The good language class: Teacher perceptions

Rosemary Senior

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THE GOOD LANGUAGE CLASS:

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences,

Edith Cowan University

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative, descriptive study of group processes in classes of adult language learners, viewed from the perspective of practising teachers. The study has an internal narrative which takes the reader through the process of the research, from the initial question raised by a casual classroom conversation to the discussion chapter which questions a number of assumptions underlying current English language teaching practices within western educational contexts.

The study falls into two distinct phases. The first phase uses the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis to integrate the perceptions of 28 experienced language teachers into the following theory: teachers judge the quality of their classes in terms of the degree to which they function as cohesive groups. The second phase uses the social-psychological framework of class cohesion to explore the perceptions of eight language teachers concerning a range of everyday behaviours and events occurring within their classes. The data were gathered through classroom observations and extended weekly teacher interviews and were supplemented by information from student interviews.

The findings suggest that much of the teachers' classroom decision-making is governed by a desire to develop and maintain a spirit of social harmony within their class groups. The teachers, it seems, not only judge the success of language classes in terms of levels of cohesion, but also consider that cohesive class atmospheres are a desirable precondition for successful classroom language practice. The students, however, while readily identifying and valuing cohesive class atmospheres, prioritise language learning over the development of class cohesion and do not consider that the two necessarily go hand in hand.
This study is original in that it:

• generates a theory from the beliefs of practising teachers and uses the theory as a framework for the exploration and interpretation of a wide range of classroom behaviours;

• documents the process of developing a theory, showing how large quantities of unstructured data can be integrated and interpreted;

• describes the kinds of classroom behaviours and events with which all teachers are familiar but which have seldom been foregrounded in applied linguistics research;

• provides an explanation for the many spontaneous and apparently unpedagogic decisions that language teachers routinely make on a daily basis;

• views classroom behaviours and events through the eyes of teachers, but suggests that their viewpoint may be only one window on the reality of language classrooms; and

• casts doubt on certain aspects of current English language teaching orthodoxy.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature

Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the help of many people. First I would like to thank all the teachers who participated in the study and who offered me the benefit of their insights and understandings. I am particularly grateful to the eight teachers who took part in the second phase of the study and who were prepared, not only to be observed and interviewed for the duration of their courses, but also to share with me in a frank and open manner the highs and the lows of their daily teaching lives. I would also like to acknowledge the help of a number of additional teachers from a range of settings whose brains I have picked in my attempt to understand more fully teachers' conceptualisations of their classes.

Second, I would like to acknowledge the contribution that a number of individuals and groups of people have played in enabling me to complete this project. Dr Vera Irurita, Adjunct Professor at the School of Nursing, Curtin University, gave me an invaluable introduction to the grounded theory approach and was kind enough to read Chapters 1 and 2. The Postgraduate Grounded Theory Group in the School of Nursing provided a stimulating context for the development of ideas and Clare Harris was a particularly useful sounding board as the theory began to emerge. The staff and research students in the weekly staff/postgraduate meetings in the Department of Language Education at Edith Cowan University gave me useful critical feedback on aspects of my work for the entire duration of the project. Steve Saxton generously shared with me insights from his own work on very small groups of language learners. In a challenging year of the study Jan Gray and her narratology interest group provided me with welcome support and encouragement. A member of that group, Dr Michelle Griffiths, acted as a role model and provided useful comments on aspects of thesis organisation. Members of the Centre for Applied Language and Literacy Research at Edith Cowan University, especially Samantha Vandaford, stimulated
my thinking with regard to the discussion chapter. Romana Senic kindly translated material into Serbo-Croatian and helped me to interpret student answers. Linda and Robert Jaunzems worked tirelessly to produce all the figures, and Linda used her expert computing skills to format the thesis.

My most heartfelt thanks, however, go to my supervisor Professor Mike Breen for his depth of knowledge and consummate skill as a supervisor, knowing when to let me have my head and when to rein me in, but always pushing me on and always exacting the highest of standards. I would also like to thank my associate supervisor Dr Caroline Barratt-Pugh, who joined us to form a harmonious threesome until a new set of priorities took precedence in her life. Finally I wish to thank my husband Clive who, knowing what it was like to do a PhD, was prepared to support me throughout the process. His unique brand of humorous scepticism, together with both editing and culinary skills, were particularly helpful in the final stages of the project.
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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Migrant Education Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASLPR</td>
<td>Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Communicative Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELICOS</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>The term &quot;the former Yugoslavia&quot; has been used wherever possible to refer to the country of origin of the students from Bosnia. This has been done because the students in the classes were a mix of Moslems and Christians (Catholic and Orthodox), and the more restricted term &quot;Bosnian&quot; implies that a person is of the Moslem faith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OET</td>
<td>Occupational English Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People's Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA Cert. TEFLA</td>
<td>Royal Society of Arts Certificate in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA Dip. TEFLA</td>
<td>Royal Society of Arts Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEFL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>TESL</td>
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<td>TOEFL</td>
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PART I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY
 CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Identification of the problem

Anybody who has done any kind of classroom teaching knows that no two classes are alike, and that each class develops its own unique character. Teachers also know that they feel differently about different classes: some classes are a joy to teach, while others are not. Not surprisingly teachers like teaching "good" classes, finding them both pleasurable and rewarding. Some teachers even get a rush of excitement when activities with good classes appear to go particularly well. Conversely, teachers dislike teaching classes that they find unsatisfactory. Teachers of "bad" classes wake up in the morning with a heavy feeling in the pit of the stomach, dreading the number of hours they will have to spend in the classroom. They have difficulty summoning up the enthusiasm to teach energetically, and find themselves counting the weeks till the end of term.

Such a stark contrast in the perceived quality of classes seems worthy of investigation. Why is it that teachers come to feel so strongly about their classes, and how is it that they can say with such assurance that certain classes are better than others? I decided that I would use the fact that practising language teachers appear to share tacit understandings about what constitutes a good class as a starting point for my research.\(^1\) It had always intrigued me, as I sat at a staffroom table listening to a group of colleagues chatting about their classes, that everyone was in agreement as to what a good class was, yet nobody ever described one. I had the feeling that the teachers did not consider it necessary to elaborate further because they assumed that their colleagues

\(^1\) Stake (1978) refers to Polyani's distinction between propositional knowledge which can readily be cast into language form, and tacit knowledge such as intuitions, apprehensions or feelings which are somehow "known."
shared the same beliefs and assumptions about the quality of language classes as they did.

The focus of the study

This study is the story of my research journey as I probed deeper and deeper into social processes within language classrooms, not only listening to teachers describing a wide range of daily occurrences, but also observing classes as they developed their own unique characters. It is a study of classroom behaviours that are so commonplace that they are assumed to be unimportant, or so fleeting and ephemeral that they sometimes operate below the threshold of teacher consciousness: lessons suspended while someone attempts to swot an insect; the class crowding round to view someone's holiday photos; general laughter at an unintentionally funny response; students catching each other's eye and making a silent pact to work together for a forthcoming language activity; students awaiting their teacher's reaction to a habitually late student who is late yet again. These were the kinds of classroom events that interested me, because I suspected that they might in some way be linked to teachers' perceptions of the quality of the teaching-learning process in language classes. I wanted, however, not only to record such occurrences, but also to understand their significance. How were behaviours and events such as these - apparently unrelated to the actual business of teaching - linked to teachers' perceptions of the quality of their classes?

Selection of the research method

When I began my study I had little understanding of what classroom-based research was all about. Having completed a faculty-wide research methods course, rather than a subject-specific one, I knew relatively little about the structured and predefined methods generally favoured by applied linguists to investigate classroom processes. I simply knew that I had formulated a research question, and that I needed to
identify and then familiarise myself with whichever method would give me the best chance of answering it.

I therefore looked around and decided to find out more about something called "grounded theory," an approach which many people seemed to be talking about, especially in connection with qualitative data analysis computer packages. I understood that the grounded theory approach was a qualitative research method that used a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively-derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). I learnt that grounded theory development procedures, if diligently followed, could lead to the generation of theory at grassroots level. This sounded interesting, especially since I had always imagined theory development was only done by eminent scholars such as Abraham Maslow, Noam Chomsky or Leon Festinger. However, I had read Snow (1973), who outlines grades of theory ranging from high-level axiomatic theory to formative hypotheses. Perhaps if I followed the steps advocated by grounded theorists I would be able to develop my own theory which would explain why certain language teachers felt the way they did about their classes.² By now I was beginning to understand that theories were powerful tools: if you managed to develop one, you could then answer higher-level "why?" questions, rather than restricting yourself to lower-level "what?" questions. I was aware that I was moving into uncharted territory, but my supervisor seemed supportive (or perhaps he just did a good job of hiding his scepticism from me).

The term "grounded theory" was coined by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, in a book entitled The Discovery of Grounded Theory. This book outlined a set of procedures for analysing unstructured data, commonly known as the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis. Both Glaser and Strauss refined these procedures in subsequent books which, despite advocating the same basic approach to the analysis of qualitative data, differed in a range of details (Glaser, 1978, Strauss, 1987). In 1990 a book entitled Basics of Qualitative Research by Strauss and

² According to Snow's (1973) categorisation I worked out that my theory would fall into the category of a C-grade conceptual theory (p. 85).
Corbin appeared. This book seemed to be what everyone had been waiting for: a book which outlined grounded theory development procedures so clearly that it seemed that, provided you followed the prescribed steps (as you would an instruction manual), success would be assured and a theory would emerge. Unfortunately life is not quite that simple. Indeed, critics were beginning to bemoan the fact that not all grounded theory studies were of a uniformly high standard (as is no doubt the case with many research projects, regardless of the methodology used). I was beginning to realise that, with grounded theory development, it was particularly important to gain a thorough understanding of the principles underlying the procedures.³

I knew that Glaser and Strauss had done their pioneering work in hospitals, with books such as Awareness of Dying (1965) and Anguish: A Case History of a Dying Trajectory (Strauss & Glaser, 1977) and that in the U.S. there was a well-established tradition of qualitative research in the health sciences. I therefore approached the School of Nursing in my own university and discovered that a series of postgraduate seminars on grounded theory development were shortly to begin. It seemed that in Australia, too, nurses who were undertaking postgraduate study did not wish to deal in numbers, preferring to select research topics which allowed them to understand more fully a particular aspect of the process of caring for others. I considered that there were certain commonalities between nurses and language teachers. Both groups consisted of practitioners with a wide range of practical expertise, yet in neither subject-area did the experience of being a practitioner in the field seem to be particularly well documented or understood. However, it seemed to me that the two professions had somewhat different attitudes towards research methods. My general impression was that researchers in the field of nursing were encouraged to go down a qualitative path if they so wished, and were given support with the research approaches suitable for use within the qualitative paradigm. It seemed, however, that researchers in the field of applied linguistics were being offered a more limited choice, perhaps because within the

³ For an overview of the origins, purposes, uses and contributions of grounded theory methodology see Strauss and Corbin (1994).
applied linguistics research tradition there was a narrower definition of what constituted good research.

The principles of grounded theory development

I attended workshops in the school of nursing for a full year, on a weekly basis for the first semester and on a fortnightly basis for the second. During this time I worked closely with a group of nurses undertaking either masters or doctoral studies, examining one another's data and discussing amongst ourselves the principles of grounded theory development. I came to understand that the decision to adopt a grounded theory approach meant abandoning a number of assumptions about the nature of research. These included: the notion that hypotheses should be formed before the research begins, the notion that research should be carried out within a predetermined theoretical framework, the notion that data collection should be completed before data analysis begins, and the notion that data, like well-behaved children, should obediently remain in the categories developed for them.

When I came to gather the data I knew that I must abandon any preconceived notions about what I might find and concentrate above all on what the teachers were telling me. This meant that I could not follow any rigid interview schedule, but rather, needed to let each teacher share with me whatever insights and observations were foremost in their minds. It also meant that I needed to transcribe everything that everyone said for the simple reason that, until I knew what I was looking for, I did not know whereabouts in the interviews I might find relevant data. Finally, I understood that, if I was going to build up a cumulative, composite picture of what all the teachers were telling me (and so highlight the similarities between what they were saying, rather than the differences), I would need to conduct the interviews in an ongoing manner, transcribing and analysing each one before I proceeded to conduct the next.

Initially I found it difficult to follow these essential precepts of grounded theory development. They sounded simple, but it was often tempting not to adhere to them for
the sake of saving time. However, despite its labour-intensiveness I fell in love with grounded theory, mainly because it forced me to think in different kinds of ways. I liked the way that it encouraged researchers to alternate between inductive and deductive logic, by using imagination one minute and logico-deductive reasoning the next. I loved the way that it gave me permission to explore through the use of images and analogies, to draw crazy diagrams, and to write fanciful memos to myself about what I thought was going on in the data. I loved the challenge of creating hierarchies of categories, and of scrabbling around in my dictionary or thesaurus to find superordinate terms which could then encompass all the features of all the subordinate categories. In sum, I felt comfortable with the methodology and felt that I could make it work for me.

The shape of the study and the research questions

This study is a developmental one, with two distinct data collection phases and three distinct periods of data analysis. I will now outline the two data collection phases, together with the research questions which accompanied each phase.

Phase One

The objective of the first phase of the study was to develop a theory which would explain why language teachers were so clear in their minds that certain classes were somehow intrinsically better than others. The research question was framed in the following way:

What is a good language class?

In order to answer this question I interviewed 28 teachers working in a single educational setting for approximately 45 minutes each. I used the teachers' written responses to the open-ended questions, "What is a good lesson?" and "What is a good class?" as the starting point for the interviews. I allowed the interviews to run freely

---

4 The reason that I gave the teachers two questions (one at the top of one sheet of paper and one at the top of another) was because I was unsure at the outset of the study of the relationship between these two.
and found myself encouraging each teacher to talk about whatever interested them most. The topics we covered, some of which appeared to be only tenuously linked to the notion of good classes, ranged from how teachers considered they should dress to what happened when teachers ran into students three years later and couldn't remember their names. Like a magpie I collected and transcribed everything because I considered that anything that anybody said might further my understanding of the phenomenon of good classes.

I likened this phase of the study to doing a jigsaw puzzle without having the picture on the lid of the box as a guide. I collected a vast amount of jumbled-up pieces of information, but did not know for a long time either how they fitted together or what picture they would eventually form. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) say, "You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 32). Gradually, after following the grounded theory development procedures outlined above (and becoming so compulsive about the process that on one occasion I stopped my car by the side of the road in order to capture on paper a fleeting thought), a certain picture emerged. Ironically, once I knew what the picture was, I realised that it had been staring me in the face right from the very first interview. Early on, however, because I did not know what I was looking for, I had been unable to see what was there.

The development of the theory (which will be described in Chapter 2) meant that the first phase of the study was complete: I had answered my first research question and now understood what, in the eyes of the teachers, a good class was. It seemed, however, that a further step needed to be taken. I considered that I now needed to do the following: (i) establish whether the kinds of things that the teachers said were happening in their classrooms were indeed happening, and (ii) understand the significance of the events that the teachers were describing for the transformation (or non-transformation) of their classes into good classes.
Phase Two

Because the findings from the first phase of the study had indicated that the teachers judged the quality of their classes against social-psychological as opposed to pedagogic criteria, I knew that I needed to set up the second phase of the study in such a way that I could examine the classroom behaviours which surrounded the joint processes of teaching and learning, rather than the processes themselves. Metaphorically speaking I wanted to focus on the backdrop against which the drama of teaching would unfold, rather than on the action taking place on centre stage.

For the second phase of the study I decided to work closely with eight teachers and their classes, documenting the social processes occurring within the classes from the first lesson of each course (when the teachers and the students met one another for the first time) to the very last lesson (after which the classes disbanded and everyone went their separate ways). Because the teachers in the first phase had indicated that the transformation of classes into good classes was a developmental process, I decided to gather the data by observing the classes and by interviewing the teachers on a weekly basis for the duration of the courses. I also decided, for triangulation purposes, to interview as many students as I could from all the classes.

Because my intention was to document the social-psychological development of each class (using the theoretical framework which had by now been generated), I framed my research question in the following way:

What factors are related to the social-psychological development of the classes being studied?

In the methods chapter (Chapter 3) I will outline in detail how this phase of the study was designed. I will also describe how I eventually reached a point where I abandoned my initial plan of documenting the social processes occurring within each class individually (thus forming eight discrete case studies) in favour of integrating all the data into a single overall developmental picture. I was able to do this once I understood that, despite the complexity of the data, there were striking similarities between the
perceptions of all eight teachers regarding the social processes occurring within their classes.

In the methods chapter I will also describe how I reached a point where I realised that the study would be stronger if, instead of taking the teachers' perceptions at face value, I assumed a more distant and impartial stance. Once I realigned my own position in this way I found myself able to evaluate critically what the teachers were saying and to identify ways in which the students' perceptions differed from those of their teachers. This shift of focus made it necessary to reformulate the second research question. It now reads as follows:

What kinds of social relationships do the teachers perceive to be of value in their classrooms and to what extent do the students' perceptions coincide with those of the teachers?

Definition of terms

The framework for the study is the teacher-generated construct of class cohesion. For the purpose of this study I shall use the term "class cohesion" in the way that it was understood by the teachers, who took it to mean the situation that occurred when a critical mass of students in their classes appeared to them to be operating in a socially unified and harmonious manner.6

Because the study focuses on teachers' perceptions of reality rather than on any precise, external, measurable reality, I do not intend the term class cohesion to be synonymous with the technical term "cohesiveness" as used by researchers within the discipline of social psychology. In the technical literature operational definitions of cohesiveness vary according to the focus of the investigation (Shaw, 1981, p. 214). As Bany and Johnson (1975) point out, while operational definitions are practical and

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5 Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 58) explain that qualitative research design is flexible and that qualitative researchers commonly modify and remold their plans as they proceed.

6 I have borrowed the term "critical mass" from particle physics, where it is used to refer to the minimum quantity of fissile material necessary for a chain-reaction to take place. The term seems to reflect reasonably well the social-psychological phenomenon of the power of group norms to prevail over the individual.
useful for purposes of measurement, such definitions of necessity do not include intangibles, which must be determined by inference (p. 73).

When describing the process of becoming cohesive the teachers tended to use conversational language, saying that classes "gelled," "bonded," "knitted," "clicked" or "took off." When talking about the construct of cohesion during the course of their interviews the teachers used a wide range of terms and expressions, including the following: "team spirit," "unity within the class," "a sense of one-ness," "a sense of ensemble," "a warm sea of people," "no isolated islands," "no friction," "camaraderie within the group," "a feeling of rapport," "that 'we' relationship" and so on. These terms reflect Corey and Corey's definition of group cohesion as "a sense of togetherness, or community, within a group" (1997, p. 150), or the following definition of group cohesiveness provided by Vaughan and Hogg (1995):

One of the most basic properties of a group is its cohesiveness (solidarity, esprit de corps, team spirit, morale) - the way it "hangs together" as a tightly knit, self-contained entity characterised by uniformity of conduct and mutual support among members. (p. 151)

This description reflects an early definition of a group by Knowles and Knowles, quoted by Howe and Schwartzberg (1986), which states that groups have a "group consciousness," with the members thinking of themselves as having a "collective perception of unity" (p. 6).

Although I have referred to "cohesion" or "class cohesion" throughout the study I have also described the construct in additional ways according to the immediate context and for the sake of variety. For example, in Chapter 6 (the first of the core data analysis chapters) I tend to talk about the teachers establishing "a cohesive classroom climate" or "an atmosphere of social harmony," whereas in other chapters I have used terms such as "a feeling of unity" or "a sense of friendly intimacy." In every case I am referring to the same phenomenon: the construct of cohesion as understood by the teachers.
Writing style and use of footnotes

One of my objectives in writing up the study was to present it in such a way that anyone reading it could understand the development of my thinking as the study progressed. With this aim in mind I decided to use a first person narrative style whenever possible, notably when describing the research process itself. The reader will therefore find that the majority of Parts One and Three are written in the first person, while Part Two of the study (which contains the data analysis chapters) is written in the third person.

In order not to interrupt the narrative flow of the text I decided to place in footnotes any references or asides which were peripheral to the central argument. I decided to create footnotes at the bottom of each page because I felt that these would be more easily accessible to the reader than notes at the end of each chapter. My decision to keep some of the references out of the main body of the text was inspired by Lightfoot (1983), who makes regular use of notes. I was also influenced by Phillips and Pugh (1994) who, in a manual on how to succeed in obtaining a PhD, quote an apocryphal PhD supervisor who apparently repeatedly told his students that he expected to be supplied with a thesis which would flow so well and would make such engrossing reading that he would take it to bed where he would find himself unable to put it down (p. 64).

The organisation of the study

The study contains thirteen chapters and is divided into three parts: the introduction (Chapters 1 to 5), the data (Chapters 6 to 11), and the conclusions (Chapters 12 and 13).

The present chapter has formed the introduction to the study, by setting the scene, identifying the research questions and explaining the developmental nature of the study. Chapter 2 presents the rationale for the study, describing how the theoretical framework was developed and then proceeding to locate the study in relation to other
classroom-based research in the field of language teaching. Chapter 3 describes how the second phase of the study was set up, explaining the reasoning behind the various decisions which were made along the way. Chapter 4, the final chapter in Part One of the study, outlines the context within which the data were gathered and presents a composite picture of the teachers and students who participated in the study.

Part Two comprises the seven data analysis chapters. The first of these, Chapter 5, describes the teachers' values and shows how the teachers from both phases of the study held similar sets of beliefs about the nature of good language classes. The following six chapters form the core of the study and present the teachers' descriptions of the strategies that they used to develop and maintain what they saw to be social cohesion within their classes. Because of the complexity of the social processes being analysed I have integrated into these two chapters (i) the opinions of the students (especially where they provided additional perspectives, or ones which differed from those of their teachers), and (ii) a discussion of the social processes being focused upon. Chapter 11, the final chapter of Part Two of the study, presents the teachers' overviews of what they considered were the key factors relating to the evolution of their class groups into ones that they considered satisfactory.

Part Three of the study consists of just two chapters. Chapter 12 restates the research questions, outlines the major findings of the study and then proceeds to discuss them. Chapter 13, the final chapter, presents a summary of the nature and objectives of the study, outlines its significance and limitations, and concludes by making suggestions for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this first chapter has been to provide a general introduction to the study. It began by describing how the initial research question was embedded in an experience which is common to all classroom teachers. It then proceeded to explain how a research method suitable for answering the question was identified, and to
describe the salient features of that method. The chapter went on to outline the different phases of the research (together with the research questions relating to each phase), to provide a definition of terms, to explain how the research would be written up, and concluded by providing an overview of the organisation of the thesis.

The purpose of Chapter 2 will be to show (i) how the theoretical framework was developed, (ii) how research findings from the discipline of social psychology were used to inform the study, and (iii) where the study is located in relation to classroom-based research in the field of English language teaching.
CHAPTER 2

THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Overview

This chapter contains four sections. The first section describes how, by following grounded theory development procedures, I was able to develop a theory which explains why language teachers define certain classes as good. The second section describes my exploration of the social-psychological literature as I sought to identify findings which would enable me to interpret the significance of the kinds of classroom behaviours that I anticipated would be described in the second phase of the study. In the third section I locate the present study within the context of classroom-based research, showing how, despite the fact that the topic is relatively novel, both the method and the general focus are in line with current directions in applied linguistics research. The final section of the chapter outlines the key features of the study.

The development of the theory

As indicated in Chapter 1, the starting point for the study was my desire to understand what teachers meant when they said that they had "good" classes. The goal for the first phase of the study was therefore to develop a theory which would explain why teachers perceived that certain classes were more satisfactory than others. In order to develop the theory I followed grounded theory development procedures as outlined in Chenitz and Swanson (1986), by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and by writers in a range of other books on methods of qualitative enquiry. I will now describe the procedures that I followed to develop the theory.
Selecting the sample

It is necessary for researchers working within the qualitative paradigm (whose goal is to discover, to understand and to gain insights), to select a sample on the basis of whoever is likely to supply the richest information (Merriam, 1988, Patton, 1990). Grounded theorists call this kind of sampling "theoretical sampling," because it encapsulates the notion that sampling is based on the need to collect data in an ongoing manner in order to develop the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). I chose to use as my sample the teachers who worked in a particular language teaching institution and to gain additional insights if and when necessary from teachers working in other institutions. I made this decision because I had easy access to these informants and considered that because of their varied backgrounds and teaching experience they would be able to provide me with a range of different insights. As indicated in Table 1, many of the teachers had been educated and/or had worked in countries other than Australia and had experienced learning a second language. The majority were over 30 years of age and had taught in a variety of different institutions and contexts. Although they all had degrees and teaching qualifications, the English language teacher training backgrounds of the teachers varied considerably.
Table 1  Teachers' backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n = 28: 21 female, 7 male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Range:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
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<tr>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Country of childhood and education:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia, Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Training:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General teaching qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA Dip. TESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA Dip. TEFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters degree completed or in progress</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Years of teaching EFL/ESL:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Experience of teaching EFL/ESL in institutions other than a language centre:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private language school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE or equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in a total of 18 different countries across all five continents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Language spoken by teachers in the study (with varying degrees of fluency):</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian dialects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The institution in which the teachers worked ran three separate intensive English language programmes, which meant that most of the teachers had taught on a variety of courses with different syllabus types and at a variety of different levels.\(^7\)

**Collecting the data**

I began the study by providing the 28 teachers with an open-ended questionnaire in the form of an A4 piece of paper on which I invited responses (in paragraphs, sentences or in note form) to the following questions: (i) What is your definition of a good class?; and (ii) What is your definition of a good lesson?\(^8\) I then interviewed 20 of the teachers in turn for approximately 45 minutes each, using their handwritten notes as a starting point for their interview.\(^9\) My interviews can best be described as "informal conversational interviews" (Patton, 1990), "free-flowing, open-ended interviews" (Murphy, 1980), or as "conversations between two trusting parties" (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). Mindful of Patton's exhortation to "go with the flow" (1990, p. 282), I was particularly careful to let the informants guide the direction of the interviews and not to put ideas into their heads. I used a variety of questioning techniques, including questions in which I advanced a tentative interpretation of what the informants had been saying and then asked the informants to confirm, deny or qualify what I had said and to expand further (Merriam, 1988, p. 80).

\(^7\) The institution ran three separate programmes: (i) a range of ten-week intensive English language courses for overseas students (ELICOS courses) at a variety of levels (ranging from pre-intermediate to advanced); (ii) a six-month bridging programme for students who had already gained admission to the university; and (iii) a six-month foundation studies programme for students wishing to enter the university. Each programme had a different syllabus framework, the ELICOS courses using coursebooks as frameworks, the bridging programme using a skills-based syllabus, and the foundation studies programme using a process syllabus organised around specific themes.

\(^8\) I asked these two questions because I was unsure at the outset whether or how these two concepts might be linked in the teachers' minds, and I considered that it was safer to gather data on both.

\(^9\) I tape recorded interviews with the 20 most willing and readily-available teachers and with four additional teachers from other institutions. By the time I had done this I had developed the theory and considered that I had reached saturation, a point when, according to Corbin (1986, p. 93), the field has been thoroughly explored, no further categories emerge from the data, the categories are dense and well developed, and the same patterns are seen repeatedly.
A key precept of grounded theory development is that the data are collected and analysed in an ongoing manner, with insights and tentative hypotheses which have been developed during previous interviews guiding the researcher's line of questioning in subsequent interviews. This is known as the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, Chenitz and Swanson, 1986, Merriam, 1988). The reason that this practice is so important to the theory-building process is because it enables the researcher to develop a composite picture of what all the informants are collectively saying.

**Analysing the data**

Grounded theorists stress the importance of transcribing all interviews accurately and in full, because (i) the significance of what an informant says in a particular part of the interview may not become evident until later, and (ii) so that sections of interviews can be analysed in detail. Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline the progressive stages of analysing the data as (i) open coding, in which the data are broken down (by means of writing associated words all over the interview transcripts); (ii) axial coding, in which the data are put back together in new ways (by considering causes and consequences of events, incidents and happenings, and by relating subcategories to higher-level categories); and (iii) selective coding, in which the central story line gradually emerges as the core (or central) category.

In my case I found that, having open coded the first three interviews, I could move straight to doing axial coding and selective coding with the subsequent interviews. However, I diligently followed all the recommended analytical procedures (relating to axial coding and selective coding), because I knew that these were axiomatic for the development of a dense, robust explanatory theory.

**Documenting emerging ideas and hypotheses**

Grounded theorists stress that it is vital for researchers to capture their speculative thoughts about the data by writing memos to themselves. Schatzman and
Strauss (1973) explain that analytic memos become the vehicle for ordered creativity and as such are likely to become the heart of the researcher's final set of ideas. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that memos "free you to work with ideas using a kind of free association, one idea stimulating another without the constraints of either worrying about logic or staying too close to reality" (p. 200). Merriam (1988, pp. 140-145) explains how grounded theorists alternate between inductive and deductive thinking, developing tentative categories, properties and hypotheses inductively through memos and then testing them against the data. I chose to write three different kinds of memos: (i) theoretical memos, in which I documented my speculative ideas; (ii) storyline memos, in which I progressively summarised and refined my thinking; and (iii) procedural memos, in which I documented the actual research process. For the theoretical memos I was careful to follow the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and write each new idea on a separate piece of paper, adding a heading and the date at the top of each new page.

As I transcribed the teacher interviews I wrote memos on a pad that I always kept beside me, together with reminders about what I might ask the teachers. As I became increasingly familiar with the data I found myself generating increasing numbers of memos and over one intensive four-week period wrote approximately 300. I periodically sorted the memos into categories and as I did so found myself generating further memos which themselves needed sorting. I then created sections in lever-arch files to accommodate the tentatively-grouped memos, writing tentative category headings on file dividers. I understood from grounded theorists that at this stage it did not matter overmuch whether I was dealing with actual data, or with my ideas about the data, because the objective was to develop a framework into which all the data could eventually be placed and which could be adjusted later as necessary. In other words, at this stage I was categorising my thoughts about the data, rather than the data themselves.
Negative cases

Patton (1990, p. 463) explains that once patterns and trends have been identified the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon being studied is increased by considering the instances and cases that do not fit within the general pattern. He suggests that negative cases are useful because they may prove, broaden, change or cast doubt on the hypothesis altogether. I identified two negative cases in the first phase of the study in the form of teachers whose observations appeared to differ from those of their colleagues. One of these teachers wished to talk at length about classroom discipline, while the other defined good language classes purely in terms of the degree to which the students were hardworking. When I analysed the interviews of these two teachers I found explanations which served to strengthen the theory. The first teacher, I decided, was having discipline problems because she did not seem to have the same kind of relationship with her students as the other teachers (who stressed that they encouraged the development of democratic classroom atmospheres) claimed to have with their students, while the second teacher, in talking about building a friendly classroom atmosphere after the interview had officially ended, showed that her values were in line with those of the other teachers after all.

Creating hierarchies of categories

A key element in the process of developing a grounded theory is developing categories with increasing levels of abstraction and placing lower-order categories with concrete headings within higher-order categories with more abstract headings. Categories can then be expanded, amalgamated, collapsed, or placed at higher or lower levels, according to where they seem most naturally to fit. The process of creating hierarchies of categories and then moving them around is made easy by using qualitative data analysis computer packages such as NUDIST.¹⁰ I preferred to create my

¹⁰ NUDIST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising) is a powerful software system for managing, organising and supporting research in qualitative data analysis projects. It was developed by Tom and Lyn Richards at La Trobe University in the early 1990s and is becoming increasingly widely used.
hierarchies manually, by writing headings on separate pieces of card and moving them around physically on a large table. By the time that I had completed the data analysis I found that I had created five separate hierarchies (or index trees to use NUDIST terminology) under the following superordinate headings: (i) class as dynamic group, (ii) conditions for good language classes, (iii) group feeling enhancers, (iv) inhibiting factors, and (v) results of good language classes. The inhibiting factors index tree looked like this:

![Index tree: Inhibiting factors](image)

Figure 2.1  Index tree: Inhibiting factors
I was subsequently able to use the hierarchies as the basis for my overall summary of the findings, which is located in Appendix A.

**Exploring with words**

I had been told in the grounded theory development workshop that there would come a point when I would find myself searching for words to label the more abstract categories that had evolved. I had been informed that grounded theorists frequently found it necessary to create new words, or to use familiar words in unfamiliar contexts, because superordinate terms did not always exist. For example, I created the words "enhancers" and "inhibitors" mentioned above to cover the positive and negative factors that the teachers considered either helped their classes to become good ones, or prevented them from doing so. On many occasions I found myself using a dictionary or thesaurus to search for new or alternative words to describe aspects of good classes. Sometimes I found it useful to create lists of words ranging from the most prosaic to the most fanciful. For example, when I was exploring the role of class members whom the teachers described as having a positive influence over their peers I created a list of some 40 words including "unifier," "coalesce," "pacesetter," "embracer," "fosterer," "fuser" and "catalyst."

**Exploring with diagrams**

At the same time that I was writing memos I was also creating a series of diagrams to capture in schematic form what the data were telling me (Strauss, 1987). Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that displays work much better than text alone, explaining that spatially-compressed, organised display modes are a major avenue to improving qualitative data analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that both memos and diagrams evolve:

They grow conceptually in complexity, density, clarity, and accuracy as the research and analysis progress. The later memos and diagrams may negate, amend, support, extend, and clarify earlier ones. (p. 198)
In my case I found that as I came to understand the phenomenon of good classes more deeply so the diagrams that I created increased in sophistication. My early diagrams were linear, consisting of clumps of words dotted around the page and joined together with lines and arrows. An early representation of the relationship of the teacher with the class and of the interrelationships between the students, for example, looked like this:

![Diagram of classroom relationships]

**Figure 2.2  Classroom relationships**

My later diagrams became circular as I found myself creating circles, coils, springs and swirling spheres. Later the diagrams developed into chains with interlocking links which snaked across the page as I struggled to understand the interrelationship between all the various elements in language classes: teachers, students, classes, lessons, sub-groups within classes and so on. A selection of these exploratory diagrams and the jottings accompanying them is included in Figure 3.
Figure 2.3  Exploratory diagrams

I also experimented with various prototypes before finally settling on the diagram which appeared to provide the most accurate schematic representation of the teachers' definitions of good language classes. Since each of these prototypes accompanied a storyline memo I will include them in the section on storyline memos later in the chapter.
Exploring with metaphors

A number of leaders in the field of qualitative research encourage researchers to explore their data by "playing with metaphors" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Miles and Huberman (1984) list the strengths of metaphorical thinking, explaining that in their view:

The metaphor is halfway from the empirical facts to the conceptual significance of those facts; it gets the analyst, as it were, up and over the particulars en route to the basic social processes that give meaning to those particulars. (p. 221)

Snow (1973) writes inspirationally about the relationship between metaphors and theory building, saying:

Metaphors may be the ratiomorphic roots of theory, where art and science are indistinguishable mixtures of fact, fantasy, intuition and reasoning in the theorist's mind from which spring the scaffolding of formal models and eventually full-blown theories. (p. 83)

For me, exploring language classrooms through metaphors was the single most important way of developing a global understanding of classroom processes. During a particularly creative phase (a period of a month when I became obsessed with discovering the theory) I likened the language classroom to the following objects or concepts: a ship of discovery; a playgroup; a swimming pool; a snowball; a spinning top; a solar system; a system; a living organism. I drew pictures of each of these objects or concepts in turn, often adding pin figures to depict teachers and students, words or phrases to describe feelings or activities, and arrows to depict motion. In each case I considered the properties of the object or concept which had sprung to mind and assessed the degree to which a language class was or was not like the object concerned. For example, I considered that language classes were like ships of discovery in that everyone was going on an adventure together into uncharted territory, with the teacher at the helm. I then thought that there was a sense in which language classes were like playgroups, because both language classes and playgroups are sheltered environments in which novices can experiment without harming themselves. Next I considered language classes as swimming pools, because in both places individuals develop new
skills and can practise at their own level, with confident learners being more adventurous and daring than their more diffident counterparts. Finally I began to conceptualise language classrooms as dynamic places in which individuals were somehow swept along or sucked in. This led me to think of metaphors which incorporated an element of movement, such as snowballs, spinning tops or planets rotating around the sun. In my mind snowballs rolling down hills and increasing in both size and velocity captured the idea of language classes drawing peripheral members into the class group, spinning tops (which have to be re-spun if they are not to topple over) encapsulated the idea that language classes needed to be periodically re-energised, while planets rotating round suns created the image in my mind of language classes operating as systems.

Once I had conceptualised language classes as systems I explored general systems theory, discovering from Owens (1991, p. 57) that it was first outlined by von Bertalanffy in 1950 as a way of understanding and describing the integrated nature of biological organisms.11 A key feature of systems theory is the notion that the whole is equal to more than the sum of the individual parts, and that a whole which functions in a satisfactory manner is not composed of parts which are in themselves perfect. For me the notion of a language class operating as a system was an attractive one, because I knew from what the teachers were telling me that in their view language classes could operate successfully, even when they contained less-than-perfect elements (in the form of weak students, awkward behaviour, unsuccessful lessons and so on).

Upon deeper reflection I decided that the word "system" had a mechanistic ring to it, suggesting that each element within the system had its own designated part to play. The data that I had collected, however, suggested that the teachers viewed their classrooms as flexible, adaptable places which could accommodate new members and

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11 Systems theory has since become increasingly popular as a way of explaining the functioning of complex systems in both the natural and the man-made world (Owens, 1991). Systems theory, for example, has been used to describe systems as diverse as agricultural systems, educational systems or industrial systems such as aircraft manufacturing companies. A key tenet of the systems approach is the notion that there is an interrelationship between the various parts which constitute the whole, and that no part ever operates in isolation (Gharajedaghi & Ackoff, 1985).
in which individuals did not necessarily have fixed roles. I therefore decided that it would be more appropriate to view language classes as biological organisms which were in a state of dynamic equilibrium, not only within themselves but in relation to the broader cultures of which they were a part. Only later did I discover that this view of the language classroom was similar to that proposed by van Lier (1996), who suggests that language classrooms should be regarded as complex adaptive systems. As he explains:

The educational context, with the classroom as its centre, is viewed as a complex system in which events do not occur in linear causal fashion, but in which a multitude of forces interact in complex, self-organizing ways, and create changes and patterns that are part predictable, part unpredictable. (p.148)

Writing storyline memos

Grounded theorists state that it is essential for researchers to write storyline and later summary memos in which they attempt put into words the overall picture which is emerging, even if the picture is not yet complete (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The progress of my thinking can be seen in two storyline memos, the second written a week after the first, and in the diagrams which accompanied them. The first storyline memo focused mainly on the notion of language classes operating as sheltered environments:

Storyline memo 1

What seems to be emerging very strongly from the data is that when teachers are talking about "good" language classes, they are referring to class ethos, rather than to their classes being collections of "good" language students. There appears to be a critical period when each new class is formed, during which the class identity is established; either the class "gels," or it doesn't. Most teachers seem acutely aware of the importance of creating a sheltered environment within which their students can not only develop their language skills, but also "grow" as people. There is an assumption that, within this protective cocoon, students are in an optimum situation for language learning. In order to learn within the classroom, teachers indicate that students must not only be engaged in doing meaningful tasks; they must also be involved at a personal, emotional level, "giving of themselves," as it were. Teachers recognise that "busy" classroom activities are not enough; lessons must be focused, and each activity must somehow contribute to the learning
"whole." Teachers normally set formal goals for their lessons, thus giving their students a sense of security and direction. However, ironically most teachers are prepared to abandon their formal goals when a lesson spontaneously "takes off" in an unexpected direction. They appear to be aware of the fickle nature of language learning, and are happy to accept that some things that have been formally "taught" will not be retained by the students, while other peripheral information may well become securely fixed in the students' minds. Teachers seem to gauge the success of their lessons, not so much by the official yardstick of "objectives having been achieved," but rather, by whether they themselves feel a particular lesson has "gone well." This personal, emotional response can range from a warm glow of satisfaction to an overwhelming "buzz" of excitement and elation.

Figure 2.4 The language class as a sheltered environment

By the time I came to write the second storyline memo a week after the first I had begun to view the language class as an organism:

**Storyline memo 2**

In order to incorporate the role of the teacher, the accompanying integrative diagram suggests that a "gelled" language class is a living organism, of which the students and the teacher are an integral part. This organism, in a sense, "exists" for the duration of the course: it is an entity, which has a personality of its own, and is made up of all those individuals who attend the class. There is an element of personal investment in the "organism" (from both the students and the teacher), everyone identifies with it, and the teacher feels fiercely protective towards it (rather like a
mother jealously guarding her young). As the course draws to an end there is a sense of sadness, and this transition is often marked by a ritual, such as a class party, at which goodbyes are said, addresses exchanged, etc.

The class may contain students with a range of personalities, backgrounds, experience, individual abilities, and so on. However, if the class has "gelled" and has developed an existence of its own, these individual differences will be of positive benefit, rather than being a divisive factor. The energy and enthusiasm of students with extrovert personalities and a good sense of humour can be harnessed, enabling the class to "pull together" and "feel as one." More passive students will be swept along by the mood of the class, and may identify with the class in spirit, even though they prefer to maintain a low profile and to sit on the sidelines, as it were. As the organism develops it can send out healthy shoots in unexpected directions. For example, students may reveal new and unexpected aspects of their background, personality, or talents. Certain students who were initially considered 'difficult' may undergo a personality change and suddenly be prepared to contribute to the class in unexpected ways. Other students who at first seemed impossibly shy and reserved may gradually come out of their shells.

However, if the class fails to develop into this vital, unified living organism, the students will remain as isolated islands, and the teacher will somehow feel unrewarded when the course comes to an end.

![Diagram of the language class as an organism](image)

Figure 2.5  The language class as an organism
The next step, as outlined by May (1986, p. 148) is to write an outline that integrates all the major memos and shows the theoretical scheme in skeleton form. Three weeks after writing the second storyline memo I wrote an extended summary entitled The bonded class which integrated all the major findings. Because of its length I have located this summary in the appendix (see Appendix A), but the diagram which accompanied it can be seen in Figure 2.6.

![The bonded language class](image)

**Figure 2.6 The bonded language class**

**Validating the theory**

Merriam (1988, p. 169) suggests that a key strategy that investigators engaging in qualitative research can employ to ensure the internal validity of their findings is to take the data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and ask them if the results are plausible. Once I had written the overall summary and the accompanying diagram I invited all the teachers who had participated in the study to attend a staff meeting at which I presented the findings. At the meeting, which was attended by 13 teachers, I explained that my purpose in gathering together as many people as possible was to give everyone the opportunity to examine my summary in a critical manner, to inform me of anything that I had written which was not a true
representation of their perceptions, and to make any suggestions for changes. I then presented the diagram on an overhead transparency and described the major findings before giving each teacher a photocopy of the findings and the diagram to examine in detail. I placed summaries of the findings, together with invitations to give feedback, in the pigeon holes of all the teachers who were unable to attend the meeting.

The teachers displayed considerable interest in the findings and said that in general what I had written was indeed an accurate representation of how they saw themselves. Several of them exclaimed as they read the text that I had captured exactly how they felt about their relationships with their classes. There was one particular aspect of the summary, however, with which several teachers did not agree. The consensus of opinion was that I should have located the teacher outside the class group (with the opportunity to join it whenever they wanted), rather than locating them within the class group and thereby implying that they were on a level with their students. In other words, the teachers wanted to conceptualise themselves as having control over their classes, regardless of how friendly they were towards the students within them. As one teacher commented, "The teacher is in the circle, but is not part of the circle."

As a result of the feedback from the teachers at that meeting I modified the diagram by changing the circle into an ellipse, placing the teacher on the outside of the ellipse, and running a dotted line between the teacher and the ellipse to indicate that the teacher's position was a flexible one. This diagram, seen in Figure 7, is not ideal, but is the best schematic representation of teachers' conceptualisations of language classes (and of their own positions within them) that I have so far been able to develop.
The complex issue of the relationship of teachers with their classes will be further explored in Chapter 6.

Merriam (1988, p. 169) suggests that peer examination is another way of ensuring the internal validity of findings. Since I developed the theory five years ago I have presented versions of the findings at ten educational conferences and have run eight professional development workshops based on the theory. I have also presented the findings at a number of teacher seminars in a variety of settings. Whenever I present the findings to peers I make it clear that I welcome comments and additional insights. These comments from practitioners in the field serve two purposes, providing further support for the validity of the theory and enabling me to fine-tune the theory so that it can relate to as many teaching situations as possible.

**The answer to the research question**

Having validated the theory with teachers working in a range of situations I was finally in a position where I could provide the following single-sentence answer to my research question concerning the nature of good classes:

Teachers define as "good" those classes which they consider function as cohesive groups.
The intensive explorations which I had made into teachers' definitions of good classes left me in little doubt that, although there was a sense in which good classes could be defined as classes which contained hard-working, highly-motivated students, there was a deeper sense in which good classes were those which appeared to their teachers to operate as socially cohesive groups.\textsuperscript{12} Even though the teachers had defined good classes in a variety of ways, and had identified a wide range of properties of good classes, everything that they said could be subsumed under the overarching term of class cohesion.

My next step was to familiarise myself with the relevant literature from the discipline of social psychology. I needed to do this for two reasons: (i) to establish the degree to which classes of language learners did or did not operate like small groups in the social-psychological sense, and (ii) to identify frameworks to guide the data collection and analysis for the second phase of the study.

\textit{Exploring the social-psychological literature}

Grounded theorists make it clear that it is essential to delay an examination of the technical literature which relates to the phenomenon being studied until after the theory has begun to emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that this is because a researcher who is already steeped in the research literature is likely to carry within themselves a set of unrecognised assumptions which may cloud their vision and prevent them from identifying new variables. When I began the study I remember assuming that what I would find would be something to do with good teaching, and that good classes would turn out to be those which teachers taught in a technically proficient way. It came as a surprise to discover that teachers judged good classes against social-psychological criteria and that pedagogy would not therefore be central to my investigations at all. It was the teachers themselves who compelled me to explore the social-psychological

\textsuperscript{12} Three of the teachers in the study pointed out that good classes could be defined in terms of the quality of the students within them, while all the teachers in the study identified and valued either class cohesion itself or properties of class cohesion. This point will be further discussed in Chapter 5.
literature. Had I been more thoroughly acculturated into the applied linguistics research tradition it is possible that I would have found it difficult to let go of the assumption that classroom-based research should, ipso facto, focus on the processes of teaching and learning, rather than the social context of the classroom.

Understandings from the discipline of social psychology

Viewing classrooms as groups with individual characteristics is nothing new. In a classic book on schools as institutions Waller (1932) says, "A class, as a crowd, develops a definite personality, and that personality can very easily be observed from where the teacher stands, for a class is never a sea of faces after the first day" (p. 162). For Luft (1984), each class is "as unique as a fingerprint" (p. 180). Gibb and Gibb (1978, p. 104) view groups as growing organisms (a similar position to my own) and point out that classroom groups can be environments either where growth and learning is easy, or where growth is inhibited and stagnation occurs. Luft (1984) quotes Lewin (well known for his pioneering work in the 1940s in the nascent field of social psychology) as claiming that a teacher's success in the classroom depends not only on the teacher's skill but also on the atmosphere created. Luft describes the classroom atmosphere as something intangible which is "a property of the social situation as a whole" (p. 4).

In an early book on educational social psychology Bany and Johnson (1964) speak of the benefits of applying knowledge of group processes to classroom situations, although they note that some of the research into the principles of group dynamics is based on groups that seem unlike those found in school situations (p. 44). Kounin (1970) talks about "the planned and unplanned realities" of classrooms and suggests that the skills that a teacher needs go beyond curricular planning and managing individual children and pertain to group management (p. iv). McMillan (1980) describes social psychology as "a burgeoning field of scholarly activity . . . right at the doorstep of education" (p. 70), crediting Charters for first identifying the potential
relevance of social psychology for education. McMillan explains that Charters identifies five dominant themes in social psychology which are relevant to educational problems, the fourth of which is the "power of the group" (p. 3). Luft (1984, p. 184) suggests that teachers will benefit from an increased knowledge of group processes and that viewing the class as a working group may change the teacher's perception of the classroom itself.

Doyle (1986) points out that to date most teaching researchers have tended to view classroom processes in a restricted sense and have studied specific actions that directly foster learning, rather than focusing on social dimensions of classes (p. 392).13 Jackson, an educational psychologist who conducted an anthropological study of schools as natural environments, writes (1990):

> The complexity of the teacher's work extends beyond the fact that he is concerned with a complex organism, working towards complex goals, in a complex setting. He also, in most instances, is working with a group of students. The social character of the classroom adds yet another dimension to the teacher's work. (p. 161)

Jackson then speculates as to whether, in view of the social character of the teacher's work, the teacher's primary concern is with learning at all.

Key questions arise for researchers who wish to study group processes in classrooms: what kinds of groups are classroom groups, and to what extent are they similar to or different from other kinds of small groups? Bany and Johnson (1975, p. 62) suggest that classroom groups in elementary schools are like primary groups, such as families and friendship groups, since there are bonds of common interest and affection and individual members are sensitive to the judgements and responses of other

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13 This view is reflected by a strand of educational research which focuses on identifying and evaluating the social and educational benefits of small group work within classrooms. See Sharan (1980) for an overview of this work, which has been carried out in a number of centres in the USA. According to Slavin (1989), there is disagreement about the effect of cooperative school learning on academic achievement, but general agreement about the positive social benefits of small group learning. I have not examined this work in more detail, since the focus of the present study is on classes operating as single groups. Interestingly, handbooks for teachers on how to set up cooperative small group activities in the classroom, for example Aronson (1978) and Johnson and Johnson (1987), advocate techniques which are similar to those routinely used by English as a second language teachers who use a communicative teaching approach.
members of the group. They point out that high school classes are essentially work
groups in the sense that they are established and organised in order to achieve definite
goals. They also make the point that class groups have an additional dimension: they
are organised to produce changes in the group members themselves (p. 64). Schmuck
and Schmuck (1988) present an alternative conceptualisation of class groups,
considering that each classroom group is located at a specific point on a continuum and
saying:

> Classrooms are not necessarily groups in the social-psychological sense. Each
classroom should be conceived of as being placed from high to low on a dimension of groupness. The closer it lies to the high end of such a dimension, the better it can be understood with group dynamics theory.

(p. 19)

Schmuck and Schmuck then proceed to cite a typical foreign language classroom as an
illustration of a classroom with a high degree of "groupness," saying that in the
language classroom "interpersonal contacts are paramount and group processes are
pervasive" (p. 19).

The nature of the classes described by the teachers in my own study suggests
that they were located at the high end of Schmuck and Schmuck's "groupness"
continuum, and that they had more in common with primary groups than they did with
work groups. The classes described by the teachers were similar to first-year elementary
school classes because:

- the students were for the most part new to one another, to the teacher and to the
culture of the institution;
- the students remained in the same class and were taught by the same teacher for
  the majority of their lessons;
- the teachers typically saw themselves as nurturers as well as transmitters of
  knowledge;
- the learning was activity based;
the atmosphere in the classroom was relatively informal and small group work was encouraged. (See Chapter 4 for a full description of the teaching contexts in which the second phase of the study was conducted.)

Classes of adult second language learners have a number of additional features which distinguish them from other kinds of classes, including the fact that:

- individuals may be returning to the classroom after a number of years in the workforce and may be concerned about their ability to learn a new language;
- individuals may be fearful of performing in front of their peers, thereby risking making errors and appearing foolish, particularly if they have strong ideas of their own self-worth;¹⁴
- individuals may have a number of worries external to the classroom (relating to living conditions or to family responsibilities, for example);
- individuals may find that the expectations of their language teacher are different from those of their teachers in previous learning situations.

In view of the special features of classes of adult second language learners, I was interested to read Patterson (1973), who made the observation that, "The teacher . . . is not a therapist, in the conventional sense, but the humanistic teacher is therapeutic" (p. 111). This gave me the lead that I was searching for. Perhaps, I thought, therapy groups might have certain commonalities with classes of adult language learners, in which case insights that I gained from applied research in the field of psychotherapy might help me to understand classroom group processes as described by my informants.

When I looked at books which apply social-psychological principles to therapy groups, notably Yalom (1985) and the various editions of a book by Corey and Corey (1987, 1992, 1997) I realised that therapeutic groups do indeed appear to share certain commonalities with classes of adult language learners. For example, therapy groups have the following characteristics: apprehensive adults are assembled; individuals have

¹⁴ Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance explains why people feel uneasy when there is a perceived incongruity between their perceptions of themselves and their behaviour as perceived by others (Schachter & Gazzaniga, 1989).
a problem in the form of a psychological difficulty; members are encouraged to become a part of a group culture with which they are unfamiliar; members will eventually have to take the risks involving disclosure of personal weaknesses; a degree of personal commitment is required. Corey and Corey (1992, p. 19) make the following additional points: the leader of a psychotherapy group is assigned to the group and has a major role in the development and maintenance of the group; the leader must provide a setting which is conducive to solving personal problems, while modelling flexibility of outlook and fallibility; the leader must show "genuine respect for differences among members."

All of these features, to a greater or lesser degree, appeared to match those of classes of adult language learners. 

There are, of course, several ways in which therapy groups are unlike classes of adult language learners. Therapy groups tend to be smaller than classes of adult language learners (and members are not split into smaller groups within the overall group), members of therapy groups are encouraged to take full responsibility for deciding on group goals, and members of therapy groups must share their inner worlds with other group members. Nevertheless I decided that therapy groups and groups of adult language learners had enough in common to warrant further investigation into applied group dynamics research within the area of psychotherapy (as opposed to other areas, such as management, where much research into small groups has been done).

The stages of small group development

There is general agreement amongst group dynamicists that groups move through more or less predictable phases of development during their life cycle (Shaw, 1981, p. 98, Jaques, 1990, p. 37). Most models of group development include an initial stage of orientation, a stage of conflict, a stage when the group becomes increasingly harmonious, and a final stage in which the group has developed into a mature work group (Yalom, 1985, p. 300). Although some researchers imply that the phases are immutably fixed and that the transition from one stage to the next is readily identifiable,
in his book on the theory and practice of group psychotherapy Yalom (1985) points out that:

The developmental phases are . . . constructs: entities that group leaders construct for their semantic and conceptual convenience. There exists no proof that stages do or must exist. (p. 310)

He quotes Budge, who makes the point that cohesiveness is not a "static, once-achieved forever-held property of a group," but that the amount of cohesiveness fluctuates during the life of the group. Corey and Corey, psychotherapists whose book in which they develop principles from practice has run into five editions, stress that the stages in the life of a group do not generally flow neatly and predictably in a certain order, and that some groups reach a plateau or even temporarily regress to an earlier stage (1997, p. 103). Schmuck and Schmuck (1988) suggest that Erikson's theory of psychological development offers some helpful analogies for understanding the growth of classroom groups, saying:

Classroom groups similarly pass through sequential and successive stages in developing their formal and informal social patterns. Moreover, resolutions to current interpersonal problems in the classroom are dependent on solutions to prior problems. . . . Indeed, if the members of a class never develop a foundation of basic interpersonal trust and closeness, they will have difficulty proceeding to more advanced stages of group interdependence. (p. 38)

Schmuck and Schmuck (1988) then proceed a step further, suggesting that teachers who understand the sequential nature of the developing classroom group can influence growth in planned and productive ways, while teachers who do not consider the need for the gradual development of skills and behaviours in attaining effective group performance will have classes that are "thwarted and stilted in their development and do not become optimal environments for individual development" (p. 41).

It remains true, however, that classroom groups are not like many other small groups in that the teacher has not emerged through mutual consensus. On the contrary, teachers are by virtue of their roles in positions of power and influence in their classrooms, regardless of the degree to which they have earned the respect of their students.
A functional approach to leadership

It is now becoming increasingly accepted that participative as opposed to persuasive leadership styles are more conducive to the operation of positive group forces within the classroom. Schmuck and Schmuck (1988) give credit to Gibb for the distinction between "participative" and "persuasive" teachers. Bany and Johnson (1975) describe how a participative teacher operates, saying that "the participative teacher guides the group and uses forces within the group itself" (p. 177). A consensus also seems to be developing that group processes are more likely to occur if the group leader has certain personal attributes. According to Corey, Corey, Callanan and Russell (1992, p. 12), "The leader's character, personal qualities and philosophy of life are more important than any technique for facilitating the group process." They also suggest that group leaders must use techniques which are a reflection of their own personalities. Howe and Schwartzburg (1986, p. 114) suggest that genuineness and empathy are two important attributes of effective group leaders, explaining that empathy is often understood as caring for and understanding another individual.

New conceptualisations of leadership consider that the concept relates to the operation of social-psychological forces within the group itself. Benne and Sheats (1978, p. 52) describe an alternative definition of leadership based on the Parsons-Bales theory of group development. In their view group members play just as important a role in helping groups to function effectively and productively as the group leaders themselves. They are critical of group training programmes which assume that the "leader" is uniquely responsible for the outcomes of the group and which therefore focus solely on improving the skills of the leaders. By conceptualising the leadership role in terms of the functions to be performed within a group, it is no longer necessary to view groups as having a hierarchical structure, with a "leader" and "followers."

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15 These terms appear more appropriate to current conceptualisations of the notion of leadership than the terms "democratic" and "autocratic" used by Lewin and colleagues in their pioneering study of leadership styles (described in Shaw, 1981, p. 326).
Rather, group leaders and group members can be viewed as having joint responsibility for the growth and productivity of their groups.

Applying the functional conceptual model to the classroom, Schmuck and Schmuck (1988) explain that:

Such a view frees us from the concept that only teachers exert leadership in the classroom. Students also perform group functions: sometimes their behaviors facilitate classroom learning and at other times they impede it. In fact, it appears that students wield great amounts of classroom leadership. (p. 99)

Benne and Sheats (1978, p. 53) classify functional member roles into three types:

(i) group task roles, related to the task which the group is to undertake,

(ii) group building and maintenance roles, oriented towards the functioning of the group as a group,

(iii) individual roles, when group members direct their activities towards the satisfaction of their personal, individual needs.

As Howe and Schwartzberg (1986, p. 111) explain, in successful groups both functions are part of the ongoing life of the group. They cite Parsons and Bales who found that groups tended to alternate in a cyclical fashion between emphasising task pursuits and social-emotional concerns. This finding relates to one of my own key findings (Finding Two), which will be outlined and discussed in Chapter 12.

The power of group norms

One of the most well-established findings from the field of social psychology is the power of the group to prevail over the individual. Hewstone, Stroebe, Codol and Stephenson (1988, p. 343) explain that as early as 1935 Sherif demonstrated that group members tend to converge towards a common norm, while Forsyth (1990, p. 143) states that the well-known experiments of Asche in the 1950s showed conclusively that groups have the power to make people conform. Forsyth (1990) quotes Rossi and Berk, who define norms as "social standards that describe what behaviours should and should not be performed in a social setting" (p. 160).
Yalom (1985, p. 118) explains that norms are created relatively early in the life of a group and that, once established, they are difficult to change. He describes the development of norms as "culture building," saying that the norms of a group are constructed both from the expectations of the members for their group and from the explicit and implicit directions of the leader and more influential members (p. 117). Yalom stresses that the group leader, wittingly or unwittingly, always shapes the norms of the group. Referring to group psychotherapy he observes:

At the beginning of the group, therapists have at their disposal a wide choice of techniques to shape the group culture. These range from explicit instructions and suggestions to subtle reinforcing techniques. (p. 119)

Yalom also makes the point that the group therapy leader also functions as a role model and therefore has the potential to develop group norms through personal example.

Referring to the operation of norms in educational settings, Luft (1984, p. 181) explains that pressure towards conformity and hostility towards those who violate group norms have an important bearing on classroom learning. Schmuck and Schmuck (1988, p. 192) suggest that open sharing and discussion about classroom norms can increase feelings of group solidarity as well as the sense of responsibility for pulling together.

**Summary**

As a result of my general reading within the area of social psychology I developed a broad understand of group development processes. The specific understandings that I considered relevant for classes of adult language learners were the following: (i) the notion that groups typically pass through a number of stages in their progress towards cohesion (even though the phases may be flexible), (ii) the notion that leadership belongs to the group as a whole, with leadership behaviours being construed widely to include both group task and group maintenance functions (so that any group member can perform a leadership role), and (iii) the notion that group forces operate to shape the unique cultures of groups.
When I came to conduct the second phase of the study I found that the understandings that I had gained from my reading in the area of social psychology had subtly shaped my own thinking. Although I did not use social-psychological frameworks to guide the collection and interpretation of data in any formal way (trying to identify the exact moment when a particular class progressed to the next developmental stage, for example), I felt that I now knew what to look for in the classes that I would be examining, and how I should interpret whatever I saw and heard. I knew, for example, that I should be on the lookout for any student behaviours which could be construed as either helping or hindering the development of a feeling of cohesion in the classes, and I knew that I should be noting down moments when classroom norms appeared to prevail over the individual.

Having understood that people in the general field of education were interested in applying social-psychological understandings to the operation of class groups, I was curious to know what the situation was in the area of applied linguistics. Surely, especially in view of Schmuck and Schmuck's observation that foreign language classrooms display a high degree of "groupness," applied linguists would have identified the area of group dynamics as a fertile one for research?

The current situation in classroom-based research

In this section I will describe the current state of play in classroom-based research in language teaching, indicating as I do so where my own study is located. After examining the levels of interest displayed in language classes operating as groups by teacher educators, teachers and applied linguists, I will give a brief outline of directions in applied linguistics research, paying particular attention to new conceptualisations of language classrooms and to the research methods considered suitable for investigating them.
Identification of supportive classroom climates

In the context of adult education, Candy (1991) discusses the importance of creating a supportive climate for learning and says that the need for such an environment "has been recognised as a central feature of good adult education practice for decades" (p. 337). Candy credits Knowles with saying that almost all learning theorists, including behaviourists, cognitivists, humanists and personality theorists, endorse the need for an "atmosphere of adultness" in which conditions of mutuality and informality combine to provide a supportive human interpersonal climate.

In the area of language teaching, the desire to create supportive classroom climates can be traced back to the work of psychologists working within the humanistic tradition of psychology such as Arthur Combs, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Dembo 1988). Dembo outlines the principles of humanistic psychology propounded by these three influential figures, explaining that a basic precept is that education should be more responsive to the affective needs of students. Following Beane, Dembo defines affective needs as those that are related to the student's emotions, feelings, values, attitudes and so on (p. 387).

Humanistic principles have been widely adopted in the various forms of learner-centred language teaching approaches that have gained popularity over the past 25 years (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. xi). Brown (1987), reprinted in Richard-Amato (1988), says that Curran's "Counseling-Learning/Community Language Learning" model of education became the classic example of an affectively-based language teaching method inspired by Rogers' view of education. Brown explains that Curran held the view that learners in a classroom should be regarded as a "group" rather than as a "class," saying that, for Curran:

The social dynamics of such a group are of primary importance. In order for any learning to take place . . . what is first needed is for the members to interact in an interpersonal relationship in which students and teacher join together to facilitate learning in a context of valuing and prizing each individual in the group. In such a surrounding each person lowers the defenses that prevent open interpersonal communication. The anxiety
caused by the educational context is lessened by means of the supportive community. (p. 370)

In recent years a range of individuals have suggested that language classes should be regarded as groups and that certain kinds of atmospheres should be cultivated. Stevick (1976) devotes a chapter to the language class as a small group, presenting descriptions by others of the goal of establishing a desirable style of dynamics for the language classroom, which he terms "Voice in Community" (p. 98). These include a statement by Rivers (1968) in which she states that a class "consists of individuals who have gradually been welded into a group with some knowledge of each other's activities, and some interest in each other's affairs" (p. 167). In Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class, a handbook for teachers which promotes the use of humanistic techniques to raise the feelings of self worth of language students, Moskowitz (1978) claims that it is essential to establish a warm, supportive, accepting, and non-threatening climate (p. 24). Littlewood (1981, p. 93) suggests that the development of communicative skills needs a learning atmosphere that gives students a sense of security and values them as individuals. In an article on helping language learners to adapt to unfamiliar methods Bassano (1986) suggests that, in order to lower defensive barriers, language teachers should try to build informal, stress-free environments "where minds are free to acquire" (p. 13). Rivers (1992) outlines ten principles of interactive learning and teaching, the fourth of which relates to the development of a "nonthreatening atmosphere of cooperative learning" (p. 378). In describing such an atmosphere Rivers talks about equilibrium in terms of teachers and students feeling comfortable, peer-with-peer bonding, the development of mutual trust, the sharing of enjoyable and successful experiences, willingness to take risks and the exorcism of the fear of failure through group laughter. Rivers suggests that such an atmosphere is necessary to stimulate the interaction that leads to communication via language.

A number of studies which focus on teacher perspectives have identified the fact that high on the list of priorities for teachers is the development of a positive group
feeling within their classrooms. In an ethnographic study of the classroom perspective of a primary school teacher, Janesick (1982) found that the broadest and most dominant aspect of the teacher's perspective was their commitment to maintaining a stable and cohesive classroom group. In a study of teacher beliefs and their influence on classroom practice Burns (1992) found that the teachers' beliefs clustered around five major focus areas, the fifth of which related to the classroom climate. As she explains:

The establishment of positive and non-threatening classroom "dynamics" was considered to be a crucial element of the language classroom. Teachers saw themselves as having a central role and responsibility in facilitating good relationships among students and between themselves and their students. (p. 62)

Focusing on the principles which guide pedagogic practice, Richards (1996) quotes from extracts of conversations conducted with English language teachers in Hong Kong. One particular teacher emphasises the teacher's attitude and the need to create a supportive environment for learning in the classroom, while another explains that her beliefs are "very much humanitarian" in that she considers that the students will learn if they feel a warm cooperative atmosphere in the classroom. Smith (1996) outlines her findings from a study of teacher perceptions in the following way:

A particular theme that emerged from the individual teacher data was the shared view that a positive social-affective climate was an essential element in the classroom. All the teachers in this group emphasised the need to build a positive and supportive learning environment. The word build is significant here because these teachers did not see such a climate as a given but one that needed to be fostered by the use of student-centered, cooperative activities and appropriate materials. This belief in the importance of classroom climate was a central factor in the decisions these teachers made about tasks and materials. (p. 208)

In 1992 Hadfield wrote a resource book for teachers which presented a range of communicative activities designed to improve cohesion in language classes. Interestingly, as she explains in the introduction, the book was written as a result of responses to a questionnaire sent to language teachers all over Britain. To Hadfield's surprise, a key concern of language teachers related not to teaching specific grammar or vocabulary items but rather, to "the atmosphere in the class and the chemistry of the
group" (p. 7). My own study reflects precisely what Hadfield found: that high on the list of priorities of practising language teachers is the development of the classroom atmosphere.

A book published in the U.S. with similar objectives to Hadfield's is Comprehensive Classroom Management (Jones & Jones, 1995), now in its fourth edition. Interestingly, the subtitle to the third edition (1990), Motivating and Managing Students, has been replaced in the fourth edition by Creating Positive Learning Environments for All Students. The existence of such books, and the shift in emphasis reflected in the change in subtitle of the above book, suggests that developing positive class atmospheres is becoming increasingly recognised as one of the goals for practising teachers in a range of settings.

Research on cohesion in language classes

In view of the fact that humanistic psychologists emphasise the importance of developing supportive classroom atmospheres and that practising teachers appear to endorse this view, I considered it likely that leaders in the field would have been suggesting that class cohesion be focused upon in classroom-based research. During the course of my general reading I kept an eye out for mention of class cohesion or of classes operating as groups. To my surprise I found that, even when class cohesion was identified (which happened relatively rarely), it tended not to be foregrounded. For example, in Focus on the Language Classroom (1991) Allwright and Bailey state, "We all know how easy it is for one or two unco-operative learners to spoil everything, to make a classroom a miserable place to learn in" (p. 19). They do not, however, elaborate further. In a recent book on effective management of teaching and learning, Nunan and Lamb (1996) examine teacher and learner roles. Although they explain that roles are dynamic rather than static, and state that these can change according to the dynamics of group activity within the classroom (p. 134), Nunan and Lamb do not appear to consider that anything can be done to alter the dynamics of the classroom group. In their view:
Anyone who has taught for any length of time will have experienced the high of working with a class that "clicks," when the chemistry between the various personalities making up the class just seems to work. Unfortunately, the reverse can also occur. There are times when, through nobody's fault, the intangible and indefinable mix of factors fails, and every lesson is a struggle. (p. 137)

Interestingly, in the course of proposing an analytical framework for conducting research on language pedagogy which can account for non-pedagogic teacher behaviours Allwright (1996) suggests that it might be profitable to examine teacher behaviours in language classrooms in terms of the development of the class as a group:

There is the possibility in principle . . . that the teacher's behaviour could be accounted for in terms of an imputed intention to develop in the learners a pattern of behaviour, appropriate to the formation and/or maintenance of a "learning community" in the classroom. (p. 219)

Others in the field have suggested that language classes should be regarded specifically as groups. Calling for researchers to take an anthropological approach to the study of language classrooms, Breen (1985) talks about the collective nature of language classes, suggesting that the psyche of the group is a distinct entity other than the sum of the individual psychological orientations of teachers and learners. Later he talks about teachers and learners establishing relationships in such a way that they can maintain "a relatively harmonious working group" (p. 146). In suggesting that language classes should be viewed as cultures, Breen defines a genuine culture as "one in which its members seek security and relative harmony in a self-satisfactory milieu." This statement can be interpreted as an allusion to class cohesion. Similarly, in his book on ethnography and second-language classroom research van Lier (1988) argues for maintaining a ritual element in language classrooms suggesting that, regardless of other possible developmental benefits, rituals such as chorus sequences may serve to "create a sense of collaborative achievement which is important for creating social cohesion and a positive ambience" (p. 226). I find van Lier's point particularly interesting because it suggests that teaching methods based on behaviourist theories of language learning may be just as conducive to the development of harmonious classroom atmospheres as
teaching approaches which are considered to be humanistic (see Chapter 12 for further
discussion on this point).

Having discovered that relatively little had been written about classes operating
as groups by British academics giving broad overviews of directions in classroom-
based research, I decided to search for specific studies focusing on language classes
operating as groups. Surely, I thought, people would have conducted studies which
described classes in terms of their social-psychological development, which compared
classes in terms of their social-psychological profiles, or which investigated learning
outcomes in relation to levels of class cohesion? My investigations initially revealed
only isolated studies in which group dynamics theory was related to language
classrooms, for example, Riddell (1991), Hotho-Jackson (1995) and Saxton (1996).

Subsequently, however, I came across the work of Dörnyei and discovered that,
over the years, he has focused increasingly on classroom group dynamics and on their
relationship with affective factors such as self-confidence, anxiety and motivation.16 In
a paper which examines motivation, self-confidence and group cohesion in the foreign
language classroom (1994), Clément, Dörnyei and Noels suggest that group dynamics
have particular relevance for second language instruction because current language
teaching methodologies focus on developing communicative competence through
classroom interaction. Quoting Bar-Tal and Bar-Tal, Hadfield and Prabhu, they state
that "the quality and quantity of such interaction is, to a large extent, a function of the
social structure and milieu of the class" (p. 424). Interestingly this particular study
reveals no relationship between self-confidence, anxiety and the atmosphere of the
classroom (and so provided counter-evidence to the assumption made by teachers in the

16 There is a substantial body of applied linguistics research which focuses on affective factors and their
relationship with language learning (see, for example, Richard-Amato, 1988, or the section on receptivity
in Allwright & Bailey, 1991). It has been recognised, however, that it is not only difficult to isolate,
subdivide and categorise affective variables, but that it is also difficult to establish correlations between
individual variables such as anxiety or self-esteem and second language acquisition (Brown, 1987,
Richard-Amato, 1988, Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). However, in an overview of studies which
consider the relationship between student anxiety and language learning Gardner and MacIntyre (1993)
reach the cautious conclusion that language anxiety does have a negative effect on second language
acquisition.
humanistic tradition that a supportive classroom atmosphere can raise levels of self-confidence and reduce levels of anxiety).

In subsequent articles Dörnyei further explores group dynamics in the context of the foreign language classroom (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997, Dörnyei, 1997). Shortly before completing this study I obtained a volume co-authored by Dörnyei (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998) entitled Interpersonal Dynamics in Second Language Education: The Visible and Invisible Classroom. I was excited to find this book for three reasons. First, it referred to many of the books that I myself had read in the area of social psychology. This confirmed that I was not alone in using insights from applied social psychology (notably psychotherapy) as a way of understanding teacher and student behaviours in language classes. Second, it explained that most of the psychological approaches to describing second language acquisition had focused on individual differences from the point of view of aptitude, motivation, learning styles, learning strategies and other cognitive and affective learner factors, rather than on dynamic interpersonal processes characterising learning in a classroom context (p. xiii). Third, it stated that applied linguists have investigated classroom events almost entirely from a linguistic point of view, especially through the discourse analysis of interaction patterns among learners and between the learners and the teacher (p. xiv). These statements supported my own research and made me feel that I was justified in having attempted to explore group dynamics within classes of language learners, and in having focused on the social meaning of classroom discourse (as opposed to its relationship with learning outcomes). In conclusion, an examination of Ehrman and Dörnyei's recent work has led me to believe that, because of its focus on group processes in language classrooms, the present study is located within a newly-emerging strand of applied linguistics research.

In this and the previous section I have given a brief outline of the current level of interest in classroom atmospheres and in classes operating as groups. I have suggested that the highest level of interest in classroom dynamics has been displayed either by those teacher educators following the precepts of humanistic psychology, or by language teachers themselves. Although, to date, there appears to have been a
relative paucity of classroom-based research which focuses on the phenomenon of class cohesion, I have indicated that the situation is now changing.

**General directions in classroom-based research**

There is a general consensus of opinion that second-language classroom research has been dominated by second language acquisition research foci and procedures (Ochsner, 1979, Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Much research has been conducted with the aim of finding cause-effect relationships between certain actions and their outcomes (van Lier, 1988, p. xiv). Breen (1985) suggests that second language acquisition researchers have tended to view language classrooms as experimental laboratories and have fostered an essentially asocial view of the language acquisition process. Breen (1985), Allwright and Bailey (1991), and Allwright (1996) lament the fact that, because of its emphasis on exploring the efficacy of language teaching methods and techniques, second language classroom research has lagged behind developments in general educational research. In other words, while the thrust of some mainstream educational research has been towards examining the complex nature of the social realities of classrooms, language classroom research has remained in the shadow of psycholinguistic accounts of second language acquisition research and has persisted in maintaining a narrow focus upon linguistic and mentalistic variables (Breen, 1985, p. 154).

It is now increasingly recognised that language classrooms are complex environments. In an authoritative review of process research in second-language classrooms, Mitchell (1985) identifies the complex and multi-layered nature of second language classrooms, while Allwright and Bailey (1991, p. xviii) state that "we see so much going on in the classroom we soon realise that understanding this mysterious chemistry is becoming more complicated rather than easier" (p. xviii). In a landmark article calling for researchers to take an anthropological approach to the study of language classrooms, Breen (1985) suggests that an appropriate metaphor for language
schoolrooms is that of coral gardens.17 Breen emphasises the social and psychological richness of classroom life and suggests that current research in language learning has neglected significant social and psychological variables within the culture of the language class.

Van Lier (1988) promotes an ethnographic approach to second-language classroom research, suggesting that research whose goal is to understand classroom interaction should complement research whose goal is to prove the existence of relationships between classroom variables. For van Lier the social context of language learning is of vital importance:

Without the social context it is difficult to see how classroom interaction can be understood and what cause-effect relationships, if they can ever be conclusively established, really mean. (p. xiv)

Other researchers working in the field have also been calling for a focus on social aspects of language classrooms. In an influential conference address Allwright (1989) observes:

If we are going ever to make significant progress towards reaching any sort of principled and practical understanding of how individual learners get whatever they do from language lessons . . . we are going to have to think much more in terms of the socio-psychology of the language classroom.

Two years later Allwright reaffirms his hunch that a key to understanding language classrooms is to examine the social processes occurring within them, when in conjunction with Bailey (1991) he writes:

We began to feel that something below the level of technique (something more interactive and less obviously pedagogic) takes place, and that this interaction . . . is likely to provide a fruitful topic for investigation. (p. 9)

Allwright and Bailey proceed to explain that certain researchers (including Allwright himself) have begun to conceptualise language lessons as "socially-constructed events" in which teachers and learners collectively produce classroom language learning

17 Breen explains that the metaphor of coral gardens derives from the title of Malinowski's classic anthropological study of Trobriand island cultures, entitled Coral Gardens and Their Magic.
opportunities through the way in which they interact with one another. Prabhu (1992) reflects this view.

Exploring Gaies' metaphor of the classroom as a crucible Allwright and Bailey (1991) suggest that, just as in a crucible the elements react with one another so, in a language classroom, teachers and students not only react to one another initially but also interact constantly with one another in a range of spontaneous, unplanned ways. They also observe that external factors contribute to the dynamics of the language class, saying:

The learners bring with them their whole experience of learning and of life in classrooms, along with their own reasons for being there, and their own particular needs that they hope to see satisfied. And the teacher brings experience, too, of life and learning, and of teaching. (p. 18)

Having tabulated the kinds of contextual features which contribute to the multifaceted nature of language classrooms, van Lier (1988) makes the following observation:

At some point all these different factors must be taken into account, for all are relevant, many are related, and as yet we know little about their potential contribution to L2 language development. In the classroom they all come together and produce that undefinable quality, the dynamics of classroom work. (p 8)

A problem associated with the shift in focus of second-language classroom research to studies of a qualitative nature appears to relate to the individualistic nature of the descriptive studies of second language classroom processes. In his introduction to van Lier's book on ethnography and second-language classroom research (1988), Candlin observes that Mitchell (1985) "underlines the fragmentary state of the still largely descriptive one-off studies that characterise the field" (p. vii). Mitchell's particular concern is that descriptive accounts of aspects of classroom life fail to throw light on the relationship between instruction and the learners' classroom experiences, or between instruction and the process of learning a second language. In other words, she considers that, although they may be interesting in themselves, descriptive studies have for the most part been unable to further our overall understanding of how, when and why students do or do not learn effectively in second language classrooms.
Mitchell (1985) suggests that the reason for the lack of coherence in classroom-based second language research is the absence of an overall theoretical framework for understanding classroom processes. Chaudron (1988, p. 2) makes a similar point, explaining that no explanatory model currently exists that interrelates all the possible variables involved in second language classrooms. Commenting on the problems associated with observational research in the late 1970s, Allwright (1988) notes that researchers have "no particular guidance as to what to look for in the language classroom," lamenting the fact that there is no "theory," within the research paradigm itself, to motivate predictions that observations can test (p. 194). Van Lier (1988) suggests that theory is doubly useful because it can serve not only as a tool, but also as a goal. He explains that this is because theory can operate first as a heuristic to direct empirical investigation and then as a way to abstract, codify, summarise and store the data that have been collected (p. 21). In sum, it is recognised that progress towards the understanding of classroom processes is hampered by a lack of appropriate theoretical models and frameworks.

My broader reading indicates that the dearth of theoretical frameworks has also been lamented by teacher educators, many of whom note the ever-present gap between theory and practice (Ramani, 1990, Richards & Nunan, 1990, Widdowson, 1990). It seems that the search for theoretical frameworks is linked to the view that underpinnings for teacher education programmes are needed to replace what Tedick and Walker (1994) describe as a "paralysing focus on methodology" (p. 306). The race amongst teacher educators to develop theoretical frameworks (and to have them widely accepted) has speeded up in recent years. People currently lined up in the race include Wallace (1991), Freeman (1989, 1991, 1996), Richards (1987, 1994, 1996), Freeman and Richards (1993), and Kumaravadivelu (1993, 1994).

I found the search for theoretical frameworks intriguing, particularly in view of the fact that I considered that, during the first phase of the study, I had already developed quite a serviceable theory myself. I had confidence in my theory because I knew from teacher development workshops that it made real sense to practising
language teachers in a variety of settings. As far as I could see the theory would operate quite well as a framework for interpreting the teacher and student behaviours that I would observe and hear described during the second phase of the study (and could perhaps even serve as a framework for teacher education programmes). Hopefully, I thought, the theory would enable me not only to describe classroom behaviours but also to identify the meanings that they held for both teachers and students.

