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**Name and Shame - the impact of the Ofsted model of school inspection on the
working lives of primary teachers: an ethnographic study**

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to satisfy the requirements of the Doctorate in Education
at the University of Durham

School of Education

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Supervisor: Professor Michael Byram



0 2 APR 2002

Abstract: Name and Shame - the impact of the Ofsted model of school inspection on the working lives of primary teachers: an ethnographic study

The question the study seeks to address is what kind of effects primary teachers experience before, during and after an inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The focus of the study is the classroom and staffroom interaction of teachers in a small primary school serving a disadvantaged estate in the North of England.

Working as a voluntary classroom assistant in each of the classes in the school throughout the school's Ofsted year, the researcher adopts the role of participant observer, noting the teachers' response to the Ofsted process, as evidenced in their day-to-day activities and interaction.

The study begins by explaining the researcher's interest in this area of study and approach, then sets this against the background of recent research into the work of teachers in English primary schools. In Chapter Three, the practicalities of undertaking fieldwork in the school are explored, relating these to literature which the researcher found particularly helpful in making sense of the realities of undertaking an ethnographic approach in this environment.

An outline sketch of the background to school inspection in the UK is undertaken in Chapter Four to place the experiences of the teachers in context. The major part of the study, in Chapter Five, is given over to the story of Banktop School's Ofsted year, as observed by the researcher working as "another pair of hands" in the classroom. The analysis of this data in Chapter Six draws attention to three main themes throughout the year - the anxiety of the teachers; their view of Ofsted as separate from their own values in their day-to-day work; the stress on public performance as central to successful assessment by Ofsted.

In the final chapter, the experiences of the year are viewed in context of the research reviewed in Chapter Two and consideration is given to the limitations of the methodology. The usefulness of the Ofsted model of school inspection in the professional development of primary teachers is questioned.

Notes

Throughout the study where quotations from other texts have been abbreviated, this is indicated by a short row of dots.

All the names of people and places in the study, apart from that of the researcher, have been altered.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Setting Out

I call ethnography a meditative vehicle because we come to it neither as to a map of knowledge nor as a guide to action nor even for entertainment. We come to it as the start of a different kind of journey. (Tyler, in Clifford and Marcus, 1986, p 140)

Rationale

I began by wanting to carry out research into an aspect of school inspection under the Ofsted framework. My reasons for this were personal. I had undergone three Ofsted inspections in three years as a teacher trainer and I had found the process debilitating and demotivating. It made me ill and for a time took away much of the pleasure I had in doing my job. The prospect of being inspected every year in teacher training was a strong factor in my decision to take early retirement.

Yet my own personal feedback from Ofsted was positive. I was a skilful and experienced practitioner, effective in my leadership and management roles.

In my dealings with schools as part of my teacher training role I had also encountered senior staff who expressed similar feelings to my own with regard to the whole process of Ofsted inspection. Comments such as "With any luck, I'll be out before our next Ofsted!" were common.

I began to feel therefore that the effect of the Ofsted process on the working lives of teachers might well be an area worthy of investigation, particularly if it might be acting as a professional *disincentive* to capable, committed staff.

At the same time I had to think how I could approach such a study. There were time constraints. I had only a sabbatical year in which to carry out the study. I was anxious

therefore to use the limited time productively.

The framework of a single academic year however would enable me to spend an entire year with a school undergoing an Ofsted inspection. In this way I could study at close quarters the effects of the whole process - the preparation, the actual inspection and its immediate aftermath - on the staff of a single school.

I was interested in doing this because of my previous experience when working on a Master's dissertation on School-based Initial Teacher Training. As part of this I had talked to staff in six schools with whom I had worked over a period of around 8 years. The responses which I got from them were somewhat more mixed and negative than the responses which other researchers in the same area seemed to be getting from their partner schools. (Howard, in Blake et al, 1995, pp. 254-255)

While there were a number of possible reasons for this discrepancy, one which I felt might well be relevant was my own close working relationship with the people to whom I was talking. They knew me. I was not a distant correspondent with a questionnaire. We had worked together over the years and had weathered all sorts of ups and downs together. This was emphasised in particular by one teacher who sought me out after school hours to tell me in detail about his uneasiness with regard to School-Centred Training, in which he was involved.

At the time I had little choice but to work with people I knew, due to the practical constraints on my situation i.e. doing a full-time job and a further degree at the same time. The outcome of this however was that, now I had the opportunity, I wished to carry out further research by working alongside teachers, to learn from shared professional experience. In this way I hoped to gain greater insight into practice, not just in terms of targets reached, or policies instituted, but rather in terms of how the

teachers themselves *felt* about their day-to-day work and their own satisfaction in their achievements.

At this stage however, I was only theoretically aware at a superficial level of the demands involved. When I came into teaching in the early 1970s, ethnography as a means of educational research had been much in vogue, and I had grown up in the profession knowing of the studies which had been undertaken around that time. I had also developed a deeper interest in the approach during my Masters course, which had covered the work of Van Manen and drawn attention to the early practitioners in the field in the Chicago school.

In a sense, my choice of subject and approach was a personal journey for me, drawing together strands of my professional experience and development, building on ideas which I had heard and read about, yet never had the opportunity to pursue in the course of a busy working life.

It would however be fair to say that I embarked on this approach, this personal and professional journey, without any detailed insight into the practical demands of undertaking fieldwork. My decision to undertake a case study of a primary school during its Ofsted year by means of participant observation was guided by my own desire to explore the approach, together with chance external events which directed me towards a particular time and place to carry out the study.

Chapter 2

Mapping the Project – Understanding the Working Life of the Primary Teachers

Teaching and learning are processes which have social, interactive and pragmatic dimensions. The issues are not simply cognitive or organisational but involve the perspectives and practical concerns of teachers and pupils as they work together. An understanding of the common patterns in the subjective perceptions of teachers and children is thus a necessary complement to other types of insight about teaching and learning in classrooms. (Pollard, 1985, p.7)

My choice of Banktop School as the location for my research was opportunistic.

I approached Banktop School because I saw an article about their work in the local paper. It sounded interesting and relevant; the staff enthusiastic and committed.

They were due to be inspected at the end of the academic year. It also had the advantage from my point of view that Banktop was a small school, in which it would be possible to spend time with every member of staff, and hopefully gain a view of Ofsted's impact on the life of the institution as a whole, as well as on the teachers as individual practitioners.

Woods, speaking of his research into creative teaching in primary schools (1995, p.12) describes his case study schools not as a representative sample, rather

“an opportunity sample, which demonstrates possible courses of action for teachers, rather than generalities or typicalities among the profession as a whole”. Banktop offered me an “opportunity” case study. The headteacher welcomed my approach.

The school's enthusiastic response did however mean that I catapulted myself, somewhat over-hastily into a year at Banktop as a part-time classroom assistant and

participant observer. My choice of school offered me a particular set of opportunities, but at the same time it limited others. The full implications of this choice will be developed in the following chapter.

I also chose to go into a primary school to carry out my study, because I was so familiar with the world of secondary school and higher education that I felt it might be too easy to 'go native' in those surroundings.

Going native is an objectionable term, deservedly, for an objectionable phenomenon. It means over-identifying with the respondents, and losing the researcher's twin perspectives of her own culture and, more importantly, of her own 'research' outlook. (Delamont, 1992, p.34)

I had never taught at primary level since I trained as a teacher, long before the National Curriculum, Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and published national 'league tables' of primary school scores. I hoped the world of the primary school was sufficiently distant from the majority of my practice to allow me to retain my own perspective.

Novice and experienced teachers would benefit from adopting the aims of researchers: fighting familiarity. Many social settings, and especially educational institutions, are too familiar. Central features of education are so taken-for-granted that they are invisible. (Delamont, 1992, p.42)

Choosing an unfamiliar educational setting, however, involved placing my own experiences against a context of wider research into the changing roles and responsibilities of primary teachers in England and Wales. In this chapter, therefore, I set out to reacquaint myself with the day to day life of primary teachers.

To be able to view the impact of Ofsted inspection on the working world of the primary school, I intended to work with the school well before its Ofsted inspection, as well as in the period immediately before the inspection and during the inspection week itself. This would give me an opportunity to contrast the normal day-to-day routine of the school with the work carried out during the immediate pre-Ofsted period and the week of the inspection. I intended to plan with the headteacher and teachers to spend time throughout the year in each classroom, to fit in with the needs and routine of the school and meet the requirements of my study. (A diagrammatic representation of my time in school is in Appendix I)

This initial outline schedule needed to be considered in light of the research into the working life of primary teachers. In order to do this I focused on studies of primary teaching in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s. In this way I hoped to map out the working world of the primary school, in order to inform my journey through Banktop School's Ofsted year.

As the quotation at the beginning of the chapter indicates, I believed that an understanding of the social processes of the primary school might provide a valuable insight into teaching and learning at this level.

The social world of the primary school is created by children and teachers acting and reacting to each other within their classroom situation and this is set within the context of their school, community and society. If we want to understand what happens in primary schools then we cannot ignore the influence of the subjective perceptions, understandings, feelings and social traditions which result. (Pollard, 1985, p.11)

Pollard's view, that the social environment of the school is a central factor in the quality of the teaching and learning seemed very relevant to my planned study. The day-to-day decision making, the routine activities of teachers and pupils, "the pragmatic adaptation to specific pressures or necessities" (Pollard 1985, p.31) formed an aspect of the working lives of teachers that I wished to study. I wanted to see how Ofsted inspection affected teachers in these key areas in the shaping of the learning and teaching experience.

As a participant observer, spending periods of time in each classroom throughout the school's Ofsted year, I hoped to discover how external inspection affected the working lives of Banktop's teachers. In a way, I was making use of Pollard's overarching theme, that

positive social relationships and the provision of appropriate school experiences must be seen as a vital contribution to formal learning outcomes. (Pollard, 1996, p.317)

Pollard postulated that primary teachers' sense of professional self was bound up in a number of key aspects of their work - "enjoyment, workload, health and stress, autonomy and maintenance of self-image" (Pollard, 1985, p.35). The importance of the primary teachers' "self" was also stressed by Woods and others.

For many of Nias's (1989, p.182) teachers. 'to adopt the identity of "teacher" was simply to be "yourself" in the classroom', and for 'Sarah', the teacher in Aspinwall (1985), teaching, far from being peripheral, was 'so vital' to her, that she could 'not divorce being a teacher from being me'(p.43) What Pinar (1986) refers to as 'the architecture-of-self' is constructed over time as a result of numerous interactions in numerous contexts. There is no disjuncture between private and public here. (Woods, 1995, p.138)

This lack of separation between professional and private self seemed to me to make the participant observation of day-to-day life in the classroom a sensitive but worthwhile way to study the impact of Ofsted inspection on the working lives of teachers. By being part of the classroom activities and interaction, seeing how teachers expressed their values, satisfaction, enjoyment and anxieties *through* their teaching and their ordinary daily interaction with their colleagues, I hoped to find evidence of the nature of Ofsted's impact on their professional lives.

Staffroom interaction was a significant part of this.

The staffroom is in many respects a place of retreat... a place for anecdotes and conversation, a place where many headteachers are uneasy and into which parents seldom venture. In short it is the territory of the classroom teacher and a critical area in which confidences are exchanged, tension is released and the staff culture of the school develops. (Pollard, 1985, p.20)

I believed that such informal conversations between colleagues might also provide me with an insight into the impact of Ofsted inspection on the Banktop teachers and as a participant observer throughout the school day, I would be able to join in such exchanges.

Teacher cultures, the relationships between teachers and their colleagues, are among the most educationally significant aspects of teachers' lives and work (Hargreaves, 1994, p.165)

In planning my research I therefore deliberately chose to look for my evidence in these areas. I intended to learn through being a participant observer of the interaction of teachers with pupils or each other in the classroom and the staffroom (or the shared spaces around the school which from time to time served as proxy staffrooms). I also hoped to be able to interview teachers about their feelings about the inspection and discuss their opinion of my own observations.

The implications and limitations of this choice I will discuss in later chapters, but in taking advantage of an “opportunity” case study and focusing on classroom or staffroom interaction, I hoped my own study might complement in some small way the work of other researchers into the effect of Ofsted, who seemed to be proceeding mainly by means of interviews and questionnaires. (Scanlon 1999, Ouston et al., 1996, Earley, 1998, Jeffrey and Woods, 1998)

The work environment of the primary school in England and Wales had however been subject to radical change throughout the 1990s, following from the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and the inspection of its delivery under a reformed framework of criteria implemented by Ofsted. The work of primary teachers had become increasingly intensified.

It is not difficult to find evidence from research done on the effects of the National Curriculum for England and Wales in primary schools to support the intensification thesis. What for some was ‘a dream at conception’ turned into ‘a nightmare at delivery’ (Campbell, 1993). It is clear that there has been massive work overload, a loss of spontaneity and an increase in stress, that the sense of ‘fun’ and caring human relationships has receded in some classrooms, that quantification has replaced qualitative evaluation, that bureaucracy has burgeoned, that some teachers feel that they have lost autonomy. (Woods, 1995, p.4)

Campbell and Neill point out that before 1988 curriculum change at primary school level had been ‘piecemeal and voluntary’ depending largely upon ‘the initiative of individual teachers, schools or local education authorities’ (1994, p.203). By late 1997, when I began my year of participant observation in Banktop School, primary teachers not only had curriculum content prescribed, but were expected to be planning

their teaching of literacy and numeracy according to the approaches and methods recommended by central government.

Towards the second half of the 1990s there was also official endorsement and promotion of whole class teaching, single subject approaches and the reintroduction of setting, as opposed to the mixed ability, integrated or project based methodologies common at primary school level, before the introduction of the National Curriculum.

In part this stemmed from a government perception of the 'success' of these methods in other countries such as those on the Pacific rim, but it was also in accord with the political desire to place the responsibility for pupil learning outcomes wholly on the quality of teaching and school organisation, rather than acknowledge that social factors outside the school might be a key influence. Her Majesty's (then) Chief Inspector, Chris Woodhead, was adamant that pupil background was simply an 'excuse' made by failing teachers and schools.

In his 1998 annual lecture, Mr Woodhead noted criticism of the style he had adopted as HMCI, stating he was 'unrepentant'. He argued that the Government of the day could reform all aspects of the education process, but that 'if these reforms do not challenge the orthodoxies which have dominated classroom life in too many schools for the past forty years, then they will do nothing to raise standards... These things need saying, loudly, clearly and, at times, intemperately' (Education and Employment Committee Report, June 1999, para. 217)

This placing of the blame for 'low standards' firmly on the 'orthodoxies' of teachers, regardless of the social and economic factors at work in the school catchment area, was hard for practitioners to accept.

We all know of countless colleagues who have been seriously damaged by the methods of Ofsted in schools where they have been trying to manage impossible situations. (Letter from Headteacher to the Times Educational Supplement, 2nd October, 1998.)

Academic researchers into comparative teaching methods were also more moderate in their views.

Even Reynolds and Farrell (1996), who argue that standards will improve if strategies based on whole class teaching are adopted, concede that social factors like poverty rates, divorce rates, percentage of single parent households and family occupation, explain sizeable proportions of international achievement variations when compared to school factors. As Berliner and Biddle (1995) suggest, families and the communities in which children spend the major proportion of their time must be significant factors in school achievement. (Galton et al., 1999, p.191)

From Chris Woodhead's appointment, first as Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council, to his later appointment as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, he however made it clear that he shared the predominant government view "in regarding the 'problems' of primary education as mainly the result of poor teaching." (Galton et al., 1999, p.16)

Jeffrey and Woods sum up such official attitudes as follows:

To them it is teachers who have suffered from ideology, for they have been under the influence of Plowdenesque child-centredness, which has left children too often to their own devices, been too woolly minded, neglected the basics, and been complacent about unsatisfactory standards (Woods and Wenham, 1994)... In effect, however, the government - and Ofsted - are driven by a highly distinctive set of values which are markedly opposed to those of the majority of primary teachers. (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998, p.57)

The model of school improvement accepted and promulgated by central government during the 1990s was one based on a managerial approach that "externally imposed

standards are needed to provide the will on the part of teachers to pursue excellence” (Galton et al, 1999, p.191). The model of teaching provided by the Framework for Inspection in the Ofsted Handbook was a transmissional one, with the pupil as the passive recipient of a set body of knowledge, the National Curriculum, which the teacher had to impart. Rather than teachers working with children, starting from their experience and building on it, pupils and teachers were seen as separate entities, clients and service-providers, and “pupils were used to test the teacher’s competence and the school’s efficiency against a predetermined set of criteria” (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998, p.58)

The working world of the primary teacher, which I re-entered in 1998, was therefore significantly altered from the one I had trained for in the early 1970s.

Primary teachers' values since the 1960s are well-known. In broad terms, they believe in holistic, integrated knowledge, child-centred teaching methods, a measure of professional autonomy, continuous and formative assessment and collaborative teacher cultures (Nias et al., 1989; Acker, 1990; Bonnett, 1994, Alexander, 1992; Vulliamy and Webb, 1993 and Sugrue, 1997). (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998, p.58)

I was joining Banktop School at a time when this culture continued to be aggressively attacked by government, and when schools which did not meet the satisfaction of Ofsted inspectors were to be “named and shamed” in the national and local press, as a matter of government policy.

Banktop School served a catchment area of great social deprivation, so the government view that family background and local environment were simply used by teachers as ‘an excuse’ for low achievements was likely to be of particular concern. I

was very glad that my 'opportunity' case study might offer me the chance to investigate this aspect of the impact of Ofsted on the working lives of teachers.

Hargreaves points out that research into the work of primary teachers identifies a commitment to care and nurture as central to their role (1994, p.146). Candidates entering the profession tend to be attracted by the "interpersonal aspects of teaching" (Ibid). I felt that there might be a possibility that teachers who had chosen to work with needy children in a demanding area might find it particularly challenging to reconcile the caring, supportive aspect of their work with "the technicism of the Ofsted model" (Jeffrey & Woods, 1998, p.10)

I felt that the intensification of the primary teachers' work might be highlighted in this environment.

The administrative colonization of time and space has increased and become more sophisticated in recent years... With the growth of administrative surveillance, what had previously been private, spontaneous and unpredictable becomes public, controlled and predictable. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.112)

The private nurturing work of the primary school was subject to external scrutiny according to a model of inspection operating within a managerialist discourse.

The language of the Ofsted Framework on which the inspectors base their work is a technical one steeped in the concepts of functionality and the use of the measurement of components to evaluate a schools effectiveness. These primary teachers on the other hand, valued qualitative engagements, holistic development and multivariable measurements of the pupil as a person. They valued human relationships. (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998, p.10)

I felt that Banktop School might offer me the chance to observe the conflict of such values in the everyday work of the school, as it moved through its inspection year.

Although the nature and effect of the intensification of the work of the primary teacher throughout the 1980s and 1990s was a matter for academic debate (Hargreaves, 1994, Campbell and Neill, 1994), what was not in contention was that the workload of primary teachers had altered and increased. Hargreaves' argument, developing the work of Michael Apple, indicated that the "proliferation of administrative and assessment tasks, lengthening of the teacher's working day and elimination of opportunities for more creative and imaginative work" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.119) had resulted in the deskilling of teachers.

Campbell and Neill however, felt that their evidence did not support the argument that primary teachers in England and Wales felt deskilled by the changes following the introduction of the National Curriculum. The teachers they interviewed "confirmed their skills had been enhanced by having had to implement the National Curriculum" (Campbell and Neill, 1994, p.213). Nevertheless their research into the work of primary teachers at the start of the 1990s did show, that even before the establishment of Ofsted to inspect the delivery of the National Curriculum, the need to respond to rapid policy change resulted in a bureaucratic overload as teachers had to adapt their practice to meet the demands of government directives.

Teachers worked on average, 53.6 hours per week in term time in 1991... Of this overall working week only 35 per cent was spent teaching pupils, and 45 per cent was spent in contact with pupils. The rest of the time was taken up with preparation (including marking), professional development, administration and other activities. They worked six hours at weekends, and on weekdays the average time spent working was 9.6 hours. (Campbell and Neill, 1994, p.62)

Menter et al have pointed out that one of the problems of carrying out research into teaching in the 1990s has been that "researchers exploring the impact of change on

education have had difficulty keeping pace with the turn of events” (Menter et al, 1997, p.3). This was certainly my experience, and in a later chapter, I will address specifically the changes in the nature of inspection, which altered the relationship between classroom practitioners and inspectors.

In this chapter I simply wish to highlight key issues in the working life of primary teachers which might be relevant to my study. One of the characteristics of primary school teachers previously noted by researchers was their conscientiousness. (Osborn, 1985, Nias, 1989) This quality could become a double-edged sword, when teachers worked themselves into a stressed condition to satisfy the new requirements placed on them

This syndrome, the enervating, subjective sense of working harder and feeling they were achieving less, was seen by teachers to be the product of expanding demands within the same time frame. (Campbell and Neill, 1994, p.166)

Hargreaves speaks of the ‘guilt’ of teachers, who feel unable to match the varied professional demands placed on them, indicating that the open-ended nature of the job encourages a sense of never being able to do enough.

There is no consensus on the limits to care, on what it is realistically possible to achieve through one’s work. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.148)

Qualitative researchers into primary teaching in England during the 1990s were beginning to look more closely at the emotional response of teachers to the changing demands of their job.

Hitherto, the study of teachers has been overwhelmingly concentrated on their thinking. We are also interested in teacher thinking, but see this as indissolubly connected with feelings, which have come to assume prior importance with the changes. Strong feelings have been generated, and these have implications for teachers’ ability to do their job. These are a more

relevant subject for study, we feel, than a detailed examination of the new role itself. (Woods, Jeffrey, Troman and Boyle, 1997, p.50)

I was intending to be party to the emotional pressures of a school's Ofsted year, to observe what the teachers felt about the process, as evidenced by their talk and actions in the classroom and staffroom.

When I approached Banktop School, it was at the end of a decade of rapid change. In seeking to understand the situation of the teachers with whom I was to work, such research into the experience of primary practitioners provided a helpful guide. It did not, however, prepare me for the practical demands of undertaking field work in the primary classroom. In the following chapter I will develop in detail the reality of plunging into participant observation in primary school and the implications of adopting this methodology as my means of study.

Pollard describing his use of ethnography as his "main methodological approach" (1985, p.x), makes it sound relatively straightforward.

Ethnographers are concerned to describe the perspectives and point of view of the people in the particular social situations being studied as accurately as possible. They try to do this through careful observation of and participation in the subject's way of life. In this respect being a teacher ... provides a flying start for anyone investigating aspects of schools (Pollard, 1985, p.x)

Menter et al point out that although their fieldwork had been "ethnographic in its method", it had been "closer to critical ethnography in its attempts to reflect the micro-social context and reflexivity than to traditional ethnography" (Menter et al, 1997, p.14). The day-to-day process of the fieldwork, however, the practicalities of the research, the relationships of researchers and researched, were not spelt out.

Woods, giving an account of the methodology for his research published in 1995, and that with Jeffrey in 1999, explains that he proceeded “through school and classroom observation, interviews, study of documents, film and life history” (Woods, 1995, p.12). By using a multiplicity of methods he aimed to “accumulate rich data” and, in Denzin’s words (1989, p.83), present the “details, context, emotions, and the webs of social relationships which join persons to one another”. (Ibid)

Working on my own with very limited time and resources, I felt daunted by such a range of methods. I could not contemplate using such a wide variety of means. I hoped rather, that by revisiting the classic educational ethnographies carried out in English schools in the 1970s, I might find a way in which I could meaningfully carry out participant observation in school, through a somewhat more limited and realistically manageable range of strategies.

What I did take on board however from recent ethnographic research in school was the desirability of collaboration. Both Pollard and Woods stressed that they had made every effort to work with the teachers they studied, rather than simply reporting on them in a remote, anthropological fashion.

Both had studied schools where they were known figures, and in the case of Pollard (1985), his selection of case study schools was drawn from schools where or with whom he had worked as a teacher. As a result, like Woods above, he states he can

make no undue claims about verification or generalisability, for such concerns require different types of research and more resources than I have had available. (Pollard, 1985, p.xiii)

Nor would I be able to make any such claims, although as Pollard (1985, p.xi)

indicates

Knowledge about school and classroom processes based on this type of research develops mainly through an accumulation of case studies.

I hoped I would be able to conclude my research by comparing my observations and analysis with the findings of other studies.

I certainly had few resources available for my own research. All I had was myself, a single academic year and a welcome from one small primary school in the North of England. These factors shaped both my choice of approach and its implementation, as I hope to show in subsequent chapters.

I began from a theoretical appreciation of the working lives of primary teachers in the late 1990s derived chiefly from the literature, and reasons, related to established research into primary teaching, for choosing to study the day-to-day interaction of teachers and pupils at Banktop School. I lacked, however, a detailed understanding of the practicalities of fieldwork in this environment. When I actually took up my role in the classroom, I found it was the accounts of the early ethnographic researchers in secondary schools in the 1970s, which most helped me make sense of my experiences, because, as will become evident in the next chapter, the scope and ambition of their work was closer to what I could hope to achieve

Chapter 3

Travellers' Tales

Even minor phenomenological research projects require that we do not simply raise a question and possibly soon drop it again, but rather that we "live" this question, that we "become" this question. Is this not the nature of research: to question something by going back again and again to the things themselves until what is put to the question reveals something of its essential nature?
(Van Manen, 1990, p 43)

I began my journey by seeking to go back to the thing itself, by going back into a school to "live" its Ofsted year. At this point however my knowledge of the nature of participant observation had been gleaned mainly from the research which I had encountered in the course of my educational studies. On this partial theoretical understanding, participant observation seemed to me to offer a chance to get close to the "private life" of an institution and to the working lives of its members, in a way which other research approaches did not seem to permit.

Theoretical Framework

There was therefore a progression of stages in my understanding of the nature of participant observation - the initial theoretical choice of approach, then what I came to appreciate after a term of working with staff in school and reviewing and extending my reading in the light of that experience.

The view of teaching as a rational and stable activity amenable to scientific methods...is not one that has been recognised by teachers.....Science has made some important contributions in education, but it has also had some bad effects. In particular, it has oversimplified complex situations; prioritised the future (in the form of objectives) over the present (process).....(I)n relation to current realities, it can only reach a part, and not necessarily the most important part of the activity. (Woods,1996, pp.20-21)

At the start I was much influenced by Woods. His account of "Living and researching a school inspection" written with Bob Jeffrey and documenting the week before an Ofsted inspection in a primary school, encouraged me to think about the possibilities of a study of the Ofsted year in a primary school serving a similarly challenging area.

Ofsted inspections are set to pervade the whole of teacher culture, and anxiety levels among teachers are high.....What new tensions and dilemmas are created for teachers and how are they resolved? How is the introduction of this mode of inspection affecting teachers' perceptions of their whole selves being integrated within the teacher role, and what are the implications of that for teaching and learning? (Woods, 1996, p97)

The approach which Woods and Jeffrey were planning to adopt in their proposed study of six schools was qualitative and involved "interviews, diaries, documents, film, life-histories and observation" over a three year period. As mentioned above in Chapter Two, my own approach had to be suited to one person with the time constraint of one year and the demands of a doctoral thesis to fulfil.

Yet it seemed to me that by concentrating on one school and focusing on a particular aspect of the Ofsted framework of inspection - the impact of the "Name and Shame" policy on the working lives of teachers - I could undertake a study which was narrower but might be able to achieve a depth of insight through observation of a particular group of staff by participating in their day-to-day activities.

In arriving at this view I was also influenced by Hammersley's opinion that the studies carried out by Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball in the 1960s and 1970s "provide a much better model for future research than does more recent (ethnographic) work " and that " narrowness of focus is one of its greatest strengths." (Hammersley, 1990, pp.108-109)

The studies of Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball, to which Hammersley refers, were influential on account of the insight they provided into the impact of streaming in secondary school, both on the attitudes of teachers and the achievements of pupils. Together they formed a powerful critique of streaming practice through studying the day-to-day work of three individual schools over a number of years as participant observers.

In his introduction to Ball's study of Beachside Comprehensive, Lacey indicates the importance of the influence of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester in the 1960s, through beginning "the experiment of applying social anthropological techniques to modern society" (in Ball, 1981, p. xi). The three case studies of Ball, Hargreaves and Lacey aimed to analyse the process of schooling in this manner.

Lacey explains that one of his own chief concerns in analysing the social process within a single school "was to throw light on the general problem of the lack of success of working class children" (in Ball, 1981, p.xiv) and he points out with regard to Ball's study that

It is a useful and potentially powerful tool in the hands of those who believe it is only through analysis and understanding that the potential of reformed or innovative structures will be realised (in Ball, 1981, p.xiv)

The three studies above, which Hammersley felt would serve as an appropriate model for ethnographic work in school, are underpinned by a belief that gaining insight into the process of schooling through studying a single school could help inform and bring about change.

They are essentially positive and constructive exercises, providing insights into the

perspectives of the people involved, how they cope with day-to-day demands in school and how they rationalise their feelings and decision making. I found it helpful that they were written at a time when issues of social class were a matter of debate in education. I found this particularly useful for the purposes of my own study as a contrast to the "class-blind" managerial approach to bringing about change in education adopted by Ofsted.

Lacey makes quite explicit that he is attracted to "a purposive, change-orientated view of society", that his interest in a sociological approach depends on him "seeing it as a tool, as a means for progressing the realisation of this purpose", believing sociology to be "a vital analytical tool in the reconstruction of our society" (in Shipman, 1976, p.64)

For instance, witnessing some extreme reactions of teachers to troublesome pupils, he demonstrates that his position as a participant observer has helped him gain an understanding of the pressures behind the outbursts.

As an observer of these incidents, I felt little affinity with the teachers - all the sympathy was for the pupils. Yet.....many of these teachers were sincere in their desire to help and encourage their pupils to learn. I had to teach in order to appreciate the strains that on occasion turned reasonable kindly men into bellowing, spiteful adversaries. (in Shipman, 1976, p. 77)

Lacey's personal statement on carrying out participant observation highlighted an aspect of the approach which particularly attracted me to it, namely its humanity. It acknowledges that people act in ways which are not always praiseworthy or logical, but nevertheless recognises that an understanding of what they do and say is important in analysing the process of schooling. After working through the late eighties and nineties during a time dominated by management and school improvement theories in education, I found it invigorating to revisit an approach that

gave importance to day-to-day feelings and frailties, recognising that the relationships and interaction of human beings were a very complex and significant factor in the process of schooling.

I was therefore much influenced by Hammersley, his three recommended case studies, and also by Woods, in choosing participant observation as my method of investigating the working lives of teachers. I found the accounts of early classroom ethnography particularly helpful, because they were often explicit about the difficulties they encountered and the pitfalls of relationships in the field. The later ethnographic work in primary school, to which I referred in Chapter Two, seemed to place less emphasis on these (for me) problematic areas.

To participate and observe involves to some extent shedding the researcher-role, since participation means accepting in some degree a normal role within the social situation. But to accept such a role, whilst facilitating the process of absorption into the community, entails limitations on the material obtained and bias in its interpretation. (Hargreaves, 1967, p.204)

Possibly, as the approach became less novel as a means of classroom research, researchers may have felt less need to highlight such issues in detail or to document examples of their implications in practice. Whatever the reason, I found it easier to identify with Hargreaves and Lacey, struggling to clarify their role in their respective schools, and spending the majority of their time in school while undertaking their studies.

I had however given some consideration to the limitations of such an approach.

