

Ethnography and the teacher

(see top)
A. K. ...

Teaching and educational research do not have a happy association. To many teachers much educational research appears irrelevant. They have little part in initiating and conducting the research. The issues selected for examination are not theirs. They are defined in ways that take little account of the day-to-day intricacies of the teacher's task, and are dressed up in methodological mystery and incomprehensible jargon. The following comment from a teacher is typical.

Some of it seems very artificial. It seems to be simply a means to an end. A piece of paper awarded to the person who's done the research, at the end, to prove that he/she has satisfied the examiners. The actual research itself is meaningless, and irrelevant to any working teacher ... I don't think the teacher in the classroom is ever really taken seriously enough ... and a lot of theory ... isn't very relevant to what goes on in a classroom or a school. (Quoted in May and Rudduck, 1983)

One of the main reasons for this gulf between teachers and research is, I suspect, the simple fact that much educational research has not been done for teachers. Rather, it has been generated within a body of knowledge related to one of the disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and its theoretical interests (see also Adelman, 1985). It is not that it is irrelevant to teachers' concerns, but that, if the primary aim of the research study were to be concerned with teacher practice, it would need to be cast in a different way. Also the connecting links would need to be clarified. Teachers might complain that there is too much philosophy and theory, and not enough consideration of how research relates to practice. They might further accuse researchers of not explaining

themselves adequately. Researchers might argue that only teachers can interpret the relevance of any study for their classroom practice, for only they are conversant with the many different factors that go towards decision-making within the actual situation. Between them, the practical significance of the work is frequently lost.

The ideal situation in principle is to amalgamate the two functions - the production of knowledge and the demonstration of its applicability to educational practice - within the same person. There has been arguably, some movement towards this from both sides - from the research, academic end in the form of 'teacher educators', and from the teacher end in the form of 'teacher-researchers' (Stenhouse, 1975). However, both of these roles are still firmly located within their own spheres, with all the attendant boundary problems. Can researchers or teacher educators really appreciate teacher practice without continual experience of it themselves? Can teachers or other professionals, without much more generous provision of free time, engage in any worthwhile research? The difficulties are considerable, but the belief that this represents currently the best hope for bridging that gap, underlies this first chapter. Later chapters then aim to help equip teachers, other practitioners and researchers with what I consider to be a particularly useful research approach for that kind of endeavour. To substantiate the point about the potential for synthesis in ethnography, it is necessary first to consider the nature of pedagogical knowledge.

Pedagogical knowledge

First, it is knowledge that teachers - and not educational researchers - have. If research is to be cast in this field, teachers, not researchers, would need to specify the issues, and there would need to be some internalization of research method on the teachers' part, or of pedagogical knowledge on the part of researchers. Second, it is knowledge that both informs and constitutes the practical action of teaching. This involves more than just instrumental effectiveness at 'task'. It includes the whole circumstances surrounding the task. The disciplines inform the theory in these areas; for example, questions of why one is doing it (philosophy), how the child learns (psychology), knowledge of the child's 'presentation equipment' (sociology), skills of communication (linguistics). However, it is its transformation into practice (how all these inputs are put together and brought to bear on particular issues) that makes it pedagogical knowledge. I would argue that, at the moment, the feed-in of aca-

demical knowledge to teacher practice in these areas is low, and, in its absence, a great deal of first-hand, anecdotal, 'recipe' knowledge or folklore is employed. Though this contains a fund of wisdom, it is, in more senses than one, undisciplined. It is not an adequate basis for professional action.

Another feature, I would suggest, is that it is not always conscious, or easily articulated. Teachers often act intuitively, but it is an intuition that usually rests on a firm basis of learned knowledge, and which exists in an 'open certainty'. What I mean by this derives from the fact that, in a sense, certainty and knowledge are occupational requirements of a teacher. They are expected to know, and to be able to make many on-the-spot decisions that allow little scope for doubt and reflection before they are made. Teachers typically handle this by advancing on a broad front, recognizing the imperfection of some actions after the event, but seeking to make restitution when a similar occasion recurs. The certainty that teachers need, therefore, to give their professionalism assurance, is a 'strategic' or 'open' one, not a 'closed' omniscience, impervious to persuasion (though there may well be some teachers who display the latter, but I would argue that their 'pedagogical knowledge' is defective).