*Methods for examining language classroom processes*

From my reading I learnt that, although classroom observation is still widely used as a means of examining processes in second-language classroom research, its limitations have been recognised. As Breen (1985) explains:

> Most current classroom-oriented research paradoxically reduces the external dimensions of classroom communication, the actual social event, to observable features of talk between teachers and learners. (p. 140)

Allwright and Bailey (1991) make a similar point, saying:

> The overall picture we have of classroom language learning from research so far is already distorted by this bias towards the visible. We only know what we have looked at, and what we have looked at over the last two decades consists largely of whatever has been easiest to observe. (p. 39)

Breen (1985, p. 140) suggests that lesson transcripts cannot reveal how teachers and learners interpret the discourse of the classroom, explaining that a researcher's interpretation of the "text" of classroom discourse has to be derived through the participants' interpretations of that discourse. In a similar manner Allwright (1996, p. 217) suggests that it is not possible to identify a teacher's intention simply by examining standard orthographic transcripts made from audio-recordings. He also points out that teachers' intentions may be multiple rather than unitary. How, then, can researchers gain access to the range of different interpretations that participants in classroom discourse give to that discourse? Allwright (1996) suggests that it will be necessary to go "well beyond transcript data into the realms of more subjective, more ethnographic, investigatory techniques" (p. 221).
At the end of her survey on process research in second-language classrooms, Mitchell (1985) identifies innovations in research methodology, such as those which enlist the learner as an active participant in the research process through introspection or diary studies, suggesting that these might be fruitful ways of furthering our theoretical understanding of language classroom processes. Allwright considers that both learners and teachers are invaluable sources of data for classroom researchers. In 1988 and 1989 he encourages forms of investigation which will bring learners more fully into the research enterprise, arguing that insider perspectives are needed and that access should therefore be gained to participants' own accounts. In 1991 Allwright and Bailey strongly suggested that teachers become more closely involved in the research process and propose that language teachers should aim to be "explorers in their own classrooms" (p. 13). In their view, the teacher who is already in the classroom and who already has the day-to-day experience of working with learners is in a particularly privileged position to decide what needs to be investigated. More recently, Allwright (1996, p. 220) suggests a number of alternative methods of accessing teacher insights, including the following: examining teachers' lesson plans, diaries and logs; conducting pre-lesson interviews; eliciting retrospective accounts from teachers; using some form of prompted recall such as playing back videos of lessons. It appears then that all the above techniques are considered appropriate for accessing the meanings which teachers and learners attribute to classroom events.

The calls made by applied linguists such as Breen, Allwright and Mitchell for techniques such as those outlined above to be developed and used more widely to examine language classrooms confirmed that I was justified in planning to use interview data based on recall of specific classroom behaviours and events as a means of understanding classroom processes. I knew that I did not, however, wish to move into the area of teacher cognition in the sense of trying to identify, describe or codify the personal belief systems of individual teachers. Rather, I wanted to use teacher

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18 Teacher cognition is a rich and complex area of educational research, initially surveyed by Clark and Peterson (1986) and more recently by Pajares (1992). It focuses on the structures of teachers' beliefs,
perceptions as a way of uncovering both the ways in which teachers interpreted classroom events and the practical reasons underlying the teachers' everyday classroom decisions and behaviours.

In summary, my investigations of current directions in classroom-based research have revealed that:

• There is disillusion in some quarters with the nature of second language acquisition research, with its focus on a relatively narrow range of variables and its concern with product outcomes.

• There is a growing interest in viewing language classrooms holistically as cultures and in focusing on social as opposed to pedagogic aspects of them.

• Concerns have been expressed regarding the lack of theoretical frameworks to guide the collection and interpretation of classroom process data.

• There have been calls for alternative ways of studying language classrooms, particularly those which develop an understanding of classroom processes from the perspective of teachers and learners.

An understanding of the above has led me to believe that my own study parallels certain new directions in applied linguistic research. I consider that the present study has the potential to make a useful contribution to the current state of knowledge about social processes in classes of adult language learners.

**The key features of the study**

The present study has the following distinguishing features:

• It focuses on a phenomenon which appears significant to practitioners but which has hitherto seldom been foregrounded in classroom-based research. The
phenomenon is expressed in the form of a collective implicit theory upon which teachers appear to base a number of their classroom decisions.19

- It follows a set of procedures for the collection and analysis of qualitative data and describes how large quantities of unstructured data were integrated into a single overall picture.
- It uses the theoretical framework which was generated in the first phase of the study to investigate teacher values and teacher and student perceptions of social processes occurring within selected language classes.
- It identifies, describes and seeks to interpret the significance of a range of interrelating classroom variables.
- It uses teacher and, to a lesser extent, student perspectives as a way of understanding the multiple meanings which classroom events hold for both teachers and learners.

Summary

This chapter has presented the rationale for the study. In the first section I described how I followed grounded theory development procedures and evolved a theory concerning the nature of "good" language classes. In the second section I located the findings within the social-psychological literature and in so doing: (i) assessed the degree to which language classes operate as groups in the social-psychological sense, and (ii) identified theoretical frameworks from the discipline of social psychology which I could use to guide my observations and lines of questioning in the second phase of the study. In the third section I located my study within the applied linguistics tradition. I investigated the degree to which the notion of language classes operating as groups and providing supportive atmospheres had been focused upon by teacher educators, practising teachers and applied linguistics researchers. I then proceeded to

19 I use the term "collective implicit theory" in a similar way to Breen (1991, p. 228), to mean a consensus view about a shared priority which is shared by a particular group of experienced language teachers.
describe current directions in classroom process research, outlining proposed solutions to current problems within the area of applied classroom research. I explained how these took the form of calls for new approaches to examine hitherto unexplored aspects of classroom interaction. In the final section of the chapter I summarised the key features of the present study.

In the chapter which follows I will describe how I gathered and analysed the data for the second phase of the study.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Overview

This chapter describes the research process. In the first section I outline the methods selected to answer the research questions, explaining why I considered them appropriate. In the second section I describe the data-gathering process, showing how certain techniques proved more fruitful than others and explaining how, in the light of the research findings, I expanded certain data-gathering techniques, modified others, and abandoned certain ones altogether. The third section describes the various stages of the data analysis process and explains why I shifted away from considering the classes as discrete case studies to considering them as an integrated whole. The final section of the chapter outlines the process involved in finding a suitable way of writing up the study.

The design of the study

The initial objective of the second phase of the study was to document the progress of selected classes of adult language learners towards a state of social cohesion, by identifying and describing social processes which appeared to be instrumental in the development (or non-development) of cohesion. I therefore considered that my study fell into the broad category of case study research and that I would be conducting a series of individual qualitative case studies, each of which would be a discrete unit.20 As Patton (1990) explains, "Each case study in a report stands alone, allowing the reader to understand the case as a unique, holistic entity" (p. 387). I knew that I would need to present my studies descriptively, understanding from

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20 See Yin (1994) or Stake (1994) for introductions to case-study research.
Merriam (1988) that, "Detailed description of particulars is needed so that the reader can vicariously experience the setting of the study" (p. 199).

At this stage I became interested in descriptive approaches and read Geertz (1973), learning that he had borrowed the term "thick description" from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle to describe the task of ethnography, and that he distinguished between "thin description" (to describe what a person is doing) and thick description (to describe the meaning behind that person's behaviour). I also read certain anthropological and ethnographic studies including Lewis' classic study of the daily lives of the urban poor in Mexico (1961), Becker, Geer, Hughes and Strauss' study of first year medical students (1961), Wolcott's study of the daily life of a school headmaster (1973) and Lightfoot's account of certain exemplary schools in the U.S. (1983). I decided that if other people had succeed in providing rich, detailed descriptions of individuals in particular settings gained through participant observation and ethnographic interviews, I could probably do the same. I considered that my own objective, therefore, would be to describe the evolution of each class (in terms of the social processes which occurred within it) as carefully and meticulously as possible. At the same time I was aware that although there was a growing interest in ethnographic approaches both in general educational research (Wilson, 1977) and in language classroom research (van Lier, 1988, Watson-Gegeo, 1988), there was an ongoing debate about the nature of ethnography and whether or not studies which claimed to use ethnographic techniques could legitimately be called ethnographies (Rist, 1980).

Since I was also considering using interview data supplied by the teachers I found out about narratology (the strand of research which reports the stories of informants in a narrative sequence) and discovered that there was controversy in this area too. In narratology, it seems, the issue at stake is the position of the researcher and whether or not they can claim to present other people's versions of reality in an accurate manner. Gudmundsdottir (1996) describes as an endless hall of faulty mirrors the potential for misinterpretation which exists between (i) the reality that informants are trying to express, (ii) their words, (iii) our interpretation of their words, (iv) our writing
down of our interpretation, and (v) readers' interpretations of our words. As she explains:

> There is no one-to-one correspondence between the reality that informants try to express and their words, or their texts. We listen to their words, and try to reconstruct their meaning in our minds, but we can never be sure about the accuracy of these transformations. (p. 303)

Despite the difficulties that I thought I might encounter I considered that telling the story of each class in turn, through my own eyes and the eyes of the teachers, was a worthwhile goal which I should try to achieve.

Because I was aware of the range of variables which inevitably come into play in all naturalistic research settings (especially classrooms) I knew from the outset that I had set myself an ambitious task. To compound my difficulties I had no guidelines to follow since, to my knowledge, no previous study of a similar nature had been conducted. I therefore had no option but to design the study myself, using whichever data-gathering tools seemed most likely to produce answers to my research questions.

The most logical way of gathering data appeared to be to sit in on each of the classes on a regular basis (for a minimum of three hours each week) and to observe and document any events which appeared to be linked to the ongoing development (or non-development) of class cohesion. I would then, I thought, use my notes as a basis for extended interviews with the teachers. I decided not to video record the lessons for several reasons. First, I wanted to have direct experience of the teachers' working contexts and as far as possible to see the classes through the teachers' own eyes. Second, I wanted the weekly interviews to develop into conversations in which the teachers talked about events that had occurred throughout the week and that they considered important, rather than simply events which happened to have been captured on video during selected lessons. Third, I wanted a high degree of flexibility in the classroom so that, metaphorically speaking, I could switch back and forth from a wide-

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21 It appears that many researchers conducting classroom-based research choose not to take into account the fact that there may be a relationship between variables which are extraneous to the main focus of the research and the results of the study.
angle lens (which would enable me to gain the teacher's perspective), and a close-up lens (which would enable me to narrow my focus and listen unobtrusively to conversations between individual students). Although I understood the advantages of electronically recording classroom events I considered that, on balance, I would be better off making handwritten notes during lessons.

Having decided that my own eyes and ears were an adequate resource, I resolved to sit at the side of each classroom (usually near the front so that I could see the expressions on students' faces) and to make notes of anything that I saw which appeared either to contribute towards, or to be a symptom of, social cohesion or lack of cohesion within each of the classes. I decided to note down both obvious and less obvious behaviours, ranging from bursts of whole-class laughter to muttered asides or grimaces made by individual students. For this purpose I designed an observation sheet with seven headings relating to teacher, student and whole-class behaviours, each of which had blank space underneath for notes (see Appendix B).

I was conscious of the fact, however, that even the most dispassionate observer brings to the research process a package of personal values and assumptions. I knew that a particular problem for insider researchers such as myself (a teacher conducting a study of other teachers) was the temptation, either to get too close to subjects and to see events exclusively through their eyes, or alternatively to be over-judgmental (and to spend time, for example, being critical of the teaching methods being used, even though these were not the focus of the study). Aware of the potential problems, but at the same time accepting that complete objectivity is neither attainable nor desirable in social research (Patton, 1990), I resolved to take Patton's advice and to consider myself in a position of empathic neutrality in relation to both the teachers and the students. Patton describes the kind of researcher that I aspired to be in the following way:

The neutral investigator enters the research arena with no axe to grind, no theory to prove, and no predetermined results to support. Rather, the investigator's commitment is to understand the world as it is, to be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirming and disconfirming evidence. (p. 55)
Taking Patton's words to heart I decided that my study would carry more weight if I triangulated my own perceptions, not only with those of the teachers but also with those of the students.\(^{22}\) I considered that in this way I would gain a more in-depth and hopefully more accurate picture of the social-psychological development of each class over time. In other words, I assumed that multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon, especially if the interpretations of the significance of the phenomenon concurred, would add credence to my particular interpretation. For example, if I considered that a particular student had operated in a "negative" manner in the classroom and then found that both the teacher and certain students held similar views, the similarity between the three perspectives would add weight to the initial observation.

To achieve my goal I decided to ask the teachers to make notes at the end of each lesson and to use these notes as the basis for weekly interviews of approximately 30 minutes' duration. I therefore designed and made multiple copies of a sheet entitled, "Teacher impressions of individual lessons," which, like the observation sheet, contained general headings and blank space underneath for notes. The headings invited the teachers to write down their personal thoughts and feelings, any specific events or behaviours that they had noticed, and their overall impressions of the atmosphere of the class during that particular lesson (see Appendix C).

In order to gather information from the students, I decided that I would try as far as possible to interview every student in the study individually for approximately fifteen minutes, either in breaktime or at lunchtime, or (with the teacher's consent), withdrawing them one by one from class. I decided to interview the students mid-way through their courses, by which time I imagined that they would have got to know their teachers and their fellow students and would know how their classes "felt." I was aware that it would be difficult to elicit views from the students in the study for a variety of reasons, including the following:

\(^{22}\) Stake (1994, p. 241) explains that triangulation is generally viewed as a process whereby multiple perceptions are used to clarify meaning and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation.
• A significant number of students would have limited levels of English. This meant that they might not fully understand my questions, and that their responses were likely to be in the form of single words, half-sentences, or statements whose grammatical inaccuracy might make their meaning unclear. I also suspected that certain students might be unable to express complex thoughts through the medium of English.

• The students might perceive that I was operating on behalf of the establishment and that any critical observations they made could be relayed back to those in power, with adverse repercussions on themselves (such as being refused promotion to a higher class). I considered that this might make them reluctant to express their views.

• The students might consider that any negative comments they made about their classes could reflect badly on their teachers or other class members and might be seen as disloyal. I thought that this might also make the students reticent about expressing their honest opinions.

• Certain students came from countries where those in authority (including teachers) were traditionally held in high esteem, and where comments at the grassroots level were seldom sought or valued. I knew that such students might consider it inappropriate to give feedback on their classes in an open and direct way.

I decided that I would have a better chance of gaining information from the students if I jotted down what they said in note form (using their exact words wherever possible), rather than tape-recording the interviews. I also decided that, in order to put the students at their ease, I should begin each interview by asking the student concerned a few questions about their personal circumstances and their aspirations.\footnote{Two of the teachers in the study allowed me to withdraw every student from their class on two separate occasions. I took advantage of this opportunity, interviewing each student extensively about their circumstances in the first round of interviews. Much of this background information has been incorporated into the context chapter.} For the student interviews, therefore, I designed a record sheet with a section in which I noted
personal details, followed by a space for general notes on anything they might want to say. I also listed a few reminders to myself of the kinds of questions which I thought might elicit responses relating to the development of class cohesion. These included questions about whether the students liked working in groups and whether they had made new friends in class (see Appendix D). As will be explained later, I subsequently developed a more effective way of extracting student insights.

Even though the exploratory, descriptive nature of the study meant that it was located at the qualitative end of the qualitative/quantitative research continuum, I considered that it might be useful to gather data which would yield quantifiable results. The teachers in the first phase of study had identified a range of dimensions of the construct of class cohesion, including responsiveness, willingness to collaborate, helpfulness towards others, friendliness, confidence to speak in front of others, interest in others, sharing common understandings with others, appearing relaxed in class and not feeling threatened. I decided that I could use these dimensions to create semantic differentials, which I would then ask the teachers to complete on a weekly basis.24 The semantic differentials that I deduced from the dimensions contained 18 statements, of which the following are a representative sample:

- How responsive do you feel that the class as a whole has been this week?
  - unresponsive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 responsive

- How friendly do you think the students have been towards one another this week?
  - unfriendly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 friendly

- How confident do you think the students have been to speak in front of one another this week?
  - not confident 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 confident

I thought that if I added up the numbers and found the average score for each week, I would then be able to plot on a graph a series of points which indicated the overall

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24 Judd, Smith and Kidder (1991, p. 167) explain that semantic differentials, developed by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum in 1957 as a method for measuring the meaning of an object to an individual, are commonly used to measure social attitudes. They say that in a semantic differential individuals rate a particular concept on a series of seven-point bipolar rating scales. For example, an individual would rate a statement such as "Me as I Am" by circling a number between 1 and 7 for a series of bipolar adjectives such as fair/unfair, passive/active, strong/weak, and so on.
weekly level of cohesion which each teacher felt that their class had achieved. By joining up the points I envisaged that I would be able to create in graphic form a profile of each class in terms of its development towards cohesion. Figure 3.1 shows such a graph, the numbers 1 - 7 on the "Y" axis indicating the level of cohesion felt by the teacher to be "achieved" by the class and the numbers 1 - 10 on the "X" axis representing the number of weeks in the course.

![Figure 3.1 Weekly levels of cohesion: Teacher impressions](image)

One of the reviewers of the research proposal wondered why a process/product element had not been built into the design of the study. In other words, they wondered why, apart from describing social processes occurring within language classes and attempting to "measure" levels of cohesion, I had not built into the study any assessment of student progress (with a view to establishing whether there was a relationship between levels of cohesion and student progress). I decided against asking the teachers to conduct formal end-of-term tests because I considered that tests might interfere with the natural dynamics of the class groups (with the students becoming nervous and so forth). I also considered that, even if "cohesive" class groups did appear to make above-average progress, I would not be able to attribute the progress to the cohesion (or vice versa), because many additional factors might have come into play. Nevertheless, this comment gave me the idea of asking the students to rate their own progress. Perhaps, I thought, students might feel that they were making more progress in cohesive classes. I therefore designed a student self-evaluation sheet which required students to circle a number between zero and ten to indicate (i) how much progress they
considered that they had made, and (ii) how satisfied they were with their progress (see Appendix G, Part A).

In summary, I intended to answer my initial research questions by doing the following:

- observing the classes on a weekly basis and taking extensive notes on anything that I observed which appeared to be related to the ongoing development of cohesion in the various classes;
- interviewing the teachers on a weekly basis about the key events and behaviours that they perceived had occurred in their classes during the previous week;
- interviewing all the students in all the classes on a one-to-one basis, for approximately fifteen minutes each;
- getting the teachers to circle numbers on semantic differentials on a weekly basis;
- getting the students in all the classes to appraise their progress and their satisfaction with their progress approximately half way through their courses.

In the following section I will describe how I carried out the research, and how events compelled me to modify certain of my data-gathering techniques.

**The data gathering**

Before starting to collect the data I had a meeting with each teacher in turn, outlining what the research would involve and answering any questions that they might have. I explained that I would be focusing on social processes within their classes rather than on aspects of pedagogy and that I was interested in the evolution of their classes as groups. I considered that it was necessary to be up-front about what I was interested in, which would soon have become obvious through my line of questioning anyway. I acknowledge, however, that my own interest in the development of class cohesion may have raised the awareness of the teachers about certain aspects of their classes. I then
gave each teacher a form of disclosure and informed consent to read and sign (see Appendix E).

I normally entered the classes on the second or third day of the courses (to give the teachers time to settle in), was introduced to the students, and sat quietly at the side of the class. When I returned to the classes in the second week of the courses (by which time the students had seen that my presence would not be intrusive) I explained to them what I would be doing, answered any queries they might have, and gave them letters to read and sign, written in as clear and simple a way as possible (see Appendix F). All the students in all the classes signed the form, except for one student who did not wish to do so. This student's privacy has been respected and she has not been alluded to anywhere in the study.

The classroom observations

I observed the classes for a minimum of a complete morning or afternoon each week for the duration of the courses (normally ten weeks). Some teachers, however, allowed me to sit in on lessons at other times, so that I could see the classes doing a wider range of activities, or operating in different settings (such as the library or the language laboratory). I also watched and noted down how the students related to one another outside class time, arriving a few minutes early or staying on in the room for a few minutes after the session had ended. I always let the teachers know in advance that I would be observing their lessons, and on one occasion, when a teacher said that my presence made her feel flustered, I suggested that I did not observe the second part of the lesson. Thereafter this teacher made no further comment about my presence in the room.

I acknowledge that my presence in the classrooms may have had the potential to affect the behaviour of the teachers and/or the students. This phenomenon is known as the "observer effect" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 47). I am also aware that certain

25 I had the letter translated into Serbo-Croatian so that the students in the beginners' class, who knew no English, would understand the nature of the research.
teachers may have been tempted to plan with extra care lessons which they knew I was
going to observe. However, because I considered it essential that the teachers felt
comfortable with my presence in their classrooms (so that the work of the class could
continue in a normal manner), I decided that I must always give the teachers prior
notice of my intention to observe their lessons.

The classroom observations proceeded according to plan in all the classes in the
study. I tended to vary where I sat in the various rooms, in order to be able to observe
behaviours of different groups of students. I was particularly interested in recording
behaviours which the teachers might not have noticed. The only problem that I
encountered during the observations was the desire on the part of certain teachers to use
me as a teacher's aid, asking me to make up numbers if a group needed an additional
member, for example, or occasionally asking me to help individual students with
problems. When the teachers asked me to join in I did so as unobtrusively as possible,
returning to my role as observer as soon as I could.

**Gathering data from the teachers**

When I came to set up the second and third case studies I found that both
teachers, pressed for time as all teachers are, were unwilling to agree to complete the
end-of-lesson evaluation sheets on a daily basis. These teachers suggested that, as an
alternative, they brought copies of their weekly planning sheets to their interviews (as a
reminder of what they had covered during the week), having added asterisks or
scribbled reminders to themselves of classroom events, student behaviours, or any
particular perceptions that they wished to share with me. I was happy with this
arrangement because, even though it gave me more work (having to transcribe longer
interviews), it meant that the teachers did not consider that their participation in the
study was so onerous. Because this system worked well for these particular teachers, I
adopted it for the remaining teachers in the study (all but one of whom developed the
habit of bringing along to their interviews a photocopy of their weekly planning sheet,
which they then allowed me to keep).
I also found myself naturally developing informal interview schedules on a weekly basis. In other words, as I sat in the various classes, or as I transcribed the interviews (which I always tried to do within a week of having conducted them), I found myself creating lists of questions which I wanted to ask each teacher the next time we met. These questions related, not only to what was occurring in the classes, but also to the teachers' personal philosophies and principles of practice. I included these additional, broader questions because I realised that the classroom environments that the teachers wished to establish were linked to their beliefs about language teaching and learning. In other words, I could see that the teachers' social and pedagogic priorities were in some way related and I considered that it was important to understand the two in conjunction with one another.

In contrast to the interviews, which yielded large quantities of rich and varied data (see below), the semantic differentials were disappointing, producing data with such little variation that the graphs which emerged from them exhibited minimal weekly fluctuations and therefore appeared as flat horizontal lines. This was because the two teachers who completed them chose to circle the numbers 5 or 6 on 308 occasions (78% of the total), while choosing the numbers at the lower end of the scale (twos and threes) on only ten occasions (3% of the total). The regularity with which the teachers chose to circle the same numbers (one or two below the highest), despite the fact that they did not eventually consider their classes to have been particularly cohesive, suggests the following possibilities: (i) they had a positive attitude towards their classes, (ii) they did not want to be perceived as having "failed," by circling low numbers (thereby "admitting" that their classes were "low on cohesion"), (iii) they did not have sufficient evidence readily at hand upon which to base their selection of particular numbers for particular statements, and therefore selected numbers which were similar to others already selected, or (iv) they became bored with the process of circling numbers and tended to do so in a cursory manner.26 At the end of the ninth

26 These findings support Oller and Perkins' comments regarding the validity of self-reports, quoted in Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p. 85).
week of the course, for example, one of the teachers circled the number five once and the number six 17 times (the total number of statements on the sheet being 18).

In view of the fact that the teachers' impressions did not appear to translate readily into numbers I concluded that the semantic differentials, while useful as a stimulus for further questioning, could not be used as a basis for drawing the graphs. This was disappointing, especially since I liked the idea of representing in a visual manner the teachers' impressions of the social development of their classes over time. I therefore resolved to abandon the semantic differentials but to retain the concept of the graphs. I decided that, instead of being used to depict measurements, the graphs could be used to encourage the teachers to reflect back on the totality of their courses. Prior to the end-of-course interviews, therefore, I asked each teacher to complete a graph and to write an accompanying descriptive paragraph which summarised their overall impression of the social development of their class from the first to the final week of the course. The graphs then served as the informal agendas for the final interviews. The ways in which the teachers completed their graphs, and their overall impressions of their classes, are described in Chapter 11.

As the study progressed I realised that the teacher interviews were yielding increasingly rich data, both in terms of quantity and quality. The second and third teachers who took part in the study, who were initially reluctant to agree to be interviewed for more than 20 minutes a week, soon became willing to be interviewed for approximately 40 minutes each week. One of them in particular made it clear that she wished to talk me through her complete weekly programme, lesson by lesson, and that she did not want to be cut short. I always allowed her to do so, sensing that whatever the teachers wished to say to me might turn out to be important. As the weeks went by all the teachers in the study appeared to become increasingly involved in the research process, and seemed interested in sharing their perceptions with me. The average length of the interviews across the whole study was therefore 40 minutes, but in a number of instances almost an hour. By the end of the data-gathering period (which lasted for 15 months) I had therefore interviewed each teacher for a minimum of 7
hours (once a week for a ten weeks, plus a retrospective interview). Apart from a single occasion when a particular teacher could not be interviewed because of an after-school commitment, all the teachers made time to be interviewed and kept their appointments.

My strategy while conducting the interviews was to switch on my tape recorder, establish eye contact and begin by asking a general question such as, "Well, how have things been this week?" or, "How has the class felt this week?" The teachers would then talk their way through the events of the preceding week (using their weekly plans as an aide memoire), recalling incidents and events, not only from their current classes, but also from previous classes. When the teachers talked about certain students in their current classes, for example, they tended to recall the behaviour of students in previous classes, remembering how they had felt and what strategies they had used in response to the behaviour.

I maintained the flow of the interviews, which I viewed as "informal conversational interviews" (Patton, 1990, p. 280) or as "conversations with a purpose" (Murphy, 1980, p. 75), by asking a question whenever the teacher concerned appeared to be concluding what they wished to say. I was happy to let the teachers talk in an uninhibited manner and tried to interrupt the narrative flow of their speech as little as possible. I routinely nodded as the teachers talked, or murmured words of agreement or appreciation for what the teachers were saying, encouraging them to keep talking for as long as they could. I decided on this course of action for two reasons. First, I perceived that, by giving them a degree of freedom in how they expressed themselves, the teachers would be more likely to reveal their personal constructions of events. Second, I considered that if I encouraged the teachers to say as much as they wanted (to the point of restating the same points on a number of different occasions), it would be difficult for them to conceal their true attitudes and opinions. In short, I believed that, by collecting interview data which were extensive in quantity and hopefully high in

27 In discussing issues of validity and reliability in case study research Merriam (1988, p. 167) points out that the objective of qualitative research is to discover "people's constructions of reality, how they understand the world."
quality, I was taking steps to ensure the truth value of the study in terms of the integrity of the teachers' own perceptions. I acknowledge, however, that any form of questioning has the potential to influence the data that are collected. In other words, the fact that a researcher is interested in particular kinds of classroom phenomena and asks questions about them may encourage teachers to think about classroom occurrences which might otherwise not have attracted their attention, and perhaps even to modify their behaviours in subsequent lessons.

I used many of the questioning techniques advocated by Murphy (1980), one of which was to ask the teachers to expand or rephrase what they were saying, especially when I was unsure whether I had fully understood their meaning. For example, if the teachers paused mid-sentence, I tended to look at them in a questioning manner, so that they had time to assemble their thoughts. I also routinely used the technique (which I had developed when conducting the first phase of the study) of summing up what the teachers were saying and asking for confirmation that I had understood them correctly. When summarising the teachers' perceptions I would often purposely appear hesitant, by making statements which ended with a fading, upward intonation pattern. I did this to encourage the teachers to interrupt and to clarify further the points that they were making. I also occasionally used "devil's advocate" questions, knowing that by proffering an opposing point of view the teachers would be encouraged either to confirm what they were saying more strongly, or to re-evaluate what they were saying and perhaps offer further insights.

At all times I was careful not to put words into the teachers' mouths, and not to encourage them to say anything that they did not genuinely mean. On the isolated occasions when I perceived that I might have been pushing the teachers too far, I backtracked, saying something like, "Maybe that's not a good question," or, "No, forget that I asked that." I took the additional precaution of transcribing everything that I

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28 Along with many researchers working within the qualitative paradigm I prefer the term "truth value" (Guba, 1981, Guba & Lincoln, 1981, Sandelowski, 1986), to the term "internal validity" when discussing the issue of how research findings match reality.
myself said during the interviews (along with everything that the teachers said), so that I could keep a check on my questioning techniques. This helped me to ensure that I did not succumb to the temptation of putting ideas into the teachers' heads. On the handful of occasions when I perceived that I might have encouraged the teachers to voice what I myself was thinking, I deleted what the teacher said from the transcripts.

I used the additional technique of indicating closure to the teachers after approximately 30 minutes of interview time by saying something along the lines of, "Just a couple of final questions," or, "To finish off with, perhaps you could tell me about such-and-such." When I did this I tended to make moves to pack away my books, and indicated that I was about to switch off the tape recorder. Almost invariably I found that, once they knew that I was unlikely to let their interviews overrun, the teachers would become keen to share additional insights with me. The final ten minutes or so of each interview was therefore frequently a time when the teachers made additional comments of what appeared to me to be of a particularly honest and thoughtful kind. Often I found myself having to switch on the tape recorder for a second or even third time, to record perceptions offered by the teachers after their interviews had formally ended.

During the data-gathering period I also recorded additional hour-long interviews with two further teachers, both of whom, despite showing interest in the project, were unable to participate in the study. I arranged to interview these two teachers because they seemed keen to share with me their personal teaching philosophies and class management strategies, and I thought that their perceptions might enhance my general understanding of the phenomenon of class cohesion. At a later point, when I realised that the insights of these two teachers complemented the insights of the other teachers in the study, I decided to include in the data analysis chapters of the study selected quotations from their interviews. The pseudonyms of these two teachers are Kerry and Richard.

Some two months after I had completed documenting the first class the teacher concerned contacted me in a state of excitement saying that her subsequent class,
despite being similar in terms of the syllabus and the abilities and demographic mix of the students, had a totally different "feel" to it from the class that I had observed. This teacher seemed particularly keen to share with me her perceptions, not only of how her subsequent class seemed different from the previous class, but also of why it appeared to her to operate in such a strikingly different way. I decided that this information was too valuable to lose and quickly arranged a further interview. I sensed that this information was particularly rich, because (i) the teacher needed so little prompting, pouring out her perceptions and feelings in an extended monologue, and (ii) she was talking about two similar classes which appeared to have evolved so differently.29

My encounter with this particular teacher and the thoughtfulness of the perceptions that she offered at that time made me decide to conduct a supplementary interview with all the teachers who participated in the study, some three months after the courses that I had observed had ended. In all cases these supplementary interviews bore fruitful results because, when I interviewed them at a later date, it was evident that the teachers (i) still had vivid memories of the classes that I had observed, (ii) had an even clearer picture in their minds of their current classes (which were often similar demographically to the classes that I had observed), and (iii) were emotionally distanced from the classes that I had observed, and therefore seemed able to give a more detached assessment of how cohesive their class had felt.30

29 A particular difficulty with setting up comparative studies in naturalistic settings such as classrooms involves finding parallel classes in which the extraneous variables can be presumed to be similar. Here was a teacher who was telling me that she had just taught in succession two classes which had appeared to her to be qualitatively different, despite the fact that the student groups had been demographically similar and that she had used the same materials and the same techniques. I was indeed interested in gathering her perceptions about why this was the case, even though I myself had not observed the subsequent class.

30 In Chapter 11 I will show that several teachers in the study readjusted their assessments of the levels of cohesion "achieved" by their classes in a downward direction. In other words, in the cold light of day the teachers tended to be more realistic about the levels of cohesion achieved by the classes that I had observed. One reason for this is likely to be that the teachers did not want to admit to me, the researcher, that their classes had not been particularly cohesive, since this might be construed as denoting failure on their part. However, if they had a subsequent class which they perceived had operated in a cohesive manner, and which they could describe to me, then they seemed more prepared to admit that the class that I had observed had not been so cohesive after all.
As the study progressed I gained the impression that I was developing a collaborative relationship with each of the teachers. They seemed genuinely interested in helping me to understand the social processes which they believed were occurring in their classes and appeared to welcome having regular contact with someone who was prepared to listen to everything that they had to say in relation to these processes. Developing a collaborative relationship with informants has, of course, its own particular set of pitfalls, as I was to learn later on when I came to write up the study. In other words, I found that I felt stimulated and rewarded by my closeness to the teachers during the data-gathering phase of the research. In turn this led me to perceive that I somehow had a duty to "tell the stories" of the teachers (whose teaching circumstances and philosophies I felt I now understood) in the form of detailed reportage. It took me some time to accept what I knew in theory to be true: that for a researcher to be able to report on their findings in a detached, dispassionate and impartial manner, they must be able to stand back and view the worlds of the players in their study from the "outside." Because of the sympathy that I felt for the teachers in my study, and because of the gratitude that I felt towards them for participating in the first place, I found the process of distancing myself from them and their experiences particularly difficult.

Gathering data from the students

The interviews that I conducted with the students in the first class that I studied yielded some useful information but were, on the whole, disappointing. This appeared to be partly due to the limited levels of English language proficiency of the students in that class (a pre-intermediate class), and partly because I was compelled (for logistical reasons) to conduct most of the interviews in the afternoons after classes had ended, by which time the students were keen to get home. In contrast, the interviews that I conducted with the students in the second and third classes in the study were highly revealing, partly because the levels of English language proficiency of the students were higher and partly because I was given the opportunity to withdraw each student in
turn from their classes on two separate occasions and to interview them for up to fifteen minutes each time.

During the first round of these interviews, which I conducted during the second, third and fourth weeks of the courses, I simply asked the students about their backgrounds and aspirations, thereby showing that I was interested in them as people and gaining their confidence. When it came to the second round of interviews, which I conducted during the sixth, seventh and eighth weeks of the courses, I probed in more depth how each student felt about their class, and why they felt as they did. A chance occurrence in one of the classes (in the form of a confrontation between student groups) enabled me to extract perceptions of what appeared to be a particularly heartfelt kind.31

Prior to conducting the second round of interviews I asked the students to rate (i) their own progress and (ii) their satisfaction with their progress on the personal evaluation sheets (see first section of Appendix G). Since this procedure took a maximum of ten minutes (by the time I had handed out the sheets, explained the procedure, given the students time to think before they circled their numbers, and collected in the sheets), the teachers allowed me to administer these in class time. I was then able to use the sheets as a starting-off point for each of the interviews, asking each student to explain to me why they had selected each of the two numbers.

I found that these personal evaluation sheets were a good way of encouraging the students to open up to me. However, the range of extraneous reasons that the students put forward for their lack of progress in English made me realise that it was naive to assume that the students would consider that their rates of learning were related mainly either to the pedagogic practices of their teachers or to the social atmospheres which prevailed within their classes. For example, students frequently

31 It could be argued that the confrontation which occurred in this particular class distorted the perceptions of the students, making them appear particularly negative. Other evidence from the study suggests, however, that tensions within this particular class were building up over a period of several weeks, and that the confrontational incident perhaps freed the students to express their views more strongly and more fully than they might otherwise have done. This occurrence illustrates that an element of chance may affect the nature of the data which are collected in any study. In other words, the state of mind of the interviewee at the time of the interview is likely to affect, not only what is said, but the manner in which the message is conveyed.
blamed external circumstances, such as lack of sleep, home duties, anxiety, laziness or the lack of contact with English speakers outside class for their slow rates of progress. Another finding was that the students routinely gave themselves moderate or low ratings in answer to both the questions, as if considering that it was inappropriate to rate themselves highly. Occasionally students circled numbers in a seemingly illogical manner. One student, for example, indicated that she perceived that she was making excellent progress, but that she was not happy with her progress. A number of students, when discussing the reasons behind their selection of certain numbers, decided that they wished to adjust their evaluations of themselves, and were keen to ensure that the sheet was changed to reflect their revised views. The above findings, which indicated that the students' perceived rates of progress were related to a wide range of factors, made me decide not to present the results numerically. I resolved however, to continue to use the personal evaluation sheets as a stimulus for discussion, since they seemed to function well as a means of encouraging the students to talk.

Realising that, in the subsequent classes in the study, I would probably not be given the opportunity of interviewing each student on two separate occasions, and certainly not during class time, I thought it necessary to find another way of encouraging the students to consider how they felt about their classes before being interviewed by me. I reasoned that, if I could do this, I could then spend almost the entire interview (apart from brief preliminaries at the beginning) trying to understand the students' perceptions of their classes in a more in-depth way. In order to achieve this objective I decided to refine a mid-term evaluation sheet that the teacher of the first class and I had developed in a collaborative manner. In my half of that evaluation sheet I had dotted around the page in a random manner fourteen adjectives describing personal feelings. These included adjectives describing "positive" feelings, such as

32 It is known that a number of factors, including the tendency of raters to avoid extreme response categories, affect the reliability of self-rating scales (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991, p. 153).

33 Upon reflection I suspect that this particular student, who expressed dissatisfaction with the course content, may have been trying to indicate that she was making good progress in English due to her own efforts outside class.
"comfortable," "happy," "supported" and "interested," and adjectives which described "negative" feelings, such as "nervous," "angry," "stressed" and "bored." The rubric required the students to select a maximum of three adjectives (from anywhere on the page), circle them, and then complete two sentences, one beginning, "I like this class because..." and the other beginning, "I do not like this class when...."

Because of their limited command of English the written responses of the students tended to be short and not particularly revealing. However, as I was driving to the location of the fourth case study class one day, wondering how I could encourage students to be more frank and open in their written answers, I suddenly recalled adjectives of frequency ("always," "usually," "sometimes," "never" and so on). Knowing from my experience as a teacher that students of a new language find it easier to write if they are presented with the first half of a sentence, I resolved to try creating open-ended sentences containing adjectives of frequency which the students could then complete in any way they saw fit. I therefore devised a sheet which had, on one side, 30 adjectives randomly scattered around the page (again, all representing either "positive" or "negative" feelings), and, on the other side, the following four open-ended sentences (with plenty of blank space underneath each one for free writing):

(i) "In this class I always feel __________ because . . . ."
(ii) "In this class I usually feel __________ because . . . ."
(iii) "In this class I occasionally feel __________ because . . . ."
(iv) "In this class I never feel __________ because . . . ."

The students' task was to study all the adjectives and to select four, one for each gapped sentence, and then to complete the sentence. Because of the random way that the adjectives were scattered around the page, and because of the open-ended nature of the sentences, the students were free to express either positive or negative feelings about their classes, or a combination of both, in a wide variety of permutations. This sheet can be seen in its final form in Appendix G. I had the sheet translated into Serbo-Croatian for the beginner-level class, 90% of whom were from the former Yugoslavia (see Appendix H).
I used this evaluation sheet experimentally with the fourth class and, because it worked well, used it with the remaining four classes in the study. Before handing out the sheets I made sure to stress that the information would be treated confidentially and that the students were free to write whatever they liked. When I collected in the sheets I made a point of putting them all in an envelope and putting the envelope away in my bag. I required the students to write their names on the sheets, so that each student's sheet could form the personalised basis for the interviews.

Although I did a numerical count of the words most commonly selected (see Chapter 5), I realised from their written comments that the frequency with which the students circled certain adjectives did not automatically relate to how they felt about their classes. On the contrary, despite the rubric of the questionnaire stressing that the focus was on the classes (see Appendix G), a number of students took the opportunity to make general statements about their personal circumstances and about their experience of living in Australia. These statements provided useful supplementary information, much of which I was able to incorporate into Chapter 4 (the chapter which contextualises the study by describing the backgrounds of the teachers and the students who formed the classes). However, I was thankful that I was going to have the opportunity to interview the students and to probe deeper, using the students' sentences as a starting point and asking them precisely what they meant by what they had written.34

I always started the interviews by asking the students a few questions about themselves and their circumstances. I would then display interest in the numbers that they had circled (representing their perceptions of their progress and their levels of satisfaction with their progress) and, as indicated earlier in this chapter, would ask them to justify their selection. We would then move on to the sentences that the students had completed and I would make statements such as, "That's interesting. Could you tell me

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34 I had the comments from the students in the beginner-level class translated back into English by a bilingual teacher. This was the only class whose members I could not interview because of lack of funds to employ an interpreter.
a little more?" or, "I don't quite understand what you mean here. Could you explain?" In this way I was able to probe more deeply into the students' perceptions of their classes and begin to understand (i) what the students meant by their statements (which were sometimes unclear or ambiguous, because of limited levels of English), and (ii) the reasons underlying the statements. I found that, unless a critical moment had occurred (such as the inter-cultural confrontation which occurred in one of the classes), the students seldom talked about the same aspects of their classes; different students had strikingly different insights that they wished to share. Interestingly, I found that I was seldom able to predict which students would give me the most in-depth responses. Students whom I perceived were likely to be forthcoming might sometimes provide me with predictable, clichéd replies, while quieter students (including those whose English appeared to be less strong) sometimes made observations of a particularly insightful and pertinent kind. I also learnt not to anticipate the kinds of comments that students might make. Students whose classroom behaviour indicated that they were satisfied with their courses, for example, often made critical comments. (This point will be discussed more fully in Chapter 12.)

The interviews which I conducted with the students in the study showed that, contrary to my expectations, those students who had a genuine desire to communicate their feelings and observations to me through the medium of English usually found a way of doing so, regardless of their levels of proficiency in English. It nevertheless remains true that, because of the factors outlined earlier in this section, and because of the limited time available to me to interview the students, the data that I gathered from the students in the study was less comprehensive than the data that I gathered from the teachers.

In summary, by the end of the 15-month data-gathering period, I had collected the following items of raw data:

- observation notes from 84 separate classroom sessions (the majority of which were of two and a half hours' duration),
Data analysis

I analysed the raw data in a number of distinct phases, each time forcing myself to examine them in more depth and detail. The preliminary phase of the data analysis took place when I typed up the transcripts of the teacher interviews. I tried not to get behind with transcribing the data because I wanted each subsequent interview to be guided by the insights that I had gained from all the previous interviews. As I typed I found myself thinking about what the data were suggesting, and every time I had a new thought I jotted it down on a separate piece of A4 paper and gave it a heading. Eventually, having amassed a pile of notes expressing random ideas and speculations about the significance of the teachers' words, I sorted those which seemed to be expressing similar ideas into smaller piles, for which I created superordinate headings. I then filed the notes under the appropriate headings.35

Because my initial objective was to document the social processes which occurred in each class as it progressed towards a state of cohesion, I decided that the next phase of the data analysis was to examine each class individually. My objective was to identify the key behaviours of both teachers and students which appeared to relate to the social development of the various classes. I had already established that I would use the functional model of leadership as a framework for analysing the development of the classes (see Chapter 2). I therefore went through the transcripts of the teacher interviews, the classroom observation notes, and the student interview notes for each class in turn, highlighting what appeared to be key classroom behaviours and

35 It can be seen that the procedures that I was following were similar to those that I had followed when developing the theory, as described in Chapter 2.
events for each successive week. I took particular note of moments when the impressions of myself, the teacher concerned, and certain students, seemed to concur. I also took special care to pick out all the references made by the teachers as to how their classes "seemed" to them, as the weeks went by, and noted the adjectives that the teachers used to describe the overall "feel" of their classes at the end of their courses.

Before beginning my task of writing up what happened in each class in terms of its social evolution, I transferred all the raw data onto medium-sized file cards, assembling on one card all the key data for the first week of each class, all the key data for the second week, and so on. Since I wished to triangulate the perceptions of the teacher, the students and myself, I placed together on the same card the data from all three sources, with appropriate reference codes so that I knew where the data had come from. I also made separate sections in the file box for the teachers' approaches and pedagogic practices (sensing, as described earlier, that the teachers' preferred teaching styles might be a contributory factor in the development of feelings of cohesion within the classes).

Using the procedures described above I identified what I considered to be the key weekly events occurring in each of the classes. I then wrote up the developmental "story" of three of the classes in what I perceived to be a detached and objective manner. Unfortunately my presentation was so devoid of interpretation that, although the narratives were of interest both to the teachers concerned and to myself, they appeared lengthy and monotonous to my supervisors, who explained that they needed to be given more indication as to what was important in each of the stories. What I was doing at this point, I now realise, what to present the raw data in a selective and organised form, but failing to interpret it in sufficient depth. In other words, I was trying to reach a level of objectivity by adapting a flat writing style, rather than by shifting my own position. (I realised at a later point that the detachment of the researcher lies, not only in their ability to write in a detached, measured style which is devoid of value judgements, but also in their ability to assume a position which is somehow "above," "outside" or "set apart from" the world views of the players within
the study.) In order to give a flavour of the case studies I have included in Appendix I a sample account of one week's events. Space does not permit the inclusion of more material form the case study accounts, each of which ran to more than 80 pages.

It was not until I had written up three of the classes as discrete narratives that I admitted to myself that I needed to approach the data differently and to find an alternative way of writing up the study. The three narratives were useful, however, in that they provided a means of checking the degree to which the findings matched the teachers' perceptions of the reality of their classrooms. As soon as I had completed writing up each case study I sent a copy of the complete text to the teacher concerned, together with an invitation to check everything for accuracy, and to make any further comments. In all three cases the teachers confirmed that the narrative presented an accurate picture of the behaviours and events within their classes. Apart from one teacher, who pointed out two inaccuracies of a minor kind (such as the reason why the students' coffee mugs needed to be locked away), no suggestions for changes were made.

Having made the decision not to proceed further with my initial plan of writing up the classes as discrete case studies, I realised that I needed to go back and re-analyse the raw data, integrating the information that I had gathered from all eight classes into a unified whole. Surprising though it may seem to those who are familiar with computer software packages for analysing qualitative data, I decided to do this by hand, using a card index system. My decision to do this was based on the following: (i) I feel comfortable with the tactile nature of cards and I like being able to sort them physically and to move them around, (ii) I like doing some of my work sitting in an armchair with pieces of paper, rather than sitting at a desk and looking at a computer screen, and (iii) in anticipation of writing up the study I wanted to have the data in a form which would allow me to run my eye over multiple pieces of information at the same time.

It took me six months to re-analyse the data, copying quotations from the eight classes onto large-size file cards, all the time putting like with like and creating a new card with a new heading each time a new phenomenon which seemed to be related to
the notion of cohesion became evident. I then created sub-sections within the card index, placing under the same section heading any cards which seemed to deal with similar facets of the development of cohesion. When sub-sections grew too large I subdivided them, and if they remained small I tried to integrate them with others. When it became necessary to re-name the section headings in order to accommodate new data, I did so. During the course of this activity I found myself refining my thinking further, and writing comments about what was going on in the classes at the top of the file cards. I also speculated about these processes in a further batch of creative memos, written like the previous ones on A4 pieces of paper.

Looking back I can see that this phase of the study, time-consuming though it was, was an integral part of the research process. Had I not re-analysed the data I do not think that I would have understood so thoroughly the social processes which were occurring within each of the eight classes and, crucially, the teachers' perspectives of those processes.

Writing up the study

By the end of the third phase of the data-analysis process I found that I had filled my card index box with approximately 700 cards, each of which contained an average of ten references. The majority of these references were in the form of direct quotations extracted from the teacher interviews. The next step was to begin writing, but I was still unsure of the form that the writing should take. Should I take an evolutionary approach, extracting examples from the various classes to illustrate various phases of group development? Alternatively, perhaps I should contrast the approaches of the various teachers, attempting to show that certain approaches were more likely than others to lead to the development of a feeling of cohesion within the classes? Then again, maybe I should focus on the roles that the teachers and the students in the various classes appeared to play in the development or non-development
of class cohesion? Or perhaps I should be selective in the themes that I drew out, in order to narrow down the topic?

I experimented most extensively with the third option, trying over a period of three months to write up the study in terms of the positive and the negative roles that it seemed that both the teachers and selected students were playing in the development (or otherwise) of atmospheres of cohesion within the various classes. I found it impossible, however, to attain the necessary level of detachment; I seemed constantly to be slipping back into the position of implicitly supporting the teachers in their struggles to develop the kinds of atmospheres that they wished to prevail within their classes.

Eventually, after much experimentation, I realised that I needed to confront my own assumptions, by asking myself two questions of an essentially philosophical nature. The first of these related to the nature of cohesion: was "cohesion" something tangible which could be identified and described, or was it simply a construct that existed in the minds, not only of the teachers, but also of myself? I knew that there was a sense in which classes could and did operate in a collaborative, "cohesive" way, with everyone "pulling together" as they would if they were members of a team. I also knew from the data that I had collected, however, that even in the most harmonious of the classes in the study there was evidence of a lack of cohesion (in the form inter-student tensions, for example). I therefore concluded that there was a sense in which "cohesion" was an abstraction of an ideal, rather than something which existed in an objective sense.

The second philosophical question that I posed for myself was whether class cohesion was a desirable goal? On reflection I realised that from the outset of the study I had always assumed (along with the teachers) that cohesion was somehow "good" and that the teachers in the study were therefore justified in their efforts to encourage the development of a feeling of cohesion in their classes. Evidence from the study suggested, however, that there were occasions when actions performed in the name of class cohesion did not appear to be in the best interests of certain students. In other words, what appeared to be good for the class as a whole did not always appear to be
good for individual class members. I also had evidence to suggest that, the more that
certain teachers tried to develop a feeling of cohesion in their classes, the more likely it
was that some students might feel dissatisfied. I therefore concluded that I must
question the assumption that the development of class cohesion was intrinsically a
"good" or "desirable" goal which should be pursued at all costs, regardless of other
considerations.

Posing these two questions and confronting my own assumptions suddenly
enabled me to assume a more impartial position in relation to the study. Metaphorically
speaking I now found myself able to look at the classes through a window, whereas
before I had been "inside" the classrooms and therefore a part of the teachers' worlds
and imbued with their values. By taking this step back and distancing myself from the
teachers, I perceived that I had at last attained Patton's position of empathetic neutrality
in relation to the phenomenon that I was studying.

Once I had let go of the twin assumptions outlined above (relating to the
desirability and attainability of class cohesion), I needed to find a way of writing up the
study which would allow me to examine critically what the teachers were saying about
their classes. In other words, I knew that I needed to demonstrate that what each teacher
was saying, while not necessarily "right" or "true," was nevertheless their own version
of the events that were occurring in their class. I therefore resolved to present the study
as an account of teachers' perceptions of the reality of language classrooms, rather than
as an account of the reality itself. I considered that, by taking this particular approach, I
would then be able to indicate where the teachers' versions of reality were supported by
those of other members of their classes and by my own observations, and where they
were not.

With my newly-acquired scepticism I re-read the data analysis chapters that I
had written so far, and was struck by the naive way in which they were written. Even
though a few months earlier I had resolved not to throw out anything that I had written
so far, I now found myself keen to reject everything in these chapters (apart from the
quotations) and start again from scratch. I decided that the best way to rewrite the study
was to take a broad sequential approach, beginning with the teachers' values (which I realised could often be deduced from the words that they used), and then moving through the various stages of development of the social relations within the classes in a broadly sequential way.\textsuperscript{36} This meant starting with the teachers' perceptions of the social climates that they wished to create in their classes, proceeding to describe the strategies that they said they used to socialise individual students, to keep their classes "energised" and to maintain a sense of community within their classes, and finally finishing by describing the rituals that the teachers said they used to mark the formal endings of their courses.

Having decided to write up the study as a process, I devised a series of headings to keep myself on track. I found it easiest to conceptualise the behaviours of the teachers and the students in their classes in terms of functions. I therefore created a series of tentative headings and sub-headings, containing as far as possible progressive verbal forms ending in "-ing," such as "setting parameters," "challenging the teacher" or "boosting individuals." I wrote all these headings on cards which I stuck up on a large board. I then started to write, constantly adjusting, shifting and renaming the headings as I fine-tuned my thinking and worked out how best to present the data.

When transcribing the teacher interviews I had always typed exactly what the teachers had said, including false starts, repetition, redundancy, recasts, phatic language and occasional errors of a non-systematic kind. When I came to transfer the teachers' words into the data-analysis chapters I made occasional minimal changes in the above areas, where not to have done so would have affected the flow of what the teachers were saying. I was careful to use ellipsis accurately, with three ellipsis points to indicate the omission of words within a sentence, and four ellipsis points to indicate any omission between two sentences. I also used four ellipsis points to indicate occasions

\textsuperscript{36} It is common for grounded theory studies to be written up as developmental processes. Examples can readily be found in journals such as \textit{Qualitative Health Research} or \textit{Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship}.
when the flow of what the teachers were saying was interspersed by a comment made by myself.

In conclusion, I found that designing the study, collecting the data, analysing the data and finding a way of writing up the findings, was itself a developmental process of growing awareness on my part. At many stages along the way I found it necessary to evaluate in a critical manner what I was doing and to find alternative ways of progressing towards my goal. I had little idea at the outset of the study that I would be embarking on such a sustained but ultimately satisfying journey of discovery.

**Preserving confidentiality**

Prior to gathering data for the study I informed the teachers and the students in the classes of the nature of the research and what would be involved, providing them with letters of disclosure and informed consent which both they and I signed (see Appendices E and F). In accordance with my commitment to guarantee that participants would not be identifiable I have used pseudonyms throughout the study.

**Summary**

This chapter has outlined the design of the study, the methods which were used to gather the data, the techniques which were used to analyse the data, and the format for the presentation of the findings. Because of the exploratory nature of the study it was necessary on a number of occasions to make decisions about how to proceed. In all instances I have made an effort to explain the reasons underlying my decisions.

In the chapter which follows I will describe the contexts in which the classes were held and will introduce the teachers and students who participated in the study.
CHAPTER 4
THE TEACHING CONTEXT

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is (i) to introduce the reader to the different teaching environments within which the data for the study were gathered, (ii) to present a composite picture of the teachers who participated in the study, giving an overview of the similarities and differences between them, and (iii) to give the reader an overall impression of the kinds of adult learners who participated in the study, together with an indication of the range of problems, concerns and expectations that they brought with them to their classes.

The eight teachers and their classes

The eight teachers who participated in the second phase of the study were all native speakers of English engaged in teaching English on short, intensive courses in an English speaking environment. Four of them were classified as TESL teachers because they were teaching English to migrants for whom English would become their second language, while the remaining four were classified as TEFL teachers because they were teaching English as a foreign language to students who would be returning to their home countries. The students on the courses were all over the age of 18 and defined as adult learners of English.

37 The term TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) is the widely used term for teaching English to non-English speaking background immigrants and their children in Australia, while the term TEFL (Teaching English as a foreign Language) is used to describe teaching English usually as a branch of study rather than a language of instruction to overseas learners in or from non-English speaking countries (McPherson, 1996).

38 An argument could be presented in favour of calling the students in the classes "learners" or "adult learners" in recognition of the status of such students. However, I have decided to retain the term "student" throughout the study because (i) in common parlance "student" is a more natural term than "learner" or "adult learner," and (ii) the term "student" balances the word "teacher" in the reader's mind, encapsulating the bipolar relationship between these two traditional classroom roles.
As illustrated in Table 2, four of the classes were composed of migrant students, the majority of whom had come to Australia as refugees. The remaining four classes were composed of fee-paying students who were in Australia on study visas. Most of the fee-paying students intended to return to their home countries to do jobs or further study once they had completed their intensive English language courses in Australia. Some of them planned to do additional courses in Australia, while a handful aspired to enter Australian tertiary institutions.

All eight courses in the study were classified as short courses. The duration of six of the courses was ten weeks, while one course was slightly shorter (8 weeks) and one was longer (13 weeks). Six of the courses were full-time intensive courses, the students having between 20 and 25 hours of English language tuition each week. One of the remaining courses was three-quarters time (15 hours a week), while the other was classified as part-time, the students attending class for only six hours a week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class name</th>
<th>Student type</th>
<th>Total weeks of course</th>
<th>Total weekly class hours</th>
<th>Weekly contact hours with teacher in study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela's class</td>
<td>Migrants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally's class</td>
<td>Fee-paying overseas students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy's class</td>
<td>Migrants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe's class</td>
<td>Fee-paying overseas students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian's class</td>
<td>Migrants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine's class</td>
<td>Fee-paying overseas students</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom's class</td>
<td>Migrants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie's class</td>
<td>Fee-paying overseas students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teachers in the study were either the sole or the main teachers on their courses and (apart from the teacher of the part-time course) had between 13 and 20 contact hours with their classes each week.

Table 3  The levels and sizes of the classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
<th>Gender balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela's class</td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally's class</td>
<td>Pre-Intermediate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy's class</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe's class</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian's class</td>
<td>Post-Intermediate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine's class</td>
<td>Upper-Intermediate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom's class</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie's class</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>10 (average)</td>
<td>variable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 3, the language classes which were examined in the study contained students with a variety of levels of English language proficiency.\(^{39}\) Pamela's class contained newly-arrived refugees with no prior knowledge of English. Sally's class was a pre-intermediate level class of "false-beginners," students who had studied English in their home countries but whose knowledge of the language had not been consolidated and whose communicative competence was limited. Amy's class was an

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\(^{39}\)The terms "beginner," "pre-intermediate," "intermediate," "upper-intermediate," "post-intermediate," "upper-intermediate" and "advanced" are general terms used to give a broad indication of the language levels of the classes. The Australian Second Language Proficiency rating scales (Commonwealth of Australia, 1984) provide descriptors of the language levels of the four migrant classes, but again these only give a broad impression. Within the classes themselves there were differences between the proficiency levels of the students.
intermediate-level class of migrant students with academic or job aspirations, while Joe's was an intermediate-level class which contained students who needed English to further their careers in their home countries. Gillian's class was a post-intermediate class containing migrant women with family commitments, while Christine's class was an upper-intermediate one composed of students who were preparing for the Cambridge First Certificate examination. Tom's class was an advanced-level class of migrant professionals who needed sufficient English to qualify for entry into appropriate professional upgrading courses. Maggie's class, also advanced level, contained a mix of students with a range of aspirations. The composition of this class was constantly changing, with individual students joining or leaving the class as the course progressed.

As seen in Table 3, the classes in the study were of different sizes, the largest containing 20 students and the smallest containing an average of 10 students. The average number of students in the eight classes was 14. The gender balance within the various classes varied considerably. Although Pamela, Amy, Joe and Christine had reasonably balanced male/female ratios in their classes, less than a quarter of the students in Tom's class were men and Gillian had only one male student in a class of 19.

**The institutions in which the teachers worked**

The five language organisations within which the teachers taught differed in terms of their cultures and the degree to which teacher mobility between the various courses was encouraged. In the institutions in which Amy, Joe and Gillian worked

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40 The Cambridge First Certificate Examination is a twice-yearly examination run by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. This intermediate/upper intermediate-level exam, which tests students' competence in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and in knowledge of grammar can be taken by students anywhere in the world. This exam is recognised by employers in a range of European countries as guaranteeing a good basic knowledge of English. This examination is becoming increasingly known in Asian countries such as Japan, with increasing numbers of students now wishing to sit for it.

41 For ease of access I studied two teachers in one private institution and two teachers in one of the institutions providing courses for migrant students. The other two teachers who delivered courses to migrants worked in the same organisation, but their locations and the nature of their courses were unrelated.
teachers had developed virtual ownership of certain courses, teaching the same level of course to the same type of student clientele four times a year. Such teachers were able to follow the same basic teaching programme each time and could recycle the same materials from term to term. In other institutions, notably the private language schools where Joe, Christine and Maggie worked, teacher flexibility was required, with teachers expected to teach at a range of different levels and sometimes being given little advance notice of which level they would be required to teach. In practice teachers tended to develop expertise for teaching particular types of courses and would be assigned to those courses whenever they were run. With her good knowledge of grammar Christine, for example, was given a Cambridge examination preparation class twice a year, while Maggie, with her ongoing interest in current affairs, was assigned the high-level general class whenever such a class was run.42

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42 The examinations run by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate which are routinely taken by students in language schools in Australia include the First Certificate in English, the Certificate of Advanced English and the Cambridge Proficiency in English.
Government-funded institutions

Table 4  The institutions where the teachers worked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Designation of course</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela's class</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
<td>On-arrival course</td>
<td>Department of Immigration &amp; Ethnic Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally's class</td>
<td>Language centre on university campus</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students</td>
<td>Student-funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy's class</td>
<td>Language centre on university campus</td>
<td>English Course for Academic and Professional Purposes</td>
<td>Commonwealth Employment Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe's class</td>
<td>Private language school</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students</td>
<td>Student-funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian's class</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
<td>Ongoing course</td>
<td>Department of Immigration &amp; Ethnic Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine's class</td>
<td>Private language school</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students</td>
<td>Student-funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom's class</td>
<td>Language centre on university campus</td>
<td>English Course for Academic and Professional Purposes</td>
<td>Commonwealth Employment Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie's class</td>
<td>Private language school</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students</td>
<td>Student-funded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 4, Pamela and Gillian taught within the Adult Migrant English Program, a well-established programme with a stable population of middle-aged teachers, the majority of whom were women.\(^{43}\) Pamela taught with a tightly-knit group of part-time teachers in a small language centre outside the city centre which had

\(^{43}\) The Adult Migrant English Program is a national programme funded and coordinated by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. The objective of the AMEP is to assist newly-arrived migrants to acquire the English language skills they need in order to function effectively in Australian society (AMEP Handbook, 1995). The program evolved from the ad hoc tuition arrangements of the late 1940s and catered for large numbers of migrants in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Since 1996, the time when the data for the study were gathered, the programme has been restructured, with the various parts of the programme allocated to alternative providers.
a culture of teacher mobility. Pamela had requested a low-level class because she had not taught one for some time. Gillian, who taught in the city, had an atypical job involving a combination of teaching on part-time day and evening courses and interviewing students for placement purposes. Although Gillian had taught the same level class for several years, she was unable to repeat the same programme or recycle materials within a short space of time because many of the students remained in her class for several consecutive terms. Gillian worked largely on her own, developing a different focus for each course according to her perceptions of the needs and interests of each set of students.

The Adult Migrant English Program had a well-established professional development programme and contract staff were expected to attend eight professional development days each year. Because of the recent influx of refugees from war zones professional development sessions on the emotional problems of refugee students had recently been run. Teachers were therefore aware of the potential to offend the sensibilities of students in the classroom situation and had been advised not to focus on certain topics. The teachers had also been given a professional development session by an English teacher who was herself a refugee from the former Yugoslavia on the preferred learning styles of adult students from her country.

Amy and Tom, who also taught migrant students, had a different set of teaching circumstances. They worked in a small, self-contained language teaching unit located on a university campus and funded on a per capita basis through the Commonwealth Employment Service. In this unit, which provided intensive English language tuition for migrant professionals, the teachers had little opportunity to mix with teachers outside their immediate circle of colleagues and had no access to professional development programmes. Amy and Tom had both been in the unit for a number of years and, since each always taught at the same level, had developed programmes which changed little from term to term. Although they worked within the same unit (albeit teaching classes at different levels) Amy and Tom employed strikingly different teaching approaches.
Private institutions

In contrast to the teachers working with migrant students three of the remaining teachers, Joe, Christine and Maggie, worked in two independent, market-driven language schools (Joe and Maggie in one school and Christine in another).\textsuperscript{44} Both these schools provided intensive English language tuition for fee-paying students from European and Asian countries. At the time that the data for the study were gathered (1996, the year prior to the Asian economic crisis) both schools were experiencing boom conditions and had enrolled record numbers of students from Korea. While the data were being collected one of the schools enrolled 200 high-school students from Indonesia, which meant that space was at a premium, with non-essential rooms being converted into classrooms and additional workstations created in the staffrooms for newly-recruited language teachers. Classroom furniture was also in short supply, with Joe's table and some of the student tables being removed from his room one lunchtime.

Both the above schools contained a mixture of long-term, relatively experienced EFL teachers, novice teachers and temporary teachers, many of whom were in possession of Royal Society of Arts Certificates in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Adults.\textsuperscript{45} One of the above schools ran a regular lunch-hour staff

\textsuperscript{44} The term "market driven" has been used because these schools, along with many private language schools, judge their success (to a degree at least) in terms of financial profit. Such schools routinely accept students first and work out afterwards which courses to run (depending on overall student numbers, student objectives and the distribution of language levels of the students currently enrolled). Because there is seldom a perfect fit between students and classes (schools work on the basis that a financially-viable class must contain a minimum number of students), classes can sometimes contain students with a range of levels, abilities, needs or goals. Alternatively, due to ongoing marketing strategies or to new marketing initiatives, classes can become unbalanced in terms of the distribution of nationalities, with student groups from certain countries dominating classes because of their large numbers. All these factors can put pressure on teachers, who sometimes perceive that they have been asked to "do the impossible" in terms of their daily classroom teaching.

\textsuperscript{45} The Royal Society of Arts Certificates and Diplomas in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language, administered from the UK by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, are becoming increasingly recognised on a worldwide basis. The RSA CTEFLA (Certificate in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults) gives native English speakers an introduction to the principles of communicative language teaching, providing them with sufficient skills to go out and teach. It is common for people who wish to make English language teaching their career to teach for a few years and then to prepare for the RSA DTEFLA (the Royal Society of Arts Diploma in the Teaching of Foreign Language to Adults), a highly-respected qualification which, in addition to refining teaching skills, provides candidates with a theoretical basis for current English language teaching practice.
development programme during which the teachers were introduced to new teaching
techniques and strategies.

The final teacher in the study, Sally, taught in a language centre located on a
university campus which offered (i) ten-week intensive courses for fee-paying students
on short term study visas, (ii) semester-long pre-university courses for students from
overseas countries wishing to study at Australian universities, and (iii) semester-long
programmes for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (both permanent
residents and non-permanent residents) who needed to upgrade their English before
entering either undergraduate or postgraduate courses. A feature of this language centre
was that the students had delineated pathways, meaning that it was possible to progress
through the short intensive courses into a semester-long course and thence into the
university proper. Sally had taught on the pre-university courses and then, having
distinguished herself in the Royal Society of Arts Diploma in the Teaching of English
as a Foreign Language to Adults (see previous footnote) had decided to hone her
teaching skills on a low-level ELICOS class.46

**Biographical details of the teachers**

Because of the personal nature of the information presented in this section I
have referred to each teacher by a number rather than by their pseudonym. In Tables 5
and 6 the details of the teachers are presented in random order and their gender has not
been given.

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46 The term ELICOS stands for English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students and, as its
name suggests, is the term used in Australia to describe intensive English language courses for fee-paying
students. The three institutions in the study which taught ELICOS students were all accredited members
of the ELICOS Association and, as such, guaranteed minimum conditions for language tuition in terms of
class sizes (a maximum of 18) and so on.
Qualifications and experience

Table 5  Biographical details of the teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher number</th>
<th>Years of ELT teaching</th>
<th>Tertiary qualifications</th>
<th>ELT qualifications</th>
<th>Previous field of endeavour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3-year teaching diploma</td>
<td>Dip. RSA</td>
<td>Bookkeeper, staff trainer, primary school teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>B.Ed.</td>
<td>Dip. RSA</td>
<td>Primary school ESL teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>BA English</td>
<td>Dip. RSA</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BA English</td>
<td>Cert. RSA</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>B. Sc.</td>
<td>Dip. RSA</td>
<td>High school science teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>BA Economics</td>
<td>Cert. RSA</td>
<td>Financial planner, freelance teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>BA (Hons) French</td>
<td>Postgraduate diploma in TESOL, MA TESOL</td>
<td>Language teacher in overseas universities &amp; high schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>BA Modern languages</td>
<td>Postgraduate teaching diploma</td>
<td>High school teacher, part-time TAFE teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 5, the teachers who took part in the study were all experienced English language teachers of adults, with at least three years of full-time experience teaching in English language classrooms. All the teachers were tertiary educated and all except one had a specialist English language teaching qualification. Two had RSA certificates and four had RSA diplomas, while Teacher 7 had both a postgraduate teaching diploma specialising in English language teaching and a recently-completed MA TESOL. Of all the teachers only Teacher 7 had had a full working life in English language teaching. The remaining seven teachers in the study had become English language teachers at a later stage in their lives. Four of these teachers came from teaching backgrounds and already had teaching experience at either primary, secondary or adult level. Three of the teachers had worked in other fields of endeavour before becoming teachers, one in commerce, one in finance and one in journalism.
The personal circumstances of the teachers

The teachers in the study differed widely in terms of their ages, their life experiences, their personalities, their priorities and their ultimate goals.

Table 6  Additional biographical details of the teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher number</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Command of other languages</th>
<th>Overseas teaching experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>German, French</td>
<td>Germany, Malaysia, Brunei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>German, French</td>
<td>Switzerland, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mid 50s</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>French, German, Dutch</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in the Table 6, the youngest teacher was in their early thirties, while the oldest was in their mid-fifties. Six of the teachers were women and two were men (a balance which roughly reflects the current gender ratio within the English language teaching profession as a whole). Five of the teachers had taught overseas, while all eight had learnt languages other than English, their skills varying from native-like fluency to the ability to communicate basic needs in an overseas country. In addition to their formal knowledge of languages other than English certain teachers had picked up words and expressions from their students during the course of their everyday teaching.

The teachers were at different stages of their lives and careers and were in English language teaching for different reasons. Teachers 2 and 5 (two of the older teachers in the study) had entered the profession within the last five years and made themselves responsible for the well-being of their students not only inside but also
outside the classroom. Both these teachers maintained contact with past students and intended to visit the countries of selected students at some point in the future. Two of the teachers in the study were focused on advancing their careers within the English language teaching profession, while two of the other teachers were comfortably ensconced in their current teaching positions, having found a satisfactory balance between job and home commitments. The remaining two teachers were contemplating career changes and saw English language teaching as an interim means of earning a living. Both of these teachers had additional teaching work outside class hours, together with other regular weekly commitments relating to the future directions of their lives.

All the teachers in the study were highly-committed individuals who appeared to enjoy the contact with students from overseas countries that their jobs afforded. As Maggie said, "It's the first job I've had that I would prefer to be there than away. . . . I like holidays, but I miss being here and I'm always pleased to come back." Several of the teachers perceived that their role involved not only teaching English but also developing in their students a feeling of tolerance and understanding towards other cultures. The language learning activities that these teachers organised in their classrooms reflected this view. Both Christine and Maggie had strong social justice concerns and tended to reveal their personal attitudes through their classroom talk. These teachers regularly set up discussion activities which encouraged their students to consider alternative points of view and thereby to question their own personal value systems.
The employment conditions of the teachers

Teaching loads

Table 7  The employment conditions of the teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Term of employment</th>
<th>Work load</th>
<th>Total teaching hours per week</th>
<th>Total teaching weeks per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Part-time (2/3 time)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>3-year contract</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>One-year contract</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Part-time (4/5 time)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>One-year contract</td>
<td>Part-time (4/5 time)</td>
<td>10 + other duties</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>One-year contract</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 7, the working conditions of the teachers in the study varied considerably. Generally speaking the teachers of the migrant students (together with Sally) were better off than the teachers in the private language schools in terms of teaching hours, with Amy and Tom for example receiving full-time salaries for only 20 class hours each week. The teachers of the migrant students (together with Sally) were also more fortunate than the teachers in the private sector because they only taught for 40 weeks in any one year (four ten-week courses). Not only did Joe, Christine and Maggie all have heavier teaching loads (Joe's would have been 23 hours a week had he worked full time), but they were required to teach for 48 weeks of the year.47 These

47 Maggie and Joe were marginally better off than Christine because their 25-hour-a-week teaching load was reduced by two hours to allow for lesson preparation.
three teachers did not have breaks between courses and would routinely finish one course on a Friday afternoon and start a new one on the following Monday morning.

**Job security**

In 1996, the year that the data for the study were gathered, three of the teachers had permanent contracts, four had short-term contracts and one was employed on a casual basis. Prospects were good, with most Asian countries enjoying sustained economic growth and therefore likely to provide an ongoing supply of students coming to Australia for short intensive English language courses. Although refugee numbers had dropped the Adult Migrant English Program was running in much the same way as it had done for many years. For all eight teachers, therefore, there were reasonable prospects of continued employment.

However, there were signs that the situation was about to change. Individuals were voicing concerns about the likelihood of funding cuts by the soon-to-be-elected Liberal Government, it was common knowledge that the Adult Migrant English Program was soon to be restructured, and increasing numbers of reports were filtering through of financial difficulties within the booming Asian economies. As a result of the general air of uncertainty there was much speculative talk within Adult Migrant English Program about what was likely to happen in the future and how people's jobs would be affected by impending changes to the organisation. The staff in Amy and Tom's unit were in a similar situation, having been led to believe that their unit, which also depended on federal funding, would be disbanded in the near future. The teachers in the independent language schools, whose jobs depended on student numbers, remained largely unconcerned. They considered that they were in a growth industry and were reasonably confident that student numbers would continue to grow exponentially in line with recent trends.

By 1998 (two years after the data had been gathered) it was evident that the rumours had been well founded. All eight teachers, either through compulsion or choice, found themselves in changed circumstances. Of the eight teachers one had gone
overseas, one had become a full-time student, one had started up a business, one had had a baby and become part-time, one had found alternative employment, two had been redeployed on different kinds of courses and one was doing casual teaching work.

Despite working in a profession renowned for its lack of job security and for its dearth of career pathways, at the time of the study seven of the eight teachers appeared satisfied with their current employment situation. For these teachers it appeared that the satisfaction to be gained through regular contact with students from overseas countries outweighed the disadvantages. Maggie spoke repeatedly about the rewarding nature of the job, particularly in relation to seeing cross-cultural friendships develop, while Kerry (one of the two teachers who, as stated in Chapter 3, supplied additional information) said:

You give a lot, but you get so much back. . . . They really end up caring for you as a person, it's just incredible. And so that's why, when people say, "Why are you still in your job?,” that's why. Where else would you get that?

One of the eight teachers, however, considered that neither their efforts nor their expertise were sufficiently recognised. This particular teacher claimed to feel weighed down by the "sheer relentlessness" of the job, remarking on one occasion, "I'm just burnt out, I really am.”
Daily working conditions

Table 8  The daily working conditions of the teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Personal workspace</th>
<th>Materials &amp; lesson preparation facilities</th>
<th>Description of classrooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Desk in general staffroom</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Large, poorly decorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Shared office with computer</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>No permanent room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Own office with computer</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Medium size, well furnished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Workstation in teachers' room</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Medium size, well decorated, lacking in furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>Own office</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Extra large, poorly furnished &amp; decorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Desk in general staffroom</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>Intimate, well furnished, no OHP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Own office with computer</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Workstation in teachers' room</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Narrow, small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 8, some teachers were better-off than others in terms of the office facilities. At one end of the scale were Amy and Tom, who had their own offices with bookshelves and filing cabinets and who could use the general campus staffroom in breaks between lessons and at lunchtime. At the other end of the scale was Christine, who shared a staffroom-cum-lunchroom with at least 20 other teachers in a staffroom which had no windows, no water supply and no sink, and where tempers tended to become frayed towards the end of the day. The conditions of the other teachers ranged between these two extremes. Pamela, Joe and Maggie had desks in general staffrooms or teachers' rooms and had limited space for storing reference books, personal records and teaching materials. Although Gillian had her own office for interviewing purposes, she kept her teaching materials in her dining room at home and
did her lesson preparation there. Because she taught in a different building from where her office was located. Gillian carried her books and materials to class in various large bags, resorting to a luggage trolley when she had too much to carry. Gillian did not return to the general staffroom for coffee, having it instead with her students in the kitchenette of the building where she worked.

All the teachers in the study had access to photocopying facilities and used them to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the focus of their courses. The teachers in the private language schools were more rushed than the teachers of the migrant students, with shorter lunch and coffee breaks and less preparation time because of longer daily teaching hours. In one of the schools staggered lunch hours had been introduced to reduce the queue of teachers waiting to use the photocopying machines. Joe avoided the queues in his school by using the photocopier during class time.

The classrooms

The classrooms within which the teachers taught varied considerably. Those in the private language schools were tastefully decorated, carpeted and furnished and were generally speaking of a size suitable for the number of students in the class. In these schools each class retained the same room for all lessons. The classrooms on university campuses, such as those used by Sally, Amy and Tom, were of a good utilitarian standard, but sometimes slightly too large or too small for the number of students in the classes. The rooms allocated to Pamela and Gillian for their classes of migrant students were however of a considerably lower standard. Pamela's room was a demountable cabin containing a whiteboard with ingrained black smudges on it. Gillian's teaching room was a large, dark assembly hall with pieces of scenery from past theatrical productions, stacks of chairs and redundant items of furniture placed around the walls. Every fortnight, after the contract cleaners had been in, the students had to re-erect the assorted trestle tables (which had been placed in a pile on the floor) and un-stack the required number of chairs before the lesson could begin.
Both the teachers and the students in the study tended to be tolerant of less-than-perfect teaching conditions. Several students in Gillian's class, however, complained in their evaluation forms about sub-standard toilet facilities and a lack of heating in their classroom. Gillian's students, who were observed during the winter months, routinely kept their coats and jackets on during lessons, and some wore gloves. Towards the end of her course Gillian acquired a single-bar radiant heater which she placed, once she had acquired an extension cord, in the centre of the room. However, she could not have the heater switched on while using the overhead projector because a combination of the two appliances blew the fuses.

Generally speaking however, the summer heat was more problematic than the winter cold for the teachers and the students in the study. In one of the rooms used by Sally's class, for example, the reverse-cycle air-conditioning did not function. The atmosphere in the room, particularly in the afternoons, became stuffy and oppressive, and students were regularly observed becoming lethargic or falling asleep. Pamela explained that she seldom switched on the air-conditioning in her demountable classroom because it blew cold air at people's heads, saying that she preferred to keep the windows open and the ceiling lights switched off. This gave the room a sombre appearance.

**The nature of the courses**

All the teachers in the study were required to work within the broad syllabus guidelines issued by their respective institutions. These guidelines were normally two- or three-page documents containing lists of grammatical structures, language functions, skills or competencies. In effect the teachers in the study enjoyed considerable pedagogic freedom and appeared to have developed courses which were in some respects syllabus driven, in some respects needs driven and in some respects interest driven.
### Syllabuses and materials

Table 9  The focus of the courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Primary focus</th>
<th>Main materials</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela's class</td>
<td>Introduction to basic structures &amp; functions</td>
<td>Step by Step, Headstart, Expressways</td>
<td>Selected competency tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Beginners)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally's class</td>
<td>Revision of basic structures &amp; functions</td>
<td>Headway Pre-Intermediate</td>
<td>In-house end-of-term test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pre-Intermediate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-produced materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy's class</td>
<td>Revision of basic structures, writing</td>
<td>Headway Intermediate</td>
<td>In-house cloze test (optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intermediate)</td>
<td>skills</td>
<td>In-house workbooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe's class</td>
<td>Structures, development of speaking skills</td>
<td>Language in Use Intermediate</td>
<td>No formal assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intermediate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian's class</td>
<td>English for everyday living, speaking &amp;</td>
<td>Magazine articles, assorted writing</td>
<td>Selected competency tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Post-Intermediate)</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>textbooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine's class</td>
<td>Preparation for First Certificate in English examination</td>
<td>First Certificate Masterclass</td>
<td>Cambridge First Certificate in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Upper-Intermediate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom's class</td>
<td>Development of academic English skills</td>
<td>Self-produced or adapted materials</td>
<td>In-house cloze test (optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Advanced)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie's class</td>
<td>Speaking, accessing the media</td>
<td>Newspaper articles, TV news broadcasts</td>
<td>No formal assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Advanced)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 9, the teachers of the lower-level classes focused primarily on structures and made regular use of customised teaching materials, while the teachers of the higher-level classes (apart from Christine) focused on themes or skills and selected topics which they considered would be of interest to their students. Even teachers such as Sally, Amy, Joe and Christine, whose classes used designated textbooks, routinely deviated from the book. Christine, whose textbook New FCE Masterclass (Haines & Stewart, 1996) covered all the elements of the First Certificate in
English exam, required her students to do the majority of the exercises in the book, but supplemented them with many activities selected by herself. As she explained,

I supplement the textbook, (a) because the grammar in there is not very communicative, and (b) because probably you secretly feel you're doing a better job [as a teacher] if you look for other stuff.

Amy used Headway Intermediate (Soars & Soars, 1986) sparingly, while Sally used Headway Pre-Intermediate by the same authors as an informal syllabus outline, introducing each structure and function included in the book but teaching them in her own way. She also routinely redesigned the activities to relate more directly to the students in her class, giving them an Australian flavour wherever possible.

Three of the remaining teachers, Gillian, Tom and Maggie, taught courses which they had developed in line with their perceptions of what was suitable for their students and used an eclectic mix of authentic and customised teaching materials, often based around specific topics or themes. Several teachers in the study, notably Gillian (and Christine in her afternoon exam preparation class) used a variety of English language teaching books as sourcebooks, photocopying activities which they considered suitable for their classes on a one-off basis. This practice was described by Kerry as "dipping and diving," because in her view, "You can't take a complete unit from any textbook and say that this is going to suit this particular class."