Most ethnography is carried out by lone researchers where cross-checking is impossible.....There remains the problem of observer reliability and validity. The normal one-person observational study is difficult to assess....The question about reliability is tough for ethnography. Validity is also to be queried because what is seen will be guided by preconceptions. (Shipman, 1988, pp 43- 44)

At the start, however, the extent of my attention to the possible limitations was blinkered by my anxiety to begin my fieldwork within the time framework available to me. I became more aware of the limitations of my approach both during my fieldwork and in my reflection on my data in the final stages of my study. In my conclusion I will consider the implications of hurrying into the field and look in more depth at the limitations of my approach.

The Nature of Participant Observation

The chief method of ethnography is participant observation, which in practice tends to be a combination of methods or rather a style of research.As Ball (1984, p.71) has noted, it is rather like 'riding a bicycle: no matter how much theoretical preparation you do there is no substitute for actually getting on and doing it.' (Woods, 1986, p. 33).

I went into school for a term before I began to review and extend my reading on participant observation. This altered my perception of the approach. At the start it had seemed almost self-evident to me that participant observation would permit me to get to the heart of the working life of the school and its teachers.

The central idea of participation is to penetrate the experiences of others within a group or institution. How better to do this than by assuming a real role within the group or institution, and *personally* experiencing these things in conjunction with others? (Woods, 1986, p.33)

I experienced much of the downside of participant observation

Wintrob identifies a number of sources of stress, including what he glosses as the 'disadaptation syndrome', which includes a wide range of feelings - incompetence, fear, anger, frustration. He cites one graduate student's account.

'I was afraid of everything at the beginning. It was just fear, of

imposing on people, of trying to maintain a completely different role than anybody else around you.... I'd keep thinking: am I really getting the data I need?' (in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.101)

Lacey also speaks of the feeling experienced by most researchers that the 'real' action must be somewhere else in the organisation and that important data are being missed. He rationalises this fear by considering that much of the day-to-day work in any institution is unremarkable.

The participant observer records as accurately as possible selected aspects of the everyday life of people in everyday situations. There is rarely anything dramatic, there is rarely anything of outstanding interest taking place...The interest in the situation emerges as the observer puts together the pieces of an amorphous and intricate puzzle in which even the pieces are not defined. (in Shipman, 1976, p.71)

Nevertheless what does emerge from accounts of fieldwork is that "the tensions and strains on the researcher are considerable"(Ibid)

Hammersley records his own early experiences as a research worker in secondary school where his initial feelings of self doubt and discomfort at having no real place or role in the organisation prompted him to abandon the enterprise after only five days. (1984, p.44)

Woods recalls Hammersley's experience to illustrate the difficulties in beginning ethnographic research. Not only may the researcher feel out of place and lacking clear purpose, but the practicalities of undertaking participant observation, and recording what is observed can also create problems. Making field notes is not an easy matter. In school there is the difficulty of finding a suitable place to write. Simply taking notes in class may well make the teacher uncomfortable and the pupils curious. The staffroom may be used for other purposes such as social chit chat, eating snacks, sharing information, and it might well look conspicuous, out of place, unsociable and discourteous to be recording notes there. The cloakroom may be bleak

and functional. There "may not even be opportunity to jot the merest note" (Woods, 1986, p.45)

All of the above were present in my own early experience, with the exception of the lack of dramatic events. In imagining that a primary school would offer more opportunity to work with the staff of a whole school, I had underestimated the sheer busyness of the primary teacher's day. The environment actually offered little chance for adults to talk to each other in private. During the early stages of my time in school I had hoped I would be able to carry out formal interviews, but as I will explain later in the chapter, I was not able to put this into practice at Banktop.

There was also nowhere in school to be inconspicuous. Classrooms opened into shared activity areas, the hall was a thoroughfare between different parts of the school, the corridors could be seen from standpoints in the classrooms and the office, the cloakroom, kitchen and staffroom opened off the main corridor next to the headteacher's and the school office.

Lacey carrying out research in secondary school in the late sixties found that "classrooms could be incredibly boring places" (in Shipman, 1976, p.71). My problem however was quite the opposite. In the primary school where I had negotiated a placement, there was always something happening. For example at an early stage while I was attempting to find a space where I was not in anybody's way, I was working on the computer in one of the activity areas. A child had a nosebleed in one of the attached classrooms and I was delegated the responsibility for pinching his nose rather ineffectively over the sink.

There was also a lot going on in the classrooms themselves. The pupils were not inclined to overlook the possibilities of the presence of another adult for assistance or

entertainment. When I finally found a place to catch up on notes, it was in one of the most demanding classes in the school, while the teacher was introducing each session. Because the pupils took so long to settle at the start of sessions, these times provided a window of opportunity for me to jot things down.

That did however ask a lot of the class teacher, not to be concerned by my activity, or to imagine that I was recording her every word and move. The pupils were also interested, convinced that I was making a note of bad children, a suspicion that was fuelled by teachers announcing from time to time that I would do exactly that, on occasions when especially good behaviour was required. I became aware that my presence in the classroom inescapably affected the environment and that, however inconspicuous I was or taken for granted I became, I was a useful additional resource to be called upon by staff and pupils. In the following chapters I will attempt to show how far and in what ways this involvement in the work of the school impacted on my research.

By spending an entire year as a participant observer in school year in school, I had hoped to overcome the initial novelty of my presence and enable the pupils and staff to carry on their work without any self-consciousness. In the following section on issues concerning access I will begin to explore the implications of my chosen role and in my conclusion I will look at some of the limitations it imposed.

Woods, using the symbolism of travelling in unknown areas, serves a useful reminder on the difficulties facing the ethnographic researcher.

Research is by its very nature problematic. It is like exploring unknown territories. There may be false trails, states of being becalmed, shipwrecked, attacked by lions, attempted seduction by native tribes. (Woods, 1986, p.32)

I learnt therefore that the approach I had chosen was much more complex than it

seemed to me at the start, both in practical and theoretical terms. In coming to this realisation I was greatly helped by the work of Clifford and Marcus. In particular I was able to view considerations about the validity of participant observation in a different light.

Another way of posing the problem is to refer to "corridor talk". For many years anthropologists informally discussed fieldwork experiences amongst themselves....These domains which cannot be analyzed or refuted....should not be regarded as innocent or irrelevant.....When corridor talk about fieldwork becomes discourse we learn a great deal (Rabinow, 1986, p.253)

In other words the single observer, her beliefs, values and experiences become part of the plot. I use the word "plot" advisedly, since ethnography is a narrative of sorts.

Clifford & Marcus point out that

In a recent essay on narrative Victor Turner argues that social performances enact powerful stories - mythic and commonsensical- that provide the social process "with a rhetoric, a mode of emplotment, and a meaning" (1980, p.153)....I treat ethnography itself as a performance emplotted by powerful stories. Embodied in written reports, these stories simultaneously describe real cultural events and make additional, moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements. (1986, p.98)

The argument put forward by Clifford and by Rabinow is that ethnographic studies are essentially partial and incomplete, but that they are no less worthwhile on that account.

I had chosen participant observation as a means of investigation because I believed it would allow me to share and record the experience of Banktop's teachers during their Ofsted year. I had imagined that this would allow me to construct an accurate, a 'true' account of the impact of Ofsted inspection on their working life.

Instead I found I faced the paradox that the method which enabled me to become close to their day-to-day experience also kept me away from it. I could only sample

the experience of each of Banktop's teachers by spending a proportion of my time with each of them. The culture of the school also made it difficult to interview them away from the busyness of classroom or preparation activities. The account which I created would be my account drawn from my observations of the parts of the school's Ofsted year which I had shared.

The point of view expressed by Shipman in the seventies questioning the validity of the work of a single ethnographic researcher rested on the assumption that a more "scientific" approach involving the testing of data in an "objective" manner was less open to personal interpretation and cultural bias than participant observation.

Rabinow quoting Hacking (1982, p.49) points out that scientific reasoning is regarded as objective "simply because the styles of reasoning that we employ determine what counts as objectivity"

Hacking puts forward what is basically a simple point: what is currently taken as "truth" is dependent on a prior historical event – the emergence of a style of thinking about truth and falsity that established the conditions for entertaining a proposition as being capable of being taken as true or false in the first place.(Rabinow, 1986, p237)

Through reference to Hacking, Rabinow seeks to show that

by drawing this distinction one avoids the problem of totally relativising reason or of turning different historical conceptions of truth and falsity into a question of subjectivism. (Ibid)

Yet it seemed to me that my study could not avoid subjectivity. My account would be constructed from my observations, and my observations could not be independent of me, my experience and interests. Nor could I divorce myself from the concerns of the teachers around me. It would be a story, but it could be a 'true' story, with the researcher acknowledged as part of the plot.

Rabinow points out that

Many now hold that fiction and science are not opposed but complementary terms (De Certeau 1983). Advances have been made in our awareness of the fictional (in the sense of "made", "fabricated") quality of anthropological writing and in the integration of its characteristic modes of production (Rabinow, 1986, p.245)

Hence I have called this section "Travellers' Tales". I am a traveller on the "different kind of journey" referred to by Tyler at the start of my introductory chapter. My fellow travellers are the teachers with whom I have shared a year's practice, together with the writers whose work has guided and informed my journey. Delamont (1992) uses similar imagery when she likens the adventure of ethnographic research to Flecker's poem "The Golden Journey to Samarkand" (1922). What I am writing is the story of my travels.

Whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experience into text.....There are various ways of effecting this translation....One can present the textualization as the outcome of observation... one can feature multiple voices, or a single voice...One can portray the other as a stable essential whole, or one can show it to be the product of a narrative of discovery, set in specific historical circumstances. (Clifford, 1986, p.115)

Story as academic research may seem at first glance to be an inappropriate combination of genres, but the writing up of events experienced and words heard is inescapably a fiction, not in the sense of falsehood, but rather "in the sense of 'something made or fashioned', the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *ingere*." (Ibid, p.6)

The recording of events and dialogue to create an ethnographic study "embalms the event" (Ibid, p.116). It changes what was spoken and immediate into a written account of the past.

The fieldworker presides over, and controls in some degree, the making of a text out of life. (Ibid, p.116)

It is in this sense that I describe what I write as a fiction, a story. Ethnographies, as Clifford points out, can be viewed as "true fictions" (Ibid, p.6).

To summarise my position, I accepted that my account of Banktop's Ofsted year would be partial, that I could not participate in every aspect of the experience of the staff and pupils. I also recognised that my own concerns and values might influence what I noted in the course of my observation and that my involvement with the teachers might affect the way in which I carried out my observation.

The first and most important step...is to recognise the reflexive character of social research: that is, to recognize that we are part of the social world we study....This is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way we can escape the social world in order to study it. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, pp 14-15)

Menter et al take this point further, identifying their involvement in the processes they are studying as a positive asset enabling them to come closer to and illuminate the concerns of the people being observed.

We acknowledge our implication in the process that we have been studying, and our direct and complex involvement with it. We defend this stance on the grounds that the virtues of hygienic research are much exaggerated; indeed, we believe that our empathy with the people we were working with permitted us to see beyond the surface or 'public' accounts of their responses to change. (Menter et al, 1997, p.138)

I had chosen participant observation as a means of research, because I hoped it would enable me to see beyond the 'public' face of Banktop School. I acknowledged that my account was bound to be partial, but I believed that it could still be judged to be true, in terms of what I set out to do, the way in which I carried it out and in terms of its relationship to other research in a similar field.

"Another Pair of Hands": Issues surrounding Access

Negotiating access, therefore, is not just about getting into an institution and group in the sense of crossing the threshold that marks it off from the outside world, but proceeding across several thresholds that mark the way to the heart of the culture. (Woods, 1986, p24)

As with the nature of participant observation, access seemed to me at the start to be a relatively straightforward issue. All that was necessary was to find a school which would allow me to participate in their Ofsted year. I had a relatively clear picture of the kind of school I needed - a primary school, serving a demanding catchment area, where practice seemed generally sound, in the view of the Local Education Authority. It would not suit my time-scale, nor contribute to my aims to become involved in the complex issues surrounding a potentially failing school.

What drew my attention to Banktop School was a short series of articles in a local paper following the publication of the national primary 'league tables' in 1997. The first article dealt with the school's position which was the lowest in the immediate area and close to bottom nationally. The second was a two-page spread about the excellent work going on in the school and included praise from parents, teachers or headteachers from other schools and from Local Authority representatives. Both articles referred to the challenging nature of the catchment area. It sounded to me like my ideal school.

I immediately wrote to the headteacher outlining the early plans for my research and she contacted me by phone. We arranged to meet at the local Teachers' Centre, where she was carrying out some work for the Local Authority. I did not visit the school itself at this stage.

At our meeting the head explained she had already discussed my coming with the

staff, who were agreeable in principle to my participation in their Ofsted year. A number of the staff were currently involved in Master's degrees or had recently completed them. Another staff member was participating in a joint Local Authority/ university research project. There was a climate sympathetic to research in the school and in any case the school could always use "another pair of hands".

In the course of this first face-to-face contact I was alerted to the sensitivity of approaching a school because of its demanding environment. While discussing the publicity surrounding the league tables it emerged that the parents had been very hurt by the comments made about the area. One of the fathers had protested to the headteacher that it was made to sound as though they were all no-hopers, permanently on benefit and failing to support their children's education. The parents who were trying their best, and working or seeking to work felt very aggrieved by this.

This made me consider right from the start the ethical considerations in approaching a school specifically because it served an extremely disadvantaged area (with over 80% of pupils on free school meals). In one sense the poverty of the area assisted me in carrying out my research. The neediness of the environment was arguably a factor in allowing me access, by making my offer of help as "another pair of hands" particularly welcome to the headteacher and at least some of the teachers. The parents were also unquestioningly welcoming. It did occur to me that parents in a high achieving school in a professional area, particularly the parent governors, might possibly have been more demanding in wanting to know exactly what I was about.

Certainly while I was in school no parent ever asked me what I was doing there, though we chatted and said "Hello". It seemed I was just accepted as "another pair of hands". It did occur to me that there might be a gender issue here, in that the presence of a motherly or grandmotherly woman helping in class gave rise to little curiosity.

In fact, at times it was like wearing a cloak of invisibility.

Being "another pair of hands" gave me extensive access to teachers' and pupils' day to day experiences, but it also cut me off from management and decision making forums. My observation was located in the classroom, the activity area, the playground, the hall and the staffroom. It was focused on the work of teachers with pupils, rather than the work of teachers as subject-coordinators or members of the senior management team. While this suited the purposes of my study, it limited my observation of the working lives of primary teachers to their actual teaching and to their interaction with each other in the course of the working day. The only meetings I attended were the weekly staff meeting and on occasion a Key Stage meeting. These however provided me with access to the documentation drawn up and circulated during the Ofsted year.

Reference to the literature, however, reassured me that it was unlikely that I would achieve an equal level of access to every aspect of the school, or enjoy the same level of confidence and trust with every member of staff.

These realities are multi-layered, and they are not all made available simultaneously to one's perception. One may also be confronted with different realities in different situations at different times (Woods, 1986, p24)

In Woods's own research he had experienced the school's "Sunday best" level, an interim level where people began to relax, but were still wary and a third, deeper level where teachers felt confident to talk freely. In his experience

At all times I was at different stages with different parts of the institution...In some areas and with some people, I never arrived at stage three: in one or two cases I arrived there very quickly (Woods, 1986, p24)

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) point out that "negotiation of access is therefore

likely to be a recurrent preoccupation" and "that not all parts of the setting will be equally open to observation" (p76). As I found out from my humble position as "another pair of hands", the ethnographer's role in a setting also has "implications...for the nature of the data collected" (p76)

Consequently my understanding of the issues relating to access began with a theoretical appreciation gained chiefly from literature, but gradually evolved through practice, till I began to develop a greater sensitivity to the issues involved. In addition to the demands of working in a disadvantaged area, I became more aware of the issues relating specifically to the primary classroom as a workplace to be studied, as distinct from the secondary school or other types of workplace environment peopled in the main by adults,

As I indicated at the end of Chapter Two, much of the literature, which I initially found most helpful in gaining insight into the practical detail of participant observation, referred to secondary school. The studies in secondary school, however, did draw attention to the dilemmas encountered by researchers in establishing relationships with both teachers and pupils.

The major function of the teacher is, of course, to teach. However, society also demands that he should grade and select, and it is this aspect of his role that excludes him from aspects of the student sub-culture....I was of course quite unable to shed my adult status during the research period, but I was able to shed my teacher status, and when I did I became aware of the increased flow of information about matters which had been taboo for me as a member of staff. (Lacey, 1970, p177)

Working with older pupils, as a comparatively young man himself, Lacey highlighted this aspect of being a participant observer in school, namely encouraging pupils to discuss matters, from which the teachers would be excluded by their role. In such a situation it could be easy for members of staff to interpret their authority as being undermined or for pupils to exploit a sympathetic adult.

In primary school, however, it seemed to be taken for granted by pupils that any adult present shared the responsibility for supporting authority. Teachers would even call upon other adults publicly to display a united front.

I've been very upset by you this afternoon, and Mrs B (Learning Support Assistant) is upset and Mrs Howard is upset. I expect Mrs B has a headache by now. She'll have to go home and take some tablets."

(Teacher to Key Stage One class)

Totally shedding the teacher's role as Lacey described himself doing during his participant observation was not an option. Even "another pair of hands" was expected to be seen to uphold the teacher's authority in any and every situation.

I also recognised that the nature of the catchment area made it particularly important to be careful in building relationships with pupils. There were a number of very needy children who craved any kind of adult attention. It was essential to be scrupulous in avoiding any sort of exploitation of this situation. I therefore made it clear to pupils that I was only in school for the year and later, when I discovered it mattered to pupils, that I would be moving from class to class. The need for this was brought home to me by small people attaching themselves firmly around my waist and demanding "Why don't you come to our class any more?"

One of the first things to bring home to me the nature of the access afforded to me by my status in school was sitting in class or assembly while pupils were reminded that there would be a "special visitor" in school that day and taken through the behaviour expected for such guests. This let me know I was not at Woods' "Sunday best" level. I was there every week, and as time went on, almost every day of the week. Children and staff grew accustomed to my presence, although nobody ever completely forgot that I was writing things in "my book"

At the start, as I indicated above, it was difficult to find the time and space to write field notes, but as time went on and the interim level of partial relaxation merged into one of greater confidence, I used to carry my book around with me and note things as soon as I had a moment.

Initially I had considered taping interviews or videoing aspects of the school's work. I even bought a tiny tape recorder. I discovered however that any sort of technology was terribly disruptive. Pupils got very excited.

Awareness that proceedings are being recorded may significantly affect what occurs....The effects of audio and audio-visual recording vary considerably across people and settings (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p24)

In my research setting pupils were *never* unconscious of any kind of camera or recording device, although I did use a still camera quite extensively to help my own memory and record keeping. In the end however that came to be used to record pupils' work and achievements in order to satisfy their desire to be a star. Even when I tried to take an informal shot of the yard from an upstairs window, I discovered a pupil waving both arms at me in the centre of the shot. By the end of the year, I was getting two sets of prints to give copies to pupils and staff.

It had not occurred to me that some pupils might have very few photos of themselves and I was ashamed not to have thought of this until it was brought home to me by a Year 3 boy, one of the real little "toughies", who told me he had taken home my very poor shot of him with his art work and stuck it up in pride of place on his wall.

The level of participation in my participant observation was frequently set by the needs and responses of the pupils. This I came to feel was a feature of carrying out research in primary school, where children expected and demanded interaction with

the adults in the classroom. In the second half of my year in school, I found it very difficult to take field notes in the course of the afternoon, because I was taking a group of Year 3 pupils in the activity area and my entire attention was required in guiding and supervising proceedings.

In general, once I was accepted at Woods' third level, I became more participant than observer. I began to serve a more useful function in the institution. I also spent more time there. It was a help at this stage to have written work demanded by my supervisor, otherwise I would simply have "gone native".

There must always remain some part held back, some social and intellectual 'distance'. For it is in the 'space' created by this distance that the analytical work of the ethnographer gets done...Ethnographers, then, must strenuously avoid feeling 'at home'. If and when all sense of being a 'stranger' is lost, one may have allowed the escape of one's critical, analytical perspective. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.102)

The issue of social and intellectual distance was a difficult one for me in the working environment of a small primary school. To some degree, being seen to go to the university once a month to discuss progress with my supervisor helped to remind everybody, myself included, of the purpose of my presence in school. What I was doing related to the demands, organisational structures and values of another institution. In a way I was presenting my own work for a form of inspection.

Although I became a part of the work of the school, I was never more than a bit player in the drama of the school's Ofsted year. The only 'timetabled' contribution I made was to take a small group of Year 3 for craft work in the activity area every afternoon during the summer term and the second half of the spring term, thus relieving the pressure in a very crowded classroom.

This was formally acknowledged during the Ofsted inspection, when it was agreed

that my afternoon sessions were part of the planned work of the class, therefore I had to be allowed to remain in the area when inspectors were present. I got a thank-you card from the teacher too, so it was also acknowledged as a help of sorts.

It was the case, however, that the changing nature of my involvement in the work in school fashioned what I could record and how I could record it. As time went on I was more closely drawn into the busyness of the working environment. In particular, because I worked with the teachers, there was hardly ever an opportunity to speak to the headteacher. The one discussion of any length which I had with her, occurred while she was sorting out the stock cupboard. She was a busy person, especially with an Ofsted inspection to prepare for.

I seldom had the chance to quiz people about their views on Ofsted, so I took advantage of this opportunity to question the headteacher directly

I expect the idea is that you keep doing some of the things you set in place for Ofsted. I imagine that's how it's supposed to work.

This was one of the few opportunities I had to ask a direct question about people's views or feelings. After the first term I gave up trying to interview people. I was simply alongside them while they went about their day-to-day business. As time went on I found myself including more and more of their actual dialogue in my fieldnotes. I found this was helpful, as my focus was the evidence that this formal and informal discussion provided of the spirit of the school during their Ofsted preparation and inspection.

In the first term I had tried to carry out interviews according to my original plans, but with very limited success. The staff were uncharacteristically on "best behaviour"

and restrained when I attempted to talk to them in this way. They seemed to revert back to Woods “Sunday best” level, although when working and chatting they were relaxed and forthcoming. I felt initially that this might be something to do with my age and background. When we were facing the demands of the classroom together, this didn’t matter. I was just another pair of hands.

When I started inquiring more formally, however, defensive shutters started to come down. The discussions I had tended to be bland and normative. In particular I was struck by Mrs S, who was in abject desperation every day about her difficult class, yet when I interviewed her, managed to sound like an advertisement for teacher recruitment. Teaching was “the best job in the world”, the children were a “joy to be with”.

I also felt there might well be political undercurrents in the school, of which I was not aware, and which might account for people clearly feeling uneasy to talk to me in this way. Perhaps they simply didn’t know me well enough to be confident to trust me at that stage, and by the time they did know me, we were so heavily into the preparations for Ofsted that there was no time for anything else.

On the surface, this seemed reasonable to accept. At a later stage, however, I came to question my superficial assumptions. I came to think that the teachers’ reluctance to be interviewed might relate to the Ofsted process in other ways. A possible insight into this is suggested by the following:

Accountability and intensification provide a potent cocktail for inducing feelings of persecutory guilt – pervasive worries and fears that mounting expectations have not been or will not be met...The demands of accountability and intensification can be felt particularly harshly where they embody singular

views of correct (and by implication, incorrect) practiceThese singular ... models, which are often based on over-confident claims regarding the supposed findings of research about effective practice, make it difficult for teachers to share expertise, still less to confide their doubts. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.149)

Hargreaves illustrates the barriers to trust and genuine collaboration in the school environment by drawing attention to issues of power. He talks of the “heresies of contemporary educational systems” (p.164), pointing out that to be seen to adhere to the heresies which contradict dominant official beliefs “ is not merely to disagree, but to be wicked and weak” (Ibid).

He stresses that

The social construction of heresy is... a powerful ideological force. It suppresses proper discussion of choices and alternatives. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.163)

The culture of Banktop was one of ‘getting on with the job’. It was practical, pragmatic and apolitical, so the teachers at Banktop could have held deeper reasons for not wanting to involve themselves in formal interviews with me.

- They might not have wished to expose worries and fears concerning their ability to meet “the demands of accountability and intensification” (Hargreaves, op cit).
- They might have felt that formal interviews concerning their own feelings about inspection went against the grain of the school culture of getting on with things without complaint, accepting the necessity of adhering to the latest official directives without wasting valuable time debating or challenging them.
- They might have felt a reluctance to confide or reveal their own doubts about their

professional imperfections

Another possibility was that they disliked anything which took them away from their central concern, which was the children and their needs.

The greatest satisfactions of elementary school teaching are found, as a rule not in pay, prestige or promotion but in what Lortie called *the psychic rewards of teaching*: the joys and satisfaction of caring for and working with young people ... Even when bureaucratic pressures and constraints seemed overbearing, it was the children and being with the children that kept some of these teachers going ... These psychic rewards of teaching are central to sustaining teachers' senses of self; their senses of value and worth in their work. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.173)

During an inspection year the teachers might well have felt they needed to have their sense of worth reinforced. The bureaucratic demands of the inspection took up a large proportion of the time they spent away from the children. They may not have welcomed my attempts to interview them, because these posed yet another call on their time to take them away from the aspects of their work that made them feel most valued and worthwhile.

Field Relationships: "Beginning with Elephants"

"What are you writing in your book, Miss?"

" Everything that happens while I'm around."

" Why, Miss?"

" So that I can write about what we do in school"

" But what do you write down?"

" Well, anything really. It's a record of what we say and do. It's evidence."

" Like in 'The Bill', Miss? "

" Sort of."

" That's what they say on 'The Bill', Miss. 'Anything you say may begin with elephants'."

(Conversation during Year 3 technology task)

The field relationship I had considered least before beginning my research was the one which came to occupy most of my time in school - namely that with the pupils. It was so obvious that I had scarcely considered the implications at the start. It is not possible to study the working lives of primary teachers without becoming closely involved with the young people who shape their working environment and whose needs, personalities and reactions make up the working day.

It was also the nature of the pupils and their background which caused many of the pressures on teachers with regard to meeting national norms and thus increased the level of concern over Ofsted.

My relationship with the pupils caused me all sorts of ethical dilemmas. I had never negotiated access with the pupils. It was difficult for them to understand what I was doing and difficult for me to explain it in terms they could understand. With older pupils this resolved itself in relationship to who paid me. Yes I was a teacher, but I worked at a university, not the university in the town but another university, and they paid me to come into school for a year to write about everything that happened there.

This however led to further questioning which I felt I could only answer with half-truths

"But why did you come to our school Miss?"

"Because I used to work at Priory (the neighbouring comprehensive)"

"But why here, Miss, and not Ridgeway (another feeder school)?"

"Because Mrs Peters said I could!"

(Conversation with Year 5 boy)

Mention of the supreme authority figure of the headteacher was usually sufficient to justify any course of action, thus putting paid to further inquiry. Guiltily to myself, however, I had to acknowledge the other reasons. I had been attracted to their school because their home area was so disadvantaged and their scores in the SATs had been

so low.

Nevertheless in gaining access to the school I gained access to their day-to-day experience. I also gained a great deal of insight into the immediate environment through informal dialogue with pupils.

Year 4 girl: I'm dead nosy, me. If anything happens in the street, I'm out there. Even if I'm in the bath, I throw on my dressing gown and I'm out there!

Me: What sort of things?

Girl: Oh you know, fights and that.

(Conversation during technology task)

Year 6 girl: Are you married, Miss?

Me: Yes

Girl: Do you live with your husband, Miss?

Me: Yes, except when he works away.

Girl: I bet you put the flags up when he goes, Miss.

(Conversation during small group work)

Learning Support Assistant: Where's mine? Mine's not there.

Year 1 boy to teacher: You can share yours, Miss.

Teacher: Share what, darling?

Boy: Your giro, Miss.

(Reported conversation during distribution of pay cheque envelopes)

Year 6 Girl: Oh Miss! Who did that to you?

(Comment when I came into school with a big bruise on my upper arm)

It was the pupils who increased my understanding of the context of my research, as much as the teachers. It was also their private relationship with their teachers to which I had been granted access.

I was made very conscious of this by the evidence that this relationship mattered a great deal to pupils. When their teacher was away for any reason, they were miserable and unsettled. They were also prone to displays of anger and lack of cooperation. Some classes simply could not tolerate a strange supply teacher. Their

behaviour and work would deteriorate to such an extent, that it was necessary to organise a minding system within the school itself.

Even within this arrangement some pupils clearly missed the security of their relationship with their own teacher. When all coaxing and encouragement had failed to prompt a pupil to work on one such occasion, I asked her "Is this because Miss X is away?" A nod was my reply and it was not until I had reminded her of all her teacher had said about what she was doing and when she would be back, that she began to carry out the tasks set.

In fact any change in routine or in the teacher's manner or tone worried pupils and set them on edge. The relationship between the teacher and the group, and the relationship between teachers and individuals in the group mattered tremendously to the children. For some it was all that seemed to make the process of school learning possible and bearable.

Gaining acceptance as an adjunct of this relationship made me keenly aware of the responsibilities of my situation, particularly because I was surprised by how private each classroom remained, despite the very open nature of the school, where there were no doors and three classrooms opened onto the same activity area.

Even although people freely walked in and out of each others' areas, the majority of what went on in each area was private to the teacher and group concerned. If voices were raised in a neighbouring area, you would be alert to some upset, but not to the details. While this was a situation in which it would be difficult to hide extreme problems in class management, the good or excellent practice which went on in each of the separate groups was the confidential preserve of that group, and anything they shared of their experience was what they *chose* to share.

The different areas of the school were also physically separated from each other. At times I felt it was like having four mini-schools within the same institution. Key Stage One was at the far end of the school from Key Stage Two with the school hall, the offices and a lengthy corridor in between. The nursery was tucked away at the end of the school drive in its own building. Reception although adjacent to Years One and Two was down a flight of stairs with its own suite of three rooms. Each of these areas had their own atmosphere and culture.

Within Key Stage Two there was even subdivision between Years 3 and 4 (downstairs) and Years 5 and 6 (upstairs, literally at the top of the school.) The tiny kitchen in the centre of the school served as common ground for staff, as did the staffroom, but frequently people were too busy to go to the staffroom except to use the photocopier. It was the boiling water machine and the photocopier queues which offered the most frequent points of contact for staff from the different areas.

Hargreaves talks of the "insulation" of the teaching environment in terms of the teacher's role.

The content or definition of a role...consists of the sum of the expectations of all the members of the role-set, including the actor himself, and which aspects of the role are used in actual role-performance will depend upon the member(s) of the role-set to which the role-performance is directed.

The persons who form the constituents of the teacher's role set are, amongst others, pupils, colleagues, the Head teacher, parents, Her Majesty's Inspectors. It is of course, the first two of these to whom the teacher principally directs his role performance...In Merton's term, the role set is highly 'insulated' from simultaneous observation by various members of the role set. (Hargreaves, 1967, pp.194-5)

In my research school, the pupils were certainly the principal observers of the teacher's performance, although intermittently a colleague might be present in a formal or informal capacity. The other adults present for part of the time, would not

have been encountered by Hargreaves in secondary schools in the 1960s: the Learning Support Assistants, the 'helpers' - mainly parents, grandparents and older pupils on work experience, and, in early years, the nursery nurses.

