2).

## **V. The Present Research**

A substantial collection of teachers' narratives, when analysed, should reveal common experiences, perceptions, values, evaluations and expressions of teachers' culture. All these could be used to build up a picture of teachers' perceptions of what primary teaching is like, for teachers. This would be the actors' account of important elements of a profession.

In the present research a sample of 123 British primary teachers were asked a few basic but productive questions in individual interviews. Parts of their answers were narratives. There were 856 narratives told in interviews. An additional 105 narratives recorded in other settings have been used giving 961 narratives in total. The narratives were analysed under various headings in order to examine the tellers' evaluations and perceptions of key areas of their work.

The key questions, therefore, in the present research are: What are primary teachers' narratives about? What cultural perspectives on teaching are revealed through an analysis of their narratives?

It can be claimed that this research sets up two basic innovations. First the multi-disciplinary consideration of narratives in Part 2 brings together concepts and insights about narrative to create an unusually broad foundation for narrative analysis. Second, the application of narrative analysis on this scale to a particular occupational group is new.

Narrative analysis could turn out to be an innovative methodology for obtaining the perspectives of an occupational group -- in this case primary school teachers. This use of narrative analysis might complement other established methods in educational research, such as the use of questionnaires, systematic observation or ethnographic methods.

## **PART II**

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### **MODELS OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

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## PART II

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### INTRODUCTION

The fundamental importance of narrative can be gathered from some of the epithets used to describe it. Narrative is "a primary act of mind" (Hardy 1977 p.12), "the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful" (Polkinghorne 1988 p.11), "a means by which human beings represent and restructure the world" (Mitchell 1981 p.8), and "a specific cultural system" (Fawcett et al. 1984 p.20). Perhaps it is because of this recognition of the importance of narrative as a major semiotic mode that some scholars have regarded 'narratology' as an independent discipline (Todorov 1969 p.10; Gulich and Quasthoff 1985 p.169; Chatman 1988 p.22). More usually, researchers have regarded narrative as a field on which a number of disciplines, each with its own focus, converge.

In this way Toolan (1988) treats narrative from the perspectives of literary theory and sociolinguistics, Hendricks (1973) views it in terms of folklore and linguistics, while van Dijk (1984) analyses narratives combining psychological and sociolinguistic models and Brewer (1985) by linking psychological with anthropological findings. De Beaugrande and Colby (1979) bring together linguistics and anthropology in their work on narrative. Similarly Labov and Fanshel (1977)

collaborated from linguistic and psychotherapeutic backgrounds. However, it is rare for narrative to be viewed from a number of disciplines within a single work (Mitchell (ed.) 1981).

Part II views narrative in terms of different models, from sociology and sociolinguistics (Chapter 2), psychology (Chapter 3), literature (Chapter 4) and anthropology (Chapter 5). Some of the functions of narratives, derived from these models, have already been mentioned in Part I. Each of these models will be considered in detail and then related to teachers' narratives. Chapter 2 uses sociological and sociolinguistic models to examine how narratives are born in social interaction and how tellers present their 'self' in narrative performance. Here the Evaluation model is presented and the Conversational Analysis model. These will be used in Part III to analyse the present data. The Evaluation model views oral narrative as recapitulation of personal experience, where tellers communicate their perspectives on the content of anecdotes. The Conversational Analysis model stresses how narratives are systematically woven into conversation by both teller and listeners.

Chapter 3 examines cognitive models of narrative, stressing the relationship between narrative structure and constructive processes of memory, higher mental structures and story grammars. This leads to the notion of personal narratives being typifications of likely or repeated experiences.

In Chapters 4 and 5 literary and anthropological

models of narrative are outlined. Notions of time, causation, interest, event and focalization are presented in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 takes up narrative structures and features of performance with reference to different cultures and contexts. The four chapters are independent, but insights and applications for an analysis of teachers' narratives are drawn from each of them.

Other relevant models are briefly reviewed below. These are educational, historical, theological and psycho-therapeutic models.

Most narrative research in education and developmental psychology has been concerned with children's stories, usually to investigate the length, variety and complexity of narrative elements and associate them with language development (Applebee 1978; Umiker-Sebeok 1979; Peterson and McCabe 1983; Romaine 1984 pp.146-158, 176-182). Some investigations have linked children's narratives with home and school cultures (Heath 1983 p.149-189), others have examined children's written stories (Kroll and Anson 1984) or differences between spoken and written stories (Shuman 1986) or advocated that teachers should be aware of their narrative structures (Morgan 1986). Some writers have considered 'story time' in infants classes, either from the tellers viewpoint (Colwell 1980; Rosen 1988) or ethnographically (Cuff and Hustler 1981; Hustler and Payne 1985). More interesting are the recent suggestions that narrative is central to the study and teaching of morality to children (Tappan and Brown 1989) and that

lesson planning and a wide range of curriculum subjects should be considered in terms of story analysis and presented to primary children in a narrative format (Egan 1988).

Narrative can be viewed as a key element in history (Ricoeur 1981, 1984) where at least two narrative versions of the same events are necessary for 'historical' description (White 1981 p.19), although this gives only imaginary coherence and integrity to the representation of past events (ibid p.23). Narratives of personal experience are slices of history which authenticate the past, at least for the tellers.

Theological views of narrative give the field a dimension of a longer time perspective, reaching towards eternity. Gardet (1976) shows that Jewish time is a narrative which gives teleological significance to history as a Covenant. The Christian Gospel could be considered a timeless Narrative of the I-heard-Him-say variety in which further narratives are embedded as parables, which invite audience reflection and analysis. Moslems would see the I-heard-Him-say type of narrative as belonging to the category of oral tradition (hadith), since the Qur'an itself is largely The Prophetic Narrative.

Some religious aspects of narrative have been used in psycho-therapeutic contexts, taking traditional religious stories as frames for clients' reflection on conflict situations (Schachter and Hoffman 1983; Peseschkian 1986). Clients in psychoanalytic dialogue tell their own story, in part to their self as audience.

Telling others about our self is doubly narrative and the narrated self is a 'mutual interpenetration of past and present' (Schafer 1981 p.31), where the past self is reconstructed using present perspectives. Studies of mutual support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, confirm the essential role of telling personal stories. Through narrative, experience becomes intelligible and manageable for the teller but the main effect may be on the listeners. It is "not so much that the listener comes to understand the teller as that the listener comes to understand his own experiences better" (Moore and Carling 1988 p.161).

Limitations of space prevent further explorations of these themes. Part III concentrates on narrative models from sociology, psychology, literature and anthropology.

Chapter 2 uses sociological and sociolinguistic models to examine how narratives are born in social interaction and how tellers present their 'self' in narrative performance. Here the Evaluation model is presented, which will be used in Part III to analyse the present data. That model views oral narrative as recapitulation of personal experience, where tellers communicate their perspectives on the content of anecdotes.

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In Chapter 4 and 5 literary and anthropological models of narrative are examined. Notions of time, causation, interest, event and focalization are presented in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 takes up narrative structures and features of performance with reference to different cultures and contexts. The four chapters are independent, but insights and applications for an analysis of teachers' narratives are drawn from each of them.

## CHAPTER TWO

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SOCIOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC MODELS OF NARRATIVE

I. Introduction

This Chapter examines sociological and sociolinguistic views of narrative. There are four sections. The first part looks at how conversation analysts find interactional patterns in the conversational context of narratives. In the second section, Goffman's comments on narratives are summarized, in the context of his dramaturgical model of face-to-face interaction. Labov's Evaluation model of narrative is examined in the third section. This model focuses on the internal structure of narrative in a sociolinguistic context and will be applied in Part III. This model is supported by a different model of discourse analysis -- lexical signalling. The emphasis on the social context of narrative is taken further in the fourth section, in the work of Wolfson (1976) and Polanyi (1985), who link narrative with culture and performance respectively. This section specifically examines the interview context as a site for eliciting narratives.

II. Conversational Analysis and Narratives

Narratives which occur in natural oral settings have been examined from the ethnographic perspective of Conversational Analysis. This perspective shows that

long stretches of apparently casual conversation are highly structured and asks how this orderliness comes about. What social knowledge do interactants need to tell a narrative?

It is assumed that conversationalists are aware of relevant rules. They design their own contribution to fit ongoing talk and they feel accountable for the interactional consequences of not following these rules. They adopt methodical solutions to the technical problem of how to introduce a narrative into turn-by turn talk, making it 'sequentially relevant', i.e. an apparently natural part of prior and subsequent talk.

Thus Sacks (1972, 1973, 1974, 1978), Jefferson (1978) Schegloff (1978), Ryave (1973, 1978) and Goodwin (1984) examine the construction of narrative in the social organization of conversation. They give less attention to the internal structure of narrative. Rather, they see narratives as an organized part of the ongoing sequence of talk, a dynamic production, jointly created by both teller and audience.

II.i. The Problem of Correct Interpretation

A fundamental methodological point made by conversational analysts is that the analyst can never have access to all the knowledge for interpretation which participants have. However by examining the subsequent talk of recipients something of interactants' own interpretations can be seen from how they display their understanding to each other. This is not possible with monologues, but crucially the analyst can do this

with conversational dialogue and with interview talk. Often the immediate response shows the interpretation a speaker makes of the preceding utterance. At other times the analyst may have to look over several exchanges in order to see what speakers have made of others' contributions (Labov and Fanshel 1977 p.352). Where recipients show a speaker that they have wrongly assessed the speaker's meaning, the speaker is likely to rephrase the original contribution or explicitly correct the recipient's reply. These subsequent comments by later speakers are not seen in a simple chaining relationship, but rather as an ongoing development of shared meaning (Goffman,1981) which is revealed retrospectively by speakers in response to previous speakers. While the total interpretation remains elusive, the analyst has access to that part of interactants' understanding which they display to each other through talk.

The methodological strategy is therefore to track subsequent utterances, looking for internal evidence for the understanding displayed by conversational partners. Ethnomethodologists argue that conversationalists are themselves analysts in this way, otherwise they would not be able to make sense out of talk. "Such an analysis is provided by participants not only for each other but for analysts too " (Levinson 1983 p.321). The ethnomethodologist limits himself to data to which interactants themselves have access (Schiffrin 1980 p.254).

This analytical strategy can run into difficulty.

Speakers sometimes get a turn by prefacing utterances with an apparent topical connection with previous talk where in fact there is no such link (Stubbs 1983 p.182). However, this is less likely in a small group or in interviews, where it is generally easier for a speaker to participate.

II.ii. Turn-taking and Adjacency Pairs

Conversational analysts place narratives within two linguistic systems. The first of these is turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), where speakers' contributions are alternated and fitted into potential turn-taking positions in conversation, or 'transitional relevance points'. This explanation emphasizes a speaker's right to speak, explains the recognition of interruptions, and uses the notion of a noticeable absence of contribution when an expected turn is not taken up. Next turns show speakers' understandings of prior turns.

A second system is that of the 'adjacency pair' (Sacks 1973, Schegloff, 1972, Schegloff and Sacks 1974). This is a sequenced pair of utterances, produced successively by different speakers. Examples are:

thanks	-- acknowledgement
offer	-- acceptance/refusal
complaint	-- apology/justification

Such pairs are arranged back-to-back: given the first, the second is expected; when the second arises, it is interpreted as the completion of the first. A first part has 'sequential implications' for the second part

by constraining a limited range of responses and if none of these appear this absence is noticeable and is interpreted accordingly. The second part is 'conditionally relevant' to the first, being interpreted as a type of utterance required by the first. There will be a clear transitional relevance point between such adjacency pairs. Adjacency pairs can be seen as small linguistic systems. They can also be regarded as "ritual interchanges" (Goffman 1981 p.17).

It is important to note that larger sequences can be built from adjacency pairs (Schegloff 1988 p.110), that the second part shows that speaker's interpretation of the first part (ibid p.113), and that not all adjacent turns are adjacency pairs (p.114).

II.iii. Narratives as Turns

How are narratives organized in the structures of turn-taking and adjacency pairs? First, once a narrative is under way it effectively stakes out space to give the teller an abnormally long turn at talk. A narrative definitively wards off interruptions. The few permissible interruptions allow listeners to ask for clarifications, repeats or additional information. Such brief interruptions do not take the main turn away from the teller, they assist the teller to design the narrative for recipients' knowledge and interest, eliciting such information as is required for the intended interpretation.

Given this possibility of a long turn, some participants in discussions couch their contributions in

a narrative form precisely in order to hold the floor for a maximum time to exercise control or power and possibly to introduce additional points, points which might otherwise be seen as irrelevant. This is one of the social functions of narratives.

II.iv. Narratives in Conversational Sequences

Based on the work of Sacks (1972, 1973, 1974, 1978) Table 2.1 can be constructed.

Table 2.1

The Conversational Sequencing of a Narrative.

1.	PROPOSAL	-T.R.P.	[PRE-SEQUENCE PAIR
2.	ACCEPTANCE	-T.R.P.	
		-T.R.P.	
3.	NARRATIVE	-T.R.P.	[SEQUENCE PAIR
4.	RECEIPT	-T.R.P.	
		-T.R.P.	
5.	NARRATIVE (2)	-T.R.P.	

This abstract model illustrates:

- how narratives do not simply begin or end in conversation
- how narratives are methodically introduced into turn-by-turn talk
- how the audience is offered turns at structurally defined positions around the locus of a narrative
- how narratives are joint speaker-audience productions
- how narratives are part of a sequence of two

adjacency pairs

In Table 2.1, 1 to 5 represent turns or, more exactly, a serially ordered set of structural positions in conversation. The conversational structures which give birth to narratives are precisely coordinated with mutual gaze, posture and other aspects of non-verbal communication (Goodwin 1984 p. 236). Each structural position is separated by a transition relevance point (TPR) where normally any other speaker could take up a turn, following normal turn-taking rules (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). However, it is in the nature of the Proposal at 1 that it suspends the usual turn-taking machinery and invokes a coherent conversation unit, 1--4, which cannot easily be interrupted legitimately, other than in the limited ways referred to earlier. There are a variety of linguistic forms which may be appropriately used at 1, 2 and 4, but this variety is not wide. Each position in the diagram will be examined with reference to Table 2.1.

II.iv.a. Proposal

At 1, a speaker (A) takes up a turn and offers to tell, or requests a chance to tell, a narrative. This proposal is designed to achieve a narrative entry and align co-participants as narrative recipients (Jefferson 1978 p.245). Narratives occupy unusually long turns and if simply begun, without audience assent, this could be seen as sudden imposition, outright insistence or unwarranted control of talk. It is in the nature of narrative that the teller needs an audience, which

implies participation. The Proposal is designed to elicit this participation prior to the telling ("Have you heard about ...?"; "I must tell you ...").

The Proposal establishes the validity, newsworthiness or interest of the narrative, often by a preface (Sacks 1974 p. 340) summary, or abstract.

II.iv.b. Acceptance

At 2, one or more speakers (B) accept the Proposal, signalling approval and acknowledging A's right to tell a Narrative ("No, do tell me." "Oh yes go on ..."). B will now take an audience or listener role. Exceptionally B may show disapproval ("Not another story." "Here he goes again.") or reject the Proposal ("I've heard that one before." "You've told me already"), at the risk of offending A.

It can now be seen that A's Proposal, in fact, is designed to get potential next speakers not to start talking (Schegloff 1978 p.94), but merely to give a minimal response to signal Acceptance. This is not merely a 'one-step' setting-up (Goffman 1974 p.510), where the first speaker selects the type of reply of the next speaker, but a two-step setting up. A's Proposal, as a turn, has selected not the next speaker, B, but rather the next but one, the proposer himself, A.

Turns 1 and 2 form a pre-pair (Sacks 1973) or pre-sequence (Levinson 1983 p.349), an adjacency pair which is itself designed as the gate to a second pair, the Narrative and its Receipt.

II.iv.c. Narrative

A now moves into the Narrative at turn 3, having negotiated the critical task of opening a large unit of speech in interaction with the necessary cooperation of others. A has the floor for as long as the Narrative takes, since a narrative contains no transitional relevance points. The Narrative itself pre-structures an extended turn, by virtue of the series of events to be recounted and more particularly because of its own internal structure. A now has the problem of constructing an interesting account but is more or less assured of not being interrupted.

The audience, B, now have the interactional problem of listening, not only to the events, but for their significance (Ryave 1973, 1978), knowing that at the end of the Narrative there will be a transitional relevance point, at 4, to show Receipt of the Narrative.

II.iv.d. Receipt

At 4, B talks to acknowledge the Narrative, that it has been told, and may comment to show understanding or appreciation, either for the content or for the manner of the telling, or for both (Goffman 1981 p.42, 148). Appreciation of either can also be endorsement (Stubbs 1983 p.190) which will be significant for A ("Incredible!"; "Really?"; "Life's like that"). Realizing this fundamental audience need to show Receipt, B will listen for when and how to react to the Narrative; while A will design the Narrative so that its point and its ending are clearly signalled and will

restrict the Narrative to facts and events which are relevant to the comments he intends to elicit, in order to aid B's Receipt.

This Receipt is in A's interest also (Moerman 1973 p.198). Normally, no teller is likely to offer a Narrative unless he believes it will be accepted, except in arguments. The teller signals the end, proposing a Narrative completion, but A cannot guarantee its end, in the sense that the Narrative is only complete when B accepts its completion (Schegloff 1978 p94). B may demonstrate insufficient or variant understanding which A will feel obliged to remedy with clarification or correction. B can keep the Narrative going with questions, which A will have to deal with. Such a misapprehension sequence can take several additional turns, in the course of which A's telling will be perceived by B as being increasingly ineffective. Knowing this, A strives to achieve B's recognition of completion at the optimum point by including all relevant information for a correct understanding. A will help B to react at the end, just as B helped A to begin.

In a sense, then, the Narrative at 3 is 'ritually bracketted' (Goffman 1981 p.130) between A's Proposals and B's Acceptances which are designed to achieve mutual recognition that the Narrative may begin and between the Receipt which shows that it is complete. The bracketting has the effect of transforming ordinary talk to a narrative context through 'keying' (ibid p.83), an effect which is mutually achieved and which will allow recognition of when and how the functions of narrative

will operate.

II.iv.e. Absence of Acceptance and Receipt

The importance of the Acceptance and Receipt is further emphasized by considering the effect of their absence. The absence of the Acceptance at 2 commonly occurs. In such cases, sometimes the Proposal is repeated, and the delayed Acceptance may be accompanied by apologies or explanation for the delay (Schegloff 1972). More usually A continues on with a Narrative, but only after a pause at the transition relevance point, giving B the right to a turn for a verbal Acceptance, which is the norm and need not be uttered, or a rejection, which is the marked form and which therefore needs to be uttered. B's silence signifies Acceptance by not taking the opportunity for a refusal.

The absence of a Receipt at 4, on the other hand, is dramatic. It is interpreted by A showing either a lack of acknowledgement or understanding. In the first case A will probably repeat components of the Narrative, its ending or coda, as a repeated exit device in a further attempt to elicit recognition of a completion from B (Jefferson 1978 p.245). In the second case A will probably repeat the point of the Narrative, or its evaluation, or add further detail to remedy what he now sees as B's lack of necessary information to understand. If in either case B's Receipt is still not forthcoming A's talking will probably tail off into a silence, in which he understands, as B does, that the Narrative has failed. This silence is an embarrassment to both A and B

since it can be interpreted as both a teller's deficiency in telling and as a recipient's lack of understanding (Sacks 1974 p.346).

Once a narrative has begun it is in everybody's interests that it should be seen to a successful completion. Both A and B will feel accountable for failure. Participants expect comments at 4, notice their absence, interpret that absence and do something about it (Moerman 1973 p.201).

Clearly, narratives in conversations are cooperative engagements. The weft of the narrator's contribution cannot easily be woven into turn-by-turn talk without the woof of the audience's participation.

II.v.a. A Series of Narratives

Position 5 in Table 2.1. is now considered. This could be a continuation of B's talk, following the Receipt and bridging the possible turn, or the turn could revert back to A. Either speaker can use the transitional relevance point to take up another topic, since they are now free of the structural constraints which applied to positions 1--4.

More interestingly, second, or further Narratives, often appear at 5. Once one Narrative has been told, others may be anticipated, triggered off by the first. These can arise without the pre-sequence pair, speakers having now entered a narrative cycle of extended turns whose product may be a series of narratives by different speakers or by the same person.

Audience Receipts commonly intersperse a series of

Narratives, but often these are not evident as such. The reason for the apparent absence of a Receipt under these circumstances is that a second Narrative itself functions as a Receipt, both acknowledging the first and showing appreciation of it, giving the strongest possible endorsement by telling the same kind of thing (Moerman 1973 p.206; Goffman 1981 p.206).

Later Narratives are highly pre-specified, showing marked parallels of topic, theme, character or events with preceding Narratives. Subsequent Narratives stand in an adjacency relationship with previous Narratives and they therefore display their teller's understanding of these previous Narratives. There is the further possibility that first tellers can respond in a Receipt slot to second Narratives, either commenting on the second as such or commenting on the second as a response to the first. We can conclude that a series of Narratives is not simply a chain but is rather a sequenced on-going mutual creation between participants with alternating speaker-audience roles.

II.v.b. Interpretations in a Series of Narratives

The interpretation of Receipts and of second and later Narratives gives analysts using a transcript interactants' interpretations of what the point of the first Narrative was, since what the teller of the second Narrative took the first to be about is on record (Moerman 1973 p.206). Also on record is how the first teller, through a Receipt, took both the second Narrative and the second teller's interpretation of the

first.

When participants make their understanding explicit in this way it is often focussed even more by a further factor, that second tellers frequently feel the need to cap the efforts of first tellers. Subsequent Narratives often exaggerate the point of prior Narratives.

From this Table 2.2 can be constructed showing a hall-of-mirrors reflection of interpretations of a

Table 2.2

SPEAKER	NARRATIVE/ RESPONSE	STATE OF INTERPRETATION
A	N1	- tells narrative
B	Receipt	- shows acceptance/ understanding of N1
B/other	N2	- shows endorsement of N1. If teller = A, shows endorsement of B's Receipt
A/other	Receipt	- by A, teller of N1, shows acceptance of N2 and of N2 teller's interpretation of N1. By another, shows appreciation of N2 reflecting N1
C/other	N3	- shows endorsement of N2, and of N2's interpretation of N1
A/other	Receipt	- shows acceptance of N3, and of N3's interpretation of N2's interpretation of N1.

Narrative, N1, assuming that subsequent speakers and tellers agree about the point and show their agreement via Receipts and subsequent Narratives, N2, N3.

Of course, there may be disagreement on the interpretation by other speakers, giving the modified model:

Table 2.3

SPEAKER	NARRATIVE/ RESPONSE	INTERPRETATION
A	N1	- tells narrative
B	Receipt	- accepts telling, but with misunderstanding or disagreement
B	N2	- illustrates disagreement with a counter-narrative
A	Receipt	- accepts telling, but with misunderstanding or disagrees with the point of N2
A	N3	- reemphasizes N1 as a counter-counter-narrative to N2
B	Receipt	- accepts telling, but probably reverts to interpretation of N2. May follow with yet another narrative.

In either of the two cases, of subsequent agreement or disagreement, the narratives in such a series share a relationship beyond mere sequential adjacency (Ryave 1973, 1978). Subsequent narratives are related by topic and/or setting. Each teller may figure as the principle character in his or her narrative and steers that narrative to, or from, the significance (evaluative point) of the preceeding narrative. Narratives become interactional resource material for subsequent narrators.

In cases of agreement, participants telling second

or later narratives show in and through their narrative that and how they understand the preceeding narrative (Ryave 1978). In cases of disagreement, recipients show their disagreement with the immediately preceeding narrative, while implicitly or explicitly reinforcing the significance of the last-but-one narrative.

II.vi. Criticisms of Conversational Analysis

In general, conversational analysis has been the subject of a number of criticisms. Descriptive categories are not defined, form is insufficiently related to function, neither data nor categories are exhaustively analysed, intonation and paralanguage are insufficiently taken into account (Coulthard 1977 p.91; see also Taylor and Cameron 1987). Moreover, turns and adjacency pairs are not the most relevant basic units (Goffman 1981, but see Schegloff 1988 for a reply); there is no explicit method of moving from the narrative text to an understanding of its significance in conversation (Polanyi 1981b); there may be cross-cultural variation in valuing and using turns; and that informal conversation may not be the basic form of speech exchange systems (Corsaro 1985).

Some of these criticisms can be acknowledged but they may not be relevant to the present narratives. Others, such as cultural variation, will be discussed in Chapter 5. That the basic model of conversation analysis has something to offer for the present analysis of teacher's narratives will be seen when this particular model is applied in Chapter 13.

II.vii. Implications of Conversational Analysis for Teacher's Narratives.

Specifically, the most relevant points for an analysis of teacher's narratives are:

- the usefulness of subsequent talk in general, and of the Receipt in particular, for examining participants' own interpretations of narratives. This relevance can be extended to the interview situation, where the interviewer is a participant, as long as he or she reacts as recipient to teacher talk and not merely as questioner.

- the recognition of the sequential placing of teachers' narratives in pairs of adjacency pairs, understanding that aspects of the narratives are cooperatively produced in the sequential organization of conversation. The organization of a teacher's narrative (not its content) is not a solo effort. When positively received in a group of teachers, it may be concluded that the narrative belongs to the group, as a common socio-cultural product.

- the analytic interest in second and later narratives, both in their own right and as interpretations of first narratives. The cumulative agreement as to the meaning of a series of narratives is likely to be powerful evidence of a group of teachers' perceptions, ideas and cultural values.

- the recognition that a narrative once begun guarantees the teller an extended turn at talk and that this may be used by some teachers to control turns in informal talk or in formal discussions and meetings.

- the possible application of the knowledge of the sorts of conversational structures which give rise to narratives, eg. for a chairman, headteacher or group leader to pre-empt, shorten or build on narratives in academic settings, conferences, teachers' meetings.

III. Narratives as Replayings: Goffman's Frame Analysis

This next section considers Goffman's model (1975), which like conversational analysis has its sociological origins in ethnomethodology. It is a rather differently aligned model, though it has much in common with the one just considered.

Goffman's sociology is broadly concerned with how people organize face-to-face interaction. He uses an elaborate dramaturgical metaphor to draw parallels between the stage and conversation. His work includes scattered insightful comments on conversational narratives, mostly to be found in 'Frame Analysis' (Goffman 1975).

Goffman uses five concepts -- of 'self', 'ritual', 'face', 'performance' and 'frame' -- to see narratives as 'replayings' of 'strips of activity'. *Each of these* will be considered briefly and related to Goffman's view of narratives.

III.i.a. Self

Following Mead (1934), Goffman sees a person's self, not as a private, individual attribute, but as a socialized entity, created in and through social interaction. In this view, narrative, like other

categories of talk, is self-expression, but it involves the management of information about the self, impression-management through conversational rituals. Interaction is a process of exchange of impressions or self-presentations between ritually enacted selves, where each participant relies on others to complete his picture of his own self (Collins 1988 p.49).

III.i.b. Ritual and Face

Conversation further involves two sets of requirements: those of system and ritual (Goffman 1981 p.14). The system requirements consist of constraints on basic organization, of the kind described by conversational analysts. The ritual requirements, underestimated by conversational analysts, describe the moral character, the reciprocally-held norms of good and proper conduct which govern ways of negotiating narrative in talk through ritualization (Kendon 1988 p.31,37). Narrative will thus be organized around the presentation of the teller's proper or desirable self (Goffman 1969; Polanyi 1982a p.519) and around the preservation of his 'face' in situations of difficulty or embarrassment. Audiences will also show a similar concern to maintain both the teller's and their own face throughout a telling. Face is the motivational basis for the ritual organization of interaction.

III.i.c. Multiple-selves

However, the social self, displayed to best advantage, is not viewed as a single entity. Goffman

These notions add richness to our perception of the socio-cultural value of narrative performance (See Chapter 5).

Talk, especially through performance, defines situations, marking off activities from the flow of surrounding events (Goffman 1975 p.25). However, Goffman emphasizes that each participant can be in complex layers of definitions of the situation at the same time. The social world can be transformed through a shifting of frames in talk.

III.i.e. Frames

'Frames' are socially-defined realities, "principles of organization" which govern social events (Goffman 1975 p.10) and our subjective involvement in them. They are both of the social world and participants' response to it (ibid, p.85), sustained in activity and in the mind (p.247). Frames are therefore operating during narration both by framing the social events narrated in schemata of interpretation (p.21) and by evaluating those events subjectively in the viewing of them during the process of narrative performance. The audience's viewing as participants in performance means that they too are also part of an external performance frame. Adjacency pairs can then be seen as a mutually organized framing into and out of narrative.

III.ii.a. Narratives as Replaying

Narratives are defined by Goffman as being tapes or "strips of personal experience" from the teller's

presents the notion of multiple-selfing in narrative (Goffman 1975 p.517-520; 1981 p.144, 167, 226). He distinguishes the teller as the author, the self who composes the lines; as the principal, the self as protagonist, "the party to whose position the words attest"; and as the animator, the self as emitter, "the sounding box" producing utterances, facial expressions and gestures. Levinson (1988 p.170) adds further distinctions between source, the origin of the words, and speaker, so that the author is both source and speaker, but a relayer is a speaker who is not the source. This is a useful distinction with which to discuss quoted dialogue in narrative. (See 'focalization' in Chapter 4)

III.i.d .Performance

The animator of a narrative effectively gives a 'performance', a notion emphasizing the on-the-spot attempt to influence the audience through impression management (Goffman 1969 p.26) . The performer is "a harried fabricator of impressions" (ibid p.244) narrating about characters, including the teller as principal, whose sterling qualities the performance is designed to emphasize. Where the performance of a narrative highlights common official values of the social group of teller and audience it can be viewed as a ceremony, an "expressive rejuvenation", or a "reaffirmation of the moral values of the community" (ibid p.45). When the expressive nature of performance is accepted, it has characteristics of celebration.

past which are 'replayed' (1981 p.174). These strips are presented not as mere reporting, but as something to re-experience (1975 p.506) and the re-experiencing is not only for the teller but also for the audience so that they can empathetically insert themselves into the replaying, vicariously experiencing what took place (ibid p.504).

The performance of such a replayed strip of personal experience necessarily means maintaining suspense for the audience, keeping them ignorant of the outcome of the narrative, but wanting to know it (p.506) Even if the audience has been told the outcome in the Preface to the narrative, they must suspend this knowledge and be led through the path of discovery by a teller who must himself know the outcome, but will tell the narrative as if he too does not know it.

As principal protagonist, the teller takes listeners back to the state of knowledge he had at the time of the episode, but no longer has. Narration thus involves a framing away from present reality and present knowledge, running through a strip of already determined events as if the outcome were unknown (p.508). The outcome is unknown not only to those persons hearing, but also to those narrating and those narrated about (see 'time' in Chapter 4).

III.ii.b. The Role of the Audience

Since narration is all about performance, the staging of a presentation of self, what matters is not whether it has been told before but whether it has been

heard before. "Effective performance requires first hearings, not first tellings" (p.508), so the teller borrows spontaneity from the audience, for whom this is a first hearing.

The role of the audience is to show appreciation (Receipt). What is narrated in performance is not said to the audience, but for it (p.540). "They are to be stirred not to take action, but to exhibit signs that they have been stirred" (p.503). The narrator does not seek shouts of responsive action, but "seeks to get murmurings -- the clucks and tsks and aspirated breaths, the goshes and gollies and wows -- which testify that the listener has been stirred, stirred by what is being replayed for him" (p.541). This feedback is vital to tellers, otherwise listeners are seen as mere hearers. "No audience, no performance" (p.125). Tellers know they must perform and they know audiences know this. Narratives are designed to get to an "appreciation of a show put on" (p.547).

III.ii.c. Quoting in Narrative

Much of the vivid performance of replaying comes from quoting others' words. Here the teller acts out another, typically in a mannered voice (p.534) so that the quoted strip uses not only the other's words but carries tone, gestures and facial expressions to categorize, but not to impersonate, the quoted figure. This is the animator at work and it requires further framing. The performance may be so convincing that narrators do not even need verbs of reporting as frames

within the narrative (She said, replied, remarked, etc.).

The teller speaks for others, apparently in their words (Goffman 1981 p.145). Yet tellers often shift their focus from what people in the narrative actually said (as sources) to the sort of thing they would say, in such circumstances (ibid. p. 43). Here the narrator is effectively a hypothetical relayer of the typical rather than of the actual.

There seems to be a balance in many narratives between typicality and uniqueness, or between the normal and the dramatic. Sacks (1984 p.419) notes that dramatic narratives are sometimes played down to give a 'nothing much happened' sense, either to prevent a narrative being dismissed as outrageous fabrication, or in Goffman's terms to protect loss of face by presenting the narrator as one so competent that the dramatic can be treated as ordinary.

The apparent vivid spontaneity of performance should not cause an analyst to lose sight of the pre-fabricated (Goffman 1981 p.504), pre-formulated nature of narrative. Narratives are always organized from the beginning in terms of what will prove to be the outcome (ibid p.559) (see Chapter 4).

This pre-formulation is, of course, also constrained, first by the linearity of speech and second by the temporal sequencing of narrative events, where real-world simultaneity cannot be replayed in a narrative. Narrators must inevitably transform (Labov 1972, 1981), and plan to transform, the complexity of

the reality of what happened into a single strip for replaying ('this is what I am able to tell you about the sequence of what happened').

It is a considerable accomplishment to bring all this to bear in telling a narrative in conversation.

III.iii. Criticisms of Goffman's Approach

There are standard criticisms of Goffman's approach, which can be summarized as an equivocal attitude to data, imprecision in the use of concepts, and unacknowledged cultural limitations (Kendon p.38; Williams p.69,71; Schegloff p.104,112; Strong p.234 ; - all in Drew and Wootton [eds.] 1988).

However, none of these criticisms seem to detract from the validity and relevance of Goffman's comments on narratives.

III.iv. Implications of Goffman's Frame Analysis for the Analysis of Teachers' Narratives

There are a number of insights from Frame Analysis which are applicable to teachers' narratives. These include:

-- the emphasis on the interdependence of participants in face-to-face interaction, their mutual monitoring and the joint production of teachers' narratives by both teller and audience, all of which reinforce the notion of cultural perspectives.

-- there are many 'as ifs' in teacher narration: events are framed in a linear fashion as if representing real events; within a narrative protagonists'

perspectives and words are presented as if they see and say things that way; the event sequence is recounted as if the outcome were not known; teachers' narratives are told as if they are spontaneous instead of being preformulated.

-- teachers' narratives of personal experience can be thought of as impression-management, as the presentation of their professional selves. Narratives of disasters may be presented in such a way as to preserve face. Narratives of successful children's learning may reveal a complex interweaving of the professional face of the expert versus the personal face of humility.

-- Goffman's consistent dramaturgical metaphor emphasizes roles, staging, the presentation of self and performance. In the ritualized theatricality of performing a strip of past experience, primary teachers as narrators are both actors and storytellers: this is manifestly true in the classroom -- in narrative it is also true in the staffroom.

-- in narrative performance teachers act out children's roles in dialogue, often alternating between teacher and pupil and presenting a child-self as well as a teacher-self in multiple frames.

-- teachers' narratives combine typicality of quotes typically said or events which would often happen with uniqueness of the characters involved and of newsworthiness). The typical may predominate through schemata (see Chapter 3).

-- in narrative performance teachers are enacting their professional selves and in doing so are coming to

know their own and others' selves, framed in the socio-cultural contexts of classroom events.

-- staffroom narration may have ritualized, ceremonial, celebratory aspects which effectively confirm cultural and social belonging which combats the isolation of much primary teaching.

IV. Labov's Evaluation Model of Narrative

This model will be the basis for the analysis of Part III, enriched by the concepts presented in this chapter and supplemented by insights from chapters 3, 4 and 5.

IV.i. Background

Labov's model of narrative analysis is a sociolinguistic approach which examines formal structural properties of narratives in relation to their social functions. Labov and his co-workers (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov et al. 1968) originally developed particular interview questions in sociolinguistic research in order to overcome the formal constraints of face-to-face interviews. Some questions obtained more casual, natural speech, it was claimed, because speakers became more personally involved with what they were saying, "Constraints of the interview situation are overridden by the intensity of the emotions generated" (Labov 1971 p.462). For example, the Danger of Death question: "Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed, where you said to yourself, 'This is it'?"; or the Fight question: "Were

you ever in a fight with someone bigger than you?" Such questions elicited oral narratives of personal experience and deeply involved speakers in rehearsing or reliving events in their past (Labov et al. 1968 p.286; Labov 1972 p.354; see the questions in Chapter 6).

Labov's initial purpose was to correlate the informal speech styles of narrative with social variables. Later, narratives were analysed in their own right in terms of their structure and social function, which were correlated with the age, social class and ethnicity of narrators.

IV.ii. Narrative Clauses and Free Clauses

Labov et al define a narrative as a means of representing or recapitulating past experience by a sequence of ordered sentences that match the temporal sequence of the events which, it is inferred, actually occurred (Labov and Waletzky 1967 p.20; Labov et al. 1968 p.287; Labov 1972 p.359; Labov and Fanshel 1977 p.105). A minimal narrative is a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered so that reversing their order reverses the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation (Labov et al. 1968 p.208; Labov 1972 p.360) (see Chapter 4 for alternative definitions).

This definition presents narrow criteria for a narrative, but it enables the analyst to distinguish between narrative clauses and free clauses. Narrative clauses are in the past tense (occasionally in present tenses), temporally ordered with respect to each other, separated by 'temporal juncture'. The order of the

clauses cannot be altered without changing the inferred sequence of events in the original semantic interpretation. Free clauses, in contrast, can be rearranged or redistributed in a narrative sequence without unduly altering the semantic interpretation (Labov and Waletzky 1967 p.21; Labov and Fanshel 1977 p.107).

IV.iii. Functions of Narrative

Labov develops a formal analysis based on recurrent patterns, which examines invariant structural units, and a functional analysis which puts forward two social functions of narrative, 'referential' and 'evaluative' (Labov and Waletzky 1967 p.20, 33-34). The referential function of a narrative is to give the audience information through the narrator's recapitulation of experience, in the same order as the occurrence of the original events. This would be a straightforward report of what occurred. Labov maintains that speakers rarely give such a report. They evaluate the events. The evaluative function is to communicate to the audience the meaning of the narrative by establishing some point of personal involvement. This is what makes the narrated events reportable and "without the concept of reportability we cannot begin to understand the things that people do in telling narratives" (Labov et al. 1968 p.30). This function is a crucial element of narrative, so much so that the model will be termed hereafter the 'Evaluation model' to draw attention to the way tellers give their perspective on the narrative content by

evaluating the meaning it has for them. Evaluation is a natural, even unconscious, part of narration.

IV.iv. Narrative Structure

Labov et al suggest that a fully formed oral narrative of personal experience has a six part structure (Labov and Waletzky 1967 pp.32--39; Labov et al. 1968 pp294--300; Labov 1972 pp363--369; Labov and Fanshel 1977 pp104--110; Labov 1981 pp 225--228). These parts can be viewed as answers to audience questions.

Table 2.4

The Structure of Narrative in the Evaluation Model

<u>STRUCTURE</u>	<u>QUESTION</u>
ABSTRACT	-- What was this about?
ORIENTATION	-- Who? When? What? Where?
COMPLICATION	-- Then what happened?
EVALUATION	-- So what?
RESULT	-- What finally happened?
CODA	

Each element in the structure is examined in turn below.

IV.iv.a. Abstract

The Abstract is optional. When it occurs, it initiates the narrative by summarizing the point or by giving a statement of a general proposition which the narrative will exemplify. It signals the start of the

narrative by past tense reference (like the Proposal in conversation analysis). Abstracts do not replace narratives, since the teller has no intention of stopping at this point. The Abstract is important because it conveys general propositions which often go beyond the immediate events in the narrative.

IV.iv.b. Orientation

The Orientation or Setting typically gives details of time, persons, place and situation. This is the background which the teller believes the audience requires to understand the narrated events. Narratives contain their own context, provided in sufficient detail by tellers for the narrative to be understood without further knowledge of the characters and their situation. If a narrative is isolated from a conversation it will generally be self-contained as far as this context is concerned, unless the teller knows the audience is already familiar with the background. Certainly in interviews the Orientation gives the necessary and sufficient context. Orientation information is encoded in free clauses, usually placed at the beginning, sometimes coupled with the first event of the Complication. The Orientation does not contain information which is in itself reportable. Past progressive tenses are often used to sketch the activity that was in progress before the first event. The Orientation can, however, refer to a past event with an adverb of time which will mark off the narrative from previous talk, as an initiating mechanism. This leads to

Labov and Fanshel's (1977 p.106) formulation of a rule of Narrative Orientation which confirms the interactive nature of narrative beginnings. For a speaker A addressing a hearer B:

"If A makes reference to an event that occurred prior to the time of speaking, which cannot be interpreted by any rule of discourse as a complete speech action in itself then B will hear this reference as the Orientation to a narrative to follow."

On hearing the Orientation B will cede the floor to A for an extended narrative turn.

IV.iv.c. Complication

The Complication follows the Orientation and consists of a series of narrative clauses in the past simple tense, or sometimes in present tenses. This section gives the event sequence which is often terminated by the Result. Sometimes the Complication is an extended section. It is basically the content of the narrative.

IV.iv.d. Evaluation

The Evaluation commonly precedes the Result. It "delays the forward movement of the narrative at a certain point by the use of many non-narrative clauses, which hold the listener suspended at that point in time" (Labov and Fanshel 1977 p.108). The Evaluation is "the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its *raison d'être*, why it was told" (Labov et

al. 1968 p.287; Labov 1972 p.366). It avoids the withering rejoinder from listeners of "So what?" since "every good narrator is continually warding off this question"(ibid). The Evaluation highlights the point of the narrative, tells recipients why it was told and "reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as opposed to others" (Labov and Waletzky 1967 p.37). "Narratives do not merely inform: they convey the importance of the narrated events and tell how those events should be interpreted and weighed by the listener" (Peterson and McCabe 1983 p.60). The absence of an Evaluation is exceptional in oral narratives of personal experience, though not in narratives of vicarious experience. "Unevaluated narratives lack structural definition" (Labov and Waletzky 1967 p.39). The Evaluation is realized by a number of evaluative devices listed below which can be distributed at various points throughout a narrative, although they are commonly positioned before the Result. The Evaluation is a kind of self-Receipt through which the speaker gives the meaning of the narrative. It is a signal as to how the teller intends that others should receive the telling.

IV.iv.e. Result

The Result or resolution, as the term implies, describes the result or resolution to a conflict in the narrative. It follows the Complicating Action or Evaluation.

IV.iv.f. Coda

An optional Coda finishes the narrative by returning listeners to the present moment. It marks the close, often by using a formula such as "That was it" which brackets the narrative as a point in the past the telling of which is now over. In the previous diagram the Coda had no corresponding question since it finishes the narrative, putting off such questions by announcing "I've finished". The Coda reinstates normal turn-taking mechanisms.

It is vital for listeners to recognize the Evaluation since they are expected to respond to it by a Receipt. The "most general characterization" of the place of narrative in conversation is that "it is given as an instance of a general proposition" (Labov and Fanshel 1977 p.109) with which listeners must agree or disagree (see the Rule of Narrative Response (ibid.) for an interactional interpretation of how this works).

IV.iv.g. Evaluation Devices

The Evaluation model is central to the present investigation, so more details of the Evaluation are now given. Labov et al. (1968 pp.301-304; Labov 1972 pp.370-375; see also Peterson and McCabe 1983 p.32, pp.222-225) give a comprehensive list of the Evaluation devices. These often show syntactic complexity where the narrative clauses show syntactic simplicity. It is important to note that in principle the Evaluation must stand out from the norm of the narrative text and that almost any element can act evaluatively, by drawing

attention to itself, by being linguistically marked. This principle explains the enormous variety of the devices listed below.

External Evaluation: this is where the narrator interrupts the narrative to step outside the recounting to tell listeners what the point is. There are five degrees of embedding in external evaluation. In increasing order of embeddedness these are:

- the narrative is interrupted while the teller says explicitly what the point is;
- in the narrative an interpretive remark is attributed to narrator as a principal, addressing himself at the time;
- the narrator as principal quotes himself as addressing other characters;
- an interpretive remark is attributed to any other character in the narrative;
- narrating an evaluative action: what characters did rather than what they said ("he turned white", "she was shaking like a leaf").

The first three are common in the narratives told by middle class narrators (Labov et al. 1968 p.302; Labov 1972 p.371) while the last two are used by lower classes.

Internal Evaluation : here the evaluation is internal to sentences and thus more embedded in the narrative texture. A wide variety of lexical, syntactic, phonological, and paralinguistic devices are used (Labov 1972 pp.378-393; see also Polanyi 1982a pp.516-517; 1985b pp.196-7). Labov puts these into the four groups

listed below:

- intensifiers, which emphasize a specific event among a chain of narrative events: Modifiers (adjectives, adverbs); quantifiers (adverbs); wh-exclamations (why! where!); repeated lexical items; gestures; heightened stress; vowel lengthening; wide variation in intonation and pitch range;
- comparators: use of negatives and modal verbs to refer to events which did not occur, but which might have occurred; questions embedded in the action; use of or-clauses; imperatives; future tenses; comparatives and superlatives (adjectives, adverbs);
- extension, which brings together two events conjoining them in a single independent clause: progressives; appended participles; double appositives; doubling in attributes (adjectives);
- explications or explanations: causal or qualifying subordinate clauses embedded within an independent clause.

The Evaluation Model is widely referred to and has been applied in contexts far beyond its sociolinguistic origins, for example in literary analysis (Platt 1977 pp 38-78; Carter and Simpson 1982 p.129; Maclean 1988 p.13,24,28); in education, for analysing children's writing (Taylor 1986 p.220; Wilkinson 1986 p.20, 35); in developmental psycholinguistics (Kernan 1977 pp.94-96; Peterson and McCabe 1983 pp.29-66); in mass

communications (van Dijk 1984 pp.84-100; 1988a p.5,14; 1988b p.20,49) and in anthropology (Watson 1972, 1983 pp.251-256). However there are two levels of criticism which can be made.

IV.v. Criticisms of the Evaluation Model

First, the isolation of the Evaluation devices is difficult because of the ~~the~~ lack of a one-to-one relationship of any particular structure with the evaluation function (Kernan 1977 p.100). The Evaluation section as a structural slot often appears between the Complicating Action and Result, but Labov draws a wave diagram (1972 p.369) to show that Evaluative devices are distributed throughout the narrative. With so many devices and so few constraints on distribution, the analyst is seeking both a structure in, and a function of, the narrative, with little in the way of a discovery procedure. This criticism can be offset by reference to the linguistic principle of marking -- the Evaluation devices stand out in contrast to the surrounding narrative text. Since most anecdotes come across to audiences successfully it is clear that if listeners can get the point the analyst can do so. If the analyst was a participant (as in this research) then the criticism should not apply. In addition, an investigator could support an Evaluation analysis by looking for 'lexical signalling' as explained below.

The second level of criticisms stems from other disciplines or fields outside sociolinguistics: conversational analysis, literary criticism, psychology

and anthropology. Conversation analysts look for the place of narrative in the social organization of conversation. Labov does not consider this. Literary critics find Labov's definition of a narrative too strict, because his criterion of the temporal ordering of clauses rules out flashbacks, flashforwards, embedding and subordination, which are common in literary narrative (Toolan 1988 p.181). The obvious counter-argument, that this is a sociolinguistic model not a literary one, is weakened when the Evaluation model is directly applied to achronic narrative. Cognitive psychologists see the Evaluation model as surface oriented. It makes no reference to cognitive structures or processes, although it has been used in developmental psycholinguistics (Petersen and McCabe 1983). Anthropologists may see the Evaluation model as being culturally specific, since Labov has only correlated narrative functions and structures with age, social class and ethnicity in the United States. These criticisms can be met by taking literary, psychological and anthropological approaches to narrative into account, which substantially strengthens the model.

IV.vi. Lexical Signalling

Analysis using the Evaluation model can be supplemented with reference to lexical signalling. This is a major aspect of Clause Relations Analysis as developed by Winter et al. (Winter 1982; Hoey 1979, 1983, 1986; Jordan 1984; Crombie 1985; Hoey and Winter 1986). They examine the semantic relations between

clauses in order to study the information structures of texts in terms of writers' and readers' inferences. Clause relations (see Winter 1982 p.189 for a definition) are often signalled by key words in a text. A number of information structures have been identified (Jordan 1984 p.142; Hoey and Winter 1986 p.123) which are reducible to Situation -- Evaluation (Hoey 1983 p.20) or Situation -- Problem -- Solution -- Evaluation. This information structure correlates very well with the narrative structure of the Evaluation model. Lexical signalling also applies to oral texts.

Many texts describe a Situation (Labov's Orientation). An aspect of this is a Problem (Complicating Action) which requires a response. This yields a result or possible Solution (Resolution) which is evaluated positively or negatively before further action is taken -- Evaluation (also Labov's term).

There is commonly explicit signalling of the text organization (see Jordan 1984 pp.152-158). The analyst can search for specific signals of Situation, Problem, Solution, and Evaluation. Examples are shown in Table 2.5:

Table 2.5

<u>STRUCTURE</u>	<u>LEXICAL SIGNALS - EXAMPLES</u>
Situation	situation, circumstance, time, place, person, (use of present perfect and past tenses).
Problem	problem, drawback, need, requirement, concern, bad, awkward, risk, hard, difficulty, crisis, change, accident.

Solution solution, answer, remedy, cope,
suggestion, overcome, improvement,
iron out, prevent, develop, tackle,
treat, help, implement.

Evaluation success, failure, better, worse,
reduce, control, benefit, enable,
delighted, excellent, pleased,
disappointed, thorough, great,
enjoyment, blessing, understand,
super, welcome, neat, nice, okay,
happy, does wonders, blossom,
develop, come on.

Clearly there is a wide range of such signals. They can belong to many word classes. Some are context dependent, but many, once seen, are obvious surface signals of information structures and clause relations.

Lexical signalling does not provide a complete heuristic since lexical signals are not always present. Without them, and sometimes even when they are present, the semantic interpretation of discourse relations may be different according to personal understanding. However, the narrative analyst who is aware of such signals will use them to identify the structural elements of narratives, including Evaluations. This use of lexical signals is a back-up to the Evaluation model.

IV.vii. Relevance of the Evaluation Model for Teachers' Narratives

The most relevant points for applying the Evaluation model to an analysis of teachers' narratives are:

- Labov's methodology overcomes the constraints of the interview situation by using questions which

involve speakers cognitively and emotionally. Such questions elicit narratives (see questions, Chapter 6).

- The model shows that oral narratives of personal experience have a clear internal structure. Appreciation of the structure makes isolating a narrative from surrounding talk relatively easy. Teachers' narratives have such a structure.
- The model stresses the social functions of narratives. This is important in considering the cultural perspectives in the narratives of teachers, both in informal staffroom contexts and in interviews. The social functions are chiefly focussed around the Evaluation. Some social functions will be seen when whole narratives are speech acts: for challenging, refusing, defending, justifying and so on (Labov and Fanshel 1977; Labov 1981). It is suggested (Toolan 1988 p. 181) that tellers fashion the narrative structure and content around the evaluative point, rather than vice versa. An examination of the Evaluations in teachers' narratives gives attention to the central focus of those narratives.
- In Narrative, tellers provide the context. The Orientation section presents necessary and sufficient information for an audience to understand the point. Teachers motivated by narrative processes will provide enough background on the classroom context for a

recipient to interpret their narratives. This means there will be sufficient context for a visiting researcher/teacher who is unfamiliar with the teller's school to understand the point. This is important methodologically since a large number of teachers could be interviewed to elicit narratives without the necessity of observing classrooms (Denscombe 1983) or of gathering additional background information. Narratives are contextually self-contained.

-- Tellers provide the interpretation. Labov emphasizes how the Abstract and Evaluation show the teller's interpretation of, and attitude towards, what is told. By examining teachers' Evaluations it should be possible to distil their perceptions on the content of their narratives. If narratives on key classroom issues are elicited in a controlled fashion, examination of the Evaluations on particular themes should reveal teachers' perceptions on those issues. If many teachers give common Evaluations, the perceptions must be cultural, at least in part.

-- The Evaluation model does not exclude other approaches. It complements conversation analysts' research and Goffman's insights. It can be strengthened by heeding lexical signals. Culture, cognitive processes, literary sophistication can be taken into account. Key concepts from other disciplines can be used to

enrich this model for teachers' narratives.

Wolfson (1976) and Polanyi (1985) have developed the Evaluation model examining performance features and cultural aspects respectively. These are now considered.

V.i. Interviews and Narrative Performance

It has been suggested by Wolfson (1976 p.206; 1982 p 62) that narratives elicited in interviews lack performance features. They are essentially summaries. If this is the case, interview narratives would be mere shadows of fully performed conversational narratives. To appreciate this argument it is necessary to look briefly at the nature of research interviews.

In the social situation of an interview there are asymmetrical rights to talk (Silverman 1973; Kress and Fowler 1983; Walker 1985). The interviewer has the unilateral right to ask questions, the respondent has the obligation to provide answers. It is the interviewer who determines, initiates, sequences and closes topics. The interview is a specific social situation in which there is necessarily some distortion from objective truth. Past recollections are not so much reports as selectively modified recollections fitted to a current view which a respondent is willing to share (Dean and Whyte 1975). Information in interviews is negotiated, not only through question and answer, but also through trust and rapport (Briggs 1986 p.3; Denscombe 1983 p.115).

The interview produces formal speech in the sense that speakers pay attention to how they speak. Labov

called this the "observer's paradox" (1971 p.461; 1975 p.113), the question of how to observe how people talk when they are not being observed. His solution is to elicit narratives, assuming that the emotional involvement of narration implies a more informal style.

Wolfson (1976, 1978, 1982) put forward several important arguments to modify this. One can tell a narrative in either a formal or informal style, depending on the situation. People know the rules of speaking which are appropriate for interviews as speech events. There are no absolute entities such as natural or casual speech. If speech is appropriate to the situation and the goal, then it is natural, whether it takes place in an interview or not (1976 p.202; 1982 p.70). The interview is thus a natural speech event with its own appropriate natural speech. She concludes that narratives elicited in interviews will be different from narratives which occur in other contexts.

Wolfson distinguishes between narratives elicited in interviews and spontaneous narratives, told in free conversation (1976 p.192; 1982 p.62). She makes this distinction on the basis of analysing 150 taped narratives occurring in interviews and 400 taped narratives occurring in a variety of spontaneous situations. She claims that interview narratives are usually in the form of a summary, short and to the point. Respondents know they are answering questions and so details in such narratives are directed to the question. These narratives must be characterized as answers. Conversational narratives, in contrast, are

more detailed and are performed. Speakers choose their own topics, elaborated in their own time. They are not answering questions with narratives.

Conversational narratives are performed, Wolfson hypothesizes (1982 p.77), when norms for evaluative interpretation are presumed to be shared. Then the point of view that the narrative expresses can be better understood and appreciated by the audience.

Performed narratives have the features (Wolfson 1976 p.206) of the historical present tense, sound effects, iteration, present deixis, detailed blow-by-blow accounts of the action. Performance is more likely if the topic is appropriate to the audience, participants have shared background interests and reciprocal relationships, and therefore, (crucial to the present argument,) shared norms for evaluation (p.207). Recent events are more likely to be performed, as are narratives where the central figure is the narrator.

V.ii. Implications of Wolfson's work.

Two points are important here in relation to the present study. First, spontaneous narratives are often told in conversation in response to questions and are triggered off by previous spontaneous narratives. There are examples of this in the Headteachers' Conference tape in this study. This is hardly surprising, given the obviously shared norms among primary headteachers, but the narratives are, as in interview situations, naturally tied to the context of previous utterances. If they were not, they would be heard as irrelevant. In

that tape of headteachers, it is clear that such 'cued' narratives are certainly perceived by participants as being relevant, judging by the appreciative comments and sympathetic responses to each narrative. Secondly, in the narratives collected in interviews in this research, there are many examples of performance features including the conversational historic present, extensive use of direct speech with use of intonation patterns, pitch range, vocal effects, including whispering, to imitate children, present deixis, sound effects, iteration, detailed blow-by-blow accounts of the action, clear uses of emotional aspects of recounting and suspense. There are also many gestures and non-verbal features which the researcher recalls, but which were obviously not recorded. This list demonstrates that here the teachers performed their narratives in the interview situation. Perhaps this is natural since primary teachers often tell stories to children and are practised raconteurs.

Since the teachers performed the narratives in the interviews, there must have been reasons for this exception to Wolfson's finding. The obvious reason lies in the interview situation (in teachers' own classrooms or staffroom) and in the relations between participants (all teachers), speaking on topics of concern to teachers. It can be concluded that there were shared norms for evaluation. The interview may have been regarded as an expressive medium, which would have emphasized the performance factor (Denscombe 1983 p.111).

Linking what Wolfson says about performance to Goffman's comments on animating and performing a strip of past experience leads to two implications for teachers' narratives. First, if teachers' narratives in interviews bear the signs of performance then those narratives are very close to narratives which occur in informal conversation. To that extent they are representative of normal teacher-to-teacher talk. Second, through performance teachers are presenting their professional selves, animating and performing strips of past experience, reliving the experience. This implies a degree of closeness of the narrative, through recall and reconstruction, to the original events. To that extent the data here seem to be a genuine representation of what occurred (but see Chapter 3).