Teacher accountability

As indicated in Table 9, formal assessment procedures of student progress did not play a prominent part in the courses in this study and, if carried out, were conducted in a low-key way. Pamela and Gillian, who worked within the Adult Migrant English Program, were required to assess each student on their ability to perform a number of

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48 I am using the term "authentic materials" to cover reading, listening or viewing materials produced for general consumption in the host country, including newspaper articles, magazine articles, TV programmes, radio programmes, videos, brochures and information sheets. I am using the term "customised materials" to refer to materials taken from textbooks specifically designed for second or foreign language classrooms. Approximately 90% of the customised materials used in the eight classes were taken from textbooks produced in the United Kingdom. The remaining 10% were composed of materials produced in the USA or Australia.
set tasks known as competencies, and to recommend student promotion to the next level based on the competency tasks that had been successfully completed.49 Pamela and Gillian were free to select from an assessment-task bank the tasks which best suited their students and to choose at which point in their courses to administer each task. In reality only a small proportion of students failed any competency task and, even if they did, were unlikely to be required to repeat the course. In the other two migrant classes the students were asked to complete the same reading cloze test at both the beginning and the end of their courses. It was emphasised, however, that nothing depended on the results of the test and that its purpose was simply to give each student some indication of personal progress. A number of the students in these two classes did not take the test a second time. The fee-paying students in Sally's classes were given a test at the end of the course to assess their overall levels of English language proficiency, but the fee-paying students in Joe and Maggie's classes were not assessed in any formal way (although moves were being made by management of the school to introduce assessment procedures, apparently as a marketing tool).

In summary, apart from Christine (who was preparing her students for the Cambridge First Certificate in English examination), the teachers were not constrained in how they taught by the backwash effect from formal tests or examinations. They were therefore free to proceed through their courses as fast or as slowly as they saw fit and could do activities in depth, omit them or introduce new ones, according to their perceptions of the needs, interests, abilities and goals of their students. Because of the high level of autonomy which they enjoyed the teachers in the study could teach in ways which they considered to be effective, prioritise what they considered important and create the kinds of classroom environments which they considered appropriate for language learning.

49 The Western Australian Adult Migrant English Program used a system of competency-based tests of English language proficiency which was developed and written by the New South Wales AMES Program Support and Development Services (AMES, 1993).
The teachers were trusted by their superiors to operate in a professional manner and during the course of the study only Pamela had a teacher-in-charge enter her classroom to observe a lesson. Most of the teachers had an idea of the overall focus and general direction of their respective courses before each new term and then planned ahead on a weekly basis. Several teachers stressed that they could not plan their courses in an overall sense until they had met their students and found out what their needs and interests were. Gillian, for example, said, "I couldn't do a course outline. I couldn't at the beginning of term say, 'This is my ten units of work'," a sentiment which was echoed by Maggie who said, "I can't sit down with a file, here's an eight-week course, here's what I'll do this week." The teachers' normal method of planning was to fill in the time slots on a weekly planning sheet, making sure that there was a balance of activities and skills practice (reading, writing, listening and speaking) during any one week. Joe and Maggie were required to pin up their planning sheets on their class noticeboards at the beginning of each week and Pamela, Gillian and Sally were expected to place their lesson plans in a course file retrospectively.

In reality the practice of documenting what they intended to do or had done appeared to be a formality. Teachers-in-charge did not check the degree to which the teachers had covered their lesson plans and or achieved their stated objectives. Although they had the basic direction of their courses clear in their minds most of the teachers in the study routinely selected additional materials and activities in a relatively ad hoc manner. Christine, with her depth of experience and high teaching load (25 hours a week for 48 weeks of the year), remarked on one occasion:

"The days of the lesson plan are gone, man. I think [to myself], "They need a bit of revision, this is a good exercise that does that, and I need something to cheer them up, this fits in." And just chuck it at them - and it'll work."

In Sally's, Pamela's and Gillian's classes the students were asked to fill in end-of-term course evaluation forms and in Sally's class the students also completed a mid-term evaluation sheet (to give Sally feedback on the relative popularity of different language-learning activities). Most students filled in their end-of-course evaluations in a
relatively cursory manner, ticking boxes but seldom offering specific comments. In effect the levels of student satisfaction with their courses were judged by default. In other words, provided that no complaints about classes filtered upwards to the Teacher-in-Charge or Director of Studies, it was assumed that students were happy with their classroom experiences and with their rate of linguistic progress. The teachers in the study could therefore be said to be accountable for what they did in their classrooms in an informal rather than a formal manner.

The teaching approaches of the teachers in the study

All eight teachers in the study encouraged the development of a degree of informality in their classes. No teacher in the study expected to be greeted in a formal manner at the beginning of the day and no teacher ended lessons with formal indicators of closure. The teachers made it clear that they expected to be addressed by their first names and they all learnt the first names, preferred names or nicknames of all the students in their classes. No teacher expected students to raise their hand when they wished to answer a question, or to stand up when answering a question, accepting instead answers offered by individuals in a spontaneous manner. All the teachers welcomed student-generated questions and requests for clarification, and all the teachers regularly allowed their students to help one another and/or to confer amongst themselves during classroom activities. Moments of complete silence in the classrooms were relatively rare.

To some extent the seating arrangements in the various classrooms reflected the general level of informality of the classes. In only two of the classrooms were the tables arranged traditionally, Pamela's students sitting in three rows of paired desks facing the front and Tom's students sitting in three wide rows. In three of the classes, Amy's, Gillian's and Christine's, the students sat round three sides of an open square, with their respective teachers as the focal point at the front of the room. The seating in the remaining three classes, however, was arranged more informally, with the students sitting in groups facing one another. In Sally's class the students sat in groups of three
or four, in Maggie's class the students sat in assorted groups depending on student numbers for that particular week, and in Joe's class the students sat six to a table. In all of the classes the students were expected to converse with a variety of class members, swapping seats and rearranging the furniture when necessary.

All eight teachers professed to teach communicatively and in all eight classes there was an emphasis on oral work, with the students engaged in group work or pair work for at least part of each lesson. Although the teachers defined communicative language teaching ("CLT") in personal ways, they appeared to be saying the same kinds of things. When asked what CLT meant to her Gillian said, "I think it's being able to use the grammar in the real world," while Sally's definition of CLT was:

Meaningful exchange of information. Something from the students needs to have gone into the communication. . . . Whatever grammar is taught I try to apply to a communicative context and try to see how they can relate it to things that they are doing in their own field and their own life here, their own experience.

In a similar manner Pamela said:

I see it [CLT] as teaching what they want to talk about and what they need to know and what they want to communicate. . . . Communicative is when you're actually using the grammar or whatever it is in a situation that they can relate to and want to talk about.

Although their definitions of CLT were relatively similar, the teachers in the study put CLT into practice in strikingly different ways (partly because of the different levels of proficiency of the students in their classes). Pamela, for example, frequently had her beginner-level students working in pairs reading aloud set conversations, while Sally had her pre-intermediate students engaging in role plays and attempting to use language in a spontaneous manner. Amy set up activities which required students at opposite sides of the classroom to improvise conversations using the language forms which had been introduced, while Gillian required her students to compose dialogues

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50 Harmer (1983, p. 38) defines the communicative approach to language teaching as an umbrella term to describe methodology which teaches students how to communicate efficiently and which also lays emphasis on the teaching of communicative value and, in some cases, the teaching of language functions. For further detail on communicative language teaching see Littlewood (1981).
and then record themselves conversing with a partner. For Joe, CLT meant setting up problem-solving tasks and only intervening if the students failed to work things out in a collaborative manner, while for Tom CLT involved the students conversing in order to discover discrepancies in parallel stories which differed in certain key ways. Both Christine and Maggie, whose classes contained a majority of students with relatively high levels of oral proficiency, regularly set up pair and small-group discussion activities focusing on controversial topics. Such activities compelled students to defend their ideological positions through the medium of English and thus stretch their communicative capacity to the full.

As illustrated above, all the teachers except for Pamela (with her beginner-level class) routinely set up activities which required the students to converse in a free manner and to improvise whenever they lacked the precise words necessary to express themselves. Such activities appeared to be based on the twin assumptions that (i) if a person has a strong enough desire to communicate they will find a way of doing so, and (ii) communicating through the medium of English is a skill which will naturally improve through practice, even when that practice involves conversing with people who, by virtue of the fact that they are fellow language learners, cannot provide correct models in the target language.

All the teachers used a combination of teaching approaches, no-one claiming to favour one particular approach over any other. Amy appeared to speak for all the teachers in the study when she said:

I'm totally eclectic. I just pick up ideas from everywhere which fit the picture of them wanting to feel that they're making progress. I do what works.

Talking about the design of his own course Tom explained that in his view:

You need a structure, and whether your structure is basically grammar or something else doesn't matter, but then you need situational too, you need functions and notions, you need communicative and so-on, and you have to put it all together in a batch to make it meaningful for the students you're teaching.
Pamela, who had been in English language teaching for a number of years, gave the following description of how she accommodated new teaching approaches without abandoning tried-and-tested ones:

To be quite honest I think what happens is, you learn a new method and so you incorporate that, and then another one comes in and you incorporate that a bit, and then another one comes in and you incorporate that. So you end up doing a bit of a smorgasbord, you know, like we're doing competency-based teaching now, but we still teach grammar, we still teach functions, and we still try and work in the communicative vein, so in a way we do a lot of different [methods].

Richard, the second of the two teachers who supplied supplementary data for the study, explained that he was not a follower of methodological fashion, saying, "I've basically taught the same way for about 14 years and I've called it whatever it's been called at the time."

Evidence from the study indicated that individual teachers did indeed use a variety of approaches, regardless of whether or not the approach in question was currently in vogue. Amy, for example, had students complete gap-fill exercises orally, rotating round the class in such a way that the students could predict their turns and could prepare their answers in advance. Tom made regular use of substitution drills to establish advanced level language patterns, while Sally used *Jazz Chants* (1978) to teach common functional English language patterns. Practices such as these appeared to have their roots in cognitive and behaviourist theories of second language learning rather than in more recent theories of second language acquisition.

Despite the difference in their approaches the teachers used the same broad range of activities, including the following: warm-up activities, trust activities, brainstorming activities (in which students pooled prior knowledge or ideas, either in groups or as a class), information-gap activities, completing tasks with partners or in small groups, guessing games, competitive team games, small-group role plays, acting in front of the class, students taking on the role of the teacher, students coming up and writing on the board, students giving presentations to the class, and small-group discussion activities with the objective of reaching a consensus view. Interestingly, the
intrinsic level of sophistication of the activity type was not necessarily related to the linguistic level of the class. For example, Sally required the students in her pre-intermediate class to search for information from authentic texts and to be video-recorded giving news presentations, while Maggie sometimes organised competitive games for her advanced-level class.

The considerable variation in the classroom practices of the eight teachers in the study appeared to be linked to a complex range of factors including the following:

- the cultures of the institutions within which they worked;
- the size of their classrooms and the ease with which the furniture could be moved;
- the nature of the training that they had received;
- the breadth of their language teaching experience;
- their personalities and individual priorities;
- their beliefs about language teaching and learning;
- their own personal language learning experiences;
- the amount of preparation time that they had;
- their general level of commitment to teaching;
- the amount of contact that they had with fellow language teaching professionals.

**The students in the classes**

In this section I will present a composite picture of the students who participated in the study and by so doing will indicate the unique character of each class in terms of its student membership.

**The disparate nature of the class groups**

In any calendar year each teacher could expect to start afresh with a new class on a minimum of four occasions. Each class might contain students who were complete strangers to one another, students who had been together for one or more previous
courses, friends who had travelled to Australia together, or close family members
(Pamela's class, for example, started off with seven husband-and-wife combinations,
two brothers and two parent-and-offspring combinations). As indicated in Table 10,
apart from the newly-arrived migrants in Pamela's class, the fee-paying students from
overseas countries tended to have been in Australia for shorter periods of time than the
migrant students in the study. In all the classes, however, there were discrepancies. In
Pamela's class for example, although the majority of the students had been in the
country for less than a month, a handful of students had been in Australia for as long as
five months. Similarly Amy's class, Gillian's class and Tom's class contained individual
students who had already lived in Australia for up to five years.

Table 10  The students in the classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Countries of origin</th>
<th>Average time in Australia</th>
<th>Average age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pamela's class</td>
<td>Bosnia (24), Poland (1), PRC (1)</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally's class</td>
<td>Korea (5), Japan (5), Thailand (4), Taiwan (2)</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy's class</td>
<td>Bosnia (8), PRC (3), Vietnam (2), Croatia (1), Ukraine (1), Commonwealth of Independent States (1)</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe's class</td>
<td>Korea (9), Japan (4), Indonesia (4), PRC (1)</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian's class</td>
<td>PRC (5), Indonesia (3), Bosnia (2), Serbia (1), Afghanistan (2), Malaysia (1), Hong Kong (1), India (1), Burma (1), Jordan (1), Nepal (1), Japan (1), Mauritius (1), Peru (1)</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine's class</td>
<td>Switzerland (7), Korea (4), Japan (1), Slovakia (1)</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom's class</td>
<td>Bosnia (6), Serbia (2), Macedonia (2) PRC (3), Hungary (1), Syria (1), Vietnam (1), Burma (1), Indonesia (1)</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie's class</td>
<td>Numbers over 10 weeks: Korea (10) Japan (5), Indonesia (3), Switzerland (2), Belgium (1), France (1)</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ages of the students in the classes ranged from eighteen to the mid-forties. Generally speaking the fee-paying students were younger than the migrant students, the majority of the fee-paying students being in their twenties and the majority of the migrant students being in their thirties. Some students were considerably older or younger that the majority of the students in their classes. Maggie, for example, had in her class of 20-year-olds a Japanese man who was well into his forties. There was evidence from the study that in some classes age discrepancies could cause problems, while in other classes having older and younger students studying together was of little apparent significance. In Amy's class, for example, a Russian woman in her forties was affronted by the behaviour of a Chinese woman in her twenties. However, in Maggie's class the middle-aged Japanese man appeared to integrate well into the class, despite his age and superior ability in English.

The countries of origin of the students

As indicated in Table 10, some of the classes were dominated by students from a particular country or region, while others contained students from a wider variety of countries. For example, one of the classes within the Adult Migrant English Program (Pamela's) started off with 26 students, all but two of whom were from Bosnia, while the other (Gillian's) contained students from 14 different countries. In several classes there were blocks of students from the same region of the world. Tom's class, for example, contained students from Eastern European countries (Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia and Hungary), while the remainder of the students (apart from a Syrian) were from countries in East and South-East Asia (the PRC, Vietnam, Burma and Indonesia). Christine's class contained one block of Swiss students and a smaller block

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51 Table 10 presents the total number of students enrolled in the classes on the first day of term, whereas Table 3 presents the total number of students enrolled in the classes once numbers had stabilised (apart from Maggie's class, where students came and went throughout the course). It can be seen that Pamela's class lost six students, Gillian's class lost three students and Sally's class lost one student.
of Korean students, while two classes (Sally's and Maggie's) contained significant numbers of students from both Korea and Japan.

**Areas of potential discord in the classroom**

Both positive and negative outcomes could result when students from countries with a history of antagonism were placed in the same class. For some students such as the Koreans, studying English in Australia afforded an opportunity to meet Japanese students for the first time and to dispel certain deeply-embedded prejudices. One Korean student in Maggie's class said, "We have hated each other without any reason." For some students it evidently came as a surprise to learn that young people from a neighbouring country had an understanding of recent political and historical events which differed markedly from their own. In an apparent gesture of goodwill at an end-of-term farewell ceremony, a Serbian student in Gillian's class handed a gift to a Bosnian student saying to the class as a whole, "This shows that Serbians and Bosnians can be friends." Indeed, generally speaking the students in the study from the former Yugoslavia, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds or religious denominations, tended to behave in an amicable manner towards one another in class. As Pamela explained, "They've all come here with the same aim, to get away from it all." Certain of the migrant students from Bosnia were not aligned to a single religious denomination anyway, having been granted refugee status on the basis of being in mixed marriages.

For some students, however, memories of the bitter internecine war which was still raging in the country they had been forced to flee, coupled with worries about the safety of family members who had been left behind, made friendly classroom behaviour towards students from opposing camps difficult and in some cases impossible. One of the two Bosnian women who were initially enrolled in Gillian's class did not associate with the Serbian class member and always sat on the opposite side of the room. Tom recalled a previous class in which certain students had made it clear that they would not engage in group work with class members whose backgrounds and political ideologies differed from their own.
Even amongst students from countries which had never experienced civil war, such as Switzerland, ethnic differences were sometimes evident. Certain Swiss-French students in Christine's afternoon class, for example, made jokes at the expense of their Swiss-German compatriots. In a general staffroom conversation one teacher considered that pecking orders sometimes developed between students from the same country, those students with "city values" apparently looking down on students from rural areas. This teacher also mentioned that she had occasionally noticed students who had entered the country as sponsored migrants wanting to make it generally known that they had been accepted into Australia in their own right, rather than as refugees. Occasionally tensions could arise because of current student circumstances. A Burmese refugee in Gillian's class reported having been made to feel "very sad" by a student who had complained that the tax paid by her husband and herself went on unemployment benefits for refugees.

Sometimes students did not get on because of differences in attitudes. One of the Swiss-German girls in Christine's class considered that one of her compatriots was particularly chauvinistic, saying, "He's a typical Swiss boy. He thinks he's the most important person in the class and he wants his questions answered. I decided I didn't want to work with him and I don't." A particular problem for the Korean students in the study related to the notion of seniority. In Korea younger students are expected to defer to older students, by speaking to them with appropriate forms of address and by listening politely to their words of wisdom. Several of the younger Korean students in the study, however, considered that they were of a different generation from students only a few years older than themselves, and did not take kindly to being lectured on how to behave. These students were proud to have adopted Western ways, along with flexible codes of behaviour and liberated sexual mores. However, the older Korean students, who had completed national service, believed that they deserved to be treated with respect and did not take kindly to being outperformed in class by their "juniors." One student explained that his father always told him: "Before you have done your
national service you are a baby, while you are doing national service you are a child. It is only after you have completed national service that you become a man."

It was evident from the study that certain European students perceived themselves to be superior to students from Asian countries. Tom reported that in his previous class the students from Bosnia had considered themselves "an elite clique," saying, "They were mostly men, they used to put the Chinese down, asserting themselves as superior." Few students in the study expressed racist sentiments in an open manner. However, a student in Amy's class was keen to express his views and made the following range of statements: "I come from Europe [and] I have Western culture," "European people have education, they know how to use the toilet," "I am a refugee with high culture. I don't want to mix with students with less culture," and, "Asian people are economic refugees. I am a political refugee." In certain of the classes which contained a mix of European and Asian students (notably Amy's and Tom's) a number of the students from Bosnia indicated through their body language that they preferred to engage in communication activities with their compatriots. In their interviews several of these students made generalised statements about Asian students being difficult to understand, implying that Asian students found it more difficult to pronounce English than they did.

**The students' learning needs and goals**

All of the students in the eight classes had received an education to secondary level or beyond in their home countries. The classes of fee-paying students contained a mix of students who had recently graduated from high school (and were still, according to Christine, "in high school mode"), students who had completed or were in the process of completing university degrees (especially commerce degrees), and students who were already in the workforce in their home countries in areas such as banking or tourism. The majority of the migrants had worked for a number of years in their home countries prior to coming to Australia, while some had left their countries before having had the opportunity to take up jobs for which they had been trained. Many of the
migrants were highly-qualified people who had practised as lawyers, health professionals, scientists, engineers and teachers. Migrants with experience in a wide range of trades, including welders, butchers and hairdressers, were also present in the classes.

It can be surmised from the above that the students had a range of priorities and language learning goals. It was by no means the case, however, that students with similar levels of education, similar levels of English, similar interests and similar learning goals found themselves grouped together in the same class. Sally's class contained four young Japanese students who were members of a contingent of Japanese students who had been sent to Australia from a single language academy for the purpose of learning English. These particular students showed minimal interest in the culture of Australia and displayed little motivation to improve their English. Also present in the class were two Taiwanese students with low levels of literacy. Other students in the same class, however, included two Thai students with university degrees who aspired to do postgraduate courses in an Australian university, and two ministers of religion who intended to enter bible college in Australia. Maggie's class, the highest level class being run by one of the private language schools at the time of the study, accommodated students with a range of language levels. These included students with a good knowledge of grammar but limited conversational skills who had progressed upwards through the various classes offered by the school until they had reached the top class. As one of these students wrote:

I don't understand why I'm in advanced class. I should have changed this class at the beginning. . . . I don't have much vocabulary and I speak slowly. It's difficult to talk with classmates.

Other students present in Maggie's class were newly-arrived students with high-level speaking skills. These included a Belgian school leaver with a full range of English swear words and slang expressions (and the behaviour to match), and a middle-aged English teacher from Japan who had enrolled in the school for a month-long refresher course.
Other classes in the study contained students with disparate levels of knowledge of the world and different areas of interest. Both Joe's and Christine's classes, for example, contained both students in their early twenties who, according to Christine, had come to Australia for "sunshine, sand and sea" and who preferred to talk about relatively frivolous topics such as sport, sex and fashion, and slightly older students who wished to discuss more serious topics such as nuclear testing and press censorship. As one student in Christine's class explained:

We are university students. We like to talk about serious topics like politics and economics. . . . We can't speak English very well, but we think about serious problems. We don't want to talk about daily life.

Some classes contained students with a range of learning needs. In Christine's class, for example, the Korean students (who had studied English grammar for many years from textbooks produced in Korea) were keen to have more speaking practice, while the Swiss students in the class, many of whom were already relatively fluent English speakers, had large gaps in their knowledge of English grammar and needed grammar revision in order to pass the Cambridge First Certificate exam. Another member of Christine's class was a student who only wanted functional English because she intended to settle in Australia. This student was indignant at having been told that "beer" was an uncountable noun (meaning that it was correct to say "two glasses of beer" but incorrect to say "two beers"), commenting that "in the pub nobody cares about rules."

In Gillian's class, which had a focus on English for everyday living (because nearly all the students were housebound women with small children), one student had academic aspirations, having partially completed a medical degree while living in Pakistan. Despite the fact that she too was married with a young child this student considered that she should have been placed in a more prestigious full-time class with an academic focus. She evidently felt resentful that a block of hours from her allocation
of 510 hours of free English language tuition had been used up on a class which she 
considered out of line with her personal learning goals.52

Some students made the best of the fact that the classes in which they had been 
placed were not entirely suited to their needs. Two of the students in Pamela's 
beginners' class were faster learners than the rest of the class and had already taught 
themselves the basics of English grammar. After ten days in the class, and after having 
seen two students less able but more pushy than themselves promoted to a higher class, 
these students requested to be moved. By this stage the higher-level morning class was 
full, so it was explained to the students that they had the option of moving to a less 
convenient afternoon class, or remaining where they were and then jumping a level at 
the end of term. In the event these students decided to stay in their present class and to 
compensate by doing extra homework. One of the Korean students in Christine's exam 
class transferred out of the class because he did not want to study any more grammar, 
but returned to the same class a week later, explaining that he had not liked either the 
teacher or the students in the alternative class. It appeared that for this student being 
with a teacher whom he respected and students whom he liked outweighed the 
disadvantage of being in a class which did not satisfy his learning needs. The only male 
student in Gillian's class had evidently come to the same conclusion, apparently happy 
to be with a teacher whom he knew had his interests at heart (Gillian helped him to 
compose his resume and advised him on future career pathways), even though the focus 
of the course (on issues relating to housebound women with young children) was not 
relevant to him as a single male.

A number of students compensated for the fact that their classes did not match 
their perceived needs by supplementing their lessons, often in individualistic ways. The 
aspiring medical student in Gillian's part-time class, for example, explained that she had 
bought herself a copy of the medical reference book Gray's Anatomy and was forcing

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52 Under the national programme funded and coordinated by the Department of Immigration and 
Multicultural Affairs all incoming adult migrants with less than functional English, regardless of gender, 
age or labour market status receive up to 510 hours of tuition (AMEP Handbook, 1995).
herself to read a few pages in bed each night. When I questioned a student in Joe's class about a yellowing copy of a local newspaper which he always carried under his arm he explained that he was working his way through the paper, reading every article and looking up every word that he did not understand. When I examined the pages of the newspaper (already two months out of date) I saw that the margins and blank spaces were filled with neatly-written words in Korean script. It was customary in one of the independent language schools for the Korean students to take a week's holiday from class, but, rather than taking a holiday, to spend their time in the school library working their way through past TOEFL exam papers. One student in Christine's class was absent on a regular basis, not through laziness or other commitments, but because he considered that he could learn more by studying on his own. This student was particularly interested in English grammar and explained that he did not consider that it was fair on the rest of the class to occupy the teacher's time in discussing the finer points of English grammar.

Other students, however, felt so strongly that they were misplaced that they insisted on being moved out of their current class. Sally explained that a weak student in her pre-intermediate class (who had apparently been placed in a class labelled "intermediate" in a previous language school) had acted in a withdrawn manner in class, had repeatedly informed her that the class was too easy, and had cast her "a venomous look" when waiting outside the office of the Director of Studies to request a transfer. Sally subsequently reported that this student had found the higher-level class too difficult and had failed to make progress. In another extreme case, reported by a colleague of Pamela, a high-achieving student resented having been promoted to a higher class, because the number of hours of free tuition to which he was entitled would be reduced. This teacher, who felt threatened by the student's behaviour in class,

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53 The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a test to measure the level of English proficiency of non-native speakers of English, required primarily by English-language colleges and universities in the U.S. (Phillips, 1989). The multiple choice format of three of the four sections of the test means that students can self-test their knowledge of English. The students observed in the library seemed to be using the test primarily as a vehicle for memorising idioms and phrasal verbs.
remarked that it was "like walking on broken glass" every time she walked into the room. She also reported that the other students in the class, sensing the aggression displayed by the student, had ensured that she was not left alone with him during coffee breaks.

The current circumstances of the students

The students in the classes in this study varied widely not only in terms of their educational backgrounds, their life experiences, their aspirations and their English language strengths and weaknesses, but also in terms of their current circumstances. At one end of the spectrum were the students who had entered the country as refugees and who were still traumatised by recent war-time experiences, while at the other end were students who had come to Australia to broaden their horizons, to learn some English and to have fun. As the study progressed it became evident, however, that few students entered their language classrooms without certain worries and concerns. Nearly every student in the study appeared to be under some degree of stress.

The situation of the fee-paying students

The majority of the students in Sally's, Joe's, Christine's and Maggie's classes were living in a foreign country for the first time in their lives. For many of these students studying in Australia also provided them with their first experience of living away from home. Some students explained that they found it difficult to adjust to the slow pace of life in an Australian city, compared to the more frenetic pace of life back home. For such students living in far-flung suburbs and having to depend on infrequent bus services was a new and challenging experience. Students living in homestay accommodation sometimes found it difficult to relate to their host parents, or found that they did not like Australian home cooking. Those students who lived in independent accommodation often lived on fast foods, or developed a liking for biscuits and chocolate, and then became concerned when they put on weight. Some students had
health problems, including hay fever and allergies, as a result of living for the first time in a hot, dry climate. One student in Amy's class was absent for a week suffering from sunburn, having fallen asleep on the beach during the hottest part of the day. One student in Maggie's class was in and out of hospital throughout his time in Australia with a recurrent medical problem which required surgery.

Certain young single students had relationship problems, either in the form of unrequited love or in the form of intense relationships which were unlikely to survive in the long term. This was particularly true of Japanese girls who became involved with Swiss or Korean men. In Christine's class a Japanese girl focused her attention so fully on her Swiss boyfriend during class time that she appeared unable to concentrate on learning English. A Japanese girl in Maggie's class was contemplating marriage to a young Korean with whom she had a serious, long-term relationship. This student became so upset by her parents' opposition to the idea of marriage that she remained at home for several days composing a long letter to her mother, who had refused to speak to her on the telephone.

A number of students had financial concerns, sometimes as a result of having to manage their personal finances for the first time. Common causes of financial difficulties included amassing large telephone bills, losing money at the casino, buying secondhand cars which proved expensive to run, or having car accidents which required payment of the insurance excess. Certain students were regularly tired in class, sometimes because they had been at nightclubs and sometimes because they had been earning extra money by doing casual work as waiters, waitresses, dish-washers or office cleaners, sometimes for up to six nights a week.

A number of the fee-paying students were disappointed to have come all the way to Australia, only to find themselves placed in classes which contained large numbers of their compatriots. During the course of their interviews several students expressed disappointment at not having met and made friends with Australians of their own age, asking how they could best make contact with young Australians. Several students were disappointed with aspects of the language schools at which they were
studying, but could not move to other schools because they had made up-front payments, sometimes for up to six months in advance. Some students wished in retrospect that they had chosen to study in a different Australian city, or in a different English-speaking country altogether.

A significant number of students in the study were disappointed with their slow rate of progress in the English language. One student in Joe's class explained that coming to Australia had forced him to reassess his level of ability in English, saying that in Korea he had studied grammar and reading and had considered that his level of English was high. When he arrived in Australia, however, he discovered that he could neither speak English nor understand spoken English. This student considered that he would never make good progress because he could not change his "nervous and shy" personality. Many students felt that they had reached a plateau and wondered whether they would ever make significant further progress. As Maggie explained:

Some of them think they're going to be native speakers by the time they finish three months, some of them think they're going to pass exams, some of them think they're going to get into study at TAFE or university in three to six months - quite unrealistic expectations. So they set themselves up to be disappointed or to be shot down. Sometimes they're trying to meet objectives from parents who set unrealistic goals, and they're often not language learners themselves. Some of the most stressed students I've seen have been ones who had parents who did speak English, or according to them very good English, and they were finding that [made them feel] very pressured. [They were] scared to go home if they couldn't understand the American Services Radio or something like that.

A number of the fee-paying students in the study were worried about the general direction of their lives. Some were very focused, such as the 27-year-old Korean student who wrote "I must prepare for retiring at 40," while others, such as a younger Korean student who had dropped out of university, had little idea of the direction that they wanted their lives to take.

54 TAFE stands for Technical and Further Education, the tertiary education scheme in Western Australia which provides job-oriented courses for school leavers. Courses such as hospitality and tourism are popular amongst fee-paying students from overseas countries because they are shorter and less demanding than university courses. Even for these courses, however, a proficient level of English is required.
The situation of the migrant students

Generally speaking the stress levels of the migrant students in the study (who were located in Pamela's, Amy's, Gillian's and Tom's classes) were higher than those of the fee-paying students. Sixty per cent of the migrant students in the study were refugees from war-torn areas of the former Yugoslavia. As Gillian remarked, "We're indirectly dealing with the ramifications of the war in many ways." The most extreme cases were traumatised students who were receiving ongoing support from stress and trauma counsellors. A student in Pamela's class had seen an immediate family member killed at close quarters, while a student in Gillian's class explained that she had felt "killed" when she lived with her four children for three years behind locked doors in the besieged city of Mostar, under constant shellfire from Serbian troops. One of this woman's children had been wounded and was still undergoing medical treatment. Four students withdrew from Pamela's on-arrival course a few weeks after it had started for medical or stress-related reasons, one suffering from persistent headaches and another suffering from an injury sustained in an internment camp.

Many of the students who had come to Australia as refugees expressed regret at having had to leave behind family members, comfortable lifestyles and successful careers. A student in Tom's class said, "I lost my job and my family. I came here with two suitcases. Stupid people! Stupid war! I lost everything." In a similar manner a student in Gillian's class said, "Before the war we had a good life, our own car, a beautiful apartment. Everything seemed so good," while a student in Amy's class said, "I had work, a house, a car, friends. Everything is gone now." Some students explained how they had decided to make a new life for the sake of their children, one young woman in Amy's class saying, "I have to think of my child and her future. This is my country now," while another young woman in the same class said, "I understand I must sacrifice my life for my children." Other students who had entered the country as refugees appeared keen to grasp the new opportunities open to them, one student in Pamela's class saying, "I accept Australia as my new home where my family will have a
happy life" and another saying, "This is my new beginning." Several students in the study appeared to be harbouring conflicting emotions. On the one hand they were grateful for the opportunity to build a new life in Australia, yet on the other hand they were critical of their adopted country because it did not live up to their expectations. One student in Tom's class described her life in Australia as a dreary grind of "house, house, house, school, school, school," with little in the way of pleasures such as visits to the cinema or theatre to relieve the monotony.

Certain teachers demonstrated an awareness of the mental states and domestic circumstances of students in their classes. Kerry, one of the teachers who provided supplementary information for the study, made the following observation:

Some of them are as tight as a drum when they come in, they really are, they're like coiled springs. Some of the women, their marriages break up, there's domestic violence because of all this frustration with language and with settlement.

Kerry also described the adjustment that male Moslem students had to make, saying:

They've come from this very repressive society and they themselves feel very repressed, and yet they're here and they're free, but they're still applying the same mores and customs and feelings that they had in their own country. And it takes them a long time to reconcile the two cultures.

Amy described how a student's worries had become apparent through her writing:

She's very serious, very tense, a lawyer and been trying to do things, carrying the world on her shoulders, working very hard. Her husband was forced to give up smoking because he was developing ulcers about two years ago. She's still smoking and she tried giving up. . . . She's the most careworn person, she seems really unhappy. And her essays were full of analysing unhappiness and loss.

The term culture shock is commonly used to describe the feelings of anomie which are frequently experienced by people who find themselves transplanted into a new and unfamiliar cultural environment.55 A number of the migrant students in the study appeared to lead isolated lives outside the classroom, some of them reluctant even

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55 According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), the notion of culture shock was introduced into the literature by Oberg in 1960 and subsequently elaborated by a great many followers. They explain that the term refers to the idea that entering a new culture is potentially a confusing and disorientating experience (p. 12).
to go shopping on their own. One student in Gillian's class explained that the only person she ever spoke English to was a gardening lady who came to water the plants outside her flat three times a week. A student in Pamela's class explained that he had no friends and spent all his free time fishing and going for solitary walks along the beach.

Apart from general problems associated with learning to live within a new cultural context the majority of the migrant students had to run homes and look after children who were themselves adjusting to a new way of life. Logistical problems facing migrant students attending language classes commonly included how to drop children off at school or child-care centres and still get to class on time (one student with four small children dropped two off at a daycare centre and two off at a primary school - but not before 8.30 a.m. - before rushing to catch the only bus which would get her to class on time). Students also found it difficult to switch from coping with domestic matters, such as leaking roofs or vomiting children, to grappling with issues such as whether or not Australia should become a republic. Many migrant students found it difficult to find time in the evenings to do prescribed homework.

A major concern for many of the migrant students was the real possibility that they might never get a job in their adopted country, or that if they did it would be at a level well below that for which they were qualified. For many migrant students their current English class would be the ultimate or penultimate free English language class for which they would be eligible. In the near future they would no longer be given special support by the Australian government and would have to fend for themselves. Several students took days off from class to go job-searching and two students in Amy's class, having found jobs, withdrew from the course before it had ended.

Five students in Tom's class (three nurses, one gynaecologist and one ophthalmologist) were in a particularly stressful situation because, in addition to Tom's class, they were preparing for an English language test upon which their future as health professionals would depend. They would not be eligible for professional upgrading
courses unless they succeeded in passing the test. Tom noticed signs of strain on the faces of these students, saying, "They are physically exhausted, with big baggy eyes and frowns," while one of the students commented that worry was affecting her English.

Most of the fee-paying students in the study had come straight from high schools or tertiary educational institutions in their home countries, while the majority of the migrant students had been in the workforce for a number of years and were returning afresh to the classroom situation. Although many students in the latter category welcomed the opportunity to return to the classroom, for some it created a feeling of anxiety. How would they perform in front of their peers? Would they be laughed at by their compatriots as they struggled to master this new language? Would they be outshone by younger members of the class? One student in Amy's class wrote, "I feel tense because I'm too old to learn. . . . I have difficulties in understanding. . . . I feel embarrassed when I'm asked a question that I can't answer." A few migrants in their twenties perceived that returning to the classroom was a retrograde step. Having recently finished their professional training in their home countries they wanted to be out in the world earning a living, not shut away in a classroom once again. As one student in Amy's class said, "I'm sick of school. Every school, another rule."

As the study progressed it became evident that personal circumstances and events outside the classroom frequently related to poor class attendance or to negative or unresponsive classroom behaviour. I began to realise that students in an angry, nervous, tired, worried or depressed state were unlikely to be able to devote full attention to the language learning tasks and activities presented to them.

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56 The Occupational English Test is run twice a year (in March and September) by Language Australia, the national testing body for health professionals, and is designed to assess whether health professionals who have trained and practised in overseas countries have a sufficiently high level of English to practise their chosen professions in Australia.
The classroom expectations of the students

The majority of the students in the study had received some form of English language tuition in a classroom situation prior to coming to Australia. Even if they had not studied English before arriving in Australia they had all studied in educational establishments in their home countries. None of the students therefore came to their English language classes as blank slates. On the contrary, they all came with a number of preconceived notions about what their English classes might be like and how their teachers might behave, based on their own learning experiences.

The Japanese teacher who spent a month in Maggie's class described how English was taught in Japan, saying:

Information goes from the teacher to the students and the students have the opportunity to answer, but there is hardly anything going on among the students. They sit quietly at their desks and they listen quietly to the teacher talk, while looking at their textbooks.

A student in Joe's class pointed out that in China the teacher always told the class what to do and never allowed students to ask questions. A member of Gillian's class explained how textbooks were relied upon in tertiary-level English language classes in her country, saying:

In China we had four separate books for the four macroskills. It gives you a strong base skill. You have problems at first, but then you go ahead fast. Here we learn English very differently from China.

A student in Amy's class explained that in Russia language teaching focused on reading and writing, perceiving that in Australia the focus was on listening and speaking. Certain students pointed out that in their view being taught English in their home countries was a more demanding experience than being taught English in Australia. A student in Gillian's class said, "Study in this class is relaxing. In Malaysia it is more tough. Both styles have benefit. The tough style is difficult to cope with, but you learn a lot."

Several students considered that the teachers who had taught them in their home countries were more authoritarian than their Australian counterparts. A Korean student
in Joe's class said, "Asian teachers are stricter in both high school and junior high school," adding that he was amazed at the flexibility of the teachers in Australia. The Director of Studies in one of the private language schools explained that in his view the Swiss students in the school wanted their teachers to be authority figures. Both Amy and Pamela perceived that the students in their classes preferred to be told exactly what to do. As Amy said:

That's their culture. The teacher's up on a pedestal and they're not used to teachers asking them how they want to be taught. They're used to the teacher taking responsibility.

In a similar manner, when talking about the students in her beginner-level class Pamela said:

They want to be told exactly how much to do. . . . They want to know what the teacher expects. . . . They're used to being told, "You do this number, you do that much."

In their course evaluations and interviews the students in the study routinely made positive comments about their teachers, praising them for their teaching skills, showing appreciation for their hard work and expressing gratitude for their kindness and high levels of concern for themselves both as language learners and as people. These comments appeared to be an indication of the loyalty towards their teachers that the majority of the students in the study seemed keen to express. However, a number of students also mentioned ways in which they were disappointed with their classes. It appeared that such students remained unconvinced of the effectiveness of certain language teaching techniques routinely used by their teachers and considered by them to be examples of good practice.57

A perception held by students across a number of classes was that their teachers should keep their classes under tighter control. A student in Amy's class, for example, said, "The teacher is like the conductor of an orchestra. The teacher must be the boss."

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57 Cortazzi and Jin (1996b) summarise the contrast between Chinese and Western ELT approaches, saying that the former tends to emphasis English language knowledge, content, teacher-centred classroom and exam results, while the latter favours the skills and realistic use of language, student-centred classrooms and the process of learning (p. 72).
[There will be] anarchy otherwise,” while a student in Tom's class said, "The teacher should be more authoritarian, more powerful, to control the students." A student in Christine's class, having observed that some students asked the teacher about their personal problems in class, said, "I think [it is] not appropriate, a waste of my time. The teacher should be more strict." Kerry made a point of saying that she dressed well for class because, in her view, "They have an expectation of what a teacher ought to be, and I have to try and match that expectation physically," while Christine observed that some students liked their teachers to adopt the persona of "the schoolmarm."

A number of students considered that the teaching of English in their classes was not rigorous enough, a student in Joe's class commenting that the teaching was "loose" and saying, "I feel unsatisfied because I want more deep, difficult class than here. The more difficult the better I get. . . . I mean not that I don't like, but I want more." This view was reflected by a student in Gillian's class, who said, "The class is very good . . . but I would prefer more pressure. I don't like wasting time." A Korean student in Maggie's class who had been taught by a number of teachers in Australia thought that Maggie was unusual because she made him study hard.

Although certain students expressed a liking for group work because it gave them the opportunity to mix with students of other nationalities, a number of students in the study said that they did not like group work. One student in Amy's class said, "I don't like working in groups. I feel I should learn from the teacher" while another remarked, "I was born alone [and] I work alone." A Korean student in Christine's class made the following comment: "We are Confucian. We usually don't tell other people our view. It's polite not to speak so much." Several students in Amy's class complained about having to move the classroom furniture in order to participate in group work activities, one outspoken student saying:

I am not young, and lots of the students in the class are not young. I don't like moving chairs and being treated like children. If I want to sit here, let me sit here. I feel better.
The Director of Studies who provided supplementary data for the study also commented on the reluctance of certain students to engage in group work, saying, "Most learners feel their most valuable learning takes place when they get individual attention from the teacher, rather than interaction with their peers." This view was corroborated by a student from Joe's class, who said:

I came to Australia to talk to residents, but in this school students use wrong English. I don't want to hear Japanese and Koreans speaking [English]. I want more time talking to the teacher.

The reason behind some of the student comments appeared to be that certain assumptions about effective classroom language learning were not shared by the teachers and their students. The first of these mismatched assumptions concerned the efficacy of the kinds of communicative activities in which students completed certain tasks by talking freely amongst themselves in English while having fun along the way. A number of students seemed to consider that such activities were frivolous and did not constitute "real" or "serious" learning. One student in Amy's class said with an element of sarcasm, "I am happy to be playing like a child in class," another student said, "Here the lesson is like a game," while a student with academic aspirations in Sally's pre-intermediate class commented, "Too much play game, not strong practice." The Director of Studies made the following comment:

You may have a Chinese student who's from a typical learning background and who sees the class as being very, very different from what he or she is used to. So they panic, they can't relax, they can't see how any learning will take place, because people seem to be enjoying themselves too much. And because they can't relax they can't feel part of the atmosphere.

A second assumption held by certain students in the study was that teachers should only provide them with finely-tuned input and should not confuse them by speaking in a natural manner and using unfamiliar, "difficult" words. Pamela described how an Iranian student in her previous class had become frustrated and had pleaded with her to slow down "because he thought he should understand every word." The Director of Studies commented, however, that different nationalities had different
expectations in this regard, saying, "The Japanese feel they're not learning if they can't understand everything, but the Koreans, who are likely to be more academic and focused, feel they're not learning if they do understand everything."

A third way in which the students' assumptions about language learning appeared to differ from those of their teachers related to the value of discussion activities. Tom provided the following example of a student who had been unwilling to learn English in the way that Tom considered effective, saying:

On the last course I had a bloke from Iraq who left after two days. He was angry because [he perceived that] he wasn't learning any English. We were talking about things and he had to discuss things with other people. He found that a waste of time.

Tom encapsulated the assumptions of a number of students in the study regarding the nature of language learning when he said, "They can't understand that you can learn English through other things [such as holding discussions]. They see learning English as learning the basic grammar rules, and that's it." Several teachers considered that it was necessary to give the students in their classes advice on how to learn early on in their courses. Richard, for example, described his normal practice in the following way:

What I say to them is, you can't sit there passively and expect me to pour English into your head. It won't work, it can't work. I can't do it and you just won't want to do it. So you have to participate in the process.

The teacher and student comments quoted in this section suggest that in a number of ways the expectations of the students regarding how they would be learning English in Australia differed from the reality of the classroom situations in which they found themselves. A more complete list of the beliefs and expectations of the students regarding classroom language learning is provided in Appendix J. These were derived from statements made during interviews (such as those included above), from comments and behaviours during class time, and from passing remarks made by both teachers and students. How these appear to be related to one of the key findings of the study is discussed in Chapter 12.
Summary

In this chapter, the final chapter in Part One of the study, I have set the scene for the data analysis chapters which follow and which form the core of the study. In this chapter I have contextualised the study, by presenting an overview of the eight classes and showing the similarities and the differences between them in terms of (i) the institutions in which the classes were held, (ii) the backgrounds, employment conditions and teaching approaches of the teachers, (iii) the nature and focus of the courses, and (iv) the backgrounds, aspirations and expectations of the students.

The purpose of Part One was to introduce the study, to present and justify its theoretical underpinnings, to explain where it is located in relation to applied research in language classrooms, to describe the research method, and to introduce the reader to the teachers and students who participated in the study. In Part Two, which now follows, I will describe the main research findings.
PART II: THE DATA
CHAPTER 5

THE VALUES OF THE TEACHERS

Overview

This chapter begins with a selection of comments about good classes made by the eight teachers which suggest that (i) they valued such classes, and (ii) they identified similar kinds of features to those described by the teachers in Phase One of the study. It then shows how the teachers defined the construct of class cohesion and how they related it to communicative language teaching. The third section of the chapter suggests that the teachers valued animated behaviour and enjoyment, construing them as indicators of class cohesion. In each of the three sections of this chapter I have presented the students' values and have indicated the degree to which they reflected those of their teachers.

Good language classes

Like their counterparts in the first phase of the study, all eight teachers considered that certain classes were better, nicer or easier to teach than others. From the enthusiastic way in which they talked about good classes (either ones that they were currently teaching or ones that they remembered teaching) I could surmise that the teachers valued such classes and felt exhilarated by the experience of teaching them. The kinds of statements that the teachers made included the following: "This class has been a dream" (Gillian); "That was a tremendous class. Almost from the beginning I felt very much at ease" (Pamela); "It was an amazing class to be with, because it was so alive. It was composed of odd bods, but I liked them" (Sally); "They're a sociable, lovely group" (Amy); "They were one of the tightest groups I've had" (Joe); "They're a lovely lot, and they were right from the start, and we've got wonderful things going . . . and they're just treasures" (Maggie); "We finished on a high, as if we were all on ecstasy or something" (Tom).
Certain teachers believed that good classes were more responsive to their teaching styles than classes that they saw as less satisfactory. As Sally explained:

This class seemed to be more on the wavelength of my style of teaching, whereas looking back, maybe my teaching style was a bit more at odds with the other class.

Talking about a class that she had enjoyed teaching Amy remarked that there was:

An atmosphere of lightness and a willingness to do any activity set. They never baulked at anything. They trusted me to get the class together and were happy with it.

Reflecting back to a previous class which she remembered as particularly pleasant, Pamela recalled, "With that class it was always the same. I never came to the end of a lesson and felt, ‘Oh! I wonder how that went?’ It always seemed to go well." On one occasion Tom described a class which he considered cohesive as "a well-oiled machine."

The teachers frequently defined classes that they considered to be good in terms of a range of attributes including enthusiasm, responsiveness, friendliness, openness, cooperation, trust, tolerance and respect for others. These properties were similar in range to those identified by the teachers who participated in the first phase of the study. Sally, for example, described the ease with which she could set up communicative tasks in a good class, saying:

There's just been this positive enthusiastic feeling throughout. . . . They just spontaneously use the language all the time. If you get a discussion going everyone's talking. It makes my job very easy. Whereas before [in the previous class] I was putting so much effort into trying to get things out. It just happens naturally in this class.

Christine supported Sally's opinion that students in a good class would willingly converse with one another, saying, "Anything you give them they will do it, to the utmost. So I could say, ‘Talk about dogs' paws!’ And they'd talk about dogs' paws for two hours." When describing her subsequent class Sally observed that the students willingly helped one another, saying:

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58 For an early article in which I outline the findings from the first phase of the study in some detail see Senior (1994).
Everyone's just functioning together. You give them anything to do in groups, pairs, whatever, they just take to it and they help each other out. . . . Tina's in that class again, and she said to me, “Oh, a really nice class, a really nice class.” . . . [There's] a completely different feeling, much more laughter, all together, a feeling that they're together. And the last class, I always felt there were bits, and different parts. . . . There are three or four Koreans who are quite a lot stronger, but none of them has asked to move out, and they help the weaker ones.

Describing her present class at the end of the second week of the course Christine believed that the students were tolerant of one another and not competitive, saying:

They're just a joy. If we do grammar work together they're not afraid to ask questions, they don't laugh at each other, there's no one-upmanship in the class, they're interested in each other's culture - it's just been really good, everything we do. I have trouble shutting them up.

Amy recalled that in a previous class that she had considered highly satisfactory the students had been tolerant of a student with poor articulation problems who had always wanted to express his views. When discussing a previous class which she felt had been more satisfactory than her current class Pamela noted that the lighthearted atmosphere was one of inclusivity, saying:

It just had a great feel about it, that class, like there was a lot of joking and talking and carrying on, but it was more directed all together, whereas I feel in this class a lot of it is not necessarily directed together.

Gillian considered that it was the students themselves (ongoing students who remained in her class for a number of terms) who were responsible for conveying a good classroom atmosphere to incoming students. As she explained:

They're happy to come back to class, and when the new students see this atmosphere where everyone's equal and everyone's happy, when they see that most [of them] relax, they feel warm, and it's these other students that are making them feel warm. . . . On Day One it's always good, warm students laughing and joking.

Reflecting back on his class at the end of the course Joe remarked on the flexibility of the students, saying:

As classes go the class worked really well together. They were really comfortable with each other and they'd change seats at the drop of a hat. Like as a teacher I had no problem suggesting any student pair off with any other one. There was no saying, "Oh, I don't know whether that
would be so suitable!" because of ability, or they'd be intimidated, or whatever. . . . In this particular class there were no students you felt that, "Oh, if I put student A with student B, they're not going to produce anything together."

Tom expressed the view that the experience of having a good class made him put more effort into his teaching:

I don't think I'll ever have as good a class, ever, for many reasons. And because of that I really put in a good performance these ten weeks. I wanted to perform better, because it was a reciprocal thing, and it worked. It was a very, very good performance all round. They made some terrific progress, and I felt it was the best class I'd ever taught. . . . As a teacher I tend to slacken off a bit if the class isn't really responding. But this class did. It was a big class, and they were always there, and it was just one long positive spin-off, all the time. And I thought, “Well, this is it, I'll actually give them everything I've got.”

Just as they were able to identify good classes, so six of the eight teachers in the study were able to identify classes which they considered were not good. Tom provided the following description of a class which he considered unsatisfactory:

From Day One there was no spark. It was just another class altogether. One of my first tasks is [to say], "Go and find someone you don't know." And of course if there's nobody they don't know it's very difficult, so I say, "Look, just find someone you don't know very well." And they weren't prepared to do that. . . . It was terrible, right from Week One, the worst class I've ever had.

Joe and Maggie were the only teachers in the study who claimed never to have had unsatisfactory classes. Joe, however, considered that some classes required considerable effort on the part of the teacher before they could be described as good. Talking about a subsequent business English class, for example, Joe said:

This is Week Eight now and the whole class has really got together, they work really well together, they feel comfortable sitting next to each other and all that kind of thing, so it's not a problem any more. But the first few weeks it was much harder than the general English class.

It is important to note that, in the eyes of the teachers (again, in a similar manner to the teachers from Phase One), a class could be good or bad regardless of the linguistic capabilities of the students in the class. Pamela, for example, spoke in glowing terms of one of her earlier classes which had contained certain students who were considerably slower learners than the students in her present beginner-level class,
while Sally perceived that her subsequent pre-intermediate level class (which contained a number of students who apparently did not find learning English easy) was a "great" class. Conversely Tom, who for the past four years had taught classes containing highly-motivated, high-achieving migrants with professional backgrounds, was familiar with the concept of bad classes, perceiving that he had taught a number of such classes himself (see above). Christine was another teacher who harboured negative impressions of a number of high-level exam preparation classes which she perceived had operated in an unsatisfactory manner. From what the teachers said it was evident, therefore, that from their point of view the overall quality of a class did not simply depend on the linguistic aptitude or on the level of conscientiousness of the students in the class. Rather, it appeared to depend upon whether they found teaching the class to be a pleasant, positive and rewarding experience, or, conversely, an unpleasant, unrewarding and un-stimulating experience.

In summary, all eight teachers were able to identify good classes and described such classes in an enthusiastic manner, while six of the eight teachers considered that certain of their classes had been unsatisfactory; only two teachers claimed never to have had bad classes. When describing either good or bad classes the teachers used forms of expression which indicated that they had felt strongly (in either a positive or a negative way) about such classes. The fact that teachers had vivid memories of classes at either end of the quality spectrum (either particularly good or particularly bad ones), and were keen to share their recollections with me (events in their present classes having sparked off memories of previous classes), indicates the degree of emotion that teaching such classes had apparently engendered. The teachers appeared to have hazy memories of middle-of-the-road classes, yet could remember clearly incidents from what they considered to have been very good or very bad classes, even when those classes had been held some years previously.
Student identification of properties of good classes

There was a wealth of evidence in the study of individual students identifying, describing and apparently valuing the same kinds of classroom atmospheres as their teachers. Listed below are a selection of comments (there were many others of a similar kind) from students in all but one of the classes in the study:

Classmates are kindhearted and going to class atmosphere very good. (Anonymous comment from member of Sally's class)

I feel comfortable in the classroom and everyone is friendly. (Ivanka, Pamela's class)

Everybody is friendly. No-one is aggressive. If I don't understand I feel comfortable to ask. I am not afraid to make mistakes. Everyone understands. Nobody laughs at me. (Alex, Amy's class)

I never feel lonely because we have a good teacher and friendly classmates. We study together and share happiness and pride. (Hong, Gillian's class)

[There is a] comfortable and cosy mood in Joe's class. I think it's important for the teacher to make the environment smooth from the beginning and make the students know each other. In class [there are] different characters, different cultures, different goals. When everyone serious [it is] not a good environment. (Hun Chae, Joe's class)

We have [a] total different mentality, yet we get on well. Everyone is open for the other one. [I am] positively surprised that [there is] no problem. (Stephan, Christine's class)

I always feel comfortable because there is a good atmosphere in our class between the students and between the students and the teacher. (Hilde, Maggie's class)

Tom's class was the only one which no student described as having a friendly atmosphere. Indeed, a number of students from Tom's class made a point of saying that they considered that the class atmosphere was unfriendly. As Henny, an Indonesian student, explained:

Our class is dominated by Bosnians. They speak in Bosnian even when I'm in the group. I keep silent, because I feel I would hurt them if I said something. But I am not happy.

Tan expressed his views succinctly, saying, "Good teacher but bad class."
It is also worth noting that certain students perceived that the prevailing atmospheres in their classes were friendly, even when they themselves had had unfriendly encounters with certain students. Akiko, for example, explained that in her view a friendly atmosphere prevailed in Christine's class, despite the fact that she had been upset by a Korean student who had told the class negative things about the history of her country, Japan. In a similar manner Francine, who had said how friendly she perceived the atmosphere in Christine's class to be, remarked, "There are always one or two persons in a class who are not good. It's life. I must accept it." In other words, the students appeared to consider that an overall atmosphere of friendliness could prevail in a class where underlying tensions continued to exist. Conversely, even though nobody in Tom's class perceived that an overall atmosphere of friendliness prevailed, certain students considered that individuals within the class were friendly. For example, both Henny from Indonesia and Tan from the People's Republic of China perceived that Ranka, one of the students from Bosnia, went out of her way to be friendly towards them.

The construct of class cohesion

As outlined in Chapter 2, the extended interviews with the teachers who participated in the first phase of the study enabled me to identify the theoretical construct of class cohesion, which I could then use as the framework for the collection and analysis of the data from the second phase. As explained in Chapter 3, the teachers in the second phase were made aware, both from the forms of disclosure and informed consent that they had signed and from my line of questioning, that I was interested in their views on how, when and why their classes did or did not develop into cohesive groups. What was striking, however, were the number of times that the teachers spontaneously referred to their classes operating as groups, talked about specific properties or dimensions of class cohesion, or described their own efforts to develop or maintain a feeling of cohesion within their classes. In other words, the concept of class
cohesion was something that they seemed naturally keen to talk about. Even Tom, who differed from the other teachers in that he claimed not to go out of his way to foster the development of class cohesion, nevertheless recognised and evidently valued classes which he considered operated in a cohesive manner. Talking about a particular group of students in his subsequent class, for example, he spontaneously remarked, "They just added to it [the class] to make an absolutely wonderful gel."

Certain teachers made explicit the assumption that there was a relationship between communicative language teaching practices and the development of class cohesion. As Joe explained:

I think . . . this kind of teaching, this communicative style bonds, whereas if they were doing a lot of written work or a lot of set tasks, like, "Here's the workbook, do the exercises!" you wouldn't get that.

In a similar manner Sally said, "I think that the types of activities you set up seem to be instrumental in the type of rapports you're getting going within the class." The following comments made by Sally about specific lessons provide further illustration of her perception that there was a link between types of learning activities and the development of class cohesion:

My language lab lesson would have been better off without the technology. There was not much scope for group feeling.

I felt the class was too teacher-centred for any interesting dynamics to go on in the class.

Everyone was actively involved. The students were having conversations with other students they had never spoken to in class before. I felt the class was really functioning as a whole.

Amy made a similar observation on one occasion, saying:

I'd say it really picked up this week, and it's partly been through the amount of oral work we've done . . . particularly that morning when we were able to divide the group in half.

A number of the teachers considered that there was a relationship between class cohesion and language learning. In Maggie's view "the key to a good learning experience is a good group," while Tom explained that in his opinion the atmosphere in
the classroom needed to be "relaxed and constructive for them to work at their optimum." Sally put it this way:

I think if the students don't feel secure and positive about the environment they're going to put up all sorts of mental barriers and they're not going to learn as effectively. I think it's absolutely crucial. It's so important, the teacher's relationship with the students and the students' relationship with the other students as well, because if they don't have that supportive wanting-to-be-there feeling, then they're just going to be resistant [to learning].

Talking about her experience with an exam preparation class in which a spirit of class cohesion had not prevailed Christine said, "It [the class] just fell apart," and "there could have been a higher pass rate if there had been a better atmosphere." In Maggie's view absenteeism increased unless students felt that their class was "a warm place to be, a nice place to learn, a nice place to come." This view was borne out by Christine who, when describing a previous exam preparation class which she considered had lacked cohesion, said, "The attendance rate dropped and dropped because people just didn't want to be there." In the study itself Tom's class demonstrated a high level of absenteeism in the final three weeks of the course, with less than half the students attending class on the Monday of the final week. As stated earlier, the students in Tom's class did not consider that the class had a friendly atmosphere.

Students' views

Just as certain teachers in the study made explicit their assumption that there was a connection between class cohesion and language learning, so certain students considered that there was a relationship between the prevailing classroom atmosphere and successful language learning. When discussing his impressions of language classrooms Yoshihiro, the middle-aged Japanese student in Maggie's class (an English language teacher himself) volunteered that "the better the atmosphere is, the better you learn." He also added that in his view a good class atmosphere was not a prerequisite for language learning, saying, "It's better to have a friendly [class] atmosphere, definitely, but it's not essential." Aurora, a student from one of Pamela's previous
classes (who was invited to interpret the impressions of the Polish student in Pamela's present class), considered that there was a connection between feeling at ease and language learning, saying, "If I want to remember I have to feel comfortable. The time is wasted if I don't feel comfortable." Referring to learning English in Korea Hun Chae from Joe's class made a somewhat similar comment, saying, "Some teachers are very strict. I think it's not useful to learn a language."

**Indicators of cohesion**

As indicated above, the teachers in the study had little difficulty in identifying which classes felt cohesive, appearing to base their judgements on how the students behaved. From the lessons that I observed I could see that many of the behaviours which the teachers identified as properties of cohesive classes were demonstrated by individual students in an unobtrusive manner. For example, I saw students helping one another, showing interest in one another, sharing materials, or demonstrating a willingness to work with a variety of different partners. Such behaviours often appeared to remain constant for the duration of the courses; students were either friendly towards their peers and collaborated well with them, or they did not.

However, from the manner in which they described the actions of the students in their classes it appeared that the teachers tended not to use individual student behaviours such as those described above as the main evidence of class cohesion. On the contrary, they seemed more inclined to base their assessments on particular moments during their lessons when they observed a critical mass of students operating in a spontaneous, collective manner. Judging by the words that they used, these moments appeared to give the teachers an adrenalin rush of excitement, described as a "buzz" by one of the teachers in the preliminary study. Sally, for example, made the following range of comments in her lesson notes about her current class (a class which she perceived did not attain a high overall level of cohesion, despite operating in what she considered to be a cohesive manner on certain occasions): "exciting and alive;" "a
really good atmosphere;" "the students were very excited and there was a great feeling during the team game;" "a wonderful, lively, jovial atmosphere, it was great!" In one of her interviews Sally said of a particular activity:

It just sort of took off. And they were buzzing, and they raced around the room getting words from other people, and they finished it much quicker than I'd thought, and it was really buzzing. It was great.

In a similar manner Joe remarked about an activity in which the students had to decide whether or not certain sentences were grammatically correct:

They were fighting and arguing over which one was right or wrong. It was great. It turned into huge arguments. It was fantastic. So we finished the day on that point.

Amy's level of enthusiasm suggests that she not only valued the atmosphere of fun which apparently prevailed at certain moments in her classroom, but that she also became caught up in it herself. Her descriptions of classroom activities, for example, routinely contained comments such as "that was lots of fun," "it was totally brilliant," "we had an absolute total ball." Amy appeared to value active student participation in classroom activities, on one occasion remarking, "It was just fabulous because the level of participation was high," and on another commenting that, "People clapped Aco for something or other, maybe the frenzy game or something like that, but there was that real sense of hilarity and congratulations." On a further occasion Amy said, "The energy level was just incredibly high [with] the level of enthusiasm and noise." The "noise" to which Amy was referring was laughter, as indicated by the following comment made about a learning activity later on in the course:

It was just hilarious. The level of laughter was really, really high. and it was just sustained over such a long period of time. It was just really high involvement stuff that was really good.

In summary, certain teachers made it clear that they valued lively, animated and even frenetic student behaviours, seeming to construe them as evidence of class cohesion. Sally made the point, however, that it might be possible to confuse extroversion with cohesion, saying as she reflected back over her course at the end of term:
I think as the term went on the students became more outgoing, more interactive, more dynamic. But I don't know whether they were becoming more cohesive or more extroverted.

Even though the remaining teachers did not describe student classroom behaviours with the same level of enthusiasm and personal engagement as Amy, it appeared that they, too, valued moments during their classes when their students behaved in an animated and lively fashion. Evidence for this is provided by the frequency with which all eight teachers made throwaway comments such as "they enjoyed it" or "it was really enjoyable." Describing some of her beginner-level students doing a role play activity Pamela said, "We had a couple of them [pretending to be] with the children running down to the pond. They enjoyed that." In a similar way Sally said about her low-level class, "We did an activity based on Mr Bean which they really enjoyed." Teachers of the higher-level classes also talked about student enjoyment. For example, on one occasion Tom said of his advanced-level academic class, "That was good, they enjoyed that," and on another, "We did a picture composition in groups, and it's a really lighthearted kind of story and they really enjoyed it." Certain teachers, however, exhibited a degree of caution when using the term "enjoy," as if aware that their perception of the level of "enjoyment" experienced by their students might not necessarily be matched by the perceptions of the students themselves. Talking about an activity which was done by her advanced-level class Maggie, for example, observed that "they seemed to quite enjoy that and get quite a lot out of it." In a similar manner Sally, when describing the animated manner in which her class had sung a Jazz Chant Fairy Tale said, "Everyone seemed involved and they seemed to enjoy it."

In summary, the term "enjoyment" appeared to be used freely by the teachers in the study to indicate approval at the general level of animation and apparent engagement with the language learning task at hand. It seemed that the teachers valued enjoyment and used it as an informal, surface-level indicator of class cohesion, since willingness to engage in tasks and spontaneity were part of their definition of class cohesion. However, they also seemed to relate enjoyment to language learning,
revealing the assumption that, if students appeared to be enjoying classroom language learning activities, they were learning language effectively.

Certain teachers expressed the belief that students would find it easier to learn English in a classroom situation if they found the experience enjoyable. Gillian, for example, said:

I think if there's fun in it, that the lower levels would learn quicker. You can still make grammar exercises fun, like I do when somebody puts it the wrong way and we laugh about it and say, this is what happens. . . . I keep saying to the students that they're there to have a good time. I say, "When you have a good time you learn. When you have a good time information goes in."

On another occasion Gillian made her point more bluntly, saying, "If you're not enjoying it you're not learning, are you?" Maggie made explicit the link between enjoyment and language learning on a number of occasions, adding in the following statement the proviso that in her view enjoyment was a necessary but insufficient condition for language learning:

If they're enjoying themselves and if they're happy and comfortable they will learn better and perform more, if they actually enjoy what they're doing. But for some enjoyment's too simple. They want to see it as being useful.

Several teachers also pointed out that in their view being in a relaxed frame of mind was beneficial for language learning. Joe, for example, said:

For me if you want them to speak, you want them to experiment, to test their language, then I think they've got to be very relaxed to do that. You don't want them to be up-tight or under stress.

In a similar vein Amy said at the end of the first week of her course:

I keep explaining my methodology . . . and here I said to them, "Look, do you all feel relaxed?" And they said, "Yes!" "You know, having fun?" "Yes!" And I said, "Well, that's number one for language [learning]. I couldn't teach you if you weren't relaxed."

Maggie considered that there was a link between feeling at ease and learning a new language, saying, "If they're feeling comfortable during the class they will learn, despite or because of you or whatever," while Gillian made the same point in another way, saying, "How can you learn in an atmosphere of fear, and an atmosphere where
creativity and everything is stifled?" Joe pointed out that in his view there was an additional benefit to be gained from having classes in which students felt relaxed and at ease:

They've got to be respectful, but if they feel relaxed then if you point to someone and ask them to attempt the question, I think they will, and if they're in doubt they'll ask a question. . . . If everybody feels relaxed in the class . . . then if they don't understand something one of them will simply say, "Sorry! I don't understand. Could you repeat that?" Whereas normally they wouldn't. . . . It makes our job easier.

Although he never spoke about encouraging the development of an atmosphere of cohesion in his classes, Tom said that in his opinion the overall atmosphere in language classes should be "relaxed and constructive."

**Student perceptions**

To some degree the perceptions of the students in the study regarding the value of relaxation and enjoyment in language classrooms appeared to match those of their teachers, and to some degree they did not. Certain students expressed the view that relaxation was beneficial for language learning. Nenad in Pamela's class, for example, said, "I always [try to] feel relaxed because that is the best way I can remember things," while Aco in Amy's class said, "I like having jokes. We need sometimes relaxation," and "I am happy to be playing like a child. Everything makes you relaxed and not under pressure and this makes you learn." In a similar vein Lan, also from Amy's class, perceived that it was necessary to feel relaxed in class, saying, "If my brain is 100% busy I can't open my mind. If I don't open my mind I forget what the teacher says." Hun Chae from Joe's class commented on the notion of fun, saying on one occasion, "I think it's very useful to learn a language to have fun" and on another saying, "Having fun makes us close and then easy to know each other and easy to practise speaking."

Numerical data from the study indicated that the students in the classes identified the prevailing atmospheres in their classrooms as being ones of comfort and relaxation. Of the 90 students (from six of the classes) who were invited to select the four adjectives which most closely matched how they felt when studying in their classes
(from a total of 30 adjectives), 33% chose either the word "comfortable" or the word "relaxed" to describe how they "always" or "usually" felt. This was second only to the word "happy," which was selected by 37% of the students. It seemed, therefore, that the students were able to identify the relaxed, informal classroom atmospheres that their teachers valued and considered were one of the features of cohesive classes.

There was evidence from the study to suggest, however, that a significant number of student did not consider that it was either necessary or desirable to feel relaxed when learning a second language. A number of the students in Pamela's class, who had had the evaluation sheet with the 30 adjectives translated into Serbo-Croatian because of their limited proficiency in English, explained with apparent approval that they never felt relaxed in class because Pamela always taught them rigorously each day. It appears that the Serbo-Croatian word for "relaxation" has negative connotations, implying laziness and a general lack of commitment towards learning. This may also be true of other languages.

There was evidence that certain students considered that the atmospheres in their language classes were sometimes too relaxed and too comfortable for language learning to occur speedily and effectively. Pei Ling, a student in Gillian's class, for example, explained that in her view you learnt quickly in Malaysia because you were under pressure, whereas "in relaxing way you learn in small steps." Tan, a member of Tom's class who had previously studied in Amy's class (a class in which, due to Amy's efforts, an atmosphere of relaxation routinely prevailed), made a point of saying that he and a number of his peers, when studying in Amy's class, had perceived that they were "wasting time." In a similar manner several of the students in Joe's class (notably the older Koreans) expressed dissatisfaction with the amount that they were learning, despite behaving in a jovial manner in class and therefore conveying the impression that they were satisfied with the relaxed and friendly learning environment. It may be that additional students in the study privately held opinions similar to those expressed by Tan and the Korean students in Joe's class, but did not consider it appropriate to share them with me. The Director of Studies in Joe's school considered that part of his role
was "to keep a lid on the simmering discontent of the students," intimating that the
levels of student dissatisfaction with their "relaxed" and "friendly" classes were higher
than might have been realised by their teachers.

A few students expressed the view that language learning, along with learning
of any kind, requires dedication and hard work and cannot be done the easy way. Tran
from Tom's class, for example, remarked, "Learning is not easy. It requires effort."
Interestingly, despite the fact that they expressed dissatisfaction with the overall
atmosphere in the class, Tom's students were the only ones in the study to make a point
of expressing satisfaction with the quality of the teaching that they had received. A
number of them said, for example, that they valued the fact that Tom presented
language items in a logical, cumulative way which allowed them to go back and review
what they had previously been taught. Perhaps for the students in Tom's class, who
appeared satisfied with their learning experiences despite expressing dissatisfaction
with the classroom atmosphere (see earlier), the quality of the classroom atmosphere
was of secondary importance to the quality of the teaching. This point will be discussed
further in Chapter 12.

Of the teachers who participated in the second phase of the study Tom was the
only one whose views appeared to be in line with the more traditional views of
language learning expressed publicly by certain students in the study (and perhaps held
privately by far more). Speaking on behalf of his students Tom said, "They want a solid
grind, not entertainment value." Tom made a point of saying that he did not link
enjoyment with language learning and that he considered that certain English language
teachers spent too much time entertaining their students and not enough time teaching
them English. Regarding the notion of enjoyment Tom made the following comment:

If they do it well that's the important thing. If they get enjoyment that's a
bonus. I think you can be really tired and do something well, even if you
don't particularly enjoy it because you're tired.

In summary, seven of the teachers in the second phase of the study perceived
that enjoyment was a key element in the language learning equation and believed that
language learning was enhanced when students felt relaxed and comfortable. Tom, however, perceived that enjoyment was not necessary for language learning, a view which appeared to correlate more closely with the views of certain students.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the kinds of class group behaviours that the teachers valued, showing that they construed these behaviours as evidence of class cohesion. I have also indicated that the teachers valued animated student behaviour, apparently believing that it related both to class cohesion and to language learning. In each section of the chapter I have presented the views of the students, indicating where they did or did not match those of their teachers.

In the present chapter I have introduced the reader to the values of the eight teachers who participated in the second phase of the study. In the five chapters which now follow (Chapters 6 to 10) I will show how the teachers' classroom behaviours appeared to reflect their values, by describing how they went about developing and maintaining a feeling of cohesion in their classes. The first of these chapters, Chapter 6, will focus on the initiatives taken by the teachers to set in motion social processes which they hoped would lead to the development of feelings of cohesion within their classes.
CHAPTER 6

TEACHER INITIATIVES IN DEVELOPING COHESION

Introduction

This is the first of a sequence of five core chapters in which I describe both the planned and the impromptu strategies that the teachers used to develop and maintain what they considered to be social cohesion within their classes. These chapters are based on the teachers' views and their actual classroom experiences, either recalled by them or observed by me, from the data that I gathered.

The range of strategies which the teachers claimed to use, and in many cases were seen to use, appeared to be consistent with the beliefs and values which were outlined in Chapter 5. The five core chapters follow a broad developmental pattern, with Chapters 6 and 7 focusing for the most part on the strategies used by the teachers in the early days of their courses, Chapters 8 and 9 focusing on the strategies used by the teachers in the middle weeks of their courses, and Chapter 10 focusing mainly on the behaviours of both the teachers and the students in the final weeks of their courses.

Overview

This chapter outlines the behaviours described by the teachers which appear to have been motivated by a desire to develop certain kinds of classroom climates. I will show that from the beginning of their courses the teachers were keen to establish informal classroom atmospheres and to be regarded, not as traditional authority figures, but as friendly and approachable human beings who were to a degree integral members of their class groups. I will then illustrate how the teachers used a range of strategies, including humorous ones, to encourage the development of feelings of informality, relaxation and friendliness in their classes. In the final section of this chapter I will focus on seating and mother-tongue communication within the classes, showing how
the teachers' decisions appeared to be governed by the twin desires of making their students feel comfortable and encouraging them to interact with other class members.

**Creating the classroom climate**

A teacher in the first phase of the study expressed the view that the first priority of teachers in classes of adult language learners was to develop a positive group feeling within the class, explaining that in his view:

> You need to work on the corporate dynamic first, before you work on the individual skills. And then, once you've got the class functioning as a happy unit with all that interaction happening, then you'd begin to identify some of the individual learning needs. . . . I'd take the class as a whole first and say, "How are these individuals going to work together?"

This same teacher described what he perceived to be the centrality of the teacher's role in establishing the overall climate of the classroom as follows:

> I think it's the teacher who sets the tone. That tends to be the way it is. Most learners tend to take their cue from the teacher. It sounds very old-fashioned, but that's the way it works. So, if you walk in with a smile on your face and with the right kind of demeanour it rubs off on the students.

The teachers in the second phase appeared to endorse this view, several making explicit the belief that they themselves played a key role in establishing the social climate which would then prevail in each new class that they taught. As Maggie explained, "All the individuals are important, but the teacher really facilitates it all." This view was supported by the comments of certain students. Francine from Christine's class said, "I feel that this class is friendly because our teacher makes a very good atmosphere," while Heidi, from the same class, observed that "you take the mood from the teacher."

These comments seemed to reflect the atmosphere that Christine was conscientiously

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59 Howe and Schwartzberg (1986, p. 178) suggest that as the organiser of the group the leader sets the climate, saying that the term "group climate" refers to the ongoing attitudes and concepts that pervade the group. Schmuck and Schmuck (1988, p. 33) use the term "classroom climate," suggesting that classrooms can either have climates of competitiveness, hostility, and alienation, or climates in which students and teachers support one another and facilitate the development of self-esteem.
trying to foster. At the end of the first week Christine said of her afternoon class, "I've been friendly, jollying them along, trying to get a class atmosphere going."\(^{60}\)

Some teachers made a point of saying that they made it clear to their students at the beginning of each course that they expected a certain kind of classroom climate to prevail. Kerry explained what she said at the beginning of each course:

> I tell them at the very outset, in this class we do not discuss politics or religion. . . . I tell them from the very outset that it's an apolitical classroom. We are people, we're all here for the same reason and that's to learn English and to learn it in the nicest possible atmosphere.

Maggie believed that, once she had made her expectations of the class clear, incoming students would bow to peer pressure and would behave in ways which she considered appropriate. She expressed her view in the following way:

> I think you can encourage, and they [the students] encourage, inclusiveness and generosity of spirit and all those things. I think a teacher's got to set an example, but I think the students also do it for each other. I mean they set good examples for the others and maybe lift the tone. [By tone I mean] a sense of community, and I think that when they come into a class, if that's established and maybe it needs a reminder from the teacher, like I consciously said to Michelle [a student who joined the class in the eighth week of her course], this is a really happy class and lots of students do things outside and I'm sure you'll never be lonely. But I consciously did it not only because it's true, but as a reminder. . . . I think some of them lift their game because they see other things happening.

Sally considered that developing the kind of atmosphere in her class that she wanted was a matter of concentrating first of all on winning over the more dominant students within the class. As she said, "The Koreans are the really strong personalities, so you had to get them on side, otherwise you weren't going to get anywhere." Gillian, who had classes composed of both continuing and incoming students, believed that the presence of continuing students with a positive attitude affected the dynamics of the class group:

\(^{60}\) I observed the class that Christine taught each morning and the majority of her comments related to this class. However, she also taught another class every afternoon and occasionally made comments about it in her interviews.
I have to say what helps the dynamics of my class is the fact that I always bring half a class with me. . . . The first day I come along with all these contented students and that's when I have a get-to-know-you and I put them with the new students and it rubs off . . . so I feel that that's part of why my classes, most of the time, run fairly well.

Making their positions known to their students

The teachers in Phase One made it clear that they themselves felt comfortable and accepted by the students in classes which they considered cohesive. In other words, the teachers' definitions of cohesion included themselves; they did not classify any class which operated in an apparently cohesive manner, but which appeared to exclude themselves, as good. Maggie observed that at the end of her course she felt included by the students, saying, "It seems that they want to do things with each other outside class, [but] also with me, in the class, it feels a very comfortable, nice arrangement." In contrast, when towards the end of her course the students from the former Yugoslavia (who formed 90 percent of the class membership) began to joke with one another in their mother tongue, Pamela said:

I suppose in a sense it makes me feel a little bit isolated, when they're gabbling away and I don't have a clue what they're talking about. . . . I don't feel quite as much a part of the group for that reason. . . . I do at times feel excluded. . . . That's maybe why at times I feel a little bit uneasy.

A key feature of the interviews with the teachers was the frequency with which, when talking about their classes, they used the first person plural pronoun "we," making statements such as: "At 9.00 I walked in and we had a clutter of desks because we had to combine with the other class yesterday" (Amy), "Kenji will be going to Bali, so we'll hear more about him" (Maggie), "Even yesterday, when we were doing the mock [exam], she was far away looking out of the window" (Christine). This suggests that, to a degree at least, the teachers in the study identified personally with their class groups.

The reader may recall that in Chapter 2 I described how, once I had developed the theory which explained why teachers defined certain classes as good, I held a validation session to check whether my understanding of what the teachers were saying
was an accurate representation of their views. At that session the teachers explained that they considered their role to be flexible, on the one hand explaining that they wished to be perceived by their students as equals, yet on the other hand saying that they also considered that they had the right to exercise control over their classes whenever they considered that the need arose (see the section on validating the theory in Chapter 2). As a result of the feedback from the validation session I modified the schematic representation of the language class as a cohesive group, showing the position of the teacher as being a flexible one which allowed them to consider themselves as being on an equal footing with their students at one moment and as an authority figure the next (see Figure 2.7). Evidence from research into the cultures of teaching also identifies the duality in the role of the teacher. Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) explain that an additional norm that governs teacher-student relationships contradicts the picture of the distant teacher, saying, "The tension between these expectations for distance and closeness creates a fundamental ambiguity in the teacher's role" (p. 508).

The teachers in Phase Two appeared to hold similar beliefs about the duality of their roles to the teachers in Phase One and acted in accordance with those beliefs. Christine demonstrated an awareness of the problems that could arise if a teacher tended to remain in one role rather than switching between the two, saying on one occasion:

I've had students who have thought I was wonderful because I was myself and I've had students who thought I was terrible because I was myself and they actually prefer the schoolmarm.

In the following three sections I will suggest that, in order to establish the kinds of classroom climates that they believed would be conducive to the development of cohesion, the teachers tended to favour their informal, "approachable" roles as opposed to their more formal, "distant" roles. These sections will show how the teachers went about demonstrating to their students that they were (i) approachable, (ii) kind, warm and helpful, and (iii) prepared to negotiate learning goals. In Chapter 7 I will then
describe how the teachers operated in their more traditional roles, albeit in non-traditional ways.

**Demonstrating approachability**

A teacher in Phase One made the following observation about the relationship between a language teacher and the students in his or her class:

I think they've got to feel that the teacher is some sort of a friend, somebody that they can relate to and talk to and is not remote, like I think maybe some of their own teachers have been.

The teachers in the second phase revealed through what they said in their interviews and through their classrooms actions that they also wished their students to perceive them as friendly and approachable people. Richard explained that his goal as an English language teacher was to "establish intimacy" with the students in his classes, by "connecting authentically" with them and establishing a rapport, saying that in his view:

You're there to grow and to learn. When you go into a classroom as an individual who's prepared to interact with other individuals, then you've got something very dynamic happening.

Certain teachers made a point of saying that they did not want their students to look up to them. When talking about the students in her class Gillian, for example, said, "I think they think I'm their friend. . . . I want it because I am equal. I tell them I'm equal."

Similarly Christine said, "If there's one thing I really try to do, I really try to convey the impression that we're exactly the same. I just know more English." Christine was not in favour of "this idea of you being the teacher and them being lowly students."

Kerry explained how, in order to encourage the students in her classes to speak up when they did not understand, she always told them a story against herself on the first day of each new course. The example which Kerry gave related to a previous course when she had evidently pitched the content too high for the linguistic capabilities of the students. The fact that she was prepared to tell subsequent classes that she had burst into tears in the pub on the last day of term, when the students had finally plucked up the courage to tell her that the content had been too difficult,
suggests that Kerry wished students to view her as a normal person who made mistakes like anyone else, and who wished to be told if ever she misjudged the situation.

