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CHILDREN AND FAMILY VALUES:
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF 'FAMILY' IN SCHOOLS

By

ROWENA ALEXANDRA PASSY

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Children and Family Values: A Critical Appraisal of 'Family' in Schools
Rowena Alexandra Passy

Prompted by the Labour government's proposal to introduce education on family relationships into the National Curriculum, this research project was set up to investigate how teachers portrayed 'family' within the classroom and the reactions that children had to the images that were presented. The intention was to highlight any problems that might arise from including 'family' into the formal curriculum.

The fieldwork was conducted in three primary and three secondary schools. Two of each of the schools were located in the West Country and the remaining two, in order to give some ethnic and cultural balance to the project, were in the West Midlands. A total of sixteen teachers and forty children were involved. In each school, three topics or lessons that concerned 'family' were observed during the course of one academic year; this was followed by interviews with the teachers, to ascertain their intentions within the lesson, and with the pupils, to gain their reaction. Final interviews with each of the children encouraged them to reflect on what they had learned about 'family' during the year.

Government documents concerned with family education suggest an agreement on the values on which family should be based and appear to regard family as an uncomplicated concept. The data collected, however, indicate that 'family' is regarded by teachers as a complex and sensitive subject that should be approached with caution. In addition pupils show a variety of reactions to the lessons, ranging from anger and distress to ready acceptance. The project's contribution to knowledge is therefore to demonstrate some of the complexities that are involved in teaching about 'family' and to inform one aspect of the ongoing debate on values education within Britain.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in this thesis:

A level	Advanced level
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CSI	Chief Superintendent
DES	Department for Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DSS	Department for Social Security
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
IUD	Inter-uterine device
IVF	In vitro fertilisation
KS	Key Stage
LEA	Local Education Authority
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PSE	Personal and Social Education
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SAT's	Standard Assessment Tasks
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SEN	Special educational needs
SMSC	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (education)
SRE	Sex and Relationship Education
STI	Sexually-transmitted infection

Throughout this thesis the feminine pronoun has been used for the third person singular in non-gender-specific contexts

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

The study was financed with the aid of a studentship from the University of Plymouth. A programme of advanced study was undertaken in the first two years of the project, which included attendance at Postgraduate Diploma in Education and/or Master of Education research seminars at the Faculty of Arts and Education at the University of Plymouth. Other seminars organised by staff and research students were attended at the Rolle School of Education. A two-day conference entitled 'Doing Fieldwork' was attended at the University of Warwick, Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, in December 1998.

Work has been presented at the following conferences:

March 2000	'Schools and family diversity: one drama department's response', given at the Islamic Academy Conference, Homerton College, Cambridge.
September 2000	'Family Values in Education' given at the Philosophy of Education conference, St. Edmund's College, Cambridge.

In addition the Philosophy of Education conference at New College, Oxford, was attended in September 2001.

Signed .....

Date 10.6.03

Introduction

While the home-school relationship forms the background to the child's school day, she can experience 'family' in different ways while she is within the school gates; in the expectations that her teacher may have of her family, in lessons that are concerned either centrally or peripherally with family matters, and in the quasi-familial relationship that some teachers may form with their pupils. This thesis is concerned with the question of family values within schools and how the experience of 'family' within schools may cause the child to reflect upon her own family situation and reinforce or undermine her own conception of how family life should be lived.

The topic is of considerable importance to contemporary education because of the development of home-school relations since the time of the Conservative reforms through the 1980s and 1990s. These arguably began to forge a new type of relationship between parents and schools as concepts of parental choice and accountability brought market discipline to schools, as a more open and participatory style of management allowed parents to become more involved with their children's education and as the idea of 'partnership' between parents and schools began to be promoted.

Within a broadly sociological approach, the main objectives of the research were to investigate the image of 'family' that was presented within schools. There were two principal research foci. The first was on finding out how teachers conceptualised family values, how family matters were approached within the classroom and the implicit values that underpinned lessons with a 'family' content. The second focus was on children's understanding of the lessons and the values within. Observations of lessons (such as the study of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) would show how 'family' became part of the lesson and would provide a springboard for separate interviews with the teacher and pupils. These would discover if the teacher had intended to pass on any particular message, how it was received by the pupils and the reflection that the lesson caused.

The context for the research was the increasingly heated 'family values' debate that had arisen through the 1990s as higher divorce rates and the increased number of cohabiting couples and single mothers had brought family issues on to the centre of the political stage. In Chapter One I investigate the relationship between the state and the family, seeking to show some of the complexities that are encompassed within this relationship and demonstrating the differences in interpretation that are put forward by academics and commentators from the political right and left. Chapter Two provides an overview of trends and debates within academic research into the family and thus places the political debate within a broadly sociological perspective. By highlighting the diversity of family life, this chapter seeks further to underline the complexity of issues related to the family. It also shows the fundamental importance of family life to the individuals within and, following the constructivist approach of Morgan (1999), suggests that the individual's conception of 'family' is influenced largely by practising 'family' within the home but also by interaction with others from different backgrounds who have different ideas and conceptions of the nature of family life.

The third chapter then places the relationship between families and schools in an historical perspective and, towards the end of the chapter, considers the argument that the present Labour government is attempting a more overt direction of family life through the medium of schools. On the one hand the introduction of a quasi-market to education may have had the effect of making schools more receptive to parental needs and wishes but, on the other, the concomitant pressure on schools to perform to a high academic standard may be seen as encouraging families to support the school's aims and values rather than facilitating dialogue and interaction between parents and schools. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that 'family' enters school life in a number of ways and that the strong research focus on home-school relations has neglected the image of family that may be

passed on within the classroom and that may undermine or reinforce children's own perceptions of family life.

The second part of the thesis provides the philosophical framework for the research. In Chapter Four I examine the question of values and of the values of freedom, equality and rationality on which a liberal society such as Britain is based. Views from the political right on the 'family values' debate are then explored and I suggest that this is a narrow, moralising approach that diminishes the fundamental freedom of the individual to pursue her own version of the good life. In contrast to the view that all values learned within the home are applied in an uncomplicated manner within broader society, I argue that social values such as justice are less likely to become embedded in a child's value system than the relationship values that she learns from everyday family life. I then offer a definition of 'family values' as values held by the individual that concern the nature of family life and suggest, in view of the way that these values are practised on a daily basis when a child is at her most dependent and vulnerable, that these are the ones that tend to 'stick'.

Chapter Five examines the question of values education and traces the origins of the introduction of 'family' into values education within the National Curriculum in 1999. The values on which a liberal society is based are revisited, together with the implications of these values for a liberal education. Communitarian and feminist critiques of the liberal conception of the individual are presented, showing the controversial nature of such values as autonomy and caring. I then suggest that there are threads from liberal, communitarian and feminist perspectives in the part of the National Curriculum that is concerned with family relationships but that insufficient attention is paid to the difficulties that may arise from such an inclusion; the guidelines for this particular part of the curriculum not only present 'family' as an uncomplicated concept but also imply an agreement over what constitutes 'good' family life. When the sensitive nature of family life is linked with the ethical and practical problems of values education, this particular part of the curriculum

may present difficulties for teachers, who are likely to be concerned about what to teach and how to teach it, and for children, who may find that what is taught conflicts with their own beliefs and practices or who may find such subjects bring their own difficulties to the surface within the classroom. The high political profile of family issues, the development of home-school relations and the influence of the school over children's developing value system are therefore brought together within this particular area of the National Curriculum. If young people are to be taught about family within schools, it is essential that we know how the subject is approached in different areas of the curriculum, how teachers regard such values education and the problems that may arise from teaching children and young people about something that is deeply personal. As this area of education is under-researched, this small-scale project can be seen as exploratory, attempting to find out 'what [is] going on' (Woods, 1986, p.18) and using the data collected to 'illuminate and inform' (Wallace *et al.*, 1998, p.76) future practice.

The third part of the thesis is concerned with the research design. Explaining the different influences that went into the research agenda, I discuss some of the problems that arise with qualitative research and show the considerations that went into the development of the ethics protocol, the collection and analysis of the data and the debriefing, justifying the decisions made at each stage of the research process. I describe the methods used and the difficulties that I experienced, endeavouring to provide a reflexive account of the research project in the manner recommended by Ball (1993) and Woods (1996). I observed a total of forty children in three primary and three secondary schools in lessons that either had 'family' as the central focus or that had a definite family theme. As a contrast to the overwhelmingly white intake of the two primary and two secondary schools in the West Country, I conducted research in one primary and one secondary school in the West Midlands, both of which had a high percentage of ethnic minority children on the school roll. During the course of the year of fieldwork, I was present for three 'family' lessons or

course of lessons in each school except for the school that I call Montague, where I observed two. After each lesson or course of lessons was completed in the secondary schools I interviewed the children, asking about their immediate reaction to the lessons and if they felt any particular image of family had been promoted. I then interviewed each teacher, focusing on the aims of the lesson and the type of 'family' message that he or she intended to give. I interviewed the primary children after each lesson, but only interviewed the teacher once at the end of the year; this was partly not to place too many demands on her time, but also so that I could familiarise myself with the teacher's methods and style of teaching before we spoke at length.

The report of the research data in the fourth part of the thesis is divided into primary and secondary schools. At the beginning of the data from the primary schools I provide a brief description of the lessons observed and then report on the four main themes that arose from the teachers' interviews. I then focus on the children's different responses to the lessons, dividing them into three separate themes. At the end of each report I list the key points that were raised. The secondary data is divided into the different subjects of English, drama, Personal and Social Education (PSE) and history and has a separate report from each school with any common themes from the lessons brought together in a summary of key points at the end of each section. The final chapter in this part concerns the final interviews with the secondary pupils in which I encouraged them to reflect on the year in which I had visited their schools and to consider which topic had provoked most thought about family matters.

The key points listed at the end of each section in Part Four provide the basis for the discussion in Part Five. In the next chapter I examine the primary teachers' entirely positive portrayal of 'family', explore their apparent reluctance to include family matters into the primary classroom and examine the difficulties that may arise from so doing. The chapter concerned with the secondary schools focuses on the different image that is presented

within lessons, bringing together the changes and continuities in the pupils' reactions at the end. The final chapter outlines the theoretical contribution that this project has made to an understanding of 'family' within schools and discusses the implications from the research for future practice. It also outlines some further areas of research by identifying some issues that were raised during the course of this project but, due to limitations of time and space, were not pursued. In total, the thesis suggests that teaching about adult and family relationships within the classroom is a complex, sensitive matter that needs to be carefully thought out in terms of both policy and practice.

PART I: THE CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this first part of the thesis, I contextualise the research into 'family' in schools. In the first chapter I examine the relationship between the state and the family. In the next I explore sociological and psychological approaches to 'family' with the intention of highlighting the diversity of structures and lifestyles that are encompassed within the term. In the third chapter I examine the relationship between the education system and the family, and argue that the interaction between state, family and schools is a subject that has been largely neglected by academic research.

Chapter 1: 'Family' in Political Context

I have taken the post-war welfare system outlined by Beveridge to be the starting point for this thesis for two reasons. The first is that it encapsulated definite ideas about gender relations and working patterns within family life and had at its foundation the traditional nuclear family of breadwinning father, stay-at-home mother and dependent children. Secondly there was a perceived predictability within family life for the next decade or so that has led to the 1950s being referred to (albeit sometimes ironically) as the 'golden age' of family (e.g. Smart, 1997, p.302) and that has provided an image to be drawn on by politicians and analysts of all persuasions as changes within family and social life accelerated from the 1970s. In this chapter, therefore, I begin with a brief outline of the relevant parts of the post-war settlement and continue by examining the different social and economic trends that have intertwined to make 'family' an increasingly political subject from the 1970s. I do not intend to provide an exhaustive analysis of the influence of the state over family life but aim instead to place 'family' in political context and thereby to afford some understanding of the controversial and difficult issues that are part of the relationship between family and state.

There were three assumptions underpinning the post-war welfare system; that there would be full male employment, that male earnings would provide the main source of family income, and that marriages were stable and for life. The state would provide limited wage substitution in cases of unemployment, sickness, disability and death, and entitlement to these benefits would be through regular insurance payments; those failing to meet these conditions would be assisted with less generous means-tested benefits. It was assumed that women would work for a brief period before they married but that they would then be dependent on their husband's earnings; married women were given a separate insurance class which meant that they were not required to pay National Insurance, in which case they would be ineligible for unemployment or sickness benefit. Should they choose to pay for insurance, they would receive benefits at a reduced rate. In essence, these measures were intended to place a large degree of responsibility for material needs with the family, with the state 'filling gaps' (Clarke *et al*, 2001, p.37) when things went wrong; political commitment to full employment would ensure that men would be able to earn enough to be able to maintain a wife and children during their working life, and that they would be able to build up enough contributions to be entitled to a married couple's pension upon retirement. As the male wage would cover most family costs, the question of women's employment became a private matter to be settled between each couple rather than being the business of the state.

During the 1950s and 1960s there was relatively little academic interest in the relationship between the family and the state, and the accepted orthodoxy was that the different arms of the state intervened only when things went wrong (Leonard and Hood-Williams, 1988, p.153). This was to change from the 1970s, with three factors giving rise to political and academic concern. Firstly, family trends that had been visible in the sixties accelerated, with one of the more notable being the change in attitude to marriage. The number of extramarital births increased, although marginally through the 70s (National

Statistics, 1985, p.41), and marriage rates began to decline while divorce rates doubled from 1971-81 (National Statistics, 1985, pp.38, 41). One of the consequences was to create a rapid increase in the number of lone parents; in the same period, the number of parents raising children on their own grew from 570,000 to approximately 900,000 (Haskey, 1986, p.7). An improvement in contraceptive techniques contributed to increased sexual activity among young people (Lewis and Kiernan, 1996, p.373), and women were experiencing greater independence through higher participation in education and in the labour market (Glennerster, 2000, p.140). Secondly, following Abel-Smith and Townsend's work (e.g. 1967) that drew attention to the persistence of poverty post-war, single-issue activists (such as the Child Poverty Action Group and Erin Pizzey, who campaigned for refuges for battered wives) sought deeper and wider access to social security, with many challenging the assumptions about family and work that were incorporated in Beveridge's Report. Thirdly, the industrial unrest, rising unemployment and economic crises experienced through the 70s were placing yet more demands on a benefit system that was, as we have seen, based on full male employment and stable families. As the exceptions to the ideal increased, so concern arose that state support was the cause of such social trends. The political debate reached a critical point when, in 1974, the Conservative politician Keith Joseph made a speech firmly on the side of those who may be called family revisionists; he stated that the family was an important part of the nation's foundation, that it was being undermined by permissiveness and collectivism, and that socialists were eroding parental responsibility through the workings of the welfare state. Developing the theme that the nation was suffering moral and physical degeneration, he went on to argue that this was exemplified by evidence showing the increased numbers of unmarried women from the semi- and unskilled classes giving birth (Joseph, 1974, p.3).

