

positive encouragement ('I know you'll be able to do this because you've been working so well'; 'I'm sure you'll find this fun').

In the light of the complexity of social behaviour, it is only to be expected that no system for measuring classroom interaction is going to be completely comprehensive. There are all kinds of subtle interactions that in any case we cannot yet score, and two identical score sheets for two different teachers (or even for the same teacher with two different classes) may cloak numerous important variations in social behaviour. And of course, children will respond to the teacher not just on the strength of what the latter says or does in the present lesson but (as pointed out when discussing episode sequences above) on their memories of the social interactions that took place on the previous occasions they were being taught by him or her: ('When Mr Wombat looks like that it means he's in a bad mood'; 'Ms Akhtar won't shout at you if you get it wrong'; 'We've never once had a good laugh in old Stoneface's lesson'). Nevertheless, interaction analysis systems provide one of the best practical ways for helping teachers to study their own professional strengths and weaknesses (to say nothing of the behaviour of children), and it is unfortunate that, in the UK at least, more use is not made of them, both in initial training and in in-service work.

## **Social roles**

The importance of a close study of teacher behaviour and, by implication, of the behavioural examples it sets for children, bring us to the subject of roles and role models. A role model is someone who exemplifies to others a set of behaviours within a specifically defined social position. People can act as desirable or undesirable role models. Drunken feckless parents for example are pretty unsatisfactory role models to their children of what parenthood should be. Caring, unselfish, clear-sighted parents on the other hand are good role models. Role models can be people who fill roles that we covet one day for ourselves or people in positions with which we simply come into frequent contact. Teachers are good examples of this latter kind of role model. Most children in the class will have no opportunity (and probably no wish!) to become teachers, yet their picture of what teachers are like is moulded for them by the specific examples to which they are exposed. Good teachers will set good examples and will give children role models that will leave them favourably disposed towards teachers and towards the whole concept of education while unsatisfactory teachers will do just the opposite. Teachers sometimes are unaware of just how influential they are (though a look at autobiographical literature should leave them in no doubt), and of how permanent an impression they often make upon the young.

But teachers are also examples of the first kind of role model (that is of individuals occupying a role to which children themselves aspire) in that they occupy the role of adults. A good teacher ('good' in the social relationship and social behaviour sense as well as in the academic) provides children with an example of the kind of adult they might themselves one day become. This example does not stop just with the teacher-child relationship. Children are very much aware of how teachers relate to each other within the school, of how they relate to parents on open evenings and at social events, of how they respond to the headteacher and to the school rules, of the loyalty they show towards colleagues, of how they behave towards the opposite sex, and of how they react to triumphs and disasters, set-backs and disappointments, winning and losing. If children look at a teacher, and see there the kind of human being they themselves would like to be, then the teacher has given them a gift that rivals any of the formal teaching that has been taking place.

### **Role conflict**

Within the role of teacher, there are a number of sub-roles. In one of these sub-roles teachers are academics charged with the business of helping formal learning. In another they are administrators, sometimes with a large department or with a year group to run. In another they are counsellors, responsible for the pastoral care of children. In another they are leaders of extra-curricular activities, and have school societies or sports teams (in which the children participate voluntarily) to organize. In another they are representatives of the authority of the school, with perhaps specific disciplinary functions (e.g. as head of lower or upper school) to fulfil. And at all times they have their own careers to think about, their own promotion prospects. Additionally, they have roles outside the school, for example as family men and women, which may interfere with the exercise of their role as teachers.

Not surprisingly these sub-roles can at times come into sharp conflict. This is dealt with further in Chapter 12, where the guidance/counselling role is discussed, but let me first take one or two obvious examples. In his or her role as responsible teacher, a teacher knows that they should stay to see a certain group of children through to their GCSE examinations next year, but a good job comes up in another school and in their career role they agonize over whether or not to apply for it. Or the children complain to a teacher with justification about certain school rules (pastoral role), which as a member of staff he or she must be seen to uphold unless and until the rules can be changed (authoritative role). Or

the demands of running a busy department take a teacher out of the classroom frequently (administrative role), and interfere with the preparation and marking of work (class teacher role). Or family commitments (parental role) prevent a teacher from going on a vital school trip during the school holidays or from staying behind after school to run one of the school societies (extra-curricular role).

#### ACCEPTING ROLE CONFLICT

Each of these role conflicts can often only be resolved by weighing up carefully the competing claims upon time and energies and loyalties. But all too often the result is a rather unsatisfactory compromise, or the abandoning of one or other role to the detriment of all concerned. In a multifaceted role like that of the school teacher there is no obvious way around this problem, but one essential is for the individual teacher (and preferably also the headteacher) to recognize its existence, and to acknowledge the fact that it can be a major source of teacher stress. The only way to avoid this stress is to be realistic in one's expectations. Teachers cannot themselves expect to fulfil each of their roles equally well and at all times. There must be a sense of priorities. And once having decided on these priorities and acted accordingly, there must not be an excess of guilt and self-accusations. Teachers *are* often superhuman people, but they cannot do everything. Better to do the more important roles really well at the expense of the less important than to do none of them adequately. And better to avoid the unnecessary ulcers and coronaries that will put an effective end to the performance of any roles at all!

In addition to role conflict at the personal level, it is also important for teachers to be aware of how their roles may lead to conflict within the perceptions which children have of them. In one role they may be friendly and informal towards children, in another brisk and remote. In one they may be sympathetic and understanding, in another arbitrary and dismissive. In one they may be thinking primarily of themselves, in another primarily of children. At times, a child may want to consult them in one of their roles while they remain firmly fixed in another, quite different one. Though teachers cannot avoid these varied roles, the important thing is that they remain fundamentally consistent across them. Thus, for example, their concern for children will show through, whether they are in the class teacher, the counsellor, or the authoritarian role. Children will appreciate a teacher's fairness, and see that vital human qualities are not superficialities to be picked up and discarded with each change of role.