All the teachers revealed to their classes aspects of themselves as people, normally in the early days of each class when they were encouraging the students to get to know one another. As Maggie said, she did not consider it fair to ask the students to tell the class about themselves without also revealing certain personal details of her own. The teachers routinely let it be known, for example, whether or not they were married, how many children they had, and what their hobbies and interests were. Amy mentioned her children regularly throughout her course, particularly in relation to child management practices, while Tom said at the end of the sixth week of his course, "I am a teacher, not a friend, but I will loosen up as the term progresses. I'll reveal more snippets about myself from now on." This he proceeded to do, on one occasion talking to the class about his wedding and on another describing a hitchhiking holiday that he had once had in the former Yugoslavia.

The revelation of personal details can, of course, confound certain expectations. One of the teachers told her class that she was in a de facto relationship, a statement which provoked a condemnatory response from a student who was a trainee minister of religion. This teacher recalled that a few days later the student announced to the class at large that she was a very good teacher, a comment which she took as an indication that he was prepared to accept her as a teacher despite her dubious morals. A student in Joe's class expressed dissatisfaction of a similar kind, explaining that he had felt uneasy with the teacher of his previous class who had apparently made his sexual orientation evident. As the student explained, "I am a Christian and I learnt moral things."

Maggie considered that it was an advantage not being young saying that, in her opinion, the students in her school sometimes had problems with the younger teachers because "it's hard for the students to work out where they're at." The way in which Maggie talked about her relationship with her students suggests that she valued the feeling of openness which felt she was able to establish through being an older person with liberal attitudes:
We do get very close and I have good warm relationships with the students. I mention that I have a son, an adult, [so] they're perfectly clear where I'm at. . . . I want to remove any ambiguity and make it safe for them [to discuss the kinds of topics that they're interested in]. I want to be as open as you would with your own kids.

In Maggie's view it was "unusual for students to have such a friendly relationship with the teacher" and to be able to talk about topics such as sex before marriage, not only amongst themselves but also with the teacher.

Another way in which some teachers attempted to convey the impression that the gap between themselves and the students in their classes was a narrow one was by making it clear that they knew that they were not infallible. There were a number of occasions when the teachers made mistakes, such as misspelling words on the board or giving incorrect answers to grammar exercises. When the teachers did so they routinely admitted their mistakes with a laugh, thanked the student who had pointed out their error, and moved on with the lesson. On one occasion, for example, Amy thanked a student for pointing out that she had spelt "embarrassed" incorrectly on the board, while Christine, who regularly got the answers to multiple-choice reading passages wrong because she worked them out on the spot, would laugh and admit that the students were quite right. Richard said that whenever he made a mistake he would turn around to the class and exclaim, "I'm not the Buddha!" Kerry considered that by making mistakes she would facilitate the development of a cohesive class atmosphere, saying:

To get them to gel as a class and to get them into your confidence and to trust you is to tell them you may occasionally make a spelling error or a grammar error, and if you do, you'd really like them to tell, if they'd be so kind, because you're not God, you're just human, and we all make mistakes. And they know then that you're not setting yourself up as some kind of authority figure, and that you're approachable and human.

Richard pointed out that in his view teachers had a difficult path to tread because "you don't want to make too many mistakes. If you do then they think, 'This person's incompetent.'"
Being perceived as "helpers"

Several teachers behaved in ways which suggested that they saw themselves in the role of mother surrogate. As Maggie explained, "There's warmth and friendship and I've got a motherly role." This comment was borne out by Keiko, a student whom Maggie had advised about coping with a personal crisis, who said, "I consider Maggie as a mother figure." Gillian was another teacher who was looked upon by a number of students as a mother surrogate. Ivan, the only male student in her class, said, "She is our stepmother here in Australia," while Suncica commented, "We are all far from our mothers. She shows real concern for us." Amy recalled that over the past few years several young male refugees who had come to Australia on their own had attached themselves to her "in a substitute sort of way," while Christine admitted to feeling maternal towards some of the young Koreans in her class.

Certain teachers described relationships of trust and confidence which they claimed to have developed with individual students in their classes. Amy made a practice of walking across the campus chatting with students whom she perceived were having problems, while Maggie routinely stayed behind after class to counsel students about their problems or to offer them advice on their career paths. Gillian routinely gave her class practical advice on a range of issues related to living in Australia, a practice which was evidently welcomed by a number of students. Ritawati, an older Indonesian woman who had recently married an Australian retiree, wrote for example:

I never feel nervous because [the relationship] between students and teacher looks like friends, so I can ask any question whenever I don't understand, although the questions are not about English lesson. I can ask Gillian things about the migrant situation that I can't ask my husband, who isn't always patient.

Some teachers had apparently established relationships of trust and confidence with individual students. A young Korean confided in Sally through regular diary entries that he was having problems with his relationship with his father, his future career direction and his inability to find a girlfriend. Another teacher, Kerry, described the following approach she made to a student in difficulties:
I could see her going downhill and through her personal journal I wrote to her and said, "You seem to be a little bit more miserable every day. Is there anything I can do to help? You may be a nun, but you're also a woman with hormones and things, and I am a woman too, and I understand. I am not happy every day, although I try to be, in the class anyway, and it's perfectly normal and natural to cry in class, and it's perfectly normal and natural to be who you are."

Maggie made a point of giving her home telephone number to students in her class whom she perceived were having problems and told them that they were free to phone her at any time. When one of her students was in hospital she went to visit him, together with several students from the class, having organised the purchase of a card and flowers.

Although it was mainly the female teachers in the study who showed themselves willing to assume the role of helpers and counsellors, it was not an exclusively female prerogative. Richard described his initial meeting with a new class as follows:

In my first meeting I put my telephone number on the board and say, "That's my home number. . . . If you have a problem, if ever you are sick, give me a ring. At the end of the course, if you want a reference - anybody here like a reference? You ring me up for a job reference, I give you a job reference." . . . It's giving them permission, embracing them in a way, saying, "You are not just people I am teaching for three hours a day to get my wages from. You are people I would like to support and help."

The desire of the majority of the teachers to be perceived by the students in their classes as supporters and helpers suggests that they may have made the assumption that, for a spirit of cohesion to develop in their classes, they needed to be viewed by their students as sympathetic people who were essentially "on their side."

**Negotiating goals**

A teacher in Phase One considered that it was essential to speak in a direct manner to the students in his classes at the beginning of each new course, particularly when the students were on short courses and were not likely to be highly motivated. He explained that he would routinely say to his class:

"So what are we all doing here in this classroom together? What am I doing here, and what are you doing here, and how are we going to work
through this together? . . . If we're going to work together, let's do it cooperatively. Let's set some aims. Let me guide you where you can't supply your aims for yourself, and you set some aims for yourself at the same time."

In a similar manner certain teachers in the second phase described how in the early days of new courses they had spoken in a direct manner, either to individual students or to whole classes. Talking about a class which he remembered teaching some years previously Richard recalled:

I had a group of people who were stuck at Stage Two. They were mostly Latin-American men, they were all depressed, they were all stuck. The Teacher-in-Charge said to me, "Would you take this class of extremely difficult people?" and I said, "Yeah, I'll take them, it's a challenge." It was mostly men, so I told them, "You guys have been here stuffing around for a year, eighteen months. You're stuck, you have nowhere to go. Do you want to stay here or do you want to move on?" So [it was] really just talking straight and authentically. They might not have liked everything I said, but they knew it was the truth, and because it was the truth they could work with it.

Describing a subsequent class which she claimed had become highly cohesive Amy said:

In Week One I negotiated with them and incorporated more work on developing formal writing skills into my lessons as requested. They visibly relaxed and the trust levels became so high that some of those students later approached me saying they'd altered their study plans to allow them to consolidate their English before racing off to do academic courses. Basically after Week One they just got on with it and were thrilled with their progress.

Kerry explained how she pointed out to the students in her class at the beginning of each new course that negotiation was a regular part of her teaching approach, saying:

I tell them it's an egalitarian classroom, it's a democratic classroom. We will vote on certain things. So they will get a week's programme broken down into grammar and integrated activities and they have a choice within those activities. . . . I give them the work they might be doing that week ahead of time and I'll say, "Okay, this work can be such and such, how do you feel about this?" And they get a chance to vote, to say whether or not they want to spend more time on a certain task or whatever.

Maggie, who had new students join her class at regular intervals throughout her course, explained that she routinely took each new student aside and asked them what their
specific learning needs were. In the third week of her course, for example, Maggie gave
the following account of what she had said to a newly-arrived student:

I told Hilde when she came that she may find that the level was below
[her level] in some way. She acknowledged that there are a lot of things
she needs, for instance with listening she says she finds some difficulty. I
said, we'll be doing a lot of that. . . . I've told her I'll give her extra help.
I've also said that if there are particular things that she wants from the
course. . . . I also told her to look at it this week, see how the balance
was, and if there was more she wanted [to let me know].

In sum, those teachers who involved students in setting individual or class learning
goals, or who showed how their teaching programmes could be adjusted to meet the
needs of individual students, seemed to be paving the way for the development of class
cohesion. Such behaviours appeared to be in line with the functional approach to
leadership (see Chapter 2), which stresses that a key leadership function in the group is
to enable group members to become involved in establishing goals (Howe and

Establishing informal class atmospheres

The ways that the teachers behaved in their classes indicated that they had made
the assumption that their students would feel more comfortable both with one another
and with themselves if the atmospheres which prevailed in their classrooms were
relatively informal. Certain teachers conveyed their expectations by the manner in
which they introduced learning activities early on in their courses. As Christine
explained:

You do a little speaking exercise in the morning and you get them going
and you tell silly stories and you try to let them know what kind of
atmosphere you would like.

Talking about the first day of her course Amy explained that:

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61 Interestingly, no teacher in the second phase of the study reported negotiating codes of behaviour with
their class groups, although it was mentioned by several teachers in the first phase. This strategy also
seems likely to pave the way for the development of class cohesion, since class members who contribute
to the establishment of codes of behaviour perform a leadership function in relation to the class group.
In the afternoon we had a reading cloze test and I introduced it in a really relaxing, joking sort of way, you know, “If you get 100%, no more English classes!” And they're sort of picking up the mood.

The teachers' desire to create atmospheres of informality appeared to be based on the assumption that their students, having understood that a degree of spontaneity was welcomed by their teachers, would behave in spontaneous ways themselves. The teachers seemed to think that individual students who behaved in spontaneous, expressive ways could assist them in setting in motion group processes which would somehow draw their classes together (see Chapter 8).

Some teachers had developed special forms of address which they routinely used, apparently in order to set tones of informality in their classrooms. Christine addressed her students as "chickens," "darlings" or "children," making statements such as, "Have a good weekend, darlings - and don't forget to do all your homework!" or, "We'll do it together, darlings!" Christine tended to use exaggerated intonation, calling out "yoo hoo!" in a sing song voice to call the class to order, or making statements such as "the passive is easy!" or "today is Friday!" Joe was another teacher who addressed the students in his class in a friendly, joking manner, saying, "That's my style, with anybody."

There were many examples of the teachers demonstrating that they were youthful people with a sense of fun and not traditional authority figures. On one occasion, for example, Christine returned to her classroom after break to find the students playing the "cha cha cha" on the radio. She immediately broke into a few steps herself, causing the students to laugh and clap. On a particularly chilly day, when the students had complained about feeling cold in class, Gillian laughingly revealed to the students the various layers of clothing that she was wearing to keep herself warm. Tom let it be known that he could play the guitar and on two occasions was prevailed upon by the students in his class to play and sing at the end of the weekly session in the language lab. Several teachers showed a willingness to make jokes against themselves. On one occasion, for example, Maggie said of President Suharto, then aged 75: "Is that old?" When the students replied, "Yes!" Maggie quipped, "Just a bit older than me!"
a similar manner Amy said on one occasion, "Some people in the class are young - like me."

Several teachers in both phases of the study expressed the view that it was important to laugh at themselves in front of their students in the early days of each new class. This belief, which may on the surface seem strange, appeared to be linked to the opinion held by most of the teachers that by encouraging the students in their classes to laugh at themselves (and by demonstrating that they were prepared to laugh too), they were acting as role models and as such would convey the message that (i) they were friendly people who could operate on a similar level to their students, (ii) engaging in play-acting and other unfamiliar activities was part and parcel of language learning, (iii) making mistakes was a natural and necessary part of language learning, and (iv) class laughter should be construed as supportive rather than derisory in tone. A teacher in the first phase said, for example:

I don't mind if I have to make a bit of a fool of myself. I think it breaks down the barriers and then they begin to feel more at ease with each other, [and then] they think, "If the teacher can be silly and make us laugh, we can do the same."

In a similar manner Kerry said: "I always teach with humour and I parody lots of things, including myself, and they like that. I act the clown and they act the clown." Speaking in a similar vein Richard said, "English language teachers must be prepared to make fools of themselves," suggesting that the reason that one particular teacher had problems was that "she didn't give herself permission to enjoy herself in the classroom."

Talking about the specific atmosphere that she wished to create, Christine said:

They don't have to clown around and laugh at my silly jokes, but there has to be an atmosphere of lack of fear to ask questions and an ability to work with each other.
Using humour to create and maintain a relaxed tone

One of the key ways in which the teachers appeared to establish and then maintain what they saw as informal, relaxed and friendly classroom atmospheres was both by behaving in humorous ways themselves and by making it clear that they welcomed humorous initiatives on the part of students. Every teacher demonstrated through their behaviour that they were prepared to use humour in their classroom, thereby endorsing Kerry's statement, "I can't operate without it." Certain teachers considered that humour drew classes together, a teacher in Phase One remarking, "It makes bonds between people, the very fact that you laugh together."

Kerry provided the following example of how she apparently used humour in a routine manner in the early days of each new language classes for the dual purpose of (i) developing a spirit of cohesion (by encouraging everyone to laugh in unison at the "victim") and (ii) establishing class rules. Kerry provided the following description of what she claimed that she regularly did at the beginning of each course:

I make sure I'm late in the first week. I go in and say, "Good evening, everybody!" And they all burst into guffaws of laughter because they know it applies to me. And another thing I do is, if people are consistently late, I will lock the door, and they will not get in to get their books until lunchtime. And it's terribly funny. . . The class is all laughing and I say, "Sh! Sh!" and you get, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock! And I open the door and I go, "Ye-e-es [voice rising], what is it?" "We want to come in!" And I look at my watch, and I'm very theatrical, and I say, "Ohh, you're a bit late. I'm sorry, you'll have to come back at lunchtime." And they look absolutely mortified, and I say, "I'll let you in - this time." And they're never late again.

I will now describe a selection of the humorous techniques used by Joe with the apparent objective of developing and maintaining a feeling of camaraderie and lightheartedness within his classroom. Joe is a good example because, although other teachers used similar kinds of techniques, Joe tended to be the most versatile performer as far as the use of humour is concerned. His repertoire included using a lighthearted, bantering tone, plays on words, off-the-cuff remarks and throwaway lines, exaggeration for effect, wide smiles and comic facial expressions, rhetorical questions (answered in a flippant manner), and mime and mimicry (including pretending to "attack" students
who made errors). Judging by their willingness to laugh on cue the students in Joe's class appeared to learn quickly that they were expected to respond to Joe's comic words and actions with laughter, even if they may not have fully understood the meaning of his words.

When Joe met his class for the first time he stood at the door and called out, "Five-ones, come in! Where are the rest of you? So you are the terrible Level Four class!" After calling the roll in a relaxed manner, sitting on the desk and peering and grinning as he called out the name of each student, Joe then said to the class, "Have you done book reports? Yes? No? Maybe!" and got them to rush to the library to find themselves readers, exclaiming, "Back in five minutes!" When they returned Joe told the students that they must finish their reader by the weekend, write a book report and hand the report in on the following Monday, adding, "Good idea? Yes! Good! You agree!" Joe used this same technique on many subsequent occasions, saying for example, "Easy? Yes! Any questions? No! Good!" or alternatively, "Everyone unhappy? Yes! Bad luck!" During the first morning of the course Joe issued instructions in a cheerful manner, saying for instance: "Up you get! You need some more exercise! Go for a walk and steal some more prepositions from other people's lists!" When coffee time came around he said, "We'll take a break. Get out of here! And don't forget to come back!" At lunchtime he spoke to the class in the same manner, adding, "Lock the room! And don't ever come back!" Later in the first week, when the students asked him what books they needed to take to the language lab, Joe replied, "You need two ears, one pen and one brain!"

Joe used a variety of off-the-cuff remarks on the first morning that he met the class and also in all subsequent lessons observed during the study. On one occasion, for example, he said, "There goes another student's legs cut off" when a drill started up outside the classroom window. On another occasion, during a matching activity involving newspaper headlines and text, Joe said, "Next headline: Student Killed because Forgot Homework." When on a particularly cold day a student sat in class in his shirtsleeves Joe exclaimed "Eskimo Ary!" and when he noticed that a particular
student looked tired, Joe said to the class in a loud whisper, "Junko has a hangover. Everybody speak to her quietly today!" On a day when a student was leaving to go on holiday he quipped, "Escape from Alcatraz!"

The variety of techniques that Joe used appeared to have the effect of inducing a critical mass of students in the class to smile quietly to themselves, to giggle or else to burst into guffaws of laughter at regular intervals during the day. This practice appeared designed to ensure that an overall feeling of togetherness would prevail within Joe's classroom throughout the course. As indicated in Chapter 4, however, surface-level indicators of cohesion in Joe's class in the form of spontaneous laughter were not necessarily indicative of student satisfaction with the learning process.

**Demonstrating flexibility**

Evidence from the study suggests that the teachers routinely made classroom decisions which involved balancing what they perceived to be good for the comfort of individual students against what they considered beneficial for the social relations within their classes as a whole. The two issues on which the teachers most frequently made decisions of this kind related to (i) classroom seating arrangements, and (ii) students conversing with compatriots in their own languages during class time. It appeared that both these issues required the teachers not only to make up-front decisions early on in their course when they first made their "policies" known to their students, but also to make ongoing decisions during the courses, including whether or not to turn a blind eye when students began to bend the rules.

**Being flexible with seating arrangements**

The teachers varied in their beliefs about whether or not students should be compelled to sit next to a range of students as their courses progressed. Kerry described how she operated a system of randomly allocating students to different tables on successive weeks, by getting each student to select a card at the beginning of each new
week and then working out which other students had cards which formed logical groupings with their own (sets of adjectives, nouns, adverbs and so on). Kerry considered that this system was effective for the development of class cohesion, saying:

They can never complain because it's always a very egalitarian system . . . and when they do meet they have to shake hands with the people in their group, even if they've worked with them before. And it does happen that some students end up sitting in the same spot for say three weeks in a row, that's just chance. And that facilitates more cohesion.

Kerry also thought that it was beneficial to class cohesion when an extroverted student found themselves sitting next to a more retiring student, explaining that in her view:

You will always find that in every class you have the class clown or joker and you have those that are very serious, and that's why I change the groups weekly, because occasionally the serious one will sit next to the class clown, and it does help the dynamics [of the class].

Kerry's belief in the efficacy of her system was borne out by the comment of a student who had moved to Amy's class from Kerry's and who said how much he had appreciated the opportunity to get to know a range of different students in Kerry's class.

There was evidence to suggest, however, that if teachers did not have full confidence that a certain seating policy would work, or if they only adopted it occasionally, then it was not likely to work effectively. Pamela explained how she had once tried out a suggestion made by a teacher during a staffroom conversation to place students in different pairs each breaktime, saying that the whole idea had "fallen into a heap" because a female student had perceived that her male partner was making passes at her. Pamela explained that as a result of this incident she considered that the idea of compelling students to remain seated in certain places for certain lengths of time was "a bit imposing." On one occasion during his course, when being observed by a group of trainee teachers, Tom got his students to sort themselves into groups using a similar technique to the one which Kerry apparently used successfully. In Tom's class, however, the students did not appear to understand the instructions and did not take the activity seriously.
Several teachers moved students around during the first week or so and then let them sit where they seemed comfortable. Christine said, "That's fine by me. [They can sit next to] whoever they work with best," while Maggie made the following observation:

Mostly you can leave it the natural way and it works well, and there's no point forcing it if there are people who really don't work well together. It's better not to [move them].

In the majority of the classes, therefore, it was known by the end of the second week of the courses which students habitually sat where, "ownership" of the majority of seats having been established. In Tom's class, for example, Nusret sat at one end of the back row, separated from the rest of the class by an empty seat. In Gillian's class the Chinese speakers sat round one particular corner of the open square. In Pamela's class all the husbands and wives sat in pairs, while in Joe's class an extroverted Japanese girl called Mika always sat surrounded by Korean men (the Korean girls sitting on another table). Talking about one table which was composed of a Korean student, a Thai student and two Taiwanese girls, Sally remarked:

That one group remained very stable the whole way through. They always sat together and it really felt they'd become very close. And they interacted amongst themselves, but they didn't interact with the others in the class that well.

In several classes a number of pairs remained fixed for the duration of the courses. In Christine's class, for example, apart from the boyfriend/girlfriend pair of Michel and Akiko, the Swiss girl Petra always worked with a young Korean called Clark and the Swiss girl Francine always worked with a Korean called Hyuck Junh. Hyuck Junh explained to me that his decision to return to the class (he transferred temporarily out of the class mid-way through the course because the grammatical focus did not suit his learning needs) had been influenced by the fact that he felt so

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62 This practice reveals an intuitive understanding of the findings of Moreno's early work into sociometric groups: that morale and discipline improve when students are grouped according to their stated preferences (Shaw, 1981, p. 400).
comfortable working with Francine. Talking about a subsequent class Tom made the following observation:

My top student was a Bosnian engineer and he always sat together with a very attractive lady, a Russian surgeon, because they found each other, I think, attractive. But they worked really well as a pair, an excellent performance. And then a Russian woman surgeon with a Bosnian journalist, and they worked together the whole course. And a lot of these really positive pairings happened early and they just got each other in a very constructive mode.

Certain teachers showed awareness of the fact that individual students appeared to "own" specific seating positions within their classrooms, Amy remarking that "some of them really like to sit in the same place every day" and Maggie making the following observation: "They do become creatures of habit sometimes, and then it's good when somebody's a bit late and they have to sit somewhere else." The fact that everyone in the classes tended to know which seats "belonged" to which students was borne out by a comment by Amy, who remarked that her class burst out laughing when on one occasion Vesna, having agreed to move seats, offered to move to the chair immediately to her right. What prompted the laughter appeared to be the common knowledge that Vesna's offer to shift seats was no more than a token gesture.

Some teachers explained that they were prepared to force students to sit in different seats, even when they appeared reluctant to do so. Talking about the polarisation of classes Christine said, "Often you've got a divide [between Europeans and Asians] and you've got to forcibly make them mingle." Talking about the tendency of certain Japanese students to stay within their own cultural group Joe explained that in his view:

If they're happy and they're comfortable and they're doing their work, then as far as I'm concerned [they can sit where they want]. If they weren't doing their work, or they're chatting in Japanese or looking at their notes and they're all in Japanese or something, I'd certainly break them up.

When talking about forcing students who were reluctant to move to do so Amy explained:
I can take the pressure off them, by being the bad guy . . . by making them move. Because then they can blame me. I'd rather they blamed me than each other.

In the seventh week of her course, having been told by Pham (one of the two young Vietnamese women in the class) that the Bosnian women in the back row were unfriendly towards her, Amy reorganised the seating arrangements of the whole class, saying, "I only had to make a few changes for a total shift. . . . We ended up with a total mix of a class, Asian-European stuff, and it was really good." Pham's complaint to Amy indicates that it was probably common in some of the language classes for certain students to feel comfortable with their customary seating positions, while other students felt uncomfortable with where they were sitting and wished they could move.

The majority of the teachers required their students to shift seats on a temporary basis in order to engage in pair work or group work activities with a range students in the class. The students would then return to their usual seats, where they had left their books and belongings. Although she required the students in her class to do tape recordings with a variety of students, Gillian otherwise allowed the students in her class to do their work in conjunction with their immediate neighbours. She explained her reasons for this, saying:

I don't want to stop that [the students sitting in self-selected groups], because I feel now that I can ask them to do any task and they're not going to feel embarrassed with one another. . . . I think the tasks they do together in their comfort zones are much more productive.

Although Gillian's students considered that a high degree of comfort prevailed in her class there was evidence of a degree of dissatisfaction with the fact that the five students from the PRC, together with the one student from Hong Kong, remained a closely-knit clique within the class. Ritawati, one of the three Indonesian students in the class, expressed her disapproval of students sitting in national groupings, telling me that she had instructed the other two Indonesian women in the class not to sit near each other or her.
Pamela considered that certain students might find it threatening to be allowed free choice in selecting a partner for specific activities, recalling how she had felt in a similar situation. During the third week of her course she said:

Sometimes there might be a case for that [letting the students choose their partners for particular activities], but . . . in a way I don't like doing that because I can remember I used to hate that [at school] like, "What if nobody wants to be with me?" That sort of feeling, "Should I choose that person? Maybe they don't like me." And I guess this is what I'm like, [so] this is my feeling.

Pamela perceived, however, that she might give her students the freedom to choose their partners later in the course, saying:

[I think I might let them do it when] they all respect each other and they know that they're going to keep everybody in the group, everyone belongs to the group, and they feel secure in that. But I certainly wouldn't say this class has got to that stage yet.

Several teachers thought that it was necessary to take into account additional factors when deciding whether or not to compel certain students to work with certain other students. Reflecting back to a previous class Tom, for example, said:

Two or three years ago I had Croats, Serbs and Bosnians [in my class]. There was no conflict at all, but they just did not work together, that's all. . . . It was just an unspoken law, and there was no way that I could possibly ask them to work together.

Pamela, on the other hand, explained that in her experience it was safe to assume that there would not be tensions between students from different ethnic groups in her class, saying:

I've always found in the past, you worry about Bosnians and Serbs, but I've always found in the past there have never been any problems, they seem to mix together and the pairings and groups and everything, there never seems to be a problem. So I thought, "Well, I'll just assume that this class is the same as the others and I'll do it like that," and I thought it was okay.

Other teachers provided examples of occasions when they thought that they had succeeded in modifying the attitudes of certain students in their classes, apparently gradually inducing them to relate to other students as their courses progressed. Kerry,
for example, who explained that she routinely expected the students in her class to shake hands with one another and to participate in certain "trust" exercises, said:

When Faro first came into this class he didn't want to sit with the women in his group. He certainly didn't want to shake hands with them. He absolutely and categorically refused to shake hands with any of the women in the class.

Teachers occasionally explained how they might try to give a variety of students the opportunity to work with a certain student. Pamela, for example, explained that she tried to make sure that Soo (a young Chinese woman with a friendly demeanour, colourful clothes and an electronic dictionary, the only non-European in the class) was, as she put it, "shared around." Similarly Christine explained that she had tried to give all the Japanese girls in a previous class the opportunity to work with a certain Swiss-French student whom she described as "a gorgeous hairy guy who was a real beach bum and a bit of a philosopher."

The majority of the students in the study appeared to accept that a degree of flexibility in classroom seating arrangements and the requirement to do language practice activities with a variety of different partners was a natural part of classroom language learning in Australia. There was evidence, however, that students did not like having to move the classroom furniture on a regular basis. Several students in Amy's class complained about the frequency with which they were required to move out of their chosen seats and/or move the furniture. Foo, for example, said: "[There is] too much movement. Once or twice a day is enough," while Mirko said, "I am not young, and lots of the students in the class are not young. I don't like moving chairs and being treated like children. If I want to sit here, let me sit here. I feel better."

In summary, the teachers' decisions relating to seating arrangements and student partnerings appeared to be linked on the one hand to their desire to ensure that individual students felt comfortable where they sat, and on the other to ensure that students became socially integrated within the class. Both these desires appeared consistent with the teachers' goal of developing cohesive classroom atmospheres in
which they considered that students would not only feel comfortable but would also be prepared to interact with a range of different class members.

**Permitting students to converse in their mother tongues**

The other issue which required the teachers to make decisions which involved balancing the interests of the individual against the interests of the class as a whole was whether to allow students to converse with compatriots in their mother tongue during class time. All the teachers encouraged their students to talk to one another in English as much as possible in class, considering this practice beneficial for the development of their English language proficiency. Maggie, for example, explained that in her view, "They've got to use the language, and if they're switching back to another language then they're just making the effort so much greater," while Tom said that on the first day of his course he always told his students that they would be wasting their time if they conversed with one another in their mother tongues during class time. By implication, therefore, the teachers disapproved of moments when students reverted to the use of their mother tongues. In practice, however, the situation was different, with some teachers routinely ignoring moments when students conversed with their compatriots in their own languages. Both Pamela and Tom, for example, allowed the large numbers of students in their classes from the former Yugoslavia to converse with one another in their language, while Gillian was happy to allow the PRC students in her class to talk to one another in Chinese.

Reasons advanced by the teachers for sometimes allowing students to converse in their mother tongues included the following:

- It was useful if students could explain grammatical points or translate words, especially in a large class where it was difficult for the teacher to give individual attention to everyone.
- It was efficient in terms of time if one student could translate a particular word, or look up its meaning in a dictionary, and then inform the rest of his or her compatriots of the meaning.
• Stronger students could help their weaker compatriots and by so doing feel that they had an important role to play in the classroom.
• In low-level classes, where students had limited command of English, it was unrealistic to expect students to converse only in English.
• Students would feel more comfortable if they felt they could sometimes converse with one another in their mother tongues.
• It was impossible to stop students conversing in their mother tongues anyway.

Various teachers indicated that they were sympathetic to the frustration felt by low-level students who did not have sufficient English to express complex thoughts and ideas. As Maggie said:

> When they're here [in Australia] for a long time, if it's a lower level, it's very frustrating [not being able to speak English]. Of course they go back to their native language, because that's the only way they can have meaningful conversations.

A student in Sally's class, Jun Pyo, bore this comment out, explaining that he felt trapped being in a low-class and longed to be able to hold a "mind conversation."

Pamela presented a view which would probably have been endorsed by the majority of the teachers in the study when she said about students speaking their own languages in class:

> I certainly don't mind it at that [low] level. But I also feel there's nothing we can do about it either. You'd have to be standing over them like a sergeant major if you were going to stop them . . . so you may as well let them. But I think it's useful, anyway, at that level. When they get up to Stage Two I start to get a bit more strict about it, and it's also easier too, because they've got more language, so it's easier for them.

While all the teachers considered that it was beneficial for language learning to have as much English as possible spoken in their classrooms, only a few of them considered that the language in which students conversed with one another during class time related to the development of class cohesion. Christine and Joe indicated through their statements and their classroom actions that they perceived that mother-tongue talk could have a detrimental effect on the development of cohesive class atmospheres. On one occasion Christine, who regularly taught classes containing a combination of
European and Asian students, remarked, "The Swiss Germans just don't seem to realise that they're actually being rude, that they're cutting the class in half." In the third week of term Natsu (one of the two non-Swiss students in Christine's afternoon class) requested to be transferred to another class, an action which caused Christine to take aside three young Swiss-German students and speak to them privately. This is her account of what she said:

"Look, the Japanese girl Natsu actually asked to change class. You don't realise what it feels like. It's okay for you because everybody here is Swiss and you feel you're on familiar territory, but imagine that there's just one of you and thirteen Asian students and they're all speaking Korean and Japanese. How do you think you would feel?"

Joe's manner of clamping down on students speaking in their mother tongues in class was to emphasise the excluding effect of such behaviour. On a number of occasions he was observed making statements such as, "Don't speak in Korean because Kajumi can't understand!" or "Speak English! Vonny doesn't speak Korean!"

An occurrence in some of the classes was for students to take more liberties as their courses progressed, perhaps because they felt more relaxed and were more aware of how their teachers would react (or not react) if they contravened official class "rules." As Tom's class progressed, for example, the amount of mother-tongue talk which occurred between the students from the former Yugoslavia increased noticeably. This included not only students quietly conferring with one another about aspects of English, but also students calling out comments across the classroom which caused their compatriots to laugh. After events had come to a head in Tom's class Natasa, one of the students from the former Yugoslavia, said, "It was our fault. We were careless. We wanted to have a good time [and] we didn't think about them [the students from other cultures]." I also observed the students in Pamela's class making jokes and having fun within the bounds of their own culture in the final weeks of her course. Such behaviour was not uncommon, another teacher in Pamela's school saying of the students in a previous class, "They just wanted to party in their own language."
Evidence from the study suggests that, even though teachers themselves may not have been overly concerned when mother-tongue talk became more prevalent as their classes progressed (though Pamela claimed to feel "uneasy" and "excluded"), "law-abiding" students who never spoke any language other than English in class routinely became irritated and affronted by such behaviour. As Pei Ling, a Malaysian in Gillian's class of Chinese extraction, explained:

The purpose we come for this class is improve our English. Some of the Chinese students speak Chinese all the time. I tell them, “Speak English!” They say, “Speaking Chinese [is] more convenient, [we] can express ourselves better.” They say, “No need [to speak English].” I feel they think, “Why is she so special?”

In a similar manner Christine said about Gabrielle, a Swiss-German student who had joined her afternoon class in the third week of the term and who was annoyed by the behaviour of her compatriots, "She has expressed her dissatisfaction to me and to the world in general about the Swiss Germans speaking Swiss German." The following piece of writing, which was submitted to Tom as part of an essay, indicates the level of feeling which was engendered by the phenomenon of mother-tongue talk in Tom's class. The student was a PRC student called Tan, who wrote:

Why don't I like working in a group? Imagine you're discussing in a group, everyone talking and use their own language and ignore [that] you are a member of the group and that you absolutely don't understand what they are talking about. How do you feel? In this situation I was very embarrassed at first, then have become irate. Once I even tried to choose my working partner, but I thought that was not polite. But I am afraid I will do that one day. . . . This is an English class and everyone should obey the class rule. I wish I had just heard English in the class, no matter if it wasn't clear.

The above evidence suggests that persistent mother-tongue talk was related to teachers' perceptions of low levels of cohesion in certain classes (see Chapter 11). Although mother-tongue talk amongst students in their classes may not have seemed significant to certain teachers, it certainly appears to have upset some students.
Summary

In this chapter I have shown that, especially in the early days of their classes, the teachers went to considerable lengths to create the kinds of classroom climates which they thought would be conducive to the development of an overall feeling of cohesion within their classes. The ways in which the teachers attempted to create the conditions under which they hoped that class cohesion would develop included the following: (i) demonstrating that they themselves were friendly, approachable human beings who sometimes made mistakes and who were prepared to negotiate goals, (ii) demonstrating, especially through humorous behaviour, that they valued informal class atmospheres, and (iii) making class management decisions relating to student seating and mother-tongue talk which required them to balance the well-being of the individual against the ongoing development of the class group.

In this chapter I have described the teachers operating in their close roles in relation to their students, showing that they wished to be considered friendly and approachable. In the chapter which follows I will describe how the teachers operated in their more traditional, distant roles (albeit in informal ways), by showing the steps that they took to regulate the behaviour of individual students whom they perceived might interfere with the ongoing development of class cohesion.
CHAPTER 7

PRESERVING COHESION: SOCIALISING THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT

Overview

This chapter shows that the teachers considered that individual students could play key roles in either developing or impeding the development of social cohesion within their classes. It illustrates how many of the teachers' classroom actions appeared to be governed by the desire to modify the behaviour of any individual whose behaviour they considered likely to hinder the development of class cohesion. In the chapter I will identify and describe the kinds of strategies that the teachers used to keep certain students in check and so maintain a feeling of cohesion within their classes. I will suggest that, rather than attempting to repress the behaviours of students whom they perceived to be problematic, the teachers tended to induce students to self-regulate their behaviour and to use strategies to do so which in themselves reinforced a feeling of class cohesion. Towards the end of the chapter I will suggest that being able to respond to student challenges appears to be part of the process of developing cohesion.

Teacher identification of "positive" and "negative" student roles

All eight teachers expressed the view that individual students could play positive or negative roles in the development of class cohesion. The enthusiastic and approving manner in which they spoke about the behaviour of certain individuals and the disapproving manner in which they spoke about the behaviour of others suggested that there was little doubt in their minds that individual students could operate as either positive or negative forces in their classrooms. The views of all the teachers in the study appeared to reflect those of Amy, who claimed that "one person can make or break a class."
The teachers readily identified students whom they considered had helped to maintain a feeling of cohesion within their classes. When describing a later class Sally observed:

The last class I taught was the most united class I've taught. Panuwat was a natural leader, dynamic and likeable. . . . One student can have an influence on keeping a class together. He generated the jokes.

Sally also commented that, "He definitely had a stronger influence on the class than I did." Talking generally about student roles in the classroom Sally explained that when a student operated as a class leader, "It takes the pressure off the teacher. Things are happening naturally. You don't have to make things happen." When discussing a Korean student called Min Woo Maggie said, "They treat him as a bit eccentric, but he's personable and likeable and he contributes to the class and they know that. He's a binding influence." Pamela commented about one of the Bosnian women in her class called Jovica, "She's sort of communal, she'll get on with everybody," and about another student:

Mirjana stands out a bit, I think. She always answers straight away. She's got a lovely personality, she understands all my jokes, a good sense of humour. She's a nice influence in the class.

Some teachers considered that individual students could radiate favourable feelings, Tom saying about Natasa, "She has a positive aura around her," and Amy saying of Goran, "He's got really high positive energy."

The teachers identified particular ways in which they considered that individual students operated in a positive manner in their classes. Tom's class contained a Syrian student whom Tom described in the following way:

He's not polarised in any group. I mean he's been adopted by the Asians, but he gets on very well with the Bosnians too. So he's very much an asset. And he's got a good sense of humour. . . . He reminds me of somebody from Beirut, when Beirut was the Paris of the Middle East. He's very westernised, he's very cosmopolitan . . . he's very mobile in the group. He can mix with any group, any small group, and be accepted.

When discussing a previous class which she saw as having been particularly cohesive Pamela said:
I think it was partly to do with the mixture [of nationalities] and partly to do with having those two or three people that showed an interest in the other students and those not only from their country.

Pamela then proceeded to describe how the above class contained:

This dear little Vietnamese girl. She was just a caring little thing and she loved the teacher and she loved the other students, she loved everybody, and she used to go round arm in arm with some of the Bosnian women... This little Vietnamese girl was able to relate to everybody, so she brought the Asians together with the others... She used to love helping, like she was terrible in a test, because she couldn't help telling everybody the answer... If you did a group thing today and she got to meet some of the others when I moved them around, then she'd be friends with that person then. She'd have started to talk to them and she'd talk to them outside [the classroom]... She loved touching. She used to walk around arm in arm with this Bosnian woman who used to sit here - it's funny how I remember where they all sat.

Sally shared Pamela's perception saying of a student in a later class, "I think Wan was a very positive influence, and he was also one of the stronger students. And in such a caring way as well." When she learnt that Alex was to remain in her class for a further course, Amy felt confident enough to say, "With Alex coming in I knew I'd have a good class."

A number of teachers believed that it was easy to identify early on in the lives of classes which students were prepared to be supportive of them in their roles as teachers. Kerry explained that in her view:

There's always a leader. One person will always stand out as an organiser. Even without being told they'll end up collecting books for you, they'll tell other students, "Look, Kerry wants this! No, not that page, that page!" And you always get your natural leaders coming out. And you can tell virtually from the first day which ones are going to be the natural leaders, just from your experience in the classroom.

There were many examples of individual students helping their teachers in a variety of practical ways, ranging from setting up the overhead projector to moving partitions. Goran in Amy's class regularly jumped up to collect in homework or to organise the collection of money for the purchase of books or the class photo, while Ivan in Gillian's class always set up the trestle tables and carried the box of coffee mugs back and forth from the kitchenette. There was also evidence of students being supportive of their
teachers in other ways. Radovan always said to his compatriots, "English now!" when Pamela walked into the room in the morning or after break, and would call the class to order when he noticed that that Pamela wanted everyone's attention. It may be, of course, that students were helpful to their teachers because they wanted to get on with the lesson and perceived that less time would be wasted if they lent a helping hand or kept their compatriots in line. Pamela was aware that Radovan and his wife occasionally became frustrated with their compatriots, saying on one occasion, "I could see that Radovan and Radojka get a bit irritated. They're trying to listen and some of the others are talking." It is also possible, as I mention in Chapter 10 with regard to Alex, that students who went out of their way to be supportive of their teachers may have been viewed as toadies by the rest of the class.

There was evidence to suggest that once the teachers had recognised which students seemed keen to operate in ways which they considered benefitted the class group, they were happy to allow those students to behave in a relatively free and uninhibited manner. In her class of newly-arrived migrants Pamela had two young women whose levels of English, even after living in the country for only a few weeks, were significantly higher than those of the rest of the class. The behaviour of these two women was, however, strikingly different. Sanja always sat in the front left-hand corner of the classroom and studied quietly by herself, while Jovana sat in the centre of the room (next to Soo, the only non-European student in the class) and played a more prominent role in the life of the class. In the third week of the course Pamela made the following observation:

Jovana is pivotal. She's even near the middle of the class. And she talks over here, then she talks over there, and then she talks behind her. . . . She gets on with everybody, like for example I put her with Darko the other day. Well, she stayed with Darko for the rest of the day, whereas everybody else moved back. I put her with Njegoslava the day before. She stayed with Njegoslava for the rest of the day, even though the others moved back.

As the course progressed I observed Jovana translating information into Serbo-Croatian for those who did not understand, chatting and joking to students on both sides of the
class (the class being divided according to Pamela into two halves, with the serious-minded husbands and wives sitting on one side and the more laid-back young single men on the other), and moving around to help individual students when she saw them having difficulty with communication activities. As Pamela said, "She's fulfilling this role of joining people together." I even noticed Jovana on one occasion catch Pamela's eye and shake her head in a smiling manner, as if to communicate to Pamela that she was aware that the young men had overstepped the mark with their frivolous behaviour.

Just as the teachers believed that individual students could operate in a positive manner by directing their energies towards the well-being of the class, so the teachers believed that individuals could act in ways which were detrimental to the well-being of the class. Certain teachers believed that there was a relationship between negative student behaviour and the non-development of the kinds of classroom atmospheres that they wished to prevail. Christine, for example, expressed the view that "one person can destroy a class," saying on another occasion, "If they're more dominant personalities it can really affect the class." Christine considered that troublesome students tended to be at either end of the ability spectrum because in her view, "The weaker ones are feeling insecure and the strongest are feeling that their genius isn't recognised." Amy provided the following example of an individual student who had apparently altered the atmosphere of a previous class:

I came back from the funeral of a close relative in Week Six of the course - I'd missed two weeks - and this guy had stirred the class up against me. It was an incredibly negative atmosphere to come back to. Most of the students were on-side, but, yeah, that was really hard work. So occasionally you've got somebody with hang-ups to deal with. . . . He took advantage of it [the fact that she'd been away]. He loved power.

Amy appeared to have experienced the same phenomenon (albeit in a less extreme form) in her current class noticing that, on the very first day of her course, the voice of a Bosnian student called Mirko had "predominated" and that as a result "everyone closed up." Talking about a session at the end of the first week, when her class had combined with another class for group activities, Amy observed that Mirko had made a negative comment about working collaboratively with the other class saying, "Mirko totally
dominated the group. No-one said anything after that. It just killed the atmosphere."

Talking about three women whom she perceived had operated as a clique, Gillian said,

The three unsettled the class, no matter what I did. . . . They had no regard for the other students. Their spoken language was good, but they were arrogant as people.

Some teachers claimed that the atmospheres in their classrooms were strikingly different when certain individuals were absent. Describing the first class that she ever taught Christine said: "A Japanese guy who ended up being deported, he just destroyed it, and when he was away I can't begin to explain how different it was." Talking about the absence of three students in her current afternoon class Christine observed that on one particular afternoon:

Claudia and Marcel and Monika weren't there and the atmosphere was completely different. It was a delight. They [the other students] were laughing and getting on together and they were interested in each other. It just made so much difference that those three people weren't there.

Similarly Amy observed how an individual student could put a dampener on things, saying:

Lela wasn't there and I just couldn't believe the atmosphere. I got the impression that any work I'd throw at them, they'd lap up. . . . After coffee I got them to do some writing . . . and if Lela had been there she would have said, "Oh, Australia, it's boring! We've done so much about Australia!"

It may be, of course, that the behaviour of individual students which the teachers perceived to be "negative" was not motivated so much by a desire to "destroy the class" as by a desire to change the learning environment so that it accorded more closely with their expectations of what a language classroom should be. Many of Mirko's behaviours, for example, such as his reluctance to shift seats, his refusal to do certain activities (such as the completion of progress tests) in collaboration with others, and his dislike of being consulted (calling out, "You are the teacher!" when the class was asked for a consensus view), could be attributed to a desire to be taught in a more traditional manner.
Setting the parameters for classroom behaviour

As indicated in Chapter 6, although the teachers wished to be perceived by the students in their classes as friendly and approachable people, they also made it clear that they were prepared to exercise their authority whenever they considered it appropriate. As one of the teachers from the first phase of the study said, "A good teacher lets the students know that they can't give a lot of trouble, but then lets them develop."

The behaviours which will be described in this section indicate that the teachers considered that their brief included a duty to maintain a spirit of social harmony in their classes for the duration of their courses. In one sense the teachers had a difficult path to tread. Having created relaxed classroom climates and thereby conveyed the impression that spontaneous student behaviour was not unwelcome, the teachers also showed that they did not wish to give any student a totally free rein. In other words, the teachers indicated that they wished to retain their authority while not being perceived as authoritarian, or to be in control while not being perceived as controlling. Some students may have interpreted these messages as contradictory and been confused, at least initially.

The kinds of student behaviour which the teachers appeared to disapprove of most strongly were those which indicated disrespect either for themselves as teachers or for other students in the room. These included the following:

- conversing with one another in a language which others could not understand;
- speaking when others were speaking;
- not listening to the points of view of other students;
- being unwilling to work with certain students;
- being domineering;
- behaving in an attention-seeking manner.

The teachers also considered that it was necessary to pull students into line for arriving late to class or for returning late after coffee breaks. As Richard said:
I tend to be fairly strong about punctuality. If they are going to be part of the group, it's an insult to everybody in the group for them to come late.

There was no evidence in the study, however, of the teachers disciplining the students in their classes for failure to do prescribed work. Pamela's view that "they're responsible adults, they want to learn, they don't want to waste their time" appeared to be endorsed by all the teachers in the study.

**Enforcing codes of behaviour**

The majority of the teachers were keen to point out that they dealt with student behaviour which they considered unacceptable in ways which they assumed would not demean the individuals concerned. As Gillian explained:

I don't ever want to get the students offside. [I never tell them off in front of the class] because I don't like to be ticked off in front of the class and the thing is, you do get students offside, and whenever you're going to do any form of criticism it's got to appear that it's not. And there are hundreds of ways that you can criticise people without criticising them [directly].

Similarly Kerry said, "They're adults and I'm an adult and there's no way I'm going to chastise them and treat them as children." One day, for example, Gillian said jokingly to Yasmin and Zeinhab, who returned from the mid-morning break later and later as the course progressed (having discovered a cafe across the road where they could get coffee and snacks), "You will have to be back at 11.00, or you will have to write 100 lines!"

Maggie made a similar point, saying, "I only tell students off in front of the class in a lighthearted manner, [saying] 'Excuse me. It's my turn! Come on! We're a class now!'"

Kerry pointed out that she did not want to be perceived as authoritarian, saying:

When people are late I always make a joke of saying "good afternoon," or if they're ten minutes late, "good evening, did you have a nice lunch or a nice dinner?" So that you're not actually being an authoritarian figure, but you're letting them know that you know they're late.

Other teachers believed that, by behaving in what they regarded as an authoritarian manner, they would destroy precisely the kind of classroom climate that they were trying to foster. As Pamela said:
I don't want to stand up there with a stick . . . because I feel that there is a certain sense of cohesion. I feel that as a whole the students are happy in the class. And I just feel that I wouldn't create the sort of atmosphere that I want to have in a class. . . . If you are very authoritarian that's going to destroy that [atmosphere]. . . . I think you could even divide the class by doing that. Some would be divided against you, like for example you've got those few people who might think that those others over there are making a bit too much noise. . . . You might make them feel different from the rest of the class or whatever, [not] feeling just as valuable in the class or whatever.

Of all the classes I observed the one which appeared to have, superficially at least, the happiest and friendliest atmosphere (in terms of animated facial expressions, bursts of whole-class laughter, willingness to swap partners and so-on) was the one taught by Joe. However of all the teachers in the study, Joe appeared to keep the tightest control over student behaviour within the classroom, routinely chastising individuals in front of the whole class. As he explained:

The class is my territory kind of thing. I blew up Hyong Gun this morning because he was speaking when I was speaking, and that's just not tolerated. . . . I sort of say, here in the classroom there are some rules. If I'm speaking they shouldn't speak, and if someone else is speaking they shouldn't speak either. So every now and again [with] the main offenders, I just crack down on them.

However, Joe was at pains to point out that, once he had made his point, he was quick to move on:

You tell them off and then forget it straight away, and I explain why. I mean to say it's bad manners, do you mind? Or, you know, I'm speaking, or Junko's speaking, how about listening to her? And then that person may realise, and the whole class realises, and also, if you say it and then two minutes later you're encouraging them to talk it's not a big problem. . . . It's not a big issue, so I just point it out. . . . I obviously pick on the ones who are talking. I definitely pick on them, and they know why . . . I pull their heads in. [Picking on them when they're chatting] is a way of letting them remember, we're in class now.

Joe evidently considered that the possible damage to a student's self-esteem of being reprimanded in public was outweighed by the benefit to the class as a whole of knowing that he was prepared to enforce class rules. Other teachers indicated an awareness of the fact that when an individual student was lectured in front of the class
the rest of the class was listening and taking note of what was happening.63 Maggie explained that when she was telling Luc that it was inappropriate to use the word "fuck" in everyday conversation she noticed little nods of approval coming from the Korean students in her class. Amy reported that on a particular occasion when she had chastised Lela for reading aloud answers from someone else's book, she had noticed that "the rest of the class was deadly quiet."

In contrast to Joe, Tom preferred not to remind his students on a regular basis of the kinds of classroom behaviour that he expected. At the beginning of the course he had told his students that to maximise their learning opportunities they should not use their first language in class. However, when the students from the former Yugoslavia began to converse with one another in their mother tongue with increasing frequency Tom did nothing to stop them. On a particular day during the sixth week of the course the mother-tongue talk between the students from the former Yugoslavia was particularly noticeable, with laughter-engendering comments called out across the room on a number of occasions. During a communication activity at the end of the day (when Tom had gone out of the room to fetch a book) cordial relations between the students from the former Yugoslavia and the students from Asian countries broke down, with the informal leaders of the two groups (Nusret from the former Yugoslavia and Tan representing the students from Asian countries) turning their backs on one another, folding their arms and refusing to speak to one another. When Tom returned he angrily admonished all the students from the former Yugoslavia for their behaviour throughout the day. After the event the non-Bosnian students in Tom's class (who happened to be interviewed in the week following the incident) expressed approval at Tom's action, explaining that they had construed Tom's behaviour as evidence of his support for them. Several students also said that they wished that Tom had been more strict with the class and that he had acted sooner.

63 This phenomenon has been described as the "ripple effect" by Kounin (1970).
In contrast to Tom, Christine used a variety of strategies to dissuade the Swiss-German students in her classes from speaking to one another in Swiss-German. She sometimes told the students directly that speaking their own language had a negative effect on class cohesion, saying on one occasion, "It's not good for the feeling of the class if you speak Swiss-German. They can't understand you. You're cutting them out."

**Drawing individual students into line**

The teacher behaviours which will be described in this section indicate that each teacher appeared to have at their disposal a personal repertoire of strategies for drawing into line any student whose behaviour they considered might be detrimental to the social atmosphere of the class. These strategies appear to have been built up over the years, as each teacher discovered through experience which particular strategies did or did not appear to work for them personally. The teachers seemed able to select individual strategies at will, choosing whichever one they considered most appropriate for the immediate situation. As will be seen, many of these strategies appeared to encourage students to self-regulate their own behaviour.

Several teachers made a point of saying that students who were behaving in ways which they considered inappropriate should be dealt with as early as possible in the life of the class. Kerry, for example, said, "I hit the nail on the head with any student," while Gillian, when talking about a previous class that she had taken over from another teacher, considered that if she had had the class from the beginning she would have found a way of "nipping in the bud" student behaviour that she considered unsatisfactory. Some teachers acknowledged that changes in student behaviour, if indeed they occurred at all, often took place gradually. Recalling an earlier class Gillian

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64 These included appealing to reason, glaring at the offending student, or parodying the lilting Swiss-German accent by going "doh di doh di doh" in a sing-song voice.

65 Interestingly, no two teachers appeared to use the same range of strategies, certain teachers appearing never to use strategies which were used widely by others. This suggests that each teacher had developed a bank of student-management strategies which were in keeping with their own personalities and educational philosophies.
said, "I had two students who were really quite aggressive and it took me a long time to get them onside. It almost took me a term."

The strategies that the teachers claimed to have used successfully to pull into line students whose behaviour they considered unsatisfactory include the following:

• raising the profile of the student in the eyes of the class;
• praising or flattering the student;
• allocating the student a specific role;
• offering "rewards" (in the form of extra attention or high-profile, "enjoyable" learning tasks);
• teasing;
• using peer pressure to induce the student to modify their behaviour;
• calling the student's bluff;
• being up-front with the student in front of the whole class;
• speaking privately to the student (and using a variety of tactics to persuade the student to change their behaviour);
• using learning activities as a way of inducing the student to conform;
• keeping the student in their place by giving them extra work;
• ignoring the student;
• reprimanding the student in front of the class;
• responding as a language teaching professional.

There was no evidence in the study of any teacher attempting to control students by using sarcasm or ridicule. I will now present the teachers' descriptions of some of these strategies. Because Amy was prepared to describe to me in some detail the struggles that she had to induce two students to behave in ways she considered appropriate, and because she used such a wide range of strategies, I have drawn fairly extensively on information provided by her in the following sections.
Dealing with awkward students

Richard offered an explanation for the behaviour of awkward students which appeared to accord with the views of other teachers in the study when he said, "Troublemakers really are people who want attention and their way of achieving attention is through a negative process." From what the teachers said and from my own classroom observations it was evident that the teachers routinely interrupted their lesson schedules in order to attempt to satisfy the demands of attention-seekers. On one occasion Christine made the following observation after Stephan had entered the classroom, evidently angry about a confusion regarding holiday brochures:

Stephan came in and basically disrupted the whole class until I went to the office and did something about it. He was going to let everybody know, [he's] that kind of person. . . . Some people have much more of a sense of "me and my problems" than others do.

In a similar manner, Maggie described how a student called Min Woo had, on one occasion, arrived in class angry because his bag had been stolen from a bag rack in the State Library. Maggie explained that only after she had spent time explaining to Min Woo that it was not appropriate to lodge a complaint with the director of the language school could she return to teaching the lesson.

On one occasion Joe found himself challenged by a Korean student who wanted to know which particular grammar rule dictated that it was incorrect to use the progressive form of the verb "to be" (which would make it possible to create a sentence such as, "He is being unhappy today"). Joe explained how he reacted, saying:

I should have just killed it, rather than argue about it, because what he said was wrong, but his [Korean] textbook says it's right. . . . Most of the class, their eyes were glazing over and I thought, "This is a point which has nothing to do with the lesson." . . . In the end I said [to myself], "Nah, stop this! Cut it!." And [I said], "I promise to bring you an exercise on it."

Joe's comment suggests that on this particular occasion he was balancing the needs of the class as a whole against the needs of individual class members. The comment also indicates that in this particular instance Joe considered that he had made the "wrong"
on-the-spot decision (by deciding to engage in an argument with Yong Suk in front of the whole class).

Both Richard and Kerry provided examples of how they had apparently been able to get students whom they identified as attention-seekers onside. Richard explained that in his view, "You can get them onside by turning them into a class personality," qualifying his statement by saying, "You have to be careful not to give them too much or it goes too far the other way." Richard proceeded to give an example of how he had apparently induced a student to modify his behaviour, saying:

I had one guy who never used to shut up, a really provocative Serbo-Croatian guy. So one time his mobile phone went off in the class and he had to go out of the classroom, so after that I called him Mr Mobile, and they all called him "Mr Mobeel." And so this guy then, without [me] having to do anything, becomes a personality, so then he doesn't feel the need to put his imprint through criticism or upsetting other people.

Kerry provided the following account of how she considered that the dynamics of her whole class had changed as a result of her humorous treatment of one particular student. According to Kerry in the early weeks of her course a student called Samuel had had a glowering expression on his face, had drummed his feet and had looked bored. Kerry also observed that during the first part of the course she had found the class in general to be unresponsive, saying:

I couldn't reach the students. No matter what I tried they didn't come together as a class. There was no gelling, no rapport as a class. They were a collection of individuals.

Kerry recalled that when an attractive young female conversation tutor was allocated to the class some students told her that, during a tutorial with this particular tutor, Samuel "sat gawping at her and didn't speak at all." Kerry explained that she was able to capitalise on this incident, using it as "a way to gel the class," teasing Samuel with remarks such as, "Only three more days before Margaret comes again!" and, "What a nice name Margaret is!" According to Kerry this treatment cajoled Samuel into laughter, which in turn "thawed the class." Explaining further, Kerry expressed the view that, "Now he has changed. The whole dynamics has changed. He's a celebrity."
Kerry described another occasion when she felt that she had been able to raise the status within the class of a potentially difficult student, apparently with satisfactory results. She explained the situation in the following way:

In my last course I had two very difficult people. One fellow for example was listening to his radio on his earphones on the very first day and I said, "Look, everyone, okay, let's just get into a circle and learn everyone's names." and he said, "Excuse me, but I'm listening to the news. This is important to me." And it could have turned nasty, because he was absolutely adamant that he wasn't turning his radio off and he got very belligerent. . . . I had to channel him very positively . . . [so] I got him to work with a very passive Burmese student who was having lots of problems. His grammar was excellent and as a result of that he finished his work very quickly, and I always got him to go and help somebody else who was much slower, so he got a feeling of being important, and they saw him as being better than they in certain areas of English, and they added respect, which was exactly what he needed.

Kerry considered that praise was an effective way of mellowing the attitudes of potentially non-compliant students, saying:

I've usually managed to cope with people. Sometimes I've felt very belligerent towards them, but I haven't let them see that. . . . I've actively disliked them, secretly if you like, but then I've had to find something nice about them and find something positive, and this has always worked for me. I use praise, and I've seen how praise can work with children, and I tell them they're intelligent.

Kerry also recounted an incident when she believed that she had successfully called the bluff of a male student whom she considered had behaved in an aggressive manner towards her. Kerry recalled that the student had said, "I don't like being in a class sitting at a desk. I'm a 46-year old man," to which she had held out her hand and said, "Well, congratulations! I'm a 46-year old teacher. How do you do?"

**Not being consistent in dealing with individuals**

Amy was the teacher in the study who appeared to employ the most differentiated range of strategies in order to manage the behaviour of certain students in her class. Some of the student-management strategies which Amy described indicated a desire to raise the self-esteem of "offending" students through praise, flattery, or the
allocation of favours, while other strategies suggested a desire to keep students in their place by chastising them or by withdrawing favours.

A number of times during the course of the twelve lessons which I observed Amy allocated high-profile tasks to certain students. On one occasion, for example, shortly after Mirko had voiced a criticism of her class-management style in an open manner, Amy selected him to role-play being "Dr Mirko" in front of the class and to answer questions from all the students about his "job." On another occasion, having seen Goran making moves to go to coffee before the appointed hour, Amy said to the class, "We've got time for a dictation! . . . I need someone who can write quickly!" and selected Goran to come to the whiteboard to write up a set of instructions. On a further occasion, after Mirko had made his personal views on the topic of health known to his group in a way which made it difficult for other members to express their views, Amy chose Mirko to come to the front of the class to chair a "debate" in which the views of the various groups were drawn together.

Amy made regular use of praise with certain students, telling me at the end of the first week of the course that she had repeatedly praised Mirko for being "an absolutely brilliant, an absolutely perfect actor" during a miming activity, considering that as a result, "He came across a lot more intelligent. . . . This positive experience was just a real boost for him." On another occasion she said to Mirko, "You're going really well. You're going to be a star soon!" and on a further occasion, when Mirko had made a suggestion about how to prop the classroom door open and said, "Who's a genius?" Amy replied, "You!" Amy regularly praised Mirko for the drawings that he did on the whiteboard, on one occasion telling the class that she wanted them left up and not rubbed off.

When dealing with Lela, however, Amy tended to adopt an authoritarian stance and on a number of occasions during the course reprimanded her in front of the class. Below is Amy's description of one such occasion, which occurred in the second week of the course (after Lela had read out a homework answer from another student's notebook, having not done the work herself):
"Lela," I said. "We're all adults here and as far as I'm concerned we all act as adults, and I think everyone's responsible for their own work, and I think it's rather upsetting for Vesna for you to take her work."

Amy was aware of the potential negative effect of her actions, adding the following comment:

I said it in front of the class. It was a real bitchy sort of thing to do [and] I thought to myself, "You're being really mean! This is a really heavy telling off." But I thought she really deserved it, because she's being so slack and she's been implying, "The work's too easy for me, I'm a bit superior here." And as soon as it's her turn she panics and pinches someone else's work.

On another occasion during the same week Amy explained how she had not only reprimanded Lela but also made a point of not selecting her to be interviewed in front of the class:

I said, "Lela, you weren't there yesterday afternoon." [She replied], "Oh, my friend wanted me to go away with her." I said, "Lela, I'd prefer you to let me know if you have to go." [She said], "I actually had to race off and I couldn't find you." I said, "Okay, the procedure is this, that and the other." And that was dealt with. And I wanted her to know that I had noticed. And I think she was hoping that she'd be the next person to be interviewed and she wasn't. It was almost like dealing with a naughty child. She's got such an ego, she would have loved people to interview her, but I thought, "There's no way!" I could see her expectations and I could see her embarrassment, because we asked Nguyen what she was doing yesterday afternoon, and then I didn't do her. . . . It was a real power thing, it was really funny.

Amy's subsequent comment indicated that she was aware of the potential negative effect that her actions might have had on Lela, saying:

After that telling off, at the end of the day, they were writing their feedback and I thought, "Goodness! What on earth is Lela writing?"
Because we didn't do her discussion on that day. And she proudly showed me, and it was all positive stuff.

At this moment Amy also considered an alternative approach, saying, "Maybe I'm going to have to seek her out for something positive."

Sometimes Amy used a reprimand as an opportunity to make a general statement to the class about the kinds of behaviours that she expected. For example, when during the fourth week of the course Mirko arrived late one morning and went to
sit in a seat saved for him by Lela, Amy told Mirko to go and sit somewhere else, taking the opportunity to tell the class that students should not reserve seats for others. In the ninth week of the course Amy made the following comment:

Mirko and Lela just wanted to stay together and I said, "I'm sorry, you've been speaking your own language. You need to be separated." They did not like it and they went into separate groups really cross.

Mirko indicated through his classroom behaviour that he was indeed sometimes angered by how Amy treated him in class. On the occasion when Amy told him that he could not sit in the seat reserved for him by Lela, Mirko walked across the room in a purposeful manner, picked up a table, moved so that it was separated from the other tables, set it down heavily and sat down, arms folded, with his back to Amy. He did not participate in class activities until invited by Amy approximately 20 minutes later to operate the overhead projector. Kerry provided another example of how a student could evidently behave in class when angered by the actions of a teacher:

This happened to a good friend of mine at the end of the last course. She had a wonderful class and everything was gelling. And on the second last day before the end of the course somebody did something and she talked to him as if she were his mother. She chastised him in a voice that she would have used for her own son the same age. And the whole class dynamics changed and she said [to herself], "I've done it now!" And he threw his books down on the floor and it became a nasty incident and he said, "Bloody teacher!" and walked out.

Kerry's assessment of the situation was the following:

She said she should have handled it differently, but she'd been annoyed by ten weeks of this immature behaviour. But what she should have done was sorted it out with him outside the class in the first week.

Amy apparently intended the granting of small privileges to "offended" students to be construed as indirect apologies for the way that she had treated them. On one occasion, for example, she perceived that Mirko had "accepted" her gesture of conciliation, saying after one particular confrontational incident:

But then he was really sweet . . . and said, "I'll do it, just for today, for my teacher." I think because I gave him the choice I sort of apologised about it and he went into the graciousness of that . . . and he was sweet for the rest of the day.
At the end of the course Mirko did not appear to harbour ill will towards Amy, presenting her in class on the penultimate day of the course with a collection of hand-painted Easter eggs and, according to Amy, making a public apology for being a "difficult" student.

It may be that the ongoing problems that Amy had throughout her course with both Mirko and Lela could have been alleviated to some extent had Amy not apparently vacillated between democratic and authoritarian student-management styles. In other words, Amy sometimes gave these two students openings to become integral members of the class group, for example by accepting their input into classroom decision-making, yet at other times she chastised them in front of the class, thereby perhaps making them feel excluded from the overall class group. These particular students may have found it difficult to predict Amy's behaviour, not knowing whether she would blow hot or cold with them.

**Inducing conformity**

As the study progressed I became increasingly aware that when the majority of students in a class operated collectively they could influence the behaviour of individuals. This is one of the major findings of the study and its implications will be discussed in Chapter 12. Interestingly, however, even though all the teachers appeared to have a tacit understanding of the normative power of the class group, only one teacher in Phase Two provided specific examples of times when she considered that her class, operating as group, had induced an individual to conform.\(^66\) This teacher was Amy and, at the risk of overloading the reader with further examples relating to Lela and Mirko, I will outline what she said.

On one occasion, in the course of describing her current problems with Lela, Amy recalled how a previous class had evidently treated a similar student, saying:

\(^{66}\) See Shaw (1981, pp. 280-289) for an overview of some of the research which has been done into normative social influence of the group.
I had one woman who was as scatty as Lela and she'd always be in a different world, and one day the other students said to her, "Look, you just don't seem interested in our class. You don't seem interested in your work, do you? We're not going to bother to explain it to you." [The other students] drew her into line. And I'm aware of that one. You can use student power, if there's a person who's not sort of part of it.

Approximately half-way through her course Amy wished her students to do a communicative fact-finding activity and, evidently anticipating that Mirko might be reluctant to join in, explained how she introduced the activity:

I said [to the class], "We've got something really light." And I looked at Mirko and I said, "This is going to involve walking around the classroom and talking to everybody." I thought, "Mirko doesn't like moving" [so] I said to the class, "Is this what you want to do?" And they said, "Yeah, yeah!" So that's what we did, and there was a lot of enthusiasm, and Mirko [joined in and] loved it.

On another occasion Amy wished the class to make a group decision on where to go for lunch on the last day of term, saying that after the students had discussed whether or not to go to a local Chinese restaurant:

The class said, "Sold! It's only $5. We'll go!" Mirko ended up having to shut up, because all the other students were saying, "If Lan and Pham think it's fantastic as well, and it's walking distance, and it's so cheap, [we'll go]."

In sum, Amy appeared to have an appreciation of the fact that, once a consensus view was reached by the class, lone voices lost their power of persuasion. It is also of course true that collective decisions may not reflect the real desires of anyone. Perhaps nobody in the class particularly wanted to go to the Chinese restaurant but, since it was the least unpopular of a limited number of options, everyone apart from Mirko was prepared to go with the flow.

_Repressing or ignoring student behaviour_

Certain teachers considered that it was necessary to try to reduce the impact of attention-seeking students on the rest of the class, rather than attempting to modify the behaviour of the student concerned. As Tom explained:

Last term there were some very strong characters and they emerged immediately, in the first week. And it was a bit of a struggle to keep
them, not under, but to keep them under control. There was one, a bit of a joker, he was constantly wanting to make comments. A lot of it was basically just, "Look at me, look at me!" . . . There was another couple who were very good, but who got totally bored when they were not in the focus. And that happened early in the course . . . and if it does happen early it's very difficult, because obviously you can only let them be leader for so many activities . . . When somebody else has a turn they just turn off and become disruptive. It's not very nice. I don't think that'll happen in this course. They tend not to be so rude.

A particular strategy that Tom apparently used to keep certain students under control was to work them so hard that they did not have time to be disruptive. As Tom said about a student in a previous class whose behaviour he had considered inappropriate, "I gave him a lot of hard work and that took all of his energy."

The teachers explained that they sometimes chose to ignore moments when they perceived that certain students were trying to unnerve them by making comments which they regarded as negative or inappropriate. When Mirko announced to the class during a communication game that his group hated Vegemite and could not think of a reason why they should "bid" for it Amy said, "I decided I would just ignore the negative energy . . . and I wrote up the other people's reasons." On a later occasion during the same activity, Amy heard Mirko make a comment with sexual undertones which only she had understood, saying, "I think the best way to handle those situations is to let them know that you know what they mean, but in front of the class just to ignore it."

**Taking individuals aside**

Some teachers described how they took aside students who were behaving in ways they considered detrimental to the development of class cohesion and talked to them on a one-to-one basis. When speaking privately to such students the teachers appeared to adopt a variety of approaches depending on the individual student, on the particular circumstances, and on how they themselves felt at the time. Amy described a situation in which she had adopted a confrontational approach, saying:

I had another guy and he liked arguing with me in the class and finally one day he walked into my office to explain he had to go somewhere, and I was in a power position [behind my desk] and I told him, "Look, I think with you arguing with me in class the other students don't like it because
you're wasting their time. If you disagree with me over something come and see me after class. That's much better, okay?" [This was] real power play on my side. And he did, and that was okay.

On another occasion Amy attempted to change the attitude of Mirko, who had demonstrated throughout the course that he held a more traditional view of the role of the teacher than the view held by Amy. As Amy explained:

I was having a little chat with Mirko and Alex. It started off with Mirko saying something about me referring questions to the group, and that really it was up to me to decide what [the class did]. I gave them a lecture on the difference between authoritarian, laissez-faire and democratic leadership because Mirko had been saying he hadn't been comfortable with democratic leadership. I said to him that he was confusing democratic and laissez-faire and I talked to him about closed choice . . . so I think he got the message.

Sometimes the teachers used private chats to try to establish a relationship with a student whom they thought was feeling angry, affronted or upset. Kerry explained how she believed that she had persuaded one particular student to change his behaviour, saying:

I took him out when everyone was working. I said, "Oh Hubert, could we just have a word please?" And he stood out there and I said to him, "I'm sorry about what happened in there." I said, "We probably got crossed wires." I said, "It's just that when I ask you to look at something I really do expect it, because it's for your benefit, [so] you'll learn English quickly." And he said how he was feeling and I said, "Well, I can understand that." And we shook hands. And he was my biggest fan after that, absolutely the biggest fan. He kept everybody in check. He was fantastic. And when he left at the end of the course, on the very last day, he gave me a hug that must have lasted five minutes, and he said, "I've learnt so much with you." And he was wonderful. But it could have gone the other way.

There was evidence of certain teachers speaking to individual students privately in an apparent attempt to encourage them to participate more fully in the life of the class. Maggie, whose class had a constantly-shifting membership, found it necessary to do this with a number of different students. On one occasion, after taking aside a French girl and a Swiss girl who were both new to the class, Maggie said, "I really told them a bit about responsibility, saying that they had to relieve Min Woo of the responsibility [of keeping the class lively]." On another occasion, Maggie explained that she took
aside a Japanese girl called Masako, whose lack of responsiveness had made her feel "a bit disappointed," and advised her to try to be "a little bit more forthcoming, a little bit more open." Maggie explained that she had tried to make Masako understand that her impassive demeanour might be interpreted wrongly by Australian teachers, saying to her:

We're used to more facial expressions and more overt behaviour. We don't know these things without some indication of what you're feeling and how you're acting. . . . I said, "You're not managing to convey your warm personality."

Leaving students alone

Teachers sometimes considered that it was not desirable to try to integrate individuals more fully into the classroom group. Talking about two women from Bosnia whom she knew had been through traumatising experiences, Gillian said, "I let Suncica and Tanja go, because they don't influence the class." Commenting on a student in a subsequent class whom she described as an "odd bod," Sally explained that she did not try to compel this student to fit in with the rest of the class, saying, "He never did his homework, but he did write in his diary every single day, so he made progress in his own way." In a similar manner Christine did not mind that one of her students stayed away from class regularly, saying, "Jong Chun's a good student and he studies on his own quite a bit."

On some occasions teachers allowed students to complete learning tasks in a different way from the rest of the class, as if sensing that they might affect the class atmosphere in an adverse manner if coerced into doing what they did not want to do. When, on one occasion, Mirko protested about doing a collaborative writing task Amy allowed him to work on his own, saying, "Okay, this is a democracy. If you want to work individually, okay." On another occasion Lela did not want to do a writing task on the set topic, so Amy said to her, "You can do your own writing on your own subject, marriage, if you like." Similarly Joe remarked about Hyong Gun, "He's on another
planet. He knew what he had to do, but he wanted to do his own thing, so that was fine."

**Responding to student challenges**

As explained in Chapter 2, there is consensus amongst group dynamicists that small groups pass through a series of developmental phases as they progress towards a stage of cohesiveness and maximum productivity. It is generally accepted that in the early stages there is a degree of uncertainty, questioning and challenge, as group members decide whether or not the group leader merits their loyalty and respect. The examples provided earlier in this chapter of students behaving in an awkward or confrontational manner could be interpreted as moments when students were testing out their teachers and deciding whether or not to have confidence in them as language teaching professionals.

The evidence suggests that, regardless of their proficiency in English, students were capable of challenging their teachers. Pamela sensed student antagonism towards her on the first day of her beginner-level class, saying:

[Yesterday] I asked them their names and they almost barked them back at me, like I'd been in the army or something. And then I didn't say it right and he kept repeating it all the time and it sort of threw me off a bit. . . . I felt it was a little bit like, we are men and you are a woman. . . . I didn't feel antagonism today. I felt okay with them, so I think that's probably why I feel a lot better today.

Pamela explained that having students in the class who wished to move to a higher level made her feel uneasy, saying:

You often feel a bit thrown when you have a couple coming up and saying, "This is a bit boring." . . . I mean I know why they've done it and I'm not taking it personally any more, but just at the time it was a bit [unnerving].

At the other end of the spectrum I noticed that Tom made the first week of his advanced-level course particularly demanding, beginning each lesson with a brain-

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67 I have used "cohesiveness" here because, as explained in the definitions section in Chapter 1, it is the term favoured by group dynamicists.
teaser and displaying a thorough knowledge of English grammar and of the Latin
derivation of words, as if to build confidence in himself as a teacher. In that first week I
noticed Said ask Tom a question regarding the use of the definite article before the
word "people," nodding and appearing satisfied when Tom told him that the
information apparently given by a previous teacher had been incorrect and saying, "Just
treat it as a learning experience and forget it." I had the feeling that, by answering Said's
question in a manner which Said evidently found satisfactory, Tom had earned Said's
confidence and respect.

Christine, with her experience of teaching exam preparation classes containing
European students who had left school relatively recently, was the teacher who spoke
most readily and openly about student challenges to her authority. She considered that
this was sometimes due to the relative immaturity of the students, saying:

The younger ones, even some of the older ones, they've got all their
baggage. They might have hated high school, or they might see the
teacher/student relationship as a power game, and it's a matter of getting
one over the teacher and proving that he or she is a fool. Some of them
really want to pin you down and they really want to get you. . . . They
want you to play this one-up game and you have to call their bluff.

Talking about students with high-level English skills whom she had taught in the past
Christine made the following observation:

They're challenging you, they're challenging you as a person. It's
definitely a challenge, and it's young smart-arse guys every time. . . . I've
had that several times and I've taken them on one side and I've talked to
them. And then [they say], "oh no, no, no! It's not a problem." But it's
there, oh, it's there.

Christine described the effect on the class as a whole that she perceived that the
behaviour of one student could have, saying:

Everything that I did he would question, question its value. When you get
a student that's sowing seeds of mistrust, especially if they're quite
confident - probably I'm not as confident as I should be, or I don't put
them down swiftly enough or something - it really sows the seeds of
mistrust in the class somehow.

Christine considered that a student's challenging behaviour could affect her own self-
esteeem, saying, "Even if there's only one student that you feel is implacably opposed to
you, you can lose a lot of sleep over it. . . . It's very hard not to take it personally." On another occasion she expressed the view that such behaviour could have a detrimental effect on the whole class, saying, "They can have a very demoralising effect on me and on the rest of the class, because every time there's this sort of ego-battle the class is held up." Interestingly, the examples of overt challenges to their authority tended to be provided by younger female teachers talking about male class members older than themselves. It may be that cultural conditioning sometimes makes it difficult for certain men to accept young women in positions of authority.

Several teachers considered that the best way of coping with students who questioned their professionalism was simply to behave in ways which showed that they had many years of experience and were informed by language teaching theory and research. A teacher from the first phase of the study who considered that she had successfully dealt with the aggressive behaviour of one particular student said, "You have to be able to show them that you have a lot of knowledge that they don't have." Talking about a young Danish boy whom she perceived had had a "devastating effect" on an earlier class, Christine described her feelings and her actions in the following way:

To me it's stupefyingly arrogant for a 19-year old boy who's just finished high school to challenge somebody he knows is university educated and a native speaker, and he knows she's been in the job for more than a few weeks. . . . Every time there was this challenge, he would stop the whole class and would insist that those words meant the same thing, and I would have to say, “No they don't,” and explain very carefully the context in which you say that word and the context in which you use the other word. And he hadn't even looked it up in the dictionary.

Luc was a member of Maggie's class whose behavioural patterns appeared to be similar to those of some of Christine's students. Maggie explained how she had denied Luc's request to study more new words in class, saying:

Yesterday he asked if there was a big list of vocabulary I could give him and I said, "I'm very sorry but you're learning words in context and that's the way to learn and to use them." I said, "You can go to the library for wonderful books of vocabulary and you can ask the librarian." But I said, "We're not going to do that in class, because you're learning vocabulary
Talking about a student who had questioned the focus of her course Gillian said:

The first day in class she challenged me, she said, "Well, what's going on in this class? What are we going to be doing?" And I said, "Well, this is what we are going to be doing," and she said, "I don't really need that." And I said, "Well, the rest of the students do."

In summary, the teachers sensed that it was necessary to deal with student challenges to their professionalism and did so in a variety of ways. The evidence suggests that, if the teachers succeeded in winning over students who may initially have doubted their expertise, those same students could then become strong allies and behave in ways which enhanced cohesion within their classes. Sally provided the following description of the behaviour of one such student:

He was such a dominant leader type and he fitted into the class in a much more positive way later on. He started off really wanting to assert that he was the one in charge, and challenging all the time, and certainly at the beginning often not doing that task that he was set, mumbling a lot under his breath, talking in his own dialect and trying to get a lot of attention, reaction. Whereas in the second term he stopped all this muttering and mumbling and suddenly he'd come and talk to me. . . . He stopped this challenging business completely and seemed quite friendly and normal. But the other thing is, instead of being this negative influence he turned into a very supporting, supportive sort of person and in the presentations he was very encouraging, and the students who were the shyest, more on the "outside" of the class, he brought them in and sort of patted them and [said], "Oh, well done! You're doing great!" He was very jovial and he still had this strong role, but in a much more positive way. He'd join into the class, he'd make contributions, he was up with what was going on, whereas before he just looked disinterested and wasn't getting involved. And I don't know if that was the reason that the class felt a lot better, but it did.

I suspect that the apparent change in this student's behaviour may have been due in part to the fact that Sally eventually won the respect of this student as a language teaching professional.

**Failing to integrate individuals into the class group**

The teachers considered that part of their role involved trying to integrate more fully into the class group any student whom they felt was on the periphery.
Commenting on a class that she was currently teaching a teacher in Phase One said, "There's one or two who are still on the fringe. You can tell that they're not quite in the group yet. They're on the outside."

The teachers provided a number of accounts of students behaving in a withdrawn manner in class, considering that such students had an adverse effect, not only on class cohesion (by virtue of their reluctance to join in group activities), but also on their own self-confidence and levels of enthusiasm. Several teachers described in tones of disappointment or despondency occasions when they considered that they had been unsuccessful in integrating students into their class groups. There was evidence that once teachers had become aware of the presence of discontented students in their classes, they continued to focus upon them without consciously attempting to do so.

Sally made the following observation about a student who wished to be transferred to a higher-level class:

Nawarat still makes me feel uncomfortable. She doesn't seem to be giving up on this. I'm much more aware of her in class all the time. . . . I saw her in the corridor on Monday waiting to see the Director of Studies and I asked her if she still wanted to move and she said "Yes!" with a venomous voice. . . . I think I've got a bit of a complex about her because I think she wants to move, like [I find myself] looking at her all the time.