Joseph's speech marked the political territory of the family for one faction of the New Right in which the family was self-reliant, stable and well-disciplined, the key

institution that would guarantee the future of society. It was a reworking of the 1950s ideal in which the traditional nuclear family could be seen as a symbol of order and stability in a time of rapid economic and social change; it also conveniently ignored the changing patterns within family life and - arguably - women's greater expectations of intellectual and financial independence within marriage or partnership. At that time Conservative rhetoric was both simplistic and appealing; it linked Britain's poor economic performance with high taxation and an overload of bureaucratic red tape which, it was argued, stifled entrepreneurial initiative. At the same time an over-inflated welfare state was seen to be sapping moral fibre by reducing citizens to passive recipients of state benefits, thus removing the incentive to work. Britain, it was implied, would regain her international influence and her position as an economic powerhouse through 'rolling back the state'; this would remove restrictions on economic life and create the conditions in which families could regain their former sense of responsibility and their place at the foundation of moral, economic and social life.

There were, however, two strands in Conservative thinking that were deeply antithetical; the authoritarian element favoured the traditional nuclear family of breadwinning father, homemaking mother and dependent children - with implications for the family wage - while the neo-liberal element advocated an individualist, laissez-faire economic policy that involved exposing labour to market forces. At the same time, the years with the Conservatives in power were marked by a further acceleration of the trends in family life that had been visible from the 1960s. But on this occasion higher divorce and cohabitation rates, greater numbers of extramarital births together with higher numbers of lone parents and stepfamilies led to a perception that these were not passing phases but the reality of contemporary social life. This was exemplified by Kiernan and Wicks' (1990, p.31) comment that the 1980s were a 'watershed' in which understanding of family in Britain may have 'changed fundamentally'. The government was therefore subject to the

inherent contradictions of upholding traditional family life and the logic of economic individualism while reacting through policy legislation to changes within family circumstances that created inequities. At the same time the central concern was to cut costs to the state. The result was a series of mixed messages; a Ministry for the Family was considered in 1979, was discarded, then renewed with the Family Policy Group in 1982. Virginia Bottomley was appointed as Minister for the Family in the early 1990s, but she was without portfolio and her role was limited. On the level of policy, too, anomalies abounded: the Children Act of 1989 gave priority to parenthood over marriage, but immigration law continued to focus on marriage; laws concerning in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and other artificial reproductive methods excluded gays and lesbians from becoming parents, while adoption policy allowed single parents (gay or straight) to adopt (Silva and Smart, 1999, p.4). There have been authoritarian measures - such as Clause 28 which prohibited local authorities from actively promoting homosexuality and the Child Support Act which compelled mothers to name the fathers of their children with benefit penalties if they refused - and more liberal policies, which include a system of independent taxation for men and women and the recognition of rape within marriage. One of the last Acts of the Conservative administration was the Family Law Act which explicitly states that one of the underlying principles is to uphold the institution of marriage, an apparent reversal of the Family Law Reform Act of 1987 that abolished the status of illegitimacy and permitted unmarried fathers to apply for parental responsibility. These confusions led to an increasingly critical body of literature from left and right that attempted to disentangle rhetoric from reality and then to assess the effects of policy on different sections of society.

Critics from the right centred on themes that were familiar from government rhetoric; the principal challenge was that the welfare state promoted deviant forms of family life and that current policy was doing little to reverse the trend. Much of the critique of this nature emanated from the Social Affairs Unit and the Institute of Economic Affairs

(IEA), both of which have published a steady stream of literature attempting to defend the traditional family against modern conditions. Work from Parker (1982, p.103) suggested that the welfare state brought about 'widespread erosion of work incentives', while a volume edited by Anderson and Dawson (1986, p.11) argued that the 'normal' (i.e. two-parent) family was under attack from three different directions: from feminists, who were hostile to family and especially to the role of fathers; from reproductive technology that threatened the 'natural' biological basis of the family; from the state, which added to the burdens of the 'normal' family by subsidising - from taxpayers' money - those who did not conform. Much of the critique is polemical, and authors tend to use sweeping statements and emotive phraseology; Morgan (1986, p.40), for instance, argues that feminists represent men as being 'entirely untrustworthy where money is concerned ... [and suggest that] wives can't stick up for themselves', thereby dismissing in one sentence a body of research that had investigated domestic violence (e.g. Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Pizzey, 1983), the unequal distribution of resources within families (e.g. Pahl, 1984) and the tensions that poverty and unemployment can cause within families (e.g. Sinfield, 1981). In 1990 the IEA published Charles Murray's work in which he argued that an underclass, characterised by illegitimacy, violent crime and the absence of any work ethic, was forming in Britain. His position was that lone mothers chose to rely on the state rather than a husband for material support because the benefit system privileged the lone mother over the two-parent family; this was bad for men, who missed the civilising effect of being responsible for a family, and for society, which suffered higher criminality and lower production rates as a consequence of this behaviour. He was an important figure who had meetings with different state departments and Mrs. Thatcher; his work was cited 'persistently' by the *Sunday Times* (Mann and Roseneil, 1999, p.101) and his opinions were echoed in much of the subsequent work from the IEA (e.g. Davies, 1993; Dennis and Erdos, 1993). Briefly, he can be seen as one who made a significant contribution to the

controversy that arose about lone mothers in the early 1990s and that brought the issue of 'family values' to the centre of the political stage.

Those on the political left, however, argued that traditional family roles were still very much in evidence and that they were reinforced by a social policy which assumed that a woman was at home to care for the young, elderly and infirm. They also argued that this was placing great financial and emotional strain on families; the combination of the deregulation of the labour market, the contraction of British industry, rising unemployment and an intensification of the boom-bust cycle (Glynn and Booth, 1996) had the effect of making the notion of the male breadwinning wage increasingly irrelevant for those at the bottom end of the earnings scale. At the same time the shift away from industry towards the service sector helped to raise women's employment rates, particularly in part-time, low-paid jobs; by the early 1990s the proportion of married women with dependent children who were in either full- or part-time paid work had reached 63 percent (Lister, 1996, p.12-13). These changes were accompanied by cuts in benefits, housing and institutional care that expanded family responsibility for the young, disabled, elderly and mentally ill; this increased the need for many women to work without any support in terms of subsidised childcare (reflecting the government's continued ambivalence towards working mothers), while simultaneously increasing their commitments at home. Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that feminists pointed to the tension that this created in women's lives; they argued that these policies had the effect of removing women's choices in balancing domestic work and paid employment (e.g. Segal, 1983, Dominelli, 1988) and reinforced their dependence on men (e.g. David, 1986, Land, 1989). As the Conservative administration continued, both male and female academics attempted to unravel the complex interaction between different state departments of housing, taxation, benefits, employment and legal policy on divorce and maintenance (e.g. Freeman, 1984; Jones and Millar, 1996; Smart, 1992), and drew on a wide range of research that examined different

aspects of poverty that was becoming increasingly apparent (e.g. Glendinning and Millar, 1992). The picture that emerged was very different to that of the welfare scroungers portrayed by the right; authors came almost unanimously to the conclusion that, while higher income families had profited from tax breaks and home ownership, poorer families had suffered disproportionately from a combination of low wages, unemployment, reduced benefits, rising prices and a shift towards indirect taxation. Ethnic minority families were more likely to be poor than white (Cook and Watt, 1992); research showed that by 1992 seventy per cent of lone parents relied on state benefits (Lister, 1996, p.13).

It was this question that escalated into 'one of the nastiest' (Glennester, 2000, p.197) social policy issues within John Major's time as Prime Minister. The number of lone parent households had risen from 12 per cent to 21 per cent of all families in the period 1979 to 1990 (Lister, 1996, p.13) and there was political concern over the consequential rising expense. Those on the right presented the problem as a straightforward equation: public spending was out of control and lone mothers on benefit were a considerable part of the expense. These mothers then reproduced patterns of welfare dependency in their children; the result was that an underclass was forming which was alienated from the values of mainstream society. This was inevitably leading to a steady rise in welfare costs together with an equally steep moral decline (Mann and Roseneil, 1999, p.106). The implication was that all single parents had chosen to raise children on their own. Those on the left were more circumspect and published research that showed the variety of different routes and circumstances that led into lone parenthood and argued that the voluntary, planned one-parent family was rare (e.g. Crow and Hardey, 1992). Other research suggested that many lone parents had the same work ethic as those in two-parent families (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991) and that the 'strongest disincentive' to lone mothers seeking work was the 'very high' cost of childcare (Bradshaw *et al,* 1996, p.57). The controversy therefore lay at the heart of the

contradictions within laissez-faire economic policy and the ideal of the nuclear family, and concerned wide-ranging issues of whether mothers are workers or carers, the relative value that society places on each of these roles, the degree to which the state should be responsible for lone parents and the extent to which 'family breakdown' might be responsible for rising criminality. The complexity of these matters is reflected in the academic response which concerns one of the central debates within sociological research; the relative influence of agency and structure in determining the course of individual lives. Thus, in this debate, those on the right often see the condition of lone parenthood as a kind of economically-determined rational choice, while those on the left investigate more closely the circumstances and constraints that lead to particular choices. Similarly, those on the right tend to regard family as a unit and any kind of breakdown in the marital bond or the parent/child relationship as a kind of moral failure, while those on the left tend to look into individual experiences, particularly of women, and to recognise that 'family' carries different meanings and experiences for each member. Each perspective has its own kind of 'family values' that will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Four. In the meantime, however, lone mothers were placed in an invidious position; if they stayed at home to care for their children they were seen as scrounging off the state, yet if they worked they were neglecting their children and thereby increasing the chances of creating future delinquents.

The political response - although on the statute books before the hysteria reached its height - was to pass two Acts that marked an important shift in government thinking. Firstly, both the Children's Act of 1989 and the Child Support Act of 1991 moved away from the concept of marriage to that of parenting as the foundation of family life; while the 1984 Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act had allowed a 'clean break' between spouses (and children) on divorce, these newer Acts regard parenting as a lifelong commitment which cannot be cancelled unless a child is adopted or she is proven to be another man's child (Fox Harding, 1996, p.138). Secondly, the Child Support Act

redefined parental responsibility by moving the cost of children away from the state to the parents. The Child Support Agency, set up by the Child Support Act, was given the legal powers to assess and recover maintenance from the absent parent (usually the father) and to deduct it £1 for £1 from the benefit that lone mothers received. The latter were encouraged back to work through receiving slightly more generous benefits under Family Credit than Income Support. The notion of parental responsibility was reinforced by the Criminal Justice Act of 1991, which requires parents to attend court with their children under sixteen and to be responsible for any fines that may be imposed (Lewis, 1996, p.97). The Acts were met by a critical response from a feminist body of literature which argued that traditional gender roles were being further reinforced (e.g. Fox Harding, 1996; Lewis, 1996; Wasoff and Morris, 1996) while Neale and Smart (1997, p.216) claimed that what they termed 'indelible parenting' could have the effect of making gender relations worse. Meanwhile there were no substantial moves to resolve the tension between mothers as carers/workers, the gap between rich and poor had widened (Goodman and Webb, 1994; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995) and the trends in family life that had been regarded as unwelcome on the right of the party from the beginning of the administration had not been reversed. The Conservative years ended, therefore, in a similar manner to the way in which they had begun - only this time with the Labour party positioning itself as the party of the family (Johnson, 1999, p.90) and its leader, Tony Blair, later calling for a 'new moral purpose' for young people (Rawnsley, 1999, p.8).

And since 1997 there has indeed been considerable policy activity in an apparent attempt to support families and to reduce family poverty. Early in the first administration Blair set up a Ministerial Group for the Family, which published the consultation document *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1999), and a Minister for Women has been appointed within the Cabinet, currently Patricia Hewitt. Agencies specifically for families that have been initiated since 1997 include Sure Start, which offers help and advice for all those with

pre-school children, the National Parenting Helpline and the National Family and Parenting Institute. In addition there appears to be a drive to encourage lone mothers to work through the New Deal which offers advice to those entering the workforce, while Family Credit has been replaced by the Working Families Tax Credit that is more generous and includes a tax credit for childcare. At the same time, the National Childcare Strategy has begun to address the problem of finding a suitable place for young children when mothers are working. Whether this will be sufficient to address the problem of mothers as carers or workers remains to be seen; in the Introduction to welfare reform proposals it states that there should be 'work for those who can, security for those who cannot' (DSS, 1998, p.iii), indicating that reform is driven by economic considerations rather than a concerted attempt to solve the dilemma between working and caring. The attempt to combat child poverty through the tax system needs to be seen in the light of high rates of unemployment among ethnic minorities in northern cities, while the new child tax credit to be introduced in 2003 that will combine all income-related support for children into a single payment made directly to the main carer (Papworth, 2002, p.19) may well prove unwieldy in its administration.

The academic response to these initiatives falls broadly into two camps; one that suggests cautious optimism over recent policy developments and the other condemning what it sees as the increase in government surveillance over family life. Within the former group, Lewis (2001, p.504) welcomes much of what she sees as a 'positive' approach to policy - as opposed to the 'negative and often punitive' approach of the Conservatives - but argues that the emphasis on personal responsibility to be self-supporting neglects the role of care. Land (1999, p.142-3), in a similar vein, applauds the redistributional element within policy that has helped to relieve family poverty, but suggests that the stigma associated with being on benefits is returning and that caring activities within the family are valued less than paid work. David (1999, p.227-9) takes something of a middle line and

suggests that 'control and surveillance' have become a key part of the attempts to foster a greater work orientation, but detects a new direction for policy that will be more favourable to women and children. These articles signify a notable softening in attitude from these feminist academics who were relentlessly critical towards policies during the Conservative years in power while the content of their articles suggests that the reality of family life may well be improving for women and children.

