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Children's Experience of the Rituals of Schooling: a Case Study

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Education and Professional Development
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2008

Dedication

To my family: my parents, sisters and my son

Acknowledgements

Two universities have helped me in providing grants to support this research: the University of Plymouth and the University of Huddersfield. Without their sponsorship my research and study would not have been possible.

I also wish to thank the following people for their involvement in the research and writing of this thesis.

Professor Mark Halstead, my Director of Studies and indeed my mentor across my time at the two universities, has contributed most to my research and the writing of the thesis. He has given me exceptional support with his time, care, patience, wisdom and academic expertise. It is his encouragement, guidance and inspiration that led me along the long and adventurous journey of research. His extraordinary life principles that are embodied through his being and doing in his everyday encounters with people will be imprinted on my future life.

During the course of my study Dr. Denis Hayes and Professor Cedric Cullingford, as my second supervisors, have given me valuable feedback and suggestions at different stages. I also treasure the opportunity I had in seeking advice from Professor Peter Woods, Professor Martyn Hammersley and Professor Andy Hannan on different occasions.

I feel grateful to the teachers and students at the school where my research was carried out. They showed me great kindness and gave me much time and support, which made my experience of doing research there both worthwhile and enjoyable. I believe that the time I spent in the school was precious not just for the research, but also as a rare chance to become genuinely immersed in their world, which gave me a profound lesson in understanding and empathising with other human beings.

During the journey of my study and research, numerous people have offered their help in various ways and to varying degrees, which it is impossible to describe in detail here. Among them, I especially give my thanks to Dr. Dorin Festue, Sally and Ron Hill, Dorothy Bruce, Sue Waite, Dr. Saida Jaser Affouneh, Diane Duqueno and my Baha'i friends in Huddersfield. Their friendship has been full of love and energy. My research and thesis has all along been inspired by their living example of moral and spiritual being.

Last but not least; I would like to thank my family. They have supported me all the time and have provided the most encouragement for me to progress in all areas

of my life. Special thanks go to my son, Junyuan Tan, who has accompanied me throughout the time and is my greatest source of energy. He has been and will be the stimulus for my life-long interest in the education of human beings.

Abstract

This research is concerned with children's experience of the repeated procedures and activities in schooling, for example, registration, dismissal, assembly, discipline and sanctions. Built on a critical review of previous studies on school ritual, the current investigation deals with two sets of issues: ritual in the context of schooling, and children's experiences of the rituals of schooling. Without being initially constrained by any theoretical framework or any particular conceptualisations of 'ritual', the research emphasises the exploration of real-life phenomena, and attempts in this way to achieve better understanding of children's experience of the ritual aspects of school life.

A case study is carried out with a Year Four class in an English primary school. Detailed classroom observations and extensive group interviews with children are employed for the inquiry. Children's experience of routines, collective activities and classroom management are depicted through the researcher's observation and by their own accounts through interviews. Focusing on registration, dismissal, assembly, class organization and grouping, discipline, the teacher's instructions, children's attention-seeking, and children's distractions and disruptions, the current research provides an in-depth examination of the normal life of the classroom, putting children's everyday schooling experience under the microscope in order to identify and analyse its authentic significance.

The inquiry falls into three stages in its exploration of children's experience of the everyday realities of life. Firstly, normal teacher-child interactions and children's responses to their trivial everyday experiences and the fleeting moments that are usually ignored or taken for granted by adults are examined through detailed observation and critical reflection by the researcher. Secondly, the children's accounts and descriptions in their interviews gradually present their own versions of the 'normal day', thus revealing the way they themselves understand schooling, the teacher's role and relationships among themselves, as well as the specific aspects of school life in question. The final step in the researcher's interpretation identifies three different but co-existing responses on the part of the children to the rituals of schooling: acceptance, resistance and reflectiveness. The research arrives at an understanding of children as autonomous or potentially autonomous agents against a backdrop of the taken-for-granted 'structuring' power of the rituals of schooling.

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1. Introduction

School life contains much ritualised activity such as circle time, assemblies and school registration, but children's experience of this in terms of its significance or impact remains largely unexplored. My research examines classroom rituals and focuses particularly on children's perceptions and perspectives in this respect. The research is done in an English primary school and the case study involves a Year Four class. Although it is not comparative research, as an outsider to English culture I naturally bring a culturally and personally distinctive perspective to the issues under investigation.

Ritual has been studied for a long time in anthropology and the social sciences as part of human culture or social systems and it remains a popular topic in sociology, culture research, religious studies and other disciplines. Ritual is a widely used term across different cultures, and the Chinese context in which ritual is often discussed in terms of the dichotomy between form and content is of particular interest to me because of my own cultural background. As a matter of fact, the present research originated from my impression as a Chinese visitor to the UK of the widespread usage of the term 'ritual' in the West and the general recognition of its function in integrating meaning and structure.

It seems to me that on the one hand ritual as a concept hints at some kind of hidden or deeper significance in people's routine life. On the other hand, my outsider's background makes me aware of some ambiguities and complexities in the phenomenon. Is the symbolic or other meaning carried by ritual an inherent element within the practice itself? Or can ritual lose its meaning and significance through constant repetition, so that it is perceived as empty of meaning even though its practice continues? Is it possible that the meaning actually received or felt by participants is totally different from what is supposed?

With such thinking and curiosity as a backdrop, I began to read previous studies that focus on ritual in educational contexts and found that the empirical investigation of this aspect of schooling is far from adequate even though ritual as a term is readily used in discussions of educational issues. The research reported in this thesis is built on previous literature on school ritual and is particularly concerned with repeated procedures and routines in the classroom. The taken-for-granted significance

of ritual derived from anthropological conceptualisations is itself brought into question rather than simply accepted as the only way of approaching the topic.

In addition to my initial attention to the ritual aspects of school life, the other leg of my literature review is about children's authentic experiences of schooling. In conventional educational studies, research is mostly oriented from an adult perspective, focusing on the concerns and intention of adults in educating and socialising children, while children's own perspectives have been largely ignored. Most recently, there are some pieces of research with an interest in students' experience within the schooling system, but most start from a concern with the needs of disadvantaged groups (for example, SEN children and marginalized groups) or of under-performing students such as drop-outs and students with behaviour problems rather than with the normal, everyday experiences of ordinary students. There is a clear emphasis on secondary school experience rather than primary. On the whole, children's own everyday experience in the circumstances of normal schooling has been under-represented both in educational research and in childhood study.

Although the two dimensions of research and thinking mentioned above ('ritual' and 'children's experience') appear to have provided the main influence on my research, it is the work of a prestigious American educationist, Philip Jackson, that has most inspired me and supplied me with a core perspective in terms of the subtlety of his approach to the researched phenomenon of classroom life. His *Life in Classrooms* (1968) successfully raises to consciousness this 'life' aspect of education and provides an alternative perspective in looking at and thinking about educational practice in classrooms. Unfortunately, except for a later work under the direction of Jackson himself (Jackson et al, 1993), hardly any investigation has adopted an approach similar to his in terms of the extent of its careful observation, analysis and interpretation.

The work of Jackson and his colleagues has been a definitive influence on me in my own exploration of children's normal experience of everyday schooling. To me, their careful observation and almost artistic gaze at human life in an educational context provides a deeper level of understanding to educational practice and to the academic study of such practice. Their integrated approach emphasises human value and the moral aspects of life through their research into classroom interactions. My literature review will expand on this aspect as well as review the relevance of these two works to my own research topic. My research practice features a careful

combination of subtle interactions, in-depth analysis and empathetic interpretation, which has been greatly influenced by Jackson and his colleagues' approach to classroom research.

In view of the combined effect of this initial influence and the originality of my research topic, my investigation into children's experience of the ritual of schooling is exploratory in the first instance. Although I am aware of a few theoretical perspectives on issues of ritual, schooling or childhood during the course of my investigation, I choose to put the emphasis on real-life phenomena rather than tying myself to any specific framework, in order to keep an open mind on the study of children's experiences. On the whole, my approach to the research topic is driven more by a personal interest in real-life phenomenon than by any specific theory or research paradigm, as explained more fully in my Methodology and Methods chapter. The process that leads to the final interpretation and conclusion is a journey of exploration.

The exploratory nature of my empirical investigations will be fully presented in Chapter Three. My research approach can best be understood as an ethnographical case study. Extended classroom observation initially identifies registration, dismissal, assembly, classroom organisation and grouping, discipline and sanctions as some of the key aspects of school ritual. My main method used in the investigation has been non-structured interviews with children. These are supplemented by interviews with teachers to explore their point of view, though these have been kept in the background and used simply as contextual information for the purposes of understanding what the children said in the interviews more fully.

Given the nature and purpose of the current project as explained above, my research is more a matter of particularity (a case study) than generality, and it aims more at capturing the real life experience of the children than at the testing of any hypothesis or the development of any theory. A situational, interpretive account of the children under investigation is the aim of my data collection, and as the thesis itself makes clear, reasoning, deduction, evaluation, or comparison are not the point of my research.

After the above statements about the origin, influence and nature of the current research I will close this brief introduction with an overview of the rest of the thesis. In Chapter Two I report my literature review of the two most relevant areas of study: ritual in the school context and children's experiences in everyday schooling.

Chapter Three reports the methodological aspects of my research practice, and the actual processes and methods used. Chapter Four presents the findings of my classroom observations and offers some initial reflection, covering four routine activities in normal schooling: registration, dismissal, assembly and other special events, and classroom lessons. The last of these includes both the teacher's classroom managing activities such as organising the children, discipline-focused instructions and use of rewards and sanctions, and the children's responses to grouping strategies, their experience of being under the surveillance of the teacher; and their distractions, time-wasting strategies, deviance and attention-seeking. Chapter Five presents the findings from the children's interviews under two headings: children's accounts of specific aspects of school life (corresponding to the 'children's experience' themes reported in Chapter Four) and what the children said on general issues. The latter includes children's accounts of their perceptions of everyday schooling, views of teacher-child relationship and the relations among children and between genders. The interpretation chapter focuses on three issues: the identification of school rituals with repeated procedures and activities; the fact that some children describe their 'ritual experience' in terms of control and force; and the fact that children's own perceptions and perspectives point in an opposite direction from the meaning the rituals are intended to convey. Some final claims about children's experience of the rituals of schooling are derived from these interpretations and have illuminative significance. The conclusion summarises the key findings of the thesis and explores the implications for further research.

2. Literature Review

Since this thesis is an exploration of the rituals of schooling seen through the eyes of children, my literature review inevitably concentrates on the two main elements in the title: the nature of ritual in the context of schooling and children's experiences of everyday life in schools.

2.1 Ritual in the school context

Ritual as an aspect of school life has long been an incidental reference in writing about education. Since the first half of the last century an anthropological perspective has been drawn into the discipline of education (Gearing, 1973) and it was through this route that ritual entered the study of education. However, ritual, as a key concept in anthropology and a constituent of schooling, has yet to be explored adequately. Even though ritual is extensively identified and referred to in the school context, it is not significant as a focus of study in educational research. Ritual in the school context is covered in the educational literature either as a topic for focused study in its own right or as an incidental phenomenon when the focus is on other matters. However, there is only a limited amount of literature where school ritual is the main focus even though there has been some increase in the last thirty years.

One of the earliest remarks concerning ritual in the school context was from Waller in *The Sociology of Teaching* (1932), with school culture as the topic:

Schools have a culture that is definitely their own. There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them. (p. 96).

At the early stage of writing about education, school ritual in its own right was not recognized as important enough to be a focus of discussion though there are some writings and studies that make comments on ritual in school settings. For example, the experience of the teacher has been linked with ritual in different ways and to different extents. Lancy (1975) and Meyer (1966) look at schooling as an often-painful initiation ritual. Moore (1976) uses the terms 'avoidance rituals' and 'presentation rituals' drawn from Goffman's research to discuss student-teacher

interaction, and teaching performances are related to the concept of ritual by Clifton (1979).

Ritual in its own right came to the attention of educational researchers in the late 1960s and 1970s and one of the important essays of this period was contributed by Bernstein et al. (1966) who aimed for a better understanding of schooling, and also an interpretation of its meaning in sociological terms. Investigating ritual in a broader system, Bernstein et al present an insightful essay on the function of ritual as social control with social change as the force which brings about organizational change in terms of value and composition.

At that time, besides quite a few studies that have included ritual in their ethnographic research on teaching and school life (for example, Jackson 1968; Goldhammer, 1969), some educationists focus on ritual in school settings with the intention of analysing the social-control function of specific rituals. Burnett (1969), for example, analyses high school pep rallies and sees them as serving an integrating function. Lutz and Ramsey (1973) identify rituals as ‘non-directive cues’ which schools employ to reinforce belief systems. Weiss and Weiss (1976) observed a ‘secret-pal’ ceremony of staff in a public school characterized by conflict and personal competition in the working context and this ritual is presented as a rite of intensification and understood as an anxiety-conflict reducing process. However, as Kapferer noted, until then the study of the role of ritual in the organization, planning, and execution of the educational project had been long neglected (1981, p. 264). Ritual was just something entering the researcher’s vision and was regarded as one of the factors that wait for people’s analysis and understanding, like that in primitive society.

The relatively recent works looking at ritual in the school context are notable mainly for their ‘educational’ concerns rather than the previous emphasis on sociological analysis. Significantly, ritual in the school context has been studied in two main ways: studies with a focus on specific school rituals, and ethnographical studies looking at the normal practice of school life. Studies with a focus on specific school rituals demonstrate more diverse concerns and interests, and their significance is fully acknowledged. When it is raised in writings with a different primary focus, such as school culture (for example, Deal & Peterson, 1999), school management (for example, Kapferer, 1981), the hidden curriculum (for example, Gehrke, 1979; Henry, 1992) and the teaching-learning process (for example, Cossentino, 2005), ritual has

been studied more fully in terms of the specific issues involved. Ritual as a topic has also arisen as a focus of study in sub-disciplines such as educational management, administration and leadership (for example, Goodsell, 1989; Samier, 1997). The presence and significance of ritual are well articulated, and the subtlety embraced in the process of values transmission through ritual practice is also sometimes mentioned.

The second kind of study, that with an ethnographical focus, is concerned with the normal life of the school rather than specific ritual activities (for example, McLaren, 1986; Jackson et al, 1993; Quantz & Magolda, 1997). As well as normally having a broader scope of investigation compared to the earlier ethnographic studies, ritual is approached in a more responsive and in-depth way. There seems to have emerged a desire for a qualitatively different approach and for a cultural and moral exploration of the seemingly trivial aspects of schooling rather than the usual taken-for-granted attitudes (as seen in Jackson et al, 1993; Quantz & Magolda, 1997).

At the same time, in addition to these two main types of literature, ritual has been covered in two other kinds of literature. First, it is extensively referred to in educational writings as the symbolic performance of community values in which the educational function of ritual in organizations is acknowledged (for example, Handy & Aitken, 1986). With the increased use of 'culture' in academic research (Prosser, 1999, p. 7), ritual has been given attention in a range of discourses concerning consciousness raising, understanding, employing, and even the manipulation of ritual in the process of structuring school culture (for example, Deal & Peterson, 1999; Thacker, 1998). Second, ritual is studied in educational research as activities seen in the school context (for example, Opie & Opie, 1959; Woods, 1979; Thacker, 1998; Gill, 2000a, 2000b; Tew, 2000; Goodman, 2006) when other issues are the main focus. Unfortunately, even though there is an increasing interest in research into school culture (Prosser, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2003), the obvious inadequacy of explorations of the impact of the cultural dimension such as rituals of schools to practice has been referred to in relevant research review (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 30). And the ethnographic study of school life in which ritual is included incidentally as school activities has only limited relevance to my topic.

Due to the peripheral nature of those studies, my literature review will focus on the more relevant literature on ritual in the school context. As mentioned before, there are two main categories of writings: (a) Ritual as an identified specific activity

or performance and as the focus of the study; (b) Ritual as less clearly identified but seen and investigated as part of normal school life. My review focuses on both types of studies, which I call ‘ritual as specific school activity’ and ‘ritual as part of the normal life of the school’.

2.1.1 Ritual as specific school activity

Some academic discussion within the discipline of education has ritual as its focus. There are two main methodological approaches applied in the study of ritual in education: speculative insights and ethnographic study. Ritual study in education or any other discipline that borrows the concept from anthropology inclines towards theorizing since interpretation as a way of approaching ritual tends to be speculative and easily produces theoretical approaches (for example, Jiang, 2000). Another kind of speculative writing on school ritual is theory-oriented in the sense of conceptualising ritual in relation to cultural development. For example, in the discipline of educational management, ritual is related to organizational facilitation or achieving efficiency through different reflections relating to the cultural meaning of ritual (for example, Handy & Aitken, 1986; Goodsell, 1989; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Samier, 1997). The empirical studies of ritual, on the other hand, often relate to one or more specific ritual practices seen in an educational context (for example, Kaperer, 1981; Henry, 1992; Magolda, 2000). Ritual may be taken as the label for those specific phenomena and the investigations often serve to test some theoretical understanding of ritual.

There is significant difference between the theorising and the empirical studies. The theory-oriented study usually has a strong influence from the author’s assumptions through the speculative approach, while the ethnographic study on its own opens up a new stage for the study of ritual because the richness and descriptive power of its data can sometimes lead the research to a different level of significance (for example, Thacker, 1998; Gohlich & Wagner-Willi, 2001). As shown in the previous section, studies of specific rituals have their origins in various concerns and academic interests. However, the interdisciplinary nature of ritual study presents a diverse but relatively shallow way of understanding ritual in the educational context.

The early investigations of single ritual practices as mentioned previously demonstrate the initial development of educational anthropology. And this line of study has been continued and further developed in recent years. In the wider context

of education various ritual and ceremonial events have been examined from the point of view of their social and cultural significance: the ritual of preparing boxed lunches in Japanese nursery schools (Allison, 1991), the annual potluck dinner as the ritual socialization of parents into a school community (Bushnell, 1997), the university campus tour (Magolda, 2000), the flag ceremony in Sino-Indonesian schools (Bjork, 2002), the college commencement ritual (Magolda, 2003), ceremonial events at integrative multicultural schools in Israel (Bekerman, 2004), and the transition between grade school and junior high for white girls (Merten, 2005). These investigations of various rituals mainly serve to raise the awareness of the presence of ritual in an educational context.

From an educational point of view, there are several articles that put emphasis on the significance of school ritual to school life and education, the meaning of ritual and the way it influences children. Somehow this strand of study on ritual in the normal context of schooling mostly gets its influence from early works in educational sociology (for example, Bernstein et al, 1966) that understand ritual as an expressive aspect of social control or as the significant features of social elements in school life. As a subject for the writers to analyse, ritual gives insights into education settings and practices as part of the hidden curriculum (for example, Gehrke, 1979), as a tool of socialization (for example, Kaperfer, 1981), or as a performance of organizational value expressing a particular world-view (for example, Henry, 1992). What will be reviewed below are those writings that focus on school ritual, with an obvious concern for the educational significance of the ritual. Both speculative and empirical studies are found in this category of writing.

Jackson (1968) is the first person to use the term 'the hidden curriculum' to describe rules, routines and regulations in the school context and he connects the normal practices of schooling to a ritual perspective. Following this 'hidden curriculum' perspective, Gehrke (1979) relates routines of the classroom to ritualised actions by pointing to a felt superhuman or supra-individual power incorporated in the routinized, regulative practice in school on the children's side. The feeling of competence when perform a ritual and the feeling of 'sin' when failing to perform or complying with the ritual is described as a demonstration of the children's acceptance of such super-power. The 'superpower' that attributes a ritualised character to routines of the classroom helps students become habituated to the desired activities.

And ‘the total experience of schooling’ is said to facilitate ‘the subtle yet powerful teaching of cultural fundamentals’ (p. 103).

But in addition to the initial step of conceptualisation, the main point of the article is to interpret the sociological meaning (such as in the status-related, conflict-soothing or crisis-controlling rituals) to help an understanding of the taken-for-granted routinized practice in the classroom. Rituals are seen as a type of hidden curriculum that socializes students into the dominant order with social significance in and beyond the circumstance of the classroom. Acknowledging that the symbolic meaning of ritual as a belief in a power beyond human experience is the difference between rituals and routines, Gehrke does not go deeply into the process of ritualising, i.e. how the routines of the classroom take on a ritualised character in many classrooms, except for her noting of the ‘habituated’ state of students. Thus this article is mainly a speculative approach to classroom-ritualised practices from a practical point of making use of routines of schooling. The last section, a discussion of the appropriate usage of ritual in the classroom, has a more obvious tone of facilitation in organizing or managing classroom issues.

Kapferer (1981) contributes a relatively early example of such studies following on from the more sociological approach adopted before 1970s, as summarised above. The educational significance of the ritual and ceremonial practices is the writer’s major concern and especially the way in which rituals achieve their effects in the socialisation process. In analysing two Australian private secondary school ceremonies, the year-opening ceremony and the end-of-year Speech Night, Kapferer answers two questions: why do private schools appear to be so much more successful than state schools in committing their clientele to the advancement of the school project and in socializing students into acceptance of and support for the culture of the school? And what is the socializing role of ritual practice in such schools?

Similar to Gehrke’s (1979) explanation of the ‘power’ of ritual, Kapferer ascribes an unquestionable and unquestioning feature to ritual. Being a complex symbolic arrangement that combines actions and ideas into a coherent and consistent order, ritual attributes the ideas and actions a certain ‘sanctity’ (p. 264). With the mere observance of the ceremonial events in private schools, Kapferer tries further to make a connection between ritual practices in school and socialization. According to the writer, the findings demonstrate an obvious difference between public and private

schools in terms of the approaches to ritual performance and the general effect of socialization. On the basis of her discussion of that, Kapferer identifies what she considers to be the relationship between ritual and educational projects.

According to Kapferer, the project of the school is formally spelled out in ritual, that is articulated and elaborated within a bounded, non-everyday context, a special occasion ‘constituting a finite province of meaning set apart from the paramount reality of everyday life’ (p. 265). The rituals being investigated in Kapferer’s comparative study on Australian state schools and private schools are exclusively those special occasions that are distinct from routine activities. The analysis of the ritual is that of the process, the literal interpretation of the speeches, hymns etc, which every student is familiar with but has a different response to and inner feeling about. But how and to what extent this kind of ritual affects the socialization of the pupils, the article does not go far enough toward answering, except for the point that the participants in the ritual are integrated in an unquestioned relation to the ideas that are presented. In her theorizing, ‘socializing’ is the way ritual impacts on children. Specifically, what they value and how they look at things, which is delivered by ritual from the ‘school goals’, is the meaning ritual brings to children. By claiming that rituals ‘provide a mode of collective communication of group objectives’(p. 261, original emphasis), Kapferer identifies that the socializing role of ritual is to a large extent ‘the symbolic order of the school’ (ibid.).

Kapferer’s assumptions about the power of the ritual are shared by Henry (1992). By examining school rituals as educational contexts, Henry investigates the symbolic meaning of ritual in terms of world-views. With Geertz’s view of culture as a theoretical basis, Henry connects ritual with school culture in the first place: ‘School cultures are sustained through symbolic acts such as rituals and ceremonies’ (p. 295). By relating ritual to symbolic acts that confirm a specific meaning system or a whole organizational culture and in this way help to define a community, Henry attributes to ritual a direct relation with ideas, and in particular with world-views. The comparison between routines and rituals further accentuates the symbolic meaning of rituals that ‘say much more than may be immediately apparent; they are symbolic of a particular world-view’ (p. 295).

This symbolic meaning was presented in her examination of two private schools, a Waldorf and a college prep school in America. With observations on some specific examples of rituals such as the beginning of a school day, the staff meetings

of the two schools, and the promotions of ideas and values within the rituals, Henry believes that three dimensions of world views emerge as the meanings of school rituals: perceptions of the world, relationships to others, and perceptions of the individual or 'self'. Her approach to school ritual is a process of reviewing observational data, examining the ideas and values presented within rituals, and categorizing the symbolic meaning of ritual in terms of world-views.

By differentiating formal or 'high' ritual (i.e. the beginning and end of school year rites, chapel and religious rites, and special holidays and festivals) from everyday or 'low' rituals (i.e. routines such as students raising hands to signal a desire to speak, recitation rituals, rituals of meetings and instruction) Henry demonstrates a concern for the everyday practice of schooling. Her detailing of real-life human interactions, contextual elements and verbatim reports of the students' recital of educational statements directs us to the seemingly 'hidden' educational significance of those normal practices at school. But anyone who has ever experienced formal schooling would easily see the educational intentions of those consciously designed procedures and verbalisation. The writer's interpretation of the symbolic meaning of school ritual is merely an expression of those intentions in terms of the implementation of the 'school statement'.

As a result, the process through which socialization takes place depends on the vision of the writer. Henry seems to attribute a direct connection between the 'educational' meaning and the school expressive practices without further exploration. The symbolic meaning is equated to school values and the meaning-creating process is simplified to 'displaying' and 'affirming'. There is no interpretation of the mechanism of the structuring role of ritual in Henry's investigation and the inevitably complicated activity is reduced to 'reminding': 'School cultures are sustained through symbolic acts such as rituals and ceremonies. These acts remind participants of what they value and how they look at things' (p. 295).

Henry's conclusion that rituals thus provide a means of shoring up members' commitment to a school is insufficiently developed in this respect. As criticized by Astley and Jackson (2000), this kind of comprehension of schooling elements is 'at the cost of ignoring what it is to be a child enmeshed in the processes of developing a view of himself in his world in relation to others' (p. 223).

As seen in the above review, there are two related aspects in terms of the treatment of ritual by writers of the school ritual studies. One is the understanding of ritual; the other is the subjective stance in terms of the writer's attitude to ritual. As for the understanding, ritual can be looked on as an organizational element and form (for example, in the discipline of educational management), a way to interpret human life (for example, mostly in educational anthropology and educational sociology), and part of the culture which is a complex structure with different sub-groups and individuals in it (for example, in school culture study). The subjective stance, on the other hand, is the approach the author takes, and the underlying assumptions he has, when putting ritual at the centre of his investigation. Different authors and different methodological systems may lead to different stances. Thus within the same discipline category, there may be various stances presented.

For example, with regard to the understanding of the role of ritual in the school context, two tendencies have emerged so far in the review. One is to regard school ritual as an organizational element of school and thus ritual is often seen as a conscious method adopted by school organizers to engage and promote certain explicit values. This understanding often starts from and relates to a managerial interest that is either explicitly expressed from the pragmatic perspective of school management (for example, Deal & Peterson, 1999) or implicitly suggested while identifying the significance of ritual in socialization (for example, Kapferer, 1981). The other perceives ritual as natural involvement in the normal practice of schooling. This understanding is developed more from an ethnographic stance to the investigation of ritual with sensitivity to the detailed performance of actions in real life contexts (for example, Henry, 1992).

However, the above two tendencies in studying ritual in the school context both start from and emphasize the structuring role of ritual. Often those studies only touch on and interpret the rationally intended meaning of ritual (i.e. the superficially or rhetorically analysed meaning), without any coverage of participants' deeper inner interpretation and construction. With the emphasis on the influence of the organization through socialization or social control, this line of study tends to ignore individual autonomy or sub-cultural motivation.

Significantly, more recent works with school ritual as the focus demonstrate some development in the above respects. Several writings contribute in the sense of referring to and demonstrating the significance of the sub-cultural or participants'

experience. Specifically, Powell and Kottler (1997) are concerned with the experience of minority ethnic groups in the often covert cultural domination of school rituals. Astley and Jackson (2000) raise the issue of the children's autonomous acceptance of messages from the practice of ritualized actions in the context of Waldorf education. Gohlich and Wagner-Willi (2001) approach school ritual from their observation of participant-initiated behaviour.

Powell and Kottler (1997) draw attention to the culturally designated and historically formed meaning of school ritual. Regarding ritual as the way to organize people's lives in 'familiar patterns', they ironically interpret school ritual as 'designed to homogenize the children and to make them walk through the day as a disciplined army, one that can be managed with a minimum of fuss given their unbridled energy' (p. 75). The symbolic meaning of ritual is viewed as 'signals' for participants 'to adopt particular frames of mind, social demeanours, or emotional tones' (p. 76). Also as an outside-in and top-down way of activation, ritual potentially yields tensions between the designed or intended aims and the actual practice of participants (p. 76).

As part of a book on raising the awareness of cultural difference and how to handle multi-cultural issues in a creative way in school settings, their sensitive exploration into the ethnocentric features in school ritual shows how school ritual reinforces the mainstream cultural pattern because of its historical and cultural significance. This is seen to 'squeeze the cultural life out of some students and to socialize students into ways of acting, knowing, and thinking that may very well be the exact opposite of what their home, family and community are all about' (p. 76). The interpretation of ritual from the standpoint of ethnic cultural reflectivity has considerable significance for school ritual study.

Astley and Jackson (2000) doubt Henry's points about the 'shared meaning' of ritual, at least in the case of Waldorf ritual. From a consideration of children's active development of a view of the world in relation to others, Astley and Jackson raise a set of questions about the 'efficacy' of ritual in terms of spiritual nurturing. Though they are not concerned with any substantial discussion of ritual, Astley and Jackson raise an important question with regard to school ritual study:

...if one takes a view of children as more proactive and dynamic – more 'persons' in their own right – rituals are dramas in which there are multiple perspectives. The only general thing one can say about participation in

rituals is that it is engaging in events that are pre-planned, pre-shaped, indeed, even ‘engaging’, is misleading. It can claim too much, since rituals may be conformed to semi-automatically, in a bored way, or too little, for children may seek to change or even subvert them. Children, in common with the rest of the species, adapt the unfamiliar to fit in with their individual preconceptions. (p. 226)

Gohlich and Wagner-Willi’s research (2001) offers a new angle for the empirical investigation of school ritual. Based on a video-ethnographic study of one aspect of a school’s everyday life, children’s transition from break time to lesson, the researchers try to understand school in the sense of ritual and ritualisation and see children as autonomous actors in the process of transition. Ritual and ritualisation is understood as ‘recurring interactive patterns of behaviour which, focused via physical expression, stylised gestures or staged arrangements, symbolise and constitute those accepted ideas, values and norms in a group or institution’ (p. 237). Their main interest focuses on everyday life ritualisations, i.e. ‘those everyday rituals involving everyone within the everyday life of schools’ (p. 237), and on the nature of ritual as process.

The article describes and discusses ritualisations of children during the transition from break time to a lesson. It shows how the transition from the state of ‘child’ to that of ‘pupil’ is not completed by admission into a school, but is a fragile process determined by everyday school life. Gohlich and Wagner-Willi’s study is different from most other studies of ritual in the school context in that it has an inherent interest in children’s lives and autonomous actions rather than being written from the concern of organizational facilitation or unquestioned social power. Therefore this anthropological investigation directs the reader further inward to participants’ practice and experience of ritual rather than the usual tendency of staying with the organizational, educational intentions.

In conclusion, the previous studies of school ritual are inadequate in that most of them are done at the level of anthropological or sociological analysis. Inevitably this approach in the first place sets limits to their vision and application to further investigations. As seen in the above review, the school ritual studies largely base their explorations on their initial conceptualisations of ritual and even the ethnographic investigations rely on their theoretical alignment to the social analysis of the symbolic

role of ritual. The educational significance or function of ritual in the school context is either unexamined or simplified in vague terms such as ‘culture’, ‘socialization’, and ‘ritualisation’.

I will now turn to the other line of study, which focuses on the normal practice of schooling while drawing on ritual as the perspective for interpretation (for example, McLaren, 1986; Quantz and Magolda, 1997). The empirical study and extended ethnographic investigation of real-life practice in the first place supply revealing findings concerning the normal performance of schooling, and thus indicate the educational significance. However, as will be developed more fully in due course, the educational significance of the ritualised actions of school practice has rarely been set out as the purpose of research in previous studies except for Jackson (1968). In this sense, Jackson’s study is a unique contribution. As demonstrated and explored by Jackson, the educational perspective calls for close investigation of the actual subjective experience of the participants (teachers and students) in ritualised actions in school, which constitutes my initial intention for the current research.

2.1.2 Ritual investigated as the normal life of school

In this line of literature, ritual is a way of understanding the performance of rules, regulations and even morality expressed through observable gestures and procedures actually seen in the normal life of schooling. The ethnographic approach that is embraced in this line of investigation initially makes the researchers aware of phenomenological features of real life rather than constrains them within some theory of ritual. As a result, schooling, in the sense of the normal life of school, is connected to and further examined through the perspective of ritual on the basis of empirical investigation rather than on the basis of theory as shown in previous section. Jackson (1968), McLaren (1986) and Quantz and Magolda (1997) are the main contributors to this line of study.

Jackson’s (1968) qualitative enquiry into life in the classroom was unique at the time it was published. With three-year observation in elementary school classrooms in America, Jackson explores what happens to the children in the classrooms. In his description of the classroom occurrences, ‘the elements of repetition, redundancy, and ritualistic action’ (p. 6) form the featured experience of children. Then after more than twenty years, Jackson and his colleagues started a

moral education research project with a similar methodological significance: *The Moral Life of Schools* (Jackson et al, 1993). This research resulted in a book that sheds light not only on moral education but also on the way we look at seemingly minor aspects of teaching performance and school organization. The significance of everyday schooling is again focused on through the lens of sensitive observation and reflection. This research project explores the moral significance of the ‘fleeting and mundane events’ of the classroom and finds deep educational significance in the normal life of school. Because of the uniqueness of Jackson’s approach and methods in this research, I will provide a detailed review of Jackson’s *Life in Classrooms* (1968), and refer to his later work *The Moral Life of Schools* (1993) to some extent, later in this section.

McLaren’s *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (1986) is a significant study. His investigation of the Catholic schooling of Portuguese immigrants in a Canadian Catholic junior high school puts emphasis on teenagers’ sub-culture and initiates his theoretical contribution in critical pedagogy. The social and cultural meaning of schooling is examined and interpreted through a variety of ritualised actions and activities in classroom instructions. The depth and richness of the ethnographic inquiry supplies a vivid case in terms of the actual practices of giving instructions, along with students’ inner feelings and the cultural and historical forces beneath the educational surface. As a result, the extended study and discussion sheds light on a cultural and performative aspect of schooling. Ritual is seen as possessing a ‘privileged sphere of articulation’ (p. 214) in schools that are themselves ‘repositories of complex symbol systems’ (p. 215). He observed two sorts of instructional rituals. He calls the total sequence of lessons on a given day the ‘macro ritual’ and refers to each individual lesson as a ‘micro ritual’ (p. 79). This perspective leads him to look at the normal practice of giving instructions in the Catholic school. The rituals of classroom instruction, he further argues, prod students toward conformity with the beliefs and values that prevail in the wider society.

According to McLaren’s investigation of instructions, ritual in school functions as structures, blueprints, or prescribed symbols for students to follow. Participation in the process of ritual performance alters the sensibilities of the participants. The response of students to the instructional ritual is mainly seen as acceptance while there occurs one case of a critical stance on the part of the teacher. The pervading tendency to accept instructional rites as ‘sacred and unquestionable’

occurs not just in the religion class but also in all subjects. The acceptance that is seen in modes of cultural reification and unproblematic acceptance is experienced as 'natural', and part of the 'socially acceptable framework of schooling' (p. 216).

On the basis of the above findings, McLaren argues that classroom ritual in the school works to reproduce and reinforce existing patterns of class and ethnic dominance. The writer's extensive discussion demonstrates that the ritualised classroom lessons tacitly create a pattern of discourse relating to certain student needs while simultaneously offering to fulfil those needs. For instance, students are made to feel inadequate due to their class status and hence the school offers to help socialise them into 'appropriate' values and behaviours by allocating them to basic level courses.

Not restricted to the overt intentional aspects of schooling, McLaren also unfolds the experience of the students as permeated by feelings of boredom. Underneath the official appearance of schooling, the resistance of the teenagers is obvious and is analysed by the researcher. Besides, from the teacher's side, the ritualised structure of instruction is seen to have lost its power most of the time and ceases to function as it is supposed to. By analysing the reification of the classroom culture as displayed in the course of instructional rites, McLaren goes further to touch on the technocratic nature of instruction and concludes with the role of education as a process of control rather than liberation.

As a whole, McLaren's work on the Catholic schooling of Portuguese immigrants makes inroads into an arena that has rarely been explored fully before and contributes many provocative findings and insights to the literature in this area. However, as noted by Gamoran (1987) twenty years ago, the uniqueness of the school under investigation makes the application of his analysis to a wider variety of educational settings problematic. Nowadays we don't expect qualitative research to be generalised. But this frustration felt by earlier scholars does suggest the necessity of investigating schooling in less specific situations. It is in this sense that Quantz and Magolda's work (1997) has its significance and inspires my own work.

Quantz and Magolda's article presents and analyses two detailed records of school life: one is the daily morning ceremony at an American elementary school; the other is the first day of class in a college located in an American Midwestern urban community. However, their emphasis is on the more invisible 'interaction rituals' presented in the second example and the analysis of the non-rational social

mechanisms integrated in small, everyday actions and activities. Even though their study of classroom performance has strong implications for the theoretical construction of ritual, the writers contribute as much to the understanding of schooling as of ritual.

In their attempt to construct a conception of ritual as a ‘formalized, symbolic performance’, the authors shift our attention from the more obviously formally practised ceremonies to the ‘grindingly ordinary and mundane world of everyday school life’ (p. 226) and the integral non-rational lessons learned through the practice of it. For example, they analyse the display of the laboratory classroom and the students and teacher’s clothes in the staging and costumes of a dramatic performance. According to this perspective, the unspoken meaning presented through all the aspects of performance actually states something meaningful both publicly and repeatedly (for example, in this case it is concerning the nature of learning science in a school context.)

Apart from their theoretical contribution (as explored more fully in Quantz, 1999), I found the most significant point in their conclusion is that it directs us to ritual as a way into an examination of students’ experience in schooling:

We are convinced that these nonrational lessons learned through the ordinary ebb and flow of everyday school rituals are not just interesting aspects of schooling but are, in fact, central to understanding our schools ... This approach becomes particularly crucial when we begin to realize that ritual has the remarkable ability to connect the emotions of the body to the cognitive commitments of the intellect, thereby either reinforcing them or resisting them. (p. 236)

However, because they are constrained by theoretical concerns and the scope of their empirical investigation, Quantz and Magolda’s article only indicates the writers’ provocative insight into the study of schooling. Jackson’s early work (1968) on classroom life provides more inspiration because of its solid depiction of school life and its highlighted sense of the educational investigation of school practice.

Jackson’s approach is deep rooted in the realities of education and seeks to answer the needs of education, as indicated in his remarks, ‘How ... to cope with the

demands of institutional life?’ (1968, p. 143). Specifically, the educational inquiry is presented from four perspectives:

1. The classroom is at the heart of the enquiry, which ‘come to grips with the reality of classroom events’;
2. The underling viewpoint is to ‘move up close to the phenomena of the teacher’s world’;
3. The aim of the enquiry is ‘the improvement of the teacher’s work’;
4. Rather than giving technical suggestions based on research ‘evidence’, Jackson’s research reveals an alternative way which is based on a new perspective on the teaching-learning reality.

Thus Jackson’s *Life in Classrooms* is rich with insights into all aspects of teaching-learning matters and his exploration is primarily aimed at informing teaching practice. My review will focus on the relevant respect of children’s experience but omit the actual central element in the discussion, the teacher’s work.

The school experience is divided by Jackson (1968) into two parts: the distinctive events and the everyday grind. As he observes, the common tendency in everyday life is to pay more attention to the result than to the process, to the utilitarian aspect than to experience itself, to the ‘spice’ than to the ‘substance’ and the ‘recurring’ activity. It is human nature to see the highlights, the results, the significant aspects rather than the much greater amount of recurring aspects of life, the everyday process. By pointing out the amount of time in total hours, its ‘abrasive potency’, and its shaping function for our lives, he actually directs us to the significance of daily routine. However, because his chief concern is to investigate classroom practices in a real-life context in order to inform teaching practice, he does not make children’s daily routine life the focus of his study. Rather, he provides relevant survey findings on teaching and learning, and adds ‘qualitative’ insights to these as a way of revealing the meanings and implications of life in the classrooms.

Significantly, Jackson observes the impact of trivial aspects such as the inevitable waiting, and being delayed and interrupted in the crowded classroom context as a means to ‘help to give structure to the activities of the room and to fashion the quality of the total experience for many of the participants’ (ibid, p. 12). The trivial happenings in the classroom depicted as basic facts of school life experience are identified under three headings: crowds, praise, and power. By these he points to the normal schooling experience of ‘being lodged within larger groups,

serving as targets of praise or reproof, and being bossed around or guided by persons in positions of higher authority' (p. 11). According to him, these 'much less obvious though equally omnipresent' experiences 'help to make up "the facts of life", as it were, to which students must adapt' (p. 10).

In contrast to other sociological studies of school and classroom phenomena, Jackson's study on the trivial dimensions of classroom life is an educational one. He does not aim at sociological understanding though his description naturally demonstrates the vivid social context and the inevitability of the phenomena he describes (which is a socially prescribed situation). As he notes, the physical limits and the human relations, are 'to some extent a function of social tradition, institutional policy, and situational wealth and poverty' (p. 17). Bearing that in mind, he makes clear that the more helpful approach in terms of supporting practice is to examine the educational consequences of the pervasive schooling:

... to decry the existence of these conditions is probably futile, yet their pervasiveness and frequency make them too important to be ignored. One alternative is to study the ways in which teachers and students cope with these facts of life and to seek to discover how that coping might leave its mark on their reactions to the world in general. (p. 17)

His perspective is sociological in the first place but leads to educational discussion, which demonstrates his unique angle and his familiarity with the educational context. Therefore, by focusing on teacher-student interaction and ways of coping, Jackson examines the phenomenon as an educational level, considering the underlying issues such as the teacher's educational knowledge, values and perspectives. For example, in the case of the inevitability of crowd life, Jackson switches to the issue of value. He discusses the virtue of patience in connection with the unfortunate but ubiquitous aspects of delay, denial, interruption, and social distraction in school life. In his further analysis, he implies that this value of 'patience' is inappropriately linked to compulsion. That is, '...powerful social sanctions are in operation to force the student to maintain an attitude of patience' (p. 18).

Through this round of analysis, we can arrive at a sociological perspective: schooling is more about social sanctions than education per se. But, apparently,

Jackson's purpose in pointing this out is not only for the sake of sociological understanding: first, he persists in examining the educational rhetoric behind the events, such as 'patience' and 'force'; 'independence' and 'obedience' (p. 33); and second, he goes on to discuss the teacher's perception of children's experience and feelings as a way of awareness raising. Actually, Jackson sometimes does not stop at the point of awareness raising; he goes on further to demonstrate the embarrassment, the unexpected, deep contradictions he finds after tearing away the rhetoric on schooling. For example, on obedience and independence, he touches on the purpose of education and reaches the conclusion that behaviour is the direct concern of teaching (p. 34). From this reflective thinking, we can easily move on to a critical view of schooling: is the purpose of schooling the 'academic' or the 'institutional'? Jackson follows this critical thinking with discussions regarding the status of ability and personality in education, which again goes back to his major concern of informing teaching practice through looking at the picture of life in classrooms.

Furthermore, in Jackson's exploration the issue of values is noted as a higher level enquiry regarding the quality of school life. For example, after the discussion of the differentiation between 'attention' and 'involvement' with regard to the state children are in for their learning, Jackson raises the following points:

The more enduring form of attachment to school work is of the sort that extends beyond the time limits of particular class sessions and even beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom itself. It is connected with those pervasive motivational states that go by such names as interests, attitudes, and values. It becomes anchored, in other words, in the structure that gives shape to the habitual actions of the student. (p. 109)

Jackson (1968) describes this approach in terms of values and the value-based procedures or in term of principles following the empirical findings as 'a moral perspective from which to view specific educational problems and practices' (p. 164). In his discussion, this moral perspective is 'qualitatively' different from the engineering viewpoint that has been described in learning theories and applied to classroom affairs (p. 166).

Actually, Jackson et al. apply this moral perspective to the study of school life in their project *The Moral Life of Schools* (1993). 'Moral life' here points to the

moral meaning of teaching in school since the project focuses on the educational significance (i.e. the significance of school teaching) to students' moral education. Although the authors briefly comment on the moral significance of the rituals and ceremonies of school as 'extracurricular' to moral instructions and rich in symbolic meaning, they do not go any further except pointing out that the mood, aim and special presence of the activities 'gave to these occasions a special character and added to their mood-inducing effectiveness' (p. 7). Since this work is not concerned with explicit ritual or ritualised activities, I will mainly review it in the coming section about children in everyday schooling.

2.2 Children in everyday schooling

For several decades, children's experience of schooling has been part of the study of education and is meant to offer support to the process of improving the quality of mass education (for example, Epstein & McPartland, 1976). There has been a longstanding concern with 'teacher effectiveness' in educational research (Hammersley, 1986b), but the activity of teaching, or the management and organisation of teaching, is the central interest (for example, Craig, 1990; Docking, 1990; Moyles, 1992; Clegg & Billington, 1994; Dean, 2001), and children's own experience has rarely been at the centre of the discussion. Even though some of these works suggest potential links between children's activities and learning achievement, activities initiated by the teacher are the focus of attention, or at least the essential concern. Within psychology children's experience is often presumed to follow a lineal framework of development, and even the discussion of children's needs has the sense of addressing better learning for the future (for example, Pring, 1984). The upsurge of 'the new sociology of childhood' (cf. Qvortrup et al, 1994; James & Prout, 1997a; Christensen & James, 2000; Mayall, 2002) in the last twenty years reflects a radical shift of approach to investigations involving children. The lives of children in society and schools are presented differently thereafter in the new advocacy of 'listening to children'. Some scholars have already noticed the existence of competing 'paradigms' in research into classroom life in terms of 'fundamentally different approaches to knowledge and research' (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000, pp. 115-137). My review of research about children in everyday schooling initially identifies two approaches: adult-agenda oriented and child-centred perspectives.

My review of previous studies into the life of children in everyday schooling covers both those from the traditional disciplines (where an adult agenda is dominant) and those from more recent studies (which focus more on children's actual experience). Also, in terms of the age group involved, my review has no distinct boundary. The results of my searches show that studies on the experiences of primary school children are much less numerous than those without an age limit, which demonstrates a significant lack of attention to the experiences of this age group. Although I have tried to concentrate on the life of primary school children in my review I have still had to include some studies with secondary school students as the focus. The criteria of selection have more to do with the relevance of the topic than with the age of the children. The inadequacy of investigations into primary education is revealed by a recent review of educational research (NFER, 2006), which is another notable point in the review of studies of children in everyday schooling. As a result, my literature review of the experience of everyday school life covers both primary and secondary stages and concentrates on studies with a variety of disciplinary and theoretical approaches on the relevant topic. My focus in this section of the review is on the emerging themes of empirical investigation into children in schools although writings with little empirical basis are also included when they bring relevant theoretical or methodological insights.

However, in my search for literature on children in everyday schooling I found that there is little connection made between school activities and children's experience. A recent search in Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA) and British Education Index (BEI) returned very few academic articles on 'school experience', and most of these are about the learning experiences of specific disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic groups, delinquent adolescents, or children with health problems. As already noted, the orientation towards an adult agenda in research on school activities often obscures the participant children and their experience in their own right. But the recent growth of interest in children's experience also seems to exclude children's normal experience of everyday schooling. Neither traditional investigations of education nor the more recent trend of child advocacy seems to adequately acknowledge the significance of children's experience in everyday schooling. My literature review starts with a search in the vast number of educational investigations for studies of children in everyday schooling in

the traditional disciplines and then moves to the more recent research focus of 'listening to the child'.

2.2.1 Re-discovering children in the schooling context

Studies of children in everyday schooling have long been the focus of attention within various disciplines (Delamont, 1983; Delamont & Hamilton, 1984; Hammersley, 1986a). Significantly since the 1970s in the UK the awareness of the importance of entering the 'black box' of the classroom has led to a series of influential research projects on classroom interaction in three distinct disciplines (Delamont, 1983, p. 16): psychology (for example, Galton et al, 1980), sociology (for example, Woods, 1979, 1983, 1990a; Delamont, 1983) and sociolinguistic study (for example, Edwards & Furlong, 1978). More recently teaching and curriculum have still been the explicit or hidden agendas of most educational research into school and children. On the one hand, recent studies in the psychological line of evidence-oriented research have emphasized the processes of teaching and learning in their investigations of school activities (for example, Montague, 1995; Lewis et al, 2000; Sperling, 2003; Baines et al, 2007; Hall et al, 2007). On the other hand, in its critical approach to schooling, critical educational theory offers a coherent approach to the sociological analysis of the contemporary education system (for example, Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; McNeil, 1988; McLaren, 2003), except that it mainly speaks to and focuses on the role of the schools in the reproduction of social inequality, and thus is more concerned with what will happen to the participants after the stage of schooling (McNeil, 1988). Since both American and British scholars have produced a great deal of research and have different emphases, I will focus on those psychological and sociological projects done in the UK because of their relatively greater relevance to my own project.

My search through the academic literature in the traditional disciplines about children's experiences of everyday schooling in the traditional disciplines gradually reveals the social circumstances our children are in: seen but not heard. It has become clear that school life has long been studied in a framework that is composed of different areas of interest, particularly the curriculum, teaching and learning, educational management, and school culture, in which children's learning, behaviour and experience is predicated as being 'taught' and 'organized' by educationists. The titles of books on primary school education demonstrate this characteristic. Just list a

few, *Managing the Primary Classroom* (Craig, 1990); *Managing Behaviour in the Primary School* (Docking, 1990); *Organizing for Learning in the Primary Classroom: A Balanced Approach to Classroom Management* (Moyle, 1992); *The Effective Primary Classroom: the Management and Organization of Teaching and Learning* (Clegg & Billington, 1994) *Organizing Learning in the Primary School Classroom* (Dean, 2001). Then there are various approaches in terms of how school life is dealt with from different disciplinary perspectives, such as philosophy (for example, Dewey, 1963), psychology (Bruner, 1960; Bloom, 1976) and sociology (Woods, 1979; Delamont, 1983; Pollard, 1985). Mostly, in these traditional studies the focus of investigation is schooling and learning, not children. Children's experience has not been reported for its own sake.

Empirically, there are two approaches to the phenomenon of school activity: one is mainly concerned with matters in the classroom and school as teaching-oriented practices, the other follows the socio-cultural study of classroom or school activities. For example, psychological investigations look at classroom interactions and children's schooling experience with a concern for scientific accuracy and a purpose of providing evidence. Indeed, psychology is normally regarded as 'educational science', as identified by Rozycki (1991), in that it is epistemologically distinct from the moral and philosophical perspective. Thus researchers working within this discipline typically aim at ways to define and measure the behaviours involved in teaching, organization and administration etc. to support effective practice. Children's behaviour is often problematised (for example in terms of 'disengagement', 'resistance', 'bullying') for the purpose of eliciting appropriate instructions to the pupils to make teaching more effective. In sociological investigations, on the other hand, school life is often seen and analysed from various theoretical frameworks within sociology, for example symbolic interactionism, Marxism, new Marxism, and ethnomethodology, etc (Hammersley, 1986b, xi). In these frameworks, children's experience has mostly been seen and presented by adults through various 'sociological' lenses (Wragg, 1999, p. 55).

In terms of the purposes and concerns of educational research in relation to school and children, those that start from the direction of teaching are much more numerous than those initiated from the direction of children's learning; subject-specific research is contrasted with a dearth of research which looks at cross-curricular issues or progression (NFER, 2001). For example, Jerome Bruner (1996)

has noted how the focus of research around standards, performance and achievement has led to a neglect of work on the intimate nature of teaching and school learning. The NFER review (2001) also notes the rise in the number of research projects which focus on assessment and levels of achievement.

Thus, children's school life is traditionally largely hidden in investigations with adult agendas relating to psychological knowledge and sociological construction. To a large extent, children are 'represented' by adults in academic terms regarding their everyday experience in schools. As a result, except for a limited number of writings that focus on the social world of children and feature in-depth study and a unifying approach to the world of children (for example, Davies, 1982; Pollard, 1985; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000) or some psychological aspects of children's experience (for example, Johnson, 1973; Epstein & McPartland, 1976), which I will review later on, children's experience of everyday schooling is largely lost. There is a need for the 'rediscovery' of children in the two main traditions of academic investigations of education: psychology and sociology. My review in this section will demonstrate my tracking of children's experience in research with an adult orientation. The purpose is to highlight the disparate approaches between the adult-agenda orientation and child-centred orientation while at the same time to acknowledge the significance of the empirical findings of previous research. My re-discovery of children's experience in those traditional disciplinary endeavours focuses on research into teaching and the sociology of the school.

2.2.1.1 Children's experience in research on teaching

As mentioned before, studies of school or classroom-based activities have traditionally focused on teaching with the underlying intention of promoting effective teaching, and psychology is the most influential discipline within the field of classroom research (Delamont, 1983, p. 16; Hammersley, 1986b, x). In this line of research the emphasis has been on supplying 'evidence' to improve or support teaching practice, and children's behaviour in the classroom or the practice of teaching-and-learning are examined by the researcher (for example, both in America and Britain early classroom research uses prespecified coding schemes such as Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories or FIAC to record and analyse classroom interactions) within a vision of what makes for effective teaching.

One of the most influential programmes for classroom research in the UK is called Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE), a five-year, SSRC-funded research programme based at Leicester University (Galton et al, 1980). This research is groundbreaking in the UK because previously ‘little attention was given to the systematic study of teaching by observing teacher and pupil behaviour in the classroom’ (Galton et al, 1980, p. 5). Before this research, ‘in all the arguments about teaching methods innovation is being urged without research’ (Bennett, 1976, p. 9). It was also the time when systematic observation was criticised in the UK either because of a preference for the questionnaire approach that was believed to be able to accommodate a larger representative sample of teachers, or by ethnographers because of its obvious limits. Demonstrating a better understanding in these respects, ORACLE does not follow the Flanders’ pattern of recording ten categories of classroom talk. Instead, two much more complicated observation categories are designed, the Teacher Record and the Pupil Record (Galton et al, 1980, pp. 12-13, 17). Other types of information such as the contexts within which the observations are made, descriptive accounts of both teachers and pupils, timetables and descriptions of grouping procedures are collected.

Within the Pupil Record that covers pupil-adult, pupil-pupil, and activity and location categories, children’s behaviours are observed and coded through a system that focuses on one pupil at a time. The target pupil’s activity and pupil-pupil interactions, and pupil-teacher interactions are coded at regular twenty-five-second intervals. The Pupil Record thus provides a picture of the target’s behaviour and his range of contacts with other members of the class.

Although there are some doubts about the reliability of ‘normative data’ resulting from coding schemes using prespecified categories (for example Delamont & Hamilton, 1984, pp. 10-11), a major research programme like ORACLE does supply an overview of the general practices in primary school classrooms that is independent of teachers’ or incidental visitors’ impressions. It is in the sense of an overall picture of normal classroom practices that ORACLE is relevant to my research into ritual and routine in the school life of children. For example, ORACLE finds that in a normal lesson, the children are sitting in their places for most of the time getting on with the task in hand without interactions with either other pupils or the teacher, which is different from the main impression of ‘busyness’ at first glance in a primary classroom (Galton et al, 1980, p. 60). Although the great bulk of the

teacher's contacts are with individual pupils, the bulk of the pupil's interaction with the teacher is as a member of the whole class. In a typical lesson, only a small portion of the time is experienced by the pupils as individuals. The first striking finding of the study is the very small amount of attention (2.3%) the teacher can give to pupils as individuals in a typical teaching session (pp. 61-2). These 'objective' observations in the sense of frequency coding and wide sampling do offer a general vision not necessarily achievable in incidental visits. And an understanding of this 'trivial' level of classroom phenomenon might be essential in trying to capture children's everyday experience.

Other relevant findings from ORACLE include the grouping and group activities in the primary classroom, the routine features of teacher interaction and pupil activity, and the categorization of the teacher's organizational, curricular and instructional strategy, which also highlights the significance of children's experience of the 'routine' part of schooling. Furthermore, the intention of ORACLE to check the actual practices of the informal, individualised ideal approach to classroom organisation is closely related to my own interest in the phenomenological dimension of children's classroom experience in the UK, only mainly from children's own perspective. In view of the time gap between when ORACLE was done and the most recent practice shown in my research, the comparison might add further significance to investigations of children's experience in the general system of schooling.

Despite all the things noted above, the approach of ORACLE to life inside the primary classroom is very much an applied one. As the authors state, the major objective of this programme is to study the relative 'effectiveness' of different teaching approaches across the main subject areas of primary school teaching. The description of the actual process of teaching in primary classrooms is used to explain teaching patterns across England at that time. Children were tested in order to assess the outcomes of teaching. The process-product study that was intended to supply evidence of the effectiveness of different teaching styles, proved unsatisfactory (Delamont & Hamilton 1984; Pollard, 1985) and is now exposed as more controversial (cf. Hammersley, 2007).

Teaching and the curriculum are still the explicit or hidden agendas of most educational research into school and children. Nowadays, this line of study more consciously emphasizes the subjective aspect of children's experience such as children's activities, attitudes, perceptions and opinions. For example, Maurice

Galton is involved in a recent piece of research that aims at gaining evidence for the promotion of group work in school teaching (Pell et al, 2007). The focus of this investigation is the slightly different attitudes to group work of children with different personalities. Other recent research especially puts emphasis on pupils' voices and experience. A series of funded research projects look at the various aspects of the life of children and young people and integrate their perspective into the study of effective teaching or the development of the curriculum, for example: Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), 'Listening to Children: Environmental Perspectives and the School Curriculum' (Barratt et al, 2005).

The TLRP is an ambitious, still on-going coordinated programme with sequential phases and successive thematic initiatives. The numerous substantive research projects of TLRP cover all educational forms and school phases. The Phase 1 project is Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004) and all the other projects in the programme reflect an underlying understanding of the significance of students' experience and cooperation. The TLRP has a very explicit focus on learning either as the result of teaching or as children's conscious endeavour and its topics are mainly about the evaluation of the effectiveness of formal education, effective approaches to learning and the assessment of learning, and some specific concerns of subject learning (such as learning scientific concepts). In this sense, the TLRP approaches children's experience and perspectives in a pragmatic way. 'Listening to pupils' is mainly the means rather than the end. Therefore I find it is more relevant to teaching-oriented research than to my research that looks into children's experience.