Pedagogical knowledge, therefore, involves an 'open' certainty and a 'closed' imperfection. The main reason for the imperfection is the host of factors attending the situations teachers confront, which are in constant flux anyway, so that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher to know them all. Some may have to be guessed at on the basis of evidence of variable worth, and on occasions they will guess wrongly. Perhaps the basis of a teacher's skill is the ability to guess right most of the time.

This is why the teacher is the sole owner of pedagogical knowledge. It is synthetic, building up separate elements (for example, from the various disciplines) into a connected whole, which is a teacher's teaching orientation; it involves knowledge of the situation (which includes not just the material environment, but one's own personal resources, and pupils, and an understanding of the purposes within it). Only the teacher is privy to this constellation of factors.

Some have argued that pedagogical knowledge is additive, not cumulative; that it is more of an art, like architecture, than a science, like medicine (Harris, 1976; Shulman, 1984). In the latter, there have been great advances in knowledge, but the former is more a matter of style, subject to prevailing mores, values, economics, etc., as well as personal whim and predilection. I believe,

however, there are elements of both in teaching, but that the scientific advances made in, for example, our understanding of how pupils learn, how cultural forces influence their motivation, teacher socialization, how subjects develop, and so on, are, so far at any rate, inadequately and ineffectively incorporated into pedagogy. Consequently the old mystique about teachers being 'born not made' continues to carry considerable point, for they are thrown back on their personal resources of, for example, the power of story-telling, the ability to speak to and relate to people, dramatic skills, caring and other vocational feelings, the ability to explain and organize, enthusiasm, drive and industry. Somebody scoring high in these areas would probably be considered a good teacher in today's schools. However, some might argue that the kind of individualistic charisma such a combination would produce is actually suppressed by our current system of teacher training, by the way educational research is communicated to teachers, and by the situation teachers are required to face in our schools. We are possibly in a situation, therefore, where the science and art in pedagogy, far from complementing each other to the benefit of both, are acting against each other to their mutual detriment.

Ethnography

Ethnography, I would argue, is particularly well suited to helping to close the gulf between researcher and teacher, educational research and educational practice, theory and practice. The term derives from anthropology, and means literally a description of the way of life of a race or group of people. It is concerned with what people are, how they behave, how they interact together. It aims to uncover their beliefs, values, perspectives, motivations, and how all these things develop or change over time or from situation to situation. It tries to do all this from *within* the group, and from within the perspectives of the group's members. It is *their* meanings and interpretations that count. This means learning *their* language and customs with all their nuances, whether it be the crew of a fishing trawler, a group of fans on a football terrace, a gang of grave-diggers, the inmates of a prison or a religious seminary, a class of five-year olds beginning school, a particular group of deviant pupils or conforming ones. These have each constructed their own highly distinctive cultural realities, and if we are to understand them, we need to penetrate their boundaries, and look out from the inside, the difficulty of which varies according to our own cultural distance

from the group under study. In any event, it will mean a fairly lengthy stay among the group, first to break down the boundaries and be accepted, and second to learn the culture, much of which will be far from systematically articulated by the group.

It is, thus, no ordinary picture. A snapshot gives merely surface detail. The ethnographer is interested in what lies beneath - the subjects' view, which may contain alternative views, and their views of each other. From these, the ethnographer may perceive patterns in accounts, or in observed behaviours, which may suggest certain interpretations. The social reality is thus seen to be composed of layers. Moreover, it is also recognized that it is constantly changing. Group life may have certain constant properties (which, of course, one is concerned to detect), but it is also in flux, a process with oscillations, ambiguities, and inconsistencies. The tendency of our mental set is to try to resolve these when it comes across them, but they are the stuff of life, to be understood, rather than resolved and thus dissipated.