Others, however, are less generous and the argument may be summed up by Jones and Novak's (1999) work which argues that the state has become increasingly disciplinary; that the state's powers of surveillance and control have increased to monitor family life just as family responsibility has been expanded. This is not a new argument (e.g. Smart, 1984), and it has recently been termed the 'new paternalism' (Lewis, 2001, p.503; Pupavac, 2001). To illustrate their point, Jones and Novak (1999, p.150) use the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 which introduced local curfews for children under the age of ten and compulsory parenting classes for those whose children are found to be behaving anti-socially or in an offensive manner. This is only a small part of Jones and Novak's argument that seeks to demonstrate that the poor have been increasingly demonised by the state; that disciplinary measures are aimed at the poorest areas of the country that have the highest crime rates, and that these measures are part of an increased attempt to monitor and control family life. Recent developments can take this argument further; the Child Support Agency has been reformed in such a way that lone mothers who are working do not have to register (Lewis, 2001, p.498); two mothers were jailed in 2002 for allowing their children to miss school (*Guardian,* 2002); more recently the ideas that housing benefit should be withdrawn from disruptive families (Wintour and Ward, 2002) and that child benefit should be withdrawn from 'tearaway teenagers' (Smithers, 2002, p.4) have been mooted. All these measures could be seen to fit with the tone seen in Frank Field's statement that 'welfare should openly reward good behaviour and ... be used to enhance those roles which the country

values' (Field, 1996, p.9) and Mandelson's claim that poverty should be abolished 'except for those who refuse available work' (Mandelson, 2002, p.xxviii). These statements from two prominent members of the Labour party seem to suggest that those who are considered responsible - i.e. those who work, cause no disruption and care for their children in the approved manner - will be rewarded by being left alone. Holding these two perspectives of cautious optimism and of condemnation in mind, let us turn to changes and developments within families themselves.

Chapter 2: Family in Theoretical Perspective

In the previous chapter we have seen the changes in family structure from the immediate post-war years and examined some of the influence that the state has on family life. This next chapter shifts the focus to the concept of family; although statistics tell us of accelerating changes in family form and policy analysts tell us of different effects that are being wrought, neither gives us an understanding of how 'family' is viewed by different theorists, how it may be experienced by its members, the importance that it has in personal life or of the images and assumptions that are provoked by the use of the - highly emotive - word 'family'. As the thesis opened with the traditional nuclear family of breadwinning father, homemaker mother and dependent children that was at the foundation of the welfare state, so this chapter will begin with an examination of the nuclear family as the basis of social and personal life. And, just as there was a vast amount of literature for the first chapter, so there is a prodigious amount of academic work that concerns 'family'; my aim, therefore, is once again to give an overview of trends and debates within the literature with the intention of providing the context for the research.

The classic work on family from the 1950s comes from the functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons, who argued that the traditional nuclear family provided a neat fit with industrial society by virtue of having the two 'basic and irreducible functions' (Parsons, 1956, p.16) of primary socialisation of children and stabilisation of the adult personalities of the population. Primary socialisation involves two processes; the structuring of the personality and the internalisation of society's culture. The first of these makes social life possible by perpetuating the norms and values of the society involved; by providing gender role models, parents socialise their children into the type of family that Parsons believes functions best for an industrial society. Children see the value of a mutually complementary adult relationship; boys accept the necessity for employment, while girls understand the need to remain largely at home (part-time work is not ruled out) to care for

the children and the house. The second part of primary socialisation involves internalisation of the core values of society to such a point that they become an inseparable part of the child; this might mean that she cannot imagine any other type of family life. In effect, socialisation develops a child's conscience and provokes a strong desire to conform to the norms and values of her upbringing. For adults the marriage relationship provides emotional stability to counterbalance the strains and pressures of working or domestic life; the gender division of labour minimises any conflict between the marital partners while caring for the children allows them to express the "childish" elements of their own personalities (ibid., p.21). At the same time the intensity of their emotional bond frees the couple from the ties of an extended family and gives them the geographical mobility to pursue work in different locations as the economic cycle creates pressures on the labour market. Parsons refers to such families as ""factories" which produce human personalities' and asserts that 'in the "normal" case it is both true that *every adult* is a member of a nuclear family and that every child must begin his process of socialization in a nuclear family' (ibid., p.16-17, emphasis in original).

This account of the nuclear family is profoundly modern in the sense that it follows the optimistic thread within the Enlightenment tradition that believes in social progress; as knowledge gained from empirical observation is applied to new conditions, society can be improved through a more rational organisation that frees the population from the constraints of tradition, poverty and ignorance (Porter, 1990, p.21). According to Parsons, the nuclear family unit has evolved in stages from more primitive family groupings towards a superior, specialised type of institution which can focus on the affective well-being of its members through the loss of other (for instance educational) functions. His reference to families as 'factories' of human personalities suggests rational mass production of fulfilled, contented adults with standardised, fully socialised children; the implication is that this particular arrangement is a triumph of modern conditions. He writes

approvingly of the 'communalistic principle' of "each according to his needs" (Parsons, 1956, p.11) on which family finances are based, of the 'professionalization' of the mother role (ibid., p.25) and of the links with the outside world, particularly through the father, that enable the child to become independent as he matures (ibid., p.19). Although Parsons worries that the increased divorce rates show that expectations awakened by the intensity of the relationship may place some strain upon marriage, he is confident that the 'experts' from the disciplines of psychiatry and clinical psychology can help couples who are experiencing problems (ibid., p.25); the social system will adjust to the new conditions and a new equilibrium will be reached that will be demonstrated by divorce rates returning to a negligible level.

Parsons' work can be criticised on several grounds; that his account of socialisation is simplified into a process in which children are filled with societal and parental culture, that the families to which he refers are essentially white, middle class and suburban, and that he dismisses the poor, the sick and the disabled as 'deviants' (ibid., p.13), thereby pathologising those who do not conform. He assumes that women tend to be emotional and men to be rational and that each is therefore suited to his or her gender role, a quasi-biological view about the natural order of things that has a long history stretching from Aristotle and continues to be seen in the work of authors published by the Institute of Economic Affairs cited in Chapter One. His faith in 'experts' such as psychologists can be countered by work by - for example - Donzelot (1980), in which the latter argues that such professionals are agents of social control rather than impartial authorities offering support for individual families. Parsons also assumes that there is a consensus on the values of industrial society among the adult population, and that these values, once absorbed, do not change. Yet it is useful to see his work as a reflection of the optimism of the postwar period which, in Britain, was characterised by the long boom, the establishment of the welfare state and the (rather short-lived) belief that poverty would be abolished, and his

type of analysis can be seen to dovetail neatly with a government welfare policy that was founded on the traditional nuclear family that he celebrated. The influence of his perspective can be seen in several British publications of the 1950s and 60s; Young and Wilmott's (1957/1980) *Family and Kinship in East London*, Bott's (1957/1971) *Family and Social Network* and Fletcher's (1962/1973) *The Family and Marriage in Britain* all investigate the marital relationship, argue that the trend is towards a greater egalitarianism between partners, and suggest that this is shown in the way that men are becoming more involved in childcare and domestic duties in the time that they spend at home. These authors seek to confirm first, the superiority of the companionate marriage in terms of adult satisfaction and the devotion to raising children, and secondly, the trend towards this particular type of family becoming universal. Economic factors are linked in an uncomplicated way to social, with the explanation for the trend based on the welfare state and the greater affluence that allowed for more leisure time; smaller family size, improved medical care, more spacious housing, higher wages for men together with shorter working hours (Young and Wilmott, 1957/1980, p.21-30) are seen as facilitators of a more emotionally fulfilling life as the question of material needs becomes less urgent.

During this time notions of the complementarity of the male and female roles within marriage were strengthened by psychologists such as Bowlby (1953/1965; 1954). He argued that maternal deprivation was caused by any separation of mother and child - including time spent working - and that it led to a cycle of psychosis and delinquency which would be passed on from generation to generation; he suggested that the essential ingredient for mental health was the 'warm, intimate and continuous relationship' (1953/1965, p.13) that a young child should experience with his mother. This became known as 'attachment theory' (Bowlby, 1972). His work was reinforced and popularised by Winnicott (1962), who regarded full time motherhood as providing enough satisfaction for

all women to the degree that they would not want any other type of existence. He was at pains to draw attention to:

> ... the immense contribution to the individual and to society which the ordinary good mother with her husband in support makes at the beginning [of a child's life], and which she does *simply through being devoted to her infant* (Winnicott, 1962, p.142, emphasis in original).

The cumulative picture of this sociological and psychological work and the government's promotion of the nuclear family within the welfare state led to a perception that the standard, normative family within industrial society was a relatively autonomous unit of husband, wife and children that was based on mutual affection and a gendered division of labour. It was normative in the sense that it was regarded both theoretically and popularly as the 'proper' way to live and standard in the sense that the majority of families were considered to have those kind of domestic arrangements (Connell, 1995, p.51). The power of this image is such that it has persisted through the entire second half of the twentieth century; writing in the 1990s, Muncie and Sapsford (1995, p.10) argue that the idea of the nuclear family 'clearly retains a potency that all other forms tend to be defined with reference to it'.

Yet different critiques of the nuclear family began to emerge in feminist, Marxist and psychological work from the 1960s that challenged the ubiquity of the companionate marriage, and began to call into question both the intrinsic good of the nuclear family as a child-rearing institution and the nature of the capitalist system that was apparently resting on a family-based gender division of labour. Laing and Cooper were psychiatrists who worked with schizophrenic patients and who argued that the stifling relationships contained within the family can have damaging effects; far from providing a secure and loving environment, in some cases the intensity of family life can lead to mental disturbance (Laing, 1961/1977; 1971). Cooper, too, saw family as an institution that stunted personal growth but took the idea further, arguing that the family operates as an 'ideological conditioning device' (Cooper, 1974, p.5) in which the child is not taught how to survive in

society but 'to submit to it' (ibid., p.27). Leach (1968), an anthropologist but with a similar analysis of the family, suggested that the isolation of the nuclear family leads to an intensification of emotional stress in which parents fight and children rebel; in an oft-quoted sentence made during the course of a Reith lecture, he argued that '[f]ar from being the basis of a good society, the family, with its narrow privacy and its tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents' (Leach, 1968, p.44). Laing and Cooper's conclusions were drawn from their own clinical experience as psychiatrists rather than a systematic study of 'family' within British society, and they can be accused of presenting a (negative) view of family life that was just as one-sided as the (positive) functionalist approach of smooth-running family that contributes to social and personal stability. Their analysis of mental illness rested purely on social factors rather than including the possibility of genetic or physical causes, and now looks old-fashioned; mental illness is currently regarded as stemming from a complex mix of causes that are not always easily separated (e.g. Dallos and Boswell, 1993). Nonetheless their work drew attention to the complexity of family relationships and to the powerful emotional pressures that can be exercised to such a point that these relationships become destructive.

Feminists joined in with this critique and from the 1960s published a wide variety of studies that focused both on family dynamics and on the relationship between the family and wider society. Early targets were the theory of maternal deprivation and the feelings of guilt and inadequacy that could arise if a mother were not 'devoted' to her infant and was either unwilling or incapable of providing the selfless type of sacrifice demanded by Winnicott and Bowlby. Laing and Cooper's work was used to support the claim that continuous, uninterrupted maternal care was not essential to a child's mental health and it was argued that Bowlby's theories had been used to justify women's exclusion from employment as well as the closure of nursery provision for pre-school children (Nava, 1983, p.68). Gavron (1966) contended that the life of the suburban housewife was one of

captivity, bringing stress rather than fulfilment and isolation rather than security, later supported by Oakley's study of housework in which she discovered that many of the housewives in her sample complained of monotony, loneliness and that being 'just a housewife' implied low social status (Oakley, 1974/1990, p.182-3). Far from the 'symmetrical family' described by Young and Willmott (1973), other researchers were discovering the double burden of domestic duties and paid employment (e.g. Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976), and argued that the responsibility for home and children rested firmly with women even when both partners had full-time careers. Marxist analyses (e.g. Beechey, 1987, p.9) contended that women's unpaid labour lowered wage costs and was therefore critical to the maintenance of capitalism; women also provided a source of cheap, flexible labour to be drawn on in times of economic expansion and discarded in times of contraction. Finch (1983) suggested that the lives of wives from every social class tended to be structured around their husbands' jobs in a way that was seldom reciprocated; Campbell (1983) argued that women's economic dependence within heterosexual marriage was a means to sexual regulation. Dobash and Dobash (1979) investigated violence in the family, arguing that the authority conferred on men by the role of the husband played a part in the generation of violence within marriage. Feminist psychologists were meanwhile suggesting that girls' upbringing, which assumes a future of marriage and motherhood, created damaging patterns of underachievement, dependency and subjugation (Segal, 1995, p.302). The arguments put forward by the different bodies of feminist thinking that developed from the beginning of the 'second wave' feminism were summed up by Elliot in the mid-eighties (1986, p.126-31) as follows: the nuclear family denies women economic independence, gives men power over women's fertility and sexuality, and reinforces gender identities that allow male domination and control.

Such feminist work has had a profound effect on the study of the family, for it has shown lasting patterns of inequality between men and women in family life and, through

the often polemical early work (e.g. Greer, 1971), has helped to bring the debate on gender and family into the political and social arena; Leonard and Hood-Williams (1988, p.76) argue that one of the major achievements of the Women's Liberation Movement was to force the government to recognise the issue of domestic violence in the early 70s. It has highlighted the different experiences of men and women, and has demonstrated the complex interaction between economic, political, social and personal considerations that go into the making of 'family'. But these strengths are also a source of weakness; as feminists emphasise the autonomy of women, they have been subject to accusations that they are trying to destroy the family, as we saw in Morgan's (1986) work in Chapter One. This may be more properly expressed as trying to destroy the oppressive relationships within the nuclear family that are believed to be at the centre of a patriarchal system; although in the early days of the feminist movement communal living and political lesbianism were offered as an alternative, it is not clear that all feminists were trying to destroy family relationships *per se.* Nava's (1983, p.72) comment in this context is illuminating; she says that it was difficult to reconcile rational critique of the 1960s 'glorification of motherhood' with the 'indissoluble knot of passion' that young mothers such as herself were feeling for their children. By highlighting a tension between the importance of the human bond in which real everyday relationships are lived and a more objective assessment of the nature of these relationships within their social, political and economic context (that logically demands serious reorganisation), she shows how any critique of family relationships is unlikely to be straightforward; the question was to work out which aspects of family life were worth salvaging and which should be cast aside. A more sustainable criticism of feminist work is that it has to a large part neglected the diverse experience of ethnic minority families; for black men and women, family can be both a source of support to which to retreat from racism in wider society and a centre for resistance against white

oppression (e.g. Carby, 1982). It also, in focusing on different dimensions of the family experience of women, has tended to ignore that of children.