Christine explained that she found it unnerving when she smiled at students and they did not reciprocate, or when students avoided catching her eye in class. Talking about a student in her afternoon class who appeared unwilling to smile at her, Christine explained that her immediate reaction had been, "Ooh, she doesn't like me!" Gillian described Yasmin as "a little bit of a thorn in my side," explaining how she affected her self-esteem in the following way:

I think Yasmin is a little bit superior. Therefore I'm not going to touch her. . . . I'm not important and I'm not delivering anything. That's what I feel. . . . I'm only a teacher in a community class. If I was a university lecturer I might carry more weight.

Certain teachers considered that the presence of certain students in their classes affected their own energy levels. As Amy explained:
If a student's bored it's quite hard to keep up the energy of, this is fun to do. You see, if I see her looking like a bored kid, I start feeling like a boring adult.

Maggie expressed a similar view, believing that having quiet students in her class was "a bit of a dampener," and that to make activities work "you need extra effort."

There was evidence of teachers of both low-level and high-level classes becoming frustrated when students appeared not to want to be drawn into the class group. When describing two young Japanese girls in her low-level class Sally made the following observations at different times during her course: "They drooped, with a look of superior boredom on their faces;" "They switched off and seemed disinterested;" "They jump into their dictionaries at the first chance;" "Tomoko just sat there fiddling with her hair." Sally recounted that her co-teacher came out of the room one day complaining that "they just sat like zombies." Maggie, who taught the highest-level class in the study, made the following observation about Masako:

She won't give any feedback. She's said [she wants] speaking and listening the same as the others, but when you're looking for some response there's nothing, not in the look in the face or in what she'll say. . . I feel now she's not making the effort. She came in at a lower level than some and I encouraged her. . . . It's purely now a personality thing. She won't change or won't make the effort. . . . When she's told to work in pairs she will, and she'll work quietly herself, but she's just so passive.

It is likely, of course, that students who behaved in a withdrawn manner did so either because they lacked confidence in their abilities (and were frightened of being chosen by their teacher to answer a question which they might have got wrong), or because within their own cultures it was inappropriate to establish eye contact with a teacher. Masako, who had selected the adjective "uncomfortable" to describe how she "always" felt in class and "stressed" to describe how she "usually" felt, explained in her interview that she felt that her level of English was significantly lower than that of the other students in the class. In a similar manner a seemingly withdrawn Japanese girl called Hiroko, who left Joe's class before the end of term, wrote, "I always feel confused because I can't understand our lessons" and, "I usually feel anxious because
everybody understands our lessons, all of them, but I can't follow them." Sally herself suspected that this might be the case, saying:

Maybe some of the times when they're not so involved it's because they don't quite understand what's going on. . . . Those marginal, shyer-type characters are going to be reluctant to participate if they're not really sure about themselves.

In summary, the teachers' tones of disappointment suggest that their personal levels of energy and self confidence were affected by students behaving in a passive or withdrawn manner and that this in turn had a detrimental effect on the levels of cohesion of their class groups. As Maggie said about Masako's behaviour, "I try not to let it affect me, but when you see it's affecting the group [you feel you must do something]."

Summary

In this chapter I showed how the teachers believed that individual students could either enhance or hinder the development class cohesion. I then described the variety of strategies that they claimed to use to induce certain students to modify their behaviour. Towards the end of the chapter I suggested that student challenges to the authority of the teacher may have been an integral part of the class group development process. I also indicated that students who remained on the periphery of the class group by virtue of atypical behaviours affected the perceptions of the teachers of the levels of cohesion of their classes.

For the most part this chapter and the previous one have described teacher behaviours in the early days of new courses, as teachers sought to establish certain kinds of classroom atmospheres and to socialise those students whom they considered likely to impede the development of class cohesion. In the next two chapters I will focus on the behaviours of the teachers during the middle weeks of their courses. In the first of these, Chapter 8, I will describe the kinds of spontaneous behaviours that the
teachers used when they considered that the levels of cohesion within their classes needed to be boosted and reaffirmed.
Overview

This chapter outlines the range of strategies that the teachers used to encourage the students in their classes to behave in an animated fashion and thus create the impression that an overall spirit of cohesion prevailed. In the first section I will show how the teachers energised their classes by using humour in a variety of ways. In the second section I will show how the teachers used a range of additional strategies to revitalise cohesion in their classes, sometimes by deviating from their lesson plans and injecting a feeling of fun into their lessons, but sometimes through the language-learning activities themselves. These strategies varied according to whether the teachers were teaching low-level or high-level classes, but normally engaged the emotions of the students as well as their intellects. I have interspersed this chapter with data gathered from selected students and my own comments because it appears that, although all the classes could be energised temporarily (with the result that they would appear cohesive to their teachers for short lengths of time), some of the strategies used by the teachers may have caused individual students to feel embarrassed or antagonistic towards their classmates.

The concept of "energising" language classes

Certain teachers talked about energy levels within their classes, viewing them as a property of their classes operating as unified wholes rather than as collections of individuals. The notion of energy appeared to be linked to the concept of class cohesion because, as I will show in this chapter, the teachers seemed to believe that "energised" classes were cohesive. The teachers also considered that classes which had low levels of energy lacked cohesion, apparently because they saw the students within such classes operating individually rather than collectively. As I will show during the next few
chapters, the teachers valued and defined classes which regularly exhibited collective
behaviour as "good." They also welcomed student behaviours which they considered
were directed towards the good of the class group, appearing to value them more highly
than other desirable individual behaviours such as students working independently on
their own.

Several teachers considered that they themselves were responsible for the
energy levels of their classes. On one occasion Amy said, "The teacher creates the
energy level in the class," while Heidi, a student in Christine's class, said, "We take the
energy from Christine." Christine believed that it was necessary to raise the energy
level within her class at certain times and to lower it at others, saying, "You've got to
try to get the energy level up, but then you've got to kill it and bring it back [down]."
Certain teachers believed that energy (either positive or negative) could also flow from
students to their teachers. Amy, for example, said of her experience of teaching a
subsequent class, "It was energising rather than draining" and of her present class, "If a
student's looking bored it's quite hard to keep up the energy of, 'This is fun to do.'" Amy
recalled an occasion when the students in her class had apparently worked in a
collective manner to move the classroom furniture back to its normal position (having
entered the room one morning and found the furniture disarranged), saying:

There's an incredible coming together in terms of, "We're a class." They
all got up and they all did it together. I couldn't believe it, four or five
guys all working in together, getting rid of all the middle desks with great
enthusiasm, totally committed, not one sign of, "Oh I couldn't really be
bothered." It was high energy, "We like this class and let's get this done."

An alternative interpretation of the alacrity with which the students apparently
completed the task is, of course, that the students simply wanted to get the lesson
started as soon as possible.

The perceived centrality of the teachers' role in creating and maintaining energy
levels within their classes is highlighted by the fact that several teachers recalled times
when they felt that they themselves had reduced the energy levels of their class groups.
Talking about one class that he felt he had worked too hard Tom said, "I just totally
burnt them out and I blame myself." Some teachers believed that events in their own lives had had a negative effect on the energy levels of their classes. Tom, for example, said:

I have my ups and downs too. A "down" was perhaps when I'd just moved into my own home. I was living on adrenalin for the first few weeks and then I just sort of lost it and I think it rubbed off on the class.

Similarly Christine said, "When I've had exam classes and there have been other things going on in my life, the class has gone wrong as well." Certain teachers observed that their own absences had had a detrimental effect on the energy levels of their classes. Pamela, for example, said:

I had a week off last term and that did really rock the boat. It was like we'd lost touch with each other, and I think it was at a fairly crucial time. . . . It was towards the middle of the term, and then I wasn't feeling well for a week after I came back, which made it difficult as well, like I couldn't put that energy in that you normally do to get that rapport. So it affected the class too, I think. It was a lovely class too, a very nice class.

When she returned from a week's absence during the third week of her course, Christine remarked about her first day back, "They seemed a bit subdued, they weren't their usual chatty self." At the end of the week she said, however, "They've come back now and they're good." Certain teachers recognised that their own energy levels could vary as the teaching day progressed. For example, on one occasion Amy said, "The day goes a little bit up and down in terms of my energy as well."

The role of humour

In all the classes in the study there were numerous examples of moments when the students and their teachers burst into spontaneous laughter. As indicated in Chapter 5, the teachers appeared to use laughter as an informal indicator of what they perceived to be class cohesion. However, the teachers also appeared to use laughter as a way of energising their classes, making them seem more lively and therefore more united socially. The teachers therefore appeared to view laughter in two ways, construing it not only as evidence of cohesion but also as a factor which contributed to the development
of cohesion. Amy was the teacher who demonstrated most clearly the dual function of laughter. Sometimes, for example, she made comments such as, "It's been so much fun and there's been so much laughter," or, "It's been really good. There was teasing and joking and all the rest," indicating that she took laughter to be an indicator of cohesion. At other times, however, she made comments such as, "I started the joke and then the class took it up," or, "They burst out laughing because I was planting some of those ideas," indicating that she believed that making jokes which engendered laughter had helped her class to become more cohesive. During one interview, Christine criticised certain teachers in her language school saying that, in her view:

> Other teachers do too much of having a good time . . . at the expense of the lesson. You've still got to convince them that you're the teacher and you're interested in them passing the exam. You've still got to make it clear that that's actually the primary focus.

This statement suggests that Christine believed that certain language teachers might be tempted to give too high a priority to the energising of classroom atmospheres (through the generation of laughter) to the possible detriment of "serious" learning.

**The role of teasing**

Evidence from the study suggested that in the early days of each new class teachers sought to identify individual students within their classes whom they perceived would respond well to being teased. It appeared that, once having identified such students, the teachers would proceed to tease them while the rest of the class watched, listened and responded by laughing in unison. It seemed that in this way a sense of friendly intimacy could be built up within the class concerned.

In an interview conducted at the end of his subsequent course Tom reflected back to the class which I had observed (and which in Tom's opinion had been "bland"), commenting that "there was nobody whose leg I could pull." Tom then proceeded to speak in glowing terms about the high level of cohesion that he considered his subsequent class had reached, recalling his relationship with a particular student in the following way:
We pulled each other's legs all the time. We talked about professional ethics a lot, and religious ethics came into it a lot, and we were able to pull her leg a few times. . . . We were talking about genetic engineering and cloning, and there was a reference to this bloke who had cloned 17 embryos and came up with 40 or 50 odd, and he compared his act to the biblical story of the loaves and the fishes, so Sister Clara explained to the class what it was all about, and then I just said, "Well, what technology did Jesus use for that?" . . . She took all those little jokes very well.

There was evidence from the study that the teasing of individual students appeared to operate most successfully (in terms of the amount of laughter engendered) when the student in question engaged in repartee with the teacher concerned. In Joe's class a Japanese girl called Miwa (whom Joe described as "always lively and self-confident"), engaged in the following kind of repartee with Joe:

Joe [to class]: "Every week [you must read] one reader!"
Miwa:   "No, too many!"

Joe:   "Good evening, Miwa!"
Miwa:   "On time!"
Joe:   "Miwa time!"
Miwa:   [laughter]

Joe:   "We have to do countable and uncountable nouns for homework, especially for you, Miwa."
Miwa:   [laughing] No!"

Another student who was prepared to interact with Joe in a way which caused the class to laugh was Fahri, a young Indonesian with a keen interest in soccer. Joe recounted the following incident:

I just went on [about how] I don't like soccer, because blah blah. And he got all wild about it, and so did half the class, because the Koreans love their soccer too . . . and so today he came in with his soccer jumper on.

On another occasion Joe pronounced to the class, "Cricket, the world's best game!," a statement to which Fahri responded by calling out in front of the class, "boring!" Joe then aimed a mock gun at Fahri and pretended to shoot him, exclaiming in a joking manner, "Back to Level One!" During the fifth week of the course each student in Joe's class was required to give a five-minute presentation to the rest of the class. Joe was amused that Fahri, who spoke on the topic of football, wore a West Coast Eagles shirt
when making his presentation, perceiving that he did so "to make his point . . . [and] to get at me." Certain students in Christine's class operated in a similar manner. One day, for example, Christine remarked jokingly to Hyuck Junh, who had arrived late for class, "Is she pretty?" (implying that he might have spent the night with a girlfriend). When Christine returned late after the coffee break (during which time Hyuck Junh had evidently worked out the significance of the remark), Hyuck Junh quipped, "Is he handsome?"

On a number of occasions Christine had good-humoured arguments with a Swiss-German student in her class called Stephan, on one occasion becoming incensed at Stephan's insistence that men were better drivers than women. Christine routinely made digs at Stephan by using his name to contextualise sentence structures, on one occasion saying, "Stephan broke down in tears" (to illustrate the phrasal verb "break down"), and on another saying, "He's macho, [so] he must be Swiss-German" (to illustrate the use of the expression "must be"). Stephan, however, was prepared to retaliate in a humorous manner. In the class party on the final day of term Christine, who was in the process of cutting the cake, posed with the knife pointing at Stephan's head and called out, "Photo!" At this point Stephan grabbed the corkscrew, pointed it at Christine's head and posed in a similar manner. When Christine was given her present by the class (an 80-centimetre-high white teddy bear) and said jokingly, "He's my boyfriend now," Stephan quipped, "One big advantage [is] he can't run away."

Some teachers pointed out that they welcomed such apparently "forward" behaviour, Joe saying on one occasion about his teasing manner, "[It's] just my style, with anybody . . . and hopefully they'll start teasing me back," while Christine said, "I rib them and then they rib me back." There was evidence in the study that, when students teased or were "forward" with their teachers, the teachers normally laughed at themselves along with their students. Tom, for example, described one particular afternoon when the class had been so lively and so full of laughter that the Director of Studies had come in to find out what was going on. Tom recounted in a laughing manner that after two students had given presentations for and against living in de-facto
relationships he had been persuaded to tell the class about his own atypical wedding ceremony. Tom recounted that on the following day the students had urged him to continue with what they called his "oral presentation," saying, "We've done ours. Now it's your turn! Come on!"

Joe predicted that by the end of his course the students in his class would feel relaxed enough with him to imitate certain of his mannerisms. This phenomenon was noticed by Sally, who said towards the end of her subsequent class, "I've noticed a couple of them imitating me, especially Johnny, because I use my hands a lot. And he's sort of taking the mickey a bit." On another occasion Sally said in an appreciative manner of the same class, "They laughed at my silly drawings." Christine's students were observed mimicking her on a number of occasions. For example, one day when Christine parodied the way in which Clark exclaimed "Oh no!,” the students responded by imitating the manner in which she had stressed the word "interesting," repeating the word a number of times while making exaggerated gestures with their arms. Tom provided an example of how the students in the back row of his subsequent class apparently succeeded in teasing him. Tom explained that these students would catch his eye and make comic faces when they saw that he was becoming increasingly irritated by a student in the front row who apparently persisted in asking the same questions throughout the course.

In summary, the teachers in the study who claimed to have been teased by their students spoke about the experience in a laughing, amused manner. It appears, therefore, that they construed teasing as a sign that their students felt comfortable in their presence, rather than as a threat to themselves or as a challenge to their authority.

**Students as the focal point of class laughter**

There was evidence in the study of teachers and their classes occasionally teasing individual students deliberately. Kerry believed that it was common for teachers to identify students whom the class as a whole could tease, explaining that in her view:
There's always one person in the class who is the instigator of the humour or the class clown. And as long as you don't make them the cruel butt of people's jokes, but you use them in a way that everyone has empathy with them, then it's a wonderful experience.

There was also evidence of students sometimes becoming the focal point of the class without their knowledge. Sally, for example, recounted the following incident, when a Korean student fell asleep in class:

The other day, when we were listening to a story, Sung Hoon was falling asleep, and . . . the people around him noticed, and I noticed, and it was like, wink, wink, nod, nod, "Let's leave him!" . . . There was a feeling of, "Oh, isn't this funny! Let's leave him and see if he snores!"

Sally explained that when breaktime arrived she motioned to the class to leave the room and everyone tiptoed out, leaving Sung Hoon to sleep on undisturbed.

Tom made a point of saying that his subsequent class was "a tolerant class," explaining that, rather than being irritated by the idiosyncratic behaviour of a certain student, the students had apparently chosen to mimic the behaviour of this particular class member. According to Tom the reaction of the other students in the class to this "irritating" student, who apparently had the habit of creating non-existent English words, was to make up similar nonsense words themselves. According to Tom, "In the end everybody was creating words in English from Portuguese and the most ridiculous words were coming out." It may be, of course, that although the class as a whole was energised through the communal experience of having fun at the expense of an individual, the student concerned may have felt deeply hurt. Alternatively, the student may have been unaware of the degree to which their behaviour had become an institutionalised class joke (see Chapter 10 for further examples of shared class understandings of this kind).

Some teachers made a point of saying that in their view students liked to be teased. On one occasion Maggie said of Min Woo, a Korean student in her advanced level class, "He's happy to be the butt of jokes. . . . [He's] somebody we can tease and joke about, and he can accept it," adding, "[But] it's got to be in a caring way."

Similarly Pamela said of a student in her beginner-level class called Branko, "I don't
think he minds. He's in that role of the one who's laughed at." Both Maggie and Pamela expressed the view that students welcomed the attention that being teased would bring them, Maggie saying, "The humour is often singling people out as special, isn't it?," and Pamela saying that in her view teasing "would make him [Branko] feel important."

However, there were a number of occasions during the study when individuals appeared not to welcome being teased. When the mobile phone of a girl in Christine's class called Mimi rang during a lesson, for example (causing Christine to quip, "We've got a yuppie in the class"), Mimi got up and strode out of the room in an unsmiling manner. On another occasion Christine teased Akiko for concentrating on her boyfriend rather than on the lesson, an action which caused Akiko to leave the room in tears, followed closely by her boyfriend. There may have been a number of other occasions in the classes in the study when students reacted to being teased in a sensitive manner, but did not let their feelings show. Joe thought that a Korean girl in his class called Hee Suk did not like being teased, saying:

You don't joke around too much with her. . . . [You've got to] be sensitive with her. . . . She's a nice girl, very friendly, but not really relaxed. She doesn't smile, her lips are together, she's very serious about her study. I think she's very easily embarrassed.

Some teachers were aware that teasing students in front of the class could damage their self-esteem. Richard, for example, said, "I tease them all too much. That's one of my slight weaknesses of teaching, I sometimes tease too much, so I can overstep that line of familiarity." Richard proceeded to give a specific example, saying:

Some of them you have to be careful in case people don't like it [being given nicknames]. I used to call one girl "Lettie Spaghetti" and she got very upset about it. . . . If they laugh the first few times and then if they don't like it you'll see that enough is enough. . . . The nickname thing is a great mechanism, but if you pick the wrong person, the wrong nickname and the wrong time, you have to double back from it quickly.

Christine made a similar point, saying, "I've overstepped the mark a couple of times and I've had to back down. It's very easy to, because you don't know what their limits are."

Talking about teasing Stephan for his Swiss-German accent Christine remarked:
You can only take a joke like that so far and then it's not funny any more. I think I'd be overdoing it if I got stuck into him tomorrow again. But I might just drop it in now and then.

It is worth noting that Stephan made the following comment about Christine: "Usually she doesn't tease too personally, she touches only the surface of someone." Maggie explained that during her course she realised that the Korean men in her class did not like being teased about being accident-prone when it came to driving cars, saying, "It was a bit too delicate, so we stopped doing that."

There was evidence of certain students encouraging everyone in their class to laugh at themselves. When selected students acted in this way it appeared that their teachers recognised that they were happy to be the focal point of class laughter. Pamela said of a student in her class, "Jovica has become like the person you can joke with and joke about." Jovica made a point of stressing that she was overweight and, with her limited level of English, was able to make the class laugh on a number of occasions. When doing a role play in front of the class, with Pamela playing the role of the doctor and herself as the patient, Jovica (who had volunteered to be the "patient") groaned as she attempted to touch her toes. She also jokingly pretended to take off her sweater for an "examination." When on another occasion the students were asking one another what time they ate dinner, Jovica exclaimed "no dinner!,” pointing to her midriff and beaming at the class. In a lesson when the students were practising the present simple tense, after one student had created the sentence, "When I'm hungry I diet," Jovica called out, "When I'm hungry I eat!" Savo, a member of Amy's class, was another student who deliberately drew the attention of the class to his weight, apparently in order to generate whole class laughter. On one occasion, for example, when the class photo was being passed around, Savo joked that he had not held his stomach in when the photo was being taken. Drawing attention to a personal feature such as being overweight may of course be a pre-emptive defensive measure.
Encouraging joke-telling

Several teachers encouraged the students in their classes to tell jokes or to recount humorous anecdotes. Kerry, who had built a regular joke-telling slot into her weekly programme, considered that this practice was beneficial for the development of class cohesion:

Every Friday is joke day and each group will be told that they have to tell a joke every Friday. So for the last hour we have joke-telling, and it's one of the hardest things in a language to do, to tell a joke and then to understand a joke. But I've always found that the students try so hard to get their humour across that it does work. It bonds them because they want to be successful and they want to understand as well.

Christine did not formalise joke-telling, but appeared to value jokes in the same way as Kerry. On one occasion, having overheard a Korean student called Wan making a Swiss girl called Francine laugh with a story about a misunderstanding relating to the voluptuous shape of a girl and the voluptuous shape of a coca cola bottle, Christine stopped the class and said, "Wait, we must all hear Wan's story!" She then asked Wan to tell the story all over again. Amy was alert to occasions when students wished to tell stories to the class as a whole and would stop the lesson to allow them to do so. In an afternoon lesson at the end of the week Amy's Russian student Alex evidently suggested that everyone tell jokes. According to Amy both she and Alex told two jokes each and then two other students followed suit. Alex's jokes were apparently anti-Russian ones relating to the Russian space programme. According to Amy the experience was "really good fun." During the final week of her course Amy allowed a PRC student called Bo to tell a number of jokes to the class, one of which was a lengthy one involving a Chinese emperor pulling down his palace in search of a prize grasshopper. Amy considered that Bo's desire to tell jokes was evidence that he felt a degree of ownership of the class, saying, "He must really have a feeling of, 'This is my group and I'm going to participate.'" There is always the chance, of course, that some students in the class may feel impatient if they think that certain students are allowed to hold the floor for too long. In such cases it would seem that a feeling of disharmony rather than social unity could be created within the class.
**Student-generated laughter**

In all the classes there were many occasions when individual students, either purposely or accidentally, generated whole-class laughter. Tom, who was disappointed with his present class because he considered that it contained "a lot of insipid characters," commented that "in other courses there's always been someone there who's on a high, who can sustain momentum." Kerry believed that, once a class had progressed beyond a certain point in terms of its feeling of cohesion, the students would somehow "take over" the class and would use their own initiative to generate laughter. Recalling a moment when a fellow teacher had apparently commented on the amount of noise which regularly emanated from her classroom, Kerry said:

> There'd be guffaws of laughter coming from our classroom and someone said to me, "Do you ever do any work in there?" And they couldn't see that [it was] the students themselves, it wasn't me. It would be some catalyst, and they felt so comfortable with each other, making fun of each other . . . that it would be spontaneous from them.

Recalling a class that she regarded as having been particularly cohesive Maggie explained that it contained "some very outgoing spunky Swiss-Italian blokes . . . [who] were so generous in their personalities, in teasing and joking and making it really nice."

Talking generally about humour a teacher in Phase One of the study said that in her opinion "humour transcends all cultural norms. . . . There are certain things that are basic to everybody and certain things that everyone sees as funny." Phase Two provided a wealth of evidence to support this statement. There were many examples, for instance, of individual students spontaneously calling out single words whose meaning the class as a whole found amusing. When this happened everyone in the class, including the teacher, would burst out laughing. However limited their levels of English, individual students seemed able enliven their classes in this way. Often such responses, as seen from the following examples, relied on universal common knowledge:

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Sally: Give me the names of some drinks.
Student: Napoleon!
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Sally: [Teaching the words "bat" and "mouse"]
Student 1: Batman!
Student 2: Mickey mouse!

Pamela: [Mentions the word "coffee"]
Student: Turkish!

Pamela: [Role playing being a doctor, with a student as "patient," in front of the class]
Student: [Calling out from back of classroom] Take off your shit!

Pamela: [Mention of Frenchman]
Student: Bonjour monsieur!

Amy: [Hoping to elicit the word "ice cream"]
What is something that children want that parents won't give them?
Student: Money!

Tom: Give me some words associated with danger.
Student: Smoking!

Tom: What is "crematorium"?
Student: Roast dead!

Tom: A word associated with "speed"?
Student: Gonzalez!

Christine: [Talking about the bankrupt Western Australian entrepreneur Alan Bond]
Student: James Bond!

Maggie: [After viewing a programme about surrogacy in which the surgeon said, "Technically there could be a hitch"] What does "hitch" mean?
Student: Hitch hike!

Sometimes individual students would take it upon themselves to generate jokes around learning activities, thus appearing to enhance a feeling of camaraderie within their classes. On one occasion, when Amy's class was studying a reader which described the hardships faced by the convicts and early settlers, Mirko appeared to be in an ebullient mood. When the class was discussing the life of a farmer Mirko called out "rich man!" and when Amy asked the class what the convicts ate Mirko joked "spaghetti!" Other students then appeared to capture the mood, one student calling out
when asked why prisoners were locked inside prisons, "Out of sun! Don't get sunburn!"
On another occasion, however when the class was studying a different reader in the
same series, Mirko's behaviour appeared to imbue the class with what Amy called
"negative energy." On this occasion the activity required the students to decide who had
"worse" conditions, (a) a convict working as a domestic servant, or (b) a convict
working in a chain gang. Amy told the class that (b) was the "correct" answer, an action
which appeared to anger Mirko who had assembled some cogent reasons in favour of
(a).

There were certain universal aspects of classroom life, such as late arrivals, the
time of day or the giving of homework, which were regularly laughed about in such a
way that a feeling of class cohesion seemed to be affirmed. The teachers normally
laughed along with their students when reference was made in a joking manner to these
well-known features of institutionalised learning. When a student walked in late typical
comments included, "Good afternoon!" "Good evening!" or "Stranger in the night!"
When asked to confirm what the time was students might call out, "It's lunchtime!" or
"Time for coffee!" or even lie about the time. Sometimes students set their watch
alarms as an apparent lighthearted reminder to their teachers not to extend their lessons
into breaktime. When on one occasion Amy said to her class, "When should we be
back?" students called out "Three o'clock!" (the end of the lesson), "Next week!" and
"Next year!" Whenever Joe mentioned homework students would call out "Boring!" or
"Oh no!," while on one occasion Heidi said, "Go to beach!" in response to Christine's
mention of homework.

Some teachers felt that certain students could get carried away once they
realised that humorous behaviour in class was condoned. Christine considered that a
Swiss girl called Gabi fell into this category, saying on one occasion, "She's very
distracting because she's easily distracted, and she can get a bit out of control
sometimes," and on another occasion, "Gabi is the class clown, she'll do anything for a
laugh." A student in Pamela's class called Branko bore this comment out, on one
occasion hitting himself on the head and saying, "Stupid Yugoslav!" after misreading
the time in a telling-the-time activity. Talking about a Korean student in her class called Sang Hyeok, Sally made a similar observation to Christine's, saying, "His behaviour has sometimes been a little bit loud or inappropriate," In one particular activity, for example, when he was role-playing being a "doctor," Sang Hyeok said to various student "patients" when they came to him for a diagnosis, "You will die!" Sang Hyeok's "patients" did not appear to appreciate the joke as much as Sang Hyeok did, one student commenting "dangerous doctor" and refusing to go to him for a "diagnosis."

In Tom's class, which he described as having "no characters as such," there were isolated moments when the students themselves appeared to wish to revitalise the atmosphere. Tom reported with pleasure that during an activity which required the students in groups to discuss the five senses (and to prioritise them in terms of which ones they could least do without), the students had laughed and joked about which senses were necessary in bed and which sense was superfluous to requirements. During a particularly demanding gap-fill activity in the eighth week of Tom's course, the students appeared to become so frustrated at never getting any answer right that they began to groan, to make exaggerated facial expressions and to laugh amongst themselves in an apparently exasperated fashion. This behaviour led Tom to join in the play-acting himself, by "becoming" a bingo host and making statements such as, "I'll take most things in the past - and in the present tense as well!" "I like 'pretend!' I like 'hope!' 'Try' is good too!" On another occasion various students in Tom's class fumbled over reading aloud various tongue twisters. When an atmosphere of hilarity developed in the class Tom himself joined in the joking mood, saying for example, "You could say, 'On the Seychelles sea shore!'"

On other occasions, however, the students in Tom's class laughed and joked amongst themselves in a manner which Tom did not appear to find amusing. When his class was being observed for the morning by three trainee teachers, Tom required the students in groups to decide which objects they would find most useful if they got lost in the jungle. Although some students took the activity seriously, others began suggesting items like "cigarettes," "cigarette lighter," "mobile phone" and "German
Shepherd dog," to which students in other groups responded by making comments such as, "Don't forget batteries!" "Phone for ambulance!" and "Call for taxi!" The students then began to joke about which film stars they would most like to be lost in the jungle with, with the names Mel Gibson, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Kim Bassinger being called out across the room. Tom continued the task in a serious manner, writing up the students' suggestions, but not including the film stars.

The above incident was one of the few observed in the study when student-generated jokes were made in a way which appeared to exclude the teacher. Had the trainee teachers not been present, Tom might have shown that he appreciated the jokes and construed the joking as evidence of class cohesion (as he did when students made jokes during learning activities on other occasions).

I do not know whether any of the laughter-generating mother-tongue comments made by students to their compatriots during class time referred to their teachers. I do know, however, that laughter-generating comments made by the students from the former Yugoslavia in Tom's class were sometimes directed towards Asian students. Natasa explained to me, for example, that a comment made prior a presentation by a young Burmese student called Cedric and which had led the students from her country to burst into laughter, was, "We've had enough theatre today, we don't want any more." The way that Cedric reacted, (reading aloud his presentation in a mechanical fashion without establishing eye contact with his "audience," and then sitting down with his head bowed), suggests that he considered that the comment was more offensive than it was. This appeared to be an example of laughter operating in a way which was detrimental to the development of whole-class cohesion (even though it may have served to reinforce a feeling of solidarity amongst the members of the class from the former Yugoslavia).

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68 I suspect that some of the comments made in Serbo-Croatian by the students in both Tom's and Amy's classes may occasionally have been racist in tone and directed towards the non-European students in the class.
There were many examples of students asking questions, giving answers, providing definitions, making statements or pronouncing words which caused their classes to laugh in unison in such a way that the cohesion level of the class seemed to be raised. In many cases the burst of laughter appeared to come as a surprise to the student concerned. Student responses which engendered whole-class laughter included the following:

Pamela: [To student with worries] How did you sleep last night?
Student: Together.

Joe: [Having spoken to the class at length about parts of speech, prior to the class watching a comic video, during which the students, in groups, were expected to make lists of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to describe the story] Now we'll watch the video.
Student: What's "adverb"?

Joe: [To student] How are you today?
Student: Good morning.

Joe: When do the Olympics start?
Student: In Sydney.

Joe: [Having difficulty explaining the expression "in Victorian times"]
Student: [After class has remained silent] Ah, history!

Pamela: [To student] What's your job?
Student: [Stumbles over pronunciation] Fritter and turner.

Amy: [Picture of man with bruise] What's the matter with the man?
Student: Blue eye.

Tom: [Wishing to elicit the word "moisten"] When you put moisturiser on your face what does it do?
Student: Makes you beautiful.

Christine: What does "reticulation" mean?
Student: You don't have to go out into the garden with your water bottle every day.

Maggie: [Introducing article on beached whales] What's the article about?
Student: Fish suicide.
Maggie: What is a womb?
Student 1: A baby house.69
Student 2: A baby bag.
Maggie: [Explaining the word "forefather"]
Student: And the word "foremother"?

Christine considered that an isolated comment made by a single student had been enough to break the ice in her afternoon class. She explained how, during a "who gets the heart?" discussion activity, a Swiss student's reply of "Forget it!" to her question, "Would I be given a Swiss heart in the hospital if I had a heart attack in Switzerland?" had produced a burst of spontaneous whole-class laughter. As she explained, "The whole class cracked up and I thought, 'Oh, we're getting somewhere!' . . . I thought, 'Ah, thank goodness!'"

Sometimes the way in which teachers attempted to explain the meaning of unfamiliar concepts produced bursts of laughter which seemed temporarily to revitalise their classes. On one occasion Pamela attempted to explain what "yoghurt" was to Soo, a PRC student who was unfamiliar with dairy products. When it became evident that Soo had little idea of what she was talking about Pamela gave a loud "moo!" (to indicate that yoghurt was made from milk and that milk came from cows), an action which caused the rest of the class (who came from a region of the world where yoghurt was eaten) to laugh amongst themselves.

Occasionally the reasoning students gave for misinterpreting words produced widespread laughter. On one occasion, for example, the students in Tom's class listened to an anti-war protest ballad and filled out worksheets which contained the text of the song, with selected words blanked out. When the time came for the students to check their work it became evident that Said had filled in one of the gaps with the word "Porsche" instead of the word "porch," thinking that the words of the song were "sit in my Porsche" rather than "sit on my porch." When asked to explain why he thought that

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69 Certain of the laughter-generating contributions made by students were the result of translating into English words from their own languages. In both Korean and Japanese the word for a womb is "baby house." In a similar manner the Vietnamese say "blue eye" rather than "black eye."
an unemployed Vietnam war veteran with an amputated leg would be sitting in a
Porsche, Said replied that the man had bought himself a Porsche with his compensation
payout.

Sometimes the way that students said things produced bursts of whole-class
laughter which their teachers construed as evidence of cohesion (laughter and
enjoyment, as indicated in Chapter 5, being interpreted by the teachers as indicators of
cohesion). For example, Amy explained that her class (having combined with a parallel
class) was doing an activity in which individuals shared their problems with the class
and asked the advice of a panel of students sitting at the front. Amy explained with
delight that Alex, an amateur musician, had said that he had a problem with neighbours
who kept banging on his wall in the middle of the night. Amy explained that the class
had burst into laughter when Alex had said in an apparently innocent fashion, "All I
was doing was playing scales on my piano."

Although responses such as the above had the effect of making a critical mass of
students in the class laugh in unison, creating the impression that a feeling of
"togetherness" prevailed, it is likely that on a number of occasions the individual
concerned may have thought that they had made a mistake and felt embarrassed. On
one occasion in Maggie's class a Korean girl called Min Sook used the slang expression
"dole bludger" to describe a jobless person being interviewed in a listening
comprehension exercise. When the whole class burst into laughter, Min Sook was
observed holding her worksheet in front of her face and giggling nervously behind it. A
student in Amy's class called Nadya explained to me that she had gone home, sat down
at her kitchen table and burst into tears because she believed that one of the students in
her class had made fun of her after she had made what she considered a simple error.
Nadya was so upset by this incident (which was evidently the final straw in a series of
similar incidents) that she resolved to withdraw from the course, but was persuaded by
Amy not to do so. I will describe how Amy claimed to have restored Nadya's sense of
self-worth and status within the class in the next chapter.
In summary, one of the clearest findings to have emerged from the study was the degree to which laughter appeared to be a part of the fabric of everyday life in all the classes, with each teacher seeming to have developed an intuitive understanding of how to use humour to best advantage. Every teacher appeared to value laughter and to consider that it functioned not only as a social lubricant and means of creating a relaxed classroom climate (as indicated in Chapter 6), but also as a means to keep classes united in an ongoing manner as their courses progressed. Selleck (1991) supports this finding, emphasising the relationship between humour and class cohesion in second language classrooms and suggesting that when students laugh together they become united (p. 34).

There was evidence in this study to suggest, however, that laughter was not necessarily an indicator of positive feelings such as comfort, happiness, or general satisfaction with the learning situation. On the contrary, classes sometimes appeared to burst into spontaneous laughter when learning tasks appeared confusing, strange, or particularly difficult. On one occasion Joe gave his class a gap-fill exercise on the use of definite and indefinite articles which required individuals to read aloud sentences, having decided whether to fill in each of the four or five gaps in their sentence with "a," "the," or to put in no article at all. Towards the end of this 90-minute activity, when it became evident that no-one could get any sentence completely right (however logical they tried to be in applying the rules governing the use of articles in English), the instances of whole-class laughter increased in frequency and intensity. Similarly, when Ljiljana in Tom's class chastised her peers for not understanding a sentence containing a series of complex technical terms that she was attempting to dictate, laughter erupted in the classroom. Tom indicated that he was aware that on such occasions the whole-class laughter functioned as a tension-releasing mechanism, saying, "Everybody burst out laughing as if the tension was broken." On another occasion Tom made the following observation:
If you're talking about euthanasia and serious issues, the only kind of laughter will be as a break, you know, to release tension, and there have been occasions when they've done that.

It may be, therefore, that on occasions such as these whole-class laughter was indicative of feelings of discomfort, nervousness, anger or frustration which had been developing beneath the surface and which could no longer be contained. The teachers themselves seemed to sense that under such circumstances the laughter should not be construed as an indicator of class cohesion.

Other strategies for energising classes

Deviating from lesson plans

A common characteristic of the teachers was the fact that they seemed prepared to be flexible and to "go with the flow" when their classes led them in certain directions. Pamela provided an organic view of language classes, considering that teaching a class was in some ways like riding a horse. As she said:

When you're riding a horse you're going together. The horse is moving first and you're moving with it, not against it and you're going together. . . You're not pulling it over here and then pulling it over there. To ride a horse has to be very subtle. . . . You try to move with it, but you guide it as you move with it.

Although there were many occasions when the teachers appeared to deviate from their lesson plans for pedagogic reasons (instantaneously thinking of ways of clarifying grammar points, or devising activities to give additional practice with certain spoken language items, for example), there were also many occasions when they appeared to diverge from their lesson plans for reasons which seemed to relate to the social well-being of their class groups. The ways in which the teachers deviated from their lesson plans included:

- changing the order of learning activities;
- extending or cutting short learning activities;
- modifying learning activities;
• bringing in additional learning activities or omitting planned activities;
• going off at a tangent and chatting about matters unrelated to the learning task at hand.

Pamela pointed out that she no longer did what she had been trained to do and followed detailed lesson plans, preferring to rely on her own intuition regarding the pacing of activities:

When you're being supervised you have to write your lesson plan and you've got to write so many minutes and you've got to try and stick to it. For me, especially with language learning, I really like to stop when it feels right to stop. . . . I always have a fairly definite plan of what I'm going to do, but not time-wise. I might plan one particular lesson for one day and find I only get half that lesson done, so I've already planned the next lesson. And it doesn't worry me at all. The supervisors say it's terribly important to stick to the times you say you're going to do, and I've never been able to understand why. But I do it because that's what I know they want me to do. But as soon as they go away I go back to what I normally do.

The teachers' explanations for why they made on-the-spot decisions to change what they had planned to do varied widely and often appeared to be related to the notion of sustaining the energy level of their classes. A selection of reasons given by the teachers are offered below:

I probably could have gone on a bit today . . . and I got a gut feeling that as a whole - just a gut feeling - that it'd been going on for long enough. (Pamela)

I wasn't going to do it when I did. I was going to do it maybe before lunch, but because they needed hyping up a bit [I did it then], so I think you've got to be a bit flexible. (Maggie)

I thought that that moment was a good time because it would bubble them up a bit. (Maggie)

It came up naturally, and it was something they were interested in, so they discussed it and it died its natural death. (Maggie)

I saw Michelle particularly enjoyed that and I made a mental note that I would do another one. (Maggie)

I wanted for us all to trip off for a coffee, but we got too carried away so I didn't bother. (Joe)
After that I wasn't quite sure what to do, but I thought I'd play the first bit again and get them to join in with the chorus, but they just seemed so happy and wanting to go along with it that I just kept it playing, although I'd intended to stop them. (Sally)

Pamela provided an example of an occasion when she considered that the social needs of the students (to relax and have fun amongst themselves in their own language) outweighed the pedagogic goal of the class (to optimise class time for English language practice). Describing an activity in which individual students were required to come to the front of the class and role-play "buying" items from Pamela, (who role-played the "shopkeeper" in a range of different shops), Pamela said:

I think it's just the fun and the laughter and all the others are gabbling away in their own language while there's one person up the front trying to talk in English [laughs]. I mean I could be really strict and I could say, "Shut up, everybody, only English!" But then I've just got this feeling that they're having so much fun. . . . They're really quite stupid sometimes and I think, "Oh well!" Initially it did make me feel a little bit uneasy, but now I'm quite accepting of it.

At this point Pamela therefore appeared to be prioritising the social needs of the class over their pedagogic needs, as suggested by Allwright (1996). Allwright's hypothesis is discussed in more detail in Chapter 12.

From the classroom observations it was evident that all the teachers routinely varied the pace of their lessons, alternating activities which kept the students in their classes under pressure with activities which allowed their students to relax and have fun. Amy said that in her view, "Every now and then they just want a light five minutes and then they want to get back into it really seriously, because they don't want to waste time." Even Tom, who spoke with pride about how hard he pushed his students, considered that it was not possible to maintain a constant high level of pressure in his classes, saying, "You have to have certain points of the week where they can relax."

Tom therefore had a file containing a selection of lighthearted learning activities which he could dip into at will. As he explained, "It's like really going hard for it, and then as soon as I see they're starting to wilt a little bit I tend to put something lighter in." At one point during the third week of his course, for example, Tom remarked:
We got to the stage where I thought, "It's about time they actually relaxed and talked to each other," so we did a picture composition in groups . . . and they really enjoyed it and it had the desired effect. It broke up the heavy turgid mood and got them relaxed again."

There were many examples of the teachers in the study varying the pace of their lessons so that their classes could relax and have fun together and apparently affirm that a feeling of cohesion prevailed. Although seven of the teachers in the study made decisions to vary the pace of their lessons without consulting their students, open negotiation was a key element of Amy's approach. In other words, Amy made it known to her classes from the outset of each course that she welcomed student input into how class activities should be done, how long they should last and what order they should be done in. Amy appeared to believe that the value of allowing students to have input into how activities should be conducted was that it would somehow keep the class "on-side."

This view reflects the functional approach to leadership, which suggests that for a group to remain cohesive group members need to have input into the general direction of the group (see Chapter 2). Referring to one particular occasion Amy explained:

Goran said, "Instead of listening to it, can we be the people who read the script and do it round the classroom, round and round and round?" And it worked terrifically and I thought, "This has worked! The idea has come from a student and I can do this in the next course. This is a foolproof way of doing things, because it's come from them."

Amy also considered that it was important to accede to the requests of the students in her class, saying at the end of the first week (after having ascertained that the students would like background music playing while they completed free writing tasks):

I kept to their rules, their request of putting the music on . . . and I felt the class lift. [I said to them], "We've got this music in the background. How loud do you want it?" They really felt consulted.

There were occasions, however, when Amy did what she intended to do despite having received feedback that certain students wished to do otherwise. On one of these Amy said to the class, "Do you want to see one of the groups having a discussion in front of you?" to which Mirko called out, "No!" Amy proceeded to organise the activity anyway, perhaps considering that the majority of the students in the class were happy to
view the "performance" of the selected group, or perhaps not having any other suitable activity to fit into the remaining minutes of the lesson.

Christine made the observation that, when a teacher asked for a consensus opinion from a group of students, it was normally the more outspoken students who got their way. Recalling an occasion when she had taken a mixed group of Japanese and Swiss students on a weekend bus tour and had asked the students whether they wanted to go to the wineries in the morning and to the beach in the afternoon, or vice versa, Christine said:

In that situation the Swiss'll say exactly what they want and the Japanese will sit and wait to see what the consensus is and agree with the consensus, which really means that the Swiss get what they want. So it's a fatal mistake and as soon as I said it I thought, "You stupid fool!" . . . If I'd really wanted to find out it would have been better to ask the night before at the barbecue, [when] I could have sussed out what they wanted individually, because then they feel freer to say what they want.

Support for this observation was provided by a young Vietnamese woman in Amy's class called Pham, who provided an opinion in a piece of writing which differed from the majority class view. After an activity in the first week of the course when the class had sat in a circle and shared opinions about homework (to give feedback to Amy on how much homework they wanted), Pham wrote, "Most of the students in my class don't like doing homework, but I like to do homework very much as it reminds me of what I studied in class." Sometimes, of course, teachers could misread student messages. Pamela, for example, explained that in a previous class she had interpreted student groans at the mention of homework to mean that they did not want homework. When she had said that she would not give them any they had apparently said, "Oh no, we like doing homework!"

Amy provided the following description of an occasion when she believed that, by acceding to the wishes of the students in her class, she had both revitalised the classroom atmosphere and had affirmed that a spirit of cohesion prevailed:

In the afternoon they were all exhausted after the test and watching the video, so they all decided they wanted a game. I walked into the room and there was a unanimous [feeling of], "We want to play a game and
relax a bit!" You know, "We need a break!" So I really walked into group solidarity, "We've made up our mind, Amy, we need a break! We've marked this test, and we've done an intensive 'Behind the News' activity, give us a break!" So I changed what I was going to do . . . against that opposition [laughter]. . . . They'd already ganged up against me. "We're not going to let Amy put us through another heavy grind. We're going to insist on a game or something, because we're exhausted."

Amy also observed that it was the seventh week of the course, saying, "They know me well enough to refuse to do what I've set." Amy proceeded to explain how she had organised a game which required three students to go out of the room while the rest of the class selected objects which the three students, having returned, had to identify by means of questions eliciting yes/no answers. Describing the activity Amy said, "It was good fun and we all had a laugh," mentioning in particular that the class had had fun selecting one of the objects, a hook on the wall on which they had hung a bag belonging to one of the students. According to Amy this activity had the desired effect, saying:

The interesting thing was, I said, "Okay, shall we send another three out?" "No. We want to do some work now. We just needed a little break, and now we want to work." And I said, "Do you want to do some writing about problems on the Gold Coast?" "No!" "Do you want to do some writing about what we were talking about, which places you'd like to visit in Australia?" "Yes!" And they wrote and wrote and wrote and continued for 30 minutes with the relaxation music. . . . At the end of 30 minutes they were just all ready to stop writing at once, and I commented on it, and Lan just burst out laughing, the fact that they were all ready at exactly the same time. So the amount of agreement in the group was just incredible. So they really gelled as a group.

Amy also made the point that she sometimes pretended that her mood matched the mood of the class, saying on one occasion, "[They said] they were too tired, and I sort of took that on board, [saying] 'I've got a headache too'. So I was part of it."

**Injecting a feeling of fun into grammar lessons**

Christine, the only teacher in the study who was required to cover the materials in a single textbook in a comprehensive manner (because she was preparing her students for a public examination), appeared to have developed a range of strategies for energising her class, while at the same time operating within the constraints of a product-oriented syllabus. Explaining her philosophy Christine said, "You just have to
keep it going fairly fast, so that they know they can have fun and work hard at the same
time." Talking in a joking manner about the teaching of grammar Christine explained
that in her view, "They remember it if you use sex or violence or alcohol or drugs or
their own experiences."

On many occasions during her course Christine was observed engaging in off-
task behaviour with her students and apparently energising the classroom atmosphere
by doing so. In one particular lesson, for example, the rubric of the textbook (which
read, "Think of some ideas and jot them down") led to a digression which engendered
an atmosphere of hilarity which was sustained until the end of the lesson.70 On this
particular occasion Christine and her students appeared to be drawn together by a
feeling of complicity at the "naughtiness" of the word being focused upon. Christine,
aware that "jot" is a slang word for "penis" in Korean, described what happened,
saying:

The Koreans were laughing because it was "jot," and when I realised
what they were talking about I told them that "chin chin!" was a problem
in Japan, and that got everybody going, and then Pierre got out the slang
book with all the different expressions in it, and that was it.

What happened in the lesson was that Christine, having informed the class that "chin"
meant "penis" in Japanese, made the class roar with laughter by saying to Akiko, the
Japanese student in the class, "Do you think it's funny if we say [imitating the clinking
of glasses] 'chin chin!'?" Christine then drilled the pronunciation of the word, saying, "If
you go to the doctor you have to be able to say this word. Come on, everybody,
pronounce 'penis'!" Christine then listed all the various slang words for "penis" on the
board, plus expressions such as "point percy at the porcelain," and the class shrieked
with laughter as Pierre checked all the words that Christine had given in his slang
dictionary, asking why "John Thomas" was not listed. Christine then made it clear that
she wished an atmosphere of normality to return, saying, "Okay, are we all happy now?
You've learnt a new Korean word and a new Japanese word." Christine also linked the

70 See New FCE Masterclass, p 47.
digression to pedagogy, saying, "When you use bad language you must be careful of the context," and, "When you're in a different country you must use cleaner language. 'Penis' is the safe word."

Christine also regularly brought into the class additional materials which she had photocopied from various books. On one occasion she took into class a photocopied sheet of Irish jokes from an old reading textbook, saying of a colleague:

Jonathan had them and he was laughing and I said, "Give me that! This will be fun, it'll lighten up the class a bit." And it went from there and that was the end of the lesson. . . . There was no plan, I just went in there with this.

On another occasion the focus of the particular section of the coursebook was on clothing. Christine therefore made a decision during the morning break to photocopy the "Underwear and Sleepwear" page from an old edition of the Oxford Picture Dictionary, which contained old-fashioned drawings of a range of male and female undergarments, including a garter belt, a girdle, an athletic supporter and long johns. Christine, apparently aware of the power of this particular page to generate comments of a ribald nature, set the tone herself, by saying to one of the Korean students about the female underwear, "This is very important language for you as a young man. Look at the pictures carefully!" Later on she said, "Pantihose, not Penthouse!" and joked with Pierre that he was a closet transvestite (because he had been seen in a shop in town buying underwear for his girlfriend). Pierre responded by asking Christine to explain the words "leer" and "ogle." When asked afterwards why she had photocopied the page from the Oxford Picture Dictionary for the class to look at, laugh about and discuss, Christine said, "I just did it for light relief."

Although no-one in Christine's class showed evidence of having had their sensibilities offended by the smuttiness of the jokes made on the occasions described above, it is likely that some of the young adults in Christine's class were surprised to discover the degree to which their teacher was prepared to operate at their level. It is worth noting that Christine's behaviour does not appear to have been unusual in the language school in which she taught. Christine considered that she was one of the more
focused and serious-minded teachers in the establishment, saying on one occasion, "Other teachers do too much of having a good time and joking about naughty things at the expense of the lesson."

As mentioned earlier, Christine was aware that by deviating from the prescribed syllabus she ran the risk of irritating the more serious-minded students in her class. She also demonstrated an awareness of the fact that it might be difficult to strike a suitable balance between seriousness and fun in an exam-preparation class, remarking towards the end of the course:

I've obviously not worried some people enough and worried people who don't need worrying too much. . . . You just really have to keep an eye on all of them. You have to think, "What's going on in her head? What's going on in his head?"

There was evidence that certain students in Christine's class did become concerned that learning time was lost when the class spent time having fun rather than focusing on the exam syllabus. Both Francine and Stephan, for instance, asked Christine on a number of occasions for reassurance that the syllabus would be covered in time for the exam. It appeared that these students had been comparing how far through the book they had progressed in comparison with the other classes in the school who were preparing for the same exam. Evidently Christine's class was approximately one chapter behind the other classes.

From their interviews it was apparent that students in other classes in the study, notably those of Amy and Joe, were also concerned about their rates of progress, perhaps considering that activities done in a spirit of fun were not as beneficial for language learning as activities completed in a more serious manner. As suggested in Chapter 5, the teachers' assumption that enjoyment (as evidenced by laughter and animated faces) equalled satisfaction with the learning experience was not necessarily shared by all the students in their classes. It may also be that the students did not share the belief expressed by Pamela - but seemingly held by all the teachers in the study - that "it doesn't matter what they talk about as long as they're using the language."
The teachers in the study seemed aware that their students were likely to become more fully engaged in classroom activities when they could personalise sentences which illustrate particular linguistic structures. On one occasion Tom's students appeared to lack energy when transforming sentences such as, "He ought to get a move on" into "It's time he got a move on," or "She ought to get a haircut" into "It's time she got a haircut," yet became noticeably more lively (laughing and calling out sentences to their friends across the class) when creating sentences such as, "The more you eat the more you put on weight!" and, "The more electricity you use the more you pay!" It appeared that in the second transformation exercise the students were thinking about the truth value of the statements.

Amy had developed a range of strategies for injecting life into grammar exercises in such a way that she felt that a positive corporate dynamic was maintained within the class. One such strategy required the class to go through grammar exercises in a communal manner, with individual students (who could predict when their turn was coming up and could therefore prepare their answer in advance) providing answers, while everyone else listened in. Amy would encourage the class to laugh whenever students made comments which indicated that they had attributed truth value to decontextualised sentences. Laughter could be engendered by comments which either reflected reality or which blatantly contradicted it. A selection of examples are given below:

Student 1: [To a male student whom the class knows is married] Are you still going out with Nellie?
Student 2: Yes!

Student 1: I'm 64 and I will retire next year! [made by a student in their thirties]
Student 2: Really?

Student 1: I'm going back to my country! [untrue, since the student is a refugee]
Student 2: Really?

Student 1: [Practising structure]: Let's have a break, shall we?
Student 2: Yes!

Student 1: Can I go to the cinema?
Student 2: No! [Language pattern required: "Yes, whenever you like."]

Student 1: Have you any money in your pocket?
[General class laughter]

Student 1: Would you like to take your shoes off?
Student 2: Yes, I'd love to.

Student 1: Would you like to borrow my rubber?
Student 2: I'd rather not.

On one occasion a student in Amy's class generated a high level of laughter amongst his compatriots by creating a sentence which had additional truth value for the Serbo-Croatian speakers in the class. In an adjective-practice activity known as "My neighbour's cat" the class laughed in unison at the absurdity of sentences such as, "My neighbour's cat is a witty cat," "My neighbour's cat is an uncountable cat" and so on. However, the students from Bosnia laughed uproariously at the sentence, "My cat is more attractive than your cat" because in Serbo-Croatian the word "cat" is apparently an informal expression for "pretty girl."

Another practice which Amy used regularly involved picking individuals from opposite sides of the classroom and requiring them to hold a conversation with someone on the other side of the room. The rest of the class, meanwhile, listened in and laughed whenever anything amusing or untoward was said. Amy described one such activity which required students to ask one another to do various domestic tasks, using a series of pictures as a stimulus, saying:

There were 16 pictures, and it would have taken them over an hour, because every one of them developed into a little drama. One example was Goran and Lela, and a picture of a vase being polished, and she asked him to polish the vase, and made sure that he had the right cloth to do it. He said, "Where is it?" She said, "On the top left shelf in the toilet cupboard." He stopped for a moment and said, "I looked for it and I couldn't find it. It's not there. What's happened to it?" She said, "You used it to clean the car last week." He said, "Oh that one! I threw it in the rubbish bin after I'd finished with it, it was dirty." She said, "That cost me $10. I'm spending all this money." So each of them developed that level of drama, it was quite incredible.
the potatoes?" "Look, we're out of potatoes, we'll have to buy some."
"Okay, have you got any money?" "No, we'll have to rob a bank!" And
then they burst out laughing, because I was planting some of those ideas,
and they started accusing me of encouraging my students to be criminals
and everything, and I said, "I'm just sitting here." We just had a lot of
laughs, it was just hilarious, the level of laughter was really, really high,
and it was just sustained over such a long period of time. It was just
really highly involving stuff that was really good, and when we got
towards the end of the worksheet there wasn't ironing clothes there, so I
tried drawing this picture and they all burst out laughing.

Despite Amy's belief that this activity had energised the class there was evidence to
suggest that certain students felt uneasy about having to ask others to do household
tasks, even though the activity was merely a simulation. Amy said about the behaviour
of a male student from the former Soviet Union, for example:

Alex blocked when he had to ask Bo [another male student], "Could you
do this for me?" He went into a great big speech of, "I can't ask another
man to do something for me. It wouldn't be right. It's more like [what] a
woman [would do]."

Amy described how she then turned to Nguyen, a young Vietnamese woman, who
apparently "turned it into a joke and refused to do it."

There was further evidence to suggest that certain students in Amy's class felt
uneasy when required to participate in certain language practice activities. In a piece of
free writing that she completed at the end of the first week Nguyen wrote, "This week
[there] have been so many strange things that I have [felt] embarrassed." During the
second week of the course Amy set up an activity which required the students to ask
one another a series of 25 "Have you ever?" questions such as, "Have you ever chopped
wood?" or, "Have you ever bought someone a bunch of flowers?" Amy described what
Nguyen did in the following way:

I couldn't believe it, because Nguyen, who's this really sweet Vietnamese
student, was sitting there with her partner Aco [a Bosnian student in his
forties] and she said, "Have you ever swum in the nude, Aco?" So she's
obviously feeling really comfortable.

The evidence suggests, however, that Nguyen may not have been feeling comfortable,
or alternatively that she was simply reading out the questions in a mechanical fashion
and may not have understood the risque nature of the question. As the course
progressed there were an increasing number of occasions when Nguyen and her compatriot Pham indicated that they did not wish to "perform" in front of the class. Pham, for example, who had well-formed handwriting and good spelling, was regularly invited by Amy to write lists of words on the board. Half-way through the course she said that she did not want to do so any more. In the ninth week of the course Nguyen, whose sister was starting up a lunch bar, declined an invitation to talk to the class about her sister's business. It is also perhaps significant that neither Nguyen nor Pham gave presentations to the class on a topic of their choice, an end-of-course activity in which all the students were expected to participate.

It seems that Amy valued moments when students made mistakes because, by provided an opportunity for everyone to indulge in collective laughter, they appeared to her to boost the level of social cohesion within the class. On one occasion, for example, she commented: "Someone made a mistake, but there was lots of laughter. Someone did a slip-up on answering the question and it turned into a joke." As suggested elsewhere, however, there may have been occasions when the whole-class laughter may have been engendered in a way which made the individual who was being laughed at feel uneasy.

Despite the fact that certain students may have felt embarrassed when chosen for certain language practice activities, there was also evidence in the study to suggest that certain students felt aggrieved if they considered that they were selected less frequently than other students to answer questions or to perform in front of their peers. Although she was aware that students liked to be selected, saying that she had had positive feedback from previous students that in her classes turns were distributed fairly, Amy admitted that she had a preference for selecting certain students over others, saying, "Bo is often the last person I choose, because he's so quiet. He doesn't have a really lively personality." Cedric, a young Burmese student in Tom's class, made the following comment in his interview: "Tom mostly asks questions to Bosnian people. I sometimes feel left out. I feel, 'What am I doing here?'" Interestingly, after the confrontation which occurred in the sixth week of his course, Tom directed a higher percentage of questions
to the students in his class from Asian countries, as if believing that they would now be prepared to be more forthcoming (as indeed appeared to be the case).

**Organising competitive activities and role plays**

Several teachers in the study set up activities which required their students to operate collaboratively in teams and to attempt to complete tasks more quickly than other teams. Sally used this technique (well known to the organisers of children's parties and also to language teachers) regularly in her pre-intermediate class, and Maggie even used one of the same games ("Betsy's game") in her advanced level class. The teachers who set up games seemed to believe that such activities not only increased motivation but also revitalised their classes, since students would often get caught up in the excitement of trying to win and would behave in a frenetic manner.

There was evidence to suggest that, even if the teachers themselves were not concerned about which team won (since from their point of view the objective of any game was language practice), certain students were pleased if they won and minded if they did not win. A student in Sally's class called Sang Hyeok, for example, became excited whenever required to participate in any team game, on one occasion cheering the members of his team on in the manner of a football supporter, shouting "Ti-na, Ti-na! Mi-wa, Mi-wa!" and whooping with joy and performing high-fives with team-mates with when his team "won." Certain students appeared to find Sang Hyeok's behaviour irritating, one student complaining in their end-of-term evaluation about the "noisy man" in the class. On one occasion a student in Sally's class whose team "lost" complained that the game had been unfair.

Tom routinely set his students information-gap tasks and puzzles which required students to work collaboratively to solve problems or find solutions. Although these tasks appeared to animate the students, they sometimes appeared to put any student who was having difficulty with the task under pressure. Describing a student attempting to draw a picture by following oral instructions given by another student, with a second student intervening and trying to help, Tom said, "For Vesna, who's usually quite good,
it was a nightmare. She was like a complete bag of nerves at the end." Tom also
organised a number of collaborative tasks which required students to describe their own
particular picture to the other members of their group (who had different pictures),
sequence the pictures and then work out what the "story" was. On one occasion the
"story" involved peasants being engaged in buying and selling a goat, while the goat,
unbeknown to them, was eating the money. One of the groups failed to grasp the story
because Tan, who had the picture of the goat eating the money, thought that the picture
depicted grass and not banknotes. He also thought that one of the peasants was a
woman because of the flowing nature of the clothes.

Talking about competitive activities in the classroom Tom said:

There's no need to be [competitive]. There's nothing to win. The outcome
isn't important. There's no pressure on them to do better than the others.

It appeared that the students in Tom's class, perhaps because they were professionals in
their own fields and therefore high achievers and accustomed to success, did like to do
better than (or certainly as well as) the other students. Tom himself considered that
classroom activities which were done in a spirit of competition carried with them the
inherent risk of individual students being blamed for letting their teams down,
explaining after the goat jigsaw activity that in his view:

If you've got any element of competition, although it can spur the
cooperative aspects in that they will work together to find the answers, if
they don't achieve the target then they're likely to create a scapegoat.
They're going to blame somebody, and in that case it would be Tan.

Joe said that he was against any form of competition, even in teams, saying:

I'd hate to think that little group there think, we're a bunch of dummies. . .
. I'd never have a competition where each group finds the answers in the
shortest time. It's not a race anyway, it's an education thing.

Joe's class management practices reflected this belief, since although he encouraged the
students in his class to work competitively in groups, he encouraged individuals to
"steal" answers from other groups by moving around the room, looking over people's
shoulders and then running back to their own groups with the information. In other
words, Joe made it clear that he expected the completion of tasks to be a collaborative
class effort, sometimes making statements to the students such as, "No single group has
found all the words, but between you you've found them all." Pamela was another
teacher who claimed to have encouraged what some might call cheating for the sake of
creating the illusion that everyone in the class was progressing at the same rate.
Reflecting back to a previous class which had contained a handful of particularly weak
students, Pamela explained that she had encouraged the weak students to copy off the
stronger ones, saying, "Otherwise they'd have just sat there and not known what to do."

As suggested above, there was evidence from the study to support the
reservations expressed by Tom and Joe and to suggest that students tended to view
many tasks as yardsticks for measuring their own performance against that of others. It
also appeared that students believed that "winning" any task which they could construe
as competitive denoted "success," and that "not winning" somehow denoted "failure." It
may be then that, although productivity goes up when students in small groups work in
competition with other groups (see Sharan's 1980 overview of research into small group
work in classrooms), the feeling of cohesion of the class group as a whole goes down
because students are viewing members of other groups as "them" rather than "us."

Both Pamela and Sally organised role-play activities in their low-level classes.
Again, just as the team-game activities described in the previous section could be seen
to "energise" the atmospheres in classes, so role plays appeared to have the potential to
fulfil the same function. There was evidence in the study to suggest that students
became excited by role-play activities and that, when they did so, would improvise in
ways that caused both themselves and anyone who happened to be watching to laugh.
In the "shopping" role plays that Pamela performed in front of the class, for example,
the following improvisations were observed: someone pretended that a pen and a pencil
were a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste, a student rushed up with a plastic bag when
one was needed, Jovica laughingly produced a lotto ticket which she could then "buy"
at the "newsagency," and Stanko stood on a chair at the door and made the
onomatopoeic sound of a door bell jangling whenever a new "customer" entered the
room. Pamela reported that in a previous class many props had been brought to class by
various students, including "wildly-coloured clothes," fruit and polystyrene meat containers.

There was evidence to suggest that role-play activities did not necessarily energise the classes to the extent that their teachers anticipated (thus affirming that a spirit of cohesion prevailed). One of Sally's showpiece lessons was a whole-class role play in which the class acted out a restaurant scenario, with the students role-playing waiters, barmen, chefs and customers. A "gunman" then rushed in and "shot" the pianist, who fell to the floor mortally wounded (having been secretly primed about what to do). Sally then entered as a "detective" and interviewed everyone about what they were doing when the incident occurred, thus eliciting sentences in the past continuous tense. Sally was disappointed with the lack of involvement of the students in the first class, finding it necessary to cajole the students into speaking by making comments such as, "Why is he lying on the floor? Come on! Explain!" Sally was keen to tell me that the second class had behaved in a markedly different way from the first, with everyone in the class evidently entering into the spirit of things and many students going well beyond what was required of them on their role-play cards.

The lacklustre performance of the students in the first class seems to have emphasised the absence of a feeling of esprit de corps within the class, while the lively performance of the students in the second class seems to have affirmed cohesion in more than one way. First, the excitement of participating in a communal play-acting activity in which spontaneous communication through the medium of English was sustained over a whole lesson is one which seems to have drawn the students together. Second, as I will describe in Chapter 10, the event appears to have entered the collective consciousness of this particular class in the sense that, according to Sally, individuals referred back to the role-play activity on a number of subsequent occasions. It seems that by keeping alive within the class the memory of a successful collaborative event the students were somehow reaffirming that a spirit of cohesion prevailed within their class.
In contrast, it is likely that the students in the first class, whom I observed doing the role play and who did not seem to get caught up in the excitement of the occasion, may have thought that the activity in which they were expected to participate was faintly bizarre. Certain students may also have felt inhibited about play-acting, especially if their own previous learning experiences had not included activities of this kind. These findings suggest that there is a sense in which cohesion feeds off itself. In other words, if classes start off well (as Sally said that the second class did), with a team spirit developing early in the life of the class, it seems that whole-class activities such as role plays can somehow consolidate class cohesion. If, however, a feeling of class solidarity has not developed by the time that students are required to engage in unusual activities which require a level of personal commitment and potential risk of ridicule, it is likely that students will behave in an inhibited manner and will fail to participate wholeheartedly in the activity. Teachers may then interpret such behaviour as lack of commitment to the class group and consider their class to be low on cohesion.

Setting up discussions on emotive topics

A technique used frequently by the teachers of the upper-level classes in the study (Christine, Tom and Maggie) was to set up discussion activities which required individual students to express their personal opinions, either to members of their groups (if they were working in small groups), or to their classes at large. These teachers considered that there was pedagogic value in organising such activities, because by engaging in discussion the students would be encouraged to stretch to the full their ability to communicate in English or, in Tom's words, "To use the resources that they have." The teachers also seemed to be aware that discussion activities often led students to become emotionally involved and to behave in an animated fashion. As Maggie remarked, "I don't think it matters if sometimes they almost come to blows about things," and saying to her class on one occasion, "Arguments are fantastic because it's more lively if you disagree." The teachers also, however, appeared to use animated engagement with the discussion task as an informal measure of class "cohesion." It may
be, then, that they sometimes raised the level of animation in their classes through introducing controversial topics and then used the liveliness to convince themselves that their classes were operating cohesively.

The kinds of topics that the teachers selected for discussion, or which arose naturally, were often ones which compelled the students to reveal their personal attitudes and values and which may sometimes have led them to question their own assumptions. The issues which Tom selected for student presentations, for example, included the following: "Euthanasia should be legalised in Western Australia," "AIDS sufferers should be isolated from society," "Trial marriages for young people should be encouraged," "Smoking in public places should be banned," and, "Media censorship should be abolished." After individual students had presented both sides of the argument (one student arguing in favour of the "motion" and the other against), Tom would open up the issue for general class discussion. At this point students frequently expressed opinions which differed from those of their peers and which reflected their ideological positions. (This was not surprising in view of the fact that the students in Tom's class came from a range of linguistic, ethnic, cultural, religious and political backgrounds.) Tom, who was apparently no stranger to confrontational behaviour in his classroom, made the following comment about his previous course:

In the last course, when we did [the topic], "Should the police be armed?" It was like World War Three erupting. There were two distinct groups in the class, one "for" and one "against," and it was very, very loud and aggressive. . . . I can remember one girl, she was Chinese - ex-police force actually - and I thought she was going to blow up. I'd never seen such emotion in a south-east Asian before. She was exploding, she really was. And others who were really quiet in the group were at each other's throat.

Tom added that he had told his present class that he was pleased that such a "confrontation" had not occurred this time around.

There were two occasions during Tom's present class, however, when, discussion activities did lead Tom to believe that the class atmosphere had become confrontational. On the first occasion Tom set up small group discussions on the topic
of in-vitro fertilisation, sending each group of students outside the classroom to find a quiet corner where they could discuss a series of hypothetical situations and decide which couples merited priority treatment in an in-vitro fertilisation programme. When the students returned there was heated discussion across the room as Tom attempted to write each group's decision on the board. At the end of the lesson, with certain students looking angry, Tom laughingly said that the students "agreed to disagree" and made reference to King Solomon's decision.

On the second occasion Tom set up a discussion activity relating to capital punishment which required the students, working in groups, to reach consensus regarding the appropriate penalty for eight different heinous crimes (all, apparently, authentic cases). Tom then left the room while the students discussed the various crimes and attempted to rank them in terms of which ones were "worst" and which ones warranted a less severe form of punishment because of extenuating circumstances (a woman stabbing her husband after finding him having sex with her daughter, for example). When Tom returned to the classroom, as described in Chapter 7, Nusret and Tan were sitting back to back with their arms folded, refusing to speak to one another. Tom's perception of the situation at that moment was that the class had "polarised into an east-west confrontation."

In Tom's mind the above incident did not, however, appear to have any lasting ill effects on inter-student relations within the class. Tom, who admitted after the event that he had been nervous about going into class on the following day, reported that he had been relieved to find that the students had seemed prepared to put the incident behind them. Tom explained that in his view the event had even had positive repercussions, saying:

In other situations it could have broken out into cold war . . . [but] things got back onto an even keel. I think something good has come out. Now they recognise that they're all here to learn English and that there's no point in bearing grudges. Although Tom did not speak in terms of a feeling of cohesion as such, his remarks indicate that he had sensed the presence of discord within his class, just as he had
recognised when, on the surface at least, a feeling of cohesion had been restored. Interestingly, at the end of the following week Tom considered that the class was operating in a more animated fashion than before the incident, saying at the end of the week following the incident, "It was a very positive week, a very good week," mentioning in particular that there was a "tremendous amount of laughter" in one of the lessons.

There were several moments during Christine's class when student emotions appeared to run high. However, while Tom was prepared to stand aside and let the students in his class argue with one another, Christine tended to become involved in the arguments herself. As she explained:

I see myself as a person with my own opinions and values, and I'm not going to hide them if they say something. . . . It's not my mission in life to make them learn and grow, I don't see it like that at all, but I'm not going to be some kind of blimp that teaches grammar.

Reflecting back to one particular class discussion Christine said:

In one way I was thinking, "God! We must be getting back to the grammar!" But in another way I didn't care. That was more important to me.

Christine was aware that her opinions did not match those of the students in her classes, saying:

I've never had a class where they all think the same as me, because a lot of them are a lot younger and a lot of them, they either don't know or they don't care about the things that I know about or care about.

During her 13-week course Christine became involved in class discussions on a range of topics, including sexism, racism, national stereotypes and physiognomy (the art of determining a person's character from their facial features). On one occasion, for example, a heated discussion involving many members of the class developed over the comparative prowess of male and female drivers, with Christine and the female students taking one position and the male Swiss students the other. At one point the female students whooped and clapped when Christine informed the class that she had a truck driver's licence and that she had successfully reversed down an alley on her first
attempt. She then said that she would challenge any man to a parking test, to which Gabi added, "Me too!" At the end of the lesson, after the males had refused to concede that fast driving was bad driving, Christine conferred with the female students in the class and they agreed that they were right and that the men were wrong. During the lesson the Korean students had been sitting back and watching the argument unfold. Christine was aware, however, that they had their own opinions, saying:

    I think it takes a bit more digging to get their opinions out of them, but their opinions are quite strong, and you can read their faces well before they say anything. The lip curls a bit, or the shoulders go back.

On another occasion Christine became involved in a discussion with the Korean students over the subject of physiognomy, expressing disbelief when informed by Choung Kook that specially-commissioned "face fortune tellers" were present at job interviews in Korea to determine whether interviewees were of good character. Christine made her own views clear to the Koreans by extending their arguments ad absurdum, saying:

    They don't seem to realise that if a foreigner was in Korea a foreigner would be dismissed on those grounds [having round eyes], and if they were living here they would definitely be dismissed if you had somebody looking at different facial features, because those using that stupid old technique used to say things like, "Narrow eyes, criminal tendencies." So Clark would never get a job in a million years.

At another point in the lesson Christine ridiculed Clark, saying, "I can't answer that question. I've got round eyes, so I'm stupid." Christine sensed that she had angered Clark by her remarks, saying, "He got quite annoyed when I said that. But I don't care, it's true." Christine explained how difficult she sometimes found it to restrain herself, saying, "It's very hard if you've got strong opinions not to weigh in. . . . I was trying to remind myself, 'Now look, let them talk. It's their job to talk.'" This comment highlights the tension which can exist between a teacher's desire to operate as a dispassionate outsider and their desire to operate as a person with a particular world view.

The incidents which have been described above suggest that, even though the atmospheres within Tom's and Christine's classes may have been temporarily energised
when arguments took place, certain students may have felt insulted or annoyed at having their beliefs challenged. Being exposed to opposing viewpoints may also have served to enforce strongly-held beliefs and inter-student differences, reflecting the view of Christine when she said, "I don't think I've squashed their opinions." Alternatively, exposure to different attitudes and values may have encouraged some students to question their beliefs and perhaps to become worried or confused in the process.

Maggie, the third teacher in the study with a class capable of discussing controversial topics in English, appeared to be more careful than either Tom or Christine about selecting topics which she considered might offend the sensibilities of certain students in her class. As she explained, "I wouldn't say there was a theme I just cover no matter what." Maggie believed that it was necessary to develop each course in an organic manner according to the interests and sensibilities of the particular students in her class, saying:

You gauge your content to the class. If they're not interested in serious topics then I don't push it too much. I'll try to encourage them, but if they're not interested in discussing abortion and euthanasia and discrimination and racism I wouldn't push it. But these ones, they're interested in social issues. It just seems logical, they're young people, it's what they talk about and are concerned about . . . but I hope I don't become so single-minded about it that I don't change if they're different.

On another occasion Maggie said:

I've had some very outgoing classes. I had a very assertive Taiwanese girl and we talked about all sorts of things like timid Asian women, stereotypes and mail-order brides and all that. But it was right for that class. I wouldn't suddenly bring in mail order brides for this group.

Maggie explained that she had not allowed the students to discuss the topic of sex before marriage in a previous class because she knew that one student was unhappy to do so. Maggie recalled how, when this particular student had left, someone had asked for the topic to be discussed. She explained her own reaction, saying, "I just looked around, but I knew a lot of them weren't really comfortable about it. It just seemed too personal."
There was evidence in the study that some students did indeed feel uncomfortable when required to confront certain issues. At the end of his course, for example, Tom introduced the topic of racism, requiring the students in his class to do a listening cloze on a satirical song about inherent racist attitudes in Australia entitled "I Hate Wogs." After the activity Savka, a student from Bosnia, told Tom that she wished that he hadn't introduced the topic of racism because it had made her feel insecure. Savka proceeded to explain to Tom that up to this moment she had always perceived that racism related to skin colour and was therefore not relevant to her own situation.

In summary, it appears that all the teachers in the study set up language learning activities in such a way that the emotions of the students in their classes sometimes became engaged. As a result of behaving in a lively and animated manner the students gave the impression of interacting willingly with their peers, a behaviour which the teachers took to be evidence of cohesion. The evidence suggests, however, that on a number of occasions such activities, while appearing to revitalise classes on a superficial or temporary basis, may have made certain students feel uneasy and may even have reinforced cultural and ideological differences between certain class members. Ironically, therefore, it seems that activities which the teachers set up to revitalise feelings of cohesion within their classes may sometimes have had the opposite effect. The implications of this finding are that there is a difference between actual levels of class cohesion (as would be measured on sociometric tests which established inter-student compatibility within the class, for example), and teachers' perceptions of levels of cohesion within their classes.71

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71 See Shaw (1981, p. 400) for an introduction to research into interpersonal relations in class groups based on Moreno's technique of sociometric choice.
Summary

In this chapter I have argued that the teachers in the study considered that it was necessary to engage the emotions of their students in such a way that the energy levels of their class groups seemed to be boosted. I have suggested that the increased energy levels that they noticed in their classes provided the teachers with reassurance that their classes were operating in a cohesive manner. I have outlined the kinds of techniques that the teachers used to revitalise cohesion in their classes, ranging from establishing bantering relationships with individual students to setting up communicative activities which required students to discuss controversial topics with their peers. Throughout this chapter I have pointed to occasions when the practices used by the teachers to revitalise class cohesion may have highlighted interpersonal differences or caused individual students to feel awkward or aggrieved.

This chapter has focused for the most part on teacher behaviours which were directed towards the good of the class group and which may, as a result, have engendered interpersonal tensions or damaged the self-esteem of certain individuals. In the chapter which follows I will describe the strategies that the teachers claimed to use, either to protect the sensibilities of vulnerable students or to limit the damage done by the kinds of spontaneous classroom behaviours which have been described in the present chapter. In other words, while the present chapter has focused on teacher actions as they relate to the class as a group, the next chapter will focus on teacher actions as they relate to individual students.
Overview

The previous chapter indicated that all the teachers in the study fostered the development of relatively informal classroom relationships and encouraged active student participation in class activities. It suggested that as a result of these strategies there were a number of occasions when certain students appeared to feel awkward or uneasy. I will begin the present chapter by demonstrating how certain teachers understood the potentially threatening nature of certain language practice activities and saw the establishment of an overall atmosphere of tolerance within their classrooms as a priority. I will then show that the majority of the teachers considered that it was important to be attuned to the behaviours of individual students, and to take steps to redress any situation in which they believed that individuals within their classes might be feeling upset by the behaviour of other class members (including themselves). Finally I will suggest that, contrary to the beliefs of certain teachers, students' feelings of well-being were not always restored as quickly or as easily as their teachers believed.

The irony of "safe" language learning environments

As indicated so far, the teachers in the study wished to create within their language classrooms social relationships typified by informality and spontaneity. They appeared to do this, not only because they assumed that superior language learning was likely to occur within informal classroom environments, but also because they thought that conditions of social familiarity were suitable for the development of class cohesion. However, informal classroom environments are, ironically, places where students' linguistic proficiencies and deficiencies are easily exposed. There is a sense in which formal classrooms, where students tend to study quietly and independently and maintain a low profile, offer a higher level of protection for diffident students than
informal ones, where students are expected to make public, not only their levels of linguistic proficiency, but also their personalities and value systems. Rivers (1992) makes this point, highlighting the potentially threatening nature of interactive methodologies which require students to engage their whole personalities, rather than just their intellect and memory (p. 378). In many ways, therefore, the activity-based language classrooms described in this study, with their relaxed and overtly friendly atmospheres, were places where certain students were likely, on occasions, to feel nervous and vulnerable.

A situation which illustrates this point occurred in Tom's class and related to his custom of having each student give two oral presentations to the class, one early on in the course and one towards the end. The objective of the presentations was to give students practice at speaking in front of an audience, using palm cards rather than reading from a prepared text. No formal assessment was involved. Tom was conscious of the fact that there had been a reluctance on the part of students to ask questions following the presentations. He expressed his view this way:

> Usually in other courses the discussion's taken longer than the presentations, but with this class they haven't, I think because the people who've been giving the presentations didn't really want any questions. They were quite happy, they'd done their bit, and they sat down and that was it. . . . I think there's a tacit agreement that nobody will ask questions to put other people on the spot.

When they were interviewed, certain students explained that they did indeed find presentations extremely stressful. Ranka, who had been a lawyer in her home country, said that it had taken her three days to prepare a three-minute presentation on the Australian swimmer Dawn Fraser, explaining that she had had to learn her words by heart for fear of making mistakes. Vesna, who had been a chemistry teacher before leaving her country, explained what had happened when she had given her presentation:

> Three weeks ago I gave an oral presentation on James Stirling [the first governor of Western Australia]. I prepared it, but at the moment when I had to stand up I forgot what I was going to say, because of the new language. I felt very bad, especially as I am a teacher and I am confident to speak. I felt bad for two days afterwards, because I had prepared it. . . .
People don't like to speak in front of people from their own country because they know when they are making mistakes.

Both these students, independently of one another, told me that they were dreading doing their second presentations which were expected to be lengthier and more complex than the first ones, and that they were considering telling Tom that they did not want to do them. Vesna added that she knew that such behaviour was "cowardly." In the event, Ranka and Vesna went to Tom shortly before they were scheduled to give their presentations saying that they were feeling ill and requesting permission to go home. Tom appeared to accept their excuse as genuine, saying, "In the afternoon Ranka and Vesna went home because they were ill. They looked it, actually, they had headaches and it looked like they were getting a virus." Tom's retrospective comment on the fact that a number of students had avoided giving their second presentations was that the presentations had "petered out through general consensus."