VI.i. The Evaluation model and culture

The work of Polanyi has extended the Evaluation model of narrative towards cultural analysis.

Polanyi (1982a p.510; 1985a p.9) defines the term 'narrative' as a kind of discourse in which a precise time line is established through the telling, made up of discrete moments at which events take place. This definition is broader than Labov's since it permits a reordering of past events (flashbacks, flashforwards) in the telling. However, her term 'narrative' is quite general and it includes plans for the future, commentary, wished-for unrealized occurrences, generic descriptions, reports and stories. A 'story' concerns specific events which occurred at specific times in the

past relative to the time of narration (1982a p.511). Her use of story corresponds to the use of 'narrative' here, but the term 'narrative' will be used, avoiding the fictional overtones of 'story'.

Following Labov, Polanyi sees a narrative as having three types of information structures (1979 p.209; 1981b p.326; 1982 p.60). These are the event structure (Labov's narrative clauses), durative-descriptive information (free clauses used for Orientation, non-instantaneous happenings) and the evaluation structure. She stresses that all three structures are 'mutually contextualizing', but it is the 'evaluative metastructure' which picks out the vital aspects of the other two structures to indicate what the speaker believes important to understand the narrative (1982a p.518). In this sense the evaluation structure is the most important part of a narrative.

Polanyi believes oral narratives of personal experience illustrate core concepts of culture and that narratives are sources of insight into those concepts (1981 p.99). The point of a narrative must be "culturally salient material generally agreed upon by members of the producer's culture to be self-evidently and importantly true" (1979 p.207). Events in narratives must be newsworthy, but the point does not have to be, and generally is not. Narratives are built around culturally salient material. They are cultural texts available for analysis.

A method is set up (1979, 1985) to abstract out the culturally salient material. Working with American

narratives Polanyi paraphrases each narrative by giving close attention to information foregrounded in the telling by evaluation. The paraphrase is then expanded to show culturally salient American values and beliefs by asking what is interesting or worthy of narration. The expansions are then distilled and organized into a structured list of cultural concepts, an abstract 'grammar' of cultural constructs (1985 pp.105-140). This is "a methodology for identifying and investigating beliefs about the world held by members of a particular culture" (1979 p.213).

Such a method seems unworkable with a large number of narratives. It would be extraordinarily time consuming to paraphrase, expand and distil each narrative in the manner suggested. However, there seems to be no reason in principle why one should not move directly from a collection of Evaluations to statements about the cultural constructs which they embody.

VI.ii. Implications of Polanyi's work for an analysis of teachers' narratives.

Seeing narratives as cultural texts and using Evaluations in the analysis of culturally salient material is important to the present study. It gives support to the notion of analysing the Evaluations in teachers' narratives in order to study teachers' culture, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. Essentially Polanyi's work suggests taking the Evaluation structures of teachers' narratives, asking what is of interest to tellers about them and putting together many such

statements of culturally salient material into a list of teachers' cultural constructs. The paraphrase and expansion stages might be curtailed.

This assumes, of course, that teachers are members of a definable cultural group and that their narratives somehow reflect this. Polanyi (1979 p.213) points out that inevitably statements of cultural presuppositions look simplistic or self-evident to those who belong to that culture. Cultural statements resulting from an analysis of teachers' Evaluations may therefore look obvious to teachers, but they may be surprising or exotic to those unfamiliar with teaching contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

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### PSYCHOLOGICAL MODELS OF NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

Psychological approaches to narrative are examined in this chapter. These approaches focus on the cognitive structures and processes used in the comprehension, recall and summarizing of narratives. It is important to consider these processes in the present research because the teachers telling the narratives are recalling classroom experiences. Crucial processes of memory are likely to be involved in such narration.

This chapter has four sections. The first outlines the theory of schemata. This theory refers to the collection of models which stress the constructive nature of memory processes and how they may be applied to narratives, invoking expectations and guiding comprehension and recall. The second and third sections examine two main lines of research which attempt to give more detail to story schemata and to predict and explain cognitive processing regularities involved in narration. In the second section Kintsch and Van Dijk's Macro-structure model is described. The third section considers the story-grammar approach associated with cognitive psychology and those working in the field of artificial intelligence. Since most of the research supporting these models is conducted in experimental situations, the fourth section discusses insights from

psychological research into remembering in natural contexts. Each of these sections will list insights and implications for teachers' narratives.

## I. Schema Theory

### I.i. Bartlett and Others

There has been a surge of interest in schema theory since the 1970's. Much of this interest has specifically focussed on the structure and recall of stories, which have been a testing site for different aspects of the theory. The basic theory of schemata, and the associated terms: frames, scripts, plans and goals, will be outlined below. The term 'story' will be frequently used rather than narrative. This follows the usage of those whose work is referred to. The term draws attention to the fact that many of the investigations into schemata use fictional written texts rather than oral narratives of personal experience.

The term 'schema' dates at least from Kant (1787) but in the psychology of memory Bartlett's (1932) work on schemata has become the reference point for subsequent refinements and investigation into narrative comprehension and recall. Bartlett held that recall is "construction rather than reproduction" (p.204). It is "an imaginative reconstruction" (p.207) and is "hardly ever really exact" (p.213). "The past operates as an organized mass rather than as a group of elements each of which retains its specific character" (p.197). The organizing principle, for narrative and other recall, is

the schema. A schema is "an active organization of past reactions and of past experiences", an "active developing pattern" (p.201) which organizes elements of recall into structured wholes.

Bartlett drew attention to key processes of change on the basis of his well-known experiments using the amerindian 'war of the ghosts' story. In retelling this story, subjects omitted details or condensed parts ('flattening'); elaborated or exaggerated other parts ('sharpening'); and made passages more compact, coherent and consistent with their own expectations in order to explain incongruous features ('rationalization'). All this was in an "effort after meaning" (p.55), as subjects used their own schemata as structures of expectation to fill in probable details when recall was partial (p.206). Presumably a story schema is derived from repeated exposure to stories and is stable over time and shared within a given culture.

Hunter (1964) summarized subsequent research into long-distance recall of stories and events involving the recallers' emotional attitude. He concluded that recall was conspicuously inferential and constructive in character (p.149). "The very best we would expect of the retelling is that it should give the main characteristics of the story in words which are largely the person's own rather than those of the original" (p.154). Narratives include "allegedly direct quotations" (p.160). In narratives containing large chunks of dialogue it cannot be assumed that narrated words are what was said. It is more likely, on this

evidence, that the teller is using a schema to fill in plausible detail with the kind of thing that is typically said on such occasions or what the teller now thinks a person should or would have said. Tellers are generally unaware of this large role played by their own interpretation, especially in narratives of personal experience. As they tell it, so it must have happened.

This work has been criticized by Baddeley for its artificial methodology. Schema theory is considered too vague and complex to be testable (Baddeley 1976 p.13). Nevertheless, Baddeley confirms that long term memory strongly abstracts. Memory load is minimized by stripping away inessential details. Material is encoded in terms of existing schemata. Only sufficient detail of the original event or story is kept to allow a reconstruction on recall. What appears to be a direct record of personal experience is actually a reconstruction based on an abstraction (p.318). Most recent work on narrative in memory takes the basic position that there are narrative schemata, "the knowledge structures that people use during the comprehension and encoding of simple narrative stories" (Yekovich and Thorndyke 1981 p.454).

The general picture of memory for events, and narratives recalling them, is that the process of remembering is constructive, abstractive and integrative (Gomulicki 1956 ; Cofer 1973). Using less exotic materials than Bartlett, and shorter lapses of time, Gomulicki found 56% of narratives were retold verbatim, while 33% of the original material was omitted, 12%

involved word changes and 6% was added by the teller. Such a high percentage of verbatim material is very unlikely in long term recall of narratives. Long term memory is generally held to be basically semantic - memory for meaning is preserved over time whereas memory for wording or the form of sentences is not (Sachs 1967; Cofer 1973; Kintsch 1974). One exception to this is that there may be excellent verbatim retention of statements in dialogues that have high interactional content (Keenan et al. 1982).

There are five properties of schemata commonly held by schema theorists (Thorndyke 1984 p.173).

- A schema represents a prototypical abstraction of the concept it represents, encoding constituent properties that define a typical instance of its referent.
- Schemata are hierarchically organized in memory, according to different degrees of specificity.
- The properties that characterize a schema are represented as variables or slots that can be filled whenever the schema is used to organize information.
- The schemata are used predictively, guiding the interpretation of incoming information, supporting inferences and matching input to expectations.
- Schemata are formed by induction from numerous previous experiences.

There have been a number of recent attempts to narrow down the schema concept in specific ways. These



attempts have been couched in terms of metaphors which include: frames, scripts, plans and goals. (For definitions see de Beaugrande 1980 p.163-164; de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981 p.90-91.) Reference to these concepts is frequently made in work on narratives in memory. All of them involve the notion that tellers and hearers have prior experience, organized knowledge and expectations about the world and likely events. Such structures of expectation make interpretation possible. In the process of interpreting, these concepts reflect back on perception of events to justify that interpretation (Tannen 1979 p.144). These metaphors will now be discussed.

### **I.ii. Frames**

Minsky (1975) suggested that a frame was "a data structure for representing a stereotyped situation" (p.212). Hearing a narrative, a person will engage in a process of selecting a previously remembered frame from among a variety of hierarchies of frames and fit the narrative into it (cf. Goffman's sociological frames). Schemas can be represented as frames having slots which can be filled in with appropriate values or information (Greene 1986 p.75). If specific information is not given for a slot it may be filled in by default as the hearer selects the most commonly expected value. Often such default values are taken for granted. A frame is a rather static representation of knowledge, whereas a script is somewhat more dynamic. Frames are included in Kintsch and van Dijk's macrostructure model of narrative

(see below).

### I.iii. Scripts

Scripts are knowledge structures which describe routine events, "predetermined sequences of actions that define a situation" (Schank 1975 p.264). Examples of these stereotypic event sequences are "ordering food in a restaurant" or "starting the day at school". A written out script would list the default values for actions which would be expected to occur in such situations and which therefore do not need to be mentioned. A script is said to be useful because it fills in the blanks in our understanding. Scripts are "glorified inference techniques" (Schank 1976 p.184). Schank (p.177) views narratives as being sequences of causal links. One problem in understanding a narrative is establishing a causal chain that connects it into a related whole. If a common sequence is involved a script helps teller and hearer because a script is "a giant causal chain of conceptualizations that have been known to occur in that order many times before (p.180)". It can be hypothesized that narrators will script events in a certain way not because they were known to have occurred as such but because that is the typical chain of events in similar situations. In recall, parts of a script which were not mentioned originally tend to be mentioned in later reproduction (Bower et al. 1979). Script actions are recalled in temporal sequence even when presented in a scrambled order. Scripts are said to be linked in memory as sets. When some of the actions are accessed, so are

the others. Like frames, scripts are hierarchically ordered. Unlike frames, they are also temporally sequenced (Abbott et al. 1985).

#### I.iv. Plans and Goals

Researchers using schema theory have suggested that it is impossible to understand narratives without taking into account the goals, plans and intentions of the characters. This dimension is missing in the evaluation model. Plans are global patterns of events and states leading up to an intended goal (de Beaugraude and Dressler 1981 p.90).

Actions in narratives are recalled better than descriptions (Gomulicki 1956). Recall of goal-directed actions is better than that of non goal-directed actions (Lichtenstein and Brewer 1980). On this evidence Lichtenstein and Brewer conclude that recall of narrative prose is largely determined by plan schemata of underlying events. Bower (1976) found that stories with more tightly-knit goal structures were judged more coherent and comprehensible than stories with less tightly-knit ones and the former were recalled better. Goal-relevant deviations from scripts are remembered better than script actions (Bower et al. 1979). Goals and plans are important elements in episodic story grammars (see below) which attempt to include people's motives and intentions in theoretical models.

#### I.v. Further Findings

There are three further sets of research findings

on the effects of schemas which are widely recognized. These are, first, that stories can be seen as having a hierarchy of propositions, or ideas. The higher the proposition, the more central it is to the story and readers rate it as being more important. Higher propositions are more likely to be remembered on recall and are more likely to be mentioned in a summary. Summaries tend to include only propositions high in the hierarchy (Bower 1976; Meyer and McConkie 1973; Meyer 1975, 1977).

The second finding is that readers can put scrambled stories back into their original order (Kintsch 1977). The removal of material which, it is supposed, is necessary to match important schema elements interferes with both story comprehension and recall (Thorndyke, 1977). Stories in which events of different sequences are so interlaced that concurrent schemas must be maintained for each sequence are rearranged on recall so as to separate the schemas (Mandler 1978). These two main sets of findings, the levels effect and the effect of violating schema order, are widely held to support narrative schema theory. This shows how much prior knowledge is used by narrative audiences. However, de Beaugrande seems to make an exaggerated claim in stating, "The effects of schemas as global knowledge patterns applied to stories have been irrefutably demonstrated" (1980 p.203, p.254).

A third type of finding concerns the cultural dimensions of schema theory. Two studies concerning the universality of the narrative schema arrive at opposite

conclusions. They illustrate some of the research problems in this area. Kintsch and Greene (1978) suggested that story schemata are culture specific. They found that subjects wrote better summaries of European short stories than they could of native Alaskan narratives. They recalled a Grimm's fairy tale much better than an Apache tale. However, since neither Alaskan nor Apache subjects were tested it is possible to conclude that the European short stories were more comprehensible to members of any culture, including Alaskans and Apaches. A second study by Mandler et al. (1980) compared Americans and Liberians listening to and recalling four European folktales and one Vai (Liberian) tale. The amount and pattern of recall for both groups was quite similar, leading to the claim of cultural invariance in story recall. However, only the Liberians recalled the stories from both cultures; Americans were not tested with the Vai tale. A further reservation in comparing the studies is that in the first study stories were read, while in the second they were heard. The results seem inconclusive. (see Chapter 5 )

#### I.vi. Criticisms of Schema Theory

Schema theory and its associated research has received a number of criticisms (Tarpy and Mayer 1978 p.325; Brown and Yule 1983 p.240-241; Greene 1984 p.37, 39) that:

- key concepts are insufficiently specified;
- it is uncertainty whether the concepts are set up to account for all representation of

- knowledge, or only for certain aspects;
- possible associated knowledge proliferates in story understanding: it is difficult to restrict the concepts to relevant knowledge only;
  - the research uses written material testing subjects (usually psychology undergraduates) in experimental conditions -- the relevance to natural narration is problematic;
  - the analysis for any of the schema concepts for any particular narrative is extremely complex and detailed, suitable for testing one or two texts on subjects but not for handling a large number of narratives.

#### **I.vii. Implications for Teachers' Narratives**

Schema theory places great importance on the prior knowledge, expectations and inferencing in interpretation which narrative tellers and audiences commonly use. In these terms, a teacher's narrative cannot be thought of as an exact reflection or reproduction of classroom events and actions. On the contrary, schemata will shape and rationalize occurrences according to that teacher's prior knowledge and expectations. Shaping is likely to depend on the teacher's perception of what is typical, offset by what is tellable and newsworthy. An explanation for this balance between typicality and newsworthiness can be seen in terms of frames of static stereotypical situations and scripted action sequences, with slots filled in by variable instances, some of which will be

highly individual and tellable. Schema theory is often thought of as comprehension of written narratives and later written recall of them. However, there is no reason in principle why schemata would not influence oral narratives, in comprehension and production. After all, the central function of schemata is that they are involved in the construction of interpretation of objects, events and situations. Teachers as tellers encode narratives schematically, employing frames, scripts and plans and other teachers as listeners employ schematic processes in understanding. The fundamental assumption of schema theory is that situations, events or texts can be understood only in terms of the schemata available to the comprehender (Rumelhart 1977 p.301). If they do not fit the schemata they are modified until they do fit. A teller of a narrative must have already used a schema in perceiving and remembering the events recalled. It can therefore be hypothesized that teachers will perceive classroom events in terms of relevant schemata; that short and long term storage of events and experiences in memory will be in data structures influenced by or held in schemata; that subsequent recall and encoding in narration of those events are also shaped by schemata. This hypothesis implies that to analyse teachers' narratives, in particular the Evaluations, is, in part, to analyse the cultural schemata employed by their tellers. Schema theory alerts us to the idea that what is not told or explicitly mentioned may be equally important to the tellers. It is unsaid, but intended to be understood by default, as

part of a frame, script, or plan.

Schema theory relates to the question of the ontological status of teachers' narratives. The problem is to assess the match between what teachers say happened (narrative) and the original event (reality). If the focus is on teachers' perceptions of their experiences, then schema theory suggests that perceptions through memory processes are reconstructed and shaped via schemata. Since the schemata are based on teachers' previous attitudes, experience and knowledge, it can be suggested that teachers' narratives are heavily influenced by these. Here the focus is on cultural perspectives, therefore the original event and the reality-to-narrative match is less important than the idea that narratives reveal teachers' attitudes and experiences. On the assumption that teachers share an occupational culture, and that this culture also shapes schemata, teachers' narratives may reveal crucial aspects of that culture.

## II. The Macro-Structure Model

In a series of publications Kintsch and van Dijk have developed a comprehensive Macro-Structure model of discourse processing from their previous work in semantic memory and text structures (Kintsch 1974; 1976; 1977 a, b; 1985; van Dijk 1975; 1977 a, b; 1985; 1988 a, b; Kintsch and van Dijk 1978, 1983). They accept the notion of schemata as basic to understanding comprehension and discourse processes and in their detailed and complex model attempt to give it



theoretical substance. They argue that without schemata the appropriate reduction and organization of large amounts of information would make storage, organization and retrieval impossible. Their model is set up to account for the processing of all types of texts, written and oral. It has been particularly exemplified by reference to narratives.

### II.i. Basic Assumptions

As a preliminary step it is worth listing nine basic assumptions behind the model (Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 pp.4--11). There are five cognitive assumptions, that:

- understanding is a constructive process;
- meaning is actively interpreted;
- understanding takes place at the same time as processing input data, not later (on-line);
- understanding activates and uses presuppositions in the form of previous experience, beliefs and attitudes, motivations and goals;
- understanders and producers use information from events, the situation or context, presuppositions, and existing schemata flexibly and strategically;

And four contextual assumptions that:

- the process of understanding or producing discourse is functional in a social context: cognitive and social dimensions interact;
- discourse has speech act functions (pragmatic);
- speech acts are embedded in participants'

interpretation of interaction, including their motivations and intentions.

-- there are always constraints on appropriateness to dimensions of the social situation.

It is convenient to divide discussion of the Macro-structure Model into three aspects: first, to outline the notion of macro-structures, micro-structures and the macro-rules which link them; second, to analyse the notion of narrative superstructure; and third to summarize aspects of strategic processing of the model, with some consideration of its psychological reality. This will be followed by a consideration of the relevance of macro-structures and narrative superstructures to the analysis of teachers' narratives.

A diagrammatic overview showing the structural levels of the Kintsch and van Dijk Macro-structure Model is shown in Table 3.1 (after van Dijk 1977 b).

Table 3.1

|                                                                      |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>NARRATIVE SUPERSTRUCTURE</b><br>conventional narrative categories | ORGANIZING<br>FORM  |
| <b>MACRO-STRUCTURE</b><br>levels of macro-propositions               | SEMANTIC<br>CONTENT |
| <b>MICRO-STRUCTURE</b><br>levels of micro-propositions               | macro-rules         |
| <b>SENTENCES</b><br>linear sequence in narrative                     | micro-rules         |

### II.ii. Macro-structures, Micro-structures and Macro-rules

Kintsch and van Dijk analyse utterances and

sentences into propositions, or elementary units of meaning. Further, they state that propositions must be combined by language users into increasingly higher levels; into fairly specific, lower 'micro' levels, then into higher, more general 'macro' levels. This hierarchy of levels is postulated in order to place the semantic representation of a narrative within a framework of cognitive processing.

In the linear sequence of sentences in a narrative as told or heard each sentence contains one or more propositions. These are systematically grouped together into micro-propositions, which form the semantic representation of the details of the narrative. A hierarchy of levels of micro-propositions form the micro-structure of the narrative, the sequence of propositions underlying the sequence of sentences of the narrative (van Dijk 1977 p.4; Kintsch and van Dijk 1978 p.66). Linear sequences of propositions are related to each other by local coherence and cohesion relationships (Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 ch.4,5), and to sentences by so-called micro-rules.

The semantic representation of the global meaning of a narrative is the macro-structure which consists of a hierarchy of levels of macro-propositions. The macro-structure is an abstract semantic description of the global content of a narrative and captures the intuitive notions of gist, theme or topic (van Dijk 1977 pp.3, 6, 95, 130, 147, 150; 1981 p.4; Kintsch 1977 b p.379, 381; Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 pp.52, 190, 194). The macro-structure level is concerned with the essence

of a narrative and must therefore include the Evaluation. The macro-structure is a coherent whole, not merely a sequence of macro-propositions. In a listener's mind it would be the memory record of hearing a narrative: in a teller's mind it would be the global structure or the central ideas of a narrative. The diagram at the beginning of this section is an indication of the macro-structure of these paragraphs.

A macro-structure may be peculiar to a given narrative since it represents narrative content, and narratives differ. Equally, it might be idiosyncratic to a teller or hearer since there are individual interpretations to narratives. However, there are also prototypical aspects to the concept of macro-structure: summaries are based directly on macro-structures; they are used as global retrieval cues in narrative recall; they are schema-based. Comprehending a narrative is essentially filling in slots to a schema outline which is intimately connected to the macro-structure (Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 ch.6). The larger the number of narratives told on a given topic by a similar group of tellers (such as teachers) the more likely it is that the macro-structures would show a prototypical character.

Macro-structures embody semantic content at an abstract level but they are often directly expressed or implicitly signalled (cf. lexical signalling) by titles, headings, captions, topic sentences, advance organizers, (in writing) and by abstracts, summaries, questions, reminders and all the evaluative devices (in speech).

Macro-structures are held: to define the relative importance of different parts of a narrative in relation to its global coherence; to organize narrative information in memory; to be stored in memory together with some micro-propositional details. They are crucial in the cognitive processing of narratives and provide their overall unity. Kintsch and van Dijk cite a large body of evidence to support the notion of a macro-structure. Kintsch (1977 a p.61) concludes "The pattern of results obtained in these studies generate some confidence that the notion of schema use in macro-structure formation is a sound one." In this model macro-propositions dominate sequences of micro-propositions but the macro- and micro-structural levels are also dynamically connected by macro-rules (van Dijk 1977 a pp.8--16; Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 p.190). These operate as transformational rules deleting, generalizing and integrating micro-propositions towards a macro-structural level. Their function is to reduce and organize information.

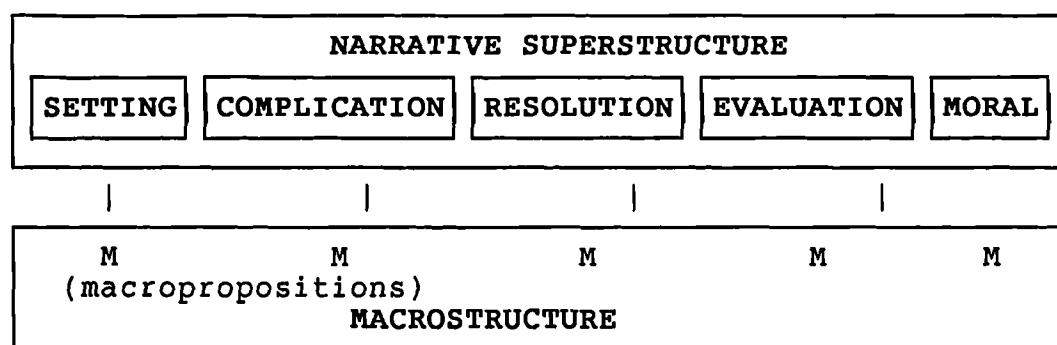
### II.iii. Narrative Superstructures

At the highest level, above a macro-structure is a narrative superstructure (van Dijk 1977 a pp.16--18; 1977 b p.4, 147, 154, 158; 1981 p.5; Kintsch and van Dijk 1978 p.69, 73; 1983 p.16, 54, 237, 240, 251). Superstructures are organizing principles which are specific to a particular type of discourse. A narrative superstructure determines the overall structure of the narrative text as a kind of macro-syntax for its global

meaning. The narrative superstructure provides the global form and organizes the particular semantic macro-structure, the content, while the macro-propositions can be said to fill slots in categories contained in the superstructure. In effect, a narrative superstructure is a special kind of schema, but a conventionalized -- not personal -- one. Knowledge of such a superstructure is thought to facilitate the generating, remembering and reproducing of macro-structures. The narrative superstructure is non-linguistic but is mapped onto semantic structures.

A narrative superstructure is defined in terms of schematic categories (van Dijk 1977 a p.17; 1977 b pp.153--155; 1981 p.5; Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 p.55, 236) either using categories similar to the Evaluation model (see Chapter 2) or using categories from story grammar (see following section). The first gives a structure in the canonical form of Table 3.2, after van Dijk (1977):

Table 3.2

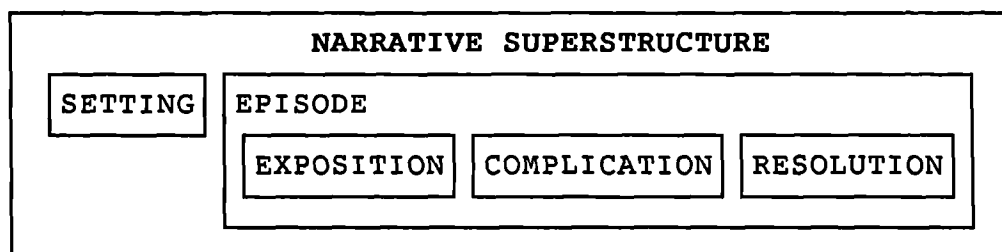


The category of setting introduces the characters, time and place and describes the conditions for the events

and actions to follow. Each of these sub-categories as state or process descriptions (the form) will be mapped to the macro-structure (the content), assigning specific functions or roles to macro-propositions. The complication category is mapped onto macro-propositions interpreting event and action descriptions, the resolution category is mapped onto an action description, and so on. Each category dominates a top-level macro-proposition, which in turn dominates sequences of lower-level macro-propositions. In telling a narrative the categories are filled in with recalled macro-structural content, which in turn is used to retrieve the more detailed micro-structural information.

The alternative is to view the Complication and Resolution in terms of Episode structure as in Table 3.3, after Kintsch (1976), this would be:

Table 3.3



The episode category can be recursive to obtain a number of episodes in sequence or hierarchical to get embedded episodes. Mapping to the macro-structure is similar to the other categories. (see Section III on story grammars)

Kintsch and van Dijk assume that macro-structures: enable comprehension of highly complex information

during input, organize the information in memory, and serve as retrieval cues in production. Van Dijk claims that "Experiments have shown that these assumptions are indeed correct" (1977 b p.157). The comprehension, organization and recall of a narrative not only depend on linguistic rules of semantic information reduction (macro-rules), but on the rules and categories determining the global organization of the narrative (the superstructure mapped onto the macro-structure). The narrative structure will determine comprehension, organization in memory, and recall (ibid p.158) and thus, "Macro-structure formation in complex discourse is a necessary property of cognitive information processing". This model gives a powerful cognitive processing dimension to the Evaluation model, by equating aspects of the formal structure and semantic content of a narrative with cognitive structures and functions. This aspect will now be considered.

#### II.iv. Strategic Processing and Psychological Reality

Kintsch and van Dijk (1983) have developed their original (1978) rather structural model towards a more strategic one, building on the basic on-line, strategic and contextual assumptions. The model gives greater emphasis to the formation of a macro-structure and processing strategies. The extraction of narrative macro-structures by hearers is an ongoing process. Far from waiting until the end of the narrative to decide what it was about, hearers continually make inferences about relevant macro-propositions. Early



macro-propositions influence how the rest of the narrative is analysed. For this reason Abstracts can be seen as crucial in narrative processing. In production, first events and actions may be encoded, ignoring later occurrences or fitting them regardless to the invoked macrostructure; subsequently the first events may become narrative macro-structure in a telling, in a cycle of typicality of perception of the expected and subsequent narration of the stereotypical.

There will be a flexible interaction between the inductive, data-driven, bottom-up construction or triggering of a macro-structure on the one hand, and the deductive, conceptually-driven, top-down processing, from macro-structure to incoming data, on the other. In order to know that the discourse is a narrative, the audience will attempt to map the macropropositions into a narrative superstructure. Once it is presumed to be a narrative, hearers will search for relevant semantic fillings of the narrative superstructural slots.

Apart from the text base (macro-structure), processing also involves the parallel activation and updating of a situation model (Kintsch and van Dijk 1983 pp.11, 336--346) in episodic memory. This is a cognitive representation of the events, actions, people, and the situation which a text is about. This is continually matched with what the hearer knows about similar situations. Again, this may reinforce perceived typicality. In narrative production (1983 p.17, 261--293) tellers first construct a macro-structure as a macro-plan, using elements of general knowledge and of

the situation model. The narrative situation model will consist of both the narrative situation and the context of narration, including a model of the hearer and his or her knowledge, motivation and past-actions. Secondly, tellers strategically execute the macro-plan, recalling the macro-structure of events and representing their meaning in a narrative structure with all the surface details, including use of stylistic, rhetorical and conversational strategies.

Has this model got psychological reality? The Macrostructure model seems to be based on the premise that semantic and cognitive structures and processes are closely related and possibly to be somehow equated with each other. Kintsch and van Dijk seem to be systematically ambiguous about this. Narrative superstructures, they state, are "not merely linguistic structures or theoretical constructs but have 'cognitive relevance' ". This is "a notion with intended vagueness" (1983 p.239). Whether some categories are merely constructs of the theory and others cognitively real, or whether all categories and rules of the model are "known and used as such in processing", can be specified "in varying degrees of strength" (ibid).

Bearing in mind the 1960's psycholinguistic debate over the cognitive status of transformational generative structures and rules, Kintsch and van Dijk are cautious. They do "not assume that the strategic comprehension of schematic structures necessarily follows the levels or categories of an abstract theory of superstructures" (ibid). On the other hand, "superstructures must be not

only in the text, but also in the reader's or listener's mind. One must know about conventional schemata before one can use them" (1983 p.251, my underlining). They have "strong theoretical reasons to assume that superstructures must play an important cognitive role" (253). Van Dijk (1988 p.52) made a clearer statement: the theory of superstructures is "not a theory of how language users go about producing or understanding schemata". Yet this is not the impression one gets from Kintsch and van Dijk (1983). In the present research the 'cognitive relevance' of superstructures will be accepted. Ultimately the 'psychological reality' can be examined by considering how well the model explains narratives.

#### II.v. Criticisms of the Macrostructure Model

Kintsch and van Dijk recognize limitations of the Macrostructure model (1983 p.121) that:

- there are possible cultural constraints since only western European languages have been examined in relation to the model;
- there is personal and interactional variation;
- there are social constraints in particular settings or with particular participant roles.

Aspects of the situation model can take these factors into account. Other criticisms have been raised, that:

- the model relies on a single propositional format, which is "the one major defect" (Johnson-Laird, 1983 p.386);
- there is no procedure for analysing natural

texts (such as conversational narratives) into propositions and micro- and macro-structures (Brown and Yule 1983 p.380; Garnham 1985 p.174). The first of these latter points seems to be covered by the notion of propositional hierarchies and macro-rules for qualitative transformations of propositions. The second point is placed in context by Stubbs: "no one has yet managed to define propositions in such a way that a definite listing of the constituent propositions of a text may be drawn up" (1983 p.214). There is reasonable agreement but not replication. Kintsch and van Dijk show that there is often explicit signalling of macro-structures.

#### II.vi. Implications for Teachers' Narratives

The Macro-structure model gives much greater specification to the nature and role of narrative schemata. It emphasizes the coherent whole of narrative macro-structures, and therefore of teachers' narratives. It has relevance for teachers' narratives through the detailed strategic approach given to the comprehension, organization in memory and recall of narratives.

The superstructure-to-macro-structure relationship of narrative is a more sophisticated form-to-content expression than is usually found in narrative-sentence relations. The link between the macro-structure of a narrative and its evaluation seems clear, since the evaluation must be a high-level proposition in the macro-structure, mapped onto the Evaluation category in the superstructure. This lends support to the

worthwhileness of investigating teachers' narratives in these terms.

Kintsch and van Dijk's cognitive assumptions are relevant to teachers' narratives. These assumptions, adopted here, permit a consideration of teachers' narratives as embodying some element of cognitive reality showing something of the schematic structures of teachers' memories. Kintsch and van Dijk's contextual assumptions have already been considered. Of major importance is the emphasis given to typicality in the superstructure and in the macro-structures of teachers' narratives on the same topic, especially if told by a large number of teachers. This can be linked, through the Macro-structure model, with teachers' cognitive processing. Another dimension can in this way be added to the investigation.

### III. Story Grammars.

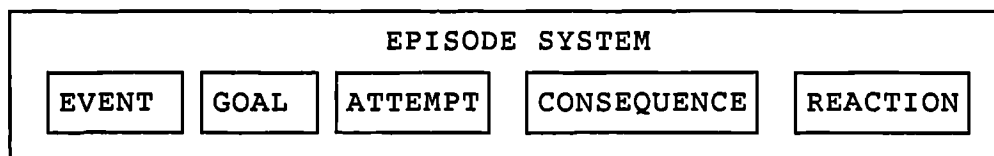
#### III.i. Models and Assumptions

In the mid 1970's a number of 'story grammars' were developed which aroused controversy in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence. Earlier structural models of narrative analysis, drawing a linguistic analogy between story structure and morphology, had shown that it was possible to break stories down into a small number of minimal recurrent units (Propp 1958; Greimas 1966; Todorov 1977). Story grammarians took this a stage further using techniques of phrase structure analysis and rewrite rules, derived

by analogy with generative approaches to syntax. These techniques were used to create sets of rules for segmenting, identifying and manipulating story constituents. The grammar assigns a hierarchical or tree structure to stories.

Story grammars have been sketched out by Rumelhart (1975, 1977), Thorndyke (1977), Mandler and Johnson (1977), Stein and Glenn (1979) and Glenn (1978). After a setting, the body or plot of a story is composed of Episodes. Something happens to characters causing them to respond or to set up a goal. Their actions or attempts to accomplish the goal result in a Resolution or state of affairs terminating the Episode. Episodes can be linked in sequence or embedded within other Episodes. Details of story grammars and terms differ but all of them parse stories into nodes of information showing how characters solve a problem. A node contains such information as an initiating event, a goal or plan, an attempt to accomplish this goal, and the consequence of doing so. Thus Glenn (1978 p.230), for example, sees a story as a causal sequence of information, analysed in terms of six basic categories, a Setting and components of the Episode system, as in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4



Here the initiating Event causes a response in the main character of the story to bring about a motivating state

or internal response which stimulates the character to form a plan sequence (Goal). The Attempt represents the character's overt actions to attain the Goal. The Consequence is the attainment of the Goal, or not, while the Reaction is the character's internal response to the Consequence.

Story grammarians assume that story structures, such as that above, have cognitive processing reality, and are explicitly linked to story schemata (Rumelhart 1977 p.301; Thorndyke 1977 p.83; Mandler and Johnson 1977 p.113, 1980 p.311; Mandler 1978 p.15; Stein and Glenn 1979 p.58; Johnson and Mandler 1980 p.81). Thus Stein and Nezworski speak of "isomorphic correspondence between incoming information and underlying cognitive structures" and of a schematic organization of stories "perhaps reflecting a universal structuring of human memory" (1978 p.191). Similarly Marshall states that "it is a reasonable conclusion" that story grammars "seem to be descriptive of the way in which narrative information is organized in the mind of both reader and writer" (1984 p.84). Even those who oppose story grammars as grammars agree that the two main higher level cognitive units in stories are goal-based episodes and thematic plot units (Black 1984 p.252).

### III.ii. Research Results

Results of research using story grammars generally support schema theory, though there are alternative explanations. Thus texts derived from the grammars are more comprehensible than others not so derived

(Thorndyke 1977). Information higher in the hierarchical structure is better recalled than lower information and is more likely to be included in a summary (Rumelhart 1977; Thorndyke 1977). The temporal order of information which is consistent with story grammars is retained better than an order of information which is inconsistent with them (Mandler 1978, Stein and Nezworski 1978). Supporters of story grammars take such results as confirmation that the structural relations represented in the grammars are used to understand and remember stories (Mandler and Johnson 1977; Thorndyke 1977; Mandler 1978; Stein and Glenn 1979). Those who oppose the grammars admit that they have stimulated useful research and thinking into the comprehension and recall of stories (Johnson-Laird 1983 p.368).

### III.iii. Criticisms of Story Grammars

Story grammars have generated some controversy (van Dijk [ed] 1980; de Beaugrande 1982). Major criticisms of story grammars are that:

- they have not been applied to extensive data but only to simple or artificial stories (Brown and Yule 1983 p.120);
- they are not real grammars: they do not generate some stories but do generate non-stories (Black and Wilensky 1979; Garnham 1988 p.122) and they can only be operated intuitively (Brown and Yule 1983 p.117);
- they emphasize prediction rather than explanation (Thorndyke and Yekovich 1980), and



prescription rather than description (Thorndyke 1984 p.188);

- they ignore social interaction and emotive effects (de Beaugrande and Colby 1978 p.58; Lichtenstein and Brewer 1981, 1982);
- they are unnecessary since all that is needed is an understanding of goals and motivations in real life situations or a focus on semantic content only (Black and Wilensky 1979 p.227).

Following these criticisms there has been further development and discussion by supporters of story grammars: Johnson and Mandler (1980) proposed a transformational model giving greater economy and flexibility. Mandler (1982 p.433) argues that more has been made of the parallel between story and sentence grammars than was intended. A story grammar is only a type of formalism. She adds, clearly "a story grammar is not a model of mental processing" (p.434). Calfee (1982 p.441,444) also discussing the assumption that narrative structure matches cognitive structure/processing concludes that story grammars serve limited heuristic functions to investigate comprehension.

In view of the criticisms various alternatives to story grammars have been proposed, including the theory of 'mental models' (Johnson-Laird 1983; Garnham 1983, 1985, 1988). These are held to contain information about particular situations and refer to what is constructed on the basis of the known, but unlike schemata their structure parallels that of the world rather than that of language. A narrative-specific alternative is the

structural-affect theory.

### III.iv. Alternatives

#### III.iv.a. The Structural-Affect Theory

Lichtenstein and Brewer (1980; Brewer and Lichtenstein 1981, 1982; Brewer 1985) have proposed a structural-affect theory. They attempt to reinterpret the results of story grammar experiments as showing memory for goal-directed events rather than as showing the cognitive structure of narrative schemata. For them, story understanding is only a special case of using event schemata.

They distinguish events, a series of events arranged in temporal order of occurrence, from discourse, the sequential arrangement of events in a narrative as told. Three types of story structures are distinguished (Brewer 1985 p.169-170) linked with a proposed distinguishing function of stories, the affective function. This function is that stories have a primary function to entertain, thereby getting an affective response. The three structures are surprise, suspense and curiosity.

In the first, surprise, the speaker withholds critical information from the beginning, which listeners are unaware of until the end of the story, at which point events are reinterpreted in the light of the surprise. In the suspense structure there is an initiating event which could lead to serious good or bad consequences. The listener is concerned about the

potential outcome and when informed of it finds the suspense resolved. In the curiosity structure the speaker again withholds critical information at the beginning but listeners know this and are curious. When informed later, curiosity is satisfied.

These distinctions seem useful. Brewer and Lichtenstein cite experimental evidence that different discourse patterns produce different types of affective response and that patterns producing affective response were judged by subjects to be stories, while others not producing such a response were not judged to be.

Brewer and Lichtenstein take the category of events and actions to be basic (1981 p.337) and understood in terms of underlying event/script/plan schemata. Within this category they put narratives which they define very broadly to include stories, newspaper articles, history texts and directions. An additional level of schema is posited to handle event-discourse relations for narrative.

Stories are characterized by their entertainment function, for which they say, a structural-affect theory is necessary. Others (eg Stein 1982 p.490) have argued that stories have multiple functions and that one cannot single out one function only for its primacy. The three story structures are linked with affective functions which in turn are related to users' intuitions, mediated by knowledge of the structures and meta-affect, which is the aspect of enjoyment/entertainment. These intuitions and affects are said to be universal (Brewer 1985) though realized in culturally specific ways.

By re-categorizing stories as narratives and actions/events, they claim (1982 p.475) that story schemata are best interpreted as relating to plan schemata and narrative comprehension. Even here, both story grammars and plan-based theories incorporate goal-directed action sequences as central elements and the structural-affect theory elevates suspense and interest above goal-direction. They present limited evidence (1982 p.483) to suggest that suspense texts without goal-directed action sequences are considered to be stories by subjects.

#### III.iv.b. Story Grammars and Action Theory

Kintsch and van Dijk take an intermediate position in the story grammar controversy (1983 pp.55-59; van Dijk 1988 p.149). Their view is that both the specific narrative schemas of the story grammars and the action schemas from the general theory of action are necessary for a complete understanding of narrative.

First, they agree that narratives (Lichtenstein and Brewer's 'stories') are a subset of action discourses. A theory of narrative understanding must include an account of motivations, plans, goals and purposes, which a theory of action provides (van Dijk 1975, 1977). However, while a cognitive account of human action is necessarily very general (not all action discourses are narratives), a specific account is not necessary for either the story grammar or the goal-oriented models.

Second, narratives have specific semantic and pragmatic constraints: what is considered interesting is

not inherently part of an action structure (contra de Beaugrande and Colby 1979), but is part of a narrative structure and is culturally variable. Such constraints become culturally conventionalized and normative. Without an interesting action or event, hearers may deny that an account is a narrative, believe it is an unfinished or pointless narrative, or accept it as a narrative from another culture. The narrative category of the macro-structure model theoretically includes these constraints.

Third, knowledge about action is not the same as knowledge about action discourse. Not all aspects of an action feature in a narrative. Only the unknown or interesting is a necessary feature, together with sufficient background to understand it. Since the narrative order of presenting actions is not necessarily identical to the original order in which the actions occurred, they argue that what is important for narrative analysis is not so much a theory of action as a theory of action description.

### III.v. Implications for Analysing Teachers' Narratives

The most exciting implication of the story grammar approach is the possibility that a generative approach using rewrite rules and perhaps transformations (Johnson and Mandler 1980) could be used to account for the narrative structure of the corpus of teachers' narratives. To find a limited number of phrase structures which could describe all and only various types of teachers' narratives would be strong evidence

of an underlying structure on schema relating to the typicality of classroom life. However, the story grammar controversy makes it clear that such grammars have conceptual and technical problems with coping with even simple stories, and the 'all and only' criterion would prove too strong to be operable, at the present state of such grammars, on a large corpus of data.

The emphasis on what is interesting will, however, apply to an analysis of teachers' narratives. The entertainment function of teachers' narratives is important, but it is not necessarily the prime or distinctive function. The inclusion of characters' goals and plans could add character-internal dimensions of motivation and response to the Evaluation model. However, a strong element of subjectivity is involved in using such a model on spontaneous oral narratives. Yet it can be assumed that there is a plan dimension to the overall organization of a narrative from the teacher's construction of it at the time of telling. 'Plan' may be doubly relevant, then, if subjective.

#### IV. Remembering in Natural Contexts

##### IV.i. Memory Studies

The majority of the psychological studies quoted have been based on the performance of experimental subjects in controlled laboratory tasks, typically reading and recalling narrative texts. In contrast, the teachers in this study were telling oral narratives of personal experience, recalling past events spontaneously

in schools. For this reason it is useful to balance the studies referred to earlier by citing some of the few studies of memory in everyday life. It will be seen that these relate very closely to schema theories.

There is plenty of psychological evidence which demonstrates that eyewitness testimony can be "deplorably unreliable" (Neisser 1982 p.93). Memory for real life events is not a copying process. Rather, it is a decision-making process where people see what they want or need to see and actively reconstruct it (Buckhart 1982). If it is "replaying a strip" in Goffman's terms (1975), that strip is not that of a tape recorder but of a "transformation of experience" (Labov 1972).

Brown and Kulik (1982) saw recollections of the circumstances of hearing significant news as "flashbulb memories". Apparently people have vivid images of details of the occasion when, for instance, they heard of President Kennedy's assassination. Neisser (1982) shows how such memories can be wrong and suggests that significance is attached to the experience afterwards through frequent reconsideration, discussion and narration. The photograph-like flashbulb memories can be linked to narrative schemata where personal narrative and historical events become intertwined. "The notion of narrative structure does more than explain the canonical form of flashbulb memories; it accounts for their very existence" (Neisser 1982 p.47).

#### IV.ii. Repisodic Memory

Neisser's study of John Dean's memory for conversations with President Nixon is relevant to narrative schemata and to the role of quotation in narratives. Neisser (1982) compared Dean's legal testimony at the Watergate trial with the White House tapes of the original conversations. Dean had been dubbed "the human tape recorder" for his apparently impressive memory for dialogue. Neisser concluded that hardly a word of Dean's courtroom account was true, at least, not literally. It was plausible but entirely incorrect (p.147). Dean was wrong both as to the words used and their gist. He dramatized. Reconstruction played an exaggerated part in his narrative (p.157). Yet at a deeper level he accurately portrayed the real situation, characters and events. Neisser interprets this as "repisodic memory" (p.158). What seems to be an episode in narrative actually represents a repetition of a set of typified experiences, distilled into a single account. A repisode is correct in essence even though it is not veridical for any particular occasion.

#### **IV.iii. Brewer's Framework**

Repisodic memory can be linked with self-schemata in narrative using Brewer's framework for autobiographical memory (Brewer 1986 pp.29-32). Like Neisser, Brewer draws attention to the difference between single and repeated instances in memory and adds the strong imaginal component of flashbulb memories to give the matrix in Table 3.5:



Table 3.5

|                       | IMAGINAL                      | NON-IMAGINAL             |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| SINGLE<br>INSTANCE    | personal<br>memories          | autobiographical<br>fact |
| REPEATED<br>INSTANCES | general<br>personal<br>memory | self-schema              |

Personal memories in narrative are recalled as a partial re-living of an episode of the teller's past, typically using strong visual imagery. This would describe a narrative of a unique event. Autobiographical facts might be mentioned in the setting of such a narrative. General personal memories in narrative typically have generic images of a series of experiences, possibly recalled as a repisode. Brewer indicates that narrators of both personal and general memories may believe strongly that the recalled episodes were experienced. "This does not mean that they are, in fact, veridical, just that they carry with them a strong belief value" (1986 p.35).

The self-schema memory relates to an assumed cognitive structure which contains generic information about the self. This is derived from past experience and organizes and guides the processing of self-referenced information contained in a teller's social experiences (Marcus 1977 p.64). Brewer (1986 p.31) and Barclay (1986 p.88) suggest that such self-schemata come to control attention and memory since personal events are recalled in a manner consistent with narrators' self-concepts. There is little research evidence for copy theories of

real-life personal memories, but much evidence for reconstructive theory, at least for a partial reconstructive theory. Thus long-term personal and generic narrative memories under strong self-schema pressures are reconstructed and non-veridical. Brewer's taxonomy seems particularly applicable to narratives of personal experience.

Barclay also draws on the concept of a self-schema to explain the evidence that "autobiographical memories are not exact". They are like John Dean's courtroom narrative, paradoxically "true but inaccurate" (1986 p 95, 97). His explanation is that self-schemata mediate in personal narratives so that the recollections conform to the existing knowledge of the self. They are true to a teller's self-image. This cognitive account of the self in recalled events complements Goffman's (1969) sociological account of the presentation of self in narrative. Apparently tellers schematically omit, warp or mould events in recall to maintain the integrity and gist of their past life events.

#### **IV.iv. Implications for Teachers' Narratives**

These frameworks of remembering in natural contexts are consistent with Schema theories and with the Macro-structure model.

The narrative analyst who is familiar with schema research and studies of natural memory processes recognizes that tellers believe their accounts to be true, yet knows that they cannot be accurate. What is recalled is typical, whether it happened or not

(Freeman, Romney and Freeman 1987). An analyst can resolve this apparent problem with reference to a framework using the concept of self-schema and personal and generic memories. Self-schemata presumably interact with other memories and use frames and scripts for stereotyped situations and actions.

Neisser's (1982) study points up the unlikelihood of verbatim recall of dialogue in teachers' narratives. The concept of repisodic narrative, using general personal memory, again indicates that narration is principled construction. Many teachers' narratives, especially if they are told to illustrate typical situations or events, will collapse recurrent happenings into a repisode. What a teacher tells as having happened once may well be representing repeated experiences. A teacher's narrative possibly tells the analyst more about the typical than the actual event narrated. A teacher's narrative is likely to typicalize the unique.

In summary, the four psychological models of narrative contribute a clear understanding that memory for events in narrative is not exact but is shaped through schemata. Schemata are themselves influenced by repeated experiences, concepts of the self and notions of typicality. The Macro-structure and Story Grammar models suggest that there may be linguistic and cognitive structures of narrative which are composed of a hierarchy of slots filled in by perception and memory processes. If teachers' narratives have many common

elements this is because of common perceptions and cognitive processes as much as because of common patterns of events. Studies of natural remembering remind us of the non-veridical nature of narrative recall. They stress the principled construction of narrative, according to self-concepts, repeated events and the way things are typically seen.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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LITERARY MODELS OF NARRATIVE

I. Introduction

Within literary theory there is no universally accepted model of narrative, although since the 1970's the theory of narrative has become a central topic in literary study. The continuous shift in the meaning understood by the term 'Narrative' in the history of literature, and subsequent description of this, itself illustrates an important point, the tendency for critics and theorists to look for an orderly development of narrative works and narrative theory is evidence of how people use narratives to impose patterns on the past in order to tell a coherent story about it (Martin 1986 p.43, 64). In this way it is suggested that narrative models in literature have developed from Russian formalism through French structuralism towards post-structuralist and reader-oriented theories (Eagleton 1983; Selden 1985; Martin 1986). Other important recent branches of narrative study include Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic views.

In the following sections attention will be given to selected concepts of narrative. These are definitions of narrative, views of structural narratology, and some particular aspects of narration including tense, mood and voice. These concepts are derived mainly from

structuralist views which attempt to apply by analogy models of sentence grammar from linguistics to literary discourse.

There is an obvious major limitation in transferring insights from literary theory to an analysis of oral narratives of personal experience. Literary theory has primarily focussed on novels and short stories. It is expected that there will be far greater complexity, artistry and imagination in such written works, compared with the spontaneous, oral non-fictional narratives of personal experience. Yet many theorists of literature have paid detailed attention to oral stories in order to understand basic problems of narrative (Todorov 1969, 1977; Hendricks 1973; Bremond 1973; Prince 1973; Greimas 1983) and some writers have held that the study of oral narrative reveals fundamental structures and processes of literary genres (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Toolan 1988; Maclean 1988). Conversely, insights from literary theory may illuminate a study of oral narratives.

II. Definitions of Narrative

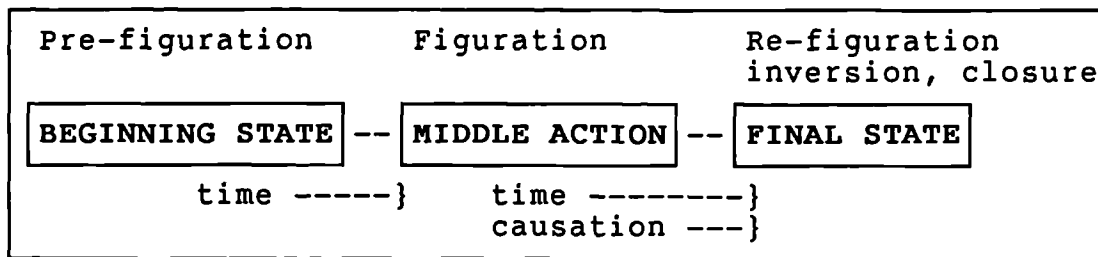
In their attempts to define narrative a number of literary theorists have suggested the three necessary conditions or criteria of temporality, causation and human interest. These are seen as combining to form a minimum plot structure. Plot is "the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature", "the only indispensable skeleton", the "most essential" but "least variable" element of narrative (Scholes and Kellogg 1966 p.207, 238-239).

II.i. Temporality

The notion of plot involves a sequence of events in time, stressed since the Aristotelian formulation of plot requiring a beginning, a middle and an end. Other elements of tension, resolution, equilibrium and causation can be included, as in Table 4.1, based on Prince (1973 pp.19-28), Todorov (1969 p.74; 1977 p.111), Chatman (1978 p.37; 1988 p.23) and Ricoeur (1984 pp 52-87).

Table 4.1

A MINIMAL NARRATIVE



Such a minimal narrative involves three conjoined events: the beginning state of equilibrium which pre-figures a change where a character (or the audience listening) envisages what is likely to happen next and plans to intervene to offset the outcome; a middle action which sets up tension by a dynamic change or disequilibrium through character action as the events unfurl; and a final state, the resolution or outcome which is the inversion of the first. The first and second events, and the second and third are linked by conjunctive features of time, "the most fundamental characteristic" of a narrative (Prince 1973 p.23).

II.ii. Causation

The middle action and final state are additionally linked by causation -- the second causes the third -- and this is "just as essential a feature as the chronological one" (Prince 1973 p.24). As Barthes (1977 p.94) emphasizes, given the temporal relation, causation is inferred by readers or hearers. What comes after is heard in narrative as what is caused by. This seems to annul E.M. Forster's well-known distinction (1927) between story, which orders events temporally, and plot which orders events causally as well as temporally. There are larger patterns: Todorov (1969, 1977) sees the three events or states as alternating with dynamic actions or changes whilst Chatman (1978, 1989) and Prince (1973) emphasize that temporality and causation work together as a whole, to finish a narrative in resolution of tension. Rimmon-Kenan (1983 p.18) argues that temporal succession of events is a sufficient minimum criterion since causality can be projected onto it and some events, intuitively recognized as narratives, would be excluded by causality. However, the consensus is that narrative is not simply a succession of recounted events, but an interesting intelligible whole, where events are connected by time and causation. Plot makes events into a story (Ricoeur 1981 p.167). At the final state, the audience re-figure what lead to the outcome. The earliest events reconnected take on their meaning and act as causes only because of the later ones -- narrative involves 'retrodiction' (Martin 1986 p.74).

II.iii. Human Interest

The third defining feature is human interest, which determines whether the events and causes fit together in a plot with beginning and end (Martin 1986 p.87). Without human interest, then there is no narrative, according to Bremond (1966 p.62, see also Prince 1973 p.160).

III. Structuralist Narratology

III.i. Literary Narrative and Linguistic Analogies

These criteria of narrative are important in structuralist models of narrative. Such models examine narratives in order to find common elements which are transferrable to non-literary media (eg.film, or spoken narrative). Proponents of these models use the term 'narratology' to suggest that narrative theory and analysis is an autonomous discipline which can formulate a 'grammar' or 'syntax' of narrative (Todorov 1967; Prince 1973; Chatman 1978). Throughout much of their writing there runs a fundamental analogy between structural, and later generative, linguistics and the study of literature. It is not clear how literary theorists are using linguistics, whether as a source of metaphors; as a source of methods, analytical techniques and rule systems; as a model, or heuristic device; or as part of a homology between literature and linguistics where the literary work is investigated as a semiotic system (Culler 1975 pp.96-109). In one or other of these ways, narratives are treated in terms of sentence grammar.

Propp's (1968) pioneering study of the plot structure of Russian folktales showed that they had only thirty-one 'functions' or significant actions, which if selected for a particular tale, appear in invariant order. The function, together with seven 'spheres of action', or roles, make up the basic units of narration. Essentially these units are seen as relations between elements rather than as elements themselves.

III.ii. Five Traits

Subsequent analysts followed this basic structural approach to narrative. Although there are differences in conceptions and terms relating to narrative units, levels, and rules or constraints on sequence and combination, fundamental common traits can be seen in the work of Bremond (1966, 1973), Todorov (1969, 1977), Greimas (1971, 1983), Barthes (1980) and, perhaps, Levi-Strauss (1968). These traits can be indicated under the five headings of autonomy; story and discourse; narrative deep and surface levels; concepts of actants and function-types; and sequences. These points will be briefly examined in turn.

First, narratology is considered to be an autonomous discipline. Within this study, an effort is made to define narrative as a specific autonomous level in the semantic organization of texts with its own rules and invariant patterns. As such, narrative (the abstraction from a or some narratives) can be seen as grammar. This utilizes the concept of grammar "in its most general and non-metaphorical sense, understanding such a grammar to

consist in a limited number of principles of structural organization of narrative units, complete with rules for the combination and functioning of these units, leading to the production of narrative objects" (Greimas 1971 p.794). Barthes (1980 p.247) sees narrative grammar more clearly in terms of the syntax of a sentence: "Structurally, narrative shares the characteristics of the sentence without ever being reducible to the simple sum of its sentences: a narrative is a long sentence...". He, like Greimas (1983) and Todorov (1969), exemplifies this with narrative categories corresponding to subject, predicate and verb categories. "Nor does the homology suggested here have merely a heuristic value: it implies an identity between language and literature" (p.247).