Nevertheless the interaction I observed between teacher and pupils was still largely private and personal to them. Sometimes a Learning Support Assistant, or nursery nurse, or "another pair of hands" might be allowed to play a part in that interaction, but the central relationship which set the tone for all classroom activity was that between the teacher and the pupils. What the teacher said and did seemed to be aimed almost exclusively at the pupils and only very seldom towards the classroom assistant. I did wonder whether the relatively powerless status of the majority of classroom assistants facilitated this.

Quite early on in my research, shortly after the October half term, the observation of classes by a "special visitor" was under discussion at a staff meeting. It was mentioned that this was the first time staff had been observed by anybody with an Ofsted background. My presence in the classroom as a trained team inspector clearly did not figure. I was simply "another pair of hands".

This insignificance did cause me some uncomfortable qualms. I was very anxious not to abuse anybody's trust.

The pathways to information are opened up by trust, and the uses the researcher makes of it are safeguarded by that quality....Often the most fascinating findings are not reported, because the researcher judges it a potential violation of trust.

By far the best way to develop trust is to have an honest project....Then, you need to show you are a person of discretion, who appreciates others' points of view and who can discriminate between admissible and inadmissible evidence. (Woods, 1986, p29)

I found I could not however share his confidence that "the trusted researcher knows

instinctively what is repeatable and what is not."(1986, p29) I resolved this dilemma by taking the approach that people would be able to see what I had written and by making it clear that I would welcome their feedback.

My conclusions however had to be *my* conclusions. The development of the themes ultimately had to reflect *my* perception, albeit refined by feedback and discussion, so I had to be equally happy with the end product. However where the data gained through privileged access was felt by the person or people concerned, to be too sensitive or to have been misunderstood or inappropriately used, then we would seek a compromise. In the event, this situation did not arise.

While this could be justified in terms of good practice with regard to reflexivity, I knew I was actually taking this approach, because I felt awkward about infringing other people's professional privacy. I also was anxious to avoid any confrontation such as Ball experienced in his account of his feedback to staff in Beachside Comprehensive.

Ball...held two feedback seminars for the school's staff at which he presented some of his findings....Ball's teachers interpreted his work as critical and queried the validity of his findings. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, pp196-197)

Many of the staff apparently read my chapter solely in terms of what it had to say about them and their subject. There was little or no discussion of the general issues I was trying to raise. (Ball, 1981, pp18-19)

I didn't want there to be any surprises. In the event I started off by putting a file of "Jean's Work" in the staffroom and giving the head teacher her own copy to keep. Everybody was disappointed it was so boring. "When are you going to get to the interesting part?" was the most common response. People did like to know the gist of any feedback I received from my supervisor, and when this took the form of written comments, I included these in my work file in the staffroom. Nevertheless, when I

removed the file to add to it, nobody asked for the follow-up, apart from the headteacher, who wanted to be reassured that the school could not be identified.

Nevertheless, knowing it was going to be read by the adult subjects imposed a discipline on what I wrote. I considered my words and my thoughts with great care. I talked over issues and events informally with the teachers concerned before I committed ideas to paper. In fact, at times I was so anxious that I should present their views and feelings accurately, that I almost lost sight of the analytical aspect of my data collection. One of the limitations of my chosen methodology turned out for me to be the social constraint of working closely with a small group of people. In my conclusion I consider this in hindsight, but at the start I was simply concerned to be as true to what I heard and saw as possible.

I also spoke to the children about certain topics to make sure my view of their response to some activity was reflected by their own opinions. They clearly thought I was hopelessly naive and ignorant in this respect.

"Miss" explained a Year 6 boy patiently, "*Nobody* likes writing!"

The relationships, which were established during the course of the year, did however make me more sensitive to the complexity of participant observation as a means of research. I found that being part of the social world of the school imposed an additional level of responsibility in recording and reporting findings. Being face-to-face with teachers and pupils every day had the effect of making me sharply aware of key issues which kept figuring in my observation. When these issues were sensitive it was the relationship which I had with pupils and teachers which made me ultra-careful with regard to accuracy and use of language.

Although increasingly familiar and supportive relationships could lead to

over-identifying with the participants' viewpoint or, more likely to the viewpoint of a particular faction (McCall & Simmons, 1969, p.132)

At the start, I did not find this in my own case. The teachers with whom I was working were in the main very critical of their own practice, and this encouraged me to be equally questioning of mine. At a later stage I did, however, find that, when it came to writing up my study, I hesitated to include material, which I felt was interesting and relevant, but private to the individual, whose working environment I temporarily shared. I experienced this as a social constraint, rather than an intellectual one. It was like a breach of the social mores of hospitality. I will question the effect of this in my conclusion, in my consideration of the limitations of my approach.

I couldn't help feeling at times that it would have involved less soul-searching to have chosen a different approach. I wished I had followed Delamont's pragmatic advice to "Do a survey, where the results, presented in tables, are much easier to write about." (Delamont, 1992, p.10)

I took Woods' point however that

If research were truly collaborative this would not be a problem (Woods, 1996, p168)

The problem was that before I began my study, I had imagined that I would discuss such issues with the staff with whom I was working. In practice, the school environment was too busy for anybody to talk about issues not immediately related to the classroom and there were priorities that demanded to be addressed. The dilemmas of my role as a researcher were of little importance, except to me. I was simply "another pair of hands" and often a pretty limited, inept pair at that.

For me, a serious limitation of adopting an ethnographic approach in my chosen research environment, was that there was simply no time to work through difficult issues. At Banktop, participant observation with hard-pressed, conscientious staff gave rise to the dilemma, that they were so conscientious that when something specific did occur which I wanted to discuss with the teacher concerned, there was hardly any opportunity to talk to the teacher on their own in private. In my conclusion I will consider this constraint in relation to Hargreaves' (1994) work on the intensification of the primary teacher's role

At Banktop it seemed to be a matter of luck whether an opportunity presented itself to discuss an event and the issues arising from it while they were still fresh in our minds. So much happened in the course of the school day or week, that it was sometimes hard to recapture the impact of any particular incident or expression after time had elapsed. As a result, I felt constrained to exclude from my final study any material relating to problematic or delicate issues which I had not been able to work through with the teacher or teachers concerned. I found that the working environment in which I was placed and the time scale available to me, made it impossible to achieve the level of collaboration or openness required to address very sensitive issues.

Woods was also referring to the collaboration of the teachers concerned, not the pupils. Yet, as I have indicated above, a proportion of my dilemmas sprang from my relationship with pupils. For instance, while sitting quietly noting something that had occurred in a particularly successful run of mathematics questions and answers, thereby not giving my full attention to the pupils, one of the Year 6 boys suddenly spoke to me across the semi-circle of children and teacher.

" Mrs Howard, we're flying now!"

It was as though I was being reminded that I was party to their success just by being there, and this demanded notice. The headteacher and the teachers had allowed me in as a participant observer, but so did the pupils, even although their agreement had never been formally sought. They expected something of me too.

I found this was most problematic with the very youngest. They had no frame of reference for adults in the classroom, beyond teachers, nursery nurses or helpers, paid and unpaid. Most of the helpers they came across were known to them - parents, dinner-ladies or learning support assistants. So where did I fit in? Trying to find out displayed itself most obviously in issues of classroom control.

In addition with younger pupils I gave out mixed messages because I was unsure how to behave. I was not a teacher in the school. I had no authority. What does a participant observer do in a class when the teacher goes out to the activity area and pupils start to misbehave? Especially if the teacher hasn't said anything to the effect of "Would you look after this group for a moment while I speak to Miss X? And (to the class) I expect your best behaviour/ I will be listening out/ I will be asking Mrs Howard when I get back!"

With younger pupils in particular 'playing up' can be one of their best means to discover and establish relationships with the adults around them, so I found myself a target for this kind of detective work throughout my time in school, but particularly during the early days of my research.

Hargreaves comments on role-conflict turned out to be helpful.

Role-conflict is the exposure of an actor to conflicting expectations which cannot be simultaneously fulfilled. This may be due to one member of the role-set having conflicting role-expectations, which require simultaneous fulfilment, or to two or more members of the role-set holding role-expectations which

conflict with one another. (Hargreaves, 1967, p 195)

The conflict of roles I experienced and had not anticipated was due in part to relating simultaneously to pupils and teacher in the classroom situation. Although I was meant to be "helping" it seemed abundantly clear to pupils that my interest in what was being said and done was not that of another teacher or a classroom assistant, and that my focus was not the particular learning objective of the lesson. They frequently questioned me about what I was doing.

I was consequently terrified of disrupting the work of the class. At times I had to discourage discussion.

"If you keep talking instead of working, Miss X won't let me come to this class any more." (Remark to Year 6 girl)

Possible disruption was also an added likelihood in my research setting since some pupils were so self-conscious and unfamiliar with talking to an interested adult (not their teacher) about their ideas or their work, that they became awkward and silly, in one case adopting a baby voice and in a number of others making gestures or noises or falling about.

In my previous roles in the classroom, as an adviser or a teacher trainer, it had been much easier to deal with pupils and their questions.

Then my role allowed the staff concerned to determine much more deliberately how they wanted to present themselves to me and imposed a particular relationship on us. People were unlikely to grow accustomed to my presence. I was not there all day every day, becoming part of the private relationship which develops between teachers and their classes. I was in no danger of exploiting anybody. In the past I had been a 'special visitor'.

In the event I need not have worried

If people are not happy that the information (will) be put to good use, confidences observed, and their own interests and identities safeguarded, they will block access to it. (Woods, 1986, p 29)

Although I became a familiar figure around the school, a member of the lottery syndicate, included in celebratory nights out, staff never completely lost consciousness of my participant observer role. The pupils also frequently noticed what I was noting and commented on what I might be writing. In the staffroom or in conversation, it was quite common for people to round off some particular exchange of jollity or an unguarded, informal remark with the warning

"And don't put that down in your book!"

Chapter 4

Context of School Inspection in the UK

When the English want to know whether a school is good or not, they send an inspector in to visit it, as they have done for more than 150 years. (Wilson, 1996, p.11.)

The English have this peculiar belief that they can learn something about schools by visiting them. No element is more basic to inspection than *being there*. (Ibid, p.118)

Government inspectors have visited schools in the United Kingdom since the beginning of universal state schooling. I therefore felt it necessary for the purposes of my study to provide a brief overview of the nature and development of school inspection to identify why the Ofsted approach to school inspection should make such an impact on the professional lives of the teachers in whose work I participated. This chapter simply outlines the context. It is not intended to do more than indicate in a general sense the extent of the change in the inspection process, which affected the teachers at Banktop.

Historical Background

Prior to the institution of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), school inspections had been the responsibility of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). HMI were senior civil servants whose duty comprised:

1. A check on the use of public funds (the accountability function):
2. Provision of information to central government concerning the success or otherwise of the education system, based on its independent professional judgement (the eyes and ears of the Secretary of State function):
3. Provision of advice to those responsible for the running of educational establishments (the advisory function). (Lawton and Gordon, 1987, p5)

Throughout its history the inspectorate re-negotiated its working relationships within

these three areas. Bolton, however, points out that

despite changes over time, some things about HMI remained the same....Putting it crudely, when governments were much involved and interested in education....HMI had a high profile and was inspecting and reporting in relation to those interests: advising about the development of policy, and about how it was working out in practice. (Bolton, 1995, p.17)

Their relationship with the teaching profession was largely supportive and designed to assist in the development and dissemination of good practice. The early inspectors were greatly influenced by the philosophy of the British idealist, T.H. Green, to see their vocation as assisting in promoting education as the means 'to the self-realization of the individual in a society orientated towards the common good'. (Gordon & White, 1979, p. x.)

They were "guides and advisers", who "largely by exerting the kind of indirect and unofficial influence...had been instrumental in causing something approaching a revolution in educational aims and methods." (Ball, 1963, pp 241-242)

Indeed, apart from the years between 1862 - 1898, when a system of payment by results was implemented, the inspectorate were not directly involved in a process of publicly 'failing' schools who did not meet specified government criteria. Kay-Shuttleworth had issued 'Instructions to Inspectors' in 1840 making it clear that

Inspection is not intended as a means of exercising control, but of offering assistance, that it is not to be regarded as operating for the restraint of local efforts, but of their encouragement. (Wilson, 1961, p.70.)

During the 25 years following the Second World War, HMI returned "to the practice encouraged by Kay-Shuttleworth....going from school to school, encouraging good practice."(Bolton, 1995, p.12)

HMI was always a relatively small group. Before the changeover to Ofsted brought about by the Education Act of 1992, the inspectorate numbered 480 (Perry, 1995, p 39). Not all inspections, however, were carried out by central government inspectors. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) also appointed their own teams of inspectors who advised and monitored the schools within the authority's jurisdiction.

This combination of central and local government inspection mirrored the overall organisation of schooling within a national legislative framework, but locally administered.

Broadly speaking, national government got on with determining the general policy and organisational framework, national funding levels and teacher training and supply. Local government provided the schools, employed the teachers, and determined local funding levels, while heads and teachers got on with the teaching. (Ibid, p.18)

This complex and permissive, rather than prescriptive, system of school management led to some confusion over the role and work of HMI amongst teachers themselves.

The structure and organisation of HMI is often not well known even among teachers and other educationalists. There are many misconceptions. (Lawton & Gordon, 1987, pp1-2)

Professional Relationships between Teachers and Inspectors

In the past, therefore, the majority of teachers had little direct contact with HMI.

With an Inspectorate of 480, it has not been possible to carry out regular inspections of all 24,000 or so schools in England and Wales. Only around 150 schools have been inspected each year. According to the Government, it would have taken around 200 years before every primary school in England and Wales had received an HMI inspection. (Harris, 1995, p.49.)

The inspectors with whom teachers were most likely to be familiar were LEA

inspectors, whose role was predominantly advisory and supportive. Indeed, in the 70s and 80s, they were generally known as advisers and at Banktop in the 90s they were still commonly referred to as such. The influence of HMI on the working lives of teachers was largely indirect, through their published materials or through the effect of these on local government policies. Only a minority of teachers would actually have been seen teach by an HMI.

A higher proportion would have had an LEA adviser/inspector in their classroom, but by no means all. (In my own 15 years in one classroom or another from 1973 onwards, I was *never* seen teach by any inspector.)

Although teachers identified inspectors as advisers, they did not feel obliged to accept the advice offered. Throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s there were high profile cases of schools or individuals who refused to accept the guidelines or directives of their LEAs. Ray Honeyford, a headteacher from Bradford, waged a campaign in the national press against his LEA's policy on anti-racist education and a number of schools, such as William Tyndale, Risinghill and Countesthorpe College caused concern by their unorthodox practice.

The impact of the Ofsted process on the working life of teachers has to be considered in this context. Until the Education Act of 1988 introduced the National Curriculum, schools and teachers were theoretically free to teach more or less what and how they chose. In practice public and professional opinion provided a strong controlling factor, but nevertheless bizarre or idiosyncratic curricula were not against the law, provided the requirement to teach religious education was observed.

Whether or not they actually made use of this freedom, teachers and schools felt that what they taught and how they taught it was their decision. This pre-1988 belief in

teacher autonomy is an important factor in understanding the impact of Ofsted on teachers' working lives.

Inspectors assume less significance because only on rare occasions need the (teacher's) role-performance be determined by their expectations. The teacher's situation is a highly autonomous one: most of the time he is 'his own boss' and not subject to the scrutiny of...superiors.(Hargreaves, 1967, p.195)

For instance, the ethnographic studies carried out in school during the 60s and 70s to which I refer in Chapter Three make hardly any reference to either local or national inspectorates when discussing the organisation, planning or evaluation of the work of the school.

Ball points that the measures used to assess success at Beachside were

examination passes, the size of the sixth form and the size and type of university entrance (Ball, 1981, p.21)

Lacey also found that the level of performance was measured by success in final examinations, but demonstrated that this made it hard to compare achievements over the years as the nature of the final examinations changed and records were lost through accident.

These examples of participant observation in schools in the 60s and 70s serve to indicate how little inspectors figured at that time in evaluating the practice of a particular school and also how difficult it was to pin down what any school was aiming to achieve, except in the most general terms.

Hard evidence of the effectiveness of schooling simply did not exist. There were examinations but no examination was taken by the majority of pupils and many pupils took no school leaving examination at all. So there was no instrument to give an across-the-board picture of what pupils had learnt. Even more fundamentally, there were no statements setting out what the education service was expected to do - such curriculum statements as existed were local, generally imprecise and non-binding. (Kennedy, 1995, p.120)

The influence of the inspectorate, both local and national, depended on the working relationships built up between individuals, groups and professional bodies, since teachers and schools were free to accept or reject inspectorial advice as they saw fit.

The Influence of the System of "Payment by Results"

There was however a kind of "folk memory" of inspection during the era of payment by results between 1862-1898. This government inspector was immortalised in literature.

A mighty man at cutting and drying, he was; a government officer; in his way (and in most other people's too) a professed pugalist; always in training, always with a system to force down the general throat like a bolus, always to be heard at the bar of his little public office, ready to fight all England. To continue in fistic phraseology, he had a genius for coming up to the scratch, whenever and whatever it was, and proving himself an ugly customer. He would go in and damage any subject whatever with his right, follow up with his left, stop, exchange, counter, bore his opponent (he always fought all England) to the ropes and fall on him neatly. He was certain to knock the wind out of common sense and render the unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time. And he had it in charge from a high authority to bring about the great public office millennium, when commissioners should rule the earth. (Dickens, *Hard Times*, Chapter 2).

The process of inspection during this era was heavily criticised before, during and after its implementation, not only in literature as above, but by high profile critics from within the inspectorate itself.

He (the inspector) has hitherto exercised greater influence...by ...conciliation of co-operative effort, than by his power to recommend the withdrawal of grants...His time under the Revised Code would be consumed with mechanical drudgery. (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1862, p.599, quoted in Edmonds, 1962, p.81)

From the nature of examination, which is entirely formal and mechanical, only mechanical results can be expected. (Watkins, 1869, quoted in Edmonds, 1962, p.81)

The highly articulate criticism of the system contributed to its lasting notoriety in the folklore of English education. In particular it was criticised for narrowing the curriculum and damaging the co-operative working relationship between the inspectorate and the teaching profession.

This begins to explain why an approach to inspection one hundred years ago should still impact on teachers' consciousness in the 1990s. Until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and the establishment of Ofsted as a means of inspecting the delivery of the National Curriculum in 1992, inspection under the regime of 'payment by results' was the only system which had ever examined the work of teachers in the UK according to a set of criteria imposed by central government.

In the earliest stage of Ofsted inspection, the first Ofsted Handbook for Inspection emphasised that, while it was

important that judgements about the effectiveness of teaching are based on its contribution to outcomes and not on preferences for particular methods.
(Handbook for Inspection, 1992, p.23)

the school's curriculum was

to be judged by the extent to which it complies with the requirements of the Education Act (1988) and subsequent regulations regarding the National Curriculum. (Ibid, p. 21)

Inspection was no longer concerned with advice or support, but rather about compliance with centrally imposed directives. No matter how professionally acceptable the criteria in the original Handbook for Inspection, the principle was still a radical departure from the inspection practice with which teachers and schools were familiar.

Professional Concerns Arising from the Change from HMI/LEA to Ofsted Inspection.

The working lives of teachers were inescapably affected by the changeover from HMI to Ofsted inspection and concern over the new system was widespread. The recruitment and training of Ofsted inspectors was contentious, since many more inspectors were needed to implement a four yearly cycle of inspections.

Clearly, the quality controls on inspection become much more problematic when inspection is no longer carried out by a full-time force, trained and developed within the meticulous framework of induction, mentoring, planned programmes of teamwork and staff development which HMI had developed for their own full-time members. (Perry, 1995, p.40)

In addition, the publication of Ofsted reports and the requirement to publish a variety of information about the achievements of pupils, which was also included in the Education Act 1992, led to considerable unease and dismay. There was a great deal of concern amongst teachers and other educationalists that schools serving poor areas would be disadvantaged, since the raw data would show a lack of achievement compared with schools in more prosperous or privileged environments.

In the early days of Ofsted this was a widely voiced concern, but anxiety was heightened with the appointment of Chris Woodhead as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in 1993, since he made it clear that he saw it as central to Ofsted's role to "name and shame" low achieving schools. The publicity given to failing schools in the press was officially encouraged and sanctioned by his provocative management style, thus further alarming teachers and raising the level of concern over the process of Ofsted inspections.

Chris Woodhead is unique in his ability to destroy the morale of the

teaching profession before the 7am news is over. By the time my wife leaves the house to go to the comprehensive school which she is privileged to lead, her day has been ruined. And by the time she reaches school she finds the Chief Inspector's insults have had the same effect on her dedicated and hardworking staff. (Letter in TES, 2nd October 1998)

There was also on-going concern over the consideration which should be given to "value-added" factors in the inspection process.

The rating of teacher quality...clearly implies that teaching quality is 'best summarised by' the extent to which the teacher 'promotes high educational standards'. Given this view of teaching quality what would a proper study of validity look like? The judgement of quality should be compared with the progress made by pupils i.e. the value added. (FitzGibbon, 1998, p25)

Arriving at effective ways of assessing "value-added" was an area of controversy. With regard to the social and cultural environment of the school, inspection teams were provided with a report giving

a statistical background to the school drawn from national data.a starting point which enables the registered inspector to construct indicators and interpret school data in the context of other schools....Such indicators may be fallible in any individual case...data will always by definition be historic. (Matthews, 1995, pp71-72)

Context of My Study

Towards the end of the first cycle of Ofsted primary inspection in 1998, when I undertook my study, it would be fair to say that the working lives of teachers were overshadowed by apprehension over Ofsted and that there was great concern over the media coverage which had been accorded reported weaknesses and "failures".

In particular, as the reports of schools were publicised over the inspection cycle it became clear that

Failing schools were overwhelmingly those in deprived areas....A study commissioned by Channel 4's Dispatches programme found that 59 of 83 failing secondary schools had to cope with poverty levels twice the national average...None of the failing schools was in an area that could be described as prosperous. (TES article, 3rd April, 1998)

While failing schools were a focus of much media interest, high achieving schools in contrast received relatively little attention. As a headteacher noted

Despite a carefully drafted press release...the local media were not greatly interested. The Oxford Times gave us half an inch tucked away in a middle page, Radio Oxford 60 seconds. Good news gets much less attention than bad news. If we had had a poor report the media coverage would have been much greater. (Roberts, 1995, p.86)

The end result of a number of highly publicised "failing" schools during the first cycle of Ofsted inspections, the much lesser attention paid to the far greater number of "passing" schools and the aggressively critical stance of HMCI, was an increase, rather than a lessening of anxiety over the Ofsted process, as the first cycle of inspections progressed.

Naming and shaming is a hard policy. I wouldn't recommend it. We got the children to write their thoughts about the school being named and shamed. They were ashamed to say what school they went to, they got bullied in the area and were told they went to a rubbish school. For a lot of children it had a great effect on their self-esteem. (A headteacher's comments in TES, 2nd October 1998)

This anxiety was accentuated by the increasing intervention of central government in the actual practice of teaching at primary level. By the time Banktop was inspected, the plans for Literacy Hour had been promoted and training had begun locally and nationally for its implementation. The school was already piloting Literacy and Numeracy Hours, and teaching methods in these two core areas had been pretty well prescribed from the centre. In effect teachers being inspected would be judged on how well they implemented the approaches demanded by government.

This was a far cry from the earliest Ofsted inspections, when it could be said that the Framework for Inspection was not

doctrinaire about how things should be done. The criteria for teaching for example, do not predicate a particular type of approach. (Matthews, 1995, p.69)

The nature of Ofsted inspection was therefore not constant, but rather developed speedily within the first years of its existence to reflect central government concerns. The emphasis moved away from the independent, "classic" approach, more redolent of the attitudes of the HMI who authored the first Handbook for Inspection and were directly responsible for the early training of Ofsted inspectors, towards a policy-driven approach spearheaded by a high profile, partisan HMCI, designed to expedite the reforms prescribed by government.

The Handbook for Inspection went through a number of revisions as did the guidance provided for inspectors. The grading of teachers' lessons was introduced, although it was recommended that this grading should remain confidential to the teacher and the headteacher concerned.

For the purposes of my study it is simply necessary to point out how the process became more, rather than less, prescriptive over time and that the stress on identifying failing schools and individuals, whether publicly in the former case or confidentially in the latter, became more predominant. This could only serve to increase anxiety amongst teachers.

Fear does not promote quality. Indeed all the promotion of fear and anxiety in schools flies in the face of the ideas of W. Edward Deming (1986)....His system of total quality management is based on good statistical data and informed interpretation thereof. He advises 'drive out fear' and observes that 'wherever there is fear we get the wrong figures'. (FitzGibbon, 1995, p.101)

In outlining the context and background of school inspection in England and Wales I have tried to indicate that the rapid changes made in education in the 1990s and in particular the change from HMI/LEA to Ofsted inspection generated a great deal of confusion, fear and anxiety amongst teachers, who had previously been accustomed to a very different type of inspection.

Judging every school and teacher in the country by "being there", as summarised by the initial quotation in this section, is a method of teacher evaluation which in any case gives rise to anxiety by its very nature. However clear and measured the guidance given to Ofsted inspectors, a judgement on a teacher's performance in class is subject to the context and conditions of a small sample of particular lessons. Teachers at Banktop worried about the response of pupils in an atypical and stressful week, when strangers were in class looking at them. Banktop pupils, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, were very sensitive to the presence of outsiders and sometimes reacted badly to them.

Also by the time Banktop was inspected, the guidelines given to Ofsted inspectors in the Framework for Inspection had been simplified and streamlined, so that the criteria had become less detailed. At the same time the pronouncements from central government about preferred approaches in primary school were becoming more strident. Whole class teaching, mental mathematics, the structure of the Literacy Hour, were presented to the profession as directives.

Although in theory the Framework itself did not dictate particular approaches, in fact it allowed interpretation of its general principles according to current central government recommendations on teaching methods. Schools would have to be able to justify by their results that their methods were superior, if they chose to ignore the recommended structures for classroom organisation.

This kind of pressure is particularly hard for schools to withstand, given the uncertainty and lack of confidence generated by a system of inspection which depends on individual judgements made on relatively brief visits to classrooms over a very short period of time.

In an article to the *Daily Telegraph*, chief inspector Chris Woodhead urged the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee to reject anecdotal evidence. Has it not occurred to him that it is the basis of his framework for school inspections? As long as school inspections depend on inspectors observing classroom practice and writing up anecdotes of what they have seen...there will be endless dispute about the validity of the process. (Letter from the Society of Education Officers to the TES, November 27th 1998)

Gray and Wilcox found in their study of four inspections that the greatest concern was about accuracy and representativeness. There was fear that the short amount of time spent in individual classes could lead "to an incomplete or even incorrect description of aspects of the school". There were also doubts about "the atypicality of what was seen" (Gray and Wilcox, 1995, pp 130-131)

The Ofsted process, by means of an open set of criteria and standardised forms of reporting, also gave an appearance of exactitude

The inspector will now record specified, standardised information on a fixed form. Requiring only narrow judgements, such forms have created the illusion of certainty by translating judgements into numbers. (Wilson, 1996, p.184)

The judgements being made however were qualitative rather than quantitative

Like the qualitative evaluator...inspectors face the task of making sense of a variety of pieces of evidence from several different sources...Inspection has generally been mute on how this substantial data reduction and transformation task is accomplished...The Ofsted Handbook uses...the attempt to objectify judgement through the use of rating scales...There are however limits to what can be achieved, particularly as long as inspection is cast in its present highly time-constrained framework...The methods and procedures of inspection, regarded as a form of qualitative evaluation, are always potentially

problematic...There will always be alternative interpretations of the 'same' school. (Gray & Wilcox, 1995, pp140-141)

It could be argued therefore that the nature of the process itself led to feelings of uncertainty amongst teachers. At Banktop a great deal of pre-inspection discussion, formal and informal, was devoted to forward guessing what the inspection team would want, in order to provide them with what it was imagined they would prefer to see and thus obtain a favourable report.

The judgements made by Ofsted inspection teams throughout the entire first cycle of inspections were not open to any sort of appeal procedure (apart from the school requesting re-inspection), so it made professional sense to worry and to seek to reduce the number of areas which a team might see as problematic. In such a situation it was therefore easy to see that following central government recommended approaches would cut down on potential difficulties.

It could be argued that the nature of Ofsted inspection, with its apparent certainty and objectivity, without recourse to any other professional vision for challenge or verification, carried out by inspectors who had not been part of a "long-term induction with a mentor", but rather assessed after a brief course on their ability to use the Framework, might well have been designed to give rise to apprehension amongst teachers.

Their concerns occurred not because they were Luddites opposed to any sort of educational progress, nor sixties subversives, irresponsibly unconcerned with quality issues. The process of Ofsted inspection gave rise to apprehension, because there was no professional dialogue possible with regard to its judgements. It claimed an absolute authority and validity which it could not in fact possess.

The collection of information to support educational accountability will never

be perfect. The best we can hope for...is continuous evolution of systems which use both attainment data and inspection...With luck there will also be improvements in pupil and student assessment ...With even more luck there will be some stability in the curricula for which the assessments are designed. (Kennedy, 1995, p.126)

The judgements of the inspectors were unchallengeable, because that power had been vested in them by government. It did not depend on their expertise or knowledge or appreciation of a school's particular circumstances, but on their attention to a set of given criteria and the authority which central government chose to give to their assessment of how closely the school met those criteria.

To an extent, this situation was masked by the fact that most teams were sensible and sensitive (and, in the early years of Ofsted, comprised advisers or inspectors trained under a different system) and most schools were unremarkable and satisfactory, so that relatively few reports gave rise to alarm. Indeed relief at a favourable report and half-an-inch of coverage in the middle page of the local paper would probably stifle the immediate, practical concerns of a school and its staff.

Academic concern was more long-term.

It is..dismaying to see adults put into such a game playing situation because of the totally unequal distribution of power between inspectors and teachers. ...Are we in danger of creating a profession in which many talented people simply inspect a demoralised and bullied, de-professionalised set of deliverers of education, whose main attention is focused on placating and pleasing an all powerful inspectorate? (FitzGibbon, 1998, pp.23-25)

Is this indeed the "great public office millennium" of which Dickens spoke in the late 19th century, "when commissioners should rule the earth"?

Whether or not this literary reference is apt, it serves to underline the way in which the remodelling of school inspection through the Office for Standards in Education in 1992 radically altered the relationship between teachers and inspectors and begins to

explain why the reformed system of inspection had a marked impact on the working lives of primary teachers.

Chapter 5

What the Inspector Didn't See

We are part of the social world we study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.14)

The social world does not present itself to us in the form of a thesis... We all have to struggle to turn the dense complexity of everyday life into a linear structure. (Atkinson, 1992, p.5)

Section 1: The secret life of teachers.

You know when you're out on a night and somebody asks you what you do, you never say teacher. I usually say I'm a hairdresser. (Staffroom conversation)

The story of Banktop's Ofsted experience I had imagined would fit into a neat pattern. I had thought I would be able to contrast a typical day at the start of the school year when practice was relatively unaffected by Ofsted to a later stage close to the Ofsted inspection, or during the Ofsted week itself.

In the event, my experience did not fit into this ideal pattern. Firstly, from the start of the school year, Ofsted figured in formal and informal discussion of most aspects of planning and day-to-day work. In that sense the Ofsted year could not be viewed as a typical year at any point:

Secondly, there was not the opportunity to sit in a detached fashion noting everything that took place within view or hearing. The record I had was of snippets of days, jotted down as and when the opportunity occurred, together with my reflections on these written up in my own time away from the school. I also had photographs and poems, other means by which I had recorded my experiences.