Several teachers said that they were aware of the potential damage to student self-esteem of performing in front of their peers, especially in an unfamiliar language when mistakes were likely to occur. Maggie for example, said, "I know the difficulty of learning, of appearing stupid or of getting things wrong," while Christine observed that "people don't like to be wrong, it's human nature," making the following observation about a student in her class:

I know Clark is a very proud person and I think he's been reluctant to write essays and join in because he's afraid of making a fool of himself in front of Hyuck Junh, who is his senior. I really do think that he's quite proud and [that] all this distance is fear of making a fool of himself.

When talking about having individual students come to the front of the room to dictate sentences to the rest of the class Tom said, "It can be a very intimidating experience." Sally was aware that the Korean students in her class might find it demeaning to be repeating a class at the same level, saying, "For the Koreans it's the second time round in the bottom class, so I think that's not very good for their ego." Talking about selecting Masako to come to the front of the class to be questioned by the other students, Maggie observed:
Maybe it was a mistake choosing Masako, but I thought maybe she wouldn't get a turn later and it was a bit confronting for her. . . . But sometimes you have to push them a little bit too, because she'll always settle back.

Maggie's comment shows an awareness of the fact that she had made a decision which had involved weighing up the benefit to Masako's language learning of having the experience of sitting at the front of the class answering questions in English against the potential damage to Masako's self-esteem of making errors in front of her classmates.

Certain teachers appeared to go out of their way to make sure that students in their classes did not lose face. Recalling her practice of inviting students to put their writing on the board for others to criticise Amy said:

I've started off with people who are very confident. . . . But with Goran yesterday I really coached him on the fact that, "You've put these mistakes here deliberately for people to find, haven't you? If it's perfect you're not giving them practice."

When a Japanese woman in her class was the only student to fail a particular competency test Gillian gave her the result in private, explaining that she "didn't want to embarrass her in front of the others."

Some teachers believed that it was occasionally acceptable to criticise aspects of their students' English in front of the rest of the class. Talking about Yoshihiro, a Japanese student with a high level of English, Maggie observed:

Maybe the others would feel demoralised, but he's so good in other things, so sometimes it's appropriate to say, "Say that again, so it sounds better!" So it's not to demoralise or embarrass him.

Other teachers were aware that students did sometimes feel demoralised. Talking about an occasion when Akiko appeared to have lost face Christine said:

I think it sort of hurt her a bit to be wrong in front of the whole class, with the whole class listening. . . . I don't correct them, I say to the other people, are they right or wrong? And you try to make it supportive because you want them to think about it as a group. . . . If they got it wrong I said, "Okay, can somebody help?" You try to make it as supportive as possible.

However, as Christine pointed out, "You can't cottonwool everybody's ego all the time."
Creating an overall spirit of tolerance

Certain teachers indicated that they held a broad view of their role as language teachers, considering that their job required them not only to teach language but also to help the students in their classes to develop a fuller understanding of other races and cultures. It appeared that the teachers' desire to develop an overall feeling of tolerance towards others within their classrooms was linked to the notion of class cohesion, since part of their collective definition of cohesion included students accommodating differences of outlook and attitude and being interested in one another as people.

The teachers were conscious that their classrooms were multi-racial and multicultural environments in which the potential for discord existed. Tom believed that it was natural for certain students not only to harbour racist sentiments but also display them openly. Talking in general terms about classes that he had taught in the past he said:

The tension that builds up is the result of prejudice, racism, perceived stereotypical views. For example, the typical one is between the Chinese and the Bosnians. The Bosnians are very racist against the Chinese, they think they're stupid, they're sub-human sort of thing. . . . They will virtually admit to that belief, that the Chinese are not really as clever as they are. There's definitely that.

The teachers were pleased when they considered that their own classrooms were places where racism had been replaced with tolerance. On one occasion Maggie made the following comment:

The Europeans can freak out when they see a sea of Asian faces. But some of them say it's the best thing that's ever happened. The most rewarding thing for the teacher is when you learn of the friendships that have been made and when you learn who visited who and which people are still in touch.

Talking about the behaviour of a Swiss-French student towards a Korean student (one of the two Asian students in her afternoon class), Christine observed:

It really gladdened my heart that Paul seems to have adopted Seok Moon. I think he's realised how well-educated Seok Moon is, that Seok Moon is not a fool just because he can't speak English very well. . . . He's just realised that this is a person with calibre.
Referring in a similar manner to her morning class, which contained a balance of Swiss and Korean students, Christine said, "I'm really glad that the Swiss people in that class have got on so well with the Asian people in the class, I'm really glad."

Some teachers believed that their classrooms were places where the students could and should develop an understanding of other cultures. Maggie made the following comment:

I like seeing them broaden their minds about each other, about each other's cultures and about Australia, and [saying] "I used to think Australians were this" or "Australia was that," but now they see this.

Maggie considered that learning English through studying Australian television news broadcasts and reading English language newspapers was particularly beneficial, especially when international events were focused upon. As she explained:

They [the international news items] encourage the students to talk about their own countries, for example the Koreans asking the Indonesians about Indonesia. They talk to each other and they learn from each other. It's peer teaching at its best.

The approving tone with which Maggie spoke of one of her students indicated her own values:

Nam Jin is a very deep fellow. . . . He wants to live elsewhere. . . . He really wanted to know what real Australians, and presumably he means white Anglo-Saxon Australians, think about people coming from other countries and [yet] keeping their traditions. . . . He really wants to discuss issues and opinions of all people, . . . to open up, to be a citizen of the world, rather than seeing himself nationally.

Some teachers were pleased when they saw evidence of students broadening their minds and apparently becoming tolerant of attitudes which differed from their own. Talking further about her morning class Christine said:

I think they're learning that there are other points of view. Pierre is a little fascist in his way. He has strong ideas about a woman's place and a woman's abilities, like he was one of the strong people on women being worse drivers than men, and his girlfriend basically works full time and does the housework . . . but in one sense at least he's open to listening about other ideas.
Maggie recalled with pleasure how a Korean student in a previous class had told her that he had never questioned certain of his culturally-embedded assumptions (such as the assumption that illegitimate children did not exist) until joining her class and comparing notes with students from other countries.

Both Maggie and Christine explained that they could not divorce themselves in their teaching roles from themselves as human beings with their own personal sets of values. As Christine explained:

I don't see myself as the sole means by which they'll learn and grow, but I see myself as a person with my own opinions and values, and I'm not going to hide them if they say something.

Maggie showed an awareness of the fact that she had her own personal agenda, saying:

I'm quite fussy about the content, and that's my prejudice in a way, so yes, I'm encouraging them to be a little bit more broad-minded and accepting about things, and a bit more aware. If you go outside textbooks you can't help but be influenced by your priorities in life and your standards.

Both Christine and Maggie considered that it was a part of their role as teachers to correct misinformation about disadvantaged minority groups, notably Aboriginal people. As Maggie explained:

I don't like any of them escaping from my clutches without being a little bit more informed about Aboriginal history, and a little bit more knowledgeable about the causes of some of the things they see, because being in an urban area . . . the only Aborigines they see are the few they see drunk in the streets here, and they come away with very narrow, very bigoted views. Sometimes the Australians they talk to here are also very bigoted and I really feel it's my responsibility, as responsibly as one can and without proselytising, to give them a wider perspective. I think it's part of what they should learn while they're here.

Christine provided the following description of an occasion when she had attempted to encourage the students in her class to modify their attitudes towards Aboriginal people:

One of the Koreans said, "All Aborigines look the same." And I said, "You have to understand that there are quite a few people who say that all Asians look the same, you have to understand that." Clark said, "Don't compare me to Aborigines!" He didn't say he was insulted or offended, but this was the impression he was giving, that he felt offended by the comparison. And I said, "Well I'm sorry, but you can't criticise other
groups and expect nobody to criticise you, you know, you can't do that."
Anyway, the Aborigine thing came up, you know, all the stereotypes
came out and they said, "White Australians are angry because Aborigines
are costing them so much money." I said, "That is perfectly true that a lot
of money has been sent in that direction and a lot of it has been wasted.
But a lot of it has gone to the people who really need it." And I told them
a bit about the policy of taking the children away from parents, I told
them that they didn't get the vote till the late '60s, I told them about
people that I have met not being allowed into country towns as children
after dark, I told them about the slavery when the squatters first went up
to places like Roebourne. So I tried to give them a bit of background and
I mean they were listening, [but] I don't actually think I changed
anybody's opinion.

The behaviours of Maggie and Christine raise the interesting question of
whether or not they were benefiting the students in their classes by encouraging them to
be more broad-minded (if indeed they did succeed in modifying the attitudes of any of
their students). Anecdotal evidence suggests that female students who return to Japan
after having studied in Australia and been exposed to Western values are considered by
some males to be less suitable as marriage partners because of the likelihood that they
will question traditional Japanese values.

Gillian expressed a view which would probably have been endorsed by all the
teachers in the study when she said:

I want everyone in the class to feel positive about each other's country.
You can't have them saying, "My country's better than yours" and things
like that. . . . That's the only way you're going to stop racism, isn't it? . . .
I think you've got to demonstrate . . . and I say, "Everyone's got
something nice about them."

Richard described certain activities, one relating to animal noises and the other relating
to ways of saying "Happy Birthday!" which he claimed had a positive effect on the
level of cohesion of his classes. Explaining what he did Richard said:

I say, "In Australia we go, 'Puss, puss, puss!' Every language has got a
different way of calling a cat." You get everybody in the group from, say,
ten different nationalities, and it has this incredible cohesion value
because people think, "Here we are, we all call a cat in a different way."
It brings out your humanness, we are all human beings despite our
different expressions. I've done the same thing with writing on the board.
I get them to all write "Happy Birthday!" on the board in their own
language. You have about ten different languages up there, all in
incomprehensible scripts, and people looking at it go, "This is the
diversity of human culture right before our eyes in this classroom. This is the mini-Australia.” . . . There is a unity underlying it all, because we are all just basically human beings who want to be happy.

Reflecting back to a previous class Tom commented on how, noticing that the Bosnian men saw themselves as an "élite clique" who used to assert their superiority over the Chinese students, he had behaved in a proactive manner, saying: "I didn't like it at all, so I tended to support the Asians more in that last course. I don't like racism of any sort."

Despite the efforts of the teachers some individuals still made comments in class which could be interpreted as racist. On one occasion, when Maggie had asked her class whether they would like to meet an Aboriginal person, the young Belgian student Luc called out, "We can go to the zoo!" In a similar manner, when German measles was mentioned in Tom's class, someone shouted out, "Germans!," a word which caused certain students from the former Yugoslavia to laugh. Interestingly, the single Asian student in Pamela's class of refugees from Bosnia seemed to enjoy the status of an exotic curiosity, with people examining her electronic dictionary, touching her clothes and marvelling at the way that she wrote in Chinese script. Perhaps this was the first time that the students in Pamela's class had ever been in close contact with an Asian.

As a result of the confrontation which occurred in Tom's class over the issue of mother-tongue communication during lesson time (referred to in Chapters 6 and 7), many students shared with me feelings of a particularly heartfelt kind. In this way I was able to understand what could happen when a teacher was not proactive in maintaining a classroom climate which encouraged respect for other races and cultures. When interviewed after the critical incident in which Tom had finally shown his disapproval of the behaviour of the Bosnian students, all six students in the class from countries in east Asia (three from the PRC, one from Vietnam, one from Indonesia and one from Burma) confirmed Tom's view that that an unfriendly classroom atmosphere had prevailed. Henny from Indonesia said, for example:

Our class is dominated by Bosnians. They speak in Bosnian, even when I'm in the group. I keep silent because I feel it would hurt them if I said something. But I am not happy. . . . [It is] very difficult to join the
Bosnians. I feel I can join the Chinese, Burmese and Vietnamese. Maybe [we have] different culture.

Chan explained that she thought that the Bosnian students in the class were rude, saying that in her view, "Aussies are first-class citizens, Bosnians are second-class citizens, Asians are third-class citizens." Chan, who was married to an Australian of European extraction, appeared to be more assertive than the other Asian students in the class, and was prepared to show her dislike for certain students in an open manner. On one occasion I noticed Chan deliberately elbowing Nusret in the corridor and on another she told Nusret to lower his voice after he had told her to lower hers, saying, "If they will put me down I will give it back." However, Chan made a point of saying that she had liked the Bosnian students in her previous class.

There was evidence to suggest that not all the students in Tom's class from the former Yugoslavia held racist attitudes. Henny, for example, made a point of saying that one particular woman from Bosnia was friendly towards her, and Yeon Hee, a young Korean woman who only attended the class for the first three weeks, said how friendly Ranka was towards her. It was also apparent from what they said that certain students from the former Yugoslavia were embarrassed by the behaviour of their compatriots. Ranka, for example, made a point of saying in her interview that she liked working with students of different nationalities and that she was interested in other cultures. Ranka explained that she had felt ashamed when Tom had berated her compatriots for persisting in speaking to one another in Serbo-Croatian, even though, as she was at pains to point out, she herself had not joined in. Vesna expressed similar sentiments.

There was evidence that Chan had occasionally tried to take matters into her own hands. Tom wrote in his notes that, on an occasion when some students from Bosnia had had difficulty understanding a sentence dictated by a Vietnamese student, he had noticed "a bit of friction" between Chan and Neira, one of the Bosnian women. Tom's interpretation of the situation was the following:

Chan sort of acted as a go-between. She'd understood [what Tran had said] and she was telling Neira she should have understood. . . . So Chan
helped Tran . . . by saying [to Neira], "Just make an effort to listen and understand."

Chan did not appear to have endeared herself to the Bosnian students in the class by demonstrating support for Tran and, by implication, criticising Neira. Tom recounted that in the next course one of the other Bosnian women had apparently refused to work with Chan, informing her subsequent teacher that there was no point in even asking her to engage in communicative activities with Chan, because it was impossible to understand anything that Chan said. This comment suggests that intercultural tensions may sometimes persist from class to class.

**Treating individual students sensitively**

The majority of the teachers made a point of saying that they tried to treat individual students in their classes in a sensitive manner. Some teachers considered that their level of sensitivity towards the students in their classes had increased as they had become more experienced. Pamela, for example, made the following observation:

Sometimes the more experienced you are the more you can feel things. Because when you first start off [teaching] you're a bit ignorant and it's all very exciting and stimulating and you just sort of go along and you don't know much about this area and you're just having fun. That's what I've found. But as I sort of get to know more about what I should be doing and how complex it all is . . . the awareness, the sensitivity increases.

Pamela gave an example of her own sensitivity in a later interview, when discussing a regular classroom activity which required the students to brainstorm all the English words they knew beginning with a certain letter of the alphabet. When it came to the letter "K" Pamela, aware that the word "kill" might evoke upsetting memories for certain of her students, remarked:

I'm glad Darko wasn't here today. Somehow, if you know someone's disturbed, you notice little things like that. I get really sensitive with the Yugoslavs. I get very sensitive about lots of things I didn't use to worry so much about.
Several teachers believed that it was necessary to treat any student who appeared to lack self-confidence in a careful manner. Talking about his subsequent class, which contained students with a variety of levels of proficiency, Joe said:

You really have to protect, especially for the first couple of weeks, the students who are a lower level than the others. They're more self-conscious, that kind of thing. . . . They [the weaker students] felt intimidated, and this class has got a couple of pretty dominant personalities.

In one of her interviews Sally mentioned Sung Hoon, a Korean student in her class, saying:

I know Sung Hoon, from what he was telling me last week, that he was really feeling quite low about not understanding things. . . . A lot of them, their confidence is quite delicate, and I think if you blast them too much, then they'll really get pretty depressed about it all.

Pamela expressed a similar sentiment about a number of students in her class. When talking about Darko, for example, she said, "I just feel that I have to be careful, you know. Just not push him too hard." At a later point she hypothesised about why a student called Milan called himself stupid:

I sort of feel he might be one of those people that may have been put down a bit. He tends to call himself stupid all the time. I try and counteract that. I sort of say, "No! You're not stupid." And often those clown-like people are people like that, aren't they? They make jokes about themselves all the time.

Certain teachers recognised that it was sometimes difficult to judge what students were thinking or how they were feeling from their facial expressions. Talking about being a teacher of European extraction who found herself teaching classes composed largely of students from Asian countries, Maggie made the following comment:

It throws us when we can't judge their facial expressions. I think I'm getting better at registering different looks on faces. They don't use their faces like us, but the eyes, usually you can tell.

When discussing a Korean student in her class called Hyong Gun Maggie said:

It's just that sometimes he looks at you and he's not quite sure, and that face is inscrutable. It's a wonderful face, I mean I think he rode with
Genghis Khan. His ancestors are fantastic and his almond eyes just look at you and you think, "What are you thinking, mate? Are you getting the joke?"

Maggie went on to explain later, "He did laugh, and it seemed it was okay, but just for a second I thought, 'Oh my god! He's offended.'" On another occasion Maggie complained about the lack of expression on the face of Masako, saying, "She's so slow to offer recognition in expression or anything. Not even a light of understanding in the eyes often."

Christine considered that over the years she had become reasonably skilled at reading the facial expressions of students, saying about the Korean students in her class:

You can read their faces well before they say anything. The lip curls a bit, or the shoulders go back . . . and I think [to myself], "You're not saying anything, but I know what you're thinking."

Gillian explained that she was aware of times when she realised that she might have antagonised students, saying, "It's just this feeling in the class that you know. They sigh a lot and they are reluctant to do their work."

Richard considered that it was important for language teachers to be sensitive to the culture-specific behaviours of the students in their classes, explaining that in his view:

Part of the success of being a good second language teacher is being able to read the culture fuse of the people in the group. So when a Yugoslav appears to be aggressive he may not be aggressive, or a Pole can appear aggressive and they're not being aggressive. They're being assertive in their own cultural terminology, so that's important to the group itself, and those conflicts between students arise out of misreading the culture fuse.

Richard recalled a specific occasion when he thought that he had misread a student cue, saying:

I remember when I first started teaching I blew up this Vietnamese guy for coming in late all the time and he started laughing, and the more he laughed the more cross I got and the more I blew up. I completely destroyed that class because the Vietnamese guy laughs when he is embarrassed and I wasn't able to read that . . . . The class was mostly Asians and the Asians consider [that] for a teacher to behave in that way is inappropriate, for a teacher to display anger at that level. So after that they considered me a somewhat unbalanced person.
Other teachers acknowledged that they had occasionally behaved in ways that they regarded as culturally inappropriate. Maggie, for example, recalled a moment when she had physically touched a student in a manner which she realised had caused offence, saying:

    Hyong Gun was really laying down the law, shouting and moving his hands, and everybody was really quite amused finally because he didn't want to finish when everybody else had ground to a halt or was winding down. And I was trying nicely to say, "We'll wind it up now," and I just put my hand on his shoulder, because I do know him very well and I've taught him for quite a long time. I said, "Oh, but you're beautiful when you're angry!" And he pushed me away and said, "No, I just want to finish."

Christine explained that she regretted having treated a student in an exam-preparation class in an unsympathetic manner, describing the situation in the following way:

    I had a guy who was an utter pain, he was revolting, and he actually confided to another teacher much, much later, that he had never passed an exam and he'd been a total bum-out at school and the First Certificate exam was really important for him to pass, because he really had a failure mentality. But he came across as an arrogant creep in the class, he really did, and if I'd known that I'd have given him the support and encouragement [that he needed]. But he wasn't going to be vulnerable, and it was a lesson to me to think, "Well, there must be something behind it somewhere."

Tom described a warm-up activity that he routinely did at the beginning of each course which required the students to get into pairs and to look into their partner's face for two minutes without saying anything. As Tom said, "It's very difficult for many of them, particularly those from cultures where it's considered rude to look." Tom, however, always required the students in his class to complete this activity, despite his belief that it might offend the cultural sensibilities of certain students.

    Some teachers believed that issues might occasionally be touched upon in class which might cause certain students to take offence. Talking about punishment in schools Maggie explained that, in her view:

    Some of them will get very hot under the collar, because they see that as being very derogatory to their culture. And for instance when it came up ages ago Hyong Gun got really angry, but the other Koreans were saying, "Yes, yes, we got hit! And not just hit on the hand, but clouted on the
head with a book, anything like that." And he was saying, "No, no!" And he really got quite agitated. That's before I knew him well. But now I'm very conscious that they are sensitive in a way that we're not about their national pride.

On another occasion, Maggie said how she had noticed that some of the Korean students had been reluctant to watch a particular video in the library. This prompted her to talk about the attitude of Korean students to the issue of political corruption, saying:

I couldn't work out for a few minutes why they didn't want to [view it], but they get quite defensive, and they see that anything on [the television] about their corruption is an offence to their national pride. We don't expect our politicians to be corrupt, but we expect to be derogatory about our politicians. [But] they still feel sensitive, some of them, so you've got to balance that.

However, Maggie explained that, in her opinion, it was not a good idea to avoid discussing potentially tricky issues in class, saying, "I think it's just as offensive to skip a thing because it might be sensitive, because then you're treating them like children."

She also believed that controversial topics led to more intensive language practice, saying, "I do think that if they're interested in the topic and you've got different opinions you have much more lively debates."

Certain teachers considered that it was sometimes inappropriate to require students to make statements about themselves in order to practise specific language forms. Pamela, with her class of newly-arrived migrants, was aware that a direct question such as, "Where are you from?" might be interpreted as inquisitive or inappropriate by a refugee who had recently left a country wracked by civil war and who might not wish to reveal his or her ethnicity or partisanship. Talking about teaching her students how to respond to the above, Pamela said:

I must admit that I feel a bit uncomfortable doing this exercise with people from the former Yugoslavia. . . . Sometimes I think I'd like to leave it out altogether, but to pass the competency [test] they have to be able to say what their nationality is, [so] . . . I just let it go, whatever they say [is okay].

Later in the course Pamela reflected further, saying:

I must admit when I was doing nationality and all that sort of thing I didn't really like doing it. . . . If I did it again [taught an on-arrival class], and especially with a group like this, I would tread very lightly on that
area. I might just brush over it. . . . If I was just using my own intuition, like we used to be able to do before we had [to teach] competencies, I would just forget about all that, left to my own devices. I just hated it.

Amy demonstrated an awareness of the same area of difficulty, making the following comment in relation to a particular student:

Aco doesn't like being asked where he comes from, because he talks about the former Yugoslavia and everyone else talks about Bosnia, so he's hypersensitive about that. I picked that up on the first day. . . . I had to be super-careful about handling that situation. . . . On Tuesday, when they were doing pair work and they were supposed to be asking each other about the weather and stuff, his partner across the room started with, "Where do you come from?" which is like a red rag to a bull for Aco, and he said, "I don't want to talk about that." He just wants to talk about Australia now, that's where he's at.

Amy believed that her careful handling of the situation had meant that she had earned the trust of Aco (whose reputation for being sensitive had evidently preceded him), saying:

Fortunately he's noticed I've handled those situations well once or twice and I've seen his trust in me. So he's visibly relaxed. I'd been really scared about having him in my class, like walking on hot coals.

**Raising the status of individuals in the eyes of the class**

Several teachers demonstrated through their comments and their classroom behaviour that they thought it was important to show that they valued all the students within their classes equally. A common strategy that they used was to show interest in the countries of all their class members. When talking about the Olympic games, which were held during his course, Joe said, "You've got to be conscious of the fact that it's all about Korea and Australia today, but then tomorrow I'd better make sure we talk up Japan." On another day Joe discussed with Fahri in front of the class the fact that Indonesia had "a 17-year old prodigy in badminton." Joe said that he also made sure that if a particular student's country was alluded to in the textbook he would ask the student to elaborate in some way, saying, "It makes them feel important in the class." In a similar way Maggie explained that she selected the TV news items for study by her advanced-level class on the basis that, if she recorded a news item on Japan one week,
she would try to find one on Korea the next. Maggie said that she did this so that the students whose countries were being focused upon would feel "valued."

Certain teachers explained how they tried to raise the status in the eyes of the class of those students whom they believed might not be held in high esteem by other class members. Christine's afternoon class, for example, contained one Korean student and one Japanese student, while the remainder of the class were students from Switzerland (many of whom talked to one another in Swiss German during lessons, despite Christine's exhortations to do otherwise). Christine made the following observation during the fifth week of the course:

At lunchtime Natsu asked to change class because she thought the Swiss were taking over the class. And she did change class for a day, but of course there were Swiss in that class too, so she came back. So I'm really trying to make a fuss of her. I just try to give examples from Japanese culture, like when they were asking dating questions today. I flattered her, I said it in front of the whole class. Just a few things like that, just trying to be positive whenever possible.

On another occasion Christine explained how she made a point of giving Seok Moon, the sole Korean student in the class, a copy of an article on Korea from the previous day's paper, saying:

I gave him that photocopy because it was in the news and it's important to validate the Koreans. They feel on the outer, especially when they're surrounded by Europeans. I try to do things to let them know that we're not that Eurocentric. I try to bring in news, if there's some big news from Japan or Korea. I mean if there's big news from Switzerland I'll give that to them as well, but usually it makes them feel a bit more validated. It's very easy for them to feel isolated in a class like that.

Gillian made a point of mentioning it to her class if she knew that a television documentary was to be screened on the country of a particular student in the class. On one occasion, for example, she said, "Tonight on Channel Two there's a programme about Burma."

Amy described an occasion at the end of the first week of the course when she had invited her students to question Nguyen, one of the two young Vietnamese women in her class, about what she had been doing on the previous afternoon when she had
been absent from class (Amy knew that Nguyen had been taking her driving test and that she had passed). Amy explained that the Bosnian students had seemed impressed that Nguyen had passed the test (especially since some of them had not yet succeeded in doing so), construing their behaviour as acceptance of Nguyen. As Amy explained, "As soon as that congratulations came out I noticed that they were all regarding her as one of them, rather than as a Vietnamese . . . so that was a real bridge." The degree to which the students in the class from the former Yugoslavia did consider Nguyen to be "one of them" is, of course, open to question.

Amy believed that certain students in her class held racist attitudes, saying about Mirko and Lela on one occasion, "Both of them have got this real arrogance in relation to the Asians" and on another occasion perceiving that Mirko and Lela had been "super rude" to a PRC student called Bo, because they had walked out of the room when required to sit next to him and had then returned and sat in different seats. There were several occasions during her course when Amy considered that she had been able to raise the status of the Asian students in the eyes of the Bosnian students in the class. During an information-search activity, for example, when each student was required to find the answer to a particular directive, by circulating and interviewing other students, Amy reported the following exchange with Aco (whose directive had been, "Find out how many people in the class prefer eating rice to bread"):

He said, "The only people I've bothered to ask are the Asians, because they'd be the only ones who'd prefer rice to bread, and they all did." And I said, "Wait a minute! I prefer rice to bread. I love fried rice, I love brown rice. I get really bored eating bread all the time." I said, "You didn't ask me!" And I said, "A lot of Australians eat rice once a week or once a fortnight, or out at Chinese restaurants, so if you ask Australians they might prefer rice to bread," and each of those times I could feel people like Lan and Pham feeling good.

Amy considered that on another occasion she had been able to support the Asian students in the class, describing the situation in the following way:

We were talking about environmental problems and [the students from Bosnia said], "Ah, China's the biggest problem, because they've got the biggest population, ha, ha, ha!" And this time I said, "Wait a minute!" and I drew a map of England on the board and I said, "If all the people
who came from England lived in England today, the people from the colonies, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, etc, if they were all in England what sort of population would England have? It'd be overpopulated." And I said, "The second issue is that Australia and the United States are the biggest consumers in terms of what we consume per head of population, when you have one or two cars per family. They [the Chinese] only have a bicycle." I said, "If China started consuming at the rate we do, then we'll have a big environmental problem."

Amy believed that on each of these occasions she was able to give the Asian students in the class "ammunition to be able to stand up for themselves when they need to."

**Dealing with culturally-sensitive issues**

Evidence from the study suggests that the teachers of the high-level classes sometimes had a difficult path to tread. On the one hand they wanted to select topics and issues which related to the students' own countries because (i) students were likely to become more involved when discussing aspects of their own countries, and (ii) by choosing to focus the attention of their classes on the countries of specific students they indirectly raised the status of those students in the eyes of the class. On the other hand the teachers ran the risk of unwittingly touching on culturally-sensitive issues. Although some teachers indicated an awareness of moments when students appeared offended, there may have been other occasions when students did not let their teachers know their true feelings. A student once told me, for example, that they had been deeply offended when their teacher, in the process of teaching the words "developed," "developing" and "underdeveloped," had informed them that they came from an underdeveloped country.

The Tuesday of the sixth week of Maggie's course fell on 6th August, the 51st anniversary of the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. Maggie, whose class was composed mainly of Japanese and Korean students, decided that she would devote class time to the anniversary of the event, saying:

We'd had an item about Korea earlier and we'd had an item about Japan, and this one actually put them together, and that was the way it was, and I decided I wasn't going to skip it because it might be sensitive.
Maggie therefore decided to show the class an Australian TV news item which focused on the unveiling of a memorial to commemorate the large number of conscripted Korean workers who had died at Hiroshima. She also planned to end the lesson by following the Japanese custom of observing a minute's silence in memory of those who had lost their lives at Hiroshima. However, events did not go according to plan. First, Nam Jin pronounced that the 6th August was a happy day for Koreans because it marked the end of Japanese colonial rule. Second, several Koreans expressed dissatisfaction that it had taken so long for the Japanese to grant permission for the memorial to be erected. Third, some students chose to pack their bags and leave the class when Maggie gave them the choice of going to lunch or staying behind to observe the minute's silence.

Maggie, who realised that she had touched on what she described as "a cultural national problem," explained that she had had to make an instant decision about how to proceed with the lesson, saying, "I thought, 'Um! I've embarked on this and I can't back down. What do I do?'" She explained that she used a technique which she had used on previous occasions to diffuse tricky situations, saying:

I stepped in so that I made it a broader thing, and made it clear that we fought in wars too. I mean they know that we were involved in the War too. . . . I said, "Well, all round the world we have different days when we commemorate people who've suffered in the war, who have died, been injured, families been killed, who have suffered in any way, the point being we've resolved to make sure there won't be war again." . . . I just think it's better that it's sort of accepted. Nobody likes war. We are remembering everybody everywhere who's been caught in wars.

In retrospect Maggie admitted that she had touched on a sensitive issue and said that she would probably not do the topic again. However, she considered that she had been able to contain the situation successfully, explaining that she had given the students the choice either to leave the class before the minute's silence or to stay and observe it. Despite Maggie's belief that she had smoothed over the situation it subsequently appeared that certain students in the class had been upset by the incident. Keiko, a Japanese student with a Korean boyfriend, for example, told me that in her view there
had not been any bad feeling between the Japanese and Korean students in the class until mention of Hiroshima had been made. According to Keiko, when it had become obvious that the Korean students did not wish to engage in "silent prayer" at the end of the lesson (because they had packed up their bags and walked out), she had felt "very sad."

On another occasion Maggie explained that she consulted a student before showing a news item which she feared might cause offence. In this case the news item was about a Japanese politician who had made an offensive comment about Korean people. Maggie explained her line of thinking in the following way:

It was about Japan and Korea and it could have been sensitive, and I would have thought more carefully if Naoko and Masako had been there, but because they weren't I thought, "Yeah, we can go for this one fine." I said [to the older Japanese student in the class], "Yoshihiro, you're not going to be offended, you're not going to take it personally?" "No."

Maggie did not believe that she should necessarily intervene when students became involved in heated discussions, saying:

I don't think it matters if sometimes they almost come to blows about things, so long as you're monitoring it and you're making sure it doesn't get too vicious. But I've never seen a problem like that, and I wouldn't automatically intervene and say, "Stop this!" You try to soften it a bit and maybe you'll become a third person in it, but I don't think a teacher [needs to stop it]. And I don't think it's a problem, unless it's sensitive to them personally or culturally.

However, she did consider that it was appropriate to intervene with general statements so that the discussions became less personal. On one occasion she described how she had reacted when a French student in the class had criticised Jacques Chirac for being racist, saying:

I said, "Well, we've probably all got some of these problems," and we started talking about immigration problems, and [I said], "Australia's the same." It's getting off the point a bit, but when it becomes an argument usually you can broaden it so that it's not so directly "you" versus "us."

Maggie also thought that it was important to admit having made an error of judgement when she discovered that she had offended the sensibilities of students. For instance, she said that on an occasion when she was telling the class that everybody sometimes...
behaved in culturally inappropriate ways, she reminded everyone of the time when she had behaved in an inappropriate manner herself, by patting Hyong Gun on the shoulder and telling him that he looked beautiful when he was angry.

Other teachers used different tactics when they thought that students might be sensitive about certain issues. Amy explained that she had decided to postpone studying a chapter in the textbook dealing with the PRC because of news headlines about the PRC putting on a display of naval strength off the coast of Taiwan (shortly before democratic elections were to be held in that country). As Amy explained:

I postponed it because of the Taiwan thing, because I knew Lan (one of the three PRC students in her class) was pretty excited about something, and I thought, "I've got to watch it a little bit and wait till the crisis is over."

Tom, during whose course the same event occurred, decided not to take any action to protect from possible implied criticism the three students in his class who originated from the PRC. He therefore screened the current Behind the News programme, which included an item about the warlike manoeuvres of the Chinese navy. Interestingly, rather than divide his class by giving the students from the former Yugoslavia the opportunity to feel disparaging towards the students from the PRC, the screening of this item appeared to have the opposite effect. As Tom explained:

For the last half hour there was a lot of spontaneous chatting about Bosnia, about China and Taiwan. . . . I asked Tan about the history [of China's relations with Taiwan] and so he gave a very concise history of what had happened over the last few years. First of all it was just Tan, Cedric and myself, and then as he was talking Selma and Natasa and one or two of the others were listening, and then when he'd finished Selma said, "Yes, it's exactly what's happened in Bosnia, except that we're not an island."

Tom explained that it had become evident that there were differences of opinion between the three Chinese students in the class about whether or not Taiwan should become part of China once again. Apparently Chan believed that Taiwan should remain independent, while Tan and Hua took the opposite view. Ironically, this difference of opinion between the PRC students appeared to have the effect of making certain
students from the former Yugoslavia feel "closer" to the Chinese students, evidently because they became aware of certain historical similarities between their countries.

Some teachers believed that it was safer to stick to the relatively bland, timeless and apolitical content of English language textbooks. Joe was one such person, saying on one occasion about his intermediate-level class:

Today it could have gone into a great debate, like Fahri's got very strong views about the Balkans, like he said, "Do you think that's interfering and all this is really what the US wants?" And Islamic Indonesians, especially, feel strongly like that, and that could develop into a great argument. But I'm not quite sure if, first of all, everyone in the class would be interested in an argument, and I'm usually against forcing a subject on a class. . . . If you have a smaller group and they generate the subject they want to talk about, like in a class of up to ten it would work. But I don't think, if you've got a class of 18 students and you say, "Right, we're all going to debate the Balkans argument!" Ji Su will go to sleep, James will go to sleep at the other end of the scale, and that's not going to do it justice.

Ironically, comments from a number of the Korean students in Joe's class (the majority of whom had done national service, had completed or almost completed university degrees, and were politicised in the sense that they had participated in student demonstrations), indicated that they wished they could have class discussions about "meatier" topics than those introduced in the textbook. James, for example, said, "I really want discussion about serious things. I am disappointed. Frankly, I feel frustrated."

**Damage limitation**

There was evidence in the study that certain teachers quickly took steps to limit the negative effect which they considered some students might be having on others. Maggie described a situation when she considered that, during a small group discussion on the topic of censorship, Luc had destroyed the confidence of a young Japanese woman called Naoko. Evidently Luc, after stating his own opinion on censorship "very strongly, quickly, fluently, fast," had turned to Naoko and had said, "Say something for
a change!" Maggie recalled how she had monitored events from elsewhere in the room, saying that after Luc's comment:

Naoko had totally withdrawn, she was looking straight ahead, totally inward-looking, inscrutable, but obviously totally deflated, and she had withdrawn from it altogether and as far as I could see didn't say another word.

Maggie explained that at the end of the lesson she had engaged Naoko in casual conversation until the rest of the class had left the room and had then invited her to sit down for a chat. Evidently, before she had even sat down, Naoko had said, "The class is too difficult for me." Maggie provided the following account of how she had then discussed Luc with Naoko, saying:

I was very frank about my opinion of him and that it was extremely inappropriate language and extremely rude in my judgement, that he was very immature and probably didn't realise how rude he was, but I would speak to him [and tell him] I was very upset, that I could cope with his rudeness in certain circumstances, but not when it affected other students. I did my best to bolster her. . . . Anyway, she was quite deflated, but I hoped that I'd made it better.

Maggie reported that, on the next day, she had overheard Naoko telling her friend Masako that if she had to look at Luc she'd be sick, commenting that, "It was very strong language from Naoko." Maggie explained that she had told Naoko to make sure not to sit near Luc and had reassured her that she'd never put her in such a situation again. After taking Luc aside and telling him that in her opinion he had been extremely rude to Naoko, Maggie commented, "I think I've put the lid on him hurting anybody else, but it's a pity that it happened."

From feedback collected from students in the class after Luc had left the school it transpired that other students in Maggie's class also considered that Luc's behaviour had been inappropriate. A male Korean student called Min Woo, for example, wrote:

In this class I felt uncomfortable for one month because one of my ex-classmates made me unhappy and I think that he is very rude and selfish. Now I'm happy because he finished [at] this school."

However, Luc was not universally disliked by the students in Maggie's class. Qiu Fang, a young Korean girl who considered that several of the Korean students in the class
(including Min Woo) were "old generation" and disapproved of "new generation" values, said that Luc was nice and that she liked him. Another young Korean called Nam Jin told me that Luc was a good friend and that they had done activities together outside class time. Therefore it is possible that Luc, with his direct manner and "uppity behaviour" (Maggie's words), operated as a role model for these particular young Koreans.

Two teachers indicated that they sometimes found it difficult to know how to respond when they considered that students had behaved in an inappropriate manner. In the second week of her course, when Luc had used various swearwords in class, Maggie said, "What concerns me is, I don't want to discuss another student in his absence, but it's quite clear that the students are aware that he's acting inappropriately," Two weeks after he had left her class and returned to Belgium Luc sent Maggie a fax which, in keeping with the tradition established at the school, she took to class and read out to the students. Maggie recounted that this led Min Sook to express negative feelings about Luc, saying "If I hadn't met Pierre [another Belgian student] I would have thought all Belgian people weren't nice." Maggie made the following observation on this occasion:

I don't like talking about students when they're not there in front of others, but it called for some response. I had to show that I wasn't agreeing he was awful, but I had to show sympathy to the ones he'd hurt. I felt uncomfortable about it, I must say, but he had sent us a fax. . . . I had to gauge it because I couldn't say too many nice things about him, like I couldn't say, "Oh, don't be silly, Min Sook! He was a great guy if you got to know him," in that he had deeply offended Naoko and then Masako . . . so I had to judge my response.

Facing a dilemma of a somewhat similar kind, Kerry described how she had once tried a variety of approaches with a student who had appeared to be full of anger, including "squashing him and humouring him," but without success. Kerry explained what she then did:

I thought about the situation for two or three weeks and in the end I decided to bring it up with him in front of the class. I'd noticed that on the days when he was absent the dynamics were completely different. I said in front of the class that he looked so angry that I knew it must be something important, and why didn't he say? He did speak and he
criticised certain things on the course and as he did so I could see the other students nodding. In the end the students liked him because he voiced criticisms they didn't have the courage to express. In the end he thought the class was wonderful and he thought I was wonderful. And in the next class he was difficult, but the teacher used the same tactics and he was fine.

**Raising or restoring students' self-esteem**

Several teachers believed that it was important to attempt to raise the self-esteem of any student whom they perceived might be feeling undervalued by other students in the class. Talking about students with articulation problems Tom said:

You think of all these highly-intelligent people I've got in class like Tan, highly intelligent [but] can't articulate, so people think he's a bit stupid, and of course he's not. We've got people here who've been probably almost world leaders in their field, and yet because they can't speak English people treat them like idiots. And that is what they don't like, [so] obviously you've got to try and lift their self-esteem.

Sometimes teachers appeared to attempt to raise the status of students in their classes in small ways. Talking about Naoko, whose self-esteem she believed had been damaged by the behaviour of Luc, Maggie said:

In fact I've been giving kudos about her writing and her reading. I put it [the writing] up on the board on the Wednesday morning because it was a beautiful model, and she had done some lovely writing, [and] when we talked earlier in the week in the language lab I made a point of saying [that] some had spoken more slowly, but much more accurately, and she was one and Masako was another. And I'd hoped that this might be filtering through to them [Naoko and Masako], more importantly, but maybe to the others [as well].

On another occasion, during a vocabulary-building activity, Maggie told the class that Masako had excellent vocabulary-recording skills, advising other people to have a look at her neatly-written book.

How successful Maggie was in boosting the feelings of self-worth of these two noticeably quieter and more self-effacing members of her class is unclear. Maggie did report that Masako seemed much happier and more forthcoming in her subsequent class, which was an exam preparation class with a strong focus on grammar. This comment suggests that Masako may have felt more at home in a class with a product-
driven syllabus, rather than in a class in which students were expected to develop their English language skills in an organic way, by viewing news programmes and discussing related issues.

Amy provided an example of an occasion when she believed that she had been able to take advantage of an opportunity which had presented itself to enhance the self-esteem of a student whose self-image appeared to have been damaged by the laughter of other class members. Amy had a student in her class called Nadya, a middle-aged woman who seemed to have a positive opinion of her own academic abilities, but who tended to make simple errors. In Amy's opinion:

[She is] too busy trying to put on an impression, and then the students keep pricking her bubble, or she keeps pricking her own bubble by getting it wrong and setting herself up to fail.

Nadya did indeed appear to hold herself in high esteem, explaining to me that previous teachers had told her that she was a top student. However, in the fifth week of the course Amy detected that Nadya was having problems with certain students in the class, notably a bright young woman from the PRC who routinely completed grammar exercises before the rest of the class and then sat smiling and drumming her fingers. Amy explained that, in her view, Nadya was not popular with the other students, who considered her to be a perfectionist. In the seventh week of the course, Nadya unexpectedly told Amy that she wished to withdraw, a behaviour which caused Amy to take her aside and tell her that she should relax in class and not worry about making mistakes. Nadya explained to me afterwards that she had decided to withdraw from the course because one particular student had upset her by laughing at her mistakes "not once, not twice, but three times." Nadya referred obliquely to the student in question, explaining that she felt comfortable with Amy but not with younger students, concluding with the following comment:

I am not twenty years old. . . . I don't think I should be in the same class with students who have been studying English for many years, when I have only been studying for one year.
Amy described with evident satisfaction, however, that she had managed not only to persuade Nadya to complete the course, but also to restore Nadya's self-esteem. An opportunity evidently presented itself when Amy was organising student groups to present their views on either the positive or the negative aspects of old age. Having found that she had a small group of three students (including Nadya) left over, Amy explained that the idea had suddenly come to her of making one of the three students "chair" the session. Amy described how Nadya's body language had indicated what she wanted to chair the debate, saying, "I'm glad her eyes lit up and she jumped forward, because that gave me a clue." Amy recalled what happened, saying:

   I said, "Hey, we've got the three of you. I guess one of you could chair the meeting and introduce the topic. And this is the sort of thing you'd say, and get the people to speak." And I could see Nadya, she went [imitates Nadya grabbing the table and leaning forward excitedly], her body language was so powerful, "I wanna do that!" It was just very, very powerful, so I said, "Nadya, would you like to do that?" And she absolutely beamed, absolutely thrilled to bits, and we dictated what she was going to say. Oh! She absolutely thrived on that idea.

Amy believed that, by assigning Nadya a high-status role in a language activity, she had afforded her the opportunity to save face and to regain her self-esteem. Amy thought that after this apparent turning point Nadya had become a more active and committed member of the class, saying on one occasion:

   I asked for someone to wipe the board and she rushed out and did it and had this lovely feeling of satisfaction. So she was ready to drop out of the class, and this week I think her feelings of well-being have been pretty high.

Students asserting their own cultural values

Occasionally students seemed to want to boost their own self-image. After Tom had chastised the students in his class from Bosnia for conversing in their mother tongue I detected a marked change in the dynamics of the class group, with the Asian students becoming noticeably more outgoing and assertive. It seemed as if, by losing his temper with the students from Bosnia, Tom had indirectly shown his support for the Asian students in his class, thereby raising their levels of confidence and giving them
the courage to speak out. Tom believed that Asian students naturally considered
themselves culturally superior to Europeans, but were normally too polite to make this
perception known. However, after the incident in which Tom gave the students from
Bosnia a public dressing down, the Asian students in his class used a communication
activity to make a series of assertions about the superiority of Asian values.

The activity in question required the students to get into groups, to discuss
amongst themselves their likes and dislikes and personal preferences, and to discover
what that they had in common with one another. The students from Bosnia, plus Tran,
formed themselves into three groups at the front of the class, and created sentences such
as, "We all like Italian food," "We all sleep on our tummies" and "We all like warm
colours." However, all the remaining Asian students in the class, together with Said
from Syria, formed a single group at the back of the room and could be heard
discussing amongst themselves whether the activity required them to make general or
specific statements. In the end, instead of coming up with statements relating to specific
habits or preferences of a relatively mundane kind, the students made a series of general
statements about "Asian" values. These included the following: "Asians are hard
working and study hard;" "Asian wives look after their husbands and vice versa;"
"Asian people have clean houses;" "Asian people have good manners;" "Asian people
have good financial management;" "Asian people maintain traditions;" "Asian people
eat healthily;" "Asian people have long, happy lives." It therefore appeared that, at this
particular juncture, the students in the class from Asian countries were keen to assert
that their cultures and ways of living were superior to those of the European students in
the class. Tom's interpretation of the situation was that it was "solidarity of the minority
group, . . . an example of affirmative action that benefited both sides."

Tom felt that "positive spin-offs" as a result of the cultural confrontation
between the students in his class included the fact that (i) the Asians had become "more
vociferous," (ii) there was more spontaneous interaction within the class, and (iii) there
was "more spontaneous cooperation between the Bosnian and the Asian women." It was
interesting to note that later in the same week Tan (who appeared to operate as the
official leader of the Asian contingent) seemed to be behaving in a more self-confident and assertive manner. Tom explained that he had noticed a change in Tan's behaviour during a vocabulary-building activity, saying:

A very strange thing happened [this week]. The big confrontation really before was Nusret and Tan, that seemed to typify the polarisation. And it was very strange on Wednesday, in the categories activity, where I dictate 20 words and they have to categorise those words into semantic groupings, and then they get up and they have to write up the words on the board. It's all very spontaneous, the students decide when they want to get up and write the words and so on. And Nusret was writing words up, and I could see Tan making a decision. He thought, "I'll get up there too!" So it was good, there was Tan and Nusret working together at the whiteboard, and I thought [that] that was a conscious effort on the part of Tan to get up there and show that, actually, hatchets had been buried, because they weren't asked to [go to the board], and the fact that they got up and did it means they were really cooperating with the activity.

However, it appeared to me that Tan's behaviour could have been construed as a gesture of assertiveness rather than conciliation.

Degrees of success in redeeming difficult situations

The teachers' actions which have been described in this chapter suggest that the teachers were sometimes able to intuit moments during their lessons when they believed that individual students might be feeling hurt or aggrieved. The teachers indicated that they were prepared to take palliative action in a spontaneous manner whenever they identified critical moments of this kind. What the teachers appeared to do was to select from a range of strategies which they considered might restore the self-esteem of the injured party. The teachers seemed to act in these ways on the assumption that, unless they took action to restore the status of disenchanted students, the class would somehow no longer operate in a socially cohesive manner. In other words, there appeared to be a sense in which the behaviour of the teachers seemed to be governed by a desire to maintain a sense of equilibrium within their classes, so that all students felt that they were both valued and valuable class members.
However, there was little supporting evidence to indicate that teachers were successful in raising the levels of self-esteem of those students whose sense of self-worth had seemingly been damaged by classroom events. It may be, for example, that the teachers' efforts to ameliorate the situations of the less assertive students in their classes had little effect, and that students such as the two young Vietnamese women in Amy's class may have continued to feel excluded by the dominant clique within the class for the remainder of their course. On the other hand, it may be that students did feel more comfortable in their classes for short periods of time, while the feelings that they had when they reflected back on their overall experience of learning English in certain classes may have remained overwhelmingly negative. Natsu, for example, may have returned to Japan with the memory of the unfriendliness of the Swiss students in her class etched in her mind (despite some students having been nicer to her after having been criticised by Christine). And Nadya may have joined the workforce in Australia with the perception that she had been a poor student and therefore a "failure" in her final English language class.

It seems likely that, in all the classes in the study, there were additional occasions when, unbeknown to their teachers, the sensibilities of individual students were offended. In the case of certain students it is likely that the "damage" which was done may have been more lasting than the teachers may have imagined, if indeed they had time in their busy schedules to reflect on such things in the first place.

Summary

In this chapter I have described the actions of the teachers which appeared to be governed by a desire to have all the students in their classes feel good about themselves as individuals. The desire to raise the profiles of students whom they perceived might have been feeling rejected, resentful or antagonised by classroom events appeared to be linked to the notion of cohesion. No student who feels marginalised is likely to contribute in a positive manner towards the well-being of the class group. Put another
way, it appears that the actions of the teachers in the study were frequently governed by a desire to maintain a sense of equilibrium between the individual and the group, so that all students maintained or developed similar levels of self-esteem and self-worth.

In the next chapter I will show that, as each class progressed, a unique body of shared understandings was built up in a collaborative manner by the teachers and their students. I will suggest that the teachers made efforts to develop and sustain these shared understandings because they believed that, by so doing, a spirit of social cohesion would be maintained.
CHAPTER 10

AFFIRMING COHESION

Overview

This chapter describes how the teachers in the study, either consciously or subconsciously, attempted to maintain a sense of community within their classes. The first section shows how the teachers and their students developed a range of pedagogic traditions in a collaborative manner. In the second section I describe how the teachers accommodated spontaneous input from individual students, suggesting that such behaviours affirmed a sense of class cohesion. The third section of the chapter focuses on the shared understandings which developed in some of the classes, while the final section of the chapter presents data which suggest that social activities formed an integral part of the social life of the classes and, as such, were used by the teachers as indicators of the levels of cohesion that they considered their classes had achieved.

Evolving pedagogic "traditions"

Some teachers described how in the early weeks of language classes routines were established, with the result that students could predict how learning activities would be organised and what would be expected of them. During the third week of her course Pamela commented:

They're starting to understand what's going on, they're starting to get the idea of the way I do things and what's expected of them and so on, so they're more quick when I give instructions.

Gillian, also speaking during the third week of her course, said, "I hope things will become a pattern. This is the third week that we've been talking about it [using tape recorders in class to record conversations with partners] and they're just settling down."

72 The Macquarie Dictionary (1985) defines "community" as "a special group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and have a cultural and historic heritage." I have selected the term "sense of community" because it appears to reflect reasonably closely the desire of the teachers in the study to hold their classes together by developing a pool of collective understandings and shared experiences.
In all the classes in the study, certain learning activities which were done on a regular basis appeared to assume the status of collective pedagogic traditions in the sense that (i) they were customary activities with which all class members were familiar; (ii) they needed little introduction or setting up, because the students knew in advance what to expect; (iii) they were conducted in a manner which allowed the whole class to operate in a communal manner; and (iv) they gave all the students in the class the opportunity to participate according to their level of ability. The teachers talked about activities of this kind in an approving way, either assuming that such activities would draw their classes together, or stating openly that they thought they would.

One of the activities which assumed the status of a collective tradition in several of the classes was "brainstorming," a process which required students to draw on what they already knew and to pool their knowledge. When brainstorming was done as a whole-class activity, with individuals calling out words relating to a particular topic and the teacher writing them up on the board, many students contributed and a sense of community seemed to be affirmed. Pamela spent the first half hour of virtually every lesson of her beginner-level class doing a brainstorming activity which involved writing a single letter of the alphabet on the board and inviting the students to call out any English words that they knew which began with that particular letter. Pamela would then write up the words in different columns according to the pronunciation of the initial letter: "cake," "cinema," "cheese" and so on. Despite the fact that they were beginners who had never formally studied English before, Pamela's students had little difficulty in producing between twenty and thirty English words for most letters of the alphabet. For the letter "C," for example, the students produced words as varied as "cosmos," "Chicago," "calendar," "celsius," "coca cola," "camera," "children" and "church," while for the letter "K" the list included "kiss," "king," "kindergarten," "kettle," "kangaroo," "ketchup," "Kampuchea," "kick," "kidnap" and "Koran." No matter their level of utility or frequency of use, Pamela would write the words on the board and the students would copy them down into their notebooks. Once she had written up enough words to cover the number of students in the class, Pamela would
proceed to go through the list and model the pronunciation of each word in turn, encouraging the class to repeat each word in unison after her. She would then go through the list once again, selecting one person from the class (in a predictable order) to sound out and then say each word, for example, "c-l-o-c-k: clock."

Pamela pointed out that this was an activity in which every class member could contribute, regardless of their level of ability, saying, "I'm glad I'm doing this exercise now, because a lot of them who mightn't say much, they get a chance in that exercise." It soon became known, for example, that Ivancica, a lady who was slow to complete activities but who knew more single words than other class members (having been in Australia for a few more months than her compatriots), was likely to start the ball rolling by calling out the first word. As soon as Pamela wrote up the letter "K," for example, Ivancica called out "kill!," causing the class to laugh. Similarly, when the letter "O" was being studied Ivancica called out, "Open!," the speed with which she did so causing Pamela to exclaim jokingly to the class, "Ivancica always has the first word!" As the course progressed certain students began to prepare for the activity in advance. For the letter "O," for example, Soo had evidently found the word "ooze" in her Chinese/English electronic dictionary, while Sanja contributed "oodles" during the same session. Pamela explained the meaning of most of the words to the class, but did not test the students' knowledge of the words at any subsequent point. She explained that she was quite happy that certain students might remember many of the words and other students only a few. This suggests that she regarded the activity as having as much of a social as a pedagogic purpose.

The letter-of-the-alphabet activity proved so popular and appeared to have become so well established that, having reached the letter "Z" before the end of term, Pamela decided that she would continue the tradition and began focusing on words containing certain vowel sounds. On one day, for example, she invited the students to supply all the words they could think of which contained the long "a" sound, creating two lists, one with words such as, "wait," "pain" and "mail," and another with words
such as "holiday," "May," "pay" and "day." When asked whether she had done this particular activity with other classes Pamela said:

I have done it with other beginner classes, yes, but I think that this class really like it and this is why I continued on with doing the sounds. And they were always right there, every time I did that lesson they really liked that. And yesterday they were preparing, because I told them, "Tomorrow we are doing the 'er' sound."

It appeared to me that this single communal learning activity, because it was done in such a regular and predictable manner and because every student had the opportunity to participate, was to some degree related to the ongoing development of a feeling of cohesion within Pamela's class.

I observed teachers of classes at a range of different levels using brainstorming techniques. Maggie sometimes did brainstorming with her advanced-level class in a way which also seemed to draw the class together. On one occasion the brainstorming of words related to the word "school" led to the sharing of a range of experiences by the students in her class. The Swiss girl Hilde seemed particularly interested in the fact that the Japanese students had worn uniforms and sung special songs at school. The class listened attentively as Nam Jin described how the headmaster of his school had been an army general who had exerted "terrible pressure" on the students. The students asked Nam Jin a number of further questions after he had described the ironical situation whereby students in Korea apparently had to pass a fitness "exam" in order to enter university, when, studying so hard, they actually had no time to keep fit.

A brainstorming activity of a different kind was organised by Gillian in her part-time class composed almost exclusively of women. This activity required the students to call out any words which sprang to mind when the word "grandmother" was mentioned, under the headings: "How they were as people" and, "What they did for you." In this way Gillian was able to elicit a range of adjectives, such as "gentle," "caring," "generous" and so on, and a range of behaviours including, "sang songs," "comforted" and "gave you treats." This led to a wealth of revelations and personal outpourings about grandmothers, one student telling the class that she had no
grandparents because her parents had been orphaned and another telling the class that, with the birth of her own child, her mother had become a grandmother at the age of thirty nine. So pleased was Gillian with the richness of the response to this particular topic that she resolved to begin her subsequent course (which was to contain a significant number of the same students) by getting class members to write biographies of their grandmothers.

A particular learning activity which Joe did on a regular basis required every student to create a sentence using a particular structure and then write it up on the whiteboard for the rest of the class to examine for grammatical accuracy. Joe would begin the activity by throwing a whiteboard marker into the middle of each table as an indication that the students should begin to create sentences. He considered that this gesture in itself would encourage collaboration, saying:

If they're all sitting in a group and I throw a pen amongst them, then suddenly somebody's got to put it on the board, and they'll all help that person produce it. It's good to let them nominate the next person, because they'll pick on someone that you've overlooked.

The sustained level of concentration that the students displayed whenever an activity of this kind occurred (with the whiteboard filled with a range of unique sentences in different colours and in distinctive styles of handwriting), suggested that the students were keenly interested in the meaning value of the sentences and in who had written what. On one occasion Joe required his students to create sentences relating to future time. Some of the sentences were of a personal nature, such as, "By the year 2006 I will have a beautiful slim wife and really cute three kids," while a significant number expressed thoughts and feelings of a sophisticated nature relating to the real world. These included, "By the year 2006 I think the united Korea will develop a new ideology which is neither democracy nor communism;" "Indonesia will have a new president and will be prepared to be a developed country, but unfortunately other countries will be developing countries;" "By the year 2006 China will be one of the strongest economies in the world;" "Japan is sinking into the ocean slowly and it will disappear from the earth in 2006."
Amy required her class to do free composition approximately three times a week, with everyone in the class writing silently and independently to the accompaniment of background music. Before the students started writing Amy did the following: (i) checked whether the students were interested in writing about the topic she had chosen and, if they were not, accepted suggestions for alternative topics; (ii) wrote the topic in the centre of the whiteboard; (iii) encouraged the students to call out any words they could think of which related in any way to the topic and filled the whiteboard with them; (iv) invited individuals to make statements using one or more of the words; and (v) wrote the students' statements on the whiteboard, having corrected the grammar where necessary. Once the whiteboard was filled with words and sentences expressing a range of ideas associated with the topic, Amy would give the students an introductory sentence and would then switch on background music and allow the students approximately 30 minutes of class time to write about the topic in whatever way they liked. The students did indeed settle into this activity quickly, evidently knowing what was required of them. According to Amy:

The level of commitment to their writing is incredible. It's a total group thing. . . . There is class recognition that it's important. Everyone in the group is committed to that.

On one occasion Amy got her students to create a poem on the topic of childhood in a collective manner, by eliciting from each student in the class a statement beginning with the words, "Childhood is a time of...," and writing the statements on the board until a four-verse poem was created. Reflecting back on this activity Amy expressed pleasure at the range of personal statements about the experience of childhood and about children in general which had been shared by the class. This activity produced statements from individual students which included, "Ugly children don't exist," "We need to communicate with children" and, "Children in war-time situations draw dark pictures." Commenting on the activity in retrospect Amy said, "It was a really lovely class activity, it really took off, it really gelled."
Pamela described how pedagogic practices involving the whole class behaving collectively only became institutionalised when she felt that they were right for the class concerned. She recalled that certain low-level classes had loved to sing songs, with the result that she had taught songs on a regular basis to the point where they seemed to have become recognisable class traditions. However, she explained that with other classes the singing of songs on a regular basis had not seemed right:

I think it has to be a group of people who you know like singing. Sometimes you might do a song in the first week and you get a good response, so you do it every week and they love it, [saying], "Are we going to do a song this Friday?" And you do it like that. But then you get another group and you don't get a good response so you think [to yourself], "Singing is not for this class."

Talking further about giving students the opportunity to develop their oral skills through singing songs in class, Pamela recalled that the Rod Stewart song I Am Sailing had gone down particularly well with students from El Salvador, saying:

It's a great song to do, but you have to choose the class. . . . If I did that song again I don't think I'd do it with this lot [refugees from the former Yugoslavia] because of their traumatic exit from their country. But I used to do it with the Salvadorians and somehow it went all right with them. They were used to expressing what they were feeling, anyway, [so] it wouldn't be new. One Salvadorian said it was a bit sad, but as a whole they really liked it.

This comment suggests that Pamela assumed that activities which gave pleasure to classes were likely to reinforce a sense of community and therefore an overall feeling of cohesion.

Like Pamela, Tom was aware that not all activities were suitable for all classes, explaining that he was not able to follow his planned programme in the same way with every class. Talking approvingly about one particular class he said, "I was able to do all the group work activities with this group that I hadn't done with the other group, because they wouldn't have worked." He then recalled having abandoned a brainstorming activity relating to the five senses with one particular class because, in his view, "a macho culture of competition" had existed.
Accommodating spontaneous student input

Apart from the instances outlined above when the teachers deliberately set up whole-class activities which encouraged their students to "connect authentically" with one another (to use Richard's phrase), there were many other occasions when individual students began to speak from the heart in a spontaneous manner, often mid-way through learning activities. When these occasions occurred the teachers normally went with the flow, interrupting activities in order to allow individual students to share with the class whatever thoughts, feelings, insights or recollections the particular activity had evidently brought to mind. On one occasion, for example, Maggie explained that a student had been keen to share with the class an anecdote about how he had had to pay a large amount of customs duty at the airport, saying:

We stopped entirely to listen to Jin Hyung's story. This was quite a long story, but it gave him a chance to talk for at least five minutes and everybody was hanging on every word and it was just wonderful.

Maggie explained that, on another afternoon, she had got the students in the class to tell one another personal anecdotes, saying:

Yesterday there was so much giggling and laughing and it was really lovely, their anecdotes, telling stories and then listening to each other's. There was an amazing happy, lovely atmosphere.

At one point Amy spoke approvingly about how a discussion task based on a collection of health pamphlets had developed into personal statements of religious beliefs, opinions on mixed marriages and so on, saying, "That was lovely. It just mushroomed into discussion." On one occasion, Tom reported with pleasure that Tan, whose articulation of certain sounds made him relatively difficult to understand, had succeeded in holding the interest of the class with a talk about a highly-acclaimed Australian surgeon of Chinese extraction who had been shot dead in a Sydney street. According to Tom the class listened attentively as Tan explained that he had known this man personally. Tom described another occasion in the eighth week of his course when, during a discussion on punishment, a student from Indonesia called Henny had told the class that she had recently visited a young Indonesian boy who was in prison,
explaining to everyone that despite the apparently good conditions the boy was
desperately unhappy. Tom described moments such as these as occasions when there
was "cultural exchange," remarking also that in his view "the barriers [between the
different ethnic groups] were down."

Similarly Amy described, with evident excitement, how certain students had
spontaneously expressed personal thoughts and feelings during a classroom "debate" on
the topic of old age. After describing how Alex had shared with the class the fact that
life for old people in Russia was extremely hard, she went on to describe the
contribution made by a student who normally said little in class:

But then we had the most stunning time of all in this class, I would say.
Lidija came out with a very personal statement to the whole class, which
I would say means she's feeling really comfortable to say it, because the
stuff she was saying was really close to the heart, the sort of stuff you'd
normally hear one-to-one.

Amy proceeded to describe how Lidija had talked about how her mother felt so lonely
back in Bosnia, apparently bursting into tears whenever Lidija telephoned, and about
how she still had great grandparents in their nineties living in Bosnia. Amy concluded
by saying, "It was quite stunning to hear that emotional statement coming out in front of
the whole class, it was superb." At this point, therefore, Amy seemed to be implying
that the class operated as a cohesive unit to which Lidija felt she belonged.

Amy also believed that the presentations which she routinely organised for the
final week of her course were opportunities for the students in her class to share with
the rest of the class their knowledge or life experiences. Explaining how she felt about
presentations as the time to organise them approached, Amy said:

In my experience in Week Nine you think, "Shivers, none of them are
going to be able to do this. It's hopeless, there's no energy for it." And in
Week Ten there are two or three absolutely brilliant talks, and the level
just goes up, and everyone's madly wanting to do their talks. . . . There's
so much from them coming in, it's their input, they're discovering how
much each other knows, and it's really great. It's fabulous, so I guess
from past experience I know it works, so even though it's sort of lagged a
bit I haven't worried.
Amy was not disappointed with the quality of the presentations given by the students in her class, describing with enthusiasm how various students had given presentations on topics as varied as: the experience of mowing a lawn for the first time; "the good mistake" (a student's account of having got on the wrong aeroplane and flying out of Australia without a passport); the Great Wall of China; fingernails; "my career"; the Nobel Prize and mathematics; The art of Tai Chi; and "fish leather" (the process of converting fish skins into leather for use in the fashion industry). When describing Savo's account of having got on the wrong plane, for example, Amy recalled the reaction of the whole class, saying, "He had us all in absolute stitches" and, "The class was in absolute hoots with all this going on." In the presentations which I observed there was indeed evidence of a high level of whole-class interest in certain topics, notably in Mirko's talk on lawn-mowing and in Alex's talk on fish leather, with a number of questions and joking comments being made. For example, Lela asked Mirko how much he would charge to cut her lawn, while Lan asked Alex how much a pair of shoes trimmed with fish leather would cost, causing Savo to quip, "You must travel to Russia."

Amy believed that the process of individual students giving presentations to the class was an affirmation of collective class "ownership," saying, "It's handing the class over to the students." Certain students, however, appeared to distance themselves from the class group during some of the talks. As Lan began her presentation on Tai Chi, for example, Lela and Mirko whispered amongst themselves and exchanged chewing gum, and Lela then appeared to make a point of not listening to Lan's talk. Also, five members of Amy's class, including the two young Vietnamese women Nguyen and Pham, were absent on both the days that the talks were scheduled to be given. This meant that class "ownership" was only demonstrated by those students who chose to give presentations - nine of the fourteen students who were still enrolled at the end of the course.

There were many other occasions during the study when teachers allowed their lessons to be interrupted by individual students who appeared keen to share personal
anecdotes, feelings or insights with the whole class. The teachers did not seem worried that lesson time was wasted on such occasions, apparently believing that moments such as these, when individual students became the focal points for their classes because of the apparent interest value of what they were saying, were confirmation that a spirit of social cohesion prevailed. It may be, however, that sometimes individual students were not as happy as their teachers thought they were to listen to the personal statements and anecdotes of their peers. In other words, certain students may have felt that, while it was satisfying for the student concerned to be expressing themselves in English, they themselves were in the passive role of listener and were therefore not maximising their learning opportunities.

Developing shared class understandings

Maggie, perhaps because she often taught high-level classes with constantly-shifting student populations, appeared to have developed a firm belief in the importance of developing and maintaining what she called a "shared class history." When describing and justifying her classroom behaviour she used the term "collective consciousness" (although she was not aware that it had been coined by Durkheim), saying that all classes had "some sense of shared history, some collective consciousness" and on another occasion saying:

We have it on a very small scale here. You build up a class history of topics they're interested in. You can then revisit them later on in the course. [And] you build up a knowledge of what they've said or done in the class.

Expanding further on how she saw part of her job as a teacher as keeping alive memories of past events in the collective consciousness of the class Maggie said, "These are all the little things you pick up and you share," explaining that in her view:

It's all on different levels and scales. Another aspect is the shared language, the stories you've read together, the personal details they share in the morning when they have a little chat, about what they did at the weekend. And it's important that the teacher remembers these to bring
out. And there's also the language that you refer back to, whether it's the
topic, whether it's the particular language.

Maggie considered that the development of shared knowledge was linked to the notion
of class cohesion, saying, "It's building up this class cohesion, when you're referring to
something they all know about." Maggie also made a point of saying that the common
knowledge to which members of class groups were privy was "a shared heritage,
something not seen by outsiders."³⁷³

Sally provided an example to support Maggie's view when talking about a class
which she believed had attained a high level of cohesion. According to Sally, the
students had entered into the spirit of a whole-class role play so fully and
enthusiastically that they referred back to it on later occasions so that it became a part of
the shared memory of that class. As she explained:

They talk about it now. It came up the other day, and they said, "Oh, role
play!" They had to write something in a sentence, and it was, "Role play,
role play, fantastic!" And they talked about it afterwards. It's the only
class that's commented on the role play, saying how they really, really
enjoyed it, and they learnt so much.

Sally described a further shared understanding which had evidently evolved in this
particular class regarding what the students collectively considered to be the banal
nature of a particular English teaching video (O'Neill, 1990). Evidently on one occasion
a student had parodied the words of one of the characters, exclaiming, "I'm a bird and I
can fly!" Evidently a student then used the expression "I'm a crocodile!" in a subsequent
activity on Australian animals, a behaviour which apparently caused everyone in the
class to laugh because, according to Sally, "Everybody knows The Lost Secret is a bit
'off'." Sally explained the ongoing nature of the shared understanding in the following
way:

³⁷³ Maggie's belief had something in common with Walker and Adelman's "strawberries" incident
recounted by Woods (1996, p. 16), in which the students in a class laughed because they had a shared
understanding of a student's response, "Strawberries! Strawberries!" to the teacher's comment about the
limited amount of homework completed by the boy. Woods quotes Walker and Adelman, who describe
these shared understandings as "the subcultural experience of the group and its associated private and
personal meanings."
In class several times it came up, or someone would put on a voice from it [the video]. And for one of the sentences this week, one of the students said, "Can I say, 'I'm fed up with The Lost Secret'?" [laughs] They have a kind of love/hate relationship with it. I've asked them whether they want to continue [with it], and they all want to. It's a bit of a kind of class tradition now. I think they all realise that it's so artificial and contrived.

Sally had evidently made it known that her opinion of the video accorded with that of the class, thereby allowing the development of a feeling of complicity within the classroom, with everyone knowing that it was acceptable to criticise the video in a spirit of fun. Another example of a teacher siding with students against commercially-produced teaching materials, and thereby seeming to enhance a feeling of class solidarity, was provided by Gillian. In this instance a PRC student called Bing had expressed mock outrage that a model letter in a writing textbook had advised a traveller to China to take writing paper with them because Chinese paper was "thin." Gillian laughingly agreed with Bing that the textbook writer was ignorant of the true facts. Later in the lesson Bing jokingly asked Gillian whether she should do her own writing on thin or thick paper, an action which caused several students to smile.

Clearly student sub-groups within classes sometimes developed shared understandings amongst themselves which excluded their teachers and/or other student groups. As described in Chapter 6, such understandings were unlikely to contribute to class cohesion if there were people in the room who did not understand the significance of the remarks. Amy wondered on one occasion why her question, "What did you do on the weekend?" often elicited the response "homework," followed by general laughter. Another understanding apparently shared by a group of students (but not by their teacher) related to the demanding nature of Tom's regular Thursday morning writing sessions, which the students had apparently dubbed "heavy writing day."

Sally reported one sub-group tradition which appeared to have cemented the relationship between herself and the students concerned. Evidently on one particular morning she had chastised the whole class for regularly arriving late (explaining to me afterwards that she had felt guilty about her over-reaction). Sally explained that when she entered the classroom that afternoon she found a can of soft drink sitting on her
table, placed there by the Korean students as a peace-offering. Sally recounted with
amusement how for the rest of the term she would enter the room after lunch, find a can
of soft drink placed on her table, and thank the mystery donor. She explained that she
thought the Koreans played some betting game amongst themselves as to who should
buy her the drink each day, but never discovered how the system worked.

Occasionally traditions accompanied students from class to class. One of the
Korean men in Maggie's class had an ongoing medical problem which required him to
use a walking stick and to sit on an inflatable cushion. Maggie explained that a tradition
had evolved whereby, whenever the class moved to the library, the language lab or the
computer room, the students would take it in turns to help, one person carrying his
books and another the cushion. I myself observed the careful, quasi-ritualistic manner
with which the students carried the cushion.

Sustaining reputations

Maggie was so keen on the idea of sustaining a collective class memory that she
made a special effort to keep alive in her classes the memory of past students, saying:

I showed them the class photo, and so the new students could see how
they [the old students] were, and Hilde was very interested to look at the
photos of the whole group, so some of them are still there, she recognises
them, and others have gone. . . . And like [I said to] Moo Tae, "You're
leaving this week, so we'll expect a letter like this from you," and
hopefully he will. So that's part of the keeping up. . . . They won't be
forgotten. We'll refer to them. And that's part of the common little jokes
that we have while people are in class, like Hyong Gun and his tennis.
And Sung Ho who he plays with left earlier, and so he's still alive and
well in the class in spirit, because some of them are still there who know
him. And gradually that will go when they've all gone, but yeah, the class
memory lasts longer than their time here.

One of the techniques that Maggie used to encourage students to share information of a
personal nature with the class was to spend the first fifteen minutes of each morning's
lesson chatting to the students about what they had been doing the previous evening
(somewhat along the lines of a primary school "news" session). As she explained:
We always need to have something to chat about while they're dribbling in the morning, and to keep them talking, and I don't like launching straight into a lesson . . . but also for the group feeling. That's when they hear about things they've done.

In the second week of the course Maggie said to the class, "Is there any news for me? Has anything exciting happened? I'm looking for gossip, interesting things. Your news, not the world news." Because she was in possession of information about the private lives of the various students in her class, Maggie was then able to speculate on what students who were absent from class might be doing. On one occasion she joked to the class about Hyong Gun, whom she knew played tennis, saying, "Maybe Hyong Gun's out practising his tennis," adding, "They can take on the Woodies." On another occasion she explained to me that Kenji's girlfriend was due to arrive shortly from Japan, saying that it was common knowledge within the class that Kenji had been dating another girl and that he had arrived home one day at 5.00 a.m. because "he had been hoping that something would happen which didn't happen."

Talking about two parallel classes that she had co-taught with another teacher, Maggie explained that she and the other teacher had devised a quiz (to be completed by the students from both classes, working in mixed groups) which focused on common knowledge relating the behaviours and actions of individual students across the two classes. This knowledge apparently related either to what students had done in class, such as, "Who did a book review on 'Drive Safe'?" or to personal revelations that students had made, such as, "Who's an expert forger?" (referring to an Indonesian student who had once told the class that he had forged an ID card at the age of fourteen in order to get a driver's licence). Maggie considered that the quiz had drawn the two classes together and given them a feeling of social unity, because every student knew at least one piece of information about every student in both classes. However, there is always the chance that certain students may not have liked the information about themselves which was selected for the quiz and therefore perpetuated in the collective memory.
A number of teachers believed that an effective way of developing and maintaining a sense of community in their classes was to create and then maintain reputations for selected individuals. A popular technique was to create humorous soubriquets for certain students and to continue to use them for as long as they engendered a whole-class response in the form of laughter. Joe, for example, called a Korean student in his class who went by the name of James "James Dean," while Christine dubbed a Korean student in her class who had chosen to be called Clark, "Superman," because of the connection of his name with the comic hero Clark Kent. From time to time throughout Christine's course Christine, Clark or other students in the class would call out "Superman!," a behaviour which led certain students in the class to catch the eye of Christine or of a friend and smile in apparent acknowledgement of this understanding which was shared by the whole class. On the first morning that I joined the class the students ensured that I also knew that Clark's nickname was "Superman," as if keen to welcome me into their class community.

As explained in Chapter 8 in the context of teasing, creating humorous nicknames for students had the potential to cause offence. However, it seemed that this technique could normally be used to good effect as a way of affirming class cohesion. Richard, who made regular use of the technique, explained that he had dubbed a student in his class whose mobile phone went off regularly "Mr Mobile," a South American student who always wore dark glasses "Señor Incognito," and a big, strong student "Count Monaro" (Monaro being the make of a large Australian sedan car with a powerful engine). As Richard reasoned, "Every family has nicknames, so why not a class?" Richard made explicit his belief that giving students nicknames was an effective way of drawing a class together, saying:

I used to call a Peruvian guy called Gabino "Gabino Machu Picchu." Then immediately the other students started to call him that. And it had this incredible [effect]. It's like a group, you know, it becomes intimate, like a family, more like a peer group.

Part of Joe's class-management style involved creating reputations for certain students and then referring to them on a regular basis throughout the course. Every
morning Joe would sit on his table and would call the class roll in the same way, leaning forward and establishing eye contact in a smiling manner with each student in turn. As he called each person's name Joe tended to make a humorous comment which related to a distinguishing feature of the individual concerned. Every morning, for example, he would refer to the fingernails of an Indonesian girl called Vonny, saying, "What colour are they today?" or make a comment (if she had not yet arrived) such as, "Vonny's away because she's painting her fingernails." Vonny did indeed appear to have a fingernail fetish, coming to class on different days with her long manicured nails painted deep purple, bright orange, pale blue or leaf green. Joe also routinely referred to the colour of the sweater which Hee Suk was wearing (having noticed that she had a range of turtle neck sweaters in different pastel colours), and would comment on the fact that Kajumi had remembered to bring her "beautiful pink dictionary," or that she had highlighted certain words with her pink highlighter. As he went through the class roll Joe would make a range of other off-the-cuff remarks asking, for example, how the "newspaper boy" was (a reference to the fact that Yong Suk went around with a yellowing copy of the *West Australian* newspaper under his arm), or commenting on whether or not Fahri was wearing his West Coast Eagles football shirt. Joe even created a reputation for a student whose name was on the class roll but who never appeared, making the class laugh by saying, "Varin, the mystery man, not here again today!" Joe was aware that he was perpetuating reputations for certain students, saying for example, "Fahri is branded as a soccer star. I keep on reminding the class of that."

Several teachers described how they developed and then perpetuated reputations for certain students concerning their relationships with members of the opposite sex. The teachers appeared to do this because it was evidently an easy way of generating interest and raising the energy levels of their classes. Maggie, for example, explained that a previous class had had "a feisty time" because she had repeatedly reminded the students that one of the class members had pronounced that "European guys like Asian women because they're meek and mild." In the eleventh week of her course Christine described how she and her class had enjoyed "a class thing" about the relationship of
Hyuck Junh and his various girlfriends. Evidently she saw Hyuck Junh in town with another girl shortly before his regular girlfriend was due to arrive from Korea and, because he was absent from class the following day, had a good laugh with the class about his various liaisons. Christine recounted what happened when he did return to class, saying:

When he came back there was a roar, and ever since then there have been these jokes about how many girlfriends he's actually got. And the other thing was, I mean I made a joke once about his sexy lips, because he's got quite full lips, and another time, completely separate - he wears this lovely dusky pink shirt, and I commented on what a nice colour it was, and I thought men looked good in pink, I said that. Anyway, Stephan said that when he said that about his girlfriend he was trying to make you jealous, and I said [laughing], "What do you mean?" And he gave me to understand that I fancied Hyuck Junh, and I said, "Stephan, there's an age difference." I said, "Does this mean that I can't compliment any male without you thinking that I'm in love with them?" So they all thought that was a joke, so that's been a bit of a joke as well.

Amy explained that in a previous class she and all the students had apparently followed with interest and amusement a classroom romance which had blossomed between a blond-haired European woman and a dark-haired South American man. Amy recounted that, on one occasion, the whole class had erupted in laughter when the two had returned late to class after the coffee break with grass clippings on their backs. Amy evidently encouraged the class to focus on the romance, saying, "The class knew, yes, yes! I'd say, 'Two people are missing!' And they'd burst out laughing." Amy explained in an equally enthusiastic manner that, in a later class, everyone was aware of a relationship of a similar kind between a young man from Afghanistan and an Indonesian girl. According to Amy, "That was part of the cohesiveness."

There was evidence in the study to suggest that some students may not have understood that the development of reputations for themselves was a group-maintenance device used regularly by certain teachers. Some students may not have appreciated that references to sexual relationships were commonly made in jest. On a number of occasions Amy insinuated that a "romance" was budding between Nguyen, one of the two young Vietnamese women in her class, and Savo, a middle-aged student.
from the former Yugoslavia whom Amy described as "jovial." A PRC student called Bo who, by the end of the course, was attempting to make humorous statements, appeared to have understood that jokes about Nguyen and Savo were in order, saying in a lesson in the ninth week of the course, "I love Nguyen more than Savo does."

Despite the fact that they regularly worked together and looked up words in one another's dictionaries, I could see no evidence of any "romance" between Nguyen and Savo. In the penultimate week of the course Nguyen told Amy that she did not wish to work with Savo any more because she did not understand him, a statement to which Amy reacted by saying, "She would have been joking. She loves working with Savo." It is not possible to know the motivation behind Nguyen's statement. Perhaps Amy's interpretation of the communicative value of Nguyen's words was correct, and she was simply trying to make a joke. Perhaps, on the other hand, Nguyen felt restricted by having to work with Savo so often and would have liked a wider range of partners, especially if she did find Savo particularly difficult to understand. My own view is that Nguyen may have sensed that she was developing a reputation for liking Savo and may have felt uneasy about the situation. Perhaps she feared that innuendoes about her relationship with Savo would continue to be made in class unless she took steps to redress the situation.

Maggie made the point that, if teachers were to develop reputations for individual students and then joke about them in class, they should also develop reputations for themselves. As she explained:

It can be personal attributes and jokes and foibles, and teachers' foibles as well, that's an important thing. A teacher's got to have foibles, and mine is that cricket is fantastic, and sometimes forgetfulness, or that everybody loves their mother, this little mother bit. Little things that are your little idiosyncrasies or foibles. And then you can joke about others' [foibles] as well.