There are also some recent research projects that study a specific activity or aspect of classroom interaction such as group work (Pell et al, 2007) or disengagement (Ravet, 2007). There are a few examples that deal with the overall phenomenon of classroom activity such as a lesson (for example, Atencio, 2004), or a case of teacher-child interaction (for example, Lobman, 2006). The constructing of learning from the teacher's perspective, the participation by the children, and all the visible interactions during the course of a lesson are the main aspects of investigation. One significant feature of the recent research focusing on the interactions in teaching activities is that they draw on various disciplinary or theoretical insights into the investigation of human performance. Observational study or ethnographical investigation in the context of the classroom are largely adopted in these research

projects and this approach to naturally occurring events in classroom activities often supplies rich findings in the sense of in-depth descriptions of life in classrooms. Nevertheless, the relevance of this line of research is limited because the focus of my investigation is more on general aspects of schooling than on specific school activities.

2.2.1.2 Children's experience in sociocultural study of schooling and classroom activity

On the whole, schooling and classroom phenomena have not been adequately investigated in a sociocultural perspective, compared, say, to issues of teacher effectiveness. The lack of detailed studies of the teaching-learning process and classroom interactions is understood by Bruner (1996) among others as the result of more academic concern with outcomes than with the teaching-learning process in psychological investigation, and by Delamont (1983, p. 42) as the result of the historical classification and framing of educational knowledge in Bernstein's (1971) theoretical concepts. Alternatively, in the discipline of psychology, the socio-cultural perspective of pedagogy in various forms demonstrates a focus on the context and process of teaching and learning, while in the area of educational sociology the attention to the interface between the school regime and classroom interaction is often the centre of interest in sociocultural investigations.

Another point concerning this aspect of academic endeavour is that sociologists and social psychologists have already worked over a long period trying to understand the social world of classroom with teachers and children as the main actors. Thus in this category, the writings that concern the experience of children are mostly based on the natural contexts of schooling and classroom interactions and the focus is on actual individuals or groups. Both teachers and children are given substantial, authentic depiction in the sociological studies of schooling in general and of classroom research in particular (for example, Woods, 1979, 1990a, 1990b; Davies, 1982; Delamont, 1983; Pollard, 1985).

Based more on sociology, anthropology and social psychology, the study of schooling and classroom interactions has a longstanding concern with the social aspects reflected in schooling context and is carried out at various levels of interest such as classroom interaction, children's social world, staff relationships, school management and leadership, and social reflection and critique in the arena of

education. Because of the disciplinary nature of these sociological explorations, even though the research focus is on real-life phenomena, there is still a strong sense that the analysis is often associated with the theoretical approaches of the researchers in sociocultural studies (Hammersley, 1986b, xv). The context of school and classroom offers an arena of investigation with different potential disciplinary interests and research on the real life phenomena of schooling often reflects various theoretical, interpretive perspectives (Delamont, 1983). The first distinction in terms of underlying perspectives is between macro analysis and micro analysis.

Macro-micro analysis is a matter of the relative approaches the researchers take to the empirical findings at the level of analysis and interpretation (Hammersley, 1986b, xv). According to Delamont (1983, p.22), the macro/micro debate existed from the beginning of the development of educational sociology and is intrinsic to the social analysis of education. In the area of classroom research this was noticed and there was a considerable debate in the 1980s about the appropriateness of either explanation, as seen in Hammersley (1986a). There is no space here to extend a discussion of this matter but my review is very much concerned with the examination of the various approaches to analysis and interpretation that the researchers apply when dealing with their empirical findings.

More recently there has been an apparent shift of attention from the historical, social structure beyond the regime of school to contextual phenomenon-based investigations (Hammersley, 1986b). This has involved the down-playing the grand dimensions of schooling and an emphasis on ethnographic approaches to classroom issues (Hammersley, 1986b, xvii; Apple, 1988). My review attempts to penetrate the varying levels of analysis and interpretation presented in more recent empirical explorations into the phenomena of schooling and classroom interaction in the last few decades. The review focuses particularly on the more detailed investigations of schooling and classroom matters that have paid some attention to children in the real-life school context. While the 'evidence' of what has happened in the classroom as revealed in this research is notable, I am still aware of the theoretical influence exerted on them. Therefore my approach mainly reflects the process rather than the outcomes of re-discovering children's experience in research preoccupied with adult agendas. This results in a panorama of academic perspectives on real-life school phenomena and thus from the very beginning the current research benefits from this

awareness of multiple perspectives that goes beyond the restraints originating from the distinction between theoretical variations.

In the first place different emphases in American and British educational research that concentrates on the sociocultural aspect of classroom and school activity have been noticed. According to Walker (1972) it is 'authoritarianism' that plays the role of social conscience in American social psychology while in the UK it is that of 'social class' in sociology. More specifically the North American tradition of the classroom investigation has a strong sense of social critique, whereas in the UK classroom interaction itself has been put at the centre in the influential framework of symbolic interactionism. For example, in America empirical research informs critiques of tracking (cf. Page, 1991), school knowledge and schooling (cf. McNeil, 1988; Page, 1999). In all these studies and more specific explorations of students' resistance and classroom authority (for example, Metz, 1978; Alpert, 1991; Pace, 2003), institutional deficit resulting from bureaucracy and inequality is always the concern (Apple, 1988) The inescapable mark left by schooling as an institutional practice is reflected and interpreted in the context of curriculum, school management and administration and wider social problems. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; McNeil, 1988; McLaren, 1986, 2003) represents the convergence of this critical approach and also to a large extent demonstrates the highest achievement of North American sociocultural study of classroom and schooling.

In Britain, on the other hand, my review points out four features of sociocultural exploration in the context of comprehensive schooling. Firstly, classroom interaction is considered to have been widely neglected (Walker, 1972; Delamont, 1983) and the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism has formed a significant approach to classroom research in the UK since the later half of last century. Secondly, considerable emphasis has been put on the setting where the classroom interactions take place (for example, Delamont, 1983) and ethnographic investigations are much more influential than psychological ones, which results in a comprehensive understanding of classroom life in its naturally occurring context. The temporal, spatial, organizational and educational settings have thus entered the vision of researchers. However, both the initial concern and the final findings of these studies focus on interactions, and therefore organizational structures and procedures such as admissions, assessment, grouping and attendance appear to take a back seat. Thirdly, because of the inevitable stand of the sociologists, schooling and classroom

research conducted from this perspective has a strong sense of social critique involving political discourses such as ‘power’, ‘role’, ‘strategy’ and ‘battle’ (for example, Delamont, 1983; Woods, 1979; Pollard, 1985). Accordingly the educational significance of school or classroom practices is neglected in this type of discussion - and the children even more so. Therefore in general, the significance veers more to teaching than to understanding the world of children. Fourthly, as the sociological approach mainly deals with the existing, well-known features of human interaction in their social contexts (for example, Pollard, 1985), the participants’ immediate experience of more ongoing, cumulative interactions has been practically obscured. As a result, the link between the natural setting and specific educational practices is disconnected and to some extent the teacher and the pupil have been simplified to standard images in discourses of ‘role’, ‘status’ and power relations.

I have no intention in saying this to minimise the significance of the productive explorations of life in primary schools and classrooms in the last forty years. The rich empirical findings and reflective insights in these will be referred to fully in my interpretation chapter. My major concern in the literature review is with the general approaches to real-life phenomena and my attempt is to retrace the emergence of a radical shift of approach. In the following section I attempt to examine academic discourses in order to trace a connection between children’s experience and schooling.

2.2.2 Looking at the recent shift to the study of ‘experience’

So far my review has emphasised the significance of studying children’s ‘experience’ by examining relevant works on school and children’s life. This serves to clear the ground and indicates the relevance of the way the topic is approached. Although most studies of school and classroom life are explicitly written from an adult agenda, now and then some comments are raised on the issue of children’s perspective and the interest in collecting children’s own accounts concerning their experience at school. For example, Hargreaves (1975) points out the different meanings tasks can hold for children in classrooms and for adults. Epstein and McPartland (1976) note that at the time when Jackson’s (1968) significant study on life in classrooms emerged there was no empirical study looking at children’s own perspective of schooling independently from adults’ concern for academic achievement. Like me, they noted two major concerns relating to children’s experience in school (Epstein & McPartland, 1976, p.

15): an early interest in children's reaction to school that is mostly associated with academic success; and a tradition of studying schooling in relation to social equality. In their own exploration, the quality of school life is the concern that actually leads them to take children's experience in school seriously. They identify three dimensions as indicators of children's attitude to school: 1, satisfaction with school in general; 2, commitment to school work; 3, attitudes toward teachers. Davies (1982) discovers distinct features of peer culture among a small sample of primary school children in Australia and documents their accounts on topics of like friendship and attitudes to teacher organisation and discipline. This early work from an ethnogenic orientation has remarkable significance in terms of its exploration of 'the culture of childhood' (p. 2). It persuasively demonstrates children's abilities in articulating their life experience. Friendship is portrayed as central to their construction of their own particular world that is significantly different from the adult world. And in this distinguished work, children show their strategic approach to making sense of and coping with the adult world in the context of schooling. In a similar study on the social world of the primary school, Pollard (1985) notes the 'qualitative' nature of what is going on in the real life of classrooms and emphasizes the subjective meaning and concerns of teachers and children in this context. On the basis of his observation he believes that psychology is inadequate on its own for educational investigation into life in classrooms. However, as noted previously, his study of the primary school along with others' work in the framework of symbolic interactionism mainly includes children's views in terms of their responses and strategies to the 'pressure' that schooling exerts as a social constituent. Children are not fully studied as 'active, social, creative and adaptive beings', even though he uses this term (p. 4), because of his concentration on sociological meaning and concern in this context.

In conclusion, paying attention to children's own experience has a history and is a matter of decreasing the adult agenda, as seen in the previous sections. However, it is in recent years with the development of a qualitative interpretative approach to social phenomenon that 'experience' as a term, though retaining its slippery and problematic nature (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 2), gains considerable attention. The recent wave of advocating the 'voice of the child' further raises the issue of listening to children in regard to their experience and opinions concerning matters they are involved in. Moreover, if the previous emphasis on 'experience' in social research is mainly seen in the tradition of phenomenologists (Pollard, 1985) and thus justifiably

marginalized by most other researchers, the recent development in childhood study has presented a 'shift in emphasis and ideology' that gradually shapes an approach based on children's experience of their own worlds (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 1).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, children's experience of schooling has largely been presented from an adult perspective. Even though there are sporadic reflections and exceptional contributions as shown above, there seems to be little influential work with a focus on children's experience of everyday schooling in the conventional disciplines. The research is also often strong on rhetoric and weak on evidence. It is only in the most recent sociological shift concerning the status of childhood that children's experience has become a significant focus of investigation. Notably, the new developments in the sociology of childhood offer more than a new approach in terms of focusing on children's experience. There is also a new underlying mode of interpretation (cf. Greene & Hogan, 2005).

However, my search for children's experience of everyday schooling in recent childhood studies or 'child voice' advocacy seems to reveal that schooling is largely excluded from the study of childhood 'experience', particularly the normal practices of schooling, apart from a few exceptions that I will identify later. So far, studies of children's experience mainly focus on children's uncommon or even exceptional experience and particularly the experience of disadvantaged children. This may be because of an orientation towards social work in the studies.

The experience of children that has been studied often focuses on the exceptional rather than the ordinary. For example, children's experience is examined in relation to issues of community safety (Nayak, 2003) or the criminal justice system (Davidson et al, 2006). Children's experience of work (Penrose Brown & Blandford, 2002) and of living with a parent with an acquired brain injury (Butera-Prinzi & Perlesz, 2004) have also been investigated. And the children involved are particular groups such as bilingual children (Rich & Davis, 2007), working-class children (for example, Miller et al, 2005), traveller children (NISRA, 2005), child victims of domestic violence (Gorin, 2004) or sexual abuse (Davidson et al, 2006), or children under the influence of parental divorce (Butler et al, 2003). At a more ordinary level, the explorations of children's experience and perceptions focus on many other aspects of life: the out-of-school curriculum (Smith & Barker, 2000), public space (Elsley, 2004), and community-based curriculum development (Barratt et al, 2005). Children's everyday schooling is to a large extent out of the sight of childhood

researchers. Overall, studies of the unusual experiences of children reveal their coping strategies, resilience and even some unexpected positive outcomes from the obviously disadvantaged situation, though early intervention and adequate support are often suggested.

Recent investigations into specific aspects of schooling or children's lives offer more academic accounts of these areas. For example, there are studies of primary school children's social behaviour (CSB project), perceptions of human rights (Children 5-16: Growing into the 21st Century), sexual values (Halstead, 2003), and children's perceptions and experiences of teaching and learning (TLRP) and discipline (Goodman, 2006; Thornberg, 2006). A most recent report of a large-scale enquiry into English primary education (Primary Review) has included primary pupils' voices on general aspects of their life in schools and communities. However, in the last twenty years there have only been a limited number of studies that concentrate on children's daily experience and investigate it at a level of their holistic learning and development (for example, Jackson et al, 1993; Cullingford, 1991, 1997, 1999, 2007). There have also been a few attempts to involve children's narratives as a contribution to policy-making and teaching practice (for example, Allodi, 2002; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003). Although a few recent studies that either focuses on one specific activity (for example, Hallam et al, 2004) or a specific group of children (for example, Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006) have embraced a perspective that genuinely values and takes children's autonomous learning into account in their focus on their everyday activities, a genuine interest in children's ordinary experience is still new.

After an overview of the literature on children in everyday schooling in conventional disciplinary investigations and those in the recent trend of 'listening to' the voice of children, my next section attempts to highlight a subtle link between children's experience and everyday schooling and focus on the limited literature on this topic. The review points to the intention to rebuild the relation between children's experience and everyday schooling, which, as detailed in the previous sections, has long been neglected.

2.2.3 Re-building relations between children's experience and everyday schooling

My review of children in everyday schooling has looked at traditional approaches and more recent ideological shifts in terms of how children's experience is treated. As discussed in previous sections, children's experience of everyday schooling is either invisible or limited to incidental references in traditional disciplinary inquiries, and as a result children's experience and everyday schooling are only related indirectly in previous psychological and sociological studies of education. On the other hand, more recent research into children's experience has not yet focused on the aspect of everyday schooling. Although the most recent developments in teaching-and-learning research emphasise the need to consult students on their perceptions and opinions of the teaching and learning process, this research is initially restrained by its pragmatic intention, and the outcomes of such exploration are often regarded as superficial and trite (Frowe, 2006).

As previously mentioned, there have been some attempts from the perspectives of sociology of education to bridge the deep-seated disjunction between the camps of psychology and sociology in their focus on classroom interaction. For example, Delamont (1983, p. 16) notes that in the UK classroom interaction used to be an arena where different disciplines worked without any reference to each other. Among other symbolic interactionists her anthropological approach contributes to our understanding of the sociological meaning of the behaviour of teachers and children in the particular setting of classroom education. On the other hand, in North America critical pedagogy argues that the content and process of instruction in schools has very real connections to the class, gender and race dynamics that create social inequalities. There has also been considerable attention paid to the relationship between curriculum and teaching, and the bureaucratic and organizational structure of the school (for example, Fullan, 1982). McNeil (1988) bases his sociological examinations of schooling and school knowledge on detailed observations and in-depth interviews with participants in the classroom. It is described by Apple (1988) as a pioneering study in integrating classroom processes and administrative policies. As a result, the sociological meaning of schooling has been explored in various ways with considerable coverage of the subjectivity of the participants in the schooling system, although Apple (1988) rightly points out the inadequacy and difficulties of a

synthetic analysis that is able to point to a convergence of practical dimensions and the social, cultural, historical and economic meaning of schooling.

In the study of educational practice, the significance of everyday schooling has been highlighted in the work of a few key writers who have given me much inspiration in terms of intending to re-build a relation between children's experience and everyday schooling. These works span over half a century and take various forms in relation to the main outcomes of each study. Significantly, these works are initially based on different concerns and interests, but all agree on a unified, multidisciplinary approach.

Firstly, Jackson's study (1968) of life in classrooms stands out as the most influential work on this topic over the last fifty years. I have already referred to him in my review of studies into ritual in the school context because he relates the normal life of school to ritualised actions. However, as I pointed out previously, Jackson's study has rich insights into all aspects of teaching-learning matters, and my review in this section of children in everyday schooling will focus on his attention to the educational meaning of participants' day-by-day experience in the classroom. 'Only as we remember that each classroom minute is one of millions of similar minutes experienced by millions of persons millions of times, are we led to look closely at the details of the events before us' (p. 177).

As mentioned in the review of studies on school ritual, to some extent Jackson challenges other approaches to educational issues (such as behaviour psychology or the 'engineering' viewpoint that focuses on applying educational theories in reality) by exploring a seemingly dull set of circumstances (the classroom) and an often-neglected area of educational psychology (the actual teaching context and classroom occurrences). And by treating the classroom occurrences as part of 'life' rather than as a teaching-and-learning activity, Jackson raises the matter of 'talking (education) in a subjective language' (p. 168) rather than in terms of human behaviour as one methodological point of educational research. By 'subjective language', Jackson means the subjective feelings of the participants' (i.e. the teacher and the students). 'Subjective discomfort' is one of the examples that on his view call for attention and further interpretation. 'Only then does its educational significance become clear' (p.168). By 'educational significance' Jackson emphasizes the actual influence on education, not the presumed effect derived from some theory. As discussed in the previous section, this 'educational significance' is the major concern of Jackson's

work. In later explanations, when he considers the educational factors likely to be responsible for the 'subjective experience', it becomes apparent that he rejects learning theories that ignore children, their autonomy, the value aspect of the teacher and the teacher's individualized action and behaviour.

To Jackson, what is significant is the classroom reality itself, that entails aspects of teaching such as 'situational demands', 'management', 'limited influence', and 'group concern'. There are many unexpected events and also complicated contingencies bearing upon teacher's decisions. 'The clarification and management of these demands make up a central part of the teacher's work' (p. 173). This insight into classroom life looks at educational settings as opportunistic situations which are under the influence of many present and previous experiences. According to him, it is clear from teachers' non-instrumental activities and concerns as well as from an acknowledgement of children's autonomy that the action of teaching is not just for learning. Keeping a tight grip on the reality of teaching rather than 'creating' or 'making' a teaching mode out of psychological insight or learning theories, Jackson offers a new point of view relating to educational investigation: the separation teaching and learning (p. 161). This insight into the study of schooling activities has methodological significance as well as theoretical value. The point of the separation of teaching and learning in his investigations shows the indirectness and complexity of their relationship rather than the taken-for-granted, over-simplified commonly held view.

On this basis, by criticizing the limited value of clinically-oriented psychology to education, Jackson touches on an essential issue: that the basis of teaching theory should be normality instead of pathology, and a style of living rather than one based on cure (p. 170). Furthermore, by relating classroom practices to the cumulative effect of schooling, he makes a significant shift from the trivial, transitory occurrences in the classroom to the long-term impact on the participants. A sense of the 'meaning of school' is revealed in the following reflections:

Considered singly many aspects of classroom life look trivial. And in a sense, they are. It is only when the cumulative occurrence is considered that the realization of their full importance begins to emerge. Thus, in addition to looking at the dominant features of instructional interchanges and the overall design of the curriculum we must not fail to ponder, as we watch,

the significance of things that come and go in a twinkling – things like a student’s yawn or a teacher’s frown. Such transitory events may contain more information about classroom life than might appear at first glance. (Jackson, 1968, p. 177).

Although this need to pay attention to the minute, expressive aspect of classroom interaction was noted nearly half a century ago, it was not until his later study (see Jackson et al, 1993) that the immediate circumstances and experiences were fully explored as a major issue in moral education. Jackson et al’s book is based on their research project on moral education in American elementary and secondary schools. They focus on the specific context of the classroom and differentiate moral practice that happens in the classroom and reveals the personal qualities of teachers from the ‘avowed visible’ moral instruction seen in the formal curriculum in rituals and ceremonies, in visual displays, and in teachers’ spontaneous interjections of moral commentary into ongoing activity. Through the researchers’ cumulative observations and reflections (and especially in their awareness that students are witnesses all the time of teachers’ words and movements), they identify those initially less apparent, more trifling exchanges of words and bodily gestures that gradually turn into more expressive and significant aspects of moral influence on children.

The book gives a tour guide of the actions of students and teacher in a shared space, and explores the invisible and probably shared understanding of the observers (classroom witnesses) under the cloak of ‘teaching style’ or ‘stylistic quality’. The hidden, ambiguous meanings of the seemingly taken-for-granted classroom interactions are deciphered through an analysis of the moral meaning of the trifling moments. Although the instantaneousness of the classroom actions is emphasised in phrases like ‘come and go in twinkling’ and ‘fleeting and mundane events’, the significance of those interactions is notably highlighted in terms of their cumulative effect: ‘...formatively, they have the potential of adding up, over time, to a coercive force whose power far exceeds what any one of them might effect on its own’ (p. 184).

The authors devote the main part of the book to their observations and related commentaries to illustrate the complexity, ambiguity and tension of the moral life of school by cautiously reflecting eight sets of observational records about eight teachers and their classrooms. The observational material is presented like drama scripts of the

scenarios of classroom life while the authors pause at different points to comment in a way that raises questions, inspires reflections and explores the complicated and ambiguous meanings contained in the observation of teacher-child interactions. The significance of the symbolic, expressive moral practice that is either intended, or taken-for-granted or implicit is explored in a way similar to ‘artistic’ approach (p. 269) in a ‘process of discovering meaning’ (p. 270). As a result, *The Moral Life of Schools* tackles the most complex but essential matter in education - children’s day-to-day lived experience of school. It is similar to Jackson (1968) in terms of the insightfulness and the approach, though its central focus is the moral significance of teaching.

The authors aim to describe authentic classroom scenes as they occur in real life, and the children’s actions in particular are closely observed and recorded as part of the observed flow of classroom interactions. Sometimes children’s actions are given further reflection in terms of their intent, ‘feel’ and experience in the particular circumstances. Suggestive questions are posed in order to raise awareness of children’s intentions. Even when the authors devote time to scrutinising the teachers’ actions and moral intent, there is a strong sense of the existence of the children in their study for the following reasons.

First, while the moral significance of the teacher’s actions is reflected on, children naturally emerge both as the witnesses of the teachers’ personal style and as those who engage further with the teacher in the classroom context. The authors acknowledge the students’ perceptions by trying as observers to be ‘on a par with what the students in those same classrooms could see and hear’ (p. 57). Sometimes when the authors ponder the real classroom events and indicate that the students involved ‘probably sense that ...’ (p. 50), children’s experience is actually the focus of attention.

Secondly, the cumulative effect is further reflected in the suggestion that children’s life involves living and acting under such conditions for an extended period of time in the sense of being immersed in the circumstance of the particular teacher-child relationships that are repeated ubiquitously in the classroom. In pondering the moral significance of the teachers’ language (including body language), practice and the classroom atmosphere, the authors try to explore how the students perceive the events in the classroom and the teachers’ characteristics against the more immediately noticeable background of their classroom performance. For example, the book

focuses on a small incident involving the teacher's response when a boy hopped backward to reach the front of the room. From what appear ordinary and trivial classroom happenings the authors point out that there is a sequence of teacher-child interactions such as 'improper behaviour → teacher comment → compliance → approval' that occurs dozens of times every day in most primary classrooms. Such repeated sequence 'not only occurs but is witnessed by everyone present, students and observers alike' (p. 53). Teachers' language and action thus 'expresses a stylistic quality' (p. 53, original emphasis) that greatly influences the teacher-child relation. Since wondering 'what kind of person he or she (the teacher) is' is 'the uppermost question in the minds of students of all ages on the first day of class (and often beyond that as well) (p. 87), the witnessing effect presented in the book is put as self-evident.

Thirdly, in pointing out that 'a teacher's actions can have moral consequences *regardless* of his or her own intentions' (p. 89, original emphasis) the book puts children's experience and perceptions into the centre of concern. For example, by pondering a trivial classroom event such as the teacher's routine-like praise to children after a recitation, the authors suggest a double opinion in relation to the moral judgement of the teacher: one is that he is helpful and supportive as a teacher who gives a lot of encouragement, the other is that his automatic and uniform praise loses its worth and may suggest the insincerity of the teacher (pp. 88-9). Another case concerns a series of events that include the teacher's immediate rebuke in response to the students' laughter at a girl's mistake, the concentration on correcting her misunderstanding in front of others, and then mistaking the girl's report card for a better student's. The subjective feeling of the children during these small events is acknowledged when the authors reflect that they are 'far more important than they look, even more important in many instances than they are perceived to be by those who undergo them' (p. 184). The relationships between the students and the individual teachers are also revealed through the reflections.

Furthermore, these consequences are seen within the context of the classroom, which is recognized as the decisive factor in explaining the moral significance of classroom phenomena. 'Classrooms are obviously workplaces for both teachers and students. If they were not, a large part of the moral authority of the teacher would disappear'. (pp. 51-2) The classroom is described as linked to the role of teachers in 'the maintenance of a working environment and the transmission of a work ethic' (p.

52) and we are told that ‘a relationship of domination and subordination... characterizes this and most other classrooms’ (p. 50). The strategic maintenance, surveillance and organisation and enforcement of the moral intentions of the teachers or the moral significance upon the students is ‘the daily morality tale’ that ‘becomes the stories of school life’ (comment at the end cover of the book). As the book claims that the aim of the researchers’ careful observation and reflection is an instrumental one - ‘learning how to think about the moral environment of classrooms’ (p. 162) - they appear to suggest that the life lived in the particularity of the classroom has greater moral significance than any incidental happening.

On the whole, the book emphasises the importance of ‘student witness’ (p. 57) and raises awareness of ‘moral matters’ rather than ‘instructional matters’ in classroom interaction. By acknowledging of the power of the teacher’s influence on children, the importance of the relationship between them, their inevitable intimate relations and the nature of the semi-public enactment of teachers’ practice, the book justifies the authors’ cautiously reflective approach to this aspect of teaching. Further detailed interrogation of students’ experience beyond what has been noticed above is yet to be done. The cautious way the book weighs the teachers’ moral influence on the students reminds me of the importance of seeing school life from the children’s perspective if we want to reinforce or disprove what is suggested by the authors as the ‘moral’ significance of those momentary happenings. Moreover, *The Moral Life of Schools* deals with nuances of the teaching styles of individual teachers and the observation records done and cited by the authors are more concerned with the teachers’ personal treatment of children in the countless classroom interactions. Although the specific physical settings are taken into account in the observation and investigation of teacher-child interactions (and even the substructure of the curriculum and the classroom rules and regulations are categorized as moral practice with their possible different meanings revealed through actions rather than superficial descriptions), the procedures in the classroom are taken as familiar and routine. In my own research, I am looking for children’s perspectives on the contextual procedures and organisation of the classroom.

Cullingford (1991, 1997, 1999, 2002, 2007) has focused on interviewing children for the purpose of ‘hearing’, not just ‘listening to’ what they say about their own lives; children’s experience in schools is a major location for exploring their ‘inner world’. As he claims (2007, Bibliography), although the implications of what

children say have been noted before, it has only recently been taken seriously. Because of this emphasis in his approach, his investigation of schooling has unique significance that he has termed ‘another level of “truth”’ (2002, vii); based on his consistent endeavours in revealing the distinctness of children’s inner world, his distinguished contribution to the scholarly study of childhood emerges in his two books (1999, 2007) on the culture of childhood.

Cullingford starts with the clear intention of revealing the nature of learning from the learner’s side (1991, Foreword). He looks at children’s perceptions of the curriculum, teaching style, discipline, and other aspects of teaching organization and management in order to explore them from the point of view of children. However, what his study reveals on these aspects of schooling is neither sociological nor written from an obvious perspective of moral education like Jackson et al’s. His emphasis on children’s experience makes his educational study into classroom teaching distinct. As he ponders,

The desire to learn and to understand begins so early that it must be considered natural, but this desire does not last undiminished through the years of schooling. This, in itself, should give pause for thought. But discussions about the curriculum, and about management of schools, rarely take children into account. (Cullingford, 1991, p. 1)

Thus in Cullingford’s research children’s experience is studied and presented as unique in contrast to the taken-for-granted views of adults’; children’s perceptions of schooling, curriculum, family and community etc., and a strong conviction of children’s ability to express their life issues are the focuses that lead to an ‘inside story’ of childhood (cf. Cullingford, 2007). In this picture, both the schooling system itself and children’s perceptions and experience of it appear unchanging and inevitable. ‘For their pupils, schools are a formal social system. For most of them it is the first experience of social hierarchies and social control’ (1997, p. 52). Obviously what Cullingford presents as the inner world of school is centred on the interface between children as the ‘yet unheard group’ in society and in the hugely institutionalised system of schooling. The overall meaning of school in children’s perception is the overarching aim of Cullingford’s exploration into children’s schooling experience.

According to Cullingford, out of the interviews with extensive samples of children (110 children in the transition from primary to secondary schooling, 160 children aged from 6 to 9) come certain ‘consistently reinforced’ findings (1997, p. 67, note 12): ultimately children’s experience at school is very much ‘a social reality’. ‘When they describe their experience of school it is the social factors on which they concentrate; on the emotional effects of relationships made the more complex by the competitiveness of which they are all aware’ (1991, p. 54). Schooling is the reflection of a hierarchical society that is topped up with the subtlety of peer culture and the pressure of the relationships among children themselves. This consistency in terms of a shared experience for every individual child resonates with what the author observes as the two unchanging practices of schooling (1997, p. 51): emphasis on the core curriculum and the centrality of individual work. And the research is then further used to explore children’s basic perceptions of society, conduct and morality (2007, pp. 229-31).

Though it has a similar concern to explore the meaning of schooling, Cullingford’s research is different from Jackson’s (1968) and Jackson et al’s (1993). Firstly, Cullingford provides a critique of educational rhetoric (for example, 2002) while Jackson mainly aims at disclosing the ‘trivial’ aspects of schooling. Secondly, Cullingford focuses on children’s subjective perceptions, while Jackson makes efforts to investigate what actually happens in schools and to probe the possible moral influence on children. Thirdly, Cullingford’s findings concern children’s general experience across the years of schooling rather than the immediate circumstances. Fourthly, the institutional nature of education rather than some specific aspects of the individual teacher is the main concern. It is obvious that what Cullingford has revealed through the interviews with children relate to the general, shared experience of children.

On the one hand, Cullingford’s approach has its unique value in revealing and highlighting children’s life and perspectives in the schooling system. As the author states, ‘the difference between “official” descriptions of schooling and children’s own shared experience is partly a matter of tone, and partly a matter of interpretation’ (1991, p. 26). Cullingford’s interpretation of the reality of children’s schooling is both insightful and provoking, in that the children’s world has been deciphered and presented with a great amount of sensitivity, wit and insight by the author. The relatively heavy element of the author’s ‘reading’ through children’s articulations to

their shared experience instead of a meticulous analysis of the individually contextualised experience is necessary given the fact that children's own experience of the institution of education in its own right has been neglected for long.

On the other hand, the presentation and analysis of the children's interviews in Cullingford's work involve relatively substantial insights drawn from fairly minimal quotations from the children, which perhaps demonstrates more conviction than interpretation, and a representation of childhood rather than a presentation. With his serious intention of listening to and taking account of what children say about their experience at home and school, Cullingford successfully translates children's expressions into a coherent scholarly presentation of childhood, which otherwise is often too readily ignored or neglected because of the way children talk. With this necessity of 'translation', the culture of childhood is thus mainly revealed through the author's 'reading' rather than children's own words. And for some topics such as routine and waiting (1991, p. 33), there are no quotations from the children. For others the quotations are woven with the references to other research and the analysis is based on other more acknowledged findings. As well as being regarded as revealing 'consistency of experience not a generalization from the illuminating example' (1997, p. 52), Cullingford's findings in the study of children's schooling experience should be seen in light of the above general comments on the author's approach.

For example, as well as referring to other research, Cullingford quotes children's interviews to reveal the 'inevitable' aspects of the institutional nature of school, for example, routine and waiting (1991, p. 33), rules and discipline (pp. 68-81). According to his study, children have an apparently accepting attitude to rules and regulations, as if they are taken for granted by the children as part of the system (1991, p. 75). And as to routine, there is a similar acceptance and even a pleasure in children's articulation (1991, p. 55). From the strong convictive tone of Cullingford's interpretation it is difficult to know to what extent such a conclusion is valid in terms of children's unified view, given the inadequate exploration of the topic in the research. Nevertheless, Cullingford's interviews with children and his exploration of children's inner world has unique value in that they offer insights and inspiration on looking at children's life in the context of institutionalised education. For example, by revealing the inevitability of children's perception of schooling, the author points out the child-teacher relationship as a central issue of the children's experience of

schooling (1997, p. 52), which is penetrating and I am therefore inspired to carry out further research based on both observation and interview to study children's situation in the classroom and the institutionalised schooling system. The relevant points will be referred to and discussed in comparison with my own findings in the interpretation chapter.

Finally, because of the limited amount of empirical research I also include a few recent works that suggest without a basis of classroom research the importance of building a bridge over the gap between children's experience and everyday schooling. Pellegrini and Blatchford's (2000) study of school children has limited value in terms of original empirical evidence on the topic of classroom interaction, but it reviews the research of others and makes a contribution at a psychological level. By identifying the developmental aspects of children as 'qualitatively different' from adults (p. 11), the authors enter the children's time and space of break-time and playground for the investigation of friendship and bullying. However, regarding the more relevant teacher-pupil interactions in the classroom, they do no empirical investigation themselves, but simply review previous research and writings on topics concerning classroom interactions.

By referring to writings from the perspectives of developmental psychology, social psychology and ecological psychology (pp. 90-92), the authors believe that classroom contacts between pupils and teachers are qualitatively different from those in other school contexts and that primary school children are mostly concerned with the classroom context. Their interactions and behaviour are regarded as context-dependent, including the class level context (such as the physical layout, the number of pupils, the classroom task and reward structures etc), and the within-class contexts (such as behavioural segments, tasks, activities and groupings). They are concerned that there has been a tendency in educational psychology and educational research to consider the effects of teaching and teacher-pupil interactions independently of the environment in which these interactions occur (p. 92). The authors further point out that future research needs to seek a fuller conceptualisation of ways that experiences in classroom contexts connect with school effectiveness and to be clearer about implications for practice (p. 113). They pay close and systematic attention to segments and activities and the comparative study of different teachers' performance. They are aware that the experiences in activity segments influence the social context and the development of children and that these need to be considered in addition to

the academic lessons that school and classroom offer (p. 114). Their perspective of teacher-pupil interaction puts an emphasis on the practices of teaching and learning in the classroom and draws more on observational research in the attempt to seek psychological significance than does the more common sociological analysis. This point of view sheds light on classroom research and reinforces the careful study of children's experience in the contextual circumstance of the classroom.

In the introduction to a project that aims at collecting the views of children on space in school, Burke and Grosvenor (2003) raise the issue of 'neglected voices' in educational investigation and highlight the significance of children's voice in rethinking the institution of schooling (p. 151). They pay attention to this inadequacy and emphasise experience as the drive and content of children's articulation of schooling issues. Children's voices do not just supply their own perspective, but also offer an integrated (rather than compartmentalised) viewpoint on schooling because behind children's voices is their experience that is often based on a general feeling or attitude to schooling. As observed by Burke and Grosvenor, children's voices provide evidence of how all aspects of school and schooling interrelate. The voices of children 'reveal, in their passionate responses in words and images, a dynamic which is missing from much exploration into the nature of schooling' (ibid., pp. 151-2). And through their expression, 'how school feels, smells, tastes, its rhythms and rituals, its meaning and significance are revealed all at once in writing, drawing, modelling and planning, which attempt to capture whole school visions' (p. 152). On the direct connection between the experience of children and the classroom, Burke and Grosvenor give very powerful comments as follows:

The history of education tells a story of institutional change on the surface, but fundamentally the classroom, its routines, the regimentation of life, the lived experience of school does not change (ibid, p. 152)

According to them, schooling as a topic such as 'the fundamental and pervasive problem within the school system as a whole' has been neglected (p. 150). To support their point they track the thinking of scholars on the institution of schooling. By referring to a research review and the insights of some other scholars, they connect this neglect with an emphasis on short-term outcomes and effects in research and practice termed as 'short-sightedness' that focuses on raising standards

and promoting higher achievement in order to produce results in the short term. The obvious inadequacy in the examination of the overall performance, the rise of research focusing on assessment and levels of achievements, and a separation of classroom and school spheres in educational research are noted as the causes of the neglect of problems of schooling (p. 151). In their examination of a major research project engaging pupils' voice on the issues of teaching and learning, they find that 'school' and 'schooling' are not brought into question. 'The fundamental structures and characteristics of school are taken as given' (p. 151). Therefore a perspective on an overall level and on schooling as a whole is provided, without the separation of achievement from experience, school from class, or subject from subject.

As has been shown, the neglect of the schooling problem in educational research is not just a simple matter of 'focusing' or adjustment. Instead, it is rooted in the research perspective at a fundamental level (for example, what research is, how it raises questions). At a more obvious level this neglect is associated with the methods used in research practice (separation or connection). Though admittedly all research has its limitation in the question itself, this neglect as demonstrated by Burke and Grosvenor is still significant and it is a notable aspect of educational research. By referring to other scholars such as Pellegrini and Blatchford (2000, pp. 90-91) that 'school effectiveness researchers do not always study classrooms closely, and classroom research has not often studied school level effects', they point out that the separation of classroom environments from the school environment causes the neglect of an overall problem of schooling. According to them, school effectiveness research is limited by its school-level investigation which inevitably emphasises management and administration and thus accepts the given structure of schooling, whereas classroom-based research often has no intention to address higher-level issues. The perspective and the research approach are shown as interrelated in this case. However, at the fundamental level, it is the perspective of education that influences the approaches and scope of research. As the 'continuity in pedagogical practice' is located in the 'power relations in educational institutions and processes' (Gore, 2001, p. 167), it is suggested that the inevitable continuity of organisational structure is revealed in children's more realistic vision, although this remains untouched by the majority of curriculum and other reforms.

In conclusion, in my attempts to 'rediscover' and 'rebuild' an academic representation of children's experience of schooling, I have identified three research

orientations in my literature review. In terms of the adults' intentions in studying children's experience of everyday schooling, the three main concerns are teaching effectiveness, social interactions, and children's authentic growth and learning. The first two are mainly in line with psychological and social disciplines. The third indicates a need for greater attention to children's own perceptions and perspectives, and in its approach to real life phenomena it reflects the epistemological views of the researcher on education. The current inadequacy in this aspect of research presents a contrast between strong rhetoric and weak evidence, and between speculative advocacy and serious investigation.

My literature review as a whole provides an overview as well as a detailed critique of relevant studies on the two key issues in my research: ritual and children's experiences of schooling. Points have been made about the inadequate attention paid by researchers to children's own immediate experiences in school. My review of the literature points to a need for more in-depth investigations into children's experience of schooling and into ritual as part of the normal life of the school. The next chapter on methodology and methods will describe the principles underpinning my research and the approaches I have adopted to obtain a more detailed understanding of children's experience of the routines and rituals of everyday schooling.

3. Methodology and Methods

In this chapter I will present the actual methods I have adopted on the basis of the informed methodological decisions in my investigation. I start with an overview of normal methodological considerations in social science research and move on to specific methodological decisions such as my research approach, specific issues relating to research with children, and ethical considerations in my research. The second part of this chapter illustrates the actual research practices adopted in the year-long investigation.

3.1 Methodological aspects

3.1.1 Research focus as the major methodological aspect

Though the report of a research project normally starts straightforwardly from a research question, moves to the clarification of the research paradigm, and then discusses the specific research design within that approach, the actual process of enquiry is usually not as neat as it sounds (Seale et al., 2004). Research questions and research paradigms as methodological terms are also not as straightforward as is often assumed. My methodological discussion of the current research is based on my journey of enquiry into children's experience of the rituals of schooling, which according to Anderson's categorisation (1998, p. 37) fits into the category that is driven by personal interest rather than structured through a paradigmatic or theoretical system. But it also revolves around the complications of the terminology and controversies embraced in recent debates about qualitative research.

First of all, in methodological terms, my investigation of children's experience of the rituals of schooling falls into what we generally call 'qualitative research'. However, from a paradigmatic point of view, I refrain from further locating my research in a certain category given significant concerns with the artificial division or labelling of research paradigms. For example, recently in both educational and social science research, some experts have chosen not to use the term 'paradigm' in the discussion of the research process (cf. Anderson, 1998, p. 57; Punch, 2005, p. 27). Some believe that to select a single paradigm or to advocate paradigm-driven research

is not appropriate (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 135; Punch, 2005, p.3). As further stated explicitly by Swann and Pratt,

... research in practice does not fit into tightly defined categories. Techniques described by textbook authors as belonging to one paradigm are often used by researchers operating with other, allegedly conflicting paradigms. (2003, p. 4)

Recent stances regarding research paradigms or methodology actually advocate a pragmatic and eclectic approach to research design (for example, Hammersley, 1992b; Silverman, 2000; Seale et al., 2004). Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (2000) observe confluences emerging recently against a background of a more complicated picture of diversity:

Inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions. Methodology is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines and particular perspectives. (p. 164)

The paradigms are beginning to 'interbreed and cross-reference' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 6-7) from those previously thought to be irreconcilable. There are influences of one paradigm upon another. After taking account of the disciplinary, theoretical, personal and contextual issues of research, specific paradigms are believed to be not so distinct as once thought. Each approach is actually given multiple uses and meanings across disciplines over time.

Adding to this complexity of locating one's research within a particular paradigm is the issue of terminology; terms that are not well examined mislead research practice (Swann & Pratt, 2003, p. 4). General terms such as method, methodology, research paradigm, and specific terms such as qualitative, quantitative, interpretative, etc. are not used in social and educational research in a consistent and coherent way. It is apparent to me that to attempt to oppose interpretivism with positivism as an explanation of the research paradigm of qualitative research is to simplify and artificially polarise different research stances. The deficiencies

mentioned above caution me against the casual use of terms like ‘qualitative’ or ‘interpretivism’ to define my own research paradigm.

To avoid ambiguity and confusion in terms of paradigms, I choose to avoid giving fixed meanings to familiar terms like ‘qualitative’, ‘interpretivism’, ‘naturalism’ etc because they have been used in various ways that are difficult to clarify. Instead, I use ‘interpretive’ and ‘naturalist’ as descriptive words rather than as indications of specific approaches or paradigms. I also choose to avoid using the general term ‘methodology’ to express a set of methods. I have chosen instead to use words with a more specific indication such as ‘approach’, ‘framework’, ‘design’ or ‘strategy’. In the same spirit, I have taken the term ‘qualitative research’ to refer to various approaches that adopt qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis (Silverman, 2000). In this sense, ‘qualitative’ describes the dominant feature of data collection, and the qualitative and the quantitative are not regarded as associated with opposing assumptions or contrasting paradigms. Rather, ‘qualitative’ is used to indicate a wide range of approaches, and quantitative techniques are also not excluded in this sense because of the focus on distinctive approaches to research. This way of adopting the descriptive meaning of ‘interpretive’, ‘naturalist’, ‘critical’ is seen in some extended examinations of qualitative research (for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1-29; Cohen et al., 2000)

Taking all that has been discussed above into account, I position my research paradigm under the umbrella category of qualitative approaches, namely the naturalist, interpretative and constructive paradigm (see Cohen et al., 2000, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, Denscombe, 2002). The descriptive usage of the above terms indicates that their applications in my research are at the level of principle rather than within a specific theoretical system. On top of that, I gradually find myself in line with a particular perspective of social science investigation that might in some contexts be termed a research paradigm. I acknowledge the influence of scholars who adopt Popper’s epistemology, which stresses the dual nature of human beings’ scientific pursuit: aiming at a regulative ideal without assuming that certain or secure knowledge is attainable (Swann, 2003, p. 14). The clarity and insight embraced by this epistemology transcend either the objective or the interpretive stance (cf. Walliman’s (2001) three-fold categorisation of approaches of social science: objectivism, interpretivism and the reconciliatory).

Popper contributes a research epistemology by making distinctions between the three worlds in which we engage our scientific enquiries: physical objects and processes, subjective experience and objective knowledge. The world of objective knowledge (which is a human construct) is no less real than the other two worlds. Objective knowledge comprises formulated problems, descriptions, hypotheses, explanations and arguments. Many of the ideas of objective knowledge are embedded in human artefacts (books, musical scores, paintings, films, etc.), social practices and institutions. Ideas in the public domain can be criticized, modified and developed by anyone who has access to them (cf. Swann 2003). The insight incorporated in Popper's perspective of objective knowledge as a human construct sheds light on human scientific enquiry in general, but has a special value to the understanding of educational research and social science investigations. Because a stronger and more obvious level of subjectivity is embraced in social science, the issue of dealing with the contradictory expectations of objectivity and inevitable subjectivity has brought a great deal of controversy since the awakening of qualitative approaches. However, in the Popperian epistemological stance, scientific theories are provisional and the scientific approach to inquiry is to 'test hypotheses' in that 'the growth of knowledge proceeds from old problems to new problems through a process of trial-and-error elimination' (Swann, 2003, p. 15). It is necessary to note that the hypothesis-testing of Popperian epistemology is somehow opposite to more traditional approaches to hypothesis-testing because of the different underpinning viewpoints on the nature of knowledge. Traditional inquiry accepts the certainty of knowledge out there and often seeks to identify 'reality' through experiment or survey, and aims at measurement and generalisation; the Popperian approach takes a fallibilistic viewpoint of 'reality' and maintains its provisional nature. The 'hypothesis' is the focused aspects of the research problem.

This Popperian fallibilist realist point of view echoes various recent methodological insights with regard to qualitative research. Firstly, in the light of Popper's epistemological perspective on research, I see my research as a process of continuously checking my assumptions with 'reality'. Certainty and regularity are what researchers pursue but are by no means attainable. Secondly, the exploratory nature of the research determines that matters like raising research questions, identifying the research paradigm and other more specific decisions concerning data collection, analysis and interpretation are all progressively developed along a journey.

This agrees with the claims of Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 5) that ‘research is a combination of both experience and reasoning’. Thirdly, since as researchers we are supposed to confront the incessant questioning originating in the interface of the two sides: (the unknown to be researched and our subjectivity that initially assumes or hypothesises and also aims to reach an objective knowledge), a continuous inner dialogue over the researched outside and our subjective selves turns out to be inescapable. The dialectic relationship between the research practice and the conceptualisations of the researcher through continuous trials and reflections as the research proceeds is illustrated by other writers (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Seale, 2004; Nilsen, 2005).

In the light of the above perspective on research as a process of continuous checking with the real life situation and falsifying the research hypothesis, I have located my research methodology around a key aspect – what Hammersley (1998, p. 28) calls the ‘research focus’. Rather than aiming at answering a set of pre-determined research questions, my approach to the research is centred on a real-life situation – the repeated experiences of children’s life in school. According to Hammersley, the term ‘research focus’ refers to the most general set of phenomena about which a study makes claims while ‘research question’ refers to the specific case in question. Along with my epistemological perspective on research, my ‘research focus’ relates to a human social phenomenon and sets children’s subjective experience of the repeated aspects of school life at the centre of my inquiry. The ‘research focus’ turns out to be a major methodological feature of my research because it gives a direct link between the researcher and the researched and especially prioritises the researched real-life phenomena before the assumptions, hypothesis or conceptualisation of the researcher. Anchored to the research focus in real life, my interpretative inquiry into children’s experience of the rituals of schooling is not tied to any specific theoretical framework, methodological school or interpretative direction and has more potential in terms of an extended study of the complexity of the ‘reality’ of children’s lives.

More specifically, in my investigations I have experienced changing landscapes in terms of my research questions and the corresponding research design during the stage of the literature review and the early phases of data collection. For example, initially I had intended to focus my research on specific links between school rituals and children’s spiritual development, but as I conducted my literature

review into spirituality and spiritual education, it became apparent that these were adult concepts (and very nebulous ones as well) that did not sit well with my central focus on children's articulations of their own experience. However, the central focus of my investigation has never changed, nor has my persistence in exploring the complexity that gradually unfolded before me. Though I went through several versions of the research question at different stages of my research, the focus of my empirical research is always on children's repeated life experiences in school. Though the continuous conceptual work I did alongside the empirical research to some extent affected what I was looking for at different stages of data collection, my emphasis on children's own perceptions and perspectives has not changed.

In the process of investigating children's experience of the rituals of schooling, I continuously 'checked' what I obtained through my data collection as the 'objectified knowledge' of the researched phenomena with the major assumptions I had at the outset. My two initial assumptions about children's experiences of the rituals of schooling were:

1. that children have their own life apart from the officially acknowledged and valued so-called 'schooling system'.
2. that children's own experience and learning is significant in many ways (for example, it may influence their academic achievement, their personal development, and their conceptualisations of teaching and learning, school and society, and the teacher's role; for primary school children, there is also an impact on their life experience when they transfer to the secondary stage with its apparently different culture of schooling).

These assumptions have been continuously interrogated against real life through my research process of data collection, analysis and interpretation, the results of which will be presented in chapters 4 – 6.

3.1.2 Research approach

As an investigation initiated by personal interest, my research topic raises a more or less open question regarding the educative significance of school ritual. Since the multi-facets of school ritual have not been explored adequately so far by educational researchers, my sheer interest and determination to investigate its educational significance in children's experience have provided the starting point. The research

problem needs an appropriate research design to help to provide a systematic investigation.

3.1.2.1 Ethnography

As already explained, my research design is not a paradigm-driven one. In Anderson's (1998, p. 37) classification of the practical approaches to research, mine fits into that based on an individual interest. Thus it integrates 'various methods, fields of study and sources of data' (ibid). Though Anderson holds the view that this approach is less likely to be at the higher levels of research because it is less likely to follow a prescriptive approach, Hammersley throws light on it from an ethnographic point of view. According to Hammersley (1998, p. 8), the natural setting, the minimal influence from the researcher on the subject researched and the contextual, situated phenomenon under investigation are all related to ethnography. With its strong tendency towards naturalism, ethnography usually involves a 'research focus' (Hammersley, 1998, p. 28), which is related to a general phenomenon, rather than a set of research questions. In this respect, research like mine has the potential to be considered of ethnographic significance.

In his discussion of 'naturalism', Hammersley is talking about a research paradigm in opposition to 'positivism', but the term 'ethnography' is more frequently used nowadays to describe a research method that involves entering into a firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives. It has been useful in many disciplines such as cultural studies, folklore, women's studies, education, sociology, etc. (Tedlock, 2000). Though the theoretical orientation and the philosophical paradigm that originated within anthropology lose their significance in strategic 'ethnography', the focus and emphasis on comparatively long-term engagement within a natural setting is the essence of this approach. In other words, the 'research focus' points to the researched phenomenon, as mentioned in the previous section of this chapter.

Moreover, in the area of child research James and Prout (1997b) believe ethnography is the most important methodology for studying children because of its closeness to children's everyday lives. They argue passionately that it is the social construction of the present, ongoing social lives of children (rather than their past or future) that is important in the analysis of childhood (James & Prout, 1997c, p. 233). My own research is focused on children's experience of school life from the dimensions of procedure, form and structure, and this is seen most clearly in the

repeated activities they experience that have the characteristics of routine or rituals. I ask questions such as how the children feel, what their experience is like, and what they learn through the routines or ritual-like activities. My research design shares the characteristics of strategic ethnography with its emphasis on naturalism in relation to the researched phenomenon.

3.1.2.2 Case study

Another element in my research design is case study. Like many other terms in research methodology, 'case study' has various meanings. It is sometimes viewed as a choice of subject to be studied rather than a methodological choice (Silverman, 2000; Stake, 2000). It may denote the boundaries of a research project and specify the research 'sample', and in this sense has a methodological dimension. In my research, the selection of the case study involves purposive sampling, which is distinct from quantitative frequency sampling. In fact, some researchers claim that sampling in qualitative research is more a case of 'choosing' than 'sampling' (Chen, 2000, p. 113).

To choose case study as the approach to my research topic also has its practical considerations. The exploratory character of my research indicates its limited significance in terms of generalisation. Depth rather than breadth is the point in an enquiry into school ritual. Furthermore, the complexity in the phenomenon of ritual based on my initial observations and literature review requires a narrowing of the research scope so that the appropriate depth can be achieved. Moreover, considering my own cultural background, a relatively long period of immersion in the life of a classroom is a basic condition for me to build a relationship of mutual trust with both teachers and children, and this immediately points to case study as the preferred approach.

Case study has its advantages for me because of its focus on relatively integrated life issues, and it serves the purposes of empirical research very well. As noted by Golby, case study has its methodological benefits because of its inclusion of a vast array of activities: 'case study refers only to the determination to relate a single phenomenon to the collective understanding by means of systematic study' (1994, p. 15). In terms of combining and interconnecting different methods in a 'flow of work' in research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), case study also supplies the best approach. The

conflation and concentration effect of case study in my research design complements the ethnographical approach in my in-depth investigations.

However, some commentators note the interventional effect of case studies because of the boundaries and settings the case establishes. It is claimed that the case-focus mode leads the research to a sort of 'implementary task', which hints at the potential influence the researcher may exert. The opposite view is that a case study suggests that the research topic is a relatively independent issue itself (Walker, 1983). In my view, a specific case study can be a purposeful, real life, contextual engagement by the researcher. It is bounded in space and time, and sometime has a distinct sense of process.

It is obvious that in my research case study serves as a choice of sampling and boundary setting for the purpose of investigating an existing phenomenon; it does not involve a case defined by the researcher. The issues of intervention and bias are thus no more significant than in other research designs. Additionally, according to Golby (1994), case study is particularly valuable for research in an applied discipline like education. Since the 'particularity' in the investigation of a case study supplies one example of a general case, the real-life basis of the research adds significance to practitioners.

In my research I chose one Year Four class in a primary school in the South-West of England for my case study. Before I got formal access to the class for research purposes, I had already familiarised myself in detail with this chosen class and the school in general through one month's field attendance. It was because of this 'familiarity' that I decided to choose it as my case study since the children of the class and I already knew each other, which I believe is a better start than other circumstances. Especially from my side, this stage of 'familiarisation' was an essential preparation for me to carry out my in-depth investigation.

The chosen school HTPS is a voluntary controlled Church of England primary school with approximately 450 mixed-gender pupils on the roll. Situated in a mainly white rural town, it includes varied social backgrounds in its catchment area. With a well-established local reputation as a school of choice, HTPS is also distinctive for its unusually large number of male teachers (who outnumber the female teachers at Key Stage 2). In my contacts for this research, the teachers and head teacher are all male: Mr. McGee and Mr. Opie share the class teaching of Class 4OM, and the head teacher Mr. Evans has been in the same position for more than ten years. Some of the

children of Class 4OM had already experienced another male teacher in Year Three. There were 38-39 pupils in the class during the period of my research, probably the maximum size for this level of education in the UK. The class size is an indication of the popularity of the school, and does not have any significant effect on the case study since my focus is on the normal practices of schooling, including ordinary teacher-child interactions that are common to nearly every school and classroom. In a sense, this particular case may be considered typical of contemporary primary schooling, although the aim of my qualitative research is not to make claims of representativeness or generalisability.

From formal access to my last interview, my empirical research spanned a whole school year of three terms. Focusing on the chosen class in the school for my observation and interviews, I had 21 recorded visits altogether of approximately 60 hours of observation and about 13 hours total length, 19 formal group interviews of two rounds with 23 participant children (see Appendix 1) plus three hours of initial conversations and group activity with them. In addition to the children's interviews I also interviewed the three relevant teachers: Mr. McGee, Mr. Opie and the head teacher Mr. Evans for the purpose of accessing more contextual understanding of my observations and of what the children said to me.

Mr. McGee is the teacher I focused on in my observation. Mr. Opie shared Class 4OM with Mr. McGee for the whole year. Mr. McGee was a senior teacher of Key Stage 2. During my observation he had each Thursday and every other Friday with Class 4OM and other days floating teaching in other classes of Year Two, Three and Five plus some administrative duty. During the final term of the year he took only one day a week of the class and took on more administration. He also started to present school assembly regularly in turn with head teacher Mr. Evans and the associate head Mrs. Jeff. Whilst Mr. McGee and Mr. Opie both were new to the school in the year of my research, Mr. McGee is an experienced senior teacher and Mr. Opie had just started his first job.

My interviews with the teachers are concerned with their basic educational beliefs and intentions, attitudes to teacher-student relations, and understandings of current classroom issues, including their awareness of children's responses and experiences in classroom routines. These interviews are more formal and structured than those with the children. They have the potential to supply another angle on the picture of children's experiences of life at school, especially from the teacher I spent

a lot of time with during the observation stage. However, since I only conducted the teachers' interviews as complementary data to those collected from my detailed classroom observations and the extensive children's interviews, which have generated huge amounts of data, the teachers' interviews do not appear in my findings and interpretation chapters.

3.1.3 Research with children

Another basic feature of my research concerns the nature of research with children. Recently academic discussion about child research has seen a radical shift under the influence of the emerging 'new sociology of childhood' (cf. Qvortrup et al., 1994; James & Prout, 1997a; Christensen & James, 2000; Mayall, 2002). Research with children has been a topic of discussion in three different contexts. First, it is a topic of research methodology, which is covered in methodological books and implicitly in all research projects with children as participants. Then, it is treated as an important part of the new sociology of childhood. Thirdly, it is part of the discussion in the emergence of 'child voice' advocacy. The first line of coverage is more at the level of practical considerations about how to approach children. The last two contexts are associated but differentiated; the second sometimes acts as the theoretical source of the third and the third is often focused at a more practical level. In these varied contexts, the issue of 'research with children' is given more meaning than the mere research technique itself. And the emerging new concerns require a rethinking the stance of researcher involved in child research and children's issues, which in my view contributes to a distinct methodological perspective.

For example, the researchers involved in the Child Matters project (Qvortrup et al., 1994) have rethought concepts such as 'growing up in the modern world', or 'becoming integrated into society'. They point out that these concepts potentially reinforce the relatively lowly status of children and the image of children as incompetent and incapable. They critique the assumption that children's lives, behaviour and activities should be treated differently from those of adults. They see this issue as related to adults' definition of 'the rules of the game' and thus as a form of 'structural inequality'. In their analysis, this further contributes to sociological constructions of childhood and to a structural 'inconsiderateness' or 'indifference' to children's own perspectives (Qvortrup et al., 1994). At a practical level, the scholars of this project started to view childhood as a social phenomenon with different

approaches to issues including child rights or child welfare. Their research aimed at a ‘sociological visibility’, or ‘conceptual autonomy’ of children (Qvortrup et al., 1994) – in other words, children as ‘the targeted group [are] directly focused upon, not anyone else related to them or upon whom they are alleged dependent’.