Thirdly, there did not seem to be such a thing at Banktop as a typical day. Each day and week had an orderly pattern, but this routine was enlivened by whatever drama was brought in with the pupils to be enacted against the background of the planned schedule. Also each week had a programme of different events for different days. Monday was staff meeting, Tuesday visits from the peripatetic people from behaviour support in Key Stage 1, Wednesday was swimming, Thursday was the visiting music specialist, Friday was lunch down the pub.

In all sorts of other ways too, each day differed from another. Teachers had to attend meetings and in-service training days. Classes had to be rearranged to allow this to happen. There were unforeseen situations arising with pupils which required attention. Sometimes these were sad, necessitating the involvement of social workers and other external agencies. At other times, they were bizarre or humorous. They could even be a mixture of all three, like a Year 3 birthday party, which resulted next day in some poorly little boys with hangovers.

Each day at Banktop was unique. Of course there were similarities in the framework for each day. There were even familiar patterns in the unplanned happenings, which grew into a kind of school and teacher folklore: windy days make pupils unsettled; a popular late film on TV the night before makes work hopeless the following afternoon; the bus for swimming will be late. Nevertheless each day brought situations and happenings which would never recur in exactly the same way.

The story of Banktop's Ofsted year, therefore, did not lend itself to neat categorisation, nor to the accurate recording of a single day as "typical". All I felt able to do was to give an impression of the working environment of teachers and pupils in the Autumn term at the start of the year, then to contrast that with the requirements and routine of the Ofsted inspection in the Summer term, almost at the

end of the school year. Throughout the year, I also noted the way in which teachers spoke and acted with regard to the Ofsted inspection.

In this way I hoped to learn how the Ofsted model of inspection impacted on their working lives.

What the 'hairstylist' had to hide.

Sometimes you think what a fool you look, like doing the songs and actions in assembly..... You think of your friends.... If they could see me!

I begin with an impression of a day in the life of Banktop during the autumn term. In November the day started in the dark. Teachers began arriving well before the children in order to set up for the day or to carry out paperwork and planning undisturbed. The setting of the school was exposed, at the top of a hill, so it was always windy and in bad weather the windows rattled and shook alarmingly. The temperature in the classrooms also varied according to how exposed the area was to the prevailing wind. The start of the morning was grey and grim.

The school had been built in the 1970s with wide picture windows which led to extremes of temperature. They also extended the view in November to wide expanses of cloudy, threatening sky. From outside, however, the brightly lit classrooms looked attractive and welcoming. One of the first photos I took was of the shadowy figures of children making their way towards the lighted windows on a bleak winter morning. I fancied it looked symbolic.

The children came into school at quarter to nine. They were welcomed by staff, one standing outside the door and the others usually waiting in the corridor by the cloakroom areas. In Key Stage 2, teachers would chat to the pupils as they hung up their coats then supervise them going into the classroom, collecting their milk from

the activity area as they went. They then dealt with the register and any money collection or administrative details while the pupils sat on the carpet drinking their milk.

"Why milk first?" I had enquired.

"Because if they haven't had any breakfast, it at least puts something in their stomach"
I was told.

This start to the school day enabled teachers to discover straight away, how pupils were feeling. This was important because it affected the planning for the day, in that individual pupils coming to school in an agitated or tearful state could necessitate changes in the seating arrangements for work in class, or adaptation of planned timing to enable the teacher to work for longer with a particular individual.

It was also the case that children distressed by events at home could react by hitting or kicking out at some real or imagined slight from another pupil in the cloakroom area. The first task of the teacher every school day was therefore to settle the class and create a working atmosphere out of the varied attitudes and emotions that the pupils brought with them into school.

By the time the pupils were lined up to go to assembly at nine o'clock, teachers had been in school for an hour to an hour and a half. There was an assembly rota with a theme for the week and different treatments of this theme on the different days. The rota was displayed in the staffroom.

On Monday the headteacher introduced the theme for the week. On Tuesday one of the teachers led the assembly with the Head or Deputy present. Wednesday was Key Stage assembly led by a member of staff. On Thursday there was singing led by the

visiting music specialist and on Friday a class organised the presentation and parents were invited. On Fridays all staff members stayed for assembly, but on other days they were usually told by the Head or the organising teacher to go once they had got their class settled. Leading assembly was something staff fretted about, and they seemed happier without an adult audience, though other staff always asked afterwards "How did it go?"

Let's make it bright inside

Assembly was Christian and celebratory, interactive and participatory. The singing was a key feature. Modern hymns with familiar melodies were sung with enjoyment. There was an informal marking system for the enthusiasm and tunefulness with which they were performed.

It's a really miserable dark morning outside, so lets make it *bright inside!* Let's see if we can make this one a ten! (Headteacher at assembly)

Staff and pupils had particular favourites.

That was so lovely! (Organising teacher after the first verse) Go and fetch Mrs P (Learning Support Assistant) from the office. She loves this one. Tell her to bring her hankie!

After the singing the member of staff leading the assembly would talk to the pupils on the theme on the rota. The talks were lively. Pupils were asked for their ideas or invited to come up and participate, a little like the magician's act when a member of the audience is invited to come up and assist.

In the singing too, children were invited to be soloists for a verse. Four or five children would come out to the front to sing and be much praised and clapped.

In all sorts of ways like these, assembly was a positive start to the school day.

Fridays assembly was especially so, because a class did the presentation and parents

were invited. Between ten to twenty parents, grandparents, aunties, younger siblings might attend.

On Friday the certificates for the week were awarded, one for the person who had excelled in some way from each class and also special headteacher's certificates. Class certificates were awarded for "really trying all week", "for being a star in Maths", "for writing and trying her best every day in English" and the like. Pupils went up to the front to receive their award, together with a special comment from the headteacher, and a voucher for a meal at MacDonald's. There was much clapping and praise. The following week, one of the staff would drive the winners up to MacDonald's to enjoy their prize.

Assembly finished with a prayer and a sung blessing. God was usually asked to help everybody do their best to demonstrate the particular quality that was the theme of the week, such as "caring" or "forgiveness".

One of the noticeable things about Friday assembly was the banter between the staff and the headteacher or deputy.

Deputy: I think we need some help with this one (a hymn that was unfamiliar). Come along up here Miss K.
Miss K: I'm not ready for this Mr S. I need a microphone!
Mrs J: And a karaoke and a bottle!
(Parents and staff have a laugh)

Except on Friday, assembly time was used by the majority of staff, to finalise the organisation for the morning or to meet up briefly with another member of staff to discuss a child's progress or difficulty, or to catch up on some issue relating to subject teaching or materials. Staff then went to collect their class from assembly to take them back to begin the teaching of the day.

The time between 8.45 and 9.30 was always a time when I felt it best to keep a low profile. Teachers were busy organising and reorganising on the basis of the state of their group at the start of the day. They didn't appreciate an audience at assembly. They certainly didn't need any distraction from getting their heads round the day ahead.

Rock - Hard

Miss K: I'm really pleased with you. Miss R said you'd never do it! Even Mr D's group found it was difficult, but we've shown them! You've done it - and it was rock-hard

At the end of assembly, Key Stage 2 split into graded ability groups for Maths. Maths was an area that the school was targetting for improvement. The year had started with an in-service day on mental mathematics and the plans mapped out for the year had been followed up by discussion at staff meetings and a whole school approach which necessitated two members of staff helping the others to plan, co-ordinate and monitor progress.

The maths session began with mental mathematics. Children sat on the carpet, for a 20-minute session led by the teacher. This was characterised by thoughtfully planned stimulus materials and plenty of encouragement and confidence boosting. At the start of the year children were given generous time to think things out.

Gavin can do this. I know he can! How did you do it last time? Tell me! (Gavin explains, haltingly) That's it! (Teacher motions the others to be quiet while Gavin thinks some more, then offers an answer) See, I knew he'd get there in the end.

This session required not just constant encouragement but also close monitoring, as tired pupils might lapse into a dream.

Danny Butcher, I haven't heard your voice for a while. Have you died?

At the end of mental maths, the teacher would explain what work different groups of pupils were going to do in their books, reassuring, cajoling and issuing reminders with regard to behaviour rules as she went along.

Gary, I don't think you'd better sit with David today. You can't leave him alone. You sit with Stephen and David you sit at Hannah's table. And you girls remember to leave out the extension material. I want you to go onto the next task, because I think you're quite strong on that money calculation now.

There was an on-going process of monitoring the work of individuals and groups to alter the planned activities to suit the pupils' rate of progress and understanding. If necessary, written activities would be halted by the teacher to reinforce or revise some point which seemed to be causing difficulties.

This was a busy session for pupils and teacher and continued till around ten minutes before break when the pupils tidied their tables and came together on the carpet to recap on what they had learnt.

During this plenary part of the session the teacher emphasised what had been learnt and singled out individuals for special commendation. At the end of the plenary pupils were lined up for break and accompanied out to the playground.

Chat and cuddles

Breaktime was notable for the way in which little groups of children hung onto and around the staff on duty. There were two playgrounds, one for infants and one for juniors. Both were windy and exposed. In the infants, children who were not clustered around the adults played parachutes i.e. running about with their coat

stretched above their head so that the wind caught it. In the juniors it was almost exclusively football, apart from the groups walking around chatting to the teachers, linking arms with them, holding their hands or hugging onto them. It was companionable and cosy and shielded people from the wind. It also meant that teachers did not have a break.

Normally the member of Key Stage 2 staff not on duty would bring back a tray of teas and coffees to those in the playground, so that they could have some refreshment when they got back to the classroom. There was a list on the kitchen wall of what milk and sugar everybody took. In Key Stage 1 the Learning Support Assistant would usually take mugs down to the staff, if she wasn't on duty herself, while the teacher and nursery nurse in Reception sometimes managed to make it to the staffroom and have their coffee there.

Break therefore was a break for the pupils but not for the teachers. They had to continue to support and monitor the children or else provide refreshments for other staff in the playground. Nobody sat down. It was even hard to find time to go to the toilet.

In Key Stage 1 and Reception, break-time meant biscuits for all. The teachers and sometimes the parents brought in biscuits for the pupils to share. There were stocks of biscuits and sweets kept in the classroom cupboard.

The major disruption to this pattern for break was bad weather. Key Stage 2 went out in their coats unless it was actually pouring down. A light drizzle didn't count. Both pupils and teachers were desperate to get out and, in the case of the pupils, anxious to be able to run around or chat. Wet break was dreaded. Both pupils and teachers started monitoring the sky from ten o'clock onwards.

It only looks bad on this side, Miss. If you look out of the other window its OK! (Pupil's comment on seeing me glance at the sky at 10.25)

Nobody likes writing, Miss

After break Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 were split up into their English sets by ability. The headteacher took the lowest ability set drawn from Years 5 and 6. English began with a joint group activity, such as the "long read" that the group were working through together, a book with chapters.

This was a mixed experience. Pupils liked it when the teacher read to them, but were less enthusiastic about reading themselves. Even in the "top" groups pupils found difficulty with unfamiliar words and a lot of encouragement and tact was required of the teacher to make reading aloud an enjoyable experience. Care had to be taken in selecting pupils to read, in choosing sentences or paragraphs that matched a pupil's ability, so that they were demanding, but not so hard as to be discouraging.

There was attention drawn to the grammatical points in the piece they were reading, which exemplified current teaching points. This was hard for both teacher and pupils. The examples from the text were often not straightforward and did not always lead to clarification of the point. They could lead to questions or uncertainties, which involved reference to other more complex grammatical points. It was easy to end up in grammatical knots.

At the end of the whole group activity, pupils were set to a range of written tasks. These could involve writing up what they had read in a number of imaginative ways, such as how pupils thought the story might end, or how they would feel if they were one of the characters. All these ideas would have been prepared by the teacher, as

writing in any shape or form was not a popular activity with the pupils. The very worst thing according to them was

having to write long stories, because your hand gets knackered.

In this situation, the quality of work depended heavily on the teacher's ability to motivate pupils and jolly them along. It seemed to me as though the teachers worked harder than the pupils during this session, circulating around the small groups providing encouragement, prompting ideas and forestalling despair.

Left to themselves the great majority of pupils demonstrated a strong tendency to give up. Writing was too hard. Continually monitoring progress was essential, since pupils would concentrate on stretching out the least onerous part of their task, such as creating a decorative title, in the hope of reaching the end of the session without actually writing anything.

Poetry was more popular than prose. As one Year 6 pupils explained

I like to read poetry, but not long reads. Poetry puts things into my head, but long reads don't....They do my head in!

Quite an emphasis in the whole group and small group English work was placed by the teachers on extending the pupils' vocabulary. This again required a great deal of effort on the teacher's part, to encourage a feel for words. There was energetic, expressive acting out of words by the teacher, to stimulate interest and dispel apathy.

An additional and ever present factor in the battle to engage pupils' interest was the need to prevent friction between the pupils. The less involving they found the work, the more likely they were to aggravate their neighbour or revive feuds and disagreements, which had begun outside the classroom, in the playground or the

streets. Teachers had to devise highly motivating classroom approaches and speedily reorientate these during implementation, if the mood and interest of the pupils was felt to be deteriorating.

A heavy confrontational approach to inattention was counterproductive, since this simply prompted pupil retaliation either in the form of antagonistic verbal response or withdrawing from the room. Teachers were adept at preventing confrontations by intervening at an early stage when they sensed attention wavering and friction arising.

It was like a performance. Every teacher had catch phrases that alerted pupils to the fact that an early warning was being issued. These phrases were often humorous and accompanied by actions

(Teacher shakes her head in a puzzled manner and wiggles her finger in her ear) Do you know, my ears are playing tricks on me. I could have sworn somebody shouted just then!

It was only if the early warning went unheeded that the teacher's tone would change.

English, because it demanded skills that most of the pupils found hard to appreciate and acquire, made particularly heavy demands on the energy of teaching staff. By the time the small groups tidied their work away and joined together for a plenary session to share and review what they had done, the Key Stage 2 teachers had been on the go, and on their feet, for four hours. During that time they had been required to adapt their plans, to be cheerful, positive and imaginative, to respond instantly to challenging situations, to comfort individual children who were distressed, to manage demotivated groups and inspire enthusiasm.

In carrying out all these activities, teachers had to demonstrate great sensitivity in the way they used language and social skills. If their judgement faltered on this, they

would be confronted with uncooperative or disruptive behaviour and the work which they had planned to do would fall apart. Similarly if they relaxed their monitoring of pupil activities and progress, the work rate would slow and the quality of what was being produced would deteriorate. This particularly showed itself in the presentation of written work.

Teachers encouraged careful presentation of written work by strategies such as praising and displaying pieces of work where pupils had really tried, bringing in attractive paper to work on (which they had purchased themselves) providing examples (which they had prepared themselves) and rewarding pupils with more immediate concrete recognition of their efforts such as sweets. I walked into Miss R's group to find everybody, including the teacher, sucking lollipops.

While all this was in progress the administrative business of the school also had to be dealt with. The headteacher would come with a message about some child or with an official communication which required a speedy response. A child would appear from another class seeking resource materials. A request from the school secretary to urgently check some information would require attention. An announcement about some change in the lunchtime arrangements would have to be given and explained.

It wasn't simply that teachers were on the go all the time, it was that they had to juggle with so many demands on their attention at the same time. Also everything they did and said was in the full view, and often hearing of their pupils, even when they made every attempt at discretion, so everything that happened impacted on the mood and behaviour of the pupils. To create a calm, productive working environment demanded teachers' active, continuous attention. It seemed to me a bit like driving a racing car - the least lapse could end up in wreckage and disaster.

It was scarcely surprising that by lunchtime people were frequently exhausted as well as seeking something to provide them with energy to get them through the afternoon.

Chocolate! I must have chocolate!

Banktop had a newly acquired Healthy School award, but the staffroom at lunchtime could not have figured in the assessment criteria. Not that everybody ate in the staffroom. Members of staff, who had work to do in their own area over lunchtime, either ate a sandwich as they worked or had nothing at all.

In fact, the only person who spent most of lunchtime in the staffroom was me. Other people came and went throughout the lunch break, stopping to rush down a snack while they photocopied materials for the afternoon, or sitting down for five or ten minutes to talk over the events of the morning with whoever else happened to be there at the time.

Chocolate featured predominantly in staffroom snack eating. Any special occasion was marked with chocolate bars or biscuits, so these were often available on the staffroom table, to augment the supplies that teachers brought with them for their personal consumption.

In the savoury line, people made themselves instant soup or occasionally potnoodle, while the more diet conscious (or organised) brought in sandwiches from home. Sometimes a member of staff went down to the local baker's coming back with a sandwich order for the people who hadn't brought anything or, on the odd occasion, chips from the chip shop on the nearby shopping parade.

The other item that was consistently consumed at lunchtime was headache remedies.

Do you remember when..

Conversations at lunchtime often started with reference to something that had happened in the morning, something surprising or funny, that everybody could have a laugh about. This would lead to shared reminiscences about past situations and pupils.

Do you remember when that class came into reception? There was Ian, Colin, Billy and David. Do you remember him? He couldn't sit still! He used to climb on the furniture! And Gary never stopped talking! And Ian and Reece fought all the time! There used to be one on one side of Mrs C and one on the other, with her holding their hands and them trying to kick each other behind her back!

These reminders of the past caused further laughter and seemed to brighten everybody up. They were stories of stormy times and situations safely weathered. They seemed to serve a useful purpose in bringing to mind that more trying times than today had been seen and survived. The core of staff who had been there longest provided a kind of oral history of the school - of past teachers, pupils and their families - which brought newer members of staff into the culture of the place.

There was however no malicious gossip or moralising. Stories were told to entertain, they made people laugh then, presumably, as well as now. They were the edited highlights of unique days in the past, the events that deserved to be held in the communal memory.

Do you remember when we did that display on hats with Nursery and Ewan said he wanted a burglar hat like his Dad? You know - a balaclava with the eyes and nose out!

People were accepted, warts and all.

A good way to spend five minutes

Along with this pragmatic acceptance of things as they were, went a practical, understated recognition of just how much individual pupils needed adult support.

When teachers sat down at lunchtime, even for the odd five minutes, there would be interruptions. Miss R had just sat down try to eat her chocolate bar before going off to organise choir when there was a knock at the door. It was the school secretary.

That Carly is worrying the life out of me. She's at the office every two minutes wanting to know when choir begins. What shall I tell her?

The reply was that it was still five minutes, but to send her along in any case. Carly duly appeared at the staffroom door and was ushered in.

So you're waiting for choir and making Mrs L's life a misery! Well come and sit beside me. I can think of a good way to spend five minutes.

So saying, Miss R stretched out her arm to extend her large woolly cardigan round Carly and wrapped her up in it. Thus cuddled up close, she sat there while Miss R finished her "lunch", then they both went off to choir together.

This particular incident exemplified the kind of flexibility which teachers showed in dealing with the needs of individual children. In conversation the headteacher frequently referred to the pupil body as "our bairns". This somehow encapsulated the level of care and empathy for the situations which children faced outside school that demonstrated itself daily in all sorts of ways. The majority of the teachers came from the local area and well understood the difficulties pupils faced. To try to reflect this adequately, I decided that I would have to devote a second section to "our bairns".

Shouts and Alarms

The staffroom was within earshot of the hall where school dinners were served and the infants' playground entrance. Although dinnertime supervisors were on duty, any loud sobbing or arguing in the corridor leading from the hall to the playground would require a teacher's attention. Any major altercation between a pupil and a supervisor would also result in the teacher being summoned.

Thus even when teachers made it to the staffroom, they were seldom undisturbed. Teachers trying to set up for the afternoon in their classroom or activity area were also called upon to mind miscreants who had been sent in from the playground, usually on account of fighting.

A different school

The atmosphere in the afternoon was quite different to the morning. This was particularly noticeable in Reception and Key Stage 1.

Children came in from the playground fractious, over-excited and over-tired. They had been chasing around, witnessing the various lunchtime dramas, falling over and, in some cases, arguing or fighting. The teachers having lined them up on the playground accompanied their classes to the cloakroom area to hang up their coats.

This was not a trouble-free task. Because the partitions on which the pegs hung were solid, they afforded cover for arguing, while the teacher was ushering the last few pupils in through the door. It required a serious tone and *very* firm instructions to get

everybody seated peacefully on the benches with their coats hung up on the appropriate peg. Almost invariably some pupil or other was in tears.

The afternoon seemed to be problematic because many of the Key Stage 1 pupils were so physically tired. Not only had they had a busy morning, they had then had a hot school dinner, which for a proportion of them would be their first proper meal of the day, after which they had run around energetically on a windy playground. In a good number of cases they had also gone to bed late the previous night. Questions about what pupils had seen on television the night before revealed that their watching hours were frequently very late for five to seven year olds.

The end product of all this was that pupil attitudes in the afternoon differed markedly from those in the morning. The teachers too were tired and in the case of those who had gone without a proper lunch, by one o'clock they were running on empty.

You need a strong head for this job

You need a strong head for this job. I hope you've got your headache pills in your handbag (Parental comment to teacher at the start of the afternoon session)

At the start of the year I spent my afternoons in Key Stage 1 with what was generally acknowledged in the school to be the most demanding class. There was a preponderance of boys in this group, one of whom was already the subject of negotiation with the behaviour support unit and a number of whom had lesser behavioural problems but greater learning problems than Ewan, the main cause for concern. It was what is generally known as a *challenging* group.

The first challenge was to get the pupils sitting in an orderly fashion on the carpet.

The main difficulty with this exercise was to ensure children were sitting beside somebody they wouldn't wind up, or with whom they were not already involved in some sort of dispute, possibly left over from lunchtime.

The recommended teaching device of sitting sternly, waiting for silence didn't work with this group. They were so much more interested in what their neighbour was up to or anxious to bring their friends up to date with some piece of news or keen to wreak their revenge on some antagonist, that they talked and squirmed and kicked and grappled without paying the least attention to a sternly silent teacher. It seemed that they had never learnt the social rules for this particular game.

To create any sort of order, the teacher had to speak *very* firmly. Generally the worst offenders were banished from the carpet to sit on the cold floor, within sight of the teacher, but beyond striking or kicking distance of their classmates. They did not stay however where they were put, but either edged in gradually towards the group, or edged out to a position out of the teacher's view where they could get up to some mischief. As a result the teacher's introduction to the work of the afternoon was punctuated by staccato warnings to the mobile miscreants. Occasionally the worst offender was exiled to the corridor by the open door.

The plan for the afternoon usually involved a number of jobs. Some children would be completing work from the morning. Others would be beginning the activity which followed from the teacher's introduction to the whole group as they sat on the carpet. Other children would be in the activity area carrying out practical work such as painting or making things. The teacher would station herself with one of these groups in a position where she could monitor the others. I assisted with one or other of the groups.

The Lord of Misrule

The main problem when it came to implementing this plan was Ewan. Ewan disliked order. He liked things to be happening. He set himself up in opposition to all the teacher's arrangements. He seemed to prefer the classroom to reflect his requirements.

Ewan had a fine sense of timing. He seemed to know exactly when the group was becoming settled and attentive to the teacher. This required his immediate intervention. He would laugh, shout out, accuse another child of kicking him, fall over on his side groaning, or lunge at another child. This would break up the mood nicely.

He was also adept at winding up other children just by looking at them or gesturing at them. Since a number of the other boys were extremely sensitive to any slight, however trivial, it was very easy for Ewan to provoke them into shouting or kicking out, rather than making the noise himself. The end result was the same. The teacher's hold on the class had been broken. Attention had been diverted from work

The school had developed a positive discipline strategy, so that attention drawn by the teacher to bad behaviour was as far as possible avoided, in favour of stressing and praising good behaviour. Hence when the majority of pupils were chatting on the carpet, instead of sitting quietly as they were supposed to, the teacher would select one who was exhibiting the desired behaviour and say

Well done Hayleigh! You're sitting beautifully. I wonder how many other people can manage to sit up straight like Hayleigh?

Ewan however had the measure of that. He would mimic the teacher's catchphrases

or sit up in an exaggerated fashion, then fall over in fits of laughter, pointing mockingly at some other pupil who had followed his example. Ewan was frightened of nobody, he didn't care. He would only cooperate with the teacher's plans if and when it suited him to do so.

What on earth will I do for Ofsted?

Teaching this group was not an enviable experience. Whenever anything particularly disruptive occurred, the teacher was apt to refer to Ofsted in tones of dread and foreboding. Understandably she could envisage herself at this early stage in the year as a failing teacher.

To gain the pupils' interest and motivate them she provided a variety of materials which she prepared herself. She seldom took a break and hardly ever came into the staffroom, as she was always down in her area preparing work for her group or having meetings with external agencies on account of the difficulties experienced by a number of children in the class.

Although this material preparation took a heavy toll on her time, it was the only way she felt she could undertake many of the tasks that children of that age were expected to do, within the framework of the National Curriculum. I knew from helping small groups and individuals, that many children lacked the basic manipulative skills and presentational skills to set out work or carry out folding or cutting tasks accurately by themselves. The whole class, apart from four or five, required individual assistance with such activities.

These factors, combined with the weariness of all concerned, meant that by 2.45 pm,

any sort of purposeful activity had simply ground to a halt. There was no scheduled afternoon break. I was told that the staff had decided that a whole school break in the afternoon had been so disruptive that they had changed to allowing each teacher to fit a break into the work of the class whenever it seemed most appropriate.

Some classes went out into the playground or onto the field (mostly in Key Stage 2), others had biscuits and what was left of the milk sitting on the mat (mostly in Key Stage 1). This of course meant that the teachers worked all the way through the afternoon, without any break or refreshment. Where there were two adults in the class it was possible for one to slip out and bring back mugs of coffee, but mostly people did without.

In the group, where I was, the last half hour of the day was a mixture of tidying up, tellings off, banishments to distant parts of the room, eating biscuits, listening to a story, getting instructions for the next day and distributing rewards for any good work or behaviour for the day that had just gone. The afternoon ended with a prayer. If the group didn't sit quietly and reverently enough they had to repeat it, then those who were sitting properly were permitted to go first.

Some afternoons it could take a long time for everybody to finally make it out of the door.

First, let's sort out dates

At the end of the afternoon on Mondays was the staff meeting. The first item on the agenda was always "Dates" - sorting out who was going to be where in the coming week. The head and teachers were required to attend a variety of meetings and in-

service training courses outside school, so it was necessary to sit down with diaries and establish who was going to be out and what arrangements were to be made for the pupils in their absence.

This was not an uncomplicated matter. Most arrangements to go to meetings and courses were made some time in advance, so more immediate issues would have arisen since, which required other members of staff to be away from class at a similar time. A teacher might have to see a visitor from the School Psychological Service or the Behaviour Support Unit, who could only come at that particular time. Somebody might be coming in to discuss sports facilities with the teacher in charge of physical education. All these additional meetings had to be scheduled into the already existing programme.

This could take some time. Everybody taught, including the headteacher, who took the bottom Year5/6 English group each morning. Arranging where the pupils were going to go when their teacher was out could become very convoluted. As the morning in Key Stage 2 was taught in three groups across two classes, it was usually possible to split one of the groups between the other two. This however was only straightforward if there was only one teacher out from that area. If there were two people out from the same area, then teachers had to swop around between classes and Key Stages.

Some weeks it was like a merry-go-round. The nursery nurses and learning support assistant helped out if a teacher was just out for a short time to speak to a visitor. A high level of flexibility was required of every member of staff. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in the staff meeting was one of positive problem solving. People volunteered solutions to difficult clashes rather than sitting back and waiting to be asked.

After the week ahead had been satisfactorily mapped out and everybody was certain what they were doing, the meeting proceeded by addressing some point of curriculum planning. There was a schedule of topics for the year to ensure that necessary areas were covered. The selection seemed to relate in the main to addressing central government initiatives and to preparing for Ofsted. The tone of the meeting was co-operative and positive and the timing was strictly adhered to. At five o'clock everybody dashed off to attend to their outside commitments - the end of a varied and demanding school day.

Section 2: Our Bairns

To create a picture of the interaction between teachers and pupils, which demonstrated the awareness of every member of staff to individual need, I can only give examples of the ways in which I experienced or witnessed this particular quality.

In class it most frequently took the form of praise and rewards for observing the basic rules or trying to work in difficult circumstances.

Teacher: And do you know what I'm most pleased about today?

Pupil: We did our best?

Teacher: Yes, you all stayed and worked. Nobody left the room.
Nobody had Timmy Tantrums.

Teachers were constantly called upon to make sensitive judgements about how to treat children under stress without compromising the work and progress of the group as a whole. Pupils closely monitored the teacher's decisions and expected them to be fair, supporting the stated rule. Where a teacher took into account the situation of a particular child, they often provided reasons for their course of action to the group as a whole.

Just move over there beside Natasha, Reece. Natasha'll look after you.
Natasha's good at looking after people (Year 3 teacher).

The open layout of the school, with plenty of space outside the immediate classroom meant that pupils could take themselves off into an adjoining area. The teacher had then to decide how long to leave the absconder before taking action to bring them back. While younger children had to be speedily retrieved for reasons of safety, older pupils could be given time to compose themselves and to return to the group under their own steam.

This was demonstrated in a Year 5/6 bottom maths set, carrying out measuring

activities.

- Teacher: Come along Dean. It'll be your turn after Hayley.
(Pupil refuses to move)
- Teacher: And you needn't screw up your face! I'm less than half-a-litre scared!
(Pupil glowers and removes himself to the cloakroom area.
Teacher continues with the activity)
- Pupil 2 : Dean's in the cloakroom.
- Teacher: (Feigning great surprise) Gerraway!
(Other pupils forget about Dean and get on with their measuring. Dean watches from a distance then gradually moves closer, as the teacher backs away slightly from the group. This allows Dean to move over to the teacher and quietly say "Sorry". He is reintegrated into the group after a minor dispute over who is going to share with him.)
- Teacher: Katie, would you mind sharing with Hayley, then Kelly can share with Dean. I'm asking you because I've got four screwed up faces this morning and I know *you* won't screw up *your* face.
(Katie co-operates, glowing with self-satisfaction)

This kind of sensitivity, which enabled pupils to come back into class without losing face and also recognised the need to praise the other pupils who allowed this to happen, was one of the most consistent aspects of the day-to-day work of the teachers I observed.

Facing up to it - on a daily basis

Different teachers had their own ways of expressing it. When I had seen the Year 4 teacher deal with an early morning fight then settle the class to calm, organised, purposeful activity, I asked her how she managed so effectively.

When something happens and it's over, I never dwell on it. It's done with. We start afresh. There's no point going on about it. You deal with it then and there. It's finished. Anything else is a waste of time.

Decisions on how to act in challenging situations, however, were never routine or

easy. They demanded active professional judgement and engagement with difficult issues, as for instance when Miss R went out to retrieve a pupil from the cloakroom for the third time in an early morning maths session.

Miss R: Can you listen out for mine, Miss K? I'm just going to have words with our friend. I know the situation, but it's gone too far this morning. If he's here, he's got to be here, not in the cloakroom.

Later in breaktime I heard her going through her choice of action with Miss K. She had been faced with a situation where a boy in the most desperate home circumstances was constantly calling into question her organisation of the group and disrupting its planned activities. At the same time she knew that he was crying out for attention and reassurance and, on account of this, was manipulating the situation so that he had sole claim on her. By so doing he was denying the rest of the group the attention to which they were entitled.