Second, is the generally recognized distinction between story and discourse. In Chatman's terms, 'story' means "the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting)", while 'discourse' is "the expression, the means by which the content is communicated" (1975 p.295; 1978 p.19). This distinction corresponds to 'fabula', the pre-narrative events as they occurred, and 'sjuzhet', the plot or narrative as told. (See Rimmon-Kenan 1983 p.133; Martin 1986 p.106; Cohan and Shires 1988 p.178 for further corresponding terms). This distinction has been used as the basis for commentary on focalization and time (see below).

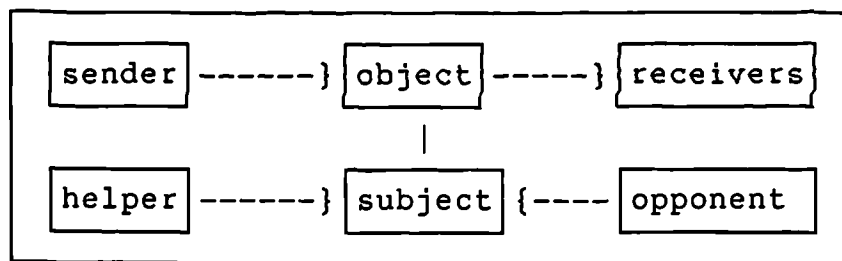
Third, this is linked with the concept of 'deep' and 'surface' structure. This is derived from linguistics to give the notion of surface narrative structures, the

actual string of words or text manifested, and deep narrative structures, an immanent abstract level of narrative from which the surface text is generated using selections of rules and units corresponding to a generative sentence grammar (Greimas 1971 p.797). In some formulations, 'story' is a chronologically-ordered deep structure (Toolan 1988 pp.12-13). In others, it is a surface structure which can be paraphrased as labels or propositions (Rimmon-Kenan 1983 pp.13-20), but still analysed for temporality and causality. The deep structure, quite unlike Kintsch and van Dijk's (1983) macro-structure, is based on static logical binary relations (see below) which are said to contain not only universal structures of narrative, but of thinking (Greimas 1970 pp.160-164) or of behaviour (Bremond 1973 p.221) (cf. Story Grammars in Chapter 3).

Fourth, is the narratological attempt to set up the specific deep-level concepts of actants and function-types. The 'actantial' model reduces Propp's roles assumed by characters in narratives. They are regularized into three sets of binary oppositions of actants, abstract classes of universal roles generated and defined in the deep structure, which correspond to actors, recognizable individual characters at the surface level. One actant can be manifested by several actors or conversely one actor might realize several actants at different points in a narrative. Greimas' model shows structural relations between actants in Table 4.2 (after Culler 1975 p.233). A narrative cannot be a signifying whole, in this account, unless it can be grasped in this

sort of actantial structure. Hawkes (1977 p.92) gives the example of the Quest for the Holy Grail showing: Subject -- Hero: Object -- Holy grail, Sender -- God : Receiver -- Man. Sender and Object are more typically abstract than concrete in many narratives, eg. the pursuit of happiness or knowledge (Toolan 1988 p.94).

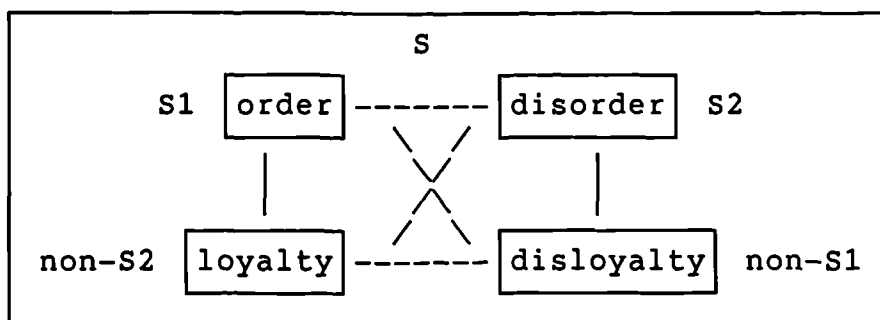
Table 4.2



A parallel correspondence is found between surface-level functions and deep-level function-types (Grosse 1978 p.163), again using a reduced list from Propp's functions.

Table 4.3

A Semiotic Square for Macbeth



In another abstraction of narrative structure, Greimas suggests that the actants or functions in a given narrative can be invested with further meaning by being inscribed in a 'Semiotic Square' based on logical relations which go beyond a binary model (Schleifer 1987 pp 93-126). In such a square, horizontal relations are

contraries, diagonals are contradictories and verticals are complementary, showing key oppositions. For instance, Grosse (1978 p.170) suggests the abstract example for Macbeth in Table 4.3. This gives the deeper meaning of narrative as equations of meaning, rather than of action. Such an abstraction of underlying values could be made from oral narratives.

Fifth, narratologists paid attention to sequences, combinations and hierarchies of narrative units. For instance, Bremond's (1966) triadic sequences of choices are combined into higher levels of complex sequences by enchainment, embedding and joining (Rimmon-Kenan 1983 pp.22-27) giving micro-and macro-sequences. Todorov (1977) and Barthes (1980) suggest hierarchies of levels of different types of units with possible transformational rules relating various levels. Clearly this is modelled on transformational generative grammar and is not unlike the macro-structure model.

In conclusion, narratologists give less attention to content and pay rather more attention to a highly reduced formal system of structural relationships of narrative. Their work emphasizes the organization of narrative as a whole, beyond a linear model. Yet, some of the deeper levels are abstract, atemporal and static, which avoids consideration of a dynamic unfolding of tensions in narrative.

III.iii. Further Frameworks of Narratology

Following Genette's work (1980), a number of central categories of narrative analysis have been developed in

narratology (Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Bal 1983; Berendsen 1984) which have attained wide currency (eg. Eagleton 1983; Martin 1986; Toolan 1988; Cohan and Shires 1988). Genette (1980 pp.71-76) adds to the familiar distinction between story (histoire), the events which occurred, and discourse (recit), the events as recounted, a third term narration, the act or process of narrative production. These terms are systematically related to each other by three categories derived from the grammar of the verb: tense, which is concerned with the arrangement and display of events in time; mood, under which heading the perspective and distance of the narrator are examined; and voice, where kinds of narrators and the ways of representing speech are considered. There are further sub-divisions shown in Table 4.4 (after Genette 1980).

Table 4.4

TENSE	MOOD	VOICE
<u>order</u> analepsis prolepsis	<u>focalization</u> external internal	<u>narrators</u> intrusiveness first-person
<u>duration</u> summary scene	<u>distance</u> diegesis mimesis	<u>speech</u> direct indirect
<u>frequency</u> singular repeated iterative		

This framework is set up to analyse literature, especially the novel, but it can be applied to oral narratives of personal experience.

III.iii.a. Time (Tense)

Time is a basic category of human experience. It is a structuring and structuralist notion involving the perception of events (Rimmon-Kenan 1983 p.43). This is forced into a linear and irreversible form when the events (story) are told in spoken narrative (discourse). The categories of order, duration and frequency are set up to account for differences between event time and narrative time. Under the category of order, departures between order of occurrence and order of presentation in narrative are discussed. The major departures, or anachronies, are analepsis and prolepsis. The first describes a flashback or expository return to an earlier period of time, either outside the existing narrative time span or inside it. This usually gives past information about characters or events, filling in omissions resulting from lapses in the teller's memory or through design to change the audience's interpretation of what has been told so far. The second refers to a flashforward or foreshadowing of an event to be recounted later. This removes the suspense of 'What will happen?', replacing it with 'How will it happen?' Some Abstracts have proleptic functions.

Duration measures the length of story-time against discourse time. Orally, this is the time it takes to tell a sequence of events compared with the time span of the original occurrences. Duration is described as summary and scene. In summary the pace is accelerated by compressing story time into a shorter telling time. In scene, story and discourse are considered to take the

same time, commonly in dialogue. Other aspects of duration involve a slow-down, where discourse time exceeds story time, or a pause, where narration continues but the story momentarily stops (Cohan and Shires 1988 p.88). An ellipsis occurs when the narration omits a point in story time. Narrators exploit duration to highlight important events by devoting more telling time to them.

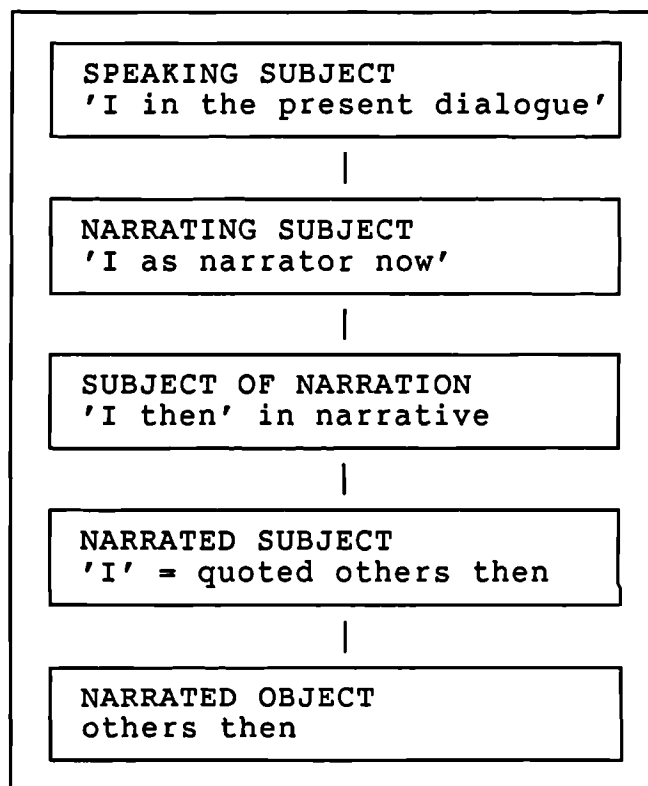
The third category of time is frequency of mentions in narrative discourse. An event which occurred once and is mentioned once in a narrative is singular. Other events which also occurred once may be mentioned several times, receiving evaluative emphasis through repetition. Some events occurring many times may be narrated only once (iterative). Genette also considers the pseudo-iterative, where the narrative tells of an event as having happened repeatedly but whose very particularity makes it seem undeniably singular. This would also evaluate an event heavily.

III.iii.b. Mood

Under the heading of mood Genette (1980) considers the notion of narrative point of view or perspective through focalization, which can include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation (Rimmon-Kenan 1983 p.71). Focalization is a triadic relationship between the narrating agent, the person recounting a narrative; the focalizer, the subject or character in a narrative who sees; and the focalized, who or what is being seen as object (Cohan and Shires 1988 p.95). Genette (1980 p.191)

distinguishes external focalization, where the narrative is told by an observer focussing on a character, from internal focalization, where the narrative is focused through the consciousness of a character. The focalization can shift from external to internal. It can be fixed, variable or multiple, by shifting between characters. In first person narrative, this distinguishes 'I' the teller, a narrator with a present self, from 'I' then, a character in the narrative at that time with a past self (see Chapter 2).

Table 4.5



Narrators may describe past experiences from either past or present perspectives and the significance of the described events may be viewed by a self who has changed between story time and telling time (Martin 1986

p.75-76). This suggests a sophisticated 'shift of the I' in narrative which, drawing on Rimmon-Kenan (1983 pp.71-85) and Cohan and Shires (1988 pp.105-109), can be diagrammed as Table 4.5.

Here the speaking subject is the present speaker in conversation before telling a narrative. The narrating subject is 'I', the speaker recounting a narrative, the person present who experienced these events then. The subject of narration is the 'I' of first person narrative at that time, the experiencing self then, who may be different from the narrating subject.

Many narratives will feature other characters, focussing through their perspectives. The teller will often speak for them and speak through them, quoting speech by them as narrated subjects. The narrative will also be about other third person characters. These narrated objects can in turn become narrated subjects, which assumes, as narrators seem to do, a degree of narratorial omniscience.

The second category of mood draws on the Platonic terms of diegesis and mimesis to describe narrative distance. Diegesis, the telling of the narrated events, relates closely to summary whereas mimesis, the showing or direct representation of what occurred, relates to scene. Booth (1987) pointed out that in narrative the idea of showing is illusory. A narrative cannot show or imitate, it can only tell in a detailed, precise manner because language signifies without imitating. However Genette (1980 pp 185-186) points out that language can imitate language. Quoted dialogue can be mimetic

especially in oral narrative performance. Otherwise, there are only different degrees of diegesis, where the teller is more distant from the told.

III.iii.c. Voice

Under the heading of voice, Genette (1980) and Chatman (1978 p.151) suggest scales of authorship: real/implicit narrator, narratee, real/implicit audience. Degrees of intrusiveness can range from the impartial description of settings and identification of character, through the more involving temporal summaries and definitions of characters, and reports of characters' speech and thoughts to commentary by the narrator. The high-profile end of this scale includes the teller's interpretation and judgements of events (Rimmon-Kenan pp.95-99). The high-profile end evaluates narratives greatly.

The distinction between direct and indirect speech has received much recent attention in literary narrative analysis (Banfield 1973; Genette 1980; Dali 1981; Berendsen 1984). McHale (quoted Berendsen 1984 p.155; Rimmon-Kenan 1983 p.109) suggests a scale from the diegetic to the mimetic: diegetic summaries, indirect paraphrases, free indirect discourse, direct discourse and free direct discourse. The latter would be pure mimetic dialogue, omitting any verbs of saying (she said/told/ asked...), apparently conveying immediacy and accuracy.

IV. Criticisms of Literary Models

There is a large body of critical literature on structural models of narrative analysis (eg. Culler 1975; Martin 1986), most obviously from the point of view of post-structuralist, or deconstructive theories (Eagleton 1983; Selden 1985). In these, attention has shifted away from the narrative text towards processes of narration and reading, with a reduction in the claim to scientific rigour. Criticisms put forward are that:

- there is an over-emphasis on structure and rigour which is reductionist at the expense of narrative content (Eagleton 1983 pp.106-126; Martin 1986 p.165)
- linguistic models of sentence grammar do not apply to narrative discourse. Linguistics should be a source of methodological clarity rather than metaphorical vocabulary (Culler 1975 p.257)
- historical development and change in narrative is ignored (Selden 1985 p.68)
- early models were genre-specific (eg. folktales, Boccaccio's tales)
- deep structures are not clearly related to surface levels in some models
- some models rely heavily on paraphrasing prior to analysis (eg. Todorov 1969), perhaps relying on intuitive summaries

V. Implications of Literary Models for Analysing Teachers' Narratives

The obvious caveat about applying literary models to teachers' narratives is the danger of seeing oral

narratives in literary terms without appreciating the psycho-dynamics of orality (Ong 1982). These models have never been applied to oral narratives of personal experience, although to do so would offer useful insights. Structural narratology reveals that literary narrative is a construct broadly similar to other forms of narrative. Some implications are:

- Instead of positing the dichotomy of written/oral narrative, it may be more useful to see narrative in a continuum.
- A narrative is viewed as a whole, with its own internal structure of mutually related units.
- Some units are organized in hierarchical levels (see Macro-Structure model).
- Some units can be seen as deep level semantic patterns of binary relations or semiotic squares.
- Literary structuralists claim that language creates, rather than reflects narrative. "It is not so much man that speaks language as language that speaks man; not so much the writer who writes narrative as narrative that writes the writer." (Lodge 1981 quoted Gibson 1984 p.94) Such a claim draws attention to the possibility that narrative form may mould the recounting of teachers' experiences in ways inherent to narration as a mode of thought.

Teachers are unlikely to be conscious of the above. They are much more likely to focus on the narrative content in

teacher-to-teacher talk. It would be important to recognize the formative influence of narrative structure on content where, for example, teachers learn about pupils via colleagues' narration.

There may be abstract recurrent patterns of character (actants) or events (functions) in teachers' narratives on specific topics. These could perhaps be formalized in sets of binary relations or in a semiotic square. The framework of story-discourse-narration, with its elaborate classifications of time, perspective, narrators and speech is richer than the Evaluation or Macro-structure model on these points. Analysing teachers' narratives in terms of order, duration, frequency, focalization, distance and speech could reveal insights into how teachers tell narratives or, more generally, into the process of oral narration of personal experience. It may turn out that teachers' narratives are more complex than is at first apparent.

CHAPTER FIVE

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### ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODELS OF NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

Anthropologists study narratives in terms of the cultural patterning of customs, beliefs, values, performance and social contexts of narration. Culture here will be viewed as symbolic behaviour and patterns of the organization, perception and belief about the world in symbolic terms (Sherzer 1987 p.295). In the first section the notion of 'ways of speaking' will be introduced. Later sections consider the structure and function of narratives in different cultures and studies of narrative performance.

Much anthropological research has seen narrative in broad terms to include myths, folktales, legends, reminiscences and jokes (Bascom 1965). Some reference is made to this broad range of narratives in this Chapter. More specific attention is given to the factual aspects of these narratives, in particular to oral accounts of first hand experiences in different cultures.

#### I. Ways of Speaking

Recent attention has been given to discourse in terms of 'ways of speaking' (Hymes 1964, 1974, 1977) and 'ethnography of speaking' (Gumperz and Hymes [eds] 1972; Bauman and Sherzer [eds] 1974; Saville-Troike 1982). As a discourse genre, narrative is seen as a speech event and



'ways of narrating' involve components of the narrative situation such as: the participants, setting, purposes of telling, communicative key and cultural norms. With these in mind, anthropologists give close attention to cultural variation in ways of telling and the relationship between narrative styles and contexts of narration. A broad division is made between referential and social meaning (Hymes 1977 p.201). Social meaning is a less obvious aspect of narrative, especially among narrators in a professional group. From this perspective narratives and narrative processes will vary enormously in different cultural groups, because people "talk differently, about different topics, in different ways, to different people, with different consequences" (Barnlund 1975 p.435). Such differences depend on a group consciousness of norms of speaking and the perception of different abilities, rights, rules, roles and status in communicative situations where narration takes place. Different ways of speaking depend in large part on the social perceptions and interpretations of different cultural groups.

Opposite ideas about narrative are found in different cultural groups. Among the Gbeya in central Africa it is believed that no one is a good storyteller (Hymes 1977 p.127), whereas among the Limba it is held that anyone is a potential storyteller and it takes no special training to give a good performance of a narrative (Bauman 1975 p.299). Tannen (1980, 1982) compared the narratives of Greek and American women, told after viewing a film. The Greeks seemed to be 'acute judges', recounting events and interpreting, ascribing

motives to characters and offering judgements. The Americans on the other hand, were 'acute recallers', giving more detailed, objective reports and showing concern with time reference. Where Americans focussed on content, Greeks focussed on interpersonal involvement.

Such variations in ways of speaking are commonly seen as reflections of cultural differences. However, speaking is itself a part of cultural behaviour and it partly shapes the whole (Hymes 1977 p.117). Language is cultural, as a form of symbolic organization of the world, and social, since it reflects and expresses group memberships and relationships. "It is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies, and fine tunes both culture and language" (Sherzer 1987 p.296). Narrative, then, is a discourse level structure or genre which reflects culture. It is a central medium of cultural expression, organization and learning. It creates cultural contexts.

## II. The Structure and Function of Narrative in Different Cultures

There have been numerous anthropological and folkloristic attempts to analyse the structure and function of oral narratives in particular cultures (Colby and Peacock 1973; Clement and Colby 1974). Many of these are second or third generation developments of Propp's (1928) work, yet this research has not shown cumulative development as each investigator has tended to invent new terms, units and levels of analysis to develop taxonomic or generative models (Jason and Segal 1977 p.4).

### II.i. Colby's Model

For example, Colby (1966 a,b; 1973 a,b) sets up a basic unit of plot, an eidon, as part of eidochronic analysis (eidos:idea, image; chronos:time sequence). He found that an analysis of Eskimo folktales required different units in different sequences, compared to Propp. Some cultures were shown to have a relatively stable distribution of narrative plot elements. He compared Japanese and Eskimo folktales. Eskimo tales emphasized the personal abilities of individuals, especially physical ones, whereas the Japanese tales showed a concern for the external social situation. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the two different physical and cultural environments. Colby (1973 b) argues that different types of narrative in a particular culture would each have separate grammars. An acceptance of such cultural diversity of narratives implies that there should be culture-specific narrative grammars. Further, if professionals, such as teachers, are considered to belong to specific cultures (see Chapter 1), then occupation-specific narratives can be expected.

Colby's framework has not been widely taken up in anthropological linguistics. However, those of Longacre (1976) and Grimes (1975) have been used to describe narrative structure and function in a wide variety of languages in many cultural groups. Longacre's analysis of narrative structure will be described below and related to narrative structures in a number of cultures.

### II.ii. Longacre's Model

Longacre (1976 p.200) distinguishes Narrative from three other major types of discourse genre (see Table 5.1): Procedural ('how-to-do-it'), Expository ('essay') and Hortatory ('sermon'). Narrative is differentiated from the other genres by having: chronological linkage; agent orientation (rather than orientation to 'patient', subject-matter or addressee); accomplished time (rather than the projected time of prophecy or instruction). It is uttered in the first or third person, and tension is present. This scheme of deep structure of different discourse types (Longacre and Levinsohn 1978 p.104) emphasizes that narrative is a major mode of oral communication in different cultural groups. It could be applied to teacher talk.

Table 5.1

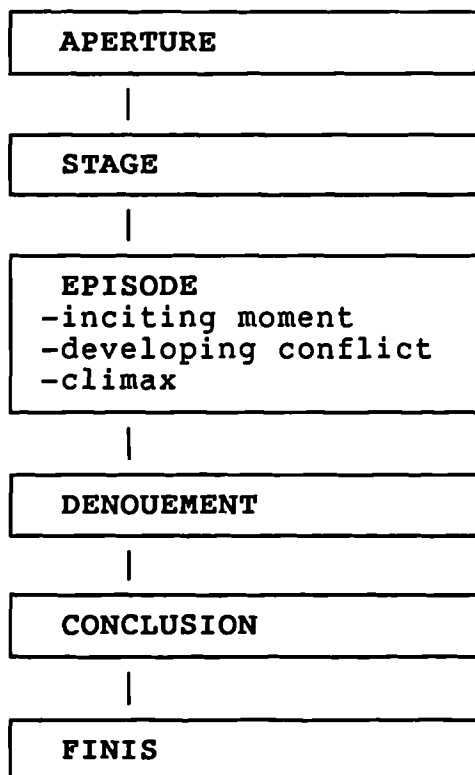
#### Longacre's scheme of Discourse Types

|              | - projected                                                                                               | + projected                                                                                        |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| + succession | <u>NARRATIVE</u><br>first/third<br>person<br>agent oriented<br>accomplished time<br>chronological         | <u>PROCEDURAL</u><br>non-specific<br>person<br>patient oriented<br>projected time<br>chronological |
| - succession | <u>EXPOSITORY</u><br>no necessary<br>reference<br>subject-matter<br>oriented<br>time not focal<br>logical | <u>HORTATORY</u><br>second<br>person<br>addressee<br>oriented<br>mode, not time<br>logical         |

The overall surface structure is shown in Table 5.2 (after Longacre 1976 pp.199-217; Longacre and Levinsohn 1978 pp.104-105).

Table 5.2

Longacre's Model of Narrative Structure



The Aperture is an optional formulaic opening. The Stage presents crucial information about time, place, local colour and participants (Setting). Episodes are likely to have an inciting moment which 'gets something going', a developing conflict which intensifies the situation (Complication) and a climax which resolves conflict (Resolution). A whole series of Episodes may have a Denouement or crucial final event. The optional Conclusion refers to a narrator's comments or interpretation before an optional Finis, or formulaic closing. Clearly Longacre's framework has much in common with Labov's Evaluation model (see Chapter 2). Parallel to the Evaluation of a narrative, Longacre (1976 pp.217-231) suggests that narrators give marked attention

to the main points, or Peaks, in a variety of ways which supplement the previously listed aspects of Evaluation. Peaks are shown by:

- rhetorical underlining, by paraphrase or repetition
- concentration of narrative characters (the crowded stage)
- tense shifts (eg. from past simple to historical present)
- person shifts (eg. from third to first person)
- transition from narration to dialogue or drama (dialogue without formulae of quotation)
- change of pace (eg. varying sentence length)
- change of vantage point or orientation, including role reversal (Focalization)

These give heightened vividness. Further, it is possible to see Episodes organized with reference to one or more Peaks, as pre-peak, post-peak or inter-peak Episodes.

### II.iii. Narrative Structure in Different Cultures

This anthropological narrative framework can be illustrated with reference to a number of cultures (Longacre and Levinsohn 1978; Grimes [ed] 1978; Brewer 1985: all the following examples are from these sources unless otherwise indicated). This will show something of the cultural diversity in oral narratives. Examples of opening formulae at the Aperture are "Let us listen" (the Dan language of Liberia), and "I want to tell you a story" (Hanga in Ghana). Some narrators explain their plans and the purposes of the narrative at this point

(Khaling of Nepal, Nafaara of Ghana).

In setting the Stage, with regard to time, Godie speakers in the Ivory Coast start the narrative in remote time, switch to proximate time for the main episodes, but will switch back to remote time to emphasize the narrator's personal involvement, or Evaluation. In the Kuna language of Panama, a narrator may jump back and forth from place to place, a practice which a European (but not a Kuna) would find 'illogical' and incomprehensible (Sherzer 1987 p.305). In the Jirel language of Nepal, time and place information is always introduced before participants, while in Khaling, also in Nepal, spatial, temporal and character information occur in the Stage invariantly in that order. On the other hand, in Wobe of the Ivory Coast the order of information is time, place, then participants. Narratives in some languages are told in elaborate schemes of spatial reference by establishing a primary location to which secondary locations are systematically related by means of motion verbs (Maxakali of Brazil, Oksapmin of Papua New Guinea). Concerning participants, all characters who will appear are introduced in the Stage in Longudu of Nigeria. Many cultural traditions introduce characters in threes, but in Navajo in North America they come in fours and in Clackamas in the Pacific Northwest in fives. However, a trio of characters is so common in different cultures that Longacre and Levinsohn (1978) suggest the abstract roles of Initiator, Undergoer and Prop. The narrator's viewpoint (Focalization) requires a special morphological marking in the verb in Oksapmin, but

similar marking cannot be equated with sympathy in Catie, where the viewpoint is that of the villain, with whose deeds the teller does not sympathize.

Turning to the Episodes, in Tharu of Nepal and in Nchimburu of Ghana events are invariably told in their order of occurrence. In Dan of Liberia there is absence of simultaneity of events in narrative: no two events are recounted as happening at the same time, only sequentially. There are different cultural patterns of linking events: in Kayapo of Brazil an entire paragraph is repeated nearly verbatim as a lead into the next paragraph which describes new events. In Nepalese Kham narratives speakers use two sets of verb endings: one is employed to mark information which hearers will need to understand later information, the other singles out sections of the narrative which are to be responded to directly in the light of foregoing presentation. At the climax of a Kham narrative, hearers are invited to respond as though they were in the situation themselves. This converts action to the present tense and is more common in personal narratives than in other types.

After a Conclusion, a narrator's exhortations to hearers are given in Toura narrative of the Ivory Coast. In Hanga of Ghana and in Mundaruku of Brazil there is always evaluative commentary, beginning with "because of all the foregoing ...". In Nepalese Sherpa narrative, the moral is followed by a summary of events related to the moral, reinforcing the moral connection.

Sometimes parts of a narrative can be used instead of the whole. Among the Ntumu of Cameroon wisdom is



distilled into proverbs which are used in tribal jurisprudence: every proverb is the final line of a narrative, but the proverb can be used alone to represent the whole (Sheppherd 1988 P.100-101). Two further examples have been noted by the present writer. In many Chinese narratives a final saying or moral of four words is popularly used as a summary or substitute for the narrative in conversation between those familiar with the culture. In Persian this occurs with the poet Saadi's popular literary work of short narratives, the Golestan, where couplets serve the same function. In such cases the quoted proverb, moral or verse may be incomprehensible to listeners unfamiliar with the narrative. The quoted extracts are equivalent to Evaluations, (see Chapter 2) so these are cases of the systematic extraction of Evaluations, implying a widespread consciousness of the Evaluation function among various cultures.

#### **II.iv. Narrative Functions in Different Cultures**

The foregoing examples show a range of cultural variation in the internal structure and function of narrative. There is also variation in the global function of narratives. Longacre (1976), Labov (1972) and others indicate that narrators take pains to highlight the main point or peak of their narratives with Evaluations and rhetorical underlinings. This does not seem to be universal, however. In Chinese culture "narrators mention the main point only very briefly and then pass on, while going into great and repeated detail about common experiences in shared time and place" (Zhang and Sang

1986 p.368). This may be to give listeners credit to spot the main point after they have been carefully led to it, or to stress group solidarity in common experience which is a notable feature of Chinese culture (Hsu 1981).

Preston (1976) suggests four main functions of Cree narratives in Canada. The most important is to define and express basic cultural categories in the sharing of individual experiences. Other functions are as news, entertainment and aesthetic expression. The first function is important in child learning, socialization, and guiding moral action. A good example of the moral function is found in Navajo Coyote narratives (Toelken 1969, 1976). These trickster tales could be taken as fiction, creation stories, legend or entertainment. Yet for the teller the essence of the narratives lies in the moral and cultural reactions of the audience. The significance is not in the content or structure, but in the texture. Social meaning here is far more important than referential meaning. Narrators use a style to promote audience laughter at Coyote's weakness, excess or stupidity. Laughter becomes the audience's recognition of what they themselves would not do. The story promotes this moral assessment, without recourse to a teller's open explanation or didacticism. A Navajo teller concluded, "If my children hear the stories, they will grow up to be good people; if they don't hear them, they will turn out to be bad" (Toelken 1969 p.221).

This strong moral element is found in one kind of Apache narrative of personal experience (Basso 1984) which is told in order to modify a recipient's future

behaviour and simultaneously reconstitute the tribal tradition. These true narratives are each connected with a feature of the geographical landscape. As members of the culture view a natural scene associated with a past event, the recalled narrative and its moral point become a powerful corrective to thinking and behaviour. Through narrative, the surrounding landscape becomes invested with moral values -- a visual symbol of cultural norms. Among members, social delinquents need not be criticized or punished -- it is sufficient to 'shoot them' with narratives. Apache narratives are moral weapons.

Two other contrasting examples will show how cultural functions of narratives vary, dovetailing with a conversational point: prospectively or retrospectively. Prospectively, Kirshenblatt - Gimblett (1974, 1975) shows that in East European Jewish culture narratives are very common. Yet they are rarely told for public performances or for their own sake. Rather the art is in their application and relevance of the point of the narrative to the conversational context. A narrative, typically a parable or personal experience, is told to connect with a subsequent point by analogy. The meaning is in the analogical relationship. Retrospectively, Akinnaso and Ajirotutu (1982) demonstrate how personal narratives in job interviews are told by interviewees as long responses to questions. They are goal-oriented towards a positive outcome of selection for employment and therefore must go beyond storytelling. They must be seen, retrospectively, as answers to prior questions and are told to attract positive evaluation.

### III. Performance

A major feature of anthropological studies of narrative is the attention given to the ways of speaking manifest in performance. Performance represents a transformation of referential uses of language towards the social and stylistic uses. It is linked with social, emotional, cognitive and moral functions of narratives in different cultural contexts.

Lord (1965) showed that illiterate Yugoslav poet singers did not memorize material verbatim, but rather reconstructed it in performance. Narratives were sung as creative acts using formulae, themes and groups of words to give a different performance of the 'same' tale on various occasions.

Hymes (1975) sees narrative performance as occasioned by the context in which it takes place. It is interpretable, reportable and repeatable. Bauman (1975 p.293) stresses the narrator's assumption of responsibility to the audience to speak in socially appropriate ways. The narrator assumes accountability to listeners for the way referential, and more especially, stylistic aspects of narration are enacted. Performance implies a double contract: the narrator promises a performance, hearers promise to be an audience. A poor performance is usually followed by an apology either from the teller for an inadequate telling or from the audience for inadequate listening, partial attention or incomplete understanding. It also implies power relationships: the audience submit to narratorial control by the teller, who may scheme to get this power. The Apache narrative type

referred to above is a clear example of this. Some narrators exercise more than narratorial control in performance -- a teacher telling children a story or a head teacher recounting a staffroom narrative have wider authority, which may mean that the audience feel obliged to show appreciation whatever the quality of the performance (Maclean 1988 p.6, 17, 25). Performance of a narrative can offer teller and audience an enhancement of experience and heightened awareness and interest (Bauman 1977 p.43). It may also give a narrative the potential to rearrange social relations, and assist the negotiation of social identity (Bauman 1986 p.4, 113).

Bauman (1975) and Hymes (1975) mention the following features of narrative performance. The narrator

- momentarily forgets the immediate audience;
- dramatizes dialogue by taking both sides;
- uses formulae at the Aperture;
- employs a range of stylistic devices, eg. rhyme, parallelism, figurative language;
- varies prosodic patterns of tempo, stress, pitch and intonation;
- uses different paralinguistic features of voice quality and vocalization;
- disclaims performance.

Not all of these will be employed in a single narrative and they will vary cross-culturally. Some performance features are likely to cluster round the Peak or Evaluation sections (Longacre 1976, Labov 1972, Goffman 1975). Some performance will be embedded in wider performance frames: a dialogue performed with 'voices'

using linguistic and paralinguistic effects must be seen as "an ongoing performance within a performance" (Maclean 1988 p.12). Performance is designed to trigger evaluation by the audience. This presupposes a mutual perception of cultural norms by tellers and hearers (Tsitsipis 1983 p.27). When the audience is involved in performance "the teller can create their experience, shape reality for them and more effectively communicate the essential message" (Scheub 1975 p.363).

Further connections between ways of speaking, cultural aspects of narrative structure and function, and performance can be seen in two examples of Amerindian narratives which illustrate the role of the audience in performance.

Toelken (1969, 1975) discusses Amerindian concepts of time and space as circular, recurrent, negotiable and adjustable compared with Anglo-American concepts of them as linear, planned, measurable, controllable. These concepts may be part of Navajo narratives in which the plot is not usually considered important. What is said is less important than the saying. Narratives are saturated with repetition, a ritual re-cycling of structure. Narratives are performed with dramatic intonation, pauses, gestures, facial expressions and body positions. The wording differs with each telling. The narrative is recomposed as the teller works from a knowledge of "what ought to happen" (1969 p.221). A narrative told without an audience is reduced to a base summary. The audience's role in trickster tales is to laugh and to recognize that they would not behave as the central characters do. They

are led to feel morally superior through their 'correct' interpretation. Toelken (1969 p.230) concludes that cultural survival is directly related to the audience's ability to impose resources of the mind, ritually directed through narrative, on an otherwise chaotic scene.

Scollon and Scollon (1979, 1981, 1984) present a parallel example of Athabascan narrative performance. Crucial to this telling are the cultural values of mutual respect between narrator and listeners, non-intervention in others' affairs, and the integration of knowledge. Like Navajo narratives, Athabascan ones have four themes, formally marked and grouped into two or four episodes. The marking is signalled by "and then"... "and then" with pauses which distinguish background and foregrounded information. In a good telling there is negotiated audience involvement. Enactment demands interaction. The narrator's role is to give sufficient background information on a theme for the audience to anticipate the conclusion and provide it in their own words. The 'best' response is to finish what the narrator is saying. "The listener tells the story" (1984 p.176). Without the audience response the narrative becomes very long and boring as the narrator increasingly expands the background information, expecting audience completion. Such a narrative is not an independent structural entity which is tailored to performance. Rather, it is born in interaction. It inevitably imposes a view of reality yet maintains respect for the audience's individuality. The listener's integrity is not violated through narrator

imposition of meaning -- the narrator does not presume to dictate an interpretation (1984 pp.115-117). The final structure is a result of joint narrator-audience negotiation through face-to-face interaction (p.175). In this culture, oral narrative of personal experience is a highly developed art form. It has functions of entertainment and management of social relations. It is a prime means to acquire knowledge by maximizing the relevance for those who learn, whilst minimizing the threat to their autonomy. The Athabascan narrative is presented in a take-it-or-leave-it manner, without telling the audience too much. Cross-culturally, it can be appreciated that Athabascans may feel that English narratives told with the conventional three episodes are too short or incomplete and a threat to their self-respect and autonomy. English hearers might regard the Athabascan narrative as too long, disorganized, hesitantly told and meaningless. They wait, in vain, for the point they expect. In either case, it can be concluded, the narrative structure, function and meaning and the ways of saying involved in it, are all culturally located.

#### IV. Criticisms of Anthropological Models of Narrative

In relation to the models considered the following points can be raised. The models of narrative:

- are more concerned with cultural differences rather than universals;
- rely on written texts (eg. Colby 1968 a, b; 1973 a, b); performance models do not do so.



- study narratives in little known languages using a limited number of informants (but see Tannen 1980, 1982);
- take insufficient account of cognitive dimensions of narrative;
- over-rate performance features at the expense of consideration of narrative deep structures, factors of memory and narrative structure.

#### V. Implications for an Analysis of Teachers' Narratives

Bennett uses folklore concepts in her study (1983) of ten 'group sagas' told by British college teachers in lunchtime gatherings but no structural analysis. She describes these as long, polished narratives, often jointly produced. Because they are already familiar to participants they are retold in a cryptic, episodic, fragmented manner. There is plenty of repartee during the saga and laughter as it finishes. Bennett distinguishes these group sagas from anecdotes or narratives of personal experience by the presence of a central motif, a pictorial or humorous image. Anecdotes in her terms have a verbal encounter as their central concern, rather than this visual tableau. The teachers' performative techniques are similar to those of traditional oral tale-tellers. She concludes that the function of group sagas is a social bonding through enacting a shared past. They are a ritual of entertainment and solidarity, performed in a ritualised manner. Neither structure, content nor function of the sagas are related by Bennett to the occupation of teaching.

Different cultural groups often have different 'ways of speaking' including ways of narrating. Teachers, as an occupational group with their own cultural patterns of communication, will have their own particular narrative ways. Some distinct uses in what is recounted, how it is narrated and what teachers believe about narration can be expected. In this regard, what is not said, but is understood, is as important as what is recorded. All narratives seem to be structured, but there can be some cultural variation in the realization of those structural possibilities. In the range of narrative functions it can be anticipated that teachers' narratives will have functions of self and cultural identity, entertainment, news, moral evaluation and so on. The concept of performance may not seem appropriate to staffroom narration. However, many teachers do act, entertain and perform stories to children as part of their work. Therefore performed narratives, which in a sense are the full, most lively form, may well be found among primary teachers. The performance features listed earlier will facilitate identification of performance and provide a strong link with the Evaluation section of teachers' narratives.

In considering teachers' 'ways of saying', the balance between referential and social meaning needs to be taken into account. If the content of teachers' narratives seems trite, it may be that the social or moral meaning (among teachers) is more important, as was seen in Amerindian narratives. It is likely that part of the social meaning will reside in the tellers' reactions

both within the narrative and to the narrative, in the hearers' reactions both to the narrative and to the narration and its performance; and in the interaction between those present during narration. The style and mode of performance of teachers telling a narrative in the staffroom are likely to be cultural signals of social and professional identity; group membership as a primary teacher or as a particular type of teacher; and solidarity with fellow practitioners, the audience.

Primary teachers' narratives can be viewed as reflections of teachers' culture, but narrative is also a medium of culture and the process and performance of narration creates cultural contexts. Listening to, appreciating and performing narratives in the staffroom is one way of being, becoming and feeling like a primary teacher. Alluding to and recalling previously recounted narratives, sometimes as group sagas, reinforces practical understanding and professional identity through a viewing of the symbolic landscape of past teaching successes, failures, difficulties encountered and problems solved. Practical knowledge, social and moral values are transmitted referentially and stylistically through narrative as much among professional groups, such as primary teachers, as among cultural groups, tribes and peoples the world over.

### **PART III**

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#### **INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS**

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## PART III

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### INTRODUCTION

Part III has eight chapters which present an analysis of primary teachers' narratives. Chapter 6 gives details of the teacher sample, the interview procedure and the model and methodology of analysis. In Chapter 7 some quantitative aspects of the teachers' narratives are presented, with a focus on curriculum areas and gender mentioned. The interview narratives are analysed by theme in Chapters 8-12. Narratives on Outstanding Children are examined first, in Chapter 8. Then narratives about one important aspect of children's learning, the Breakthrough, are considered in Chapter 9, followed by those on teachers' Planning in Chapter 10. Some tragi-comic aspects of teaching are explored in the narratives on Disasters and Humour in Chapter 11, before the narratives about Awkward Parents are discussed in Chapter 12. The order of presentation runs from children, who are the focus of teaching, through issues of learning and planning towards increasingly wider social issues which extend beyond the classroom. Finally Chapter 13 takes up some of the Spontaneous Narratives recorded in natural settings among groups of teachers.

## CHAPTER SIX

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DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter gives details of the sample of teachers who told the narratives to be analysed in section I. The interview process and interview questions are outlined in section II. The method of analysis is described and exemplified in section III.

I.i. The Narrative Corpus

The data to be analysed here are 961 narratives told by primary teachers. 856 narratives of these were told by 123 teachers interviewed individually in 11 schools. Interviews were about 30 minutes each and were tape-recorded. These are analysed by topic in Chapters 8--12. An additional 105 teachers' narratives were recorded in non-interview settings (see Chapter 1). Some of these more spontaneous narratives are analysed in Chapter 13.

The 961 narratives make a substantial corpus of data as can be seen by referring to other narrative research. Labov and Waletzky (1967) quote 14 narratives, while Labov (1972) presents 30. Both sets come from a much larger unpublished corpus derived from 2,600 sociolinguistic interviews in 4 separate studies. Schiffrin (1981) analysed 73 narratives for tense

variation, van Dijk (1984) analysed 133 for ethnic prejudice, and Wolfram (1982) analysed 550 for the historical present. The largest published sample are Peterson and McCabe's (1983) 73 children's narratives, part of their corpus of 1,124. The only previous study of teachers' narratives is Bennett's (1983), who quotes 10 narratives out of a sample of 100.

I.ii. Data collection

The narratives were collected in 1978. Have subsequent changes in primary education made these data in some sense redundant?

First, it is in the nature of narrative that past events are recounted, whether of a recent or distant past. The teachers telling the narratives thought those past events were relevant to a picture of teaching, although some recalled events had happened decades previously.

Second, it is claimed that the narratives, with the evaluations and perspectives they embody, are an important element of primary teachers' culture. It is doubtful if those narrated elements of primary teachers' culture which relate to children and their learning, classroom situations and problems have changed greatly during this time. Schools tend to change less quickly than other aspects of society. Marriott, surveying the primary education of the previous 20 years concludes, "Both the organization of schools and classrooms and the practices of teachers within classrooms appear to have changed, but rather slowly and inconsistently; the

evidence suggests evolution not revolution. It is almost certainly not true then, that massive and fundamental changes have occurred or are occurring in primary education" (1985 p.64).

I.iii. The sample

Most studies of narratives do not give details of the narrators in their samples. Sociolinguistic studies (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972) usually specify only social class, ethnic background and age of tellers. This section gives more extensive details of the present sample.

In this research, where a single researcher was using interviews, it was recognized that it would be difficult to have a stastically representative sample, but an attempt was made to ensure some variety of schools, taking into account the type of school and the social class of its area.

I.iii.a. The Schools

Eleven headteachers in Northampton were contacted by letter to see if they would be willing for the interviews to take place in their schools. These schools comprised 7 lower schools with pupils of 5--8 years old, 1 infant school with children of 5--7 years, 2 primary schools, with 5--11 year olds and 1 middle school with 9--14 year old pupils.

At the time, most schools in Northampton were part of a lower - middle - upper school system. Since the focus was to be on 'primary' teachers, it was felt that

it was better to visit only 1 middle school, which was quite large, and a number of lower schools, most of which were smaller.

A general picture of the social class background of most children in the immediate area was obtained from the head teacher, which was confirmed by three teacher trainers who were familiar with the area. Seven of the schools were considered to be in a generally 'working class' area, the remaining four were said to have 'middle class' catchment areas. The heads and teacher trainers seemed to employ criteria based predominantly on occupation of parents, types of housing, and parental support for schooling.

Table 6.1

The Type and Social Class of Sample Schools and
the Number of Teachers Interviewed

coding of school	type of school	social class of area	number of teachers
A	lower	working	11
B	lower	working	11
C	lower	working	10
D	lower	middle	10
E	lower	working	9
F	lower	middle	12
G	primary	working	14
H	primary	middle	9
I	lower	working	11
J	middle	working	18
K	infant	middle	8

These aspects are shown in Table 6.1, where schools are coded by letter, together with the number of teachers interviewed in each school. This shows that there was some variety of type of school, although there were more schools in working class areas than in middle class areas. The larger number of lower schools meant also that in the total sample of teachers there were more teachers currently teaching the younger children of the age range.

The total sample of teachers interviewed was 123. In school C an additional 5 teachers were interviewed, but the tape recordings were inaudible so they were discarded.

In the majority of the schools all the staff were interviewed. One or two teachers were absent. One person refused to be interviewed and one refused to be tape-recorded. Generally, the response rate was extremely high. Teachers were keen to be interviewed.

I.iii.b. The Teachers

After being interviewed teachers filled out a brief questionnaire about their background. This information has been used to characterize the sample as a whole.

Table 6.2

Male and Female Teachers in the Different Types of School

	Infant	Lower	Primary	Middle
Male	0	11	6	11
Female	8	63	17	7

95 of the 123 teachers were female. This proportion is not surprising, given the number of lower schools in the

sample. The distribution of male and female teachers in the different types of schools in the sample can be seen in Table 6.2.

The age spread among the group of sample teachers is shown in Table 6.3. All age bands are reasonably represented, with larger numbers of teachers in the younger groups, which is to be expected. There is a slight over-representation in the 46-50 group.

Table 6.3

Age Ranges of Teachers
ages in years

	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	55+
No.	24	21	16	13	11	20	11	7

Table 6.4 shows the academic qualifications and training of the teachers. There is a slight overlap between these figures, as some teachers had more than one qualification. Most teachers had Teacher's Certificates. Surprisingly, the number of teachers with degrees was low and only one person had a higher degree.

Table 6.4

Academic Qualifications and Teacher Training

qualification	no.of teachers
Teacher's Certificate	107
B.Ed. Degree	8
Other Degree	11
Degree + P.G.C.E.	7
Adv. Dip.in Ed.	5
Higher Degree in Ed.	1
Other qualification	9

Table 6.5 shows the range of age groups the sample teachers had taught in the past. It is clear that many of

them had taught several age groups, including secondary and adult age ranges.

Table 6.5

Age groups Taught in the Past

age range taught	no.of teachers
3-5	40
5-7	88
7-9	74
9-11	65
11-18	34
adults	13

The number of years the sample teachers had spent in teaching is shown in Table 6.6. The majority of the sample had quite substantial experience.

Table 6.6

Number of Years spent in Teaching

no.of years completed	no. of teachers
less than 1	9
more than 1 but less than 3	9
more than 3 but less than 5	15
5-10	38
11-20	29
21 or more	23

In Table 6.7 the number of years the sample teachers had spent in their present school is displayed. This shows that most teachers were stable in their posts.

In Table 6.4 it was seen that the vast majority of the teachers had a Teacher's Certificate. Given this situation, it might be supposed that many would be involved in In-Service courses in order to up-grade their qualifications or improve their skills, yet Table 6.8 shows that few were

involved in courses. Two teachers were involved in both in-service courses and study groups.

Table 6.7

Number of Years in Present School

no. of years completed	no. of teachers
less than 1	21
more than 1 but less than 3	25
more than 3 but less than 5	27
5-10	34
11-20	13
21 or more	3

Table 6.8

Current Involvement in Courses or Research

	no. of teachers
none	100
in-service courses	9
diploma course	5
higher degree course	0
open university course	2
research/study group	9

Table 6.9

Present Position in Schools

	no. of teachers
class teacher	37
resp. for curriculum area	36
resp. for age group	16
other responsibility	13
deputy	11
headteacher	9

Table 6.9 shows the current position of the teachers in

the schools. This shows an expected pattern of responsibility. One class teacher had previously been a head teacher in another school. The teachers with 'other responsibilities' were responsible for the library, 'remedial' work, or for children with special needs in a partial hearing unit in school C.

It is worth noting that 27 of the 123 teachers had trained as 'mature' students; 37 had spent more than a year in full-time employment other than teaching; 68 had children of their own; and 29 had spent some years out of teaching in order to bring up a family.

Table 6.10 completes the picture by showing the teachers current teaching responsibilities. There are overlaps in this table because some teachers work in vertically grouped classes. The large number of infant (5-7) and lower junior (7-9) teachers is accounted for by the high proportion of lower (5-9) schools in the sample.

Table 6.10

Current Teaching Responsibilities

age of children no.of teachers

up to 5	15
5-7	47
7-9	39
9-11	14
11-13	7
no specific age	12
head (groups)	7

The sample of 123 teachers is a very substantial one for a single researcher to work with. To characterize the total sample briefly, they were mostly female, had few advanced qualifications, had taught a wide range of age groups and were very experienced. They were stable in

present posts. Rather more of them taught in working class areas than in middle class areas. Most of them were teaching children aged 5-9.

II.i. The Interview Process

Preliminary contact with the headteacher covered issues of the interviewer's acceptability and confidentiality of data (Wragg 1978; Measor 1985). Headteachers, and later teachers, were informed that the purpose of the research was to ask about teachers' day-to-day experiences in order to build up a picture of what teaching is actually like. Tapes would be made anonymously and would be erased after transcription.

The researcher spent a week or two in each school. The headteacher had consulted staff to see if they were willing to be interviewed. In two schools the interviewer explained the purpose to assembled staff before any decision was taken. Generally, the headteacher was interviewed first. The researcher mentioned the possibility that if the questions or the approach were felt to be unsuitable then the interviewing process could be terminated. This possibility was never taken up.

Teachers were interviewed in the staffroom, medical room or in their classrooms, if children were absent. Teachers were freed from their normal teaching duties in order to be interviewed. The head or deputy toured classes relieving staff or a colleague took two classes.

That the staffs of the 11 schools were willing to undergo the disruption entailed by the interview process clearly indicates strong support. Teachers were interested

and helpful. Frequent comments were "At last someone is asking us" or "If you could give a proper picture, perhaps people would appreciate what teachers do".

II.ii. The Interview Schedule

In this section each main question of the interview schedule is given, followed by a brief comment. The interviewer was aware of the structure of the interview as a whole since "The communicative structure of the entire interview affects the meaning of each utterance" (Briggs 1986 p.102).

After many of the questions teachers were asked if they could give an example from their own teaching, if they had not already mentioned one. The exact ordering of questions was kept flexible in order to attempt some sort of conversational flow. The wording of a few questions was slightly adapted for headteachers and teachers who were not class teachers in order to fit their situation. Interviewees were given a brief idea of the basic purpose of the research after which nine basic questions were asked.

II.ii.a. Statement of Intent

Introductory remarks covered the point that there was a lot of public debate about education in which teachers themselves were rarely asked about their work. The intention was to draw on teachers' experience and to ask a few questions to get a picture of the interviewee as a teacher.

This opening was designed to let teachers feel that someone was interested in their experience, and that this was worth sharing. The interviewer presented himself as a

teacher, a fellow professional who had worked with this age range. It was hoped that this opening would establish a rapport, interviewer acceptability and topic worth. Teachers were not being asked to talk about themselves as such - possibly a difficult or threatening task - but rather the emphasis was on getting a picture of teaching as they experience it. This is probably easier to talk about. Terms such as 'narrative', 'story', 'anecdote', were avoided. While narratives constitute the primary data to be analysed, it was felt that explicitly asking for narratives as such might have a limiting or distorting effect on the teachers' reactions.

Question 1: What happened yesterday/on Friday/this morning? Was it a typical day? Did anything unusual happen?

This question is straightforward to answer, starts the interview off easily, and would help most teachers relax while talking about daily events. The question is likely to yield a report rather than a narrative as an answer.

Question 2: What are the children like in your class this year? Which children stand out?

This question turns attention to children and asks teachers to consider their whole class and comment on individuals or characterize some children as a group. The question draws on teachers' mental categorization or labelling of children. Respondents are free, however, to employ any categorization they wish. The answer may include a narrative where something interesting has happened with the child or group mentioned.

Teachers perspectives on children play an important role in their work. This can be seen in the general

appreciation of having high expectations (DES 1982 p.57; DES 1983 p.5, 10); in the notion of labelling and categorizing pupils (Hargreaves, Hester and Mellor 1975; Hargreaves 1977); in the effects of labels and expectations seen in studies of self-fulfilling prophecies (Nash 1973; Rogers 1982). Primary teachers constantly typify pupils in terms of learning, discipline and relationships. These typifications change over time and are influenced by the child's home or family circumstances (King 1978 p.58, 84). Question 2 should elicit some spontaneous labels, more rapidly, though less comprehensively, than by using a Kelly's repertory grid (Nash 1973; Calderhead 1979).

Question 3: Generally ,do you plan things or play it by ear?

This question looks at planning or at being flexible and spontaneous in the classroom. The answer may include a narrative if something relevant has happened recently.

Teachers' planning takes up 5% of their school time, yet frequent interruptions and a large element of unpredictability are typical features of primary classrooms (Hilsum 1972 pp.21,25, 46-58; Hilsum and Cane 1971 pp.60, 186-187, 200-201). This means that there is a quality of spontaneity, immediacy and opportunism to teaching young children where teachers 'play it by ear', not knowing exactly what they will do in the classroom until just before it happens (Jackson 1968 pp.14-17, 116; King 1978 pp.72-73). In the case of developing children's personal and social behaviour, teachers seem to react after the event. Their actions apparently depend on those of individual children (Ashton 1981). This contrast between planning and

playing it by ear is clearly an important question, especially in the context of recent work on classroom decision-making and teachers' thinking (Calderhead 1979; 1987 (ed), 1989; Sutcliffe and Whinfield 1979).

Question 4: When you are teaching, do you feel it is pretty much up to you what you do, or...?

This question explores the issue of teacher autonomy. If further prompting seemed necessary the interviewer mentioned the head, parents, or syllabus as possible influences. Answers are not likely to include narratives and so this question might be considered a distractor, as far as the main purpose of this research is concerned, ie. it momentarily focuses on a different type of issue with the intention of avoiding suggestion of what kind of answers were desired. If all questions are of the same type some interviewees will give answers they think interviewers want. This is less likely where there is a variety of questions.

The question of who influences schools and teachers was investigated by Taylor et al. (1974) who put teachers' perceptions of influences on the school in the rank order of the head, teachers and pupils; whereas influences on the classroom were ranked : the teacher, pupils, the head, the colleagues. The perception of teachers' classroom autonomy has long been recognized (Jackson 1968 pp.129-133; Hargreaves 1972; Nias 1989 pp.15-17), although it is probably seen as being increasingly limited by central government or parents (Nias 1989 pp.120-121).

Question 5: Have any of the children in your class had a breakthrough recently?

This relates to children's learning and will be seen as

an important question by teachers. It is likely to yield a narrative if the answer is positive.

While there is a wealth of research literature on children's learning, there seems to have been very little investigation into teachers' mental models or perceptions of that learning. Since teacher talk about children's learning is, on the whole, not characterized by reference to research or learning theories (see Chapter I), it can be concluded that teachers' perceptions of learning may be different from those of the learning theorists. To ask teachers about 'children's learning' seems a worthwhile research activity. Question 5 focusses on one aspect only of learning, a 'breakthrough', ie. when a child learns after a period of apparent lack of success.

Question 6: Have you ever had any trouble with parents?

Possible problems with home-school links are explored with this question.

The question form makes a narrative response quite likely. There is no implication that all, or most, or even more than a few parents have problems with teachers.

Since the publication of the Plowden report in 1967 parental interest in, and encouragement and support for, work in primary schools has increased. Parental involvement has been institutionalized in schools' governing bodies since the Taylor report of 1977. Teachers are strongly aware of the influence of pupils' home backgrounds on school progress and of the need for their knowledge about those home backgrounds (McGeeney 1969 p.1; Sharrock 1970 p.34; Bennett 1972 p.68). They may not, however, be conscious of huge differences between their perceptions and those of

parents on, for example, the influences on educational success (Tizard et al. 1988 pp.82-83). At times these differences may lead to problems, though not necessarily as dramatic as "natural and inevitable" conflicts, arising because "parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfort of the other (Waller 1987 p.68-69). It is however, natural to expect a few problems, if only because of "differences in role disposition built into parental and teaching functions" (Taylor 1972 p.298).

Question 7: Have you ever had any disasters in teaching?

This question, and to a lesser extent question 6, is parallel to Labov's "danger of death" question (Labov et al. 1968) in that it could evoke a narrative of critical experiences. "Disaster" can be interpreted as an accident, a serious mishap, or simply as something going wrong in teaching. Any of these possibilities was acceptable and all of them are likely to include a narrative in the answer.

There is no implication that any teacher is a poor practitioner -- or that disasters are common. Rather, it assumes (as was explained, if teachers were in doubt) that most competent teachers may have had 'disasters' at some time in the past.

There seems to be a dearth of investigation into this topic, yet it must surely be one aspect of teachers' practical learning and improvement of their professional skills. A disaster, as an event, is quite distinct from the more general dissatisfactions studied by Nias (1989).

Question 8: What's the funniest thing that has ever

happened to you in teaching?

In an interview situation this question is very unexpected. It explores occupational humour and provides light relief. There is a strong possibility of a narrative answer.

The importance of humour and laughter in teaching is widely recognized in studies of secondary schools (Walker and Adelman 1976; Walker and Goodson 1977; Stebbins 1980; Woods 1983). There do not seem to be any studies of humour and its role or content for primary teachers.