Under the influence of this ‘new childhood sociology’, researchers nowadays often take this approach and achieve an understanding of many aspects of children’s lives. There are also some research projects that raise the issue of children’s status from the perspective of research practice or real-life considerations. For example, through the re-examination of the process of gaining access to children for a research project on risk perception, Hood et al. (1996) offer us a chance to reflect on the existing status of children in society. At the stage of gaining access, the response from those institutions excluded children as participants even though the investigation was about gaining access to children’s perceptions. This suggests that children have low status as active acquirers of knowledge within the school setting. The researchers reflect on the deep-seated but also common-sense social relationships, in which children have no independent position.

Ethnographical investigations of the world of children typically present their findings from an adult perspective. For example, Nilsen (2005, p. 120) explores child-child interactions within an adult-supervised world. Illustrating the use of concepts that are not originally produced with children in mind, Nilsen cautions against the forging of ‘adult-centric representation’ (p. 121). Nevertheless, children’s activity and adults’ expectations are counted equally in the investigation with a consideration of the ‘structural features’ of institutionalised education. In this kind of research, child-child interaction and the everyday adult-organized life are included in a single picture and reveal the highly adult-controlled situation of early childhood education. Other contributions that raise the importance of ‘listening to children’ include empirical studies that reveal the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality and the division of perspectives between teacher and pupil (for example, Bullock & Wikeley, 2001; Cullingford, 2002), and educational insights into the ability of students to exercise freedom of speech and criticism (Minow, 2006). Additionally, the emergence of principles like ‘child advocacy’ and ‘child voice’ in the area of childcare work takes ‘listening to children’ as part of the decision-making process, which also supplies an angle for research on children. It is associated with another wave of ‘pupil research’

since sometimes pupils are organized to take on the role of researcher or to assist in research projects involving ‘listening to children’ (Alderson, 2001; Harding, 2001).

Having highlighted the point of ‘listening to children’, I also recognize that there are still methodological dilemmas for this kind of ‘child voice’ research. For example, is it possible for the adult researcher to get inside the world of the child? What is the credibility of the data obtained through research with children? How will we legitimate the status and accounts of children as research participants? What is the significance of observation in ‘listening to children’ research?

Whilst these issues are subject to continuous exploration through both theoretical and practical approaches, it is clear that the above methodological concerns are general ones for qualitative research except for the issues of status. Instead of regarding the barriers to getting inside the children’s world as uniquely daunting, maybe we do not need to see it as more daunting than the world of adults. Like other research, child-focused research is mainly an issue of practice. The only real barrier to this kind of research is that the practical difficulties are often intertwined with presumptions about the status of children. As illustrated in the following section on my actual methods of data-collection, positioning myself as a researcher in this investigation is as much concerned with the practical process of the research as with awareness of the children’s status. Therefore in research with children it is the actual practice that determines the direction of the investigation.

My attitude to working with children is essential to the process and outcome of my interview practice. It is also valuable to the evaluation of the quality of my interview data since it largely determines the contextual and process aspects of the interviews. The basic principle of my work with children is that I genuinely respect them, their rights, their abilities and their potential. Respect does not just mean tolerate, but also means being open, being appreciative and being supportive.

3.1.4. Ethical Issues

Research of the kind carried out here raises a number of ethical issues. The involvement of data collection from teachers and children through observation and interview entails ethical concerns of all kinds, though the probability and magnitude of harm arising from participation in the research is no greater than those encountered in going about those aspects of everyday life at school.

In my research, ethical issues have been taken into account at different stages of the process to ensure that ‘the interest and concerns of those taking part in, or possibly affected by, the research are safeguarded’ (Robson, 2002, p. 18). Before proceeding to the fieldwork, I went through the university’s research ethics procedures, and ethical protocols were completed and reviewed (see Appendix 2). Informed consent letters are administered for access to both teachers and children. During the period of observations and interviews, I was very sensitive to the possible influences the research conduct might have and tried to be proactive. Some concerns are recorded and discussed below. After the stage of data collection, the research data has been kept confidential. What follows is a more detailed report of the ethical issues of my research.

3.1.4.1 Benefit and risk

According to Silverman (2000), ethical thinking starts as early as the research proposal and research design. He suggests self or peer assessment of the benefits and risks of carrying out a particular social science research project in relation to the participants. My research will be beneficial to school education with its contribution to knowledge. At the stage of data collection, my research has benefits of offering opportunities for participants to share and reflect on some aspects of life experience with me. For example, Mr. McGee referred to the informal talks with me as ‘a mirror’ reflecting his work in a unthreatening way. He seems to have appreciated this kind of communication very much. Children also liked their time with me, probably for many different reasons. I was always surprised at how much they wanted to be taken to the school library to ‘have a talk’ with me.

As for the risks, clearly there would be no health or safety risks. But I was sensitive at all times to the participants’ interest, concerns and other potential ethical issues. To the teacher, there is the concern for their time and state of mind in the case of the interviews. I needed to make arrangements to ensure a relatively comfortable and enjoyable experience for the individual child. Many other ethical aspects such as privacy and confidentiality affected the state of the children in the interviews. But care and appreciation from the adult researcher originating from an open, friendly and respectful relationship with the children is essential for a worthwhile communication experience for 8-9 year-olds.

I had three to four interactions with every child taking part in the interview stage. Apart from my style of interview which is explained in the section on 'Methods', I took some specially 'designed' approaches to the children. For the initial conversations, I had a special arrangement of letting each child choose one plastic folder for him/herself. For the first round of formal interviews, I encouraged them to 'feel free to draw and write' when they were talking. But for the second round of interviews I seriously reminded them before the interview actually started that the 'talk' might be boring and it would be hard work for them since there would only be talking. Though these particular approaches involve multiple significance, at their core is the principle of care and respect to children as equally valued individuals. Other risks such as being found patronizing, embarrassing, or alarming by the participants were safeguarded in the same spirit by the researcher.

However, there remains one subtle aspect similar to that referred to by Woods (1979, p. 266) as 'legitimation'. When children were expressing negative comments on school life in general, on teachers' work or on a particular child, I felt a bit uneasy because of my concern about the probability of 'legitimising' or reinforcing these seemingly 'unwarranted' critiques. In Woods' case, it was topics such as smoking, fornication and teacher-victimization in secondary school pupils' lives, which are more problematic than a sense of 'being negative' in my case. He expressed his inability to resolve this and responded by 'taking sides' as a pragmatic way out. I found this is a more subtle issue in my case. On the one hand, I acknowledged and even encouraged them to comment freely on the things in their lives from a child-centred point of view. On the other hand, I felt uncomfortable within a framework of understanding such potential moral or educational concerns in working with children. The inescapable dilemma and possible solutions pertain to the complexity of my research topic, which is yet to be clarified.

3.1.4.2 Informed consent and the right to withdraw

Informed consent was considered necessary before the start of the empirical research. Before I recruited one teacher participant, I got the support of the head teacher and handed out the letters to teachers about my research and recruitment intention. One teacher volunteered after reading the letter. The children taking part in the interviews signed their consent letters after the parents' agreements were obtained. The letter to children was composed with a view to communicating effectively to their age group.

The information was given in a meeting with the class and in a written letter. The teacher on duty volunteered to help to make sure the letter was understood. All the children whose parents agreed for them to be involved in the interviews signed their consent letters without exception.

I am aware that the children's right to withdrawal is harder to establish in that the adult-child relationship in the school carries with it an authority imbalance. What I did was to take all possible approaches to encourage and show respect to children's own decisions and judgements. For example, I followed a procedure of checking before each interview. For initial conversations I asked the children enlisted to indicate their willingness and chose those who put their hands up. For the later formal interviews I approached one targeted child to ask if he or she would be happy to be with me for the conversation in the coming hour and asked him or her to invite one or two friends to join the interview. Then before each interview, I stated their right to withdrawal, to refuse to answer if they wished and their right to stop the tape-recorder. There was no case of withdrawal or request to stop the recording. But there was one boy refused to give further explanations for a few questions.

During the course of the interviews, I usually shared with the children my sympathy in terms of the hardness of the questions or the difficulties of articulating ideas. And I took proactive steps to respond to children's concerns. For example, just before the planned interview I got to know that there would be a school football championship match taking place in the school field and children were given the chance to watch after the early school dismissal. I thus made the decision to have a shorter interview to ensure that the three boys need not lose their chance because of the interview. Surprisingly, none of the three interviewees felt eager to go to the field. They claimed that they would prefer to talk to me. Finally, I often asked about their feelings about the experience after the interviews. All group interview participants gave very positive feedback except that one girl commented to me after a few days that 'the questions are really hard on that day'.

3.1.4.3 Privacy and confidentiality

All measures were taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Clearly, anonymisation is applied to individual names of children, the name of the school and classes, and this will ensure confidentiality in any publications. But during the course of the group interviews, the children's opinions were open to all the group

participants. And due to the focus on one class in one school, it is possible that individuals may be identifiable. However, the structure of friendship grouping for the group interviews to a large extent offsets the possible problem of confidentiality in that the participants already shared mutual trust and confidence themselves. The other aspects of practice concerning privacy and confidentiality include issues of access to the data and the retention and final treatment of the data, which have been specified in my Ethics Protocols (see Appendix 2)

3.2 Methods

Generally, observation is important to get access to the active processes of schooling, to see the situation at first hand, and to understand how the action reflects different interests and perspectives and brings about further interactions (Woods, 1986). In combination with interviews, observation of the context provides a means of seeing the procedures and routines of schooling dynamically and finding out about people's views as expressed actively in real-life situations, rather than passively in response to an interview question. It gives greater access to much more of the reality I was attempting to research.

Interview as a research method is usually used for in-depth inquiry to explore reasons and interpretations. The interaction and the possibility of two-way communication offer room for the interviewee to develop, clarify and challenge ideas. The interview method also allows flexibility in its actual conduct. The situational interactions involved in interview are the essence and the basis of this means of data-collection. However these advantages are counterbalanced by potential problems relating to the possibility of objectivity and comparability, which affect issues of data analysis and generalisability. Also acknowledging the significance of the social dimension of the interactions draws attention to the complexities in the way the interviews are constructed and the way reality itself is presented. In taking the interview as the central method for my research, I am aware of all above issues in the actual planning and conducting of the interviews with the children and the teachers. Below is a more detailed report of my research process and methods.

3.2.1 The research process: interplay of progression and reflection

The meaning of the process of a research project is presented in various practices. Kirk & Miller (1986, p. 72) emphasise the documenting of procedures, as 'for

reliability to be calculated, it is incumbent on the scientific investigator to document his or her procedure'. Woods' (1986, p. 24) description of the issue of access in ethnographic research supplies a valuable insight: 'negotiating access...is not just about getting into an institution or 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.' Strauss and Corbin (1998) acknowledge that the practice of qualitative research is a 'messy affair' (p. 32). According to Chen (2000, p. 67-161), the process of qualitative research does not consist of linear, clear-cut steps that move forward but is reiterative and interactive.

Due to the exploratory nature of my research, the practice and process of data collection has also not been straightforwardly and neatly carried out; it presents a spiral process of 'planning → practice → reflection → planning'. For example, the whole design of doing observation first and then interviews shows a sequence of progressive investigation. In practice, the observation stage offered a situational context for the interview themes. The interviews were the further exploration in terms of children's perceptions which is a more subjective, individual-level experience.

The observation witnessed a focus shift from teacher to student, from the general to specific parts and to individuals, and from the superficial to deeper and more subtly expressed aspects. Observation itself involves a circular approach: getting access → carrying out the observation → reflection and analysis → further plan and then a new round of observation practice.

My work with the children in order to elicit their perceptions and perspectives of school life experience was a particularly slow, cautious process, and thus to a large extent experimental. I experienced different stages along the way:

- Getting access and having a taste of interviewing children with the first batch of initial conversations
- Having more initial conversations while continuing planning and experimenting with ways of working with children
- A period of reflection on the approach to children's perceptions and experiences
 - Formal interviews (first round)
 - Further reflection and the second round of interviews

The experimental nature of my research with children involves a constant process of 'planning → implementation → reflection'. Just for the initial planning, I

compared two strategies of getting access and working with children: group work and setting up an extra-curricular club. From these two I decided to take the group work option because of the complicating nature of extra-curricular work for children. Later I experimented with several designs of group work with children during the period of the initial conversations. But I finally decided to adopt semi-structured and unstructured interview to get access to children's perceptions and experiences in the light of all the methodological and practical considerations derived from the practices at this experimental stage. And a structure of two rounds of involvement of each participant in the group interviews was decided on as the interviews were proceeding.

3.2.2 Observing the children

Below I will present my approaches to the observation and my efforts to go beyond the subjective and impressionistic level by being aware of, and if possible by eliminating, bias through systematic work and being open about the procedure.

3.2.2.1 Researcher as the instrument of research in classroom observation

In terms of the interaction between researched and researcher, from the very start of the data-collection I adopted the neutral researcher position of a reflective outsider. It was a conscious decision and entailed a continuous effort to stand apart from both teacher and children, even though my research focus apparently took a side. In the observation I stayed at the corner of the classroom and didn't involve myself in any teaching or assistant teaching. I just stayed there as a researcher and an adult and presented myself as an outsider. I refrained from any involvement or intervention in the activities of teacher or children and deliberately kept myself at a distance from the classroom interactions.

This non-participant role as an observer in the classroom is admittedly different from the more common participant observation (Woods, 1986, p. 36; Wragg, 1999, p. 15), although some writers suggest that any observation in social science research involves being a participant (cf. Delamont, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 107-8). According to Woods (1979, p. 260), the involvement offers the researcher the perception of his or her own reactions and motives during the process of which he is a part and contributes to gaining understanding of the real life situation. Other advantages of participant observation include reducing resistance and

decreasing disturbances. However the risk of ‘going native’ and therefore the need to manage and balance the two roles of the participant researcher is demanding.

My non-participant approach has its practical reasons and takes advantage of my natural status as a ‘foreigner’. I feel more comfortable to keep myself as a ‘non-participant’ in the English primary school classroom, which allows me time for detailed observation and note making. Also taking the subtle perceptions of the children into consideration, I believe it is better for me to put myself in a neutral position in the classroom and to avoid them readily identifying me as in line with teachers, which could influence their openness to me at the later stage of the interviews.

Admittedly the neutral position doesn’t necessarily mean being unfriendly or indifferent; the children’s impression of me as a friendly adult was actually reinforced by my constant attention focused on them, either in the classroom or occasionally in the playground for break time. My status of well-accepted acquaintance was not affected by my relatively detached position during the stage of observation since the children showed no different responses to me after I got access to them as a researcher. Nevertheless my non-participant observation, which reinforced my status as ‘outsider’, actually helped with the next stage of the research as seen in the later report of my interviews with children, as I deliberately used this to elicit participants’ descriptions and explanations of classroom phenomenon in the interviews with the children and the teacher.

As well as keeping an ‘outsider’ status in line with Jackson’s (1990) suggestion for classroom observation, I made an effort to not to be too distant from the children as an adult. I engaged in ‘close-up’ observation in the form of a ‘detailed’ and ‘enlarged’ look at the real life of the children. Firstly, my research topic in terms of its specific focus on the repeated procedures and activities in schooling practice shows this feature and in the first place gives my observation a particular perspective to look at classroom life. During the actual observation stage, I gradually focused my perspective to a close-up level as I became better acquainted with the context and repeated phenomenon. Furthermore the terms ‘close-up’ or ‘distance’ here have both psychological and physical meanings in my deliberation and practice (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 83-92). Psychologically my perspective of child advocacy gives me an alternative vision and thus the potential to get closer to the children’s world. From the children’s part it is easier for them to be open to an

‘outsider’ than to someone who has any relation to the schooling system. Physically, the distance between the observed real-life phenomena and myself as researcher is to a large extent determined by the location of my observation in the classroom and the effort I put into the observation and recording.

From an autobiographical point of view I have the skills of a journalist from my previous work. I am always interested in small signs and want to reveal something behind what is usually taken-for-granted. To me, actually observing the human world is naturally fascinating, and the observation of the classroom and children is rewarding in its own right. Therefore rather than aiming at merely ‘collecting’ data for the purpose of research, I actually immersed myself in the real-life situation and the phenomena of classroom life.

My presence in the classroom might raise some concerns about presentation (Gill, 2000a), which is often inevitable and difficult to assess. However, in one interview the teacher (Mr. McGee) commented on my presence in his class as ‘part of the furniture’. The evidence from both the teacher and children showed that my status of lacking authority exerted a minimal influence on classroom interactions and practices. My relatively extended presence (over twenty observation visits dispersed across nearly four months) also potentially offset the possibility of the ‘presence effect’.

Reflecting upon my own perceptions and assumptions is another way to self-examine myself as the instrument of research. The moment I began the research, I inevitably brought my own beliefs and values which would influence my perceptions of the phenomena, understandings of the participants, and the scope of my sight and attention. With such consciousness, I have always been aware of and weighed the influence of personal factors such as my Chinese cultural background, my status as an adult researcher aiming at understanding the world of child, and my preconceptions of the school phenomena, before during and after the period of observation.

According to Chen (2000) and Greig and Taylor (1999, p. 107), the quality of the researcher can be assessed in terms of three aspects: the capability of self-awareness; the capacity to see the world from another’s point of view; and the awareness of being perceived by others. Regarding these aspects, my continuous reflection before and during the empirical research on my own personality and my specific role in the research has helped me to make use of them for the practice of the research. I believe it is the different levels of such consciousnesses that actually

delineate the quality of the researcher as an instrument. In my case, my general experience as a foreigner to the local culture around me helped me to be more sensitive to my own position in relation to others. From the beginning it was natural for me to be conscious of my own changing position due to the many influences around me. I have been always aware of this ‘dual consciousness’, which gives me the potential flexibility to move between being a participant of local culture and a cultural outsider. And hence I formed the habit of reflecting on my own stance, i.e. to stand outside the situation I was in and to make sense of the experience. This sense of ‘inter-subjectivity’ is significant in the case of my own study (Greig & Taylor, 1999, p. 107) since the aim of the current research is to focus on children’s life experiences.

Actually I have to admit the empathy which was generated during the long course of my observations, and the fact that through sitting attentively in a classroom I felt some similarities to a primary school student. I sometimes even imagined myself as a ten-year-old and recorded some empathetic notes during my observations. Saliently, at a later stage in my visits some subjective experiences such as fulfilled predictions, boredom and tiredness all emerged in my own experience, as the cumulative effect of classroom life.

3.2.2.2 Observation practice and progression

As acknowledged by many writers, classroom observation can lead to conflicting responses from the researcher: either we can find it difficult to select from everything going on in a busy classroom, or we can feel there is nothing worth recording because of the taken-for-granted scenes before us (Jackson, 1990; Wragg, 1999). Structured classroom observation (Flanders, 1970; Croll, 1986) such as seen in the ORACLE research project is a useful way of capturing enough data, even though this approach has been criticised by ethnographic researchers. With the nature of my research paradigm and the general approach of ethnographic case study, I have adopted a naturalistic observation rather than a pre-structured one. However, the advantage of my research topic is that it supplies a structure for me to focus on, by setting a conceptual context for the observation in the first place.

With these difficulties in mind, I adopted a gradually progressive way of observation with a different focus at different stages. Before the official access to the observation, I had a whole month of familiarization and built up a general view and identified some repeated activities in the primary school. After a few observation

visits I was able to identify the repeated procedures and activities that happened to the children of the focused class. Then for every observation, before I went to the school I started by visualising what the observation would be like. I was aware of the difficulty of capturing the multi-dimensional, rich information I expected to encounter in the classroom and saw the advantage of making some decisions beforehand as some sort of guide or structure for my work. Actually at an early stage I visualised two different frameworks for my observation:

1. Observations at various levels of coverage (for example, the school as a whole and the target class – and within the target class, the teacher, the children as a whole, and interaction between children)
2. Procedure-oriented observation (for example observation along a timeline or sequence line with children's experience as the focus)

As soon as I found my position and settled in as an observer in the classroom, the great task was to decide: 'What is the purpose of observation in my investigation of children's life experiences in primary school?' 'What are the experiences that can be observed by me?' 'Can I 'see' their experience?' My practice of classroom observation turned out to be an exploration. My constant reflection offers further impetus to a progressively focusing process. As the observation went on, there emerged more design in my observation plans and more variety emerged in terms of how to capture the classroom phenomena. My observation notes recorded my gradually developing plans and the way I carried out my focused observations through the first week, tracking Mr. McGee in different classes and age groups.

On the first day I have just managed to pay attention to the linguistic interactions between teacher and children, in which the teacher's words and movements outweighed those of the pupils.... On the second visit, it is clear that more decisions must be made regarding the capture of children's experience: 1. I need an overall picture of the classroom days 2. The children need to be individually identified 3. A fixed relation with the children is essential...On the third visit of my observations I have the perception that ritual presents itself as procedure and arrangement of others in the school (and classroom) circumstance in the first place. I have started more or less to speculate on the children's perception of the teacher's status, movement, and talking etc. It occurs to me that whatever is listed

below or above (of the notes) is asking for another version: the children's perceptions... (On the fourth day...) there is a sense of fixed procedures from both sides: the children and the teacher are clearer to me now. I can almost make a list of those repeated procedures and activities. And the list also expands from pure repeated activities to more abstract dimensions such as space, time, objects or people-related procedures. These repeated procedures and activities are not only presented in more formal school-day structuring activities such as registration, but also seen in issues of human relationships etc... '(On the fifth visit ...) I think it is possible to gather children's experiences by observation only if I have a well-structured observation plan to cover children's various expressive dimensions of school life (for example their feelings through facial expressions, their engagement through states of concentration, their level of concentration, etc), and to make some comparisons between what I observe in different situations (for example indoor vs. outdoor, paired work vs. whole class instruction session, some special cases vs. normal routines). As a matter of fact, my notes can demonstrate some contrasts, discrepancies and commonalities. (My observation notes)

After the first week of visits in Mr. McGee's different classes I turned to my second stage of observation with Class 4OM as the focus. My understanding of the school context and classroom practices actually highlighted some procedures and occasions that I could target in the focused observation in a single class. My later observation visits thus include seven to the single class 4OM, some visits to observe the assembly, two special events visits, and another two for the purpose of supplying contextual information for interviews. The focused observation in 4OM made me aware of the intensified classroom phenomena such as surveillance and discipline, on which I took further quantitative measures in order to pinpoint the real-life situation. During the whole period of the observation stage, I made continuous, conscious efforts to capture the 'reality' of life phenomenon.

Compared with 'more reliable data such as audio or video recordings of actual behaviour' (Maynard & Clayman, 1991, in Silverman 2001), my observations are just the notes of a meticulous observer. However, as my conscious efforts led to adjustments of focus; the observations witnessed a progressive focusing (Hammersley

& Atkinson, 1995, pp. 206-7) from teacher to student, from general to specifics and to individuals, and from the superficial to more subtly expressed aspects. Therefore the practice of observation is not just a way of recording what happens, but a dialectic process between the outside and inside in that it brings the outside world into the consciousness of the researcher and makes the researcher accordingly adjust her approaches to dealing with the outside. Observation itself involves a whole circle of research: getting access → carrying out the observation → reflection and analysis → further observation.

If we think of our adaptive process to a new environment, we will see that naturally enough immersing ourselves in a certain environment helps us to form a sense of the totality and then this totality presents itself as a context in which we can gradually explore real life situations in more detail. The observations carried out within a certain period of time have a similar shape to this building-up, progressive feature and its focus-shifting character. In this sense, my observation is naturalistic even though the process itself embraces much intentional deliberation. My awareness and insights as outcomes of my reflection in the above quotation from my observation notes record my emerging self-awareness as a detail-recording observer. As shown more fully in the sample notes in Appendix 3, my observation stage also involved some initial analysis and emerging interpretations. The practice of progressive, reflective observation gradually led my investigation to further steps and deeper probing into classroom realities.

3.2.2.3 Recording the data and the issue of ‘objectivity’

The record of the observations and the implementation of the observation are sometimes classified as either coded (or structured) observation, or written records throughout the act (Robson, 2002). Some writers use ‘systematic observation’ (Flanders, 1970; Galton et al., 1980) to describe the structured way of accurately tracking some aspects of what is observed and recording the frequency of actions. Nevertheless this structured observation might miss out the interactions, or ignore the context, and usually it neglects the insight behind the reflection.

I adopted the mode of ‘thorough notes’ within some kind of framework because of the focus of my topic. I followed Silverman’s (2001) rigorous treatment of observation notes in which Spradley’s (1979) specifications of notes are suggested. In these specifications, observation notes may consist of different contents: on-site short

notes, expanded notes afterwards, a field journal, and a provisional running record of analysis and interpretations. With this broad coverage of various contextual information as well as detailed notes, observation notes supply a more complete picture and thus show better evidence of trustworthiness. According to Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 52), 'The contemporary search for reliability in qualitative observation revolves around detailing the relevant context of observation'.

Silverman refers to Seale's (1999, p. 148) 'low-inference descriptors' and emphasises recording verbatim accounts rather than reconstructions. With this way of detailing as much as possible of the actual circumstances of what is observed, the researcher is practising rigour and clarity, and is conscious of the possible 'personal perspective' that could influence the reporting of the researched. My observation notes have the quality of meticulous thoroughness in terms of their coverage of various content. I have to put down the notes in as much detail as possible in the first instance with the proviso of not losing track of the overall scene. Also because of my limited language ability it is a necessity for me to record the words used verbatim in the original notes taken on site rather than using a form of shorthand.

Of the matter of recording the data, I put the stress on my original notes; these usually record my immediate observations and the track of thoughts developed in that situation (either directly from what I saw, or because the observation was associated with other previous scenarios, memories, thoughts). The advantage of the original is that they are the situated notes, by which I mean the original notes made on site with the original sequences, initial understandings and responses in terms of immediacy. The layout of the notes and the handwriting of the notes also presents the state of the observer and the major aspect of the situation then. So when I put the notes into the computer, I carefully fitted the original contents of the on-site notes into a structure with subtitles like 'note', 'awareness and reflection' and other categorized procedures and activities. By separating the original notes into those three major groups I paid attention to and differentiated between the focused phenomenon, my own consciousness and reflections, and some extra notes on contextual or complementary issues.

By inputting my notes off-site, I sometimes read the original notes as narrative. My observations and the on-site records were detailed and reflected the immediacy of the time. In those cases my way of sorting out the narrative is actually a combination of analysis and interpretation. The 'real' picture is depicted in the notes.

My inputting is more an interpretation of the depiction than the simply depicting. My recognition of this inescapable ‘lens’ through which I capture and record the ‘reality’ is another characteristic of this kind of research. As mentioned before, the continuous ‘checking’, ‘reflection’ and ‘self-doubting’ therefore features as the particularity of my approach to the research.

However, the quality of my data is subject to a scrutiny of the objectiveness of my notes as well as an awareness of the possible bias and presumptions derived from both the open and hidden background issues involved in my observation. Objectivity can never be absolute. In my previous explanation of my research paradigm I made it clear that the objectivity of reality is an ‘illusion’ for us to pursue for the purpose of ‘falsifying’ our presumptions. As made explicit above, my research practice presents a meticulous concern in terms of detail-recording and reflective thinking about all the issues involved. Therefore in the first place I respect the relative objectivity of the real-life situations in my observation. My observation notes are structured to separate my more subjective awareness and reflection from the more purely observed phenomena on each visit.

Together, all these proceedings show the progression my observation went through, which to a large extent avoids the risks of ‘cherry-picking’ and ‘anecdotalism’ (Silverman, 2001, p. 222). The accumulation of data, the repeated notes of the same research focus, and the continuous effort to eliminate all possible bias indicate my conscious pursuit of a sense of rigour and clarity of observation in relation to the real life phenomena. For example I asked myself more than once: Is it too meticulous to focus on registration? Is it meaningful to place such emphasis on the small interactions? Why is it important to study these five- minute activities? The process of questioning and looking for answers to questions of this sort forms and helps the process of the current research, and the final answer will be revealed at the end of the thesis.

3.2.3 Listening to the children

My observations supply my record of the repeated real-life actions and activities. The children’s interviews further supply their own perceptions and their self-reports, which have their own significance but also may support and complement what I observed. Even though the whole process of my observation is by itself an exploration, it is beneficial to complement it with the children’s interviews. As a

matter of fact at the end of my observations (16/01/06) I still doubted what I had achieved in trying to probe into small things like registration when I sat in the classroom and saw nothing from the children's side. The dilemma is that I observed much detail of their lives, but still find it difficult to get the meaning of the children's own experience. My observation is just what I captured of the observable layers of their lives. In one sense, another person might not get what I see. Or people might not take it as seriously as I did (I calculated the frequency of the discipline, I focused on the repeated routine life, the seeming trivia, the meaningless, negligible dimensions of life). My work on the children's interviews turned out to be an exploratory journey with the aim of getting inside the inner world of children in terms of their perceptions and perspectives of repeated school procedures and routines.

3.2.3.1 Interviewing children or 'listening to the children'

Before I move to describe my research practices at the stage of the children's interview I will devote this section to the topic of 'listening to the children' since this is the real meaning of the practice. As was mentioned in my methodological overview, 'listening to the voice of children' is a recent advocacy in both areas of educational reform and in child research. Interviews are believed to be essential to understand the children's social world and there is growing evidence to suggest that the best source of information about issues pertinent to children is the children themselves (Scott, 2000), though multiple sources are always desirable.

The initial presumption of children's ability to articulate certain specific topics sets the tone of how and to what extent the 'child's voice' is attainable in child research. In the recent wave of new childhood research and sociology, children's capacity for self-presentation and impression management is evidenced. In terms of the relevant issues in my research, Scott et al's research (1995) reveals that children relate their state of mind with respect to different aspects of life. Children are able to identify their moods and changes in mood. My research as a process witnessed an exploration of children's awareness levels and their ability to articulate these.

Practically, there have been some explorations of the most effective means of getting access to the voice of children (for example, Lewis, 2001; Davis, 2007). Mortimer (2004, p. 171) reminds us of the significance of practical aspects such as where, how, who and through what approach children are given the choices to express their views, and of 'active listening' when children's words and voices are

not available (p. 174). Scott (2000) mentions some points on how to gain quality data in interviewing children: suitable measures such as questions, treating 'I don't know' responses interpretively, and relating questions to children's own experience or knowledge. Contextual elements have been recognised as a major influence on the performance of children in the interviews (Scott, 2000; Mayall, 2000).

As for the mode of interview, informal conversation (Mayall, 2000) and group interview or focus group investigation (Scott, 2000) are identified as effective. Mayall's (2000, p.123) experience is to talk to children in twos for their confidence. Sometimes specially designed tasks are used (for example, Davis, 2007). Bosacki et al. (2006) examine quantitative and qualitative techniques in the investigation of school bullying and victimization. They point out the constraining effect of posed questions in that the well structured clearly targeted questions do not give children an opportunity to raise and discuss those most salient aspects of the issue being investigated. They apply open-ended questions to 'elicit, in a non-directive manner' (p. 233) children's views and it 'enables children to provide intuitive and spontaneous comments about their experiences' (p. 240). And the researchers' role has been described as being 'a different adult' (cf. Corsaro, 1985) or occupying a 'least-adult role' (Mandell, 1991; Thorne, 1993), sometimes 'asking for help' in ethnographic research (Mayall, 2000, p. 122). Other relevant issues such as their ability and willingness have been taken into account (Scott, 2000).

However, besides all the explorations and advocacy of 'listening to the children', it is important to further clarify the purpose and nature of this advocacy. Is it directed towards other purposes, perhaps under adult control? Or is it a research practice aiming to obtain the voice of children? Or is it an attempt to carry out research with children in a way that can be justified morally, sociologically and with its educational significance?

In my research, 'listening to the children' has multiple implications. In the first place it is the practical functioning process because my research question is mainly concerned with the issue of listening to the children's voice. Interviewing children is the main approach in my research design. The previous stage of fieldwork offers only the surface of a world with children as the focus. The children's interviews therefore bear the major task to fulfil the aim of getting into their world and to unfold a world that is hypothesized to be independent from what adults believe and adults intend to take charge of.

Then practically ‘listening to the children’ entails the task of getting the children to talk. The precondition of ‘listening’ is that children are able to talk; children’s interviews or ‘listening to the children’ is actually the further step of ‘having them talk’. In this sense, children’s interviews are not interviewing children directly; and listening to children is not just listening. Along with other writers, Mortimer (2004) lists a range of activities designed to listen to the voice of children with the central idea of offering choices and obtaining their views. As shown above, most of the contributions of ‘child voice’ in research practices are about how to effectively get children to talk and to gain quality data. Similarly in my research I termed the stage of children’s interviews as that of ‘working with children’, which highlights the various jobs I was engaged in and the important status that children have for the interviewing process; ‘listening to the children’ is an active process rather than what its superficial meaning suggests.

Moreover, as soon as I put ‘listening to the children’ in the centre of my work with children, it became more of an attitude rather than mere rhetoric or particular kinds of actions. Compared with ‘interviewing children’, ‘listening to the children’ as a practice implies the researcher’s tendency to value and respect. For my own part, I acknowledge and respect the independence of children’s lives. I genuinely respect children, their rights, their abilities, and their potential and take this as fundamental to my research. Aiming at getting inside the world of children, I take ‘listening to the children’ as my research agenda and central attitude. As the research went on, I found that taking ‘listening to the children’ as a stance, attitude and even spirit of the research is essential to actually ‘hearing’ children and get inside children’s world.

Finally, there is a process involved in carrying out the practice of ‘listening to the children’ in its full meaning. Because of the believed gap between the world of the child and that of the adult, to truly listen to the voice of children asks for much effort from the side of the researcher. In my research it presented a process within which I gradually found my position and my appropriate role in the interaction.

With ‘listening to the children’ as the aim and spirit of the interviews, my children’s interviews in practice emphasised the actual process and my subjective attitude rather than the outcomes. In other words, interview is the approach to the practice of ‘listening to the children’; ‘listening to the children’ is the real meaning of my interviews. In this way, my children’s interviews had the potential to handle the difficulties of in-depth inquiry with children. Children’s limitations and the possible

constraining effect on the side of the researcher are positively dealt with during the process of actively ‘listening to the children’, which still turned out to be no easy task in my experience. The following sections will present the actual process and practice of the work at the stage of children’s interviews .

3.2.3.2 Initial conversations and the further reflections

The children’s interviews in my research involved slow and cautious steps. It was after much struggle in the early stages of initial conversation and further planning that I finally arrived at the stage of successfully obtaining their voices. I had initial conversations with children and took it as an opportunity to experiment with possible approaches to get access to the children’s voices. I had three sessions of initial conversations in which varied approaches were tried: individual talks with two different sets of questions, and group activities. As the first contact with the children, which I believe is vital to relationship building, these initial conversations were taken as opportunities to warm up and as the vital starting point that influences children’s later engagement. I consciously phrased my words during the stage of initiation and expressed a clear message: I need your help; you have the resource I need. I offered each child a file and told them to put in any drawings, doodles, diagrams etc that they might want to do in the coming interviews.

In the initial conversations, I failed to get effective responses from the children about their inner feelings about the normal flow of school life, although they talked about friends almost passionately and revealed their enthusiasm for playing and they also reported on their work (such as their favourite lesson). But by listening to the initial conversations again and again I saw that after the first four to five minutes there was something emerging through the conversation. Also from the limited source in the initial conversations I found that their emotional response to those routines and rituals is closely associated with their general feeling about schooling. The other side of the story is that the general feeling shows the influence of their experience of everyday repeated activities. Therefore two issues were fixed as focuses of my investigation in the interviews: their general sense of schooling, and their experience of those repeated procedures and activities. Specific aspects such as the factual aspects of actual happenings, their expectations, and experiences which may reveal their choices and awareness on some issue, how they think; why they understand things like that, their report of others’ behaviour, following up their own

expressions and vocabulary to seek further explanation and details – all these provide scope for me to explore their life experience in school.

In view of the barriers that influence children's capacity to articulate their perceptions and perspectives, I put much weight on finding appropriate strategies. I had something like an action research plan made up but then it gradually diminished through my continuous reflection and design. At one point, I determined to use interviews first and identified some activities with children as complementary to the interviews. Then I tentatively made a plan to have some free activities in advance of the interviews as a way to arouse children's interest. Before the day came for me to go back to the children and carry out the interviews formally, I had many versions of the interview design. I kept adjusting the overall focus of my interview. However, the different elements highlighted in the previous versions could be easily adopted into the final design for the purpose of setting a better atmosphere, adding a game-like flavour, triggering children's interest and imagination etc. This kind of repeatedly going back to the design helped me to locate my position in the research. In a sense this is a repeated off-site examination of the reality, the participants and my intention.

3.2.3.3 Key issues in my reflections in preparation for the children's interviews

Given the particularity of my research topic I had to be well prepared to tackle the high level of difficulties anticipated in the children's interviews, for the enquiry I was to take involved the exploration of children's inner feelings and subtle awareness. Based on the above understandings of the status of the children's interviews in my research, my further judgement concerned subtle details in the planning of the interviews. One example is that I saw the importance of having interviews on a fixed site and in a closed room after the initial conversations. I was very aware that such small issues might influence the quality of the research, especially for a project that aimed at listening to children.

Three issues have been well explored for the purpose of achieving a better implementation of the children's interviews for my research: children's awareness and articulation, the researcher's approach to the children, and the issue of language. For the purpose of getting access to the children's awareness of some schooling issues I decided that what I would do is:

- To focus on opportunities for the children to have access to a state of looking inward, which constitutes the context of my interviews

- To be aware of and keep a sensitive approach to the children's ability to articulate
- To design a proper interview plan according to my understanding of the situation, the children, myself as the other party to the investigation, and my research question.
- To carefully conduct the interviews in a way that is sensitive to the children's ability, potential, inner state and implicit barriers, and potential triggers.

Instead of preparing a list of questions, I created a framework of enquiry themes as the first step. Then on the basis of this framework I developed lists of questions but just as a question reservoir for myself for the interviews. All the enquiry themes are developed on the basis of my observations and understandings of the relevant issues of the investigation. Enquiry themes rather than interview questions actually leave space for both researcher and interviewee. In the first round of the interviews the prepared questions were not applied as much as my spontaneous questions. Actually, at that stage that when and how to raise a question was always a spontaneous decision. Only in the second round of interviews did I pose questions to children in a more prepared way. To some extent, the children's interviews in my research have the nature of an exploration I carried out with the children; it is the enquiry themes that represent my preparations for the interviews, not the interview questions. In most cases the interview questions in my research are no more than the prompts to elicit the children's own reports.

I identified three categories of interview topics for exploration with the children:

- A. Aspects of school life
- B. Indicators of school life
- C. Aspects that might involve personal learning and development.

Under each category there are three to seven subcategories and further lists of specific related issues. Even though all topics are relevant to all children, I was concerned that not every child would be prepared to answer these questions. In this sense some further preparatory work was important to make the interview go on smoothly. Therefore, after listing the interview themes that formed the framework for the issues I was to raise, I evaluated them from three perspectives:

1. How difficult is the topic for the children in terms of how far it

requires the capacity for abstract thinking?

2. To which individuals will this theme be most suitable and important to ask?
3. In what kind of situation will this theme be relevant in order to bring immediate experience into the interview?

By pondering on these issues, I was actually preparing myself for the interviews in three ways: familiarisation with questions, familiarisation with the interviewees, and building up an awareness of situational factors. More specifically, I deliberately rooted the consciousness of the associated aspects of the interviewee, the interview context and the interview questions, before I actually started the interviews. Therefore during the due course of the interview I could take these elements into account and raise suitable questions to activate children's interest and thinking.

Among the three aspects of preparation, a consciousness of individually tailored themes and contextual themes is significant since they are featured by a relevance and immediacy that can supply concrete incidents to open up a conversation. The way of marking the level of difficulty gave me a preliminary understanding of an appropriate sequence for all the themes for exploration. The different levels of difficulty can be described as follows:

1. Concrete topics with the most direct reference to real-life incidents (least difficult)
2. Relatively abstract topics that require some thinking (difficult)
3. Unfamiliar concepts that ask for some self-awareness and ability to reflect (most difficult)

Scott (2000) believes that the age of seven is a significant time to mark children's capability to be involved in interviews in that their cognitive and social development allows them not just to respond properly, but also to edit and control their way of revealing their thoughts. For this pre-teen group, Scott also suggests that visual stimuli are a helpful approach.

As shown by some researchers (Loeber & Farrington, 1989, Amato & Ochiltree, 1987), the relevance of questions to the time and place is necessary for quality data because primary school children's attention span and memory have their limits. With older children, this relevance is not so important. As mentioned by Scott (2000, p. 108), raising questions that are meaningful to children's own experience is the first consideration for quality data.

After much reflection and designing, I was clearer about the task, the approaches and the participants. The children's interviews were the major means for me to get access to their voice and I had learned from my observations that children's group work and tangible stimuli are two effective means to get children to talk and respond. After the initial conversation, I focused on working out some strategies in order to tackle the limits of children's abstract thinking. One of the points is to ask about real-life issues. I designed several plans in order to bring children's real life aspects and even concrete actions to the interview and to encourage them to express related emotions, perceptions and comments. These plans included:

1. To relate general topics to real-life actions and activities as much as possible. This link between a general concept and real-life issues is essential sometimes for children's interviews. It avoids a situation that children find the interview topics are too remote from their life and too difficult to respond to.
2. To take some time to conduct targeted observation just before the interview so that I can raise questions concerning their real-life responses in the classroom to open up chances of follow-up questions. By acting in this way I could also examine their awareness level, i.e. see to what extent they are aware of the happenings around them and of their own actions. In the first place I would like to avoid the case that the aspects of classroom life I am interested in do not fit in the conscious world of the children.
3. To put children in a position of observers or even researchers.

Besides the outer circumstances mentioned above, awareness and articulation both are associated with the key element of language. What kind of language is used for children to articulate their awareness? From another direction, only through their language can we get an idea of what their awareness level is. If we don't have enough sense of children's language, we can't arrive at an appropriate conclusion either on their ability to articulate or their awareness level. It will be like using the wrong tool. This aspect was considered and built into my further interview designs.

I took efforts to shift my notions to children's language. This involves excluding adult notions and tuning into the children's world. This approach has a double benefit: it avoids imposing and facilitates children in relating their life stories.

It is good to check the terms used in my questions. I actually took a progressive approach to the research topic at this stage:

- First step: observe real-life phenomenon and form corresponding concepts (my concepts and terms came into being and formed some topics for further investigation)
- Then: obtain children's own terms for the issues under consideration (this was achieved through initial conversation and later preparation)
- Then: ask for further explanations and details of their life experiences (at the stage of the first proper interview, to get children's own definition of the investigated topics to some extent)
- Then: use children's terms to consult concerning issues with other children (for the second round of interviews).

3.2.3.4 Interactions during the course of the interviews

Usually before each interview, I would have some kind of specific plans for different groups in order to have effective interviews. Though there are elements of repetition, complementing, and confirmation in respect to the links between different group interviews, each interview takes its own shape, and presents independence and spontaneity. This individuality is because the aim of my interview is to explore and practically I leave space for both the children and myself to explore the concerned themes.

The way I decide who is to be included in the interview on a particular day is based on my planning along with the immediate observation before the interviews. So the targeted interviewee is decided on the basis of situational elements to some extent. With the target child decided by me, I then ask that child to choose one to two friends to join him or her. As for the interview itself, I emphasize the principle of being flexible, and following the flow of the conversation, which is to let go of my status as leader of the conversation as much as possible.

For most of the interviews in the first round I started from the most life-relevant concrete topics such as special activities, special events, grouping, sequences of activities, noise and rules. At the beginning of the first round of proper interviews, I also complemented the ordinary interview enquiry with some extra ideas to trigger the children's interest. For example, twice when the interview time was after either register or assembly, I set the observation of these activities as a task and thus gave

children the idea of reporting what they had observed like a TV reporter when they were with me. For all first round interview sessions, the children were asked to have some coloured pens and white paper with them and it was suggested they draw or scribble, as they wanted, during the conversations.

During the course of the interviews, half intuitively, half deliberately, I approached each interview as a comfortable conversation. First, I lowered my position, physically as well as in the sense of a true relationship. I chose the lowest chair. I asked them to help me to understand their life. Second, in the first round of interviews, I approached the topic like a story, saying ‘what were you doing?’ ‘what was it like?’ and ‘what were you thinking then?’ Third, I sensed the group atmosphere and tried to balance between being a dominant and a restrained speaker. Physically I arranged the seats sometimes with consideration to who sat in the centre, who sat on higher chairs in order to create a balanced space for everyone.(for example, giving the shorter child a higher chair, the shy child a more central seat).

I always left the room for the children to put forward their own agenda. This was part of my design, which was consistent with my belief on the issues of childhood and children. At the level of research practice, it is by giving them room that I can be invited into their world. In return, the children put forward their agenda, which was genuinely ‘authentic’, i.e. they gave me their immediate, emotional, free-spirited response. Very often, I followed up with questions for them to further explain, clarify and explore their own topics a bit further.

I reminded myself always to be patient, especially when I was dealing with relatively hard questions. I would explain the question in a different way and also not easily give up when the children found it difficult to answer. However, when we came to the second round of interviews, the first thing I told them was that we could only talk, and also that I would stop them when necessary and push them to respond more fully. I emphasised that there were difficult questions for them. And I would move on if I found the children felt it too hard. At the stage of design, I cautioned myself to be open to complexity and subtlety revealed in the children’s report of their lives and perceptions and not to try to simplify or reduce it. After some interviews, I had some feelings that my way of interviewing has the nature of a journalist’s interview which is freer and more open to the interviewee’s perspective; the research interview is normally more focused than this, with the interviewer’s aim essential to the whole process.

On the whole, my interviews with children moved in the right direction for my research focus. It was the appropriate tension between the natural forces of my research practice (for example, my design, research question, my personality and so on) and children's own agenda that moved it ahead. Without the 'authentic' forces from participants, the research may not come to life. In other words, through the dialogue between the two main elements of the research, the investigation can generate originality and extend beyond the previous knowledge.

At the later stage of my interviews, I realised that they really were like conversations, with a naturally smooth flow. They were not just questions and responses. My follow-up questions gave a force to the flow. On the children's side, their spontaneity in terms of responding to my questions (they gave what they straightforwardly wanted to in response to my questions, even a single word) had the opportunity to shift to some thinking and rationalisations. In this sense the conversational flow contributed to the progression of a topic or the exploration of a theme. It thus totally transformed the question-answer mode to a well-engaged two-way communication.

3.2.3.5 Interview data: transcription and some preliminary considerations

All the children's initial conversations and group interviews (about 16 hours of recording) were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcribing is verbatim. Some transcription symbols are used to specify the non-verbal features presented in the flow of the conversations. The repetitions and hesitations in the children's talking and their accompanied actions are included in the verbatim transcriptions and bracketed notes. The overlapping talking is treated as interjections for the purpose of recording all the articulations, at the same time presenting the actual flow of the words spoken.

Because of the language barrier I depended on cassette tapes to record the interviews though I had a few notes before and after the interviews about contextual or peripheral issues. The transcription is based on repeated listening and checking. Listening to interview recordings created a kind of distance between the on-the-scene interviewer and myself, which helped me to capture the wholeness of our communication and thus led to reveal children's state of mind in the process of the interviews. In this way I actually heard more than I did on-site. I had many occasions when I heard more or got different understandings from when I was actually engaged in the interviews .

Having claimed the research as child-focused and emphasised its status of valuing children's voices, there is a further issue of how to look at the nature of children's accounts in terms of their relation to their own experience. In the case of children's 'self-reports', which is how I tend to define the outcome of the children's interviews in my research, is it justifiable to claim the children's accounts to be the 'reality' of their experience? With my epistemological perspective expounded previously, the 'reality' issue turns out to refer to the authenticity of the children's voice in addition to the understandings of the relation between 'voice' and 'experience'.

My understanding of the complex issue of the accountability of interview data in relation to 'reality' is a relative one. We can only obtain 'provisional' and 'relative' reality (Hammersley, 1992a, 1998). The way I make explicit my process of collecting data shows the relatively 'authentic' status of the data in that my approach to the children and my actual interaction with them shows comparatively little 'imposition'.

With all above aspects taken into account, the closest status of the interview data in relation to 'reality' is that they are 'representations' of reality, which means that we need further analysis and interpretation (cf. Miller & Glassner, 1997). This does not mean to devalue the children's account, but to take a more rigorous approach to what is being researched and to the research question. In this sense, I consider the interviewee's account presented in the form of data to be in line with Silverman's view (1997). Pointing out the inadequacy of 'reporting' people's experience, Silverman (2001, p. 283) problematises the way of treating the actor's point of view as an explanation. The interpretation is a necessary instrument for the purpose of investigating reality. According to Bosacki et al (2006) in the case of research on children, this interpretive methodology has special significance since what they are able to offer in the investigation is somehow constrained by ambiguous expressions and by their limited capacity to articulate abstract ideas. My research finally achieved some further explanation from them, but the interpretation is still of huge importance. All the above mentioned issues will be further interrogated in the course of the presentation and analysis of the findings in Chapters Four and Five and the interpretation in Chapter Six.

4. Classroom Observation and Initial Reflections

This chapter and the next set out the findings from my investigations. Chapter 5 focuses on the interviews with children and teachers, but the present chapter reports the observation stage of my research, and includes my preliminary reflections on these observations. The observation stage of the research, which was completed before the interviews began, serves a number of purposes. It sets the context for the interviews by familiarising me fully with life in the classroom which I was investigating. It has developed my understanding of familiar practices in English primary schools, but also enabled me to see them in a new way, with particular emphasis on the way they were experienced by the children. It has helped me to pay close (perhaps even minute) attention to details in the classroom. It has encouraged me to reflect on what I observed, and raised many questions about issues which I wish to consider further in the interviews. It has also enabled me to identify the school life themes around which the interviews will be structured. The intimate link between the observations and the preliminary reflections can be illustrated by two sequences that are central to the unfolding of the research as outlined in this chapter.

SEQUENCE 1:

Observation → reflection → further observation at a deeper level

SEQUENCE 2:

Observation → reflection → questions re interpretation → questions for interviews.

The primary purpose of the 21 visits I made to the school to conduct my observations is to provide an in-depth investigation of the lived experience of primary school children, to understand their life from the point of view of 'how they experience it' rather than the more common way of 'knowing what's happening'. Therefore my observations also aim at an alternative understanding in place of the normal 'taken-for-granted' knowledge of primary school management and teaching. With an emphasis on the details of how the teacher organises those procedures and on the specific situational aspects children encounter during the process, the observations involve a re-examination of issues such as how the school day starts, how it shifts

from one activity to another, how children are organized, how they experience repeated activities like school registration, dismissal, assemblies and other special events on the calendar, how the normal issues of time and space make sense to children, and more significantly, how children respond to all this and experience their lives behind these official structures. In fact, my focus is on everything the children experience at primary school including rewards, punishments, grouping, discipline, etc. - everything, that is, except for the formal curriculum or how the teacher deals with the teaching content.

My observation findings are analysed and presented according to a straightforward framework of school life themes, including

- Registration
- Dismissal
- Assembly and other special events
- Classroom lessons

The biggest section, classroom lessons, is divided into three sub-sections focusing on what the teacher does (organising the children, discipline-focused instructions and rewards/sanctions) and four further sub-sections focusing directly on the children's experience (their response to grouping strategies; their experience of being under the surveillance of the teacher; the issue of distractions, time-wasting strategies and deviance; and their attention-seeking). Everything recorded in my observation was roughly categorised into this framework of themes of school life when I put my observation notes into the computer, usually at the end of each day of observation. My emphasis is equally on routine activities and on specific one-off incidents, but the longer my observations went on (for example, I observed registration on fourteen separate occasions), the more I became aware of two particular trends. On the one hand, even repeated activities could be differentiated because of minor variations in the circumstances and implementation of the routine. But on the other, there was a noticeable underlying consistency and coherency in Mr. McGee's dealing with routines and school procedures. In addition to the prevalent routines and activities, I also paid attention to the use of objects in the classroom, such as a small teddy bear kept on the teacher's desk that was once used by Mr McGee to comfort an upset boy.

Alongside my record of what is happening in the lives of primary school children in the classroom and other locations, there exists my own immediate reflective response to the observations. This response becomes more sophisticated and enriched as the observations continue and in turn influences my ongoing record of my observations. The interactions between observation and reflection form a spiral that continuously lifts the inquiry to a higher level of understanding and interpretation. The chapter therefore aims at capturing both my findings and my developing consciousness and understanding of the life experience of the children during the observations. My repeated attendance in the class led me to share some of the experiences of the children directly, and as I myself moved from initiation to familiarity and eventually to a state of boredom, I found myself wondering if I was actually entering into something like the lived experience of the children.

There are three final preliminary points before I move on to an analysis of the data. The first is that this chapter represents only the first stage in my research. The reflections presented here are tentative and often raise more questions than answers, or else suggest a number of possible interpretations. The aim is mainly to raise consciousness of the aspects of repeated school life of primary school children and to bring some otherwise hidden issues to the surface. As already pointed out, the awareness that is developed through the observations clearly influences the kind of questions that are asked in the interview stage, but the more thorough interpretations of the data in Chapter 6 will draw equally on the observations reported in this chapter and the interviews reported in the next.

The second preliminary point is that in the presentation of my observation findings, I am deliberately emphasising the children's experiences even though during the observation both the teacher's and the children's actions are covered and actually the teacher's words and actions are more obvious in the classroom context. Since the next stage in the research is to interview the children on their life experiences, my observation naturally has a tendency to focus on the children's side.

Thirdly, my observation notes exceeded 30,000 words and in summarising these in the present chapter I have inevitably had to make some judgements about what to select, though my aim is always to give as accurate a picture of classroom life as possible. For each of the sub-headings I use, I include both the official story usually initiated on the part of teacher and the response and strategies on the children's side, together with my own preliminary reflections and analysis. Questions

are raised on the basis of some uncertainty of interpretation at this stage, though as the thesis develops, this uncertainty will be stabilised as my interview data offer substantial material from the children's perspective that to a large extent shapes this investigation.

4.1 Registration

Registration is the first official activity in the classroom in the morning and in the afternoon. How teachers manage this transition from break to lesson may indicate their style of dealing with children. The standard practice for registration is calling each child's name in turn to check if he or she is present. In the morning, the teacher also needs to check how many children want school dinner. A register is used by the teacher to keep the records and then returned to the office, usually by two pupils. Often this task is used as a way of rewarding children - usually it is last week's 'Achievers' who take back the register. In Mr McGee's class, children normally sit on the carpet to wait for the register before morning lessons or after lunchtime break, though sometimes he asks them to sit at their tables. Typically, he calls their name from the alphabetical list in the register, followed by a greeting, 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon'. Only once I observed him using reverse alphabetical order.

In contrast with other classrooms where teachers expect children simply to respond 'Yes' or 'Here', Mr. McGee's registration contains three specific expectations which the children know and understand. The first is to sit still and the second, to use his name in their reply: 'Good morning, Mr McGee'. The third is to maintain eye-contact as they reply. He frequently waits for eye contact with the child whose name he calls, reminds children what to do if they forget ('What do you do when you are talking to people?') or rewards a correct response with praise ('Good boy!' 'Thank you for repeating my name.' 'You remembered to look at me.'). Another feature of Mr McGee's practice is to use registration time as an opportunity to communicate either with the whole class or with individuals. On one occasion, he checked that a girl was well enough to stay in class: 'Are you feeling better?' Another time he added, 'Cheer up a little' after the exchange of greetings with a boy whose reply seemed moody and depressed. On other occasions he commented on a boy's muddy shirt, on a badge a different boy wore on his shirt, and to the whole class on some playground misdemeanour.

It is difficult to interpret the teacher's intentions or the significance of his actions on these superficially insignificant occasions. Nothing seems casual in his behaviour, and yet there is ambiguity in what is going on. In his attention to detail is he demonstrating his interest in the individual children and his respect and care for them? Or is he making the children aware that they can do nothing that goes unnoticed? Is the eye-contact which he insists on a reminder to the children that they are under constant surveillance, after the style of Foucault's Panopticon? Does the praise he frequently gives represent real pleasure at the children's behaviour, or is it simply a way of positively reinforcing behaviour he deems appropriate? Is the underlying message that he expects the children to conform totally to his expectations? Is the intention efficient management, to be achieved through a high level of control? What learning is going on? Are the children being encouraged to 'please teacher' and to avoid autonomous behaviour? Is the teacher aware of the hidden messages that lie behind the way he manages registration? How is the experience perceived by the children?

If Mr McGee's actions during registration are complex and ambiguous, those of the children are more so. Some children seem eager to conform to the teacher's expectation, and even exaggerate their movements to emphasise their attentiveness. For example, I observed Mark quickly folding his arms when it was his turn, and Joyce not only turned round in her efforts to make eye contact with Mr. McGee, but also moved her upper body to the right and left again to avoid being shielded by the child beside her. Many appear to accept Mr McGee's reminders or praise and genuinely try to follow his expectations in terms of sitting, eye contact and the proper form of greeting. Yet I am also aware of an unwillingness on the part of some children to conform. In addition, the children's concentration levels differ. Usually there are some children who are playing something with their heads down and they only raise their heads when it is their turn to reply. Several also hesitate or make mistakes in their replies, as the following extract from my observation notes makes clear:

Mark replied as if he had just woken up from somewhere. Helen spoke very softly, in a low voice, and appeared shy, as she always does. Peter replied not quickly enough, with a pause as well. During the course of the register, Mr. McGee intervened with a reminder to one child, 'By the way,

don't cover your mouth, please' (Covering the mouth may be a way of having unauthorised conversation with another). The last child made the mistake of calling Mr. McGee 'Mr. Opie' (the name of the class's another teacher).