She had to get across to him that the support she could offer had to be within the framework of an ordered group situation, where other people had claims on her time and attention, no matter how great his individual need and however much she cared about him. She had approximately three minutes to speak to him on his own, before getting back to the class.

At the same time she felt bad about having to speak so forcefully to a boy who had already been rejected by almost everybody in his short life and had just spent the night in a sleeping bag on somebody's floor. She decided to simply confront him with a straight choice. He could either stay on her terms or he could go.

I thought, if he runs, he runs. I'll just have to face up to it afterwards!

In the event he stomped back into class ahead of her with a screwed up face to demonstrate his spirit of resistance to the others.

Concern for individuals was thus not just shown in comforting cuddles, although there were plenty of those. It was demonstrated in dealing firmly and honestly with pupils whose desperate personal situations could make you weep, and whose behaviour reflected the confusion in their backgrounds.

The reception teacher reported a conversation between two of her pupils, to demonstrate their problematic environment.

Sammy-Jo: Where's your brother?

Brooke: He doesn't live with us any more. They took him away.

Sammy-Jo: Did they put him in that school?

Brooke: Which school?

Sammy-Jo: (Pointing over towards a neighbouring Special Unit, which used to be a residential children's home)
That school over there. That's where they put you when they take you away. My Dad went there.

You can't but feel sorry for her. She's nowt but a bairn herself!
(Headteacher's comment about a parent)

Concern for pupils' individual needs was also demonstrated in the support extended to their families in practical ways. One mother with a child in almost every class was in the habit of popping up to school, regularly coming into class with a forgotten item or a message for one or other of the children. The school received her visits with good humour and courtesy, recognising that she had special needs herself, and that these visits seemed to help give shape and purpose to her day. The headteacher was particularly concerned to give her some practical support in clothing the children, but knew that she would not accept "charity" from the school.

Consequently a scheme was devised with the help of another mother in the area,

whose discretion the headteacher knew could be trusted. All the hand-me-downs from the headteacher's grandchildren were given to this mother, who manufactured opportunities to pass them on to the needy family.

In addition, the classteacher of one of the children, whose slow growth gave rise to concern from the school's medical officer, supervised that extra food was brought for her and eaten at breaktimes, as well as the free school dinner to which she was entitled.

The “posh” end of Raleigh Road

In part, the understanding shown to individual pupils seemed to spring from a close working knowledge of the area in which they lived. I was talking to Year 1's voluntary classroom assistant when she explained to me that she had gone to school in the area herself.

I went to High Dockside School. If you lived in Raleigh Road, you went to Low Dockside Secondary, but we were right at the posh end of Raleigh Road, so we went to High Dockside.

When I recounted this to one of the teachers, remarking on the different status and reputation of individual streets and parts of streets, she was keen to put me right

She always says that, but she didn't live at the posh end. The posh end is at the top and she was nearer the bottom.

I sought further information from the school secretary who took me to the glass doors overlooking the surrounding streets.

Look down there. That's Joan Simpson's house (the dinner time supervisor). That block is private - they're nice. That's the top of Raleigh Road. If you go down to the next one across, they're nice too - new doors, gardens looked after, really neat. Then the next one

down, that's Drake Drive, that's OK. Then you get to Admiral Court. Well, that's like another world - it's frightening. There's bricks in the street, dirty nappies, bairns running about with no pants and snotty noses, windows put in. And that's how close it is, back to back. One road fine and the next...(Words failed her and she made a disgusted expression) And when they did them up last, while the workmen were leaving one end of the street, at the other end the tenants were taking out the new doors already to sell them!

I decided to take advantage of a rare lunchtime opportunity in the staff room when both the deputy headteacher and the nursery nurse were present to inquire further about the distinctions between streets in the catchment area.

Nursery Nurse: Down in the Courts - that's the worst area. They've been refurbished four times since I came here 9 years ago. They (the council) put in new walls and doors and they (the tenants) sold them. The council had to put the old ones back!

Deputy Head: And right in the middle it's like Beirut. They had to bulldoze houses. They just had to give up. They built some new, but left the rest. It's like a bomb site.

Nursery Nurse: Its true!
They were broken into and burnt out. The bottom of Raleigh Road is the same. I knew this fellow who bought a flat at the bottom of Raleigh Road. He didn't know the area. If he'd asked me I could have told him! Well, his motorbike was stolen 16 times, he was broken into, he had his windows put in, and in the end he just had to leave it. He couldn't sell it.

Deputy Head: You want to take a drive around, but take somebody with you and don't take photographs.

The majority of staff, teaching and non-teaching, had been educated in the town both at school and college level. Only three had not gone to schools in the town, and those had done their degree level studies and teacher training at the local university. Their knowledge of the area was often personal as well as professional. When I mentioned the challenging behaviour of one of the Year 3 boys to Mrs N, one of the nursery nurses, she wasn't surprised.

His mother was just the same.. They're all moody. Her sister was the



worst. She was in my class all the way through school. She was a terror!

This familiarity with the area also displayed itself in the language used in the classroom. When it was important to get some point across, teachers tended to revert to local dialect

Mind, when we go to the farm, you've to wear your wellies, because it'll be dead clarty. (Instructions from teacher regarding class trip)

The Man of the House

Flexibility and understanding with regard to individual needs and background was also exemplified by the school's approach to Arthur in Year 6, who appeared to care for his little brother and sister. He organised getting them to school in the morning, shepherding the youngest to the infants' entrance, coming in with the mothers and granddads, getting his sister out of her coat, hanging it up, kissing her goodbye and telling her to be good. Although the family was well known to all the external agencies, it was Arthur who had to deal with the practical day-to-day business of getting his siblings to school.

This was brought to my own attention one morning when I was working with Shelley, Arthur's sister.

Shelley: Do you know what we had for breakfast?

Me: No- what did you have for breakfast?

Shelley: Apple crumble!

Me: Apple crumble? Are you sure?

Shelley: Oh yes. It was all Arthur could find. It was nice!

Arthur and his siblings lived a nomadic existence, depending on the state of family

relationships and economic pressures. Every so often they turned up back at Banktop, having been moved from school to school in line with family vicissitudes.

Arthur was a different kind of problem. He was desperate to do well at his work and gain adult praise. This made him constantly interrupt the teacher and other pupils with his ideas and answers. His teacher had a continual battle to prevent him becoming an unpopular nuisance to his classmates, but at the same time to encourage him in his efforts to do well. Although desperate to make a good impression, he could become an irritating presence to those around him, thus giving rise to friction in class.

In response to this situation, his classteacher had negotiated with the head and other staff to spread Arthur's presence out and give some relief to his classmates. To maintain his enthusiasm, yet prevent it becoming too wearing on others he had been given a number of responsibilities which kept him busy and which he executed with zeal. He helped get the Reception class ready for assembly and lunch, and he assisted in the infants' playground. This also helped to overcome another sensitive problem.

The family had no money to pay for school outings. An easy-pay instalment system was run for all excursions, to allow parents to contribute a little each week till they had reached the full amount, but even this was too much for Arthur. He could perhaps manage to organise the money for one of them, they simply couldn't afford for all of them to go.

In the past the school had been able to assist poor families, but finances no longer stretched to cover the amount of need. A firm rule had therefore been made that if you didn't pay, you didn't go. In the case of Arthur and his siblings, the headteacher was desperate to allow them to go on a school excursion without it appearing that any

unfair favouritism was involved. Arthur's role as teacher's assistant in the infants allowed this to happen. His responsibilities were extended to encompass the participation of his brother, so that both could go as "helpers" on the infants outing.

The headteacher covered the expense involved.

Individual Need.

Concern for and awareness to individual needs therefore demonstrated themselves right from basic practical matters of feeding and clothing, through monitoring and reporting non-accidental injury or indications of abuse, to the difficult professional decision making of managing learning and behaviour in the classroom.

Every member of staff was involved, even "another pair of hands" like me. When one of the boys I was helping in a small group was particularly upset one day, my questions to him prompted the disclosure that he was being ill-treated at home. He was quite specific about what had happened to him, so I reported the conversation to the classteacher and was shortly afterwards asked to write down my account of what he had said, for the headteacher to take matters further.

There was no fuss or gossip about such occurrences. The proper procedures were discreetly followed and action was taken. I couldn't help feeling despair about whether *any* action could ever make Darren's life even begin to approximate to a model of stability. I remembered the day he came in with some news he wanted to share with his infant classmates.

Darren: We saw a picture of my Mam's new baby. In her belly!

Mrs S: That was exciting. Was it a girl or a boy or couldn't they tell?

Darren: You couldn't tell! Tom (Mam's boyfriend) said "Just as well!"

If it's a girl, I'm off!" But I'll look after her. I love the baby.

I sat with Darren on a number of occasions while he cried. As a child who moved from school to school, he found it hard to make friends. He was little and had dark mediterranean looks which got him picked on. He was also attention seeking and noisy, which made him difficult to teach and unpopular with his tablemates, who blamed him for attracting the teacher's ire to their group.

Comforting him was a challenging experience. He smelt. He took advantage of adult attention and played up. He was as likely to throw his pencil away (or at his neighbour) as he was to respond to individual encouragement. At the same time he was so unhappy. I felt quite powerless to help. I let him cuddle up to my legs as he sat on the carpet and tried to encourage him to keep quiet and out of trouble by patting his back.

I often noticed Mrs B, the Learning Support Assistant, taking much the same kind of action with one or other of her charges in the same class. She explained to me about one of them.

I know he can't remember a single letter, for all I've tried. But he's such a lovely bairn. I just love him!

Darren moved on to another school. It was only after he had gone, that his teacher told me all his older siblings were in care.

What was noticeable at Banktop was that there were so many children in every class who demanded special care. It wasn't just one or two, or the occasional incident which marked out a child at risk.

The evidence of a range of individual needs, and the attention of the staff to those

needs, was before me on a daily basis. Credit was always given to children for managing to cope under stressful circumstances, and staff did everything they could to build up the confidence of vulnerable youngsters.

Mr S: I'm going to give Daniel a certificate for good behaviour today, because I know he's tried so hard and he hasn't got into a fight, although Garry has been trying to wind him up all day.

When the situation demanded it, however, staff did not shirk the need for straight talking, often in the local vernacular

Headteacher (to Year 6 girl): There's no point in turning on the tears. You know what the rule is by now - if you do wrong, you get wrong! Your poor Mam will be so upset - you were the one she could be proud of!

To respond flexibly to rapidly changing situations and to the varied needs of the individuals involved required skill, good humour and sensitivity of a demandingly high order. Nor was there any respite from these demands during the school day, even in the "rest" periods of break or lunchtime.

Section 3: Waiting for Ofsted

I have tried so far to provide an impression of Banktop School at the start of its Ofsted year, by choosing some examples of the work in which I participated and by giving some accounts of pupils and their needs. I would like to proceed by paying particular attention to the ways in which staff talked about Ofsted, and the ways in which they approached key areas where they felt particularly vulnerable, as the year progressed. I plan to finish by considering the final preparations for Ofsted and the week of the inspection itself.

A Consultant Calls

In November, a key staff meeting was given over to receiving feedback from a consultant, someone qualified as an inspector whom the school had employed to see everybody teach and to help prepare them for the Ofsted inspection later in the year. Anxiety had run high about these visits, which I had noted as follows in my own journal.

Threats and Bribes (October 1998)

I was standing by the door of Sally's class. They were not having a story as usual at the end of the day. They were sitting on the carpet doing mental maths.

"And tomorrow at this time we will be having *an important visitor*. You all know how to behave when we have *an important visitor*. (There was a pause while she looked meaningfully round every member of the class, finishing with me in the doorway.)

Mrs Howard, would you come in and sit here to show everybody what our important visitor will do. Our important visitor is here to see *how well you work*. (Another pauses while inspiration struck, then to me, sitting looking stern pretending to be the important visitor. "Hang on a minute I've had an idea!" Sally leapt up, hurried off, returning with a piece of paper and a pen, which she gave to me).

Our important visitor will be writing about all the work she sees in this classroom. Mrs Howard, could you look at all the girls and boys and make a list of who is good and who doesn't work properly? No, when I think about it most of my boys and girls work *very well*, so I think we will just need the names of the people who don't, because otherwise you will have to write a *very long* list.

I duly make a short list of boys (it has to be boys after that build up) who shout out instead of putting their hands up, are rude or don't sit properly on their bottoms. The rest are quite ostentatiously *good*. I look very obviously at people and write things down. Everybody is very interested in my list.

The session goes very well and everybody enjoys it, even the "baddies". At the end I am solemnly requested to present my list to Sally.

Sally: There are five names on this list, and none of them come as any surprise. (The names are intoned in turn with appropriate comment)

Me: And do you know Mrs Olsen, I think some of those boys didn't even notice what they were doing. Sean fell over, but he was so busy fidgeting I don't think he even knew he was behaving badly.

Sally: That's half the trouble Mrs Howard and, do you know, if those boys cannot behave themselves when our important visitor is here and if their names are on *her* list, then I'm afraid they won't be getting the nice treat that Mrs Simons and I told them about. Yes, on Friday there will be a nice treat, because I've got some special biscuits in my cupboard, but I don't know if the people on your list will deserve it. They'll have to make sure they work *very well* tomorrow to get their treat. (Looking hard at said culprits) Now you make sure you get to bed early and have a good night's sleep and come to school tomorrow with your sensible heads on. Now hands together, eyes closed, let's have our prayer.

Sally however must have decided to do a belt and braces job, because I met her later in the cloakroom area talking to the mother of one of the "baddies"

"Well, Mary, he just won't sit still" (Mary makes a reply that I can't hear exactly but seems to be along the lines of trying her best and nothing doing any good)
"You'll just have to threaten him, Mary, that if he doesn't learn to sit still and pay attention, he'll miss out on something (Mary replies again, but obviously cannot come up with an effective enough idea.) "Tell him he won't be able to go to the Halloween party. That should do it." (Both laugh)

Practise understanding Ofsted-speak

The consultant was very understanding of the level of staff anxiety exemplified above. She made clear that she had noticed that some people were quite nervous at the start of her planned visits. She acknowledged the horror stories that circulated about Ofsted and about some teams in particular. She stressed the need not to be intimidated by such rumours, but simply to be very positive and very professional.

Since she had previously given feedback privately to individuals, her feedback to the group emphasised strongly the benefit of understanding the Ofsted process, of learning the language and pattern of inspection. She indicated the ways in which key documentation, like lesson planning and evaluation, could be adapted to make it crystal clear to the inspection team what teachers were seeking to achieve and how far they were achieving it.

The importance of ensuring the inspectors would see the school at its very best, with nothing left to chance, was also a strong theme throughout.

You want to make sure they see all the things you're best at. Don't leave it to chance. For instance the children's singing. Make sure you let them show just what they can do at assembly.

Pointers were given on areas which could be sharpened up. Key questions were asked: how do you plan to extend your able pupils; how are your stated outcomes measurable; how do your displays help pupils to work independently? There was advice on the layout of documentation

You want to set out your planning so that the inspectors can follow it clearly. It has to leap out at them.

The consultant was very anxious to make it clear to staff that the feedback they received from Ofsted would not be delivered in a user-friendly manner. It would be quite unlike the way in which she presented her own comments. She explained that teachers would be given grades and a brief individual feedback session if they wished, but that the words in the actual report would be formal and cold.

The only individual session which was singled out for comment was the mental maths session which had occasioned the additional preparation noted in my journal. The consultant felt she had to commend it as one of the most effective sessions of its kind which she had seen anywhere.

The teachers responded to this feedback in thoughtful and practical ways. It was discussed how some of the points, which she had raised, were being acted upon. In reply, these initiatives were welcomed and warmly praised. At the end of the session the consultant stressed how she wished to be kept in touch with how things were progressing and, of course, to know the eventual outcome of the inspection. She conveyed the impression that she was really interested in the school, the staff and the pupils, and that she also now had an investment in their Ofsted experience.

After the session the staff stayed around to chat over what had been said, even though it was after five o'clock by this time and people usually shot off to other commitments.

This meeting brought the school day to an end. At the start of the year, in the midst of all the busyness of a demanding routine, a range of activities and duties, staff were already looking towards Ofsted, planning for Ofsted, learning about the language and approach of Ofsted and worrying about Ofsted.

To me it seemed that the consultant's visit and feedback was a significant milestone in making the inspection a practical reality, rather than a distant terror. This was particularly so in explaining the impersonal, formal nature of the process, introducing an understanding of cold, detached language and making this seem less strange and frightening to people who worked in a very personal, warm and interactive manner.

The irony was that this approachable, supportive, gifted and, in some ways, inspirational consultant earned her money at other times by being an impersonal, detached Ofsted inspector, who inspired the very anxiety she had shown herself so skilled in defusing.

If that's what they want, that's what they'll get!

The headteacher's words above embodied a grim determination at the staff meeting at the start of the Spring term to have everything in the school matching Ofsted requirements by the time of their visit in June. The first staff meeting of the New Year had to be conducted with the staff room door open, since two infants had not been collected at the end of the school afternoon, and were consequently sitting outside in the corridor waiting for some relation to remember to pick them up.

After the usual review of dates, the first topic on the agenda was a telephone call from the Registered Inspector leading the inspection team, commonly known as the RegI. She wished to set the date for her preliminary meeting with staff, when she would come to look round the school, talk to the parents and collect the required documentation. It would be the Friday immediately before the half-term holiday and she would meet the staff after school. This was the only date she could manage.

The headteacher hastened to say that a staff meeting later in the year would be shortened in order to give them time in lieu of that given to the RegI's meeting, but the timing was received with sighs and resigned expressions. The Friday afternoon before a holiday was the most difficult time to keep pupils motivated. It was also one of the few afternoons in the year when staff would normally leave almost immediately after the end of the school day.

Nevertheless, the headteacher's attitude seemed to coincide with that of the majority of staff. Banktop was not going to show itself to be in the least uncooperative.

"If that's what she wants, that's what she'll get"

One of the reasons staff were reconciled to attending this meeting at a time when they would normally be dashing home to sort out family holiday breaks seemed to be that nobody was going away for the half-term week. I already knew this was the case with the headteacher, since I had bumped into her with her husband in our local pub and she had told me they were not planning to go away as they normally did every half-term.

Her husband also seemed resigned to this, explaining to me that his concern was the publicity that now accompanied any criticism in Ofsted reports. "The trouble is that if they find anything bad, it all goes in the paper, so I get it at home".

The prospect of going away, having a break and enjoying life was out of the question only four weeks before Ofsted. "There'll be far too much to do!" was the headteacher's opinion, and it seemed that this view was shared by the other members of staff.

"Do you think anybody here will get a level 5, Miss?"

The anxiety over publicity was heightened by the school's recent experience of having performed poorly in the national Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) the previous year but one. The generous coverage in the local paper had affected morale badly.

Mrs J: I had just started here the week before and when I came in the morning after that article, it was a different school.

In discussion, formal and informal, about Ofsted the need to demonstrate improvement in the SATs scores was therefore generally recognised as a key issue that needed to be addressed.

Head: Even although we can't reach the sorts of targets they're talking about, we've got to show that we're doing something about it.

It was also a source of quiet despair at times

Mr D: I know I can never get an excellent, because of the results. Whatever I do, they're never going to get the grades, so even the best I can do will never get an excellent.

As a result of this shared experience and concern, there was a great deal of preparation and encouragement for the SATs in Year 6, beginning gently after Christmas and building up to the SATs week itself, when it culminated in the SATs trip.

The SATs Trip

The week of the SATs in early May began with the Headteacher's visit to Year 6 to suggest a trip at the end of the tests. After she had gone the classteacher reminded the pupils of the conditions.

There are rules, mind. You have to come in every day, you have to work hard and do your best.

Most of the pupils remembered that last year's class had gone to Metroland, the indoor fairground at Europe's largest shopping mall, about half-an-hour's drive away. The classteacher did an effective sales job on the attractions of the trip.

Last year we went and had the whole place to ourselves because it was in the week. We could go on all the rides. Terry went on the Roller Coaster about 22 times! Would you like that?

Attendance throughout the week of the SATs was thus ensured. It was necessary to provide some such immediate concrete incentive as I had seen during the practice sessions on old test papers earlier in the term.

Dreading the SATs

Pupil 1: English is the worst. The questions are hard. They say things like "Explain" and "Give your opinion."

Pupil 2: And when you have to write long stories. I *hate* when you have to write long stories. I know you have to do them for the SATs, but not every day!

Pupil 3: I just don't like them because its exams. I don't like exams.

Me: Why? How do exams make you feel?

Pupil 3: Nervous! And if you pass them you feel like a swot and I don't want to be a swot..

(Conversation with Year 6 pupils after a practice SAT paper)

The practice SAT papers were a feature of English, Maths and Science sessions with year 6 pupils in the long run up to the SATs themselves in May. I started sitting in on them in March.

What immediately struck me was how sensitively and continuously the two teachers chiefly concerned had to motivate and build up the confidence of Year 6 pupils in this

respect. The pupils expressed either a dread of the SATs or a bored indifference to them, whether feigned or genuine.

Tony: Miss, why do people worry about the SATs? I mean - they don't make any difference, do they?

Some of the anxieties amongst the pupils sprang from misinformation and lack of understanding.

Katie: There was this girl in the next street and she failed her SATs and everybody knew. It was in the papers!

"Failing" and "passing" were the terms commonly used by the pupils, although they knew about grading into levels and wanted to know what level they were. They simply recognised that some levels were a "Fail", no matter how their teachers tried to encourage them.

Pupil : I thought I'd get more.

Miss K: As far as I'm concerned, David, it's just words on paper. You've worked really hard. Just keep going. You've done really well as far as I'm concerned.

Oh, Miss, I *hate* her!

A particular focus for hatred was the lady on the mental maths test tape. Normally the pupils preferred Maths SATs to English. The general consensus was that the questions were "easier", which in this context seemed to mean less words and more straightforward. "They don't try to trick you, Miss" several pupils explained to me

The exception however was the mental maths tape. The teacher had tried to prepare them for it.

Teacher: The lady on the tape speaks *beautifully*, not like me, very posh.

Pupil: I don't like the sound of her much!

Teacher: I always encourage you to put down your working out, but you mustn't write down any working out for this. That's a bit mean isn't it?

Pupil: Miss, I hate her!

This first impression was consolidated by the tape itself with its *beautifully* enunciated instructions. The teacher switched it off to go over the guidelines in her own words and accent. After some questioning, it became clear the pupils had ceased to concentrate after the first few words in BBC English.

Having eventually ascertained that they knew what they had to do, the teacher began the tape again. There was a five second gap between the questions in which to write down each answer. After the first couple of questions there was general despair. Pupils threw down their pencils in frustration as the calm modulated tones moved relentlessly on. After question 10, even the teacher gave up. Muttering "Oh, forget it!" she switched off the tape.

The pupils began a battery of questions.

- What does "divide" mean?
- What does "subtract" mean?
- What does "fewer" mean?
- What does "remainder" mean?

In vain the teacher tried to reassure them.

You've done this all before! You went over all this last week! I'm not meant to help you with any of this. (This last point had been heavily stressed in the "posh" instructions.)

The tape was turned back and started again, with the teacher allowing a longer gap

between questions by halting the tape. The questions from pupils became more urgent during the gaps.

Pupil: Miss, what does "fewer" mean?

Teacher: I can't really answer that, just think. I'll repeat the question for you.

Next question, another pupil

Pupil: Miss, what does "remainder" mean?

Teacher (giving up): What's left over. You know when we write the answer like 4 into 9 is 2 r1, the r is for remainder.

At question 10, the teacher gave up for good.

Teacher: I'll switch her off. You might want me to shoot her but I'll just switch her off. (Commenting quietly to herself and me)

I bet they don't have this trouble in East Brinden! (the most expensive suburb in the area)

Afterwards, talking about the exercise with me, the teacher shook her head.

Poor things! That was really hard! You think you've done so much with them and that they really understand, but then they just go to pieces!

This "going to pieces" syndrome was one I witnessed in almost every SATs practice. The whole exercise seemed designed to undermine the pupils' already fragile confidence. They had to work in silence on their own, when they worked most productively in cooperation with the teacher and their peers. They had to sit still for long periods, when they were accustomed to getting up to fetch pencils or other materials. They had to sit in single units, when they were used to working round tables and spreading out to suit the nature of the task.

In particular they hated the "good" examination practice of leaving the questions you can't do till the end then going back to them. This really went against the grain.

Pupil to me: But Miss I've left out *three* now!

Me: It doesn't matter! Do the ones you can manage first, then go back to them!

Pupil: But I'll have left out loads of them!

The more they had to leave out, the more upset they became by the procedure. Yet, despite the encouragement and cajoling of their teachers, they seemed unable to reconcile themselves to examination conditions. They "went to pieces" when confronted by unfamiliar language and questions placed in a context, or presented in a fashion, to which they were unaccustomed.

Tested and found wanting

No matter how their teachers masked the fact with encouragement and praise, Year Six knew that their SAT scores ranked them. In particular they knew it would matter at the "Comp." Mrs A from the local comprehensive school had been round shortly before the SATs to answer their questions about transfer.

Pupil: How do you get chosen into the groups?

Mrs A.: Well, you'll be put into the same house as your brothers and sisters, then the Deputy Head and I put the house into tutor groups. They're what we call a mixed ability group. We don't just put all the people who are good at maths in the same tutor group. You might not be in the same tutor group as your friends, but you might be in the same English or Maths set.

Pupil: How do you get into sets?

Mrs A: As soon as we get your SATs results we put you into English and Maths sets. If you are absolutely brilliant at English, you'll be in Set 1.

Mr D (Year 6 teacher): I wouldn't be in Set 1, would I, Terry? I'm rubbish at English!

Pupil 2: But you would be in Maths!

So they knew the score about the role of SATs with regard to their future social and academic life at the Comp.

Mrs A: Are there any other questions?
Pupil: Can you play football in the yard?

The Final Outcome

The SATs scores were important to Ofsted. The Headteacher was right. The RegI confirmed that they would form an important part of the evidence, and since the inspection was at the end of June, the year's scores should be available to them.

As I write this almost a year later, I have the national results in front of me in the newspaper. The result of all this practice and effort was that 50% of Year 6 achieved Level 4 or above in English, Maths and Science - lots better than when they figured in the local press in 1997 for being close to bottom nationally.

East Brinden scored 79%.

Well, I've got a miner and I've got a lamp, so I might have one satisfactory lesson! (Teacher planning resources for her local history lesson during Ofsted week)

By the time of the actual SATs week in May, planning for Ofsted had moved into high gear. The Local Authority inspectors had been invited in to view the preparations and offer their comments and the inspector in a curriculum area causing the staff some anxiety had been in to run two in-service sessions giving detailed advice and ideas for the Ofsted week itself.

Planning for specific topics and lessons during the week had already begun. One of the in-service sessions by the Humanities inspector concentrated specifically on what was being planned.

Visiting Adviser: One of the advantages of the LEA agreed syllabus is that it is so vague it's virtually impossible to avoid teaching it! What are you actually hoping to do that week?

Headteacher: Well, we're hoping to win the lottery if the truth be told!

The documentation in planning files came in for attention and praise.

Visiting adviser: I've had a look at your planning files and everything looks bang up-to-date and thorough, but I've brought with me some information about what the inspectors are looking for in pre-inspection evidence and I thought we'd remind ourselves about the Ofsted observation form or OF.

Teacher: Haven't you got those letters the wrong way round?

Headteacher: Well, at least I didn't say it!

The adviser and teachers pooled their ideas about suitable approaches to the RE topics planned for Ofsted week

Visiting Adviser: Now about the "Thoughts on watching a candle" with Year3 -

Headteacher: I'd have thought arson would be the first thought that came to mind.

Deputy: And my mum being a devout Catholic is lighting candles for us every week for Ofsted. I could bring that in!

Miss R: So's mine!

Mrs S: I told mine to light one to St Jude! (Patron of hopeless causes)

By the end of this particular meeting, focusing on practical planning, developing ideas and sharing approaches, the mood was mixed. There was plenty of confidence and enthusiasm about what people could teach, but about the whole idea of Ofsted week itself?

Miss K (flapping her collar): I get hot and bothered just thinking about it!

And don't touch the interactive display!

A particular focus for anxiety was display. There had been an in-service session in the autumn term about interactive display and the consultant who visited in October had also stressed that display should assist the pupils' independent learning. Consequently a great deal of thought had been given to the work which would be displayed during the Ofsted week. The school had an overall plan for display covering the key areas on which pupils were currently working. Each class also had a responsibility for part of the common areas in the school, such as the hall and corridors. Each teacher made sure the work displayed in their own area supported and developed the master plan for the whole school. Miss R had the responsibility for checking that all the display in the school met these targets.

Immediately after Easter, new backing paper began to replace the old, right throughout the school. Then new displays were carefully built up on it. The problem was that there was a gap between the RegI's first visit towards the end of May and the actual inspection a month later. There was a general anxiety amongst the teachers that the school should look its best right from that first visit, but also that the displays for the inspection week should be fresh and pristine.

Putting up displays was very time consuming. Most were done by the teachers themselves at the end or before the start of the school day. Although the children provided the work, the teachers mounted it and arranged its display on the walls. One teacher who had worked for some time in a fairly privileged area remarked on this.

Teacher: Where I was before it was wonderful. The pupils did all their own mounting and helped with the display. But they could do it, you see. They'd all had coloured paper and card and scissors since the year dot and their parents had helped them.

If I asked Reece to do it, poor bairn, he can't even manage to cut straight. He'd do himself an injury!.

As the Ofsted week got closer, staff anxiety seemed to focus on display work. There were discussions about displayed materials in the corridors and the stairs. At the start and end of the school day, I would come across small groups of teachers staring intently at the classroom walls and gesticulating to indicate their plans for particular areas.

Mrs J: I haven't got any photos up! Have you seen upstairs? They've got photos *everywhere!*

Mr S: You don't need to have any photos up!

Me: If it'll make you feel better, I'll take loads of photos!

Mr S: You've got plenty up. It relates to your planning and it shows progression. Don't worry!

Mrs J: I *suppose* so.

Me: If you saw a dreadful classroom, you'd wonder what you were worrying about.

Mr S: Remember what Mrs P said - there's been no school in the town that's been more visited by inspectors, advisers etc and nobody has said we should worry *and* Jean's been here.

Me: If you go into a bad school, you know it!

Mrs J: (Laughing) I know! I've been at a school like that!

Me: So you know the difference!

Mrs J: I know. I'm just having a pre-Ofsted panic!

At times the headteacher found this extreme display angst at odds with other areas that were of particular concern to her.

Head: I wish you'd pay the same attention to the Registers! They have to be perfect! And they can't be lying about the classroom. They have to go straight down to Lorraine at the end of registration.

A neighbouring headteacher visiting the school for a meeting offered her constructive criticism on the display work. The headteacher reported back to the teachers concerned standing in the corridor in front of the display which had occasioned comment.

Head: And when she came out of my room she said "I'll ask you before your RegI asks. Why are there lower case letters only in that display?" I kept my face straight and said "Well, I couldn't tell you, but I'm sure there's a good reason!"

Teacher (laughing): Well, there is! We didn't have any upper case stencils! But I'll take them off anyway! (Does so)

Teacher 2: Imagine her saying that!
When we went round there before their Ofsted, we were so encouraging. Everything was lovely! We'd never have dared!

Head: She *said* she was being supportive!