Question 9: If I asked you why you teach you might give a general answer, but can you tell me an incident that would characterize or sum up teaching for you?

This last question was the only specific mention of an "incident" that teachers might feel was typical. Answers might take the form of a report or a narrative. At no other point in the interview were teachers asked for a narrative, story or anecdote as such.

This question explores job satisfaction among primary teachers, recently investigated by Nias (1989 pp.83-102). She found that the main sources for satisfaction were liking children and seeing children's progress, feeling occupationally competent, having opportunities for personal growth, the unpredictability and variety of teaching.

II.ii.b. Conclusion of the Interview

Teachers were reminded of the purpose of the interview - to get a picture of teaching - and were asked if the interviewer had, in fact, got such a picture or if they wanted to add anything else.

This gives open space for any further comments, ideas, unexplored topics or additional narratives. If the answer to this question is simply "Yes", or some minimal additional comment, then the interviewer has the respondent's confirmation that the answers to the questions, and any narratives contained within them constitute a representative picture of teaching as these teachers experience it. A strong claim for typicality of the data can then be made.

Teachers were thanked and asked to fill in a brief questionnaire to obtain background information. This concluded the interview.

The next section describes how the data will be analysed.

III.i. Method of Data Analysis

The 123 interviews yielded over 60 hours of tape-recordings. These were listened to and all the narratives were transcribed and typed. The process of transcription involves both theoretical questions and practical problems, such as the degree of levels of detail, or delicacy, of transcription; the degree of the listener's accuracy in hearing and transcribing; the extent to which stress, intonation, pauses and tone of voice may be represented; the possibility of representing facial expressions and gestures; the extent of the interviewer's interaction and whether this should be transcribed (Stubbs 1983 pp.218-246; Powney and Watts 1987 pp.146-168). In transcribing the present data the researcher attempted to be consistent in facing these problems. The interviewer's talk was minimal and was not transcribed, which could be regarded

as a weakness. Stress, intonation, tone of voice and recalled gestures were noted when narratives were clearly being performed, for instance when tellers used whispers, high pitch or characteristic intonation to imitate children. Inevitably, however, much information was lost in transcribing the oral narratives. The narratives were transcribed and classified (see below). They were then analysed using the Evaluation model to examine narrative content and cultural perspectives.

III.ii. Classification of Narratives

The narratives can be broadly classified according to the interview questions, shown in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11

Narrative Categories

<u>HUMOUR</u>	- What's the funniest thing that has ever happened to you in teaching? (Q8)
<u>PARENTS</u>	- Have you ever had any trouble with parents? (Q6)
<u>DISASTERS</u>	- Have you ever had any disasters in teaching? (Q7)
<u>PLANNING</u>	- Generally, do you plan things or play it by ear? (Q3)
<u>CHILDREN</u>	- Which children stand out in your class? (Q3)
<u>BREAKTHROUGHS</u>	- Have any children had a breakthrough recently? (Q5)
<u>YESTERDAY</u>	- What happened yesterday / on Friday / this morning? (Q1)
<u>TEACHING</u>	- Can you tell me an incident that would characterize or sum up teaching for you? (Q9)

There are inevitably overlaps in the content of these narratives in some cases. A narrative about parents may be humorous, another about an outstanding child may involve a breakthrough in learning. To avoid

problems of arbitrary categorization all the narratives were treated as answers to interview questions. For example, a narrative told in response to Question 2 was classified under the heading of Children, even if the narrative mentioned parents, a breakthrough or a disaster in teaching.

III.iii. Analysis of Narratives

The narratives in the present corpus will be analysed using the Evaluation model of narrative analysis which was considered in Chapter 2 (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972; Labov and Fanshel 1977; Labov 1981). It draws also on the cultural aspects of this model (Polanyi 1979; 1985) and in general on the anthropological insights of Chapter 5. In Chapter 13 the non-interview narratives will be analysed drawing on the models of conversational analysis presented in Chapter 2.

It will be recalled that the narrative structures separated out by the Evaluation Model are as follows:

Abstract (abbreviated to A)

This summarizes the narrative and precedes it by encapsulating the speaker's point, giving the general proposition which the narrative will exemplify. Arguably, such a point is often made more succinctly in a narrative than it would have been made without being followed by a narrative.

Orientation (abbreviated to O)

This gives the general context and information of

time, place, characters and situation. Usually such information will be placed at the beginning of a narrative, but it is sometimes dispersed elsewhere as the teller fills in information immediately before recounting an action.

Complication (abbreviated to C)

This is the series of past tense clauses which make up the event sequence.

Resolution (Abbreviated to R)

This describes how the Complicating actions were resolved or the result of a successful solution to problems presented earlier. Some narratives will have inconclusive results where problems are not solved.

Coda

This returns listeners to the present time and usually concludes the telling.

Evaluation (abbreviated to E)

This indicates the point of the narrative, revealing the speaker's attitude to what has been recounted. It conveys how the teller thinks the narrated events should be interpreted. It may express opinions or emotions, attitudes or beliefs. Unlike the foregoing structures, Evaluations are independent dimensions which may be distributed at any point and may overlap with the other structures. Many evaluations occur at the end of a narrative. Without the narrative the opinions, emotions, attitudes and beliefs might be otherwise expressed or perhaps not expressed at all.

Not all of these structures occur in every narrative as van Dijk (1984 p.95) demonstrated. He found that in narratives of ethnic prejudice Abstracts occurred in 11% of them, Orientations and Complications were found in 98%, Resolutions in 54%, Cudas in 33% and Evaluations in 62%. Such percentages probably vary from speaker to speaker, from topic to topic or from one occasion to another.

In the following chapters representative examples of a number of complete narratives will be given each category. These will preserve textual unity and preserve the teller's sense of the global meaning of a narrative. However, not all of the 961 narratives in the corpus can be quoted in this way. Therefore in each category quotations from within the narrative structures will be used, grouping together common elements of content or expression to facilitate comparison. Such quotations are inevitably partially decontextualized. However, if the Abstract, Orientation or Evaluations are taken as the point of the narrative, the characterization or context and the essential meaning or speaker's attitude respectively the context will to a large extent be preserved. Narrative analysis should offer the possibility for the systematic treatment of large quantities of interview data. What would perhaps otherwise seem to be a mass of undifferentiated talk can be treated as structured. If groups of narratives on the same theme are treated, the researcher can compare the same structures in the narratives of many speakers to examine their narrative perspectives.

III.iv. Examples of Teacher's Narratives

N1

A "They are so funny, some of the things the children say.

O I remember in my very first year of teaching, those were the days when they wrote a story on a piece of paper and if it was nicely done they would sit and very carefully write it down in their best book and I remember having 44 children in my class and trying to hear reading and give words to somebody else and children coming up to me to say, 'Where do I do this?' and I was saying, 'Do it on paper. Do it on paper.'

R and he looks at me very surprised and says, 'But I want to go to the toilet, Miss.'

Coda That remains in my mind.

E We get frustrated at times but we've had all sorts of funny things here. I thoroughly enjoy my job and find lots of things I can laugh at."

(104)

For each narrative the structure can be initially analysed as above, using the abbreviation A, O, C, R, Coda and E for the categories of the Evaluation model. The bracketted number at the end is the number given to the teacher who recounted the anecdote. Each narrative can either be analysed as a whole for its content and cultural perspectives or parts of it, such as the Evaluation, could be compared with similar structures of other narratives in the same category. In this example the Abstract gives a general statement about classroom humour from the teacher's point of view. The Orientation

specifies a distant time reference and outlines the then current procedure for copying out good work. This is necessary background to appreciate the 'Do it on paper' remark. The mention of the large class size is crucial, since together with the listed range of activities in progress, it gives the picture of rapid teacher-pupil interactions. The teacher's formula for coping with the queue of children, 'Do it on paper' and the constant interruptions of the reading add to the picture of busyness, later interpreted as frustration. The switch to the narrative present ('up comes a child') which is maintained for the subsequent chain of main verbs can be taken to dramatize the Complication. The Evaluation emphasizes the humour and enjoyment of teaching. Clearly the teller was able to laugh at the incident recounted. The overall perspective can be summarized: teaching can be frustrating because with large class sizes it is difficult to organize many activities simultaneously whilst giving individual attention. However, children say funny things and the teller enjoys her job partly because of the ability to find things to laugh at. Humour and enjoyment predominate over frustration.

N2

- O "One occasion [of trouble with parents]... the one occasion that does stick in my mind was last year. We had a fair bit of snow at one time and I decided to do a bit of creative writing from it and I thought I'd take the kids out into it, just to walk around and listen to the snow crunching under their feet and so on and take it

from there.

C And I sort of said to them -- I sort of thought, 'It's asking for trouble, someone's going to start throwing snow around,' so I said, 'If anybody starts playing about with the snow I shall bury them in it.' you know, and of course one of them inevitably did throw a snowball at somebody else, so I thought, 'Well, I've got to do something, having said I'll do something,' so I just picked up a ball of snow and I just went CLASH on his head, you see, and er some of it inevitably dripped down his neck and er apparently at break time, which was shortly after, he went off home and his mum must have phoned up saying, you know, 'My son's been attacked by a teacher and had snow shoved down his back' and so on. It got so exaggerated and blown out of all proportion that er....

R She didn't come in the end. I mean it was sort of... the head sort of took the phone call and I think he sort of smoothed things over and came and asked me what happened, you know, and I told him, and er it sort of got laughed off in the end,

E but er it shows how things can get so, you know, built up out of nothing really. You know, he probably wasn't the best of kids to do that with. A lot of others it wouldn't have mattered in the slightest." (15)

If the focus of analysis is on the Evaluation then

the teller's reason for recounting is the explanatory comment "it shows how things can get so, you know, built up out of nothing really". If the focus is on other possible cultural perspectives then a more detailed analysis of the narrative structure is more likely to highlight them. Such an analysis might take the form of a cycle of Orientations (situations) -- Complications (problems) -- Resolution (results or solutions) followed by a final Evaluation. This could be seen as a series of episodes.

Episode 1 - The teacher plans writing, pupils will listen to crunching snow and take it from there (O) - he anticipates the problem of throwing snow (C) - he resolves this by issuing a threat (R) 'if anyone starts playing about'.

Episode 2 - A boy throws a snowball (O) - this presents a two-fold problem: that of throwing snow and that of defying the teacher's warning (C) - which the teacher recognizes, "I've got to do something" - he clashes a snowball on the boy's head (R) which should solve both aspects of the problems.

Episode 3 - Snow drips down the pupil's neck (O) - this is a problem for the boy (C) - the boy goes home (R) and complains to his mother.

Episode 4 - The mother phones the school (O) - she presents the head with the problem of

assault, "My son's been attacked", and threatens to come to the school (C) - The head smoothed it over and she didn't come (R).

Episode 5 - The head asked the teacher "What happened?" (O) - The teacher now has the problem of explaining to the head (C) - The head (and teacher?) laughed it off (R).

E aluation- Things can get built up out of nothing.

Analysed in this way the narrative can be viewed as a highly symmetrical cycle of episodes, each with three parts. The analysis reveals further perspectives: creative writing can start by providing sensory experience but needs no further planning, the teacher 'takes it' from there; teachers have to preserve their position and control, which includes the need to carry out hasty or unwise threats; children can be unpredictable, "he went off home"; parents can be unpredictable -- they can exaggerate, "My son's been attacked", and make threats to come to complain; head teachers may have to deal with irate parents, but they protect teachers, "he sort of smoothed things over"; problems can have humourous aspects which relieve tension in teaching, "it sort of all got laughed off"; teachers' experience can lead them to predict problems, "I sort of thought, 'It's asking for trouble'", which they can solve in advance; it is important to treat children as individuals and to know the appropriate action to take with each, "he probably wasn't the best of kids to do

that with. A lot of others it wouldn't have mattered in the slightest"; parents can cause pressure, "My son's been attacked"; some teachers present questions of discipline in personal terms, "If anybody starts playing about with the snow I shall bury them in it".

N3

A "Sometimes I'll, I'll just come in and think 'Oh no, I'm fed up with them doing Maths and English all the time and they are as well' and I just think of something on the spur of the moment.

O Just before half term, a couple of weeks before half term, they were doing Maths, English, Maths, English, week in, week out, the same old stuff,

C so I came in after break and I thought, "This isn't good enough. We'll have to do something different" and I thought, "*Let's try Star Turn*". It just sort of struck me, you know, as I walked through the door. So er they got on with their normal work for about ten minutes and all of a sudden I started dragging, getting all these different things together and I dragged that fire extinguisher across the floor and dumped some things, a bowl of wallpaper and a bottle of ink and all this sort of thing, and the kids must have thought I'd gone mad or something. So I put out seven chairs in a circle and they suddenly twigged what I was going to do and they were all excited about this and er I put one object on each chair and explained what we were

going to do, you know, they had thirty seconds each and at the end of thirty seconds I blow the whistle

E and it was absolutely amazing what I got from them, you know, they were all so eager to try this, even the kind of kids who are normally very quiet. It was absolutely amazing the story lines and the imagination I got from them, you know, and they really enjoyed it

CODA and we did it a couple of times and we're going to do it this week

E and er I think that must be one of the best lessons that I've ever had, just sort of off the spur of the moment and they really enjoyed it and got some good things out of it. It's the first thing I'd actually done where I could get them to express themselves and talk and explain things, you know, and I was absolutely amazed.

A teacher's 'best lesson', such as this, is likely to have salient importance in defining that practitioner's personal parameters of what 'works well' in the classroom and how other lessons might be improved, if the same elements can be appropriately applied. A narrative analysis can reveal the teacher's perspectives on these elements by looking particularly at the Abstract, which shows what the anecdote will be about, and the Evaluation, which reveals the teller's perspective on what has been told.

The Abstract here contrasts the teacher's and pupils' feelings of boredom from the routine of Maths and

English with a lesson which was thought of on the spur of the moment, which the narrative is obviously going to describe. The point of interest and the reason for the recounting is the spontaneity of the lesson. In the Complication this is underlined by the way in which the idea struck the teacher on entering the classroom and in the suddenness with which he prepared the room, together with the effect of this on the children.

The Evaluation highlights three elements: first, that this was one of the speaker's best lessons, done on the spur of the moment; second, that he was amazed at what he 'got from them'; third, the pupils' enjoyment. The first point emphasizes the quality of a spontaneous lesson. Unlike the routine which the teacher was 'fed up with', this lesson aroused interest and excitement. This leads to two perspectives, which if held by many teachers would be important cultural perspectives: that the best lessons are not planned and that the teacher's and children's interest and sense of excitement are important factors in successful teaching. On the second point, the teller's amazement is emphasized by triple repetition. What he 'got from them' and what they 'got out of it' are not specified beyond 'imagination' and 'story lines' and the fact that the lesson is about the children's spontaneous 'creative' expression. Again, if there were many such examples, 'getting imagination out of children' could be an important perspective which shows something of teacher's everyday concepts of learning, apparently contrasted with learning skills, developing processes, concepts, understanding or attitudes. None of the latter

are mentioned. The third point of evaluation is the repeated 'they really enjoyed it'. As a criterion for a successful lesson this is another important perspective which again appears to contrast with unmentioned areas of learning: knowledge, concepts, and so on.

With a single narrative the perspectives revealed may possibly be individual or situational ones. However, if such perspectives are evident in the narratives of a number of teachers, individually interviewed in a number of schools, then this would be evidence that such perspectives may well be cultural. The case for this would be strengthened if the same kinds of things were said in the same terms, i.e. if the structure of the content and the linguistic expression showed common patterns. The next chapters show that this is the case.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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### SOME QUANTITATIVE ASPECTS OF TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

#### Introduction

In this chapter data concerning the number, type and range of the teachers' narratives is briefly presented. The tellers' choices of which areas of the curriculum and which gender of pupils they mention are particularly considered. Both choices are of general educational interest.

#### I. The Range of Narratives

In the 11 schools visited, 123 primary teachers were individually interviewed. The interview transcripts were found to contain a total of 856 narratives. On average, teachers told 7 narratives each. However the range of the number of narratives told varied enormously. This range is shown in Table 7.1. Thus at one end of the scale, 3 teachers told only 1 narrative each, 4 told 2 narratives each, while at the other end, 3 teachers told 14 narratives and 1 teacher told an astonishing number of 17. Analysis by school, catchment area, years of teaching experience and gender of teacher revealed only marginal differences in the number of narratives told and no obvious patterns.

Table 7.1

The Range of Narratives

| No. of Narratives | No. of Teachers |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1                 | 3               |
| 2                 | 4               |
| 3                 | 5               |
| 4                 | 12              |
| 5                 | 25              |
| 6                 | 10              |
| 7                 | 17              |
| 8                 | 11              |
| 9                 | 10              |
| 10                | 9               |
| 11                | 6               |
| 12                | 6               |
| 13                | 1               |
| 14                | 3               |
| 15                | 0               |
| 16                | 0               |
| 17                | 1               |

Most of the key interview questions yielded high numbers of narratives as shown in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2

Type and Number of Narratives

| Type of Narrative | Number Told | % of Total No. of Narratives |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| HUMOUR            | 168         | 19.6%                        |
| PARENTS           | 126         | 14.7%                        |
| DISASTERS         | 124         | 14.5%                        |
| PLANNING          | 116         | 13.5%                        |
| CHILDREN          | 105         | 12.3%                        |
| BREAKTHROUGHS     | 99          | 11.6%                        |
| YESTERDAY         | 95          | 11.1%                        |
| TEACHING          | 21          | 2.5%                         |
| TOTAL             | 856         | 100 %                        |

All the narrative categories contain a substantial number of narratives except Teaching. Some of the narratives may be tacitly elicited by the form of the interview question (eg. Humour, Disasters). However, the

spread of narratives here is very even and it includes categories from questions where one would not have expected many narratives (eg. Planning, Children). Therefore in general the number of narratives does not seem to be an artefact of the interview situation. The question about teaching was the final interview question and perhaps interviewees were tired at that point. Most had already told a number of narratives which gave a picture of teaching as far as they were concerned. There was a wide variation in the number of narratives told by different teachers under the various headings. This further individual variation in the numbers of narratives recounted by teachers is shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3

No. of Teachers Telling Different  
Types of Narratives

| Types         | No. of Narratives Total |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |
|---------------|-------------------------|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|
|               | 0                       | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| HUMOUR        | 18                      | 68 | 18 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| PARENTS       | 40                      | 51 | 22 | 9  | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DISASTERS     | 39                      | 60 | 13 | 7  | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PLANNING      | 44                      | 53 | 20 | 4  | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| CHILDREN      | 53                      | 47 | 13 | 8  | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BREAKTHROUGHS | 54                      | 48 | 15 | 4  | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| YESTERDAY     | 63                      | 37 | 16 | 5  | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| TEACHING      | 105                     | 17 | 0  | 0  | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Some teachers, naturally enough, did not include a narrative in their answer to a particular question.

Others told several narratives in the course of answering the same question. Table 7.3 shows that in the category of Humour, for instance, 18 teachers gave non-narrative responses, 68 teachers told 1 narrative, 18 teachers told 2, 15 teachers told 3, and so on. The majority of those interviewed told one narrative, if any, under each category. Many however, once they had begun a recounting, moved into a series of narratives without prompting. Most teachers gave a narrative as part of their responses to most of the key interview questions. It is reasonable to conclude that they felt they had a great deal to tell about their classroom experiences.

#### II.i. Curriculum

In this section the results of an examination of the Orientation sections of the narratives for *mentions of* the curriculum will be presented. At no point in the interviews were teachers asked specifically about the curriculum as such or about any particular area within it. The interviewees were free to mention any or all areas of the curriculum, or none.

Altogether 45.4% of the narratives mentioned subjects of the curriculum. Within different types of narratives, 88.9% of Breakthrough narratives mentioned curricular areas, while 56.0% of narratives about Planning and 54.3% of narratives about Children did so. In the other narrative types the percentages of curriculum mentions were lower. It seems justifiable to draw some connection between frequency of mention and how frequently a subject is taught. Further, though with



caution, one might also link frequency of mention with teachers' perceptions and the salience of a subject in their memories. That such a link might be made can be supported by the interview preamble, where teachers were asked to give a picture of teaching, and by the conclusion, where teachers confirmed that they had, in fact, given such a picture.

Table 7.4

Mentions of the Curriculum in Orientation

| Types of Narrative | Curriculum Subjects - No.of Mentions |    |   |   |    |     |    |    |     |  |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|----|---|---|----|-----|----|----|-----|--|
|                    | E                                    | M  | S | F | GH | A   | MD | P  | R   |  |
| HUMOUR             | 43                                   | 1  | 0 | 0 | 2  | 1   | 5  | 9  | 4   |  |
| PARENTS            | 18                                   | 6  | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0   | 2  | 6  | 1   |  |
| DISASTERS          | 2                                    | 7  | 3 | 0 | 2  | 6   | 5  | 10 | 0   |  |
| PLANNING           | 34                                   | 6  | 0 | 0 | 21 | 1   | 2  | 0  | 1   |  |
| CHILDREN           | 36                                   | 13 | 0 | 1 | 1  | 1   | 2  | 3  | 0   |  |
| BREAKTHROUGHS      | 67                                   | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0   | 0  | 3  | 0   |  |
| YESTERDAY          | 20                                   | 7  | 0 | 1 | 1  | 1   | 2  | 3  | 4   |  |
| TEACHING           | 2                                    | 0  | 0 | 1 | 1  | 0   | 3  | 0  | 0   |  |
| TOTAL              | 222                                  | 58 | 3 | 3 | 28 | 10  | 21 | 34 | 10  |  |
| %                  | 57                                   | 15 | 1 | 1 | 7  | 2.5 | 5  | 9  | 2.5 |  |

Key: E: English; M: Maths; S: Science; F: French;  
 GH: Geography, History; A: Art; MD: Music,  
 Drama; P: P.E; R: RE

The number of such curricular mentions is classified in Table 7.4, according to each subject in the curriculum. Technology has not been included, as such. Craft has been categorized with Art and for the present purpose Drama and Music have been grouped together. History and Geography were sometimes specified, but were

more often mentioned as Topics.

Table 7.4 shows highly dramatic contrasts between subjects of the curriculum which are mentioned in teachers' narratives. These data can be further examined by taking only those more central mentions of the curriculum arising from interview questions which are directly related to teaching, namely those relating to Planning, Children, Breakthroughs and Teaching. The totals and percentages for these four headings only are shown in Table 7.5.

From Tables 7.4 and 7.5 it is noticeable that the 3 R's take up 80% of the curriculum mentions in teachers' narratives. In individual subjects such mentions are utterly dominated by English. From these data it could be argued that for these teachers English is the most crucial area of the curriculum, probably because reading is given huge emphasis by teachers of young children and because language is seen as the basis and medium for much other learning.

Table 7.5

Subject Mentions in Narratives Directly  
related to Teaching

| Subjects              | E    | M    | S | F | GH | A | MD  | P   | R   | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|------|------|---|---|----|---|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Total No. of Mentions | 139  | 30   | 0 | 2 | 23 | 2 | 7   | 6   | 1   | 210   |
| %                     | 66.2 | 14.3 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 3.3 | 2.9 | 0.5 | 100%  |

From Table 7.4 and 7.5, it can be seen that in narrative accounts children have breakthroughs in English more than in any other subject. Such breakthroughs are especially

likely in reading. Examples of Humour occur far more in English than elsewhere. They are especially noted by teachers in children's writing. If a child stands out, it is more than likely linked with English. When teachers refer to their immediate past teaching, 'yesterday', or where there are problems with parents in relation to the curriculum, it is probably connected with English. When plans are set aside, this is linked with oral language and discussion.

Maths is an important area where children have breakthroughs. Some children are outstanding for their Maths work, either because they are 'able' or 'slow'. Disasters can occur quite often in Maths and teachers have sometimes problems with parents connected with children's work in Maths.

Science was barely mentioned in the teachers' narratives, except as an area of the curriculum where disasters occur. At the time of the interviews it seems that there was nothing of worth or interest to report in Science teaching. There were no breakthroughs, nor children standing out for their Science work. There is no evidence of planning or humorous events in Science. However, it is likely that in the era of the National Curriculum, with the core role of Science, that teachers' perceptions of this subject will change.

French was similarly hardly reported in narratives, but this is less surprising, given the number of first schools in the Sample where French is not taught.

It is remarkable that Geography and History were hardly mentioned, except when teachers gave accounts of

planning. In Planning narratives, topics featuring Geography and History were fairly frequent.

Art, like Science, was reported as a subject where disasters occurred, as was Music and Drama, though the latter has some spread of mentions.

PE seems to be an accident prone subject, judging by disaster accounts and narratives about problems with parents, yet humourous events also occurred in PE. RE is another subject which was rarely mentioned, except when tel ers said something about a previous day's assembly or rec unted an occasional humourous anecdote about RE.

Table 7.6

Non-narrative Mentions of Curriculum Subjects

| Types of Question | E    | M    | S   | F   | GH  | A   | MD  | P   | R   |
|-------------------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| PLANNING          | 38   | 20   | 1   | 1   | 17  | 8   | 5   | 5   | 2   |
| CHILDREN          | 33   | 11   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 3   | 2   | 2   | 0   |
| BREAKTHROUGHS     | 33   | 8    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1   | 0   | 1   | 0   |
| TEACHING          | 21   | 3    | 0   | 1   | 1   | 0   | 1   | 1   | 0   |
| TOTAL             | 125  | 42   | 1   | 1   | 18  | 11  | 7   | 7   | 2   |
| %                 | 58.4 | 19.6 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 8.4 | 5.1 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 0.9 |

These data are supported by an additional analysis of teachers' non-narrative responses to some of the interview questions. Curriculum mentions of such non-narrative comments by teachers are tabulated in Table 7.6, which corresponds to Table 7.5. This broadly confirms the previous picture and shows a certain consistency between the teachers general comments and the narratives they told.

### II.ii. Further Discussion

These findings of frequency of curriculum mentions in the teachers' narratives, the 'narrative focus' on the curriculum, can be related to other research data on actual time spent on teaching the various areas of the curriculum. Here, some allowance must be made for different terms and for different research methods. Bassey (1978 p.28) obtained junior teachers' estimates of their time spent on Language (7 hours), Maths (5 hours), 'Thematic Studies' (4), P (3), Art/Craft (2) and Music (1). Galton et al (1980 pp.76-83) observed junior teachers and found 37.8% of their time was spent teaching Language, 33.1% on Maths, 18.7% on 'General Studies' and 10.3% on Art and Craft. Ashton (1981) found primary teachers giving basic skills substantially more importance in 1979 compared with an earlier study (Ashton et al 1975). Reading and Maths were 'of major importance', Oracy and Writing were 'very important' and PE, Music and RE were 'of minor importance'. Science, Writing and Maths were given greater importance than previously. These results can be compared to the present study, sampled at around the same time, where teachers barely mention Science, and Maths is clearly secondary to English in terms of narrative focus. This emphasis on language may be influenced by the infant teachers in the present sample. In infant stages most time is given to language. Thus, Tizard et al. (1988 p.51) found infant pupils spending 47% of their working time on Language, 17% on Maths, and 21% on Art/Craft. On the other hand, Bennett et al. (1980 pp.45-50), found infant classes

spending 37% of their time on Language, 16% on Maths, 10% on Art and 4% on PE. As a final example, Galton (1989 p.47) reports further research where infant teachers spent 39% of their time on Language, 24% on Maths, 21% on General Studies and 16% on Art/Craft. This infant-junior differential emphasis on Language does not seem to explain the present results however, since proportional differences here are far greater than observational research results.

It is clear that in all these cases Language is greatly emphasized and is given the most curriculum time, and that Maths is a close or more distant second in rank order of hours spent. However, the present data are far in excess of the results of observational studies. In Table 7.6 teachers mention English (Language) nearly three times as much as Maths. In Table 7.4 *the figure is* nearly four times as much, while in Table 7.5 it is more than four times. Most of the studies referred to above report observed classroom time, whereas the present research analyses teachers' accounts. Since teachers' accounts are often different to their observed behaviour, these data could be interpreted as another example of a 'perception gap' (Galton 1989 p.16). The conclusion seems to be that teachers, in narratives, give a much greater emphasis to English than they do in actual classroom practice. It could further be argued that teachers believe English to be more important, as a foundation for so much later learning, and that this belief is reflected to a greater extent in their narratives than it is in their observed practice. Narratives do not only reflect

what actually happened. They are shaped by teachers values and beliefs and schemata derived from typical or salient incidents.

### III. Gender

The great majority of the narratives are about children and it can be expected that an anecdote featuring a single child will specify whether that child is a boy or a girl in the Orientation section. Even if an initial characterization is not given in these terms the gender will be shown in pronominal usage. Of course, many narratives are about several pupils or a whole class and cases of mixed gender are bound to occur. Some teachers also refer to 'the child' and use a singular 'they', 'their' or 'them' form of reference, or even 'it', which avoids gender specification.

Table 7.7

#### Gender of Pupils in Narratives

|                   | Boys  | Girls | Total |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| No. of Narratives | 361   | 166   | 527   |
| %                 | 68.5% | 31.5% | 100%  |

In the following analysis the frequency of characterization of boy/girl in the Orientation is reported. Only clear-cut cases were counted. Mention of 'children', 'the class', 'boys and girls', 'a child' were not included unless it was clear that a single child of a gender specified by the teller was the focus of the narrative. The gender was clear in 527 narratives. More than twice as many boys were featured than girls, as

shown in Table 7.7.

Each type of narrative was also examined for focus on gender to see if there were significant differences. This is presented in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8

Gender in Types of Narratives

| Types         | Boys | Girls | Total Gender Mentions | % Boys | % Girls |
|---------------|------|-------|-----------------------|--------|---------|
| HUMOUR        | 84   | 27    | 111                   | 75.7%  | 24.3%   |
| PARENTS       | 61   | 42    | 103                   | 59.2%  | 40.8%   |
| DISASTER      | 40   | 16    | 56                    | 71.4%  | 28.6%   |
| PLANNING      | 21   | 12    | 33                    | 63.6%  | 36.4%   |
| CHILDREN      | 68   | 30    | 98                    | 69.4%  | 30.6%   |
| BREAKTHROUGHS | 52   | 23    | 75                    | 69.3%  | 30.7%   |
| YESTERDAY     | 31   | 11    | 42                    | 73.8%  | 26.2%   |
| TEACHING      | 4    | 5     | 9                     | 44.4%  | 55.5%   |
| TOTAL         | 361  | 166   | 527                   | 100 %  | 100 %   |

The remarkable focus on boys is evident in each category except Teaching, where the number of narratives is very small. When they spoke about Humour, teachers told more than three times as many narratives about boys as they did about girls. In discussing the previous days' Teaching and any particular incidents that had arisen, nearly three times as many boys were featured than girls. More than twice as many boys than girls were involved in Disaster narratives. Narratives about outstanding children were about more than twice as many boys as girls. Even when telling about their Planning nearly twice as many boys were significantly involved in



deviations from plans than girls.

A possible explanation might lie in the fact that there were more female primary teachers than male ones in the sample, just there are nationally. It may be that there is a tendency for women to focus on boys, while men might speak more about girls. If this is the case, the greater proportion of female teachers would explain the results here. In fact, both male and female teachers mention boys far more frequently. For example, in the category of Humour male teachers tell 20 narratives featuring boys compared to only 3 about girls, and female teachers tell 64 focussing on boys and 27 about girls. Similarly, in the category of narratives about Children male teachers single out 13 boys compared to only 4 girls, and female teachers tell of 50 outstanding boys but only of 25 outstanding girls. These figures are not statistically significant, but they are surely indicative of attitudes and perceptions of gender. It seems that to these sample teachers boys are funnier, naughtier, both more able and less able. They have more problems and are more likely to have awkward parents. They have more breakthroughs in learning. They are more likely to cause teachers to deviate from planned lessons. In sum, boys are twice as salient as girls in teachers' narratives.

This finding, together with the tremendous salience of English in particular and of the 3 R's in general suggests that narrative analysis could be used alongside of other research methods to focus on general issues which are important in education. The other main finding indicated in this chapter was that there is great

individual variation in the number and range of narratives told. This needs to be set alongside the analysis of the content and cultural perspectives in teachers' narratives which will be presented in the chapters which follow. In general, later chapters show many common narrative patterns of content and broadly similar cultural perspectives, in spite of the numerical individual differences indicated here.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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OUTSTANDING CHILDREN

Introduction

Seventy teachers between them told 105 narratives about children in their answers to the second interview question, "What are the children in your class like? Which children stand out?" This is an important question with implications about labelling and categorizing children, about assessing and reporting pupil's progress, and in general about teachers' perceptions of the children they teach. The question will be briefly related to other research before the teachers' narratives on Outstanding Children in the present study are examined.

I. Previous Research

The notion of giving children individual attention is central to the thinking of modern primary teachers (Boydell 1978 pp.66-84). It is part of a "long-standing rhetoric" represented by the Plowden report of 1967 (Galton et al. 1980 p.49). The ORACLE study found that junior teachers spent 50% of their time interacting with individuals and, on average, distributed their attention across the individuals in their classes roughly equally, i.e. with little difference between children of differing abilities (Galton et al. 1980 pp.60-66; Galton and Simon (eds.) 1980 pp.29-32). However, nearly 20% of the pupils in that study were 'attention-seekers' (Galton et al.

1980 p.143) who seek or receive more attention. These children may not be perceived in the same way as other pupils by teachers. It can be hypothesized that they may stand out in the teacher's mind much more than 'solitary workers', who receive little attention from the teacher (ibid. p.145). In principle, how teachers perceive pupils, which ones are best remembered, or which ones spring to mind first are distinct questions from how they are treated in the classroom, which may or may not be in terms of equal attention. Yet it seems likely that if teachers say that certain types of children do stand out in their minds then this may well have some influence, for example on how they think about different children.

A number of studies have investigated primary teachers' perceptions of pupils. Calderhead (1979, 1981) found that teachers' attributions of children fell into the areas of ability, behaviour and personality. Taylor (1976, 1979) found that academic achievement was the dominant category of teachers' perceptions, followed in rank order by personality characteristics, behaviour, home background and interests. Nash (1973) found that children were perceived primarily in terms of work habits, maturity and behaviour. These studies, however, all necessarily involved small samples since they used repertory grid techniques to elicit constructs. Anning (1988), using such a technique, found that teachers constantly expressed doubts about it. She comments that the process was not a 'natural' way for teachers to think about children (p.131). Perhaps the question employed in the present study is more natural. Certainly its use with

a larger sample is feasible.

King (1978), in an ethnographic study of infant teachers, comments on how they constructed typifications of children on the basis of children's learning, their progress, their compliance with classroom rules and their relations with other children. When typifications changed in a positive direction, in teachers' terms, this was attributed to natural development whereas if there were negative changes they were attributed to illness or home background. This accords with the social pathology perspectives held by infant teachers reported by Sharp and Green (1975 p.217). Pollard points out how the need to type children is a simplifying strategy which makes classroom life manageable and assists prediction and control. It is at odds with the educationist concern for individuals (1985 p.201). He argues that the content of typifications relates to teachers' interests in coping. Typifications will be influenced, he maintains, by three factors: by individual factors associated with a particular teacher's biography and teaching style, by wider social and cultural ideas about children and expectations of them, and by teacher knowledge developed in the situation (1985 p.202).

The present research simply used the interview question, without using probing follow-up questions, check lists, repertory grids or specific questionnaires. All terms and labels used are those of the teachers as used in their narratives or in non-narratives replies. While all three of the factors distinguished by Pollard (1985) are relevant to the teachers' narratives the

analysis presented seeks to explore the social and cultural ideas by looking for common expression among the descriptions of children. It is further assumed that at least some of these typifications are peculiar to teachers and therefore part of their particular cultural perspectives.

The sample teachers between them taught well over 3,000 pupils who must differ in a large number of ways, yet it will be seen that these teachers' comments about children who stood out employ a restricted range of terms within restricted categories. In the following sections their comments will be analysed under three headings which seem to describe the cultural models used. When teachers recall children who stand out they describe them predominantly using these models. These are first, an academic model, where pupils are seen "work-wise" (78, 91), "learning-wise" (45), or "ability-wise" (83); second, a problem model, where children are viewed "behaviour-wise" (62) or "background-wise" (91); and a third, slightly less clear, character-personality model. In their non-narrative responses many teachers used more than one of these models, as might be expected. Narrative Abstracts greatly resembled these non-narrative replies and so these are treated together below. The Outstanding Children narratives which were told to exemplify the Abstracts usually focussed on a single individual per narrative.

II.i. Individuals

Most teachers gave immediate characterizations of

children and recounted a narrative. However, six resisted this on the grounds that all children were individuals and that none in particular stood out more than others. "You've got to know every child as an individual...you've got to know the child as a person" (35). "No particular individual stands out. They're all individuals and they're all people and they're all special. They've all got their strengths and weaknesses" (79). "I think they all stand out. I hope I know every one of these children very well" (75). "All the children stand out in a different way...I wouldn't say anybody stands out more than anybody else in a lot of ways because all the children stand out in their own different ways" (6). I generally tend to relate to individuals rather than to the whole class at a time" (9). Such statements echo the Plowden report (1967) or training courses, "I remember at college we were told, 'Don't forget, each child is an individual'" (85).

For one teacher the opposite was the case - she saw her class as a class, "The children as individuals don't stand out all that much. My classes are all very much classes as a whole. I never get classes which are bits and pieces" (26). Another lamented, "I'm not very good at remembering children. I don't know whether it's a defence mechanism or whatever, but very few children stand out" (120). Two other teachers used the 'problem model', i.e. recalled pupils with problems, but they applied it to all children. "They all have problems" (46). "I'll remember all of them. They've each got their own particular problems" (115). All the above replies were exceptional.

Four of those teachers did, in fact, recount an Outstanding Children narrative.

II.ii.a. The Academic Model

Given the breadth of the primary curriculum and the complexity of children's learning of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes, it might be supposed that descriptions of outstanding children in academic terms would be wide-ranging, rich in professional description and analysis and multi-dimensional. This is not the case in the data under consideration. Rather, the outstanding children are described in terms of a one-dimensional linear scale, with particular reference to the two extremes. This will be termed the Academic Model here, since it refers principally to children's learning and ability. In this model there is some reference to a middle group of pupils, often expressed in terms of concern or showing an awareness that the speaker does not feel fully familiar with those children. The teachers repeatedly speak of 'top -- middle -- bottom' categories or 'bright -- middle -- poor' ones, or they use a limited range of synonyms related to the same scale. There are 75 descriptions of 'top' or 'bright' children, 29 expressions about 'the middle' and 67 characterizations of 'poor' children 'at the bottom'. In Table 8.1 the academic terms used by the sample teachers when talking about outstanding children are displayed in detail.

Table 8.1

The Academic model of Outstanding Children

bright 31 examples
 "brilliant (37)
 the brightest (89, 117)
 really bright (7, 9, 11)
 very bright (31, 42, 56, 69, 99)
 particularly bright (21, 24)
 brighter (14, 87, 89)
 so bright (97)
 bright (5, 7, 11, 25, 26, 31, 39, 41, 78, 79, 94, 97, 112, 114)
good 13 examples
 very very good (4, 5, 6, 120)
 very good (5, 18, 127)
 good (4, 37, 43, 114, 118, 127)
intelligent 11 examples
 extremely intelligent (73)
 exceptionally clever (12, 85, 121)
 very intelligent (55)
 got a terrrrific I.Q. (100)
 very clever (124)
 intelligent (106)
 clever (85, 92, 123)
able 5 examples
 very able (28, 56, 60)
 with a great deal of ability (61)
 the more able (21)
fliers 5 examples
 high fliers (20, 45, 58, 67, 128)
others at the top 10 examples
 the top ones (92)
 the top third (1)
 a genius (5)
 very forward (23)
 a very good worker (33)
 the hard workers (84)
 the workers (83)
 my best group (83)
 the cream (87)
 with the most to offer (80)
the middle 26 examples
 in the middle (12, 14, 18, 31, 55, 60, 124, 128)
 the middle ones (23, 85, 87, 118)
 the middle band (12, 14, 23, 128)
 the middle of the road ones (78, 89, 128)
 middle of the roaders (43)
 middle of the liners (55)
 a very middle of the road bunch (20)
 the bunch in the middle (42)
 the middle children (79)
 the middle third (1)
 in between (69)
average 3 examples
 the average ones (127)

a good average (65)
 about average intelligence (90)
poor 17 examples
poor (25, 37, 84, 91)
 poorer (7, 25, 30, 31, 55)
 very poor (28, 45, 55)
 very poor workers (18)
 very very poor (2, 89)
 the poorest (89, 91)
slow 13 examples
slow (5, 20, 31, 51, 78, 120)
 a slow learner (25)
 a slower learner (9)
 slower learning ones (7)
 very slow (12, 24, 40, 78)
bottom 8 examples
 at the bottom (57, 92, 116, 124)
 the bottom third (1)
 a bottom group (89)
 a very bad bottom group (121)
 the very bottom (5)
less able 4 examples
the less able (56, 60)
 not very able (65)
 the very less able (28)
backward 4 examples
backward (54)
 very backward (23, 74, 94)
lower 4 examples
a lower band (14)
 at the lower end (14, 128)
 the lower intelligence children (82)
others at the tail 17 examples
a tail end (67)
 a duff lot (26)
 a D or E standard (120)
 not so bright (57)
 well below average (53)
 non-readers (91, 100, 124)
 the remedial ones (56)
 very bad (127)
 plodders (42)
 thick ones (31)
 thickies (83)
 the two short planks (85)
 dumb-dumbs (85)
 dim and dumb ones (123)
 the least to offer (80)

It is immediately obvious from such a list that there is indeed a collective, or cultural, model here. The linear, one-dimensional, scalar character of the Academic Model is clear. The range of terms is quite

limited and non-technical. The numbers of speakers using the terms is, in some cases, substantial. The children may be individuals, but the teachers' terms for those who stand out in their classrooms are limited. There seems to be a cultural element here.

In more detail, it can be seen that there are three basic sets of relational terms: 'bright -- middle -- poor'. 16 teachers used at least one term from all three sets. An additional 23 teachers used terms from two sets, usually the two extremes, 'bright -- poor'. A further 29 teachers used terms from one set, the use of which implies, of course, the existence of at least one other of the sets in the teacher's academic repertoire, since all the terms are clearly relational. In summary, 68 teachers of the total sample seem to use a 'bright -- middle -- poor' classification, or its equivalent, when independently asked about the children they teach. Also there are many additional uses of similar terms elsewhere in other narrative categories which have not been listed here.

The tri-partite nature of the Academic model is clear from such comments as, "the top third...the middle third that were trying, the other third that had switched off, the bottom third or the less able third - it always works out at about a third" (1), "The very clever children, hardly anything in the middle and then a hump at the bottom" (123). The many comments cited seem to indicate that teachers expect this, "it always works out at about a third" (1). This is even seen in counter-examples where such expectations, clearly

present, are not met, "An interesting thing this year is that there is no one who makes a tail end" (67). The scale here may have connotations of more traditional grading systems or it may be formed analogously by reference to statistical 'bell-shaped' curves sometimes used to illustrate concepts of I.Q. The typifications were generally made globally, i.e. without specifying a particular ability or curricular area for a given child or group. It can be suggested that such a schema strongly informs the Abstract and Orientation sections of teachers' narratives, whether or not they are about academic matters.

The linear character of the Academic model, with its 'ends' and 'extremes', is confirmed by widespread use of phrases indicative of a polarized view: "at the other end" (31), "at either end" (114), "the others at the lower end of the scale" (128), "at the other end of the scale" (69), "both ends of the scale" (5), "the other extreme" (5, 69), "sort of extremes" (11), "the two extremes" (23, 85), "two extremes with the majority in the middle" (55). In the view of several teachers greater attention, or at least more time, is given to the children who fall into these extreme categories. "Usually the first children who spring to mind are the poorest, work-wise, because I do spend much more time with them" (91). "You have to spend a lot of time with your poorest and you try to spend a lot of time with the brightest to stretch them" (89). "Your time tends to be taken up with the two extremes" (85) (see below on the Behaviour Model).

II.ii.b. The Middle

If the 'extremes' stand out, then the quiet children 'in the middle' may be overlooked. It is perhaps significant that fewer teachers mentioned the middle and those who did so used a more restricted lexical range. 20 teachers expressed awareness and concern that children 'in the middle' in their classes might get forgotten. They spoke of:

"The bunch in the middle, the plodders who don't stand out much" (42),
"The middle of the road ones...they're sort of not noticeable" (82),
"the middle ones who get left out" (18),
"Both ends stand out more than the children in the middle" (128),
"I tend to fall down on the ones in the middle" (85),
"It's the mass in the middle who are difficult to get to know, particularly if they tend to be quiet" (85),
"The quiet ones who tend to get pushed into the background, rather" (72),
"It's the quiet ones you tend to leave out" (38),
"The quiet one are very difficult to write a report on" (37),
"The quietest, they're sort of not noticeable, almost" (89)
"It's the middle band that worries me. It's difficult to know them. It's a very grey area. There are so many in that grey area that we tend to forget" (12)
"There's a group in the middle who I don't treat with indifference but they're not at the forefront of my mind" (60),
"The middle ones tend to blend into one another. It's always the middle band that tends to fade" (23),
"The average ones, after a while the names never seem to stay in your mind" (127),
"The poor children that miss out are the middle of the road ones, always" (78),
"It's the middle of the liners who tend to be overlooked, they sit there, working away religiously, you hardly know they're there" (55),
"It's the middle of the roaders that you never really spot, yet they need you really as much as the others" (43),
"The ones you tend to remember least are the ones who get on in an average middle way. They plod along quite happily, but not in any

outstanding way' (107),
"I'm aware that the child that is easy to overlook is the good little girl or little boy, in inverted commas [sic], who does well enough, but not exceptionally well" (75)
"The big problem with having kids that stand out is the reverse, isn't it? It is the kids that get forgotten because they don't stand out enough" (16).

In the following narrative the sources of the teacher's surprise seems to be not knowing the child in the grey area, not knowing the child's home situation and that this situation had not, in fact, affected the child in school in the way teachers expect, on the basis of their experience.

N4

O "A child who was within this grey area, it was just one of these children who happened to be talking

C and during the conversation it came out that mother had left

R/E and it shook me that she seemed to be capable of controlling that situation without talking about it, without it being in any way in school.

E Yes, that was a child within that middle sort of grey area and it did surprise me

Coda and there must be quite a few of them that take that sort of pressure" (12)

The kinds of statements cited in the previous paragraphs clearly run counter to the notions of equal attention and individualism. The sample teachers' perception of 'the middle' can be related to HMI surveys (1978, 1983, 1985) which state that primary and middle

school teachers do not provide enough suitable activities for the more able and less able. Rather, they found that the demand the pace of work were usually directed towards the children of average ability. This reveals a paradox when this is compared to the findings in the present research. Whilst apparently providing lesson content and direction mainly towards 'the middle', the 'extremes' are pre-ominant in the teachers' minds. The 'grey area in the middle', which teachers apparently know least, is the target of most of the educational provision. The 'middle' in the Academic model is overlooked by teachers who seek to give individual attention. Teachers and students in training could be made aware of this model and the problems of provision and awareness involved in it.

Children are apparently not fixed in a given position in the Academic model. Teachers do sometimes revise their assessments. This is shown in the three following extracts from narratives which show the teachers' pleasure and surprise as their assessments were modified.

N5 "One lad...a D or E standard as far as spelling and reading goes...but I failed to teach him really during the year. His is the best bit of writing of the lot. He'd got all these phrases, "The JCB was like an archaeologist gone mad". It was startling and I'd failed to tap it all year, but I was pleased about that" (120).

N6 "He needed to be prodded and pushed... 'Well, come on, kid'. I don't think I've been as good

with him as I might have been and yet his mother came in last week and she said how thrilled he was, and it makes you feel, 'Well, I can't be doing that badly after all' (120). "It's lovely when the middle ones catch up. There are one or two that I wasn't expecting to come on but that really makes it a worthwhile job when you get this happening" (87).

II.iii.a. The Problem Model

Many of the teachers said that among the children who stood out in their classes there were children 'with problems'. The cultural model involved here seems to be a dual one. 'Problem' children, as described in teachers' narratives, are either 'naughty' and 'troublesome' or they have 'home problems'. The latter are viewed etiologically as being part of the former for some children and for others as leading to emotional disturbance in the classroom. For teachers, it seems, home and school are indissolubly connected as far as problems are concerned.

The existence of the Problem model can be seen in the following comments from 8 Abstracts.

"You remember the ones who have got problems" (32, 83).

"The children who are problem children stand out" (96).

"Your problem children you'll remember" (26),

"Children who have the problems, basically they are the ones that stick in your memory" (103),

"Children who have problems, they are the ones that stick out in your memory and worry you the most" (96),

"The problem children are the ones you think about the most" (25),

"Most of them are problem children" (34).

In 7 Orientations the tellers moved from generalizations towards narrating about specific children, using such terms as:

"he's a real problem" (40),

"he's quite a problem" (94),

"he's always got some kind of problem" (91),

"children who are presenting some problems" (41),

"several children have personal problems" (94)

"we have, you know, social problems" (81)

"a problem child who cries continuously" (37).

With what was probably unintentional ambiguity one teller concluded, "I think one remembers one's problems" (25). Children who have problems become problems for the teacher because of the large numbers of pupils in the classroom (see below). Hence they are, in a double sense, 'problem children'.

II.iii.b. Behaviour Problems

Many such children cause 'trouble' in the classroom as mentioned in these 12 Abstracts and Orientations.

"the troublesome ones" (118),

"a little girl who is troublesome" (84),

"a very troublesome boy" (82),

"a very excitable boy, very troublesome"(82),
 " a little boy who's had a lot of trouble" (84)
 "a certain nucleus who enjoy causing
 trouble"(63)
 "a reputation for causing trouble - a real
 trouble boy" (9),
 "one of the boys who's a bit of a troublemaker"
 (85),
 "the ones who get into trouble" (12),
 "he's always getting into trouble" (125),
 "troublemakers that come to mind, always" (61),
 "the troublesome ones, they take the most
 attention" (119).

If children who stood out as behaviour problems were
 not considered 'troublesome', then they were probably
 described as 'naughty', as in these 9 Abstracts:

"The naughty ones stand out" (43, 114, 117,
 125),
 "It's the naughty children who stand out in
 your mind" (29),
 "You can't help remembering the naughty ones"
 (63),
 "You always remember the naughty ones most"
 (127),
 "You always remember the naughtiest children
 the longest amount of time" (94),
 "The ones who stick out like a sore thumb are
 always the very naughty ones" (94).

Specific children were referred to with these 9
 Orientations:

"one particular boy who is very naughty" (125),
 "a particularly naughty boy" (114),
 "really naughty" (76),
 "one of my naughtiest boys" (114),
 "the other naughties" (106),
 "he enjoys being naughty" (125),
 "the naughty ones who can't do very much" (77),
 "the naughty ones who are not working" (104),
 "very, very naughty, I wouldn't trust him
 anywhere, he's very cruel to the other
 children, thumping, pushing, squeezing,
 pinching [aged 5]" (64).

In the narrative data as a whole there is remarkably little use of any technical or academic language. Only here in the Problem model of outstanding children is there a hint of psychological terminology in some of the Orientations. That some such terms should be used for 'problem' children, but not for normal learning (see chapter on Breakthroughs), may show yet another sense of child-centredness (rather than being learning-centred) among the sample teachers. The tellers spoke of children who were : "maladjusted, very disturbed" (103), "extremely disturbed" (90), "emotionally disturbed" (99), "attention-seeking" (42, 112), "very withdrawn" (96), who had "severe behavioural difficulties" (103). Other children were described as "difficult to control" (62), "very difficult" (49), "most demanding" (33, 50), "very difficult and demanding" (42), "a very boisterous child, uncontrollable" (64). For the rest of the Problem Orientations the range of terms is wide and often

colloquial and imprecise: "the ones who are a nuisance" (80, 85), "the ones who mess around" (18), "children who misbehave" (98), "very badly behaved" (119), "absolutely dizzy" (53), "absolutely anti-institution" (106), "the thorn in my side" (90), "the main bugbear" (37), "a right little rogue" (100), "one or two nasty ones that I have to watch all the time" (31), "some real terrors that you have to battle with" (88), "very erratic in her behaviour" (38), "so peculiar" (96), "very peculiar" (122).

II.iii.c. Home Problems

In their Problem narratives many teachers made clear causal connections between problems which children have at home and difficulties at school. This is illustrated in the following 9 extracts. "His work is far below what he is capable of doing because of the *disturbed home* background" (90). "We have since discovered the family background and discovered why she is the way she is" (96). "Young children are quite unguarded in what they say...sometimes there is information you really need to know, sometimes you hear when they've been with another daddy or 'we went to nanny because mummy...' Often it gives you a clue as to why all last week that child was either very quiet or just the opposite, was tearing everything apart" (98). Another narrator told of "a boy who's had a lot of trouble. It varies a lot from week to week depending on what's going on at home...home, very inadequate there" (84). Other tellers in their narratives about school problems added, "There were also home

problems that were exacerbating the situation" (85). "That's the trouble with these children...a feeling of instability which probably comes from their home background" (36). "These are the ones who have problems because of home" (61). "They don't get the attention at home so they get it at school" (38). "It has taken us two years to find the root of the problem because...not much cooperation at home" (23). Another concluded his narrative with the explication, "I think it's the home background that causes the problems anyway. In fact, I put the blame on the home every time. If the children aren't settled at home how can they be settled at school?" (113).

Many other narratives mentioned home circumstances in the Orientations. This was not wholly expected since the tellers are recounting episodes about outstanding children in school, not at home. The majority of such mentions are of what the teachers clearly considered to be adverse circumstance. In this way narratives featured a child "from a broken home" (64, 96), "from a one parent family" (97, 113), "with problems, home problems, as long as your arm" (40), who is "deprived" (53, 95).

The circumstances of parents are also frequently mentioned, though often such circumstances have no apparent connection with the plot of a given narrative. It may be that tellers as teachers are aware of the general importance of teacher's knowledge of the young child's home and put this information, even irrelevantly, into narratives simply to show that they know. Possibly the inclusion is not self-aggrandizement or show of

knowledge but a sharing of knowledge, as teachers are wont to do in the staffroom. Again, one could conclude that teachers, as tellers, use this knowledge as extra lurid or entertaining information to heighten hearer's interest. Or it may be considered that the tellers, as teachers, consider that such domestic information about parents is necessary for a given hearer as teacher to understand the narratives about children at school, individualizing the child. Such orientational information, it is suggested, is particular to teachers' narratives. In this way "father died last summer" (61), "his father took the kids away from the mother" (94), "his mother has been in and out of mental hospital" (91), "his mother was a battered wife" (125), "his dad used to knock mum about something shocking" (61), "mum was on the game, she was a drug addict" (53), "the girl whose mother was murdered last holidays" (28), "another family problem, I don't think he's got a mother at the moment", "this particular family is one where there has been concern over child neglect and some abuse" (34), "his parents have moved around an awful lot" (102), "basically her parents don't want her and there are all sorts of problems in the family background" (25). These were children who stood out at school because they were "kids with incredible home backgrounds and problems and difficulties" (4), where "often the home situations were so disastrous" (12).

Those circumstances mentioned above were not, in those narratives, directly related to the events recalled. However, as previously stated, other narratives

contained clear links between childrens' home and school problems. Further examples make this clear. "His mother had another baby and we think perhaps it [the cause of school problems] is that" (52), "he is emotionally disturbed because there is no father about" (99), "she comes from a very unsettled home, no father" (27), "he possibly has an aversion to women teachers, but he is very much dominated by his mother" (99), "his parents are divorced now and he's had a lot of trouble" (125), "his father can't read or write and clowns about and this boy copies his father" (94)

II.iii.d. Solutions to Problems

Faced, as they see it, with teaching children seriously affected by such home problems, some narrators expressed concern, sympathy and love. They spoke of "the pathetic little kids ... they're such nervous little bundles that have got no security at home, no love at home, nothing at home, and I think this is the side that worries me most, more than the academic side" (2), "children who obviously need you more, not necessarily because they're less able, but for some reason or other they need... well, love, really, and affection and care" (65), "to get through to a child I generally try love and kindness and if that doesn't work I try something else" (113). Such an approach was recounted in one narrative as a solution to a 'problem' situation at school, "it's taken me nearly a year to get her into a manageable state and all she really wants is for me to put an arm round her. It's really a case of asking for the cuddles" (38).

Three other narrators who had given Problem narratives saw a possible solution in social or psychological training - which they felt they did not have. The children " are held back by emotional problems and socio-economic factors, you know, the environment they live in and broken homes and mixed marriages. I need to be clued up more and more about emotional problems and psychological factors" (36). "I think the child will benefit if I involve myself...but I don't feel I'm qualified and trained for it [this kind of social work] ...and we talk about it a lot and other teachers say, 'Well it's not what you're trained for, you're only a teacher, you shouldn't dabble.'" "I find it difficult to deal with problems such as this because I feel so lacking in formal qualifications. I think there is a great lack of basic teacher training in psychology" (99). Few of the teachers in the sample had advanced qualifications which might have met this need (see Chapter Six), although the last speaker stressed basic, rather than advanced, training. Another teller of such a narrative had had such training already - but he was unable to apply it. "I personally have the expertise to know what should be done with these children, but it is completely impracticable to do it because of the thirty others" (103).