(17th Nov, in Class 4OM)

The occasions when children intentionally deviate from the patterns of behaviour expected by Mr McGee merit special attention. Once a girl added 'Have a nice day' to her standard greeting 'Good afternoon, Mr McGee', and following the teacher's positive response ('Thank you, darling', accompanied by a big smile) eleven others (both boys and girls) provided similar extended greetings. The final boy, however, said, 'I hope you have a good Christmas', to which the teacher replied, 'It's fairly far away, isn't it?' (it was early November). A boy with Special Needs in the class would sometimes include a football score in his greetings, or express his enthusiasm about a forthcoming football game or about a recent snowfall, but these spontaneous interpolations were generally either acknowledged minimally or ignored. On other occasions, however, the teacher made his expectations plain. Once a boy changed 'Mr. McGee' to 'captain' in his greeting, and Mr. McGee was quick to respond, 'I prefer Mr. McGee.' Another boy used the greeting, 'Good afternoon, Mr. Simon McGee'. Mr. McGee explained to the class that even though Mr. Opie calls him Simon in work, 'In class you must call me Mr. McGee'. Later, a boy greeted him in Italian. Mr. McGee nodded in acceptance of this, and also told him how to say it in Spanish. The following boy then greeted him in Spanish, and Mr McGee then commented, 'Changing is good.'

When I pause to reflect what is going on in these exchanges from the children's point of view, it is clear that any attempt at interpretation raises complex issues. When the children try to pay attention and be co-operative, is this done out of a genuine desire to please the teacher, or for more sycophantic reasons, or to avoid trouble, or out of a belief that the behaviour really is right and appropriate, or because they think that in the long run it makes for an easier life? How far can we take the children's actions at face value? When they make mistakes, is this because they are bored and not concentrating? Do they perceive the requirements of registration (such as sustained eye-contact) to be artificial impositions, and are their innovations in the routine simply an attempt to be more natural and spontaneous? If they are bored, are

their innovations an attempt to 'be clever', to have a bit of fun or to test the boundaries (of the teacher's tolerance and of what is acceptable) with non-standard responses? Since it is only boys who appear to test the boundaries, how significant are gender differences in the classroom? How does the teacher perceive the children's behaviour? Is he afraid of losing control? What learning is going on during registration? Are they in fact learning to survive in (or to manipulate) a complex social situation with many unwritten rules? Does the teacher's response (or sometimes lack of response) help them to find their way through the complicated social rules?

4.2 Dismissal

Dismissal marks a number of different transitions during the school day for Mr McGee's class: the start of break or lunch hour, the end of PE (in the School Hall) or Maths (in a different classroom) or the end of the school day. Dismissal can take many forms, from the simple 'You can go now' to a highly elaborate or regimented procedure. Mr McGee may allow a quick dismissal of the whole class as a reward for sustained good work. On one occasion, he said, 'You have been really, really good. So would you now tiptoe back to your class?' But if the children are disorganised or noisy he will make them do it again. On other occasions he dismisses them a row at a time, with a mechanical movement of his arm, or by holding a teddy bear to their ear and pretending that it is whispering permission for them to leave, or by touching the mat on which they are lying still after their PE lesson, as a sign that they should pick up the mat, take it back to its place and then leave quietly.

At the end of the day, the children are expected to greet the adults present in the classroom before dismissal, either individually or by saying, 'Good afternoon, everybody'. However, the artificiality of the procedure is clear from the fact that the adults rarely reply and from the children's intonation: 'G—oo—d af---ter---n—oo—n', the unnaturally prolonged pronunciation persisting in spite of Mr McGee's attempts to get them to say it more naturally.

One of the main features of Mr. McGee's dismissal at the end of the school day is to use it as a time of reflection before the rush to pick up the school-bags and meet the parents outside. This reflection may take the form of a short prayer, thanking God for the day with all its laughter, fun and learning. As always, the prayer is

accompanied by lots of instructions: 'Sit really nicely.' 'You don't need to cover your face. Just sit quiet and nicely.' The pupils join in with 'Amen' at the end. Sometimes the children are told to sit quietly for a while with their hands resting on their laps, to think about the achievements of the day. More frequently, the reflection involves asking the children to think of something to share with their parents, perhaps about something learned during the day: 'Before you go, take one minute to think of a good thing to give your parents or others'. Sometimes he asks them to fold their arms on their chest if they think of something they have achieved or enjoyed. Occasionally his comments get more personal: 'Tell mum and dad something you enjoyed at school.' 'Give them a cuddle and a kiss. And tell them you love them. Your love matters so much to them.' 'I love to hear my child tell me things. It doesn't matter what it is.' But the children are rarely drawn into this activity, and are reluctant to mention anything they have enjoyed beyond the name of their favourite lesson. Once, on the day there was a snowfall, Jess unexpectedly volunteered that she 'enjoyed the morning before school', but when Mr. McGee pushed further with 'What's your best thing in school?' she relapsed after a bit of a pause to the standard reply: 'PE'.

This activity, like registration, is open to quite different interpretations, both from the teacher's perspective and from the children's. Once again it is not clear whether the teacher is more concerned with maintaining control and order or with trying to sustain the pupils' attention and interest. There may be other priorities operating here as well. It may be that he is encouraging the children to feel that they've learned something, that their attendance at school is worthwhile. He may want the message to get through to parents that the children like school. He may be trying to create a bridge between school and home, to reduce the impression in children's minds that they move between two different worlds (the home and the school) that have little connection with each other, and even be willing to make himself vulnerable in front of the children in order to achieve this, by recounting something from his own experience as a father to them. It is clear, however, the role of the teacher is dominant; he plans, organises, explains, implements and reinforces the entire process of reflection and dismissal, so that it is difficult to know how children experience it or what they feel about it.

Without exception, the actual dismissal is quiet and orderly, but do the children do this out of respect for others or simply because they know that a failure to follow instructions may delay their departure to that other world of home? When Mr

McGee attempts to encourage them to reflect on their school day, are their invariably brief replies indicative of boredom or a desire to get away as quickly as possible or fear that any comment from them that is out of the ordinary may generate further discussion and delay? Their dull, short answers to Mr McGee's enthusiastic questions hardly seem substantial enough to be viewed as a gift to the parent on the first sight after a whole day. What if anything do they learn from the complex rituals of dismissal?

4.3 Assembly and other special events

Apart from everyday routines like registration and dismissal, other school rituals worthy of mention include less frequent activities like assemblies (which I observed on six occasions) and circle time (which occurred only once during all my observations) and one-off events like the Minute Silence ceremony, the Christingle ceremony, the Christmas Concert and Pancake Day.

Whole-school assembly occurs twice a week in this school, with an extra weekly session of singing practice. The children walk quietly to the school hall in two lines and sit on the floor in their allocated areas with the youngest classes at the front and the oldest at the back, and teachers sitting on chairs at the side of the hall. Classical music is played during the entry, with the name, dates and nationality of the composer projected onto the screen. A normal school assembly occurs at the end of the school day and lasts 45 minutes. It has a relatively fixed programme of story, singing, prayer and award giving. The teacher usually narrates a story either from the Bible or connected to the children's own lives. The story is told in a child-friendly way that includes activities or interactive questioning. The prayers are led by the presenter and include a procedure of lighting and extinguishing a candle. The children bow their heads, put their palms together and voice 'Amen' together at the end. Occasionally, as on Remembrance Day, the children may be given time to meditate. The children usually sing one or two songs they learned in the singing practice. The school orchestra positioned on one side of the hall play accompanying music for the singing and also at the end of the assembly. Prior to dismissal the presenter announces the awards. Children tiptoe across the crowded hall to receive their awards to the sounds of applause. I found myself wondering what the experience is like for the award-receiver and the rest of the audience.

A number of features of assemblies are immediately noticeable. The first is the overcrowding: the children are crammed tightly together, and this may affect their ability to concentrate or see the assembly as a spiritual experience. The children may be distracted by the slightest movement or difference from normal procedures, whether intentional or not. The second is the similarity to ordinary lessons, especially in terms of the formal entry and dismissal, the use of questions and putting hands up, the prioritisation of keeping order, and the teacher's control of the content of the session. The third is that the children are constantly under the watchful eye of the teachers. Once while the music was still playing, Mrs. Jeffs (the deputy headteacher) said, 'We won't start until all of your eyes on me.' In another assembly I saw Mr. McGee sitting beside his class giving continuous instructions in a low voice to keep order: 'Hands not in mouth', 'Good girl', '...would you now go to sit with Mrs.... (the teaching assistant)', 'Mum'd want you to sit nicely, would she?' and so on. During the observation, I wondered how the children felt about the constant surveillance and whether they were genuinely interested in what was going on.

It is difficult to get a clear idea of how children experience these activities by merely observing the procedures for several times. It is especially difficult to get hold of individual responses in the collective activities if there is no special effort put into it. Therefore children's own point of view on the issue of prayer and singing will be essential, and this will be presented in Chapter Five. Special events like assembly are supposed to carry more cultural, moral or social learning than other more transient routines like registration or dismissal. However, what I am interested is a series of issues: how far is the routine of assembly significant to children? What does it mean to them? What effects does assembly have on children in terms of their lived experience? Do they actually listen to the music, or is the end of the music simply an indication to them of when they need to sit up straight and fold their arms? In other words, what do children learn from this kind of repeated experience? Is each assembly a fresh experience or do they accept them as a compulsory 'lesson'? If the latter, what kind of 'lesson' do they think assemblies are?

Other special events like Pancake Day or the Christmas concert happen only once a year and thus stand apart from the daily-based structural elements of schooling. Initially, I thought that such rituals would be central to my research, but as it proceeded, my interest in these isolated events diminished, for a number of reasons. First, the one-off events only supplement the strong sense of children's everyday

experience and do not make much difference. Second, those ritualised activities are much more difficult for the children to articulate than their everyday experience, even apart from the subtle meaning and hidden message intended by the organiser. There is very little information about these special events in the children's interviews. Third, my intention to explore children's experience of everyday school life means that the daily procedures and arrangements in school contexts are the main subjects of my research. Therefore I have excluded observation data on special events in this report of my findings.

4.4 Classroom lessons

Lessons form the major part of the teaching-learning experience and I observed many classroom lessons on my visits to the school. I was not concerned with the curriculum or with the formal content of the lessons, but I observed the way children are organised for learning, and the way they are given instructions, helped with their work, and disciplined. These aspects of school lessons are not discrete, but usually are mixed or even entangled with each other. My way of observing and making notes is to record as much as possible of what I see in the classroom and then analyse the raw data under the following headings: organising the children, discipline-focused instructions, and rewards and sanctions. These three headings refer primarily to what the teacher does, but when the focus is on the children's experience of classroom lessons, a different set of headings is needed: their experience of the grouping strategy and organisation for work, their experience of being under the surveillance of the teacher, the issue of distraction, time-wasting strategies and deviance, and finally the way they seek the teacher's attention. Taken together, these seven headings provide the analytical framework for the report on the observation of classroom lessons, and at the end of the section I provide my own initial reactions and interpretations.

4.4.1 Organising the children

Classroom teaching in a class of this size (39 children) requires extensive organisation. In a sense, the organisation is itself part of the teaching because it may result in much indirect learning on the part of the children, but it also raises issues to do with children's experience of school. There are two ways of looking at the issue of organisation in the classroom teaching—the teacher's perspective and the children's.

The former will be dealt with in this section, the latter in a later section when the focus moves to the children. One example of the teacher's organisation is the way he settles the children in their places. And during the course of a lesson he probably needs to deal with children who want to go to the toilet. In order to get the children ready for learning, he also needs to put them into some kind of grouping patterns such as paired work, small group work or working alone, etc. Sometimes after a teaching session there are other organisational tasks such as handing in books and getting ready for the transition to another lesson. All these ways of organising children for learning and for the smooth proceeding of the lessons involve the creation of certain fixed groups and sequences in which children are allocated in particular ways to carry out activities.

According to my observations Mr. McGee generally carries out his teaching in accordance with these general principles: he needs to get the children ready for lessons at the beginning of the day, proceed with his teaching plans with the appropriate groupings and transitions and deal with all the normal things that might happen during the lessons. To start with, the children are supposed to come in, sit down and prepare for the lessons. 'OK, come and sit down there please.' 'Come in quietly. Settle in your own place'. During the course of a lesson, other transitions (such as moving from one mode of study to another) are always under Mr. McGee's careful control. For example, one Year Six science lesson started with the children sitting on the carpet first and listening to the teacher's story-telling and introduction to the lesson. Then they changed to the table and chair area for discussion with their partners. After the talking time they were asked to work in silence on their own and then they came back to the carpet to continue the story telling and introduction of a new topic. Later they were instructed to sit on their chairs and work again. After the work they were led outside and sat in a circle on the ground with some equipment in the centre. Finishing that part, they went back to the classroom, sitting on the carpet before they were dispersed to the table for work time again. Sometimes this kind of organisational arrangement sets a strict framework of activities for the children every 5-10 minutes. For lower year groups this kind of transition is combined with different task-related group work conducted simultaneously under the teacher's guidance and control.

The organisational complexity sometimes causes confusion if the instruction from the teacher is not clearly received. At the end of one Year Five morning session,

Mr. McGee gave instructions about which table was to change for PE and the children at different tables therefore took turns to transit from writing to changing their clothes. For the third table one or two boys hesitated about whether to move to get changed or not, and nobody actually left their table to get their PE kits until Mr. McGee noticed their delay and gave further instructions. On the teacher's side, it is important to keep the situation under control. Once, the day after a session which he admitted was disorganised, Mr. McGee took special care to limit the number of people for a school library visit.

Sometimes Mr. McGee's teaching organisation demonstrates both sophistication and flexibility as he tries to devise a plan suitable to everybody's needs. Once the teaching assistant was asked to stay inside with the remaining children when most were working outside. Another time, near the end of a period of work he let children choose between going to the front to listen to his story and taking more time on their writing. In a maths lesson, after some presentation to the whole group he called seven children's names and made them a group for special work; while he was helping the others to work out some maths problems the special group worked on some tasks with the teaching assistant. Then at an appropriate point, Mr. McGee let the children do self-assessment of their ability to work out the sums on the whiteboard and decide their own grouping. One group made of children who self-assessed their ability to complete the work went to their tables to work by themselves. Others stayed with Mr. McGee to have more teaching from him. Eight children chose to stay. Then a little bit later, another three came back from their tables and joined the group. After more teaching and support, Mr. McGee dismissed the children in batches: 'xxx, xxx and xxx, you don't need my help. Go back to get on with your work'. In four different batches these eleven children were gradually sent back to work alone.

4.4.2 Discipline-focused instructions

Instructions and guidance take two main forms in the classroom: those concerned with the organisation of teaching and learning activities (which were the topic of the last section) and those concerned with discipline (the topic of the present section). Instructions of both kinds are an inescapable part of lessons. As we saw in the previous section, the instructions are an essential part of Mr. McGee's fast-paced transition between teaching activities. But disciplinary instructions are also part of the

everyday experience of classroom lessons for the children in his class. There are three aspects of disciplinary instructions that occupied a prominent place in my observations:

- The contents of the instructions
- The frequency of the instructions
- The object of the instructions.

First, the content of the instructions falls into three categories according to the message they give. Some explicitly addresses disciplinary issues to individuals. ('You are not doing what you are asked to do'. 'This just can't be done', 'What are you doing now? What are you supposed to be doing right now?'). Others reinforce regulations about entry, sitting, moving and concentrating. ('We have to learn how to come in. Not walking around, not shouting...', 'First of all, we're going to sit down', 'We all need to listen, we all need to sit down'. 'That's absolutely not how we go to the room.' 'First thing, first of all, tuck in your chairs', 'I wouldn't have children sit with their back to me', 'Bill, stop, we have a nice quiet room. You're running around', 'Sit on your bottom; turn your chair this way. Put your book down and look this way', 'I want to see that you're listening'). Others provide explanations for the regulations. ('It's not fair you always call at me while I'm talking to others', 'I can't hear the boys and girls in front of me' or 'I can't hear xxx who sits beside me', 'Some of you think it's a talking time and playing time. It's definitely not.' 'You might not be good if you're talking...You may really like to talk but you should think if it's really necessary.').

Secondly, I counted the number of disciplinary instructions that occurred on one afternoon in the class I was observing. From 1:10 to 3:25 pm there were nearly 50 different occasions when discipline was used. Altogether there were 190 units of discipline. By a unit of discipline, I mean either one name being called out, or one sentence reminding the children what to do, or repeated reminding or explanations, or positive comments; each of these was counted as a separate unit. This set of data can be further analysed quantitatively. For example, in terms of frequency disciplinary instructions occurred on average every three minutes or less.

Thirdly, with regard to the object of the disciplinary instructions, I noticed that there were some children who were constantly being reminded on an individual basis in addition to the more general disciplinary instructions to the whole class. To some

children, there was constant reminding and guidance. Their name was called, together with a brief disciplinary instruction. Sometimes it was expressed sternly: 'xxx, you must sit down', 'I don't want you to walk around the room and talk today.' Mr. McGee raised his voice to Andy and Bill, something rare in his interaction with others. His approach in their case was more severe, and the frequency of disciplinary instructions greater. One afternoon, over a 20 minutes' period, I recorded behaviour-related interventions as follows: Small Bill was targeted 3 times; Andy, 5 times; Joyce, 4 times; Jackie, once; Mark, 2 times; Kevin, 2 times. In addition to these, during the 20 minutes, he gave a quiet gesture to a child, softly called a girl's name and used an Effort Point as a means of discipline.

4.4.3 Rewards and sanctions

Discipline is closely related to rewards and sanctions. These are highly structured in this school. For example, Effort Points are given out by the teacher and when a certain number of stamps have been collected there is a prize. 'Achiever' is the weekly award given to one or more children, and is formally recognised at school assembly. There is also a way of putting names on the 'Smiley face' and 'Bad face' board in the class I was observing; children's names are added to the respective faces to indicate a reward or a warning. However, these set forms of reward and sanction are not as conspicuous as the indications of reward and sanction given by the teacher in his judgement of children's behaviour and performance.

On the whole, rewards are frequently used as positive feedback on children's work and performance by the teacher. Mr. McGee sometimes gives rewards to a whole group or the whole class at the end of a lesson or a day. But conspicuously in Mr. McGee's lessons rewards to specific groups or individuals are a way of giving praise and rewarding good performances. For example, once in a music lesson, three children were allowed by Mr. McGee to choose their favourite track of music to replay because 'You've done very well today.' Behaviour that conforms to expectations such as 'Sit nicely' or 'No shouting' is often taken as deserving reward from the teacher. Mr. McGee invited the boy to do a maths problem, 'Would you like to have a go? You are sitting nicely and quietly.' At the beginning of a lesson he gave an award to a girl sitting nicely for the start of a lesson, 'Lilly, give me your effort card, you've made such a nice start'. Another time when children were competing for the teacher's attention to give their names to the two cartoon characters created for

maths work, Mr. McGee gave the chance to Ted, saying, 'Ted, because you are so quiet'. Once in circle time Mr. McGee said, 'You've been such a good girl. Would you like to sit in the centre to start the game?' In one indoor PE Mr. McGee asked Eve who was described as having done the best balance movement the week before to demonstrate it to the class, 'Can you show us what you were working on?' At the end of the lesson the most improved child named by the teaching assistant had a similar opportunity. Mr. McGee reiterated that she would 'use her eye to spot who is doing very well.' For one dismissal, Mr. McGee let two boys have an early break time while he kept others back for a while before they were dismissed.

There are two main kinds of sanction in Mr. McGee's lessons: 'time out' and 'move out'. 'Time out' is to take some time out of the offending child's break time. Mr. McGee usually takes the time to talk with the child concerned. Once Mr. McGee just said 'Lunchtime' to a boy who appeared to have done something wrong and it seemed that the boy knew well that he would be required to come to the teacher at lunchtime. 'Move out' is to move the child from his or her regular place while the lesson continues. One day Mr McGee twice asked the same girl to move out of her group to sit separately on the carpet as a penalty for misbehaving. Another time he just pointed with his finger without speaking to indicate that a child should move to the carpet. Sometimes this sanction was not noticed by other children. Once nearly at the end of a handwriting session, a girl was asked to move to the carpet alone. Two children came to her separately and asked if she had finished her work before all the others and was waiting for the next lesson.

The rewards and sanctions are also used as means of stimulus or warning by Mr. McGee. 'Can you see me at break time?' was clearly understood by a boy as an indication of punishment. Then a little while later, Mr. McGee gave a concession: 'If in the rest of the lesson you can show you are behaving well, you won't have to do it [see the teacher at break time].' On other occasions, Mr McGee uses awards to encourage the patterns of behaviour he wants, such as sitting nicely and concentrating: 'Nice, I hope you all get 2 effort points', 'I know two tables are good enough to have effort points but I don't think the other three are'.

4.4.4 Children's experience of grouping strategies and classroom organisation

The above accounts of the teacher's approach to organisation and discipline still do not give a clear picture of what the life of children in the primary classroom is like. In the coming sections I will shift direction to look at classroom life with the children as agents. Of course, the teacher makes all the decisions about modes of teaching and learning, and the different patterns of working are part of the teacher's organisation and planning. In this section I will start with the arrangements the teacher adopts for the children and then examine their actual time and space related situations from their own perspective.

In my observations children have three main working modes that operate with different frequencies:

- Paired work
- Group work
- Working alone

In paired work the two children are partners cooperating in discussion or the working out of tasks or assessment, and may be treated by teacher as one unit. Group work is when more than two children work on the same topic, but not necessarily in a cooperative style. For example groups may be given work of different levels of difficulty, but work on their own within the group. On other occasions the different groups may be engaged in quite different tasks, such as spelling, reading and a school library visit. Co-operative group work was observed once at the end of a music lesson in preparation for group practice and performance and another time in a literacy lesson where three children worked closely together on the same task. Working alone is the mode in which children are supposed to work quietly on their own task until they finish. For every session of Numeracy or Literacy there is a time of working alone, usually after some initial teaching.

Because in these three working patterns children have slightly different relations with each other, it is worth looking more precisely at the relative locations and status of the children. For paired work, children are typically asked to take someone nearby as their partner though occasionally in music or RE they have the chance to choose a partner. Once Mr. McGee gave specific directions for the children's pairing, 'xxx with xxx, xxx with xxx, please'. Later I discovered there

were fixed pairs for discussion that are known by the children. For group work, usually the groups are pre-set by the teacher. The name list is kept and sometimes shown on the board by the teacher. Sometimes the groups are given names of colours or famous writers. But the children were very clear about their groups, so naming one of the members (such as Jess's group or Oscar's group) was clear enough to children. Children of the same group usually sit at a big table separate from other groups. For working alone, there is a clear indication of how one child is supposed to relate to another. Sometimes in Mr. McGee's practice, the status of 'alone' was further clarified by regulations. Once he required children to sit in boy/girl/boy/girl order to prevent any possible grouping by gender. Therefore one by one the children selected their seats carefully. Another time children were asked to sit as far apart as possible and to put the workbook upside down after finishing the task. On the whole, the children in the classroom are mostly allocated to a particular place according to a previous plan or in an impromptu fashion by the teacher, either in a pair or group or deliberately separated.

The 'places' of the children are also articulated in the teacher's remarks. Mr. McGee uses the phrase 'the normal place' to indicate the table a particular group of children belong to. Typically after some teaching with the children sitting randomly on the carpet he asks them to go back to their group's table to work alone. Sometimes he reiterates the place to sit and strictly requires the children to stay in their places. The group sets are subject to the teacher's adjustment. One day he announced that the children were to change places. He called their names to relocate each of them, and thus the children were placed in different groups with different tasks and with relatively focused attention from either the teaching assistant or himself. One Maths lesson children were asked to go to the place indicated by their books that had previously been given out onto the tables by the teacher. Mr. McGee rearranged the Maths groups and asked the teaching assistant to take photos of the children group by group. After this reorganization the children were asked to go to their 'set places' for the maths groups and the photos were used to identify the location of some children by the teaching assistant. Once I saw Mr. McGee ask the children one by one to go back from the table to the floor before registration. I got to know later that by doing that he was checking whether children were actually at their 'normal place'.

The grouping of children is a recurrent feature in my observations. Once after the latest re-arrangement of children's places, when children were asked to sit on the

carpet they were asked to sit in lines and the children from the same group were instructed to sit roughly in clusters so that it would be more convenient to 'move quickly from table to the carpet'. In line-ups, the children seem to have an order with which they are familiar. Once when they had to stand in line, Mr. McGee asked them to take the order for entry into assembly, and on two other occasions the children were asked to line up boy/girl/boy/girl.

There are times that the grouping is relatively a matter of autonomous choice. In one music session Mr. McGee named several children as group leaders and asked them to pick members, and others could volunteer to join the practice and performance groups. Once at the end of a Maths lesson, Mr. McGee asked children to decide their own grouping after several rounds of mental arithmetic. 'Put your hands up if you'd like to work out how long the duration is between the two times'. The children who decided to do this work were asked to stay on the carpet while the rest were asked to go to tables to continue with last week's work (finding the time of TV programmes).

It is difficult to know how children experience all these different working modes and arrangements simply by observation. In most cases they just do what they are asked without any delay, especially when the instructions are clear. Also it is hard to capture the subtle responses of individuals in a broad and flowing picture of a classroom with thirty-nine children and two teachers. But twice through more salient actions of the teacher I recorded something which revealed the existence of a more hidden side of the picture concerning children's life in the classroom. During the rearrangement of the Maths groups mentioned above, I observed that in the first minute Mr. McGee had to tell two children off because they didn't follow the setting. They tried to move the books and sit somewhere they wanted. Another time when Mr. McGee checked where the children were sitting one by one he actually suspected that the children's places were different from their allocated places. Also at a later stage in my observations when I was focusing more on individuals, I witnessed how concerned the children were with the grouping. They were waiting on the carpet and kind of guessing where they would be located when it was the time to announce the new Maths groups. 'I want sit on that one,' a girl called out. 'Yeah', Henry and Peter cheered after their names were called out in the same group. Similarly, Iris and Phoebe liked to sit together, but they were asked to swap places by Mr. McGee because they talked too much.

Although I feel that the children were generally well involved in their work when working in pairs or co-operative groups, these patterns of working do not form the main components of the children's mode of learning. My observations confirm that most of the time children learn as individuals as they sit on the carpet or at their normal tables in the classroom, and this suggests that the most common interactions in the classroom occur between teachers (Mr. McGee and the teaching assistant) and children. Therefore the main focus of my observation within the kaleidoscope of classroom busy-ness was this teacher-student interaction. The next three sections attempt to capture some of the major elements of this complex interaction while keeping the experience of the children at the heart of the narration.

4.4.5 Under the surveillance of the teacher

It has already been noted that the classroom under observation is characterised by frequent organisational and disciplinary instructions. Mr. McGee seems to set store by the teacher's direct influence on the children, and this is reflected in his style of organisation which is teacher-dominated rather than based on peer grouping and co-operation. The teacher's dominant role in the classroom is highlighted by his clear instructions and constant indirect reminding. It seems as if the children are under his surveillance all the time. He uses three main strategies to maintain this surveillance and vigilance.

First, he requires the children to stay in his sight at all times, and he wants them to know that they are in his sight. He constantly reminds individual children to sit with their face towards him. On one occasion he asked the children who were out of his line of vision to shift their position: 'You are out of sight.' Mr. McGee pointed with a gesture of his hand to a position just within his field of vision. No matter what he is doing, he makes sure that he can always keep an eye on the other children, at least once in a while. Once Oscar was standing up after returning from the toilet while Mr. McGee was explaining the writing task, and immediately Mr. McGee spotted him and said, 'Oscar, could you sit down? Just wait.' He always notices the little actions of deviant children and responds by moving one of the offenders away. Once while he was working with one group on the carpet he kept an eye on the others and on six occasions within a very short period of time he reminded them of the need to get on with their work. He always maintains a position where he can tightly supervise everybody in the class even when he is listening to an individual child's reading. This

is a recurrent theme in my field notes. He reminds the whole class about the need for quiet, and quickly spots the noisy ones. On one occasion he noticed the actions of the individuals and called their names to remind them, 'Bill, what are you reading? So you don't need to talk to Jason, do you? Tuck your chair in, please.'

Secondly, he uses a wide range of bodily movements to maintain the children's attention and remind them that he is watching them. His facial expressions sometimes show a silent power over the children; for example, when he is quietly waiting for the children to calm down his face may appear pensive while he keeps looking at them. Sometimes his eyes and the intensity of his glance are used to remind individual children of what they should be doing. In my field notes I wrote that Mr McGee's eyesight was sticking to the boy as he said 'No, no. Don't touch it, Jason.' On another occasion he stopped a boy who had just started reading to him and gazed intently at the whole class to indicate that he thought the noise level was too high. Three times in one morning I saw him touch his lip with his index finger and move it slowly down, and then follow it up with a smile. Regularly he would simply click his fingers to remind individuals not to do something. Above all he made use of his voice. Normally it was well-controlled with the same level of sound, so that any variation in level was immediately noticed by the children. In a working session I observed in a Year Five class, Mr. McGee used his voice level to get his message across to his students. His first set of instructions and question answering were at a level for the whole class to hear. Then he kept a low voice in answering and instructing individual students. His evaluation of the whole class was meant to be heard by everyone, though he got their attention simply by raising his voice. 'There's five minutes left' was another 'public' announcement after further work with individuals.

The third main method he uses to ensure the children know that they are under his constant surveillance is constant verbal reminding, including both frequently repeated instructions such as 'tuck your chair in', 'stay in your place', 'no moving', 'no calling out', 'stay in your place', 'sit down on your bottom', 'sit back down', 'don't get out of your place', 'don't mess about', 'don't cover your face', 'we don't want a lot of noise today' and more specifically focused statements like 'Bill, you have ten books. You don't need to go to the library', 'Kevin, you'll stay there today' or 'George, put your chair on the floor.' The children are repeatedly reminded to focus their attention on the teacher when they are expected to. At the end of one

Maths lesson, Mr. McGee asked the children to have their 'arms folded, to show you're ready for the end of maths', 'all show we're listening'. Because some children were still moving, he needed another line of instructions: 'Boys and girls, stop, and listen. Don't stand up and walk off before you really listen.' He also gave individual instructions to each child with eye contact to indicate the need for attention. Once, in the middle of a sentence, Joyce's name was called by Mr. McGee. 'Joyce, Show me you're listening. Listening doesn't involve turn around to something else.' Another time when he needed the children's attention but it was not there he shouted, 'Well', and strictly guided the children: 'Put your pen down, turn this way, fold your arms and look this way.' After that he kept calling individuals' names to look at him, 'Come on xxx'. 'Come on, xxx, this way, please', and 'Can you look at me again?' whenever a distraction happened.

It is clear that Mr. McGee's surveillance is a tool of control over the children (even if at first sight from my description of the repeated instructions it appears as if the children are out-of-control). As a fact of matter, Mr. McGee is always in control of the situation. Mr. McGee's way to stay in control is to fill the classroom with his reminders and instructions. Indeed, it is through the constant reminding that he takes control: 'Jason, Andy, you find your place here and sit down here today', 'Lily, sit down. Jack, you concentrate on this, please', 'Joe, you sit down now. Tuck your chair in please', 'George, I don't want your first reaction to be to find somebody to talk to. I want you to sit down and work for yourself.'

How do the children experience this constant surveillance and constant use of instructions? Clearly it is part of their everyday experience. Sometimes the reminders are so frequent that I find myself wondering if any child's name has not been called out for some minor infringement of the expected patterns of behaviour. And for many children, this is a very frequent occurrence. At the end of one session of work the children were asked for attention: 'Boys and girls, could I stop you for a while, please? I'd like to ask you all sit down, fold your arms and look at this way.' Then he went on calling their names to remind them what to do: 'Thank you, Jim...', or 'xxx, hands down, feet on the floor, please.' Another boy was named and reminded, 'It's good manners to...I find you are rude. You're doing something else. People will find that rude.' Andy then was spotted turning to the library table while Mr. McGee was talking about the attention given to people. 'Andy, can I see you tomorrow?' which Andy understood as a penalty. The whole time Mr. McGee's

reminders were dominant and lasted until the children moved on to their next activity. My preliminary reflections on the way the children experience this surveillance are contained at the end of the section on Classroom Lessons.

4.4.6 Distractions, Disruptions and Time-wasting Strategies

Normally, the children in the class I observed do what they are supposed to do, though even this picture of normality is difficult to describe because the classroom is always so full of a wide variety of activities and interactions. It was only gradually that I became aware through all this busy-ness of an undercurrent of minor deviations from the expected patterns of behaviour. In this section I shall attempt to describe and analyse these deviant behaviours, which may all have their roots in children's boredom or inability to concentrate for long periods. The first category is distractions: the children may be too easily distracted from their work by disruptive neighbours, or they may be actively seeking something to distract them because of a lack of interest in what they are meant to be doing. The second category is time-wasting activities, which are a particular kind of self-initiated distraction like asking to go to the toilet at regular intervals, or to go to get a drink, or to sharpen one's pencil. The third category is disruptive behaviour, i.e. behaviour which stops other children from concentrating on their work, such as unauthorised noise and moving about the classroom or generally 'messaging about'. I shall now examine each of these categories in more detail.

Most of the distractions in the classroom originate from the children, of course, but sometimes the teacher can be responsible. Once, when Mr. McGee played the cassette recorder, the sound of the machine actually attracted almost every child's attention. For a moment everyone was concentrating on it. When Mr. McGee played the wrong track accidentally, it led to big laugh from the children. But it is rare to find occasions when all of the children are concentrating at the same time. One such occasion was the PE game 'Who are the quickest?' (i.e. to stand up and lie down in accordance with the teacher's instruction). Even though Mr. McGee moved while giving his instructions, all children followed very well and seemed really fascinated with this game. But most of the time there are children who are not really engaged with their work, and for some children this happens quite frequently. For example, I noted that some children found it hard to concentrate on a maths activity after the first 5-10 minutes of a 20-minute session of work. On another occasion, I observed Ann

sitting near the front in a state of distraction most of the time. She was supposed to be reading; but was just gazing at the activities on the front carpet. Another occasion again I observed Mark (who was sitting by the work trays) pull out one tray and gaze at it for several minutes during a writing lesson. Another form of distraction is to have some small movements and quiet contacts with friends. Once I observed Tina and Ann exchange eye contacts and whispers with Elisa. Sometimes Mr. McGee asks children to move because of this kind of distraction. In an independent reading session Andy went over to his tray and showed me, 'I still have my poppy', and then said the same thing to the children at his table. Eve and Joe had a look at it. Joe played with it for a while then put it back in front of Andy. Later, Tim put the poppy on his chest, and when Lily came back from the school library time she too played with the poppy for a while.

Even under the teacher's constant surveillance, there is often an underlying search for distractions on the part of the children. In my field notes on a music lesson, I recorded a series of quiet distractions that occurred totally out of the teacher's sight.

The recorder-playing for the music lesson started. But still Mr. McGee was reminding individuals continuously: 'Anna, we ALL need to sit down.' 'Andy, can you see me tomorrow?' 'Kevin, leave it.' 'xxx, you should come to join us now.' 'You really have to sit down today.' 'Kevin, Bill...Bill, what did I say (with clicks of fingers)?' 'Joyce, if you hit the recorder, I'll take it away.' Then I saw Bill and Mark were close to the trays and they played a little bit without any noise. Also without being seen, Joe and Andy had already exchanged parts of their recorders. Around the tables, some boys rolled their recorders on the table. Mr. McGee spotted this and reminded them that they could stop the rolling by putting something stable beside it. But for a few, the recorder itself was still the focus of attention. I saw Mark was not settled. Then big Bill's recorder was taken by the teaching assistant and later he was told to sit in the front because of his tapping on the table. After the music when children were asked to sort out their stuff, Andy had the chance to be near to Henry; he called Henry and congratulated him on the performance of his group and especially his playing of the recorder: 'Henry, Henry, well done!' In the same period, Jason came to Andy to compare heights with him. Oscar was

hugging the teaching assistant and encouraging her to feel his coat. After the stuff had all been collected, the children were asked to sit on the carpet. Mr. McGee continued to remind the children to sit up.

(17th Nov, in Class 4OM)

Time-wasting activities include things like asking to go to the toilet or to get a drink. Once when a boy asked to go out for a drink, his request was rejected because 'you've just come from your lunchtime'. Another time Alice sneakily went to the teaching assistant to ask if she could go to the toilet. 'You have to ask Mr. McGee,' the teaching assistant replied, but on this occasion Mr. McGee gave permission. I was aware that the big pencil sharpener fixed on the table next to the sink was a haven for some children wanting a break. For example, Bill and Ted made their visit to the big sharpener an excuse for a talk. Ted was asked to go back and Mr McGee told him he shouldn't come until Bill had finished, but he came back a while later when Bill was still there. Another time when the children were supposed to be working, Big Bill and Joe went to the bin to sharpen their pencils (using their own small sharpeners) and have a chat. Meanwhile, Andy struck up a conversation with Jim and small Bill on his way back from the big sharpener, Joe came to use the sharpener. On his way back Tim was laughing at him, and then it was Eve's turn to sharpen her pencil. Tim, Joe and Eve seemed to be in a competition to get the sharpest pencil. Lily came after that, and joined the game. Then Andy returned to the sharpener (the fourth time to my knowledge). Interestingly, the constant to-ing and fro-ing at this table had no influence on the other tables, but after a while Mr. McGee noticed that the table was unsettled, and they started to work at last.

More serious disruption occurs when the children wander round the class, make too much noise, or generally 'play around' rather than getting on with their work. Once, Andy was spotted by Mr. McGee changing his seat. When challenged, he complained that it was because of the sunshine on his original seat, and I helped to pull the blind down. On another occasion, he said to a girl, 'You're not having a walking-around-the-room day. You'll be sitting in your place, Alice'. When small Bill needed some help, Mr. McGee asked him to 'Tuck your chair in. Don't wander about. I'll come in a minute'. These kinds of disruption are actually highlighted by the teacher's vigilance because he keeps reminding some children to be more attentive. During one period of working time I recorded the teacher's reminding as

follows: ‘You’re wanted to sit down, please, Joyce. Joyce, would you tuck yourself in please. Joyce, would you really tuck yourself in, please.’ ‘Iris, Jackie, Jenny, sit down please’ ‘Sit down’ in the classroom context, I noted, usually means to be quiet, not to interact with other pupils, to be quiet by oneself.

Apart from wandering out of their seats, the most frequent misdemeanour in the classroom was making noise. One afternoon Joyce was told off twice because she ‘made noise’ throughout the transition. Andy was told, ‘Put your noise down, please.’ This kind of reminding and naming occurred very frequently this afternoon. Bill was told off and told to move himself to another table. Alice was reminded about noise many times. Some time later, Bill couldn’t help drumming on the table with his fingers and was stopped by the teaching assistant. Another lesson, during the two carpet sessions, he made drum beats four times with his thumb or hand on the carpet or on the teacher’s chair. One afternoon, Andy and Jason were spotted making noise, and Mr McGee said, ‘Andy, Jason, you’ll never sit together’.

‘Messing about’ or ‘having a laugh’ (referring to children’s intentional initiation of some fun in the context of classroom) is another form of classroom disruption. On one occasion, Andy, Jason, and some others were at a table and I was sitting at the corner of the table. When they were doing their work, Jason tossed a little piece of rubber back to the centre of the table after using it. The rubber rebounded in my direction and touched my arm. Jason immediately said ‘sorry’, a bit uneasily. Seeing that there was no risk of it being counted as an offence (I had gestured ‘it doesn’t matter’), Andy and Jason laughed cheekily at it. Andy took the rubber and tossed it again, and tried to attract another boy’s attention by recounting the incident with gestures accompanied by laughter and mocking. After that the lesson carried on quietly, but their facial expressions showed their ‘mocking’, ‘playing around’ intention.

‘Messing about’ seems to be caused by a general lack of interest or boredom, or perhaps in some children’s cases an acuter feeling resulting from the difficulty of the task and almost getting lost. For maths works, for example, I found that many children just are far below the level of difficulty represented by the work, and the work time to them is something totally painful. Thus the disciplinary reminding from the teacher has to be constant, especially for those children perceived by Mr McGee to have disruptive tendencies. But once again it is a complex situation. The regular distractions and disruptions remind us of the normal justification of the discipline

arrangements: to make sure there is a good learning environment. But if we dig deeper, it is obvious that the superficial quietness does not guarantee the concentration. It also raises questions about the nature of distraction. Are there more complicated feelings on the side of the children that lie behind the distractions? Again, these issues will be the subject of further reflection and discussion at the end of the present section.

4.4.7 Getting the teacher's attention

My observations indicate how much time the children spend trying to get the teacher's attention, either because they need help with their work, or because they are seeking permission to do something, or because they are seeking approval for something they have done. Sometimes it is simply that they think they have the answer to a question, and they are competing with other children to be chosen to give the answer. Clearly in a classroom with one teacher (plus normally one teaching assistant) and 39 children, getting the teacher's attention can be a major issue from the children's perspective. I shall begin this sub-section by explaining the teacher's rules relating to getting his attention, and then examine the children's responses to those rules. I shall also distinguish between the different reasons children may seek or need the teacher's attention.

Mr McGee provides clear rules about acceptable and unacceptable ways of gaining his attention. Apart from emergencies, the general principle is that the children should sit with arms folded and try to catch his eye, though sometimes he accepts it if they put their hands up, especially if he wants them to confirm they have understood something, for example. He regularly reinforces this expected behaviour: 'Anyone who sits on their bottom with arms folded will be chosen first, those who put their hands up will be chosen second', 'I'll call somebody who catches my eye, rather than waves.' At one point, Mr. McGee named two girls because they were not following the instruction: 'Joyce and Alice, I don't want your hands up.' Joyce made a face to Alice when she heard this. 'Keep your hands down.' Before the afternoon register, there were immediately some hands up after children came into the classroom. Mr. McGee insisted, 'I'll not answer any questions until I take the register. Keep your hands down.' On another occasion he said, 'I won't ask you to put your hands up. It may be anyone I choose', presumably to stop the immediate putting up of hands to answer a question and especially the children's competitive seeking of the

teacher's attention by calling and raising their hands up higher and higher. But not long later, when a question was raised and Mr. McGee was expecting an answer, hands were put up instinctively. This time, Mr. McGee forgot his promise and chose from the children with their hands up. Mr. McGee would request children to put their hands up on some occasions, for example, to find out how many children would have school dinner. On another occasion he requested 'Hands-up' and stressed 'Straight up' as a clear indication of a certain attitude: 'Do you honestly know the answer, or are you not so sure?' Once in maths, a boy and a girl were about to raise their hands but then quickly folded their arms instead and looked up at the teacher. Unfortunately, a girl who raised her hand was chosen to answer the question.

But the fact is that any question just leads to an immediate putting up of hands. Another aspect of this phenomenon is that children dramatise this practice. I noticed one day that they were competing to raise their arm higher and quicker than anyone else. From the children's point of view, the problem with the approved way of getting the teacher's attention (making eye contact with the teacher) is that it demands 100 per cent concentration and even then there is no guarantee of success. If there is any problem with the search for eye contact, the children are helpless to indicate to the teacher any response they had, which is frustrating, and any attempt to give additional gestures to the teacher has the potential risk of being spotted as offending.

On other occasions, Mr McGee consciously sought out responses from children who were not competing for his attention. Once he invited a boy to deal with a maths problem and used the approach as an encouragement of good behaviour: 'Would you like to have a go? You are sitting nice and quietly.' This invitation came out of the blue to the boy, and he shook his head with an expression of timidity on his face. This kind of response on the part of the children to an unexpected request from the teacher provides an interesting insight into the position of children in the classroom context. The teacher has a very clear, assertive, confident connection between behaviour and academic attainment, or at least an encouraging attitude towards 'good' behaviour. Thus there is a double pressure on children: pressure to behave in a certain way, and the expectation of behaviour-related academic attainment. Academic ability is the essence, but to some children this means a constant struggle because either they are not able enough to keep up or they find it difficult to obey the rules and fulfil the teacher's expectations.

These teacher-child interactions on the issue of attention-seeking can lead to a state of tension in other ways as well. One afternoon when the class were working quietly, Mr. McGee required the children to put their hands up for personal inquiries. 'Please don't follow me. Stay in your places and hang on. Don't call out,' Mr. McGee kept reiterating the rules. But since the teaching assistant was out with the children for the school library visit, children kept coming to Mr. McGee. After many reminders, Mr. McGee once raised his voice to the class and said, 'I'm really getting cross now.' In another incident in a Maths lesson, Mr. McGee spotted small Bill calling the teaching assistant for help. He reminded him, 'We don't shout for Mrs. Todd, do we? Raise you hand, and wait'. But some time later, Bill couldn't help drumming his fingers on the table, before the teaching assistant was free to come to him and stopped him.

The children need a lot of individual help and support at work time, and seeking help is one of the main reasons why children try to get the teacher's attention. It seems that sometimes two teachers are not enough for the vast needs of the children. On one occasion I counted seven hands up for help at one point and on average there were no fewer than four hands waiting at any time during work time. At the work session of one maths lesson, Mr. McGee took turns to go to each table while the teaching assistant sat in her normal place in Oscar's group. Gradually hands went up from the other tables. Mr. McGee spotted one girl's hand up for help, and he asked her to put her hand down and to go on to the next question. He promised to be there to help in four minutes and instructed her not to stay stuck on one question. As Mr. McGee kept moving from one table to another he also kept responding to children who had their hands up with words such as, 'Don't wander about. I'll come in a minute', 'Keep on working, don't be stuck there.' When Oscar made some noise for attention, he said, 'Oscar, no shouting please. Some others are waiting as well.' On another occasion when Tim came up to Mr. McGee and the teaching assistant while they were talking, he was ignored intentionally for a while. While Tim still followed the teachers, Mr. McGee told him, 'Sit down, please. I'll come to you.' Sometimes Mr. McGee makes it clear that it is not the time for questions. Once he told the class that for the first twenty minutes of the working time he would not answer any questions: 'No matter how much you want to ask a question, you have to wait'. Another time he said to a child, '[We'll] come to questions at the end' when he

spotted his hand up. Then he always seems to remember to go back to it at the appropriate time.

Another reason why children try to get the teacher's attention is to get permission for something personal or different from the current activity, for example, to go to toilet in the middle of a lesson. The usual rule is that only one child can go to the toilet at a time. Once I observed Luke, who had only recently moved to the school, go to the front to Mr. McGee when he was working with a group of children on the carpet. 'Mr. McGee', he said, intending to ask permission, but Mr. McGee just shook his head without looking at him and rejected his request. He ignored him later on while Luke stood there. Luke made a face out of frustration in my direction. 'You can't ask to go to the loo', Mr. McGee then explained, but did not elaborate. Later two boys went to the front again. Before they opened their mouth, Mr. McGee gestured 'no' by a wave of his palm. Sometimes when children do not get a response to a raised hand, they try to call out the teacher's name or else walk up to him. But Mr. McGee doesn't accept this behaviour. 'Please don't follow me. Stay in your places and hang on. Don't call out.' Once Mark had his hand up for a long time but the teaching assistant didn't come (either she didn't notice him or she was busy with other children). He then walked up to her while keeping an eye on Mr. McGee. Finally he still was told to go to Mr. McGee by the teaching assistant.

Of course when children seek the teacher's attention, he does not immediately know what they want; it may be help with their work, or permission to do something, or something entirely different. Once Peter and other two boys put their hands up insistently and finally got Mr. McGee's attention. It turned out to be that they had seen the signal of low battery on the laptop. Mr. McGee gave them a brief thanks.

Sometimes attention seeking seems to be part of an elaborate game of 'pleasing teacher' by drawing attention in an exaggerated way to the fact that one is following the rules. Mark sometimes folded his arms and tried to catch Mr. McGee's eye immediately after the question was asked. This led me to think that he liked to get the teacher's attention, but it may have been just another way of relieving his boredom (his boredom was indicated by his tendency to beat the edge of the wood box beside him). Alice showed similar behaviour. I noted her keenness to get the chance to give an answer, with her eyes open wide trying to catch the teacher's eye and get his attention, but at the same time she was constantly playing with her bead bracelet. Once small Bill called out 'please' to show his keenness to have a go at

answering a question, and when he was not picked he showed an expression of very obvious disappointment on his face and even with the movements of his head and arms. When he turned head again, I noted his normal expression of emptiness and lack of interest and involvement. Vicky always sits close to the teacher, in front of the teacher on the carpet and makes a lot of effort to show her attention. She folds her arms quickly with a big movement of her upper body to emphasise that she is following the rules. Once at the end of maths, Eve offered to help tidy the tables for a group even though she was not in that group. Was she seeking approval from the teacher, or was she simply glad to have something she could do well, after the strain (or boredom) of the maths lesson?

4.4.8 Initial reflections on classroom lessons

The teacher's actions include frequent organisational and discipline-focused instructions that keep children under constant surveillance and provide clear indications of rewards and sanctions. During their classroom lessons the children experience repeated reminders about their behaviour as well as regimented grouping and placing, and generally they appear to accept these as part of the normal life of the school. Classroom activity is dominated by the teacher, though at the same time the children may initiate certain actions with the purpose of getting personal attention or relieving their boredom or anxieties by deviating a bit from the order the teacher aims at in his organisation and surveillance.

My observations provide a more or less coherent picture of children's life behind an even clearer picture of the teacher's way of giving instructions and organising the class. Mr. McGee's way of relating to the children suggests a strong tendency to control their actions and behaviour. However, the intentions behind the more obvious 'controlling' measures are worth exploring. Is this control for its own sake or for a more justifiable reason, such as creating an optimum environment for learning? To what extent is Mr. McGee consciously trying to modify the attitudes and values of the children by controlling their behaviour and activities? Is there also a difference between the conscious and unconscious in terms of his intention? What is Mr. McGee's intention in his frequent interventions in the children's behaviour and activities? To what extent are his reminders simply an immediate reaction to the children's distracting conduct? To what extent does he act according to his initial intentions? To what extent is his use of rewards and sanctions a genuine response to

children's behaviour and performance, given its strong intention to stimulate cooperation and obedience?

My initial reflection on the children's response to this surveillance and control is focused on the children's own feelings, perspectives, learning and ways of making sense of it. Even though there are some clear indications of their responses revealed in my observation notes in connection with the teacher's surveillance, grouping and placing, there is never a clear picture of how children respond to the generally 'strict' atmosphere in Mr. McGee's classroom. As mentioned before, on most occasions children follow the teacher's instructions, even in some difficult situations. But how do the children make sense of the teacher's measurements in grouping them, and keeping an eye on them? Do they take a similar view to the teacher's in relation to groupings and classroom behaviour? How do they find the difference between their own view and that of the teacher? Do they learn anything from the teacher's use of rewards and sanctions, or from his reminding, assessments and stimuli? What is going on in the children's minds when they are distracted or disruptive or when they try to waste time? Why do they sometimes try to 'please teacher' and sometimes to the opposite? Are their actions motivated by boredom or by feeling under pressure? Is life a constant struggle for some of them?

There seems to be a range of different responses to the situation in the classroom. Most children demonstrate their obedience most of the time but some obviously find it difficult to conform to the teacher's rules and instructions. The behaviour and performance of these children are noted and assessed much more frequently and severely. At the same time, it is interesting to explore the experiences of the 'invisible' majority. These and other questions will be explored more fully in Chapter Six after the findings from the children's interviews have been presented.

This chapter on observation findings and initial reflections offers a close-up portrait of the children's life in the closed classroom or school hall, which has brought quite a few issues to the board, for example the dominance of the teacher's instructions and management in lessons, and assemblies as comparable to class lessons due to the sheer similarity of the organisational aspects of the two occasions. Specifically, my reflections on the intentions or perceptions of either the teacher or the children point to a complex task of trying to decipher their inner world. However, the ambiguity that my observation data inevitably reveal will be further probed

through the children's own accounts. My coming chapter will report the findings of the interviews with the children.

5. Interview Findings

Interviews are the main approach I adopt in getting children's perceptions of and perspectives on their own school life. The findings from my observation presented in Chapter 4 provide a context for the further exploration of children's experience of the rituals of schooling. The interview findings will be presented in two separate frameworks: children's accounts of the specific aspects of school life that I identified in my observations, and what the children said on general schooling issues that they identified themselves. The purpose of analysing the accounts of the children in this way is to give space to the children's own agenda as well as focusing on my own major concerns. Given the nature of my research and its emphasis on valuing the children's own perspectives, my twofold analysis of their accounts thus attempts to bring a better balance between the children's agenda and my own intentions as a researcher.

I am aware of different possible ways of 'reading' and reporting data (for example, breaking an interview up into sections according to the particular topics being discussed, or following the natural flow and viewing the entire interview as a unity). My judgements are based on my understanding of what the data as the whole reveal to me, in addition to the two main frameworks of analysis. As illustrated in Chapter Three, my interviews with the children are largely to be seen as conversations with them as well as listening to them talk to each other. Because children's ways of expressing things are sometimes broken or repetitive and jump from one topic to another, it is better to take what they say in its whole meaning, not just taking bits or parts of the flow of speech.

On the whole, what the children said can be counted as a genuine expression of issues in their own lives, given the nature of the interviews. I approach the interview data in a spirit of 'wholeness', although judgements are necessarily being implemented all the time. For example, given the quantity of data, I have to be selective in terms of how much quotation to include and how much weight to give to each issue. But at the same time I have taken great care to present no distortions or false information and to be fair, accurate, and also representative of the diversity in children's attitudes and opinions.

Children don't restrict their conversations to a single clear topic. I have had to present the data in a semi-analysed form in that I have cut up the transcriptions and then put them into different sections depending on the topic. However, a good balance between direct quotation and my own writing is important. My writing summarizes and explains the connections between the different content and holds the extracts together like threads. The summaries are done carefully so as not to be at the cost of missing out the diversity, subtlety and complexity of the data. At the same time, the children's unclear, tangled-up expressions of their school experiences have various level of depth (for example, description, judgement, expressions of subjective feelings and emotions, or conscious rationalisation). Overall, their accounts give an indication of their general experiences of schooling, and these will be presented in the Interpretation chapter as the result of further exploration.

5.1 Children's Accounts of Specific Aspects of School Life

Each theme of school life identified in the previous chapter has been fully discussed in the interviews by most children. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, my way of administering the interviews is to give full space for the children to explore topics or initiate new ones.

5.1.1 Registration

Registration as one aspect of school life is covered in eight different group interviews which involve almost all the children who participated in the research. The children's accounts reveal two contrasting pictures of registration: one is an official version that connects registration to rescue procedures in the case of a fire or other emergency; the other is a daily routine experienced by them with some boredom and distraction. One interview sheds light on this aspect of school life in a rather abrupt way:

JX: Does the register mean anything to you?

HELEN: Well, it does mean a little bit, like what we have to do.

NICOLA: Well, the register means like ... fire alarm and talk to your friend.

(Interview 9)

The fire alarm side of registration is told by all eight groups. ‘Cos’ if there is a fire’ (Kevin, Interview 17), they want ‘to make sure if everyone is there’ (Iris, Interview 8). It seems that the possibility of an emergency or panic situation has generally convinced children of the importance and value of registration. This strong connection between the practice of registration and the issue of emergency rescue has been learned by the children from their teacher and reinforced by their experiences of fire practice, as revealed in a few interviews. The bit about ‘talking to friends’ sounds like a lapse but turns out to be well supported by children’s confessions of what they actually do during the period of registration.

According to the children the register is taken mostly in alphabetic order by children’s surname and the practice is to respond plainly when the teacher calls the name. Children are easily able to explain the whole process of registration:

IRIS: We sit on the floor, and-, we have to answer, like say, ‘Good morning, Mr. Opie’, like, ‘Packed lunch please’. But if, they’re not here, usually we don’t get an answer. Or people say, ‘They’re away’ or ‘Ill’ or stuff like that... You have to wait and sit silently, waiting your name to be called. Sit silently and in a little bit, he might just ask the last person on the register. The achievers take it and the money box for the like school dinner. And we go to our next lesson.

(Interview 8)

This normal practice of ‘sitting and waiting’ is confirmed as a recurrent point by children. Since it is the alphabetical order of taking register that sets the sequence for children to wait before they are called, a matter of fairness is raised by a group of girls in relation to the practice of registration:

ANITA: Sometimes the teachers, ‘cos they think it’s quite unfair for the people at the last of the register, sometimes they go backwards. So they go from the last. The last person to the first person.

ELLA: Mr. McGee does that. And also...

JX: Why is it unfair, when you said ‘unfair’? Is this...?

ELLA: Because they have to wait until last, to call out their names.

(Interview 7)

The children's immediate responses usually show their consciousness of the existence of the norm. Often the girls demonstrate a subtlety in their way of revealing their own behaviour:

JX: *So what do you do usually when you are waiting?*

ELLA: *We just like sit and talk.*

ANITA: *No. We have to wait. We don't.*

POLLY: *We just sit.*

ELLA: *Erm, well. Some people are talking, which is not supposed to do.*

ANITA: *But I do sometimes.*

ELLA: *Erm, me too, (Ella and Polly giggled.) 'cos it's a bit boring. 'Cos it's like forty person are sitting there, you have to talk a little bit.*

ANITA (grinning): *I got the nails.*

ELLA: *I gonna like that. (She acted out chewing the cuff.) Sitting is boring. Yeah. (She giggled.)*

JX: *Chewing?*

ANITA: *Chewing is not definitely the best thing but it gets you occupied.*

(Interview 7)

Boys sometimes express things in a straightforward style. Kevin told me that they are sometimes told off because they are a bit sloppy and '*not paying enough attention*' when coming back from the lunch time break (Kevin, Interview 9). George told me, '*I think that some people don't like it 'cos you just sit there and quite tend to talk, just sit on the carpet*' (George, Interview 11). In another interview he and the other boys also revealed to me another side to the official story of registration. For example, in George's view, instead of trying to be fair, the teacher uses reverse sequence in taking the register to keep children more alert. Two boys told me that what they do is just to remember the names before and after theirs and wait for either of it, and then get ready to answer the teacher. And about the mistakes children sometimes make during registration, for example, when a girl mixed up the names of two different teachers, George said some children did it deliberately.

Regarding further perceptions of the normal practice of registration, there emerge two versions in terms of understanding exchange of greetings between the

teacher and the child at this time. One girl thinks the exchanges of ‘Good morning’ or ‘Good afternoon’ are a kind of greeting and she generally regards the greetings from teachers as a sign of care. She raises an issue of personal care that no one else mentions about the registration. Others see the greeting as merely a requirement and put more emphasis on practical matters like apologizing for their late arrival or confirming their lunch category.