Stories about Other People's Ofsteds

Because Banktop was one of the last schools to be inspected during the first round of Ofsted inspections, staff in other schools were keen to pass on their experience to them. This varied from the general and colloquial - "She's a bitch" (of an inspector) to practical and constructive help.

Visiting Headteacher: If there's anything you want, anything at all, just pick up the phone! When Sacred Heart had their Ofsted, one of their computers packed up the day before. They got on the phone and we took them one of ours. That's how it works! When Dockside and us were being inspected, we ran a ferry service! We all help each other.

Even in the pub on Friday the other schools who also went there for their Friday lunch would come across to pass on anecdotes of their inspections. There was a kind of one-upmanship as well as support about these encounters.

Friendly Teacher: And how's it going?

Miss K: Well, I think we've got it all under control. We've done everything we can.

Friendly Teacher: We were in such a state of nerves, but it was fine. They weren't too bad at all. Who's your team?
(Banktop gives them the name of the RegI) Grange Farm had them. I know she's got a name for being a bit of a bitch, but my friend there said they were very fair. You'll be OK.

Miss K: I'll just be glad when it's over. It's gone on so long.

Friendly Teacher: And where are you going for your party?

The Post Ofsted Party

The celebration after Ofsted was the next big topic of conversation after the Ofsted inspection itself. Other schools were as ready to offer suggestions for this as they were for managing and surviving the Ofsted week.

Visiting Headteacher: We're all demob happy. We've had the two weeks holiday immediately after Ofsted and we had a really good night out before that.

Banktop Teacher: We were thinking about where to go.

Visiting Headteacher: Well, we went to the Dockside Stadium and we'd go again. In the end we were in the bar, because the rooms they had were either too big or too small, but it was really good. They did us a lovely buffet and there was a dance floor and everything. It was a really good night.

Serious discussion started at a staff meeting in March.

Miss K: We could do them (the Ofsted team) a grid for staff nights out. That would test their sense of humour!

Miss D: We should go somewhere where nobody knows us.

Mr S: I was thinking about getting a flight from Teeside. You can get some really good weekend deals.

Mrs J: Oh a weekend away! I like the sound of that!

Mr S: I was thinking about Dublin.

Miss D: All those Dublin bars

By May there was a shortlist of venues. Dublin was off the agenda and it was a choice between a boat on the Tyne, an upmarket pub/restaurant and the Elizabethan banquet at a five star castle hotel.

Language Support Assistant: I think we should go for the Castle. We deserve something with a bit of class.

Mrs J: Some friends of ours went and you can get a deal on rooms if you want to stay.

Miss K: I'll get on the phone and find out the price. I'll send a note round.

In the end the Castle won, with the option of staying the night for those who reckoned

they would be incapable of getting home.

Section 4: Face-to face with Ofsted

A One-way Thing

The carrot of a good night out was needed to get everyone through the first stage of the actual inspection, the RegI's visit to the school at the end of May. The great concern was how the pupils would behave on the Friday afternoon before the half-term holiday. At lunchtime on the Friday, staff checked up with each other on how their classes were doing

Mrs J: Are your lot OK?

Miss R: Oh they're fine! At least they have been since I burst into tears.

Mrs J: You didn't!

Miss R: I did! I don't know what it was. They weren't being all that bad, just David was being silly and I just burst into tears. They got such a fright!

Mrs J: I bet they did.

Miss R: Anyway they've been creeping about like little mice ever since.

I was working in the activity area making crocodiles with my CDT group when the headteacher appeared with not one, but two inspectors in tow.

Headteacher: This is Jean. She's a research student at Durham University. She's been with us all year. Tell them what your research topic is, Jean.

Me: The impact of Ofsted on the working lives of teachers.

RegI: That must be interesting. Will you be here during the inspection week?

Headteacher: She's here *all the time*. She works with Mr S in the afternoons.

Inspector 2: And are you going into any other schools?

Me: No, it's a case study here.

Inspector 2: That's a shame. Its very different on the second round of inspections. People respond much more positively.

It was an awkward moment, but one which I felt the headteacher enjoyed for her own reasons. She never mentioned it to me. For my part, I thought it was up to her how she introduced me and my presence to the inspectors. I was in her school and it was her business. I would go along with whatever she decided.

The big event of the afternoon was the talk by the RegI, first to the parents (five turned up) and secondly to the whole school staff, teachers, cleaners, caretaker, classroom assistants and secretary. I went along.

The RegI knew a number of the teachers. She had worked in the Local Authority. She expressed her pleasure at meeting Mr S again and greeted him with a kiss on the cheek. (He had been taking his class on a mapping exercise in the school grounds while she was looking round the school.) He had previously mentioned to me that the last time he had met her to talk to, had been in the jacuzzi at the swimming pool of a hotel, when they were both attending some educational function. That was before she had been reinvented as a RegI.

The tone of the meeting was disarming:

I'll run briefly through what will happen during the inspection, so there will be no surprises.

Humorous asides to put people at their ease interspersed the professional information.

If you see us looking in cupboards don't get upset. It might be Megan having a fag!

We also talk to the children and that might be your downfall - like the little girl I asked "What are you doing?" and she said "I'm writing about Goldilocks *again!*"

Don't you be taking a huff with me if I say "Satisfactory"- that's the word I've got to use.

In an easy-going, familiar but still authoritative manner, the meeting was highly professionally managed. The headteacher however succeeded in bringing home the actual nature of the relationship between the team and the staff, by means of strategic questions.

RegI: If you've got something you know is brilliant, make sure somebody's there. Send a runner. I'm used to having little children with Post-its saying "Come now." This is partnership.
Head: Can they send a little note saying "Don't come!"
RegI: No, this is a one-way thing.

We'll just have to *look* positive about this

At the staff meeting following the RegI's visit, the Headteacher re-emphasised her point

Don't be taken in by that comfy comfy Friday afternoon. I know it made you feel better, but don't be taken in by it. Don't tell them anything, unless you're asked. Don't volunteer anything. Be professional, be polite, but *don't offer anything*.

With regard to other preparations she was equally direct.

The next three weeks will go so quickly and we can't keep them (the pupils) down or you know what will happen (Throws her hands up into the air to indicate an explosion) We'll have to target a few key things and be really strict with them

There was straight talking about money matters too.

Head: Miss K and I went out to spend £500 on books, but we got 10% discount so we could spend £550.

Miss K: You spent £ 790!

Head: But this will *not* continue! Next year there'll be no more splitting classes and extra resources.

A final check on teaching in key subject areas was organised..

Miss K and Mr D need to do some monitoring. Miss K, you're easy to organise, but with you Mr D I'll have to see what I can manage to cover - and I don't want them for an hour of bloody PE either!

There were, however, things which couldn't be surmounted.

Head: Homework will be an issue (with the inspectors), but if we set written work we have to send pencils or pens home and that draws attention to deprivation, which is a sensitive issue. Then when paper goes home, it gets used for other things.

Miss K: The trouble is it starts off the session on a bad note if you have to start bawling out somebody for not having done home work

Head: And I can't help feeling, if they've done what they're obliged to do during the day then why should they do more? They're bairns after all. But that's not what the government says. It's a massive issue. We'll just have to *look* positive about this.

Get that out of here! It's more than 10 years old!

During the last weeks of preparation for the inspection there was a total spring-clean of the entire school. All the cupboards and shelves were cleared out and the materials and books double-checked for relevance to the National Curriculum.

The cull was ruthless. Everything that had been stockpiled because it might come in useful one day, or any books which looked old or tatty, were put in the activity area. Stan the caretaker had one of the extra large school wheelie bins brought round beside the fire escape so that the rejected material from Years 5 & 6, 3 & 4, could be brought directly out. One of my photos provided a permanent record of Stan remonstrating about the amount. He had had his hair restyled in honour of Ofsted.

Stan: You've broken it! You can't close the top! You've put too much in!

Next to the bin a staff car was parked with its boot open, so that materials which the teacher thought could be useful, but which might not meet the requirements of Ofsted, were being shipped home for the duration of the inspection.

I brought in some children's reference books from home for the library corner in Year

5/6 activity area. They were subject to the strictest scrutiny. One extensively illustrated book about buildings and architectural styles, published in the Fifties, was instantly rejected by the English co-ordinator.

Don't you dare put that on my shelves! Do you want to fail us? It's old! It's more than ten years old!

Final cupboard and worktop check by Mrs P 1pm Thursday!

At the last staff meeting before the Ofsted inspection, there was a final briefing from the headteacher.

Head: Just keep yourselves under control, because if you don't keep yourselves down, the children will sense it and they'll get out of control, so just keep yourself calm

I want you to keep the pupils off the flowerbeds. They're being planted up for next week. I have known the plants to be gone by the morning, but Stan says he'll keep an eye on them at night and over the weekend.

We need decent hand towels and teaspoons for next week, so we'll have to bring them in from home.

We have 2 fire drills a term and I expect you all to say so, as I've got a log to prove it.

Final worktop and cupboard check by me, 1pm Thursday

Now I've just talked about hysteria. I can't be doing with it. If you're not eating or sleeping, you'll be no good to me next Monday

Mrs O: And for those who are married, the other went out of the window weeks ago!

Now you can't take them home because I can't risk you losing them!

Preparations with the children took a number of different forms. I worked on the

Ofsted assembly with Year 3 and Mr S. My art and technology involved making the costumes and set, and I joined in enthusiastic encouragement for the singing practice with Mrs Tring.

Mr S: This is our Ofsted assembly, you know Mrs T. It goes with our local history work. For Wednesday morning.

Mrs T: And do you know Mr S - if any class had to be singing in assembly when the inspectors are here next week, then I would choose this one! They're *beautiful* singers! (Class glows with satisfaction)

Encouragement and exhortation went on throughout the school.

Head (taking mental maths while Miss K monitored another group): You don't just give up! Footballers don't say "We're two down, so we'll just pack up and go home!" They keep battling on!

In Miss K's English group, she explained the procedures to her pupils

Miss K: And next week we'll have 5 visitors in school - the inspectors
(Pupils mutter and look disgruntled)
Well - *I'm glad* the inspectors are coming so that we can show off our good work. I'll be *glad* to show off to them!
Mind you, they won't be here all the time - they'll just pop in and out. All I ask from you is good manners and good behaviour. I don't want you showing us up, because this inspection is very important for the school.

Pupil: Why?

Miss K: Because whatever the inspectors write about us will be straight in the paper.

Pupil: Will my picture be in the paper?

Miss K: Well, you never know! The inspectors might say "This boy is so brilliant!" that your picture will be all over the papers!
(Everybody laughs)

Mr D read the riot act over the reading books that had not been returned.

Mr D: I'm fuming now! Us teachers work so hard to make sure you can read and write and all we ask of you is one little thing. I'm not giving out any more books over the weekend. Why do you think that is?

Pupil 1: Because nobody reads them.

Pupil 2: Because they won't come back.

Mr D: That's right. I can't let you take them home and risk you losing them. They won't come back and when the inspectors come in next week and want to hear you read, what would happen?

Pupil 2: We won't have our books.

Mr D: Exactly! And what will that look like?

Later on he had calmed down, and was sitting sorting out pencils

Pupil: Are you doing what Miss R did, Sir?

Mr D: Yes, I'm sorting out the pencils. I think we'll need some new pencils for next week!

In a better frame of mind he explained the actual procedures of Ofsted to his group.

Mr D: As well as wanting to hear you read, they'll ask you some questions. They might ask you what sort of books you like, how often you read, whether your teachers read with you, like we do in our groups.

Pupil: Can we say we read in our group, Sir?

Mr D: Yes, you can say we read in our group. Now does anybody have a problem, or are you all comfortable with that?

Pupil: If they think you're bad, who will they tell? Mrs P (the headteacher)?

Mr D: Yes, but don't worry about it. You'll be fine! They'll be *glad* to hear you read!

If this pain was the other side, I'd think I was having a heart attack!

Despite all the warnings about Ofsted hysteria, by the Friday before the Ofsted week, everybody was worn out and edgy. The school had chosen to take this Friday as one of its allocated days off timetable, so there were no pupils in school. It began with a brief pep talk from the head.

Head: You do a good job every day, so there's no reason why you shouldn't do the same next week. I couldn't sit here with more confidence. (One of the teachers makes a comment about not being able to act normally while being observed)

Well, it's just the same for me, only worse. I'm responsible for all you buggers! (General laughter)

If anybody feels an inspector hasn't treated them right, then I need to

know, because I can sort it out with Cherie (the Regl). But there's no reason why they should be off with you. Daleside found them perfectly OK and there's no reason why we should be any different.

After the pep talk and a brief meeting to go over the questions that the coordinators would be asked people dispersed to their own areas.

Mrs L: If you want to know how I am today, I'm pissed off! I just wish Ofsted would come and get it over with, instead of me sweating buckets about what this lot will get up to! I'm getting ridiculous now! When Miss K was in monitoring my English, I was sticking to my plan to such an extent that I never saw the poor children! They were coming up with ideas and I was saying "Good, fine, but we're not doing that today", because it wasn't in my plan! And I kept looking at my plan to check and I *never* do that normally. I was so uptight!

In reception, anxiety took the form of excessive cleaning.

Nursery Nurse: Well - we've cleaned every surface. We're dust-free!
Look - I'm even washing the handwash bottle. It comes to something doesn't it - when you get to doing that!

In Year 1 Mrs O had brought in her husband and teenage daughter to help her ensure everything was perfect for Monday morning, while in Year 2 Mrs S was worrying about her health, while she sorted through pieces of work she wanted to bin and others she wanted to take home for the duration of Ofsted week

Mrs S: If it wasn't on the wrong side, I'd think I was having a heart attack. I've got pins and needles right down my arm.

Me: It's probably tension. You're pinching a nerve.

Mrs S: (Rubbing the middle of her chest and making a disbelieving face). Well, it *feels* like a heart attack.

Outside in the activity area Mr D and Mrs O were talking animatedly as they sorted out some on-going problem with the computer. Mrs O put her head round the room divider to address me.

Mrs O: I hope you're not going to put all this bad language in your book! I bet you've never heard swearing like it!

Mr D: And I don't swear - normally!

Despite highly complimentary feedback from the consultant in the earlier part of the year, Mrs O was very apprehensive about Ofsted. She had mentioned to me her feeling of frustration that at times she found it hard to restrict her teaching approach to the rigid demands of the Literacy Hour.

I know they ought to be doing their sounds like that, but I just keep wanting to *teach* them

On another occasion I had heard her lamenting the fact that her anxiety over Ofsted was adversely affecting her health and aggravating a long standing condition.

I sometimes wonder whether I have the right temperament for this job.

Nevertheless all the anxious forward planning had to come to an end. Towards late afternoon (and the Headteacher's deadline for end of Ofsted preparations at 4.00pm sharp), I returned to Mr S in the Year 3 area.

Mr S: Well, I've got Monday sorted and it's all *safe*. I'm doing irreversible change in science and that's with the candle, so I'll have to demonstrate that - Health and Safety - so I'll send one group out to you to write it up and you can help them. And I'll do a sheet for them - that's differentiation - and the others can do the writing up according to our agreed plan.

Just as we were congratulating ourselves on having everything sorted before the deadline, Stan the caretaker appeared.

Stan : Mr S, I need you and Mr D. The ceiling's just fallen down on the stairs!

Mr S: It's an omen! (Comes back, after having a look. One of the ceiling panels has fallen off and has to be propped up safely out of the way). I've told Stan there's no point in panicking. It could have happened any time.

Me: It's providential it happened when the kids weren't around. (The cleaner reappears to survey the damage)

Shelley: It could have come down on their heads! I did this all yesterday too - oh well! (She goes off to get the vacuum

out again and cleans up the area over again.)

By 4.00pm the school, apart from the missing ceiling panel, was perfect. On the headteacher's orders, it was to be locked and nobody was to be allowed back into the building until Monday morning. As we prepared to go home, a grim-faced Mr D deliberately sought me out.

Mr D: If you want to say about Ofsted in your book, say it fucks people up.

Forbidden

As I came in from the car park, I was met in the corridor by the headteacher. She had been looking for me.

Head: I need a word with you! You are not to be *anywhere* being inspected. In the afternoon you are in with Mr S as a helper, because he has written you into his plans, but you are not to be anywhere being inspected, because you haven't got permission from Ofsted. She said you really shouldn't have been at that meeting, but she didn't want to be rude. Well, she only had to say! And you are *not* to record anything about the inspection. You mustn't write anything at all! You'll have to go to Lorraine and get a badge saying who you are! You mustn't be anywhere near the inspection.

Me: Well, my focus isn't them. It's the *teachers*.

Head: I've told her that, but she's still worried.

We want your Mams and Dads to be proud of you

With the inspectors busy planning their week, assembly was an inspector-free zone so I could participate as usual. The topic for the week's assemblies was "Do as you would be done by"

The specific focus for the headteacher's talk was respect for the dinnertime supervisors in the yard, both of whom had come along to take part, but towards the

end of assembly the headteacher took the children into her confidence.

Headteacher: This is a very special week for us. The inspectors are here and they are here to see how well you work and how good your manners are and we want your Mams and Dads to be proud of you....This morning all of us are a bit nervous because of the inspectors. I am and I know all the teachers are and I don't mind sharing that with you, but Chelsea Davis in year 2 has made me feel really cared for! (Head displays one of the school certificates for good work, made out to her and signed by the pupil.)

Once assembly was finished, I devoted my attention to keeping out of the way of the inspectors.

Mr S: I've got the collywobblers.
Mrs L: They're looking around already.
Mr S: Well, Jean says they look nervous too.
Mrs L: It is horrible observing people, because you know what you're doing to them.
Mr S: It is if you've got a heart.
Mrs L: I don't think people like that go in for Ofsted.

Even Miss K, normally totally confident and in control, was temporarily rattled.

Pupil: Miss, it's not 18 (Pointing to a maths answer on the board)
Miss K: What is it then?
Pupil: It's 28.
Miss K (Looking at the board and checking) You're right and you said that too and I said "No it's not!" Oh dear, that bodes well!

For the rest of the morning I dodged inspectors. The pupils were most impressed by my label.

Year 6: Nice label, Miss!
Year 3: Oh, Miss. You've turned into an inspector!
All Years: Is your name Jean?

Reece in particular was most interested. He spent a lot of time with me in the Year 3

activity area. He got me to read it out to him a number of times.

Reece: Do you work there? (It had the name of the university on it)
Me: Yes.
Reece: Then why are you here all the time?
Me: That's my work for them. I'm paid to come here in a way.
Reece: For ever Miss?
Me: No just for this year.
Reece: Aww!

Reece's disappointed noises surprised me. He was always absolutely dreadful with me. He specialised in showing me up in front of other staff by his total disregard for my instructions. He seemed to reserve his very worst behaviour for me. Although he was a trial to all his teachers, he seemed to try things out on me.

I was to have Reece in my special needs group during the inspector's visit to Year 3 science that afternoon.

At the start of the session I sat between Reece and Leon during the whole class demonstration, trying to direct their attention to what Mr S was doing, rather than giggling and making comments about the inspector who was sitting almost directly behind them. Reece was making rude gestures under the table. They were both high as kites, very conscious of being observed.

After the demonstration, we went out to the activity area to write up what we had seen. We were joined by Danny who had just slipped/been pushed in the toilet after PE and was clutching some soggy tissues to put on his bruise.

They were all dreadful, making silly comments and fooling about rather than writing in their books, but we struggled on with me insisting they get the date and title down in the approved manner. Then, horror of horrors, the inspector appeared.

Reece saw him first and signalled to Leon to shut up. The inspector sat down and spoke to them. I couldn't believe it. They answered him properly! They were good and sensible! They tried to write things in their books! I could have kissed them!

I think by the end of the day that was what upset me the most. The pupils were trying so hard to be good. Other teachers noticed it too.

Mrs C: I can't believe it. Do you think it's the calm before the storm?

But it wasn't. It clearly mattered to the pupils what the inspectors thought of them. They wanted their Mams and Dads to be proud of them.

If you can keep that up all week we should get a *glowing* report

Mr D: I've been speaking to some of the inspectors and they were really impressed by your behaviour yesterday. They say if you can keep that up all week, we should get a glowing report. We will be having them this afternoon because they need to see our music. Now it's a bit funny doing music on a Tuesday, because when do we normally do music?

Pupil: Thursdays

Mr D: Yes we usually do music on Thursdays with Mrs Tring, but today we'll do a little bit of music in the classroom instead.

So that the inspectors could see everything they needed to see, some special arrangements had to be made. The initial feedback however was encouraging. All the teachers were so busy nobody had time to discuss it, but the auxiliary staff were able to pass the information on. They met up in the kitchen, the staffroom being used for interviews and meetings, as the headteacher's room had been given to the inspectors.

Mrs B (Learning Support Assistant): Mrs P says we're doing OK so far, if we can just keep going.

Mrs N (Nursery Nurse): I felt sick, not ill you know, just sick. And yesterday I was cooking with them and he was in for 45 minutes! At the end he said " I really enjoyed that!" and I felt just exhausted.

Mrs B Well, I was in with Year 2 trying to contain Ewan with Bryan and Connor on the same table. Well, I was just...(rolls her eyes up to the heavens, unable to find the words to describe it) I was saying "What we're doing is *weaving, weaving* " and Ewan's saying "Do you mean like *peeing*!" And now I've got such a headache.

Mrs N: I've got one too

Me: And me and I'm not even being inspected!

Mrs B: Nor me! *And* I didn't have so much as a glass of wine last night. I told Sally and she said "You must be mad!"

Mrs N: Well, you'd better not stop for a pee now or they'll think you're not working.

The feedback from the teachers was sparse, firstly because nobody stopped to eat, drink or speak and secondly because I didn't want to be seen by the inspectors to be covertly researching. The majority of my mornings were spent with Mr D who was becoming frustrated at not seeing an inspector during his most successful sessions.

Mr D: (To pupils) Now I wish the inspectors could have come in for that. You did really well

(To me) Another really good lesson and nobody has come in. It's really frustrating. I put so much work into this subject, it's my best subject and nobody's seen me teach it. There were a few comments made about my group being a very able group and I think that's maybe why they are staying away and just look - extension tasks, differentiation and nobody to see it! It's frustrating! Put that in your book!

By Wednesday frustration was also growing in the "top" English group about the non-appearance of an inspector.

Miss K (to pupils) I know you're desperate for Mrs Clark to come in to see your English. Well she won't be in till tomorrow, so you'll just have to contain yourselves. But remember we are the best English group and we need to be proud of our work, so I want *sensible* plays today.

Mrs O was much happier now the inspection was actually under way.

Mrs O (Tuesday): I feel better now. I'd rather be doing it than thinking about it!

By Thursday, however, her nerves had returned..

Mrs O: I feel really jittery this morning

Me: But it's only a day to go.

Mrs O: I know, that's why. It's gone well so far and I don't want to spoil things now.

It had been hoped that the actual inspection in the classrooms might finish at Thursday lunchtime, but at the end of Wednesday it was decided that they would need to inspect right the way through Thursday afternoon. Both pupils and teachers had reached their limits.

Ewan had to be sent home for bad behaviour at Thursday lunchtime, the school having earlier turned down his mother's generous offer to keep him away throughout the entire inspection week. The littlest Reception pupil, exhausted by three and a half days of being good, which she interpreted as being alert and smiling at all times, fell asleep on the carpet.

In the kitchen at lunchtime I had got my instructions

Mr S: Well, they're in all afternoon, so it's Design Technology, Jean! Back to the plasticine and they must use the design sheets, because the inspectors asked to see them.

Me: The last lot really needed leaning on to get anything down on paper, but they all wrote something.

Mrs C: This has gone on too long. I'm collapsing!

Mrs N: Do you know, I didn't have a thing yesterday from seven in the morning till six at night. I never stopped! Not even a cup of tea - all I had was a glass of orange.

On Thursday lunchtime Mrs L, who was part-time, was due to get her feedback.

Mrs L: I'm waiting for my feedback (Makes a face) I don't want it.

- Me: Oh, you have to get it! It gives you an idea of the sorts of things they pick up on. It's useful for the future.
- Mrs L: I suppose you're right, but on three half lessons? (She makes a quizzical expression)

By the end of the afternoon the inspection was over. There were queues for feedback after 3.30 outside four separate rooms. Mrs S stood in the corridor after hers looking ten years younger and stress-free.

- Mr D: I was pleased with my grades, although the trouble is you don't know what grades go with what lesson. Still, it'll come in useful for interviews.
- Mrs S: I couldn't care! I just saw all mine in the right line and that was all I wanted!

Yes - we got a rather good Ofsted. No - I'm not joking!

The next morning the Headteacher came into assembly in her normal skirt and top, not her power dressing, special meeting suit. She was carrying a cup of coffee.

Headteacher: Right, teachers! You can get off this morning!

Everyone scattered. I was grabbed by Lorraine to go on an errand for her. She was on the phone to the florist.

Lorraine: Can you make us up a nice bunch, pinks, lilacs, you know - Mrs P's colours. Before lunch because we want it to be a surprise. Because we had a rather good Ofsted. No, I'm not joking! The staff did really well and we had a wonderful week. Jean will be down to collect them.

When I got back at breaktime there were people in the staff room.

- Miss K: Look! (Gestures with arms to include the whole company)
A staffroom! I haven't been here for weeks!
- Me: Nobody has!
- Mrs J: It's a real anti-climax
- Mrs O: All that work! I wish we could just go out straight away!
When are we giving Margaret the flowers?
- Mr S: Ten to one - in here!

Mrs S: Mind, she's been great (General agreement)

At lunchtime the headteacher got presented with her flowers

Head: It has made my day that Banktop has achieved something. You know I'm not a kissy cuddly kind of person, but I was dead pleased because everybody worked so hard. And it means I can walk down the seafront at the weekend without having to hide my face in case anybody recognises me!

Postscript

After Ofsted it was strange. Hardly anything was said about it, except how exhausted people were. The only comments of the inspectors which were mentioned concerned the pupils' language needs and these did not appear to be discussed in any detail.

They seemed to be pretty much accepted at face value.

Mr S: Spoken English and presentation - just the things we knew anyway. We need to work on those.

At post-Ofsted staff meetings talk was directed at meeting these needs through the Literacy Hour, augmented by some additional strategies..

Head: I think when you have our profile, you just have to go with it (the Literacy Hour) and get on with it. They (the inspectors) said the sets were a good thing. They said that was where the progress was coming from, so we're locked into that timetable.

So that was that. Post Ofsted exhaustion however led to bad temper and survival strategies.

Miss R: I think I can promise you that tomorrow will be the longest hymn practice *ever*.

There were rumblings in Key Stage one about the proposed literacy timetable changes following Ofsted.

Mr S: It's been no problem up here (in Key Stage two) but down there its World War 3! But it's been decided so we've got to do it!

I wondered when and how it was decided, but never discovered. The plan had been presented as a fait accompli at the first staff meeting after Ofsted.

In all sorts of ways the cohesion of the school quietly fell apart. Some members of staff were going to other jobs, due to the expected reduction in funding in the coming year. Mrs N had been made redundant, and had found another post on the headteacher's recommendation in a neighbouring school. Mrs J too was coming to the end of her one year contract.

Me: Did Mrs J get that job at Daleside?

Mr S: No, she didn't get that job, but - here she comes, she can tell you herself.

Mrs J: I've been offered a job at Grange Farm.

Mr S: Well, he knows we've just had Ofsted and we've done well.

Mrs J: I could have hugged Mrs P! He (the headteacher) is coming in this morning to see me and get it all sorted.

Later on I heard the headteacher denying that she had done anything at all to bring this about.

Mrs P: All I said to him was the absolute truth, because we're not meant to talk about an individual teacher's grades. I said that there were only three unsatisfactory sessions seen in the entire school and none of them were down to Mrs J.

Mrs L had found a full-time promoted post in another town, so she would never achieve her post-Ofsted dream of doing a project with her class.

Mrs L: You know - when you can carry on with something until you feel it's finished instead of having to rush on thinking "I have to make sure I cover that" When you can get the art and the music and the history all linked together and start from the children's experience and go out from there...

Miss K: Oh wouldn't it be lovely! I'm really looking forward to September, when we can just get on with the job without worrying about Ofsted.

Before the end of term the whole school had to be cleared for the builders. The architects from the Civic Centre came round to finalise the arrangements. The headteacher was not pleased as she took them round the school. She came to the staff meeting looking grim. It was two weeks after Ofsted.

Head: I'm none too happy about this afternoon. If there are Year 6 pupils in your area, I expect them to be supervised, not to have people from the Civic telling them off. Year 6 are no more able to be left by themselves than Reception or Nursery. Ofsted may have been, but the school goes on.
(Miss K rushes in late from her meeting at the Teachers' Centre preparing for Literacy Hour)
It's just as well you missed the bollocking. You'd have been none too pleased!

The staff were chastened but still unable to work up energy or enthusiasm for the curriculum.

Mr D: I've nothing planned now sports day's been postponed

Miss R: Is there any card in the stock room?

Miss K: Why?

Miss R: I thought we could make posters and invitations for the new sports day.

Miss K: Posters! And invitations! Don't you think that *every* child in the school *deserves* to have an invitation! (Delighted laughter from everybody)

(Headteacher sticks her head round the door)

Head: Could two of you go out at ten to one so that those poor girls can have a break. They (the nursery nurses filling in for the absent dinner time supervisor) have been on duty all dinner time. (Goes out)

Miss K: So it's not just us that's tired and grouchy!

Mrs J: Who's going to ask for the key to the stock cupboard?

Mr D: Oh, don't bother. We'll just do posters.

Miss R (Standing up and bracing herself:) No - I can do it!

There were sports days and trips.

Mrs O: Did you hear about the big dogs, on the Infants' trip?

Miss R: No - what do you mean?

Mrs C: One of mine on the coach - "Did you see those girt dogs in the field, Miss"

Miss R: What were they?

Mrs C, Mrs O, Mrs N and Mrs B all in one voice: Cows!

Then the whole school had to be cleared for the builders. All the materials and displays, so carefully prepared for Ofsted had to be dismantled or stored.

Miss R: When I think of all the work I put into this just to tear it down three weeks later...

Mr D: Well, I'm glad, because it means Ofsted's gone.

Miss K: I like it. It's *symbolic*!

It seemed appropriate that I should end my record of Banktop's story at that symbolic moment, helping the teachers strip the school of every physical reminder of their Ofsted inspection

Chapter 6

What teachers do and think

Educational change depends on what teachers do and think - it's as simple and as complex as that.....Classrooms and schools become effective when (1) quality people are recruited to teaching, and (2) the workplace is organised to reward accomplishment...The two are intimately related. Professionally rewarding workplace conditions attract and retain good people. (Fullan, 1991, p.117)

The purpose of inspection is to identify the strengths and weaknesses in schools in order that they may improve the quality of education offered and raise the standards achieved by their pupils. Particular attention is to be paid to pupils' standards of achievement, which are better or worse in any subject than the average for their age group, and to the reasons for such difference. (Ofsted, 1992, p.1)

The reform of school inspection in the UK was intended to raise standards, and to do so by comparing pupils' achievements against national norms. As I mentioned in my third and fourth chapters, the Ofsted model of inspection adopted a peculiarly "class-blind" approach. There was very little account taken of pupils' background in the reasons why "pupils' standards of achievement" might be "better or worse in any subject than the average for their age group"

By the time Banktop was inspected, there had been a degree of relaxation in the class-blindness of Ofsted inspection, in that inspectors were provided with more information on a school's environment, but they could still only compare achievements within certain very broad categories and consider the attainment of pupils against those in "similar " schools.