Much psychological work, however, has been directed on the centrality of the family for a child's emotional development and stability; some (e.g. Minsky, 1990) focus on the power of the unconscious, arguing that events and conflicts experienced in childhood are central to its formation. This is important because our actions are motivated by a mixture of the conscious and unconscious. Rather than the static picture of parents filling children with cultural values, socialisation in this case is rather an active, conflict-laden struggle in which the child learns the power of social conventions through her parents or carers; the psyche is complex and multi-layered. Pringle (1974) has expanded on Bowlby's (1972) work on attachment theory, arguing that children have four categories of non-physical needs; love and security, new experiences, praise and recognition, and responsibility (Pringle, 1974, pp.33-58). Each is an important component in developing a child's security and trust in both herself and others; the family in this case is the child's first educator, not necessarily in the sense of socialisation but in the wider understanding of introducing her to a range of experiences that can enrich her life. Others (e.g. Dallos, 1995, p.175) argue that each individual in the family influences how others behave, while observational research has questioned the image of parents imposing their will on children. Infants copy adults, but mothers also imitate their children; children respond selectively to parental instruction (Schaffer, 1993, p.112-3). The family then becomes the first arena in which to learn what pleases and distresses other people, about notions of fairness and reciprocity, about the process of negotiation; early mistakes are made in the safety of the home rather than in the public arena where others may not be so forgiving. Equally, other research has shown that 'family' can be a dangerous place where violence and abuse are the reality of life for both adults and children (Nazroo, 1995; Saraga, 1994) and where issues of negotiation and compromise have little or no place. If we sum up the arguments

of psychologists and sociologists cited so far, we can see that 'family' can provide a bridge between the individual and society through offering a secure base from which to enter the social world and to which to withdraw when things are going badly, or it can be a place from which to escape. It is the first place of learning, where all kinds of social skills are practised and from where new experiences are lived. It can provide children with a foundation for personal and moral fulfilment and growth. Events in early years have a profound influence over a child's future, not only in material terms but also in those of personal development, for it is the locus of a range of intense emotions; it can be a site for jealousy, abuse, hatred and mistrust as well as love, security and emotional fulfilment. It is both private and public, influenced by social and economic policy as well as providing a foundation for political and social resistance. Agreement among social scientists from the 1970s therefore centres on the fundamental importance of family life, although each discipline or perspective presents a different picture of *how* it might be so; each offers a specialised, partial view of family life that belies the possibility of a grand, overarching theory of 'family' to fit all cases at all times, unsettling the theoretical certainty of work such as Parsons and offering a complex variety of overlapping approaches in its place (Morgan, 1985).

Linked to this theoretical uncertainty was a growing concern within the literature from the 1980s about how family could be defined. Partly this arose through the sociological work that demonstrated that the nuclear family was not necessarily the dominant family form; Bernardes (1985, p.194) calculated that there are around two hundred variations to family life and, using figures from the 1981 census, argued that only a small percentage of families were nuclear (Bernardes 1986, p.828). The Stepfamily Association has also suggested that there are seventy-two different routes into stepfamily life (Gorell Barnes *et al,* 1998, p.2), offering a further picture of complexity and fluidity within family relationships and filling out the demographic work that, as we saw in Chapter

One, was showing higher numbers of divorces, cohabiting couples and extramarital births. Higher numbers of single parents belie the idea that a family has to have two adults; although adoption and fostering have always challenged the idea of biological parenthood as being 'best', technological changes that allow sperm and egg donation add further confusion to the issue, as do cases of surrogacy. Two gay men from Essex and their children have recently made history; a donated egg was fertilised by the sperm of one of the men and the resulting embryos were placed within a second woman's womb for gestation. The resulting twins becoming the first children to be registered with two fathers and no mother (Woodward, 1999, p.6); when both the social and the biological considerations are taken into account, the twins also have the possibility of four parents. These cases illustrate the complexity of understanding 'family' as a unit, for the boundaries are both permeable and moveable; as Gubrium and Holstein (1990) demonstrate in the opening chapter of their book, 'family' is a slippery concept that can include friends, colleagues and the family pet and yet exclude those who are related by blood. Rather than attempting to begin with a definition - and thereby running the risk of it being either so generalised that it becomes meaningless or so narrow that exceptions to the rule are easily found - they argue that the important factor is the meaning that individuals place on the relationship in question; the way that they practise 'family' is their construction of the reality of family life (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990, p.10).

It is possible to draw a parallel between this constructivist approach and that of Parsons in the sense that each is a reflection of a type of sociological thinking that is fashionable at the particular time of writing; Parsons' work emphasised the structural aspect of society and the contribution that 'family' made to social stability, while the focus in Gubrium and Holstein's work has shifted towards the individual's ability to decide for herself what family 'is' within an uncertain and rapidly changing social context. As the nuclear family is weakened by a combination of women's possible economic

independence, the loosening of sexual mores and the removal of social stigma from divorce, cohabitation and extramarital births, so there becomes more room for manoeuvre within personal life; the emphasis on structure within Parsons' interpretation from the comparatively rigid society of the 1950s has shifted towards a focus on agency in keeping with an increasingly individualised and individualistic society (Kingdom, 1992; Hutton, 1996). This shift has been captured by Giddens' (1997) work *The Transformation of Intimacy*, in which he talks about 'confluent love' and the 'pure relationship', arguing that intimate relationships are entered into for their own sake and continue only for as long as the individuals concerned believe that it delivers enough 'satisfactions' for them to remain (Giddens, 1997, p.58). Love, rather than having a romantic and 'for-ever' quality, requires active commitment, equality in 'emotional give and take' and develops only to the degree that each partner is prepared to become intimate with and vulnerable to the other person. Reciprocal sexual pleasure is a 'key element' in deciding whether the relationship should be continued or not (ibid., pp.61-63) and, as the trust on which this relationship depends has no external supports, it has to be developed on the basis of intimacy between the partners (ibid., p.138). The partnership is thus based on sexual and emotional equality, continuous negotiation and the understanding that both partners should be emotionally and sexually fulfilled; it applies to both heterosexual and homosexual partnerships. While the principal objection to Giddens' interpretation of the nature of contemporary intimate relationships is that he ignores the reality of children who can place demands on their parents and be obstructive towards new partnerships (Lampard and Peggs, 1999), the substance of Giddens' approach strikes a chord with what has recently been described as a 'ditch-him-and-get-a-new-one society' (Sweet, 2002, p.9) in which intimate relationships have tended to be more transitory than in the immediate postwar period. He has been credited with an important contribution to theorising family life by locating individual action within its social, historical and political context (Smart, 1997, p.307); his focus on

the dynamic nature of relationships has also furthered understanding of family as fluid and diverse.

Morgan (1999) has followed this trend towards placing individual agency within its social and historical context but broadens the perspective by focusing on the tangible links between family and wider society. He suggests that a focus on the everyday can give an understanding of how members conceive family; eating or sleeping are 'doing' family in the sense that they are establishing or confirming that particular family's lifestyle and the perception of proper roles within it. There is a sense of fluidity within these practices that flows into others and leads to negotiation over future practices; a family outing may be repeated or changed, for instance, depending on members' perceptions of its success/failure. For Morgan family is an active concept practised by members who are connected to broader social life through (for instance) schools, clubs and the workplace. Other relationships outside family life thus feed into 'family' through demands on time, finance or emotional commitment; members' actions can be located within a wider perspective to include questions of gender, ethnicity and class (Morgan, 1999, p.19). This conception of family is not the intimate, bounded institution of Parsons' analysis but something that a 'small non-transient group containing both children and adults, united by intimate relationships and common interests' (Wringe, 1994, p.78) practise within their personal, social and societal circumstances. This theoretical approach allows for personal manoeuvre within the constraints of socio-economic conditions and offers a positive way forward in researching the different influences that are brought to bear on individual conceptions of family.

And yet, in contrast to the fluidity of the constructivist approach and the diversity seen within gay families (Weeks *et al*, 1999), cohabitees, single parents and stepfamilies, there is evidence of a strong commitment to marriage and the extended family, particularly among certain ethnic minority groups. A survey from the Policy Studies Institute of

attitudes of African, Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani people showed that the Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents tended to prefer multi-generational households, to believe that women should not work outside the home and to expect arranged marriages to prevail as a custom. All Asian groups in the survey had a strong belief in marriage as a foundation from which to raise children, while Afro-Caribbean respondents tended to believe that the quality of the relationship was more important than the marriage certificate (Beishon *et al*, 1998). This corresponds to the relatively high number of black lone parent families in Britain today (National Statistics, 2002, p.49). In addition the majority of those interviewed in the Family Policy Institute's study believed that their families were very different to those of the white majority, arguing that white parents showed lack of commitment to parenting and that their children were undisciplined (Beishon *et al*, 1998). Although the number interviewed in this survey was relatively small, the findings are supported by more recent research from Berthoud (2000), who suggests that the key feature of the Afro-Caribbean population is their low rate of marriage, while the key features of South Asian communities are the high rate of marriage and very low rates of divorce. With this commitment to marriage comes a pattern of a traditional division of labour; Berthoud argues that a majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are full-time mothers and housewives although this pattern is less common among women with educational qualifications. He argues that all ethnic groups in Britain are moving towards the 'modern individualism' of low rates of marriage and high rates of single parenthood. It is, perhaps, too early to make such an assertion; divorce rates reached their peak in 1993 and are now slowing down (National Statistics, 2002, p.44) and a recent report in the *Guardian* (Morrison, 2002) argues that marriage is coming back into fashion. The author cites financial reasons, the desire for formal commitment and security for children as underpinning the change in attitude, factors that may be supported by the suggestion within recent research that cohabiting partnerships tend to be less stable and that fathers of

children born outside marriage tend to be less involved should the union break up. They tend to pay less child support and to visit their children less often than their previously-married counterparts (Kiernan, 1998, p.55). There are thus strong continuities within family life as well as the changes that have been extensively documented over the last thirty years.

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that 'family' is a complex concept that is thought of and practised in numerous ways; that it has a fundamental effect on children's future life, not only in material terms but also in social and emotional; that different influences from within and without the family come to bear on each individual's conception of what it 'is'. This all has implications for a child's education; school is generally the first place that she will experience large groups of people with varied experiences of family life, where she is taught by people with no connection to her own family and where she has access to different ideas about 'family' in the formal situation of the classroom. In the next chapter I investigate the relationship between schools and families, outline different interpretations of recent developments and finally consider the number of ways in which 'family' enters a young person's school day. This, in turn, opens up hitherto unexplored avenues for research.

Chapter 3: Families and Schools

This third chapter seeks to explore the nature of the relationship between families and schools. My concern is with the state-maintained sector, first because it provides an education for the majority of children in Britain and secondly because my research was conducted in such schools; the independent sector, although an important part of the British education system, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Once again, I do not intend to provide a comprehensive analysis of the issues involved but attempt instead to place the relationship between schools and families into an historical perspective and to give some understanding of how this relationship has developed since the changes that the Conservative party made to primary and secondary education during the 1980s. At the end of the chapter I argue that 'family' enters school life in a number of different ways and that this is a subject neglected by academic research.

The 1944 Education Act reorganised the national system of schooling in an attempt to move away from the 'entrenched system of social class' that had been part of the education system up to the second world war (David, 1993, p.35). Educational opportunity was to be opened up through the creation of free schooling for all children from the ages of eleven to fourteen (fifteen from 1948), which represented a break from the situation in previous years when children from poorer backgrounds had had to rely on scholarships to fund their secondary education. While the intention was to afford a degree of social mobility for children of the working class, it was also linked to the aim of economic growth; if all children were offered the chance to be educated according to their ability, they would be able to contribute to a competitive economy that would, in turn, foster social progress (David, 1993, p.38).

The terms of the Act set out the duties of parents and Local Education Authorities (LEA's); every parent with a child of school age should 'cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude' (Great Britain Statutes, 1944,

Section 36), and the Ministry of Education and the LEA should 'have regard to the principle that, so far as it is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents' (Great Britain Statutes, 1944, Section 76). These terms of 'efficient' and 'suitable' education were not defined, nor was 'in accordance with the wishes of their parents'; although the options of home schooling or attending denominational or fee-paying schools had not been removed by the Act, the reality of the secondary system was that success or failure in the eleven plus exam determined the nature of most children's secondary schooling. Those who passed were entitled to go to the local grammar school, whereas failure led either to the secondary modern or to one of the (relatively few) technical schools; parents had no say in how this was to be decided.

The management of each school was the concern of the relevant LEA and governing or managing body, with the Ministry of Education playing little part in the daily organisation of schools or the content of the curriculum. As there was no obligation to include parents in any part of the decision-making process, they too had little or no influence on these matters, nor was there an independent system of dealing with complaints other than to appeal to the Ministry of Education. Yet there was a clear expectation of the role that parents should play in supporting their children's education:

> Most people now recognize how important it is for home and school to work together. This working together for the same thing should begin early, and the earlier the better. Parents should take the trouble to learn about the school and what it is trying to do for their children; in return the school must take account of how the child lives at home (Ministry of Education, 1947, p.19-20).

A little later the same document suggests that parents should be made to feel welcome in the school so that their confidence is won and so that 'the values which a school is setting before a child come to be understood in the home' (Ministry of Education, 1947, p.22). The onus is therefore on parents to support the school; 'taking account' of a child's background

is not suggestive of a two-way interaction between parents and teachers but of the desirability of subsuming home values under those of the school. Given this official attitude, it was unsurprising that relationships between parents and teachers tended to be distant; in a brief review of the development of home-school relations, Partington and Wragg (1989, p.1), for instance, comment on the schools of the time that were 'notorious' for having a white line painted across the playground that marked the place beyond which parents should not pass. Ellis *et al*, writing in the aftermath of the Tyndale affair, remark that until the late 1960s schools were the 'privileged domain' of the headteacher and the staff; criticism was discouraged through the maintenance of a 'professional mystique', parents were kept at a physical distance through the use of 'stringent' appointment systems and 'specially staged' open evenings revealed only that which the school was prepared to reveal (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p.65-6). While more impartial research commissioned by the Plowden committee showed that this was not always the case (DES, 1967, p.38), Ellis *et al*'s observations were indicative of the general character of home-school relations in which parents' concerns and opinions were likely to be viewed as an unnecessary distraction from the educational task in hand (Vincent, 1996, p.24).