Evidence from the study suggests that certain students enjoyed being the focal points of their classes and appeared to initiate the development of reputations for themselves. In Joe's class, for example, a Japanese girl called Mika was regularly the focus of attention, initially of the people who sat with her at her table, but eventually of
the class as a whole. On the first day of the course, for example, guffaws of laughter emanated from the table where Mika sat surrounded by five young men (four from Korea and one from the PRC). When I asked the students at breaktime what had caused such sustained laughter they explained that Mika's nickname was "buttonhole," because of the way that her eyes became slits whenever she laughed or smiled. In the second week of the course the young men at Mika's table created a new joke about Mika, saying, "She comes from Mongolia because she doesn't know what a skirting board is." As the course progressed Mika's reputation for being someone who appeared to welcome being laughed at grew so that, whenever she was required to read aloud or to provide answers to questions, the class would begin to laugh before she had said anything at all. Joe was aware of Mika's apparent power over the class, describing her as a "queen bee" and remarking at the end of the first week, "She's cornered the class already." On one occasion Joe responded to the jokes which were coming from Mika's table (as a result of the fact that she had cut her fringe in a completely straight line) by saying in a laughing manner, "Thank you Mika, we are happy because of your hair." Because she appeared to operate as a focal point for the class and as a catalyst for laughter, it does not necessarily follow that Mika was popular amongst all her classmates. It may be, for example, that the two Korean girls in Joe's class resented the attention paid to Mika (who was from Japan) by the group of young men from their own country who always appeared to wish to sit at Mika's table.

Amy had a student in her class who also appeared to operate as a focal point for the class, albeit in a different way. Amy explained that, before she had met her class for the first time, the Director of Studies had informed her that one of the students he had interviewed was going to be an asset to her class. Amy confirmed these predictions, remarking about Alexandre, "He was helpful from Day One." From the start of Amy's course, for example, Alexandre sat in a seat near the whiteboard and got up to wipe the board whenever the opportunity arose. In the second week of the course someone called out, "Maestro!" as Alexandre jumped up to do his self-appointed task, a comment which caused Alexandre to quip, "After class I write my experience of rubbing the
board. I get job!" From this moment it appeared that Alexandre had gained ownership of the board-rubbing role to the point where he was apparently unwilling to surrender it to anyone else. As Amy explained:

Goran cleaned the board once and Alexandre got totally taken aback that his role had been taken away, so I asked him to close the curtains or move the overhead projector or something. It was quite funny. Alexandre said, "What am I going to do now?"

On another occasion, when Amy inadvertently rubbed the board for herself, Savo joked that Alexandre had not been quick enough to do his job. Amy later reported that the board-rubbing "tradition" had accompanied Alexandre into his subsequent class, saying:

The wiping of the whiteboard has extended into this course, because Alex was traditionally the one to do it. However, these two big guys from Afghanistan, they now do it as well. . . . This guy from Afghanistan, a bachelor, told this joke about this person who wasn't a gentleman, but he was a real man with the women and he said, "Amy, you're just going to have to ask a real man to rub the board." So these days I say, "Right, is there a real man who wants to wipe the board?"

Further evidence of the acceptance by Amy's class of Alexandre's status as a class "personality" was provided by the fact that, in the fourth week of the course, Amy reported that everyone had begun addressing Alexandre by the shortened form of his name. Amy explained what she did, saying:

They were all starting to call him Alex, [so] I checked with the class, I said, "Ah, should we call you Alex?" And everyone said, "Yes!" So I thought, "Right!." . . . I heard people throwing that name around, so I double checked it, and there was incredible class support of saying, "Yes, call him Alex!"

As Amy's course progressed Alex regularly did a variety of additional tasks, including opening and closing windows, holding open doors, operating the overhead projector, moving furniture and wheeling videos around. While students in other classes, such as Ivan in Gillian's class, helped their teachers in just as many practical ways, the bravura with which Alex completed each task suggested that he wished to cultivate a reputation for himself. On one occasion, for example, Alex exclaimed, "Morning exercise!" as he sprang up to move furniture, and on another occasion clicked his heels, smiled and did a little bow of acknowledgement, when described by a
particular group of students (in a collaborative writing exercise) as, "The most helpful and friendly person in the class."

Alex also operated as an entertainer, volunteering to play the guitar and sing on a number of occasions during the course. These included certain Thursday afternoon sessions (when Amy's class combined with the parallel class), the class lunch which Amy held in her own house mid-way through the course, and the end-of-term get-together for the whole language centre. Alex was also generous in his praise of others, leading the clapping on a number of occasions when individual students gave "performances" in front of the class. As mentioned in Chapter 7, Amy was so certain of the apparent power of Alex to draw classes together that, when she heard that Alex was to remain in her class for a further term, she remarked, "With Alex coming in I knew I'd have a good class."

In conclusion, Alex's cheerful demeanour and helpful behaviour gave me the impression that he genuinely wanted the class to operate as a socially cohesive unit, with everyone getting on well with everyone else. However, it may be that some of the students in the class grew tired of the fact that Alex was so consistently cheerful and keen to please, and perhaps even felt resentful that he enjoyed what could be construed as a privileged position within the class. Amy herself considered that Alex was not universally popular, giving her opinion of him in the fourth week of the course in the following way:

He's absolutely lovely, and he's always there, but I don't think his rapport with the other students is very strong at all. . . . I notice in pair work he'll talk and talk and talk, but he won't listen to the other person. So he's expressing his own personality, but it's not an open dialogue.

In this section I have shown that foregrounding certain students and allowing reputations to flourish was a strategy regularly used by some teachers to forge a unique corporate identity for their classes. It seemed that this strategy helped to sustain an

74 I suspect that Alex's overwhelmingly positive attitude, detected even by the Director of Studies in his pre-course interview, may have been related in part to the fact that he had come to Australia as a migrant rather than as a refugee. In other words, he had made a conscious decision to come to Australia and start a new life, rather than being forced by political circumstances to do so.
overall feeling of cohesion because students found themselves sharing a body of knowledge known exclusively to them.

**Affirming the existence of a sense of community**

All the teachers occasionally organised social events for their classes. These included visits to the pub, barbecues, lunches or dinners at restaurants, sporting activities, "parties" (either in the classroom or in their own houses), and weekend trips to holiday locations. The purpose of these events appeared to be to reinforce a feeling of class solidarity as the classes progressed, or to celebrate the completion of courses. The teachers also organised class outings, such as visits to the cinema or art galleries, which appeared to have a social as well as a pedagogic function.

Some teachers seemed clear in their own minds that out-of-class activities were a means of reinforcing a sense of community within their classes. Talking about a weekend visit to a holiday island that she had organised for an intensive exam-preparation class, Maggie said:

Knowing that over the twelve weeks it's going to get a bit [heavy] you build in other things, including the trip to Rottnest . . . so it was a bonding thing, and because they're going to be very tired with the repetition they need a really good break, where we're doing things together and having fun . . . [and] to help them to get to know each other better if they haven't already. And it was good, a romance blossomed . . . They organised themselves into groups in the cottages . . . and it was just really nice. We [the teachers] cooked for them the first night, and that is also to set the tone of the communal thing, that our place was the headquarters, they could drop by for their chat, and we told them the schedule, that they could get a grammar lesson if they came by at any time after three and helped chop vegetables or whatever, so they did that. It was a communal thing. And I made pasta sauce for thirty five [people], and then they were given the pasta to cook in their cottages and they had to bring it back, and that was conscious again, so then we served up the sauce, so they stayed and ate with us. So that sets the mood for the whole thing, that we're all part of the same group. And we expected them to do some cooking for us, and they did fish soup. Another group organised a party in their cottage for the last night, made sangria, and it was good, and we joined in and did things with them, and it was really great. So that's part of keeping things together.
In a similar manner and apparently for similar reasons, Amy described how she had organised an outing to a wildlife park followed by lunch at her house, while Christine described how she had organised an evening out in the city for her class. Maggie also described how for her present class she had organised a lunch-hour barbecue in the park mid-way through the course at which Masako had ventured to try a kangaroo steak. Even Tom, who did not organise any mid-term social activities for the class that I observed, explained that in classes which took place in the warmer months he routinely organised soccer matches between the male members of various classes. Tom described with evident satisfaction how the students in a previous class, who had apparently refused to engage in communicative activities with one another because of ethnic tensions, had nevertheless played soccer together in the same team. This out-of-class activity appeared to be evidence, therefore, that some degree of community spirit prevailed within that particular class.

Occasionally "traditions" involving the sharing of food appeared to evolve because of initiatives taken by particular students. Amy described how the students in a class which she considered particularly cohesive had developed the tradition of bringing food to class on a regular basis. Amy recounted that, on Thursday afternoons when her class routinely combined with a parallel class for an afternoon of joint activities, she and the other teacher had brought drinks and fruit for the first two Thursdays. As Amy explained:

By Week Five one of the women brought cakes in for Thursday afternoon, then someone in Week Six, and someone in Week Seven, and they talked about food and how to make it, so food was part of the social group set-up.

In the class which I observed no tradition of this kind developed, although Amy described how one particular student, who resigned from the course in the eighth week because he had found employment, had apparently made a special effort to say "goodbye" to the class. Amy described the occasion in the following way:

On Thursday [the last day of the teaching week] Goran didn't show up. I thought, "What's going on? Is he just not going to turn up?" At two
o'clock in walks Goran with this big tray, this beautiful gorgeous tea
towel, real ethnic bright colours over it, all these little cakes, a bottle of
orange juice, a bottle of coke and cups for everyone. He just walked in
with that, and there were great big cheers, and he said, "They're going to
go bankrupt without me [if I don't start my job straight away]." And he
really had tears in his eyes. "I'll miss you all, I didn't want to leave the
course till it's finished." . . . He did not like leaving two weeks early. He
really, really wanted to finish the course, because of all the friendships
that they built up themselves.

Amy also claimed that Lan, one of the PRC students in the class, had lamented the fact
that the "class as community" feeling would be broken by Goran's withdrawal from the
course, reporting that she had said to Goran:

"I don't want you to go. Please can you come to our break-up lunch in
two weeks' time? Come out to a restaurant!" And everybody said, "He
can't leave his job." And Goran said, "Look, I'll write my phone number
up on the board" and he said Lan was welcome to visit him. . . . It was a
"let's not lose touch" [gesture]. And Lan had got the class photo and on
the back of the photo she'd got a whole lot of people to sign their names,
and she got Goran to sign his name as well.

In most of the classes in the study the atmospheres in the final week of term
were more relaxed, with the teachers evidently believing that it was appropriate to build
into their lesson plans activities which gave their classes the opportunity to affirm that a
community spirit existed within them. Often these activities seemed to fulfil both a
social and a pedagogic function. The quiz which Pamela organised for the final day of
term, for example, not only gave the students the opportunity to work collaboratively in
groups for the first time (up to this point they had only worked in pairs), but also
allowed them to pool their general knowledge, together with information absorbed
during the course. The students behaved in an engaged manner during the quiz,
whispering together in their groups and laughing as they called out decoy answers for
the other groups, such as "Italy!" in answer to the question, "In which country is the
Parthenon?" and "fish!" when asked what sort of a creature a kookaburra was. Darko
made a number of jokes and Stanko was given the task of handing out the bar of
chocolate to the winning group. The behaviours of the students during this activity
suggested that the class was operating as a community at ease with itself, its members
sharing a wealth of knowledge, not only about one another as people, but also about
how their class had operated over the previous ten weeks. The confident behaviour of the students on the final morning of term was in stark contrast to their behaviour in the first week of term when they had sat quietly and compliantly in an unfamiliar learning environment in a strange country, waiting to meet their teacher for the first time.

There was evidence that, as certain courses drew to a close, students began to look ahead, sometimes becoming concerned about future pathways. Joe noticed this happening at the beginning of the final week of his course, and spent approximately half an hour explaining to the class what their options were regarding subsequent courses. He was in a difficult position because he was not sure whether the business course (one of the options offered by the school) would actually be run. In a similar manner, Pamela found herself having to reassure the students in her class that they would all be progressing to a higher class. As she explained:

There were a few sighs of relief, I thought. They were all quite happy. I think they worry a bit that they're going to fail or something. I'm happy about that, so it was a good thing to tell them that.

On the final day of her course, Gillian made a point of summing up the achievements of her class, saying to them:

“Several students have handed in lots of homework and their writing has improved. They are using expressions and phrases from the TV. That must become automatic. . . . I've been very pleased with everyone's work this term. I feel you've grown in confidence.”

She also encouraged students to chat about what they would be doing in the holidays and told them where she would be going and what she would be doing. As she gave out the certificates to the five students who were leaving, Gillian congratulated them and wished them luck in their future endeavours. Gillian told me that she was concerned that certain students such as Nellie, a quiet Burmese woman who had been studying with her for several consecutive classes, were feeling too comfortable in her class and were becoming over-dependent on her. It appeared that by speaking in these ways Gillian was trying to place her class in a broader context and was encouraging the
students to understand that one day they would all have to leave the protective environment of her particular classroom.

It is interesting to note that Joe was the only teacher in the study who did not have the opportunity to signal the closure of his class in any kind of ritualised manner. (Joe taught the class on the Monday and Tuesday of the final week, another teacher taught them on the Wednesday, and then on the Thursday and on the Friday the students did a variety of tests to see whether they qualified to enter an exam preparation class.) As Joe said, "The week sort of petered out because everyone was getting a bit nervous." It appeared that this lack of closure may have made it difficult for one particular student to sever his attachment to Joe. In the week after the class had ended, I listened to Ary speaking to Joe on the verandah and heard him tell him how impressed he had been by his ability to learn everyone's names so quickly. He also asked Joe whether he would continue helping him with his English, explaining that his present teacher taught English very differently from Joe.

**Social functions to mark the end of term**

In all the classes in the study, apart from Joe's, the endings of the courses were marked by a social occasion of some kind. These social events took place either inside the classrooms, in public places such as parks, pubs or restaurants, or in the teachers' own homes. In some of the institutions the tradition had been established of students pooling their resources at the end of term to buy their teacher a present. Amy explained that she had learnt not to question her class too closely about unexplained absences in the last week of term, saying:

> When I first started off I was saying, "Where's so-and-so?" And they didn't say much, and when they presented me with a present the next day [I thought], "Oh no!" [So] I've learnt to be quiet.

Evidence from the study suggests that the teachers tended to use the social climates which they thought prevailed at these events as informal indicators of the levels of
cohesion that their various classes had "achieved." When talking about the class lunch on the last day of term, Amy said:

We went to the Chinese restaurant and the closeness of the group really came out. They really gelled as a group. We had lots of "in" jokes, lots of sharing, all that sort of thing. One of the students started a game of Chinese whispers, and others followed suit in their own language, and they were a really close-knit group, and that restaurant really brought it out, and they were sitting there in a circle and they were teasing each other about eating with chopsticks. Every single person attended, except for Mirko. But the others were all there, and they were just totally thrilled about the course and about being together. A very strong statement of, "Let's hope we're all together next time." It was just lovely.

Pamela, Gillian and Christine considered that their end-of-term social occasions had been positive experiences, not only for their students, but also for themselves. Pamela described how her class had organised a picnic at a beach location, with the students arranging amongst themselves who would bring what kind of food for everyone to share. She explained that most people came, included the young Chinese woman Soo who brought a plate of cooked fish. Pamela's description of the occasion was as follows:

Darko insisted on having his photo taken with his arm around me. . . . I felt very relaxed. I felt they were all together, and I had a good time and a good talk with people. Radovan and Radojka were good value in the class, and it came out more in this situation. They were smiling and friendly and wanting to speak English. Sometimes in parties they talk in their own language, but with me they kept to English. . . . It all felt very together, and I felt really good afterwards. It's nice to finish off like that. It makes you feel positive about [teaching] next year.

Pamela explained that she was particularly pleased to have had the opportunity to talk to Darko, a student whom she considered had been in a traumatised state in the early weeks of the course, saying, "I felt I could ask him these things, that he was open to talking. I felt this about all of them, that I could talk on a personal level," adding, "You don't ask questions like that unless there's a trust there." These comments suggest that Pamela believed that over the preceding ten weeks a bond had developed between herself and the students within the class.
Apart from operating as indicators of cohesion in the eyes of the teachers, the social events which marked the formal endings of the various classes in the study also revealed the levels of emotional attachment which individual students appeared to have developed towards their particular teachers and classes. As Christine remarked, "It [the end-of-term celebration] is a good reflection of how the class feels about the class." A student in Gillian's class, Suncica, reflected this view, saying to me during the course of the end-of-term function, "Because the class has been good this party is a celebration."

In the final lesson of Christine's thirteen-week exam-preparation class (during which time the thirteen students had spent a total of 325 hours in one another's company), the students behaved in a range of spontaneous ways. When I entered the room just before the morning break a mass photo-session was in progress, the students posing with their arms round another and then laughingly regrouping for further photos. For one of the photos the seven male students in the class got together, the three Swiss students perching on the shoulders of the four Koreans and making comic faces. Towards the end of the morning, someone suggested that the class transfer to the foyer so that the whole class, including Christine, could pose for a group photo. At the request of the students I then took the same photo thirteen times, each time with a different camera.

During the morning break, one of the Korean students had gone to the shops and purchased a large white teddy bear and a card which everyone signed. The Swiss girl Heidi, who handed the gift and the card to Christine, said as she did so: "I speak for all the students. Thank you for what you did for us. We love you." Heidi then turned to me and added, "We have been together for three months, like a family. It's sad, [but] now we must move on." In the penultimate week of the course Pierre had circulated a piece of paper on which all the students had written their addresses in their home countries so that everyone could keep in touch.

After the presentation of the teddy bear (and the exchange of a number of joking comments relating to Christine's relationship with it) and the consumption of a cake and two bottles of champagne, the Koreans sang a student song to the class in their own
language, clapping and banging their pencils on the tables as they did so. They then asked for a song from the Swiss students, who obliged by singing a drinking song which involved everyone linking arms, swinging from side to side, and standing up and sitting down in unison. Christine then suggested that everyone sing the English version of Frère Jacques, and it was discovered that the Korean students and also Akiko (from Japan) were familiar with both the tune and the English words. After singing the song, the Korean students suggested that the class sing another round, this time Row, Row, Row Your Boat, a song which is apparently used to teach Korean children all the words which end in the sound "li." In order for everyone to be able to sing the Korean version, Christine first wrote on the board a phonetic version of the Korean words. After establishing that the students wished to end the class with a final song, Christine ran out to the staffroom and returned with a photocopied version of the Whitney Houston song, Saving All My Love For You. The class proceeded to sing this slow love song in a quiet, reflective manner, everyone in the room joining in and singing the words from the sheet.

Reflecting back on the spontaneous nature of the events which had occurred on the final day of class, Christine said:

I had a song in mind I was going to do, that I'd photocopied in the morning, but we ended up doing Whitney Houston. I didn't know that was going to happen. It was really nice that they all did the rounds. We'd only done Betsy's game for a little while [in the time before the coffee break], and I'd thought we could do more Betsy's game, have a chat, you know, maybe a few other games and a song. There are things that you do [on the last day of term], but I was just going to play it by ear, and all that round singing, that was great. That was wonderful, really nice.

It seemed to me that the events of the last morning in Christine's class were generated by the enthusiasm of the students rather than by any careful orchestration on the part of Christine. This suggests that on that particular day the students felt a sense of ownership towards their class and wished to demonstrate that they felt close both to one another and to Christine. There is no way of knowing how long this warm glow of closeness and camaraderie would have lasted, or whether the students stayed in touch with one
another. When the exam results came out three months later Christine commented that the results for this particular class had been disappointing, with few students attaining the grades that she had anticipated.

The morning tea which marked the last day of Gillian's class was another social event at which students behaved in ways which suggested that they felt close, not only to Gillian but also to everyone else (including students with whom they had not even appeared to be particularly friendly). When Gillian gave out the certificates to those who were leaving she was kissed by several students. Both she and I were then presented with pot plants. Despite Gillian having told the students that it was not necessary to bring food, because she herself would bring a cake, several people had brought food for everyone to share. During the course of the morning tea the students appeared to make an effort to taste everything, asking who had prepared what and then complimenting the cook. Several students asked Zeinhab for her recipe for chocolate cake and copied it down, while I overheard Ivan (who was a chef by trade) promising to send Jia a recipe for lasagne. The women also seemed particularly interested in one another, several people crowding around and admiring Wan's jewellery. Wan then examined Michiko's ring and tried it on. When it was time for the students to go home, everyone paid special attention to the students who were leaving. People waved and called out "Goodbye!" and "Good luck!" to Ivan, while several of the women kissed Michiko and embraced her warmly, having exchanged phone numbers and promised that they would keep in touch.

There was some evidence in the study to suggest that students occasionally used the wind-up celebrations of their classes as opportunities to seek the acceptance or forgiveness of their teachers, or to demonstrate generosity of spirit towards class members to whom they might not have appeared particularly close. After the class photos had been taken in Christine's class, for example, the Japanese student Akiko embraced Christine and burst into tears, an action which Christine interpreted in the following way:
I think there was a little bit of emotional conflict. She was definitely displeased with me the other day, and I think there was a bit of conflict there, feeling that she shouldn't feel that way because other people were being positive towards me. She did it again in the evening. She didn't really cry, but we went off to the coffee shop and she wanted to sit next to me. She didn't actually say anything, but she wanted to sit next to me.

As mentioned in Chapter 7, Mirko (who was unable to attend the class lunch on the final day of term) presented Amy with some Easter eggs hand painted by himself during the final lesson and, according to Amy, apologised in front of the class for being a difficult student. As mentioned in Chapter 4, when Ivan (a migrant from Serbia) won Gillian's "door prize" on the final day of term, he handed it to Suncica (a refugee from Bosnia) in what appeared to be a symbolic gesture, telling the class that his action was proof that people from the former Yugoslavia liked one another.

In summary, the spontaneous behaviours that I observed during the end-of-term class functions suggest that many students felt that they had been members of classroom communities for a specific period of time and recognised that a group experience was coming to an end. It may be, of course, that certain students did not have particularly strong feelings about their classes and were simply carried along by the euphoria of the occasion. It is also possible that, although the sentiments displayed at the end-of-term functions tended to be of a positive and relationship-affirming kind, certain students did not view themselves as integral members of their class groups. Such students probably included Yasmin, who had wanted to study English full-time rather than part-time (and who looked grim and unsmiling at Gillian's morning tea), and Mimi, who attended Christine's class on the final morning and posed in the group photos, despite only having attended the class sporadically and therefore not having built a relationship with the other students in the class. It may be that students such as these, and perhaps a number of others, experienced feelings of relief rather than sadness or loss when their classes were disbanded. It seems reasonable to assume that those students who did not attend their end-of-term functions without a reasonable excuse may also have felt this way.
There was evidence in the study to suggest that there was a relationship between the teachers' perceptions of the low levels of cohesion which they considered that certain classes had achieved and the apparent lack of enthusiasm, friendliness and gratitude at the end-of-term functions. Talking about the main teacher of her afternoon class, Christine said:

She's not particularly enamoured of that class. They didn't even give her a card, or even a thank you. I mean you don't line up expecting presents, I mean flowers die, and what can I do with a teddy bear? But the thought's nice. But if you'd had a big hearty thank you [that would have been sufficient] . . . . And she put a lot of work into worksheets, I know because I saw them. . . . On the last morning she was doing gamey things, not idiotic things, and Claudia was just studying in the middle of the game, which everybody else was enjoying, and Belinda said, "Come on! Don't sit there, it's the last day!" And she [Claudia] just got up and walked out.

Although they gave him a card which contained a message of appreciation written on their behalf by Natasa (the student in the class with the most accurate written English), the students in Tom's class did not show any evidence of emotional attachment to the class itself. Tom did not receive a gift from the class as a whole, receiving instead a bottle of whisky from the Bosnian students and a batik shirt from Henny. Only eight students (half the students officially enrolled in the class in the final week) attended the class lunch on the final day of term.

Another example of an end-of-term function which did not appear to develop a festive atmosphere was the end-of-course party that Sally organised in her own house. At this function the various nationality groups arrived separately and for the most part remained within their cultural groups for the duration of the party. The Japanese students, for example, arrived approximately one and a half hours after everyone else and went straight to the kitchen to prepare and cook the raw ingredients that they had brought. The married Koreans, meanwhile, stayed in the living room with their wives, while the young Taiwanese girls and the Thai students remained outside by the swimming pool. After the event Sally commented that the party had required a considerable effort on her part (especially with the cleaning up) remarking that, in
retrospect, she regretted having organised a party in her house for this particular class
group (having evidently organised parties in her house for previous classes which had
gone with much more of a swing).

In summary, the teachers in the study who believed that their classes had
operated in a socially cohesive manner tended to express pleasure and satisfaction at the
high level of spontaneous student interaction that they had noticed occurring during
their end-of-term functions. Conversely, those teachers who considered that their
classes had not developed into cohesive groups appeared to feel exhausted and drained
at the end of their courses, and tended to speak about their end-of-term class functions
with little enthusiasm.

Summary

In this chapter I have described how the teachers and the students in their classes
evolved a range of shared understandings as their courses progressed. Some of these
shared understandings appeared to become institutionalised to the point where they
could be described as class traditions. It appeared that once a particular classroom
practice had been elevated to the status of a "tradition" students could predict its
occurrence and would adjust their behaviour in anticipation. These student-initiated
behaviours appeared to give the teachers the impression that their classes were
operating as communities rather than as groups of individuals and were therefore
socially cohesive. In the final part of this chapter I have described the social events that
marked the end of the courses, suggesting that the atmospheres which prevailed during
these events affirmed the levels of cohesion that the teachers considered their classes
had attained.

The chapter which follows is the final chapter in Part Two of the study, the
central part of the thesis in which the data are presented. In this chapter I will take each
teacher in turn and will describe the level of cohesion that they considered their class
attained (both at the time that it disbanded and with hindsight). I will also present the reasons that each teacher gave for the unique developmental pattern of their class.
CHAPTER 11

THE TEACHERS' GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF THEIR CLASSES

Overview

This chapter presents the impressions of each teacher in turn regarding the developmental pattern of their particular class. It outlines the reasons which the teachers gave for the levels of cohesion they considered their classes achieved, showing that they routinely made comparisons with other classes that they had taught. The chapter also reveals that the teachers did not have immutably fixed in their minds the perceived levels of cohesion of their classes, tending to adjust the levels of cohesion that they considered their classes had attained in the light of their experience with other classes. The concluding section of the chapter summarises the main factors which the teachers considered were instrumental in the development of social cohesion within their classes.

How cohesive did the teachers consider their classes to be?

At the end of their course I invited each teacher to describe the level of cohesion that they believed their class had attained. To assist them in making their judgements I provided them each with a blank "Cohesion Development Graph" on which to plot in an impressionistic manner their perception of the development of cohesion as their course had progressed, the "y" axis representing the level of cohesion from zero (no cohesion) to seven (highly cohesive), and the "x" axis representing the number of weeks in the course. It may be recalled that I explained in Chapter 3 why I resolved to let the teachers complete the graphs in whichever way they wanted (my initial plan of measuring weekly levels of cohesion within the classes by means of semantic differentials having proved unworkable). I therefore did not provide the teachers with descriptors for the numbers on the "y" axis, emphasising when I handed out the blank
graphs that my prime interest lay in the reasons that the teachers gave for the perceived levels of cohesion that their classes attained, rather than in the levels themselves.

Although they did not know in advance that I would be asking them to complete a graph, seven of the eight teachers appeared to have a clear idea in their minds of the overall developmental profile of their classes in terms of the strength of the group feeling which they considered was present in the class from week to week. These teachers were able to make impressionistic judgements, even though they could not always recall the precise weeks when specific events had occurred. In short, at the end of their course seven of the eight teachers in the study could recall the overall developmental pattern of their class in terms of their personal definitions of the construct of cohesion. The eighth teacher was uneasy about allocating a weekly level of cohesion to her class, partly because her impressions had evidently fluctuated both within and between lessons, and partly because she considered that there were different ways in which classes could be deemed cohesive (see Sally's impression of her class later in this chapter). She was happy, however, to give a global impression of the level of cohesion that her class attained.

As I will describe in the following sections, certain teachers believed that their classes had achieved high levels of social cohesion, while others felt that their classes had attained lower levels. The ways in which the teachers described the overall levels of cohesion of their classes indicated that they were pleased with classes which had seemed cohesive and disappointed with classes which had not seemed so cohesive. Christine and Joe, for example, were pleased with the levels of cohesion that they considered their classes had achieved, while Gillian, Maggie and Pamela expressed satisfaction with their classes at the end of their courses but recalled classes which had seemed to them more cohesive. At the other end of the scale Amy, Tom and Sally expressed disappointment with the levels of cohesion of their respective classes and, in later interviews, were keen to share with me their impressions of subsequent classes which they considered had been more cohesive.
As outlined above, the cohesion development graphs are the visual representation of the teachers' perceptions of the levels of cohesion achieved by their classes, as indicated in interviews conducted in the final week of each course. They are not therefore indicators of any immutable reality or "truth" regarding the levels of cohesion of the classes concerned. The fact that the graphs could be completed differently according to individual definitions of the word "high" was pointed out by Maggie, who asked the following question before completing her graph: "Is 'high' the highest I've ever experienced, or is 'high' what one would aim for as something one can never achieve?" As I will illustrate later, certain teachers expressed a desire to adjust the levels of cohesion that they perceived their classes had attained, either during the course of their interviews or in the light of their experience with subsequent classes.

Christine's impression of her class

Christine taught an upper-intermediate, exam-preparation class containing 13 students who were balanced in terms of gender and country of origin (the majority of the students being from either Switzerland or Korea). Because the students in the class were preparing intensively for a specific exam, the majority were to a degree united by a sense of common purpose before the class had even begun. When asked whether she thought that having an exam-preparation class was in any way linked to the development of cohesion Christine said:

I think most teachers would say that there's definitely more cohesion in an exam class, in a half-way decent one, because they've all got a definite goal, and it's a common goal.

When she completed the graph at the end of the final week of her course Christine produced the following pattern:
Christine described her impression of the development of cohesion in her class in the following way:

It was really very high at the end, really high, and it reached a low when I came back from Sydney.\textsuperscript{75} I felt as though I'd lost something, as though they were a bit displeased with me for going away. . . . It didn't fall apart the way other classes have completely fallen apart, but it just sagged a bit, and then seemed to get progressively higher. After the first mock [exam] it just got better. It was really good at the beginning, and it was really good at the end, but about a third of the way through it just sagged.

Christine's decision to give the class a high rating at the beginning of the course appeared to be due in part to the fact that, in contrast to her afternoon class (which contained a number of Swiss-German students who behaved in ways which she believed were deliberately intended to exclude other class members), the morning class had appeared to her to operate in an amenable manner from the outset.\textsuperscript{76} Christine had said in her first interview, for example, "They're working really well as a group. They like each other. . . . They just got in there and started working with each other."

Christine had also pointed out with evident satisfaction that the majority of the students had chosen to work with partners from different cultural backgrounds, with several young Korean men working with Swiss girls and a young Swiss male working with the

\textsuperscript{75} Christine was absent for the third week of the course, having been granted permission to go on a pre-arranged visit to Sydney. According to Christine the teacher who replaced her was "an inexperienced teacher who didn't know any grammar."

\textsuperscript{76} Christine taught for a total of 25 hours a week, teaching one class every morning (for a total of 15 hours) and another class every afternoon (for a total of 10 hours). The class that I observed in the study was the morning one.
Christine made the following observation about her morning class:

They're just a joy. If we do grammar they work together. They're not afraid to ask questions, they don't laugh at each other, there's no one-upmanship in the class, they're interested in each others' culture. It's just been really good, everything that we do.

She did not claim to have done anything special during the first week of term, apart from what she described as her normal "little speaking exercises to get them going."

Christine considered that an element of chance had come into the equation, with her morning class happening to contain students who seemed to her compliant and eager to relate to one another.

Christine was keen to point out in her final interview that, in her opinion, she herself had been partly to blame for the fact that her class had seemed to lose energy and momentum mid-way through the course. When pointing to specific fluctuations on the graph Christine said:

I sort of lost it there for a bit, especially because I was so busy doing so many other things in my life. It was just frantic. There were several weeks there where it was just hysterical, and I lost it a bit there, and I think it dropped there, and then after the first mock it went up again. So it started really high, and then it dropped, probably about a third of the way through - a third to a half of the way through.

She also expressed the view that the feelings of herself as teacher and the students as learners were interrelated in a complex manner, and that it was not possible to attribute causality in a uni-directional way. As she explained (when recalling a particular Friday when she had phoned in sick because she had felt under too much pressure to come to work):

I don't know whether it was them sagging or me sagging. I think maybe [on that occasion] it was me sagging. It's hard to separate how you feel from how the class feels. Usually they correlate, but you can't tell. I'm fairly sure that when I came back from Sydney the class was sagging, it wasn't just me sagging. And I was feeling bad because I wasn't putting enough time in.

It could be argued that the high end-of-course cohesion rating that Christine gave her class in her final interview was due, in part, to the fact that the class party had
evidently been a success (see Chapter 10), and that at the time (with a Christmas break looming and the likelihood of having a less onerous teaching load in the subsequent term), she felt well disposed towards this particular class. When interviewed six months later, however, Christine's impression of the class was the same. Asked to compare it with all other classes (past and present) in terms of its cohesiveness Christine said, "It would have to be pretty near a seven," adding, "It was a good class, one of the best."

**Joe's impression of his class**

Joe's class was, like Christine's, a class of fee-paying students who were in Australia on short courses. Unlike Christine's exam preparation class, however, Joe's was an intermediate-level class of 18 students with a focus on the development of general English skills. The class was more or less balanced in terms of gender (10 male and 8 female students), but not in terms of nationality: 50% of the students were from Korea, while the remainder came from other Asian countries. The majority of the students had studied together in a previous class and had been promoted collectively to a higher level.

When presented with a blank graph Joe drew the pattern outlined below:

![Graph](image)

**Figure 11.2** Joe’s impression of his class

As he began to draw the graph Joe mused, "It probably started really high because they knew each other," and proceeded to draw a steadily rising line which went off the scale
by the final week. Joe gave various explanations which, in his mind, accounted for the high level of cohesion which he considered had been attained by the class. The first of these related to the willingness of the students to move around the room and to engage in collaborative work with other class members. As Joe explained:

As classes go this class really worked well together, they were really comfortable with each other and they'd change seats at the drop of a hat. Like as a teacher, I had no problem suggesting any single student pair off with any other one. There was no saying, "Oh, I don't know whether that would be so suitable," because of ability, or [because] they'd be intimidated, or some students needing to be more stretched than others, or whatever. [There was] none of that in this particular class. There were no students you felt that, "Oh, if I put student A with student B, they're not going to produce anything together." That never really occurred in that class ... whereas even in this new class I have now, it's quite clear there are some students that want to be challenged more than others do.

It seems then that Joe, like Christine, considered himself fortunate to have been allocated a class which he felt contained a high proportion of students with a positive frame of mind and a willingness to work collaboratively.

When asked to compare the class with all other classes which he had taught Joe said, "It was one of the best classes I've ever had." He then went on to say that the only classes he had taught which had seemed to him more cohesive were classes which had had a specific learning focus, contained fewer students and had taken place over a longer period. As he explained:

The only classes that would be comparable to it would have been some of the business classes I've had. All of those were [cohesive], but they were different circumstances. The business classes were like that because they were all together for the same objective, and they were together for 22 out of 25 hours in a week, and the group was smaller than that group. So when you have a dozen people for twelve weeks instead of eight, you tend to find that they are totally bonded, and they would be the only ones. But for a large group ... they worked really well together. They were one of the tightest groups I've had.

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77 A student I interviewed some nine months after the class had ended told me that the class had been relieved to have been allocated Joe as a teacher, his reputation for being a friendly and lively teacher having preceded him. Apparently they had not related well to their previous teacher.
When asked whether he believed that any additional factors had contributed to the strength of the group feeling within his present class, Joe said that the class had been surprisingly homogeneous in terms of linguistic abilities, with all the class members developing their skills in English at approximately the same rate. As he explained:

Most students were in the appropriate level. There weren't any that were standing out as being far above the others, and even the weakest member of that class could still function in all the exercises. . . . So I think that's important. They were in the appropriate level, and in a large group that often doesn't occur. You may get the odd one out, one that's a straggler who's repeating from a previous level, who's not quite there but is in there for various reasons.

He proceeded to express the view that it was equally detrimental to the maintenance of a feeling of cohesion if a class contained certain "super-achievers [who], by Week Four, are already moving beyond the rest of the class." Joe considered that, in his present class, the students had become increasingly homogeneous, rather than increasingly differentiated in their rates of learning, saying:

Some were a little ahead of the class at the beginning and were caught up, like Hyong Gun, Hun Chae, who at the beginning were very strong in the grammar, and they stood out from the rest of the pack, but by the end of the course they didn't. That's not so much that they weren't working, it's just that probably they were a little bit ahead, like maybe back in Korea or something they'd covered the grammar, but they were weaker in speaking, and then by the end the rest of the class sort of caught up to them. But there was no-one in that class who really galloped ahead.

The notion of certain students progressing at a faster rate than others led Joe to recall one particular student, saying:

I remember one class where a guy joined the local baseball team and, as I think I've said before about football teams, those kind of people, after a month, they are pulling ahead in communication ability, because straight after school they're off playing footie or something with a bunch of Australians, and their English is improving more rapidly than someone who goes back to a shared house with a bunch of Koreans. But in this class it just didn't happen.

Some teachers, however, did not believe that classes composed of students with similar levels of English and similar rates of progress were more likely to become cohesive than classes which contained a more heterogeneous mix of students. Pamela was
generally satisfied with the level that she considered that her class had achieved (see below), considering that the presence in the class of one particular student whose level of English and speed of progress was markedly different from that of the remainder of the class had been an asset rather than a problem (see Chapter 7 for Pamela's description of Jovana's role in her class).

In Joe's mind there appeared to be a link between class cohesion and pedagogy (a view which he expressed in other interviews and which I explored in Chapter 5). For Joe, the stronger the feeling of social unity within the class, the easier it was to teach, because students would more readily engage in collaborative learning with a range of partners. As he explained:

If you're looking at it in from the point of view of cohesion, really, from a teaching point of view you felt that any of them could go together quite well. The more the class went on, as the weeks went by, the more it was like that. So from the teacher's standpoint, then, I would say, go from five and then off the scale.

**Gillian's impression of her class**

Gillian taught a class which was similar to Joe's in certain respects. It was of approximately the same size (19 as opposed to 18 students), was roughly similar in level (post-intermediate as opposed to intermediate), had a general English focus, and started off with a core of students who already knew one other (having studied with Gillian in the previous course). However, Joe's and Gillian's classes could not have been more different. Whereas Joe's class contained students who were about to return to their home countries to start careers in which they intended to use their improved English language skills, Gillian's class (which only met twice a week) was designed for migrant women with family commitments, all of whom were in the process of building new lives in Australia.

When asked to complete the graph Gillian produced the following outline:
When invited to describe why she had drawn the line in the way that she had, Gillian explained that the level of cohesion of the class had felt low at the beginning of the course because she considered that four of the six new class members had not readily integrated into the established class group. As she explained, "I feel that I have this group that is cohesive and then a new lot come in and it depends how people gel with them." Gillian lamented the fact that the new students had not even banded together amongst themselves, saying, "They were islands, they weren't even a group." She mentioned in particular the young Japanese woman Michiko, saying, "I felt that she felt that she didn't fit. And she wasn't given the message of, 'Come to the clan' by those two [other new students]."

Gillian explained that the overall level of cohesion in the class had appeared to rise mid-way through the course because, in her view, by that time the students had had the opportunity "to sit with other people and get to know them to a degree." For the final few weeks of the course, Gillian considered that the class had remained at a constant level six, making a point of saying that "the hiccups didn't matter" (referring to the fact that a number of disruptive events had occurred, such as lack of heating, blown fuses, problems with the overhead projector, key students being granted interviews during class time, and the unannounced appearance of the teacher-in-charge to check on student progress). In her final interview, Gillian explained that she had been "very happy" with the social atmosphere during the morning tea on the last day of term (see
Chapter 10), assessing the level of cohesion within the class on that particular day as a seven and saying, "This [class] finished as well as any class I've had."

Overall, however, Gillian did not think that the class was one of her best, saying, "I've had classes that have been tops," recalling a previous class which she felt had attained a level 7 by the fifth week of the course. When asked to explain why she had rated that particular class so highly Gillian said, "[There were] a lot of motivated students in it who had a work focus. . . . Eighty per cent had a common goal." When asked whether she considered that having a common goal was a necessary prerequisite for the development of a spirit of unity in language classes, Gillian said that if the students in a class did not have a common goal, "It does interfere a bit." Her experience with her subsequent class provided further support for this belief. Two weeks into the subsequent course she said, "I've wondered where I was going this term, with four men and four pregnant women. The interests of the group are so different."

The other factor which, in Gillian's opinion, sometimes made it difficult for a feeling of cohesion to develop in her classes related to the attitude of individual students. Gillian appeared to have a particular problem in this regard because, in her view, the prevailing perception amongst both staff and students within the Adult Migrant English Program was that part-time courses were less rigorous and therefore somehow of less intrinsic value than full-time courses. Gillian considered that, unless it had been explained to them in advance that part-time study mode was more suited to their personal needs and circumstances than full-time mode, some students were likely to have a poor attitude in class and would "take a long time to settle down." She believed that the ongoing problem that she had encountered with Yasmin (the young mother with aspirations to become a doctor) related to the fact that the course had not matched Yasmin's expectations. In Gillian's view, "She needed somebody to point it out, then she wouldn't have come with these ideas, she would have known what she was coming to." In this connection Gillian thought that it was particularly important to sell the course to the students in the very first lesson, saying:
If I don't grab them with something on Day One, I never grab them. They go away disgruntled. . . . I mean grab them in interest. [They must think], "This class, oh yes! There's something in this class for me!" . . . so if they know the focus of the class is "this," they're more patient.

From what she said in the interview at the end of her subsequent course I understood that an individual student's classroom behaviour could change dramatically from class to class independently of the level of cohesion apparently attained by the class as a whole. Although she believed that her subsequent class was significantly less cohesive than the class which I observed (because of the presence of the four students who, according to Gillian "unbalanced" the class), Gillian made special mention of an Indian student called Rajes. Rajes had appeared so unhappy in the previous class (bursting into tears during one lesson for example), that Gillian had arranged for her to study independently in the library rather than attend class. At the end of the subsequent course Gillian reported a marked changed in Rajes's behaviour, saying, "Rajes's settled down, she's come back, she's marvellous. . . . She's a happy little vegemite. . . . She's a different person, she's not nearly as demanding." Gillian considered that the change in Rajes's behaviour was due to the fact that she had sorted out various family problems and now had a part-time job. This comment suggests that events outside the classroom could have a greater influence on students' classroom behaviour than events which occur inside the classroom.

In summary, although Gillian did not consider that the class which I observed was the most cohesive class that she had ever taught, in retrospect she harboured pleasant memories of it, believing it to have been "more vibrant" than her subsequent class. This statement suggests that Gillian had noticed a distinct difference in the atmospheres of the two classes, even though 75% of the students from the first class were present in the second.

**Maggie's impression of her class**

Maggie's class was very different from Gillian's. Whereas the student population of Gillian's class remained stable, with some students continuing in her class for up to
five consecutive terms and no-one joining the class mid-term, Maggie received new students into her class and farewelled old ones on a weekly basis (an experience which Christine, who had taught similar kinds of classes herself, likened to "teaching in a railway station"). Whereas Gillian's class stabilised at 19 students, Maggie's class was of approximately half the size, with daily student numbers seldom exceeding ten. The migrant women in Gillian's class hailed from thirteen different countries, while the majority of the students in Maggie's class were from Korea or Japan, with the addition of a few Europeans. Several of Maggie's students were on study vacation in Australia for periods as short as four weeks.

When invited to complete the graph Maggie did so in the following way:

![Graph showing cohesion levels over time](image)

Figure 11.4 Maggie’s impression of her class

When asked to explain why she had drawn such a flat profile Maggie said, "I haven't felt that the cohesion varied very much." She justified her selection of a consistent level six in the following way:

> There were very brief dips at points when people left, but even when half the class left at the end of the eighth week it didn't dip significantly. . . . I'm not sure where the little dips came. . . . I can't remember when Kenji and Moo Tae left, I'm not sure whether it was Week Four or Week Five, [but] whenever that was there was a little dip, but other than that I'd have said it was [constant].

Asked why she had not chosen to give the class the maximum cohesion rating of seven Maggie said:
I think that, partly because there has been so much coming and going, it would be a little bit unrealistic to put it top of the list, and I have on occasions had much bigger groups where there was something immeasurably different.

Maggie then recalled a particular class which had stood out in her mind as having attained a particularly strong feeling of social unity, saying:

It was a very low level group, and there were some European blokes in there who were just gems, because they were very nice to the Asian girls, even the funny little fat ones, and all their hormones got jumping, they were just lovely, everybody got on well, they were joking, they would laugh. Their level was very low, so their English wasn't grand, but we did a lot of excursions and outings and I felt that class would have been very hard to beat for that cohesion, given that there were so many factors against it: a huge range of cultural differences, from shy little Japanese girls to very outgoing spunky Swiss-Italian blokes, but that was just absolutely wonderful because they were so generous, those blokes, in their personalities, in teasing and joking and making it really nice.

In Maggie's view, therefore, the dynamic quality which the above class appeared to have acquired was enhanced by a combination of extroversion, cultural diversity and sexuality. It seems unlikely that any course coordinator responsible for placing students in classes, and knowing the cultural backgrounds and language levels of the students, would have predicted that this particular class would have developed into what Maggie considered to have been a highly cohesive group.

Describing her present class Maggie talked about student learning, saying:

It's been a satisfactory class. I can move on and I think they can move on, feeling we've had a good time there and they've learnt, immeasurably some of them, and I've been trying to tell them as they go. . . . I think most of them can see that they have improved, they've got the things they wanted. . . . I think they've seen they're improving, but they've all made new friendships. I think they're going away satisfied and therefore I am. I wouldn't be otherwise.

Maggie's concern to reassure the students that their English had improved while attending her class was echoed in comments made by Joe and Amy. The fact that these teachers apparently felt the need to convince their students that their English had improved suggests that they sensed the students themselves may not have been as convinced as they were that engaging in communicative activities within classrooms with friendly atmospheres was an effective way of improving their English.
When interviewed three months after her course had ended and asked to compare her present class with her previous one in terms of its level of cohesion, Maggie's first comment related to the intrinsic difference between the two classes in terms of the stability of the student population. Reflecting back to the previous class Maggie said:

The huge contrast with the last one you saw was the turning over all the time. They didn't even really have a core that went right through, or there was so small a core, so that is the big difference. There was changing all the time, but I felt that we had a pretty good group feeling most of the time, and good interaction.

The fact that the class had maintained, according to Maggie, a satisfactory level of group feeling, despite the fact that the student population had changed almost entirely over the ten-week period that the course was run (with only four of the original students still enrolled in the final week), suggests that Maggie herself must have played a part in the maintenance of the ongoing feeling of cohesion which she believed existed within the class.

When asked to describe her subsequent class, Maggie was equally approving of the level of cohesion that it had apparently attained, although she was keen to point out that the two classes were so different that they could not easily be compared. Talking about her new class Maggie said:

Now we've got a set class for 12 weeks . . . and that's the big difference, it's a class who knows they're together for 12 weeks. They're a lovely lot, and they were right from the start, and we've got wonderful things [going], and they're doing things together, and they're just treasures. It's a lovely class, and there's good feeling. . . . There is some stress, and of course the syllabus is more restricted because we're teaching for an exam, but it's still a lively class with lots of fun, lots of interaction, lots of little jokes.

Maggie considered that exam-preparation classes were, generally speaking, easier to teach in the sense that the range of student expectations was narrower, with everyone knowing that the focus would be on grammar. Maggie explained, however, that it was essential to address the social-psychological needs of such classes, describing the holiday weekend that she had organised (see Chapter 10) in the following way:
It was a bonding thing, because they're going to be very tired at the end of twelve weeks with the repetition, so [they need] a really good break, where we're doing things together and having fun.

It could be hypothesised that a contributory factor to the seeming loss of momentum that Christine had felt in her exam-preparation class mid-way through the 14-week course was the fact that the class did not have a similar opportunity to reinforce its own social identity (although Christine did organise an evening at a restaurant mid-way through the course).

An additional factor governing the cohesion ratings which the teachers allocated their classes may have been related to the teachers' levels of enthusiasm about teaching. Maggie, who was relatively new to English language teaching, gave the impression of being highly involved in her job and committed to her students. She was also one of the two teachers in the study who claimed that they had never had an unsatisfactory class (see Chapter 5). The fact that Maggie was prepared to make this claim suggests the prevalence in her case of one or more the following conditions: (i) she had a positive attitude towards every class that she taught, and therefore tended to give each class a high cohesion rating; (ii) she was so skilled at encouraging the development of an atmosphere of cohesion in her classes that she always succeeded in doing so; or (iii) she was not prepared to admit that she had ever had a non-cohesive class, believing that this might reflect badly on her ability as a teacher. Christine, on the other hand, having been an English language teacher for considerably longer, seemed quite prepared to talk to me about her failures as well as her successes. Indeed, at times Christine appeared to enjoy sharing vivid memories of classes where social relations between students had evidently broken down in a dramatic and irrevocable manner.

Pamela’s impression of her class

The only features that both Pamela's and Maggie's classes had in common were that the objective of the students in both classes was to learn English, and that certain of the students in both classes had only been in Australia for a matter of weeks. The
classes differed in every other respect. The most striking difference was that Maggie's was an advanced-level class containing students who had studied English for a number of years, while Pamela's was composed of newly-arrived refugees with no prior knowledge of English.

When invited to complete her graph Pamela produced the following group development profile:

![Graph Image]

Figure 11.5  Pamela’s impression of her class

Pamela started her graph near zero, explaining that on the first day of class there was little evidence of anyone relating to anyone else. She told me that when she walked into the room on the first day all the students were sitting quietly and expectantly in the three rows of paired desks, waiting to be taught their first words of English. Pamela proceeded to explain that she gave the class a relatively low cohesion rating for the first few weeks on the grounds that the presence of a number of traumatised students (four of whom subsequently withdrew from the course) had a dampening effect on the overall class atmosphere. As she explained:

You had those few who had just arrived, all the ones [who sat] on the left of the room. They really hadn't had much time at all [in Australia], they'd just arrived in the holidays and they'd been stuck in a class. . . . Not only [had they] arrived recently but also I think they'd gone through a lot of trauma before they came here. I think some of them haven't had quite as much [trauma], like we have a lot of students who've been living in Germany for a year or two and things, but I think a lot of these, like Branko had been injured in the concentration camp and Stanka and Darko lost the head of the family and Halida had her boyfriend back in Yugoslavia or whatever, and poor old Dejan, who was having headaches.
And I asked Ivancica [his wife], "How is he?" And she said, "No good, still no good." So you had all those [traumatised people], and that was the reason it took a while to gel.

Pamela accepted, as an integral part of her job, the management of students whose classroom behaviour suggested that they were still suffering the after-effects of recent tragic events in their lives. As she said:

That's life, isn't it? And that's certainly life if you're teaching refugees. We've always got the majority of people who are refugees. These are people who don't choose to come here, do they? These are people who [under normal circumstances] would never have dreamt of coming to Australia.

How Pamela felt about her class as the course progressed appeared to relate to some degree to the behaviour of one particular student. In her interview in the final week she described her impressions of the class in the following way:

I felt particularly happy about the last few days. It's felt really quite nice. . . It's just gone extraordinarily smoothly the last few days. . . . It felt like they were really there, they were really concentrating, they were with me, they were motivated. . . . Maybe it's partly to do with the fact that he [Darko] has been really quite settled these last few days, so the rest of the class has been settled . . . because there have been times when Darko gets into these moods, sometimes when he gets very chatty, but I noticed on Monday he was chatting a bit and I said, "Okay, Darko, that's enough," and he stopped.

When asked to reflect upon the change in Darko's behaviour, Pamela made a series of expansive hand movements as she struggled to find the words to express her thoughts, saying, "I don't know what it is, but it's just that there's certainly more communication there, or a response, maybe. Maybe it's just easier, there's an understanding or something." She went as far as to consider that Darko was "turning into an almost positive force" in the classroom. She explained how, when he had overheard her sympathising with Milan (who had said he did not like attending school) by reminding him that the extended Christmas holiday break was about to begin, Darko had butted in and had said, "Ah no, that's no good! Six weeks of no school, no good! I like coming here. I've got no job, I go home, I just make coffee for my mother."
Thinking aloud as she completed the final part of the graph in the tenth week of the course (and then going back to readjust the earlier part of the graph), Pamela made the following comments:

It's been good. That's probably the main thing that I've thought over these last few days. I've felt really quite good in the class. In fact I think I might even put them another rung up. There were a few bumps, weren't there? But last week... I suppose if it was a five last week, then it's gone up from there, I'll put it up at least to a six, anyway. It sort of went up fairly steadily I think, up to Week Five, something like that. . . . Although it went up steadily, there was still that problem with the two halves [the traumatised students sitting down one side of the classroom].

This statement highlights the fact that the cohesion level allocated to the class by Pamela was related to her own feelings. In other words, she was prepared to adjust the level in an upwards direction because the behaviour of the students in the final week of the course had evidently made her feel good.

When invited to compare her present class with other low-level classes that she had taught, Pamela was quick to recall a previous class which evidently stood out in her mind as having operated in a highly satisfactory manner. Interestingly, she considered that this particular class had achieved a high level of cohesion in the very first lesson, saying:

That was a tremendous class. I always felt, almost from the beginning I felt very much at ease. In fact I'd say almost from the first lesson. I can remember I was quite nervous about going in there because I hadn't taught zeros for a long time.78 [I thought to myself], "Oh, are they going to understand anything?" And from about that very first day I think it just went, whew! [whistles in a manner indicating surprised appreciation].

Pamela then proceeded to give a number of reasons why she considered that this class had been so successful, despite the apparent wide ability range of the students:

Right from the start the Chinese were great value, and there was the Vietnamese girl and it just worked from the beginning.79 It was a funny class I suppose in the sense that you had these real slow ones... who

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78 Students who enter the Adult Migrant English Program with no prior knowledge of English are put in a "zero level" class and are therefore known as "zeros."

79 See Chapter 7 for Pamela's description of the role that this particular student evidently played in the class.
were being taken out three times a week and who really didn't have much idea of what was going on, but everybody helped them, they copied off everybody [laughs], and they seemed happy enough, or they didn't influence the dynamics, they didn't have a negative effect. I wouldn't say they were necessarily a hundred per cent happy, but they weren't having a negative effect on the class in general.

The way in which Pamela described this class suggests that a culture had developed in which the stronger students were happy to spend time helping the weaker ones. Her view that social cohesion could develop in a class containing mixed-ability students contradicts Joe's view that homogeneity in terms of student levels of English is an important contributory factor to the development of class cohesion.

Pamela considered that one of the reasons why her previous low-level class had operated in a more cohesive manner than her present class (which contained 18 students from the former Yugoslavia, one student from Poland and one student from the PRC) was because there was a wider mix of nationalities, and jokes were made in English. As she explained:

In the other class there was a lot of fun, but the fun was good because a lot of it was in English, because there were more mixed nationalities. A lot of the good people who would draw the class together were not necessarily Bosnians or whatever, so you had lovely interaction, but in English. It was terrific, yes. Whereas unfortunately with this class, and I mean this is where it's hard to compare it in a sense, because you didn't have that mix. So if they wanted to have fun, obviously they had fun in their language, because all the others spoke the same. . . . Over the last few weeks there were times when they got really carried away with their jokes, and you don't have a clue what they're talking about . . . whereas with the other class the jokes included everybody, so the jokes were drawing everybody together.

Pamela explained that if she were to continue teaching this particular class she would develop the habit of asking the students to translate their jokes into English, saying:

Possibly if I carried on with this class I think this is what would happen more and more, like I'd just ask them more and more, "What's the joke?" It's the first time I've taught so many of the one language, so I'm getting used to it.

The class picnic which took place on the last day of term evidently went well (see Chapter 10), causing Pamela to say, "From what happened on the last day I could
put it up to a seven." Talking generally about the class a few days after the course had ended Pamela made the following comment:

They were a nice group of people who will make good Australian citizens. . . . The class had its ups and downs, but it's been worth it, and I came away feeling really positive. . . . I was pleased with the class picnic, I felt relaxed and I felt they were all together. It's nice to finish off like that and it makes you feel positive about the next year.

When invited to reflect back on the class four months later, however, Pamela's overriding memory of the class was that it had not been an easy one to teach. As she explained:

I found them hard work, and I still do, looking back on that class. It was hard because there was so much of their language being spoken all the time. . . . You feel a little bit under attack with the Yugoslavs. . . . It really challenged every skill that you'd got to keep it going and keep them learning.

It is likely that the first opinion of the class that Pamela offered was a temporary one, expressed in the afterglow of a successful class party, and that the second opinion was probably a more enduring representation of her opinion of the class. Pamela also stated in her retrospective interview that she had not realised at the time how much she herself had been affected by distress being felt by students in the class when making comments such as, "My country is finished." As she explained, "That trauma is projected out in some way. I really did feel quite stressed out. I was ready for a holiday."

**Amy's impression of her class**

Although fifty per cent of the students in Amy's class were also refugees from the former Yugoslavia, their English language level was higher than that of the students in Pamela's class because they had already been in Australia for an average of eighteen months. This particular student group came from a range of professional backgrounds and aspired to raise their English to a level where they could upgrade their qualifications and practise their chosen professions in Australia.
When asked to complete the graph in the final week of the term Amy placed a dot for each week in turn and then joined them up to produce the following class-development profile:

![Graph showing class-development profile](image)

**Figure 11.6 Amy’s impression of her class**

Because Amy had expressed her views of the level of cohesion attained by her class on a weekly basis in some detail, I did not ask her to repeat them during her final interview. Outlined below are a selection of her weekly impressions which, as can be seen, match quite closely the developmental profile of the class which she drew at the end of the course:

Week One: "A bit of a mix." Some days were "difficult" or "a bit tense," while others were "super-relaxed."

Week Two: "I think it's all happening now. It's starting to move in the right direction." "I feel a lot more comfortable than I did in Week One, because I really feel they're behind me." "They're still gelling slowly."

Week Three: "The atmosphere was unstable." Monday had felt flat, Tuesday had been very good, on Wednesday and Thursday many students had been absent. Thursday had started off well, but had then petered out in the afternoon in terms of the energy of both Amy and the students.

Week Four: "I can really move with them." Amy was pleased with the students' commitment to learning, and pleased with how the week had gone.

Week Five: A "settled feeling."
Week Six: On Tuesday morning the mood of the class had been "low," but thereafter the atmosphere had improved and had remained high. However, "Three students left the fold, got lost, and then had to be dragged back."

Week Seven: Amy said that she noticed inter-cultural tensions between certain students.

Week Eight: Amy referred one particular student to a counsellor, having tried without success to prevail upon her to modify her classroom behaviour.

Week Nine: The week went well, but was dominated by the actions of two particular students, who, according to Amy, put out negative "vibes."

Week Ten: The week proceeded on a high note, with the student presentations and the class lunch. Amy was pleased that a previously quiet class member was behaving in a more outgoing manner.

Despite the fact that she only gave the class a cohesion rating of approximately 4.5 for the tenth week of the course, when interviewed six weeks later Amy described with evident pleasure the high level of cohesion that had been demonstrated to her by the students at the class lunch in the Chinese restaurant on the final day of term (see the quotation in the final section of Chapter 10). One of the statements that she made ("they were just totally thrilled about the course and about being together") suggest that in Amy's mind the high level of group solidarity which she believed was demonstrated at the class lunch was an indicator of the students' satisfaction not only with the social relationships within the class, but also with the course itself. In short, it seemed that in Amy's mind social and pedagogic aspects of language classes went hand in hand.

However, when asked to compare the level of cohesion achieved by this particular class with the levels of cohesion achieved by other classes that she had taught, Amy admitted that in her mind this class did not rate particularly highly, saying, "I've had a lot of classes that have felt very groupy by the end, more groupy than this one." The apparent inconsistency in Amy's views regarding the level of cohesion which she considered that the class demonstrated at the end of the course suggests that she may have been judging it against different criteria at different times, sometimes considering the class holistically and sometimes recalling specific events. Alternatively
Amy's personal feelings may have come into the equation. Perhaps if she was interviewed when feeling tired negative memories of the class would spring to mind, whereas if she was feeling enthusiastic and full of energy positive memories would come to the fore.

Amy explained that the subsequent class that she taught was similar to the class which I had observed in terms of the demographic mix of students (six students from the former Yugoslavia as opposed to eight, but the same 50-50 male/female ratio), although the overall ability level of the students was lower. However, there was no doubt in Amy's mind that the subsequent class was more cohesive. After one month of teaching the latter class she said:

They're easier personalities on the whole. There's one woman who's a bit of a worrier, a very intense Bosnian lady, and really only worries about her own progress. She's got real tunnel vision. But for the rest they're a sociable, lovely group, and whichever pairs you put them into, it works. . . They are all totally committed to the pair work, they're totally engrossed. Whereas in the other group there wasn't that level of commitment to the group work.

Although other teachers such as Tom and Pamela considered that the presence of worried or disturbed students could have a negative effect on class cohesion, Amy did not believe that the presence in the class of the intense and worried lady had an adverse effect on the dynamics of the class group.

When asked which particular factors contributed towards making the subsequent class seem more cohesive than the previous class, Amy talked about the presence of a number of students whom she believed had played a positive role within the class, saying, "There was a high level of positive energy coming from them [the students], particularly from two male and two female students." Amy explained that one of the male students was Alex, the board-rubbing student from the previous class who had remained in her class for a further term. According to Amy several other students had followed Alex's board-rubbing lead, saying, "In this class there were three or four Alexs all competing for the board, . . . [so] Alex didn't stand out doing what he did." Amy also mentioned the presence of a particular student from Bosnia who was apparently
"always initiating helpfulness," and who "would jump up and vacate his chair as soon as a female student entered the room." It may be, then, that in her subsequent class the apparent generosity of spirit embodied by students such as Alex was more generally pervasive than it had been in the previous class.

As described in Chapter 3, I began writing up the study by considering each class as a separate entity and by describing what I saw to be the key social processes occurring within each one. Amy's was one of the classes that I documented in this way (see Appendix I), in each case inviting the teacher concerned to read the story of their class, check it for accuracy, and provide written feedback if they wished. This was part of Amy's written response:

I was amazed at how exhausting the class was to work with, especially compared with the two I taught subsequently. . . . I was surprised at how intense and draining my experience with the class had been, at how much I'd had to give and how I'd had to be on top of it constantly.

Amy also added that she had had to address what she saw as the problem behaviours and attitudes of individual students, saying, "Unless you're dealing with personality conflicts, negative student perceptions and so on, you can't facilitate them getting on with the process of learning." How Amy struggled to manage those students whose behaviour she found problematic was described in Chapter 7.

**Tom's impression of his class**

Tom's class was similar to Amy's in that it contained migrant professionals, 50% of whom were refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The students in Tom's class, however, had a higher level of English language proficiency than the students in Amy's class. When asked to complete the graph at the end of the term Tom produced the following pattern:
Tom explained that, in his view, the level of cohesion of the class had started at a 4.5 and had slowly risen to a 5.5, before plummeting sharply to a level one in the sixth week of the course. Tom explained that the sudden decrease in the level of cohesion exhibited by the class was due to a combination of factors, including the following: (i) a long weekend which had disrupted the normal teaching programme; (ii) one particular student (Ljiljana), who had spent the Tuesday following the bank holiday complaining about what she perceived to have been the unfair nature of the exam that she had taken in the previous week;\(^80\) and (iii) various unscheduled classroom events, including a poorly-presented anti-smoking talk by a group of trainee nurses, which had caused the Bosnian students in the class (the majority of whom were heavy smokers) to mutter comments to one another in their mother tongue. The increase in mother-tongue talk in the classroom throughout the day, combined with a learning activity which required each student to adopt an ideological position, led to the show-down between two particular students (Nusret from the former Yugoslavia and Tan from the PRC), and to the class splitting into two opposing camps (one supporting Nusret and the other supporting Tan).

\(^80\) The exam was the Occupational English Test (see the footnote in Chapter 4). Unless she passed all sections of this exam Ljiljana would be unable to practise as a health professional in Australia.
On the strength of this single incident Tom awarded the class a temporary cohesion rating of one. However, the lack of cohesion within the class only lasted for a period of approximately half an hour at the end of the Wednesday afternoon lesson. Tom reported that by the following day cordial relations between the students had been restored. Indeed, Tom considered that the confrontational incident had not only cleared the air, but had also led to the development of a lighter and more friendly classroom atmosphere (hence the higher cohesion rating for the week following the incident). As he said at the end of that week, "Perhaps in some ways this was the best week we've had, because the facade has been torn away." Tom explained, however, that he felt compelled to reduce the cohesion rating for the final weeks of the course because the class apparently failed to sustain its newly-found cheerful atmosphere.

Tom was the teacher who seemed most familiar with the phenomenon of class cohesion levels appearing to him to fall away as courses progressed. As he explained, "I've had classes that started out brilliantly, worked brilliantly, and then suddenly deteriorated." To illustrate this point Tom recalled two consecutive classes which had seemed to him to develop in strikingly different ways, one having started well and then deteriorated, and the other having started slowly and then finished on a high note. In order to demonstrate his view of the contrast in the developmental patterns of the two classes, Tom drew the following two graphs:

![Figure 11.8 Tom’s impression of two contrasting classes](image-url)
Tom took responsibility for what he perceived to be a dramatic fall in the level of cohesion of one of the classes, saying:

They burnt out. It was my fault. We worked so hard in the first five weeks I just totally burnt them out and I blame myself. And we just had to slow down towards the end. . . . I think a lot of it depends on me, actually, on the way I conduct the ten-week course.

In Tom's mind, therefore, class cohesion was related to student learning. In other words, his words indicate that he considered that if the pace of a class was set too high (presumably causing certain students to worry about not being able to keep up), the level of social cohesion within the class could fall dramatically. Tom proceeded to contrast the second class with the first, saying:

It started very slowly. I don't know what the problem was. Then, after four weeks, things really worked, I mean the amount of work that got done on those last six weeks was amazing. We finished on a high, as if we were all on ecstasy or something.

Again, Tom's words suggest that he considered that the sense of unity within the class was bound up with progress towards learning goals, a feeling of excitement (generated by cooperative achievement) appearing to him to have pervaded the class.

Tom mentioned that the second class contained three students from opposing factions in the former Yugoslavia who would not work with one another. He explained that, having been forewarned by the previous teacher that this would be the case, he did not put pressure on these students to interact:

I didn't put them in any kind of difficult situation. I didn't tell people to work with anybody, but the groupings were always spontaneously [formed]. . . . I had about five Polish girls, and they'd move around, they'd be with different people all the time. . . . [There was] a lot of moving around, but those three never came together.

It seemed, therefore, that this class operated in a manner which Tom considered satisfactory despite the fact that certain students avoided speaking to one another. Tom did mention, however, that these particular students did play together in the class soccer team. When asked how the students got on during the soccer games Tom said:
The differences weren't evident at all. There were those three, there was myself, there were two South Americans, there was an Afghani and a Korean, a real good mixture.

Tom considered that his subsequent class (the class following the one which I observed) had also operated in a highly satisfactory manner. Indeed, he went so far as to say that this particular class was the best class that he had ever taught, saying, "I don't think I'll ever have as good a class, ever, for many reasons." One of the reasons which he put forward for the satisfactory nature of the subsequent class was the fact that it had received an injection of new blood in the form of nine students who were new to the programme. As he said, "They just added to it to make it an absolutely wonderful gel."

An additional factor identified by Tom was the fact that the class was balanced, not only in terms of gender (there had only been four male students in the previous class), but also in terms of nationality. As he explained, "In this group it was a better mix of racial groups, and even the racial groups that we had didn't form cliques." He considered that, because the students in the class mixed well with one another, the group work sessions were "absolutely brilliant," explaining that he was able to do a range of activities with this particular class which he had been unable to do with the other class because in his view "they wouldn't have worked."

Tom was particularly pleased with his subsequent class because it was, in his words, "So positive and so geared to learning." Describing the way in which the students responded to his teaching approach he said:

It just worked really well. Everything we did, they were receptive and worked hard. I used to have about forty five pieces of writing to mark each week. They were just on the ball the whole time. They were constantly there. I had so few absences this term, it was unbelievable.

He described how the experience of teaching such a responsive class had caused him to put everything he could into his teaching, saying:

I really put in a good performance these ten weeks. . . . I wanted to perform better, because it was a reciprocal thing, and it worked. It was a very, very good performance all round. They made some terrific progress, and I felt it was the best class I'd ever taught.
Tom was so convinced of the qualitative difference between the class which I observed and his subsequent class that he described them as "like chalk and cheese," explaining that in his opinion the previous class was "bland," with "no spice, no flavour, no variation, insipid characters," adding, "There was no one whose leg I could pull."
The enthusiastic way with which he described the bantering relationship which he had evidently struck up with the Polish nun in the subsequent class (see Chapter 8), suggests that for Tom it may have been important to have in his classes students to whom he felt he could relate at an intellectual level.

Tom reported that the teacher who had taught the first of the two classes after him had also found the students unresponsive, saying:

Mary is repeating the same things about the class. She's got them en masse and she's had similar sorts of problems, [such as] refusal to work in groups . . . so that's been constant. It wasn't just a one-off thing.

This comment suggests that the perceptions of teachers regarding the intrinsic quality of classes may coincide.

**Sally's impression of her class**

Sally's pre-intermediate class contained fee-paying students from Korea, Japan, Thailand and Taiwan. Sally considered that the Korean and Thai students, who were in their mid to late twenties, were more goal-oriented than their Japanese and Taiwanese counterparts, who were somewhat younger. When asked to complete the graph at the end of the course, she said that she would prefer to give the class an overall rating, saying:

I think I'd be looking at a five out of seven for overall cohesion. I think as the term went on the students became more outgoing, more dynamic and more interactive.

Sally apologised for not having created a weekly profile of the class in terms of its level of cohesion, explaining why she had not done so:

I think it's difficult, partly to think back to all the weeks and what happened from one week to the next, but also, difficult to even think where they ended up, because sometimes I felt that they were very
cohesive as a group. But then if I really think about it, I still think there was that problem with the Japanese and the Koreans never quite [getting on]. There was always something between them.

She then proceeded to think her way around the classroom, visualising each table of four students in turn and making the following comments:

That one group, with Mei Ying, Bambang, Tina and Jun Pyo, that remained very, very stable the whole way through, they always sat together, and it really felt like they'd become very close. And they interacted amongst themselves, but they didn't interact really with the others in the class that well. And then the two other Thais, Tanarat and Apitti, they seemed to get on with whichever situation they were put in. They seemed to be very happy with everyone and everything, so they were sort of crossing everywhere, they seemed to cross cultural boundaries. But then, well, Miwa, I just felt she was really switched off pretty much the whole term. I just got the impression that she really didn't care. And sometimes it was like that, sometimes Tomoko was pretty switched off as well. And I always sensed that the Japanese never really wanted to be with the Koreans. If I asked them to go and work with them they would, but . . . you just felt they were never that happy with each other.

This comment suggests that Sally saw her class in terms of several disparate groups, some of which demonstrated behaviours which she associated with cohesion and some of which did not.

I was fortunate to obtain from Sally, who was the first teacher to participate in the study, a batch of evaluation sheets which she had completed at the end of each lesson.81 The comments which she made at the bottom of her post-lesson evaluation sheets (referring to individual lessons over the ten-week period of the course) included the following:

"First part dead, second part, encouraging."

"Exciting, dynamic."

"A bit flat."

"Enthusiastic and involved."

"First part dynamic and involved, second part slow, students 'heavy'."

81 As explained in Chapter 3, I was unable to obtain from the other teachers in the study post-class evaluation sheets of this kind (conducting longer interviews with them instead).
"Chugging along, but a good feeling."

"Exciting, the students pulling together."

"First part light and fun, second part a bit 'heavy'."

Seemed to run itself, a relaxed and comfortable feeling."

"Excited, distracted, jovial."

These comments suggest that Sally considered, as had Amy, that levels of class cohesion could fluctuate not only between but also within lessons. In other words, there was a sense in which, with this particular class, Sally saw class cohesion as an on/off phenomenon, like an electric current, which either flowed or did not flow (and which might have occasional surges). Both Sally and Amy had felt that there were times when their classes had operated cohesively (in the sense that they had seemed to be generating their own momentum) but at other times they sensed that their classes were becoming lethargic. While Amy had talked about her class being "exhausting" and "draining," Sally said retrospectively about her class, "I was putting so much effort into trying to get things out [of them]."

It may be, of course, that the views of Sally and Amy of the stop-start nature of their classes (in terms of what they saw as the presence or absence of cohesion), may have emerged because these two teachers kept the most detailed week-by-week and lesson-by-lesson records of perceived levels of cohesion within their classes. Equally, it could be argued that these teachers were able to do so precisely because they did detect so many apparent fluctuations in the levels of cohesion within their classes.

Sally's situation is interesting because, by coincidence, she found herself teaching a subsequent class which was similar in terms of size, level and student population to the class that I observed. Both classes contained a high proportion of Korean and Japanese students (with the second class containing a wider spread of additional nationalities) and both classes contained students with a range of ages,
abilities and aspirations. In Sally's opinion, however, the two classes operated in a strikingly different manner, with the subsequent class appearing to her to be far more cohesive than the one that I observed. When thinking about the cohesion level of the subsequent class Sally seemed to be thinking in terms of an ongoing property of the class as a whole, rather than as a collection of individual moments when the class seemed to her to be operating in a manner which suggested the temporary presence of cohesion.

After having taught the subsequent class for less than two weeks Sally approached me saying that she was keen to share her impressions of the difference in "feel" between the two classes. This she proceeded to do by describing the way in which the students in the subsequent class had welcomed newcomers to the class. The words that she used, and the length of her monologue, give an indication of Sally's feelings towards this new class. This is what she said:

This class is really, really lovely, they're all [so] together. Last week we had three new students, and they all arrived on different days. On the Monday there was a Japanese girl, and I told the students in the class she was going to be arriving, and she came in, and they all said, "Hello, how are you?" They really just welcomed her, and they clapped her, and they sat her down, and they just sort of naturally started introducing themselves, and just made her feel so welcome, she was just beaming all morning. And then on the Wednesday we got another new student, and I was thinking, "I wonder how they're going to react to another one?," because the class is growing in size almost daily. And I took her into the class and I said, "I'd like to introduce you to Tina," and they all started cheering again, yeah, clapping and cheering, and saying, "Welcome! Welcome!, Come in! Come and sit here, come and sit here!" [It was] really nice.

Sally proceeded to explain that on the Friday she had been worried about how the class would accept the third new student, who was evidently atypical in that she was a sponsored student from Nepal, was married with children, and had a pierced nose. She added, "She looks quite traditional in what she wears and she seems different."
However, Sally reported that she was pleased with the way that the class had accepted this additional class member, saying:

She came in, and the class didn't cheer and clap her, but they did make her feel welcome, and again they all introduced themselves, and when they were introducing themselves a few of them said, "Welcome!" And, there was just a really, really nice feeling there.

Another feature of the subsequent class which apparently stood out in Sally's mind was the fact that, despite the range of abilities within the class, the stronger students had apparently been happy to remain in the class and help the weaker students rather than requesting to be promoted to a higher level. Referring back to the previous class Sally said:

Last time there were quite a few students in that first week who wanted to move out and go up a level. Well, this time there was only one student, and she did move out at the end of the week, and no-one else said anything, and there are three or four Koreans who are quite a lot stronger, but none of them has asked to move out, and they help the weaker ones.

One of the students who remained in Sally's class for a further term (and who therefore had experience of being a member of both classes) was a Taiwanese girl called Tina, whom Sally reported as being "confident and relaxed" in the subsequent class, (despite being a weak student whom Sally believed was unsure of the relationship between sounds and symbols in English).83 Sally recounted that Tina had even said to her, "Oh, a really nice class, a really nice class!" and had not appeared embarrassed when her inability to read aloud had become evident to the rest of the class.

Sally was in a good position to provide information on how two classes could apparently operate in strikingly different ways because she taught a number of identical lessons with both classes. One of these lessons was an extended role play involving everyone in the class. As described in Chapter 8 this activity required the students to pretend that they were in a restaurant and to role play being customers, waiters and waitresses, cooks, the bartender, the manager, the owner and so-on, and to sustain continuous talk in English as they went about their business. Sally described the manner

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83 This student may have been fully literate, however, in her first language.
in which the subsequent class had engaged in the activity, contrasting the behaviour of the students in the two classes in the following way:

This time round I wouldn't have needed to be in the room, it was just buzzing. I did a similar lead-up, so they all knew that they were going to pretend that they had these roles, and they had to keep talking, but they were just beavering away, and there were all these things happening that they were inventing themselves. They were just putting in that bit extra. . . In the other class I'd had to go round and say, "Look, on here [it says] you want a pay rise, [so] say something!" whereas with this class it was just happening automatically. . . . They were getting more involved in what was on the [role-play] cards, and they were doing additional things, and there was just so much noise in the classroom. Everyone was just talking, talking, and getting involved.

In short, after having taught the same lesson to both classes, Sally was convinced that the two classes had operated quite differently and that the amount of spontaneous language being used by the students in the class that she saw as cohesive was superior in both quantity and quality to the language being used by the students in the earlier class.

Sally made a further comparison between the two classes in terms of the manner in which the students had completed their mid-term evaluation sheets. To provide her with feedback on which activities they liked, she had given the students lists of all the language-learning activities that they had sampled. These ranged from routine activities such as working from the coursebook, doing vocabulary exercises or using the language lab, to more innovative activities such as chanting a nursery rhyme from the book *Jazz Chant Fairy Tales*, performing role plays or making a videotape of themselves reading the "news." The rubric required the students to place a maximum of three ticks or three crosses against each activity to indicate (i) whether or not they liked certain activities, and (ii) the degree to which they liked or disliked the various activities. According to Sally the students in the second class were more generous with the number of ticks they allocated the various activities with no-one indicating that they disliked working in groups (as certain students in the other class had done) and everyone giving role-play a high approval rating.
The above responses suggest that the students in Sally's subsequent class not only got on better with one another, but were also more appreciative of her efforts to provide them with a range of stimulating learning activities. The following comment indicates that Sally also considered that the students in the subsequent class had learnt more English:

This class I just feel generally has made a lot more progress, and I can think of individuals that I feel really, really have made a lot of progress, and others have made less substantial progress, but they've still progressed.

It could be argued that Sally's belief that the students in the second class had made more progress with their English than the students in the first class was due to the fact that they had provided her with more evidence of having done so (because they had evidently spoken more readily in class). However, the mid-term test results indicated that Sally's belief had some foundation, with the average mark of the students in the second class being 58%, compared with 52% in the first.

In summary, of all the teachers in the study, Sally was the one who supplied the fullest description of what it felt like to teach two classes which were similar in all respects except their apparent levels of cohesion. Interestingly, after having taught the second class, Sally expressed a desire to change the cohesion rating which she had originally given the previous class. Having originally assessed the level of cohesion as a five, Sally explained that, in the light of her experience of teaching the subsequent class, she now perceived that the cohesion level of the previous class "would be more like a three or a four."

Conclusion

In discussing their overall impressions of their classes the teachers identified a range of factors which they considered were related to the development of class cohesion. Listed below are the factors which were identified by one or more of the teachers:
the degree to which the students in their classes were working towards the achievement of common goals;

the extent to which the students in their classes seemed naturally inclined to relate to students from different nationalities, cultures and backgrounds;

the degree of heterogeneity within the classes, in terms of nationality, ethnicity, cultural background and so on;

the levels of energy of the teachers and the extent of their commitment to their classes;

the size of the classes;

the stability of the student membership of the classes;

the degree to which the content of the courses matched the expectations of the students;

the degree to which the students seemed willing to do what was required of them in terms of communicative activities and so on;

the degree to which the students related to one another socially outside class time;

the personalities of individual students, their level of commitment to their classes, and the apparent extent of their influence over others;

the level of pressure imposed on the students, either by the teacher or by events or circumstances outside the classroom.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the teachers' overviews of how cohesive they considered their classes to be, and have put forward the reasons that each teacher gave for the developmental pattern of their particular class in terms of the construct of cohesion. At the end of the chapter I summarised the factors which the eight teachers considered were related to the development of class cohesion.
I have not attempted to draw any general conclusions from the graphs, or to make any comparisons between the various classes regarding the levels of cohesion "reached" or "sustained," because (i) the purpose of the study was to gain a composite picture of the impressions of all the teachers regarding classroom social processes (rather than to describe the individual developmental pattern of any class), and (ii) as explained in Chapter 3, the purpose of the graphs was to encourage the teachers to reflect back over their courses and to provide additional insights. Although it might be tempting to try to draw comparisons between the classes in terms of their developmental patterns I would not wish to do so, especially in view of the disparate nature of the classes and the fact that the teachers completed their graphs impressionistically.