Yet bringing about change and the raising of standards depended on the teachers, on

their thoughts and feelings, their willingness and ability to become the agents of change. The delivery of the national curriculum, the focus of Ofsted inspection, was not an impersonal production line, an assembly of mechanical techniques. It was a human activity depending on the adults and children concerned. The school environment, the context in which the teachers worked and which shaped their professional development was inseparable from the social context of the catchment area, which shaped the experience of the pupils. Working conditions mattered not just in terms of Health and Safety regulations, but in terms of how far they nurtured personal growth and engendered enthusiasm for learning, amongst teachers and pupils alike.

In my analysis I consequently focused on how far Ofsted inspection at Banktop contributed to the professionally rewarding conditions which were likely to make classrooms more effective places, attracting and encouraging quality teaching staff, fostering teachers capable of bringing about the raising of educational standards and effecting long-term educational change.

How did the name and shame approach to inspection affect teachers' working lives?

When I looked over my field notes and personal journals for the Ofsted year three main themes emerged:

- the apprehension and anxiety of staff;
- their lack of professional identification with the Ofsted process;
- the "performance" aspect of Ofsted and its ritual nature.

Underpinning all these was concern over the "class-blindness" of the Ofsted approach.

All of the above prompted me to question how helpful the Ofsted model of inspection could be with regard to the quality of teachers' working lives, to their professional development and consequently to the likelihood of sustained improvement or the raising of standards.

Staff Apprehension and Anxiety

If you want to say about Ofsted, say it fucks people up

The one direct instruction I received from a member of staff regarding feedback to 'put in my book' was the comment above. I feel it deserves to set the scene for my analysis of how the Ofsted process impacts on the working lives of primary teachers. In the school I studied, there was plenty of evidence that the process caused anxiety and stress, that it placed an additional burden on already hard-working teachers in terms of repackaging their documentation and the organisation of their classrooms.

The view of the Chief Inspector, "the giant stalking the land", is that this is an over-reaction to the process on the part of teachers and that a shortening of the preparation period will alleviate this hysterical response. Without actually admitting that the name and shame approach to school inspection might have contributed significantly to teachers' "hysteria", the public humiliation of failing schools was officially abandoned in September 1998.

No school will have to face the humiliation of being pilloried in the national press (D Blunkett, Secretary of State, quoted in TES, 2.10.98)

Banktop was therefore one of the last primary schools to be inspected with the sword of public humiliation still hanging over its head.

An over-reaction?

It seemed to me that anxiety and over-preparation was a perfectly understandable response to the threat, however distant, of professional and personal shame. Banktop staff were also entitled to feel particularly vulnerable since their catchment area was akin to that of the majority of "failing" schools (See Chapter 4)

In addition all the Banktop staff came from the locality. The majority had gone to school there themselves. The small minority who hadn't had studied at the local university or college and settled in the town. The highly popular local paper was read by people they had grown up with, their neighbours, their family, their parents' friends and neighbours, the families of their children's playmates. It seemed to me that it was small wonder the teachers and headteacher felt pressured by the name and shame approach of Ofsted inspection.

In my data the teachers themselves referred to Ofsted hysteria in jovial terms, as an explanation for their hyperactivity in spring-cleaning, their angst over the display work, but the headteacher took the issue seriously, speaking firmly to the staff about "keeping themselves together".

In my data chapter there is plenty of evidence of a high level of anxiety over the presentation of the school's work and the reaction of the pupils to a week of close inspection by a team of outsiders. The school however was used to 'important visitors', as well as unimportant ones like myself. One of the teachers, having a pre-Ofsted panic was reassured by having it emphasised just how much the school was visited by advisers and researchers.

Yet this staff, who could tolerate a researcher with a notebook, recording their work for an entire year, were at panic stations when it came to Ofsted. I think this indicates that it was the nature of the Ofsted process that induced such a high level of anxiety, and I would argue that the teachers' apprehension was not completely without foundation. Ofsted was largely unaccountable, although researchers and local authority advisers were not.

Ofsted is the only inspectorate constituted as a non-ministerial government department....While it may in theory be accountable to the Prime Minister and Parliament, it is questionable whether either have the time....to hold it to account (TES, 15.1.99, p.4)

There could be no professional dialogue with Ofsted, as there was with advisers or researchers. My own experience as a researcher in school during an inspection demonstrated the suspicion with which any contact with other educational professionals was viewed and how unwelcome such contact was. As the Regl made clear in her initial meeting with the staff, Ofsted inspection was a one-way thing.

Shame for pupils too?

In these circumstances it was scarcely surprising that in talking about Ofsted the teachers' language often focused on avoiding shame and humiliation. This was particularly evident in the teachers talking to pupils.

When the inspectors come in next week....what would that look like?
(Year 6 teacher, drawing attention to a failure to follow instructions)

All I ask from you is good manners and good behaviour. I don't want you showing us up (Pre-Ofsted pep talk by Miss K)

We want your Mams and Dads to be proud of you (Headteacher at assembly on the Monday of Ofsted week)

This contrasted markedly with the way teachers spoke to the children about the SATs, which was another means by which the school could be "shown up". Although the staff were clearly concerned by the publication of the SATs, this was not something that figured in their talk to pupils. The tone of their discussion with pupils was on them doing their best *for themselves*. Often at odds with the evidence from the world outside the school, they tried to encourage pupils that their achievements were worthwhile and valued, that what mattered was trying their best to achieve a personal goal.

As far as I'm concerned, David, its just words on paper. You've worked really hard...You've done really well as far as I'm concerned.
(Teacher encouraging a pupil disappointed in his grade.)

Inspection however was spoken of as an exercise in presentation, politeness and correct behaviour, rather like a royal visit.

Look - I'm even washing the handwash bottle. It comes to something doesn't it - when you get to doing that (Nursery Nurse on the Friday before Ofsted week)

The Otherness of Ofsted.

The second key theme that seemed to emerge from my data was the detachment of the Ofsted process from everyday working life of the school. This showed itself both in the way the teachers spoke about it as something separate which was imposed on their normal activities and also in the way inspectors distanced themselves from any personal identification with their task.

The consultants and advisers who came to the school throughout the year, and the Registered Inspector leading the team all spoke of Ofsted as a rigid, depersonalised

body, with a language and culture remote from that of the school.

I thought we'd remind ourselves of the Ofsted observation form or OF
(Local adviser, beginning her pre-Ofsted in-service session)

Don't you be taking a huff with me if I say "satisfactory". That's the
word I've got to use. (Registered inspector)

The wording of the actual report will be formal and cold. They won't
give you feedback like I do. (Visiting consultant)

One of the difficulties in preparing teachers for Ofsted inspections seemed to be in altering the mindset of teachers, who focused on the everyday needs of their pupils and the demands of their role, to view their work in a detached official fashion and to measure it according to Ofsted criteria.

It was this that occasioned the headteacher's lament that she wished teachers would devote as much attention to the registers as they did to their display. She knew that the conduct of registers would be of an importance to Ofsted, that was not sufficiently recognised by teachers and, after the first feedback was received from Ofsted, triumphantly drew attention to the fact that more time had been devoted to the registers than to the display work in the school.

"Similar" schools?

In fact, I could find no evidence of professional identification with the Ofsted process. Teachers spoke of it as a burden, a time of trial, an endurance test. They also expressed concerns that Ofsted could easily fail to recognise the real nature of the difficulties faced by many of the school population and the demands these made on staff.

Nor did the measurement of the uptake of free school dinners accurately represent the neediness of pupils. The top category for statistical purposes in defining the deprivation of a school's catchment area was 50% (or over) of the school's population entitled to free school dinners. At Banktop almost 90% of the school were on free school dinners, nearly double the lowest possible score in their category, yet the school was in the same statistical band, and therefore open to comparison with, so-called similar schools who served significantly less disadvantaged areas.

The school secretary touched on this in her description of the catchment area. The families in the estate were within walking distance of three primary schools, but many of the streets closest to Banktop were amongst the least desirable housing stock. Although to outsiders the estate might seem a single homogenous area, in fact there were distinct zones which all the inhabitants recognised. Some streets or parts of streets were regarded as more respectable than others.

We came from the "posh" end of Raleigh Road (Classroom assistant)

Since it was doubted that outsiders such as Ofsted inspectors would recognise the distinctive nature of the catchment area, there was staff concern that their achievements and those of their pupils would be viewed in comparison with others in less demanding circumstances.

Where I was before.....the pupils did all their own mounting...but they could do it.....They'd all had paper ..and scissors since the year dot and their parents had helped them. (Year 4 teacher)

I know I can never get an excellent because of the resultsThey're never going to get the grades, so even the best I can do will never get an excellent (Year 6 teacher)

All the staff, including the headteacher, shared the concern that the school might be seen as less challenging than it actually was. Yet all the efforts they put into making

the school an attractive, safe, well-organised learning environment served to make it appear less demanding. They were caught in a Catch 22 situation. Their success could actually mask the extent of their achievement.

A spur to professional development?

The closest I came to any positive expression with regard to Ofsted was in my stock cupboard discussion with the head, who said

I expect the idea is that you keep doing some of the things you have to put in place for Ofsted. I imagine that's how it's supposed to work.

In her pre-Ofsted discussions with staff, however, the language was of just getting on with it in as businesslike a way as possible. There was no time wasted on discussion of underlying principles nor any attempt made to "sell" the process to staff as in some way beneficial.

This contrasted with discussion in staff and informal meetings of other curriculum matters, where educational issues were teased out and people considered the pros and cons of particular ideas or approaches in the light of their own experience. An example of this was the concerted effort to introduce a mental maths session in all classes throughout the school, both to improve attainment in mathematics and prepare for the Numeracy Hour. Discussion about this was lively and involved. People debated methods and approaches, sharing their ideas and successes.

The "Us and Them" attitude to Ofsted did however serve the function of uniting staff, pupils and to some extent parents, in a common cause against a common enemy. It was more difficult to predict the long-term effects of this campaign. I was certainly

not able to do so from my evidence. All I saw was the immediate aftermath of the inspection when the exhausted footsoldiers fell into relieved disarray.

Teachers' v. Ofsted values?

The failure to identify with Ofsted also demonstrated itself in the way teachers talked about the aspects of their work which they appeared to value highly, as opposed to the aspects which they considered Ofsted would consider most worthwhile.

A good way to spend five minutes (Miss R giving pupil a cuddle)

Do you know what I'm most pleased about today?..... You all stayed and worked. Nobody left the room. Nobody had Timmy Tantrums. (Miss K at conclusion of a lesson)

That was so lovely! Go and fetch Mrs P. from the office? She loves this one! (Teacher after the first verse of a song at assembly)

You've done it - and it was rock-hard! (Teacher to class)

What the teachers valued was their interaction with the pupils, and the pupils' success in understanding or achieving what they were teaching. They valued the relationships they established with pupils, both individually and in a group, constantly recognising the efforts and achievements of pupils.

They gave particular praise to pupils who succeeded in mastering their own difficulties in working in a group situation.

I'm going to give Daniel a certificate for good behaviour...because he hasn't got into a fight, although Gary has been trying to wind him up all day (Mr S to class)

Teachers valued their skills in managing difficult situations and recounted to each other how they had dealt with particular challenges, re-running the dialogue and the outcome, as Miss R did with Miss K, when she had to retrieve her pupil from the cloakroom.

Yet these skills in teaching demanding groups and pupils were less likely to be formally recognised by Ofsted, since there was such stress on the “performance” aspect of Ofsted week. Neither the teachers nor the school as a whole had the confidence to adopt the attitude of business as usual. If anything, Ofsted appeared to reduce their professional confidence. Everything done in Ofsted week had to be “safe”.

All the advice they had received, together with their own common sense, told them it was not worth taking chances. There was no way they were prepared to risk being named and shamed. Staff and pupils seemed inhibited by Ofsted from being themselves or from having the nerve to stick with their own way of going about things.

All I ask from you is good manners and good behaviour. I don't want you showing us up....because whatever the inspectors write about us will go straight in the paper. (Teacher to class)

Ofsted as Performance Art

When the criticism is made that schools put on a show for Ofsted, a common official response is that no school can sustain an artificial performance for the best part of a week. Most schools, however, are at least satisfactory. They are not creating an

artifice of competence to fool the inspectors. On my evidence, what I experienced was a competent, hard-working school devoting a great deal of time and effort to displaying their work, to showing it off in the way they hoped would be most likely to meet Ofsted requirements.

The school was actively encouraged in this by each of the advisers and consultants whom they recruited to assist them. The tone and language of such advisory sessions always stressed performance and presentation.

Set out your planning in a way that will make it easy for the inspectors to follow.

Make sure the good points leap out at them.

Make sure they see all your best work. Don't leave anything to chance
(Consultant advising the staff in October)

A great deal of the formal and informal advice given with regard to inspection seemed to me to address the *packaging* of the work the school and teachers were already doing well.

Conform or else?

The shadow side of any performance is what the performers hide. Performers choose to show only what they want their audience to see. In the case of an audience of Ofsted inspectors, it seemed to me that the teachers sought to hide anything that might possibly be taken as non-compliant.

As I pointed out in my fourth chapter, the Ofsted framework, despite its apparent exactitude, is open to interpretation. It seemed to me that the model of the ideal school it presented was interpreted by staff in terms of the current political priorities

for education. The emphasis at the time of Banktop's inspection reflected the spirit of the times - demonstrable compliance with recent government guidelines and directives.

This showed itself in the staff discussion about homework. It seemed to me that the teachers had good educational reasons for not setting a great deal of homework, in particular that it placed many children at a disadvantage and soured the positive learning environment in school, by forcing the teacher to "bawl out" pupils who couldn't complete homework, often for reasons out of their own control.

The headteacher's passing comment that she couldn't help feeling that if pupils had completed the targets set for them in school, there was no particular virtue in attempting to force them to do additional work at home. Her comment, "They're bairns after all", exposed a huge gulf between her own philosophy and that to which she felt expected to conform for Ofsted purposes.

All staff doubts however were set to one side with the comment

It's a massive issue. We'll just have to *look* positive about this.

In fact, the headteacher's response to the whole Ofsted process exemplified this attitude.

If that's what they want, that's what they'll get

This unwillingness to expose any kind of risky practice was also reflected by Mr S

I've planned Monday (of Ofsted week) and it's *safe*.

Ofsted inspection seemed to me to encourage the concealment of any sort of non-

conformity, either on the part of the pupils in terms of their behaviour, or on the part of the teachers in their coverage of the National Curriculum or attention to official "guidelines" on the organisation of their teaching. Removing any deviant resources or work to home for the duration of Ofsted week was another concrete example of this attitude. In this way the teachers' normal practice need not be permanently affected. Certain things and opinions were simply put to one side for Ofsted purposes.

What the inspectors were therefore not able to see, was the full range of the teachers' strategies for encouraging learning in awkward and non-conforming pupils. Only "best behaviour" was on show for inspection week, apart from a few lapses. It seemed to me that the school was encouraged by the Ofsted process to mask the very real difficulties involved in teaching such pupils and that the pupils themselves had no wish to parade their disadvantages to outside scrutiny.

Teachers chose *safe* approaches to their topics for the Ofsted week. Pupils tried to reply to questioning from inspectors clearly and courteously. (What is a pupil expected to reply when an official stranger with a clipboard asks, "Do you have books at home?" In order to save face, it is sometimes preferable to lie.)

There seemed to be a pragmatic consensus amongst teachers, pupils, consultants and advisers that the Ofsted inspectors must not be allowed to see the normal interaction of the school. Most especially, strategies had to be in place to avoid any sort of confrontation. The school must be seen to run according to the plans so clearly and painstakingly set out in order that the inspectors could follow them without too much difficulty.

I felt that Reece had demonstrated this game-playing aspect of inspection to perfection when he misbehaved in the activity area, making me sweat while we

waited for the inspector, then shut everybody up the instant "that man" appeared and spoke to the stranger like the personification of an enthusiastic pupil in a television soap.

Ofsted as ritual

There was plenty of evidence in my data that Ofsted had become part of the ritual of state education. It was often spoken of as a kind of rite of passage:

When we had our Ofsted, we were in such a state of nerves, but it was fine...You'll be OK. (Friendly teacher in the pub)

We had a really good night out (at the end of Ofsted)...a lovely buffet and a dance floor and everything (Visiting headteacher)

There were discussions about the detail of the preparation, mulled over and compared with those of others. There were prayers and superstitions to ensure a favourable outcome.

I've told my mother to light a candle to St Jude!(Teacher's comment in staff meeting)

School events were remembered in relation to when they occurred before or after Ofsted. People planned their life to take account of Ofsted: they couldn't have a holiday before, because they wouldn't be able to enjoy it, but they could plan a celebration, a spring clean, a home improvement, a family wedding after it.

The whole process was shared and talked over by colleagues, family and friends. Teachers discussed their anxieties, their nervous symptoms and their strategies for coping. Schools vied with each other over the splendour of their post Ofsted celebrations.

When one of the inspectors spoke to me about the difference between reactions to the first and second round of Ofsted inspection, I wondered how much this might relate to the rite of passage nature of a school's first Ofsted.

It's a shame (you are not going into other schools). It's very different on the second round of inspections. People respond much more positively.

This led me to speculate how quickly people might become adept at going through the performance, familiar with its requirements and emotional phases. How far might (or have) educational consultants become Ofsted advisers or counsellors, specialising in guiding schools through the process, rather than the disseminators of new ideas or subject approaches?

Such speculation, however, goes well beyond my evidence, although my data does indicate the ritual nature which Ofsted has already assumed.

How useful was Ofsted to the working lives of teachers?

I had set out to discover the impact of the Ofsted process on the working lives of primary teachers by working with one small school throughout their Ofsted year. Throughout this time I asked myself whether I could see any evidence that it was improving their working lives whether by making their responsibilities more clear-cut, extending their classroom strategies or by enabling them to organise their teaching in an effective manner.

There was certainly plenty of evidence of re-organisation of paperwork, policy and routines in the preparation for Ofsted, but it was difficult to see whether or how these

changes affected teaching and learning. In their conversation teachers gave no indication that they felt such changes were improving their working lives or enabling them to meet the needs of their pupils more effectively, although from time to time they spoke of changes they had instituted themselves in these terms.

In general, however, the school seemed very responsive to new initiatives. I have mentioned above how they had identified achievements in maths as a key area which needed to be addressed and had set in place training, support and encouragement to run a pilot numeracy hour throughout the school, a full two years before this became required by government directive.

The motivation to do this seemed to come from a desire to raise the achievements of the pupils and a willingness to work with the local authority mathematics inspector, who was spoken of with warmth and respect. As far as I could gather from discussion, the concerns which had jump-started this initiative centred on the SATs scores. There was a determination to improve these by acting on the best advice teachers could obtain from the local inspector and the courses run by local university education departments. The headteacher was also imaginative and constructive in identifying key members of staff who could support and encourage others in developing subject teaching in the area.

This work planned and implemented by the staff was discussed in positive and enthusiastic terms. Ideas were put forward on how particular approaches might work and plans shared as to how targets could best be achieved. The achievements of the pupils were recounted to renew commitment to the initiative. Although there was debate and discussion over the practicalities of the implementation of their plans, teachers (and pupils) seemed upbeat and cheerful about what they were doing.

This provided a marked contrast to talk and discussion on Ofsted related issues, which was frequently apprehensive or even resentful at times. Whereas the teachers discussing their own initiatives appeared to buoy up each others' confidence and pride in their professional abilities and achievements, talk about Ofsted seemed to dwell on personal insecurities and reinforce the shared concerns about possible Ofsted judgements. Talk about Ofsted therefore tended to be unproductive in professional terms, although in human terms it seemed to function as a reassurance to teachers that each felt as bad as the other about the inspection process.

The shared negative feelings about Ofsted were clearly recognised as a problem by the Headteacher when she warned against staff working themselves up into a state of high anxiety. The universal relief following the successful outcome of the Ofsted inspection was also a management problem as evidenced by the "bollocking" delivered to staff following a particularly lax afternoon, when normal procedures had been allowed to slide

In short I could not find evidence that the staff themselves saw the Ofsted process as helpful to their professional or personal lives, although they were quite clear and explicit on some of the ways in which it was unhelpful.

It makes me wonder whether I've got the right personality for this job

I just feel sick

I'm sweating buckets wondering what this lot will get up to.

If the pain wasn't on the wrong side, I'd think I was having a heart attack.

The other went out of the window weeks ago!

I hope you're not going to put this bad language in your book....I don't swear normally.

There'll be far too much to do (to go on holiday before Ofsted)

Both personal and professional lives seemed blighted by Ofsted. It was Ofsted, more often than the demanding and challenging behaviour of their pupils, that prompted mention of other career options. It seemed to me that an inspection process which made competent, experienced and skilled staff feel ill and unable to pursue their normal family activities could scarcely be said to enhance their professional life. It certainly did not seem to square with the professionally rewarding workplace conditions, which Fullan described as conducive to educational change.

Post-Ofsted Apathy

Just as it seemed to have been taken for granted that what was most valued by inspectors was conformity to government directives, it was taken for granted that what was commended by the inspectors would have to be taken on board.

They (the inspectors) said that sets were a good thing.....that was where the progress was coming from, so we're locked into that timetable
(Headteacher)

The immediate aftermath of the inspection was not marked by any sense of professional renewal, but rather by an occasionally grumpy exhaustion.

Teachers also recognised that although their individual grades were "confidential" they still had currency in the employment marketplace.

I was pleased with my grades, although the trouble is you don't know what grades go with what lesson. Still, it'll come in useful for interviews. (Year 6 teacher)

I just told him there were only three unsatisfactory lessons seen in the entire school (Headteacher referring to a telephone request for references).

In fact, apart from reassuring themselves about their own grades and areas of curriculum responsibility, there seemed to be a noticeable lack of staff interest in the Ofsted feedback.

We need to work on spoken English and presentation - just the things we knew anyway (Deputy headteacher)

There was also little evidence that staff felt that the inspection had contributed to their understanding of the school's strengths or weaknesses. The predominant feeling seemed to be relief that they would not be shown up, by being held up to public condemnation in the local and national press, together with a feeling that next year they could concentrate on with the real work of teaching.

I'm really looking forward to September when we can just get on with the job without worrying about Ofsted. (Year 6 teacher)

And it means I can walk down the seafront at the weekend without having to hide my face in case anybody recognises me (Headteacher)

Chapter 7

An unnecessary and damaging delusion.

Structures for educational accountability are necessary, but they are not sufficient for high-quality learning. To think otherwise is an unnecessary and damaging delusion and we must hope that the 21st century will see the development of more balanced appreciation of the complementary roles of child development, experience, social processes, curriculum and educational structures. (Pollard, 1996, p.317)

My conclusion, after observing and recording Banktop's Ofsted year and analysing this data, was that Ofsted's claim to raise standards might well be an example of Pollard's "unnecessary and damaging delusion". All that my evidence supported was that Ofsted effectively *policed* central government directives, to the extent that teachers, pupils, support staff, cleaners, caretaker, dinner-ladies and even parents colluded in creating a kind of "Ideal School" exhibition for the benefit of the inspectors.

This pressure to meet Ofsted requirements, however, also drove teachers to ignore their own professional judgements and instincts. It led Ewen's mother to offer to keep her disruptive son away from school. It obliged pupils to lie politely in order to save face. It made teachers and pupils dress up for a week in their Sunday best. The threat of "naming and shaming" in the local press successfully inhibited any appearance of educational or social non-compliance.

I said in the previous chapter that I believed Ofsted had begun to assume a ritual status in schools. It was something teachers had to go through, like an educational

initiation ceremony, surrounded by shared rites and celebrations. By the end of my study I felt it was also an empty ritual, which coerced teachers into dissembling values they did not hold.

In the interests of satisfying the measures used by Ofsted, the post-Plowden child-centred values of the primary teacher as described by Nias, “the ethic of care, nurturance and connectedness” (in Hargreaves, 1994, p. 145), were forced underground. They were hidden beneath the framework of documentation which presented the work of the school in language and structures acceptable to the functional, technicist requirements of Ofsted inspection. Concrete evidence of any divergent approach, such as past work, materials or non-conformist texts, were simply destroyed or removed from the school before the inspection.

The “disjuncture between public and private” in the life of Banktop’s teachers

The gap between the model of the responsible, accountable professional on public display and the private experience of bitterness, anxiety and overload is also indicative of the covert coercion of the new management. (Menter et al, 1997, p.115)

I felt that Miss R bursting into tears just before the preliminary visit of the Registered Inspector was an example of the stress caused by this requirement to present herself as a different kind of practitioner. Of all the teachers in the school, Miss R was possibly the one who found it most difficult to tolerate Ofsted values and their colonization of her classroom. As a teacher, she built up very close and constructive working relationship with her pupils, she was inspired and idiosyncratic in her

approach, approaching the demands of the curriculum planning in an imaginative and highly creative fashion. She encouraged children who had desperate home situations to achieve their very best. She didn't need other adults around to distract her. On wet playtimes she used to take all Years Five and Six for wholehearted and joyful choral verse sessions.

She was a teacher who believed that "to 'care for' children was to teach well and to accept the need for continuing self-improvement". For her "caring was not a soft option" (Nias, 1989, p.41). Although she worked extremely hard to support the school's effort in preparing to meet the needs of Ofsted, it manifestly went against the grain of her own values. When I think of Miss R, it is of her welcoming a needy child into the teacher's sanctuary, the staffroom, and giving her a cuddle before taking her off to choir. Miss R was a practitioner who did whatever *she* felt was necessary to promote the achievements of her pupils, and doughnuts, gingerbread men, lollipops, jokes and cuddles figured in her range of strategies to raise standards.

The "expansion of bureaucratic control and standardisation in the development and delivery of services" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.113) demonstrated by Ofsted, reduced Miss R to tears. Here was a woman, who coped confidently on a daily basis with extremely challenging children, who made difficult professional decisions with sensitivity and courage, who required only a bar of chocolate and a good laugh to help her through the most tiring day, yet the only time she broke down throughout the year was immediately before her first visit from Ofsted.

I felt this supported the comments made by Menter et al on the tensions experienced by practitioners, as a result of having to suppress and disguise their own perceptions of their role

The case of teachers and the disjuncture between public and private accounts is also interesting in the light it throws on the interpretation of research data on the changes in primary teachers work. If we are correct that the new managerial discourses 'manufacture consent' to current changes, then it follows that articulation of criticism of such change is rendered more difficult by those same discourses. Within a framework of accountability and improved standards, it is hard to find secure ground from which to speak about the loss of control over teaching, and its supplantation by administration and the apparatus of management and teamwork.

The gap between the model of the responsible, accountable professional on public display and the private experience of bitterness, anxiety and overload is also indicative of the covert coercion of the new management. (Menter et al, 1997, p.115)

Miss R's reaction would perhaps be seen by Menter et al as a symptom of 'the gap' between the public and the private.

This also reflects the findings of Jeffrey and Woods in their research into the effect of school inspection on primary teachers.

The 'Framework' that guides the approach of Ofsted inspection teams and the aims and mode of procedure of the inspectors make no allowances for emotional responses, either to the inspection process itself or to teaching and learning. (Ofsted, 1993). As a result Troman (1996, p.32) argues 'teaching quality has come to be defined in terms of technical competences' ... This contrasts starkly with the strong emotional input that primary teachers make into their teaching (Elliot, 1991; Bonnett, 1994) (Jeffrey and Woods, 1999, p.113)

Miss R's 'emotional input' to her teaching was not recognised therefore had to be suppressed, hence her outburst of tears at the imminent approach of the Registered Inspector.

This would accord with the findings of Menter et al that the older teachers in their study

had all decided on compromises which amounted almost to leading a dual existence (Menter et al,1997, p.114)

In my second chapter I speculated that the demanding catchment area which Banktop served might highlight the conflict between the teachers' values and those represented by Ofsted. In the event, as I stated in Chapter Six, I found that the frustration which teachers expressed frequently focused on the disregard which official measures of excellence paid to the background of the pupils and to their own experience in responding to their pupils' specific needs. This concern underpinned their anxiety and lack of identification with the Ofsted process.

The "dual existence" which I observed at Banktop prompted me to devote a section of my data to "Our bairns". To highlight the nature of the day-to-day interaction of adults and children and the stressful circumstances under which they worked I found it was necessary to illustrate the pupils and their situation. The pupils and the estate were the context which had shaped the teachers' skills and craft knowledge, but their anxieties centred on the measures for assessing their competence which paid only scant regard to the school's particular situation.

Pupils were also exposed to the conflict of values. The encouragement which they were given by their teachers at times explicitly acknowledged the gap between official values and what the teachers themselves valued about their pupils' work.

As far as I'm concerned its just words on paper (Predicted SATs grade).
You've worked really hard.... You've done really well as far as I'm concerned.
(Miss K).

I always encourage you to write down your working out, but you mustn't put
down any working out for this. That's a bit mean isn't it (Instructions for
Mental Maths test)

On the other hand, my observations in a very disadvantaged and vulnerable
community highlighted the extreme reluctance of the teachers to take any risks
whatsoever with regard to disclosing their true values or any evidence of a non-
compliant approach to the inspectors. Perhaps the most striking example of this was
the physical removal from the school of any materials which might indicate a
divergent approach.

This would lend weight to the point made by Menter et al that,

As the detailed operations of the classroom, managed through the professional
(craft?) skills of the teacher, are increasingly extracted and abstracted from the
classroom (Lawn and Ozga 1981; Ozga and Lawn 1988), the work of the
teacher is redesigned along standard sets of procedures which, through
systems like the national curriculum and testing, ensure that controls are
established and the 'one best way' of teaching is increasingly built into
the ... operations. (Menter et al, 1997, p.125)

Mrs L, criticising her own reaction to the pressures of Ofsted, demonstrated the
pressure she felt to present an acceptable public face at odds with her own style of
teaching.

I'm getting ridiculous now! ... I was sticking to my plan to such an extent that I
never saw the poor children! They were coming up with ideas and I was
saying "Good, fine, but we're not doing that today", because it wasn't in my
plan! And I kept looking at my plan to check. *I never do that normally.* (My
emphasis)

I will return to this conflict of values in a later section, with particular reference to FitzGibbon's concerns about game-playing.

Colonization

Driven by concerns for productivity, accountability and control, the administrative tendency is to exert tighter control over teachers' work and teachers' time, to regulate and rationalize it; to break it down into small, discrete components with clearly designated objectives assigned to each one. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.113)

There was certainly much in the conversation of the teachers at Banktop to indicate that they were under stress because their commitment to their pupils was to be measured in narrowly functional terms. They had been enjoined by consultants and advisers to learn to view and review their practice according to the demands of Ofsted. They had been obliged to translate their practice into 'Ofsted-speak', by rewriting and reorganising their documentation to make it Ofsted-friendly.

Surely this could be taken to be characteristic of the administrative colonization, described by Hargreaves.

Colonization is the process where administrators take up or "colonize" teachers' time with their own purposes... The administrative colonization of teacher's work is most noticeable and most significant where the private, informal "back regions" of teachers working lives are taken over for administrative purposes. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.109)

For instance, in anticipation of Ofsted, lesson planning at Banktop had to be re-organised to an identical format throughout the school. The same documentation had

to be used for every teacher and every activity, so that every lesson reflected Ofsted priorities and that attention to these priorities would 'leap out' at the inspection team.