Dale (1989, p.125) suggests that the aims of the education system at this time were 'uncodified, incoherent and implicit', and that they rested on the assumption of shared values rather than explicit rules. While the aims may have been uncodified and implicit, the assumption was rather that parents would come to share the school's values; that they would trust the LEA's and schools to provide their children with an 'efficient' and 'suitable' education regardless of whether it was primary, grammar, technical, secondary modern or comprehensive and that they would accept the professionalism of the teacher in an uncritical and unquestioning manner. But any consensus over the aims and methods of educating young people - if it ever really existed - was to fall apart as social and economic conditions changed in the subsequent years, as immigration brought greater numbers of

ethnic minority families to Britain and as perceptions about the education system changed in response to these new circumstances. Parents proved not to be the homogeneous, acquiescent group that was, perhaps, envisaged by policy makers of the time, and government, teachers, LEA's and different groups of parents were to become embroiled in debates that focused on their respective roles in influencing the aims and content of children's education. The 1970s were to prove a critical time when the terms of the home-school debate were to shift from the liberal principles of equalising educational opportunity (in which parents were ideally supportive of schools' effort and a resource for schools to draw on) to a more conservative emphasis on standards and parental rights and in which parents were envisaged as having a very different set of roles.

In Chapter 1 we saw that the ascendancy of New Right ideas to do with family and the welfare state during the 1970s was underpinned by a powerful and seductive rhetoric at a time of economic, social and cultural uncertainty. The debate within education was framed in similar terms, tapping into and seemingly offering a commonsense solution to concerns manifested through the 1970s that were linked to the questions of individual social mobility and national economic competitiveness. Those on the left (e.g. Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977) were arguing that education, rather than facilitating social mobility, was entrenching class position while those concerned with investigating the experience of ethnic minorities argued that 'race' added an extra dimension to a system that favoured the white middle class (e.g. Tomlinson, 1984). Commentators on the right, meanwhile, were suggesting that multicultural, comprehensive education was leading to a general lowering of standards in which Britain's economic competitiveness was suffering and her brightest children were being deprived (Cox and Dyson, 1971; Cox and Boyson, 1975). Some parents, too, were proving to be unhappy with the idea of comprehensive education and there were pockets of parental resistance to the abolition of grammar schools in different parts of the country. Although these campaigns met with varying degrees of

success (James, 1980, pp.35-52), the emotions that they provoked gave a potent illustration of an argument for parental rights within education; that parents should be able to have a say in how their children were to be educated. As economic conditions deteriorated through the 1970s, so the power of this rhetoric increased and by mid-decade the argument was beginning to influence the political agenda (David, 1993, p.57). Thus, in a series of measures throughout the 1980s and 1990s the Conservatives attempted simultaneously to transform the relationship between schools and parents, reduce the power of the LEA's and address the concern over (perceived) slipping standards. The changes they made can be briefly summarised as follows: parental 'power' was enhanced and the autonomy of the LEA's reduced by giving parents the right to express their preference for a particular school and to appeal if the judgement went against them. Open enrolment was intended to give parents greater freedom to choose as it compelled schools to accept children until they were at maximum capacity and thus prevented LEA's from evening out numbers over the different schools in the area. Parents were also given the right to ballot on the option of the school receiving its funding directly from the government rather than through the LEA. In addition the management of schools was to become more open and participatory through the obligations to include parents on the governing body and to hold an annual meeting between parents and school governors. Finally, parents were given rights to have regular reports on their children's progress, on the school's finances and to be consulted over the education of children with special educational needs.

The centralising measures that increased the state's authority over education included a National Curriculum introduced in 1988 that was compulsory for all schools in the state sector and a new system of government inspection that was begun in 1992 under the direction of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Children were to be given new compulsory tests at the ages of 7, 11 and 14 that were called Standard Assessment Tasks (SAT's) in addition to the established examinations at 16 (GCSE's) and 18 (A

levels), the published results of which were to form a major part of the information on which parents would base their choice of school. The state therefore outlined the responsibilities of schools while the latter would implement the various strategies in their own way; per capita funding made a direct link between school income and pupil numbers and was used in conjunction with parental choice to bring the discipline of the market to educational services. Schools were thus directly accountable to both parents and the government.

Once again the rhetoric was deceptively simple; standards within education would be raised by the mechanism of competition in which parental choice would force schools to be receptive to parents' demands and to deliver the education that parents wanted. Those schools who did not produce the goods would suffer in terms of falling rolls and (therefore) funding, and those who were successful would be rewarded by greater numbers and resources; it followed that all schools would strive to offer the best education that they could for each local community. Furthermore, if parents had chosen a particular institution for their child, they would be more inclined to support the school's efforts at whatever level they thought they could; this could range from hearing their children read to helping in the classroom, fundraising or becoming a governor. In short, once the choice had been made, both staff and parents would work together to produce the highest possible standards of education, benefiting both individuals and the nation and in keeping with the Conservative project of moral and economic regeneration.

The emphasis on parental empowerment in the rhetoric suggested the possibility of a new type of relationship between schools and parents in which the latter could become partners in their children's education. Writing in 1987, Bastiani (1987, pp.88-107) argued that home-school relations can be characterised by a series of ideologies that have moved from compensation (the belief that deficiencies within children's backgrounds can be offset by the efforts of the school) through communication (which suggests that home-school

relationship problems are caused primarily through failures of communication) to accountability (which encourages the concept of parent as consumer) to participation (in which parents and teachers work together in a non-hierarchical relationship with shared goals and complementary roles). Although he cautioned against regarding these changes as a linear development, he argued that the period following the Plowden Report was marked by attempts by schools to 'colonize' parents (ibid., p.103) and that the 80s produced a counter-view in which the role of parents and schools was regarded as complementary; differences were recognised and 'a spirit of co-operation' (ibid., p.104) was stressed. He recognised that more open communication between home and school could highlight the tensions between the two as well as produce more constructive relationships (ibid., p.104), but seemed to believe that a critical point had been reached in which parents and schools could form relationships in which there was a greater degree of understanding and collaboration. This generally optimistic position was echoed by others whose books suggested ways in which parental involvement could be encouraged (e.g. Merttens and Vass, 1990; Topping and Wolfendale, 1986) and that outlined parental and school responsibilities for more 'effective' relationships between them (e.g. Macbeth, 1995; Atkin and Bastiani, 1988).

The reforms themselves were predicated on several assumptions. The first is that all parents would have an active choice about which school to send their children, something difficult in rural areas where the transport provided is usually to one school only. The second is that all parents would be equally well-informed about the nature of the choice they are making, an assumption refuted by research through the 1990s that suggested a strong correlation between social class and school choice; there were indications that middle class parents are better able to secure places for their children in their preferred schools than those from the working class (e.g. Gewirtz, Ball and Rowe, 1994, 1995; Reay and Ball, 1997) and that race can be a negatively influential factor among white parents'

choice of school (e.g. Bagley, 1996; Tomlinson, 1997). Related to this is the issue of school expansion; as there are necessarily tight limits on the ability for a school to expand, oversubscribed schools are quickly in the position of being able to select pupils rather than vice-versa, which tends to increase the difference in quality between schools as the high status schools attract the high-performing students. The final assumption within the legislation is that schools are both willing and able to respond to parental concerns and that improvement will follow from addressing these concerns. Yet, as we have seen, the legislation placed schools into the difficult position of being accountable to parents through the necessity of maintaining school rolls yet on the other hand being constrained by the requirements of central government; the National Curriculum of 1988 was highly prescriptive and weighted heavily in favour of academic subjects (White, 1993); the use of league tables indicated government attempts to influence the criteria by which schools should be judged successful (Halstead, 1994, p.14); in 1993 the Secretary of State was given the power to send in a team of experts to those schools that were deemed to be 'failing' (Pierson, 1998, p.133). In addition, although the local management of schools had largely been handed over to headteachers and school governors, it was within budgetary restrictions set by the government and the LEA (itself limited by central government). Thus if schools were willing to effect any changes parents demanded, the ability to do so would be strongly curtailed by the financial and academic framework within which they operated.

Parents, too, were placed in the difficult position of having multiple and possibly conflicting roles; as customers they competed against one another for places in the school of their choice; as governors there could be tension between the good of the school and the good of their own child; as people in 'partnership' with the teachers for their children's education, parents were still subject to the demands of the National Curriculum and the pressures that these placed upon teachers and educationalists. Once again research has tended to indicate that middle class parents have shown the most active involvement with

their children's education; studies on parents as governors found that schools drew on white middle class professionals (e.g. Golby, 1993) rather than people from ethnic minorities of whatever social standing (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Tomlinson, 1993). Typologies of parental involvement tracked the differing levels of interest and commitment that parents showed (e.g. Vincent, 1996; Edwards and Knight, 1997) while other researchers have endeavoured to unpick the social, economic and personal conditions that play a critical part in determining the degree to which parents (mostly mothers) engage with their children's education (e.g. Reay, 1998). Factors that feed into the complexities of home-school relations include the cultural diversity within family life, familiarity with the workings of the educational system, the willingness of individual parents to contribute to their children's education, their perception of what a 'good' education 'is' and the receptiveness of different teachers to parents' participation in school life. Thus, although the Conservative measures provided the capacity for a greater degree of parental involvement and the possibility of schools' increasing their awareness of the needs and values of 'their' parents, the aims of such involvement and the methods by which it might be achieved have been controversial both in interpretation and implementation.

In addition, the framework of trust that was implicit within the post-war relationship between schools, LEA's and families has been replaced by a framework of schools' accountability to both parents and government. Nias argues that in a pluralist society, where there is bound to be conflict over the aims of education, formal procedures facilitate trust between members of the public and teachers (Nias, 1981, p.222-3). That may be so; evidence from local polls suggests that parents seem to have confidence in the improving quality of schools (Brighouse, 2001, p.29). But the formal procedures of the National Curriculum, SAT's and Ofsted inspections have been accompanied by an apparent diminishing of government trust in heads and teachers. This appears to have had unfortunate results; research indicates that these measures can be acutely stressful for

teachers through the extra work involved in meeting parents, planning, administration and through the demands of Ofsted inspections (e.g. Troman, 2000). Brighouse (2001) argues that the balance between support and pressure implicit within government guidelines and target setting has, since the early 1980s, tended to fall in the direction of pressure, and has brought in its wake a serious problem with teacher recruitment and retention (Brighouse, 2001, p.28-9). It also has interesting implications for the development of the relationship between families and teachers.

Generalised overviews on the effect of the reforms tend to argue that schools have become more sensitive to parents' perceptions of activities and policies within its gates and that parents are more aware of their rights (e.g. Godber, 1999, p.125). The suggestion is that things have improved in some measure from the days of the white line drawn across the playground; that parents are made more welcome and efforts are made to maintain open lines of communication with schools and teachers through which there can be an exchange of ideas and concerns. Other more detailed research, however, has been concerned with the balance of control between parents and teachers and suggests that it continues to lie with the latter rather than the former. Stanley and Wyness (1999, p.155), in their conclusion to a small-scale study on parental involvement, contend that 'parental empowerment seems to be something of a myth'. This, they argue, is because parents and teachers are not equals within the schools; teachers may reveal only the kind of information that maintains their position in relation to the parents, and they encourage parents to come and see - to join in with the school experience, feel part of it and thereby learn to support the school. In much the same vein Vincent and Tomlinson (1997, p.367) argue that partnership has meant little more to many parents than attending school events and a 'passive receipt of information'; they suggest that the 'soft rhetoric' of partnership is masking a harder professional concern to control the form and extent of parental involvement (ibid., p.373). These two perspectives are developed in some detail by Edwards and Warin (1999, p.326), who focus

on the deficit model of parenting throughout the 1980s and beyond. The main thrust of Edwards and Warin's argument is that their research in primary schools points to evidence that 'a form of colonisation rather than collaboration' is in evidence (ibid., p.332). Teachers, under pressure from large classes, a heavy curriculum and the necessity to produce good academic results, are interested in breaking down barriers between home and school so that parents help with the delivery of the large amount of information that children have to absorb. If parents are unable to help in an academic way, they will at least value the efforts of the school and give practical support by ensuring their children's regular attendance. Indeed, bringing the parents on board is seen in some schools to reduce behavioural problems by discouraging children from playing home and school off against each other (ibid., p.332-338).

Ball and Vincent (1998, p.393) argue that the notion of choice brought with it the discourse of the 'good' parent who takes choice of school seriously and discharges this duty by making the 'best' possible choice for her child; Edwards and Warin's work argues that this has been taken one step further and that the 'good' parent is one who actively seeks to support the school and the learning processes within it. Personal accounts of this pressure to conform are also seen in Standing's (1999) research into the experience of lone mothers' involvement with their children's education; one describes the guilt she experiences should she fail to hear her children read:

> I got the impression that if she [daughter] wasn't doing well, it was my fault ... If you don't do it, it's going to affect them, so you were feeling guilty, you think 'oh I haven't listened to them read' (Standing, 1999, p.67).

These studies would suggest that relationships between parents and schools, rather than following Bastiani's optimistic trajectory from the 1980s, have changed little from the 1950s for many parents; they are encouraged to understand and then to share the school's values, to support the school's efforts and to encourage their children in their academic endeavours. The critical difference is that they have - in theory - chosen their children's

school, and could therefore be liable to come under considerable moral pressure to become the type of parent that the school (or teacher) would want. As Edwards and Warin (1999, p.328) comment '[e]ducating the client is ... a feature of the market' and the 'second curriculum' (ibid., p.337) for teachers may be to teach the parents the values of the school, something regarded as particularly relevant to those from ethnic minorities who may have different cultural assumptions about education.