It is likely that the teachers' awareness of class cohesion was heightened by my line of questioning in both the weekly and retrospective interviews. However, despite their probable increased sensitivity to issues relating to cohesion, and their heightened awareness of the relationship which their class management strategies may have had with the development of class cohesion, not all the teachers considered that their subsequent classes were more cohesive than the ones that I observed. Joe and Gillian claimed that their subsequent classes were less cohesive. This finding suggests that, during the course of the study, the teachers did not find any ready answers as to how to enhance cohesion in their classes.

This chapter concludes Part Two of the study in which I presented the data. Part Three, which now follows, contains two chapters. In the first of these, Chapter 12, I present and then discuss the main findings.
PART III: CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER 12

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The questions addressed in the study

This study developed in an ongoing manner, with the major findings from the first phase used as a framework for the second phase. The research question for the first phase was framed as follows:

What is a good language class?

The answer to this question led to the identification of the teacher-generated construct of cohesion which is as follows:

Teachers define the quality of their classes in terms of the degree to which they operate as cohesive groups.

The aim of the second phase of the study was to describe the social processes occurring within selected language classes using the conceptual framework of the development of cohesion to guide the data collection and analysis. The research question was formulated in the following way:

What factors are related to the social-psychological development of the classes being studied?

It subsequently became evident that (i) although the teachers could describe the developmental patterns of their classes in terms of the construct of cohesion, cohesion itself was an ephemeral concept which was difficult to pin down or measure, (ii) the teachers' insights and motivations were highly revealing for the attitudes and values that they displayed, and (iii) additional comments made by students suggested that they did not interpret classroom behaviours and events in the same way as their teachers. The study was therefore written in answer to the following question:

What kinds of social relationships do the teachers perceive to be of value in their classrooms and to what extent do the students' perceptions coincide with those of the teachers?
Major findings

I will now draw together the findings which have emerged from the study. From the data it was possible to deduce seven major findings, each of which contains a number of related findings. Finding One is based on data gathered from both phases of the study (information provided by a total of 36 teachers), while the remaining findings are based primarily on data gathered from the eight teachers who participated in the second phase. (It will be recalled that the second phase of the study was based on a combination of weekly classroom observations, weekly teacher interviews, and individual interviews with students in all the classes.) The findings are as follows:

Finding One: All the teachers in the study define good classes in terms of the construct of cohesion, value classes which they consider operate cohesively, and want all their classes to become cohesive.

• The teachers intuit the presence of cohesion by a variety of external indicators including body language, facial expressions, responsiveness, willingness to engage in interactive tasks with a range of other students, and spontaneous whole-class behaviour (especially in the form of laughter).
• The teachers feel rewarded by the experience of teaching classes which they consider operate cohesively and teach such classes with enthusiasm.
• The teachers believe that classes which operate in what they consider to be a cohesive manner provide favourable environments for language learning.
• The teachers assume that students value cohesive classes to the same extent that they do, learn effectively within them and are satisfied with their rates of learning.
Finding Two: The teachers attend to both social and pedagogic priorities in their classrooms, considering them to be interrelated and mutually dependent.

- The teachers are flexible in their classroom decision-making and routinely deviate from their lesson plans.
- The teachers' daily classroom decision-making involves attending to both the social and learning needs of the class group and merging these two priorities wherever possible.
- The teachers' classroom decision-making involves balancing the best interests of individual students with the best interests of their class as a group.

Finding Three: The majority of the teachers claim that they actively seek to develop class cohesion and behave in ways which they consider likely to encourage the development of class cohesion.

- The teachers see themselves as integral members of their class groups and consider it necessary for the development of class cohesion to exercise authority in low-key ways.
- The teachers have at their fingertips a range of strategies which they use when they sense that the level of cohesion in their classes needs to be developed, boosted or affirmed.
- The teachers search for ways of integrating more fully into the life of the class any student whom they consider is on the periphery of the class group and in danger of not falling under its influence.
- Those students who have not become integrated into the class group are constantly noticed by their teachers, who find their presence in class unsettling.
- The strategies that the teachers use are in keeping with their personalities and preferred teaching styles. The teachers routinely re-use and refine old strategies and develop new ones.
**Finding Four: Once classes have begun to operate as groups the teachers and the students collaborate to maintain class cohesion in an ongoing manner.**

- The teachers are quick to identify the presence within their classes of students who seem to them prepared to operate in ways that they consider satisfactory.
- From the feedback that they receive, certain students rapidly intuit the kinds of behaviours that their teachers value and behave accordingly. Such behaviours range from developing a bantering relationship with the teacher to helping weaker members of the class with their language learning.
- Students with strong personalities can either help or hinder the efforts of their teachers to develop the kinds of classroom social mores which they consider appropriate.
- There is a sense in which class cohesion feeds off itself. Once student behaviours which the teachers construe as positive begin to occur, the teachers and the classes provide positive feedback in such a way that more of the approved-of behaviours are demonstrated. This cycle continues.
- The development of shared understandings within the classes allows unique classroom cultures to develop. These in turn serve to reinforce class cohesion.

**Finding Five: Although they recognise class cohesion and value it, the students' views frequently differ from those of their teachers.**

- The teachers generally assume that external student behaviours are accurate indicators of inner feelings.
- For the students, class cohesion is a bonus rather than a necessary condition for successful language learning.
- Students are not as satisfied with their classes, even ones deemed cohesive by the teachers, as their teachers believe.
• A significant number of students, regardless of whether or not they are members of classes considered cohesive by their teachers, are disappointed with their learning.

• Many students feel nervous and diffident about practising new language in class, regardless of whether or not they are members of classes considered to be cohesive.

Finding Six: Once they have developed a degree of cohesion, classes appear to operate in ways that have been shown to be typical of groups.

• Classes exert pressure on the individual to conform.

• In classes which have begun to operate as groups the overall culture of the class predominates, making the presence of student subcultures within the class less obvious.

• The teachers use group processes as a way of maintaining social control.

• Students in classes which have developed a degree of cohesion find themselves carried along by the prevailing class atmosphere and tend to behave collectively rather than individually. Students in such classes find it difficult to indicate dissatisfaction to their teachers.

• Once classes have developed a degree of cohesion teachers become less aware of strained inter-student relationships.

Finding Seven: Class cohesion exists in the teachers' minds and is unrelated to any external, concrete reality.

• Class cohesion is related to the teachers' feelings and at any given moment they can say how cohesive their class feels.

• The teachers adjust perceived levels of class cohesion both during courses and retrospectively.
Discussion of findings

This section provides a general discussion of the above findings in the order in which they have been outlined above, with the related findings being discussed under the seven major findings. I begin by presenting a number of hypotheses which may explain why all the teachers in the study (28 from the first phase and eight from the second) define good classes in terms of the construct of cohesion, value classes which appear to them to operate cohesively, and hope that all the classes that they teach will become as cohesive as possible (Finding One). I then provide a possible answer to the following conundrum which has puzzled Allwright since 1989: Why do teachers spend so much time attending to social considerations in their classrooms when their task is essentially a pedagogic one? (Finding Two).

Having put forward reasons which may explain why the majority of the teachers claim that they actively seek to develop class cohesion, and why certain teachers claim not to do so (Finding Three), I then suggest why certain students may be more prepared than others to collaborate with their teachers in attempting to develop class cohesion (Finding Four). In the section which follows I present a range of reasons which could account for the mismatch between the views of the students and those of their teachers regarding class cohesion (Finding Five), suggesting that the transformation of certain classes into cohesive groups in the social-psychological sense may be a powerful contributory factor (Finding Six). After presenting reasons to suggest why class cohesion is intuited by teachers and then adjusted in line with subsequent experience (Finding Seven) I conclude on a speculative note, proposing that the notion of class cohesion may hold meaning for all teachers who finds themselves teaching groups of learners in classroom situations.
Finding One: All the teachers in the study define good classes in terms of the construct of cohesion, value classes which they consider operate cohesively, and want all their classes to become cohesive.

There appear to be a number of reasons which could, singly or collectively, account for the fact that all the teachers in the study defined good classes in terms of the construct of cohesion, valued such classes, and aspired to have classes which operated in ways which they considered demonstrated cohesion. First, classes which they considered cohesive provided the teachers with positive feedback in the form of smiling faces, responsiveness, spontaneity, friendliness towards themselves and other students, and apparent keenness to undertake all learning tasks. It seems likely that most teachers working within a western cultural context would welcome feedback of this kind, construing it as an affirmation of their skill as a teacher and of their personal charisma. This could be termed the feel-good factor. Teachers, like anyone else, want to be appreciated and valued, and classes which operate collectively in a responsive and lively manner provide more overt signs of student appreciation and apparent satisfaction than classes which do not operate cohesively.

There may also have been pedagogic reasons why the teachers preferred to teach classes which seemed to them to operate cohesively. At a practical level it would seem that classes which operated in a seemingly cohesive manner made life easier for the teachers, all of whom professed to teach communicatively and all of whom required the students in their classes to engage in speaking activities with different class members for at least part of each lesson. Most language teachers know what it is like when certain students are unwilling to work together, when pairs or groups of students are reluctant to be prised apart, or when nobody in the class wants to partner a certain individual. A teacher's life becomes altogether easier and smoother, especially in an activity-based classroom environment such as the ones described in the study, if students relate to one another in the way that the teacher wants.
The issue of how language-learning progress is measured may also be linked to the teachers' desire for cohesion. As outlined in Chapter 4, ongoing assessment of linguistic progress was not a regular feature of any of the classes in the study. The teachers, however, evidently wanted to be assured that the students in their classes were learning. One way that they could do this, in the absence of formal assessment procedures, was to use the quantity, quality and range of student interaction as a measure of student progress. Research in social psychology has established that cohesiveness is related to both quantity and quality of group interaction (Shaw, 1981, p. 218). Since classes which the teachers considered cohesive were ones in which students readily interacted with one another, it follows that cohesive classes would provide the teachers with more evidence that their students were apparently making satisfactory linguistic progress than would classes which did not appear to them cohesive.

Although only a few teachers specifically articulated the belief that there was a causal relationship between class cohesion and language learning, they all readily assumed that classes which they saw as cohesive provided favourable environments for language learning. Some of the reasons underlying this assumption seemed to be related to the teachers' basic belief systems. During the course of their interviews the teachers articulated a range of beliefs about the nature of teaching and language learning and it was evident that there were a number of commonalities between them. First, several teachers thought that students were more receptive to linguistic input and were more likely to learn when they felt in a happy and relaxed frame of mind. Second, a number of teachers expressed the belief that language learning was potentially threatening to the self-esteem of learners, in the sense that students might feel embarrassed or nervous when required to reveal their levels of oral proficiency (or lack of it) to other class members.84 Third, I understood from the approving way in which the

84 In assuming that anxiety has a negative effect on language learning the teachers in the study appeared to be guided by a combination of folk wisdom and their own experience as language
teachers described students becoming involved in interactive language practice activities, that they valued active participation in the learning process and particularly engagement of the affective domain.

These shared beliefs suggest that a further motivational force may have underpinned the teachers' desire for class cohesion. Perhaps the teachers considered that cohesive class atmospheres functioned as protective cocoons within which they could legitimately compel their students to engage in personality-revealing language practice activities. The following comment by Rivers (1992) highlights the potentially ego-threatening nature of activity-based language learning:

In a highly structured methodology . . . in which students perform according to instructions in a well-planned, emotionally neutral, and predictable sequence, students are protected from such wounds to self-esteem. Once a teacher tries, however, to stimulate interactive activities where more than the student's intellect and memory are involved, then the whole personality of the student comes into play. . . . There is now place for emotional hurt and embarrassment. (p. 378)

It seemed that the teachers had made the assumption that the levels of awkwardness and anxiety that might be felt by students when required to participate in a range of unfamiliar interactive learning activities would be reduced by the knowledge that they would be performing within the bosom of cohesive class "families."

Alternatively the teachers may have considered that cohesive classes provided favourable environments for language learning because of their teaching circumstances and their beliefs about the nature of language learning. The majority of them routinely taught classes containing students with disparate strengths and weaknesses and, as a result, different learning needs. No teacher used a purely product-oriented approach, inputting new language and then

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learners themselves. Researchers have had difficulty in establishing a relationship between affective variables such as anxiety and language learning (Horwitz & Young, 1991, Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).
systematically testing whether it had been acquired. The majority of the teachers appeared to assume that language learning was a developmental process. In other words, from the ways in which they spoke about their teaching and went about organising their lessons it seemed that, rather than considering their students as empty vessels waiting to have knowledge poured in (the image used by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*), the teachers saw their students as shouldering some of the responsibility for their own learning. This view of language learning would provide further support for why the teachers wanted to have cohesive classes: they considered that a major part of their role was to operate as facilitators whose job it was to create suitable environments in which students could develop linguistic competence at their own pace and in their own way. In short, the teachers may have assumed that, since it was an impossible task to cater fully for the individual needs of any learner within the class, they were better off spending time developing supportive classroom climates within which individuals would feel confident enough to use their own initiative and to maximise their learning opportunities.

Why did the teachers assume that students valued cohesive classes to the same extent as themselves and were satisfied with the progress that they were making? The animated way in which they talked about classes which they considered cohesive indicates that that the teachers' own emotions were bound up with the notion of class cohesion. If they felt excited and exhilarated by teaching classes which they believed to be cohesive it is perhaps not surprising that they found themselves teaching more energetically and putting that extra bit of effort into preparing lessons. This may have been one of the reasons why the teachers considered that students were satisfied with the experience of being members of cohesive classes. Their assumption that students who were members of cohesive classes were satisfied customers may also be linked to what might be termed the snowball effect. If teachers have a general feeling of well-being as a result of what they consider to be a positive communal group experience, they are likely to
consider that others who undergo the same experience will have similar feelings
to their own. They may consider that what is good for themselves as teachers
must, ipso facto, be good for their students as learners, thus confounding the two
beliefs.

There may have been a number of additional reasons which contributed to
the teachers' desire to weld their classes into cohesive groups. As outlined in
Chapter 4, the teachers frequently found themselves teaching classes containing
students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The students were
likely to meet one another for the first time on the first day of their courses. It is
possible, therefore, that the teachers' desire to meld their classes into cohesive
groups was to some degree linked to the belief that, unless they behaved in a
proactive way to break down inter-cultural barriers early on in the lives of their
classes, the loyalties and energies of their students would continue to be directed
towards their respective cultural groups rather than towards the class as a whole.

**Finding Two: The teachers attend to both social and pedagogic priorities in
their classrooms, considering them to be interrelated and mutually dependent.**

One of the clearest findings to have emerged from the study was the
degree to which the teachers made spontaneous, ad hoc classroom decisions and
were prepared to deviate from their lesson plans whenever they considered it
expedient to do so. For a number of years Allwright has puzzled over teachers'
seemingly "unpedagogic" behaviours, first raising the issue at a conference in
1989 (although the papers were not published until 1992), and continuing to
search for a satisfactory explanation in 1996. Allwright's conundrum can be
expressed in the following everyday terms: Why do teachers spend so much time
attending to social considerations within their classes when their task is basically
a pedagogic one?

In 1989 Allwright suggested that teachers were pulled in opposite
directions by conflicting social and pedagogic considerations. By 1996 he
believed that the arguments that he put forward in 1989 may have been flawed, revising his position to one in which he saw teachers as having to make a series of compromises in the classroom:

Classroom behaviour . . . is not a simple binary matter of a set of straightforward either/or decisions. It is perhaps much better represented as some sort of balancing act between opposing forces, a tightrope walk for the most conscientious of teachers and learners, a continually reinvented compromise between competing social and pedagogic demands. (p. 223)

However, by using the words "opposing forces" and "competing social and pedagogic demands," and by including the words "social and pedagogic pressures" in the title of the article, Allwright appears to continue to view social and pedagogic considerations as independent, mutually-exclusive aspects of language classrooms. Indeed, throughout the article Allwright emphasises what he sees as the polarity between social and pedagogic demands on teachers, talking about contrasting social and pedagogic "considerations," "priorities" and "matters," in addition to the terms quoted above. Allwright's position can be represented schematically in the following way:

![Diagram showing the teacher drawn in opposite directions between social and pedagogic demands]

Figure 12.1 Allwright’s position

The findings from the present study support Allwright in the sense that the teachers were constantly adjusting their priorities, sometimes balancing the needs of the individual against the needs of the group, sometimes modifying their pedagogic practices in line with social considerations, and sometimes digressing from the task at hand for what appeared to be mainly social reasons. However,
Allwright was at a loss to explain the motivation behind the teachers' "puzzlingly unpedagogic" behaviour, perhaps because he was not focusing on the construct of cohesion. The findings from this study suggest that the teachers' constant oscillation between pedagogic and social priorities can be explained in terms of a desire to develop and/or maintain a feeling of cohesion (which can only be achieved if both priorities are attended to). In contrast to Allwright's view, therefore, it seems that teachers' social and pedagogic priorities are closely intertwined and interdependent, rather than being in opposition to each other. This interpretation is represented in Figure 12.2.

![Figure 12.2](image)

**Figure 12.2** The findings of the present study

It appears likely that the majority of the teachers in the study had an intuitive understanding of the fact that both the social and the learning needs of their students had to be regularly addressed if their classes were to metamorphose into cohesive groups. This view accords with the functional approach to leadership (see Chapter 2), which posits that behaviours which enable small groups to develop into mature work groups include both group development and group maintenance behaviours (the socially-oriented behaviours of both teachers and students) and group task behaviours (the traditional pedagogic behaviours...
normally exhibited by teachers). In short, the teachers in the present study seemed to understand that, if their classes were to develop true cohesion (as distinct from the superficial, surface-level cohesion exhibited by groups of people gathered together simply to have fun), they needed to nurture both amenable social atmospheres and purposeful working environments. In language classes a purposeful working environment is surely one in which there is a shared understanding of the fact that the class as a group is moving collaboratively towards mutually-acceptable language learning goals.

Interestingly, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Allwright seems to have been moving towards considering language classes as groups. In 1996 he goes as far as to suggest that it may be that teachers accept as a major part of their pedagogic responsibility the fact that they should help learners to form some sort of an effective "learning group" (p. 212). He does not, however, appear to have been thinking in terms of class cohesion, where teachers see themselves operating as integral members of their class groups (see the discussion regarding to the position of the teachers within their classes in relation to Finding Three below).

The above interpretation of the motivational forces underlying the classroom behaviour of language teachers would explain why the teachers so readily deviated from their lesson plans, even occasionally allowing their classes to engage in activities which seemed to have only tenuous links to pedagogy. If it is accepted that teachers consider that maintaining class cohesion is a crucial element in the classroom language teaching and learning equation, then the fact that they sometimes allow their students to engage in activities whose purpose appears primarily to be social can perhaps be better understood.

85 This view of language classrooms also accords with the biological condition known as homeostasis, which refers to the physiological equilibrium which exists within living creatures involving a balance of function and chemical composition. According to the Macquarie dictionary the term homeostasis can also refer to the maintenance of social equilibrium.
Finding Three: The majority of the teachers claim that they actively seek to develop class cohesion and behave in ways which they consider likely to encourage the development of class cohesion.

As discussed in Chapter 2, negative cases are useful to researchers because they force them to search for explanations for findings which appear to run contrary to the overall pattern of the findings. The third major finding from this study was that all the teachers apart from two (one from the first phase of the study and one from the second), claimed that they went to considerable lengths to foster the development of class cohesion. In other words, 34 teachers said that they actively sought class cohesion, while two denied ever doing so. Why did the opinions of these two teachers differ so markedly from those of the remaining teachers?

Both the teachers who said that they did not attempt to foster the development of class cohesion made it clear that they considered that their role as language teachers was simply to teach as efficiently and effectively as possible: as far as they were concerned trying to develop a feeling of cohesion in their classes was not part of their job. These teachers also implied that teachers who actively tried to develop class cohesion were frivolous and lightweight, viewing them as "entertainers" or "babysitters" whose priority was to create "birthday party atmospheres" (their words), rather than to teach English. These two teachers, apart from the fact that they may not have wanted to be associated with teachers whom they considered less serious and academic than themselves, seemed to view social and pedagogic aspects of language classrooms as distinct from one another. In other words, it appeared that in the minds of these two teachers effective language teaching and learning were unrelated to the development of class cohesion. If my interpretation of their perceptions is correct, these two teachers saw themselves driven primarily by Allwright's pedagogic demands (see Figure 12.1); for them social demands were not an integral part of the language teaching and learning equation.
One explanation for the apparently atypical perspectives of these two teachers may be related to their perceptions of themselves and to their particular teaching circumstances. Both teachers had higher degrees and considered that they taught English in a rigorous and relatively traditional manner. Unlike the majority of teachers in the study (who routinely taught classes containing students with diverse levels, needs, interests, priorities and ultimate aspirations), these two teachers had for the most part taught high-level classes of motivated, achievement-oriented students who were working towards specific exams or professional goals. Perhaps in such classes, already to a degree homogeneous in terms of student goals, there was less of a need to foster the development of cohesion in an active manner. This interpretation accords with group dynamics theory, which stresses that the existence of group goals is what binds groups together (Shaw, 1981, p. 346). Alternatively, these teachers may subconsciously have accepted that a feeling of cohesion would naturally develop precisely because the students in the classes considered themselves to be moving collectively towards mutually-acceptable goals.

In addition, it seems that these particular teachers had for the most part a product-oriented view of the teaching/learning process, believing that their students would judge them on their ability to deliver the goods, rather than on their skill in creating classroom environments in which language learning could take place in a natural and unhurried manner. These two teachers appeared to have a particularly strong appreciation of the fact that their own particular students, because they wanted their English brought to a high level as quickly as possible, might construe group-building activities as a waste of time. It is interesting to note that, generally speaking, the views of these two teachers probably accorded more closely with the views of the students in the study than they did with those of their colleagues (see the discussion related to Finding 6). Perhaps the views of these two teachers might accord more closely with those of other teachers when, as will no doubt eventually happen, the pendulum swings...
away from the communicative language teaching approach and the assumptions about the nature of language teaching and learning that appear to underlie it.

Despite the fact that they claimed never to have behaved in ways designed to develop class cohesion, both the above teachers provided evidence of having done precisely that. Both teachers provided evidence not only of having taken steps to develop class cohesion, but also of having responded to the apparent group-building initiatives of individual students within their classes. These two teachers also talked enthusiastically and at length about classes which they considered operated in a cohesive manner, thereby indicating not only that they recognised the phenomenon of class cohesion, but also that they valued it just as much as all the other teachers in the study said they did.

Apart from the two atypical teachers described above all the remaining teachers spoke at length about the widest possible range of ways in which they claimed to have behaved in class, apparently with the express purpose of encouraging the development of class cohesion. These behaviours comprise the bulk of the data presented in Chapters 6 to 10, the core data chapters of the thesis. The kinds of strategies that the teachers described accord for the most part with findings from the discipline of social psychology regarding the development of cohesion within small groups. The fact that the teachers preferred, for instance, to see themselves as integral members of their class groups (claiming to revert to their traditional roles as disciplinarians as little as possible and trying to exercise authority in low-key ways), suggests not only that they saw themselves as facilitators rather than as dispensers of knowledge in the pedagogic sense, but also that they had an intuitive understanding of the fact that small groups are more likely to develop into cohesive groups when no group member (in this case themselves in their role as teacher) is over-dominant. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the conceptual frameworks for the study is the notion that leadership is a property of the whole group and shared equally by all group members, rather than being the sole prerogative of the assigned group leader.
The teachers' efforts to draw students who appeared to be on the periphery of the class group into the fold also seems to be consistent with the principles of group development. Students who consider themselves as outsiders are perhaps less likely to be swept along by the energy generated by group processes and may have a dampening effect on the teacher's general level of enthusiasm. Such students may attract the attention of others by their low-key behaviours, which could engender a general a lack of commitment to the class group. The teachers in the study claimed to devote a great deal energy trying to integrate outsiders into their class groups, perhaps believing that the presence in their classes of uncommitted individuals would prevent the evolution of class cohesion.

In one sense it is not surprising that the strategies that the teachers chose to use to develop and maintain class cohesion appear to have been diverse and idiosyncratic. After all, the behaviours of each teacher are a unique combination of natural attributes and inclinations melded with current circumstances and previous experience. What is surprising are the similarities between the strategies that the teachers claimed to use to develop class cohesion, rather than the differences between them: strategies such as giving nicknames to certain students, allocating roles for students, or developing "in" class jokes. Perhaps the staffrooms in which the teachers socialised with their colleagues provided an opportunity for the informal exchange of ideas for the development of class cohesion. There was little evidence in the study of teachers entering each others' classrooms and having the opportunity to observe the class management strategies of their colleagues. Perhaps the attributes of extroversion, empathy and the ability to draw others out which may have led the teachers in the study into teaching in the first place meant that they had a natural ability to foster the development of what they called class cohesion.
Finding Four: Once classes have begun to operate as groups the teachers and the students collaborate to maintain class cohesion in an ongoing manner.

During the course of the regular classroom observations and teacher interviews a finding gradually emerged relating to the ongoing development of what the teachers perceived to be class cohesion. This finding showed that there was a sense in which the development of class cohesion was a collaborative exercise, initially set in train by the teachers but soon taken up by responsive students and eventually, if events went according to the teachers' plans, by everyone in the class operating in a collective, apparently collaborative manner.

The fact that all the teachers were alert to the presence in their classes of students whom they believed they could enlist as allies in the group-development process suggests, again, that the teachers had an intuitive knowledge of how small groups develop and function, and of the roles that individual group members play in this process (see the discussion on the functional approach to leadership in Chapter 2). The fact that some students appeared ready and willing to side with their teachers in promoting the kinds of classroom atmospheres that their teachers wanted to develop could be related to a range of factors. Perhaps these students had naturally extrovert personalities and welcomed the opportunities afforded to them by their teachers to adopt high-profile roles within their classes. Perhaps the personal circumstances of such students were related to their positive attitudes (students who had come to Australia as sponsored migrants, for example, and who seemed determined to make a success of every aspect of their life in their newly-adopted country). Perhaps such students were relieved to find themselves in classrooms where teachers were not aloof and seemed to welcome spontaneous student input. Perhaps such students were pleased to be able to establish a rapport with their teachers, or perhaps they welcomed the opportunity to be seen to be of value within the classroom.
Finding Five: Although they recognise class cohesion and value it, the students' views frequently differ from those of their teachers.

One of the most striking findings from the study was the mismatch between the perceptions of the teachers and the students in their classes regarding (i) the importance and desirability of class cohesion, and (ii) the relationship of class cohesion to language learning and to satisfaction with progress. One possible explanation for the mismatch between the views of the teachers and those of their students may lie in the fact that the teachers interpreted the behaviours of the students in their classes at face value.

When I began the study I had assumed that there would be a reasonably close fit between what the teachers and the students in their classes would be telling me. One of the reasons I had anticipated that the students' views of their classes would reflect those of their teachers was that, like the teachers, I had assumed that external behaviours (in the form of facial expressions and body language) were accurate indicators of how students were feeling and what they were thinking. I had imagined that students who seemed happy were indeed happy, that students who appeared enthused by language learning activities were indeed enthused, and that students who were reluctant to participate in communicative activities were essentially uncooperative. It was not until well into the study, when I had been surprised on a number of occasions by the critical comments offered by students whom I had assumed were satisfied, that I realised that there was not a direct relationship between students' classroom behaviours and their personal feelings and opinions.

One explanation for the mismatch between teacher perceptions and student feelings may therefore lie in the fact that the teachers intuited the presence of cohesion by external indicators (Finding One), almost always interpreting "positive" behaviours in a positive light. It appeared, for example, that they regularly construed laughter positively, considering it to be an indicator of relaxation (which they valued) and of class solidarity. Only rarely did they
consider that it might indicate embarrassment, frustration, nervousness or panic. Similarly the teachers took the smiles and nods of the students in the classes as indicators of comprehension rather than of incomprehension, and when students voluntarily behaved in a helpful manner (by moving chairs and so on) the teachers considered that they were motivated by a desire to be supportive rather than by a desire to save valuable lesson time.

It is possible that in some cases the teachers interpreted the behaviours of their students in context-specific ways. For example, the teachers almost invariably construed spontaneous and animated behaviour positively, whereas a teacher of a high school maths class might interpret such behaviour as evidence that they were losing control. There was also the likelihood that the teachers, who were living and working within a western cultural context, regularly placed a western interpretation on overt student behaviours. For example, they might interpret lowered heads, blank faces and a reluctance to establish eye contact as evidence of negative student attitudes, whereas such classroom behaviours in other cultures may be considered appropriate or even desirable.

A further reason for the fact that the teachers seemed to be largely unaware of how the students in their classes were feeling may relate to the fact that they themselves, by virtue of their assigned roles as teachers, were in positions of power within their classrooms (however much they may have wanted to give the impression that they were on a level with their students). This automatic power imbalance makes it difficult for any student to pluck up the courage to convey their views to their teacher openly and honestly in a face-to-face situation. The difficulty is compounded for students who find themselves in an unfamiliar cultural environment, who have limited English language skills, who have been used to holding teachers in high esteem, who expect teachers to know what is best for them, and whose own cultures do not encourage the expression of personal feelings or challenges to authority.
A further explanation for the mixed messages which the students evidently sent to their teachers (behaving in ways which did not represent their true feelings) lies in the power of group processes. This is discussed further under Finding Six later in the chapter.

One way in which the views of the students did accord with those of their teachers was in their identification of amenable classroom atmospheres. Many students spoke appreciatively of the relaxed and friendly atmospheres which they considered prevailed within their classrooms. It is likely that for such students the opportunity to learn English in classes with informal atmospheres provided a welcome and refreshing change from the more formal classroom environments to which the majority of them appeared to be accustomed. As described in Chapter 5, certain students considered that their ability to learn was enhanced when they felt relaxed and at ease, and considered that the classroom atmospheres that their teachers tried to foster did, at one level, make them feel comfortable.

Nevertheless, whereas the teachers considered that classes with friendly, informal atmospheres provided favourable environments for language learning, the students considered such conditions to be a bonus. In other words, the students believed that satisfactory classroom language learning could equally well occur in classes with atmospheres which were less overtly amenable. An explanation for this finding could lie in the fact that the students, like the two atypical teachers mentioned earlier in this chapter, seemed for the most part to have a cumulative view of language learning, evidently wishing to be able to measure their progress in terms of how much new language they had absorbed each week, rather than in how much their fluency had improved as a result of communicative practice within the classroom. It is likely that students with this viewpoint may have considered that they did not learn as much doing interactive activities (especially ones which allowed them to have fun), as they did when doing more traditional (and perhaps less exciting) learning tasks. This view would
account for the level of frustration that some of the students evidently felt both with their classes and with their rates of learning.

The fact that the students sometimes considered that valuable learning time was lost when their teachers organised classroom activities which they considered frivolous could relate to the fact that they did not view class cohesion as an essential condition for classroom language learning. In other words, if the students saw social and pedagogic activities as separate and unrelated (unlike the majority of their teachers, who saw them as intertwined), then it is not surprising that they may sometimes have failed to see the point of classroom activities whose prime purpose was apparently to maintain or boost flagging levels of class cohesion. A further reason for the students' dissatisfaction and even impatience with their teachers may relate to the fact that the majority of them were in a considerable hurry to learn. The number-one priority for almost all the students in the study was to learn English as speedily and effectively as possible (the migrant students knowing that they were only eligible for a limited number of hours of English language tuition, and the fee-paying students knowing that they were only in Australia for a given length of time). If the expectations of the students regarding how much English they would be able to learn on one short, intensive course were unrealistically high, it is perhaps not surprising that they were so often disappointed.

A further finding is that the students indicated that they regularly felt nervous in class, even if they were members of classes which their teachers considered cohesive. A factor which may have contributed to the students' continued high levels of nervousness about practising new language in class (regardless of the prevalence of classroom atmospheres which the teachers considered would minimise language anxiety) is that some language teaching methods safeguard the privacy of students more than others. Interactive, activity-based language learning, which requires students to reveal aspects of themselves in an open manner (and which perhaps intensifies the desire of the teachers to
create supportive classroom climates), may not be universally suitable for all personality types, for all learning styles, or for students of all ages. For example, it seems unlikely that a middle-aged professional who has enjoyed the status accorded to his profession within his own country and who suddenly finds himself doing play-acting in an intermediate-level language class will feel at ease, however ostensibly supportive the classroom atmosphere. Perhaps there is a sense in which communicative language teachers behave in culturally-imperialistic ways, assuming that classroom language learning is most likely to occur where students become emotionally engaged in learning tasks. It is perhaps not surprising that certain students feel uneasy when compelled to display features of their personalities to their classes at large, or when required to engage in activities which involve risk taking and the likelihood of committing errors in public.

These reservations are not new. In an article in which he criticises humanistic approaches in the adult classroom, Atkinson (1989) suggests that language learning activities which involve deep, affective investment by learners in the learning experience make excessive demands on students, saying, "A given student may not wish to develop a particularly close relationship with some (or any) of his or her classmates" (p. 271), while Widdowson (1990) makes the following point:

The individual may not want to reveal his private life in a public role. Thus, encouraging learners to explore and share their own personality can actually be seen as an unwarranted intrusion on privacy, and as the imposition of alien attitudes, in some cultures and in some individuals. In which case it may lead to a disengagement from learning. (p. 13)

A further explanation for the mismatch between the teachers' and students' levels of satisfaction with their classes emerges from an examination of student expectations. Perhaps the students were dissatisfied with their classes, not because there was anything intrinsically wrong with them (indeed, by western standards the classes were excellent exemplars of what good language classes should be), but rather, because they may have thought that they themselves would learn more
effectively in classes which were organised differently. This point was emphasised by the fact that certain teachers informed me that, although they taught communicatively, they themselves preferred to be taught new languages by more traditional methods. This struck me as ironic: teachers presuming to know how their students learnt best, while admitting that they learnt more effectively in other ways.

In order to show the range of factors which could, in theory, account for the disappointment with their classes expressed by the students, I have listed in Appendix J the range of beliefs and expectations about classroom language learning of the students in the study. These findings are derived from statements made by students during their interviews (illustrative examples of which are included in Chapter 4), from comments made by outspoken individuals during class time, and from remarks made in passing by both teachers and students during the course of the study. They relate mainly to (i) the role of the teacher and how rigorous he or she should be, (ii) the level of formality which should prevail within the language classroom, (iii) how language is most effectively learnt, and (iv) the kinds of activities which are appropriate for language learning. The evidence suggests that in each of these areas there is the potential for a mismatch between teachers' and students' expectations of what language classrooms should be like and of the kinds of activities that should occur within them. Since teachers are, as mentioned above, in positions of power, it follows that they are unlikely to adjust their practices in line with their students' expectations, if indeed they are fully aware of what those expectations are (and of course not all students have the same range of expectations).

Towards the end of the study I was struck by the extent to which the students appeared to want to be provided with strategies to enable them to take fuller control of their own language learning. It seemed that for some students it was not enough to be given a range of opportunities to develop linguistic proficiency within a supportive classroom environment. Perhaps some of them,
although they appeared to recognise the benefits of the communicative language teaching approach, might have preferred to have spent more class time learning in ways with which they were familiar and which had worked for them in the past.

**Finding Six:** Once they have developed a degree of cohesion, classes appear to operate in ways that have been shown to be typical of groups.

I have tried to emphasise that this is a study of teachers' perceptions of a phenomenon, rather than an examination of a readily-identifiable, verifiable and measurable phenomenon. I have also indicated that the teachers' definitions of class cohesion were related to the circumstances in which they found themselves working and seemed to encompass their aspirations for what good classes should be (see the definition of terms section in Chapter 1). Nevertheless, the accounts of the teachers of the social processes occurring within their classes, coupled with my own classroom observations, have led me to believe that the classes in the study did undergo processes of social change as the courses progressed and did develop varying degrees of cohesiveness in the accepted social-psychological sense.

If this is accepted then it would seem that an additional reason why the students' views were so different from what their teachers might have anticipated could be attributed to the operation of group processes within the classes. In the discipline of social psychology it is widely accepted that group norms influence the behaviour of individuals within the group. As Shaw (1981) says:

Groups characterized by friendliness, cooperation, interpersonal attraction, and similar indications of group cohesiveness exert strong influences upon members to behave in accordance with group expectations. (p. 218).

Some of the best known studies of the power of group norms to influence the behaviour of individuals include the experimental studies conducted by Asch in the 1950s which demonstrated that the social pressure to conform is so powerful
that it can induce people to make judgements which are at odds with what their senses and physical reality tell them (van Avermaet, 1988, p. 352).

The evidence from this study suggests that the teachers had an intuitive understanding of the power of group forces to prevail over the individual. This being the case, the actions of the teachers to set in motion group development processes within their classrooms may be construed as a desire to mobilise class groups so that individuals with different expectations will be induced to conform. There were indeed examples in the study of teachers doing precisely this, notably when individual students behaved in ways which ran counter to the behavioural norms that they sought to establish (see Chapter 7). Possibly some teachers felt that they had to use the power of the group to pull students into line because they considered that it was inappropriate to discipline adult students in traditional ways, for example through the use of sanctions.

However, there is perhaps also a sense in which group processes can operate not only to draw into line reluctant students but also to make other students appear happy and satisfied with what they are doing in class, even when they may not be. For example, it is difficult for a student not to join in when their class laughs in unison at a certain behaviour, not to clap when everyone else applauds a student performance, or not to become emotionally involved in competitive language-learning activities. It seems that students may sometimes find themselves swept along by the artificially-generated excitement engendered by certain language practice activities within their classes, only to realise in retrospect that they were dissatisfied with what they consider they had accomplished during the lesson. If this interpretation is correct, then there is a sense in which language teachers, no doubt with the best of intentions, are manipulators of the emotions of their students.

Regarding the situation of language teachers, it seems that there is a sense in which they are uniquely placed to instigate the kinds of group processes which may compel students to behave in ways which give an outward appearance of
involvement and satisfaction. This is because language teachers' jobs are essentially open-ended. Their brief is often so broad (to raise the general level of English of all the students in their classes) that a wide range of activities (including those which fall into the excitement-inducing, party-games category) can be justified in terms of enlivening students and compelling them to speak English. This may be because language teachers have at their disposal such a diverse range of artificial group-enhancing activities that they are in a good position to mobilise group forces within their classes in such a way that class members find it difficult not to be swept along by the prevailing atmosphere of excitement and euphoria. Perhaps this is why a significant number of students in the study displayed signs of enthusiasm and engagement which only appeared to run skin deep.

Group forces are so powerful that it is also possible that the teachers sometimes found themselves swept along by the very processes that they had set in motion. There were occasional instances in the study when certain teachers gave the impression that the excitement of participating in a group situation was such that they had temporarily forgotten the purpose for which they and their students were together. It is also possible that the power of the group to compel members to conform, on the outside at least, was responsible for the fact that in classes which appeared to demonstrate cohesiveness in the social-psychological sense there were few external signs of students not getting along with one another. Interviews with individuals, however, indicated that inter-student tensions still existed beneath the surface.

**Finding Seven: Class cohesion exists in the teachers' minds and is unrelated to any external, concrete reality.**

The seventh finding of the study is that class cohesion existed in the minds of the teachers, who were able to say at any given moment how cohesive their classes felt. The teachers often adjusted their perceptions of the overall levels of
cohesion that they thought their classes had attained in the light of subsequent events with the same class, or following their experience of teaching other classes. An explanation for the fact that the teachers were so readily able to make judgements about their classes may relate to the nature of teaching. Perhaps being able instantaneously to assess how their classes feel at any given moment is a survival mechanism for all busy teachers, enabling them to adjust their behaviours in an ongoing manner in line with their perception of the mood of the class. Because their job requires them to attend to so many matters at the same time there would hardly be time for teachers to assess the mood of their classes in any way other than by intuition.

A possible explanation for the fact that the teachers routinely adjusted the levels of cohesion that they had attributed to their classes may lie in theories of social cognition, or how individuals make sense of the social world and develop personal constructions of it (Leyens & Codol, 1988). Baron and Byrne (1994, p. 121) describe schema theory, which posits that individuals organise information that they have acquired through experiences into schemas, gradually building up schemas or "mental scaffolds" into which subsequent information can be slotted. Baron and Byrne (1994) say that social cognition "consists of the processes through which we notice, interpret, remember and later use information about the social world." It seems possible that the teachers in the study were building up personal banks of knowledge about how language classes typically behaved, based on their cumulative experience of all the classes that they had ever taught. This might go some way to explaining why their assessments of class cohesion were changeable. Perhaps the teachers were slotting into their personal schemas memories of how cohesive previous classes had been, subconsciously ranking them and then re-ranking them in line with their subsequent experiences.
Postscript

This has been a qualitative study whose purpose was to describe the perceptions of a sample of teachers working in one particular city in an English-speaking country. Its purpose was not to identify universals or to suggest that the findings would be generalisable to other contexts. Nevertheless, there seems to be a sense in which the notion of class cohesion is something to which a great many teachers can relate. When discussing class cohesion informally with teachers outside the study I have found that most teachers, regardless of their teaching circumstances, have something to say about cohesion in relation to their own classroom experiences. It seems, therefore, that the notion of class cohesion is something which holds meaning for teachers in a range of different pedagogic contexts, even though they would no doubt define it differently.

Although the evidence suggests that the development of class cohesion may be high on the list of priorities of those teachers who work in English-speaking environments and who profess to teach communicatively, it is possible that degrees of class cohesion, albeit in different forms, are intuited by anyone who finds themself teaching groups of learners in classroom situations. Who is to say, for example, that the lovable, pedestrian Mr Chips (created by Hilton in 1934 in his memorable short novel *Goodbye Mr Chips*), who taught Latin to generations of small boys in pre-First World War England, and who viewed his pupils as "decent little beggars individually, but, as a mob, just pitiless and implacable," did not consider that some classes were more cohesive than others? Perhaps degrees of class cohesion are also intuited by language teachers living in villages on the high, windswept altiplano of southern Peru, whose task it is to teach Spanish to Quechua-speaking Indian children through chorus recitation and chorus responses (van Lier, 1988, p. 226, and 1996). Teachers working in a range of language classrooms in China (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996) may also sense a difference in the feel of the classes that they teach. Casual conversations held with Chinese-born teachers of English who have taught skills-based courses in
university settings in China suggest that these teachers also sense that certain classes are more cohesive than others, certainly in the sense that the students within them appear lively and responsive.86

It is possible, then, that class cohesion is some kind of a universal, even though its properties may change from situation to situation, from location to location, and from one era to the next. If this is the case, perhaps new definitions of cohesion will gradually evolve to reflect new approaches which will emerge and eventually supplant communicative language teaching orthodoxy as we know it today.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed a range of possible reasons which may explain why the teachers in the study valued class cohesion so highly. I have also discussed some of the motivational factors which seemed to underlie the desire of the majority of the teachers in the study to encourage the development of cohesion in their classes. In doing so I have provided a solution to Allwright's conundrum, by suggesting that teachers vacillate between social and pedagogic priorities because attention to both is necessary for the ongoing development of class cohesion. I have also called into question some of the assumptions underlying communicative language teaching and have advanced reasons to explain why a significant number of language learners seem dissatisfied with the kinds of classroom environments which their teachers consider will maximise their language learning opportunities.

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86 It may be, however, that class cohesion is a luxury to which teachers working within certain cultural contexts may not be able to aspire. For example, for teachers who teach English to classes four or five times the size of those in the study, the quality of the social relations within their classes, or even levels of student responsiveness, may be issues of little relevance or concern.
In Chapter 13, the final chapter, I will restate the nature and objectives of
the study. I will then proceed to describe its significance, outline its limitations
and make suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 13

OVERVIEW AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The nature and objectives of the study

This study is a qualitative, descriptive investigation of the belief systems of a group of experienced English language teachers. The first phase focused on a sample of 28 teachers and, over a period of 18 months, led to the development of a theoretical framework. This framework was then used as the basis for the second phase which investigated not only the belief systems, attitudes and values of a smaller sample of eight teachers, but also the relationship of the teachers' beliefs to their classroom actions. The data for both phases of the study were gathered mainly through extended teacher interviews and were analysed using grounded theory development procedures.

The objective of the first phase of the study was to understand why a particular sample of teachers preferred teaching certain classes more than others and why they considered that some classes were "good," while others were not. I was able to establish that all the teachers based their judgements on the same factor: the degree to which they perceived that their classes operated as cohesive groups. In the minds of the teachers, classes which operated cohesively were deemed satisfactory and were highly prized, while classes which did not operate in a cohesive manner were considered unsatisfactory and were not valued in the same way. Because the teachers seemed able to identify the phenomenon of class cohesion so clearly and unambiguously, I knew that I could confidently use the construct of class cohesion as a framework for the second, more detailed, phase of the study.
The ultimate objective of the second phase was to explore the concept of cohesion in action through the teachers' perceptions. In particular I wanted to investigate how the social relationships in their classrooms were related to the teachers' everyday decision-making. Why did they behave in the ways that they did, and what effect did they think that they were having on individual students and on their classes as a whole? I wanted to establish, for example, what proportion of the teachers' daily classroom decisions was governed by a desire to develop or maintain a feeling of cohesion, and how the teachers reconciled their pedagogic goals with this desire.

In order to obtain a broad range of teachers' views I selected as varied a sample as possible for the second phase of the study, choosing to observe and interview teachers who worked in a variety of different institutions and who taught different types and levels of classes. I used prompted recall techniques (in the form of the teachers talking about past lessons) to extract information, because I suspected that the teachers were likely to reveal their values, belief systems and motivations in an open manner when talking about specific classroom events and about students whose personalities were familiar to me.

The findings from the study were remarkable in that, despite the range of institutions in which they worked and the different types of classes that they taught, the kinds of things that the teachers were saying were strikingly similar. What was particularly noticeable was (i) the high number of occasions during the interviews when the teachers spontaneously referred to the construct of cohesion, and (ii) the range of strategies that the teachers professed to use for the specific purpose either of fostering or of maintaining class cohesion. These findings suggested that cohesion was something more than a convenient framework for my research: it was an ideal which had been reified by the teachers and which existed in their minds as something undeniably beneficial which should be pursued and, if achieved, cherished and nurtured.
The overall findings, which were summarised and discussed in the previous chapter, present a composite picture of what all 36 teachers in both phases of the study were saying. The most noteworthy of these are Findings One and Two. Finding One is the following: All the teachers in the study define good classes in terms of the construct of cohesion, value classes which they consider operate cohesively, and want all their classes to become cohesive. Finding Two provides an answer to Allwright's conundrum regarding the social and pedagogic priorities of language teachers and is as follows: The teachers attend to both social and pedagogic priorities in their classrooms, considering these two priorities to be interrelated and mutually dependent.

**The significance of the study**

If all research studies were placed somewhere on a continuum, with maximally qualitative ones at one extreme and maximally quantitative ones at the other, then this study would be located at the qualitative end of the spectrum. The study adopts a broad-brush approach, focusing on a wide range of classroom behaviours identified by practising teachers. It aims to describe rather than to categorise, to generate hypotheses rather than to test them, and to raise new questions rather than to provide alternative answers to old ones. Although its objective is exploratory, the study does not aim to investigate anything which is new or unfamiliar to practising teachers. Rather, it seeks to understand more fully the many things that language teachers intuitively know about their classrooms, but which they may seldom consciously think about or discuss. In short, the study is an attempt to understand the interconnected nature of the widest possible range of classroom events and behaviours from the perspective of a group of people who are uniquely placed to interpret their significance: classroom teachers. The other group of people who are equally well placed to interpret the significance of classroom events are, of course, the students.
This study is novel in that it gives a warts-and-all account of what is perceived to occur in classrooms on a daily basis. Put another way, it presents a vivid picture from the viewpoint of teachers of the actualities of teaching English to classes of adult learners from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One of the problems with educational research is that it has failed to produce more than a handful of detailed descriptions of everyday life in classrooms. Notable exceptions include Life in Classrooms (Jackson, 1968, reissued 1990) and School Teacher (Lortie, 1975). It has often been left to creative works, such as To Sir with Love (Braithwaite, 1977), or even the movie Dead Poets Society (Weir, 1989) to fill the gap, by providing the audience with insights into what goes on in classrooms behind closed doors. These versions of reality are of course somewhat idealised for public consumption. It seems strange that in the area of English language teaching, which has experienced exponential growth in the last twenty years, so little is known about what happens when teachers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds spend many hours a week in one another's company within the hothouse environment of the language classroom.

It is possible that the situations in which the teachers in the study found themselves are ones to which teachers working in other contexts can relate, and that the kinds of classroom behaviours and events which they describe are to some degree familiar to teachers working in similar contexts. It is usually accepted that the aim of qualitative research is not to claim the generalisability of the findings, but rather to produce findings which are so well contextualised and which ring so true that readers automatically find themselves making links with their own situations. Stake (1978, p. 7) terms the process by which readers see patterns which explain their own experience "naturalistic generalisation," Wilson (1979) describes the process of handing responsibility for making connections over to the reader as "reader or user generalisability," while Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the importance of providing rich and detailed description so that
"transferability" can occur. Perhaps the teachers in this study, through the words that they have used and the daily events that they have described, have brought alive certain situations to which other language teachers can relate.

The limitations of the study

This study has examined social processes in language classrooms primarily from the perspective of teachers who are, by virtue of their assigned roles, in positions of power. It therefore provides for the most part a one-sided, one-dimensional view of events. Although individual interviews were conducted with nearly all the students who participated in the second phase of the study, the insights that they provided were, for the reasons outlined in Chapter 3, considerably less rich than the insights provided by the teachers.

This study was conducted in a range of language teaching establishments in one particular city in an English-speaking country. All the teachers who participated in the study were native English speakers who were trained in ways which were, broadly speaking, similar. Despite the fact that the concept of cohesion was shared across the sample of teachers in this study and might well resonate for many readers, it is possible that the findings are to a significant degree situation-specific and will therefore hold limited meaning for those outside the immediate cultural context in which the data were gathered.

The purpose of the study was not to establish whether or not what the teachers said was true but rather to understand why they preferred teaching certain classes and why they behaved as they did in their classrooms. The study was therefore an investigation into teacher perceptions of reality, rather than an examination of any objective reality which existed outside the teachers' minds. Clearly much further work needs to be done to establish whether cohesion has

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87 For further discussion on the issue of generalisability within the qualitative research paradigm see Kennedy (1979).
more general applicability as an experience or process actually shared between teachers and students in particular classrooms. If it can be established that the intuitions of teachers and students regarding the presence of cohesion coincide, then it may be possible to explore further how this shared process develops and what factors may inhibit or enhance its evolution.

In line with the goal of qualitative researchers this study was concerned with process rather than with outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 31). Its goal was not to establish the existence of a relationship between the development of class cohesion and effective language learning. However, research which explores the relationship between process and product is useful because it can inform practice. Future researchers might, therefore, wish to design studies whose goal is to establish whether or not a relationship exists between class cohesion and language learning.

Because this is a qualitative study conducted with a small sample of teachers, no claims for the generalisability of the findings have been made. However, all 36 teachers who participated in the study related to the phenomenon of class cohesion and valued classes which operated in what they considered to be a cohesive manner. Clearly much more research needs to be done before it can be established whether or not class cohesion is as crucial as the teachers in the study believed it to be.

**Suggestions for further research**

One of the features of this study is that it poses new kinds of questions and may encourage researchers to consider using alternative methodologies in order to understand more fully social aspects of language classrooms. Researchers who feel challenged by the prospect of collecting and analysing large quantities of unstructured data might wish to conduct further grounded theory studies. Any
unanswered question or puzzling aspect of classroom behaviour can provide the starting point for a grounded theory study.\(^8^8\)

Other types of studies of a qualitative nature, using diaries, journals, essays, semi-structured or open-ended questionnaires and so forth might perhaps investigate the following:

- students' definitions of quality language classes;
- students' expectations of good language teachers (along the lines of recent work conducted by Cortazzi and Jin, 1996a);
- students' perceptions of their personal rates of progress and the factors relating to their progress or lack of it;
- students' ongoing perceptions of the social atmosphere in their classes as their courses progress;
- students' perceptions of the classroom factors which relate to their levels of motivation;\(^8^9\)
- students' levels of receptivity and the reasons underlying their openness or lack of openness to course content;\(^9^0\)
- the perceptions of teachers working in different cultural settings regarding the nature of "good" classes.

A further avenue for research relating to the phenomenon of class cohesion might lie in correlational studies which investigated the possible relationship between levels of class cohesion, as perceived by students, and student progress in language learning. A number of measures would need to be

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\(^{88}\) If the objective of a study is to develop a theory at the grassroots level it is a good idea to formulate a "why?" question. This is because "why?" questions, as language teachers well know, elicit "because..." answers, and the role of "because..." answers is to provide explanations. The role of theory is to provide general propositions which can be used as principles to explain specific classes of phenomena.

\(^{89}\) Research of this nature would be in line with Dörnyei's call for studies of motivation associated specifically with learner groups (1998, p. 130).

\(^{90}\) This is an area which Allwright and Bailey (1991, p. 195) explain is new and which as yet has no very firm foundation in research.
taken to reduce the likelihood that variables other than class cohesion had an equally strong influence on students' rates of progress (not forgetting factors outside the classroom itself). Even if a positive relationship were found to exist between class cohesion and student progress, it would not be valid to infer causality. In other words, it is just as likely that a class makes progress because it feels cohesive as it is that a class feels cohesive because the students know that they are making good progress.

One of the problems of conducting studies which focus on the phenomenon of class cohesion is that it is defined by different people in different ways. Bany and Johnson (1975) point out that even operational definitions of group cohesiveness do not include intangibles, pointing out that these must be determined by inference (p. 73). Nevertheless there were many similarities in the dimensions or indicators of cohesion identified by the 36 teachers in the present study. These fell into the following general categories: (i) inter-student relationships, (ii) behaviours of individual students, (iii) responsiveness of the whole class group, and (iv) the development of class cultures in the form of shared understandings of an apparently group-affirming kind. If researchers sought to assess relative levels or degrees of cohesion in particular language classes, the prevalence or relative frequency of occurrence of the following variables might be assessed:

**Inter-student relationships**
- overt signs of friendliness towards a range of students in the class;
- preparedness to help others to learn;
- willingness to swap seats on a regular basis and develop working relationships with a variety of students;
- generosity of spirit towards others (liberal with praise and so on);

**Individual student behaviours**
- willingness to engage in activities which have the potential to embarrass or demean;
- willingness to take risks and make errors;
- willingness to laugh at selves;
- willingness to be the focal point of the class;
- willingness to volunteer for activities;
- general helpfulness;

**Responsiveness of whole class group**

- laughter;
- animated behaviour;
- spontaneity;

**Shared class understandings**

- whole-class response when reference made to past events known to the class as a whole;
- class responsiveness to shared understandings relating to the roles of individuals and so on;
- class knowing what to do without being given instructions.

A further area for investigation might lie in the relationship between the clarity with which teachers make explicit their teaching objectives, or the nature and timing of the feedback they give to students, and the development of class cohesion. I suggest this because both these variables have been found to be determinants of group cohesiveness (Shaw, 1981, p. 215). I suspect that a key factor in the development of class cohesion may be the degree of confidence that students have that their class is progressing towards specific, mutually-acceptable learning goals.

**A note of caution**

Even though I have recommended a number of directions in which future research on class cohesion might go, I wish to qualify these recommendations by offering some words of warning to three groups of researchers: (i) those who wish
to conduct studies of a quantitative nature, (ii) those who wish to conduct studies based on classroom observation, and (iii) those who have themselves taught classes of language learners.

First, to potential researchers interested in conducting quantitative studies I would like to point out that, although a wealth of small-scale, carefully-designed and executed studies could no doubt focus on specific dimensions of the construct of cohesion, such studies might fail to throw much further light on class cohesion because of the holistic nature of the phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a sense in which language classes are like systems or organisms, the parts of which are interrelated and interdependent. Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998, p. 14) quote Lewin, who states that the whole is not "more" than the sum of its parts, but has definitive properties of its own, while Guba (1981) observes that because the whole is made up of many factors it cannot be understood if it is dismembered (p. 84). This being the case, it would seem to make little sense to try to understand class cohesion in terms of its constituent parts which, when reassembled, would form something quite different. Researchers who attempt to measure degrees of class cohesion, or to reach an understanding of class cohesion by examining its elements in isolation from one another, might find themselves in the position of all the king's soldiers and all the king's men - unable to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

Second, I would like to remind potential researchers who are interested in gathering their data through classroom observation that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between what is seen to be happening in language classrooms and what is actually happening. The present research revealed that overt behaviour does not necessarily reflect how students are actually feeling, and that observers of that behaviour (whether researchers or teacher informants) frequently interpret those behaviours in different ways. In other words, there are problems relating to (i) whether student behaviours can validly be taken as indicators of class cohesion, and (ii) whether indicators of class cohesion would be interpreted as
such by all observers, regardless of how rigorous they tried to be. I am reminded of Gudmundsdottir's image of an endless hall of faulty mirrors which she uses to represent the distortion that occurs between what informants think, the words that they use, how interviewers understand those words, and the personal interpretations that interviewers place upon them (1996, p. 303). Although Gudmundsdottir is referring to interviewing I think the point is equally applicable to observational research.

Finally, I would like to offer a word of caution to the third group of potential researchers, those who have themselves taught in language classrooms and who have had the experience of teaching lively, responsive, "cohesive" classes. My experience as a researcher in this investigation revealed that it is very difficult to examine class cohesion through the articulated perspectives of the participants in the classroom when you yourself know how much easier and more pleasant it is to teach classes which seem to operate in a cohesive manner. So researchers who decide to examine class cohesion should try not to become ensnared by their own values and assumptions. Unless they can pull back and examine the phenomenon objectively their vision will remain clouded and they may unwittingly fail to apprehend data which contradict their own value systems.

Endnote

It seems ironic that even though the majority of the teachers in the study behaved in ways which suggested that they endorsed a socially-grounded view of learning in language classrooms, people conducting classroom-based research appear for the most part to have adopted an input-uptake model which ignores social variables. Second language acquisition researchers have tended to conceptualise language classrooms as tidy, well-ordered workrooms where language can be inputted by teachers and taken up by students in a single, seamless process. However, the evidence from teachers in the present study
suggests that it may be more appropriate to view language classrooms as rough-and-tumble playgrounds with unique cultures which develop as teachers and students interact with one another and learn to function as groups. This view of language classrooms acknowledges the presence of a range of intervening social variables within the language teaching and learning equation and allows them to be taken into account.

Perhaps the teachers who participated in the study, by showing that their classroom behaviour was governed by a concern for the well-being of their classes as groups, have suggested a new direction for classroom-based research. In future researchers in the field of applied linguistics might consider turning their attention to the complex interface between social and pedagogic processes in language classrooms.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The bonded class

The initial findings indicate that, although there is little consensus about the nature of good language lessons, there is considerable similarity in what people are saying about good language classes. This study has therefore concentrated on the nature of good language classes.

Most informants have a clear idea of the characteristics of a "good class." It is one where the students and teacher have somehow come together; there is a sense of one-ness, and the feeling in the class is one of warmth, mutual support and trust. What appears to have happened is that, when a class is defined as "good" or "nice" by its teacher, it has an additional dimension. Not only does it have the features traditionally associated with the classroom situation, with the teacher in the superior role of "knower," or in the currently fashionable support role of "facilitator," but it also has some of the features of a "self help" or therapeutic small group. In this latter scenario the role of the teacher is that of "group leader," on an equal footing to the other members of the group, and leading gently by example. Many informants have talked of the importance of admitting that they do not know all the answers, of making occasional mistakes, of making fools of themselves and being prepared to laugh at themselves, and of revealing personal details. They also talk about the fact that they frequently find that they themselves learn unexpected new things.

For the remainder of this study the term "bonded class" will be used to describe a class which has acquired this new dimension.

There is little evidence to suggest that language teachers consider that language learning only takes place, or takes place more efficiently, in a bonded class. However, there is little doubt that teachers feel happier and more comfortable when they are teaching classes that have bonded, and find such classes easier to teach. They feel quite proprietorial about such classes, although they understand that at the end of each course they must surrender their "group leader" role. There is evidence to suggest that students, however, retain a vivid, positive memory of bonded classes, and a warm feeling of gratitude towards their teachers, which lasts for a considerable length of time.

There is evidence to suggest that whether a class bonds readily or not is to some degree a matter of chance - a "happy accident" - although informants are aware that there are a number of strategies which they can adopt to facilitate the bonding process. These include providing a variety of warm-up and getting-to-know-you activities in the early stages of the existence of the class, and creating an emotional atmosphere which is conducive to learning. Informants are aware that there is a critical period at the beginning of the "life" of the class, when bonding usually starts to take place. However, there is no general consensus about
how long it takes for a class to bond: some classes bond within the first few lessons, others do not start to bond until the final weeks of the course, and some classes never bond at all.

Informants have identified a number of factors which make it difficult, but not impossible, for a class to bond. Firstly, there are a number of practical considerations, such as student numbers being too great or too small, the class being too disparate in terms of language level or objectives, the class being dominated by students from one particular cultural background, or the room, furniture or temperature being unsuitable. More significantly, there appear to be a range of affective factors which can inhibit the formation of a bonded class. These include: students being in competition with each other; students remaining as isolated islands, because they are under pressure to pass exams; students who resent being in the class, or who do not want to be learning English at all; students who are in a state of culture shock; students who are distracted by outside events, ranging from losing their personal papers to leading a wild social life.

It appears that, in order for a class to bond, it is not enough for a teacher simply to exhibit the qualities of a group leader. Informants reveal that they themselves have mastery over the full range of skills associated with being competent, experienced professional teachers of English. These include not only the ability to organise tasks, select materials and design a suitable programme for the class, but, more importantly, to be prepared to be flexible, to modify goals when appropriate, and to abandon tasks and activities when these do not appear to be working. Informants are aware of the innate contradiction of having to give a sense of purpose and direction to the class, while at the same time being guided by the needs of their students and being prepared to go in new and unexpected directions.

There is no evidence that informants consider that the specific nature of a language course (for which a class has specifically been formed) has a bearing on whether or not a class becomes bonded. However, informants are sensitive to the fact that that the series of lessons which make up the course must contain a balance of activities and moods, and that within the lessons themselves there must be a similar balance. Informants understand that lessons need to flow on from one another, and that whether or not a lesson is technically competent is less important than whether it fits into the overall pattern of the course. Interestingly, informants indicate that occasional incompetent lessons can make a positive contribution to the class bonding process. Informants value highly lessons which engage their students both emotionally and intellectually, and they are aware of the subtle signs which their students give to indicate satisfaction or otherwise. They have an understanding of the fact that each language course is an integrated whole, which exists for a finite length of time and which must inevitably come to an end.

It is evident from the data that not only professional, but also personal qualities, are exhibited by teachers who assume the dual role of teacher and group leader. In the group leader role teachers are carers, showing respect for individual students, valuing them as people, and nurturing those with difficulties, either of an educational or personal nature. In addition to this, as has been stated above,
Informants indicate that they adopt a number of specific strategies to show that they are on a level with their students and are essentially no different from them.

Informants have identified many events which can enhance, sustain and develop the feeling that a class has bonded. These include class visits, out of class activities organised by the students, class parties in a teacher's or a student's house, and students bringing food to class for everyone to share. In one sense a bonded class feeds on itself; once the atmosphere has been created, events which might in other circumstances have made students feel threatened and distant from each other, in fact serve to draw the class even closer together. These include someone in the class making an unwitting, silly error, someone making a spontaneous joke, someone speaking out of turn, or someone revealing a new and unexpected aspect of themselves or their past experience. There is evidence to suggest that even those students who are initially resistant to group pressure, either through shyness or a sense of superiority, find themselves gradually drawn into the group. They may never become leading lights in the bonded group, but they are with the group in spirit, as it were.

The basic feature of the bonded class appears to be that it is a support network, an outer protective layer which in some way shelters those individuals who find themselves within it. The concept of the protective environment is not, of course, restricted to the classroom itself. Certain informants have identified how, in a sense, the bonded class is itself a part of the wider protective environment of the language school, and the language school is in turn defined and shielded by the university setting in which it is located. Conversely, when "high risk" language activities are to be attempted, teachers often organise sub-groups within the class, so that individuals feel more fully insulated against threats to personal esteem.

The evidence suggests that the bonded class has a number of specific features. Most obvious of these is the emotional climate, which is one of warmth, comfort, relaxation, security, happiness, and trust. Within this environment, which basically has the characteristics of an (ideal) family, the feeling of "giving" is paramount. By "giving" is meant the sharing of ideas (rather than guarding them selfishly for oneself), respect for others, tolerance of the weaknesses of others, and a willingness to be helpful and friendly to everyone in the class. When a class has bonded there is a sense in which communicative activities, such as role playing, discussions, problem solving or group decision making tasks, involve an element of genuine personal commitment.

Informants have identified that, within the sheltered environment of the bonded class, there is an absence of fear. This means that, within the four walls of the classroom, students are more likely to indulge in linguistic risk taking, to make errors, to strive to express new ideas in English, to initiate activities and to experiment with the language. In a sense the bonded classroom is like the danger-free environment of the kindergarten. Just as within the kindergarten children have controlled freedom to explore the physical environment, so within the bonded classroom adult learners of English have controlled freedom to make linguistic sorties into new areas, and yet feel safe about doing so. There is evidence that within the bonded classroom there is a sense in which people can
take liberties with each other. In other words, some teachers go as far as teasing, cajoling and laughing at students, and even sometimes point out the weaknesses of individual students in front of the whole class. Similarly, within the limits set down by the teacher, students can be cheeky to their teacher, point out the teacher's mistakes, challenge their teacher and even on occasion tease them.

Informants give a clear overall impression that the experience of being in a bonded class is a positive one both for their students and for themselves. Regarding student learning, informants indicate that they consider that student language proficiency improves, although they indicate that they believe that there is little positive correlation between what is taught and what is learnt; they believe that students take away from the language class a variety of different linguistic elements, depending on individual interests and priorities. Informants also stress that during a bonded class students develop in personal ways, expanding their own self-knowledge, their understanding of other people, and their knowledge of the world. What is equally intriguing is the fact that informants consider that they themselves develop as a result of being in a bonded language class, both professionally and personally. It seems, therefore, that membership of a bonded class results in personal growth for all concerned, and that education, rather than learning, has occurred.
Appendix B
Observer Checklist

Teacher: .................... Date: .......................... Week No: ...

Description of content /pattern of lesson

Teacher's actions relating to development of group

Behaviours of individual students (seem positive)
Behaviours of individual students (indicating negativity)

Group behaviour/reactions (e.g. laughter), general group understandings

General observations

Overall summary of the feeling/atmosphere in the class today:
APPENDIX C

TEACHER IMPRESSIONS OF INDIVIDUAL LESSONS

Dear teacher,

As soon as you can after each lesson please take a few moments to jot down in note form your impressions of your class. We can then use these notes as a starting point for our brief weekly interviews. Thank you very much.

Name of class: …………………    Week no: ……………   Date: ……………

My personal thoughts/feelings/impressions of my class today:

Particular things I noticed about the behaviour of either individuals or the class as a group during the lesson today:

A word or phrase which best summarises the atmosphere in the class today:
## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STUDENTS IN CASE STUDY CLASSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of student:</th>
<th>Country of origin:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Age):</td>
<td>Fee paying/migrant/refugee:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/single:</td>
<td>Family:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job/study in home country:</td>
<td>Time in Australia:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of courses:</td>
<td>Aspirations:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General feelings about the class:

- working in pairs/groups, moving around?
- working with students from other nationalities?
- making friends?
- range of class activities?
- good aspects of class? problems? difficulties?
- anything they would have liked done differently?
- anything else they would like to say?
APPENDIX E

FORM OF DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

THE BONDED CLASS: AN INVESTIGATION OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES IN CLASSES OF ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to reach a fuller understanding of group development processes occurring within selected classes of adult language learners. The researcher wishes to focus particularly on the following two aspects of group development: (a) the developmental stages through which language classes pass through, and (b) the role which both the teacher and individual students can play in the development of class cohesion.

The following points should be noted: (1) the researcher is primarily interested in social-psychological processes which occur in classrooms, (2) the researcher’s purpose is not to evaluate the techniques of class teachers, and (3) the researcher is aware that group development processes are often enhanced or inhibited by circumstances which are beyond the control of individual teachers.

Procedures

In order to achieve the research goal outlined above the researcher wishes to work with the teachers of the selected language classes in a collaborative and mutually supportive manner. This will involve the teacher in doing the following:

1. Keeping a note of points for weekly discussion.

2. Being interviewed by the researcher on a regular basis in order to discuss more fully classroom processes or events which the teacher wishes to share with the researcher. [Estimated interview time 30 minutes]

The researcher will need to observe the class for a complete lesson once a week. She will sit unobtrusively at the back of the class and will make field notes.

The researcher will also need to interview selected students regarding group processes at appropriate points during the course. This will be done outside class time and with the prior permission of the teacher concerned.

Amount of time involved

From the estimates given in the above section it can be seen that becoming involved in this project will involve the participating teacher in a commitment of approximately 40 minutes per week for the duration of the language course under review.
Benefits of participating in the study

It is hoped that those who participate in this research will benefit professionally, in that they will increase their awareness of classroom group processes.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will ultimately benefit the teaching profession as a whole, since an understanding of group dynamics principles can be useful for class teachers in a wide range of classroom situations.

Any questions regarding this project can be directed to me, Rose Senior, Centre for International English, on 351 7617, or at home on 385 2919.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please kindly complete this section and return it to Rose Senior.

I ………………………………………………….. have read the information above and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published providing that I am not identifiable.

…………………………………………………………………………………
Participant                                                                                Date

…………………………………………………………………………………
Investigator                                                                               Date
Dear student,

I am doing research into language classes. My purpose is to study the many things which happen in language classrooms. This will help teachers to teach better, so that students from overseas can learn English more quickly and easily.

Your teacher has agreed to help me with my research, by letting me sit in your class once a week and make notes.

Before I begin my research I need to make sure that everybody understands exactly what I am doing.

I guarantee that, if the results from the study are published, no person who takes part in the study will be identifiable.

If you have understood this letter, and if all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, please would you sign the form below.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Rose Senior, Researcher

I have understood the above letter, and I agree to take part in this research.

Signed: ...........................................  Date:  .......................
(student)

...........................................   ...................................
(researcher)
APPENDIX G

STUDENT PERSONAL EVALUATION

Name: ………………………

PART A:  **Personal language progress**  
(Please circle the most appropriate number on the scale)

1. How much progress in English do you think that you have made since joining this class?

   0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  
   (None)  (a great amount)

2. How satisfied are you with the progress that you have made since joining this class?

   0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  
   (Not at all satisfied) (extremely satisfied)

PART B: **Social aspects of the classroom**

I am interested to know how you feel about the class in which you are currently studying. Please complete the sentences below with your own thoughts and impressions of this class.

1. In this class I always feel ……………………………. because

2. In this class I usually feel …………………………… because

3. In this class I occasionally feel ……………………… because

4. In this class I never feel …………………………… because
Here is a selection of adjectives which language learners can use to describe their feelings about their classes. Please think about your present class and then complete the four sentences over the page. Choose one of the adjectives listed below to fit each sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>relaxed</th>
<th>tense</th>
<th>confident</th>
<th>cheerful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sad</th>
<th>nervous</th>
<th>competitive</th>
<th>serious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>respected</th>
<th>happy</th>
<th>worried</th>
<th>calm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>confused</th>
<th>supported</th>
<th>friendly</th>
<th>lonely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>understood</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>stressed</th>
<th>satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>contented</th>
<th>frustrated</th>
<th>positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>angry</th>
<th>bored</th>
<th>excited</th>
<th>depressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>comfortable</th>
<th>unhappy</th>
<th>interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX H

STUDENT PERSONAL EVALUATION
(Serbo-Croatian Version)

DRAGI UCENICI ENGLESKOG JEZIKA,

JA BIH VOLJELA DA RAZUMIJEM KAKO SE VI OSJECATE U OVOM RAZREDU. MOLIM VAS PROCITAJTE OVE RIJECI I, POPUNITE I DOVRSITE SVAKU RECENICU. MOLIM VAS DA POKUSATE BITI ISKRENI.

HVALA NA SARADNJI.

LICNA OSJECANJA

OPUSTEN NAPETO SAMOUVJEREN NEUGODNO
RADOSNO TUZNO NERVOZNO
OZBILJNO POSTOVANO VESELO ZBUNJEN
ZABRINUT SMIREN PODRZAN
PRIJATELJSKI RAS POLOZENO USAMLJEN
RAZUMLJIVO NEGATIVNO
ZADOVOLJNO FRUSTRIRANO POZITIVNO
LJUTITO DOSADNO UZBUĐENO
DEPRESIVNO UGODNO NESRETNO
ZAINTERESIRAN SUPARNICKI (TAKMICARSKI)
MOJA OSJECANJA

U OVOM RAZREDU:

1. JA SE UVJEK OSJECAM …………………….. ZATO

2. JA SE OBICNO OSJECAM ……………………… ZATO

3. JA SE POVREMENO OSJECAM ………………….. ZATO

4. JA SE NIKAD NE OSJECAM …………………….. ZATO
APPENDIX I

THE STORY OF AMY'S CLASS

Week Three

During Week Three the weather was hot, with temperatures approaching 40 degrees celsius. To make matters worse, as Lela pointed out, the classroom did not have air conditioning. Amy perceived that the students were lacking in energy and enthusiasm, particularly on the Monday, because the heat had "knocked it out of them."

On the Monday afternoon Amy organised a communication activity in which the students were required, in groups, to role play moving house. The students were first organised into groups of five, but were reluctant to move, complaining that the chairs were cumbersome. Goran said: "It's not my day to come to school today," and several of the Bosnian students could be heard speaking in their own language. There were two warm-ups: an activity in which the students brainstormed necessary arrangements prior to moving house, and an activity in which the students matched words related to moving house in list A with the definitions of the words in list B. During the first warm-up session the students in one group, who were from Bosnia, began to criticise Australia. They mentioned the proliferation of cockroaches in Australian houses and said that Australians were lazy because "you have to clean your house before you move in." Someone criticised Australians for wearing shoes inside the house, saying that shoes were for outdoors only. In Goran's opinion Australian houses were not well built, because they were "built in a week," whereas in Bosnia houses were built for both cold and hot weather. The group then discussed how beautiful houses in Bosnia were, with their parquet floors and rugs, or fitted carpets with rugs placed on top.

Amy then required the students to re-group into fours and gave out role play cards (father, mother, daughter aged 15 and son aged 13) for a hypothetical
situation in which the father's promotion required the family to relocate, while the other family members had personal reasons for wanting to stay. The students were then invited, in their "families," to discuss the problem. In three of the family groups individuals made compromises and reached agreement, but in the other two the atmosphere was confrontational and no agreement was reached. For example, in his group Aco said that he would forget his dreams for the sake of his family. Goran, on the other hand, said to his "wife": "You must do as I say!,” while Rezo, who was role playing the son, announced that he would go on hunger strike to prevent his family from moving. At one point Mirko got up and went out of the room, returning later. The discussion activity lasted for 30 minutes and Amy then asked the class whether they would like to see one of the groups perform the role play. Mirko said "no,” but Amy encouraged one of the groups to give a quick performance anyway. For the final part of the lesson Amy invited a member from each group to give feedback to the class about what their group had discussed and what decisions they had reached. By this time, however, time was running out, and the students began packing up their books before the feedback had been completed.

On the Wednesday morning six students were absent, but the ten who were present seemed in a positive frame of mind. Goran made a point of explaining that he had been tired on the Monday because he had had to work all day on the Sunday, including the evening. Amy noticed that Mirko seemed happier and complimented him, saying, "You're going really well. You're going to be the star soon."

The first activity of the morning was a fluency activity which required the students, in pairs, to practise the simple tense with adverbs of frequency and adverbial phrases such as "fairly often" and "as rarely as possible." Amy had modified the list of questions which the students were to ask each other so that, as well as questions such as: "How often do you water your garden?" or: "How often do you watch the tennis or soccer on TV?,” there were questions related to
hygiene, such as: "How often do you brush your teeth?,” "How often do you have a shower?" and "How often do you change the sheets on your bed?" Amy then divided the class into two groups of five, asking each student to report to the group what their partner (who was now in the other group) had said. Amy sat with one of the groups and encouraged free conversation. Much laughter was generated, with the students creating unusual answers to questions about things they normally never did, such as buying flowers. Goran's high-pitched laugh was particularly noticeable. Mirth was created when Nguyen was asked how often she had dinner in a restaurant and replied: "No money. I work in one." In the across-the-class question-and-answer session which followed, in which the students had to pretend to invite each other to do things, some of the students indicated by tone of voice that they were aware of the doubles entendres of questions such as: "Would you like to come and check out the bookshop with me?,” "Would you like to take your shoes off?,” or "Would you like to borrow my rubber?"

On the Wednesday Amy gave the students two free writing tasks, the first of which was to describe what had gone on during the first part of the morning. The students found this difficult and Goran pointed out that it was not logical to do this task using the present tense form of verbs. The second writing task, on the subject of children, was one which fully engaged the attention of the class, everyone looking carefully at Amy and the whiteboard. Amy wrote up the word "children" in the centre of the board, and the students then called out words associated with children such as "school,” "fun,” "happy,” "carefree,” "tell lies,” "playgrounds" and "attention." Individual students then created sentences which Amy wrote up, various women contributing eagerly. Halima, for example, said, "Children very often make mess in their bedrooms and get dirty when they play outside" and also. "We need to communicate with children." Goran's contributions were, "Ugly children don't exist” and "Big children, big problem for parents."
Amy perceived that the class dynamic had changed on the Wednesday, because several "key students," including Rezo, Aco, Vesna and Lela, were absent. On this day Amy felt that Goran had emerged as the temporary class group leader.

On the Thursday morning there was almost a full class again, with most of the absentees from the previous day present. Amy took advantage of this natural information-gap situation to ask those who had been in class to fill the others in on what had been going on. She perceived that this activity was a high-energy one, because the students who were the tellers were excited about their peer teaching role. For example she noticed that Bo (who was still suffering from halitosis) "was totally obsessed with telling his partner about the listening exercise we'd done on Wednesday afternoon." Amy perceived that the Thursday morning continued on a high note, with a further activity on childhood in which the class as a group created a poem beginning "childhood is a time of..." She considered that Mirko's sentences, such as: "Childhood is a time of great happiness," were particularly moving.

Amy's overview of the week was that, although "it was all coming together," there was still a sense in which the class atmosphere was unstable. According to Amy Monday had felt flat, Tuesday had been very good, Wednesday had felt different because of the absence of so many students, and Thursday had started off well but had then petered out in the afternoon - not only in terms of the energy of the students, but in terms of her own energy as well.
APPENDIX J

STUDENTS' BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT CLASSROOM LANGUAGE LEARNING

1. Classrooms should be formal places in which teachers keep tight control, not only over learning processes but also over student behaviour.

2. Teachers should compel their students to study hard by giving them more homework and so on.

3. Teachers should present students with clear sets of procedures which, if followed, will guarantee success in language learning.

4. Teachers should correct inaccurate English at all times.

5. Accuracy is more important than fluency, and fluency practice with students whose English is difficult to understand and who make grammatical errors is of limited use.

6. It is inappropriate to express personal views and opinions or to disagree openly with others.

7. Certain subjects are taboo and should not be discussed or joked about in class.

8. Learning is essentially a cognitive endeavour which involves analytical thought and rote memorisation.

9. Any language can be reduced to a system of rules and an understanding of those rules provides a key to successful mastery of that language.

10. Doing collaborative work in class is somehow cheating.

11. Classrooms should be quiet rather than noisy places.

12. Mastery of a new language is not achieved without effort (the "no pain, no gain" view), and it is inappropriate to have fun while learning a language.

13. All courses should be built around textbooks (so that students have something specific to study at home and can prepare units in advance or revise what has been studied in their own time).
14. Textbooks are always right and language use should be understood and mastered before language usage is attempted.

15. All new language should be systematically inputted and the degree to which that input has been successfully internalised should be formally tested on a regular basis.

16. If the full meaning of a text is to be accessed the meaning of every word must be understood (and that reading a text without understanding every word is indicative of a lazy attitude).

17. It is preferable not to make errors during the process of mastering new language because incorrect language forms become ingrained and as such are difficult to eradicate.

18. A certain level of decorum should be preserved in language classrooms. It is therefore neither seemly nor necessary for language learners (especially adults) to engage in activities in which aspects of personalities are revealed.

19. Games are for children and are therefore inappropriate for language learning.

20. Language learning is essentially a personal and private affair.

21. Teachers deserve to be respected for their high level of learning and for the extensive knowledge that they have of English grammar.

22. It is not appropriate to be over-friendly towards teachers or to use familiar forms of address.