Do they learn anything from the experience of registration? This question is perceived as strange, but three groups of children offer some interesting responses:

MARK: *Well, you don't learn anything on the register. You just learn to behave, look at the person who is saying it. Look at Mr. McGee or Mr. O.*

JX: *How do you think?*

HELEN: *I think from the register, you will kind of learn ... All I could think you would learn is names. (She giggled.)*

(Interview 19)

GEORGE: *Yeah, even if you don't want to do it you have to do it, 'cos it's for your own safety. But also-, erm, you just sit there, so you're learning to try not to talk. It's not aiming to do that, but sometimes some people might actually learn that, do things from that.*

JX: *So do you learn that?*

GEORGE: *No, not really. (He grinned.)*

JESS: *Not really.*

JX: *How about you? What did you learn?*

JESS: *It's just usual, for us. We've learned it and now it's usual for us, so ... Well, it's like expecting it.*

GEORGE: *It's kind of like to go on routine, because it's like we're programmed to do that, through walk in, sit down, we have to register and so on.*

JESS: *So we are sort of like expecting it really. We know what's gonna happen.*

GEORGE: *And it's kind of planned in our mind.*

JESS: *Because we're experienced. We've experienced it before. We've done it before.*

(Interview 11)

POLLY: *In the register you know like ...seeing all my friends like packed lunch. If in the register they said they were school dinners, then I'll know who goes ...who goes on the trip if my friends are away. I'll just know who to play with at the break time or lunch time.*

(Interview 18)

5.1.2 Dismissal

Dismissal at the end of the day as a topic is discussed in nine group interviews, and most of the children have something to say. In their descriptions, the picture of the last few minutes at school consists of two aspects of life. First there is the plain business of taking the coat, book bag, news letter etc., getting ready and then being dismissed. Then sometimes there are some fun activities such as the games played on Mr. Opie's days and the sweet-giving occasions on someone's birthday. Without any prompting the children tell me these two kinds of things:

IRIS: *We get our stuff. And if we have a little bit of extra time before the parents, like while they get waiting, we can play 'Head down, Thumbs up'. And it's a game where everyone joins in. But you don't have to. And everyone can join in, if they want. And it's just like a couple of minutes. So they're fun things we do for the day.*

(Interview 8)

The two things that happen during dismissal are described differently by different children. The chore of collecting things and the subsequent dismissal are mentioned in a dull or sometimes impatient tone. A group with two girls and one boy complained that sometimes the school day runs later than it is supposed to because of the management of the chores after assembly. Their impression of the dull procedure of dismissal is given by a group of girls as follows:

ANITA: *He like points at you and calls your name and then-. Sometimes you, he has to hand out letters for your parents, so. And normally there's names on the letters. And he just sets the letters in a pile and he calls*

while, by when your name, when your letter. He hands out your letter and you can go.

ELLA: Also, also, sometimes he piled up our bags like books. And then he pulls out our book bag and then the name, the name of the book bags, the beginning of the book bag. Then we get to collect our home stuff and go home. 'Cos he does this with like the book bag, so if you still have your book bag in the tray, you can't go.

POLLY: Then you, then you go last.

(Interview 7)

My further enquiry uncovered a range of alternative approaches the teachers take to dismiss the children. In the children's account, sometimes Mr. Opie does a game, or pretends to shoot and says, 'OK, "PUSHI", you can go'. He also dismisses the children according to some kind of random groupings e.g. those with this letter in your name, those who have been wearing this colour. Mr. McGee's dismissal is mainly reported by the children as pointing to children one by one, saying 'you can go', 'you can go', until the half are gone and then the rest are dismissed.

The end-of-the-day reflection time is only mentioned by one girl spontaneously as a negative comment on Mr. McGee's approach. If I ask them the children respond reluctantly or passively to my inquiry in this respect. For example, some children also revealed that at the end of the day they are a bit restless and often thinking of something else. In the first group interview when I mentioned looking back over the day's activities, the boys showed their not-so-enthusiastic response though every one acknowledged its value when I asked if it is a good thing. George mentioned that he actually didn't like any of the lessons too much but he had to identify one session like library time as the best part of the day so that he could raise his hand and have his arm folded to show Mr. McGee he was ready to go home. Henry and Peter said some days were good but some were 'horrible'. George hoped there could be some change rather than the same routine things every day.

However, when the children explain the practice of reflection time at dismissal, they comment on both the teacher's performance and how they actually feel. The girl who initiated the topic imitated Mr. McGee's tones and her acting appeared slightly mocking:

HELEN: *Or, it's the end of the day, he's like, 'Now, then children. Think of one thing you've really liked from today, or from this week. And once you've done it, sit up nicely'. Like, we have to sit up like this ... (She acted out: arm folded, and appeared very nervous, and artificial.) And then he says ... oh, then asks some people what their favourite thing was. And most people actually just say, 'playtime.'* (She grinned.)

(Interview 9)

The other four children made efforts to share with me their own perspective on the requirement to tell adults their favourite bit of the day, which they obviously considered a private matter.

KEVIN: *That ... that's just stupid. As you know what you did in the day, you know what your favourite lessons is, but you don't ... You want to keep it a bit private between yourself. It's like say, 'Oh, tell me this. You've got to tell me, Yeah.'*

KATE: *'Cos it's like if you're playing a game at break time or lunch time and there were people watching because they were just walking past. And they were in the class. If you said out to anyone, the game is a bit private. Then they're going to laugh. They'll say ... 'cos they'll know that is your favourite thing of the day.*

(Interview 17)

IRIS: *Yeah, so you wouldn't like to tell anything. But if like something's been really happy, and erm ...if you think that your mum wouldn't like it and go and see them ...But we've had fun. It sounds in a way like it wouldn't have been fun. And it would have like been horrible. But ... So, sometimes you don't really wanna tell your parents. But normally we do.*

(Interview 13)

Therefore, it is not surprising that the replies of the children are uniformly short and similar.

JX: *I remember like that Mr. McGee asked you to like think about the day.*

BILL: *Yeah, think about the day.*

JOHN: *Yeah, the favourite bit of the day.*

JX: *So, what's that?*

BILL: *Most is probably PE.*

JOHN: *Yeah, everyone is PE.*

(Interview 3)

5.1.3 Experiencing classroom organisation, grouping and sequencing of activities

Classroom organisation, grouping or sequencing of activities is discussed in ten interviews with the children. Though the theme was on my own research agenda, almost all the data under this heading emerged naturally in the conversations. Since the organisation, groupings and sequences done by the teachers are part of school life, the children naturally refer to their experience in various topics. For example, when Helen replied to my enquiry about the different moods at different times in the classroom, she alluded to two learning modes I observed in the lessons and shared with me how the children feel differently within the two types of teaching organisation:

HELEN: *'Cos like when we talk to each other, it's easier for us. Then we can kind of discuss it. But then when we work on it, it's kind of hard. 'Cos sometimes when we're writing a story, the teacher can't help us because it's like our assessment, see how we can do.*

(Interview 19)

Other aspects of organisational issues include how the children are organised in two areas of the classroom (the carpet and the table-chair area), how they are paired or grouped for learning activities, how they line up in a particular sequence, and even how they are supposed to signal to the teacher when they want to be picked to answer a question or need to go to the toilet. Children are very clear and certain about this kind of issue in the classroom and seem to share a single system in which issues like where to place themselves, who to work with, how to move and line up are set out by

the teacher for them to follow. Although they mostly accept the existing system they demonstrate acute awareness of it and sometimes strong emotion about it.

For example, in the first interview I had with four boys, George, Henry, Peter and Gavin, I discussed two incidents in the lesson before the interview. One was that Mr. McGee put two pieces of black tape on the two edges of the carpet where the carpet area meets the chair-table area and asked children not to sit beyond the tapes. The other was that Henry and Peter yelled excitedly 'yeah' in response to the literacy grouping announced by the teacher. From the interview I got to know that the children all understood the unspoken intention of the teacher. They told me it was because some people like to hide themselves behind the tables when they are sitting on the carpet. As for their exuberant happiness about sitting at the same table for literacy work, Henry and Peter said that they like to be with friends.

It seems that the most important of all the issues in the classroom in the children's eyes is where they are placed. The four boys told me that on the carpet they can choose where to sit but in the table area they cannot. They drew me a map of how the children are normally set into 'top', 'middle', and 'bottom' tables. This feature of school life is mentioned continuously in the interviews in terms of which table the children are at. For example, while drawing the classroom, John gave me the explanation of the tables: '*Me and Bill are near the window on our table*' (Interview 5). After Tina mentioned that the spelling groups are named '*green group, red group*' etc, Anne added that she was in the bottom group. When Eleanor was trying to explain the classroom noise she identified children with tables:

ELEANOR: *Normally there's two highest tables. They don't normally speak as much like the bottom tables. And ...*

JX: *What do you mean by high? You mean the tables are taller, or...?*

IRIS: *No.* (She laughed.)

ELEANOR: *No, it's higher class or something.*

(Interview 8)

While the children seem to accept the fact that they are organized into groups and that there are ability differences between the groups, they show much dissatisfaction with their lack of freedom to decide whom they sit or stand next to:

ANITA: *Maybe you should like ... maybe you feel it's better you should choose who you sit next to on the tables and things.*

(Interview 15)

ELEANOR: *And when we're in pairs, we're chosen out of the groups. So if I'd like to be with someone, I will be like with Ella, with Anita, with Nicola and all, and like Helen, and like a lot of all those.*

(Interview 16)

KAREN: *I don't normally get paired with any of my friends.*

(Interview 18)

It seems that a gender issue comes into play here since it is mostly the girls who complained about not being able to sit with friends and being placed next to boys. But once a boy connected the way they are placed in the assembly to their negative feelings about it:

EDDIE: *Yeah. You have to stay on a cramped space, next to loads of people. And you might sit next to somebody you don't want to sit next to. And we have to go register order. We don't really like it.*

(Interview 10)

One girl feels that being asked to line up in register order is somehow like being punished.

ANITA: *Sometimes it's not really fair because some teacher uses it as a punishment and then we feel like we get punished like on Monday when he teaches us.*

(Interview 7)

It seems that all these dissatisfactions are only a matter of preference in children's minds. But further enquiry uncovers a more hidden reason why some children believe they are not allowed to sit or stand where they want. For example,

RORY: *If you sit next to your friends then you talk. Then your whole table will be staying behind.*

(Interview 15)

POLLY: *Probably because if you are just like standing there where you wanted, you're probably talking to your friends.*

ANITA: *It's just easier for the teacher. So they don't have to work so hard really. (Anita and Polly giggled.) So that's maybe easier.*

(Interview 7)

5.1.4 Experiencing discipline, sanction and rules

This aspect of school life is covered in almost all the interviews with the children, either in the context of my inquiry about their descriptions of classroom noise, classroom mood and rules, or naturally initiated by themselves in the flow of conversations around other aspects of school life. Even though the topic of rules and related topics was approached neutrally with the intention of gathering a range of perceptions, the children mostly express negative views about rules and disciplines. For example, one girl initiated the topic of pencil throwing as an offence at the end of an interview when we were talking about classroom noise:

ANNE: *'cos if I had a pencil, (She acted out throwing it.) and I was just spinning it round like that, and he'll just tell off me.*

KATE (giggling and immitating): *'Anne, just pick it up'.*

ANNE: *Yeah, and like ...*

KATE: *'Don't throw pencils'.*

ANNE: *Yeah, that's why.*

(Interview 4)

In some children's cases, the issues of discipline and sanctions are dominant in the children's consciousness, and they are always ready to jump from other contexts to the issue of discipline. For example, after Toby drew a picture of the classroom, he jokingly pointed to one figure and explained,

TOBY: *That's Bill, getting told off. He's like this, 'What did I do?'*

(Interview 5)

On another occasion, when asked to give advice on how to be a better teacher, John replied with much assertiveness about the discipline issue:

JOHN: *'Don't shout all the time. Don't tell us off when we just walk around. That's it.'*

(Interview 5)

The children frequently move away from the topic of their life experience into an account of behaviour problems and teachers' disciplinary norms. For example,

JX: *Go back to the classroom mood. Do you have any other, like image of the classroom?*

MARK: *George. When it's listening time and Mr. Opie asks you a question, George just shouts out. I think he's got behaviour problems or he might not be able to stop himself. Like Peter on Big Brother, 'Stop yourself on the food!'* (All laughed.)

(Interview 19)

JX: *I saw the other day Mr. McGee asked you to move from the corner to him. What's that for?*

BILL: *I don't know.*

JX: *Why did he move you?*

BILL: *Because I was talking. Oh, yeah. And if you talk on the carpet ... 'Cos me and Joe were like talk very loudly, he gives like two ticks on the board and one more we'll go time out.*

(Interview 3)

5.1.4.1 Children's description of teacher's discipline and sanctions

On the topic of rules, discipline and sanctions, children's descriptions are more concerned with the teacher's conduct and manner of giving instructions, and they express strong views. There is little reflection on their own behaviour even when they

are asked to talk about a neutral topic like classroom noise. The children's comments include:

HELEN: *He just says stuff like, 'Quieten down now, children', stuff like that.*

NICOLA: *And he's quite bossy as well.*

(Interview 9)

ANNE: *When we are at our tables, and we start chatting he just shouts at his loudest voice and he says, 'My voice is getting louder, it shouldn't be getting louder.'*

(Interview 4)

ANNE: *If we're noisy on our tables, he just claps his hands ...*

TINA: *Or shouts at us.*

(Interview 4)

The children are more critical of the teacher when his discipline is concerned with 'telling off' individuals or exercising sanctions. For example, four boys complained of Mr. McGee's strictness in stopping children covering their mouths in the lessons. Though they know it is to prevent people talking behind their hands, Gavin raised it as unfair and said he often sat with his face leaning against one hand.

Some boys criticised Mr. McGee for picking on George as an example for others, and some girls criticised him for telling off the wrong person:

POLLY: *When like we've got friends talking to us, he does not really listen properly and he just tells off anyone who's near. And he doesn't tell off people properly. So it's like telling off the wrong person and makes her upset. (Interview 7)*

To some boys, the existence of the teacher's discipline and sanctions goes against their own values and priorities:

KEVIN: *With Mr. McGee it's like- 'No chances. One minute.' 'No chances. Two minutes'. So we have to be good, good, good, no fun, no talking in the class, no jok ...*

(Interview 17)

BILL: *If you drop a pencil, he like shout at you. You like go time out. And if you forget your homework, you go time out. When you've done it at home, but like if you forget it, you go time out...*

(Interview 3)

Most of the children interviewed offer a picture of the teacher's 'strictness' and they frequently mention a range of discipline and sanctions in their accounts of school life. Nevertheless there is a gap between how much they feel they are exposed to various sanctions and how much they actually receive. For example, three girls reveal that 'time out' as a sanction has never involved them. And they only mention a few 'time out' cases that have happened to the other girls. When three boys are describing a concrete, severe system of discipline and sanctions that potentially threatens their everyday life, they at the same time reveal that 'time out' is rare in their own case. Another group of girls confirms this:

JX: *Have you ever got time out?*

ANITA, ELLA, POLLY: *Erm, no.*

ELLA: *It's ...*

POLLY: *Mainly boys. (They giggled)*

ELLA, ANITA: *Yeah.*

ANITA: *Sort of ... Erm, not many people do that.*

POLLY: *It's like if you've been really naughty, or you get three sad faces on the bad board.*

ANITA: *But it does take quite a long time to get all of it.*

(Interview 7)

However, from the children's accounts, we get a feeling that for Bill and John 'time out' is a real issue:

JOHN: *If you go into the field, you go time out.*

BILL: *Yeah, if you go in the field you go time out.*

JOHN: *If you speak in assembly, you have to go to the front.*

BILL: *Yeah.*

JOHN: *Erm ... Oh, if the teacher is talking, and we're talking, you get things like ...*

BILL: *Ticks on the board. And three times you get time out.*

JOHN: *And if you get three ticks you get time out.*

(Interview 3)

For those children who have experienced sanctions personally there are chances to express their feelings at some point. They express their feelings in different ways and at various depths. But their emotional responses might be quite strong. For example in my second interview with him George reflected how he used to feel being picked on by Mr. McGee:

GEORGE: *It's torture. 'Cos I like I came to school, but then it would just be very annoying. Then I was like very angry, and then probably throw it on my sister at the end of the day and get in trouble at home.*

(Interview 11)

In an interview with the other two boys Mark usually gave single-word responses, but he joined in the discussion of 'how you feel in time out' very actively and his talk was exceptionally fluent, fast, assertive and full of confidence. He seemed to release all the sentences in a single breath and was totally different from his usual manner. He said,

MARK: *I know what time out is about. And it is absolutely rubbish. I wish they'd had never invented time out, 'cos all you have to do is just sit down on a chair for about ten minutes or the whole of break time. It's really bad.* (Interview 6)

And a boy described the 'feeling' of being told off as follows:

GAVIN: *Yeah, 'cos when you're being told off, you kind of feel like the classroom is a bit like been dungeon. You've got like this empty feeling. And your stomach got like... you get this weird feeling in your stomach.*

(Interview 12)

I had a long interview on this aspect of life with two self-confessed 'daring' boys, John and Bill. The two boys feel strongly about the teacher's way of dealing with children. On the one hand, Bill, a high-profiled boy as far as discipline is concerned, complained about the strictness and unfairness of the teacher. On the other hand, he emphasised a 'don't care' attitude when recalling his experiences of being in time out:

BILL: *No, it's not that bad. All you got to do is just like sit down. All you got to do is to take a slip up and show it to them. And they say 'what you've done' and they say 'that's very naughty of you'. And all you have to do is just like sit down. And if you got it twice, you got like go back house, sit down in the very corner, so that Mr. Evans can see you.*

(Interview 3)

However, as shown from many anecdotes in the interview, he is still sensitive to the fact that he had been seen as 'always in trouble', especially to the point of being given more serious punishment than that he had already experienced. He confessed in another interview that being in 'time out' can spoil his day.

5.1.4.2 The two facets of children's stories: to obey or disobey

From the more exploratory discussions with the children, there emerge two contrary responses in the domain of rules and discipline, perhaps reflecting their inner struggles, the choices open to them in different contexts and the difficulties they face in school life. To some extent, the contrary responses have a gender dimension, in that the acceptance of rules by some girls contrasts to the more complaining and sometimes disobedient boys. For some girls, rules and discipline set a clear meaning, which leaves no space for negotiation. This kind of understanding is demonstrated in the following exposition of classroom rules:

TINA: *The rule is 'Don't do stuff what you shouldn't be doing and do stuff what you should be doing'. Like you shouldn't be shouting out or throwing pencils. So you should be doing what you are supposed to be doing.*
(Interview 4)

This kind of clear, unquestioning attitude to school rules is rarely seen in the boys' articulation. On the contrary, some boys seem to put more effort into expounding the constraints they are under and the threat of sanctions:

JOHN: *When we walk around, when we like drop a pencil, he shouts at you. 'Cos he thinks you've thrown it.*

BILL: *Yeah, when you drop a pencil.*

JOHN: *And like when you're just like walking, say from here to there, and then walk back, you get time out for that. And you have to tuck your shirt in for assembly...*

(Interview 3)

In addition to these more extreme stances, however, several of the boys appear relatively more knowledgeable on the matter of what proper behaviour in the lessons consists of. And sometimes the girls reveal that their actual behaviour falls short of the clear-cut image they present in the interviews:

JOHN: *We get told off if we are too noisy.*

BILL and TOBY: *Yeah.*

TOBY: *Erm, or you'll have to talk in groups.*

(Interview 5)

KATE: *Sometimes when at the beginning when we go to our seats we are quite loud. Sometimes we can't really talk through the lesson because we're too loud, we can't speak. We have to be quiet.*

(Interview 17)

Thus in most children's minds there exists a kind of double consciousness regarding the theory and practice of school rules and discipline. The two extreme

attitudes described above (viewing rules either as clear-cut dos and don'ts or as something completely unacceptable) are only the two ends of a continuum. As a matter of fact, the girls who suggested that rules have an absolute status further demonstrated the unrealistic side of their own story, and laugh at the idea of total obedience:

JX: *How do you know this 'don't'?*

ANNE: *Erm, (then in a funny voice) you just don't do it, you are not allowed to do it. (KATE burst out giggles.)*

(Interview 4)

Another version of the contradiction is concerned with the real-life situation the children are in, when they find it difficult to follow the rules:

JOHN: *It's hard, really. 'Cos when you're trying to talk sometimes, you get told off and all that, don't they?*

(Interview 5)

PETER: *Well, the stuff we learn from them is quite good, 'cos the teachers teach us Maths and things. But they also teach us not do things when someone says 'Stop'. But it's hard to them, because if our friends start talking, so do we. It's hard not, it's hard not to talk back.*

(Interview 12)

In a more concise way, some children reveal the complexity of their life under the constraints of school rules and discipline:

KEVIN: *Even sometimes like when we were making out the class rules, it's half disobeyed.*

(Interview 17)

JESS: *I've broken basically half of them.*

(Interview 11)

To obey or to disobey is sometimes the autonomous choice of individual children based on their specific understanding of both the nature of the rules and the person exercising the rules. This is clearly shown in the following dialogue:

GEORGE: *If you keep by his rules, he can turn out to be quite nice. But Jess doesn't keep by his rules.*

JESS: *I know. 'Cos I'm not too bothered by them. I'm not very scared.*

(Interview 11)

However, there is another phenomenon which demonstrates the contradictory state of mind the children have. It is concerned with the decision whether to be perceived as a 'goodie girl' or a 'daring boy'. Ella is regarded as a 'good, good girl' by other children in the class. But she struggles with this self-identification. Actually, Henry and Eleanor also share similar thoughts about the question 'Should I be good?' and reveal some aspects of children's life experiences in school:

JX: *Why don't you like to be good?*

ELLA: *It's just...*

ELEANOR: *Because it's just boring.*

ELLA: *Boring. Yeah. It's better being bad.*

HENRY: *Why don't you start being bad?*

ELEANOR: *I don't want to ... I don't. I can't.*

JX: *Why it's boring to be good?*

ELLA: *Because ...*

ELEANOR: *It's like the goody goody all the time, aren't you?*

ELLA: *Yeah, except we're not ... Because ...*

ELEANOR: *George called me a goody goody one, so I said, 'You're baddy baddy'.*

JX: *Why it's boring to be good?*

ELLA: *Because it's just ...*

HENRY: *Well, I'm just both really. I don't ... Let me do both, but better than bad. But I sometimes get sent out of the room. 'Cos like yesterday, just 'cos Paula was annoying, I said, 'Paula, what do you do that fool for?'*

JX: *OK. But do you think being good is boring?*

ELLA: *Yeah, it's a bit boring because you just have to listen to all the teacher...*

HENRY: *I'd like to be banned.*

ELEANOR: *He always asks you to do stuff just because you would say 'Yes' all the time.*

HENRY: *Yeah! Yeah, being good, there is a good thing about it. Because you get...*

ELLA: *You learn more. You learn more.*

HENRY: *No. You get ..., you get sent ...*

ELLA: *You get fortune.*

HENRY: *You get all these good things, like you get early for break. Remember the whole time you were staying in ten minutes, 'Eleanor, Ella and Anita, you can all go out'.*

ELEANOR: *These are the people that I can trust, be good.*

HENRY: *And I was one of them, actually.*

(Interview 16)

Finally, what kind of learning do the children attain from their life under rules and discipline?

GEORGE: *When sometimes when I'm naughty and I get told off, I know, 'You don't do that any more'. So I don't do it. Then maybe I'll do something else. So then the teacher tells me off, 'Do never ever do that' and he said. So then, I don't do it again. So I kind of know not to do it again.*

(Interview 11)

JX: *So do you learn something from these experiences of being disciplined and asked to follow the rules?*

HENRY: *Well, you need rules in life because if you just go under your rules, you won't be trained. You won't be as good as you like.*

ELEANOR: *If you don't follow anything, you'll just kind of be like a grumpy person, moody person, don't you?*

HENRY: *That's true.*

(Interview 16)

To obey or to disobey, the children have not much choice in real-life situations. However, the way they express themselves supplies much food for further reflection and interpretation.

5.1.5 Children seeking attention

The theme of children seeking attention from the teachers was raised in eight group interviews, sometimes introduced spontaneously by the children and sometimes in response to my questions. Seeking attention generally points to situations when children feel they need to be noticed as individuals by the teacher and need to get permission or approval, or to be helped and taken care of. This is very much a topic focusing on children's intentions, for it is the children that take the initiative in the first place.

From what the children have said, the initiative to seek attention on the children's side has four contexts in the school:

1. When they want to be picked by the teacher to respond to his requests or questions;
2. When they have a personal need such as going to the toilet etc., and want to get permission from the teacher;
3. When they need help in their work;
4. When they are in a vulnerable situation and need extra care from the teacher.

This list suggests that the word 'attention' might have slightly different meanings, such as 'attracting the teacher's notice' or 'seeking special care' etc. However, under the umbrella term of 'attention from the teacher', the children mainly talk of their chance to be noticed and given individual care. In most cases the children intend not just to be noticed, but to be 'picked' or 'treated as special'. The issue of 'getting the teacher's attention' is thus mainly a judgement on the part of the children.

BILL: He normally picks the girls.

(Interview14)

JESS: *Out of ten, I probably get chosen twice.*

(Interview 11)

ELLA: *The older teachers usually have a favourite child.*

(Interview 16)

As seen above, the children express their ideas in different ways but they all point to a sense of dissatisfaction with the attention they actually get from the teacher.

However, it seems that compared with the boys, the girls demonstrate a tendency to want more attention. For example, Anne, Kate and Tina talked about the different contexts in which they seek attention in a way that demonstrates an intensity in their need to be noticed, approved, supported and cared for by the teacher:

KATE: *It's like you really want the teacher to get attention to you and you can say the answer.*

(Interview 4)

TINA: *And like other reasons if say we want to go toilet or something we have to.*

(Interview 4)

ANNE: *In Maths today, I needed help on my work. Mr. McGee just said 'not now'.*

(Interview 4)

ANNE: *Like when I cry, only Mrs. Todd [the classroom assistant] cares, not really the teachers. The teachers just get on with someone else, they don't really care about us.*

(Interview 4)

In contrast to George's calmness and even cynicism about the issue of wanting more attention, Jess expresses herself as if she is in a vacuum of attention:

GEORGE: *Well, is it good to get the attention? If you like shout out or mess around, you do. Mess around and get your name on the bad board.*
(Interview 11)

JESS: *I can't get much 'cos I'm among the naughty kids.*
(Interview 11)

JESS: *'I've had my hand up for five years here!' He says, 'Vicky', one of the girly goodies. And it's like, 'Vicky?' And Vicky says the right answer. And he's like, 'Well done, Vicky. Get an effort point'.
(Interview 11)*

In another case when a boy and a girl were in conversation, the girl showed more sensitivity to the responses she received and her own state of being.

KEVIN: *Well, you talk to them every day. You have to put your hand up and say, 'Oh, I've got this question, Mr. Opie'.*
KATE: *Sometimes he doesn't really notice you. Your arm aches. Then you put the other up and then the other one.*
(Interview 17)

When three boys were interviewed on the topic, they actually joked about the existence of 'favourites' and the intention to impress the teacher in order to get favours from him:

JX: *How do you get teacher's attention?*
JOHN: *Put your hand up and then have a good answer. And then they'd be really impressed with you. And then you could be like special ...*
EDDIE: *Special teacher's pet.*
BILL (giggling): *Yeah, teacher's pet.*
JOHN: *Yeah. No.* (John giggled.)
EDDIE: *We're not teacher's pets.*
(Interview 14)

Similarly, when the three boys expressed their awareness of a frequent bias in the teacher's 'picking' between girls and boys, they showed a sense of detachment. They seemed to accept that girls '*do everything nicely*' (BILL, Interview 14). However one girl complained much more strongly about this on the basis of her judgement about gender discrimination:

KAREN: *In every class the boys always get chosen and not the girls, don't they?*

(Interview 18)

On the whole, the topic of 'seeking attention' is more concerned with the way they believe they as individuals are treated by the teachers. Therefore the children make a range of judgements about who actually get lots of attention, mentioning the frequency of attention given to Oscar, the special-needs boy (Interviews 4, 11 and 16), the teachers' 'favourite child' (Interviews 14 and 16) and the 'girly goodie' (Interviews 11 and 14).

5.1.6. Distraction and time-wasting strategies

I did not ask any questions in the interviews about children's problematic behaviour at school, but the children alluded to a wide range of topics in their life experiences, and references to deviance, distraction and time-wasting strategies are found in 13 interviews. Among the disruptive actions in the classroom, unauthorised talking in the lessons is the most frequently mentioned; indeed, most children admit to talking or whispering in the course of their interviews. Below are a few extracts:

JX: *What's the biggest noise in the classroom?*

TOBY: *Chattering.*

(Interview 5)

ANITA: *Some friends will chat through lessons and teachers don't like that.*

(Interview 15)

ELEANOR: *A lot of the boys start talking and then everyone else join in.*

(Interview 8)

POLLY: *The teachers are like talking to the classroom. And the boys like whisper. So they get told off.*

(Interview 7)

What do the children talk or whisper about in the lessons? They describe two main categories: irrelevant chat, and enquiries about their work. These two kinds of information-exchange activities have further meanings to both boys and girls, as will be revealed in the section where the children set the agenda. On the whole the children imply that they talk when they feel like it and see the desire to talk as something natural:

RORY: *When you're quiet working, the teacher has to tell you to be quiet because most people like talking about stuff like what they like doing - football or ICT or what they've done at home ... But some people might not talk and need to know what's happening.*

(Interview 15)

JESS: *You can't even talk with him 'cos he just tells you to be quiet ... What if you're talking and helping someone?*

(Interview 11)

The girls are more likely express their wish to talk freely and emphasise the fact that they are not allowed to do so:

NICOLA: *And, all my friends sit on one table. And I'm the only one there of my friends that sits on the other table. But we can't talk to each other because we just get told off.*

(Interview 15)

ANITA: *Maybe you don't like to talk, maybe you just want to be with your friends. But sometimes you want to talk, like if you don't get the lessons if you talk to somebody who knows. Maybe like you'll be able to trust them.*

You have trust in your friends. You can ask them sometimes if you're worried or something.

(Interview 15)

As for the boys, they seem to be more concerned with the freedom to have a laugh to dilute the deep boredom they feel in the lessons. The unauthorised talking is sometimes connected with this intention. For example,

KEVIN: *'Cos sometimes we're in a really good conversation, then pop out of it ...*

KATE: *Like a joke or something, then it goes something funny.*

(Interview 17)

JOHN: *We try to make ourselves laugh.*

EDDIE: *Yeah, what we do is just like ... You do it. You do it. And then ...*

JOHN: *Like we do it and then we go, and then we just make ourselves laugh and then ...*

EDDIE: *Then you just had a bit more talk.*

JOHN: *Or we talk about something, and then you get sent time out.*

(Interview 14)

Other distracting behaviours all are related to the fact that the children take every opportunity either to have a laugh or plan some way of wasting time (e.g. throwing pencils, asking to go to the toilet, or going to sharpen the pencils).

JOHN: *Sometimes it's quite funny, isn't it? Like ...*

JX: *What's kind of noise is funny?*

JOHN (giggling): *Like... you know, we can't tell you because it's too...*

(John made a gesture of keeping silent.) *The word ... the word comes...*

(John turned to Bill and whispered the word 'fart' to him and they laughed.)

(Interview 5)

ANNE: *People really... 'Cos if I had a pencil, and I was just spinning it round like that... (She acted out throwing the pencil.) See that? If we'll be naughty, he'll call us to pick it up. (Interview 4)*

RORY: *And I would say in lessons it's also quite noisy and busy. Everyone is excited running around, cheering. And people snapping their pencils and getting on ... 'Cos the pencil sharpener ... Especially Andy, when he starts his pencil on, he breaks it every five seconds and goes to the point (where the sharpener is) and just winds, winds, winds...come out...break...winds, winds, winds. (Interview 15)*

In addition to the distractions and time-wasting strategies, some children mentioned 'pestering' or 'annoying' others with disruptive actions in the lessons:

NICOLA: *Some people are really quiet on the table, and the rest like shouting like maniacs. And then we get, we have to stay, the whole table has to stay in. (Interview 15)*

MARK: *He wants to attract people's attention, so they get the blame. (Interview 6)*

RORY: *It happens mostly in maths when we go in. Bill and Joe are the worst of them there. They annoy Rose, who is new. They get stuff and fling it. They get rubbers and go, 'Hshhhh ...' They even annoy Andy. He gets upset and he hides 'cos he doesn't want to get hurt. And he throws the stuff back. But they keep going 'Hushhh ...' And that's not very nice. (Interview 6)*

5.1.7 Assembly

The theme of assembly as one aspect of school life is on my agenda, but like other themes, the children talked about assemblies not just in response to my questions. They sometimes alluded to some experience in assembly when talking about other topics, and then I usually followed up the topic and embarked on a fuller enquiry. Once I made use of the fact that the interview was immediately after an assembly.

Three boys were asked to observe the assembly and we focused on this topic in the subsequent interview. On the whole, ‘assembly’ is a solid topic for the children to discuss since it weighs significantly both in terms of the actual time it is given in school and the psychological effect it has on the children. The transcript extracts concerning assembly are taken from 13 interviews.

5.1.7.1 Children’s experience of singing, listening to Bible stories, prayer and awards in assemblies

Singing, listening to Bible stories, prayer and awards are the four main dimensions of a typical assembly in the school. The children expressed their experience of these four aspects either spontaneously or in response to my questions. There were no comments from the girls about the experiences of singing or listening to famous music on entry into the hall. Only one girl mentioned that she played in the orchestra and learned new songs. Some boys expressed their feelings about the singing. They seem to share certain reluctance in regard to singing in the assembly:

EDDIE: Sometimes you’re kind of afraid people gonna laugh at you ‘cos you don’t have a good voice. You just sit at the back. You sit behind two persons. But if you’re tall you just ... Only you have to kind of do lips. You have to do lip read like that. (He acted out lip movements without letting any sound out.) (Interview 14)

BILL: I don’t sing. I just go ... (He acted out the silent singing with lip movements only.) (Interview 14)

With regard to the Bible stories, the children in most cases just stated the fact that they heard the stories. However from children’s spontaneous comments - either brief ones such as ‘weird’ or ‘boring’ or more extensive ones - we can sense there are more underlying issues at stake.

ELEANOR: I don’t believe half the Bible.

HENRY: I don’t believe the new Testament at all. ‘Cos I don’t believe Jesus can do all those miracles.

...

HENRY: *Yeah, some of them are quite unable for you to believe them.*

ELEANOR: *Some are just like ... you just think, 'What are they talking about?'* (Interview 16)

Similar issues occur in the practice of prayer. It is not a problem to conduct the prayer properly for most children. However, what the prayer means to them sometimes sounds problematic.

JX: *When you are doing prayer, do you think something?*

KATE: *Sometimes when I, when we have prayer, so I think, 'Well, I hope this person is listening a lot a bit'. 'Cos sometimes we talk about team work. I think, 'Well, I hope this person is listening 'cos they need to learn a lot more about team work. Now I hope they feel guilty about it'.*

(Interview 17)

HENRY: *I don't see the point of prayers, do you?*

ELEANOR: *No, don't see the point of prayers.*

(Interview 16)

The award-receiving is taken more positively by some children though others expressed their indifference to it:

JX: *How do you feel than when you have the chance to receive an award?*

PETER: *Most people feel really happy. And when you go up you'd have to keep a straight face 'cos you don't really want to burst out laughing in front of the whole school.*

(Interview 6)

MARK: *Yeah, that was, you are trying to ... You're like feeling, 'I wanna try to improve more than that kid', or 'I'll get better than that kid'.*

RORY: *Or you can feel, 'Oh, that's good.' because you felt good that someone achieved, like Anita today. She's done really good.*

(Interview 6)

5.1.7.2 Children's experience of the organisational aspect of the assembly

The organisational aspect of the assembly is revealed by three boys' observations on the assembly in one interview. Rory, Peter and Mark were given the assignment to observe an assembly and report on it in the interview immediately afterwards. According to their report, the assembly is organised in an orderly way in a relatively small, constrained space.

RORY: Well, what happens is you line up at the playground and you would walk in to assembly. And you have to be quiet or you'll have to stay after and sit there. And also when you sit down, he will like say 'Good afternoon' or something.

(Interview 6)

MARK: I think the sitting should be like, the biggest people at the back and the smallest people at the front, and like, in-between people in the middle. 'Cos when you're trying to see, the people are always bigger than you. Like I'm the smallest in my whole Year. And people are trying to see over you and you can't really see. 'Cos people are just going up on their knees.

(Interview 6)

Other descriptions of the assembly experience add some lively children into this physically constrained environment to complete the picture.

GEORGE: They talk or they are just day dreaming or fiddling their shoes or something.

JESS: And their hair.

GEORGE: But I fiddle sometimes.

(Interview 11)

HENRY: Most people mess around.

ELEANOR: Yeah. There're a lot of the football boys messing around.

HENRY: Yeah, they just think it's funny and they just show off.

(Interview 16)

However, as in the classroom, the children's experience of assembly is not just a product of the physical circumstances; it is the organisation that sets the tone for this kind of event. The children are not supposed to talk during the assembly and the teachers are supposed to check that they obey the rules.

JX: *What does the teacher do in the assembly?*

MARK: *You can't play ...*

RORY: *They ... 'cos they want to look at their children when they're silly.*

(Interview 6)

In addition to their distractions, the children continue to act out secretly as a way of dealing with the surveillance. Once in an interview, a boy and a girl demonstrated a trick they play quietly with their palm in the assembly. They also mentioned that they would think about something else while the assembly proceeded. Some other anecdotes appeared as well:

JOHN: *And then every time we were at assembly, you'd always hear that once again. You'd always heard 'poo-poo' ... We always laugh, then we'll just get told off 'cos we just had a little laugh. But it's fun sometimes.*

(Interview 3)

RORY: *Bill Hurst, he flicks stuff, which is not very amusing sometimes.*

(Interview 6)

5.1.7.3 What assemblies mean to the children

Before going to the specific findings, I want to make a distinction between how children feel and what things mean to them. From the interview data on assembly, it occurs to me that although children's general feeling towards assemblies may be negative, assemblies do mean something to them. Taking advantage of naturally developed friendship-group conversation, they did respond to my inquiries about their experience in assemblies in various ways. The children discussed assemblies in nine interviews and in seven of these expressed negative feelings about the practice – three

in terms of ‘dislike’ and four of ‘boredom’ or ‘repetition’. In three interviews the children offered their suggestions for improving assemblies.

This dominant impression and feelings regarding assemblies may be because of the specific activities like singing for some boys, as noted previously. But they also revealed their dislike of the inevitable repetition. For example,

ELEANOR: *It’s, sometimes it goes a bit boring because we go, every year we do the same things, don’t we? Because, on like, on like ... we go through like on Christmas, we normally go everything all over again, don’t we?*

IRIS: *Yeah, like Jesus.*

(Interview 8)

Some children provided extensive explorations into how they make sense of the practice of assembly. Then they revealed that there can be another side of the assembly, something unexpected and fun.

JESS: *Yeah, we do get some surprises, like when Mr. Evans make the kids carry a bucket of water on their heads and we were like, and everyone was like, ‘Wow!’*

(Interview 11)

The children revealed three dimensions to the meaning of assemblies: assemblies as community occasions, comparisons between assemblies and lessons, and assemblies as religious education:

PETER: *Well, yeah. You get to all meet up. Awards are given out. You get to see people who have achieved.*

(Interview 6)

JESS: *It’s just a bit of time to get to know your headmaster really, and to learn a bit stuff too.*

(Interview 11)

HENRY: *This assembly and RE are the same, 'cos assembly is really a religious education.*

(Interview 16)

JX: *Did you just say it (assembly) is work as well?*

RORY: *Yeah, because everyone does a piece of work in the assembly. 'Cos they like tell you stuff and like what she thinks they feel.*

NICOLA: *And put your hand up and tell your feelings.*

(Interview 15)

Moreover, two girls and one boy touched on something significant when they reflected on what happens in the assembly. It seemed as if assemblies can be a special time for them.

HENRY: *Well, I, well, the singing practices help us, gives us a bit more, erm, better speech, not all just talk away, keeps us a bit more happier and keeps us more like up-to-date. (M: You like singing?) It's a bit more-, it's a wake, it's just nice and fun to do. (E: And in the assembly-) And it's safe and, when do those stories.*

(Interview 16)

ELEANOR: *In the assembly, it's just all quiet. And you just, you just get to think all the, all the other times, don't you?*

HENRY: *Instead of listening to the story.*

(Interview 16)

Nevertheless, because of the timing of assemblies, children do have their own sense of the various meanings the assembly carries. For example, Peter thinks it is the 'countdown' of the day. George finds that the real interest he has in the assembly lies in calculating the life span of the musician presented on the screen, and the final end that may bring a trace of excitement.

PETER: *I think it's a countdown at the end of the day. 'Cos usually it's at the very end of the day, which is half past two.*

JX: *What do you mean by 'the countdown of the day'?*

PETER: *Countdown. Well, it's at half past two and it finishes at a quarter past three which is when school leaves. You can look at the clock, and it's half past two. And then you look at it again, it's a quarter to three, you look at it again, it's three o'clock. And then you finally look at it, look at it one more time, it's a quarter past three. Then you hear them say, 'It's time to go now'. And then you're like, 'Yes!' 'cos you really want to go home.*

(Interview 6)

GEORGE: *I feel bored. So here is along the assembly. (He drew a line on the paper.) I feel bored in the centre of it 'cos that's when they are drooling on and on. Then I get a bit bored at the end 'cos this is just all the awards. But at the start, it's quite exciting on working out the dates. A bit boring and then at the end, 'Oh, my! Yes. I can get home, I can go on the computer, or 'Yes, I'm going to Portsmouth this weekend', or 'Yes, we'll see the cousins'.*

(Interview 11)

5. 2 What the children said on general issues

It is possible and legitimate to get a general sense of what the children have raised in the interviews not only by reporting the ways they dealt with the issues I asked them about but also by looking at the issues they raised themselves, since they were given plenty of opportunities to do so in the flow of the conversations. Therefore in this second part of the report on the interview findings I am approaching the data from children's side - the things that *they* highlighted, picked up, categorized, or appeared to consider important. The main areas identified from an overview of the children's agenda as it appears across the whole set of interviews include everyday school life, the teachers, and the children, but under each of these broad headings there are a number of sub-headings. This classification of topics originates directly or indirectly from the children's own accounts, particularly

1. the children's own initiative (either extending the discussions beyond

- my questions, or offering detailed descriptions with independent value)
2. inquiries from me based on topics initially raised by the children in previous interviews (i.e. topics not on my original agenda)
 3. my general inquiries about their life in school (such as their ‘best thing’ or the thing they enjoyed most at school).

In order to analyse the general issues relating to the children’s school experience, I attempt to identify what parts of what they said come from own agenda, what parts are responses to my questions, and what things the children couldn’t respond to or articulate.

5.2.1 Everyday schooling

There is an interesting opening in one interview that immediately demonstrates some basic issues in children’s general school experience. Before I set off and asked any questions, one girl eagerly inquired about our topic and suggested her thoughts about topics for discussion. Then other children joined her.

ELLA: *What shall I speak? Can I speak about school grounds?*

ANITA: *What you want us to speak about?*

JX: *It’s mainly about school life.*

ELLA: *Can I speak about what I think we should improve, about like... maybe playing things, like playground?*

POLLY: *What happened in school?*

ELLA: *What about my favourite lesson?*

POLLY: *I’ve done some research in my folder on the computer about school. About what lessons I like, what I just don’t. It’s at home.*

(Interview 7)

This brief exchange draws attention to several aspects of life in school, including ‘lesson and play’, ‘my favourite lessons’ and ‘what happens in the school’. However as it develops, the analysis of children’ interviews reveals some more significant themes. My analysis in each of the following sections attempts to start from the obvious themes children raise in their accounts, but also to further unfold the subtle and complex meanings they express about school life.

5.2.1.1 Working and playing in the school

‘Work’ is the general term children take to indicate the main intended activities of schooling. Children describe themselves as ‘doing some work’, and talk about teachers ‘giving hard work’. They say that they need help with their work. Children often take the weekly timetable of lessons, which is put on a board hanging on the wall at the front of the classroom, to indicate the different things they do at school, eg. Maths, Literacy, Art, Science, RE, etc. Significantly, from Year Four children at this school are encouraged to choose to have some extra homework and this was mentioned by them in three interviews.

Apart from the amount of work, the level of difficulty is one of the factors that children concern themselves with. Two boys complained of the hard tasks that they were sometimes given and they found their Maths always ‘really hard’ and sometimes ‘really really hard’. In other several cases children mentioned they needed someone’s help to ‘get moved along with their work’ in Maths and Literacy when ‘they are really stuck’. To some children this difficulty seems to be related to what they mean by ‘work’:

HELEN: *‘Cos like when we talk to each other, it’s easier for us. Then we can kind of discuss it. But then when we work on it, it’s kind of hard.*

(Interview 19)

However at later stages in the interviews when it was near to SATS, the children complained a lot about the repetition and easiness of the work they were doing in preparation for the tests.

Apart from the tasks or lessons, children also expressed a more abstract meaning of ‘work’ in one interview with me, where it refers to things like feeding pets at home or earning money in adulthood. Also very obviously ‘work’ is understood by the children as the opposite to ‘play’ or to being ‘out of school’.

JX: *You term it as ‘work’. What are the other things, oh, what other terms you’d like to use to describe your school life?*

ANITA: *Well, like play times we find it quite fun. It’s quite nice to see your friends and things and play with them.*

RORY: *And after school, school clubs. It's time to have fun and see each other.*

(Interview 15)

In a further exploration of the concept of work with me, the children divided the various activities in the school (for example, assembly, art, break, clubs, literacy, science lessons etc.) between work and relaxation. It is the busy-ness and the potential pressure that gives work a sense of work.

RORY: *Literacy is work. Most nearly all the lessons are work, except for maybe ICT. 'Cos ICT you can just go on the computers. And then you're told what to do, the rest you just do it.*

NICOLA: *You do whatever you like.*

RORY: *And break is relaxation.*

NICOLA: *You can relax.*

(Interview 15)

Further, somehow 'work' is put as the natural and necessary feature of 'school' and taken as the opposite of what they believe to be the 'free'.

JX: *So, what does 'feel free' mean?*

RORY: *Like you are in a class, if you're hot you can go outside. If you, if you want to do something you can do it. Erm, freedom, you can go into the countryside or go to listen to seagulls. You don't have to be in the school doing work. 'Cos work is, I will say, boring. Of course some pieces of work are nice.* (Interview 15)

It is clear from many interviews that 'work' for many children is linked to 'boredom', 'dislike' and other negative feelings. This kind of bored feeling can often be linked to their attitude to certain lessons, to repeating 'the same old things' (Kate, Interview 17), and to the absence of fun (Polly, Interview 18; George, Interview 11).

KATE: *Sometimes when I come into school, I look at the chart (of lessons), and then I see what's today. And I go, 'Boring, boring, fun, boring, boring, fun, fun, fun, boring'.*

(Interview 17)

5.2.1.2 Normal life and favourite moments

The 'normal day' is a term the children initiated. In the second interview, George and Jess told their stories of school life and then mentioned that 'normal days' are long days. So from Interview Three I started to explore the concept of the 'normal day', and eleven subsequent interviews touched on this topic.

Relating to the 'work-play' dichotomy, the children describe the 'normal day' as a set structure composed of programmed activities. All the children are able to describe their school life in this way: when it starts, when it ends, and what things happen in-between. They use 'normal', 'routine', or 'usual things' in their explanation of their daily experience.

ELEANOR: *I expect like just the normal day at school, really, don't we? It's all like the same, really, you know.*

(Interview 16)

In the context of the normal school day, the transition from being outside to being inside the classroom is something that is taken for granted as natural by the children. Some expressed it in terms of the special 'mood' of schooling.

JX: *How do you know the school day started?*

BILL: *Because we do lessons.*

(Interview 3)

ANITA: *You have to change from being like, being able to whatever you'd want to do and then you'll have to be like, you'll have to do what you're told, put your hand up and answer the question.*

(Interview 7)

The almost fixed image of everyday schooling in the above quotations already oozes a sense of the inescapable staleness. Unsurprisingly, many children express the boredom as a normal feeling at school, though different children point to different issues. Some girls talked about the boredom of repeating tasks, while some boys complained of the predictability of school life.

GEORGE: *Sometimes they might think some of the lessons are bit boring. 'Cos you just sit on the carpet with written things for about half an hour. Even if you know, they are telling you what you'll be doing. And then you're going to do it. Yeah, it's better if you do it 'cos sitting on the carpet isn't fun.*

JESS: *For five years!*

(Interview 11)

EDDIE: *'Cos you've done it, for like most of your life.*

JOHN: *You've done it for all six years.*

BILL: *Yeah.*

EDDIE: *You've done it like for almost of your life. And you have to do it. And it's like an everyday thing. Yeah. I mean you have to get used to it.*

JOHN: *You have to get used to it. And then it like get boring after a while.*

JX: *But I don't know. Are you get used to it? Why you feel sad? If you just get used to it, you just do it. It's like a habit.*

JOHN: *'Cos it just ... 'Oh, it's another day again'.*

EDDIE: *'Oh, it's boring'.*

JOHN: *'Oh, to do that, the same thing!'*

EDDIE: *'Oh, well, there you go'.*

JOHN: *'Oh, oh, go again. There's goes another day'. 'Oh, here you go, up another day'. It's just repeating and repeating.*

EDDIE: *It's boring.*

JOHN: *And you get to do the same thing basically everyday.*

EDDIE: *But what I think they should do is like muddle. Well, do the same thing in each day, but muddle them up each week. So, like say you do Maths, Literacy, Science. They should do like Maths, Science, Literacy and stuff, all mix the whole day up. Well, otherwise it just gets boring.*

(Interview 14)

As well as their feelings of boredom, some children told me about their favourite things as a more positive report of their everyday life at school. For example, Bill was asked to explain his everyday experience of school life to a boy of the same age studying in China. As well as expressing his boredom, he immediately referred to his favourite lessons:

BILL: What? Oh. Like ...PE, my favourite of lesson is PE. And my second favourite is probably, yeah, Maths.

(Interview 3)

Also one boy and one girl explained candidly that nobody enjoys nothing at all at school. There must be at least one thing the children like:

GEORGE: Nobody hates school, I don't think anybody hates all the lessons 'cos there's probably at least something everybody likes ...

(Interview 11)

However, the favourite things expressed in the children's account often don't belong to their ordinary life of 'work'. For example, the children in the above interview further revealed that their favourite lessons are '*Library or on the field*', or '*flute lesson*'. This highlights their dissatisfaction with 'normal' school things since both the girls and the boys tend to find happiness outside the arena of normal schooling.

5.2.1.3 Living with the normality

In the interviews with the children I raised some general questions about the special things in their school life and what they liked best. I also encouraged them to describe their different moods in the various circumstances in the classroom and asked about their ways of coping with everyday life. All these conversations helped to reveal the children's lived experience of everyday schooling. The children's sharing of their best or special moments shed light on their everyday living in school. Adults are sometimes curious to know what impressive things will merit the title 'best' or

‘special’ from the children’s perspective, but this was difficult to establish because almost always the response was the same - PE.

I picked up a few points in response to my question about what the children consider ‘special’ in their school life. Firstly, it is clear that not much qualifies for this description in the children’s view. But what does merit the term is the unexpected or the amusing. For example, two boys mention the accidental pants-wetting or passing of wind in assembly as ‘special’, while all the specially organized events such as Pancake Day and the Christmas concert are not considered worth mentioning. Secondly the children find it difficult to mention anything special in the classroom. They will ask if it is OK to mention outdoor PE and end up with some description of what they did in PE or art. Finally, it is the personal significance that actually brings about some special feelings in the children. Getting rewards such as effort points in lessons can be experienced as special:

ANNE: I feel quite special when I’m the achiever and when I get an effort point. And if we’re sitting up straight, he always says ‘Well-done! You set a good example’.

(Interview 4)

One day is mentioned several times by the children without prompting as a ‘special’ day: the mufti day.

HENRY: Even we just do the same all day. You are out of the school uniform, I mean ...and all the playtimes seem to be more fun in Mufti. I don’t know why.

ELEANOR: It’s because at Mufti you get, you are like free, aren’t you, really?

HENRY: Yeah, just a free man or woman.

ELLA: Yeah. And in Mufti you get to play games nearly all day.

(Interview 16)

Compared the ‘best’ or ‘special’ thing in the classroom, the children seem more familiar with the everyday state of work. They simply try to ‘get on with it’.

GEORGE: *'Cos there's probably about one lesson each we don't like, but we still do it.*

(Interview 11)

KEVIN: *But I still like to get over and done with, probably get back home and go on my PS2 and play my game.*

(Interview 15)

POLLY: *Sometimes I'm bored 'cos I already know it. So I'll get it done really quickly and really easy, and then ...*

(Interview 18)

A group of boys vividly illustrated their state of working in the classroom that is a mixture of being sensible, boredom, getting on with the work, having a laugh or chatting to relieve the boredom. Both behind it all is a sense of accumulated and reinforced negativity.

EDDIE: *Things that we like, we'll do it very sensibly, 'cos we like it. And the things we don't like, we don't like. We are not sensible ...we are sensible, but like, 'Wow-,ah---' (imitating sighing).It's like you're really bored at doing it after a while.*

JX: *So what do you do? Because you mention a lot of like 'bored', you feel bored .When you're feeling that boredom, what do you do then?*

JOHN: *Erm, we just ...*

BILL: *Talk*

JOHN: *No.*

EDDIE: *Yeah, but you have ... What we do is just like ...*

JOHN: *We try to make ourselves laugh.*

EDDIE: *You do it. You do it. And then ... (He acted out a facial impression of lack of interest to demonstrate the changing mood) You do it and then ...*

JOHN: *Like we do it and then we go, and then we just make ourselves laugh and then ..*

EDDIE: *Then you had a bit of more talk, just had a bit of more talk..*

JOHN: *Or we talk about something. And then you get sent time out.*

EDDIE: *When you do that, sometimes you really want If you just do it, you can't be bothered to do it. You just do something. And you just wrote rubbish words like... 'Cos you've been talking, like you hate that thing.*

(Interview 14)

5.2.1.4 Normal classroom phenomena

The classroom as the main venue the children gather and stay has its particular phenomena. The children are often able to describe normal happenings like noise, and different moods as well as the objects in the classroom. Some of their illustrations are spontaneous and even those that are replies to my enquiries are full of natural descriptions of real-life situations. The classroom phenomena in the children's account therefore supply detailed supporting evidence to their own lived experience in the school, as the following extracts about classroom noises indicate:

ANNE: *Like when we're really noisy and we start talking and all that and like we start shouting across the room, 'cos if it's really quiet and we whisper, if someone makes a loud noise, then another table make a loud noise, and then it all gets louder.*

(Interview 4)

KATE: *Also when we were on the carpet, sometimes when teacher is talking, someone is trying talk to you, but not actually saying. I can hear them whispering and then the teacher goes 'mmmmm'.*

(Interview 4)

ANITA: *Everyone talks to each other in lessons about the lessons really.*

ELLA: *Everybody wants ... even though it's just whispering. Because it's such a big class you can hear with your friends. It's just like one big noise. Then the teacher sometimes shouts. And sometimes you hear children outside playing.* (Interview 7)

Some children also tried to explain a more subjective feeling about the classroom setting and the entire mood of the lessons. For example:

GEORGE: *Yeah, it's difficult. I would say what we do ... If you're like tied up, it do seem a bit like the gloomy place, so we don't really want to be there. But when you're happy and having fun, that might be a bit like a jolly place, then lots of fun.*

(Interview 11)

HELEN: *It depends on what lesson really. Like say we're in something like Literacy, there will be a lot different because like people be talking each other. But then if we're like to write a story or something, people won't be, 'cos there's like different moods.*

(Interview 19)

RORY: *If they had enough money to extend each class, like half the size would be library, that will be nice. 'cos they would put a lounge, a sofa or chair. And they could have a door. Then you'd like have relaxation and could have ... 'Cos the teacher could sit down. And if you'd like to watch a video, there will be a TV.*

(Interview 15)

5.2.1.5 Main meaning of schooling: friendship

'Friendship' as a theme originated from the children's spontaneous comments, and only at a very late stage did I adopted this topic and raise questions for further enquiry. As the interviews went on the issue of 'friendship' seemed to stand out increasingly as a key element in children's experience of schooling. In reporting this theme I will follow a logical sequence from surface issues (what the children said) to a more in-depth examination of friendship as an issue of self-expression, which at the same time will explain the status of this topic that goes beyond what they have actually said.

5.2.1.5.1 Friendship permeates school life

The issue of friendship is reflected in virtually all aspects of children's lives. They often referred to 'making friends' or the importance of friendship when they were talking about other topics such as lessons, assembly, break-time or grouping for work.

However, because friendship was not the main topic of the conversations, it is difficult to quote the children directly on the topic. My analysis of their incidental references to friendship serves as the report of its significance in their school experience.

Firstly, both at break-time and in the lessons children try to spend time with their friends. One girl mentioned her frustration when she couldn't find her friends at lunchtime. When the children mention talking in the lessons, they actually imply that they are interacting with friends. For example, once when a girl mentioned that she mouthed a name to the people nearby, her friend in the interview added, '*You do it especially ... you do it to me mostly, don't you?*' (Kate, Interview 4). However, as they said, '*We usually don't get talk too much. So, like in lessons we are still friendly but not as friendly as break time as we don't really get the chance to*' (Ella, Interview 16). But there are chances when they have indoor play or if the teacher lets them work with partners: '*If we go into partners, you have got to choose your partner, don't we? And we help each other*' (Henry, Interview 16).

Secondly, in assembly and registration, the children take the chance to think about friendship issues. When two girls told me what they think about in prayers, they immediately mentioned friendship. One girl summarised her thoughts: '*Make up if we do break up. And just stay friends*' (Iris, Interview 8). Other girls said that during registration they thought about which friends they would play with at lunch-time as they listened to the information about the lunch type their friends announced to the teacher.

Thirdly, as mentioned before, both girls and boys shared with me their understanding of the components of the class of children as 'tribes' (Henry, Interview 1; Eddie, Interview 14) or 'groups of friends' (Ella, Interview 16).

Fourthly, in the grouping for work and in other opportunities to be placed with other children, there is always an issue in the children's minds of whom one can stay next to. When a group of girls were asked about the grouping practices they complained immediately because '*We don't really get to be with our friends*' (Anita, Interview 7).

Moreover, the friendship issue is sometimes a dominant one that influences the children's moods, decisions and judgements. In the initial conversations when they were given an opportunity to introduce themselves to me they talked about

friends as a very significant part of themselves. In the interviews, a boy explicitly expressed his feelings about friends:

GEORGE: *Well, if they are telling off like your friend, then that could influence your mood a lot. Some teachers made wrong decisions.*

(Interview 11)

Finally, friendship also tends to extend beyond the school. The children told me that they often went to clubs or parties together with their friends.