The ethnographer thus aims to represent the reality studied in all its various layers of social meaning in its full richness. It is also a holistic enterprise in another sense, for, within the limits of one's own perception and ability, the aim should be to give a thorough description of the relationship between all the elements characteristic of a single group, otherwise the representation may appear distorted. For example, in a study of pupil culture, a great deal would be missed if just the classroom situation were studied; or in a study of teacher careers, if just a segment or section were selected for examination. This is not to say that limited studies cannot be done, but that they should be seen within a holistic framework. Typical ethnographies, therefore, are highly detailed, and rich in the sense that they penetrate the swards of meaning that enwrap any culture.

Ethnographers thus try to rid themselves of any presuppositions they might have about the situation under study. They go into the 'field' to 'observe' things as they happen in their natural setting, frequently 'participating' themselves in the ongoing action as members of the organization or group. Whether one is studying people in classrooms, nude beaches, public conveniences, staffrooms, city streets, clinics, hell's angels' chapters - wherever it may be, ideally one has to get in there and 'do it with them'. It will be seen that ethnography can be great fun at times - but it can also be very risky! Either way, it carries the excitement of engaging in a voyage of discovery toward new territories, and the basic human interests of seeking to understand the people that we encounter in them.

The idea of participation, of course, is both to improve one's own empathic insights and to guard against possible contamination of the scene by outsider influences. The same principles underlie their interviews, which are 'unstructured', 'in depth', 'ongoing' in the sense that they may take place on numerous occasions, and are almost part of their natural conversation.

The usefulness of ethnography to teachers

There are certain parallels between ethnography and teaching that make them eminently suitable co-enterprises.

In the first place, they are both concerned with 'telling a story'. Both research, prepare their ground, analyse and organize, and present their work in the form of a commentary on some aspect of human life. Then, ethnography, too, like teaching is a mixture of art and science. Ethnographers have a great deal in common with novelists, social historians, journalists and the producers of documentary television programmes. Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Henry Mayhew, D. H. Lawrence, Paul Scott, Thomas Keneally - such as these show superb ethnographic skills in the acuteness of their observation, their keenness of ear, their sensitivity for feeling, their depth of insight through the layers of reality, their ability to get inside the skins of their characters without losing the ability to appraise them objectively, their power of expression, their ability to re-create scenes and cultural forms and to 'bring them to life', and their ability to tell a story with an underlying structure. Ethnographers try to cultivate all these skills. They are not trying to write fiction, of course - that is where the science comes in, in validating procedures and analysis. However in seeking to represent cultural forms as they are lived by their owners, they have a common purpose with some novelists. How these are identified, comprehended and processed is more a matter of style, perception, interpretative processes, 'feel', sensitivities, an ability that is difficult to pin down but that involves empathizing with others, an ability to 'understand' - essentially artistic properties - than a product of scientific method. Some might consider these useful attributes for the teacher. In that they are both artistic and scientific pursuits, ethnography and teaching, therefore, have a certain basic affinity.

Teachers themselves have considerable experience as participant observers and as interviewers on this kind of basis (see Pollard, 1985a). A little knowledge of the possibilities and limitations, the

checks and balances, in other words the *science* of the enterprise, together with some spare time and a reflective disposition to achieve, on occasions, some social distance from the teacher role, would enable many teachers to engage in fruitful ethnographic work. It is therefore more *accessible* to them than some approaches. They require no expensive, sophisticated equipment (other than their own mind), no knowledge of statistics, no controlled experiments. They do not need to be steeped in theoretical and methodological knowledge (though this is not to deny its value, as I shall explain later). Once they have recognized and begun to identify with the ethnographic idea, they will grow into it as the research work proceeds. It is not a matter of massive prior book learning. It would be a mistake to conclude that this makes it *easier* than other methods, but it does make it more available to teachers, and it gives them more scope for understanding the criteria by which the truth of any of their research would be judged.