There is, however, a fine line between educating parents into the ways of the school and educating parents into the 'correct' way to bring up their children, and the rhetoric of 'partnership' also masks the extent to which the current Labour administration seems to be directing home-school relationships. In the first White Paper following the 1997 election David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, wrote of his vision of creating a 'new culture' which fostered a 'realisation that education matters to everyone' (DfEE, 1997, p.3). He made his intentions clear:

> Partnership for change means commitment from everyone: from the family and the wider community; from those working in the education service; and from those who support it ... Everyone has a part to play (DfEE, 1997, p.3).

Home-school contracts have been introduced, which, although legally impotent, formally set out the nature of the school/parent relationship and, according to the same White Paper:

> '...will be important in helping engage parents in raising pupil's achievement and in action to combat truancy, bullying and unacceptable behaviour which undermines pupils' progress' (ibid., p.55).

This would indicate a stronger and more defined role for parents in their children's education, suggesting that they would have to 'play their part' whether they liked it or not, a point taken up by David (1999, p.218-9). She argues that the White Paper shows an intention to regulate parental standards for all and she uses measures within the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 to support her case; homework clubs can be used to increase surveillance over children's activities, while home-school agreements can be used to monitor parental activities as much as children's. The Advisory Centre for Education

came to a similar conclusion after the details of the Standards and Framework Act had been published, commenting that '[a]ll the messages coming from legislation ... suggest [parents] are seen as little more than yes-people, who dispatch well-fed, properly rested and homeworked children into school each day' (ACE, 1998, p.3). More recently, Edwards (2002a, p.4) has detected what she calls 'an increasingly hard-edged attempt to direct and regulate' family life through the promotion of home-school links. And while schools are obliged to ensure that such measures as the home-school agreements are adopted, it is also in their interest to do so; children who accept the necessity of working while at school and completing their homework on time contribute to an uninterrupted delivery of the curriculum as well as being more likely to achieve the academic results that are necessary for the league tables. There is some tension, then, between the image of home-school relations in which schools are sensitive to parents' cultural differences and/or educational wishes and the necessity to produce good academic results. Schools appear to be under pressure from policies of target-setting, SAT's and the competitiveness of league tables, all enshrined in the phrase 'zero tolerance of underperformance' (DfEE, 1997, p.12) and seem to have little option but to pass this pressure on to parents; parents, in turn, are expected to support the school rather than question the aims or methods of education either generally or in the particular case of their own children.

All of these issues, however, form the background to the child's school day rather than being a focus for direct attention within the classroom. 'Family' may nonetheless be experienced in a number of ways while the child is at school. In secondary schools pupils often stay in the same tutor group for the years 7 to 11, forming a quasi-family group that meets at certain times during the week for lessons and to be given information that relates to school activities. In primary schools, pupils tend to remain with the same teacher throughout the day, enabling a similar but more intense relationship through the continuous contact that this affords and that may be modelled on family life; primary teachers see

themselves 'in some senses' as parents (Nias, 1999, p.75). In addition 'family' can form the background to or the focus for topics in history, English, drama and Religious Education as well as being implicit in the relationships discussed within sex education and in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). In each case an image of 'family' is projected - either deliberately or unintentionally - that may support or undermine pupils' own conception of family and that may cause them to reflect on their own home situation. Such images may be further reinforced or undermined by individual teachers' expectations of their pupils' families; the degree to which parents are welcomed in the school, the extent to which they are expected to support the learning processes and the quality of the relationship between the teacher and parents may generate a sense of harmony or of discord between home and school. As we have seen, much academic attention has been given to the nature of home-school relations, the circumstances that hinder/encourage parental involvement and the forms that this might take. Recent research focus on the ethos or culture of the school (e.g. Prosser, 1999) has drawn attention to the importance of the atmosphere within which children learn. But there has, as yet, been little focus on the processes within the classroom that may reinforce/undermine images of 'family' that are held by children; much of the academic attention on drama (e.g. Winston, 1999; Day, 2002), English (e.g. Cox, 1997) or sex education (e.g. Halstead and Waite, 2001) for instance, focuses on children's moral education in a general sense rather than on the images and values that relate specifically to family. In the next part of the thesis I explore the concept of family values and examine the recent changes to the National Curriculum that include specific reference to family relationships, and argue that rectifying the academic neglect of the portrayal of family within the classroom has now become a task of some considerable importance.

PART TWO: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH

This second part of the thesis is concerned with the question of values. In Chapter Four I explore the question of family values and argue that they are values of lasting and fundamental importance to the quality of our relationships in adulthood. Chapter Five takes up the question of values education with particular reference to the recent introduction of the question of 'family' into Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). Together the two chapters provide a philosophical framework for the research that is reported in Part Four.

Chapter 4: The Concept of Family Values

The phrase 'family values' is one with which most of us are familiar; it is used by politicians and in the media and recently seems to have become a shorthand for conservative ideas on the family that include heterosexual marriage and a gender-based division of labour in which women continue to take primary responsibility for their children's welfare. This, however, is a narrow interpretation of the phrase that gives little indication of the complexity of the relationship between values, the individual and society. In response, therefore, this chapter seeks to examine the nature of values within the context of contemporary British society and to find a more precise and sustainable definition of family values.

First, the question of values. The name indicates that they are something that we hold in high esteem, which in turn suggests that they might be preferences. But values have more significance than being merely one alternative chosen in an arbitrary fashion from many; they are principled preferences, judged against certain criteria (Carr, 1993, p.3) that, broadly, contribute to the individual's idea of the good life. They are aimed at a condition or mode of behaviour that is considered desirable rather than at a physical object; for instance, I may value a painting, not only as a pleasing object to look at but also as a

possible source of income should I run short of cash. The picture itself cannot be a value, although it may have both aesthetic and monetary worth; my values in this case concern my desire to be surrounded by beautiful objects and/or to have a secure life that is free from financial worries. But life is not influenced purely by aesthetic or financial values, for values concern just about every area of life from the global environment through to intimate personal matters; there is little that we say or do that is entirely value-free in any context. With such a wide area to cover, definition becomes a formidable task.

Nonetheless, Halstead (1996) suggests that values are:

> ... principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as points of reference in decision-making or the evaluation of beliefs or action and which are closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity (Halstead, 1996a, p.5).

The key word in this definition is fundamental, for it indicates the level at which values operate. Whether consciously or unconsciously, many of our decisions are measured against some sort of standard or principle; our stance towards questions of religion, relationships with others and the degree to which we respect the law rests on our values, as do many of our everyday judgement on others' behaviour and attitudes. That is not to say that impulsive thought or action is impossible, nor to propose that every decision that we make is carefully considered according to the relevant values, but as 'fundamental convictions' our values underpin much of the workings of our everyday lives. They are used when we try to resolve any kind of conflict, whether personal or between others, and they can motivate in the sense that they can cause us to choose one course of action above another; we might help at a family occasion rather than seek the company of friends, for example, or contribute to a project to tidy local beauty spots rather than join the cricket team. Values also provide a sense of continuity within our own personal life course as we grow older, broaden our experience and endeavour to make sense of what we have learned within the context of what we know; they help us decide on the worth of new experiences and how they may be incorporated (or not) into our own particular worldview. Weeks

(1995, p.50) offers a useful, visual interpretation when he refers to values as 'the substratum' of both individual and social existence, and this image suggests a layer located within a person's psyche on which action, behaviour, attitudes and beliefs rest. And, as creatures that are situated within a particular time and place, within this fundamental layer we have culturally-borne ideas of what is right or wrong which are then related to our perceptions of how the good life is organised. As Halstead suggests, there is a strong link between our values and the type of person that we are.

Yet our value systems operate in complex and subtle ways, and an understanding of how they 'work' is elusive and difficult to quantify. Rokeach (1973, p.14) proposes that they may be likened to a map, part of which is used in any given situation with the rest remaining in the background; values concerning, say, environmental issues would probably be irrelevant when one is attempting to sort out a fight between two teenagers. This presents a rather static, one-dimensional picture in which we move around our values on one level, and is augmented by his claim that values have cognitive, emotional and behavioural components (ibid., p.7); they need to be understood, felt and acted upon if they are to become a part of us. If we take these ideas a little further it is possible to envisage the 'substratum' of values as layered and multidimensional; different circumstances bring different values into play as we interpret and then react to what is going on. If values are only partially understood, for instance, they may not be readily available in a situation where they might be applicable; if there is little emotional commitment to them, they may be forgotten or buried beneath others that seem more relevant and immediate. On the other hand, acting on a value may help to clarify its meaning and strengthen its significance; we may discover that showing tolerance towards a neighbour leads to friendship and understanding rather than shouting and disagreement, or that telling the truth is preferable to lying because of the emotional pain that deceit can inflict. Values, then, can be applied

selectively and creatively in response to new situations rather than being a set of rules to which one should unthinkingly adhere.

This, in turn, means that value systems can accommodate change; learning from new experiences means that we can alter value priorities, or assimilate new values that we have encountered, or that we can lose others that we feel no longer contribute to our version of the good life. Values conflicts can also be significant for ordering our own personal hierarchy of values and for determining how absolute or relative they may be within different contexts and circumstances; whether it is personally acceptable to tell a white lie to a friend about the clothes she likes, for instance, or whether an honest opinion is more important than offending her sensibilities. This inherent dynamism of value systems is a strength, for a capacity for change allows a kind of continuous personal development throughout life that would be impossible if values were to remain static once they had been adopted. It also gives rise to hope that no-one is irredeemable, for without such a possibility there would seem to be little point in trying to reform criminals, for example, or for religious leaders to persuade sinners of the error of their ways. But if they are 'fundamental convictions' that form a 'substratum', then change is necessarily slow; psychological work assumes that our adult value systems are fairly stable and it is argued that stability is necessary to maintain to a coherent sense of self in different situations and over time (Seligman and Katz, 1995, p.55). Thus our values are likely to be influenced by factors such as the values of those whom we hold dear or whom we respect, the image we hold of ourselves and of the type of person that we would like to be; these factors interact in complex ways with the social, economic and political circumstances in which we live, having the effect of making each person's value system unique. And the stability of adult value systems implies that the most critical time for the assimilation of values is during childhood; this is the time when we tend to be strongly influenced by those caring for us by

virtue of our dependence and it is the time when we are introduced and exposed to a wealth of new experiences by virtue of our age.

At the centre of our value systems are moral values, for these are the values that underpin how we conduct our relationships with others and govern the extent to which we recognise the rights and responsibilities that are intrinsic to living in a society with other human beings. Examples of moral values are truth, respect for others, tolerance and justice; each is concerned with the promotion of a life in which not only the individual but every member of society can flourish and in which the potential of harm to others is minimised. Our moral values help us determine if something is (more or less) right or wrong in our dealings with loved ones, friends and strangers; they are the principles by which we set our own standards of behaviour towards others and judge that of others towards us. And the way that we behave towards each other is important not only in terms of individual actions but in a wider sense that encompasses the nature of the society in which we live, bringing us back to the image from Weeks (1995, p.50) of social systems having a 'substratum' of values on which the organisation and character of each society rests.

In every society, then, there is a basis of agreement on the values that underpin social, economic and political organisation although there may be many different interpretations of and emphases on each of those values; we have seen that each individual has her own, unique values system that is forged by a combination of circumstance and beliefs. Social values may change over time, as individual values do; there is little conception of the Greek notion of honour in modern societies while the value of human rights is now well established within moral and political discourse (Haydon, 2000a, p.52). In a western democracy such as Britain, the values that form the basis of social and political organisation are liberal. Although liberalism is not a unified body of thought, there are two fundamental tenets on which all liberals are agreed; that each human being is of equal worth and that the primary source of that worth is the power of moral choice. If it is

to uphold this moral equality of persons, the liberal state must respect and promote the liberty of choice, and it must respect each individual citizen as a chooser (Nussbaum, 1999, p.57). Thus the fundamental values on which liberal societies are based and most citizens are agreed are those of freedom, equality and rationality (Halstead, 1996b, p.18); the freedom and equality of each individual to pursue her own version of the good life together with the development of consistent rational thought in order that these decisions can be satisfactorily justified to self and others. The degree to which citizens can be both free and equal is, of course, a matter for long-standing philosophical debate and one that is beyond the scope of this thesis to pursue, as is the history which led to the acceptance of those values. Rather I would focus on the practical effect that these values have, which is to present the opportunity for people from many different cultures, religions and ethnicities to live together relatively peaceably in the same land without interference from others; to live their lives according to their own values and beliefs while accepting the right of others to do the same. British society therefore has both unifying and diversifying elements; above the layer of agreed fundamental values - and beyond these three values the thickness of this layer is much disputed - there are many different lifestyles that arise from deep-seated and possibly irreconcilable values that concern particular visions of the good life. And, as an institution that is part of the basic structure of social life (Rawls, 1973, p.7), the family is at the centre of this unity and diversity; unity in the sense that family is significantly shaped and defined by the state through marriage, education and welfare laws, and diversity in the sense that the experience of family is unique to each individual. And it is the family's centrality to both social and individual life that makes the concept of family values difficult to grasp; are they closer to social values or individual? Or they a kind of value *sui generis*?

If family values are close to social values, they could be seen to reflect and perpetuate those values on which society is agreed. This is perhaps the vision of social commentators such as Davies (1993), Morgan (1998) and Murray (1990), whose concept of

family values can be summarised as families consisting in responsible, hardworking units that contribute to national stability and economic prosperity. The argument is based on the notion that the two parent family is the only institution capable of producing well-balanced, responsible citizens. It is a perspective that has Aristotelian roots, for Aristotle saw the family as an 'orderly community of love and friendship' (Saxonhouse, 1994, p.46) where the human need to be connected to particular others can be fully expressed in family relationships, and where the complementarity of gender roles gives both satisfaction and fulfilment to the adults. According to this perspective, the foundations of family life are the care that each family member feels for the others and the moral guidance that is given to children during their formative years; example and discipline from the adults combine to give the family a sense of cohesion as a moral unit with a clear sense of right and wrong. The mother tends to be the primary caregiver while the father is the authority figure and the principal breadwinner; in contemporary society where there is a relatively high percentage of dual-earner couples, satisfactory childcare arrangements must be made so that family ties are forged and maintained. It follows that the members of these families are less likely to resort to crime because it is immoral and against the law; it also carries a risk of being caught and therefore disrupting family life. Accordingly the adults have a strong work ethic and encourage their children to apply themselves to their studies so that they, too, will be able to become responsible members of the workforce. Having seen the 'success' of their parents' traditional family, children are more inclined to wait for marriage before committing themselves to the responsibility of having their own children; they are unlikely to drink to excess or to take drugs because of their possible disruptive effects. And as each generation recognises the importance of those values, so they are passed on to the next, with the result that each family is contributing towards social life in such a way that the country can flourish economically while maintaining a high level of social stability and

order. Social values are thus reflected in family values; family values perpetuate social values.