5.2.1.5.2 Friendship relates to children's affective aspects

In one interview, a group of children raised it as a big issue who they should sit with at one table as a group; as already mentioned, they prefer sitting with their friends. However, in the effort they took to explain the situation they introduced an emotive issue as well.

RORY: *Also you feel a little bit jealous 'cos all your friends have just gone to that table and you, you've been like ...you feel like you've just been kicked out or left out. And you feel jealous because your best friend just have gone over there and you're like, 'Oh, no. I've got no one to be with'. Then you make new friends, then more people come to the table and they get annoying. And you just want to move.*

(Interview 15)

NICOLA: *And all my friends sit on one table. And I'm the only one there of my friends sits on the other table. But we can't talk to each other because we just get told off.*

(Interview 15)

The two girls and one boy related complex feelings to the situation of not being allowed to sit with their friends: a lack of freedom, jealousy, exclusion, annoyance and unfairness. In response to my further enquiries they expressed other general feelings about friendship at school. Basically to go with your friends is connected with positive emotions like safety, trust and happiness: *'You feel safer with*

your friend basically'; 'You have trust in your friends. You can ask them, sometimes if you're worried or something' (Anita, Interview 15). To be without any friend, on the other hand, is a terrible thing: 'You will be like bullied' (Rory, Interview 15); 'You will be like walking alone and then you won't have anyone you can talk to'; 'You're just not very safe. Because there's a boy on my table, Luke, he's like, he bullies me' (Nicola, Interview 15).

5.2.1.5.3 Friendship as the main meaning of school life

The permeation of friendship in children's accounts of their school experience also demonstrates in the connection they make between normal life and friendships at school. In one interview, three girls immediately discussed friendships in response to my inquiry about the general features of school life:

JX: I'd like to ask you how you feel everyday. Is every day always different from each other, or similar?

POLLY: Different, because you learn different things, different things happened.

ELLA: It's just different things go on. Because on one day everyone could like get on really well together; the next day some people could be fooling out. And then next day we're getting on well ...

POLLY: Because some days you may get on with friends and learn all stuff.

ANITA: You might fool out or be friends next day, staying friends next, then fooling out next day.

(Interview 7)

Another more focused description shows the significance of friendship to the children's experience of school:

ELLA: It's usually a quite busy day because we've got quite a lot to do. And there's a good thing since we get free break-time when we go into school. And, we get time to play with our friends and have a little talk with our friends. Then we have some more break time, and then we have some new friends ... (Interview 7)

In the next comment, going to school is explicitly linked to meeting friends:

ANITA: I don't like to go to school all the time really. But I don't mind coming to school a couple of days to see your friends and things, 'cos some of the people you don't see on any other time.

(Interview 15)

Also when the children discussed the value of schooling, friendship was mentioned as one of the main things they learned:

POLLY: Yeah, and we learn just how to education, how to be kind to people, like by sharing, by making friends, allso in PSHE, because that's about friendship.

(Interview 7)

In another interview two girls told me their feelings during the school day depended on 'experiencing friendship':

KATE: I feel different in different days as well. Because sometimes if I had a fall- out, and I haven't make up, then I get quite upset in case the fights gonna get worse.

(Interview 4)

JX: Sometimes what make it different?

TINA: Erm, 'cos when I'm all alone, people just start saying horrible things and I get left out; when I'm playing with my friends, that makes me really happy.

(Interview 4)

A girl makes the point that 'friendship matters' even more clearly by saying:

HELEN: Well, sometimes at the start of school, I'm like quite grumpy 'cos I've got out and played and I don't really want to go to work. Then at the

end of the school day, I'm normally quite happy because like I've seen my friends and I just feel like ...like not, say grumpy or sad or anything.

JX: *So you're happy when the school finished?*

HELEN: *Yeah, 'cos we've seen our friends. It's like we feel better about it. It's like something sad happened or anything, just seeing your friends makes you feel better. So then you don't feel so bad later on, as you do in the morning.*

(Interview 9)

Usually the girls like to be in groups. For someone such as Jess who is not obviously included in any friendship group, the situation is not so good. She expressed her wish to have *'one or two friends that let me play one game that of my choice for once'* (Interview 11). This frustration seems to be deflected into a need for more attention compared to girls with stronger attachments:

JESS: *It's those girly-girly girls. They always get attention.*

(Interview 11)

The boys in contrast have less to say about friendship (and about feelings generally). However from their limited articulations we can judge the significance it has for them. For example, two boys talked about the 'goodness' of going to school in terms of making friends:

PETER: *Well, I think school is quite good because if you just had holidays all the time and you never ever even had school, you-, I wouldn't have-, Kim wouldn't actually be my friend, and I wouldn't have ever met him at school. And if you like went to school for one day, and then it was all holiday for the rest of your life, you wouldn't get contact with your friends that much because...You like to go to school five days, you get to your friends and then you might see your friends sometimes along the weekends. So school is quite good for like getting together with your friends, and playing.*

...

GAVIN: *Well, I think the teacher is more educational and then like fun, whereas your friends... If you had no friends, you would... the school will seem like a nasty thing, but whereas if you have friends, there's fun side of school.*

(Interview 12)

When a girl and a boy were discussing the topic of teacher's attention the boy raised the issue of friendship as something comparable to the teacher's attention. He confessed:

GEORGE: *Well, I wouldn't really mind if all I have is just two friends that want to play as well, that there's one friend that will talk to me.*

(Interview 11)

5.2.1.5.4 Learning from the friendship issues

By and large, the children don't relate friendship to learning; it's more about wellbeing and development. As one boy put it, '*being with friends is not just 'being' with them, it is having fun and playing together*' (Mark, Interview 19). Only occasionally do they allude to the interactions among friends as part of their learning.

JX: *What do you mean by 'respect'? For example...?*

MARK: *Like if you're being really nasty to people, that's like you're not respecting them. If you like say, oh, went to play with them-. If you like see someone sitting down really alone and no one to play with, you'd go up to him and say, 'What's, what's the matter? Do you want to play with me?' And like, well, they'll make you feel good in your heart and you make them feel happy in their hearts.*

(Interview 19)

When I asked directly about learning from being with their friends, Helen, possibly the shyest girl in the class, responded in terms of learning 'how to socialize':

HELEN: *Like, say, if just somewhere at school you don't socialize with them and you don't socialize with anyone too much, and when you get*

older, and went out somewhere there's lots of people, you don't really know like how to react, like when they ask you a question, which you don't know anything. (Interview 19)

Other responses included learning how to relate to other people:

JX: What are the things or kind of attitude you learned from friendships?

KEVIN: Well, it's not nice to punch your friends or kick them around, then you'll lose them. And not to really shout at their faces, be angry with them all the time.

(Interview 9)

KAREN: Well, sometimes I knew how to be nice to them in different ways 'cos some of them are like different. Like some of them like sports, like me, so I go and play with them, and be like a sports team. And then when I was like with other people, who I don't know, and I like sports and I try to teach them how to play it.

(Interview 18)

5.2.2 Teachers

The views expressed by the children on teachers and teaching may be classified into three categories: commentaries, reactions and understandings of teacher-children relationships. The first two themes are mostly things mentioned spontaneously by the children, while the third was raised in my general questioning. I will focus here on the children's understandings of the teacher-children relationship since the specific commentaries on, and the reactions of the children to, the practices of different teachers are not really the point of the present research. It is the wholeness of what the children expressed about the role of teachers that is relevant.

The relationship between teacher and children is explored through two questions in particular: what is the role of the teacher? and how does the teacher's relationship with children compare with that of parents or friends? Some interesting discussions emerged from these two questions. One interview witnessed a child-initiated exploration of the status of the teacher. After Henry mentioned that he didn't

quite accept that teachers are cleverer than the children, the others launched into a discussion of teachers' intellectual power or authority:

HENRY: *Some teachers think they are more clever than us. And they think that everything they say is right. And actually...*

ELLA: *We all have different opinions.*

HENRY: *No, it's not really we have different opinions. Sometimes they say things wrong. They don't ...*

ELEANOR: *Mr. McGee, he always has been right and everyone has been wrong, don't they? Sort of like ...*

JX: *Do you think teachers are cleverer than you?*

ELLA: *Erm, I actually think we are all the same, a bit, because ...*

HENERY: *Yeah.*

ELEANOR: *They are teaching us but they are teaching themselves the same time, aren't they really?*

(Interview 16)

Another aspect of the general relationship between teachers and children is expressed by the children as a conflict of wills. For example, one girl expressed her disagreement with the teacher's requirement of eye-contact to indicate wanting to be picked to answer a question. In another interview two girls explained fully why they didn't like the teacher's idea of giving a hug and kiss to their parents when they see them at the end of the school day. Also the barn dance is another thing imposed by the teacher that is very much disliked. Sometimes the clash of wills is seen as a power issue.

Children's perceptions of the role of teachers are sometimes an expression of rational reflection, sometimes of their intuitive awareness. For example, some children tried to rationalise the teacher's authority: '*He's the teacher though*' (Kate, Interview 4), or '*Teacher is bossy*' (Jess, Interview 2). Others struggled to explain their perceptions:

JOHN: *They are our guardian. To be honest, while we are in the school, because they are the boss of us really, so they're kind of ...They kind of*

...They look after us. Like when we hurt ourselves, or ... I don't know. And then they kind of just look after us.

(Interview 14)

In general, the children mentioned two dimensions of the teacher's role. The first is carer/helper, and role model. This implies that the children have a kind of trust in the teachers. For example:

KEVIN: *Well, when I first came to the school and I was been taught. Before I got to here, I was knew nothing. I was struggling how to write, struggling how to do anything. Now I can write, jog, run and everything and talk. Yeah, the teachers have helped us.*

(Interview 17)

JESS: *Teachers show the children what they do, so they teach them and give them many good influence.*

(Interview 11)

IRIS: *And he just like takes care of us. We are like his own children. And he makes sure we're safe.*

(Interview 8)

JX: *So you feel the love, or you feel the trust from the teacher, right? From all the teachers...?*

GEORGE: *S-o-m-e.* (Hesitantly)

JESS: *All of the teachers, I think. Well, most of the teachers.*

(Interview 11)

The second dimension of the teacher's role is more neutral or slightly negative - a boss who takes charge of the children and ensures that they '*just do what they are expected*' (Karen, Interview 18). For example:

KEVIN: *When you've been taught by that teacher, he's the boss. He's in charge of you. Your mum and dad is giving the teacher permission to ...*
(Interview 17)

JX: *Do you think teachers love you?*
(Silence.)

JOHN: *No, (Giggled) like us.*

EDDIE: *They care. 'Cos we are in their care.*
(Interview 14)

Also to some children the image and function of teachers are different depending on who the children are and how they behave, and so are their feelings to the teacher:

JX: *I mean what are teachers like in front of children?*

GORGE: *Depend on which the child is.*
(Interview 11)

TOBY: *Well, we're like in charge ourselves. When we are naughty, we are not in charge.*
(Interview 17)

PETER: *But, you like teacher quite a lot because if you're like a well-behaved child, they're really kind to you.*

GAVIN: *Award you.*

PETER: *And they tell you things and you get awards and things. But if you're like a badly behaved child you'll... you probably wouldn't like your teacher very much, 'cos they have to punish you. But that's really not the teacher's fault. It's their fault for being silly and getting punished.*
(Interview 12)

As for my deliberate questions on the comparison between parents and teachers or between friends and teachers, the children's answers reveal more of their opinions about teacher-children relations and the role of teachers. For example, the

children unanimously set a clear line between teachers and parents, but they seemed to agree to some extent that some young teachers could be like their friends. The comparisons between teachers and parents focus on issues like trust, closeness and fondness, which the children feel more strongly in relation to their parents:

EDDIE: Parents trust you. Teachers teach you quite a lot. But then you see Mum and Dad after school every day really. And you get to see them the whole holiday, see them at the weekends.

(Interview 14)

EDDIE: Well, you feel a bit uncomfortable really. Because you know you can give your mum a hug ...

JOHN: And a kiss, but you don't do that to a teacher though. (The boys giggled.)

(Interview 14)

The affective dimension is not well acknowledged or recognized in the teacher-child relationship. It seems that teachers are seen by the children mostly as people having executive responsibilities rather than as living human beings. Thus the relationship between teacher and children differs from other more human relationships such as that between parent and child or that between friends, as the following extract makes clear:

JX: How about love? What kind of love, I mean, exists between the teacher and children, you to the teacher, or the teacher to you? Can you ...?

GEORGE: No love, I don't think.

JESS: Hardly.

GEORGE: To me, the teacher is just a teacher, somebody teaches me. Just a teacher.

JESS: Yeah. He's not like as special as your parents.

(Interview 11)

The children are aware of the difficulties the teachers face balancing their position of authority with their more affective role in showing the children trust and care.

JX: *Do you think teachers trust you?*

GEORGE: *Some of us, and some bits, some ... 'Cos there's like a big balloon of trust between the teacher and children. And the children can just blow it by messing around quite a lot and then the trust can break a little bit, 'cos teacher trust them, but not all the time.*

(Interview 11)

JOHN: *He trusts Ernest, because ...I don't know. Because he's not ...*

EDDIE: *I'm sensible. (Jokingly) 'Cos you're silly. He never picks you because you are silly. And you never do a job properly.*

(Interview 14)

The comparison of teachers to friends sounds more reasonable to the children. My questions to two groups received similar replies. The children were able to name one or two young teachers that they found *'like friends'* (Eleanor, Interview 16) and somehow *'like a big kid'* (Kate, Interview 18), *'because they are more fun'*. (Ella, Interview 16). While *'the older teachers usually have a favourite child'*, they agree that there is one young teacher that *'let us all like be special'* (Henry, Interview 16) and *'just likes everyone as they are'* (Ella, Interview 16). Here the children seem to express a few qualities that they expect from teachers, which will be discussed more fully in the interpretation chapter.

5.2.3 The children

I asked no specific questions about children except some follow-ups based on what the children told me in order to explore their ideas further or to clarify some issues. The transcripts with this theme generally record what children said about their relations with each other.

5.2.3.1 General relations between each other

Generally, the existence of other children is very significant to the children. Some spontaneously referred to their relationship with other children:

KATE: Maybe if people have finished their work, maybe the teacher can see who's finished their work and they can go around helping people.

(Interview 4)

RORY: And I loved it on my holiday, 'cos when you come back, you're like, can tell the class something.

(Interview 6)

A number of points emerged from their conversations. Firstly, setting by ability does not represent a natural mode of classification for children and they have little to say about this official practice, although one girl referred to her experiences of grouping in another school. However, she offered a somehow contradicted picture. On the one hand, she pointed out that setting by ability avoids the possibility that *'the highest people make up, the lowest people copy'* (Iris, Interview 8), but on the other she mentioned the distress and pressure caused by artificial groupings:

IRIS: If you go to the highest like maths group, there is-. You're like then, you feel like really shy and upset. Because people are making fun of you because you can't do as high work as them. And they're wondering why you are there and keep like going, 'Haha, you're in this group, you can't do it.' All like that. And it upset people's feelings. They're not showing their, their emotion. They are just feeling too shy to speak up and just wanna just, want to disappear, like that. 'Cos it really hurts you inside.

(Interview 8)

Secondly, some children stand out from the rest in class, notably the special needs children, the 'teacher's pet' and some naughty children. From the children's perspective, this kind of 'visibility' depends on the teacher's actions. For example, many children complain about the special need boy Oscar because *'He gets more*

attention than us' (Anne, Interview 14) , but not the disabled girl Polly because she just looks different from the others and '*She can't help it*' (Tina, Interview 4). Similarly bad behaviour usually doesn't trigger comments from the children until the teacher intervenes:

ELEANOR: *Some of the boys say your name. And then you have to turn around and the teacher tells you off, not them. Very annoying.* (Interview 8)

RORY: *There's a lot of children who are silly.*

MARK: *He like wants to attract people's attention, so they get the blame.*
(Interview 6)

This feature is obvious in the case of 'teacher's pet':

EDDIE (singing and dancing the term 'teacher's pet') *Always call you 'teacher's pet', 'teacher's pet',* (And then turning to explain seriously) *means like you're best ... If you're the best person in the class, it means 'the teacher's pet'. 'Cos like, he asks you everything. He asks you to ...*
(Interview 14)

HENRY: *Give them more attention like treat them nicer and give them more opportunities to do than anyone else, and let them do all the jobs.*
(Interview 16)

Thirdly, the children often describe the class as made up of a number of friendship groups:

EDDIE: *You kind of have many tribes, like me, John, Ted ...* (Interview 14)

KATE: *They're pretty much groups and we're just playing at lunch time and stuff.*
(Interview 18)

ELLA: *We all sort of like a group of friends. The class's sort of like all in different friendships. Like you have the girls like to sing the songs, the boys are really into football and there're people there just like sort of really get friends and they had rarely had fall-out. And they just like anything really, didn't they?*

(Interview 16)

5.2.3.2 Gender issues

The gender issue is often quite dominant in the children's thinking. The children naturally refer to the other gender as either 'girls' or 'boys' and then offer descriptions or comments based on this gender distinction. On the one hand, it is easy for them to generalize on gender issues, especially when they argue that the opposite gender is treated differently. For example, as mentioned in the section about children seeking attention, the children tend to believe the other gender has more attention from teachers and both girls and boys generalise the situation as disadvantageous to them. Some girls and some boys offer their views in the form of observations or perceptions:

TINA: *The boys always get told off ... And they do something that they shouldn't be doing, like calling out and girls just sit nicely and we, and the teachers put us on the good board. We don't do stuff what we shouldn't be doing.* (Interview 4).

BILL: *'Cos once, yeah, he sent me time out and he gave Elisa five effort points for just doing good work, doesn't he?*

JX: *So how do you feel about that?*

BILL: *It's not fair cos he only wants to do is to let all the girls win.*

JX: *You mean you get more chance to be told off?*

BILL: *Yeah, yeah. Cos all the girls like always scared.* (Interview 3).

The children often present the gender stereotypes. For example a group of boys describe a group of girls as 'quiet, get on' (Eddie, Interview 14) and contrast them with their own approach to life:

JOHN: *We're dare to do stuff but don't like 'Oh, look at me. I've got a dress' Whee!* (He acted out girls' action of swirling and showing the dress).
(Interview 14)

However, they are also aware of the 'exceptions' or the diversity:

BILL: *Boys are normally loud.*

EDDIE: *No, I know boys are not really loud.*

(Interview 14)

NICOLA: *But some girls, they like football and they go like to football training and something. But they like other lessons too, not just the ones that boys like.*

(Interview 9)

Also the boys and the girls expressed their sense of gender difference in a slightly different way. It seems that the boys like to present the positive features of girls, though in an exaggerated way, while acknowledging their own disadvantages:

EDDIE: *They always do really really really really really really good work.*

(Interview 14)

BILL: *All the girls do everything very nice and make it all neat. Boys make it scruffy.*

(Interview 14)

On the other hand, some girls tend to complain about the boys' dominance, laziness and indifference:

TINA: *'Cos when you're with girls I feel quite happy. And when I was with boys, I just like have to do all the work. 'Cos they don't wanna do it. So, all the girls have to do the boys' work.*

(Interview 18)

ANNE: *The boys don't really want to do ... want anything to do with girls.*
(Interview 4)

KAREN: *I was annoyed when we have to go with boys and then I feel quite happy when we have to like get with girls because we all make suggestions then and we'll be happy.*
(Interview 18)

At the same time another group of girls shared their appreciation of boys' advantages:

ELLA: *I would actually prefer being a boy.*

ELEANOR: *So would I.*

ELLA: *Because they're more daring, aren't they?*

(Interview 16)

In conclusion, what is particularly significant about my categorisation and presentation of the interview data in this chapter is the relatively fuller space it provides for children to express themselves. The chapter begins by giving 'voice' to the children on the aspects of school life that were portrayed in Chapter Four through my own eyes. But in the second half of the chapter what is reported is the children's articulations of whatever they want to say in relation to general issues about schooling. The coming interpretation chapter will look at three main lines of findings in an attempt to bring coherence to the complexities and implications of the topic of children's experiences of the rituals of schooling.

6. Interpretation

The findings presented in Chapters Four and Five are categorised in terms of the specific aspects of the schooling practice that are the focus of my enquiry, in addition to the extra general themes that emerge from the children's own accounts. The findings should be looked at in a synthesized way, that is, none of the themes is to be looked at in its own right, because children's expressed experience is the result of a convergence of different experiences within their compulsory schooling. In this sense, children's recounted experience (as articulated either by me or by themselves) reflects the complex outcome of the performance of schooling (McLaren, 1986). In spite of that, a combination of interview and observation shows its advantages from a methodological perspective, even though the two approaches do not necessarily 'triangulate' in a legitimated way (cf. Silverman, 2001, p. 234).

My observation findings are very revealing on their own, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, and thus have much potential in interpretation. For instance, the dominance and busy-ness on the teacher's side can be interpreted at various levels. Is this the teacher's personal practice? Or is it an institutional outcome? The children's behaviour in the classroom is also open to various interpretations, such as in what ways to interpret children's momentary actions or responses, and how to understand what is in the mind of the child when he is distracted or disrupts the lesson. My initial reflections in Chapter Four led to a list of questions, but there is no way to answer them fully in one piece of research. Also the interviews with children in my research aim at understanding their life and experience from their own point of view, and hence do not supply direct answers to the questions raised initially.

But since my research puts emphasis on two key aspects, namely children's experience and school ritual, the children's own accounts are essential in this sense. The interview findings reveal the children's experience of the repeated aspects of schooling, which in itself fulfils the research intentions of the current inquiry and initially builds a link between schooling and the life of children. However, it is not my ultimate concern merely to depict school life through the eyes of the children, although as hinted in the literature review, I initially set my research apart from the dominant paradigm of 'adult-oriented' research and claim 'listening to children' as the core principle. My interpretation will further arrive at understandings of

children's experience and perceptions on the basis of a convergence of my observations and the children's own accounts, in which the children's interview accounts are taken as 'representations' of their perspectives as mentioned in Chapter Three.

Jackson talks about the significance of interpretations of educational research in terms of 'outside observation' (Jackson, 1968, p. 88). I am aware that there are many pathways I can follow as I seek to interpret the ethnographic observation notes and the transcriptions of my conversations with the children. For example: interpretation can follow different disciplinary traditions such as psychology, sociology, cultural studies etc. so that different things are taken as the focus (for example, the emotional aspects, a sense of justice in line with psychological investigation; authority and control as in social interpretation; various expressions of social class, gender conflict and division from a cultural perspective). I also realize that my interpretation can easily be expanded to various aspects of educational issues: experiential learning and the curriculum, children's well-being, the conception of teaching-and-learning, socialization, children's rights, spiritual development, teaching and school organization etc.

In reviewing the literature on school ritual and children at school, I have located my study as an ethnographic investigation of children's experience of everyday schooling in the light of an understanding of ritual as one aspect of the normal school life. The relation between ritual and schooling is itself under investigation rather than merely taking for granted a particular conceptualisation of ritual. My interpretation follows the initial purpose of my educational research and looks at the influence of the ritual aspect of schooling on children in the sense of their experience and development, rather than examining the quality of the performance of schooling for its own sake. My initial and ultimate concern is about the influence of schooling on children in terms of what they learn autonomously, and thus I aim to provide an in-depth investigation of schooling through an exploration of children's performances, perceptions and viewpoints as presented in the observation and interview findings.

As for my approach to interpretation, I follow that of rigorous qualitative research and pursue a sense of 'objectivity'. Already, I tentatively expressed my stand as a 'neutral' educational researcher who tries to tread a careful path between the explicit evidence-based educational research focusing on policy and practice on

the one hand and the theoretically-informed, discipline-defined investigations (for example, educational psychology, educational sociology) on the other. In the research design, implementation and presentation, I took cautious steps to attain this middle path, which always incorporates inevitable tension between ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’. On the one side, my empirical approach and the way I present my findings demonstrate my effort to attain ‘neutrality’. However, my interpretation can never stay in that kind of detached objectivity or neutrality. I would like to intrude beneath the appearance of confusion presented in the descriptive findings and express my own interpretation in an attempt to shed light on our understanding of primary school children’s life and the schooling. On the other side, even though I am interested in schooling and the interpretations may inevitably reveal my own thoughts about the schooling system, it should be born in mind that my intention in the research is not to influence policy or evaluate decisions. Rather, it should be taken more as an anthropological study of schooling, with more weight on the educational discussion. Therefore my three sections of this chapter deal with the schooling issue from a relatively ‘neutral’ stance that speaks more through the children’s voice and their articulation of their own lives as they appear in my observation than through more suggestive comments from myself as researcher. And they are presented in a logical sequence of gradual moving towards the central focus of the research intention.

As reported in Chapters Four and Five, certain specific aspects of schooling are the focus of my investigation. Through ethnographic observation I identify four activities as my main research focus: registration, dismissal, assembly and classroom lessons. The interview findings offer corresponding experiences and perceptions of the children about these four aspects of schooling. Whilst registration and dismissal are more routine-like performances, classroom lessons and assemblies are investigated purely with attention to ‘form’ rather than ‘content’. Therefore my investigation takes little account of the substantive content of teaching and learning in lessons or the moral content or information delivered in assemblies. It is the procedure, performance and especially the children’s state of being, perceptions and learning that stay at the centre of my concern. In what follows I will start from the children’s immediate experience of the repeated schooling practices as presented in my observations and in the interviews.

6.1 Children's 'ritual experience' of the repeated schooling practices

6.1.1 Repeated procedures and activities as 'the ritual of schooling'

In previous literature, various approaches have been taken to the investigation of school ritual. As detailed in my literature review, some studies conceptualise ritual as symbolic acts of unquestioned efficacy or 'power', and link it to ideas such as socialisation and cultivation etc. However, in research that either looks at ritual as part of the normal life of schooling, or studies schooling in terms of recurring practices, there is no taken-for-granted efficacy embraced in ritual. Methodologically my stand on school ritual in this research is the latter one. School life is under examination without a preconceived notion of what ritual is. Instead, by focusing on the empirically identified repeated activities and procedures of schooling, I initially approach ritual as a normal phenomenon in the school context.

Classroom life presents itself to me as a complex system with intertwined dimensions (for example, routines, transitions and structuring elements such as rules, grouping and sequencing). In the observation stage of my investigation, the organisational aspect, i.e. how the normal life is structured, is at the centre of my interest. Beneath the official version of the way classroom teaching is organised I have looked for structural elements and am interested in the patterns, routines, rituals etc, intending to investigate children's experience in a framework with a more neutral point of view (such as use of space and time, and the issue of attention). In other words, I am looking at the performance of the teacher and children on the classroom stage, like Quantz and Magolda (1997). Rather than focusing on the teacher, as Jackson et al (1993) do, my concern relates to the children's side and focuses on their 'live performance' in the classroom context.

I pay particular attention to the significance of trivialities, i.e. the habitual, day-to-day trivial aspects of life, in comparison with the activities aiming at achievements or various learning content, which is normally considered the real business of education by teachers and parents. According to Jackson, among the three factors that may influence children's school life experiences (1. the mismatch between individual desires and institutional goals; 2. the element of compulsion; 3. the 'old hat' effect; see 1968, pp. 60-61), the third point is the most significant aspect

that determines the nature of children's experience of schooling. This ritualized life is believed to constitute, and to further shape the characteristics of, children's school experience. 'A third, and perhaps the most important, reason why attitudes toward school tend toward neutrality is that school becomes "old hat" for most students' (p. 61). My focus on the repeated, ritualised aspects of schooling highlights the authentic context of the 'old hat' idea in order to investigate how children experience and make sense of school life in this respect.

As clearly illustrated in my observation findings, school activities such as registration, dismissal, assembly and lessons are the official things that constitute a school day. As well as administrating practical functions, these practices demonstrate some kind of standard procedures and actions; for example in registration it is the alphabetic-order naming. There is also a strict time-bound significance in these practices. Registration represents the official start of the day, while dismissal states the end of one session and the transition to another space and time. As well as the necessarily 'natural' way of signalling the different parts of a day, assemblies and classroom lessons represent the more deliberate efforts of the teacher and school organiser in organising school time. Sequential movements between various teaching modes, grouping and sequencing of children's activities, discipline, rewards and sanctions etc. are the observed distinctions of practice on the teacher's part. Assembly on its own is a complete unit of time and space that occupies a distinctive place in the school day, according to a weekly timetable. The procedure is set by the school and the practice is structured with certain activities such as singing, story telling, award giving and prayer.

In this research, I have further examined assembly and classroom lessons in terms of the performances of the teacher and the children, namely, the deliberate 'organising', discipline and surveillance on the teacher's part, and the explicit attention-seeking and the private distractions and disruptions on the children's part. Three kinds of particular formalized procedures in the classroom context are thus illustrated: grouping and sequencing, discipline and sanction, and ways for children to seek attention. These three procedures capture the features of classroom management and represent the main structure of classroom organisation. As discussed below, my study of school life gradually reveals the 'structuring' feature of these formalized activities, to use Jackson's term (1968, p. 12).

Firstly, the ‘structuring’ nature of those specific activities is reflected in the children’s interviews. There is a sense of routine apparently revealed in their articulations of general issues of school life as well as the specific aspects of schooling. For example, for the specific activities, in all cases they have to act out the requirements even though it is obvious they have their own private practices of talking and ‘messaging about’. At the same time as revealing their own role in the situation, the children share their awareness of the designated procedures, requirements and rules.

JX: *Does the register mean anything to you?*

HELEN: *Well, it does mean a little bit, like what we have to do.*

NICOLA: *Well, the register means like...fire alarm and talk to your friend.*

(Interview 9)

RORY: *Well, what happens is you line up at the playground and you would walk in to assembly. And you have to be quiet or you’ll have to stay after and sit there. And also when you sit down, he will like say ‘Good afternoon’ or something.*

(Interview 6)

From my observation and their conversations I am aware that because of their routine-like nature, the seemingly meaning-bound activities such as saying Goodbye together at the end of the day, the exchange of greetings with the teacher in registration, or the teacher’s deliberate inclusion of a reflective prayer all tend to lose their efficacy on the children’s part. Assembly, although it is clearly identified by some children as ‘religious education’, is a functional event in children’s general understanding: to meet up, learn a bit, work, or get to know the headmaster.

PETER: *Well, yeah. you get to all meet up. Awards are given out. You get to see people who have achieved.*

(Interview 6)

In a general sense, the children are also very aware of the nature of schooling in the sense of being ‘at school’ over the span between the first ring of the school bell

and the final dismissal by the teacher, which reflects a function of ‘delineation’ of the repeated procedures and activities in the school.

NICOLA: *You kiss them (parents) when you’re at the start of the school as you say ‘Bye ...’ (The ‘bye’ sounded sad.) But at the end of the school, you say ‘Hello’ and you give them a hug and then you go back home.*

...

HELEN: *Well, it’s normally because we’re leaving them for like a while ...*

NICOLA: *For six hours and 15 minutes. (JX laughed.)*

HELEN: *It’s actually six hours and five minutes.*

(Interview 9)

Secondly, as an in-depth investigation of classroom practices as well as assemblies, my research illustrates a parallel between the two seemingly very differently purposes of assemblies and classroom lessons. A comparison of assembly to ordinary classroom lessons seems inevitable on the part of both the children and me as a close observer:

JX: *Did you just say it (assembly) is work as well?*

RORY: *Yeah, because everyone does a piece of work in the assembly. ‘Cos they like tell you stuff and like what she thinks they feel.*

NICOLA: *And put your hand up and tell your feelings.*

(Interview 15)

As detailed in the Assembly section of Chapter Four, there are quite a few parallels between the assembly and classroom lessons. Taking place in a similar closed space, with the same teacher-child interaction, the assembly to children is just another lesson, a kind of ‘work’ in their ‘work-play’ categorisation of school activities. It seems fair to say that the significance of the religious ritual has to a large extent been diminished in the experience of the children, although the assemblies do mean ‘a quiet time’ for some children and they use it to ‘think a bit’. Additionally, as I mentioned at the end of that section, other annually-run special events such as Pancake Day, the Christmas concert, Christingle, and the one minute devotion on Memorial Day reveal a diluted significance in the totality of the normal flow of six

years of primary schooling. According to my observation and the interviews with the children, these one-off events exert only a supplementary impact that is also subject to the influence of the everyday experience of schooling. Very little mention was made in the interviews of these special events on the children's side.

However, as shown in Chapter Two, previous literature concerning school ritual identifies assemblies and other communal, ceremonial events as 'ritual' and investigates them in the name of ritual (for example, Weiss and Weiss, 1976; Kapferer, 1981; Jackson et al, 1993; Bushnell, 1997; Thacker, 1998; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Gill, 2000a, 2000b; Magolda, 2000; Bjork, 2002; Magolda, 2003; Bekerman, 2004) whilst other daily repeated practices such as registration and dismissal or classroom-based regulated practice such as discipline and putting hands up to get attention are more regarded as routine or the plain business of schooling and hence tend to be neglected in academic reflection. Although a certain number of studies have highlighted the normal practices of schooling in line with ritual either initially through anthropological conceptualization (for example, Gehrke, 1979; Henry, 1992; Powell & Kottler, 1997; Gohlih & Wagner-Willi, 2001) or through an ethnographical approach (for example, Jackson, 1968; McLaren, 1986; Quantz & Magolda, 1997), it is still a low-profiled aspect of school life.

My empirical research points out a strong similarity between the two types of repeated practices on the basis of my in-depth observations and extensive interviews with children. Thereby children's experiences at school are revealed as a homogenous experience. As noted in Chapter Two, McLaren (1986) approaches a group of secondary school Canadian Portuguese immigrant students' Catholic schooling from the perspective of ritual study and examines the institutional instructions in that context as ritual performances. My research further justifies the significance of bringing normal schooling practices into the domain of ritual study with a focus on the examination of the repeated 'performance' and the meaning it exerts in a general sense. Following McLaren's (1986) term of 'schooling as a ritual performance', I use the phrase 'the rituals of schooling' to highlight the normal experience of children in the repeated daily aspects of compulsory schooling. This approach to schooling not only potentially questions the significance of the more obvious ritual practices such as assembly and award ceremonies, as claimed by previous studies, but also raises awareness of children's experience of the daily grind of schooling. Although the blurred distinctions between ceremonial ritual and the

trivial routines of classroom procedures deserves further exploration, the overwhelming effect of everyday schooling in mass education is centred in my study on the perspectives of children because of the fundamentally ‘structuring’ role of the rituals of schooling.

6.1.2 The ‘ritual experience’ of schooling

My investigation underlines the importance of exploring children’s lived experience of the repeated everyday practices of schooling during the course of compulsory education. This aspect of school life, as Jackson puts it, helps ‘to give structure to the activities of the room and to fashion the quality of the total experience for many of the participants’ (Jackson, 1968, p.12). However, as illustrated in my literature review, the investigation of schooling practices with students as the focus is very rare. Since the advocacy of the voice of the child is a recent tendency, focused study into children’s experience of schooling or school ritual has only recently emerged (for example, Cullingford, 1991, 2002; Gohlih & Wagner-Willi, 2001; Mayall, 2002) or only just been raised at a conceptual level (for example, Astley & Jackson, 2000). Other more general research on children’s school life offers very little insight into children’s lived experience of the repeated normal practices of schooling. My finding chapters have presented in a descriptive way how children live, perceive and regard their normal day. In this section, I will discuss the schooling experience of the children in light of the convergence of the observation and interview findings.

My study of schooling concentrates on how the children experience and what they learn from the repeated moments of those ritual aspects of schooling, namely the performance of registration, dismissal, grouping and sequencing, discipline and sanction, and approved ways of seeking attention. As mentioned previously, classroom lessons and weekly assemblies are looked at in terms of the formalised procedures of grouping, discipline etc. rather than their educational content. Children’s day-by-day experience of schooling thus is captured as a set of structures involving entry, dismissal and teacher-child interactive procedures in the classroom context. Children’s experience of these repeated procedures and activities in the first place involves a sense of ritual. Further investigation of such ‘ritual experience’ requires an in-depth analysis of the children’s lived experience as defined by teachers’ normal schooling practice.

My approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation follows the form of ethnographic investigation proposed by Jackson, aiming to ‘appreciate the cultural significance of the humdrum elements of human existence’ (1968, p. 4). With this value-laden attitude of ‘appreciation’ with its focus on subtlety of insight, this kind of ethnography is different from what Greig and Taylor suggest (1999, pp.103-4) when they relate ethnography to a theory-based interpretation of actions and the contexts in which they occur. My interpretation in this section seeks to capture the everyday fleeting trivial experiences in schoolchildren’s lives and then to reveal what has been touched on as the experience of ‘ritual’ in the school context.

On the one hand, as mentioned in the last section, the procedures of registration and dismissal as part of the structure of schooling present routine experiences for the children.

GEORGE: *‘It’s kind of like to go on routine, because it’s like we’re programmed to do that, through walk in, sit down, we have to register and so on.*

(Interview 11)

But obviously they have their own way of spending the time:

IRIS: *‘It’s like forty persons are sitting there, you have to talk a little bit.’*
(Ella, Interview 7) *‘Looking at the window.’*

(Interview 8)

ANITA: *‘Chewing is not definitely the best thing but it gets you occupied.’*

(Interview 7)

In line with this routine experience, the extra ‘meaning-full’ activities such as Mr. McGee’s reflective moment before dismissal, and his imposition of greeting exchanges in registration are not so significant on the children’s side. Mainly because they have to, they just fit themselves into the structure. Two boys responded to my inquiry about the practice of reflecting before being dismissed:

JX: *I remember like that Mr. McGee asked you to like think about the day.*

BILL: *Yeah, think about the day.*

JOHN: *Yeah, the favourite bit of the day.*

JX: *So, what's that?*

BILL: *Most is probably PE.*

JOHN: *Yeah, everyone is PE.*

(Interview 3)

On the other hand, the findings from my observations and interviews have illustrated four main dimensions of life on the children's side when the focus of study is on teacher-child interactions in the context of classroom or school hall. As detailed in Chapters Four and Five, the children are inevitably put in a situation of being located, supervised, and regulated and at the same time seeking and even competing for individual attention. The matter of discipline and sanction stays immediately on the surface of the children's awareness and readily dominates their conscious judgement of the state of affairs in the classroom. As a close observer, I felt myself overwhelmed by the teacher's organising, instructing and classroom management when I was recording and calculating meticulously what happened in the classroom. In the organisational and disciplinary interactions, the intentions of the teacher kept the upper hand, like a hidden force that seemed able to exist independently of the children.

Firstly, grouping and sequencing always deal with children collectively, although the children are often not satisfied with how and where they are placed.

POLLY: *Probably because if you are just like standing there where you wanted, you're probably talking to your friends.*

ANITA: *It's just easier for the teacher. So they don't have to work so hard really. (Anita and Polly giggled.) So that's maybe easier.*

(Interview 7)

Secondly, the way the teacher puts children into the designated places and then gives them intensive instructions concerning organisational or disciplinary matters actually puts them under full surveillance, though the children have their own practices of distraction, disruption and time-killing.

JX: *What does the teacher do in the assembly?*

MARK: *You can't play ...*

RORY: *They ... 'cos they want to look at their children when they're silly.*

(Interview 6)

Thirdly, the way the teacher supervises the children, assesses their behaviour, and rewards or punishes them according to their conformity to the various contextual regulations implicitly puts the children in a state of always being 'under regulations', which causes them to face the inescapable choice between 'to obey' or 'to disobey'.

JOHN: *It's hard, really. 'Cos when you're trying to talk sometimes, you get told off and all that, don't they?*

(Interview 5)

JX: *How do you know this 'don't'?*

ANNE: *Erm, (then in a funny noise) you just don't do it, you are not allowed to do it.*

(KATE bursts out giggling)

(Interview 4)

Fourthly, the way the children are explicitly required to seek attention from the teachers causes competition for attention among the children, which further exaggerates the tensions on the children's side resulting from the lack of individual attention from the teacher in the classroom context.

KEVIN: *Well, you talk to them every day. You have to put your hand up and say, 'Oh, I've got this question, Mr. Opie'.*

KATE: *Sometimes he doesn't really notice you. Your arm aches. Then you put the other up and then the other one.*

(Interview 17)

Compared with the routine nature of registration and dismissal, the above four dimensions of school life are much more significant in their everyday schooling, which is quantitatively demonstrated in children's own accounts of their life in the

school. This feature is also reflected in their illustration of a 'normal school day' in that most of a normal day is concerned with 'work' and 'work' is mostly perceived as opposite to 'freedom' and 'play'.

ANITA: *You have to change from being like, being able to do whatever you'd want to do and then you'll have to be like, you'll have to do what you're told, put your hand up and answer the question.*

(Interview 7)

JX: *You said, in the school you are told to do these things. And, let me see, when you 'feel free', do you know what does 'free' or 'freedom' means? How do you think?*

ANITA: *It means to us at school really, like you won't have to be told around and you can actually do what you want really.*

RORY: *Won't go down, don't go down to next door neighbours in school, you can't go around to your next door neighbours. In the school the gates are locked. But some people are bad, and escaped. 'Cos the gate is quite easy to go over. But, erm, for some reason, which, erm-, is all right, the back gate you can get through.*

(Interview 15)

Moreover, the issue of children's behaviour, in which there are the topics of grouping, discipline and rules on the one side, and their confession of their almost 'natural' distractions and disruptions on the other, permeates children's reports of the various aspects of school life such as registration, assembly and classroom lessons.

JX: *So what do you do usually when you are waiting?*

ELLA: *We just like sit and talk.*

ANITA: *No. We have to wait. We don't.*

POLLY: *We just sit.*

ELLA: *Erm, Well. Some people are talking, which is not supposed to do.*

ANITA: *But I do sometimes.*

ELLA: *Erm, me too, (Ella and Polly giggled.) 'cos it's a bit boring. 'Cos it's like forty person are sitting there, you have to talk a little bit.*

ANITA (grinning): *I got the nails.*

ELLA: *I'm going like that.* (She acted out chewing the cuff.) *Sitting is boring. Yeah.* (She giggled.)

JX: *Chewing?*

ANITA: *Chewing is not definitely the best thing but it gets you occupied.*

(Interview 7)

In conclusion, a key issue is that children's experience in schools is determined largely by the power structures of the school. There are two broad perspectives with regard to this normal experience of schooling. Firstly, when the 'lived experience' of the children at school is looked at from the direction of teacher-child interaction, there is a sense of the teacher's 'power' that overwhelms their schooling experience. In this respect Jackson (1968) discusses the pitiful but ubiquitous aspects of school life like delay, denial, interruption, and social distraction and notes that 'powerful social sanctions are in operation to force the student to maintain an attitude of patience' (p.18). As reviewed in Chapter Two, a number of previous educational studies have focused on this ritual aspect of schooling but more often it has just been taken as self-evident (for example, Gehrke, 1979; Powell & Kottler, 1997), and children's experience is assumed rather than empirically studied as the focus of research. Expressed either as 'structuring', 'forcing', or 'ritualisation' in previous writing, this kind of 'power' has often simply been taken for granted, even in studies in teachers' behaviour. For example, Morrison (1927, in Jackson, 1968) suggests that the teacher's activities fall into three categories, control, operation, and administration, and these three ways of action are also the techniques through which teachers demonstrate their power.. It is the fact that this 'power' is such a widely accepted element of schooling and class management that holds back further enquiries into the authentic experience of children in education. Secondly, although such a version of lived experience as 'being placed, supervised, regulated and put under the pressure of attention competition' sounds strong and might at the first sight be difficult for educationists to admit, it is not unfamiliar to us at all. To some extent it points to the nature of compulsory mass education since it first occurred several hundred years ago. In sociological investigations and similar research, schooling is discussed in terms of 'authoritarianism', 'hierarchy', and 'control' (for example, Delamont, 1983; McNeil, 1988; Cullingford, 1991, 2002),

which comes explicitly from the perspective of adults. Still within the field of educational studies Jackson (1968) and Jackson et al (1993) closely examine teachers' behaviour and suggest an alternative perspective from that of educational psychology. 'The clarification and management of these demands make up a central part of the teacher's work. As he seeks ways of trying to do his job better, the teacher who turns to an intensive study of personality dynamics or psychological pathology may discover that he has learned more about alligators than he needs to know' (Jackson, 1968, p. 173).

The above two approaches to the normal experience of schooling presumably start from the perspective of adults and the children's authentic point of view is not heard at all. My empirical data with the focus on children's lived circumstances highlights and amplifies the problem, in that the portrait of the children's experience reveals a deep division of priority and value between the two parts: children as the participants on the one end, and the school and teachers on the other. In view of the repeated procedures and ritual activities of schooling, not only do the practical experiences and educative intentions in normal school organisation and classroom management seem to be understood differently on the children's part, but the cumulative effect of years of schooling practice also impacts significantly on children's attitude to the idea of 'going to school'. As Jackson (1968) points out in his *Life in Classrooms*:

Shortly after his initiation into the institution the young child develops an understanding of what school is like and in the years that follow his initial views are not modified radically. Patterns of social interaction remain about the same throughout the grades and the physical environment remains very much the same as he moves from one room to the next in the same school building. The content of the work may change in each successive grade but, essentially, arithmetic is arithmetic and spelling is spelling. This year's teacher may be nicer than last year's but both are teachers and the student's relationship with both is a highly standardized flowering of stable role expectations. After the first few thousand hours of attendance (and possibly long before then) the global experience of being in school probably holds few surprises for most students. This is not to say, of course, that surprising events do not take place in the classroom. Many otherwise dull days are

brightened by unexpected happenings, and many teachers do their best to inject novelty into the daily lesson. But the excitement of school, its sharp disappointments as well as its joys, is contained in colourful interludes that interrupt, rather than characterize, the normal flow of events. (Jackson, 1968, p. 61)

At first sight, the normal flow of life seems not to have changed in the years since Jackson wrote the above paragraph half century ago. But, it is worth investigating what is inside children's world and their mindset in terms of their experience and perceptions of schooling nowadays, given the dramatic changes in the schooling system. My research attempts to take the study of children's own experience and perspectives further, as indicated below.

6.2 Looking deeper into the children's own perceptions and perspectives on life

As illustrated in the last two sub-sections, my investigation of the normal life of school children superficially reflects previous studies of schooling in terms of interpreting the significance of its ritual-like activities. However, it further suggests the importance of exploring the meaning of repeated everyday practices to children as participants in the course of compulsory education. The significance of this approach is the emphasis on 'listening to the voice of children', which is rarely or at least inadequately in evidence in other research. The attempt to understand children's actual experiences through these findings involves a huge task of interpretation. My findings chapters present the world of the children in a more descriptive way. And a few themes concerning children's own perceptions of school life have already directly emerged, for example: 'routine', 'friendship', 'work and play', 'normal day', 'teacher as educator', and 'children's concern with the personal significance of the individual in the collective experience', as presented in Chapter Five in what the children said about general issues of schooling. My observations chapter with its initial reflections has raised the difficult issue of interpreting children's actions and behaviour from an outsider's point of view, which depends on one's taken-for-granted values and assumptions about childhood, listening to children, the meaning of education and so on.

From the academic angle, there have been many dimensions presented in studies into the children's own world, as detailed in the literature review. For example, the dynamics and the mechanisms of classroom interactions have been specifically explored through what is called 'symbolic interaction', one of the sociological theories that bloomed in the middle of the last century (as in Woods, 1979, 1990a; Davies, 1982). More recent endeavours bring in the perspective of cultural and social psychology and set the focus on children's 'development' which it is suggested results from the convergence of inner growth and outside influences (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000). However, how children experience and make sense of such day-by-day routines of interactions has been paid little attention.

Different disciplinary investigations shed patches of light on the area of schooling experience as noted in Chapter Two, and comparison between school education and other forms of education suggests the limits of the dominant schooling system (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Quantitative results drawing on student surveys offer a neutral, grey-coloured picture of life, without strong responses from the participants (Tenenbaum, 1940, in Jackson, 1968). Tenenbaum's study reveals that children's responses to the questions about their views of school life tend to be stereotyped and to follow a 'conventional pattern', and often had an 'adult character' about them (*ibid.*). He concludes that 'the children attend school with consciousness that it will help them out in later life. School is not pleasurable for itself. It is important for its future promises.' This conclusion appears too general and superficial to be very meaningful, in that it demonstrates something common to us all. Actually it raises an issue of children's authentic perceptions and perspectives.

Even person-to-person interviews with children may give a blurred picture of their life (for example, Cullingford, 1991, 1997, 1999, 2007) since they leave too much space for subjective reading and especially adult-oriented interpretations, as seen in Chapter Two. When a student's behaviour is mentioned by Jackson (1968) as ambiguous and unstable (p. 87), 'a separation between their feelings and the daily business of classroom life' is also noted by him (p. 62), which suggests the difficulty of making a link between institutional education and children's affective aspects. It seems that children's perceptions and perspectives on their own life in the rituals of schooling have not yet been given enough attention for their own sake.

In the light of child advocacy, my research adopts in-depth group interviews with supplementary detailed observations of classroom activities. With an emphasis

on the children's spontaneous responses and their own agenda, the extensive findings of the interviews portray a complex picture with diverse responses that seem ambiguous and confused, thus resonating with the previous findings of children's 'neutral' attitude to their school life (cf. Tenenbaum, 1940; Cullingford, 1991). However, to go beyond this merely descriptive level, I intend my investigation to aim at understanding not only children's lives on the basis of the convergence of observation and interview, but also (at a deeper level) their perceptions and perspectives. Even though the findings from observation and interview will be looked at simultaneously in the process of interpretation, what the children said and how they articulated their points are given particular attention in my further exploration of the perspectives of the children.

Cautionary notes have been sounded from different directions regarding interpreting children's experience. A specific concern is expressed as the tendency of adults to 'too easily lay claim, firstly to know and secondly to apportion blame, for a child's deficiency' (Billington, 2006, p. 15). Whilst the intention of reporting the findings as comprehensively and objectively as possible in the last two chapters is for the readers to make their own judgment, I can see, during the long course of observing and interviewing children, the importance of interpreting what the children said in its fullest possible meaning. The two levels of findings from the interviews demonstrate my attempt to read the children's words in two different ways: as answers to my research questions, and as a general inquiry about their school life. For further interpretation, I will concentrate on children's responses to the ritual of schooling, which the children express in terms of their own experience and perspectives on life.

Children's ability to articulate their own experience has been examined in Chapter Three under the heading 'Listening to Children' and in the review of recent tendencies in childhood research. Specifically, for participant children aged 7-11 years, the emotional attitudes are identified as significant (Cullingford, 1992). In my research, this is manifest in their expression of feelings and opinions, as well as their descriptions of what happened to them. In addition, there are clear signs of their inquisitiveness (for example, Ann, Mark, Ella), their self-consciousness (for example, Helen) and their capacity for reflection (for example, George, Iris). Even though these aspects at first glance are not major features of the whole group, they strongly suggest the autonomous potential of some of the children at least. In Chapter Five,

the first half (the framework of specific aspects of schooling) serves mainly to depict some specific aspects of school life, and the second half (the framework of general issues) is basically to offer some child-initiated accounts of more general issues of schooling. Whilst their articulated responses reveal children's particular ways of experiencing the world and their own perceptions, this section of interpretation will supply an even more authentic perspective on their school life with fuller attention to their subjective emotion and value. Therefore my approach to the interpretation of the children's voice involves hearing their own perceptions and perspectives. Instead of merely referring to what they literally said about their experience of the ritual of schooling, I approach the interpretation by trying to capture their general perspectives revealed through their articulations and subjective views about the issues they mentioned.

A few notes of caution are necessary on the topic of children's experience of schooling. For example, children's experience has various layers (individual, group, and whole class), and is cumulative in at least two respects: two or more teachers have brought their distinctive approaches to the children in the year under investigation, and their experience over their previous years at school also influences their perceptions of school life. In addition, as touched on in Chapter Five, outside life (particularly the interactions at home) sometimes presets a mood for the day. The children will also bring understandings from homes that affect their experience of school life. The media is a determining factor of children's perspectives on some issues and as a result can alter their perceptions and experiences. These complex influences affect children's experience in addition to the complicated interactions within the school. Hence the children's responses are analysed and interpreted in the spirit of illuminating rather than evaluating the school's organisation and classroom management.

The next section contains my exploration of the children's perceptions and perspectives of the ritual experience of schooling on the basis of their attitudinal responses, actions and the way they express themselves. Whether relating to specific aspects of schooling or general issues such as teachers and school days, there seems to exist three styles of response in terms of their attitudes and actions: acceptance, resistance and reflection. I will discuss these three responses as three general dimensions of the children's experience of school ritual and then gradually explore the in-depth meaning these responses reveal. I do not intend to probe into the social

differentiations in the world of children as some sociological studies do (for example, Pollard, 1985). Instead, my investigation uses these three lines of response to provide an overview of the children's experience of schooling. It will become apparent that all three responses are reflected in more or less all the children as different aspects of their experience. This finding clearly conflicts with research by Woods (1979, 1990a) that emphasises children's resistance and by Cullingford (1991, p. 80) that emphasises their belief in 'the sanctity of discipline'.

6.3 Children's responses to the ritual of schooling

Children's experience at school is at the centre of my enquiry, although what the children said is not taken as 'proof' or 'evidence' of anything, simply as 'representations' of the 'reality' on which my research is focused. For example, instead of approaching the interviews as a way of trying to obtain answers to specific enquiries from me, my data-collection and analysis of the interview data reflect my core concern with the authentic experience of the children. This is expressed in Chapter Three at both methodological and practical levels. Although the interview findings have not responded directly to the questions I raised in the course of reflecting on my observations, my child-oriented approach has certainly obtained some 'representations' of the children's life at school from what they have said.

According to Jackson (1968), children's attitude to school in general is not correlated with their response to individual teachers and classmates; 'the institution' rather than 'the people' influences their feelings towards schooling. My approach of 'letting go' of my own agenda in the interviews and analysis has actually helped me to avoid the common tendency to examine the teacher's performance in the light of the children's account, which is not my research purpose by any means, though I recognise that the different perspectives and concerns of teacher and children are significant enough to merit another major research project. Initially I touched on this point in Chapter Five when I reported what the children said specifically about the teacher and children,

As stated in Chapter Three, my investigation into children's experience of the ritual of schooling adopts an approach involving continuous checking between my initial hypothesis and the 'real life' situations. It takes their experience of the repeated procedures and activities in schooling as the research focus and approaches it through

close observations and interviews, which supply substantial accounts of their everyday school experiences. My interpretation further interrogates the findings in line with my enquiry into children's own perspectives and the possible learning that takes place through the ritual aspects of school life.

Both my observations and the things the children said about their everyday schooling will be looked at as 'representations' of their general experience. A focus on the corresponding expressions of feeling, opinions and reflection will help to reveal the children's affective life in school, which turns out to be not just compelling in terms of its emotional momentum, but also a remarkable contrast to the perspectives of adults. And the children's own perspectives regarding their school experience shed lights on the educational significance of schooling and hence suggest an alternative view of structural and organisational issues in the context of mass education.

The general experience of the children is taken in my research as their perspective on, (i.e. their own experiences and perceptions of) the 'rituals' of schooling. Although my observations and interviews reveal that the children have different kinds of co-existent responses to the routine practices of schooling, I pay attention to them with the intention of understanding their perspective in general. By doing so, I interpret the research findings through a careful exploration of how children understand and respond in a different way to adults. Therefore, instead of being satisfied with a superficial examination of children's experiences and responses seen from an adult perspective, we are able to look as if through their own eyes for a further interpretation of the impact the rituals of schooling have on them.

6.3.1 The co-existent responses of resistance and acceptance and the revealed impact of the experience of school ritual

Acceptance and resistance are two contrary responses. They are certainly the most common responses to the rituals of schooling. Generally, the continuance of day-by-day compulsory schooling is evidence of the children's acceptance of the system, even though it may be not voluntary. However, distractions and disruptions are pervasive and ubiquitous. The co-existence of two opposing stances to the ritual of schooling is also hinted in the terminology the children use about general school life: 'normal day', 'routine', or 'have to', and 'getting on with it'. With regard to specific

aspects of schooling such as registration, grouping and discipline, the children reveal their awareness of two sides to these: the official, functional side and children's deviant actions. For example, the children believe that registration is a necessary practice so that the school knows who is present in case of emergency, but at the same time they see it as a daily routine experienced by them with some boredom and distraction. *'We just sit down and we are not allowed to talk. But some people like to whisper and all that.'* (Eleanor, Interview 8) On some issues such as grouping, the children's attitude can be partly accepting and partly resisting. While all the children interviewed seem to accept the fact that they are organized into groups, they often express dissatisfaction at their lack of freedom to choose whom they sit or stand next to. In other cases it may turn out that some children accept and some reject a particular practice. For example, Kevin and Jess's strong rejection of Mr. McGee's discipline-oriented instructions contrasts with their friends' indifference to it.

However, the contrary responses of accepting and resistance cannot always be easily differentiated. It is clear that (a) different children may respond differently to the same situation; (b) the same children may respond differently to different situations; and (c) children may superficially accept but privately resist a particular situation. Because I am interested in children's general experience of the rituals of schooling, I will not probe into the first two occasions as they involve specific situations relating to the particular issue or particular children. It is the general co-existence of the two opposing responses and particularly the nature of the private resistance that matter in interpreting the children's perceptions and perspectives. For the convenience of interpretation I will distinguish between active and attitudinal resistance. For example, it is clear that distraction and disruptions are deviant actions involving active resistance, and so are the complaints children make when they are dissatisfied. When the children express their concerns they show more than an awareness of a situation and often demonstrate a trace of resistance to something they are not totally happy with, and so I put these under the category of resistance. The main ambiguity is concerned with how far awareness of the norms and rules implies acceptance. Whilst sometimes the children demonstrate that they are well aware of the rules, norms, and procedures of a practice even though they immediately put forward their own complaint, sometimes they express the norms and practice as if they are long-accepted routines. In what follows, I am aware of the subtlety in these different responses to the rituals of schooling.