Second, the approach does promise to yield results that are *news-worthy*, and which cannot be acquired in any other way. It is only over the last decade or so that school processes have been studied in any consistency and depth. Ethnographers have explored teacher and pupil perspectives, cultures, strategies and careers (see Woods, 1983, for an account of these), and would claim to have cast new light on these areas. They have, for example, demonstrated the strategical (as opposed to pedagogical) orientation of much teacher activity (for example, Edwards and Furlong, 1978; Ball, 1981; A. Hargreaves, 1977); the structured, meaningful nature of some apparently 'wild' and meaningless pupil behaviour (for example, Rosser and Harré, 1976; Beynon, 1984); the social construction of school knowledge (Hammersley, 1977b; Goodson, 1981; Ball, 1982); the functional properties of pupil culture (Willis, 1977; Davies, 1982); the routine but unwritten rules that guide teacher action (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1975); the meaning behind some apparently inconsistent pupil behaviour (Turner, 1983; Fuller, 1980; Furlong, 1976). All these exhibit strata of meaning that are hidden from manifest observation and that are also frequently different from what they were purported to be. It is, therefore, information that teachers need to know in establishing the conditions for their work, and in understanding the prosecution of their tasks. This is not to deny that some teachers, as natural, reflective participant observers, may anticipate many of the conclusions. This is to be expected where so much emphasis is placed upon familiar, everyday events, and inmates' perceptiveness. However, its very familiarity to teachers constitutes one of its strengths. It has been pointed out that much

educational research 'has explicitly ignored the routine, the mundane and the way in which in the most ordinary and commonplace fashion, members make sense of and understand the environments in which they live' (Hitchcock, 1983, pp. 9-10). Ethnographers seek to understand why such apparent trivia to an outside observer as the loss of a free period, the positioning of a drinks machine, the allocation of duties on sports' afternoon, the colour of a pupil's socks, petty squabbles in the staffroom, can be so important within the teacher's scheme of things. Such are the stuff of the teacher's day, together with a mass of minutiae that go into the moment-to-moment action and decisions. Ethnographers and teachers are thus in league in the same terrain, with the same identifiers.

Because of this, ethnography can have considerable *practical* value for teachers. It is concerned with issues that they recognize, deals with their problems, and in their terms. Thus teachers can add to their strategical skills through the many studies of teacher-pupil interaction (e.g. Delamont, 1976). They can see how inequalities are actually worked out in the classroom, and how they themselves, unintentionally perhaps, contribute towards them (Stanworth, 1983). They can be assisted toward better diagnosis of pupil deviance. Ethnographers have considered which pupils deviate and why, tracing out how cultural forms can be exhibited in individual behaviour. They have considered the meaning of deviance from the essential 'sussing-out' of new teachers, to innocuous 'mucking-about', to symbolic rebellion, to culture clash (Willis, 1977; Woods, 1979; Beynon, 1984). They have picked up deviant behaviour that goes unremarked, and possibly unobserved by the teacher, especially in the case of conformist pupils, and of girls (Turner, 1983; Davies, 1984). Each one of these cases requires a different treatment - their identification is therefore essential.

Teachers can bring ethnographic techniques to bear on the evaluation of their work, on pupil motivation and learning, on their own careers and development. This points to another advantage of the approach. Ethnography offers researchers a large measure of *control* over the work done. The researcher *is* the chief research instrument. In a sense, the questionnaire, the experiment, the statistical tests, etc. - all the paraphernalia of other approaches - are all embodied within the person of the ethnographer. This entails difficulties, to be sure, but it also means a high degree of personal direction, and an opening of opportunities - for teachers lack the specialist knowledge to use many of the traditional research instruments. In a curious way one learns how to do ethnography as the

work proceeds, making it a personal quest in method as well as substance, although all one is doing, in effect, is refining one's major research instrument. Just as one works at perfecting a questionnaire, one must work at developing personal qualities of curiosity, insight, discretion, patience, determination, stamina, memory, and the art of good listening and observing.