This dilemma of trying to meet the needs of particular 'problem' children while coping with the class as a whole was expressed in the Evaluations of 7 Problem narratives. The dilemma was especially acute if a class was described as having several such children. "I can't do for him what I want because I'm only one person, with

a class of thirty two children" (76). "He needs to be near me all the time, which is very difficult when there others who need attention" (95). "She needs an individual one-to-one relationship most of the time to get anywhere and I've got thirty four children" (65). "So many of these children need individual help and time is against you (103). "A child like that in the classroom takes an undue amount of your time and you feel you're not doing your duty by the rest of them" (25). " I am bothered because of the others. I haven't the time, really, to spend. I really ought to help more" (76). "This child gets attention, attention, attention, all the time, no matter what you do...there are about three of four others, and if they're doing it together you're in real trouble. These children are really demanding attention and if you're not giving it to them, they're going to go round disturbing everyone else as well" (21).

Possible resolutions to the one-or-many dilemma came when 'problem' children were absent, unexpectedly quiet (for whatever reason), or were in a small group, which was possible for a whole day only on school trips when extra help was available. "It's quite a relief when he's away" (119). "He was out of the classroom - it was a different class altogether. It was a nice relief for the rest of the class...It's an awful thing to say, but I was glad he was out"(39). "The one child I did have who caused major incidents in my classroom was moved into another class so it's calmed down an awful lot. You wouldn't believe one child could have such an effect on a class" (38). "It really drains you and I feel there are

times when I hate him and on the whole I love the kids in my class. I shall be quite pleased to see him go and he is the only one I think I have ever said that about really" (90). "If a child like that is quiet, you're so damned glad to have some quiet that you tend not to follow it up. You feel, 'Here is a moment I can get on giving others some attention" (25). "He should not be in this school. He should be in a smaller group situation. Yesterday he was fine [on the trip]. Why? Because he was in a small group with me and I was giving him plenty of attention" (25). These six narratives also seem to show the tellers' strong positive feelings for children and their sense of moral obligation or desire to have such feelings for all pupils, though this is a dilemma in some cases.

The same teacher in another narrative spoke of a 'problem girl', "It was very nice yesterday [on the trip] to have a relaxed time to talk to her a bit about home. It was a nice day to have time and to have a small group and to talk and to relax with them" (25). This narrative additionally stresses the importance of talking to children and of the teacher's need for knowledge of the home situation, which may be partly gained by talking to pupils.

Other solutions with 'disruptive' or 'troublesome' children were suggested in Evaluations. In the following example 'a few sharp words' were used. Unusually, the actual dialogue is not recounted, though the teller shares her thoughts about the role of 'face' in disciplinary situations. "A very troublesome boy...there

had been some trouble in the playground...anyway that was dealt with and passed off. A few sharp words, I thought, because he mustn't lose face in front of the class" (82). Sometimes such reprimands were not really expected to work fundamental changes. If they did, it was an occasion for surprise. "Initially when we told him off he couldn't care less, treated it with disdain, it wasn't going to make any difference to him. But within two weeks when he was told off he listened and he was sorry. Now how about that? Two weeks, and he was a right little rogue" (106). The cultural proposition here, which is shared with surprise, is: children can change, even problem children. This is further illustrated by the follow-on narrative to the above, where the teller's perception of peer pressure and scapegoating is evident, as is his surprise that peer pressure had no effect in this case. "I think they get this feeling that they are wanted and liked in this school and in a short while that lad, instead of being the naughty boy, was behaving well. His work was picking up no end. The other naughties spotted that they were getting into trouble and he wasn't. He was getting stars and 'goods'. So they turned on him and tried to get him into trouble and tried to encourage him to be naughty, but anyway he didn't. He's very good. Isn't it interesting, that?" (106).

Another narrator, failing with reprimands, tried patience and succeeded in eliciting admiration, which from such a child is 'an achievement'.. "He thinks the world of me and I regard that as an achievement. We found him irritating and there was some conflict. Then suddenly

I realized that nagging wasn't the approach to use with him. I'd got to try and be as patient as possible. It worked with him" (102). It is noticeable that in each of the above narratives the tellers clearly include cultural perspectives which in some cases are in addition to those behind the main point of the anecdote.

It is clear from the foregoing that most mentions of home with outstanding children are in the context of home problems. There were exceptions to this in the narrative data, when home was seen in more positive terms: "his parents are relatively well off" (65), "from a well-to-do family" (70), "the parents are very interested and he worked very hard" (124), and "the father was a professor at the Open University. He [the child] had obviously got all the stimulus at home" (11). Sometimes teachers were surprised that 'problem' home situations had not, in fact, had a negative effect for the child in school. "Despite his background he got on well, his home situation is quite different, he's an only child" (112). "His mum said she had a bit of a problem with him at home, that he was disobedient and riotous, which was the complete opposite of what he was in school" (65). The teacher's surprise here, and the exceptions above, seem to confirm the existence of a basic cultural proposition held by primary teachers for which there is a lot of narrative evidence. The proposition is: if there are problems at home there will be problems with the child's behaviour or progress at school. (See Chapter on Parents)

II.iv. The Character-Personality Model

The third reason given for children standing out in the classroom was for 'character' or 'personality'. This was frequently associated with the Academic or Problem model when a given child was being described in an Orientation. A broad picture given by 21 teachers was that such children were lively, pleasant and mature with a sense of humour. While the children so described were being singled out precisely because they were considered 'individuals' a listing of the descriptions in Orientations shows common elements being singled out.

"some very strong characters" (71),
"the characters in the class" (56),
"the boys...they are the characters" (112),
"the characters, not easy characters, but they each have something nice about them" (78),
"they are characters and they've got something that singles them out...the children with some sort of personality and go" (34),
"the ones with real personality...with outgoing personalities" (67),
"the ones who have got personality" (23),
"those that are particularly ebullient" (47),
"a right character, very outgoing" (3),
"the mature characters" (14),
"one or two girls, very mature, very sensible, very reliable" (7),
"very nice kids, quite mature and very, very friendly" (3),
"very self-reliant" (21),
"very lively and inquisitive" (11),
"extravert, very creative, nice to handle, they're enthusiastic" (17),
"the ones with a bit of spirit" (13),
"the treasure of the class [helpful]" (98),
'the nice ones, the ones with a sense of humour" (45),
"the children who have got a sense of humour" (23),
"those with a sense of humour" (22),
'a very individual child, he's got a sense of humour" (90),
"he's got a sense of humour, a very adult attitude" (73),
"very, very competent, very confident and very pleasant...the very nice children" (12).

In this Character-Personality model children stand out for certain traits which may differ from pupil to

pupil and from teacher to teacher. The list above does show some common perceptions, however. Clearly for a number of teachers there are some 'characters' who stand out for common features of maturity, reliability, extraversion and 'niceness' which implies that the rest of the class do not have these characteristics or do not possess them to the same extent.

Of the three models which, it is suggested, these teachers seem to be using, the Academic model looks rather traditional. It is linear and one-dimensional. It does not seem to take into account individual learning styles, or differing cultural approaches to learning, or even different areas of the curriculum. It would probably be immediately familiar to the public at large and may indeed be derived from concepts of children and learning which obtain in the wider social and cultural world.

The Problem model, on the other hand, may be particular to teachers, although aspects are likely to be shared with other caring professions where home conditions are seen to influence children's well-being. It can usefully be linked to what teachers say about 'problem parents' in the next section.

The Character-Personality model is interesting for qualities such as helpfulness, maturity, reliability and extraversion, which educators would wish to see children develop. It could be viewed as the counterpart to the Academic model since it seems to include elements of moral and social education. The inclusion of qualities of humour again show the importance of fun, enjoyment and laughter for teachers (see Chapter on Humour).

This chapter has suggested that teachers use three models or criteria for outstandingness: an academic scale where children stand out at the extremes; a problem model where children stand out for bad behaviour or 'poor' homes and a character model where they are seen to be outstanding for maturity, reliability and niceness. It has been suggested that there is a very important admission by the teachers that certain children are overlooked mainly because they are 'in the middle', but perhaps also because they do not have 'problems' and are not 'characters'. Equally important and apparently outside these models is the absence of any sophisticated view of learning.

CHAPTER NINE
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BREAKTHROUGHS

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the teachers' narratives about breakthroughs in children's learning. These narratives were told as part of the teachers' responses to the question: "Have any of the children in your class had a breakthrough recently?" None of the teachers interviewed had difficulty understanding the question. A total of 99 breakthrough narratives were told, but a few of these had no evaluations and simply reported the events. Those lacking evaluations were dropped from this analysis since the purpose is to focus on the teachers' interpretations of events through the Evaluation sections of their narratives. For this reason 85 of the breakthrough narratives are analysed. These were told by 63 of the total sample of 123 teachers.

This analysis is divided into several parts. First, two examples will be given to introduce the type of data here. This is followed by a presentation of the topics of breakthroughs. Then the Orientation or Complication information about children having breakthroughs is described. Further examples of typical narratives are later analysed. These are followed by a detailed analysis of the Resolution and Evaluation sections, which can be divided into descriptions of the moment of a breakthrough and the teacher's reaction to that moment.



Two important preliminary points need to be made. The first is that breakthrough narratives are not merely reports of just any children's learning. Rather, they are recollections of salient and significant occasions of pupils' learning. They can be considered as descriptions of the high points of experienced teachers' memories of certain pupils' learning. This is clearly borne out by the data analysed in the following pages. The second point is that, bearing in mind the fact that breakthrough narratives were generally told in response to an interview question, the narratives were spontaneous in that any information or phrasing is freely included by tellers, presumably because it is necessary to the narrative or because that is what the teachers wish to say. In the interview there were no detailed, probing follow-up questions on each interesting aspect since such an approach would have destroyed the attempt to replicate natural teacher-to-teacher talk. While this means that the narratives are fairly natural, which seems to be a strength of the approach, it also means that it is impossible to be sure what the teachers might have said by way of further details, exceptions or justifications on a particular point had they been asked.

### I. Two Examples of Breakthroughs

In order to introduce the kind of material which will be analysed here two breakthrough narratives will be quoted, followed by comments which will indicate the essential features of typicality of these examples. These narratives were consecutively told by the same speaker.

As a reminder of the pattern of analysis which will be followed the categories of the Evaluation model of narrative analysis have been marked. (Numbers in brackets indicate the teacher interviewed.)

N7

O "One boy that I've had a lot of trouble with, his reading is not good, but his number was appalling.

C He couldn't count, he couldn't recognize any numbers

R/E and then all of a sudden in the space of about two weeks it seemed to click and I could see him beginning to go.

C DA He's now beginning to understand it.

E It suddenly came on...

N8

O ...And then another little boy who just did not understand addition at all.

C I tried it all ways. You name it, I tried it

R/E and then all of a sudden he just came in one day and [clicks fingers] it seemed to click and I could really see the breakthrough" (95).

There are several noteworthy features in these two narratives told by the same speaker. The breakthrough is sudden. It is described, and indeed performed, in terms of a click. The child's learning in N7 is described using the verbs of motion 'go' and 'come on'. In N8 the teacher's efforts prior to the breakthrough are emphasized. The teacher's reaction is that he could really see it, using visual terms. In neither narrative

is an explanation for the breakthrough given. In both of these examples the Evaluation centres on the moment of the breakthrough and, in the second, the teacher's reaction to it. This is signalled by the suddenness, the enactment of the click with fingers, in the second, and the return to the moment, in the first example, with "it suddenly came on".

## II. The Topics of Breakthroughs

The general topic of the narratives discussed in this section is 'breakthroughs in learning'. It is expected that most tellers, as primary teachers, will clearly indicate in the Orientation section a specific area of the curriculum where the breakthrough occurred. This is the case. Very few tellers mentioned more than one area of the curriculum in relation to a particular pupil's breakthrough. Some breakthroughs featured social development.

A second expectation is that a large number of breakthrough narratives will, between them, feature all aspects of the curriculum. After all, primary teachers generally teach all areas of the curriculum and it seems reasonable to assume that children will be reported to be learning significantly in all of them. This is not the case, however. Some areas of the curriculum are mentioned over and over again in breakthrough narratives, while other areas are not mentioned at all by the sample teachers. The curricular areas which are reported are shown in Table 9.1 using a classification based on the terms mentioned by the teacher themselves. Some

narratives mentioned two areas, both of which were counted.

Table 9.1

Curricular Areas of Breakthroughs

| curricular areas | no. of narratives |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Language (total) | 61                |
| reading          | 35                |
| writing          | 15                |
| oral             | 10                |
| spelling         | 1                 |
| Mathematics      | 15                |
| P.E.             | 3                 |
| Drama/Language   | 1                 |

There were 10 narratives about breakthroughs in social development.

The overwhelming predominance here of breakthroughs in language can be explained by reference to primary teachers' general recognition of the fundamental role of language in young children's learning. According to this explanation, language is so important as a medium for learning that breakthroughs in this area are significant and memorable. The very high percentage of breakthroughs in reading could similarly be explained -- that reading is regarded as crucial for later learning. Also reading, as commonly taught, involves the teacher in one-to-one instruction, often 'hearing' children read, where, if a breakthrough occurred, it might well do so in the presence of the teacher and might be recalled as such. This explanation might be supported by the fact that most reading breakthrough narratives involve word decoding skills, particularly of 'phonics', 'breaking down' or 'building up' words. These are frequently taught or practised face-to-face with adults in classrooms.

Another explanation might lie in what teachers feel is measurable. One of the few 'technical' aspects of teachers' talk which is evident in the breakthrough narratives is the notion of a reading age, which is mentioned in 7 of them. "When you get their reading ages, that's always nice. It's measurable somehow"(88). Some reading breakthroughs are virtually summarized with reference to reading ages. "She had a reading age of 6. It's jumped to 8" (102). "After a couple of months this boy's reading age shot up to 10" (93). "This boy's reading age has gone up a couple of years in six months"(126).

It is more difficult to explain the absence of recounted breakthroughs in moral or spiritual development, in aesthetic, scientific and technological areas of the curriculum. Is it because breakthroughs in learning do not occur here, or because they occur but are somehow not noticed by teachers? Or is it because they occur, and are noticed, but are perceived as less significant or are less memorable? Are they not measurable in terms of teachers' daily experience? A more detailed analysis is required before tackling such questions (see later).

### III. Who has a Breakthrough ?

Naturally, in the Orientation sections tellers will provide information about who has a breakthrough plus any background information which the teller considers relevant for an appreciation of a narrative. It seems very likely that tellers will specify the gender of

pupils, either as a specific mention or less directly through the choice of a pronoun. To see whether boys or girls would feature equally as having breakthroughs, as might be expected, the Orientation sections were inspected for mention of gender. Boys were specified in 52 narratives, compared with only 23 narratives featuring girls. Narratives where gender was not specified were about 'a child', 'a kid', 'a pupil', or 'children' without further specification and without use of a specifying pronoun, for example using the singular 'their' instead of his or her. Very few narratives mentioned two children. These were classified for the gender of each child. From the above finding, it appears that teachers are twice as likely to recall boys as having moments of significant learning as they are to recall girls learning in this way. There do not seem to be any logical reasons for this dramatic difference in what, objectively, boys or girls actually learn in primary schools. All children, it can be assumed, have breakthroughs sometimes and there are on average equal numbers of boys and girls in schools. However, the teachers' perceptions of who has a breakthrough seem to strongly favour boys. It will be shown below that a breakthrough follows a struggle or difficult period of learning. The teachers perceptions of gender differences in breakthroughs may therefore associated with their perceptions of which children have difficulties in learning -- if so, such children are twice as likely to be boys. A further factor which could well be relevant is the gender of the teacher. In the sample, as in primary

schools in general, women predominate (see Chapter 6).

The Orientation sections were also examined for statements about pupils' ability to see whether the more or less able children were featured. It was not possible to quantify this, since the teachers used a range of terms and in many cases only implied the child's ability. A quantitative analysis would therefore involve much interpretation and a high degree of subjectivity. Without compiling figures, the impression is that a few narratives involve children who are described as intelligent, whereas it is far more common for the breakthrough to feature a less able child. In five cases in intelligent children involved were described as 'bright' (63 'the bright Paul' (44), 'apparently quite intelligent' (86), 'a very intelligent little boy' (124), 'an exceptionally clever child' (121). In eleven cases the less able were described as 'not particularly bright' (6, 58), 'not of the best ability' (47), 'one of the slower learning learning ones' (8), 'my least able child' (60, 112), 'very poor academically' (126), 'of very, very poor ability' (89), 'absolutely thick' (73), 'a real plodder' (90), 'a late developer' (91). Further examples of teachers talking about the slower learners' breakthroughs are given later. As elsewhere in these data, there are a restricted number of terms used. Children in breakthroughs are apparently not described as 'average'.

Five pupils were described in terms of their special educational needs, 'an epileptic' (30), 'semi-spastic' (126), 'had speech therapy' (60), 'a profoundly deaf

child' (48, 52). In four narratives ethnic minority labels were used, 'a Pakistani' (36), 'a little Italian' (45), 'a little Indian boy' (88), 'an Asian child' (104), while other labels were implied. The relevance of such categories was most apparent where there was a breakthrough in oral language, since the child 'couldn't speak any English' (116), 'spoke very little English' (114), 'didn't have one word of English at all' (81), 'could not communicate in any way' (86), or 'doesn't understand because of cultural differences' (36).

Where the child's progress in an area of the curriculum was mentioned the terms used were often phrased in categorical, even extreme, terms. For reading, a child 'couldn't read at all' (40, 76, 126), 'could hardly read at all' (114), 'couldn't string two words together' (32), was 'not able to word-build' (96) or was 'virtually a non-reader' (99). In oral language, the breakthrough typically featured a pupil who 'had never gone up to anyone and said anything' (33), 'hadn't said very much at all' (81), or who 'will not talk' (33). In writing, the child was 'an untidy scruffy writer' (53), was 'unable to write a sentence' (97), could 'not even spell his own name' (43), 'couldn't spell at all' (30). Their writing was 'appalling' (40), 'absolutely appalling' (6), 'atrocious' (38). Pupils who had breakthroughs learning mathematics 'couldn't recognize any numbers' (95), had 'no number concept at all' (54), 'just didn't understand addition' (95), had 'no idea at all of addition' (38), or their 'number was appalling' (95). Whether these terms are seen by the speakers as



matching children's abilities or whether they are used for dramatic effect in narrative performance is unclear.

If children's behaviour or personality was described in the Orientation of breakthrough narratives, extreme terms were also sometimes employed. A child was 'very rough' (46), 'very aggressive' (46), 'a holy terror' (62), 'an absolute villain' (9), was 'in trouble for attacking the head mistress' (9), or simply 'my very naughtiest' (43). The child had 'a very foul tongue' (30), 'a red hot temper' (9), or 'a history of violence' (103). As might be expected the comments were often oriented to classroom work. The child 'had given up' (112), 'spent weeks and weeks just not doing anything' (118), 'couldn't settle to do any work' (86), 'would do anything to avoid doing it' (7), 'wanted to play about' (86), or was 'going through the motions' (21).

#### IV. Before the Breakthrough

In the Orientation or Complicating Action of seven narratives the period before a child's breakthrough was described as a struggle. 'They struggle with it for day after day' (26). It was 'an uphill struggle' (114), 'such a struggle at first' (27). The child was 'struggling away' (117), 'struggling with her reading' (92, 93). 'You struggle for months, you struggle, I struggle, everybody struggles with this child and we've almost on the verge of despair when it clicks' (93). Such comments clearly show the teachers' perceptions of a period of difficulty or lack of progress before the breakthrough. This is further shown in nine descriptions of children having

'tremendous difficulty' (23), 'having a lot of trouble' (41), 'having battled with it for a long time' (74), being 'in a bit of a muddle' (63) or being 'in this kind of a rut for so long' (58). 'Very little progress was made at all' (113). The child was 'not making any headway' (39). 'The general old hard slog' (101). 'You've slogged on and suddenly they recognize it' (50).

#### V. Further Examples of Breakthrough Narratives

Further examples of breakthrough narratives follow. In N9 the teacher has described a competitive arrangement where pupils in groups learn tables in order for the whole group to get a star. She continues:

##### N9

"Jonathan just couldn't get the hang of his tables at all. He had been the same in his previous class and he suffers from adenoid trouble and he'd sort of say [imitates the child], 'Once one is free', you know, and he just... he had no concept. You couldn't make him understand how to work out the tables and I thought the best thing to do was to make him learn them off by heart. He just didn't seem to understand at all and we went through no end of methods and ways of doing it and then eventually one day Jonathan came to school and he knew all his tables up to six and he could give them just like that, you know, 'six sixes are thirty six". He didn't have to go 'Once six is six, two sixes are ...' and so on. So that

was amazing. I don't quite know how it happened, but it happened and he knows his tables up to twelve and I can't take any credit for it. I don't know how it's happened. I just know that it has. Unless all the methods sort of congealed. And I think the competition on the table helped as well, because, you know, he was the one who was letting them down all the time and I think he felt it, not in a weepy sort of way, but 'I've got to do something' (56).

Here the teller's dramatization of the child's talk is noticeable in the nasalized 'Once one is fwee', as heard on the tape, and her close identification with him in the child's final thought 'I've got to do something' attributed to the child, though not said to have been uttered by him. The teacher's long-standing but previously unsuccessful efforts with 'no end of methods' precedes the moment of breakthrough. This moment is evaluated by her reaction to it, 'so that was amazing' and her reflection on why it occurred, the repeated 'I don't know how it happened'. The later somewhat vague explanations, of congealing methods or of competition, are said with a tailing-off falling tone, whereas the 'I don't know how it happened' is given prominence with greater stress and pitch movement. The Evaluation therefore conveys amazement at the breakthrough and a reiterated confession of not knowing the reason for it .

#### N10

"One particular girl, she suddenly realized she

was making headway and the whole of her outlook on school work changed dramatically because of that, and her achievements went up in leaps and bounds. It may have had something to do with teacher expectations as well. She has suddenly taken off with her reading and other things. I was sat there, I must have looked daft because I had a silly grin all over my face and I was so pleased with this and that was my reward for the day that she had achieved and that she had somehow managed to get herself going. I think any little thing that a child doesn't understand and is genuinely worried about and comes to you and says to you, 'I don't understand this. I can't make head or tail of it'. And if they go away and they can understand it, you can see the light dawn on their face and that to me is worth -- well, you can't put a worth on it in financial terms" (128).

Here the child's progress may have been gradual but her realization of it was sudden. This and the resulting effect are narrated before the teller comes to the main point, which is the effect on him. His reaction, looking daft with a silly grin, is the Evaluation, which is explained in terms of reward for the teacher. This is repeated in more general terms, clearly based on a typification of similar moments of what a child says when 'the light dawns'. The final explication of the worthwhileness of such moments emphasizes the reason for

telling the narrative. For this narrator, breakthroughs are priceless rewards for teachers.

N11

"I think it very often happens over a child's comprehension. You get this when you're struggling with -- or mathematics is a good thing for this, too, where you can be plodding on for perhaps a week with, in this particular case I'm thinking of it was em fractions, just additions and subtractions, sort of mixed in, you know. Well, this child had been through addition of fractions and em oh, she was going through the motions and I'd tried to explain it all ways, you know, and I'd tried it with blocks and I'd tried with everything and I know that she was -- that she could see what I was -- I was framing the questions in the end because I was getting to the stage where em I was feeling a lack of time and so on, then I was trying to show that I was em it got to the stage where I thought, 'No, she's not going to get this ever', you know, 'It's a concept which she's just not going to grasp'. So I just let her go through with it on that and then she came to the subtraction of fractions and I thought, 'Oh dear, it's the same thing all over again'. So we started plodding and then all of a sudden she realized what she'd been doing before, you know, and you get this sort of flash going straight through, 'Oohhh', you

know, and it's all there, and I think it's that sort of experience which, fair enough, you don't get every day, but two or three times a week, I think, you get that sort of experience and that makes it worthwhile for you, really, just simple things like that. That's what it means for me, really. It's just this sudden point when you actually reach this child and the child had tackled a concept which you've been plodding on in your own inadequate way with, and it just suddenly comes. It's when the child reaches forward and meets you" (21).

Like the narrator of N9 in the Complication, this teacher emphasizes his persistent efforts to find a strategy to help the struggling pupil. This is evaluated with his reported thoughts, 'No she's just not going to get this ever' and in the repeated situation with subtraction, 'Oh dear, it's the same thing all over again'. Again, the sudden breakthrough is the Resolution, described evaluatively with a metaphor, 'this sort of flash going straight through' and with the vowel-lengthening in the reported 'Oohhh'. The teacher's reaction also explicitly evaluates the narrative, that the experience of such a breakthrough makes it (teaching) worthwhile. This is what teaching means for him. This is further underlined by the teller's return at the end of the narrative to describe the moment of such a breakthrough, once more characterized with verbs of motion, 'the child reaches forward and meets you'.

"One particular little boy in the top class, one little nine year old, we'd practically given -- well, not given up, in teaching you just don't give up, you just keep trying and trying, but you get to the stage where you think, 'Oh, I'll never do anything with them', don't you? and I've had him for years out of the classroom, trying to get him to read and now, all of a sudden, he saw the light, and his behaviour's changed and it's only because he knows he can read now. But this particular child, last year, was a holy terror, if you like, nice boy, nice background, nothing wrong with the child, very difficult, and all of a sudden everything seemed to click, and he's one of the nicest boys we've got at the moment. The change is incredible. I think it gives you a terrific kick when that happens. I really have worked on him and, you know, to get the results we've got at the moment, er, well, it gives you a nice feeling. that is what it is all about. I think teaching is, okay, the children, the average and the clever children, you obviously teach and then they go on with no particular problems, but I think I'm more interested in the ones who find it more difficult to keep it up and then when you really do try to work hard with them and then all of a sudden they see the light, I think that's where the fulfillment of teaching comes from. I am sure it does" (62).

In this narrative the initial period of repeated attempts by the teacher is again evident, as a Complication, before the Resolution of the sudden breakthrough, described metaphorically. This is followed by a re-run of the narrative with more orienting information about the boy and his background, followed by another description of the breakthrough in a changed metaphor. The Evaluation, 'The change is incredible', and more particularly the teller's reaction to the breakthrough, the 'terrific kick' and 'nice feeling', are again explicitly interpreted in terms of general propositions about the worthwhileness and job satisfaction of teaching in general, 'That is what it is all about', 'that's where the fulfillment of teaching comes from'. The teller makes it clear that for him this comes mostly from pupils who have more difficulty.

From these examples of breakthrough narratives it is clear that it is worthwhile to focus on the Evaluation sections to understand the teachers' perspective or cultural model of learning, as shown in breakthroughs. It is worth examining other Evaluations to see if there are other instances of teller's reactions in terms of a general interpretation of what, for them, is worthwhile about primary teaching. The following section draws together the teachers' phrases describing the moment of the child's breakthrough in learning.

## VI. The Moment of a Breakthrough

This moment is frequently described as a Resolution in a teacher's narrative. In addition it is often part of



the Evaluation as has been already exemplified, using evaluative actions, repetitions and metaphors.

#### VI.i. Characterizations of Breakthroughs

The breakthrough is characteristically described in terms of speed. It happens 'suddenly', according to no fewer than thirty two narrators, or 'all of a sudden', for ten narrators. Some tellers use both terms. Sometimes the suddenness is evaluatively emphasized by repetition or action, or both, as in "It was very quick, very sudden, like that [clicks fingers]" (115). Four teachers, apparently conscious that others describe breakthroughs as sudden, indicate that for them this is not the case. A breakthrough happens 'not suddenly, but through the year' (72). "It happens over, say, six months -- change is not a sudden thing" (54). "You do see a moment when light dawns. Often it is gradual" (104). "I don't think there is any one great incident where I could say, 'My God, he's got it, it's there!' It's more the hard plod" (90). Another teacher drew attention to the fact that for her breakthroughs are perceived as being sudden, though the learning may actually have been gradual. "It doesn't usually come suddenly. You think it does, but for a long time they just listen and absorb. Although you think it's sudden, a miracle, it's not really. It's just that you've been plodding on and on" (81). In these teachers' expression a breakthrough is 'sudden', or if gradual it is 'a plod', 'slog' or 'grind'.

The majority of teachers seem to conceptualize a

breakthrough as happening in 'a moment' ( eg. 8, 9, 45, 76, 104). This will be abundantly illustrated by phrases cited below. However, for many teachers the time span is surprisingly variable. A breakthrough can happen 'overnight' (6, 40), in 'one day' (30, 95) or 'within days' (63). Some teachers apparently notice it after two weeks, 'after a fortnight' (47), 'suddenly in the last fortnight' (118), 'you look back over a fortnight' (114), 'in a space of about two weeks' (95). A few teachers saw breakthroughs as happening over even longer terms, 'after a couple of months' (93), 'over this last half term' (7), 'in less than nine months' (126), or 'within a year' (99). There seem to be two likely interpretations for such varied time spans, first, that children differ in their rates of learning and second, that teachers notice children's learning at different rates. The first is already well known to teachers through educational psychology courses. The second is more rarely discussed, but does seem to be supported by these data.

How often do breakthroughs occur? The teachers were not asked this question but many of them gave a spontaneous indication of frequency. In those narratives where frequency is mentioned the answer varies, but indications of high frequency are common, as seen in the following eleven extracts from the Evaluations or Coda sections. "This is happening all the time" (79). "One finds this all the time with individual children" (74). "There are always times like that " (37). "It's over and over again, isn't it" (26). "You get lots of small instances" (61). "I suppose it's very small things all

the time" (80). "Lots of times, especially with reading" (41). "We have breakthroughs all the time, little ones, nearly every day" (49). "Daily" (48). "It happens not infrequently" (97). "It happens often" (35). For three teachers breakthroughs were less frequent, though no less memorable. "It's that sort of experience, which, fair enough, you don't get every day, but two or three times a week" (21). "I have had that several times, not often, but when it happens it's lovely" (114). "Good moment, which are few and far between" (8). Four other teachers indicated in non-narrative responses to the breakthrough question that breakthroughs were unusual. Their comments also show that a breakthrough is a question of the teacher's perception and recall, rather than an occurrence objectively recorded. "They are rare, but you do get them" (45). "I'm afraid there have been very few breakthroughs that have occurred to me this year" (82). "Not particularly, although it's easier for the parents to see"(120). "Not particularly, just the general old hard slog. I may not see the breakthrough" (101).

#### VI.ii. Metaphors for the Moment of Breakthrough

From the six previously cited examples of breakthrough narratives it was seen that the moment of breakthrough in the Resolution is not described with reference to psychological theories of learning. Instead, the sample teachers have a very strong preference for metaphor which in effect also evaluates the breakthrough. These metaphors have been extracted from the breakthrough narratives and comments about breakthroughs and are set

out below in various groupings which will be commented on.

Table 9.2

Metaphors used for Breakthroughs

- Click (28 examples)
- " it clicks (26, 47, 64, 77, 93, 114, 117)
  - it all clicked (44, 64)
  - it began to click (47, 126)
  - it seemed to click (60, 95, 103)
  - everything seemed to sort of click (89)
  - it just clicked together (103)
  - it just simply clicked (14, 15)
  - it has all just clicked (96, 32)
  - it's clicked in his mind (70)
  - there was a sort of click in their minds (57)
  - he has clicked (35)
  - it must have just clicked (97)
  - it all clicked straight way (105)
  - it's beginning to click (35)
  - the words clicking and the number clicking (75)
  - hoping that one of the ways will click"(85)
- Jigsaw/Mosaic (3 examples)
- " it all fell into place (6)
  - everything seemed to have got into place (39)
  - it all sort of seemed to fall into place " (6)
- Seeing light (18 examples)
- " the light dawns (27, 58, 74, 104, 128)
  - it dawned on him (45)
  - daylight has dawned at last (32)
  - he saw the light (23, 60)
  - he's seen the light (30)
  - they see the light (62)
  - the light in his eyes (52)
  - their eyes light up (91)
  - the light on their face (26)
  - her face lit up (64)
  - he really saw it (45)
  - a spark (91)
  - this sort of flash going straight through " (21)
- Movement - Direction (27 examples)
- " it's come (43)
  - he/she came on (7, 8, 58, 87, 95, 114)
  - he's come round (30)
  - she's just come out (100)
  - she came from nothing (99)
  - they've come through (83)
  - they've beginning to go (91)
  - I could see him beginning to go (95)
  - they've not going to move that much (91)
  - he is just beginning to move (89)
  - they've moved at the same time (16)
  - they all seemed to be moving (91)
  - she's gone (100)
  - he has suddenly gone on (36)
  - she just goes straight through (97)
  - we've got through (125)
  - you get through (78, 91)

- he got off on his reading (86)  
 a couple really have pushed through (92)  
 one child has made a step forward (74)  
 the child reaches forward and meets you " (21)  
Movement - Off the Ground (8 examples)  
 " he/she made great leaps and bounds (30, 32, 71)  
 her achievements went up in leaps and bounds (128)  
 this sudden leap (75)  
 we really have got lift-off point with her (75)  
 they take off again (112)  
 this girl has suddenly taken off " (128)  
Movement - Destination, Journey (7 examples)  
 " the least able child had reached a milestone (112)  
 he came to a peak (8)  
 he was off, he was off (8)  
 she was running away with her reading (92)  
 great strides with his reading (36)  
 we've made it (112)  
 we've got somewhere (32)"  
Movement - Speed, Water (8 examples)  
 he whipped through (86)  
 they zoomed away (105)  
 they go great guns (126)  
 you can see a spurt forward (93)  
 they do learn in these spurts (112)  
 she was making headway (128)  
 he made quite a bit of headway (59)  
 they had a surge " (115)  
Taking (5 examples)  
 " he suddenly picked it up (40)  
 the child has picked it up (41)  
 she/he has grasped it (39) (125)  
 it takes the thing into its head " (58)

#### VI.iii. Discussion on Teachers' Metaphors

It is evident from the above list that these metaphors for children's learning and understanding are frequently used by the sample of primary teachers in breakthrough narratives. This was also seen in the six examples of such narratives quoted earlier. These metaphors occur predominantly in the Resolution section of this group of narratives, ie. where the actual moment of a child's understanding is described. The metaphors can also be seen as having an Evaluative function since the narrator is recounting an evaluative action (cf. Labov's examples, "He turned white", "She was shaking like

a leaf", 1972 p.371) or giving a vivid rhetorical underlining to the Peak of an account (Longacre 1976 pp.217-231). There is a notable absence of terminology from educational psychology or learning theory.

It might be tempting to interpret the use of these metaphors as a poetic response by teachers to the magic of the moment. Such an interpretation would take a 'classical' view of metaphor as a departure from ordinary modes of language for purposes of decorative addition. However, the basic stance of most twentieth century writers on metaphor is that metaphor is central to language, defining and refining it (Hawkes 1972 p.67). Metaphor is seen as the basis of conceptual systems (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Salmond 1982; Taylor 1984; Aspin 1984). This may be why it has been advocated that teachers should systematically encourage pupils to use or invent metaphors as a means to understand most curriculum areas (Gordon 1966). Metaphors pervade ordinary talk and are systematically organized in clusters, typically exemplified in the common Western metaphors of 'Argument is war' and 'Time is Money' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) or 'Knowledge is a Landscape' (Salmond 1982) around both of which many everyday metaphorical expressions are grouped. "The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980 p.22). This view leads to the possibility of examining metaphors clustered around key concepts expressed in ordinary talk as a way to examine the cultural concepts presumed to underlie the metaphorical

expression (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Salmond 1982; Lakoff and Kovecses 1987). By examining the use of breakthrough metaphors by primary teachers we have some idea of the cultural -- cognitive model of learning apparently held by them. The breakthrough metaphors are concentrated in the Resolution and Evaluation parts of the narratives and might be said to be organized to some extent by the very structure of narrative discourse.

It can be suggested that teachers use metaphors in breakthrough narratives for seven reasons (cf. Low 1988; Ortony 1979). First, using metaphors may make it possible to verbalize what is unknown or difficult to describe in other terms. This is especially likely to be the case if teachers have no explanation for the breakthrough. Since the teachers do not draw on psychological terms, perhaps metaphors are the next best thing. Second, metaphors may add dramatic effect for a more vivid performance of a narrative. At the very least it can be said that teachers talk as if there were a limited set of cultural models of learning which underlie their talk about it in breakthrough narratives. Third, metaphors may be used more concisely than a prolix non-metaphorical equivalent. Fourth, metaphors may have an interactive function (Black 1962 p.38) by forcing hearers to work out the relevant resemblances and associated ideas between the parts of a metaphor, at least on a first hearing. Fifth, the metaphors may have a function of organizing systematic concepts (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) in cultural -- cognitive models of teachers. This possibility is supported by the fact that the metaphors occur especially

at points where teachers are interpreting children's learning, ie. in the Evaluation. Sixth, some metaphors may be core cliches through which tellers transform images into models which are manipulated through performance to develop critical themes (Scheub 1975 p.3 7). A final point is that it is difficult to be sure if the narrative is organizing the metaphor, as a Peak, or whether the metaphor, as a central image of learning, is organizing the narrative. Probably both processes are involved.

As grouped above, it can be seen that the teachers' metaphors are organized around the key notions of a clic , a jigsaw, seeing light, various categories of movement, and taking. The click, accompanied in at least two instances by finger clicking or snapping (95, 115), seems to denote rapid, unexpected learning of a mechanical sort, shown in one teacher's comment of a child learning "just as if somebody had switched a switch on the back of his head" (75). From the many uses of 'click' it can be concluded that many primary teachers draw on an underlying cultural proposition: 'Learning is a Click'. This is basically a mechanistic model.

The jigsaw or mosaic metaphor, of which there are few instances, is very similar, implying that static pieces of knowledge or concepts are fitted together according to the proposition 'Learning is a Jigsaw'.

The light metaphor, exemplifying the proposition 'Learning is Light Dawning', is not unexpected in view of the every day expression of understanding, 'I see'. Where the click may be an aural metaphor, the light image is



clearly visual and is often a sudden 'flash', 'spark' or 'face lighting up'. A further example gives a more detailed picture in which the teacher's emotional reaction is also very apparent: "It's a really marvellous experience to see these eyes being opened and sort of...I don't know, it's almost like these cartoon characters with a little light bulb up here at the top of their head. You could see the light shine in their eyes (14).

The movement metaphors are frequently deictic, oriented towards direction of the teacher, as in 'come on', 'come round', 'reaches forward and meets you'. These can be thought of as showing the cultural proposition, 'Learning is Movement'. Some movement metaphors can be seen as instances of the cultural proposition, 'Learning is a Journey' by making 'steps' and 'strides', reaching 'milestones' and 'peaks'. Others exemplify the propositions of 'Learning is Jumping', making 'leaps and bounds', and 'Learning is Flying' after 'lift-off' or 'take-off'. There is also the proposition 'Learning is Moving through Water' by 'spurts', 'surges' or 'making headway'.

The final set of metaphors, concerning 'Learning is Taking', by 'picking it up' or 'grasping it', while common in everyday talk, does not occur very frequently in these data. On the other hand, the 'click' and some of the movement metaphors do not seem to be that common in everyday speech. This suggests that at least some of these metaphors may be specific to teachers.

All of the above are, with great frequency, said to occur 'suddenly' or 'all of a sudden', although this may

be how teachers notice learning, rather than how it actually occurs.

#### VII. Teachers' Reactions to Breakthroughs

Part of the Evaluation in the breakthrough narrative is the teller's interpretation of what it means to him or her. These reactions fall into several categories. First, this reaction is often one of amazement or excitement for the teacher, sometimes expressed as being mutual for both pupil and teacher. Second, many teachers gave the generalization that breakthroughs made teaching worthwhile. Some further explained this by reference to slow r learners. Third, a number of teachers indicated their lack of explanation for a breakthrough. Fourth, many shared their reactions in terms of their reported thoughts at the time. These categories will be looked at in turn.

In thirty six narratives there were reactions of amazement and excitement which seems to indicate that breakthroughs are as important to primary teachers as they are to their pupils. The feelings of surprise and satisfaction are presumably heightened after any struggle by the teacher and/or child prior to the breakthrough. Even so, it is surprising that so many teachers should be surprised when pupils learn. These reactions were that the breakthrough was 'amazing' (54, 71, 113), 'fantastic' (86, 121), 'smashing' (114), 'terrific' (121, 126), 'marvellous' (45, 52), 'really good' (6). Feelings of excitement, amazement and warm satisfaction are very clear in such comments. "It's a really nice experience to

go through" (14) "It's nice when that happens" (91). "I'm very pleased about that" (4, 30). "That was a great feeling" (40). "It gives you a nice feeling" (62). "That was superb, that was. That was superb, I can remember that vividly" (89). "I was over the moon" (41). "Riding on a cloud" (76). "I did feel happier then" (42). "I was amazed. All the work we'd done then came out" (93). "I was absolutely chuffed about that for a long time" (102). "I said how thrilled I was. I was thrilled" (43). "I was so thrilled when she got it right" (87). "I was thrilled about that and his parents were thrilled too." (60). "I was thrilled to bits with her. That is truly your breakthrough and that gives you a tremendous thrill" (75) "That gives me a real thrill.... That really makes it a worthwhile job" (87). "It gives you a terrific kick when that happens. That is what it is all about" (62). Though such feelings are described in the first instance as being the teachers', they are often mutual to both teacher and pupil. "He was grinning away, which to me spoke volumes, I was thrilled with that" (8). "You're as happy as they are to see their faces" (26). "He was thrilled and I was thrilled" (76). "I was really pleased and she was pleased" (92). "It's worthwhile when they enjoy it and you enjoy it" (88)). "They get such a feeling of success, it gives you the greatest thrill" (115). "It's great for the child and for the teacher" (60). So close is this mutual feeling after a hard struggle that in some instances the teachers saw themselves as having the breakthrough. "I feel I've made progress" (88). "I've made a breakthrough" (37, 38).

There is no doubt about the teachers' warmth and sense of excitement about breakthroughs when the above comments are heard on tape.

In thirty three narratives teachers' reactions in the Evaluations of breakthroughs include clear statements that teaching as an occupation is seen as rewarding and worthwhile precisely when children learn in the kinds of circumstances described as a breakthrough. A breakthrough is 'one of the most significant moments' (9), "what it is all about" (62, 79), "very rewarding" (88, 104), "tremendous satisfaction" (93), "where the fulfillment of teaching comes from" (62), "one of the joys of being in this age range" (73) "where you get the most satisfaction" (112), "a satisfying, worthwhile experience" (21), "makes me feel I've achieved something" (56), "my year's achievement" (30). Comments about the breakthrough "making teaching worthwhile" (21, 23, 24, 27, 32, 39, 67, 98, 117) or "rewarding" (76, 77, 100, 128) are frequent. As one teacher said, "you suddenly realize that it's come. Those are the sorts of things that make teaching worthwhile. Those are the things that stand out. The good moments after the struggle" (43). Another spoke of "the joy and satisfaction of your job, when a child, you give it a new concept and they struggle with it for day after day and you're thinking of different ways round it and suddenly it clicks. The job's worthwhile. You're doing a worthwhile job and I feel that that is what makes the job" (26). "It's worthwhile...when you see a child suddenly make some progress....it sounds trite but it's true" (29). It is noteworthy that these

comments about what is worthwhile in teaching are attached, by many teachers, to apparently small instances and incidents of learning, as was shown in earlier extracts.

Some of this job satisfaction was explicitly linked by six teachers with the slower-learning pupils. "You always get greater satisfaction from these children than from those children that are good (ie.in ability) all the time" (70). "The reward of that is tremendous, much more than the able children. These breakthroughs are one of the things that make teaching worthwhile and it's also the thing that makes it very worthwhile teaching less able children"(98). "I get a big kick out of kids, the slower kids to some extent, who suddenly latch onto something" (15). "A child like that sticks out much more in your mind than the bright kids" (73). "While it's wonderful when the more able go on and on from strength to strength, it is also rewarding at the other end when this sort of breakthrough happens, you know, however slow the progress might seem to an outsider" (60). "I think I'm more interested in the ones who find it more difficult to keep up and then when you really do try to work hard with them and then all of a sudden they see the light, I think that's where the fulfillment of teaching comes from, I'm sure it does" (62).

#### VIII. Reasons

In ten of the breakthrough narratives the teachers explain possible reasons or conditions for the child's sudden learning in the Evaluation section. Sometimes the

necessary condition mentioned is giving 'extra attention' to a child who is struggling (38, 41, 62, 92, 112) or showing encouragement (8, 47) or patience (39, 48). For instance, "Constant praise and encouragement has won the day" (103). More usually, and quite specifically in fourteen narratives, the breakthrough is unexplained. This seems to imply a lack of planned, deliberate learning. Rather, teachers speak hopefully of learning, as if, to them, it happens by chance or by magic or mysterious means. A breakthrough is "accidental" (86), "by coincidence" (9), "for no apparent reason" (103), "for some unknown reason" (73), "there's no reason...it just happens" (67), "just one of those things" (64). "There is no reason why it's done it in one day, when it couldn't do it the day before, but it just happens" (67). It is "unbelievable" (97) and "unpredictable" (103), yet teachers clearly looked for a method and clearly reflected on possible explanations after the events even if they came to no particular conclusion. "The reason for the breakthrough isn't always clear, it was just finding the opening" (86). "It was just a question of finding a way through to him" (113). "One minute they've struggling, and for no reason at all, suddenly, it suddenly clicks and they can read and there's no holding them, they just go on. Why it is I just don't know. I've often tried to think. I can't honestly say why this happens at any particular time" (64). "It's very difficult to know when you're actually teaching something or when the child has picked it up in other ways" (41). "I don't know how it happened, but it happened and I

can't take any credit for it. I don't know how it's happened. I just know that it has, unless all the methods sort of congealed" (54) "You've got to make moments to reflect. You've got to look for things" (8). "It's very difficult to know when you're actually teaching something and when the child had picked it up in other ways" (41). In no case did a teacher give a clear, specific unhesitating explanation for a breakthrough. Rather, as illustrated above, teachers had a sense of amazement and thrill even if the breakthrough was unexplainable. The important thing was that it had occurred.

#### IX. thoughts

The teachers clearly reacted to the breakthrough. In twenty five cases this reaction was reported, with heavy evaluation, in terms of what the teller thought at the time. These purported thoughts convey the same sense of joy and surprise illustrated earlier. Any reflection about the breakthrough is likely to either be in terms of these emotions or in terms of thoughts about the rewards of teaching and the child's progress. There is little apparent attempt to generalize from instances of breakthroughs about the teacher's role in bringing about learning or to fit such instances into a general theoretical framework. Rather, one detects a closeness to the children and a sense of concern for them.

"I felt, 'Well, perhaps I'm getting through'. (42)

I thought, 'Great, we've got through at last!' (125)

I thought, 'Great, I must be doing something.' (33)

I felt, 'Yes, I've achieved something'. (124)

I thought, 'Major breakthrough!'. (30)

I thought, 'Crikey, major breakthrough'. (36)

I thought, 'My God, he's progressed!' (8)

I thought, 'We've got somewhere at last'. (32)

I thought, 'She's gone.' (100)

I thought, 'Well, he's come out with this perfectly structured sentence.' (81)

I really thought, 'We've made it.' (112)

I thought, 'That, for me, is the reward for this year.' "(36)

Sometimes these thoughts are preceded by a verb in the narrative present, which gives greater dramatization in performance (Wolfson 1976).

"I think, 'He might not be writing very much but at least I can read it'. (38)

I think, 'My God, he's writing stories and they make sense'. (90)

I think, 'This is the child I had in September. This is his approach now'. (35)

I think, 'Smashing you've doing a good job with her'. (53)

I think, "It went home".(14)

You think, 'Gosh, he's waking up to the fact that reading's enjoyable'. (36)

You think, "It's reading, it's done it, it's got there". (67)

You think, "Well, I'm trying hard and now this child's got it at last". (77)

You realize, 'They understand it. I'm not banging my



head against a brick wall'." (38)

For one teacher the verb of reporting was dropped, perhaps because reporting such a thought was considered obvious or perhaps because the thought itself assumed priority. She said, "recently I've seen, 'Yes. It's there. At last you can do it" (112). This has something of a stream of consciousness effect and made a dramatic point.

A few teachers reported their thoughts in the Complicating Action, which framed the Resolution with their reactions in such cases, both prior to and following the breakthrough.

"I thought, 'My God, this child is never going to get off on his reading'. (86)

You think, 'Oh, I'll never do anything with them'. (62)

You think, 'Oh dear, so and so is going to know absolutely nothing'." (98)

#### **X. A Breakthrough Schema**

The following elements of a cultural schema for breakthroughs are suggested.

Typically the primary teachers' narratives about breakthroughs reported sudden learning or understanding in reading, or writing or mathematics. This is twice as likely to feature a boy as a girl. Before the breakthrough there is a period of difficulty or struggle. The cultural model of the moment of learning, as evidenced by the teacher's use of metaphors is that this learning is a click, seeing light or involves movement: a

journey, jumping, flying or moving in water. It often involves speed and is characteristically sudden. The breakthrough gives the teacher joy, surprise and amazement. It is what makes teaching worthwhile, especially with slower learners. A typicalized example is suggested in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4

A Breakthrough Schema

|              |                                                                                                         |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Orientation  | A boy, a slower learner,                                                                                |
| Complication | struggled with reading,<br>I tried various methods.                                                     |
| Resolution   | All of a sudden<br>there was a breakthrough.<br>It clicked / Light dawned.                              |
| Evaluation   | I was amazed.<br>I thought, 'Great, major<br>breakthrough.'<br>This is what makes it all<br>worthwhile. |

More authentically, three further generalized accounts, clearly based on a number of breakthroughs, conform reasonably to this schema.

N13 "You notice it with reading. You see light dawn and you feel 'Oh yes, gosh, we've got somewhere'. Their eyes light up, 'Oh yes, I remember, we can do this', you know, or 'I see how to do it now', sort of thing. You've slogged on and suddenly they recognize it".  
(50)

N14 "You are hearing it read, you know, and you've been struggling day after day after day and

then suddenly the day comes when you think, "It's reading, it's done it, it's got there", you know. There's no reason why it's done it one day, when it couldn't do it the day before, but it just happens and that moment makes everything worthwhile, I think" (67).

N15 "You get lots of small instances. I think you share in the child's delight in that. I can think of lots of little instances where you've been plugging away, particularly with reading, sometimes with writing, where they've struggled, you've helped and you've felt for months and months that you've made very little progress and suddenly it dawns on you that that child is improving. Suddenly the reading is coming on and the smile that dawns on that child's face when they appreciate that they can read. It's a most exciting moment". (61)

### Further Discussion

It would need further study to ascertain whether these apparently very common elements to primary teacher's narratives are common to other teachers, or, indeed, whether breakthroughs in other professions are similarly described. At present there is no baseline for such comparisons. Some elements of the descriptions of breakthroughs, as narrated, may be type-cast by the structure of narrative, or by underlying conceptual schemas of narrative deep structures.

Why should language, especially reading, predominate in breakthrough narratives? The tentative answers suggested here need to be checked, perhaps by direct questioning about other curricular areas. If the best explanation is in the individualized nature of much teaching of reading, or in the measurability of reading ages, this has deep implications for teaching or assessing of primary children under the terms of the National Curriculum. Direct questioning might also reveal why more boys are said to have breakthroughs than girls. Is this a question of teachers' attitudes and expectations of gender?

The remarkable frequency and role of metaphors used by teachers when talking about breakthroughs needs further study and comparison with other professional groups. At the least, it seems that there is a cultural model or schema of learning among primary teachers. The cultural model of learning revealed here, of struggle -- breakthrough -- joy -- worthwhileness raises questions of theory and practice. Why are there no references at all to learning theories? Could a theory of learning be built from teachers' perceptions of learning? Do other teachers learn from breakthrough narratives told in the staffroom?

In general the cultural model of learning apparently held by primary teachers seems strangely passive. Not only do the teachers not take credit for the breakthroughs, but also the metaphors imply some self-driven or unexplained phenomenon of learning (it clicked, light dawned, it's come) or the child achieves

it (he's come on in leaps and bounds) where the role of the teacher is often unclear. The occasional exception to this ("Light always dawns but it never dawns by itself" [127]) remains unelaborated and unexplained. Does modesty override what must, in many cases, be professional competence?

## CHAPTER TEN

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PLANNING

Introduction

This chapter focusses on the Planning narratives, i.e. those 116 narratives told by 79 of the sample teachers as part of their responses to the third interview question, "Generally, do you plan things or play it by ear?"

This question apparently poses a disjunction between different types of teachers' decision-making, between pre-active and interactive phases (Jackson 1968) or between strategical and tactical decisions in the classroom (Galton 1989). However, it is to be expected that most teachers would answer that both are necessary, at different times. Primary teaching is hardly likely to be unplanned and it has been suggested that lesson planning takes up 5% of teachers' school time (Hilsum 1972 p.21, 25). On the other hand, researchers have observed that lessons in primary classrooms are frequently interrupted, disrupted and fragmented and that they often have a flavour of variety and spontaneity (Jackson 1968 pp.14-17, 119-120; Hilsum 1972 pp. 46-58; Hilsum and Cane 1971 pp. 60, 186-187, 200-201). Thus Jackson comments that teaching is opportunistic, "Plans are forever going awry and unexpected opportunities for the attainment of educational goals are constantly emerging" (1968 p.166). King links the autonomy of infant teachers with the 'loosest kind of planning', where

teachers were able to 'play it by ear' (1978 p.72). From these comments, then, both the structured advance planning and the more improvisatory response to the moment of 'playing it by ear' are thought to be necessary. Narrative analysis with this kind of question might complement existing approaches to planning in decision-making reviewed by Calderhead (1985), Clark and Peterson (1986), and Clark and Yinger (1987), although much research on planning has focussed on student teachers rather than on more experienced practitioners, as in the present sample. Also much research is American. "Surprising as it may seem, we have no research evidence as to how teachers in English primary schools plan" (Richards 1985 p.192).

I.i. Responses

In their responses to the planning question the teachers universally affirmed that they did plan. This affirmation was usually their immediate explicit response, but sometimes it was implicit in what they were saying. No teacher denied planning. The most common time foci of planning were the lesson or the day, except projects which were planned over several weeks. Teachers who only said that they planned gave short non-narrative responses, whereas teachers who replied that they both planned and played it by ear tended to tell a narrative. This latter group was the majority of the sample teachers and all their narratives were about playing it by ear. Perhaps the reason for this was that planning was so taken for granted that it needed no illustrative example,

while playing it by ear may seem newsworthy since it involves change from routine plans. Where planning seems routine, playing it by ear is a major source of variety in teaching which demands different skills to those involved in planning. Apparently playing it by ear is the kind of occasion where recountable incidents happen.

I.ii. Planning

Teachers who said that they planned, without mentioning that they played it by ear, made such comments as "We plan what we do" (52), "I plan overall" (46), "I usually plan each day" (92), "You've got to have basic planning" (98). In School J there was a well-organized system of developing pupils' individual work. This system was highly planned and was alluded to by teachers in that school, "Our situation is highly planned" (1), "Everything is very well structured" (9). There were no narratives which were only about planning.

The remainder of this chapter, following the majority of the teachers' replies and all their planning narratives, will therefore concentrate on playing it by ear.

I.iii. Playing it by Ear

In many of the Planning narratives there is a common structure. First, there is an affirmation that the teller plans. This is immediately followed by a statement of reservation or limitation concerned with flexibility or the need to play things by ear. The teller then moves into recounting an instance of this.

Like the Breakthrough narratives, the Planning narratives have concentrations of metaphors. In this case they are usually in the Abstract or Evaluation. Thus in 33 narratives things 'crop up', in 9 narratives the lesson 'goes off at a tangent', in another 8 something 'comes up'. In these lessons, as recounted in Evaluations, the teachers very often follow the children's 'interest', 'excitement' or 'enjoyment'. This is frequently associated with the need for the children to 'talk about it'.

What emerges in a collection of Planning narratives is a cultural picture of teaching where teachers are highly sensitive to children's interest and enjoyment and the need for lessons to follow this. Taking planning for granted, they stress the need to adapt flexibly to children's shifting interest and attention. Such a picture, and the narrative structure and the language used to exemplify it, seems to be very common. It should be born in mind that the teachers were interviewed individually and that within the framework of the question they could give any answer in any manner with any choice of discourse structure or lexis that they thought appropriate.

II. Some Examples of Planning Narratives

In the following examples the overall structure has been marked out. Subsequent comment will be directed at common realizations of expression at key points in this structure. In reading these later comments it may be helpful to turn back to these exemplifying narratives. In

general, many Planning narratives have the kind of pattern outlined above. Other Planning narratives, not cited in full as these ones are, will be briefly quoted later.

N16

A "Well, I plan things to a certain extent, but also if something crops up you can easily just stop and follow a different tack as long as...as long as it's relevant.

O The other day one little boy brought in shrimps
C and so we just...

O you know, fresh water shrimps in a jar
C and, you know, we stopped to talk about them, whereas probably we would have done other work around something else.

R They drew pictures and did some writing and things from the shrimps

E which I think is much more rewarding than...It's interesting, because that's why they brought them in and anyway they like things like that, creepy crawlies." (42)

N17

A "I plan all my teaching but that doesn't mean that if something comes up I won't use it and follow it up.