6.3.1.1 Rebellion and resistance

Responses involving an attitude of resistance or rebellion are made more explicit to me and are more straightforwardly expressed by the children, whilst accepting attitudes are generally more ambiguous. Apart from that, out of all the specific aspects of schooling the children's deviant activities in the form of distraction and disruption cannot be neglected. On the basis of the findings from my observations and interviews, I am able to classify the children's responses of resistance and rebellion into various categories, which are revealed in their attitudes to schooling generally as well as to specific aspects of schooling. First, there is the level of awareness and consciousness of the existence of regulations, sanctions, and the restraining features of the school on the children's part. Second, the children show their concern over certain issues like grouping or getting the teachers' attention. Third, complaints over discipline and sanctions are made explicit. Fourth, the children express their disagreement with the perspectives of the teacher. Finally, at the level of actual behaviour, their observed deviant actions such as distraction, time-killing strategies and disruption are confirmed in their own accounts. The interpretation of these five forms of rebellion and resistance is given below.

6.3.1.1.1 Attitudinal forms of resistance and rebellion

Firstly, the children reveal their awareness and consciousness of the restraints of schooling by describing the untold intentions of the teacher in some specific practices. Such awareness is demonstrated through plain reporting. They are not surprised at all at the teacher's intention of regulation and surveillance, but this does not imply an attitude of acceptance. For example, some boys were very certain that the teacher's intention in taking the register in reverse alphabetical order was to keep the children more alert rather than playing fair in terms of balancing the normal order. As for sitting next to friends, four boys revealed to me that on the carpet they can choose where to sit but at the tables they can't choose since the grouping is under the control of the teacher. Similarly, when the teacher was reported by the children to dismiss children by pointing to them one by one and saying 'you can go', 'you can go', 'you can go', there was no explicit complaint. But in comparison with other procedures before dismissal such as the handing out of birthday sweets there is an unsurprising flavour of dullness about it in the children's reports.

Similarly, in the context of the normal school day, the transitions from lessons elsewhere to classroom-based lessons are something that children are clearly aware of. Some children consciously used the term ‘have to’ to describe this sort of situation. This awareness of the restriction is straightforwardly expressed and significant in their experience.

ELLA: At school, we have to unpack our bags, and then we've got to go up a little break time. And when the bell rings, we have to go back to our classroom, sit down and have the register, then change classes for our maths group.

(Interview 7)

ANITA: You have to change from being like, being able to whatever you'd want to do and then you'll have to be like, you'll have to do what you're told, put your hand up and answer the question.

(Interview 7)

Secondly, at the level of their expressed concerns, the children's awareness of school discipline and sanctions turns to a clear consciousness of the almost ‘threatening’ situation with respect to the teacher's classroom practice. This consciousness over discipline and sanctions is shown in their own accounts of these topics, which to me is a pervasive response from the children. For example, as shown in Chapter Five, the issues of discipline and sanctions seem to dominate the consciousness of some children and stay close to the surface of their consciousness. Most of the children frequently refer to a range of discipline issues in their accounts of school life. All the children show a concern about sanctions since they are more critical of the teacher when his discipline is concerned with ‘telling off’ individuals or exercising sanctions.

Thirdly, according to my findings, the children are also very bothered about the issue of where they sit in the classroom and most talk negatively about rules and discipline. This kind of awareness or concern is further apparent in some children's complaining attitude and apparent subjectivity, which is directly related to living under the ‘threat’ of discipline and sanctions.

BILL: *'If you drop a pencil, he like shout at you. You like go time out. And if you forget your homework, you go time out. When you've done it at home, but like if you forget it, you go time out...*

(Interview 3)

With regard to schooling generally, many children complain more explicitly of boredom as a normal feeling at school and express their experience of the normal school day as 'getting on with it'. Such boredom is a significant experience of schooling. On the one hand, school life is divided between 'work' and 'play', as shown in Chapter Five, and 'boredom' is perceived as the opposite of 'fun'.

GEORGE: *Sometimes they might think some of the lessons are bit boring. 'Cos you just sit on the carpet with written things for about half an hour. Even if you know, they are telling you what you'll be doing. And then you're going to do it. Yeah, it's better if you do it 'cos sitting on the carpet isn't fun.* (Interview 11)

On the other hand, the boredom mentioned by the children is mostly connected with '*doing the same old things*' (Kate, Interview 17), which is also referred to in the comment '*it's not fun*' (Polly, Interview 18). For example,

ELEANOR: *It's-, sometimes it goes a bit boring because we go, every year we go the same things, don't we? Because, on like, on like ... we go through like on Christmas, we normally go everything all over again, don't we?*

IRIS: *Yeah, like Jesus.*

(Interview 8)

EDDIE: *It's boring.*

JOHN: *And you get to do the same thing basically everyday.*

(Interview 14)

It seems that in the children's complaints repetition and boredom are among the main features of 'work', the major part of the school life. Accordingly, as reported in Chapter Five, not only are lessons like literacy, maths, and science

counted as work, but assembly is mostly seen as ‘work’ as well. Within the perspective on schooling as a ‘work-play’ dichotomy, there is almost another dichotomy of ‘boredom-fun’ that directly corresponds to the former. The fact that the children experience school days mostly as ‘work’ reveals their characterisation of schooling as repetition and boredom, which is simply the opposite of fun, play and ‘something different’ to the children.

Fourthly, the children sometimes express more open disagreement with or criticism of the teacher. For example, sequencing and grouping are raised as a matter of fairness, considering the waiting and lack of individual choice: ‘*They think it’s quite unfair for the people at the last of the register.*’ (Anita, Interview 7) ‘*It’s just easier for the teacher. So they don’t have to work so hard really. So that’s maybe easier.*’ (Anita, Interview 7) Their reluctance in responding to the teacher’s suggestion of reflection before dismissal is based on self-knowledge and knowledge of peers: the favourite bit of the day is personal and should be treated as private. Besides, according to the children no lessons are exactly their favourite thing, and some days are ‘horrible’. Another aspect of practice that is covered by explicit disagreement concerns the implementation of discipline and sanctions. For example, although the boys in Interview 1 know that Mr. McGee stops them covering their mouth to prevent people from talking, Gavin raised it as unfair. He said this is because he has a habitual pose with his face leaning against one hand. Some girls criticised the teacher for telling off the wrong person. It is clear that the resistance in forms of reluctance and disagreement originates from different viewpoints between the teacher and the children.

In conclusion, the children’s clear expression of their subjective views, complaints and disagreements, represent attitudinal resistance to the compulsory schooling practices. As well as directly reflecting the situation of the classroom in general, and the teacher’s conduct in particular, most children’s strong attitudes and emotions apparent in their articulations are seen as mere reactions and are not necessarily reflected in their behaviour. It seems that the existence of the teacher is the cause of children’s attitude of resistance. The children’s expressions of awareness, concerns and complaints correspond to the overt or covert restraints and disciplines.

A parallel is seen between the fact that children are very bothered over the issue of where they sit in the classroom and the fact that they truly are told where to

sit by the teacher most of the time. Similarly, while they express negative views about rules and discipline, the children are actually reacting to the fact that the teacher implements these matters forcefully in the classroom. Also in most cases when the children talk about who actually gets ‘attention’, they mean not only being noticed, but also being ‘picked’ or ‘treated as special’, which clearly in their minds corresponds to an absence of care for individual needs in the classroom context.

Interestingly, in all these cases, the children seem to overreact to the teacher’s approach of regulating and supervising them. As explained in the findings chapter, in their complaint of ‘being under threat’ there is an obvious gap between how much they feel they are exposed to various sanctions and how much they actually receive. The children seem to express *what they feel* more than what actually happens. Similarly, the children’s accounts of ‘getting the teacher’s attention’ all point to a sense of dissatisfaction with the attention they actually get from the teacher. Their claims about who gets special treatment are mainly unsupported judgements based on their strong emotional responses without much hard evidence, such as ‘*The older teachers usually have a favourite child.*’ (Ella, Interview 16), and ‘*He normally picks the girls.*’ (Bill, Interview 14). In addition, different children appear to overreact to different issues to different degrees, which also reflects perceptions of gender differences in their treatment. For example, compared with the boys, the girls demonstrate a tendency to want more attention and personal care. In terms of discipline and sanctions, it is usually the boys who are most frequently disciplined by the teacher that feel themselves under threat.

Another justifiable claim based on the above analysis is that somehow the children are acutely aware of the dominating presence of teachers in school and in the classroom, even though the children’s response to this situation is not always clear. For example,

RORY: ‘*Because some of the boys they normally don’t like listen or something. But you might ...The teacher’s sit there. And there’s like a row of teachers, and they look on you. And there’s Mr. Evans at the back.*

(Interview 6)

In this case, it is easy for an adult to assume acceptance of the situation by the children and explain the reasons for it sensibly. A seemingly neutral articulation of

the children's awareness of the state of affairs in school blurs the boundary between positive and negative attitudes. In order to discover children's perspectives we need to ask whether for them it is an accepted norm or a perceived constraint. However, the children are always very aware of the teacher's presence. At the same time as they are under the watchful gaze of the teacher, they have been trained to keep an eye on the teacher themselves. It seems that such vigilance on the children's side parallels the teacher's action of surveillance. Therefore, as well as their expressed concern and even overreaction to rules, discipline and sanctions, and their perceptions of a deficit of individual care, their disclosure of their awareness of the unarticulated regulating intention of the teacher reveals the children's understanding of and response to the situations they are in. Their acute awareness is the explanation of a reactive mechanism between them and whatever teachers do to them, which illustrates a key aspect of children's perspectives on the rituals of schooling.

6.3.1.1.2 Actions of resistance and rebellion

At the level of observable actions, strategies like distraction, disruption, and trying to have a laugh and pass the time are the well-documented ways for pupils to 'get on with' school life (Delamont, 1983, Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990a). According to children's accounts and my own observations, deviant actions and strategic responses are pervasive in the rituals of schooling under consideration. On the one hand, it is a very common response for people to get a bit distracted during the course of a whole day's work commitment. For example, the children revealed that they are a bit sloppy and '*not paying enough attention*' when coming back from the lunchtime break (Kevin, Interview 9). Some children also revealed that at the end of the day they are a bit restless and often thinking of something else. Thus distraction and deviant actions fit easily into the picture of real school life. On the other hand, it is important for us to discover and understand children's perspectives by looking at their lived experience and listening to their own voices.

Significantly, the children's conversations reveal more specific meanings in their ways of dealing with the everyday schooling. This enables me to further classify their distracting and disruptive actions into various forms such as strategic resorts, issues concerning friendship, unauthorised talk, jokes and messing about. This further analysis reveals children's perspectives and the complexity of classroom realities, neither of which is obvious to us as adults and educators. The actual experience of the

participants in classroom life is often hidden behind the superficial ‘reality’ and our taken-for-granted impressions regarding children and classroom management.

Firstly, according to my research findings, some children resort to some (mildly) deviant mental tasks or actions to get through the procedures such as registration, dismissal, reflection, and assembly in the sense of ‘getting on with it’. Several boys revealed that they just remember the names before and after theirs and wait for either to come up during the course of registration, and then get ready to answer the teacher. Most children automatically choose ‘PE’ as the best thing of the day when the teacher asks them to reflect at the end of the day and report what they liked best. One boy explicitly mentioned that he simply picks something like library time in his mind so that he is able to quickly show Mr. McGee that he is ready with the answer by raising his head or having his arms folded. In reaction to the unspoken intention of the teacher to regulate where the children sit, some children admitted to hiding themselves behind the tables to avoid being spotted doing something that is not allowed when they are sitting on the carpet. In addition, as reported in Chapters Four and Five, the children have various ways of passing the time. Common ones include day-dreaming, fiddling with something, throwing a pencil, going to the toilet, and going to the sharpener in the front of the room (Is the existence of public sharpener a way of preventing children’s tendency to distract others by their sharpening?). A girl told me about a kind of finger game they do when sitting in the assembly and the boy in the same interview group immediately recognized it. This boy actually enjoys the way that he can work out the age of the composer of the classic music played at the beginning of the assembly as the name and dates are displayed on the screen.

It is claimed that these ‘secret’ approaches are adopted by the children as coping strategies, to use a common sociological term (cf. Wood, 1979, 1990a; Delamont, 1983; Pollard, 1985). Elsewhere they are used as evidence of children’s sophistication (Cullingford, 1992, 2007). However, my findings do not support such an adult-oriented interpretation. Even though the behaviour of the children may appear secretive and calculating, in most cases they do not need to scheme or develop coping strategies. The children’s approach, as revealed in their interviews, is more of a spontaneous response (or in some cases a defensive reaction) than a secretive or calculated strategy. Just as they comment naturally on the unspoken intentions behind the teacher’s regulations, they simply mention their hidden or spontaneous activities

as a natural response, in terms of how they feel. As the girl said with regard to chewing her nails, *'Chewing is not definitely the best thing but it gets you occupied.'* (Anita, Interview 7) Whilst Rory's references to another pupil continuously snapping his pencil and going to the sharpener as a bit of excitement is rather strange, George's calculations of dates in assembly is experienced as genuine fun, as the following transcriptions show:

RORY: *And I would say in lessons it's also quite noisy and busy. Everyone is excited running around, cheering. And people snapping their pencils and getting on ... 'Cos the pencil sharpener ... Especially Andy, when he starts his pencil on, he breaks it every five seconds and goes to the point (where the sharpener is) and just winds, winds, winds ... come out ... break ... winds, winds, winds.*

(Interview 15)

GEORGE: *So here is along the assembly. (He drew a line on the paper.) I feel bored in the centre of it 'cos that's when they are drooling on and on. Then I get a bit bored at the end 'cos this is just all the awards. But at the start, it's quite exciting on working out the dates.*

(Interview 11)

As for the second form of distraction, issues involving friendship, the girls focus more on this in their accounts of school life. For example, registration is regarded as an opportunity to identify where friends will be at lunchtime according to one girl:

POLLY: *In the register you know like ...seeing all my friends like packed lunch. If in the register they said they were school dinners, then I'll know who goes ...who goes on the trip if my friends are away. I'll just know who to play with at the break time or lunch time.*

(Interview 18)

However, on the whole, as shown in Chapter Five, friendship is expressed by the children as such a significant issue that it holds the main meaning of going to and

being at school for the children. They deal with friendship matters virtually all the time. It is thus not hard to imagine what form deviant actions involving friendship can take in the classroom context. For example, expressed mostly as concerns and complaints, the matter of whether they are able to sit with their friends when working in groups emerges as either source of happiness and excitement, or a cause of disruption. For example, Henry and Peter yelled excitedly when they heard the teacher had put them in the same literacy group. A girl was told off because she swapped seats with another child to be with her friend. The self-revealed actions such as exchanging whispers or gestures and other unauthorized playful actions among friends are not surprising to careful observers. The children mention this aspect of life spontaneously:

ANNE: *Like funny noises, like shouting, and like ... they always call names like* (She acted out whispering names.) *'Tina', 'Kate', 'Anne'.*

JX: *Who calls names?*

KATE: *Sometimes the children, they want to talk to us.*

(Interview 4)

Thirdly, unauthorised talk is the most common and pervasive form of classroom disruption, although it can almost be classified as a friendship matter because the talking often occurs between friends as shown in the findings. The chat may be on an irrelevant topic or something to do with their work. Although the children tend to be cautious in directly admitting to unauthorised talking, they do spontaneously describe their tendency to talk whenever they feel like it and their desire to be able to talk whenever they want.

ELLA: *You'd hear like quite a lot of noises because ...*

ANITA: *Everyone talks to each other in lessons about the lessons really.*

ELLA: *Everybody wants ... even though it's just whispering.*

(Interview 7)

KATE: *Also when we were in the carpet, sometimes when teacher is talking, someone is trying talk to you, but not actually saying. I can hear them whispering and then the teacher goes 'mmmmm'.*

(Interview 4)

Finally, making jokes and messing about are perhaps linked to unauthorized talking, but are more of a boys' activity, as my findings show. Whilst the girls more likely express their hope of talking freely with an emphasis on the fact that they are not allowed to do so, boys seem to be more concerned with the freedom to have a laugh as a way of diluting the thickness of the boredom they feel in the lessons. From the findings there also emerges an interesting link in the boys' accounts between such jokes and their expressed 'special moments', which says something about the boys' initial perceptions of the boring nature of school routines and rituals. Unsurprisingly, jokes, having a laugh and even messing about are all mentioned in the children's accounts as spontaneous responses to their normal school life.

JOHN: *We try to make ourselves laugh.*

EDDIE: *Yeah, what we do is just like ... You do it. You do it. And then ...*

JOHN: *Like we do it and then we go, and then we just make ourselves laugh and then ...*

EDDIE: *Then you just had a bit of more talk.*

JOHN: *Or we talk about something, and then you get send time out.*

EDDIE: *When you do that, sometimes you really want ... If you just do it, you can't be bothered to do it. You just do something. And you just wrote rubbish words like ... 'Cos you've been talking like you hate that thing.*

(Interview 14)

On the whole, it seems that the children regard distractions as common responses to the rituals of schooling. The way they express this aspect of life is straightforward without many attempts to defend of their disruptive activities. Only the more conspicuous disruptions that involve 'pestering' or 'annoying' others are articulated with a degree of criticism by the children. For example,

RORY: *It happens mostly in maths when we go in. Bill and Joe are the worst of them there. They annoy Rose, who is new. They get stuff and fling it. They get rubbers and go, 'Hshhhh ...' They even annoy Andy. He gets*

upset and he hides 'cos he doesn't want to get hurt. And he throws the stuff back. But they keep going 'Hushhh ...' and that's not very nice.

(Interview 6)

Also when a group of boys claim that some people deliberately call the wrong teacher in registration, they seem to disapprove of this activity.

In conclusion, by concentrating on how the children articulate their responses we become aware of their spontaneity. Nevertheless, all five forms of deviant actions are actually under the teacher's disciplinary control. A range of measures is taken for granted in order to regulate the children's behaviour. As indicated by Jackson (1968; see also Jackson et al., 1993), the intention to manage classroom matters through discipline and sanctions is far more complicated than is normally thought. From my in-depth investigation of those minor forms of deviance and disruption, a number of questions are raised. For example, is it appropriate or possible for the educationist to confront and try to regulate such behaviour problems?

My interpretation with its emphasis on children's perspectives suggests that discipline or behaviour-management is a matter of adults imposing their will on children. The spontaneous or excusable deviant activities on the children's side can expect to be met with tolerance. A noteworthy aspect revealed through the children's conversation is the parallel they draw between the children's having a laugh or being distracted from the lesson, and the teachers' arrangement of alternative approaches to the routine activities. It seems to them that such alternative practices act as an 'official' distraction from the normal business or dull routines of school life. For example, for dismissal, the normal business consists of getting ready by taking the coat, book bag, news letter etc. and then being dismissed. But sometimes there are fun activities such as the game played on Mr. Opie's days and the sweet-giving occasions on someone's birthday. The children consistently prefer the latter to the former.

Therefore it seems to me that in insisting on our administrative or educative practices of discipline and control, adults might be ignoring the children's perspectives on these matters. When discipline and explicit actions such as rewards and sanctions are used to manage children's behaviour, it is actually a deep moral issue on the part of educationists, school and adults, but not, as we normally believe, a matter of conveying moral education from adults to children. This interpretation

may sound radical; nevertheless it is an informed conclusion following a careful study of the context and the children. The intention of the research was not to be liberationist or radical. But caution must be exercised before jumping from this finding to any recommendations for practice. My intention from the beginning has been to look for whatever emerges through a genuine exploration of the perspectives of children. The recognition and understanding of these perspectives is the first and most immediate outcome of the research, and the further implications for practice are open to discussion.

6.3.1.2 Acceptance

As an attitude, 'acceptance' has a sense of passive tolerance and differs from true enjoyment. Although the children sometimes express something 'more than acceptance' (i.e. an attitude of implicit or explicit enthusiasm), acceptance is a pervasive response expressed by the children in their accounts of specific aspects of schooling and their discussions of general school issues. As illustrated in Chapter Five, children's most positive feelings in the context of school are mostly reserved either for special activities that fall outside normal expectations (for example, mufti day or some unexpected incident) or for things with personal significance such as favourite lessons, rewards and achievements. When we focus on the children's accepting attitude towards school rituals, complications emerge if we try to interpret its exact meaning. Acceptance as an attitude towards the schooling system thus deserves in-depth investigation in terms of how and what the children accept.

The initial impression of children's accepting attitude is that it extends only to the official and superficial level of schooling practice. Their spontaneous responses are most closely linked with their consciousness of the existence of the norm. Through my observations of their surviving strategies and their complaints about the teacher's strictness, the children indicate their awareness and understanding of the procedures and arrangements of schooling. There are two elements in this awareness. First, the children learn what the procedures, rules and norms are. Second, they have to come to accept and follow them and adapt to this structuring aspect of schooling. However, the subtle, complicated process of personal development in children in this respect is still greatly understudied (cf. Cullingford, 1991).

As shown in Chapter Five, the children are very clear about this kind of school procedure and seem to accept that issues like where to place themselves, who

to work with and how to move and line up are in the first place fixed by the teacher and they are simply expected to follow what the teacher says. All the children are able to describe their school life in this style: when it starts, when it ends, and what things happen in between. They use words like 'normal', 'routine', or 'usual things' in their explanations of their daily experiences and describe the 'normal day' as a set picture that is made up of programmed activities. A group of boys drew me a map of how the children are normally set into 'top', 'middle', and 'bottom' tables. This feature of school life is mentioned frequently in the interviews.

The second aspect of an accepting attitude is related to their understanding at a functional level. For example, the children are easily able to explain the whole process of registration. The specifications of the dull procedure are clear to them. And by passively following the procedures and getting on with them, the children are at the same time co-operating with the existing system. This is demonstrated in their response to the teacher's enquiry about the best thing in the day:

JX: *I remember like that Mr. McGee asked you to like think about the day.*

BILL: *Yeah, think about the day.*

JOHN: *Yeah, the favourite bit of the day.*

JX: *So, what's that?*

BILL: *Most is probably PE.*

JOHN: *Yeah, everyone is PE.*

(Interview 3)

The third aspect of the children's acceptance of the ritual of schooling seems to highlight the structuring power of schooling. When they are asked about routine activities, most of the children can confirm the normal practices. For example, registration is described as 'sitting and waiting' while it is going on. And generally, in comparison with the best or special thing in the classroom, the everyday requirement of work is what the children are familiar with and what they are most engaged in. They seem to hint that their daily task is simply 'getting on with it':

GEORGE: *'Cos there's probably about one lesson each we don't like. But we still do it.*

(Interview 11)

KEVIN: *I know. You just have to ...*

KATE: *Think something else.*

KEVIN: *And just get over and get it done quickly.*

KATE: *'Cos you remember what you have to do and then you think something else. You're still doing what you have to do, then you don't ...*

KEVIN: *But I still like to get it over and done with, probably get back home and go on my PS2 and play my game.*

(Interview 15)

POLLY: *I'll just like get on with the work and then help people when they need help.*

JX: *What do you mean by 'get on with the work'?*

KAREN: *Just write all you have to do and then just get it right to the teacher and get it read.*

POLLY: *Sometimes I'm bored 'cos I already know it. So I'll get it done really quickly and really easy, and then ...*

(Interview 18)

In addition to these three aspects of acceptance, different children sometimes provide contrasting perceptions in their articulation of the accepting attitude. For example, there is a contrast between value and practicality in their perceptions of school practices. One girl refers to the significance of personal care in registration, but most children see the greetings in registration as merely a requirement and think of registration in terms of practical matters such as checking their attendance and confirming their lunch categories. These two different perspectives in children's understanding of the school rituals also draw our attention to the importance of investigating children's perceptions of teachers' educative activities. The transcription below presents different levels of perception of the teacher's administrative role in registration:

MARK: *Well, you don't learn anything on the register. You just learn to behave, look at the person who is saying it. Look at Mr. McGee or Mr. O.*

JX: *How do you think?*

HELEN: *I think from the register, you will kind of learn ... All I could think you would learn is names.* (She giggled.)

(Interview 19)

There is also a marked contrast in the children's responses between an active understanding of the value incorporated in registration and a mere resignation to the activity as a formal requirement of school. For example,

GEORGE: *Yeah, even if you don't want to do it you have to do it, 'cos it's for your own safety. But also-, erm, you just sit there, so you're learning to try not to talk. It's not aiming to do that, but sometimes some people might actually learn that, do things from that.*

JX: *So do you learn that?*

GEORGE: *No, not really.* (He grinned.)

JESS: *Not really.*

JX: *How about you? What did you learn?*

JESS: *It's just usual, for us. We've learned it and now it's usual for us, so ... Well, it's like expecting it.*

(Interview 11)

The range of perceptions on the children's side demonstrates a variety of attitudes and understandings beneath the surface, which becomes more apparent through their responses to my questions about what kind of learning they think they have attained from their experience of school rituals. As illustrated in Chapter Five from the children's own accounts, four kinds of learning are generated through everyday school routines and rituals. Firstly, sanction-stimulated behaviour is believed itself to be a kind of learning. For example,

KATE: *Well, I think that we all learn that we should be a bit gooder so we don't lose our playtime. So when we do, seems like we've only a minute left of your playtime.*

JX: *How about you?*

KEVIN: *Well, we've learned not to always talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk in class, or we'll do get a minute's break time. But sometimes it's for*

the whole class, sometime it's just for you, fifteen minutes for your first break. So if he keeps us for fifteen minutes, we've lost about, probably ...

(Interview 17)

PETER: *Well, we learn not to keep like messing around like over and over again. And we learn that if we don't do that we'll, we'll get a longer lunchtime because we don't have to keep staying in.*

(Interview 12)

Secondly, there is inward learning through the repetition of reminders, warnings and discipline:

GEORGE: *When sometimes when I'm naughty and I get told off, I know, 'You don't do that any more', so I don't do it. Then maybe I'll do something else. So then the teacher tells me off, 'Do never ever do that' and he said. So then, I don't do it again. So I kind of know not to do it again.*

(Interview 11)

Thirdly, the children come to understand something about the nature and importance of rules and readily apply future-oriented understandings to their immediate life choices:

JX: *So do you learn something from these experiences of being disciplined and asked to follow the rules?*

HENRY: *Well, you need rules in life because if you just go under your rules, you won't be trained. You won't be as good as you like.*

ELEANOR: *If you don't follow anything, you'll just kind of be like a grumpy person, moody person, don't you?*

HENRY: *That's true.*

(Interview 16)

Fourthly, there emerges a kind of inward reflection and active learning, both about the need for rules and about the impact that rules can have on other people and one's relationship with them:

GEORGE: *They are good rules. They're good rules. 'Cos if you talk on the carpet, you're messing around, how can you learn? If, if ...*

JESS: *What if you're talking and helping someone?*

GEORGE: *It's like if you talk one type of music, and I've got another type of music. How can you gonna to listen to the music? That's like talking. If you talk to your friends, how can you listen to Mr. McGee? How can you gonna pass your test? How you can do that?*

JX: *But Jess said how if you are talking to your friends?*

GEORGE: *Well, you shouldn't help your friends. You shouldn't help them 'cos they need to learn. It's-, you should tell them sometimes you shouldn't help them really.*

(Interview 11)

GEORGE: *I reckon if Jess was, was well obey Mr. McGee's rules and she stayed by them, and she was positive, she has positive feel about Mr. McGee, I think she would love, not love him, but like him.*

(Interview 11)

This further analysis of the children's accepting attitude sheds light on our understanding of their actual learning and of the various paths they follow towards an attitude of acceptance, and this opens up a range of deeper perspectives on the significance of school rituals for them. Another noteworthy finding concerning their accepting attitude is an alternative type of acceptance that occurs on the part of some 'high-profiled' boys. It seems that the inevitable deviance on their side and the discipline and sanctions that follow are simply accepted as one of the 'rituals' of their life. For example, from their accounts, we get the feeling that for Bill and John time out is solid reality. For them, discipline and sanctions are actually part of their normal life. From their account of this aspect of their normal life, we gain the impression of their perception of teachers as punishers.

JOHN: *If you go into the field, you go time out.*

BILL: *Yeah, if you go in the field you go time out.*

JOHN: *If you speak in assembly, you have to go to the front.*

BILL: *Yeah.*

JOHN: *Erm ... Oh, if the teacher is talking, and we're talking, you get things like ...*

BILL: *Ticks on the board. And three times you get time out.*

JOHN: *And if you get three ticks you get time out.*

(Interview 3)

BILL: *Because I was talking. Oh, yeah. And if you talk on the carpet ... 'Cos me and Joe were like talk very loudly, he gives like two ticks on the board and one more we'll go time out.*

(Interview 3)

In Bill's case, as shown in Chapter Five, he complained on the one hand of the teacher's strictness and unfairness in terms of discipline, but on the other hand he emphasised a sense of 'don't care' when recalling experiences of being sent to time out. He seems to be trying to make it out to be not a problem. The normal life of being disciplined is dealt with lightly, as if he is trying to cope with the situation like a routine. However, under the surface of this 'acceptance' he is actually very sensitive to the situation in which he is probably regarded by the teacher, other children and even himself as 'always in trouble' and under the shadow of sanctions and punishment. Just like other children, he has strong emotional responses to discipline and rules if he is given opportunity to express them. But it is significant that Bill's seeming acceptance of the miserable state of being constantly targeted by discipline and rules corresponds to his unavoidable, spontaneous response of resistance to the rituals of schooling as a 'high-profiled' boy in the class. I wonder where this kind of 'acceptance' will lead after the accumulated years of schooling.

6.3.1.3 Understanding the co-existence of children's contrary responses

So far, I have provided an in-depth examination of the children's two contrary responses in their experience of school rituals, namely, resistance and acceptance. Resistance in particular is a well-used term in investigations of children's response to schooling (for example, Woods, 1979, 1990a; Pollard, 1985; McLaren, 1986; Alpert, 1991) although it is sometimes claimed that there is no such thing as resistance to rules and discipline on the children's part (Cullingford, 1991). Although I have

followed the same terminology as previous studies to describe the opposing aspects of children's responses, my research suggests that there is a dimension of co-existence, even overlap, in these responses of resistance and acceptance.

Firstly, the co-existence of the two attitudes is a normal expectation in any institution of mass education. As already noted, the children's awareness of the restricting circumstances and controlling intentions in the supervised classroom or school hall is clear enough, no matter whether the attitude is one of resistance or acceptance. Concerns regarding discipline, sanctions and the need to compete for personal attention are also pervasive. Also as demonstrated in my findings, resistance and acceptance co-exist in a special way in the children's experiences of the rituals of schooling. Most of the time and for most of the children, this co-existence stays low-profile and the normal school day appears to run smoothly. The teacher's organisation and management are practised openly and remain dominant, while the private distractions and disruptions stay at the children's level.

Secondly, in a situation when they are given a clear request for 'obedience', the children still have their own inner struggles and claims. For example, when the rules and discipline are extensively applied to misbehaviour and sanctions are implemented strictly, as in Mr. McGee's class, the children are then faced with a clear choice between 'obedience' and 'rebellion', which implies the co-existence of these attitudes in the context of classroom. As shown in Chapter Five, the children's responses with regard to this kind of real-life dilemma imply their own perspectives on the lived experience of schooling. For example, for those boys who seem always in trouble, it is difficult to comply completely with the teacher's instructions. For some girls, there is an inner struggle between whether to adopt the ways of 'goodie girls' or those of the 'daring boys'. Even the 'goodie girls' hint that absolute obedience to rules can be unrealistic and arbitrary in reality. Therefore it is apparent that some fusion of the two attitudes is inevitable and necessary. The question is to what extent and in what kind of way the attitudes of accepting and resistance can co-exist in practice.

Thirdly, on a closer examination, the differentiation between the two opposite attitudes, resistance and acceptance, turns out to be difficult, even meaningless. As we have seen in my analysis and interpretation above, the children's resistance is a natural, spontaneous response to the rituals of schooling whereas their acceptance is mostly a superficial response based on practical considerations and the pressure to be

passive in the face of the schooling system. Whilst ‘resistance’ and ‘rebellion’ sound negative from the educationists’ perspective, they actually demonstrate children’s ‘innocence’. Similarly, whilst ‘acceptance’ seems to show a kind of agreement on the children’s part to the rituals of schooling, my findings suggest that the opposite is the case; the children’s acceptance involves a passive response to expectations built into the rituals of schooling.

The examination of the two responses also reveals the ‘structuring’ power of school rituals, but in a totally different way from that suggested by previous writings. It is usually claimed that the teacher’s presence is the instrument that shapes children’s behaviour. For example, the discipline, reward or sanctions are said to be the stimulus to children’s required behaviour, shaping their values and structuring their behaviour. However, beneath the surface the children’s reports of their actual experience and perspectives reveal an almost opposite effect in practice: the ritual of schooling generates reactive behaviour rather than compliance, passiveness and superficial obedience rather than active learning and genuine absorption of values. The ‘structuring’ effect of the ritual of schooling pervasively leads to the opposite of what it is supposed to.

Furthermore, my interpretation draws attention to the taken-for-granted application of discipline and other instruments for the purpose of behaviour management. If the investigation of children’s resistance and rebellious attitudes raises a moral issue of intolerance on the part of the school, teacher and adults of their ‘intolerance’, the investigation of children’s accepting response draws attention to another moral issue - the children’s ‘tolerance’. The moral meaning of the ritual of discipline and rules is thus raised as highly significant and open to further examination.

With this interpretation in mind, based on an understanding of the children’s perspectives, we should have a better grasp of the experiences they express in their spontaneous illustrations of the classroom and thus be more sympathetic to their predicament.

GEORGE: Yeah, it’s difficult. I would say what we do ... If you’re like tied up, it do seem a bit like the gloomy place, so we don’t really want to be there. But when you’re happy and having fun, that might be a bit like a jolly place, then lots of fun.

(Interview 11)

RORY: *If they had enough money to extend each class, like half the size would be library, that will be nice. 'cos they would put a lounge, a sofa or chair. And they could have a door. Then you'd like have relaxation and could have ... 'Cos the teacher could sit down. And if you'd like to watch a video, there will be a TV.*

(Interview 15)

6.3.2 Reflective children and their autonomous learning

A reflective response is an alternative to both a passive acceptance and a spontaneous resistance that I found in some children's accounts of their experiences of the ritual of schooling. Initially it became apparent mainly in the accounts of one boy and one girl. George presented a U-turn in his attitude to the teacher's discipline and sanctions in his second interview. In his first interview he complained along with others about the teacher's strictness. He mentioned the unfairness of it and agreed that he had been picked on by Mr. McGee when another boy suggested that. Two months later he expressed his 'turnaround' in clear terms:

JESS: *He (Mr. McGee)'s like easily snaps and picks you up a little bit.*

GEORGE: *He was, but now - Because if, if you're good enough, 'cos I'm quite good now. 'Cos I know he can snap, but I hardly get told off now. If I aim not to be bad, not annoying him, it's OK for me.*

...

GEORGE: *It's torture. 'Cos I like came to school, but then it would just be very annoying. Then I was like very angry, and then probably throw it on my sister at the end of the day and get in trouble at home. But, now I keep cool, I keep down. He doesn't really get me. So, now I can kind of see why he's making these rules, and why he snaps at me, why he snaps at the other people. (Interview 11)*

This change in attitude was explained by him as an instant inspiration.

GEORGE: *It's kind of just one day, I, or just in the school on these days, 'Oh, Mr. McGee is nice and handsome', 'Oh, he's been nice to me', or 'he says he'll give me the answer', or 'Oh, he's been nice to me'.*

(Interview 11)

From his autonomous change of perception and attitude, I can see the reflective capacity in the children. The phenomenal change in his articulation has the same spontaneity and honesty as seen commonly other responses by the children such as having a laugh, complaining or expressing concerns. And he didn't indicate any specific incident or encouragement from adults that prompted this change, although it is hard to be absolutely certain in this respect.

The girl Iris demonstrated reflectiveness in her interview mainly through her long explanation of her understanding of prayer:

IRIS: *I think like saying the prayer (is the significant thing in the assembly). It gets people trying believe it, doesn't it? And, like, if you don't believe in them, 'cos that is quite amazing if he's true. 'Cos there's so many stories in Bibles and stuff like that for him. And like disciples and his friends and how they got killed and how we don't see stuff so we don't really believe it. But if we say a prayer, it gets us think about it. And if you do something bad, then it'll get us think before we do it, and think of God and Jesus, and then think back and then don't do it. Because it like you're hurting Him, sort of thing. 'Cos like, it's hurting His feelings. 'Cos when He was alive if He was ever alive, He was good to people and we're trying to do that nowadays. 'Cos it's, it's very wrong to like treat someone really badly. And if you treat someone like horribly and you don't like them, you bully them, that's like hurting Him. But then, when you get a bit older, you realize that it could be true, so you stop doing it and become kind.*

(Interview 8)

These two significant cases introduced a new dimension to my enquiry as I sought to listen to the children and understand their perspectives. I saw sensitivity in the bearing of these two children, and noted their ability in articulating the subtlety and complexity of experiential learning and the apparent process of reflective

absorption. As a matter of fact, an element of reflection is shown in George's discussions about nearly everything in his second interview. He showed a level of understanding that went beyond either resistance or passive acceptance to as he expressed his views on topics such as rules, discipline, the teacher, other children, school life as a whole, teaching and learning and the relationship between teachers and children. He expressed a more positive view about school life generally and about the teacher's existence than most other children, which from my adult perspective is a more balanced opinion than children's merely 'emotional attitude' (Cullingford, 1992). Interestingly, in his conversation with a girl, he showed very different understandings and presented his attitudes as almost the opposite of hers:

GEORGE: *But if you keep by his rules, he can turn out to be quite nice. But Jess doesn't keep by his rules.*

JESS: *I know, 'cos I'm not too bothered by them. I'm not very scared.*

GEORGE: *And she doesn't like Mr. McGee, so she won't accept that he can be nice.*

...

GEORGE: *When you're teaching it can be horrible when children talk. 'Cos I was doing presentation you were, you just shouted out.*

JESS: *I did not.*

GEORGE: *You did. And it was horrible. I felt so angry. So I kind of see why teacher's done the rules.*

JESS: *He's lying. Lying, lying, lying.*

(Interview 11)

Although initially these two children's responses struck me as exceptional, their articulation reminded me of the children's capacity for autonomous absorption, learning and independent thinking. However, if research aims only at identifying what happens in the classroom rather than trying to understand the people themselves, these features of children can easily be neglected. Reflectiveness turns out to be the third response of children to their experiences of the ritual of schooling. And as soon as we become aware this dimension, our understanding of the children's accounts can move to a new level.

For example, the children demonstrate self-awareness in the emotional, behavioural and value aspects of their lives to various degrees. The apparently joking style of the three 'good' girls applied in their 'confessions' reflects the subtlety and complexity that the labelling of groups of children may bring to life:

ANNE: *'Cos we like we're kind of good girls in class, we don't really ...* (Kate giggled then)

TINA: *We don't really do these sort of stuff. Sometimes boys, but not all the boys.*

ANNE: *We call out, sometimes ...*

KATE: *We talk ...*

ANNE: *Yeah, sometimes we talk. Sometimes we fight each other.* (Her voice gradually decreased to very low.)

(Interview 4)

They also take opportunities to think and look back. Their spontaneous responses to tangible issues are expressed with emotion and value. Their opinions may differ from the teacher's but at the same time are reasonable. Without acknowledging children's capacity for reflection, how can we seriously make sense of the articulations below?

MARK: *I know what time out is about. And it is absolutely rubbish. I wish they'd had never invented time out. 'cos all you have to do is just sit down on a chair for about ten minutes or the whole of break time. It's really bad.*

(Interview 6)

KATE: (About the reflection time before dismissal), *'I think back on the day. I just don't want to say.'*

(Interview 17)

MARK: (Talking about stopping himself when he has the urge to do something that is not allowed.) *It's not easy.* (Accent on 'easy') *It's not easy,* (Accent on 'not') *yeah? But you can stop yourself.* (Accent on 'can'.)

But if you have behaviour problem then you couldn't stop yourself. You just slip out.

(Interview 19)

TOBY: When I came home, I shut out all of our time when the kids are playing, and thinking about, thinking about things.

(Interview 17)

HENRY: The singing practices ...keeps us a bit more happier ...it's a wake, it's just nice and fun to do. ...And it's safe when they do those stories.

(Interview 16)

ELEANOR: In the assembly, it reminds you like when you're little, don't they? Because you're resting-

HENRY: You're just, you're just resting. You are having great thinking time.

...

ELEANOR: In the assembly, it's just all quiet. And you just-, you just get to think all the, all the other times, don't you?

HENRY: Instead of listening to the story.

(Interview 16)

In one specific interview with two girls and one boy, their conversation was very extensive and spontaneous, which naturally created an exploratory space for their feelings, opinions and ideas. They discussed many things, demonstrating much autonomous thought and passion. I wonder how we could truly hear such articulations without fully acknowledging their capacity for reflection.

HENRY: (When talking about taking time to think back over things in assembly) When I'm in assembly, I feel a bit upset because-. Well, when I was little, I used to be more-, 'cos all these people've joined our class. And they were not just very nice. When I was in Year One, we had a lot of day-, and there's about seven or eight of us. It's just like a few of us are all kind

to each other. It was just happy. It really makes me upset because I don't want-, I just don't want to grow up. We used to have a brilliant time.

ELEANOR: *In the assembly, it's just all quiet. And you just-, you just get to think all the-, all the other times, don't you?*

HENRY: *Instead of listening to the story.*

JX: *So is that good or not? I didn't get you, sorry.*

HENRY: *It's not good or bad, is it?*

ELEANOR: *No, it's just-. And in the middle, really, it's just-*

HENRY: *It's a bit miserable. And it's good when you think of it.*

ELLA: *It's sort of like happy when you remember all the good times you've had. A bit of the bad times-*

HENRY: *Yeah, and you worry a bit.*

(Interview 16)

HENRY: (Talking about the issue of boredom) *Well, I, in the assembly, can be boring or not boring. And really, if it's break time it's just the same, really. Everywhere is boring or could be boring.*

(Interview 16)

HENRY: (Talking about teacher in a bad mood) *'Cos, if one person is in a bad mood, they ruin like another person. Say they get in bad mood, so it gets on and on and on.*

ELEANOR: *Yeah, then the teacher gets in a bad mood.*

HENRY: *And everyone gets in a bad mood.*

(Interview 16)

ELEANOR: *The bad days like, like five times a week, and then five times a month.*

ELLA: *There's a normal day. You have normal days and then the bad days are really bad days. All good days are excellent, really fun days.*

HENRY: *'Cos at good day you probably get every three in a month. Normal days is probably about every-. A bad day is probably every two weeks.*

Interview 16)

In conclusion, as we can see, even the articulations of resistance or acceptance in the children embrace autonomous learning. Although it is a big question how much space to give children as opportunities to reflect in the sense of making them think instead of merely teaching them and instructing them, it is essential for us as adults first to see the potential of children's autonomous learning and reflection.

The present interpretation chapter has followed the main line of research and focused on children's own perceptions of and perspectives on the repeated procedures and activities in school. It is at this stage that ritual and the schooling practices in question are linked through the empirical findings, and a 'ritual experience' comes into view as a result of the portrait of the children's schooling experience. The major part of this interpretation chapter has provided a full interrogation of the children's attitudinal and behavioural responses to the rituals of schooling and has arrived at three co-existent dimensions of their perspectives: resistance, acceptance and reflectiveness. Along with the integrated analysis, my interpretation suggests limitations in the effectiveness of the organisational and disciplinary approaches to schooling since the 'structuring' function of such schooling practice mostly leads to superficial or passive acceptance on the one end and to almost innocently reactive 'disobedience' on the other. Simultaneously, my investigation presents children's potential ability to reflect and absorb autonomously, which makes up the third dimension of their autonomous experience in the ritual of schooling. This emerging dimension in my investigation deserves more exploration in the future, but within the limits of the current interpretation it still sheds light on our understanding of the educational significance of schooling practices and routines.

7. Conclusion

The current research is concerned with children's experience of ordinary school practices such as registration, dismissal, assembly, class organisation, discipline and other normal school matters. By identifying the current investigation as an exploration of children's experience of these repeated procedures and activities, I have approached the ritual aspect of schooling as part of the normal life of the school. And thus how the children get on, live through and experience everyday schooling is the focus of the current inquiry. The observations and interviews in the in-depth investigation of a Year Four class in England has generated extensive data. My finding chapters present the outcomes of the two approaches to data collection with minimal analysis except for the necessary sorting and selection. My interpretation chapter gradually unfolds the children's experience of 'the ritual of schooling' as I approach the findings through a coherent and progressive process of analysis and questioning.

Firstly, the 'structuring' function of school practices such as registration, dismissal, assemblies and the organisational and disciplinary management is evidenced and identified as the first layer of children's experience. Simultaneously, it transpires that the more ritual-like practice of assembly and the more routine-like everyday schooling practices of registration, dismissal and approaches to class management are harmonized as one general experience of schooling from the children's perspective, which is reflected through their accounts and my observation. Hence, I point to the normal phenomena of schooling as 'the rituals of schooling' on the basis of previous studies and my own substantial empirical investigation.

Secondly, further analysis of the children's experience of the rituals of schooling with a focus on the trivial nature of everyday grind leads me to identify a 'tense' controlling aspect as well as a routine aspect as the 'ritual experience'. And it is revealed that the children's situation and experience of being subjected to 'control' in the closed classroom and school hall (i.e. being located, supervised, regulated and limited with a lack of personal attention) becomes conspicuous if more attention is given to the children's subjective expressions of their 'normal school day'.

However, refusing to accept such a 'controlling' force as an inevitable part of the nature of ritual, I do not stop at this level of acknowledging a kind of 'power' that

is seemingly embraced in the performance of ritual, as most previous studies maintain. My third level of interpretation explores the children's own perceptions and perspectives and looks deeper into their responses to the rituals of schooling. Three dimensions of response are identified and carefully examined: acceptance, resistance, and reflectiveness. In a comprehensive discussion of children's contrary responses of acceptance and resistance in respect of the rituals of schooling, my interpretation arrives at a strong critique of the taken-for-granted expectation by educationalists of acceptance of the teacher-oriented rituals of schooling, as well as the taken-for-granted intention to restrain any resistance from the children.

My inquiry into children's own perceptions and perspectives suggests that children's resisting or accepting responses exist at a superficial level in that these merely represent either reactive or passive attitudes to the dominant position of the teacher. My research suggests that children's autonomous and holistic learning based on their own capacity to reflect exists at a different, much deeper level. My interpretation makes children's reflection and autonomous learning the third dimension of their response to the rituals of schooling, and this, along with my critique of adults' tendency to focus on the surface level of children's being, hints at the need (and obligation) for adults to recognise children's reflectiveness and endeavour respectfully to promote their development as reflective beings.

To sum up, this research has looked at children's lived experiences through their own eyes, rather than from the perspective of adult assumptions about what their life is like. Also as a social inquiry it aims at description and interpretation of social process, meaning and situation rather than at theorizing, deduction, or evaluation. Its immediate contribution to knowledge is at a descriptive level in terms of children's accounts of various issues and aspects of school life. The research provides new insights into an under-researched area of school life and children's experience, and has the potential to extend their implications to schoolteachers and other educational decision-makers. However, it has no significance in terms of directly applying the research findings to practice, or even taking them as evidence so that practitioners might be guided in a sense of evidence-based practice. Rather, the value and significance of the research relies on the active and reflective engagement of practitioners with the issues being discussed or investigated (cf. Hammersley, 2000).

In conclusion, it is worth noting some of the other directions the interpretation of this research could take, given its extensive data and open-ended approach, and the

necessity of narrowing my interpretation to the focus on the children's own perceptions and perspectives, which also meant the compromise of my own initial reflections on the divisive culture between teacher and children. Alongside the main assumptions underpinning my inquiry into the experiences of the children, there were many judgements concerning how much detail I should cover in terms of the middle steps before leading to solid interpretations. I am well aware that every middle step has the potential to be developed into substantial interpretations of children's reflections on their own life, for example, their concern for human relationships, fun and freedom, their strong expressions of emotion and attitude, and their tendency to express themselves negatively rather than positively. Apart from all this, there are many other relevant issues underlying the experience of children that are worth further exploration, for example, children's natural inclination towards ritualisation, and the relationship between making use of such a tendency and encouraging rational development in the context of the schooling system.

More specifically regarding the possibility of further research, the most important general area might be to explore the educational significance of the organisational activities and procedures in schooling. A few lines of direction have already emerged in current inquiry. Firstly, as noted previously with regard to their affective responses to the rituals of schooling, the children have indicated what they actually learn and how they learn indirectly in everyday schooling. Further exploration of their autonomous learning is a major topic for future investigation.

Secondly, from the current findings I have become more aware of children's desire for fun and freedom and their central concern with human relationships. Following a logical sequence starting from the children's own self-expression such as their spontaneous articulation of emotions and opinions which reveal their inclinations and orientations, further study will offer us a lens through which to read other aspects of their lives.

Thirdly, the current research reveals another level of experience or meanings constructed by the children, which goes beyond all those tangible experiences that they more readily articulate. This level involves a strong sense of value, subjective feeling and rationalization and is presented as the outcome of children's autonomous approaches to 'making sense' of their own world.

Fourthly, the human dimension of schooling (in terms of both peers and adults) has an important influence on children's lives. There is evidence that the

general impression coming from children's accounts of their own lives at school is largely about human relations (i.e. about their lives with teachers and other children and particularly about friendship) rather than about what they learn in 'work' or enjoy in 'play'. This points to an alternative approach to children's values or moral education with much more emphasis on children's autonomous learning.

Fifthly, from what the children said about the general issues of life in school, we have got a picture that there is a major, though not entirely clear-cut, division in their school life between work and friendship. This finding resonates some other studies into the social world of schooling with regard to the significance of friendship in children's life (for example, Davies, 1982; Cullingford, 1991; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003). More recent studies further relate a deteriorating state of affairs regarding children's friendships as a result of the increasing pressure of schooling in the UK, linked especially to increased assessments (Mayall, 2002, p. 73-6; Save the Children, 2007; Primary Review, 2007). Therefore it seems to me that an emphasis on the 'peer interaction' that features extensively in previous research (for example, Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000) is not enough in such a context. Further exploration of the development of children's social and moral attitudes and values cannot afford to neglect the side effects of institutionalised education or to minimise the potential educative role of teacher-child interactions.

Finally, it is worth comparing the influences of schooling on secondary students and on primary school children. An apparent contrast in terms of their attitude to adults deserves fuller exploration. By paying adequate attention to the actual lives and growth of children and young people in this world, studies of the state of 'control' and 'resistance' will contribute significant knowledge to our understanding of the new generation and of our educational legacy in schooling.

In conclusion, I would like to go back to a point mentioned by Jackson (1968). As explained in previous chapters, Jackson's distinguished work and his way of engagement with education in the classroom has been the strongest influence on this research. The essence of such an approach to education is 'a moral perspective from which to view specific educational problems and practices' (p. 164). From this perspective (as applied in Jackson, 1968, and Jackson et al, 1993), not only are the trivial happenings in the classroom (such as overcrowding, constant evaluation, and power relations) probed in relation to their educational consequences, but teachers and children as participants in the process are also studied with full respect to their

autonomy and individuality as seen in their real lives. This perspective or approach to education has a similar emphasis to recent discussions in educational research about, for example 'spiritual awakening in education' (Alexander, 2004, vii), 'children's well-being' (Billington, 2006, p. 13), 'reconnecting management with education' (Glatter, 1999) and the socio-cultural elements of learning (Edwards & Mercer, 1987, p.160).

However, as shown by my current inquiry, at an empirical level such a perspective has the potential to draw attention to and explore the complexity of social interactions. And there is much to learn in the intention of achieving an adequate understanding of 'others'. Jackson calls the values or moral dimension of children's experience in schools a 'more enduring state of involvement' (1968, p. 109), which he notes as a key influence on the quality of school life. In an inspirational way, Jackson points to the fundamental meaning of these 'enduring' aspects in relation to the 'structuring' system of schooling, which might supply a perfect starting point for much future inquiry:

The more enduring form of attachment to school work is of the sort that extends beyond the time limits of particular class sessions and even beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom itself. It is connected with those pervasive motivational states that go by such names as interests, attitudes, and values. It becomes anchored, in other words, in the structure that gives shape to the habitual actions of the student' (ibid.)

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The children in the research

My research was done in a primary school in the South-West of England. The class I focused on is a Year Four class known as 4OM. Out of 60 hours of observation notes, 40 hours were spent in classroom observation with Class 4OM. All the children who were involved at the interview stage were from Class 4OM, and all were given pseudonyms in the research.

There were 39 children in the class. They were all aged 8-9 years, white, local children. There was one SEN child, Oscar, and one disabled child, Polly, in the class. Oscar has been mentioned in the interviews by other children. Polly is a participant.

23 of the children (11 boys and 12 girls) participated in the interviews. The names used in the research are listed below:

Boy participants:

Peter, Gavin, Mark, Rory, Kevin, Henry, John, Toby, George, Eddie, Bill.

Girl participants:

Jess, Nicola, Helen, Anne, Iris, Polly, Tina, Karen, Eleanor, Kate, Anita, Ella.

At the interview stage, first I had initial conversations individually with 17 of the participants and one group activity with the other 6 participants. Then I had two rounds of formal interviews with groups of children. Each participant was involved in two interviews. The name lists of the 19 group interviews are below:

Interview 1: George, Henry, Peter, Gavin

Interview 2: Jess, George

Interview 3: John, Bill

Interview 4: Kate, Tina, Anne

Interview 5: Bill, Toby, John

Interview 6: Peter, Mark, Rory
Interview 7: Anita, Ella, Polly
Interview 8: Eleanor, Iris
Interview 9: Nicola, Helen
Interview 10: Eddie, Kevin, Karen
Interview 11: George, Jess
Interview 12: Peter, Gavin
Interview 13: Iris, Anne
Interview 14: Bill, Eddie, John
Interview 15: Rory, Nicola, Anita
Interview 16: Henry, Eleanor, Ella
Interview 17: Toby, Kate, Kevin
Interview 18: Karen, Tina, Polly
Interview 19: Mark, Helen

Appendix 2

Ethics protocol

1 Background and purposes

The purpose of this research is to investigate children's experience of school ritual and to identify any relationship between school ritual and spiritual education. The academic study of ritual has deep roots in anthropology, sociology and religious study, but over the last forty years, ritual has also been seen as part of school culture, and more recently children's own experience has come to the fore in the study of the mechanism of ritual. My own Chinese background will enable me to bring an original and enriched approach to ritual in school, drawing in particular on a social and cultural analysis of the Chinese concept of 'Yi Shi'.

School assembly, circle time and other school rituals are widely believed to be significant elements in children's spiritual education, but little work has been done so far on any links between ritual and spirituality. The subtle influences that ritual has on children (particularly in relation to their spiritual education) are yet to be explored, and this research seeks to add to our knowledge and understanding in this area.

2 Objectives

The research project is planned to:

- Raise to consciousness the workings and the significance of the ritual dimension of primary school life by identifying school traditions, the teacher's educational intentions and other factors
- Offer an illuminative understanding of how children experience school rituals by exploring their own perspectives
- Provide further insights into the relationship between school rituals and spiritual education

3 Methodology

The project is an ethnographic case study carried out in one local primary school. Qualitative methods such as extended classroom observation, interview with teachers, children and others, and children's group work, will be conducted.

Data will be gathered over three terms in order to cover the range of activities within the school year, since many key rituals may occur only once in a single year.

Observation of the actual happening of classroom activities is taken as one of the main methods for data collecting. I will sit at a corner to watch the procedures and teacher and children's actions. After the observations, I will have some informal talk with the teacher and some children to collect detailed information on their intentions, perceptions or feelings in regard to the procedure and actions.

At some stages, tape-recorded interviews will be carried out with the teacher, children's groups, and others. The interviewee will be informed of his/her right to withdraw or stop recording at any time. Children's interviews will be under the careful guidance and supervision of their teacher. Each session of interview will be not longer than 30 minutes.

Children's group work such as writing or drawing with a theme etc will be designed and worked out at some point in the research aiming at a better understanding of children's perceptions and perspectives. The group work of children will be voluntary and carefully carried out within the context of the school day.

4 Participants

The research will be conducted mainly in one class in a single school. Some data will be collected from a second class for some comparison. There are three lines of participants involved in my research. The main line is two classes of children (Year 4-6) in the selected primary school. The selection of the year group is derived from a consideration of the capability of the children to express themselves and articulate their ideas and their relatively longer accumulation of school experience. The teachers involved (two teachers are the main participants but others may be involved in for

cross-comparison) are the second line. The third line is other adults and older children whose recollection of their primary school experience will be obtained for the purposes of triangulation.

5 Recruitment

Permission has already been obtained from the head teacher and I am currently negotiating with class teachers to identify the most appropriate class or classes to work in. Written permission will be sought from the parents of all children included in the research.

Due to the nature of the research, the children's perspective is the most important aspect. An ethical position in regard to the relation between adults and children is essential. Therefore the children's own consent is considered as a precondition for my access. After obtaining the informed consent from their parents or carers I will go to the targeted classes to explain my research in a proper way to the children and to get their signature of consent.

Other adults and older children as a line of participants will be recruited randomly in a university or college. A written consent letter from themselves or their parents will be obtained in due course.

6 Benefits and risks

I hope the participants will see the benefits of having a chance to share and reflect on some aspects of life experience with a professional researcher and culture outsider.

There will be no health or safety risks, and any risks to the personal well-being of the children are minimal. However, the researcher will take care to be sensitive at all times to the children who play a part in the research. Such sensitivity includes being aware of anything that might be perceived as patronizing, embarrassing, or alarming to the participants.

7 Privacy and Confidentiality

All children, teachers and others contributing to the research will be fully informed of the nature and purpose of the research project before they are asked to participate. Prior to each interview, participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time and of their right to control the tape recording of the interview.

Participants will be assured that information provided during interviews will be treated in the strictest confidence. Only the researcher, research supervisor and research assistant/person responsible for transcription will listen to tape recordings.

The whole or part of the tape recordings made during interviews may be erased at any time during the interview or subsequently if the participant wishes to do so. Tapes will be returned to the participant or – if the participant wishes – erased by the researcher at the end of the research period.

The researcher and researcher's supervisors will be the only people to have access to the transcripts. The transcripts will be kept in a secure environment throughout the period of the research and destroyed at its conclusion.

Evidence will be anonymised throughout the research and in any subsequent writing or publication. Such anonymisation will apply to individual names, the name of the school and the name of the classes.

A draft of the main points arising from their interviews and observations of their practice will be shared with the teachers for comment, response or modifications, if possible at a meeting arranged by the researcher. Any factual errors will be corrected.

The final account of the research, any publication or conference presentation arising from the research will be the responsibility of, and authored by, the researcher. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout.

8 Period for research

Data will be gathered between November 2005 and July 2006.