Of course this degree of personal involvement has disadvantages also, as we shall see, but one of the great advantages is the latitude and flexibility permitted - indeed required. One is on a personal quest in a situation that has certain unique properties. It is like a detective hunt, looking for clues, seeking to discover, analysing.

Personal resources here are everything, but so too are interests, for we are not *tabula rasa*. However much we try to neutralize our own views, opinions, knowledge and biases and open ourselves to the understanding of others, we cannot accomplish total purification. To some extent we shall be drawn where we will. The task then becomes one of trying to ensure that our methods are as rigorous as we can make them. We might then make the best of both worlds.

Ethnography thus offers teachers an engagement with research and a direction over it. Typical approaches within ethnography also offer a sense of another kind of control. For example, an interactionist orientation - the one that has been most predominant in British educational ethnography - lays emphasis on the 'self', how it is constructed, how it interacts with others and with its environment, how it is influenced by, but also influences, external forces. Interactionism recognizes an element of volition in teacher practice, without going to the extreme of believing teachers totally free from the influence of external forces - that would be as mistaken as the 'robotic' view. There are rituals; there are forces operating on schools and the people within them; but within the press of these forces, individuals possess an element of volition, and this permits us to take both an optimistic and a realistic stance. It recognizes the difficulties confronting teachers, but holds out the prospect of the self negotiating passages through them, though they may be tortuous. Thus it recognizes that teachers have their own self interests and ways of achieving them.

With the general contraction of the system, these interests are more under attack than usual at the moment. For example, many teachers are having to revise their notion of career structure. Some recent work has been investigating teachers' responses to this situation (Sikes, Measor and Woods, 1985). One might argue that this kind of ethnography has a *therapeutic* value - and indeed many

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people say they enjoy talking freely and frankly to researchers (see, for example, Denscombe, 1983).

This points to the essentially democratic nature of the approach through its enhanced appreciation of others' points of view. With regard to pupils' views, for example, activities such as 'being shown up' or 'picked on', 'having a laugh', 'dossing', 'blagging and wagging', 'bunking off' and even 'doing nothing' are discovered to be not irrational, childish or pathological, but to have deep meaning, and some considerable priority in the lives of pupils suffering or practising them.

Pollard (1985a, p.232) sums up his personal experiences as a teacher-ethnographer thus:

I found that the research process as a full participant was often tiring, frustrating and difficult, and yet it was also fascinating and very rewarding to identify patterns in the data and to hesitatingly, step-by-step, attempt to construct a deeper understanding of the events and social relationships in which I daily participated.

Some educational uses of ethnography

Some educational uses of ethnography will already be clear. At its grandest, it is concerned with understanding the human species, how people live, how they behave, what motivates them, how they relate together, their forms of organization, their beliefs, values, interests, the rules - largely implicit - that guide their conduct, the meanings of symbolic forms such as language, appearance, conduct. Sociological ethnographers are also particularly interested in social factors that are connected with differences among groups in all these various respects, such as social class, gender, ethnicity, generations, the environment, the media. Those working within schools have been particularly interested in examining the following.

(1) The effects on individuals and groups, teachers and pupils, of organizational structures and changes in them such as streaming, setting, mixed-ability groups, comprehensive schools.

(2) The socialization and careers of pupils and teachers, with the emphasis on their subjective experience of their careers rather than the objective indices; for example, with respect to pupils, much attention has been paid to key transitional periods such as eleven-plus or twelve-plus transfer, subject choice at thirteen-

plus, and leaving school. There has been interest in teacher biographies, the personal resources they bring to situations, and how they are formulated and developed.

(3) The cultures of particular groups, such as teacher subject sub-cultures, the culture of the staffroom, pupil groups from large (where they might be distinguished by simple divisions, such as examination/non-examination, streaming/non-streaming, boys/girls, white/black, middle/working class) to medium (such as a particular class, or a clearly demarcated group within one, or across some) to small (which may consist of merely two or three, or may be very fluctuating in their membership).