O Last week when we were watching television...this was when I had the six to sevens...and we were watching television and we were doing words with the long 'a' and the

magic 'e' and that sort of thing

C and it came to the word 'cake' and from then on
all they wanted to talk about was cake that
they'd had for their birthday and this sort of
thing, whether it made a shape and so on

R so I think then we did go off. We forgot all
about the words that we were doing with the
long 'a'. We went off into what they'd had for
their birthday and this sort of thing

E because I felt that they wanted to talk to me

O and this was a slower group that I had

E so when I felt that they wanted to talk to me
we switched topic." (35)

N18

A "You've got to have a certain amount of
organization and know where you're going, but
on the other hand you've got to be flexible
enough, haven't you? 'Cause with little ones
you've got to go off at a tangent if...I
believe that if the children go one way you
follow them, you follow them if they've got an
interest.

O I mean, the other week I'd got no idea of doing
ladybirds.

C Someone brings some ladybirds in

R so we had a whole week of ladybirds.

E It was most interesting.

R Now we got an awful lot of...even to counting
the spots on their back...how many had seven
spots, how many had six...

E I hadn't planned to do it. Something else had to go, but it was their interest...and this is what you've got to do, haven't you?" (76)

N19

"With everytning, really, you need to plan. You also play things by ear. You drop everything and you do this.

O I remember doing, not so very long ago, we were doing things which were just visible, doing the five senses and talking about the wonders of the spider's web

C and I remember, and this came up incidentally,

O again, it was creative writing,

C but it came up incidentally and I remember walking into school and seeing a cobweb outside, so..., with dew on it, you know, so we dropped everything and we all traileed through and saw the cobweb

R and from that they took me all round the grounds, showing me cobwebs and how spiders make...you know, and we went into... we ended up with tarantulas and all sorts of things

E so em...and I often think that your best things in teaching come out of incidentals." (45)

N20

A "I always plan things. If ever I've gone in and not been prepared I've found so many things where it's been a little bit of a waste of time but if something crops up then we make use of it, well, of course...

O Babies...because I'm having a baby and the children...

C yes, when we talked about that a lot of children brought pictures and things in, pictures of their babies

E and that was all on the spur of the moment

R and we did do something about that

(N)

O and we have a little girl who's just come out of hospital, so the day that she came back

C/E we kind of stopped everything to talk about it

Coda but I would prefer to be prepared rather than to play everything through by ear." (39)

N21

A "Most of the teaching has to be very planned, sometimes things might crop up.

O Well, you know we're doing this book about our school, well, it was somebody's birthday in the unit [for partially hearing children],

C so I decided, "Right, how old are you?" So I taught them to lip read the question, "How old are you?"

R and they've learnt to write 'I'm 5', 'I'm 6', 'I'm 7'.

E and that cropped up, something I hadn't planned for but which cropped up because

O one of the children in the unit, she was 8. She's in the other class

E and I just jumped on it. So whatever else I had planned for that day I just didn't do because

something else had come up that was much more exciting. I mean, it may not sound exciting to you, but for me...we have to make things exciting, we have to grasp anything we can use." (48)

N22

A "Well, basically my teaching is planned because I've got to have a scheme of work in my mind, but I do play it by ear to a certain extent and we will branch out along lines of interest. I mean, you've got to, if you've got something of interest you'll get far more from the children using it there and then.

C I've just had something brought in today er
O just before the holiday we've been watching a television programme called 'Watch' and it's been based on the sea and of course we've been making a wall picture, which we're halfway through, of seaside scenes

C and one of my boys got very interested and during the holiday he's been making a lighthouse and he's brought it in. He's used, I think it was probably a container for salt or something, and er, he's got a light flashing from the top from batteries. I think he had a bit of help from his father

E and of course the children showed a great deal of interest in it there and then and of course we've immediately branched out onto lighthouses and otherwise we probably wouldn't have gone

into it so deeply. It came in, and I did suggest to them that if any of them were going to the sea, "Keep your eyes open for lighthouses"...

Coda but I haven't been able to develop it that far yet, but we'll be doing some more this week" (...)

N23-24

A "Sometimes I do play it by ear because so many interesting things do crop up incidentally, because I've got an interesting class

O well, one boy, for example, is very interested in car racing. This comes from the fact that his father manages some racing cars

C and we were discussing the design of the car and I realized that Mark knows considerably more about it than I did, so I stayed at the back of the room... and said, "Mark, it's all yours", you know, "We'll ask you questions that you'll give us the answers to", you know, "Why are tyres thick?, Why do we have this? Why are they made like that?"

E It went very well, very well. Topic work can come up incidentally, a child can bring a book along, an interesting book about birds or something, and some children then become inspired and would like to do some work on birds. Fine! That's the time to let them take off, when the interest and enthusiasm are

there.

- O One boy before half term was going to Corfu for a holiday and his plane was due to leave at a certain time
- C so we looked at the clock and said, "Well, Ian will just about be taking off" and we didn't know which route he was taking but we got the globe and said, "Well, he might be going over this country this way" and so on and so forth
- R and that leads to a discussion on Europe.
- E You know, you can go on lots of tangents and I think one must be flexible like that and realize when opportunities arise and make the most of them." (60)

III.i. Abstracts

In the Abstracts of the Planning narratives N16-22 the tellers affirm that they plan in degrees varying between "to a certain extent" (42) and "everything" (45). This affirmation is immediately followed by 'but' (implied in N19 and N21) and statements delineating exceptions to planning: "if something crops up" (35, 39, 42), "Sometimes things might crop up" (48), "if something comes up" (35), playing it "by ear" (45, 61) because "things will crop up" (61). The Abstract of N23-24 affirms the planning, but only by implication. In N23-24 the teller also plays it "by ear" because "interesting things crop up" (60). After the Abstract featuring these metaphors the tellers then move into their narratives proper. Among the Planning narratives there are 55 with a

similar structure to N16-22: affirmation of planning -- but/if -- exceptions to planning -- narrative illustration.

III.ii. Cropping Up

The statements in the tellers' Abstracts in the previous examples are not unusual. In fact, the metaphors used are apparently very common and quite limited in range. In 33 narratives things 'crop up', which the teacher often 'uses', or after which she 'changes plan', or from which things 'branch out', 'take off' (see Chapter on Breakthroughs), or 'go off at a tangent'. The pattern of this is shown in the following examples.

"If something crops up you follow it through" (97).

"If something crops up then we do it" (55).

"If something crops up then I change my plan, obviously" (104)

"If something crops up, I mean, things change" (70).

"If something crops up we do something different" (90).

"If something crops up one goes from there, one branches" (43).

"If something crops up in the classroom I go off at a tangent" (62).

"If something has cropped up it may be worthwhile going off at a tangent" (128).

"If something crops up then we'll take off on that tangent" (84).

"If things crop up you tend to go off on a red herring" (85).

"If something crops up that's even better, that's a bonus because there's no problem in jumping off" (112).

As in N19 and N23 what crops up is 'incidental': "So many things crop up incidentally" (68). "There are always little incidentals cropping up all the time" (65). "I'm pulled off course by incidental things" (52). In N4 such 'incidentals' are evaluated as the 'best things in teaching' (45). The great similarity and frequency of

such expressions is evidence for elements of a common culture among British primary teachers.

III.iii. Complications: Bringing Things in

It is in the nature of these incidentals cropping up that they will be unexpected and varied, and therefore the content of the narratives will be varied. In fact, what crops up is often that a child brings in some interesting object. "Things do crop up from things the kids bring in" (90). "A child brings something in which sends you off at a tangent" (67). This is described in the Complication of Planning narratives. In N16 shrimps are brought in, in N18 ladybirds, in N20 photos and in N22 a model lighthouse. This unanticipated bringing in becomes an important source of 'interest', 'discussion' and 'use' in the classroom and could perhaps be viewed as a substitute for planned learning. However in the teachers' narratives it is clear that they see children's interest as being a factor of overriding importance, at least for a time. To ignore objects brought in by children would be, it seems, to ignore an important source of interest and point of oral language development through discussion. "If something is brought in it triggers off something" (73). "They often bring in things which are interesting... They're always on to you bringing things in" (91). "Someone brings something of interest in and we'll make use of it" (124). "If a child brings in anything of interest... I try to bring it into the lesson" (92). "I didn't know that would happen before I came into school but you use it" (70). "If somebody

happens to come in with something then I will make use of it" (34). "Sometimes children bring things in and so you take advantage of the situation" (102). "Kids do bring things in and you talk about them on the spur of the moment" (114). "A nice thing is when somebody brings something in from home" (88). Twenty other Planning narratives featured such objects being brought in as books (63, 93), medals and badges (102), a globe (60), a model dinosaur (69), a willow pattern plate (124), petrified wood (121), sheep's wool (124). Teachers also told of a variety of living things being brought in: fish (43), tadpoles and snails (25), rabbits (71), a lamb (71), furry caterpillars (26, 70, 93, 102), runner beans (67) and flowers (77). Sometimes objects brought in were reported not as causing deviations from planning but as being sources of the planning itself. "A boy brought a whole lot of things on space, that's when I thought we'd do this project work on space. And of course 'Star Wars', they all brought things in about Star Wars, and I thought, "Well, we'll do this" and particularly the boys were interested in that. They were bringing things in from home." (125) Sometimes what is brought in depended on the social area around the school. "The children frequently bring in bits of news but it's usually of the kind I dare not repeat. 'Guess who slept with my mum last night?' is a fairly common sort of conversation, rather than, 'I found this flower on the way to school'" (103). The teacher giving this Abstract went on to recount how when these children were asked to bring in flowers they raided wreaths from a local cemetery. "So the head

instantly stuffed all the 'In Memoriam' Cards in the bin and prayed no one would come to get the wreaths back' (103).

Other things which crop up are that 'things happen'. "If something happens, I'll follow that up" (35). "If something else happens we follow their interest" (78). Examples include a crane arriving at school (11), workmen putting a surface of tarmac down (34) and a fire practice (112).

A common cause of deviation in planning was that the teacher saw the need to follow children's interests in topics. A topic planned about Vikings became focussed on 'digging things up' (38), while another on Evolution became focussed on amphibians (12). "That sort of shoots off at a tangent... nothing resembles what we started off as, sort of thing" (38).

Less frequently deviations came from the teacher, as in N19. "Sometimes you just think of something on the spur of the moment" (4). Instant ideas which were recalled as leading to successful lessons included playing 'I went to the market' to teach grammar (28), using the clock face to teach the five times table (57), and taking inner city children out to see hedges -- "I suddenly realized none of them knew what a hedge was" (76).

III.iv. Evaluations

In the Evaluation sections of Planning narratives, and sometimes in Abstracts, the teachers often give an explicit or implied reason for playing it by ear. This

can be seen in the narrative examples quoted earlier where three reasons are given. first flexibility (N23-24), second, the need for talk (N17, N20) and third, and above all, the need to follow children's enjoyment, excitement and interest (N16, N18, N21, N22) are emphasized. In the Planning Evaluations and Abstracts there is sufficient evidence to suggest strongly that these are three key elements in primary teachers' cultural conceptions of teaching. The section on enjoyment, excitement and interest will be additionally supported by reference to narratives about Yesterday and Teaching.

IV.i. Flexibility

The essence of 'playing it by ear' is flexibility as shown in 13 other narratives. "We're reasonably planned, but flexible too" (24). "I like to be flexible, I like to think I'm adaptable" (26). "It isn't so inflexible that if something crops up we stop and do that particular thing" (107). "I would not stick rigidly to something I said I would do " (25). "If things don't seem to be working out we alter it" (69). "I plan a day but I don't mind going away from it" (75). "It has to be a very flexible day" (101). "The day is very flexible" (51). "It's open to variation" (55). "It can vary because of varying situations" (95). "Three quarters of my teaching is planned and the rest varies and I play it by ear" (67). "The thing [lesson] was absolutely flexible" (850. "I think you can do this in an infant classroom because it's so much more flexible" (83).

As indicated in the Coda to N20, this flexibility does not mean everything is played by ear. Flexibility is contingent upon things being planned in the first place. Four other Codas return to planning, "for me, work has to be planned, you can't rely on things cropping up" (99), "but overall I am probably fairly well organized" (28), "but I would always keep in the back of my mind that there was the basic planned work to do" (34), "but I think you must plan, depending on how much experience you've got" (48). As indicated in this last remark, experience may be an additional factor in 'playing it by ear' with flexibility. "I've been teaching long enough to be experienced to play it by ear" (12). "I often ad lib. I think this comes with many years of experience" (2). The age of children taught is likely to be another factor: it might be expected that the younger the age range taught, the more things are played by ear. This seems to be indicated by two reception teachers. "Every day something happens, like someone wets themselves, somebody is sick, somebody is unhappy about something that happened at playtime, and you cannot get through what you planned to do" (122). "In a reception classroom you can never plan from one minute to the next what is going to happen. There are always little incidentals cropping up all the time and things arise from that. You've got to be prepared to flow with the children but with a guiding hand" (65).

Plans themselves can always be resumed later. "We'll save it for another day" (38). "What I was going to do has got shelved for the time being" (55).

For some teachers the variety which results from being flexible when the unexpected 'crops up' is one of the key factors of the enjoyment of primary teaching. "It's varied, very varied. I enjoy it because it's so varied, because of the unexpected things that happen. The children vary it, don't they?" (16). "There's never a run-of-the-mill day-to-day situation. That's what makes teaching, the variability" (2).

IV.ii. Talk

There were 13 teachers' Evaluations which indicated that things 'cropping up' are usually associated with talk. It appears that lessons focussing on discussion skills are not planned, rather the teacher plays such aspects by ear, as they arise. "We talked about it because I think the language needs developing, so anything like that that comes along I would make use of" (34). "They were all bringing these in going mad, you know, so of course, everything... the consequence was we didn't get out to PE... we sort of stopped and talked about all those" (72). "The children were very quick to talk about it" (38). "We talked about it, they enjoyed it and we did some lovely work on that" (56). "It was nice... you know, I thought it was nice that we could all talk about it together" (114). "It cropped up so we discussed it" (85). "I don't think discussions can ever be planned really. It depends on their situation and their mood, so what I try to do when things crop up is develop it into a point of principle" (15) (see also 26, 57, 67, 85, 90, 102).

IV.iii. Interest

The children's enjoyment, excitement and interest seem to be a third key element in playing it by ear. Planning narratives rarely mention learning, understanding, developing skills and attitudes. Yet interest and enjoyment are not only frequently mentioned but are major features of 22 Evaluations. "The children really enjoyed it" (63). "The children had great fun" (71). "That was really tremendous they enjoyed that" (124). "They all enjoyed doing that" (118). "So we did a whole load of work on amphibians much much more than I ever planned because the children enjoyed that" (56). "It had great impact" (112). "They're still as keen as nuts" (73). "They found that quite remarkable" (71). "That was quite thrilling" (90). "They got very interested" (36). "The interest was there" (95). "That took off when I hadn't planned for it to take all day because they were interested in it" (83). "If a child brings in anything interesting at the beginning of the day then I would discuss it" (91). "If something crops up that the children are interested in, I follow that" (25). "That cropped up because one child had seen it and was interested" (89). "Because the children were keen" (25), "because of the terrific interest" (62). "There's more to teaching than just, sort of, the three R's and, you know, I mean, you've got to get this interest, haven't you?" (72). "What I do is basically what the children... I think you've got to ... you've got to think what the children are interested in" (76). "I like to be adaptable if it goes around their interests" (26). On rare

occasions when 'learning' is mentioned here, it is associated with 'interest'. "It caused a lot of general interest and, you know, the children were busily occupied, I felt, and they've learnt quite a bit" (68). "I try to adjust to the mood of the children or any particular interest that arises suddenly if they're not going to respond. They're going to talk about other things, fidget, bang about" (68).

V. Examples from other Narratives

These data on the teachers' focus on children's enjoyment, excitement and interest can be supplemented from the narratives about Yesterday and Teaching. When giving a narrative about their previous day's work ('Yesterday'), teachers often evaluated lessons or topics. From their narratives, the major criteria employed in the Evaluations are enjoyment and interest, rather than children's learning, understanding, development of skills or concepts, progress or development.

This is the case in Maths. "I think they need a certain amount of mental number work in Maths and they...they enjoy it" (7). "Many of them enjoy it [Maths], they ask for more" (82). "We had a long discussion generally about the metric system and we discussed for quite a long time, it was very interesting" (60). In this last comment the interest could be that of the teacher, which is identified causally by another teacher with that of the children, "It didn't go very well, I wasn't terribly interested, and I think it didn't

go very well because I wasn't terribly interested" (90).

There is a similar close relationship between the teacher's and children's enjoyment in this account of an art lesson, "I started off reading the story because it's nice and moral and it's a good story and the children enjoyed the story. We don't often do art lessons which aren't connected with something else. So we've got a very big wall to cover and we did the whole map of Narnia. I enjoy it and so do the kids" (6). This importance given to children's enjoyment and interest comes through in the following Evaluations. "They enjoy it [sewing] and you get all Friday afternoon and they make soft toys and glove puppets, but to them it's good fun" (6). "There was one boy in particular who was absolutely enthralled about it [topic] and he was absolutely steeped in it, you know, he was absolutely wrapped up in it and em a lot of the others were too, of course...that really did capture their interest" (72). "It [topic] was something that I'd meant to cover fairly simply but it went very very well. It went O.K. They, they enjoyed it. We did animals before, which was quite interesting. They enjoy doing animals and things like that" (5). Children's waning interest, rather than any learning difficulty, learning success or other criterion, was taken as a signal by teachers that topics should come to an end. "The kids reacted quite well but it went on a bit too long, I think, and they began to lose interest" (27).

These criteria of interest and enjoyment are even used to evaluate school assemblies, as in these narrative Evaluations. "They responded ever so well, really

interested. I think it was the best assembly I've had, great interest, the children loved doing it" (27). "The kids enjoyed it. One or two of them came up and said, 'Thank you for your assembly' and they enjoyed it and it was quite interesting for them" (19).

A final example from Yesterday narratives shows yet again this stress which teachers put on enjoyment, fun and even entertainment, without mentioning learning, skills, understanding or progress:

N25 "We decided we would do cowboys...and they thoroughly enjoyed it...they enjoyed the rodeo part very much, it's the side that *the children* are enjoying, the cowboys, the jobs and the work that they do...we had a lot of fun with brands, branding patterns. We decided we'd select a name for our ranch and we decided in the end that it would be the 5 star ranch because we're class 5, which one or two of them cottoned on to as being the best in restaurants. We had an entertaining hour, actually, doing brands" (84).

In the Teaching narratives the teachers' focus on children's enjoyment is broadened to be linked to the rewards and worthwhileness of teaching as an occupation. Teachers characterized or summed up teaching, for them, by stressing its worthwhileness, which in turn came from the feedback they got from children's enjoyment and interest. "When they're enthusiastic about it and really interested, then it's worth it" (72). "When you've got their enthusiasm, yes, I think that's what makes it worthwhile" (91). "The children's enjoyment makes it all

worthwhile" (102). "I think it's very rewarding to think that they enjoy school" (90). "You talk to them about things and two or three days later they come up to you and say, 'You know when you were talking about so-and-so...' and I think, 'That's great. They enjoyed it'" (37). "If you've enjoyed the day and they've enjoyed the day that makes it worthwhile" (88).

In the Planning narratives, when the children are interested the teachers use metaphors with a vertical upward spatial orientation: 'crop up', 'come up', 'take off', 'get off the ground', 'arise', (see Chapter on Breakthroughs). When the pupils are not interested the metaphor has a downward or horizontal orientation of 'falling flat'. "You haven't really planned it properly and it does fall flat, it doesn't go well" (7). "It went quite flat and I stopped it that same day. There was just nothing coming back at all... It fell quite flat" (48).

Clearly these teachers in their narratives give great importance to following the children's interests, in the light of which lessons will change. "I'm prepared to change it anytime if the interest in the class shows that more time should be spent on whatever it may be" (82). "I will change tack if they bring in things which are interesting" (91) "I will always take up anything that comes in from the children" (112). Some teachers were clearly very sensitive to the interest of the children, alert to any changes and ready to 'seize' or 'pounce' on opportunities to use it. "If they come along with some new experience you seize it from there" (81). "If there's something that interests them that I can

pounce on, then I pounce on it" (104) (cf "I just jumped on it", "we have to grasp anything we can use" in the Evaluation of N21).

Reading Planning narratives it is not hard to get the impression that while much primary teaching is routinely planned, what is more salient, and often more successful for teachers is the more spontaneous following of children's interests, 'playing it by ear' as things 'crop up'. This aspect of primary teaching is child-centred in the sense of teachers focussing attention on children's attention. It is discovery learning, in the sense that teachers learn to discover children's interests. Because 'cropping up' means appearing or arising unexpectedly and because this unpredictable aspect depends on the children, there is perhaps also a sense in which the teacher's strategic planning might even be tactically manipulated by children in a version of exchange bargaining (cf. Galton 1989 p.120-121). "So much depends on the children" (84). "The most odd things crop up, but if the idea comes from the children I've always found that it does work" (113). "What I do is dictated largely by the way things develop" (74). "That really did generate from them -- I was more or less dragged into that, I must admit" (115). "The interest really came from the children when they themselves decided that they were interested in it" (113). "You just have to take each situation as it arises" (121). "If something crops up I welcome spontaneity, it's very valuable, and I will make time for it" (86). "I would definitely play things by ear. I think

that's often the best way" (37).

A possible Planning schema is shown in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1

A Planning Schema.

Affirmation	"Yes, you have to plan but
Reservation	things crop up and you go off on a tangent...
Narrative O	last week someone
C	brought in caterpillars
R	so we went off on that and talked about it
E	and they were very interested...you have to be flexible...

Such elements are further exemplified in the following typical Planning narrative, where the role of children's interest and the teacher's overriding concern with those interests is clear.

N26

- A "I plan and follow the plan but it's difficult because various things happen that change that plan. The children themselves say something and you think, "Oh that's worth following up", so I discard the plan and try something else.
- C A child brought in a caterpillar
- O and we'd been doing pirates, the sea and pirates and we were just about to do this pirate ship
- C but then the child brought in the caterpillar and it was the focus of everyone's attention
- E and this caterpillar was really interesting
- R so we left the pirates and went on to caterpillars and whether we will go back to pirates... I don't think so...

E So it's totally new, totally unplanned and I was totally unprepared for it, but the interest was there" (107).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### DISASTERS AND HUMOUR

#### Introduction

In this Chapter an analysis of the teachers' narratives about Disasters and Humour is presented. The sample teachers between them told a total of 124 Disaster narratives in response to the seventh interview question "Have you ever had any disasters in teaching?" 168 Humorous narratives were given in answer to the eighth question "What's the funniest thing that has ever happened to you in teaching?" This is the largest single category of narrative in the present data, nearly 20% of the total number of narratives told. The questions were a fairly direct invitation to tell a narrative and clearly the teachers found it easy to give examples of humorous incidents and disasters from their own personal experience.

These two types of narrative are treated together in the same chapter because there are overlaps in the content which make it clear that for some teachers disasters and funny incidents are two sides of the same coin. Some disasters have a funny side, while many humorous happenings can be seen as actual or potential disasters. In fact, 35 of the Humorous narratives could easily be classified as Disasters and a number of the narrators made comments to this effect. Therefore in this Chapter the teachers' cultural perspectives on teaching



as tragi-comedy are explored.

### I.i. Interpretations of Disasters

The term 'disaster' in Question 7 of the interview is ambiguous. From the teachers' narratives, it is possible to see three interpretations. Firstly, a disaster is an accident, injury or serious physical mishap. Generally such an event, at least as recounted by teachers, is outside the teller's control. Secondly, a disaster can be an occasion when the organization and planning of a particular lesson goes seriously awry. As described by narrators, these disastrous lessons are usually because of inadequate preparation by the teacher or are a result of insufficient knowledge or skill, especially early in a teacher's career. Thirdly, a disaster can be a situation or incident where a serious lack of discipline is apparent, even for a brief moment. Such a situation could be considered to be within the teacher's control. However, where a single child or several individuals are involved teachers often look to a child's home for causal factors (see Chapter 8). The latter two interpretations relate to the two basic concerns of teachers identified by Stebbins (1975 p.45) as the concern for learning and the concern for order (see also Pollard 1985 p.35).

In all three interpretations teachers are conscious of their responsibility for children's safety, for the organization of lessons and for children's behaviour. Therefore when things do go wrong teachers might be expected to show concern not only for the children, but

also about the possibility of facing headteachers' reprimands, parental complaints and even lawsuits. Such underlying concerns are evident in some Disaster narratives.

### I.ii. Face

The occurrence of a disaster may affect a teacher's public or self-image of competence. Therefore admitting to a disaster seems to cause speakers to lose face (see Chapter 2). Perhaps it is for this reason that 39 teachers did not give examples of disasters in their teaching. The emotive power of the term 'disaster' might cause some speakers not to classify relatively minor incidents as disasters. Yet at a deeper level admitting to a disaster may preserve or even enhance face. The argument here is that most teachers at one time or another will have disasters in one or more of the three categories. The more experienced teachers seem to admit that this is the case and in their narratives of disasters they show their competence at handling the situation. For some tellers narrating this this may be a way of gaining prestige. Thus the losing or gaining of face does not necessarily depend on whether disasters occur, since it is inevitable that they will do so. Rather, face depends on how teachers tell of their managing disasters when they arise. Their responses to unanticipated events, even where the causes are outside their control, reveal presence of mind, the ability to handle children in difficult circumstances, flexibility towards planning, a reflective attitude towards their own

teaching and the display of how they have learned from mistakes. In the context of disasters teachers are learners.

I.iii. Some examples of Disaster narratives

N27

A "There have been physical accidents...a broken wrist...

O there was a laddie who...we were doing apparatus out in the playground with some mats underneath, but even so, to fall from the top of this apparatus, the mats...that wouldn't do...

C and this laddie fell awkwardly and this was the first accident I'd ever had, the first physical injury I'd ever had with a child of mine and he was brought to me. He was on his feet, but his wrist was hanging at an impossible angle

E and I thought, "Oh dear",

R but in fact his mum was very good about it and there was no comeback or anything,

CODA but apart from that I've been fortunate." (120)

In this accident narrative, the narrator begins with an Abstract to signal the topic of physical accidents, within which he is going to give the example of a broken wrist. The Orientation seems dislocated. The laddie is introduced but the relative clause is left incomplete as the outdoor PE context is described. As a teacher aware of safety in such situations, he specifies that mats were

left out, but seems not to give details (the mats...that wouldn't do...) before moving on to the Complication. Arguably, however, the narrator is building up suspense through incomplete utterances. The audience is left to complete them. The mats were placed, "but even so...to fall from the top of this apparatus" suggests that they are insufficient protection and anticipates the laddie's fall. Since the teller specifies that there were some mats, but has indicated insufficiency, there may be an implication that this is outside his control and that it is a question of shortage of resources. It is supposed that other teachers would draw this implication. "The mats...that wouldn't do" confirms this, apparently anticipating some such audience completion as "that wouldn't do much good", reinforcing the notion of insufficient protection. After the Complication the narrator's personal involvement is underlined by repetition ("the first accident I've ever had") with an element of possession ("with a child of mine"). The repetition of "first" both emphasizes the length of his experience since the accident and distances the teller uttering the words from a principal character then, who was younger and less experienced. The mention of "the first physical injury" now means that listeners must do further interpretive work putting together the various clues: a broken wrist, a laddie, PE apparatus outside with mats that are probably inadequate, the awkward fall resulting in injury. The teller has arguably designed the narrative for recipients to do this interpretive work, thereby involving them and perhaps thereby enhancing his

chances of getting interest or sympathy. The wrist, "hanging at an impossible angle", confirms the interpretation that the boy fell awkwardly and broke it. The narrator's Evaluative reaction of "I thought, 'Oh dear'" could, at this point, be understood as sympathy for the injured child or a reaction of the teacher wondering about first aid. Such ambiguity again involves the audience in interpretation and suspense. The next utterance reveals that both of these possible interpretations are not what was meant. The teller resolves the ambiguity by showing that he was concerned about parental reactions to the injury, most likely in terms of complaints or accusations of negligence. Such possible negative outcomes are dismissed with the Resolution of "His mum was very good about it and there was no comeback or anything". The contrast between this relief and the implications of comebacks, held in the "Oh dear", is doubly signalled by "but" and "in fact" which emphasize the Evaluation. The Coda suggests that such accidents are interpreted as occurring by chance. They are unfortunate incidents which are outside the teacher's control.

This narrative is interesting for two points. First, the telling consistently uses incompletions and implications to involve the audience interactively. Second, the teller's perception of possible parental comebacks is immediate. In the narrative this perception is given as if it was the teacher's first reaction to the accident. This shows awareness not only of safety factors when using PE apparatus, but more particularly of

teachers' responsibilities towards parents and possible comebacks.

N28

- A "I've seen loads of disasters with plays and things. We've always managed to get it right for whenever we've put it on but we've had some terrible things go wrong on the way. I think the most horrifying thing is when kids don't turn up on the night. This has happened. I know, having worked with these kids, from experience, from when I first started doing these plays and things. I always now keep a couple of kids near me, some of the better ones, if you like, who are just singing in the choir or just doing some little things that can easily...I just turn round and say,"O.K. you do this." And I've told them as we've gone along what things to watch.
- O We did an Arts Development thing over at the Sports Centre and I was asked to do the mime. So we piled in the kids and worked on it and made masks and we had to go to a full rehearsal
- C and on that day two of the key parts didn't turn up. So we got there and there was one part we couldn't do without
- O and there were loads of schools there and the orchestra was full
- E and this was kind of the high spot
- O and these kids were doing the action to this song and one of the girls, who's in my class

and who's very good, she was just sitting there. She was in the choir.

E and er I just suddenly...

O/C it was all very quiet and everything

E I suddenly said, "Oh, would you come do

C She was looking around. She came down and I said

E/C "Go on then. You've watched it. Off you go. Don't worry about it."

R and she went through it and I don't think anyone knew she'd never done it before

E But I must admit I was really on the line. But every time we'd practised it I'd always said to her, "You make sure that you watch and be prepared to fill in."

The narrator indicates that organization can go wrong in teaching situations. Sometimes this is outside the teacher's control, as in this instance, yet the narrative makes the basic point that teachers can make provision for mishaps, especially if it has happened before. Though the Abstract has made this point, that the teller makes arrangements to overcome "the most horrifying thing" of children not turning up the teller still goes right through the narrative. Summarizing is not telling and it is the telling that is important. The disaster here is recounted to the teacher's credit because it shows his preparation of the understudy, after, it is implied in the Abstract, previous disasters. The rehearsal mentioned in the Orientation is, in fact, a performance since "loads of schools were there" and an

orchestra. The importance of the Complication of children not arriving for key parts is underlined by the fact that the mime is the "high spot" of the event. His reaction to the emergency is calm. On tape he quietly says, "Oh, would you come down?" The girl (aged 8) rises to the emergency and in the Resolution "she went through it". The narrator does not evaluate her performance, rather he evaluates his reaction by emphasizing how he had prepared beforehand, though he was still "on the line". There are two outstanding elements here. First, the alternations in the narrative structure vary the pace and fill in details as they are required, building up tension. Second the vocal performance of his words is stressed much more than her performance on the stage, no details of which are given. The teacher's response to the disaster is the reason for the telling. Assuming that for reasons of perceived modesty he cannot simply say, 'I kept calm', his calmness could only have been conveyed in a narrative.

The next examples are an uninterrupted series of narratives told by a teacher who had worked for some 29 years in the same school. During that time it had been a secondary school.

N29 "We had a lad who was very big and very muscular. He was 15 and er...you see, we had rather a large school and some of the teachers were not er...all that strong in the classroom. Anyway, this boy hit a teacher, who was off for a fortnight. Touch and go whether his eye would heal up, you know, and so on. But when we went



into this in some detail, er one could almost understand why the boy did it. You know, you could say he had been goaded. Well, the boy was completely in the wrong. It would have been better if someone more experienced had dealt with the case, but em...

N30 There was an occasion where another one, small of stature, little weedy lad, er who was a great nuisance and he went for the headmaster, well, the headmaster we had in those days, with a knife and er this had its funny side because there was another teacher there who managed to grab hold of him and take the knife away. The headmaster said, "Yes", he said, "he came for me with this knife and called me a bald-headed bastard. 'Bastard' I don't mind, but 'bald-headed' I draw the line." You know, so it had its funny side, but at the time it was a disaster. We had to do something about it.

N31 But, as I say, there have been a couple of occasions er This lad, he er wanted to set about one of the teachers, you know, and we had a little bit of a scuffle, but er I always managed to do very well with him because I whispered his own language in his ear, you see, very often, and just sort of pushed him off, you know, when he was going to do something. For instance, he used to say "I'm going" and when I happened to be nearby I collared him and whispered to him in his

ear,"Well, you [muttered swearing] go, we don't want to see you anymore." And, of course, he stayed, to be awkward. But, you know, I mean, all these sorts of things, as I say, looking back, nine times out of ten if you look for humour in a situation it does not become a serious upset." (16)

In N29, the Orientation describes the pupil in physical terms, which is unusual but later seen to be relevant. The hesitation during the characterization of some of the teachers as "not all that strong in the classroom" may be a professional reticence to criticize even past colleagues. The mention of the size of the school, which is irrelevant to the narrative itself, could be a mitigating factor in having weak teachers - where there are many some are more likely to be weak. The Complication is the assault and the Result is the teacher's injuries, which were obviously serious. The subsequent explanation is hedged with hesitations, but it seems that an inexperienced weak teacher had provoked the boy into the assault. The further explication is that an experienced teacher, such as the teller, could have dealt with the case in such a way as to avoid violence. The boy's actions are evaluated as being wrong while the teacher's actions are indirectly evaluated in the same manner.

In N30, the violence is pre-empted. The Orientation describes a pupil in opposite terms to the one in N29. The Complication of the knife assault is immediately followed by "this had its funny side". This clause

signals an up-coming Evaluation. The signal is strategically placed for interest before the Resolution, where the other teacher disarms the assailant, but the Resolution itself is not the source of amusement. The "funny side" is clearly the later remark of the headteacher with his evaluation contained in his embedded recounting of the story. The embedding is doubly signalled by two "saids". The later interpretation, "so it had its funny side", matches the prior Evaluation. What was a disaster at the time is only later seen to be humourous. The final utterance, "We had to do something about it", implies that in this instance an experienced teacher dealt with the case, though the narrator does not say how. Instead he moves smoothly into N31.

The Orientation of N31 immediately shows that this will be a third example of pupil violence where the lad "wanted to set about" a teacher. The Complication, "we had a little bit of a scuffle", is followed by the teller's generalized Resolution about his own competence in dealing with this pupil by whispering "his own language in his ear". An instance of this is given, with the result that the boy stayed at school. The final Evaluation emphasizes the narrator's belief that serious upset can be avoided by looking for humour in a situation. Teachers may find humour here, but whether pupils might is less apparent.

The three narratives together were an uninterrupted series and seem to have great textual unity.

#### I.iv.Accidents

Accidents can happen to children in school just as

they can occur anywhere. Among the Disaster narratives, 43 examples of physical accidents and injuries are reported. The range of these is surprisingly wide. They are often unpleasant and sometimes tragic. A listing of these incidents recalled by the sample teachers in Disaster narratives provides sobering material for reflection on the kinds of experiences primary teachers sometimes have to deal with.

Inevitably, some small children get their heads stuck in chairs (49,96) or in the school gate (69). Children are sick in classrooms (77), 'constantly vomiting' (87), even for 'several days running' (77). One boy was 'constantly messing himself' (122). In the playground or classroom children get their teeth knocked out (116), their fingers trapped in doors (69), their heads bumped (92) or cut (90), their knees cut (81), their arms scalded by teacher's coffee (53). They have severe nosebleeds (35,87), sometimes caused by pencils pushed up nostrils (124). Primary teachers have to cope with such things, as well as with epileptic (29,115) or asthmatic fits (29,81). Drama using a stage and PE using apparatus can be hazardous. In the hall children may suffer a bang on the head (89), a badly bruised face (64), a split face (67), a sliced lip (81), blood streaming down a face (122), or bad gashes (79). Some head cuts which occur need stitches (52,64). In PE "anything can happen" (17). How such accidents are classified varies. For most teachers, broken bones are disasters. They told of broken arms (41,45), broken knees (12), and wrists (79,120), sometimes breaking in the

classroom (54). They also recounted incidents of fractured vertebrae (16) and skulls (106). Yet some do not call these disasters. "There's been the odd broken bone, never what I would call a disaster" (75), said a teacher who later told one narrative about a broken leg and another about a child breaking a leg falling over his own feet. Others are clear that falls resulting in concussion (79,87,123,126) are definitely disasters.

Not surprisingly, some teachers have "a real dread of someone hurting themselves" (57). Safety consciousness is especially evident in PE: "Kids get away with knocks all the time, but it makes you think about it" (16). "The thing I'm very conscious of is letting the children work on the PE apparatus" (41). Some consider themselves lucky not to have faced such accidents, "I've been fortunate in that I haven't been involved in any" (102). They "touch wood" (77) that they haven't seen any. Others who have been involved learn from the incident. "I realized afterwards that what I'd asked him to do was dangerous in the circumstances. I've never done it since" (67). Teachers seem to be conscious of safety not only for the sakes of the children, but also for their own sakes to avoid repercussions from parents. For example, "Although it wasn't negligence on my part, if the parent had been awkward it could have been a bit unpleasant for me" (79) and "I did feel afterwards, 'That's my fault'. His mother was quite happy about it. She said, 'Oh well, if he hadn't done it in school, he would have done it outside'" (67).

Six teachers reported having to cope with sudden death. The mother of one child committed suicide (123),

the mother of another was murdered (29), with consequential emotional outbursts in the classroom. A six-year old living opposite the school died of leukemia (101) and an eight-year old had a heart attack in school and died (36). Another child 'with a bad heart' died after a PE lesson (29). One boy hanged himself in the school changing rooms, following protracted bullying (57). These teachers had presumably given emotional support to the other young children in these classes to help them to come to terms with death, besides having to do so themselves.

It is difficult to listen to a series of Disaster narratives without feeling that primary teachers often have to cope with a range of physical and emotional situations which are rarely appreciated by those outside teaching.

#### I.v. Organization and Planning

Twenty one teachers interpreted 'disaster' in terms of things going wrong with organization and planning. "You do have disasters, various things you plan don't go, but then that's if your plan is wrong"(22). They told of classroom organization 'not working out' (4,18,53), and of attempts at organizing groups (26), team-teaching (74), or integrated days (42,117) which failed. In Maths, the reported disasters involved attempts at grouping children for different ability levels (5,38,92). Science was simply 'disorganized' (54), but art and craft sessions were described by 5 tellers as having 'chaotic organization' (18,35,76,104,119) and so were school

dinners (22) . Some lessons were 'abandoned' as 'inappropriate'(47). On school trips disasters meant motorway delays (25) and coaches catching fire (25). Most of the classroom examples were admittedly within teachers' control and they said or implied that they had learnt from them (see below).

Eleven Disaster narratives seemed to involve planning or the choice of teaching methods and approaches. There were accounts of wrong approaches to reading (128) and wrong methods in writing (6,112) and wrong choices of topics (96). Further narratives focussed on wrong approaches to particular children (99,122,123) and a difficult probationary year with a class of 40 reception children (70). Six other narratives involved the approach of the whole school. It was a disaster when a teacher taught 'against the philosophy of the school' (19), when an acting head 'deliberately undermined' the head's approach (19), and when a school's approach to 'children with emotional problems' (19) or difficult home backgrounds (114) was wrong. Other narrators told of the disastrous lack of materials (10,14,25).

#### I.vi. Discipline and Control

Thirty three Disaster narratives involved discipline, indicating a broad range of problems. These included 8 descriptions of 'general rowdiness' (9), with 'undisciplined' or 'disruptive' children (24,25,33,118) who whistle and shout (34,56,115). In 3 other cases this was linked to the teacher, who had a wrong relationship with a class (34), was unable to cope (2), or who coped

by sending nearly all the children out (21). In 5 more narratives young children ran home (59,85,119,122,123). In a further 5 narratives, children had emotional outbursts (105), tantrums (13,87), screamed and used foul language (127) or 'went beserk' and 'totally lost control' (55). Other groups of children stole sweets (54) or money (115), or fought (29,48).

Eight children were recalled as using violence against teachers, hitting (16), scuffling (16), brandishing lumps of wood (11), throwing chairs (30,65,119), going for them with a knife (16) or slashing their bicycle tyres (118).

Some Disaster narratives were unclassifiable under the above categories. One involved the need to feed children who were neglected and abused at home (40). Others recalled boys openly playing with their genitals (31) and a mother who ran stark naked down the road to the school as the mayor was due to arrive there (98).

#### I. vii. Teachers and Disasters

It is clear that the majority of the Disaster narratives focussed on children, but there were 9 where the principal character was the teacher. These involved a teacher who got term dates wrong and arrived late (128), one who set off a fire alarm (1) and another who locked herself out of the classroom several times (114). A teacher fainted when a dead bird was brought in by children (56). Two teachers were injured, one with a broken leg (11), and one from 2 gas explosions in science



(10). A head persuaded a particularly difficult pupil 'to play truant for three months' (103). Two assaults on pupils were recounted, where a teacher picked up a child, carried him and 'pinned him to the wall' (11) and another where a child was 'literally thrown against a wall' by a teacher, 'landing in a heap of blood' (103). In most of these cases the teacher was at fault.

In their Evaluations, teachers gave their interpretations and reactions to disasters, particularly to those involving organization and planning. The frequency and universality of the occurrence of disasters were often commented upon and disasters were often linked to 'experience' and the teacher's own learning. This is evident in the following comments from nine teachers. "Everybody has disasters" (43). "Don't we all have disasters? So many, it's a job to think..."(26). "Of course, it happens all the time" (21,121). "All of us would say there are certain lessons we wouldn't take again" (54). "All teachers make mistakes and learn from them" (56). "That's experience, isn't it? You make gaffs" (105). "Obviously you learn by experience, how to organize things, don't you?" (51). "You're always learning as you go along" (117). "You're always learning by experience and another time you would react in a different way" (80). However, one teacher felt that mistakes, experience and learning did not necessarily go together. "You're always feeling you should have handled something differently. I don't know that you always learn by experience because of human nature" (123).

There were differing perspectives about time in

disasters. For some, they occurred early in a career, "In the first year in teaching everything seemed to go wrong. We all make mistakes in our first years of teaching" (41). For others, the awareness of mistakes and the learning from them were not confined to the first years of work. "There's no doubt about it, the longer you go on, the more you realize you learn by your mistakes, and we all make mistakes" (45). "You can have a disaster like that at any stage of your teaching career, things can go wrong and happen, but if you've got experience you know the things to do to start putting it right" (25).

Teachers' comments on disasters reveal that they perceive the need for planning in order to avoid disasters, yet they also perceive the need for variety and flexibility in approach to modify plans to avoid disasters. "Very often you suddenly decide to do a lesson and you haven't really planned it properly and it does fall flat, it doesn't go very well" (7). "You have to try things in different ways and you also have to adjust to the children" (62). "You modify immediately. You don't let a disaster get to a stage where it becomes a major disaster" (37). (See Chapter on Planning)

#### I.viii. Thoughts

Teachers' reported thoughts were sometimes included in the Disaster narratives (See Chapter on Breakthroughs). Where thoughts were mentioned they had an Evaluative function highlighting the main Complicating Action or explicating a Resolution.

"I thought, 'God! What do I do now? They don't

tell you about this at college'(11).

I thought,'Oh dear, I've killed him'. It was all right, but it was frightening at the time (29).

I thought, I'll never do that again. I'll never ever have us doing art at the same time' (35).

I thought,'Well, I'll never do it like that again' (68).

I thought, 'Was that the best thing to do in that situation?' (23).

I think, 'Well,that didn't go as well as it should have done. I should have done this' (11).

You think, 'Huh, what did I do wrong?' (14).

You always look back and think,'Well, I could have done this differently' (51).

You think,'Oh, that could have gone better. We'll do it another way' (66).

You think, I could have handled that situation better, tackled it in a different way' (17).

It is not clear that the tellers actually thought these things. Perhaps they were later reflections which were inserted retrospectively into the story for narrative effect. Yet when the thoughts are listed it is apparent that many are quite similar, which supports the notion of common perspectives on disasters held by primary teachers. If such thought were indeed in their minds at the time, this would indicate that teachers reflect on pupils' safety, on organization and planning

and on the quality of learning situations in the classroom. However, primary classrooms are busy places and teachers may not be in a position to consolidate such reflection towards improving practice. This was confirmed by one teacher, "In retrospect, you think you haven't done it well enough. There are various things I know I won't do quite that way next time but on the other hand there are various pressures and you think, 'Oh hell, we do that and be done with it', because you haven't got time to go into it more thoroughly' "(85).

#### II i. Humour

Humour springing from teacher-pupil relationships was said by Waller (1932 p.349) to be "a topic of the first importance", yet only recently has serious consideration been given to it. Existing studies are oriented to secondary schools. Stebbins (1980) outlined a framework for considering classroom humour in terms of aggression against others (conflict), preventing unwanted behaviour (control), establishing greater solidarity (consensus), social comic relief and unintentional humour. Examples of these are likely to be shared in the staffroom where "It is through laughter that teachers neutralize the alienating effects of institutionalization" (Woods 1979 p.211) and take part in a creative growth experience involving fondness and affection for pupils (p.215). Humour in the staffroom reduces fatigue, lessens strain and strengthens staff solidarity (Woods 1983). Laughter is "the catharsis that heals social ambiguity" while simultaneously celebrating

group cohesion (Walker and Goodson 1977 p.213).

The 168 Humourous narratives told by the sample teachers can be classified as being about situations, disasters, amusing remarks and howlers, and actions. This is shown with the numbers of narratives in each group in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1

Narratives about Humour

| type                     | no.of narratives |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| verbal humour<br>(total) | 86               |
| amusing remarks          | 62               |
| actions                  | 52               |
| disasters                | 35               |
| howlers - written        | 11               |
| remarks by teacher       | 8                |
| situations               | 7                |
| howlers - spoken         | 5                |

In this classification there are overlaps between disasters and other classes. Overwhelmingly the narratives centre on children, with the exception of the 8 remarks made by teachers and a few of the humourous disaster narratives. The vast majority fall into Stebbins' (1980) category of unintentional humour, and are verbal. The other categories mentioned by Stebbins may be rare in British primary classrooms or, at any rate, they seem to be rarely narrated by teachers. Below, particular attention will be paid to the Disaster narratives, which clearly link with the previous section, and to the Humourous Remarks and Howlers, since this type of humour seems to be particularly characteristic of teachers of young children.

In telling these narratives, 35 teachers stress that humourous occurrences occur in quantity and with great

frequency in their classrooms. Indeed, the following 39 comments are themselves so frequent and repetitive that they appear to be opening formulae for Humorous narratives. "There are lots of funny things that happen" (23,36,56,78,95). "Lots of funny things, so many good laughs" (45). "I've had loads of laughs" (3). "I've had lots of laughs in teaching" (75). "We've had an awful lot of laughs" (86). "There are lots of small incidents" (10,16). "There are so many incidents I've been curled up with laughing" (111). "There's a tremendous amount of funny things" (14). "There are many, many funny things" (112). "There have been so many funny things" (47,68,73,79). "So many funny incidents" (55,101,103). "There must be dozens and dozens of them" (62). "You get hundreds in a day" (76). "Funny things are happening every day" (5,30,49,76,122). "There are lots of little things that amuse you every day" (72). "I get loads and loads of examples" (18). "Humorous things happen all the time" (22,48,49). "There's always humorous things happening all the time" (13). "Funny things seem to happen all the time" (68,79). "One is smiling a lot, all the time" (43). "Every day is funny, isn't it?" (51). "It's a laugh a minute, really" (97). Amid this flood of emphasis of the frequency of funny moments in primary teaching there was only one dissenting voice, which still recognized humour with children. "You don't get many funny things happening in teaching, do you? Because of my age [55+ years], I take it as a serious occupation, although I have a sense of humour with the children" (93).

## II.ii. Some Examples of Humorous Narratives

### N32

- A "I've got quite a nice bunch at the moment.  
They've got a very nice sense of humour
- O But one...I think it was one day last term
- C I put a row of fossils out, animal fossils, and  
I put "120 million years old"
- R and as one of the kids walked by he started  
[sings] "Happy Birthday to you"
- E That's the sort of sense of humour they've got,  
em, it just sort of kills me, it kills me."  
(14)

The Abstract comments on this teacher's class and their sense of humour which the narrative will exemplify. The Orientation, which might include the first utterance also, singles out the time reference, "one day last term". This does not seem to affect the immediate interpretation of this narrative from the hearer's point of view, but it still seems to have three functions. It does, of course, signal an up-coming narrative. Also giving the time reference may aid the teller's visualization and recall. Thirdly, a recent time reference may impress the listener with the freshness of the anecdote. Conversely, a distant time reference might be used when the speaker wishes to convey remoteness, as in Disaster narratives when the more remote the time the more the speaker can feel diminished responsibility now, since he has presumably changed meantime. Here, the Complication shows the teacher putting out a display of fossils with the notice about their age, a standard

primary teaching procedure. The Resolution is performed as the narrator sings in imitation of the child's Happy Birthday song. The humour seems to lie in the sudden shift of viewpoint for the teacher and the verbal incongruity. The Evaluation is that the narrative demonstrates the children's humour, which the teller obviously enjoys as part of the teacher-pupil relationship. The teller has given more than verbal appreciation of their humour. Through narrative performance he has imitated it. The teacher imitates the child, and gives him credit thereby.

N33 "A funny thing a couple of days ago, a child came up and said, "Can I have pra?" This was for his spelling book, you see. "Pra?", I said, "Pra?" "Yes, pra...pra." "What?" "Pra, yes, pra." "Well, what sentence do you want it in?" "Well, you know, fifty miles pra." Oh dear, oh dear..." (20)

The Orientation here signals a Humorous narrative and gives a brief time and character indication. The Complication shows the pupil's spelling enquiry followed by the two questioning repeats of the teacher and the two repetitions of the desired word for spelling. This is extended by another question from the teacher and the double affirmation from the child. Finally the puzzled and frustrated teacher (to judge by his tone of voice on tape) resorts to the context question, "What sentence do you want it in?" The Resolution comes with the pupil's phrase and the implied realization from the teacher that



the boy is talking about m.p.h. The exclamatory Evaluation was accompanied by smiles and head nodding, indicating amazement at the 'pra' pronunciation and a 'why-didn't-I-get-it-earlier' reaction. The reported dialogue is notable for 7 turns, the last 5 of which have no reporting verb and give an extended performed dialogue with strong mimesis. Such dialogue strongly conveys a 'this is how it was' impression. Since a large number of teachers' narratives contain such dialogues it can be concluded that the tellers were using dialogue as a narrative device to convey a 'this is how teaching is' impression. The build-up through dialogue reinforces the Evaluation of puzzlement. Children can often surprise teachers with their unwitting use of language.

N34 "The teacher who is taking the assembly at the end of the assembly asks a child to hold the door for everybody to go out. So this particular day out of the children of every single class, not just the big assembly or the small assembly, but out of the whole school, she said, "Anthony, would you go and hold the door open for everybody please?" And he got up very slowly like this [demonstrates] and got up very carefully and walked very bow-legged like this [further demonstration] and we all wondered what had happened for a minute and he had tied his shoe laces together and he couldn't move. You see, he was so taken unawares....out of the whole class, out of the

whole school, Rosemary should say to him...she didn't know, she had no idea...We laughed for weeks and even now I sit here and think of that. I don't think the other children really noticed, but we did. I thought he'd got dirty pants, someone else thought he'd done something else. Oh, it was hilarious. I mean, it really was, and if you say anything now about Anthony Hume they'll say, "Oh,yes..." you know. That was funny.

In N34 the Orientation gives sufficient background information about the procedure for leaving assembly for the incident to be understood. The teller takes pains to emphasize that the whole school was gathered. That this first audience did not notice Anthony's shoes enhances the telling for the later narrative audience: only the teachers noticed. In the Complication the teacher asks Anthony to open the door with the Result that he does so, but slowly and with difficulty. The manner of this was demonstrated by the teller standing up and miming. The further Complication heightens tension, where the staff ('we') wondered what had happened. The Resolution of their realization that his shoelaces were tied, and the explication that he was taken unawares is followed by a return to the emphasis that the whole school was there, which underlines the element of chance. The Evaluation shows the effect on the staff. Apparently there was no effect on the children. The teachers' speculations about why the child was walking strangely and their hilarity were obviously shared later on a number of occasions as a

staffroom saga. The Evaluation emphasizes the element of chance, the unlikelihood of choosing a child with tied laces, and the teachers' reaction to the event. There is no further focus on the child. This is confirmed by the coda ("If you say anything now...") which reinforces the collective memorability of that moment for the staff.

#### II.iii. Humourous Disasters

Teachers often see the funny side of what are otherwise disastrous situations. This is evident from the fact that 35 narratives told in response to the interview question about Humour could equally well have been told as Disasters for their similar content. A listing of the Complications reinforces the earlier picture of the enormous variety of situations faced by primary teachers. It will also give examples of what primary teachers find funny enough to share. Given the importance that these teachers put on humour, it seems reasonable to suggest that this is a key element of primary teachers' culture.

The teachers told of various chases and pursuits. A child attacked a head teacher and 'went absolutely haywire' (9). Another threatened suicide by jumping from a high window and a teacher chased him down the drive (40). A third, dressed in a monkey suit, was chased by teachers down the street (40). Another young child ran home and locked himself screaming in the house, leaving his teacher in embarrassment shouting through the letterbox (34). Yet another leaped off a roof, pursued by a teacher watched by the assembled staff from the staffroom window (21).

Other Humourous narratives consisted of a variety of minor accidents and injuries, amounting to slapstick humour. A blackboard fell on a teacher's head (79), a teacher suddenly developed a stiff neck while writing on the board (74), and teachers fell to the floor when chairs collapsed (19,59,67). A teacher lit birthday candles and set the waste paper bin on fire (92). Another made a complaining child walk backwards and forwards for a whole PE lesson, later to discover the child had a broken leg (16). Also considered funny were the child who put a gardening fork through his boot (82), the one who trod on a wasps' nest amid frantic screaming (73), the one who got stuck in a chair (96) and the one wedged in the toilet (121). Another child sat on a drawing pin to see if it would hurt (84), while another sat on a pile of chewing gum (125). Three children dressed in a dragon costume fell off a stage during a play performance and fell into the Chief Education Officer's lap (106).

Teachers also recounted difficult or embarrassing situations, such as two mothers fighting in the classroom, pulling hair and scratching faces (81). A teacher and a class of children were trapped in a mobile classroom when the door handle came off (58). A young child was found intently reading a lavishly illustrated 'sex book' (115), another ran naked from the swimming baths into a snow-covered street (50). A child's glass eye fell out, to the surprise of teachers who were unaware of its existence: "I've lost me eye" (66). Teachers further told of a child 'trying to piddle undisturbed' in the middle of a story group (124) and in

the middle of the performance of the school play : "Miss, I've wet myself" (47). Teacher's mistakes could also be laughed at, "The funny things are the things where you're forced to laugh at yourself in teaching" (21). For example, there was a teacher who tipped blue paint all over herself, "She looked just as if she was dressed in woad" (98), one who inadvertently swore loudly in front of a class (20) and the teacher and headteacher who separately put school reports into the wrong envelopes (40).

Teachers' reactions to such events in Evaluations showed how the teachers' perception of humour was sometimes tinged with other feelings. "We laughed about that afterwards, but it could have been serious" (50). "A situation like that is amusing, but it's also a bit frightening" (12). "That amused me, but it's rather sad really, in a way" (29). "It wasn't very funny at the time, but looking back I can't help but laugh" (11). "That's sadistic really, isn't it? Sadistic pleasure" (16). "That was quite amusing really, even at the time I saw a funny side, even though I'd been made a monkey of" (21).

#### II.iv. Verbal Humour

The major category of the teachers' Humorous narratives was verbal humour, with 86 examples: 62 narratives about children's humorous remarks, 11 about their written howlers, 5 based on verbal howlers (not easily distinguished from humorous remarks) and 8 concerning remarks made by teachers.

The following statements from Orientations or

Evaluations indicate how 16 teachers readily identified this verbal aspect. All such comments are spontaneous in that teachers were not asked probing follow-up questions. "The funniest things are the things the children say" (113). "I find the things they say are more funny than actual incidents "(104). "With small children it's what they say to you. They just come up with funny bits of conversation all the time" (65). "Every day they come and tell you something that's funny" (5). (Similarly 6,24,37,38,39,49,64,88,111,113,114,115.) Sometimes the humour depended upon knowing the individual child. "It's particular children that make you smile, rather than an instance, isn't it? Somebody else can say the same thing and it's not funny" (24). "That sort of thing is quite funny when you know the child and hear the child come out with it" (111). "We laughed because it was funny for us, knowing the child" (54). In this sense, and because the topics of these Humourous narratives are overwhelmingly about children, the teachers' humour seems child-centred.