The circularity of the argument masks two important points. The first is that this view is concerned with the value of the family as an agent of social stability rather than with the concept of family values; when single parents and families of the so-called underclass are said to be lacking the requisite 'family values', they may more accurately be described as failing to act as such agents. The members of these families clearly do have values, but they happen to be different to those of the commentators who condemn a lifestyle that they find immoral. Secondly, it is a view in which specific interpretations of values concerning morality, authority and child care are linked with the affective importance of family life to produce an idealised and prescriptive account of how family life should be led. There are two main objections to this. One is that it rests on the dubious assumption that the heterosexual married couple that is based to a greater or lesser degree on the gender division of labour is the only effective way of bringing children up to be moral, law-abiding citizens. This view of the traditional family fails to recognise that the structure of the family is no guarantee of the quality of the relationships within; a family of heterosexual parents with children can be the source of destructive as well as positive relationships for some, most or all family members. The physical proximity that family life affords means that these differences are inescapable unless individual members leave home; think of teenagers who run away, marriages that break up and lasting feuds between parents and offspring. Thus divorce or separation can bring freedom from physical and mental abuse, offer emancipation from a relationship in which the talents and aspirations of one family member are stifled, or provide respite from continuous conflict. It may also mean that, in the absence of other emotional demands on the carer parent, the children may have a more loving and secure home life which, in turn, is likely to have a more positive

effect on their emotional and moral development than living in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

The other objection to this moralising, narrow interpretation of family life is that it diminishes the fundamental liberal value of freedom for the individual to pursue her own version of the good life; in this case, for each adult to be able to exercise choice in the way she conducts her adult relationships. Family life for some may not include heterosexuality or partnership, while for others responsibility for children may centre on exposing them to as many experiences and opportunities as possible rather than initiating them into a certain type of work ethic from an early age. It is possible to argue that the fluidity that has become apparent in family life over the past few decades can be seen more as an expression of the fundamental liberal values than a decline in morality; in contemporary society there is a greater - although by no means complete - freedom and capacity to choose the type of family life that seems to be the best personal option. Hence there are more families consisting of people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as more gay partnerships and children raised outside marriage. The danger, as these 'family values' commentators point out, is that this freedom can lead to a life of hedonism and self-indulgence rather than a morality in which children are cared for and the dignity of others is kept intact; the virtue of self-discipline may get lost in the pursuit of personal fulfilment. But equally there is the possibility of an openness in family life in which there is a greater effort to understand the emotional as well as physical or material needs of individual family members; for a greater degree of tolerance of and sympathy towards the familial and individual differences of lifestyle, values and beliefs that are facilitated by a society that is based on liberal values. And the expectation that all families should have the same values, implicit within the 'family values' perspective, is contrary to the diversity and richness within contemporary family life.

But the 'family values' commentators are not alone in considering the idea that the values we learn in the family are applicable throughout broader society. John Stuart Mill (1960), for example, argued that a society cannot be just until relationships between men and women are both formally and informally equal. His point is that an unequal relationship between men and women within marriage has the effect of perpetuating hierarchies of power and obedience within society, partly because of the (formal) legal and financial dependence of the wife on her husband, but also because the (informal) quality of that relationship cannot be based on justice, one of the values that he regards as the 'main foundation of the moral life of modern times' (Mill, 1960, p.477). Around a hundred years later Okin (1989, p.171) states much the same point in more radical terms when she argues that 'a just future would be one without gender' in which men and women shared domestic and paid work, pay cheques would be divided between spouses at source and the workplace would assume that all adults - not just women - were parents. For both of them children absorb the value of justice through observation of their parents relationship to one another; Mill is thinking of the respect and courtesy with which equal partners treat each other, the openness of their relationship where each is not afraid to communicate ideas that may be unpleasant to the other, their recognition of personal strengths and weaknesses, and the ability of both to learn from each other. Okin focuses on joint parenting as a powerful example of practical justice combined with love, arguing that this can increase both adults and children's capacity for empathy which she regards as an essential part of developing a sense of justice. Here she is sharply critical of Rawls, who assumes that families tend to be just and who bases his theory of early moral development on this assumption (Rawls, 1973, p.490). The essence of Rawls' argument is similar to that of Mill and Okin, but from a different direction; while he assumes justice within the family, Mill and Okin are pointing out the injustices. From each theorist the message is clear; just families mean that children absorb the value of justice, which in turn makes a contribution towards a more just society.

Or, conversely, families considered to be unjust are seen to perpetuate injustice through the inequalities lodged within gender roles and the division of labour within the family.

Mill and Okin's arguments are similar to those of the 'family values' commentators in that moral development is regarded as a straightforward process in which children and young people learn to accept their parents' values and beliefs. Mill emphasises children's obedience to their parents and the inculcation of values through this obedience (Mill, 1960, p.479); Okin argues that children who are nurtured by both male and female parents learn a more complete sense of empathy than those who are cared for by just the mother, and that the ability to empathise is essential to a sense of justice that can later be practised within wider society (Okin, 1989, p.185). For both of them justice within society can broadly be equated with equality before the law; justice within the family can similarly be seen as a respectful relationship between parents 'without power on one side nor obedience on the other' (Mill, 1960, p.479). The difference between the two approaches, however, is that the 'family values' commentators emphasise the role of families as agents of social stability while Mill and Okin believe that families can be agents of change; the latter suggest that if the law is altered so that both men and women are treated equally, families will be better able to provide a practical example of justice to their children. As they mature, these young people will then be able to contribute towards a more just society by applying the principles that they have learned within the family into broader society.

Justice, however, is open to different types of interpretation; it can be seen as fairness, for example, or based on need, desert or entitlement. In a social context these differing interpretations will mean that different actions are viewed in a variety of ways; welfare, redundancy and alimony, for instance, are issues where there is scope for disagreement over the fairness of actions of corporations, governments and solicitors. Government laws concerning welfare may seem just to those outside the system, but unjust to those who are caught in the so-called poverty trap with little expectation of securing

well-paid employment. Similarly a high child maintenance award to a wife deserted by her husband may seem just to her in the light of the suffering that she and the children have experienced, but unjust to the husband who feels that her unreasonable behaviour forced him to seek solace elsewhere. The point is that there is not necessarily a straightforward connection between justice as perceived within family life and a wider sense of social justice; what appears to be just within one family context may not in another, and one family's perspective may not be the same as another's. As Okin argues, the family may be the place where children learn a sense of justice by observing their parents' relationship - but it is equally possible when a parent has been wrongfully dismissed, for instance, that children learn about prejudice through their identification with the parent who feels aggrieved. Rather than a seamless transference between values learned within the family and social values, then, it is more likely that a family provides a foundation for a child's social values that will be subject to different influences and perspectives as she goes to school, joins social organisations and becomes a part of wider society. In the light of these influences she will begin to have a broader and deeper understanding of the value in question and to practise it in other contexts than within the family. It is possible therefore that her interpretation of justice - or indeed any other social value - may not be that of either of her parents' when she reaches maturity.

I would argue that it is within the personal relationships of the family that children are more likely to develop the sense of justice of which Mill and Okin write. Yet they are not strictly speaking about justice *per se*, but more about the quality of the relationship between parents; when they write about the importance of two rational, autonomous human beings living together in love and harmony, they are discussing the values on which they believe a family should be based. In every family the partners have relationship values that form the basis of their respective relationships with their children; in Mill and Okin's idealised picture of family life the parents share the same values and operate as a

consensual moral unit. The reality of family life, however, is that not all partners have the same relationship values; while some may operate as Mill and Okin suggest, there are others in which there is little or no agreement, or in which the partners simply go their own way while sharing the same dwelling. Children learn about these values through discussion and example, but they can also be taken for granted and 'caught' through observation of a glance, a grimace or a smile; from an early age each child becomes aware of the different characteristics of the members of her own family as she participates in the life at home. The dynamics of family life, in which new children arrive, older ones leave home and parents may separate and/or find new partners, means that within the established patterns of thought and behaviour the values on which they rest are at times open to question and reassessment; with each new development the character of family life may alter, partly through the physical changes but also because these can cause members to reflect on what really matters to them. So, within the complexities and subtleties of family life in which each member has a unique relationship with the others, each person will develop her own interpretation of those affiliations and the values that underpin them. Family values can therefore be thought of as the values that individuals hold concerning the relationships within family life; they are necessarily individual values because of the different interpretations and emphases that each member puts on the values she has learned within the family. Why, then, should these become more firmly embedded in a young person's values system than social values?

First, as we have seen, values have cognitive, emotional and behavioural components, and each of these three aspects of relationship values will be brought into play during the everyday course of family life. While a young child may not reflect a great deal on values, she will be able to understand, say, why she should 'be nice' to her brother; hitting him hurts, as she discovers when he retaliates during an argument. And although she may not always be able to follow the principle at first, as she grows older she will be

able to exercise a greater degree of control over her behaviour and to understand more fully that caring, for instance, is more emotionally rewarding than violence; the value is felt, practised and thought about. Another example is love; an infant can feel the presence or absence of love from the earliest days through the speed at which someone comes when she cries, through the time her parents play with her or through the way she is held. She can reciprocate with a smile or a chuckle; loving behaviour that may later be expressed verbally by both parents and child as well as through action. And so each aspect of the values of care and love repeated and reinforced on a daily basis helps to embed them into the child's developing value system. Similarly if family relationships are based on abuse and neglect, these values will be regularly practised to the same effect.

Secondly, a young child's family environment is of central importance to her life because of her dependency and vulnerability, and each relationship value is immediately relevant to her own existence because of the effect it has on the way her life is led within the home. If parents live in a state of disharmony, intense sibling rivalry may contribute to an atmosphere of blame and recrimination; a loving home may cause a child to feel secure, or the absence of love may cause her anxiety. These early relationships are also the medium through which children learn about other aspects of life during their most vulnerable and formative years; family (or its absence) provides a large part of both the content of daily life and the context for other relationships and experiences. As the child goes to school and begins to form relationships outside the family, she is strongly influenced by the values learned at home; think of needy children who are continuously seeking attention, those who turn to violence to settle disputes, those who seem secure. And while each child encounters other relationship values in different milieux, she nonetheless returns home at the end of the day to the well-practised values of family life, ensuring their reinforcement until such time as she should leave. The values and patterns of behaviour learned at an early age therefore tend to be the ones that stick; first, because of the centrality of family life when

children are at their most dependent and impressionable and secondly, because of the continuous repetition of relationship values as the children mature into adolescence.

The problem with this interpretation of family values as individual values that relate to family relationships lies, once again, in defining the boundary of 'family', and it may well be argued that if we learn to treat family members in a particular way, then it is reasonable to assume that we will treat others in a similar manner. But equally children can learn to be on their best behaviour, to understand when it is appropriate to act in certain ways and when they can do as they please. Adults, too, can present one image to the world and another to those at home. The intimate nature of family life, in which a group of people are living in close proximity and in which members see each other in every different kind of humour, offers the opportunity for a special kind of collective relationship that is nonetheless unique to each member and that, as our first moral experience, has a profound effect on the way we conduct such relationships in the future. Nonetheless, while the family environment may be the strongest influence over how we view these relationships, others are brought to bear on these perceptions as we grow older and widen our experience. One of these is the school, and in the next chapter I examine the direction of government policy in which there is an increasing concern with directing the nature of family relationships.

Chapter 5: Recent Policy Directions in Values Education

In this chapter I explore the current debate over values in education; I then outline the recent changes to the National Curriculum that have included 'family' as a subject area within formal lessons. This forms the basis for a critique of the direction of such a policy in which I discuss both the philosophical and practical problems that arise from such an inclusion. Finally I argue that the inclusion of family and relationship education into the formal curriculum raises questions that show the need for research into 'family' topics within the classroom.

The Conservative reforms to schools during the 1980s and 1990s, in which the quasi-marketisation of the education system, a National Curriculum and league tables were introduced, initially appeared to pay little explicit attention to the question of values. Some attempt was made to include values education by focusing on the spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils through cross-curricular themes; theoretically this would ensure that children had access to a 'broad and balanced' curriculum that would prepare them for the 'opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of everyday life' (Great Britain Statutes, 1988, p.1). The reality however was rather less convincing; some critics (e.g. McLaughlin, 1994) argued that the national curriculum paid inadequate attention to the fundamental aims and principles that should govern young people's education while others (e.g. White, 1993; O'Hear, 1993) suggested that the contents of the curriculum had little cohesion. But in schools such matters were arguably low on the list of priorities, partly because time was largely occupied by the knowledge-based aspects of the curriculum that were subject to inspection, partly because there were no extra resources to cope with the extra demands on teachers' time and partly because values education lacked statutory force (Taylor, 1998, p.6).

It was possibly the legislation of 1992 that pushed schools into devoting more time and energy into the question of values, for under the terms of the Act it became a legal

requirement that Ofsted should inspect the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of their pupils (Great Britain Statutes, 1992, Ch.38, Sec. 2(1)(d)). However, difficulties with quantifying children's 'development' in those areas led to a revision of the policy and it was later decided that Ofsted should evaluate how the school promotes pupils' SMSC and 'how pupils respond to that provision' (Ofsted, 1994, p.22). The White Paper *Choice and Diversity* (DfE,1992, p.7) also introduced the idea that schools should form a values statement, a suggestion made more formal by the proposal that the school should set out the values it intends to promote 'and which it intends to demonstrate through all aspects of life' (SCAA, 1995, p.8). This suggested they should include, among others, telling the truth, keeping promises and taking responsibility for personal actions. Although it lacked legal compulsion, the idea of producing a statement had the effect of concentrating the minds of headteachers, staff and governing bodies on the nature of values within their schools. Yet the problems that arose from forming such a statement reflected some of the concerns expressed within broader society about the plurality of values and the degree to which they can legitimately be imposed on members of different faiths and creeds; it also highlighted the difficulties of trying to bring a coherent approach to values within schools in which all aspects of the curriculum and school management were covered while taking into account the different values espoused by teachers, parents and the local community.