(4) What people actually *do*, the strategies they employ, and the meanings behind them. This includes teacher methods of instruction, and of control, and pupil strategies in responding to teachers or in securing their ends. It invariably depicts a dialectic between self and society, as one seeks to achieve certain ends, perhaps modifying them in some way, or seeking more conducive situations or to try to change them.

(5) The attitudes, views and beliefs of people, for example, teachers' about teaching and about pupils, pupils' about teachers, about school, learning, their colleagues, the future.

(6) How particular situations influence views and behaviour, and how they are constituted.

New ethnographic research is urgently needed in areas such as the management of schools, how decisions come to be made, inter-staff relationships, school ethos (suggested by some to be the most important factor in school academic and behavioural achievement); teacher identities, their interests and biographies, how they adapt to the role, how they achieve their ends; crisis points in teacher careers, and what kinds of assistance are of most value to them at what points; how pupil perspectives on teachers come to form, how pupils learn; and the psychic rewards of learning and teaching, as opposed to the problems, pressures and constraints. Ethnographic techniques can also be very useful in evaluations - of large-scale curriculum innovations or school re-organizations, of short-term inset courses, of particular styles of teaching, of the effects of particular events, or the impact of particular policies. Arguably they can penetrate deeper, and operate from the span of a broader period than the one-off tests that are usually employed. However, while this is my own personal shopping list, there are, of course, many other areas and aspects of them that can be fruitfully investigated using ethnographic techniques, and others may have other

priorities. Only they will know what these priorities are. The examples I give are simply that - illustrations of 'the kind of things' ethnography might be applied to. Let me therefore take this a little further by considering some localized ethnographic studies that I might have made when I was teaching in grammar schools in the 1960s:

(1) Many examples of cultural conflict, clash or difference, that obstructed my teaching and pupils' learning. Key periods are when beginning in a school or meeting a class of pupils for the first time, and when changing from one school to another. If a teacher is having difficulty with a particular group of pupils, and especially if an antagonism is felt towards their ordinary behaviour (i.e. when not directed toward the teacher), it might be worth investigating their views on a range of things with a view to understanding their motivation. Cultural supports run deep: they are better identified than threatened.

(2) By the same token, cultural similarities or 'bridges' across basically opposing cultures. Typically, individual teachers build these instinctively, through humour, appearance, manner, language, attitude to pupils, school in general and their own role. A particularly successful teacher in this respect might agree to be observed teaching, and to discussions taking place between them, and between them and the pupils concerned.

(3) Labelling. With so many pupils with which to deal, teachers often have to take a short cut to coming to a judgment about a pupil. A pupil might thus be designated 'thick', 'troublesome', 'sly', 'lazy', 'immature'. The danger is, of course, that pupils will live up to these labels if they are directed at them with any force (for example, teachers discussing a pupil among themselves may harden that particular identity in their - and the pupil's - minds). It would be a useful experiment to set these interactions on a different basis and label somebody something completely different, and monitor what happens. The same experiment could be made with a group, or class of pupils.

(4) The analysis of 'crisis' events. In all schools from time to time crises occur which subvert the normal order. Typically, somebody is held to be responsible, there are conflicting views on whom it might be, tempers become frayed, and it is all very educationally counter-productive. But it need not be, for we can learn from these incidents. If we can manage to step back out of our teacher role for a moment, examine and analyse all the evidence, and conduct further enquiry into other people's perspectives, we may

discover that the crisis was not a matter for personal blame, but rather a structural fault, or culture clash perhaps, or a breakdown, through some unforeseen occurrence of the normal rules (largely implicit) that govern relationships. Such knowledge would be very useful in obviating a recurrence of such an incident.