9 Deception/covert action

All aspects of the research will be agreed with participants; no aspects will be conducted covertly.

10 Compensation

No compensation or payment will be offered to participants.

11 Conflict of interests

No conflict of interests is envisaged. The researcher has no direct personal or professional contact (other than through the parent-and-school familiarisation and routine professional contact) with any potential participant.

12 Informed consent process

(as Recruitment above) The researcher will make initial contact with the teachers and get the signed consent of the teachers after they have been recruited through the headteacher's support. The parents of the pupils of the two classes involved will be informed by a letter of the nature of the research and the signed *Letter of Consent* will be attained from them. Then, subsequent meetings will be arranged to inform children of the research project and their consent will be obtained. The research will not commence until all written consents have been received.

13 Additional Ethics Review

The proposed project is not subject to any other ethics review.

Appendix 3

A sample of the observation notes

Friday, 11th Nov, 2005, with Mr. McGee in 4OM

Note: There was a special ritual practice today: a minute silence for the remembrance. The problem was that I couldn't catch children's talk well in this kind of outdoor activity.

Aspects of awareness and reflections:

1. I noticed different situations in terms of Mr. McGee's interaction with the children. He mentioned about a difference between 'formal and informal' situations at school when we first touched the topic of school life.

2. I put the accent on the original notes; the advantage of the original is that they are the situated notes, by which I mean the original notes were made then on site with the original sequences, initial understandings and responses in terms of the immediacy. The layout of the notes and the handwriting of the notes also present the state of the observer and the major aspects of the situation then. I normally input the notes into the computer a few days after the observation, the process offers a time gap and thus a psychological distance.

3. I reminded myself of the pure pressure of teaching tasks on the teacher and to give enough acknowledgement and appreciation of a teacher's daily organisation for the purpose of effective completion of teaching tasks.

4. By inputting my notes a week later, I had the experience of reading the original notes as a narrative. My way of sorting out the narrative is actually a round of analysis and interpretation. The 'real' picture is depicted in the notes. The process of inputting gives me a mental opportunity to carry out interpretation than simply depicting what had happened.

5. The full attention required on the teacher's part reminds me of an article on 'attention'. The educationist shares her insight that attentiveness is not a state that should be imposed in the inspiration of a spiritualist.

6. The concern of the noise in the classroom is like paranoia from the teacher's part (similar to my nervousness of the noise generated by my son in the morning in our room). Mr. McGee especially is concerned about the noise. The quiet reading time today saw his non-stop reminding and disciplining.

7. In my observation, I saw a contrast of entry and dismissal of the children's state, which is significant in revealing a general sense of schooling in children's perception.

8. Yesterday I was hesitating and worried a little bit about in case I misread the situation I was in (the teacher's control and the children's state of be controlled). My observation of today reinforced a strict 'control' of sound, move etc. It just depicted a

picture of control and children's quiet resistance (maybe not a real resistance). Maybe I should divide the two pictures first and then analyse them together. It seems to me that the firmer control is, the more the children tend to get loose of the control through quiet distractive activities (e.g. asking for an outing to the toilet, going to the front table to sharpen the pencil). Also I understand that this 'stress' from Mr. McGee's side may have a reason. This morning before lessons he told me that a teacher was off sick and he had extra work because of that. 'You'll see that I will be struggling with the teaching', he added. Therefore, I think some informal talk is necessary for me to make clearer of the situation, the teacher's state. Also I believe that the teacher's state of mind, mood and the level of understanding to the children and the job is an important aspect that influences the interactions between him (her) and the children. Mr. McGee did have concern about the teaching of this afternoon. He mentioned that 'This afternoon is a little bit disorganized' after class when he intentionally enquired about my research.

9. My notes depict very normal happenings of the classroom. There will be no significance if there is not a perspective for me to look at and think of the classroom interactions. The analysis and interpretation thus become essential in my research.

10. Is the scope (or area) of the existence of the children in the classroom an element to affect the matter of 'teachers' control'? It seems to me that when children sit in the front on the carpet, Mr. McGee wouldn't worry too much about noise level. But when children sit around the table by themselves, a sense of control is obvious. How can teachers' tendency to control students' behaviour be justified? If we look at this matter of 'distance'; a hidden power play beyond a concern of classroom

management is clearer. Even though we can say that it's easier and the teacher may feel more confident about the proper practice when children are in a 'controllable' distance (in a distance within eye control rather than with a need of language control), a hidden 'fear' of out of control may be the explanation of excessive language intrusion on the teacher's part. Or we can say the control is always there but only presents in different form. For example, when language is not necessary, eye-contact 'calls out'.

11. I wonder what 'folding your arms' means in different situations (e.g when in the teacher's direct instruction for attention, when in the children's effort to catch teacher's attention, and when the children use that to give an indication to Mr. McGee that they feel they have achieved something after reflecting what they learn in the lesson). How do children make sense of it?

12. Children's responses to the two requests: 'question with hand-up' or 'question with eye-search', supply me another expressive case of comparison. The commonality and difference between these two situations reveal the matter of 'control' and a growing pressure to take the control on the teacher's side. Maybe I can get the teacher's understandings regarding this in addition to a general context of current education.

Registration:

Mistakes: Five pause (e.g. 'Mr.---McGee') in morning register. Two mistakes and one pause in afternoon register. Eddie mistook Mr. McGee to 'Mr. Opie'. Eleanor hesitated in greeting, 'Good afternoon, Mr. ----McGee'. Jason was not sure for a moment. He repeated, 'Good afternoon, Mr. McGee. Oh, good afternoon, Mr. McGee'.

Extra tasks: In the morning register today, Mr. McGee asked children to check the grouping name lists for the spelling exercise, which was showed on the screen (smart white board), while the registration was on. (I don't know if there is any correlation between the less mistakes and the more business-like registration in the morning. It seemed there was no mistake then except five children had paused in the course of the greetings. However, this alternative helps me to imagine the situation where children normally are. This time, maybe it was because of a more business way, the greetings were done more like a routine. There may be less stress on the children's side than normal when there is a complexity of generated by the teacher's subtle requirements). Oscar had some special request in addition to the greeting, 'Good afternoon, Mr. McGee. Can I go to the toilet?' Mr. McGee rejected it because it's just after lunchtime break. (Oscar, a special- need boy, presents himself very apparently as a somehow special character in the class. It's no surprise that he has this exception of being deviant. Some little fun were seen in the registration before from some boys. This kind of 'exceptions' can be an aspect to look at in searching for a sense of schooling from children's part).

'OK, come and sit down there please.' As the first thing for the lesson, children were required to transit quickly from the previous state to classroom state. In the afternoon,

with the instruction informed before lunch by Mr. McGee, children were expected to come in and sit down in their normal place. 'You've forgotten', 'Come quietly, settle in your own place'. Mr. McGee reminded children. The similar comments were at the beginning of a maths lesson, 'I'm very pleased that you come so nicely'. (It seems that a transition from the out-of-class state to a classroom state is significant for schooling and classroom teaching. The transition is definitely a very significant ritual, which is embraced in registration. Because of its multiple statuses, registration has elements like initiation, transition, and a function for reinforcing a teacher-children relation.)

Attention-seeking (where the relative statuses between the teacher and the children, and a teaching-learning relationship are revealed):

'Don't show me'. 'Keep your hands down'. Mr McGee had to keep reminding after the question was raised for the pair work or the 'thinking in you mind' work. (It seems children are very well used to 'responding' to the teacher's question with an 'answer', and also to answer the teacher as quickly as possible. This pattern is very deeply imprinted in children's way of acting in school because it has been taught and encouraged from the beginning of their school days. This pattern can be interpreted at this level for the purpose to examine the stereotyped teacher-children relationship. But underneath that, is the teacher dominance, the well-formed teacher-centred schooling. It may be not very valuable to linger on the controversy of either the teacher-centred or the child-centred models. Only that when we raise the hidden but deep-seated issue to the foreground, will it help us to understand the schooling itself

better, in a deeper meaning than at a surface level. The interesting point here in my observation is that Mr. McGee is starting and trying to form a different norm of practice from the children's habitual way. The attempt to change has its value and significance for teaching in that teaching practice has varied purposes. For example sometimes teachers adopt question-answer mode to assess children's learning. Sometimes it is used for encouraging participations, especially of the shyer children. Sometimes it is designed as a flexible and open approach for children to explore freely. But the change Mr. McGee tries to introduce was done a very similar way to his other practice; it is more of an initiative, imposition and structuring from the teacher's part. Lots of instructions are inevitable. Thus, in this respect the approach that is designed for the flexibility and openness actually led to a situation of 'control'. How is children's experience of this? There is the complexity.

'You can pop your hands up now. Who thinks you can tell me ...?' some time later when Mr. McGee finished the 'work on your mind' session, he needed children to use 'hands-up' to indicate that they had got the answer. This is a case that supports my perception of a matter of 'control' in the teacher-child relation. At one point, Mr. McGee named two girls because they were not abiding to the instruction, 'Joyce and Alice, I don't want your hands up'. Joyce made a face to Alice when hearing this. 'Keep your hands down'. In the writing lesson, Mr. McGee needs to remind children another time. After that, with the teacher's reminding and his intentional ignorance of the hand-up, Peter and another two boys put their hands up insistently and finally made Mr. McGee inquire about their actions. It turned out to be that they saw the signal of low battery of the laptop in the Smart Board. Mr. McGee gave them a brief 'thanks'. Before the afternoon register, there were immediately some hands-up after

children came into the classroom. Mr. McGee insisted, 'I won't answer any question until I take the register'. 'Keep your hands down'. It wasn't until in the afternoon in the writing lesson that the children showed that they were more used to the new way of responding to a question designated by Mr. McGee; they raised up their heads and looked at Mr. McGee with their arm folded. This pattern under Mr. McGee's request turned out to be a more control-featured ritual.

(My observation gave me the impression that the children need to have complete obedience to and total concentration on the teacher. A shortage of either could lead to problems. The children may either innocently make mistakes between hands-up or keeping hands down at appropriate stage when they lost several minutes' attention on the teacher, or turn to the deliberate trouble-makers in the 'all-in-control' situation if they find themselves difficult to obey or to suppress their own will.)

The other more general encouragement of eye-contact from Mr. McGee supplements my observation today. For example, at the end of the maths lesson today, Mr. McGee said, 'I know you're listening when arms are folded down and you look at me'. When he assigned the homework, Mr. McGee reminded an individual child, 'ready to listen now, show me your face'. To me, the theme of 'control' outweighs anything else in Mr. McGee's classroom.

(I start to figure out a sequence of the designated norm of attention-seeking for children to follow. Maybe I can get confirmation through some talk and planned group work from children themselves:

the teacher raises the question---children think the answers in the mind--- children show the teacher that they've got their answers by sitting well and searching for teacher's eye-contact-----if the eye-search is a success there will be the possibility to be called to give his/her answer, but the eye-search itself is the focus at that moment because 100 percent concentration of attention to the teacher is needed for obtaining his eye-contact-----if there's any problem with the eye-search, the child will be helpless to indicate his/her wish to answer the question to the teacher, which can be frustrating----any attempt to give additional gestures to the teacher has the potential risk of being spotted as offending.

Through empathising with the children's efforts in abiding to the 'eye-contact' norm, we can see why the main response to school experience is a kind of feeling bored and lack of enthusiasm. The situation for them seems as if either they can't help breaking the rule and causing problems or it is too much for them to follow in order to fit perfectly into the instruction system.)

Discipline:

When children were in a session of 'quiet work time' there was a lot of reminding of the proper acts (e.g. 'chair tuck in', 'stay in your place', 'no move', 'no calling out', 'stay in place', 'sit down on the bottom', 'sit back down', 'don't get out of your place', 'don't mess about', 'don't cover your face'). While working with the six children on the carpet separated from those who had got right answers, Mr. McGee

kept an eye on the whole classroom especially when the noise was up. He reminded children of disciplinary matters by naming and reminding individuals.

Maybe this kind of reminding is not to set strict boundaries, instead it just works as a tool to keep the order to a certain extent. But it seems to be very restraining here. To me the thing is that the reminding to individuals has no general meaning to the whole class. Some trivial aspects like tucking in the chair and moving hands out of mouth in my observation are mainly the teacher's reminding to those unsettled individuals on seeing signs of their fidget. The offenders' names were called out at different point in order to control the noise level or to keep whatever the state that the teacher normally expected on this occasion (quiet independent work time in this current case.)

The superficial obedience seems essential for children's fitting in the schooling system. Therefore, it is necessary for a redefinition of those children who have behaviour problems; in the picture of 'the teacher's control', a small number of children have a more difficult time than others even though largely the life 'under control' is not in harmony with the children are. Reversely, the way a small number of children are treated appears to reinforce the 'controlling' nature of schooling. But in my observation this is just superficially demonstrated. Actually, the two parts ('small number' and the 'others') are different in terms of their potential tendency (for example, normally chair tucked in or hand out of mouth is meaningless to most other 'obedient' children. It is the unsettling that needs the reminding and 'grounding'). The issue of 'distraction for the purpose of encouraging attentiveness' (mentioned in Jackson, 1968) need more confirmation from children themselves.

When children entered the classroom from the other two maths groups, Mr. McGee stopped them, 'Can you stop here, please. You've come to the room shouting'.

In the spelling lesson, children were required to be quiet when they were working independently, 'No noise, please', 'I ask you to be quiet another time because you don't need to talk to people'.

In the reading session, Mr. McGee had three groups of children read independently while he himself worked with another group. 'We don't want big noise today', he set the boundary. Thus, he disciplined children by reminding and telling them off. 'Kevin, you'll stay there today', 'Can you sit in the library' (Andy was told to 'be grounded' in the classroom library area). Once Luke went to the front to Mr. McGee and asked, 'Mr. McGee', intending to ask for something (the permission of doing something) when the teacher was working with a group of children on the carpet. But Mr. McGee just shook his head without looking at him and rejected his request and ignored him later on while Luke stood there. Luke made a face showing his frustration to my direction. And then, 'You can't ask to go to the loo', Mr. McGee now answered clearly to Luke without further explanation. Later, more discipline was given by Mr. McGee in reminding children whilst he still sat on the carpet with a group of children and listened to their reading. He kept reminding to the whole class as well as individuals, 'Some of the noise is getting very big', 'Your really need to be quiet please', 'I can't hear Corey at the moment. Do you really need to talk? If you do need to, make it in whisper', 'If you don't need, please don't, because I can't hear Corey now', 'Some of you think you can come and talk to me now, you can't because I'm hearing Corey', 'Can you stop and listen, Oscar'. Further on, he once stopped the boy who had just started reading before him and watched (gazing at the whole class)

the class contemplatively as his response to the noise level that seemed to be ‘out of control’. ‘George, put your chair on the floor’, when Mr. McGee reminded George like this, George misunderstood it to be asked to sit and read on the floor. He went up to the front and sat on the floor for a moment and then went back to his seat. Later on, two boys went to the front. Before they opened their mouth, Mr. McGee gestured ‘no’ with his waving hand. ‘Getting a bit noisy now. xxx table, can you be quiet now?’, ‘I can hear a few voices very clearly now. If I can hear voices it might be a bit noisy now’. Mr. McGee’s frequent reminding was very salient in this session and I just wondered if any child hadn’t been called for the reminding of the discipline. Also there are always some children who were ‘picked up’ very frequently.

In the afternoon, I had a sense that Mr. McGee was imposing firmer regulations than that of yesterday. In the quiet work time, children are not allowed to go around and even move out of their places (‘Chair tucked in and no turning around’). The whole structure of the afternoon session was more specified (strictly structured into each steps. The whole class of children were given instructions every 5-10 minutes. 1:10 Children were sitting in their chair according to before-lunch instructions. 1:20 After register children were asked to go to the carpet and listen to teacher’s explanation of today’s theme. Around 1:30 Children were sent to tables for work Time. 1:48 They were asked to come back to carpet again. 1:55 The children went to their chairs to copy the second question and write the answer. 2:05 ‘Pencil down, look this way’, the children were asked to tidy the table and listen to the homework requirement. 2:17 Mr. McGee handed out the books while talking 2:20 Mr. McGee collected the books 2:22 He dismissed children table by table to assembly.

Mr. McGee did concern the teaching of this afternoon. He mentioned that ‘This afternoon is a little bit disorganized’ after class when he intentionally asked how my research went.

At the first session of quiet work (after 1:30), a boy asked for an outing for drink, which was rejected because ‘you’ve just come from your lunchtime’. Also I noticed the sharpener fixed on the table in the front of the classroom can be a haven for some children to get a break.

When Mr. McGee was wanting attention from the children in their chairs (after 2:05), he had to name some children to reiterate the discipline, ‘xxx, ready to listen now, show me your face’, ‘you can’t go anywhere’. ‘If you need to move, put up your hands’. While handing out books and talking (after 2:17), Mr. McGee reiterated, ‘One way to show you’re listening; You look this way. Don’t ...’. When collecting the book (around 2:20), the classroom was in the similar discipline. ‘I don’t like to call over anyone’. Bill was told to sit beside Mr. McGee because of his unsettled behaviour.

Assembly:

Children were expected to look at Mrs. Jeffs (assistant headteacher who presents the assembly today) from the beginning of the assembly. After the music and entry, Mrs. Jeffs made the first sentences, ‘we won’t start until all of your eyes on me’ while music was still on.

A game of checking people's memory was used as the introduction of today's theme: Remembrance Day. Games and stories are of interest to children. All hands were up to respond Mrs. Jeffs' question and suggestion of participation.

Children clamoured for Mr. McGee to play the memory game.

The applause with noises was commented by Mrs. Jeffs as 'not nice'.

Jason was told off by Mrs. Jeffs when he turned around to talk to Oscar.

The life of the First World War soldiers was described by Mrs. Jeffs (e.g How long they walked in rain and sun, some never came back home.) mixed with some questions designed to draw in children's knowledge and empathy.

Song (the remembrance)

Prayer: candle lit, Mrs. Jeffs gave some instruction for the prayer (bow your head, your hands together).

A poem read by Mrs. Jeffs ('On the Poppy Day' is the title and it tells about a boy buying poppy from a lady). After the poem, Mrs. Jeffs asked children to take some time to meditate. 'I just want you to sit very, very silently, to think about that boy who asked the elderly lady who lost her son', 'Think of the message the story in the poem gives'.

Award-giving: Children tiptoed across the other children to receive the awards. What was the experience like? I also saw a 'Certificate of Achievement'.

Dismissal: 'Go out in silence' was the clear instruction for today's leaving because of this 'special occasion'. Mrs. Jeffs especially reminded children, 'I do mean...' The offenders were facing the threat of 'being sent to the front'. Jason was told off by Mr. McGee and was a casualty of the special day. (From the nature of this reiterated 'special' nature, we may analyse and interpret the normal situation, which just can't be 'silent', I mean the dismissal of assembly.)

Alice, Bill, Andy and some others:

Alice, Bill, Marli, Andy and Oscar were more noticed than others.

'Don't look at others, just me and the clock'. Mr. McGee gave Alice clear instruction in respect to her tendency to turn around to talk or ask others. She is the one that Mr. McGee calls the name of more than others. For this session of the maths lesson, Mr. McGee wanted children to work out the time by themselves, in their mind. He was specially concerned that children should not discuss with each other. He seemed to like to get the 'honest' answer for some kind of assessment for the children. However, his instruction to Alice was salient.

‘Andy, put your noise down, please’. Such kind of reminding and naming were very frequent this afternoon. ‘Big Bill’ was told off and he moved himself to another table after being told off. Alice was reminded of her chair (to tuck in the chair and sit down) and noise many times.

Positive response: The positive responses were manipulated on this occasion. The names were called out, and the positive comments were followed for the encouragement of a keep-on good behaviour of the individuals. And sometimes it was also like reminding of the discipline (e.g. xxx, lovely and quietly, well-done.).

‘You don’t need to turn around, do you? If you’ve got a problem, put your hands up’, the teaching assistant said to Small Bill. ‘We don’t shout for Mrs. Todd, do we? Raise you hand, we wait’, later Mr. McGee spotted Bill calling of the teaching assistant and said. Some time later, Bill couldn’t help beating the table like drumming with his fingers and he was stopped by the teaching assistant. At the end of maths, Bill was told off again when he went to Mr. McGee to return his book while Mr. McGee was talking about book returning and hadn’t finished his talking yet, ‘When I’m talking, you don’t walk...’

In the afternoon, Andy and Jason were spotted by Mr. McGee as making noise (it’s interesting that making noise turns out to be the main offence and the prominent cause of reminding and telling off). ‘Andy, Jason, you’ll never sit together’. He indicated and moved the two boys to different places.

When Mark was sitting just beside the trays in Mr. McGee's lesson of writing (specifically on the jumps of story writing), he pulled and peeped one tray. (This quiet distraction reminded us of the normal justification of the discipline arrangement: to prevent the distraction and to ensure a good learning environment. But it is not true if we dig deeper. Firstly, it is obvious in this case that the superficial quietness doesn't guarantee the concentration. Secondly, what is the nature of distraction? Can children be distracted by the furniture if they have real interest and drive to learn?)

(It seemed the children were not troubled by the classroom noise at all, except for the moment when the teacher got 'fussy' and called other groups' names (children were working around table groups then).

Attention:

'Sit on your bottom; turn your chair this way. Put your book down and look this way', at the end of the reading session, Mr. McGee required children's attention with this instruction.

'Rory, would you join-----'two boys keeping gazing at Mr. McGee when he was giving instructions but paused. They kept their eyes on Mr. McGee waiting for the completion of the sentence.

‘Put pen and sheets down. Put them right down’, before starting reading after the sheets and books were handed out by Mr. McGee, children were given such reminding.

Minute Silence on the Remembrance Day:

11am, 11th Nov, one minute silence. After a brief introduction of the ‘minute silence’, Mr. McGee made the instruction, ‘I want it to be a special moment’, ‘I don’t want ... I don’t want talk’.

Children were led out to the playground. All KS2 children were standing on a circle line paint on the ground. It was a very windy morning. Children were chilled in the wind and tucked themselves tightly. I heard the two girls exchanged some ideas when they stood there waiting for the start of the ceremony, ‘Every school did this’. Then Mr. Evans came with a bell. He had some words but I couldn’t hear them clearly enough. The one minute silence started. I saw the girls standing near me were laughing silently. Whereas the new Jim took a praying stance and bowed his head. Wind blew doors. One door banged four times. Each bang took the girl’s attention. The minute silence was obviously quiet when comparing this with the small voices from the children afterwards. When children were released from this special practice, (a little while after the special one minute, children were certain it was OK to return to normal activity, the calling out, running were sensational. It was like that they were dismissed out of the specially ‘cold’, ‘stressful’ moment.

Messing about, having a laugh (children's initiatives of some fun in the context of classroom)

I saw an example of 'messing about' which is caused by a general attitude of 'lack of interest' and 'boredom' or in some children's cases an acuter suffering because the task is too hard and they almost lost interest. 'Mess about' has its sense in terms of 'intentionally' making a mess. Thus the reason behind is interesting for an exploration on it a little bit more. Andy, Jason, and some others were at a table. I was sitting at the corner of the table. When they were doing their work, Jason tossed a little piece of rubber back to the centre of the table after using it. The rubber rebounded to my direction and touched my arm. Jason responded 'sorry' with uneasiness and a little bit of fear immediately. Seeing that there was no risk of 'offending' (I gestured a 'it doesn't matter'), Andy and Jason laughed cheekily at it. Andy took the rubber and tossed it again, also he intentionally suggested another boy to pay attention to him and retell the incident by making a presentation accompanied with laugh and mocking. All went on quietly; but their facial expressions show a sense 'mocking', 'playing around' that is very common in some boys.

Dismissal

The lunchtime dismissal was a easy and quick one after a more stressed morning. 'Leave table tidy and nicely. Have a lovely lunch time', Mr. McGee dismissed children in this exceptionally quick way. Immediately, the hustle and the noise roared

up. Half of the school day was over. (This quick and easy dismissal was a bit out of my expectation. The contrast with the stress there in the classroom showed a state termed by Mr. McGee as ‘the teacher’s role’, by which he means that he tried not to be influenced by his mood or anything else.)

The end of the whole day: ‘It is a long and busy week’, Mr. McGee made the last remarks. He encouraged children to ‘take a minute to think something really good to tell mum and dad’. He indicated that if they thought of something they could fold their arms (I need to know more what this means to the children). For the dismissal greeting, today Mr. McGee reminded children ‘instead of saying “G—oo—d, after---n—oo—n”’, they can greet just ‘Good afternoon’, ‘not rushed and not very short’. The children did. But there is always difficulty with the collective greeting. I didn’t see much improvement in terms of the quality of the greeting.

Appendix 4

A sample of the interview transcriptions

27th, March, 2006, Kate, Tina, and Anne

(No sooner had we settled down in the library, than the girls asked questions such as, ‘What stuff do we say?’ (by Tina), and ‘Do we take it in turns?’ (by Anne). As for Kate, in all my observation notes, there is no mention of her. It seems she was not present. Maybe from the beginning I did not really get acquainted with her, so I had difficult to identify her. Nevertheless she has never done anything noticeable in class, otherwise I wouldn’t have missed that.

(I gave brief instructions to stress the freedom to draw, scribble etc. before the first question.)

JX: *I’d like to know how you get your teacher’s attention.*

ANNE: *Well, with Mr. McGee, we just to have to catch his eye really.*

JX: *How to, what do you mean by ‘catch his eye’?*

ANNE: *Well -, sit nicely -*

TINA: *Sit nicely or just look in his eye.*

KATE: *But with Mr. Opie-*

ANNE: *We just put our hands up because Mr. McGee doesn’t like us putting our hands up really. But I find it better when you wanna put your hand up because if you’re just sitting straight, he might choose you and you won’t know the answer.*

JX: *Mm, so when you say, said ‘catch the eyes’ or ‘sit nicely’, what do you mean by ‘sit nicely’?*

ANNE: *Like cross your arms and sit like* (She acted it out by putting effort into the straightening of her back.), *over with your back straight and cross your legs.* (Kate giggled.)

JX: *Ah, like that. And how you catch his eyes?*

ANNE: *Erm, we just look* (She acted out.) *in his eyes really* (K giggled in a low sound.), *or just sit up straight really.*

KATE, TINA: *Mm.*

JX: *And how do you feel when, when you do that?*

ANNE: *Well, it's a bit weird because your back starts to ache because if you're sitting up really nicely, and no one else is, he sometimes don't pick you, so you're all like 'me', 'me', 'me', 'me' (She acted out). And then your back aches.*

JX: *So you raise your hands in other occasions, right? But why, how do you think, why does Mr. McGee prefer the eye contact, not hands-up?*

ANNE: *Because like, when we've got our hands up we talk.*

TINA: *Sometimes we can shout out.*

ANNE: *Yeah, and so. 'Cos when we have our hand up we tend to talk to people, so he thinks if we're just sitting up nicely, then-*

KATE: *And also maybe because when we've got our hands up, our hands are moving about all the time.*

JX: *So what's the problem with that, with the hands moving?*

ANNE: *It just distracts other people because if someone is behind you and you start waving your hands, they get more attention to your hands.*

TINA: *They can not actually see.*

ANNE: *So they start like, talking and all that.*

JX: *Ah. So, do you have any, like, erm, how to say that? Something happened about this hands-up? Like, do you remember an incident or something like that?*

ANNE: *No, not really. It's just that when people wave their hands, the hand gets other people to get attention to you. Because like on the carpet if someone's like sitting away from you, you just start waving your hands to get them.*

JX: *Ah, how do you think, Katie, about this? It's like how you get a teacher's attention, because you - when you like to get teacher's attention.*

KATE: *When you know the answer to a question, you'd like to. 'Cos it's like you really want the teacher to get attention to you and you can say the answer, yeah.*

JX: *Ah. And other occasions? Other reason you'd like to get teacher's attention?*

TINA: *Not really.*

JX: *Have some questions? When you have questions, you will put your hands up?*

ANNE: *Yeah, 'cos like other reasons, if say we want to go toilet or something we have to.*

TINA: *Well, when we're like reading, we have to go to the door, and put our hands on our heads.*

ANNE: *If we want to go to toilet, we just go like that, and by the door. And if someone is there, you've got wait for them, so, to come back.*

JX: *Ah, you mean to the library?*

ANNE: *Yeah.*

TINA: *'Cos everyday we're like have green group, red group and blue, and green plus.*

JX: *Ah. What does this group mean?*

ANNE: *It's for spellings.*

KATE: *It's like how good you are at doing them.*

JX: *Ah. So, how good you are, like for green group?*

ANNE: *Well I'm in the bottom group. Well-*

JX: *So what's the difference between the groups?*

ANNE: *There are harder spelling as you go up and go easier.*

KATE: *'Cos if your spelling is getting really easy, for you, then you move up a level.*

JX: *To another group?*

TINA: *Yeah.*

JX: *(I stopped the conversation and asked them to stop their irrelevant drawing.) OK, I don't think you should draw this because you're not answering my questions. Because I'd like to get your ideas and understandings. What they do is, they tried to use the paper to help you think. So when you, when I said, 'get the attention', 'how many ways you can get teacher's attention', like this. So when you put them down, you think. It's not like you're drawing, but we will draw at another stage.*

ANNE: *Oh, so, like for attention, we can put like 'a hand going up.'*

JX: *Yes. You can do like this, like make a list, or something like that. So you can, like a brainstorm* ANNE: *Mm, Oh.*

JX: *So it helps you to express yourself, right: But another stage, maybe at the end of it, we can have a drawing for something, but also around the school life. Is that OK? Because you seemed keeping quiet, so, not so, really on the questions.*

JX: *Yes, still on the 'attention'. When you say 'put your hands up'-*

ANNE: *Yeah, like above your head. 'Cos if we're doing reading, then we go up by the door and we put our hands over our head, and that means we need to go to the toilet.*

JX: *Ah. So is this in Mr. Opie's day?*

ANNE: *Yeah.*

JX: *Ah.*

ANNE: *'Cos Mr. McGee, he doesn't like us getting up and about, so-*

JX: *Ah. So do you feel any difference between Mr. McGee's day and Mr. Opie's day? I mean that you feel differently or you do things differently So, what's that?*

ANNE: *Mm. Yeah. Erm, it's just that. Mr. Opie, he -, it's hard to explain. (Kate giggled.)*

JX: *Sometimes it's hard to explain.*

ANNE: *He's just, he's a bit more calm than Mr. McGee. 'Cos, erm, he's a bit more patient than Mr. McGee.*

JX: *So you mean sometimes Mr. McGee is different.*

ANNE: *Yeah.*

JX: *For example? At what occasions, I mean he react differently?*

ANNE: *Erm, when we are at our tables, and we start chatting he just shouts at his loudest voice and he says, 'My voice is getting louder, it shouldn't be getting louder.' While Mr. Opie, erm, when we're sitting at our table, he just rings on the triangle, just get our attention. But sometimes Mr. McGee doesn't do that.*

JX: *Ah. Get your attention. How about, Kate? Do you feel any-*

TINA: *That's Kate.*

JX: *Oh, Tina, do you feel the difference between these two, I mean different days?*

TINA: *Yeah, sometimes. 'Cos we have this board and we have different things to do. 'Cos on Thursday we do music and ICT and we don't do it on other days, like on Monday. We just do it on one day.*

JX: *Yes, the lessons are different. I mean the day you feel differently, like-. I'm asking, like the difference between Mr. McGee and Mr. Opie. Do you feel this?*

TINA: *Not really.*

JX: *Not really- Yes.*

JX: *What about you?*

KATE: *Well, Mr. Opie is definitely different from Mr. McGee 'cos Mr. Opie is a bit more funny. ANNE and TINA: Yeah.*

ANNE: *What we do were doing about elephants is about what their trunk does. And we said 'smell' and anyone like, 'Woo, it doesn't smell' [She acted out, M laughed]. So he's actually quite funny.*

JX: *Aha, yes. And how about get his attention? You said-*

ANNE: *We just put our hands up.*

JX: *Is that easier?*

TINA and ANNE: *Yeah.*

JX: *Why it's easier?*

ANNE: *Because if we know the question, we'll put our hand up. But if we don't we won't put our hand up. 'Cos with Mr. McGee, he just wants us to catch his eye and so, if we just sit up straight, then, and we don't know the answer, he'll just pick us. And we don't know the answer.*

JX: *Oh, yes. Sometimes it's like, erm, you can't make the difference by knowing the answer or not knowing the answer. Do you like to be picked up?*

ANNE: *No.*

JX: *When you don't know the answer, you don't like to.*

ANNE: *Because if you don't know the answer, everyone just turns around and looks at you.*

TINA: *Yeah.*

JX: *Ah. You'll have that pressure. (K started laughing.)*

JX: *So, you feel differently, yeah? But this is one way, like you'll get teacher's attention. As you just said, Mr. Opie uses triangles to get your attention. At what occasions teacher would like to get your attention?*

ANNE: *Like when we're really noisy and we start talking and all that and like we start shouting across the room, 'cos if it's really quiet and we whisper, if someone makes a loud noise, then another table make a loud noise, and then it all gets louder. So he just rings the triangle. If he rings it three times, we have to stay in five minutes at playtime.*

TINA: *Not always five. We can just stay like one or two minutes . 'Cos we got this timer.*

ANNE: *And if we annoy, he put our name in the bad board, or if we are really good, we put us, he puts us on the good board. And if we have three sad faces on the unhappy board, we got to go time out. But it's three happy faces on the good board, we get an effort point.*

JX: *Ah. So, how do you do it? I mean, have you ever get this time out?*

ANNE: *No.*

JX: *Never?*

ANNE: *No.*

JX: *Tina?*

TINA: *No.*

JX: *Never. So who have got the time out?*

TINA: *It's mostly the boys. 'Cos they like, in the classroom, if they set in a big group, they also chat up and so they have to go to time out sometimes.*

JX: *Ah, you don't actually get time out.*

KATE: *Polly and Lilly went time out 'cos they were swearing, weren't they?*

TINA: *Yeah. And Paula and Iris.*

JX: *Ah, so, like when you said this time out, is for both teachers or just for Mr. Opie?*

TINA: *Normally both, but sometimes Mr. Opie.*

ANNE: *Mostly Mr. Opie.*

JX: *How does Mr. McGee get your attention and in what occasions he want to get your attention?*

ANNE: *Erm, if we're noisy on our tables, he just claps his hands.*

TINA: *Or shouts at us.*

ANNE: *Yeah, he just goes like that (She clapped).*

JX: *So, that's his way to get your attention*

KATE: *But today he's been using the triangle.*

ANNE and TINA: *Yeah.*

JX: *Any other ways he used to get your attention?*

KATE: *Erm-*

ANNE: *Erm, not really. But with Mr. Opie, when we're really noisy, he says, 'I've got the pen out' and he starts writing the beginning of someone's name on the bad board if we're all shouting and standing up.*

TINA: *And my name really short 'cos it's only got three letters. So it's not fair.*

ANNE: *Once he nearly put you on, didn't he?*

JX: *So what do you mean, he puts the names, whose names?*

TINA: *Like he goes really slowly. Then he gives us a chance to sit down.*

ANNE: *If Kate was walking around he'd say 'I've got the pen out' and start writing her name, (She acted the writing) like that-*

KATE: *And then if I sat down, then he'd stop and rub it out.*

TINA: *Yeah, rub out (She acted out on her paper).*

JX: *Ah, yes. So teachers use different ways to get your attention. And you get teacher's attention. Yeah, maybe you can tell me like one story. One special experience of yours or of others, today, or yesterday, so whenever, just, just, how to say that, getting into your mind. You can think for one minute, like what you can tell me, like a story.*

ANNE: *Does that have to be in the classroom, or can it be out in the playground?*

JX: *It's better in the classroom.*

JX: *Like something you remembered, you know.*

ANNE: *I got a-*

JX: *Yeah, you can write. You can try to think, like today, what happened, anything special? Or yesterday? No, not yesterday (K laughed), last week, anything special? Special, just whatever you felt special.*

JX: *It's like one of your stories.*

ANNE: *Mine is gonna be-*

TINA: (Spoke to Kate) *Not outside, inside.*

JX: *Of yourself, of your, or of others, of your friends, or of your teacher. It's like your story telling.*

ANNE: *I'm just like making notes and then I'll make it in-*

JX: *Aha. Yeah, tell me the story.*

(Girls were scribbling on the paper.)

JX: *Or you think of anybody special in the-. If you think somebody is special, it's easier for you to think of his or her story. Or some day when you feel special, maybe you get a prize, or get a punishment, or-. That will be special, right? Or some special day, like you have those activities, some special activities. You never, you haven't done, you can't do it everyday. So you may feel special.*

TINA: *Can we do, like PE, 'cos sometimes we do it in the hall, but-?*

JX: *Yes. Yeah, if you like. You know, just think about it and pick, pick one thing as special. It's not easy, right? (K laughed.) Is it easy?*

ANNE: *I've done mine.*

KATE: *I just thought one.*

JX: *Why it's not easy? Maybe I, so (M spoke to Tina), you take the time, others can think about it. Why it's not easy?*

ANNE: *Because we have lots of stuff happening in our class all the time. So that's quite easy to think of one thing. It's like the main thing, really.*

JX: *So you think it's easy. How about, Kate, do you think it's easy, or not?*

KATE: *It's not easy in picking a special thing. There are so much stuff going on about you. Since most of it is good, then you pick up a special one-*

JX: *Ah, so, many things are similar things, you mean?*

KATE: *Yeah.*

JX: *Mm. Similar. Why they are similar?*

ANNE: *Because there's a boy called Oscar. And he gets more attention than us because- he's got this thing wrong with him. 'Cos he told me he was disabled once. So Mrs. Todd has to help him more. And he all gets wound up if someone, like whispers about him or something, so he shouts and that.*

JX: *Oh. So, you, you find he's special. And others-. Ah.*

ANNE: *Yeah, a bit too special though.*

KATE: *No, sometimes-*

TINA: *There's Polly. Yeah, she's got a wooden leg, which she can't help it.*

ANNE: *I find Joyce a bit special because when we fall out with her, 'cos her mum comes to read, she's always think that she can go and tell Mrs. Todd on us. And Mrs. Todd always sticks up for us, so it's not quite fair on us. 'Cos she's like, just tells of us on Mrs. Todd, and so we got told off.*

KATE: *And sometimes when Joyce starts the fight, she always like tells lies on us and says it's our fault.*

TINA: *Yeah.*

ANNE: *She's always like pushes us and that.*

TINA: *Began to fight and all like that.*

ANNE: *It's like the argument today, she's like grabbing me when I didn't wanna her. And she won't let go. She always think she is so cool and that. But she is actually not.*

JX: *Do you think, I mean, yourself is special?*

ANNE: *Erm, not really. No.*

JX: *So, you think-. Just everyone think about it, because I, I'm like exploring, because I don't know, really don't know how you feel. Because there's so many children here in one big room and you get on all the time together. Erm, yeah, you may, easily see, like Oscar or who, are special. But how about yourself. Have you ever feel yourself? Like you feel yourself, almost everyday feel the same? Or you feel differently?*

ANNE: *I don't feel the same everyday. Because like some days I come in school like really happy, but some days I come in really sad. If I'm coming sad, then I never have a nice day at school. But if I come happy, then have a really good day.*

JX: *Ah, you mean when, before you came to school you feel happy? Or because of what happened?*

ANNE: *Yeah, because like the mood I'm in.*

ANNE: *Because at home, me and my sister like always have overnights and that. So she makes me feel unhappy in the morning. (M—Ah, yeah.) And I don't speak at all, so-*

JX: *How about Kate?*

KATE: *Erm. I feel different in different days as well. Because sometimes if I had fall-outs, and I haven't make up, then I get quite upset in case the fights gonna get worse.*

JX: *Ah, you mean the fight here in school? In the break-time, right? (K nodded) Yes, any other things upset you? I mean, in school. Or besides the friendship things, I mean. The girls like to be with friends, right? Other things, any other things upset you? Or make you feel special? Special can be you feel good or some, feel bad. Can be both. Just above the normal.*

ANNE: *I feel quite good when someone else gets the achiever 'cos I feel happy for them. Like they've tried so hard and I feel happy for them all the time.*

JX: *Mm. How about yourself? You feel differently, I mean, for some special occasions? You remember very well, 'Oh, exciting', or 'Oh, that's terrible, terrible thing's happening'.*

ANNE: *I feel quite special when I'm the achiever and when I get an effort point and when he says... If we're sitting up straight, he always says 'Well-done! You set a good example'.*

JX: *Who said that?*

ANNE: *Erm, the teachers.*

JX: *When you sit very well. Does that happen very often?*

ANNE and TINA: *Erm. Yeah.*

ANNE: *Not that often.*

TINA: *Or not that often, but-*

KATE: *On and off.*

JX: *Why not that often, because it's-, because-?*

ANNE: *Sometimes I just get bored with just always sitting up straight and that. So-. Just relax and that.*

TINA: *It hurts your back.*

JX: *How about Tina, you haven't express your feelings, I mean you feel differently everyday or, about the same.*

TINA: *Different sometimes and probably the same.*

JX: *Aha, sometimes, because of what, make it different?*

TINA: *Erm, 'cos when I'm all alone, people just start saying horrible things and I get left out. When I'm playing with my friends and that makes me really happy. So-*

JX: *Aha, yes. I found friend is very important, right? Besides the friend things, in other school activities or in the classroom learning, whatever. Those things, any aspect, will make difference, make it different or not? I mean besides the friendship things.*

TINA: *Erm, different.*

JX: *Yeah, you may feel different sometimes, right? But what are the things make you feel different? What are the things?*

TINA: *Erm.*

JX: *Sometimes you need to think about it. Yes. It's not easy, I found. It's like hard work for you, when I ask those questions. See? Erm. Maybe it's easier to tell your story. So, who will go first?*

[Girls exchanged whispers.]

ANNE: *Well, when we were in Maths, we were playing Bingo today, or the other day. Oscar shouts out when, when he just wants to do something and he gets told off. He goes on the bad board, and he doesn't like it. He gets very upset. And he cries to get loads of attention. And he gets too much of it. So, it's not fair enough for us because when he cries, he just gets loads of attention.*

JX: *What do you mean by 'attention'?*

ANNE: *Like-*

KATE: *All the teachers always go around him.*

ANNE: *Yeah, the teachers go 'Oh, Oscar, you're alright?' And on us they just go, 'Right, sit quietly' and it's just not the same.*

JX: *Ah. Did you get, do you get such, erm, when you said, 'attention'? Erm, do you think you get such attention, or kind of attention?*

ANNE: *No.*

JX: *No. When you can get attention?*

ANNE: *Erm. (Long pause) Don't know really.*

JX: *But you feel you'd like to get more attention, or, especially, when you like to get more attention?*

ANNE: *Yeah. When, like, when I cry, people, only Mrs. Todd cares, not really the teachers. The teachers say, just get on with someone else, they don't really care about us.*

JX: *Ah, you mean, this kind of attention. Like you like somebody really take care of you. But in the class, do you feel you need more attention?*

ANNE: *Yeah.*

JX: *What kind of attention?*

ANNE and TINA: *Erm-*

JX: *OK, Tina, you're ready?*

TINA: *Tell you a story.*

JX: *Yeah, you can tell a story. Because I don't know, it's like, when you said 'attention', it's, it's, it's from your heart. You feel this. Erm, you mean, you'd like to have more of this. But, what, what's this attention? Maybe you can tell me a story, like when you feel 'Oh, I'd like the teacher come, come along', something like that. Can you tell the story?*

ANNE: *In Maths today, I needed help on my work. Mr. McGee just said 'not now'. And I said, 'But I really need help', and he just said 'I can't'. So-*

JX: *Why he can't?*

ANNE: *Erm, 'cos he was working with this other group. But they were doing work, and he wasn't doing anything. So I thought he could just come over to me for one minute and help me. But he didn't. He just said, 'I can't help you'.*

JX: *Yeah.*

TINA: *And on Bingo, people shout out and when erm, I need to get a 'five', erm other people just shout out 'Bingo'. And I just didn't, didn't get this and 'five'.*

JX: *Ah, so what's teacher's response then?*

TINA: *Erm-*

JX: *So, when you say attention, you mean, maybe in one case you need to be taken care of. And another case, you need to be helped. And in your case, what's that? You like to be spotted, and to be heard, maybe?*

KATE: *Mm. Once- 'cos when we need help, sometimes when there's a lot of people put their hands up, the teacher's always with them and your arm starts to weaken. And you put it down. It's like you are not noticed.*

ANNE: *Yeah.*

JX: *Oh, being noticed.*

ANNE: *It's like leaves you out a bit.*

JX: *Ah, so how do you think, the teacher should do, or the school should do to help, with this?*

ANNE: *I think the teacher should, when they are not doing anything, I think they should go around each table and see if anyone needs help a bit to get moved along with their work. Like if they only did a line of work (She doodled on the paper like working) and they are really stuck, someone should come and help them and like boost them on a bit.*

JX: *Ah, so, (Spoke to Tina) what's your opinion? How do you think it can be helped?*

TINA: *Erm-*

KATE: *Maybe if people have finished their work, maybe the teacher can see who's finished their work and they can go around helping people.*

JX: *Mm. Mm. Maybe that's a solution, right?*

JX: *Ah, and-, yes, when you said your story, do you have story? Can you tell?*

ANNE: *Please, 'cos I was the only one who talked.*

TINA: *Shall I read?*

JX: *Have you written anything? Have you written anything?*

TINA: *Yeah, I wrote three, but-*

JX: *So, you can, you can tell. It doesn't matter, you know, what kind is it, or-. (M read Tina's writing.) Ah. So just tell us because maybe we can't-*

ANNE: *Go on.*

TINA: *Well, Mr. McGee showed us how to do roly poly. And Oscar and Joyce and Eve, I think, they did it. And other people were on the mats and we did other stuff. And, this group with Mr. McGee, they can do roly poly now. So they can do roly polies. (K giggled)*

JX: *So, you couldn't.*

TINA: *Yeah. But other people couldn't. They had to do it another day. 'Cos we ran out of time.*

JX: *Oh, this is, erm, interesting game, is it?*

TINA: *Well, it's not a game. It's just that-*

JX: *It's like balance something?*

TINA: *Yeah. 'Cos one week we did, like, if you stand in a mirror, and we put one arm down and one up. And the other done the same. But when we turn around back to back, we'll -. If I said, 'I'll put your left hand up' and it will be different.*

JX: *Ah, yes. Yes. So why you think it's special, in this case?*

TINA: *Erm.*

(Anne whispered to Tina.)

JX: *It's just get to, get into your mind, maybe.*

TINA: *I don't, erm-*

JX: *OK. Kate?*

KATE: *There's a lesson what I found which is special, which is art. 'Cos you never know what you're gonna do. Whatever it is, it's always fun.*

JX: *Ah, yes.*

TINA: *'Cos when we did patterns and we was- (Anne whispered to Kate.)*

ANNE: *We did about Titania and Bottom.*

TINA: *Yeah, and we had to draw the Titania and Bottom. It was really hard and some people didn't actually get to do it 'cos-*

ANNE: *'Cos we were doing about 'A midsummer night's dream'. And we had to draw these people called Titania and Bottom. 'Cos they fell in love because this evil man put this potion -*

TINA: *Into Titania's eye and the first person she saw was Bottom and then she fell in love with him.*

ANNE: *Because the evil man put a donkey's head on him. She, they lie down together, so in the morning, Titania heard him, wake up going 'Eeyor' (K giggled), and so she wake up and that's the first living thing she saw. So she fell in love with him But the man put the, took the potion out of the eye, so she would fall in love with him.*

JX: *Mm. Yes. So, do you think other lessons you just know what you will do?*

ANNE: *Yeah, because we like-*

TINA: *'Cos we got this board, what says like literacy or science or -*

KATE: *Maths.*

ANNE: *But sometimes we don't know what we were doing because erm, in our -*

TINA: *It just says, art.*

ANNE: *It changes.*

TINA: *Yeah.*

JX: *Ah, but you think art is different, because-. Like Kate, you said, because you said, because you don't know what you will do, but for other lessons you will know, more or less (K—Sometimes) know that.*

KATE: *'Cos sometimes we like doing something for a week, like we're doing book review for a week.*

TINA: *And it changes in a week, and it changes and changes, so-*

JX: *OK, maybe we can do another, it's more like an activity. So, write on this one, start afresh. [K giggled] I'd like to, if you can, it's like use your brain. List out the rules as many as possible in the class.*

ANNE: *So, like the rules we have in class or the whole school.*

JX: *Yeah, in class or sometimes you can make it more specific, like, in what situation, you should or should not, you're allowed or not allowed. Just think, just reflect your own life in class and list as many as possible.*

(Girls scribbled.)

JX: *And then maybe we can discuss it. Maybe you can think, in normal days, in the classroom, or some special things like, assembly, that you may have some, you may need to know some rules, I mean, to be nice.*

JX: *Is it easy or not easy?*

ANNE: *It's quite easy because we do the rules like the stuff, we get told off with, like shouting out and swearing, and hitting, and shoving, and being mean.*

JX: *So, what are -, what does rule mean?*

ANNE: *It means-*

KATE: *It's what you should do in the time.*

TINA: *The rule is don't do stuff what you shouldn't be doing and don't do stuff what you should be doing. Like you shouldn't be shouting out or throwing pencils. So you should be doing what you are supposed to be doing.*

JX: *Is it told by the teacher or not?*

TINA: *Yeah.*

JX: *When he told you that you should or should not? Erm, or it's on a piece of paper? Is there anything like written out, or have been written here.*

TINA: *Well, we have got photocopied paper with some rules, like don't throw pencils or don't shout out on when other people are talking.*

JX: *Ah, where is it, this photocopy?*

TINA: *Erm-*

KATE: *It's by the door.*

JX: *By the door? Ah, I didn't know. Anne's made eight of them now.*

(Girls looked at each other's paper.)

JX: *You have another two minutes.*

ANNE: *What? To write the rules down?*

KATE: *Yeah.*

JX: *Yeah, the time is up. How time flies. Maybe I took more time on, you know, doing the things.*

KATE: *We just managed ten past, do we?*

ANNE: *It's twelve o'clock.*

JX: *So, ten past twelve you'll have lunch, right? Yes. OK. So, Anne, do you think you nearly finished? Or you can take your time.*

(Girls checked with each other)

ANNE: *I've done mine.*

TINA: *I've done mine.*

KATE: *Yeah.*

JX: *Really? Let me see, just in case- Mm.*

KATE: *Can we show and tell you all?*

ANNE: *Yeah.*

JX: *So, which one? Oh, this is not.*

KATE: *Can we tell you our friends?*

ANNE: *Can we read these out?*

JX: *Yes, I'd like to, because-*

ANNE: *Don't call out. Don't swear. Don't hit. Don't shout. Don't be mean. Don't scribble on your work. Don't throw pencils and don't shout.*

JX: *Mm.*

TINA: *Don't shout out when people are talking. Don't throw pencils. Don't hit. Don't swear. Don't rip pages.*

KATE: *Listen to the teacher. Don't walk about. No fighting. Don't shout. Don't throw things around. Don't swear. And in school dinners don't throw your food. Don't tear pages out of your books.*

JX: *Oh, how to say that, like those 'don't', how you know this, don't-*

ANNE: *Erm. (She began to speak in a funny voice) You just don't do it, you are not allowed to do it. (Kate burst out giggling.)*

JX: *So, how do you know you're not allowed?*

TINA: *There's-*

ANNE: *Because we made up the class rules all together with all the school, with all the class and -*

JX: *Ah, so, it's part -*

KATE: *And also if we did do it, we'd get told off and so we know not to do it again.*

ANNE: *So we know, it's a 'no', 'no', 'no'.*

JX: *Ah, yes. And, do you know like other children, do this?*

ANNE: *Yeah, because some of the people swear sometimes. Some of the people hit and shove and call out. They be mean. They shout. They throw pencils. And they scribble on work. So, all of mine they do.*

JX: *Ah, so, after they did this, what will happen?*

TINA: *They'll go on the bad board and they'll sometimes -*

ANNE: *They'll go time out and see Mr. Evans (She twisted the tone of 'Evans').*

TINA: *Or they, and the teachers might send a letter to the, erm, to their parents.*

ANNE: *Because if they go time out about three times, then they have a note to their parents. So -*

JX: *Oh, so, is this very serious? I mean, to you?*

KATE, ANNE and TINA: *Yeah.*

ANNE: *'Cos we like we're kind of good girls in class, we don't really- (K giggled)*

TINA: *We don't really do these sort of stuff. Sometimes boys, they-, but not all the boys.*

ANNE: *We call out, sometimes.*

KATE: *We talk.*

ANNE: *Yeah, sometimes we talk. Sometimes we fight each other (Her voice gradually decreased to very low).*

JX: *So, what happen, then?*

ANNE: *Erm, just like, (Anne raised her voice, dramatising) 'Don't do that, Anne', 'Don't do that, Tina', (Kate burst into laugh) 'Don't do that, Kate, any more.'*

(JX laughed.)

KATE: *And also once when it was lunch time, the boy were throwing at us and they blamed all of us when it wasn't our fault and so-*

JX: *Oh, yeah.*

KATE: *Also there was someone throwing yogurt.*

ANNE: *Yeah. There's this girl called Vicky Smith and she always knocks us if we have yogurt.*

TINA: *Yeah, 'cos one time she knocked Paula and Paula's jumpers and arms, trousers got yogurt. So she had to wipe it with this-*

JX: *So, what's the -, the last, maybe the last question I'd like to know. What's, how to say that, what's the difference between boys and girls, in the classroom?*

ANNE: *They got different personalities and-*

KATE: *The boys always get told off.*

TINA and ANNE: *Yeah.*

ANNE: *They've got different personalities to us. 'Cos like 'We're good girls' (She acted as how girls claim themselves), 'We-.'*

KATE: *And the boys are bad.*

(JX burst into laugh, and Kate giggled)

TINA: *And they do something that they shouldn't be doing, like calling out and girls just sit nicely and we, and the teachers put us on the good board. We don't do stuff what we shouldn't be doing.*

JX: *Do you think, erm, do you like this?*

ANNE: *Erm, Yeah.*

KATE: *I like this sometimes.*

JX: *Do you know how boys think of this?*

ANNE: *I think the boys don't really like it, 'cos they always go like this 'Woo—'*

(JX burst into laugh.)

ANNE: *They go 'Woo--- (She dramatised. Kate burst out laughing)*

JX: *But why, why you, basically you do differently from boys?*

ANNE: *Because girls are better than boys sometimes and- (K—Always) and we just don't have much to talk to (She giggled) as boys do, so-*

JX: *Ah, OK. Good. Erm, what time is it now, Kate?*

ANNE: *Ten, five past.*

JX: *Five past. OK. Oh, I think I have everything now. Noise? Maybe one thing. Do you feel, what are the noises in the classroom?*

ANNE: *(Anne made fun) 'Babaa-' (Kate giggled), like, funny noises, like shouting, and like, they always call names like (Anne acted out the whispering calling...) 'Tina', 'Kate', 'Anne'.*

JX: *Who, who call names?*

ANNE: *Erm-.*

KATE: *Sometimes the children, they want to talk to us.*

ANNE: *Yeah, the girl sometimes. Because the boys don't really want to do, want anything to do with girls.*

KATE: *And also...*

TINA: *'Cos girls normally put their hands up and boys-*

ANNE: *Because there's noise normally like 'Bmbmbm—'* (She acted out the whispering talking)

KATE: *Also when we were on the carpet, sometimes when teacher is talking, someone is trying talk to you, but not actually saying. I can hear them whispering and then the teacher goes 'mmmmm'.*

(Anne acted out the whispering with Tina)

KATE: *Yeah, like that. But sometimes they just mouth the words. The word sounds like -, like you do -.*

TINA: *Sometimes they shout, sometimes they, sometimes they whisper.*

JX: *Ah, those are the noises.*

ANNE: *Mm, 'cos like sometimes I mouth them out to people like. (She acted out the quiet calling by exaggerate the movement of mouth.*

KATE: *You do it especially, you do it to me mostly, don't you?*

ANNE: *Yeah. (K giggled.)*

JX: *But those are very low. Do you think those are noise?*

ANNE: *No, not really. But, sometimes you don't mean to get like 'Tina' (She acted out calling out unintentionally.)*

TINA: *Well, in the dinner hall, some dinner ladies bang the cups on the tables like, erm-*

KATE: *Bang the cutlery.*

JX: *Ah, that's the noise.*

KATE: *To keep us quiet.*

TINA: *Cos we're like the noisiest class in this school.*

JX: *What's the biggest noise you ever heard, in the school?*

TINA: *Oscar shouting really loud.*

KATE: *Yeah, we can hear him most of all.*

ANNE: *I don't really think, I think that Oscar's quite loud all the time. Because-*

KATE: *Like at playtime, if someone accidentally, well, if he trips up, he always goes to the first person he finds. He's all shouting about and saying, 'I'll kill you' and things like that.*

ANNE: *Yeah. He always. 'I'll threaten you'. 'Cos he always like threatens us. It's like (She acted out)*

JX: *So, that's the biggest noise.*

(Kate giggled.)

TINA and ANNE: *Yeah.*

KATE: *I think he is the person who can make the loudest noise out of all the world.*

JX: *Do you, do you feel any, like the sound of a pen, fall on the floor, or anything like that?*

ANNE: *Yeah, we always get told off, if a pen hits the floor.*

JX: *Why?*

ANNE: *Because-*

TINA: *We have to pick up.*

ANNE: *Yeah, he always says, 'Go and pick it up, Tina', (She acted out and dramatised a little bit to make it frightening) 'Cos he like-*

KATE: *He's the teacher though.*

JX: *Why, why?*

ANNE: *Because if - I always have this pencil. (She spoke to Tina...) Can I just borrow for a second? (She acted out dropping her pencil) And I went, hang on, that did roll...*

JX: *Because it makes big noise or what?*

ANNE: *'Kate, pick that up now. Don't throw pencils.'* (She acted out the teacher's shouting.)

JX: *Who, who said that? (K giggled.)*

KATE: *And it's the teacher. 'Cos that's what he always does.*

ANNE: *People really, 'cos if I had a pencil (She acted out throwing it.), and I was just spinning it round like that, and he'll just take it off me.*

KATE: (Giggled) *Anne, just pick it up. (Acted out the teacher.) Don't throw pencils.*

ANNE: *Yeah, that's why.*

JX: *You mean, you mean the friend will call you, or the teacher.*

ANNE: *No, the teacher calls us. Say that, if we'll be naughty, he'll call us to pick it up.*

[End of the recording.]