Howlers were separately identified by another 4 teachers. "Some of the funniest things are the howlers that they make" (43). "Some of the best laughs in teaching come from their creative writing, when you've got to see it to appreciate it" (45). "It's some of the word-play" (20). "Some of the things the children write in their books" (71). (Similarly 6,88,113)

The following examples of children's remarks were certainly considered funny by the teachers who narrated them. In print, read by those who do not know the children, they may appear less humourous, though no less

interesting for the insights into teachers' perspectives that they offer. The remarks are children's. They had sufficient impact on the teacher to be recalled and cited later, as one teacher to another. Thus they reveal something about children, seen through teachers' eyes. It may be supposed that none of these particular remarks were funny for the children. "One of the boys said, 'Hey lady' [to a dinner lady] and another said, 'That's not a lady that's a teacher'" (63). "My grandad says they d dn't have lovely teachers like you when he was young. He thinks you're a lovely young lady. I always thought you were old" (64). "Why do your teeth fall out?" [teacher's false teeth](69). "I'm not telling lies. You see, I don't tell lies, I'm a Roman Catholic" (115). "I said, 'Pick up that piece of string and put it in the waste paper basket, will you?' and he said, 'Mrs John, I can't because it's too long'" (2). "A child spilled some ink. He said, 'I'll go and fetch a brush'"(24).

Inevitably some of these remarks reflected aspects of children's language development, though none of the teachers gave any mention of this. *But if children were reported to be struggling to understand adults, the reverse was also the case.* "She said she saw some animals in Richmond Park. I said, 'Were they deer?' 'I don't know. We didn't want to buy any'"(70). "'What did you have for lunch?' 'Pineapple'. 'Pineapple?' 'No, not pineapple, pine apple.' In the end it turned out to be pie 'n apple" (111). "'Will you write in my dictionary 'Mountain Wrist?' [Mount Everest] (113). "This child was looking at the menu. 'Oh, I do like gladioli'" [ravioli] (115).

Some other examples reflected what the teachers saw as 'advanced language', relative to the age of the child in the narrative. A five-year old to a tired teacher, helping with a stuck zip, "I am rather a liability sometimes" (25). A little boy had reluctantly performed a country dance with girls in front of parents. "When they came back into the classroom afterwards he said, 'Oh Miss' I was so embarrassed.' A lovely little phrase" (47). Some of the children's comments were interpreted by tellers as revealing something of children's homes or home language. (See Chapter on Parents) "Does basket rhyme with bastard?" (42). "'Your parents don't use bad language at home do they?' 'Yes, they bloody well do'" (29). "Miss, has your daddy got those books at home with women's bottoms sticking out like that [demonstrates]?" (91). A four-year old looking at a collage of a milk float with rolled-up paper milk bottles, 'Ere, what are they?' 'They're milk bottles.' 'Well, bugger me, I thought they were fags'" (112).

Examples of verbal humour in children's writing quoted by teachers in narratives included: "A plumber is a man who picks plumbs" (105), "A baby lion is a lion cube" (117), "James Brindley was an engineer who invented strong men called navvies" (88), and a child's British airline poster "Fly Birth Airways" (117).

## II.v. Discussion

Such vignettes seemed to be prized examples to be valued and shared. Six teachers specifically mentioned in their narratives how they tell Humorous narratives in



the staffroom or at home. "You come into the staffroom and you say, "Oh, So-and-so has said...." (72). "I had the staff laughing about that" (87). "In the staffroom at lunchtimes teachers talk very often. You hear about some lads and girls and their misdemeanours and there's things we laugh about" (16). "Lots of things that I relate to my family when I get home" (45). "Every day you come home with something that happened" (13). "Every night I go home and say something funny that has happened" (39). Such crucial comments confirm that Humorous narratives are told by many teachers in everyday contexts. The incidents and sayings are clearly sufficiently memorable to be recounted.

However, in teachers' memory it appears that there are opposing tendencies with regard to humorous incidents. They are transient yet enduring. Nine teachers commented in the Codas of their narratives on the memorability of what they had recounted. "I've always remembered that" (44,72), "That I'll never forget" (84,112), "These are the sorts of things that stick out in your mind" (85,101,104), "It is one of the most memorable moments of my short teaching career" (9). One reason why these incidents are remembered may be precisely because they are narrated. The process of narrating, especially through repeated recountings, fixes in memory.

Such incidents and remarks which form the basis of Humorous narratives may also be transient and fragile in memory. Five teachers commented on this point. "The thing is only funny at the particular time that it happened"

(80). "They're funny at the time but you tend to forget them" (23). The reason for this does not seem to be because the humour is ephemeral, but rather because of the pressures and complexities of teaching. "We laugh and then you move on to something else" (50). "I don't tend to remember things very long because something else has come along by then" (79). "You take them in your day and have a laugh and smile and then they have to be passed off because there's so much more to get on with" (37). If humour from children is one of the sources of satisfaction in primary teaching, as seems to be the case, then there is not much time to enjoy it. For the most experienced, humorous moments may become the norm, "There are so many of them and they come and go. After a time you put it out of your mind. You tend to regard even the funniest things as being part of the normal occurrences" (16).

Even if these humorous anecdotes, and the funny incidents they celebrate, seem transient in memory and trivial to the outsider, there is no doubt about their importance for tellers. The incidents which are recalled are remembered well. Arguably they form an important part of teachers' cultural and cognitive professional framework, that teaching can be fun because children are funny. The necessity for this humour is underlined by some teachers in Evaluations, "You've got to have a really good sense of humour" (1,68), "With teaching, if you haven't got a sense of humour, you've had it. You've got to see the funny side of it" (86). "It relieves the stress" (128).

The teachers' sense of humour is linked not only with the teachers' enjoyment of work, but with children's enjoyment and learning. "I thoroughly enjoy my job and I find lots of things I laugh at" (104). "I always try to create a bit of a laugh, at least once a day. Very often at the end of the year, they enjoyed the Maths lessons the most and I ask them why and it's because we always had a giggle" (53). "Every day must have its humour, otherwise the children don't enjoy it and you don't enjoy it" (25). Laughing and joking makes 'a good day' apparently at least equal in importance to teachers as children 'doing good work'. "It's the laughing and joking you can have. You can sort of think to yourself, "Yes, that was a good day, we had a good laugh in that lesson, but they still did some work" (119).

This sharing of humour with children is frequently stressed in the Evaluation sections of the sample teachers' narratives. In these instances it is not "I" the teacher, but "we", the teacher and children together who laugh. "A child may say something and we all share the humour of it" (60). "I enjoy teaching and we can laugh a lot during the day, fortunately" (71). "It's possible to have a lot of fun with children" (75). "I feel I've had a bad day if there hasn't been something to giggle about, I mean, with the children, not at them" (112). "If children find humour in the situation as well it makes it all the more funny" (18). "It was funny because the children thought it was funny" (54). "Life often is funny in school, very funny, and you know, we all have a good laugh together" (48). To have a sense of

humour is held to be an essential quality in teaching. Not to have this quality is 'the worst fault of all', which, however, can apparently be overcome, given time. One narrator described a colleague, "He had the worst fault of all and that is that he took himself seriously. I think this is fatal and he has changed amazingly. He has, now, the most marvellous sense of humour. It was a gradual process" (14).

It can be suggested that humour in the classroom, as seen here through teachers' narrative perspectives, links disaster and humour via coping strategies. To see the funny side of a disaster is a coping strategy for teachers. To laugh together in the classroom is also a coping strategy, for both pupils and teachers (Pollard 1985 p.115). Laughter also meets the need of both for enjoyment. Narrating the humorous side of the tragi-comic dimension of teaching is necessary for survival.

The Disaster narratives here reveal the enormous range of unexpected situations that primary teachers often face. These involve accidents, mistakes and unforeseen incidents with planning and organization, and problems with discipline. The stressful, dangerous and unpredictable aspects of teachers' work are apparent. Yet the Humorous narratives show that teachers find a funny side to this. Major sources of enjoyment for teachers are the children's saying and doings, which for adults can be a frequent and constant source of amusement, small peaks throughout the day which are valued by teachers. This humour is part of what makes teaching worthwhile. This is

as unpredictable and varied as the disasters are. While some funny anecdotes are shared for laughs between teachers in the staffroom, a great deal of the humour is shared between the teacher and the children in the classroom first. This can be an important aspect of a 'nice' relationship. Both Disaster and Humorous narratives are largely centred on children. They usually reveal teachers' caring attitudes and a sharing of enjoyment with children where possible. If primary teaching is shown in teachers' narratives to be complex difficult and frustrating, it is also shown to be full of variety. This variety has both serious and funny elements, both of which seem to be important in teachers' perspectives.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

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AWKWARD PARENTS

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the 126 narratives about parents told by 83 teachers in the sample as part of their responses to the sixth interview question, "Have you ever had any trouble with parents?" A majority of the teachers replied that they got on well with most parents and that parents were appreciative and supportive of work done in schools. They then went on to give what might be called Awkward Parent narratives (eg. 28, 70, 72, 81, 84, 121). This analysis focusses on complaints, misunderstandings and exaggerations. It highlights differences between parents' and teachers' perspectives. First, a brief consideration of research on such perspectives is given.

I. Parents' and Teachers' Perspectives

Since the 1960's there has been widespread awareness of the close relationship between children's home environment and educational progress at school (McGeeney 1969 p.1; Sharrock 1970 p.34, 37; Lynch and Pimlott 1976 p.xii). A major component of this perceived relationship is parental interest and attitude, emphasized in the Plowden report (1967 p.181). Some researchers have found primary teachers using a 'social pathology perspective': that home background is a determinant of pupils' school achievement and that problems at school can be explained

by family violence, parental divorce or separation, parental unemployment or lack of child care at home (Sharp and Green 1976, King 1978, O'Sullivan 1980). Thus 90% of primary teachers agree that it is necessary for them to know the home backgrounds and personal circumstances of pupils (Bennett, 1976 p.68). However the proportion of parents who feel they need to know about school circumstances is likely to be much lower. Whereas teachers consider that it is part of their job to know something of the parental situation and home background, the reverse cannot be said for parents. A number of investigators have drawn attention to asymmetries in parents' and teachers' perceptions. Teachers often see the causes of both behavioural/emotional and discipline problems as being located in the home (Croll and Moses 1988 p.46; Tizard et al. 1988 pp.130-132). They see the family and parental encouragement as being major influences on educational success, while parents tend to believe that the school or teacher is the more important factor (Tizard et al. 1988 pp. 82-83). There is some recognition of the truth of Waller's statement that parents and teachers "are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfort of the other" (1932 p.68) and that conflict is "natural and inevitable" (p.69). This is, as Taylor puts it, because of "differences in role disposition built into parental and teaching functions" (1972 p.293). While teachers do strive to teach individuals, their role imposes a more objective, achievement-oriented approach which is quite different to parents' subjective acceptance of their children

irrespective of standards. Where teachers emphasize social justice, parents look after the welfare of their own family members. When they meet teachers, some parents may feel ill at ease with an expert in surroundings which remind them of their own schooling and roles as children (Green 1968, Hinds 1976). Teachers, as highly educated trained professionals, have manifestly been successful at education. The same cannot be said of many parents. Teachers may be anxious to defend this hard-won professional status against erosion by parental 'interference' (Cyster et al. 1979). Some parents, especially single or younger parents, may lack confidence in the presence of teachers. On the other hand, some younger teachers who are not themselves parents may lack confidence faced with those parents who are older, more experienced with children, even perhaps more experienced in dealing with teachers than they are in dealing with parents. Parents have known their children for years. Teachers may have worked with those same children for only a few months.

Parents' and teachers' assymmetrical perceptions of children and of each other could lead to conflict or misunderstanding as exemplified below.

II. Some Examples of Narratives about Parents

N35

- O "There was one particular lady who used to come in every day and I got to know all sorts of personal things about her and I tried to talk in a neighbourly kind of way to her but towards the

end of last year

C when she was rushing into my classroom at a minute past a quarter to four, saying, "I've got the gas man coming and I've got two children to look after. Why aren't they out?"

R/E I just turned and said "I have 36 children to look after, Mrs So and So and would you please like to wait outside"

E Tricky, quite difficult." (41)

Several perspectives are evident here. In the Orientation the teller emphasizes her daily contact with the parent which has led to some knowledge of the child's home. The teacher has tried to give advice and show a supportive attitude "in a neighbourly kind of way". The teacher presents herself as competent at parental relations: meeting parents, 'knowing' the home, being friendly, listening, showing support, all of which can be justified as being in the child's interest. In the Complication, movement, time and territory are emphasized. The parent 'rushed' in, presumably interrupting any leave-taking, messages, *story endings* or whatever was taking place. Instead of waiting outside as the teller requests later, she comes in, into 'my' classroom, overstepping expected spatial limits. School finishing time is at 3.45 p.m. and the teacher clearly considers it reasonable to ask parents to wait a minute beyond this time if necessary. This parent is heard, to judge by the teller's abrupt tone of voice, as demanding, rather than enquiring, "Why aren't they out?" The greatest difference in perspectives is encapsulated by

the Evaluation: where the parent has one or two children to look after, the teacher is concerned with 36. This difference in numerical perspective, with its implications concerning management, organization, justice, equality, and coping occurs in many narratives. The parent has overstepped limits of time and space and failed to appreciate the difficulties of dealing with such a number of children in the class. The teachers' narrative makes these points and so presumably the teacher understood them at the time, but given the presence of the children couldn't explain them then.

N36

O "Yesterday I arrived at 20 to 9 and one of the mothers meets me the moment I get out of the car, you know,

C about something that happened last Friday

E a nice way to start off, you know,

C sort of, one of these things, she wanted to complain about one of the dinner ladies, because they supervise them at lunchtime and she said, 'The dinner lady was supposed to be looking after them at lunchtime and her daughter's dress got torn and why wasn't something done about it' etcetera

E and I'm supposed to sort all this out at 20 to 9 in the morning

R anyway I pacified her quite happily and soon sorted that out." (57)

The Orientation gives the unusual time to see a parent, before the teacher has set foot in school,

off". A problem from Friday greets her before the school day on Monday morning. The Complication shows the problem to be a dress torn during lunchtime, supervised by non-teaching staff, ie. ostensibly neither a 'teaching' problem nor something for which the teacher could be held responsible. The perspective is that parents complain about social or welfare aspects of child-care, and not always about academic issues. The second part of the Evaluation, "I'm supposed to sort all this out at 20 to 9 in the morning" stresses the unreasonableness of parental demands and timing and probably implies a lack of parental appreciation of the teacher's job. The Resolution shows the teller's competence at 'sorting it out'.

N37

- A "I can remember one particular incident
E which I think is astonishing
A but it does sum up, really, the attitude of
these people who have been brought up in London,
they are very insecure,
O and this child used dreadful language, *four*
letter words,
C and it was reported to me and
O I've been cracking down on this language in the
playground although it's nearly impossible to
stop
C so I thought, 'Well this boy's mother works in
the dining room' and I thought 'She's all right
and she's obviously concerned' that if he was my
son I wouldn't want him to swear like that so I

just happened to say to her, 'Do you know that your son is using some bad language in the playground?'

E and, Gor Blimey,

R/E her reaction was extreme, hysterical, right in the middle of the dining room and she went screaming off, telling everybody that I'd been accusing her of training her kid to use bad language, all sorts of things, but what was even worse, she wrote to the Office complaining about my attitude to the kid and the whole thing became a huge mountain of trouble, letters backwards and forwards to the office complaining about my attitude to the kid

E and all I was trying to do was to be helpful. She assumed straight away -- and I'd never said this but she jumped straight away and said, 'Are you saying...?' that he had heard these words at home, that's what she said. I'd never said anything of the sort. Then she used that in her letters.

Coda I learned a lesson from that incident

O and the other day he was caught by another teacher

C shouting racist things to coloured kids

R but I daren't go and tell her now. So what do you do?

E Here we go again. But it's an extraordinary situation. Most parents are mature and would say 'Oh yes, thanks for telling me', but she was the

opposite". (106)

The Abstract of N37 indicates that the speaker is illustrating the insecurity of parents from a development area, many of whom originate from London and who are predominantly regarded as being 'problem' families. The Orientation gives the background information that the teller, a deputy head, is 'cracking down' on bad language while recognizing the impossibility of actually stopping it. This is presumably seen as part of social and moral education, rather than as language development. The Complication indicates the teller's perspective of having established a good relationship previously with the dinner lady/parent ("She's all right"), the assumption that she would share his attitude to playground swearing, at least as it involved her child ("She's obviously concerned"), and his sympathetic identification with the parent role ("if he was my son..."). The teller's perspectives and assumptions here are sufficiently strong for him not to anticipate any trouble -- the whole incident is 'astonishing' and he 'just happened' to mention it to the parent, as if in passing. There is an ironic element in the teller's exclamation, 'Gor Blimey', which was presumably not expressed at the time of occurrence. The parent's reaction is heavily emphasized as extreme hysteria, followed by 'a huge mountain of trouble' of letters of complaint which, he feels, misrepresented the situation. Instead of appreciating his helpful remark with the expected 'maturity', she shows great 'insecurity' by overreacting to what she sees as the accusation that the

bad language comes from home. Parent narratives indicate that many teachers would probably believe this to be the case, though they would hardly say so to parents. The narrative carries the implied message of caution when trying to help parents because some are insecure and overreact, which can cause 'a mountain of trouble'. The teller now dares not mention the second incident of racist remarks to the parent, although arguably they have more serious implications for social and moral education. The general importance of such troubles with parents is indicated in the Coda. Teacher's 'learn lessons' of caution from the extreme unpredictable reactions of a minority of parents.

N38

- A "You always get one or two difficult parents, I had one who came roaring in one day
- O The children had been out at lunchtime on the playground and it had started to rain
- O/E and trying to get three hundred children into the building is not an easy process
- O and this lady happened to be walking through, as, of course, they do, saw that her son was still out in the rain. Her son, of course, hadn't taken any notice about coming in
- C and came sort of storming in and really went hammer and tongs with the dinner ladies whereupon I interrupted and asked if I could help
- O of course she didn't know who I was
- C and er she blew me out and I said, 'Well, I'm

very sorry. We are getting the children in and it's very difficult to get them all in' and she sort of turned on me and said, 'Well, who do you think you are?' I just said 'I'm Mrs Peacock and I'm the deputy head', and she just told me I was disgusting and marched off, you see,

O but she was a very irate sort of lady

R but she came back the following day and apologized

E but some of them do get a bit like that but she came back and apologized

Coda and our relationship was fine after that, you know, there was no animosity." (34)

Again, in this narrative the crux lies in differences in perspectives between parents and teachers. The parent focusses her interest on her son who is apparently getting wet while adults present seem to ignore him in the playground. The teacher's focus is on three hundred children and on organizing an orderly entry into school. The parent is seen as one of the 'difficult parents' of the Abstract. In the Orientation she 'happened to be walking through, as, of course, they do' ie. she is there by chance, not by appointment, and is walking through the playground by unacknowledged privilege rather than by right. This is implied by the first 'of course', while the second implies that the boy is at fault for not following instructions about coming in. The parent's action is characterized by metaphors of violent and noisy movement: she came 'roaring' and storming in' and 'went hammer and tongs' in argument with

the dinner ladies. As recounted, the teller keeps calm and politely asks if she can help, for which she gets 'blown out'. This is another example of the teacher who tries to help and receives the brunt of a parent's anger. Still calmly, as conveyed in the tone of voice in the telling, she explains the difficulty. This is followed by the over-assumption of rights of enquiry by the parent, "who do you think you are", an enquiry more appropriate to the teller rather than the uninvited visitor. The parent is portrayed as usurping teachers' rights. The teller then introduces herself and mentions her role as deputy head, which should have clinched the argument. However the 'very irate' parent tells her she is disgusting and marches off. As told, the right to receive apologies lies with the teacher and the parent is reported as duly apologizing the following day. Although the relationship 'was fine after that' and 'there was no animosity', nevertheless the incident has been remembered by the teller as exemplifying a 'difficult parent'.

In the Awkward Parent narratives as a whole there are common elements. Parents are 'awkward', but this depends to some extent on the social nature of the area; the most common problems are parental complaints and parents' misunderstandings and exaggerations. The differences in parents' and teachers' perspectives is partly a question of numbers, where parents' interest lies in one or two children, that of the teacher includes a whole class. The headteacher is frequently involved in problem situations and develops key strategies to deal with them. As far as possible problems are 'sorted out', usually by talking it

over or explaining the teacher's situation and role, after which parents sometimes apologize. These common elements will be considered in turn.

III. Awkward Parents

Trouble with parents means that parents are most commonly 'awkward' in narrative Abstracts or Evaluations. "You get your awkward ones" (126), "a few awkward parents" (78), "the odd one or two" (76), "very awkward" (44) or "a bit awkward" (45), or at least "awkward moments" (89, 97). "Not a great deal of aggression, just awkwardness" (34). "One does have awkward parents, they stand out in your mind" (54). "You always get one or two awkward parents, no matter what the area" (128). "Nobody gets through teaching without having awkward parents" (66). Those teachers who have not had 'awkward' or 'stroppy' (63, 85) parents consider themselves 'fortunate' (60) or they 'touch wood' (22, 94) and are well aware of the kinds of problems which arise for others, "I don't think I've had any really stroppy parents, not judging from what I've heard other teachers say" (117). Immediate reasons for awkwardness are parents' unpredictability and, in common with teachers, human failings. "All the parents that come in can be awkward because you can never predict how they are going to react" (33). "Of course, you get problems, your teachers are only human and your parents are only human" (66).

The nature of this awkwardness may vary, according to tellers' perceptions of the area. In middle class

areas teachers see parental pressure, rivalry and expectations as factors leading to 'awkwardness'. "Some parents put on pressure" (99), "are keen for their children to get on" (121) "he was under pressure from his parents" (60), "what slight problems there are is because parents are overinvolved and because they are expecting more from their kids" (120). "There's a lot of rivalry between some of these parents" (96). "They want the best for their children and sometimes they get overwrought and heavy-handed" (55). One teacher commented that pressure in a working class area was influenced by the media. "They seem to be influenced by what they've heard on radio and TV about falling standards, they pressurize their kids" (93). Generally, however, pressure and expectations of children from parents were perceived as being lower in working class areas. "We don't have too much parental pressure, it isn't like a middle class area where every child's got to be top of the class" (90). "We don't get a lot of high parental expectations here" (83). "My parents at the moment are basically uninterested, just uninterested" (48). There were no such remarks in middle-class areas. In the working-class areas social, rather than academic, problems were emphasized. "The complaints you have are usually of a social kind, somebody has hit their child or torn their dress" (83). "It's usually nothing to do with the school" (85). "You've got to be very careful, this is a socially deprived area and the parents all live on top of each other" (115). "It's very much a social job that we do as well as teaching, helping them out, following their court

cases and divorces"(33). "Some of them are involved in all sorts of [social] services, there's someone telling them about this and someone advising them about that, and they come to when they're just had enough of these people. Teachers are a group they can perhaps get back at. 'It's my child and I know my child'" (34). This social pressure is construed as an important factor in trouble with parents. "But they've got to be in a desperate state before they will come to school" (85). "We do have quite a lot of trouble here" (43). Headteachers in particular commented on increasing social pressures. "Teachers do get an enormous number of problems and the public never get to hear about them because they're confidential. We often have to get social workers, welfare officers and the police in" (54). "A headteacher's work has become less headteaching, less teaching, and more social work - attending to parents, split families, people who want advice. This is very much increasing and it's time-consuming"(66). Some social problems are also found in middle-class areas, but they are less forcefully and less frequently mentioned (63, 101).

IV. Complaints

Some of the social complaints the parents make are about children's playground squabbles, dinner money and mislaid or torn clothing. These types of complaints were held to be the teachers' responsibility, a fact which they found irksome, time-consuming or insoluble. As reported, such complaints are: one child hitting another

(62, 88), pinching (83) or kicking (80). "Steven ended up kicking Simon and his dad bothered to sit down and write a letter to the head" (37). "So and So's done something to them in the playground. 'I'll send my husband round if this doesn't stop'" (77). Children losing dinner money or confusing dinner arrangements is a second source of complaint (42, 79, 93). A third source is clothing. "Her daughter's dress was torn and why wasn't something done about it " (57). "Her child had its anorak torn, somehow we've supposed to be responsible" (73). Lost shoes (41) and boots (31, 34, 94), usually unlabelled, were sources of complaints for five teachers. "Children lose things. They [parents] think it's your responsibility that no name is in them. It's usually over silly things like that, not over work. To them it isn't small. It's their child and something has happened to him" (23). "After days of searching we finally found these boots and the mother said, 'She does need a new pair, a bigger pair, she's growing out of these'. So all that time, I'd wasted ages and ages, you waste ever such a lot of time in this way" (94). "If a child got clothes with paint or something on it, 'I sent her out this morning very clean and look at her now, she's a mess'. You try and cover them up and everything, but if you're hearing readers and you've got a group doing this and a group doing that and maybe she's painting there... so I think it's more the irate parent coming in rather than 'so and so doesn't read'" (35). Teachers felt that they could not be responsible for every squabble or lost item of clothing. They would rather encourage children's independence,

making children responsible for them, with some educational justification. They were, however, prepared to be firm with parents where the parent's line of argument was contrary to school policy. "It was the social side... his boy had been hit, he [father] was quite rude and abusive, you know, he was saying that he would encourage his son to hit back and fight. I was trying to say that the policy is we don't fight'" (63).

In cases of fights a teacher will naturally separate the children. This action, however, can be grossly misunderstood as in the following example.

N39

A "I picked up one child, I separated two children,

O I think it was in my first year here

A separated two children from fighting

E and they really were... nasty, it was, hair-pulling

C and I picked up one, who was almost hysterical and I had to carry him across the playground into the classroom, and let the other one go home and within ten minutes father was up

O this was about a quarter past four

C 'Oh, I'm going down the Education about you, Mate'

E 'Down the Education' is the er usual one we get

O em I was rather new in school

E and rather sort of... new in this school and rather concerned about my image

C and er I phoned the headmaster who had already

gone home,

R and he came back and em basically said that what I had done was right.

E Dad was annoyed that I had carried the child. I had 'manhandled' him. I had 'picked him up by his arm and swung him round my neck' according er according to the parents." (20)

The teacher's action here has obviously been misunderstood by the father, who presumably accepted the almost-hysterical' child's version at face value without further enquiry. There are three important elements here, of misunderstanding, exaggeration and threatened complaints to higher authority ('the Education [office]'). In this case, the head supports the teacher and since the narrative goes no further, it can be assumed that the head resolves the problem. The teller's concern for his image is also quite evident. These elements will be examined beginning with parental reactions.

V. Parental Reactions

In many narratives the tellers show a common perception of how 'awkward' parents react. Parents are said to be 'irate' (68, 87, 102, 104, 121), 'very aggressive (15, 91, 94) especially with younger teachers, 'quite rude and abusive' (63), 'very abusive' (44), 'really nasty' (59) or 'really vindictive' (90). Storm metaphors are used by nine teachers, who report that parents 'came roaring in' (34, 38), 'came storming in' (34, 54, 121), 'came storming down' (63), 'came storming

up' (84), 'came storming back' (85), 'creating havoc' (101), 'created hell' (33), 'she blew me out' (34), 'ramping and raving away' (33). Others 'started shouting the odds' (12) 'had a go at me' (38), 'harangued me' (33), 'gave one quite a sticky time' (79), 'he'd have the law on me' (102). There is a strong threat of physical violence against the teacher in nine narratives: 'threatened to come and bash my brains in' (120), ' was coming up to school to punch that teacher on the nose' (120), 'was going to wipe the floor with the teacher' (126), 'would have laid hands on me' (43), 'pushed one of the probationary teachers around, literally' (112), 'will make himself felt about the school' (5), 'was so obnoxious and so violent that the head used to keep a stick in his office just in case because he [parent] would come in and literally attack' (112).

Such parents were recalled as phoning (15, 60, 102) with threats and complaints, or more usually writing, particularly to the 'Education Office' (25, 38, 41, 44, 53, 60, 62, 73, 82, 100, 106).

In the Orientation of ten narratives parents are portrayed as 'fussy' or overprotective towards their children. Mothers were characterized as being 'rather overanxious' (72), 'very protective' (89, 115), 'a great fuss pot, basically' (25). There are 'fussy parents who will make fuss about absolutely nothing' (104). 'They'll hover around and it would be much better if they cleared off and let you get on with it' (84). 'Rather a lot of the parents who come in won't let the children grow up, generally these mums can't let go' (37). 'They take a lot

more interest but they're also a lot more possessive. It's a job to get parents to realize that the best thing they can do for their children is to make them independent' (26). 'I think you are very influenced by parents who are over protective and very demanding and you watch your step about what you say to these children because you get repercussions' (89).

VI. Misunderstandings

'Awkward moments' are said to occur through misunderstandings (46, 68, 74). Such misunderstandings between parents and teachers arise from two sources, either from children's 'tales', which parents accept against the teacher's version, or from different expectations of children, where those of parents are 'unrealistic'. The Evaluation in seven narratives stresses that children's tales cause misunderstandings. "Children can mislead parents. They believe their children and get hold of the wrong end of the stick" (106). "She'd been making up tales, that I'd been hitting the children" (125). "It was his own tale which he'd told his mother, you see. As I say, it's usually a misunderstanding, rather than the parents wanting to get at you' (68). "As usual, it was a story that had got sort of garbled, it was a story that had gone home the wrong way round... but it got sorted out. It was a misunderstanding, as usual" (115). "This particular child spent most of his time at home, he was never at school,... this note came, that I'd thumped him in the back... and this is what I was supposed to have done. I

hadn't seen the child for two weeks at all. He just ran off and told this tale" (59). "He [parent] says things like, 'Well, I've questioned my son and he says so-and-so' and I say 'well, I'm sorry, but that's just not true, he's fabricating it'. But I trust my son's judgement' I really object to having a five year old child's story being held against mine, when it comes down to it" (65). "I said to his mother the old stock phrase. 'You promise not to believe what he says about school and I'll promise not to believe what he says about home.'" (82).

When parents believe what their children say without question, however unlikely it seems, teachers may interpret this as demeaning their status as adults and threatening their status as teachers. In these narratives the children, and more particularly the parents, are at fault, never the teacher. Narrative perspectives are that teachers are right.

Different expectations about pupil's achievement or ability also lead to misunderstandings as these Evaluations show. "A few parents think their children are brilliant, when they're not really" (117). "She came in and was horrified at the work he was doing, she had very letter sounds. She couldn't read a thing, she couldn't do this, she couldn't do that. It was just not true... and they'd come in and created all this bad feeling" (122). "I just couldn't believe we were talking about the same child" (97). "They said, 'Robert can't do a thing'. He just needs praise and encouragement, because he has come on tremendously" (91). "This expectation of what the child should do at school is totally unreal. He could

have been doing 'O' level Maths from what the father said. This is the kind of conflict one comes up against" (99). Here the teachers' perspective is that they, not parents, know the child's academic potential and attainment, perhaps because they can measure it against other children more easily than parents. Such misunderstandings are finally dismissed as trivial by the teachers, who see these conflicts as wasting their time. Knowing children's background has a high priority. Yet dealing with 'trivial' misunderstandings stemming from that background simply tests teacher's patience and strains credulity. Some parents are 'unreasonable' and 'difficult'. "One does get unreasonable parents, I'm sorry to say it, I wish we could say more about this, simply how parents can be so difficult" (54).

VII. Exaggeration

The view that many misunderstandings between parents and teachers arise from trivia which are exaggerated is expressed in these six Evaluations. "They [parents] always seem to react to the smallest things" (33). "'You're making my daughter go into a race'... she went to the headmaster, you know, it exploded out of all proportion" (56). "At the manager's meeting, 'why didn't you have a football match?' It's trivial, absolutely trivial" (127). "We had one [parent] that was in every day about the most stupid things" (78). "What was passed as a general remark, how he had got on today, was taken so exaggeratedly, she was going to change the school and that. That is one kind of thing that one gets" (43). "If

our head were to act on everything they said he'd have no staff left" (33).

In addition to such common expressions of parental exaggerations of trivia, two teachers indicated that teachers, as well as parents, could become emotionally involved and say the wrong thing. "The question is whether, because one is emotionally involved in this, like this, whether one is overreacting to the situation" (54). "I think troublesome parents... very often through saying the wrong thing at the wrong time..." (28). Potentially these exaggerations were emotionally involving and often carried implications of threatened legal action.

N40 "This coloured boy helped himself to something.

He had not been accused of taking it but it had been suggested to him that he might be able to find it, which he did, but that afternoon the school had a phone call from a West Indian solicitor who suggested that we were practising blatant racial prejudice" (103).

N41 "She [pupil] picked up her foot to kick the boy in front of her and of course, well naturally, I knocked the foot down and next morning up came the mother saying I had 'hit the child' and 'cruelty to children' and 'there are marks on her leg', but it was just waffle." (29)

In the following example the narrator shows her competence as a senior teacher, with dealing with disobedience. She gives expert assistance as asked, but meets misunderstanding and exaggeration from the parent.

N42

- O "A teacher was having a lot of trouble with this child at home time. She had said that no one was going to go into the cloakroom until they sat with their legs crossed on the mat and this child habitually disobeyed her
- C So she said, 'Right, you can stand there until you can come and do as you're told' and it got to be about 4 o'clock and the child still hadn't sat on the mat, so she called me in and I coaxed the child to sit down but still she wouldn't put her legs crossed, so... so I got down behind her and crossed them and I said 'Oh look, aren't you good', you see, and then she went into the cloakroom. She was quite upset and a letter came to school the next day that I had smacked this child and that I wasn't the class teacher and that therefore I wasn't really to interfere with what went on in that other class so that ... the parent was not, in fact, concerned that I had smacked the child, she said she felt that children did need to be disciplined with a smack but it was not up to me to do it
- E So I had a lump in my throat then, because I thought, 'Well, I haven't smacked the child and I was asked to interfere and it was part of my job."
- R So, of course, the head then had to see the parents and in fact everything was right as rain from then on

Coda and in fact I do see the lady in town sometimes
 and she's very polite and pleasant to me, but at
 the time I was quite upset" (41).

This narrative reports parental exaggeration on the basis of children's tales, parents' misunderstanding of children's roles and failure to ascertain teachers' perceptions of events before complaining. There are also the evident needs to be firm about discipline and to carry out threats, which are obviously accepted by both the teller and her junior. The parent, however, might well have considered it unreasonable to insist on the child crossing her legs before she was permitted to go home. In the Resolution the head presumably explained the teachers' viewpoint on what happened to the parent.

VIII. One or Many

When parents complain they do so about an individual child. One strategy of reply used by the sample teachers was to point out the difficulty of treating children as individuals when they had to deal with much larger groups. This point has already been seen in N35 and N38. This difficulty of individualization is explained in the Abstracts and Evaluations of seven further narratives and it applies to both academic and social issues in the classroom. "I'd given him homework on the Thursday night and I had a comeback straight away the next day, saying 'He had too much homework... you ought to be seeing he does this Maths in the week'... but I don't think they realize how many children there are in the class" (13). "These are her sums, she did them in ten minutes for me

[parent]'. I said, 'Fair dues, she does them in ten minutes for me, if I stand over her, but if she's left in the class with everyone else she doesn't do it'" (104). "She started coming in just to look at his work and I was getting it marked daily, really for her, which is difficult with 40 children, and she would say, 'He can do this but he needs your attention all the time. I have 39 others in this class'" (124). Fundamentally, the teachers' perspectives here are on the class, in order to cope and to be fair, where the parent -- not the teacher -- focusses on the child as an individual learner. "That parent is really geared to that one child" (47). "Parents only have to deal with one or two children at a time. They can't appreciate that with 30 or 40 at once you've got to be as fair as you can. Parents tend to think that theirs should be given special consideration, but you can't" (127). "Her child was the only one in step according to her. The difficult parents usually can't see that their child is out of step and they are not prepared to support you. They support the child against the teacher" (47). In drawing parents' attention to large classes and the difficulties of individualization, teachers are not simply formulating a numerical excuse. They are also resisting parental and perhaps child manipulation for favouritism by singling out the child of the parent who complains. It could be claimed that in the individual - class paradox there is an element of impartiality. "I should have considered each child in their own right, rather than think of them altogether... but at the same time in the back of your mind, you think,

'Well, why should children get away with things, just because their mums are always coming to school'" (56).

IX. The Role of the Head

In Awkward Parent narratives the headteacher is frequently mentioned as a mediator in the Resolution, as in N39 and N42 previously quoted. The perspectives of the head are likely to be different from those of class teachers. The head may simply be informed after the resolution, "I didn't have to bring the head into it. I simply told him what I'd done" (79). Some heads are reported as taking decisive action on the teacher's behalf, "he [head] sent her away with a flea in her ear" (78). Other heads in narratives effectively shield teachers from Awkward Parents. "Fortunately he keeps them [parents] at arm's distance. We never come in contact with these people" (33). The heads clearly believed in the success of their support or mediation. "I like to think that my parents can go to my staff and I tell my staff, 'If you get into deep water don't hesitate to call me in'. They've got that backup and on the whole it works well" (101). Where teachers see parents as often jumping to conclusions, misunderstandings, or accepting erroneous versions from one party (the child), heads portrayed themselves as being careful to look at both sides of disputes. Where parents seem interested in one child, heads stressed fairness: to the child, class, teacher and parent. "Usually I say I'll have a word with both parties in the morning and try to sort it out. I don't think you can accept the word of the one who is complaining" (88).

"Let them [parents] understand that you are prepared to listen to them and they understand that you are prepared to be fair. You've got to be fair to your parent and your teacher. I'm the first line of defence. In fact, all things come to me first. The teacher may or may not be involved subsequently, a lot depends on what we discover in conversation" (66). A teacher's narrative of such a head explained, "If the teacher was really in the wrong the head would do something quiet about it. If the parent was being unreasonable nobody knew about it. She only brought you in if she felt it was necessary. She probably had a quiet word with you afterwards" (79). While there are admissions here of the possibility that the teacher may be at fault, only 2 out of the 126 parent narratives show a teacher to be unambiguously wrong. In neither of these cases, where one child was 'banged round the ear' (126) and another was 'knocked across the room' (82) was the teller the perpetrator. In all other cases the narrative perspective of Awkward Parents is that the teacher is basically both right and in the right. Problems are resolved through talk and 'sorting it out' -- towards the teacher's viewpoint -- and parents depart understanding that viewpoint. Some later offer apologies. In rare cases where disagreement remains (24, 44, 103) the tellers are convinced of the correctness of their perspective. The teachers' self-portrait shows them as calm, correct and reasonable, while parents are presented as irate, insistent and wrong. "They [parents] insisted that it was my fault. I suggested that they try to put their own house in order" (103)

X. Explaining

A number of the quoted narratives (eg.N36, N42) have revealed that the narrators solve problems through talk with parents, chiefly by explaining the teachers' perspective to the parent.

"I explained to her and she calmed down" (72).

"Two minutes of explaining and everything was all right" (104)

"So I had to explain that things were changing" (61).

"They got the idea, they did get the idea, once it was explained, but it was just a case of misunderstanding" (61).

"As soon as I had explained it to her, she said, 'Oh, I can see now', you see, and she went off quite happy" (66).

"I usually manage to talk them out of it" (28).

"I would like to think that what I said had an effect" (25).

"Mostly it's a question of parents being anxious and often they have to get things off their chest first" (112).

"They need someone to talk to, they need it [problem] as an excuse" (77).

"If there is a problem they come and have a word about it, so it doesn't become difficult" (12).

"Having talked to them as two civilized people, one hopes, we saw the light in the end" (128).

"I said, 'Well, look at it from my point of

view, Mrs Freeman, you must put yourself in my shoes'...she said,'Oh well, yes' and she calmed down, then she said,'I can see it that way' "(87).

The Resolution in Awkward Parent narratives usually comes about through teachers' explanations, rather than through those of parents. In this highly assymetrical manner things are 'sorted out'.

"It got sorted out" (54, 57, 59).

"It was sorted out" (83, 115).

"We soon sorted that out" (57).

"She went off quite happily" (66).

"He went away quite happily" (63).

"The mother calmed down" (85).

"She calmed down a bit" (72)

"But mum's satisfied" (31).

"She sort of shut up" (91).

"He took the point" (71).

"That blew over" (42).

"I smoothed her down and everything was all right" (121).

The 'sorting out' may involve an apology from the parent, which of course will reinforce the teachers' perspective.

"He did apologize' (71).

"He apologized afterwards" (12).

"He has since been in to apologize" (90).

"We had another phone call apologizing" (59).

"She came back the following day and

apologized" (34).

"She rang up and said she had not meant to upset me and was very aplogetic"(97).

One of the pressures to 'sort it out' is that parents are perceived as being likely to talk to other parents. The teachers' perspective is that if they talk to parents and explain it prevents gossip. "You only need one parent to be disgruntled about something and she can stir it" (127). "Parents have talked to other parents and compare their children with other children" (58). "One parent is meddling in this other case. I think she is trying to make mischief" (25). "I said, 'Look, if ever you're worried, don't talk about it with So-and-so next door', I said, 'Come up'" (23). Clearly in such narratives, teachers see themselves as successfully sorting out problems. There are very few unresolved situations, at least in narratives.

XI. Home

In Chapter 8 it was shown how Problem Children were frequently linked in narrative with the home situation. This is coupled with the underlining by many teachers of the need to know the home situation of pupils. From this it is expected that teachers in Awkward Parent narratives would again stress how important home information is to them. Such emphasis is evident. "Home conditions have to guide how you treat children. I think it's extremely important to know what sort of home they come from" (121). "You do need to know something of what's going on [at home]" (84). "I assumed he was downright lazy and I

put quite a lot of pressure on him, whereas if I'd been aware of the home background and the problems then I might have tackled it from a different point of view" (84).

In line with the social pathology model, which explains pupils' problems in terms of home conditions, (see Chapter 8), problem children are firmly linked with problem parents by some teachers. "When you meet the parents you understand an awful lot about the children " (84). "It's usually the problem child who's got the problem parent" (73). Teachers seem to feel that there is little that can be done about this, other than educate the parents. "Most of them [parents] have done the damage before we get them [children] " (44). "The parents of our [partially hearing] children usually have a bigger handicap than the child. It's the family problems that arise and this is a big part of the work" (48). "Do we need to educate parents before children come to school?" (26). One example of perceived inadequacies is having parental disputes in front of children or at the wrong time, "They have a full-scale row in front of the child over his reading, then they wonder why, when someone shows him a reading book, he almost visibly shudders" (93). Another example is not sharing information which is thought to be essential for teachers, "She [pupil] was half doped [with phenobarbitone] and her mind wasn't alert, she wasn't able to cope at all. You see, parents don't think to tell you that" (121). Other parental inadequacies enumerated by teachers ranged from "no encouragement for him at home at all" (125) to "some

parents are not capable of helping" (91). The social pathology model was even extended to parents themselves when some Awkward Parents were said to be troublesome because of home circumstances, "very often the parents came to grumble, it was the home background, giving vent to their feelings for things which had started off at home" (68). "I think really the trouble was that she [mother] got into trouble at home [with father] and she came back at me...took it out on me" (83).

XII. Drawing the Line

A further point which emerges from Awkward Parent narratives is that teachers sometimes see the need to draw a firm line between themselves and parents, in order to preserve their own professional interests. This establishes clear limits to parental cooperation and to having parents in school. Some teachers resisted what they saw as excessive parental pressure. "You've got to be very careful with parents once they come in. It's quite difficult to draw the line" (48). Some parents are seen as being over-demanding. Teachers seemed to be especially sensitive to this in relation to organization. "One middle-class parent demanded sort of rights around the school, he wanted to have a real say in how the school was going to be run" (54). Clearly this speaker was against any such 'real say'. "You should be approachable, but that doesn't mean you should let them run your school for you" (66). "She tends to want to know what her rights are and she wants them all" (43). "This mother came to tell me how to do it. Well, you can't have

a parent in any shape or form telling you...you've got to make them happy, but you don't bow to their wishes" (73). Such an attitude on the part of both parents and teachers could be the cause of problems, but the sample teachers do not say so. Rather their narratives emphasize parental misunderstandings.

Although so many Awkward Parent narratives have outcomes which are 'sorted out' by getting parents to appreciate the teachers' viewpoints, rather than vice versa, the potential conflict between parents and teachers seems to be a source of underlying concern for the teachers. Incidents which are awkward or unpleasant seem to be vividly remembered, even if they are few in number. Such incidents set limits to cooperation because they seem to affect teachers' consciousness of parents' roles. As the next example shows, such awkward incidents have an effect on teachers which is out of all proportion to the incident itself.

N43

O "A child lost a plimsoll

C and I said, "Oh, just keep one plimsoll on for the time being" and, I don't know, we were busy doing something else, and I just sort of said, "Oh well, just keep the one plimsoll on." And his mother thought I was chastizing him and not allowing him to wear plimsolls, and children should wear plimsolls...and so she sort of wrote a letter, 'Why hadn't I let her child wear plimsolls?' you know, and I...Well it was just lost at that moment and, you know, we just

carried on with what we were doing.

Coda That's the only...

E and that bothered me, I didn't like that at all,
it bothered me.

Coda and that, after teaching about 12 years, is the
only time I've had a complaint from a mother."
(70)

A lost shoe is a common cause of parental complaint, but here the mother assumes the child was punished by not being allowed to wear them. Presumably the parent's perception is based on what the child told her and probably part of what bothers the teacher is the fact that the mother wrote a letter of complaint, rather than come to the school to ascertain the facts first. The teacher's version stresses how busy they were and how they 'just carried on'. What seems to have been an incidental remark was misunderstood and exaggerated. The extent to which such a small incident can affect teachers can be seen by the triple repetition of the evaluative 'it bothered me'.

This effect that awkward parents can have on teachers is well demonstrated in the following final example where the teacher shows physical signs of fear at the prospect of being unjustly reported to the Education Office.

N44

O "I had a little girl in my class, it's quite a
while age now, she em ... I came into the
classroom

C and caught her kicking somebody else so I asked

her how she would feel if somebody had kicked her, which I thought was a fair enough statement
O and it was at the beginning of playtime
C so I said, 'Right, you can wait till the end of playtime... I'm not wasting my playtime sorting you out when you've been in trouble, so you can stand by my desk.' I came back after playtime and she'd run home, didn't want to come back to school and she'd probably told her mother that Miss was going to kick her
E and I thought, 'Oh, no'
C so her mother came up at a quarter to four the following day and had a go at me with the rest of the children in the classroom, so of course I just said, 'Well, if you're not prepared to accept my word and you want to believe your daughter and....,' you know, 'you don't want to...', you know, I said, 'she's obviously misunderstood what I've said. I said 'How would you feel if somebody kicked you', not 'if I kicked you', I said 'and she's panicked. She's thought I was going to kick her and she's gone home.' I says 'And if you've not satisfied with what I'm telling you, you'd better go and see the headmaster.' No, she wouldn't go and see the headmaster, I says, 'Well, I can't give you any more of my time. If you won't go and see the headmaster, I'm going to see him.' So I went storming up to the office, you see, by this time I was shaking, I was so cross, and she's

threatened to report me to the Education Office,
the lot!

O Of course, nothing like this had happened to me
before

E it was the first time that it had ever happened
but I was absolutely petrified

C and I went up

R and the head calmed me down and sent me back off
home, then he went and had a word with the Mum
and calmed her down

Coda and I've heard nothing from it since.

E but I was a nervous wreck when I got up to the
head's office, I was shaking like a leaf, I was
absolutely petrified, because the school I was
at before I came here was nothing like this
school. I was all on first name terms with the
parents and to have a parent come and accuse me
of doing something like this, I thought, 'Oooh',
so I was a bit panic-stricken, to say the least,
this parent coming and saying that I was going
to hit her child." (38)

The teacher's anger and, more particularly, her fear
is obvious in the Evaluations, 'I was shaking',
'absolutely petrified' (twice), 'a nervous wreck',
'panic-stricken'. Undoubtedly this is partly because the
rest of the children were still in the classroom. As
another narrator said, "What I found most unnerving was
to have to deal with it when the children were there in
the classroom... that isn't nice, it upsets you... that
wasn't very nice" (25). Unusually the teacher in N44, not

the parent, went storming up to the office. In this narrative the themes of many other Awkward Parent narratives can be clearly seen. The incident begins with a squabble which the teacher has to sort out. The child misunderstands her and runs home. The mother 'has a go' at the teacher, exaggerating the child's misunderstanding and overreacting by threatening to write to the Office. The teacher appeals to the head who talks to both parent and teacher, calms them down and 'sorts it out'. The teacher gives no further details, but if the head had 'explained' to the parent and she had 'apologized', if the child's home had been 'poor' and if the teacher had pointed out that the whole class of many children waiting (which was obviously the case) then this narrative would be a classic Awkward Parent narrative with most of the elements to which attention has been drawn in this chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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### SPONTANEOUS TEACHER NARRATIVES

#### Introduction

In this chapter a number of spontaneous teachers' narratives will be analysed with two purposes in mind. The first is to examine how such narratives are socially organized in teacher-to-teacher talk. The second is to explore the cultural perspectives which the particular narratives may illustrate. All the narratives were recorded at conferences and meetings. They arose in discussion with no prompting apart from the previous talk of participants themselves.

#### I. Headteachers - the Aims of Education

The first examples come from a 50 minute tape recording of 9 primary headteachers in a workshop group who were discussing the aims of primary education at a headteachers' conference. These narratives occurred in the context of discussing direct and indirect approaches to moral education, the role of example, and relations between headteachers and staff. In the transcription, letters refer to speakers. A and E are female, the rest are male. Comments in brackets were made by unidentified speakers.

#### N45

B. I was quite shattered that one of my staff came

to me -- as I said, I interviewed for a caretaker, obviously because one is leaving and we're having to give a retirement present and one kiddie said, "Well, why should I give anything? He's done nothing for me."

(no) (yes) (mm)

and he's only nine, you know.

(yes, yes)

Completely shattering.

H. Yes, a lot of teaching in this sort of thing can be done incidentally, can't it?

I. I think it has to be done incidentally.

N46

H. I mean, I was cleaning up a mess I'd made by knocking the caretaker's pot of polish over

(yes)

I knocked it over and I was cleaning it up and a little six year old came up to me and said, "Mr Goodall, why are you doing that? That's the caretaker's job."

(yes) (mm)

Which gave a wonderful opportunity to talk to him about, you know, "when we make a mess we clear it up." and em heh

N47

B. But I er yes, you see, my deputy did, went even further than that. He took er morning service and put his hand in his pocket and brought out a handful of sweet papers and just walked round the hall and dropped them all over the floor and he

said, "Did you see what I just did? Dreadful mess." They knew what he was going to say. He's always moaning about litter. "All right, I dropped it, I'm going to pick it up", which he then did. But this was a direct lesson.

(mm)

You did it indirectly and I think you probably would've had more effect than er...

N48

F. If I can pick up an interesting story which demonstrates how it does affect the two different standards of outside school and inside school. A boy last week threw a crisp bag on the playground and the teacher on duty told him to pick it up and find another couple as well and pick those up "I'm not picking up papers." And he walked straight out of school and went home

(mm)

because the standard at home was that you didn't do anything to help anyone else.

(yes) (yes)

B. This is the child who is the sore point in the class.

G. How did you deal with him? Do you, do you point him out as being a dreadful example by er, you know,... or do you just say, "This type of behaviour..." and not mention his name... or...?

F. I went straight off, brought him back and made him pick up three crisp papers.

(laugh)

G. Direct teaching method.

C. Yeah, did the rest of the school know you had done it?

F. Er, no, no, it was done quietly.

B. Mine, mine worry about litter. All the kids now bring me the litter.

(laugh)

N49

F. I had a grumble, not last week, but the week before, about litter, and they said, "But we put it in the bag."

A. And it blows out again, yes.

N50

C. Well, that is... that... I had a grumble too, but I found out who was scattering it all over the playground and it was the birds.

(mm) (yes)

They take the packet out and shake the crisp crumbs out and eat the crumbs and leave the bags blowing around.

I. Did you organize them to pick it up, though, Frank?

(laugh)

C. I thought it was the children. They were so pleased they'd caught me out.

N51

D. Coming back to litter again, er, I had one little boy who decided rather thoughtfully that he'd go round and pick some up and I gave him a sweet and the next day I had about forty-four outside my

room lined up expecting sweets.

(laugh).....

N52

C. Actually you may be interested, I've just had this problem and solved it by moving them down an age group and they threw up their hands in horror. These particular teachers couldn't cope with younger children

(yes)

and so immediately they were in a situation where they had to ask for help from others and the other members of staff, knowing the weaknesses, in inverted commas, but perhaps it's a bit unkind to put it that way, were very eager to help and set that teacher on new lines and it worked wonders

(yes)

that person has got a new interest in their job, really.

(mm)

N53

J. I heard at another head teachers' conference that the question was put, "What would you do if you were moved into a school and there was this Fred Bloggs who was nearly retired, traditional, doing a marvellous job and the teachers who are younger are prepared to follow your ways, which are way out and progressive. What would you do?" And his answer was, "Sack him." And apparently one head did write to the authority and said, "I want

three of my staff to go." And they said, "No, no, you can't do that." And he said, "I want them to go." "No, you can't do that." "All right, leave it to me." And within a year they'd gone

(mm)

because he'd made life hell for them.

N54

H. Yes, well, it was put to me that good schools run without them, anyway. In fact, I told them, because I was away one day, and I said, "I fully expected this ship to have sunk." And they said, "Good gracious, we can do without you for a year. You needn't worry."

(laugh)

N55

B. And er, we had.. oh, a visitor the other day, and, who said, "I was very pleased about your children. They, they I didn't know their way about the building and somebody came up and said, "Can I help you? Can I show you the way?" and "Yes, I want to see the head." "Do come with me and I'll show you." and I said, "Well, quite frankly, I'm amazed, because they've never been told this. We don't have monitors on duty looking for strangers." This was apparently part of something going on and that er and was presumably part of the set up. But we run the perfect school anyway, so there you are.

F. but it's all part of the example, isn't it?

B. That's what I think. It comes by example more



than by...

A. That could've been parental example, couldn't it?

B. Yes, in an isolated instance it could, yes, er, but this has happened, you know, on a number of occasions in fact. I thought, "Now have I missed out? Should I tell the whole school, if they see somebody strange walking about, that they...?" But I decided not. If it was working all right, there was no point in emphasizing it."

F. Right.

These 11 narratives are part of a group of 18 told in a 50 minute discussion. Superficially, it seems that the tellers are merely engaging in mild reminiscences. However, these highly experienced primary teachers in senior management would surely be conscious of the professional purposes of a large day conference involving nearly a hundred headteachers. Especially in times of financial stringency and social and administrative pressures, they must be keenly aware of the time, costs and benefits of such an event. They are not likely to give up a day from school, with all the inconveniences this entails, only to reminisce. These narratives must be serving other functions.

One function which can be suggested is that participants whose daily work isolates them from fellow headteachers are sharing experiences of problems in moral and social education and management through narratives. The tellers' and audience's perspectives on the recounted events can be confirmed or modified in the light of colleagues' interpretations.

The themes revolve around social and moral educational issues (N45-51), whether teaching should be direct or incidental, and about children's perceptions of the roles of caretaker and head. Narratives 52-54 concern the power of the headteacher and what to do about 'weak' members of staff.

The narratives will be examined in turn, looking at their social organization in the discussion and at the apparently shared cultural perceptions of participants.

N45 opens with the speaker's evaluation of the incident to be recounted, he was 'quite shattered'. The narrative itself is actually an embedded implied dialogue: the member of staff had asked children for contributions for the caretaker's retirement gift and a child replied that the caretaker had done nothing for him. This was later recounted to the head, who is now telling it to other heads at the conference. The relayed recounting indicates first, that such small incidents are passed on in teacher-to-teacher talk quite naturally and second, that they are deemed worthy of recounting to wider audiences. For participants, it is non-trivial, however outsiders might judge it. The Complication, "He's done nothing for me" is received by the audience with the 'no' of disbelief and 'yes' of understanding, and the further 'yes, yes' on hearing the boy's age. The Evaluation, "Completely shattering", is repeated at the end. The narrative has no Resolution, but the audience do not need one. They know that an experienced teacher would respond to the child's remark with an effort to help the child to appreciate the caretaker's role, perhaps also

pointing out other social or moral aspects of living in a school community. That participants understand this is indicated by H's reference to incidental teaching, which assumes that the member of B's staff would take up such an opportunity. The tag question, 'can't it' shows H's further assumption that other participants share this view, since it is said with a low fall-rise, presuming agreement. I explicitly shares his agreement, before H moves into N46. It seems surprising that the teller and audience find a child's egocentric view 'completely shattering'. Is their surprise because the view is publicly expressed? Or do they hold (unrealistic) views about children's recognition of social values towards cooperation or school spirit?

The point of N46 is to show how a 'wonderful opportunity' for incidental moral/social teaching arose. H's Orientation, 'clearing up the mess', is accepted by a hearer's 'yes'. Again, the Complication of the child's reported comment is received by another 'yes' and 'mm' as hearers predict the up-coming Resolution of H's talk to the child, "When we make a mess we clear it up". This message about tidiness does not seem to meet the child's puzzlement about occupational roles, "That's the caretaker's job." This would lead to the conclusion that in addition to stressing responsibility for cleaning up a mess the teller is also giving an indirect message to the child, and to the narrative audience, about social egalitarianism.

N47 receives N46 by giving a counter-example of direct teaching, before evaluating it with the favourable

comparison of "you probably would've had more effect". The series, N 45-47, build up progressive agreement about the validity of indirect teaching on moral and social issues not only by H's and B's narratives extending the speakers' understanding of N1 and H and I's reception of it, but also through the general acceptance of the series through the placement of 'yesses' and 'mms' at transitional relevance points.