(5) Any unplanned piece of interaction which one suspects may have been significant for pupil motivation, for good or ill. Occasionally, something - an aspect of a subject, or instructive change of teacher style, a comment, a conjunction of circumstances, a chance rearrangement of the environment or class or lesson structure - may have important educational results. Indeed, it could be argued that the pedagogical knowledge derived from these circumstances is potentially of more purport than that received from more formal training, because it happens in a real teaching situation and has real consequences.

(6) The study of a particular pupil, or groups of pupils. Though we cannot know all our pupils in detail, there is much to be learned about them from the few. This could be a holistic study, which aims to incorporate as much information as possible, both from within and outside school, and examines the inter-relationships among the various aspects of the pupil's life.

(7) Evaluation studies. Ethnography can help us monitor the effects of our teaching. One might argue that standard tests have only limited value. They do not demonstrate if or how pupils have incorporated a particular piece of teaching into their general personal awareness or group culture. Through observation of a colleague or colleagues, and observation of and interviews with, pupils, teachers can complement the usual tests. There are many possibilities here. One may wish to monitor the effects of an INSET course on one's own teaching, and on pupils; or of a new policy, such as a deliberate attempt to raise awareness of gender and racial issues; or of introducing mixed-ability classes instead of streaming; or of the effects of team-teaching, or of a different method; or of a particular subject, or section of syllabus. One might compare the methods and results of one's own attempts to teach reading with those of parents, and possibly develop new joint enterprises. One might consider the efficacy of homework. Of course teachers have their feedback devices built into their teaching, but occasionally they may feel the need to explore a little further, and in a different way.

(8) Language, and other symbolic means of communication. Tape-recording some lessons and examining the speech-form,

vocabulary, who speaks (and who does not), who to, for how long and what about. Close scrutiny of how one tries to get a point across might be combined with pupil evaluation of the transcript. There would thus be a three-sided enquiry:

- (a) one's teaching intentions;
- (b) one's actual teaching as shown by the transcript; and
- (c) the evaluation of same by both teacher and pupils.

A transcript is a good blueprint of a lesson, and can help one assess general strategy.

(9) One's own career and biography. If teachers are to teach effectively, it is important that they 'feel right'. For a number of reasons, many do not do so. A study which re-assesses one's own experiences, abilities, interests, aspirations, accomplishments, and measures these against situations and opportunities may be salutary. One rarely bothers, in the ordinary course of events, to make such a systematic assessment, more typically just recalling periodically certain incidents or aspects. Thus it may reveal new lines of career, new possibilities, new sources of satisfaction, and new ways of harmonizing one's own personal resources with the elements available.

(10) For headteachers in particular, perhaps, a number of issues. How to accomplish change within a school, the management of staff relationships, and of governing bodies, relationships with parents (how, for example, do parents view parent evenings, interpret school reports, intervene in their children's education?), promotions, what factors control parental choice of school, staff turnover, the cultivation of a particular school ethos, how to promote staff efficiency, the decision-making apparatus in the school, certain aspects of school structure and their effects, the disposition of resources, the examination of one's own role.

I repeat that these are illustrations from my own experience. Other teachers would no doubt produce further possibilities from theirs. Additionally, other methods, of course, can be used to research them, and I would indeed argue that one should not be a slave to one method, but select according to the issues and problems under examination. However these are all items eminently susceptible to ethnographic techniques.

A point to bear in mind here is that, while ethnography can be an intensely personal experience, much can be gained from working with others. This can be either as co-workers investigating aspects of the same subject (for example, by monitoring different techniques and methods, observing each others' lessons, interviewing

each other, joint discussion of own and others' perspectives), or by using colleagues as subjects, where they are agreeable. Also, one would hope that ultimately, while the work might certainly be personally rewarding, it would also yield results that would benefit others' pedagogical knowledge and teaching experience.

My major task in this first chapter has been to try to convey something of the character of the ethnographic approach, and to assess some of its possibilities as a research tool for teachers. In the following chapters I shall look at some of the basic techniques involved, and consider further the nature of the orientation and of the ethnographer.