This was not carried out to rectify any lack of planning previously. The teachers had already devised and implemented their own planning and evaluation strategies, which were monitored on a weekly basis by the headteacher. It was carried out to replace these materials with a format which the consultant advised would be more "Ofsted-friendly".

In particular, shortly before the inspection and throughout the inspection week itself, teachers spoke of sticking rigidly to these plans, and of meticulously planning activities which were safe and did not lend themselves to risk of improvisation, to the extent that they sometimes felt themselves to be ignoring the pupils' input to lessons. These areas of their work, which had previously allowed for a degree of spontaneity, flexibility and pupil participation, they clearly felt to have been 'colonized' by Ofsted's requirements.

Administrative surveillance

This I felt supported Hargreaves point that

the administrative colonization of time and space has ... become more sophisticated in recent years with the expansion of forms of administrative surveillance ... Such surveillance entails not only direct control over, but also increasing disclosure or making visible of what had hitherto been the private plans, thoughts, reflections and intentions of its subjects. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.112)

In the initial talk which the Registered Inspector held with the staff, she joked about finding inspectors in cupboards. But the inspection of the school did involve all the “back region” areas of practice. Hargreaves points out that it is the back regions which

give teachers a measure of personally controlled flexibility in managing the polychronically packed and complex character of their working life (Hargreaves, 1994, p.110)

My observation at Banktop during the inspection week itself showed a school without any “back regions”. Even the staffroom was out of bounds because it was being used for meetings. In the weeks leading up to Ofsted the staff systematically went through every aspect of their documentation, practice and environment to create a set of performances. All aspects of their work became “front regions, places of performance where people were in a sense “on stage” in front of their clients, the public or their superiors.” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.109), and because of their perceived vulnerability to assessment against national norms, they could not afford to take any chances. This could be argued as illustrating Hargreaves contention that

the colonization and coordination of “back-region” activity in work settings, including teaching, is part of this swing to surveillance, this tendency to fill up and regulate the informal. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.112)

Deskilling

Hargreaves also argues that the intensification of the primary teachers work 'deskills' them.

Teachers' work is portrayed as becoming more routinized and deskilled; more like the degraded work of manual workers and less like the autonomous professionals trusted to exercise the power and expertise of discretionary judgement in the classrooms they understand best. (Ibid, p118)

At Banktop the teachers did not doubt their own practical skills. Apart from Mrs S, who had very specific and justifiable concerns about how best to cope with an extremely demanding group, they were confident of their professional practice. They did however doubt that their particular skills, *geared to the needs of their pupils and setting*, would be recognised or valued by Ofsted and this caused them frustration and distress. This demonstrated their belief that the structures of public accountability were insensitive to, or disregarding of, their private knowledge of their pupils and their background. Banktop's teachers were consequently despairing of the likelihood of any official recognition of the professional strategies they had devised to meet the specific needs of their pupils.

In fact, this perception was fully justified by the Ofsted report on the school, which praised the conformist elements of the school's practice, but criticised the teachers' use of the vernacular in the classroom. It recommended that teachers should provide a more consistent model of standard spoken English and correct the pupils whenever they used common local dialect expressions.

Coming from a professional background which had embraced two decades of language work in a multilingual and multicultural community, I had always felt that

one of the strengths of Banktop School was that there were so few language barriers between teachers and taught, a strength which has long been supported in the literature on the language of school and home.

Loban's (1965) opinion is that the emphasis in the early stages of schooling should be on the child's using whatever dialect of the language he already speaks as the means of thinking and exploring and imagining. (Goodacre, 1970, p.109)

Barnes has emphasised above all that the crucial quality of a teacher's language is whether it is warm, exploratory, available, encouraging the child to involve himself actively in learning. (Barnes, Britton, Rosen and the I.A.T.E, 1971, p.64) (Creber,1972, p.65)

At Banktop children readily volunteered to speak out in class or assembly; nobody felt constrained by their dialect from contributing to discussion or debate. Teachers often translated local phrases into standard English, in a matter of fact manner, in the normal course of their teaching, but nobody was made to feel small or ashamed for expressing themselves in the language of home. Nobody except the teachers that is, when the inspectors called.

In the second part of my conclusion I will touch on the issue of language in relation to the limitations of my study, but for the present I use it as an example of how the teachers were penalised by Ofsted for sticking to a divergent approach, which their own professional judgement told them was successful in motivating their pupils.

They were in fact "de-skilled" in exactly the way they had feared, in that their professional skills, informed by the context in which they worked, were devalued by the Ofsted process.

It is little wonder that many teachers experience what David Hargreaves calls a fundamental competence anxiety, ... (which) also arises from the arbitrary imposition of expectations for teaching that contain singular rather than multiple models of competence expectations that may mesh poorly with teacher's personal self or with the context in which the teacher works. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.150)

Teachers were expected by Ofsted not only to assume a professional persona other than their own, but also to disregard their own experience and adopt a prescribed approach. Their professional autonomy was replaced by the requirement to act as an unquestioning instrument of central government educational policy, particularly with regard to the teaching of language and literacy skills.

Hargreaves points out that

Prevailing patterns of educational change and reform have been criticised for their top-down, standardised, bureaucratic application across entire systems in ways that neglect the purposes and personalities of individual teachers and the contexts in which they work (Ibid, p.253)

I believe my data demonstrates just how constrained the headteacher and staff were by the pressures to present themselves as totally compliant with government directives and how little they believed their own professional expertise was valued except in the narrow, technical terms of delivery of the set curriculum. At Banktop it was clear that the staff as a whole felt they had to *appear* to support the values represented by Ofsted. They strove to respond speedily to government directives, even although as Mrs O lamented.

“I know I ought to be doing it this way, but I just keep wanting to *teach*”

Nor was there any escape from this. When their next inspection occurred, the inspectors would look at the recommendations of the previous report, and if the school had not implemented the key points for action, or accepted the inspectors' recommendations, then the school would be open to criticism.

As the headteacher remarked,

They (the inspectors) said the sets were a good thing, so we're locked into that timetable.

The iron grip of bureaucracy

This might be acceptable, if central government preferences were soundly based on incontrovertible research evidence, but with regard to literacy, it would be possible to challenge the view of the Banktop's Ofsted team that using the vernacular should be eschewed in favour of providing "a more consistent model of standard English"

The vernacular was frequently used by the teachers in school to ensure that pupils could grasp the meaning of a point being made, to reinforce or translate standard English, as in the Year Two teacher's instructions to her class, quoted in Chapter Five.

In the letter home, it says you must wear waterproof shoes or boots. You must not wear sandals or trainers. Mind, when we go to the farm, you've to wear your wellies, because it'll be dead clarty.

As I noted with regard to the Year One pupils during their outing, an issue with regard to language was the pupils' narrowness of experience of the world outside their estate. Their lack of vocabulary was more than poverty of language, it was lack of familiarity with the contexts which could give the words meaning. In these circumstances, for teachers to avoid using the language which held meaning for the pupils, in order to satisfy government preferences, seemed to me likely to hinder, rather than help, strategies of developing literacy skills. As Friere put it,

(When) the teacher ..expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of his pupils... words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity. (Friere, 1972, p.45)

A linked concern arising from the pressure put on teachers to adopt a prescribed strategy was the indication in the research of Menter et al that

The evidence presented (from the replication of the 1976 ORACLE study) - particularly that which indicates the pressures on today's teachers to act as the transmitters of information rather than engage in dialogue and enquiry, and the passive response of many of the pupils to this regime - suggests that there may be dangers ahead. (Menter et al, 1999, p.198)

An increase in passivity of primary pupils, mimicking the low profile, non-involvement of disaffected secondary pupils, could easily have been a problem at Banktop, had teachers abandoned their child-centred values and disregarded their knowledge of the specific needs of their situation and environment, in particular, their use of the vernacular to engage their pupils.

In an area where pupils saw little value in education, and held few expectations or ambitions for themselves, they were hugely reliant on the motivation and

encouragement which the teachers provided. If the skill which the teachers valued – the ability to relate to the pupils in a holistic way, calling on their knowledge of that individual and using their professional experience to create a means of encouragement appropriate to the needs of that child - was to be downgraded in favour of adherence to general directives, then the pupils would easily become disenchanted.

Re-professionalization

My evidence also seemed to reflect the experience of the primary teachers studied by Menter et al (1997) that

Re-professionalization as an effective team member, a good organizer and coordinator, and a skilled facilitator does not seem to be sufficient to meet the absence of traditional child-centred and teaching-orientated professional identity (Menter et al, 1997 p.114)

At Banktop they were open to re-professionalization. In Hargreaves' words, they “voluntarily consorted with the imperatives of intensification” (Hargreaves, 1994, p.120) There was a readiness to take on new ideas and develop practice, as evidenced by their willingness to take on the role of monitoring and supporting their subject specialisms throughout the school, and to cover for colleagues to enable them to fulfil their monitoring role.

This did not, however, give them the satisfaction provided by interaction with the pupils. When they spoke about their pleasure in something which they had achieved,

it usually related to the success of their classroom strategies with the group or with an individual child. Like the teachers in Menter's study, they

regretted the way new policies reduced the time they could spend with the children in their classes. It was the work they did directly with the children that produced job satisfaction. (Menter et al, 1997, p.114)

I spoke above about the lack of separateness between the private and professional 'selves' of primary teachers. At Banktop it was clear that the teachers, normally confident of their practice, felt personally diminished by the process of Ofsted inspection. As Mrs O sadly reflected,

It makes me wonder whether I've got the right personality for this job

This was a finding also noted by Jeffrey and Woods.

In recent years, the delicate balance (between public and private) has become more and more disturbed as the increasing pressures have intruded upon the private sphere. The Ofsted inspection threatens to disturb this balance further, eating into and in some instances eroding, teachers' family life, leisure activities and social life. Their lives, and their capabilities as teachers, are in consequence, they feel, being diminished. (Jeffrey and Woods, 1999, p.90)

Scanlon, researching the effect of inspection on failing schools, noted that even successful and competent teachers suffered this feeling of inadequacy as a result of the inspection process, summarised by one teacher as being

made to feel totally incompetent. You are made to feel that everything you've done in the last 20 years of teaching is absolutely useless. (Scanlon, 1999, p.33)

Interestingly, Scanlon also found that in schools which 'passed' their inspections, a greater proportion of the staff reported a deterioration in staff morale after the inspection, than in schools which had been placed on special measures. Certainly, at Banktop the staff were exhausted and demotivated after the inspection, despite their relief at their success. They fell back on survival strategies in the classroom to such an extent that the Headteacher had to issue a "bollocking" at a staff meeting.

Game-playing

It is dismaying to see adults put into a game playing situation because of the totally unequal distribution of power between inspectors and teachers.
(FitzGibbon, 1998, p.23)

In my data there are many examples of the games Banktop felt obliged to play to ensure a successful inspection report. The game-playing extended to the pupils, the support staff, the cleaning and maintenance staff and even the parents.

Reece teased me by playing up during the first day of Ofsted, but put on a perfect performance for the inspector, encouraging his friends to do likewise. Mr D's class collaborated with him in planning out how they could best respond to an inspector's questions about their reading. Pupils lied to inspectors about the books they "liked" to read at home. The smallest pupil exhausted herself with smiling at the strangers.

In a very disadvantaged area, there was a heightened desire not to be "shown up". Parents, children and staff wanted to demonstrate they could be as good as anybody else. The assembly on Monday of inspection week set the tone.

We want your Mams and Dads to be proud of you! (Headteacher)

I found the collaboration of the pupils in the performance demanded by Ofsted particularly questionable. Yet Ofsted's practice of quizzing the pupils about their teacher's classroom routines and activities made their involvement and support essential. In her initial talk to the teachers, the Registered Inspector even joked about how pupils could give their teachers away.

This aspect of using the pupils to assess the teachers (Jeffrey and Woods, 1999, p.58), was a part of the inspection process which I found particularly upsetting. As I indicated in Chapter Five, the pupils were very supportive of their teachers during the inspection, anxious for the school to be well-thought of and also worried by what might be said about their own achievements. The teachers in their preparation for inspection both unconsciously and deliberately used language which heightened the children's awareness that they would be "shown up", if the inspectors did not find absolutely everything to their satisfaction.

All I ask from you is good manners and good behaviour. I don't want you showing us up...because whatever the inspectors write about us will go straight in the paper!

This exemplified FitzGibbon's concerns mentioned in Chapter Four and quoted at the beginning of this section, that teachers were being put into a "game-playing" situation, focusing "on placating and pleasing an all-powerful inspectorate." (FitzGibbon, 1998, pp. 23-25). I also share her concerns about the

moral implications of children being drawn into this play-acting, and seeing respected adults amending and concealing their normal practice in the interests of gaining a 'good' report.

Yet game-playing on the part of teachers seemed to me to be simply taken for granted throughout the Ofsted process by all the professional people involved, from the grooming of the lesson plans in collaboration with the local adviser to Mrs O's practice mental maths session to accustom the pupils to carrying out activities at an unaccustomed time, to the neighbouring headteacher offering loans of equipment, to Mr D forbidding anybody to touch the interactive displays and the caretaker and his dog guarding the newly planted flowerbeds.

Fear of being "named and shamed"

In Scanlon 1999, the effect of a damaging Ofsted report on pupils is reported by a headteacher

The school ... got some extremely bad publicity in the local newspaper. That had a really bad impact on the students. Because this is a small town, the students got a lot of abuse from students from other schools goading them and saying they go to a useless school. (Scanlon, 1999, p.35)

The pupils at Banktop had already had this experience as a result of the articles on their SATs scores, when the school was close to the bottom of the national 'league'.

The conversations between teachers and pupils prior to the inspection indicated that concerns about “shaming” were shared by both sides.

“If they think you’re bad, who will they tell?” Year 6 boy (quoted in Chapter Five)

It was this aspect of concealment of your true self, in case it would be found wanting, that impacted on both pupils and teachers alike, throughout the Ofsted process. In a disadvantaged catchment area, where families often had plenty to hide, it was particularly potent and damaging. To protect your self-esteem, you were required to hide who you really were, and never, never be heard to speak in your mother tongue.

I have thus shown in this chapter up to this point how my findings broadly coincide with those of other researchers. My approach was a case study, others have used other methods. I explained in earlier chapters how and why I chose the case study and participant observation and I have shown how the case study can contribute to the literature by giving depth and ‘thick description’. Nonetheless I am also aware of the problems of my approach and it is to these that I turn next in order to clarify the status and nature of what I have summarised in this chapter.

Limitations of my approach

In Flecker’s poem (The Golden Journey to Samarkand, 1922) the Chief Merchant claims to ‘gnaw the nail of hurry’. Given the perils of the golden journey, the caravan would be equipped with the correct food, water and other supplies before it began. The equivalent precautions for the researcher are to have thought reflexively about one’s sampling, and chosen one’s site or

population carefully, in the light of reading already done. (Delamont, 1992, p.78)

When I set embarked on my research journey, I was very conscious of time constraints and over-anxious to begin. I therefore set out on my travels unclear of the pitfalls which might lie ahead. My preparatory reading was barely adequate for a novice participant observer, and it did not begin to relate meaningfully to my own experience, until I found myself in some of the situations described.

Choice of methodology, in relation to the structure of the Doctorate in Education

Although I read *throughout* my study, I did not read very widely *before* beginning my fieldwork and to some extent the structure of the degree actually limited the amount of time which could be given to such preparation. The reading in the earlier parts of the course had to be directed towards the assignments, so it was only partially relevant and helpful to my chosen approach.

For this pragmatic reason, I believe I was over-ambitious to plunge straight from full-time professional responsibilities and a part-time course of this nature, into a study by means of participant observation.

Wide reading, and careful attention to what is read, will prevent newcomers to ethnographic research making elementary blunders in their own writing... Reading should go on throughout your research, starting long before you settle on a topic and continuing to the day your thesis goes to the printers. (Delamont, 1992, pp.11-12)

The self-awareness of the researcher is a key factor in undertaking ethnography, which makes it particularly important to have read widely in the planning stages. As I indicated at the start of Chapter Three, I began my fieldwork only partially aware, in theory, of the demanding nature of the methodology.

The central method of ethnography is observation, with the observer immersing himself/herself in the 'new culture ...

Each researcher is her own best data collection instrument, as long as she is constantly self-conscious about her role, her interactions, and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. (Delamont, 1992, pp.8-9).

This initial lack of awareness *might* have been avoided by a wider preparatory consideration of other ethnographers' experience in the field. Nevertheless, it was the actual practice of carrying out fieldwork that made me appreciate the theory. As I quoted in Chapter Three,

No matter how much theoretical preparation you do, there is no substitute for actually getting on and doing it. (Ball, 1984, p.71)

The limiting nature of my early contact with the school

However, because I was only partially aware of the complexity of field relationships, my earliest contacts with the school limited the subsequent flexibility of my study and affected the relationships I built up in the field. In addition, I was so grateful to be given access to the school's Ofsted year, that I readily accepted the offered role of "another pair of hands", without thinking through the implications.

One of the important lessons during one's first days in the field is finding out what the access negotiated in advance, and in theory/the abstract, means in practice. Frequently, it transpires that either it is possible to do much more than the gatekeepers promised or expected or that apparent freedoms are curtailed. (Delamont, 1992, p.102)

In my own case, by over-stressing my focus on the teachers' working lives in my initial contacts and failing to explain fully the nature of the methodology, I inadvertently tied myself to a narrow brief. As my data in Chapter Five indicates, the ethos of the school was very straightforward and business-like. I was not expected to divert from my original plan. If I had wanted to be able to develop my research by altering my focus in the course of the year, I should have voiced this possibility at the start of my discussions with staff.

Certainly if I were to carry out any further ethnographic research, I would take make sure to negotiate this possibility with my informants. Once I was in Banktop, it became clear to me that there was a very interesting aspect of the school's work worthy of investigation, namely, the use and role of language, and the conflict between official attitudes/directives on the development of literacy skills and the experience of the staff and pupils.

Although I would have liked to develop my research into the effect of Ofsted inspection along those lines, I found my attempts to broach the subject blocked. The perception that I was there to focus specifically on their working lives was too firmly

established. I had not been sufficiently clear or open in my initial negotiations, to explain that within the broad brief of my approach, the precise focus might alter as time went on. Through my own lack of appreciation of aspects of the methodology, I had not been able to explain it clearly to others.

Nevertheless, the school liked to be clear-cut about things and if I had presented myself as too vague or woolly-minded an academic, they might well have sent me packing. It may have been the potential usefulness of “another pair of hands”, that helped gain me access in the first place. In a sense, it was a trade-off – I might be able to help them and they could help me. In another school environment, with different personalities involved (my own included), the difficulty might never have arisen.

The limitations of being a research ‘guest’ in school

I mentioned in Chapter Three that I felt limited by the *social* constraints of being in somebody else’s school. Delamont quotes the experience of Linda Valli (1986, pp.217-218), who “describes the perennial problem of fieldwork: being always ‘on trial’”.

Many researchers have described how they were very subdued, withdrawn or careful in their setting, for fear of being asked to leave. (Delamont, 1992, p.124)

As I indicated above, I was very frightened of interrupting the smooth running of the school and at times avoided following up an interesting issue, because I did not want to upset the teacher involved. An instance was given in Chapter Three when I prevented a pupil talking to me, actually saying “Miss X won’t let me come to this class any more!”

I also explained in Chapter Three that I never reached a stage in my field relationships where I found it possible to work through sensitive issues. In part this was due to the time constraints of the busy Ofsted year, but it was also due to my reluctance to endanger my status as an invited research ‘guest’. I did not wish to run the risk of bringing my research to a premature end by harming the positive working relationships I had established, by going beyond my role as “another pair of hands” during Ofsted year.

I did however come to wonder if I had actually been encultured into the social code of professional relationships in the school. Working in and with a small group of people, I had almost without realising it, adopted their unspoken strategies for peaceful and productive co-existence. At Banktop there were limits to the kind of help, ideas and support that one colleague expected from another. Practical suggestions and concrete assistance were always welcome, as was positive encouragement. Voicing of radical questions or challenging a particular aspect of practice seemed to be taboo.

This reflected the observation by Hargreaves that

Collaboration can be confined to safer, less controversial areas of the teachers' work – ones which avoid... collaboration through systematic shared reflection, in favour of moral support and sharing of resources and ideas. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.247)

Whether this was an on-going feature of relationships within Banktop school, rather than a response to the pressing need to concentrate on the immediate demands of Ofsted, I was unable to determine on the evidence available to me.

With regard to my study, however, the result was that I felt constrained to avoid sensitive areas. In particular I had to accept that, for their own reasons, the teachers did not want to explore the issue of language with me. I knew from my observation that some individual teachers had concerns about their own use of language, as shown by the comment of the Year 6 teacher to his pupils, quoted in Chapter Five

I'm rubbish at English! I wouldn't be in Set 1, would I?

I came to the conclusion it might cause added and unjustifiable stress to pursue the issue with people who could easily be feeling particularly vulnerable during Ofsted year.

As it turned out, their concerns with regard to Ofsted in this respect were justified.

Going Native?

While ethnographers may adopt a variety of roles, the usual aim throughout is to maintain a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participant perspectives, but at the same time minimizing the dangers of over-rapport... The ethnographer needs to be intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness: and, in overt participant observation, socially he or she will usually be poised between stranger and friend. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.112)

One of the reasons I chose to carry out my research in primary school was because I was not over-familiar with the environment. I had hoped this would help guard against “going native” (Chapter Two). In Chapters Three and Five, however, I think it becomes clear that the *pupils* at primary level expected any adults in their environment to be drawn into the life of the school and this affected the balance between participant and observer in my role.

The semi-detached social role “between stranger and friend”, described above, was not an option. The pupils expected and demanded an active “helper”, somebody with knowledge and authority to sort out difficulties if the teacher was busy or to provide assistance with a variety of tasks, from helping find equipment to ministering to minor injuries.

The primary school was a working environment in which it was particularly difficult to be distant or private. It was possible to maintain an intellectual distance through writing up notes and keeping a research journal, but within school, as the year progressed, it is clear from my data that my level of participation increased, to the extent that I was written into the lesson planning for Year Three during Ofsted week.

This was useful, in that it actually enabled me to observe during the inspection week itself, despite the Registered Inspector's opposition. It did however show that my role had gone beyond the marginality described by Hammersley & Atkinson above. In a very concrete way, I had officially become a part of Banktop's inspection.

This did cause me to worry that my choice of role as "another pair of hands" had led to a situation where I was too involved in the actual day-to-day work of the school.

Decisions about the sort of role to adopt in a setting will depend on the purposes of the research and the nature of the setting. In any case anticipation of the likely consequences of adopting different roles can rarely be more than speculative. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.109)

Nevertheless, although my chosen role involved a lot of cutting, sticking and sawing of balsa wood, this drew me into the life of the school in a very practical way, and also enabled me to go unremarked into every area of the school and to work in every classroom in a systematic manner.

My role also gave me the opportunity to talk to pupils and teachers in all the informal meeting places of the school. We talked while setting up the activity area, or supervising in the dining hall or playground. We talked while going on class outings or sorting out cupboards. These situations were where the interaction between teachers normally took place, and my role allowed me to be part of that.

In Chapter Six, however, I note that in analysing my data, I had difficulty in detaching myself from the absorbing drama of school life. This was an unanticipated aspect of taking on a role which involved me very closely with pupils and staff. I had imagined that the risk of “going native” would be a concern relating to my observation and my level of involvement in the classroom. In fact I found that identifying with the standpoint of my respondents became problematic during the analysis of my data, both throughout and after my time in school.

As a result, I went back to my material and questioned my findings very carefully to see if I had left out issues which I felt I would have included, had I not been so involved with the people concerned. In the event, I felt that my reluctance to pursue sensitive issues, such as the language, and my abandonment of interviews were justified on the grounds of the pressures they might have caused.

Abandonment of Interviewing

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I had originally planned to interview the teachers at Banktop, but I abandoned these attempts by the end of the first term. I had noticed that the staff were uncomfortable with this approach and the responses I received were at odds with the views and feelings they expressed informally.

Menter et al noticed a similar pattern during their interviewing of teachers

the version we were being given was a public version of the events and conditions of their experiences as class teachers. (Menter et al, 1997, p.114))

Once trust had been established,

we were able to hear a different version of events (Ibid)

The difficulty I experienced in interviewing during the early part of my time in school could well have been an example of the teachers' reluctance to share their private experience, as opposed to their public face with somebody they did not know very well.

The value of trust in collaborative working relationships is so well acknowledged and understood that we rarely probe more than superficially into its meaning and nature. One exception is Nias and her colleagues, who note that "to talk of trust as if it explained everything is... to make it into a 'black box', an abstract word packed with individual meanings". (Nias et al, 1989, p.78) They argue that trust has two dimensions: predictability and common goals. "For trust to exist," they argue, "people must find one another highly predictable and share substantially the same aims" (Ibid) (Hargreaves, 1994, p.252)

In the first part of the school year it would have been difficult for staff to find me predictable or to be certain that we shared the same aims. The practical aspect of being “another pair of hands” was less problematic in this respect than the vaguer, less familiar or secure nature of participating in ethnographic research. In the classroom, it was easier to share common concerns and ideas relating to the pupils and their activities and to establish a working relationship. Also, in the classroom the teacher was in charge, so controlled the situation.

I have indicated above that rather than endanger the continuation of my research, I accepted the role of “another pair of hands” and was reluctant to pursue avenues of enquiry with which the teachers were uneasy.

By the time my relationships with the teachers were more firmly established and it might have been possible to carry out interviews, people were simply too busy and fraught. I felt that this was another aspect of the intensification and colonization of the teachers’ time by the demands of Ofsted.

Pressure, stress, lack of time to relax and lack of time even to talk to colleagues are effects ... which again are highly consonant with those of the intensification process. (Hargreaves, 1994, p.136)

I was carrying out my research at a very stressful time, and this was an integral part of the area I was researching. I could not manufacture peaceful times for collaborative development of ideas. I had to work with the staff in the pressured situation in which

we found ourselves. This did, however, lead me to question the effect of the intensification and colonization of teachers' work mentioned above as a possible limitation on the extent of their involvement with classroom research.

Validation by respondents

Some researchers believe in having their whole account validated by respondents: that is giving the whole manuscript (or substantial chunks of it) to some or all of the participants. This can be done as a political act by people who believe that the respondents own the data; ... or it may be a validation strategy. (Delamont, 1992, p.159)

I chose to take the course of action above for both the reasons given. As I make clear throughout the study, I felt it was Banktop's Ofsted year and I had been allowed to be part of it. I was also conscious that, because I had not been able to use formal interviews as part of my data collection, I had to have another means of ensuring that my observation and informal conversations with staff provided me with an accurate representation of their opinions and feelings.

The response to my material was mixed. Nobody complained, and, although one person was delighted, contacting me immediately to say, "That was just how it was!", I had the impression that it was simply no longer relevant to their present concerns. In the previous section I spoke of the absorbing drama of school life at Banktop. Part of the involving nature of the workplace was its immediacy, the need for instant action and response, the living on the edge, the interplay of different and

demanding personalities. By the time I had completed my writing, it was more than a year after the inspection. My study and I were part of the past.

As a result, my strategy for validation by respondents was only partially successful. If I were to carry out a similar project in the future I would plan for feedback sessions in a more systematic manner and if possible, set up meetings on a regular basis. That being said, I do not believe I could have organised such meetings at Banktop. The teachers were too pressured, as I mentioned above. They had to prepare for Ofsted, research took up precious time and involved “boring bits”.

There is a structurally tense relationship between teachers and educational researchers...Such hostility must not be taken personally, because it is of long standing, and is endemic to the occupational culture of teaching. (Delamont, 1992, p.128)

Reflecting on my case-study, then, and its contribution to the literature on inspections, I have to conclude that this is my account – one which I have written deliberately in the first person – an account which is supported by the teachers’ words, by my observations, by one explicit response and at least the implicit acceptance by others.

In Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I echoed Pollard’s concern over the “unnecessary and damaging delusion” of over-emphasis on the redemptive power of the structures of

educational accountability. Despite the limitations on my study, I believe it lends support to his view. My observation of Banktop's Ofsted year during the period of the "naming and shaming" of schools, demonstrates that the process of Ofsted inspection:

- coerced Banktop's teachers into concealing, rather than changing their post-Plowden, child centred values
- encouraged "game-playing", by involving teachers and pupils in presenting the work of the school in ways which were specially chosen for the inspectors
- limited the teachers' ability to follow and devise strategies tailored to the specific needs of their pupils and environment
- discouraged wide or deep thinking on educational issues, by demanding concentration on short term practical strategies for the implementation of government directives

The lack of time that teachers had to involve themselves in discussion with me or with each other on issues other than satisfying the demands of Ofsted, seemed an illustration of the "colonisation" of their time and the "intensification" of their work, as described by Hargreaves(1994), Pollard et al (1994), Woods (1995) and Menter et al (1997).

The results of this superficial compliance led in the short-term to stress, self-doubt and post-Ofsted apathy. In addition, the penalising of Banktop's teachers for trusting

their own professional knowledge and experience with regard to using the vernacular to engage their pupils in the classroom, raises concerns about the reliability of Ofsted's judgements.

The absence of professional debate following Ofsted was characteristic of a pragmatic, resigned compliance which had been apparent throughout the year.

If that's what they want, that's what they'll get!

The impact of Ofsted inspection on the working lives of primary teachers at Banktop subdued their own initiative, suppressed their personal values and discredited their professional choices. It is perhaps timely to consider Senge's views on the management of organisational change. His argument is that commitment, not compliance, is necessary for long-term change and that a vision not consistent with the values that people live by will not only fail, but foster cynicism.

There is a world of difference between compliance and commitment. The committed person brings an energy, passion and excitement that cannot be generated if you are only compliant... A group of people truly committed to a common vision is an awesome force. They can accomplish the seemingly impossible ...

What then is the difference between being..compliant and..committed? The answer is deceptively simple. People who are enrolled or committed truly *want* the vision... Compliant people want it in order to get something else – for example, to keep their job, or to make their boss happy, or to get promotion. But they do not truly want the vision in and of itself. It is not their own vision. (Senge, 1990, p.221)

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Appendix

Time scale of researcher's contact with Banktop School

Summer 1997 – May : Initial letter sent to Headteacher following the publication of an article on the school in the local paper
Discussion with the Headteacher by telephone
Headteacher discusses the proposal with staff

June: Meeting between the Headteacher and researcher

Autumn 1998 - September-October half-term

Three full days per week in school. One week spent observing in each class in Reception, Key Stage One and Key Stage Two on a rota basis, beginning with Reception. Visit to Nursery.

October half-term – Christmas holiday.

Three full days per week in school in Key Stage One. Based in Year Two and helping with and observing specific activities in Year One and Reception.

Spring Term 1999 – January- February half term

Three full days per week in school in Key Stage One.

February half-term – Easter holidays

Three full days per week in school in Key Stage Two.
Morning sessions with Maths Year 5/6 sets before breaktime and with English Year 5/6 sets after breaktime.
Afternoon sessions with Years 3 & 4, assisting with work and observing in class and in the activity area

Summer Term 1999 – April – Ofsted inspection in June

Four/five full days per week in school. As above for three days a week and the remainder helping with and observing Ofsted preparations throughout the school

After Ofsted with Key Stage Two for three days a week as above. The remainder assisting with and observing school visits, sporting and end-of-term activities and post-Ofsted clearing up throughout the school.

Autumn Term 1998 Writing. Partial first draft sent to school Christmas 1998

Summer Term 1999 Full first draft sent to school June 1999.