N48 occurs after several turns. F signals his request to tell the narrative with the tentative "If I can pick up an interesting story." The silence after this utterance signals listeners' assent. That others agree that the story is interesting can be seen from the chain of 'mm', 'yesses' and laughter. The Evaluation about different standards between home and school is accepted by others, 'yes', 'yes'. That such narratives have a function of showing different ways of facing problematic situations is revealed by G's question, which sets out some of the alternatives. The other headteachers are not only interested in the event, but in F's handling of the situation. G concludes that this is direct teaching, -- a comment endorsing the telling. C's question further checks this.

F follows up his success with N48 with a bid for a follow-up narrative, N49. This is truncated by A's comment, that the litter blows out again. A could be interpreted as interrupting F's narrative, or as completing the narrative, which gives it approval through joint production. C now introduces the topically-related N50, which again is positively received with 'mm' and

'yes', and I's joke. N50 not only shows that agents other than children are sometimes responsible for scattered litter, but also that C admits to being fallible, or, rather, enjoys reporting the children's pleasure at catching him out.

Several utterances later, D bids for another narrative turn by entering his story through a reference to litter. The narrative shows the efficacy of rewarding children on occasion, and it is positively received with laughter.

These Litter narratives are followed with great interest by the audience. The cultural values which are embodied and which the audience endorse are about tidiness, respect for property and personal responsibility. This is seen through narrative analysis but could easily be missed otherwise, leaving the impression that instead of discussing moral and social education the heads were trivializing the discussion with anecdotes about litter. The heads' perspective on school assemblies in N49 and N50 involve 'grumbling' at children, which in N47 is somewhat ineffective since the teachers there is 'always moaning about litter".

N52 relates to intervening talk on the question of how headteachers handle 'weak' members of their staffs. The opening, 'you may be interested', is not interrupted, signalling listeners assent to telling the narrative. The Abstract announces a solution to the problem, so the story is certain to be of interest to others who potentially face similar staffing situations. Once more, the 'yeses' and 'mm' show others' interest and approval.

N53 is on a different topic, that of the power of the headteacher. The 'mm' placed after the Resolution of the staff leaving shows receipt of the narrative, even before the explanation, 'he'd made life hell for them'. There seems to be group acknowledgement of the authority and apparently unlimited power of the head. N54 provides a counter-example of staff coping without a head, although the head in fact affirms his concept of authority as 'captain of the ship'. Both N53 and N54 show situations of tensions between head and staff, as is perhaps revealed by the laughter with which N54 is received. The teachers in N54 jokingly maintain that they can do without the head, in contrast to his declared indispensability.

N55 returns to the topic of social behaviour with another detailed embedded dialogue. Like N45, N55 reports a dialogue narrated to the speaker, who thought it sufficiently interesting to recount to his peers. B reports his reaction of amazement to the visitor's telling and his interpretation that the courtesy was 'presumably part of the set up', ie. not taught specifically to children. B's narrative and his Evaluation of it both accepted by F's comment and B's reply about the role of the example of adults in school. A's interpretation, that this could possibly be parental example, is rejected by B, who then reveals that this had happened on a number of occasions. The narrative, as this teller himself confirms had been typicalized. Importantly, B then shares his reflection at the time on whether to mention this to the whole school and his

reason for deciding not to do so. This narrative not only describes the events and B's interpretation of them, but also shows something of the speaker's decision-making processes, or at least what the speaker thinks will be of interest to other headteachers. The acceptance of the narrative, F's 'Right', perhaps signals approval of both B's reaction and his decision.

Throughout this series of narratives experience has been validated by the peer group. The recounting can be seen as being consistently approved of by the back-channel cues of 'yes', 'mm', and more significantly by subsequent enchainned narratives endorsing prior tellings. As a group, tellers and receivers show enormous certainty in their stories. There are no preceding comments of deferential hesitation, such as 'I think' or 'I don't know about you, but I've found...' The tellers' confidence is fully justified inasmuch as their peers completely endorse the narratives. There are elements of paternalism, e.g. in N52, but no doubts and few suggested alternatives. In one sense there is no need for alternatives. Apparently they already know.

## II. Headteachers - Religious Education.

### N56

P I'm surprised to hear you say that most teachers use a traditional Bible approach rather than thematic approach. Many teachers are reacting against using Bible stories. When I was in the primary school, I remember the head, a very stern man, he stood out at the front and said Psalms.

"I lift mine eyes up to Heaven..." It was an authoritarian society. I think we probably accepted it at the time, but we reacted against it at the age of 19. Now as teachers we are still reacting against it and not using Bible stories.

N57

Q Well, I was reminded about a lesson at primary school when I was there. We had this lesson about sharing. It was a story about a couple of boys. These boys shared something and then the teacher brought it home with a Bible Story, I still remember it now, so some traditional RE teaching must be effective.

N58 And another thing, I always remember from when I was a class teacher, we were talking about God and this boy said, "I don't know much about God but He's very beautiful." I quote that one a lot in service. I'm a lay preacher.

Speaker P presents his narrative about the Psalm-saying head as personal experience of reacting against traditional Bible approaches. N56 is sandwiched between generalizations and is used to support the argument, which is related, it is supposed, to social change.

N57 is triggered off by N56, "I was reminded about a lesson...". This endorses the telling, but not the point of N56. N57 is about the speaker's own childhood but shows the opposite effect of N56. The narrative leads up to the speaker's point that some traditional RE teaching must be effective. This counter-narrative contains two



implied embedded narratives, "a story about a couple of boys" and "a Bible story, I still remember it now", which are, however, unelaborated. N57 leads to N58, "and another thing", the point of which, the boy's comment about the nature of God, seems irrelevant to the previous discussion on Bible versus thematic approaches. Perhaps Q, having got the floor, wishes to keep his turn using another narrative to ward off interruptions. Both P and Q refer to personal childhood experience rather than to theory, analysis or logical argumentation. This could be interpreted as showing the influence of teachers' own experience as pupils on their thinking as teachers. Certainly Q's narratives show this, with the additional possibility that the traditional RE teaching led to his present role as a lay preacher.

As before, this extract shows a series of floor-holding narratives, told to 23 listeners. By affirming the validity of their experiences as pupils, even to illustrate opposite viewpoints, P and Q are implying that they and their listeners, as teachers, potentially influence pupils they teach in similar ways.

### III. Teachers -- Mathematics

The next example of a single narrative was recounted during a two hour meeting of 5 headteachers and teachers. The purpose of their meeting was to revise a Maths syllabus. The narrative arose in the context of considering children's abilities at maths.

#### N59

R No, but kids at this stage can beat the teachers

at it quite honestly. I was surprised to find a,  
a child...

S Oh yes.

R ...who could visualize the er, a quadrilateral  
being flipped

T Yeah.

R and ... and ... not fitted

U mm

R er er

S When you say 'flipped', but turned, is that it?

T Yeah.

R Yes, turned over, rather than rotated.

S Yes.

R Whereas all the other things previously, the ...  
the... octagons etc. had been flipped and rotated  
eight times

V Yeah

R and so on

V mm

R and you got eight rotations

S Oh, I see, I'm with you.

R and he could see this. It just, it took, I found  
it very hard to visualize. As a matter of fact, I  
had to ... to be sure of it ... I had to cut it  
out...

T Cut it out, yes.

R and do it to be sure.

V mm

R But he was convinced before I did it that he was  
right, and he was.

T I've had one or two like that who can tell me things that I have to do in practice to make quite sure.

R He told me the answer and of course he was right, but er I wasn't really convinced until I did it.

The continual feedback of 'yeses', 'mms', questions and clarifications throughout the narrative leaves no doubt about the interest that all participants have in the narrative. The on-going meaning is generated by all, not by the teller only. R's opening generalization establishes the point which the ensuing narrative will illustrate, that some primary children may be quicker at mathematics than their teachers. R's proposal to tell a narrative, "I was surprised to find a child" indicates his reaction of surprise at something, which may therefore be of interest to the other teachers present. S accepts the proposal, with enthusiasm, "Oh yes". R's Abstract, a child could visualize the flipped quadrilateral, is accepted also by T's "yeah". S continues to show interest with her clarifying question about turning, reinforced by T's second "Yeah". R clarifies that by flipped he means turned over, which is understood by S, and R then gives further details which are closely followed by V and S. R now makes the evaluative point, that the child could visualize this easily, while, as he hesitantly admits, he himself had to cut out the shape to confirm the child's prediction. This, of course, is the reverse of the more common situation where the teacher sets up practical situations for children to cut out shapes and try them. T confirms

R's experience, particularly with the receipt of the narrative that he too has had children who could tell him things that he had to do in practice to make sure. This receipt virtually summarizes R's anecdote. R drives home the point, however, with the final Evaluation, "He told me the answer and of course he was right but er I wasn't really convinced until I did it", thus accepting T's receipt and confirming T's understanding. The Evaluation could be an admission of teacher failure or could be interpreted as acceptance that primary teachers teach all aspects of the curriculum and that inevitably some able children will on occasion see what their teachers find difficult. The narrative could easily have been summarized in a sentence, but it is not. One must conclude that there is something functional about the actual process of narration and narrative performance, (rather than the narrative point only) which is important enough for most of those present not only to listen but to share in the narrative production. Functionally, the sharing of the details of such experiences and tellers' interpretations and hearers' confirmations of the validity of both the experience and its interpretation, seem to make it worthwhile postponing the immediate task in hand which is to discuss a maths syllabus. Isolated teachers need to know how teaching is, for others.

#### IV. A Staff Meeting

A final set of spontaneous narratives comes from the beginning of a staff meeting in a first school where H,

the head teacher uses a narrative to explain her lateness.

N60

H I'm sorry I'm so late. I had a real old to do with Alan McGee.

D What again? What was it this time?

H He's got a chain that Mark Clemming had from Wayne Clemming and he'd hit Richard Fitzhugh with it twice across his back and he'd got two weals across his back.

D I'm sure he's pushing it all the time. He's doing it deliberately to get caught, I'm sure of this.

X I think he should be expelled.

D Well something ought to be done with him ... Shot ... or ...

H I've given him a darn good hiding and after that he was cheeky to Mrs Moskowicz, so I just got hold of him and {...inaudible...} on the floor...

Y Well, you see, they are so big physically, there's not a lot you can hurt them with.

N61

H And yet he was a bit late this morning and he went up to Mrs Wilson, "Mrs Wilson, I'm so sorry I'm late. Can you put me down for dinners, please?"

X Yes, so nice.

N62

Y He was lovely to me coming through the corridor...

X There is a nice side to him.

Y ...When I was walking past, you know, he ... I can't remember ... he was being charming...

H He can be.

Y Split personality.

H His Dad is often drunk when he goes home and beats Mum up and that's why she's split up, because of him being so violent. I suppose Alan ... it might be a bit in Alan ...

Z Well, we can't solve Alan's problems at the moment, although it's a sad story.

H's opening remark, "I had a real old to do with Alan McGee", is both an Abstract and an Offer to tell a narrative. D, the deputy head, shows understanding of previous history of trouble with the boy, "What again?" and accepts the Offer with a request for details. H's subsequent narrative will now be told as an answer to the request, which is a strong entrance to the telling. H gives details of the child hitting another with a chain, but it is clear from the following talk that the real interest lies in how to handle the child following the fact that he has a nice side, and in causes for his behaviour. D immediately interprets H's brief narrative, that the boy's behaviour is deliberate. X then gives a strong reaction by suggesting expulsion. Whether this is a serious suggestion to the head is uncertain. D does not seem to treat it as such, since he caps it with the hyperbole of shooting. H now reveals how she has in fact dealt with him, by administering 'a darn good hiding', though apparently this had little effect, since he was 'cheeky' afterwards. Y expresses her concern about the

dilemma of how to handle the child, before H turns to the boy's earlier politeness to the school secretary with N61, H not only quotes but imitates the child here. This mimesis is immediately appreciated by X's comment, "Yes, so nice". Y then attempts a narrative to illustrate the child's occasional charm. This narrative N62 corroborates N61. The Abstract, "He was lovely to me coming through the corridor", is also an offer to tell N62. Additionally it confirms X's receipt of H's second narrative. This confirmation is acknowledged by X, where the comment, "There is a nice side to him" also serves as an acceptance of Y's offer to tell N62. Y's continuation with N62 runs into trouble when she cannot recall the details -- apparently she is trying to remember the exact words as H had done earlier in N61. H cuts in with her recognition of the boy's charm, which Y then interprets as 'split personality'. H now interprets the child's behaviour with reference to the parental drunken violence and separation. Presumably this information about the child's home circumstances is new to at least some of those present, so that N60-62 have now served as reasons for her to update the staff's knowledge about a difficult child with possible reasons for his behaviour.

The evidence of the previous pages permits four general conclusions. First, that narratives can, and frequently do, occur naturally and spontaneously in teacher-to-teacher talk, even in formal professional settings such as conferences, curriculum discussions and staff meetings. Second, these narratives are structured

and their structure is amenable to analysis using the Evaluation model. Third, not only do the narratives have their own internal organization, but they are organized in social interaction as joint productions. Such production can be analyzed with reference to the Conversational Analysis model. A series of narratives show that the perspectives revealed by first tellers are often positively received and elaborated by subsequent tellers, showing strong endorsement. There is some justification, then, for the claim that narratives embody group perspectives. Fourth, the perspectives shown by teachers' narratives can be listed, with special reference to the Evaluation sections or Recipients' responses. From the foregoing examples a partial list of narrative perspectives is that:

- children can be surprisingly unaware of the roles of adults in schools;
- moral and social education are best carried out incidentally by adult example;
- differing home-school standards may lead to unacceptable behaviour in school;
- weak teachers could be helped by colleagues if placed in an appropriate situation;
- some heads see themselves as having ultimate power over teachers, but some staff see themselves as quite able to cope without a head;
- teachers' own experiences as pupils may influence their current views;
- some children understand things faster than their teachers, who may need to carry out practical



activities to confirm children's predictions;  
-- a young child can be violent to other children  
yet charming to adults; home violence or parental  
separation may explain the former, the latter  
needs no explanation.

All the above are sharable perspectives, which are  
cultural in so far as that they are endorsed and  
confirmed by others participating in discussions,  
sometimes in large groups.

**PART IV**

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**CONCLUSIONS**

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## PART IV

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### CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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CONCLUSIONS: TEACHERS' NARRATIVES AND CULTURAL MODELS

Introduction

Conclusions are presented in two sections. The first summarizes aspects of the models of narrative analysis presented in the literature review of Part II. The second draws conclusions from the teachers' narratives analysed in Part III. This is followed by two sections in which various models of cultural perspectives derived from the narrative data are suggested. A final section indicates limitations of this study and suggests areas for further research.

I.i. Conclusions -- A Model of Narrative Analysis

The conclusions here are an attempt to draw together important threads from Part II, where models of narrative from sociology and sociolinguistics, psychology, literature and anthropology were discussed. Some major characteristics of narratives are summarized in list form below. Oral narratives of personal experience are:

-- a part of reality for tellers and audiences

since anecdotes are frequently told for amusement, argument and other pragmatic purposes. Narratives have been studied for many years as an important part of culture. For most primary teachers, storytelling in the classroom and swapping anecdotes in the staffroom are everyday experiences which are a hitherto uninvestigated part of teachers' culture. Teachers sharing incidents and accidents of classroom life in staffroom narrative are breaking the barriers of professional isolation and bringing about or maintaining social cohesion.

-- a mirror of reality, accounts where both speakers and hearers reflect on and make sense of their experience. The act of telling clarifies and establishes in the mind what would otherwise be transient experience. For a speaker, an event recounted is an event which comes to be at least partially understood through the very act of telling. Narratives, as it were, make sense. Furthermore, narrators evaluate their experience in the process of recounting it. To the extent that the self is mirrored in a personal account it can be said: I narrate, therefore I know. As I narrate of myself, so I see myself, so I am, or so I become.

-- models of reality, symbolic structures representing human actions in terms of solutions to problems, resolutions to complications and crises. In narrative, every climax has its

denouement and even an enigma has some sort of closure, or if not, this is for narrative effect and this, too, is a model. As models, narratives inevitably simplify and reduce complex actions and contexts to types. While narratives as models often clarify events, they also sometimes distort them. Teachers' narratives can be regarded as cultural models of classroom realities. They tend to reduce complex events to prototypes.

-- mediators and managers of reality. Speakers cope with stress by recounting anecdotes in an atmosphere of camaraderie. Laughing at the funny side of events lifts teachers' spirits helping them to face the serious side. Conveying messages and morals in anecdotes has a pedagogic function and helps teachers to avoid conflicts and mistakes. The moulding of what has happened into narrative form, the act of narrating in the staffroom and getting others' responses to a given crisis or offering a solution to another's problem are all ways of managing the reality of classroom pressures.

-- interactive productions which are systematically and jointly constructed by both tellers and audiences. Through narratives, teachers present their selves and manage others' impressions of them. This is done through narrative content and more particularly through dynamic narrative performance. Dramatized for effect, a performed telling is designed to trigger acceptance by an

audience and elicit agreement or appreciation with the point. Received in this way, a narrative told among a group of teachers has the quality of a group narrative.

-- cognitive representations or knowledge structures, which are systematically shaped by processes of perception and memory. This shaping shows oral narratives to be non-veridical yet made true to tellers' self-images or pictures of reality by rationalization and typicalization. Narratives show present desires projected to the past. They show how tellers wish things had been, or how things typically are, as exaggerated by speakers' perspectives. In telling anecdotes teachers make explicit their perceptions and memories of events. Recognition of these elements of rationalization, typicalization and exaggeration in narratives means that teachers' anecdotes are suitable sites for investigating their perspectives since such perspectives will be writ large. As narratives are passed from teacher to teacher they are shaped by narrative processes so that the very structure of narrative in later accounts may determine the content as much as the original event did. Key elements of this structure, the Abstracts and Evaluations, are top ranking in cognitive hierarchies and therefore salient in perception and memory for both tellers and audiences, dominating and organizing details. This, too, will highlight the

tellers' perspectives.

- deep structures representing abstract roles or events. These can be expressed as binary contrasts or semiotic squares. Narrative structures are timeless in the mind, yet sequenced in the telling. The structures can explain delicate distinctions of time, character and role of speaker. These structures organize speakers' or listeners' pictures of reality as semiotic systems and also organize the telling in cultural patterns.
- culturally diverse: different cultural groups use specific ways of speaking and telling which depend on tellers' social interpretations, attitudes and beliefs. Tellers, as members of a given culture, are sensitive to hearers' presuppositions which may derive from the same culture. Teacher-to-teacher narratives must inevitably be clothed in teachers' ways of saying.
- carefully organized in conversation, in cognition and in cultural codes. These aspects give narratives a multi-dimensional context - yet narratives create their own textual contexts. A teacher's narrative will carry sufficient background as part of its internal organization for the point to be understood. The degree of detail in such background will depend on the audience. Recognition of all these levels of narrative organization means that teachers'

off-the-cuff reminiscences. They are textual objects worthy of investigation in their own right, which can also be intensively studied in terms of any of these levels of organization.

-- definitions of the past. The past is used to define the self and to provide perspectives on the present. Professions are partly defined by their discourse, both in formal and informal contexts. Teachers' narratives are a commonly occurring element of their informal talk. Teachers, therefore, define their past, their selves and their profession in narrative discourse.

The above list of major characteristics of narratives supports the claim that teachers' narratives reflect their cultural perspectives. A collection of narratives on common themes, told by a specific group such as teachers, can be analysed for tellers' cultural perspectives using models of narrative such as the Evaluation model used here.

I.ii. The Evaluation Model

The Evaluation model of narrative analysis was described in Chapter 2 and was applied in Chapters 8-12. In this model, narratives have a structure of : Abstract -- Orientation -- Complication -- Resolution -- Evaluation -- Coda (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972). It has been demonstrated that teachers' narratives can be analysed in terms of this structure and the model seems to be an appropriate tool

for investigating teachers' perspectives; it draws attention to the speaker's interpretation and perspectives in the Abstract and Evaluation sections. The model highlights both referential and social functions of teachers' narratives. As expected, not all teachers' narratives contain all the elements of narrative structure (see Chapters 2 and 6). Optional Codas are often not included. The Abstract, also optional, is not always present. The most important element in terms of the present research, the Evaluation, was present in over three quarters of the narratives. The Yesterday category was an exception in that Evaluations were present in less than half of the narratives in this category since many of them were reports. This generally high percentage of Evaluations shows speakers' involvement in the telling. The high percentage may be partly explained by the inclusion of questions on disasters (Q7) and humour (Q8), both likely to involve teachers emotionally, but both observably common topics in teachers' accounts of their work. However the large number of narratives, and of Evaluations, cannot be considered as artefacts of the interview since the planning (Q3) and parent questions (Q6) would not have been expected to produce so many narratives with so many Evaluations as were in fact delivered. This point is confirmed by the 105 spontaneous narratives which were readily collected in teachers' meetings and which are amenable to the same analysis. A high proportion of these contain Evaluations (Chapter 13).

The application of the Evaluation model has been

amply illustrated here with the inclusion of 62 complete narratives and extracts from hundreds of others, many of which were labelled or categorized. In applying a category system, such as the Evaluation model, to data, there is always a danger of overlapping categories. In the teachers' narratives some overlaps were noted. These involved the Evaluation. This is to be expected since by definition the Evaluation can be distributed throughout other structural categories.

However, it was recognized in Chapter 2 that there are limitations to the application of the Evaluation model, which has therefore been supplemented in this work. Five such limitations have been taken into account.

First, the model emphasizes social functions of narratives, but does not consider cultural aspects. Polanyi (1979; 1985) showed that cultural perspectives can be analysed by developing the model. The use of narrative analysis to approach cultural perspectives has been extended here by focussing on a professional group: teachers. Teachers were interviewed individually and it might be argued that any perspectives revealed are basically individual perspectives. However, it has been emphasized through extensive quotation in this study that there is great similarity in content and expression in teachers' narratives. Since the sample teachers were interviewed alone, in a wide range of different schools, the best explanation for similarities is that they reflect common cultural perspectives. There is a possible counter-argument to this point, that teachers' narratives might have social similarities if teachers had

communicated with each other about narratives between interviews. However, this cannot be accepted in view of the fact that very many teachers showed surprise at some of the questions (eg. on humour and disasters) and it was clear that no information about the interview had been passed from previously interviewed staff. Other inter-school communication about narratives seems extremely unlikely.

A second limitation of the Evaluation model is that it originally restricted attention to linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena within the narrative text without taking account of preceding or following talk. Labov and Fanshel (1977) partially remedied this by writing rules describing how speakers and hearers introduce a narrative, but a richer model showing how narratives are woven into discourse is the Conversational Analysis model (Chapter 2). This was applied to the present data in Chapter 13, in combination with the Evaluation model. That chapter revealed that spontaneous narratives also showed cultural perspectives since the teacher audiences received the narratives with demonstrable interest and agreement. Even a single narrative told in natural teacher-to-teacher talk with a clear positive reception from a large group of colleagues can be analysed using these models to show cultural perspectives.

Third, Wolfson (1982) argued that interview narratives of the kind to which the Evaluation model was originally applied were not performed and so were in a different category to performed conversational

narratives. The latter are arguably more akin to everyday talk. The present corpus contains many performed narratives (see below), therefore some interview limitations have been overcome and/or teachers' narratives are exceptions to Wolfson's point.

A fourth limitation is the lack of a psychological dimension in the Evaluation model. Chapter 3 has considered psychological models to show that schema theories of memory are compatible with the Evaluation model. This was demonstrated particularly by the 'narrative superstructures' in the Macrostructure model of Kintsch and van Dijk (1983), in which, at the least, the 'cognitive relevance' of the narrative structures is claimed. Other models of narrative in natural memory cited in Chapter 3 indicate the 'repisodic' nature of narrative and how it links with self-schemata (see section IV). This would indicate that teachers' narratives are highly typical of teachers' experience, even when the factor of newsworthiness is taken into account.

The final limitation is the lack of a deeper abstract level of analysis in the Evaluation model, such as those outlined in Chapter 3 and 4. There is, however, no reason why an analysis based on the Evaluation model, should not be taken further in such directions (see section III and IV).

The Evaluation model offers specific advantages in examining teachers narratives because the model gives emphasis to teller's perspectives. It also draws attention to specific structural slots (as other models

do), where unexpected results have been found. In this investigation somewhat surprisingly, the Orientations of teachers' narratives, showed first, mentions of twice as many boys as girls, and second, an overwhelming mention of English compared with other curricular areas. Furthermore, pupils' home background was often mentioned in Orientations. It is not likely that such results would be obtained in a narrative analysis of other professional groups, although there are no other studies at present with which to make such comparisons. This analysis of Evaluations also revealed that many of the teachers used metaphors (see Chapters 9 and 10). Labov (Labov et al. 1968 p.302; Labov 1972 p.371) noted that such Evaluations were used by lower social classes. The present results can be seen as clear exceptions to this, since teachers are classified as being in the middle class in the Registrar General's list. In this research, it is probably unnecessary to pursue social class as an explanatory factor for the metaphors. Other more plausible reasons for their presence can be put forward (see below).

II. Conclusions from the Analysis of Teacher's Narratives

First some general conclusions are drawn, before specific conclusions from particular categories of teachers' narratives are presented in the order of the foregoing chapters.

II.i. General Conclusions

In this study 961 narratives told by 123 primary

teachers have been analysed. Of these, 62 have been quoted as complete texts and large numbers of others have been cited in part. The narrative structures, particularly the Abstracts, Orientations and Evaluations, have been systematically compared to show common elements in content and expression.

Teachers' narratives occur frequently and are easily elicited in interviews. Teachers were willing, even eager, to share their experiences with this researcher.

The national context of primary education, with contemporary rapid changes in the political and economic context which have affected management and curriculum, was simply not mentioned in these narratives. Only the social context was frequently referred to.

The evidence is that the tellers of these narratives experienced primary teaching as hard work which they enjoyed immensely because they loved children. They found teaching rewarding and worthwhile because of their relationships with children. Thus 33 Breakthrough narratives and 12 Humour narratives give explicit, strong and unsolicited mention of the rewards and worthwhileness of teaching, linked to breakthroughs and funny things happening in the classroom. Teachers' perceptions of children's interest and enjoyment seem to play a key role in planning and in teachers' own enjoyment of their work. Children's interest and enjoyment were explicitly mentioned in 22 Planning narratives and in 12 Yesterday narratives. Their enjoyment was directly linked to that of the teacher in a further 15 Yesterday narratives. Besides the very common general tone of enjoying teaching

Besides the very common general tone of enjoying teaching because of the children, which was evident in many narratives, 10 Teaching narratives state quite simply that the tellers teach because they love children and that this is why they love their jobs. This sense of the reward and worth of teaching and the enjoyment of being with children was in spite of a strong perception of increasing social pressures and problems, articulated most clearly by the heads. Teachers presented themselves in narratives as being devoted to their work, highly motivated to teach children at a time, according to widely-held views, of low salaries and low morale.

A second general impression is that many narratives were performed, especially through quoted dialogue. They were animated with gestures and prosody using varied pitch ranges and intonation patterns, tones of voice and accents to imitate children. This gives many narratives an emotional tone of fondness for children, even of identification with children. There were frequent performed switches between child and adult roles. The incessant 'you know' which framed citations in reported teacher-pupil dialogue, might be a filler, hesitation phrase, or marker of informality, but it also seems to signify an assumption of typicality of the quoted words. There was also frequent quotation of teachers' thinking, cited here from 25 Breakthrough and 10 Disaster narratives. These two features give a general feeling to the narratives that many teachers were in effect saying, "This is how it is", "This is how I talk to the children and how they talk to me" and "This is how I teach". This

strong indication that teachers were presenting their perceptions of teaching as they typically experience it is supported by teachers' responses to the final interview question. When asked if they had given a picture of teaching, all the teachers either simply affirmed that they had done so or added a brief comment, then stopped. They could have said that it was impossible to give a picture of such a complex affair as primary teaching by answering a few questions for 30 minutes. None did so. Evidently tellers felt that narrative does capture representative experience.

II.ii. Conclusions: Specific Aspects of Teaching

This section draws conclusions from the narrative themes in the order of the foregoing chapters. First, a point about the content of the narratives as a whole. This content is a part of the primary teachers' cultural perspectives in the sense that these themes and events are what teachers thought it was worthwhile talking about. Naturally the scope of this content is marked out by the interview questions, yet all but the last of these elicited extensive comment and narration. The common patterns of language show how they talk about what they clearly thought were significant events. The narratives and the teachers' ways of telling them are a part of their cultural behaviour which reflects their values.

II.ii.a. Children

Teachers were asked which children stood out (Chapter 8). Theoretically they could have said anything

to characterize any of the children in their classes. In fact, their narrative responses can be analysed in three cognitive-cultural models. In the Academic model, clearly employed by 55% of the teachers, children are seen to stand out if they are at the extreme ends of a perceived linear, one-dimensional scale. Children at the top or bottom, bright or poor, are perceived as remaining in their teacher's mind, while those in the middle tend to be overlooked, or are forgotten, according to 16% of the sample. In the Problem model, explicitly drawn on in some way by 51% of the sample, children are said to achieve salience for teachers by being troublesome or by having home problems which are seen to affect school performance and behaviour. In the Character model, whose terms were referred to by at least 17% of the teachers, nice, extravert, mature or reliable children who have a sense of humour are said to stand out and remain in their teacher's memory. Children in the middle, apparently without problems or character, seem certain to be swiftly forgotten. The fact that so many teachers freely employ such a limited number of models independently of each other supports the argument that these are cultural perceptions. The models may guide or constrain teachers' perceptions of children, especially early in an academic year.

II.ii.b. Breakthroughs

Teachers were asked whether any children had had a breakthrough recently (Chapter 9). Positive responses showed that reported breakthroughs were perceived to be

overwhelmingly in the curriculum area of language, particularly reading, and that twice as many boys, rather than girls, were said to have had breakthroughs. Narratives presented a picture of struggle where pupils had difficulty and teachers tried various strategies. There was then a sudden moment when 'it clicked', or 'light dawned', or other metaphors were used to indicate learning. Breakthroughs were perceived as constituting major rewards of teaching. They were vividly remembered, unpredictable, unexplained, individual affairs. Breakthroughs were never recalled for groups or for the class. There was no evidence that teachers reflected on this successful learning. The cultural model of learning conveyed through Breakthrough narratives seems not to be influenced by educational psychology, rather it is influenced by situated knowledge and metaphors (see below). Breakthroughs seem to have been overlooked by teacher educators. The cultural values emphasized by teachers in their narratives were that learning is individual, a struggle, sudden, somewhat fortitious and outside the teacher's control. Breakthroughs were perceived as occurring frequently but they were not seen as being constant, progressive or continuous.

II.ii.c. Planning

Teachers confirmed that they planned lessons (Chapter 10). Most then gave narratives indicating that plans were laid aside if something 'cropped up': a child had brought something interesting to school, something interesting had happened, or the teacher had

spontaneously decided to do something else. Teachers displayed themselves as being essentially flexible, responding to children's interest, excitement and enjoyment, which reportedly led to the more successful lessons. In spite of claims to rational planning there was no evidence of a careful rationale behind the flexibility. Planning narratives conveyed a cultural model of learning which gives central importance to children's interest and enjoyment, to teachers' flexibility and to their roles as entertainers, and to the provisional nature of plans. There is a strongly ad hoc aspect to the model, which experienced teachers clearly think is necessary.

II.ii.d. Disasters and Humour

Narratives about disasters and humour in teaching were focussed firmly on children (Chapter 10). Disaster stories showed that teachers perceive an extraordinary range of events as disasters. The trigger word 'disaster' in Question 7 proved likely to evoke, on the one hand, an account of an apparently trivial event or, on the other hand, what might ordinarily be regarded as a tragedy. A common element in disasters seems to be that they pose a threat to the teacher's self-image. Narratives revealed teachers self-perceptions of coping with accidents and unexpected situations or with lessons which went wrong. Teachers claimed to have learnt from the latter. Humorous narratives showed that teachers laugh at children's incongruous sayings and doings, often with the children. Some events which teachers evidently laughed at

also posed threats to their self-image by loss of dignity, control or competence. Much teaching was seen as fun. Humour with children turned out to be tremendously important for teachers -- a further factor which made teaching a rewarding and worthwhile job.

II.ii.e. Parents

When asked about parents, teachers found most parents friendly and supportive (Chapter 12). Many also told narratives about a few Awkward parents. Teachers had learned to be cautious since some parents behaved unpredictably. Such parents were perceived as misunderstanding, exaggerating or making ill-founded and unnecessary complaints or threats. These were seen as being caused by inter-parent rivalry and unreasonable expectations or they were viewed in a social pathology model as reflecting home situations and social pressures. The cultural perspectives emphasize teachers' superiority over parents through being essentially right. Parents were portrayed as needing explanations to clear up their misunderstandings. The reverse situation was never narrated.

II.ii.f. Spontaneous Narratives

These natural, non-interview narratives were not thematically collected. The numerical weight of evidence of teachers saying similar things therefore lies with audience receipts, since these were told among groups of practitioners (Chapter 13). Headteachers narrated with certainty and authority, giving the impression of great

confidence in their power as heads. They seemed sure that other heads shared their views and interests. Such group narratives constitute excellent material for a cultural analysis since they convey group perspectives.

III. Cultural Models

In the following discussion abstract narrative structures or schemata which seem to lie behind many of the cultural perspectives in the narratives in the data are suggested. These are presented as binary oppositions, semiotic squares and a Control-Orientation model. All three types of models derive from narrative analysis as presented in Part II.

III.1. Binary Oppositions

Underlying the narrative categories examined in Part III are some abstract binary oppositions (see Chapter 4) which seem to encompass some of the cultural perspectives employed by the sample teachers. These oppositions are presented here not as mutually exclusive choices but rather as polarities between which teachers operate on a continuum, oscillating between the tensions of two poles according to the demands of the situation, never able to adhere completely to only one of them. The polarities are important as pairs, rather than as discrete categories. It is assumed that both poles are accepted by teachers as necessary and that part of the importance of these theoretical constructs lies in the relationship between the elements. The constructs are proposed as cultural models, since they have been derived from the narrative

data related to large numbers of teachers interviewed independently. The notion of polarity features strongly in the early work of the poet Goethe (1749-1832). Polar oppositions have been noted between cultures by Barnlund (1975) and Hsu (1981) and within a single culture by Lynd (1939 p.57). In primary education the notion bears some resemblance to the Berlak's 'dilemmas of schooling' (1981) and to Pollard's concept of teachers' role factors (1985 p. 151,153) although the following oppositions themselves, and their derivation from narratives, are very different.

III.ii. INDIVIDUAL <-----> CLASS

This polar opposition summarizes the problem of the class teacher working with a large number of children within a tradition of education which emphasizes individuals rather than groups. Teachers apparently believe that it is necessary to focus at different times either on individuals or on the class as a whole. Some individuals always stand out in teachers' perceptions, for extremes of academic ability, problems or character. Following the primary education dictum to 'meet the needs of the individual', it is the extremes from the total range of children, to whose needs the teacher apparently gives greater attention. Because of the demands of the whole class she cannot meet every need of every child. From the narrative evidence it seems that the extreme individuals (themselves on binary scales: bright -- poor; troublesome -- home problems) dictate much of the pace and style of classroom work. Individuals do dominate the

teachers' consciousness, but only some individuals, the extremes. In Awkward Parent narratives teachers will often focus attention off the child in question by drawing the parent's attention to the needs of the whole class. In other narratives types teacher focussed predominantly on individuals.

III.iii. PARENT <-----> TEACHER

This polarity captures the potential conflict between teachers and parents. Teachers see great importance in eliciting cooperation and support from parents to benefit pupils. They also affirm their need to know pupils' background, which is partly obtained from parents. When pupils have behavioural, social or emotional problems teachers tend to use a social pathology model to interpret the sources of these problems as being in the home, rather than in school. Teachers view the origin of the problem as being outside their domain and focus on the Parent pole. With awkward parents teachers find the parent pursues the interest of their child, therefore the teachers explain their own situation to parents. They move away from the need to know the home, from the Parent end of the polar opposition, towards the Teacher's end, focussing parents' attention on the teacher's concerns. Explanations about the teacher's situation overcome parental misunderstandings. Teachers, in narratives, can be seen to swing from pole to pole, according to the demands of the context. They see both poles as important concerns.

III.iv. FLEXIBILITY <-----> PLANNING

The need for planning, organization, structure and system was recognized by the sample teachers, but was offset by the frequent need to be flexible or to 'play it by ear'. Teachers said they could neither inflexibly stick to plans, nor continually 'play it by ear' without planning. Both poles were necessary. Planning was generally for the whole class or for groups, but not for individuals. Being flexible meant responding to individual children's interests and excitement when something unexpectedly 'cropped up', which was then used for the whole class. Some long term plans originated through being flexible to children's interests. In these cases the class apparently followed the individual. It is likely that with young children there is a constant tension between these poles, with the teacher's focus moving continually from pole to pole.

III.v. BREAKTHROUGH <----- > INCREMENTAL LEARNING

Children's breakthroughs as narrated, are reported as being sudden 'clicks' after a period of little progress. This can be contrasted with slower continuous incremental learning which some teachers also indicated took place. The polarity here seems to lie in the teachers' perceptions of learning: some takes place suddenly and is noticed as such (a breakthrough), other learning is a slow accumulation and is noticed gradually (incremental learning). Other points on the scale are where the learning is gradual but is noticed suddenly (a breakthrough, according to some teachers) or where sudden

learning is noticed gradually (a breakthrough?). This polarity is more speculative than others.

III.vi. DISASTER <-----> STABILITY

Many disasters were reported as unanticipated interruptions of stability. Disasters (accidents) are of various types, on a scale from mild events (eg. falling off a chair) to severely disturbing incidents (eg. concussion, child suicide). The teacher's response must be to restore stability. The majority of disasters in narratives occurred with individual children, as opposed to the stability of the whole class. The exception to this was when lessons went wrong, which invariably happened with the whole class. Because interruptions and the unexpected are characteristic of primary classrooms, and because young children inevitably have accidents, the polarity expresses the notion of teachers see-sawing between disaster and stability, such that for some teachers it is the norm to do so as they seek to control actual or potential disasters which could threaten their competence.

III.vii. HUMOUR <-----> SERIOUSNESS

This opposition is between the assumed serious tone of most classroom time and smiles or laughter for teachers, and children, arising from the incongruity of children's sayings and doings. The humour is unexpected and nearly always associated with an individual child. After laughter the teacher must restore seriousness. Humour turned out to be a key element in the sample

teacher's job satisfaction, supporting the argument that both poles here are necessary.

III.viii. UNPREDICTABILITY <-----> ROUTINE

Planned, serious, 'normal' classroom work is the routine, aimed at incremental learning. The opposite to this is the pole of the unpredictable and the unexpected. There are no narratives about routine, except a few brief reports about Yesterday. Perhaps this is because the routine is basically not newsworthy. There are, however, hundreds of narratives involving the unpredictable in most Breakthrough, Disaster, Awkward Parent and Humorous narratives. Teachers commented that such variety made teaching interesting and enjoyable. The unpredictable is newsworthy, but this alone does not explain such a high number of narratives featuring unpredictable events since teachers were asked to give a picture of teaching as they typically experience it. Most explicitly agreed later that they had given a picture of teaching, and none disagreed about this. It can be argued, then, that the unpredictable is a given, typical characteristic just as much as the more obvious one of routine is. This polar opposition is a characteristic of primary teachers' perspectives rather than solely a feature of narrative newsworthiness. Here again, it can be deduced that teachers will seek a balance between the poles and that both are necessary.

III.ix. ENJOYMENT <-----> GRIND

This opposition puts the hard work aspect of

teaching against enjoyment. Many teachers mentioned that teaching was inevitably often a 'grind', 'slog', or 'struggle'; it was 'hard work', 'extremely busy', and so on. The pressure of this can be endured if there is also enjoyment. Breakthroughs, Planning and Humorous narratives frequently include Evaluations where enjoyment is a prime element, often linked with being 'thrilled', 'amazed' and 'interested'. This enjoyment was often shared with children. Sometimes the teacher's enjoyment was derived from children's enjoyment. The enjoyment pole emerges very clearly from narratives and in the staffroom this sharing of enjoyment in anecdotes may be an important element of camaraderie among teachers. However, it must be balanced with the conventional complaining about the grind, which is also an element of camaraderie (see Chapter 1).

III.x. SOCIAL <-----> COGNITIVE

This opposition expresses the important polarity between learning, remembering, understanding concepts and developing cognitive skills on the one hand, and social relationships, feelings, attitudes and the like on the other. Both are obviously necessary and important in education yet in teachers' narratives there seems to be tension between the two and usually the Social pole is given greater importance than the Cognitive one. It might be expected that both would feature heavily in teachers' narratives about, for example, children, learning, planning or parents. In fact, there is scant mention of the cognitive end of this binary opposition in the

narratives. There are a few references to children's 'progress', without further specification except in the case of reading, where reading ages are mentioned (see Chapter 9). Terms such as concept, understanding, generalization or insight simply do not occur in the data, whereas the Social pole is continually mentioned as the teachers specifically and repeatedly stress children's 'interest', 'involvement', 'enjoyment' and 'excitement' and, more generally, continually refer to relationships in the classroom and social situations in children's homes, sometimes with great detail. Parallel cognitive situations are never referred to. The tension between the poles is clear in the breakthrough narratives (Chapter 9), where cognitive learning is described, but the teachers' reactions are broadly social. They are 'thrilled', 'excited', 'surprised', 'delighted' and so on, but they do not specify exactly what children learnt, or how, or how it might or should develop and why it was important or worthwhile. One could speculate that educational psychology had had little impact on the sample teachers, whereas sociological concerns with pupils social background seemed to have permeated their thinking about children. Where teachers seem knowledgeable and confident in speaking about social concerns, they may not feel such competence or confidence to discuss cognitive issues. The apparent emphasis on the social pole may also reflect the anti-intellectual theme mentioned in Chapter 1. A further possible explanation is that the most common time-span for teachers to work with particular pupils is an academic year, during which

cognitive development may be less obvious than social development.

III.xi. GENERAL <-----> TECHNICAL

This polarity refers to the teachers' use of language, expressed on a continuum drawing on professional technical registers from disciplines relevant to education, opposed to general common terms used to discuss education. The teachers' narratives overwhelmingly avoid technical terms or more academic registers: "Is the word 'autonomy'? I've forgotten big words since I've been in this job" (105). It may well be that the teachers were perfectly capable of using such language but there are cultural inhibitions against using technical terms in the staffroom and narrative does not require it. On the other hand, the topics would seem to require at least some technical reference: in children's learning (Chapter 9), planning (Chapter 10), the aims of moral education (Chapter 13). In this binary opposition, the teachers' use of metaphor (Chapters 9 and 10) is an interesting case of using General terms in contexts which would otherwise be expected to be Technical. The teachers' metaphors are so frequent in use, yet so limited in range, that they appear to constitute a folk terminology for learning. The metaphors seem to aid verbalization about the unknown or the inexplicable yet they may inhibit deeper reflection or professional development. To say 'it clicked', or 'light dawned' or 'she really came on in leaps and bounds' is meaningful as metaphorical description, but does seem limited as a

professional way of focussing on one of the central issues of education -- children's learning. As cultural descriptions the metaphors provide a perspective in their own right. They could be used for conceptual or theoretical development, as metaphors are used in science, but teachers do not seem to do this. In this polarity the social and cultural pressures seem to cause teachers to favour the General pole.

The polar oppositions as discussed and listed in Table 14.1 seem to form broader patterns, many of those in each column accompany each other and may be mutually reinforcing. In general, elements listed on the right are not the focus of narratives, while those on the left seem central to what the sample teachers had to say. This can be in part explained by the interview questions, but not entirely since many elements on the left were not the subject of questions.

Table 14.1

Teachers' Polarities

individual	-- class
parent	-- teacher
flexibility	-- planning
breakthrough	-- incremental learning
disaster	-- stability
humour	-- seriousness
unpredictability	-- routine
enjoyment	-- grind
social	-- cognitive
general	-- technical

Larger signifying patterns suggested by polar oppositions can be expressed as semiotic squares.

IV. Semiotic Squares

Semiotic squares (see Chapter 4) go beyond binary oppositions in expressing more complex structures of semantic relations. Horizontal dimensions are contraries, vertical ones are complementary and diagonal ones are contradictory. Table 14.2 shows a layout of this, where x and y are opposites. The item in the lower left square has qualities of both x and y, while the item in the lower right square has qualities of neither.

Table 14.2

x	y
both x and y	neither x nor y

The examples given below are, in effect, summaries of aspects of the cultural perspectives found in teachers' narratives. These squares express relations between cultural concepts. The assumption is that they have a cognitive correlation with schematic representations of memory and that to some extent they guide perception, recall and narration of classroom events. They are major organizing concepts for teachers.

The semiotic square of Table 14.3 follows on from the discussion of polarities, is based on Chapter 8, but is implicitly linked with most of the narratives in the present data.

IV.i.

Table 14.3

INDIVIDUAL	CLASS
OUTSTANDING	GREY

Teachers express the need to see children as individuals and treat them as such, meeting individual needs. This is a cultural concept not found in all societies. Large numbers of individuals make a class, the demands of which override those of individuals, as teachers report themselves telling parents. Since there is clearly tension between the Individual and Class they can be expressed as contraries. Outstanding children (see chapter 8) combine aspects of both Individual and Class. They are particularly salient individuals who readily come to teachers' minds, often years later. They are the ultimate Individuals, seen in terms of a limited number of cultural models of children, who to a large extent seem to determine the pace, style, management and mood of the class and the teacher's relationship to it. The Class without Outstanding children is a noticeably different entity. Outstanding children seem to be the social, behavioural and academic yardsticks for the rest of the Class. Most narratives of all types are almost by definition about Outstanding children. The Grey children 'in the middle' (see Chapter 8) are neither Individuals nor the Class. They do not stand out. If they are absent

the effect is negligible. They work quietly but are easily overlooked or forgotten. They form a busy group of the Class, yet they are not identified as a group beyond being 'in the middle'. Many teachers are aware of overlooking them, but do not seem to have strategies available for giving them more attention. The Grey area in this model must be a cause for concern since such pupils are much less in teachers' consciousness and therefore probably receive less attention.

The model can now be analytically summarized. Individuals and the Class are contraries. The Outstanding children are complementary to Individuals, since they are individualized yet obviously special. Not every Individual is Outstanding. The Grey children are a group like the Class. They form a nebulous part of the Class but are not as readily identifiable as the Class is. Outstanding and Grey children are contraries. The Outstanding children and the Class are contradictions, perceptually distinct individuals versus the administrative group. Grey children and Individuals are contradictions, since by definition Grey children are not individualized. This model describes a cultural perspective on children held by the teachers although it is not the only perspective.

Such a model, if substantiated by further research, has wide implications, for instance for assessment of pupils, or indeed for the cultural meaning of "children" for teachers, since it expresses cultural dynamics of teachers' perceptions of children. Other models in the square format are briefly suggested.

IV.ii.

Table 14.4

PLANNING	FLEXIBILITY
LEARNING	BREAKTHROUGH

Teachers state that they plan classroom work but narratives are all about the polar opposite of Planning - Flexibility - responding to children's interests and enjoyment when things 'crop up'. Learning combines elements of both of these antonymies. Much Learning is presumably planned, but the memorable instances of learning and the most successful lessons come from the flexible response of 'playing it by ear'. A Breakthrough involves neither Planning nor Flexibility since narratives reveal the fortuitous, sudden, unpredictable nature of Breakthrough and they are not exploited for children's interest as things which 'crop up' are. Breakthroughs occur for individual pupils. In contrast, Learning is assumed by narrators to take place with all children most of the time, even when it is initiated by an interested individual 'bringing something in', the teachers without question assume the whole class are 'interested' and 'enjoy' the learning. A Breakthrough is a kind of Learning but it is outside of the teacher's control. Flexibility originates with children but is ultimately controlled by the teacher. Teachers seem to reflect very little on the reasons for successful flexible lessons or learning in Breakthroughs.

IV.iii.

Breakthroughs and Humour have the common feature of being unpredictable and outside the teacher's control, but they are contraries to the extent that breakthroughs are cognitive affairs while classroom humour is a social event. Both Breakthroughs and Humour are key elements in the Rewards for teachers, since many teachers mention in narratives how they make teaching worthwhile.

Table 14.4

BREAKTHROUGH	HUMOUR
REWARD	GRIND

It is predictable that an occupation like teaching will have both a Reward and a Grind aspect. These are contraries. A Breakthrough is preceded by a Grind yet the Breakthrough itself is not a Grind, rather it is sudden excitement which contradicts the Grind. Humour and Grind are complementary inasmuch as Humour is vital to offset the Grind. Where the Breakthrough and Grind are primarily cognitive, the Humour and Reward are primarily social. The square expresses something of teachers' cultural perceptions of their jobs.

IV.iii.

Parents and Teachers have contrary knowledge of a child, contrary social experience of the child and, in

some ways, conflicting interests regarding the child. Where problems in parent-teacher relationships arise, the Head combines aspects of both Parent and Teacher, whilst remaining identified with neither. The Head, in narratives is said to listen to both, and to be fair to both when mediating between them. However nearly all narratives show the Head as shielding and supporting the Teacher.

Table 14.5

PARENT	TEACHER
HEAD	CHILD

The Child is neither Parent nor Teacher but is the focus of the interest of both. The semantic roles which Awkward Parent narratives reveal are Initiator/Opponent (Parent), Undergoer/Subject (Teacher), Prop/Helper (Head) and Object (Child). These roles constitute a cultural description of problem parent situations, though not all parents are involved in them.

IV.iv. A Control-Orientation Model

An even more general, abstract and powerful conclusion is to formulate a 'Square of Squares' to attempt a summary of major aspects of the teachers' narrative perspectives. This cultural model will be suggested after linking notions of the self.

Chapter 2 presented Goffman's notions of self in

narrative (1965,1975,1981), showing how narrators may present themselves as author, principal or source for impression management. These distinctions parallel those of Gennette (1980) and others between speaking subject, narrating subject, subject of narration and narrated subject in literary models (Chapter 4) where narrators focalize through different selves for narrative effect. Distinct selves are central to such models of narrative.

Intriguingly, the notion of distinct selves has also been put forward as central to the study of primary teachers for coping and managing interests-at-hand (Pollard 1985) and to stress the central importance of self-image as being distinct to professional image (Nias 1989). Primary teaching demands a lot of self investment (of talent, personality, skills and ideas) and self-expression. Pupils and events can confirm or threaten a teacher's image of professional competence (Nias *ibid.* p.55) or that teacher's personal self-image (Pollard *ibid.* p.237). It is therefore natural to draw a distinction between a teacher's self as part of the professional role and the teacher's self as a person, the self-image. Of the two, the second may have more importance for many teachers, since as many as 80% of teachers in their first decade of teaching do not feel like professionals but do feel, and need to feel, a sense of self (Nias 1989 p.38).

The model of teacher's cultural perspectives suggested below takes up these distinct selves of teachers in the context of those teachers narrating their experiences through narrative selves.

In Table 14.6 the left hand squares represent significant classroom or school events and actions which are within the teacher's locus of control. The teacher's role is controllable and expresses the teacher's professional self.

Table 14.6

	Control	Orientation
External	SIGNIFICANT EVENTS	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS
Self	PROFESSIONAL ROLE	TEACHER AS PERSON

The right hand squares represent the orientation of the teacher to significant others, who are sometimes unpredictable and outside the teacher's control, and the orientation of the teacher to his or her own self, as a person. The latter, at social and emotional levels, may be less easily controlled than the professional self. The notion of control implies controlling learning as well as controlling order.

This Control-Orientation model has some explanatory power, not only to represent an interpretation of the trajectory of a substantial number of individual narratives, but of classes of narratives. It summarizes at an abstract level a broad sweep of many narratives in the present data. Different classes of narratives trace slightly different patterns through the squares.

In Breakthrough narratives, Orientations describe

the role of the teacher as trying to help a child, attempting to control the significant event of learning. In a sense, the child as a significant other is in control. The child is not, apparently, learning. The breakthrough, when it occurs, is admittedly outside the teacher's control and if anything might be controlled by the child. The actual moment of the breakthrough, the 'click', is a significant event described in the Complication and recognized by the teacher in role but responded to by the teacher as person in terms of a 'surprise', 'thrill' or 'enjoyment' in the Evaluation. This emotional response of the personal self makes teaching worthwhile and reinforces social relationships between teacher and pupils. The teacher's self-image of professional competence, which could have been threatened by the non-learning, is restored. The narrative trajectory homes in towards the self at an emotional level in terms of the reward of teaching.

In Planning narratives, the role of the teacher is to plan and organize the significant event of classroom activity and learning. In Complications, something 'crops up', changing the significant event. This is frequently because an unexpected event occurs. The teacher sees the children's interest and 'takes it from there', responding in role by organizing learning around the new, now controlled, significant event. The teacher, in the Evaluation, observes that the children enjoyed it, were interested and excited, and herself enjoys it: 'we' enjoyed it. Again relationships are bonded and threatened disorder from distraction is avoided through the

teacher's competence in responding flexibly to children's interests. The personal self has satisfaction with work and the professional self is seen to be competent.

Disaster narratives can also be seen in terms of a path through this model. A significant event, a lesson, has been controlled in terms of order and learning. In the Complication this is disrupted by a pupil, as a significant other, unpredictably having an accident, or by pupils causing a lesson to go awry. The teacher in role copes with the disaster and sometimes with the implied threat of possible comebacks from a parent for negligence. The professional self is relieved, remains competent or in the case of lessons going wrong has learnt from a poor lesson, assuring future competence.

Parent narratives frequently have a Complication of a parent, as a significant other, storming in with complaints or threats. This significant event challenges the role of the teacher and therefore the teacher's self-image. Teachers solve this problem in role either by using explanations to clear up misunderstandings or by calling upon another significant person, the head, to ward off threats and deal with complaints. In Evaluations, teachers remain in control and are basically right. The self-image is restored after the comeback. Status and competence are unaffected. The stress and anxieties caused to teachers by awkward parents suggests that the personal self is also threatened, since teachers identify so much with their ("my") class, their children and their work.

Such general patterns described in these terms

subsume many, though not of course all, of the narratives in the present corpus. It can be speculatively suggested that the polar oppositions, semiotic squares and the control-orientation model have correlates in the form of schemata deriving from cultural perspectives and influencing later perceptions of events and the narrating of them. Form and content in narrative interact: with each other, with the mind of the teller and in cultural relations with narrative audiences. Teacher's narratives show how they see things. Teacher's narratives are a part of staffroom reality, mirroring and modelling the teacher's cultural reality, helping the teachers to mediate and manage that reality to present a professional self and defend a personal self-image.

In one way or another narratives keep things under control.

V. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This research has been limited in several ways. Further research might pick up on some of these points.

The present sample were British primary teachers, interviewed in the late 1970's. Further investigations might seek to replicate the present findings in the 1990's and establish whether a changed national context, in particular the National Curriculum, influences teachers' perceptions as shown in their narratives. Specifically, it can be hypothesized that the increased role of assessment and the establishment of attainment levels may be reflected in an enhanced cognitive element in narratives. In the Orientations of narratives, Maths,

Science and Technology ought to feature more frequently and there should be more equal mention of girls and boys. Given the increased role of parents in the management of education, narratives about parents could focus on different issues. However, a constraint on all such hypotheses of changes in teachers' narratives is the fact that cultures change slowly and therefore it may be some years before much change in narrative is in evidence.

While this study was limited to the primary phase, further narrative analysis could concentrate on secondary or tertiary levels of education. More subject-centred and fewer child-centred narratives might be expected. There might be fewer performance features since some of those reported here are clearly linked with teaching young children.

This study has approached teachers' cultural perspectives through narrative analysis, but results must be speculative in relation to reflecting specifically teacher's culture in the absence of substantial studies of other occupational narratives using the kinds of models referred to here. It would be interesting to compare teachers' narratives with those told by lawyers, journalists, or policemen, and in particular with narratives recounted by those working in other caring professions, such as medicine or social work. Since teachers' beliefs and values vary from country to country, cross-cultural studies within teaching can also be suggested by obtaining narrative data in different countries. In the present study there were no teachers representing ethnic minorities (there were none in the

schools visited), and how far ethnicity might affect narrative perspectives could also be investigated.

A necessarily limited number of questions were used here to elicit narratives. Other questions to elicit narratives include those focussing on best lessons, best pieces of work, most interesting children, best relationships with colleagues, and so on. Another limit here was that there were no follow-up probing questions. The present findings could be cross-checked with specific follow-up questions, eg. on Breakthroughs: Are there breakthroughs in Art, Music or R.E.? Are there children who seem not to have breakthroughs? Do others have many? How do breakthroughs relate to other kinds of learning? A particularly significant aspect to follow up is the question of teachers' use of metaphors thrown up by the present research. Previous analyses of metaphors in education (eg. Taylor 1984) have paid attention to the theoretical or programmatic writing of educators, but none to teacher's use of metaphors. The range, frequency of use, and cognitive and cultural significance of teachers' metaphors would warrant further study.

This study has demonstrated that narrative analysis of teachers' anecdotes is feasible, interesting and worthwhile. Results give a picture of teaching as teachers experience it. An examination of teachers' narratives is a hitherto unexplored way to investigate tellers' cultural perspectives.

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