In an attempt to find a way forward through some of these difficulties, the School Curriculum Assessment Authority convened a National Forum on Values in Education and the Community in 1996. Its remit was firstly to discover to what extent there was agreement on the values that school should promote and secondly, to decide on ways in which schools could be supported in making their contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Talbot and Tate, 1997, p.2). The result of the Forum's deliberations was a statement of values that covers four areas:

- Society: we value truth, human rights, the law, justice and collective endeavour for the common good of society. In particular we value families as sources of love and support for all their members and as the basis of a society in which people care for others.
- Relationships: we value others for themselves, not for what they have or what they can do for us, and we value these relationships as fundamental to our development and the good of the community.
- The self: we value each person as a unique being of intrinsic worth, with potential for spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical development and change.
- The environment: we value the natural world as a source of wonder and inspiration, and accept our duty to maintain a sustainable environment for the future (SCAA, 1996, pp.3-4).

The values statement is not without problems, principally that it is less about values concerning 'family' (for instance) than the fact that 'family' is valued by British society; if we return to Halstead's (1996a, p.5) definition that values are 'principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances', few points would seem to conform. The Forum's deliberations have been criticised for confusing philosophical argument and empirical claims (Smith and Standish, 1997, p.142); for producing a prescriptive list that is separate from the lived experience of morality (Williamson, 1997, p.94); for being narrowly traditionalist about moral education (White, 1997, p.27); for being 'dangerously reductionist' (Taylor, 1998, p.8). While it is probably easy to criticise the shortcomings of the Statement issued by the Forum, it is important to recognise that an effort had been made to assist schools with some of the difficulties that they were experiencing; Haydon (2000b, p.7) argues that it made a useful practical response to the diversity of values within contemporary British society and that it can provide a starting point for discussion about their interpretation. This is a sensible point that would seem to be justified by the considerable amount of debate that has followed the publication of the Statement.

In the subsequent Consultation Paper there was further specific reference to the family, for five members of the Forum had wanted a stronger statement in their belief that:

> *[t]he most important relationships throughout life are those experienced within the immediate and extended family. Children should be nurtured and developed within a stable, moral and loving home environment and with preferably both mother and father present in a happy marriage relationship. Marriage and parenting successfully undertaken are very creative of good values in adults and children* (SCAA, 1996, p.6, italics in original).

Clearly the concept of family was contentious; according to the Consultation Paper, most delegates considered that agreement on the extent to which 'family' is valued was covered by the initial statement, while the minority who dissented felt sufficiently strongly that their point of view was included in the consultation document. However, despite the attention that was brought to the question of 'family' and the controversy that surrounded it, the values statement remained unaltered and was then included in the introduction to the latest version of the National Curriculum, published in 1999 and implemented from 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999a and b). Further consideration is given to family matters in the section following the values statement and 'family' is mentioned three times as a guide for action in which 'we' should:

- support families in raising children and caring for dependants
- support the institution of marriage
- recognise that the love and commitment required for a secure and happy childhood can also be found in families of different kinds (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p.196).

For the purposes of this thesis the importance of the Forum's deliberations and the subsequent adoption of the values statement in the National Curriculum is that it brings 'family' into schools as a legitimate area in children's education; it marks the time where the quality of family relationships is brought in to official educational documentation and where it is suggested that specific instruction should be given to pupils to help them 'form and maintain worthwhile and satisfying relationships, based on respect for themselves and for others, at home, school, work and in the community' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p.10). That is not to imply that family-related issues have never been approached within schools, nor that the subject of relationships has not been broached; the point is rather that forming and sustaining relationships within the family should become part of the National Curriculum. Closer consideration of guidance for the Curriculum and for Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) Guidance published in July 2000 will give some idea of the direction of this particular policy.

In the non-statutory guidance for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) within the 1999 curriculum, there is an emphasis on personal and family relationships; within the four categories of learning areas, one has the heading 'developing good relationships and respecting the differences between people'. An examination of 'developing good relationships' shows that in Key Stage (KS) One children should learn 'that family and friends should care for each other' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p.138); in KS Two they should be made 'aware of different types of relationship, including marriage and those between family and friends, and to develop those skills to be effective in relationships' (ibid, p.140). At the level of KS Three these concepts are given a little more elaboration and pupils 'should be taught' (among other things):

- the changing nature of, and pressure on, relationships with friends and family, and when and how to seek help
- about the role and importance of marriage in family relationships
- about the role and feelings of parents and carers and the value of family life
- to negotiate within relationships, recognising that actions have consequences, and when and how to make compromises
- to communicate confidently with their peers and adults (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p.190).

Finally, in KS Four, pupils should be taught:

- to be aware of exploitation in relationships
- to be able to talk about relationships and feelings
- about the nature and importance of family life and bringing up children
- about the role and responsibilities of a parent, and the qualities of good parenting and its value to family life
- about the impact of separation, divorce and bereavement on families and how to adapt to changing circumstances (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p.193).

This emphasis on marriage is continued in the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, delivery of which should be 'firmly rooted within the framework for PSHE and the National Curriculum' (DfEE, 2000, p.3). Once again pupils:

> should be taught about the nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children. But the Government recognises ... that there are strong and mutually supportive relationships outside marriage. Therefore pupils should learn the significance of marriage and stable relationships as key building blocks of community and society (DfEE, 2000, p.4).

In addition, sex and relationship education is seen as having different elements, one of which is to encourage the development of 'attitudes and values', among which are the following:

- learning the importance of values and individual conscience and moral considerations
- learning the value of family life, marriage, and stable and loving relationships for the nurture of children
- learning the value of respect, love and care
- exploring, considering and understanding moral dilemmas; and
- developing critical thinking as part of decision-making (DfEE, 2000, p.5).

Thus the curriculum outlines in some detail the nature of relationships within the family that teachers should foster within schools. Marriage is the ideal circumstance in which to bring up children, although stable relationships can be a second best; respect, love, care, commitment, happiness, and security are considered important, while the ability to communicate, negotiate, compromise, cope with changes to family life and seek help when it is needed are skills that should be developed. Young people should be able to recognise the qualities of good parenting and how these are important to family life, as well as to identify exploitation within relationships. Finally, they should be able to explore moral dilemmas, understand the importance of values and develop critical thinking within the context of their own sexual relationships. While it may be argued that many of these skills and understandings are an important part of moral life, in this case they are specifically directed at family relationships and it is in this light that serious questions arise concerning the implementation of such a policy.

Within each school values education takes place both formally and informally; through the values that are passed on (perhaps) unintentionally through such matters as class seating arrangements, off-the-cuff remarks or the respect that a teacher may (or may not) show her pupils, and through those that are disseminated through formal values education in, for example, school assemblies or PSHE. In addition every lesson can be seen as an activity in which values are transmitted through matters such as the choice of topic area, the manner in which this is approached and the materials that are used; the result is

that values education takes place in every lesson in a variety of different ways. Education on family values - which, to return to the definition offered in Chapter Five, are values concerning the relationships between family members - can therefore enter into classroom life in a number of different ways; how a teacher talks about her own family, how she reacts to stories that are told about her pupils' family life, in the texts and books she may use and in the subject matter of stories, essays and projects that she requires the children in her class to undertake. To introduce 'family' into the values education area of PSHE is to bring a formality to these subjects that may not sit easily with other aspects of the curriculum and that may give rise to particular problems of its own.

The first of these concerns the question of the concept of autonomy. We have seen that the foundation of liberal thought is that each individual is of equal worth, that the primary source of that worth is the capacity for moral choice, and that the state should respect each individual as a chooser. A fundamental aspect of a liberal education is therefore the concept of rational autonomy. This is the notion that the individual should realise her capacity for independent, critical thought that she first, might avoid indoctrination by others and secondly, will be able to make (justifiable) choices in matters pertaining to the good life. This refers not only to personal choices about the way life should be led but also to the maintenance of a healthy democratic society, for the latter depends to a degree on citizens who are able to exercise 'independent and informed political choices' (Bridges, 1997, p.153). Accordingly, an education within a liberal context provides the individual with a basis of generalised knowledge that she can understand both the opportunities open to her and the constraints that may narrow her choices. Her horizons should be widened that she can see her prejudices and superstitions that arise from the circumstances of her birth as exactly that; she should be encouraged to become a free moral agent, or in Bailey's words, to move 'beyond the present and

particular' - to be in a position to break 'the incestuous ties of clan and soil' (Bailey, 1984, p.20-2).

Underlying the concept of rational autonomy is the liberal view of the individual. Arguably this is that the essence of the self is prior to its historical, social and cultural context; that it can disengage itself from such things as relationships, culture and politics, for these are possessions rather than constituents of the self. Rawls, for example, argues that 'the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it' (Rawls, 1973, p.560); that the self is a given independent of circumstances, that ends are chosen by each individual in accordance with the values and beliefs she comes to hold and that these are subject to assessment and revision. The individual is thus the basic unit for analysis in philosophical and political thought, while society consists of an aggregate of individuals who are more or less connected through market, political or personal relationships. More extreme versions of liberalism present individuals as rationally self-interested utility maximisers and emphasise rational choice as the basis for all decisions (e.g. Nozick, 1974; Hayek 1976). Others, however, have distanced themselves from this position; Rawls has been at pains to refute charges of asocial individualism within his theory of distributive justice (Rawls, 1985) while some contemporary liberals (e.g. Nussbaum, 1999; Weeks, 1995) emphasise the importance of the human bond. From the perspective of the family and education there are two implications; one is that the focus on either the individual or society as a whole has meant that the family has been absent from much liberal analysis, particularly within classical liberalism. Family has traditionally been a part of private - as opposed to public - life within liberal thought; a matter for private choice. The second related point, if Bailey is right, is that young people should be able to choose their own conception of the good life without believing that their parents' is the one that they must follow; young people should not be indoctrinated by their parents any more than anyone else. Education therefore plays

a critical part in ensuring that children do become the free moral agents on which liberal society rests.

Recently however this concept has come under attack from two different directions that can be broadly defined as feminism and communitarianism. While there are different perspectives and arguments within both schools of thought, each has an important criticism concerning rational autonomy that has profound implications for the delivery of education about 'family'. Broadly speaking, and with a degree of simplicity, they can be defined as follows: communitarians (e.g. MacIntyre, 1985) argue that the concept of rational autonomy ignores the way individuals are embedded within their own cultures and communities, and they suggest that the liberal atomised individual is one empty of content. Feminists (e.g. Noddings, 1984; 1998), in a similar vein that emphasises the connectedness of human beings rather than their separateness, argue that the emphasis on the cognitive in the notion of rational autonomy plays down the role that emotions play in decision-making. Let us first examine the communitarian challenge.

Communitarians argue that it is mistaken to understand the self as detached from her aims and attachments; the self is not prior to her ends but partly constituted by them. These ends are things she discovers through belonging to an historical community, and her identity is partly derived from the roles she inhabits within the communities - for example family or church - of which she is a member. Her aims, then, rather than being chosen after rational reflection, are inseparable from the person she is. Furthermore, because these aims are tied up with the communities to which she belongs, she is involved at a deeper level than the liberal individual (who is assumed from a communitarian perspective to co-operate in social relations rather than to engage herself) with their maintenance and continuation. Traditions and values are thus handed down rather than negotiated with each generation, and it follows that the good of the individual is strongly related to the common

good or that which is good for the community. The point is illustrated in a particular passage written by MacIntyre (1985):

> ... we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle ... Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point (MacIntyre, 1985, p.220).

This approach presents difficulties for liberals. If traditions and values are passed through the generations, there is little scope for the (potentially liberating) promise of a liberal education; ideas of critical review, questioning and choice could be replaced by notions of stability, continuity and acceptance. Liberals may argue that this encourages conformism, the acceptance of ascribed social status or intolerance against those whose faces do not fit. One of the problems with regarding community as a good *per se* is that among people's 'inheritances' may be the practice of excluding outsiders; think of Nazi Germany, the friction between Serbs and Croats and - a particular concern of feminists - the exclusion of women from predominantly male organisations. Liberals would argue that critical appraisal of the values that underpin such associations is therefore essential if discrimination against minorities is to be avoided or the view of the majority is accepted simply because there is consensus. On the other hand, communitarians may say that the critical objectivity fostered by a liberal education encourages a type of individualism that diminishes the importance of community ties and a sense of belonging. They may also argue that to bring a child up to question parental beliefs and values is to sever family ties that provide an essential sense of identity and continuity within life; Bailey's idea of fostering the ability to break the 'incestuous ties of clan and soil' (Bailey, 1984, p.22) would be destructive both to the individual and the community within which she resides.

The second challenge to the concept of rational autonomy comes from a feminist perspective. Again this is grounded in the belief that the self is social rather than atomised,

and this idea is brought together with the notion that relationships with others are fundamental in giving meaning to life. While there are obvious similarities between communitarians and feminists, I would like to focus on one aspect of feminist theory that has become prominent through the work of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984; 1998); the role of emotions in decision-making, closely linked to the ethic of care. Within liberalism care and emotion have traditionally been seen as feminine preoccupations, largely because a woman's role is bound up to a high degree with nurturing and caring for children, and rationality has been the province of the male and the model on which moral judgement has been based. This latter point is exemplified by Kohlberg's (1984, p.174-6) stages of moral development which rest largely on the cognitive; on the rational assessment of a moral dilemma, the primacy of individual rights and justice in attempting to solve the dilemma, and then the universality of the solution. Gilligan's work - although she does not regard herself as a feminist, nor does she suggest that her work applies exclusively to women - shows a different dimension of moral thinking that is based on the conflict between responsibilities to different people rather than the primacy of considering people's rights; the 'morality of responsibility' rather than 'the morality of rights' (Gilligan, 1982, p.19). This morality of responsibility describes the conflicts that exist within a given situation and focuses on the limitations of any resolution rather than concentrating on the rights-based just or fair solution on which all rational human beings would agree. Morality, then, is multifaceted and bound up with the narrative of the self which is in the middle of real situations and dilemmas; it is not abstract or distanced from the messiness of human life. Noddings (1984; 1998) has taken these ideas further, arguing that moral education should be based on an ethic of care that develops a young person's capacity for empathy and reciprocity which, while recognising that 'standard linear rationality' has a part to play, nonetheless focuses on the importance of 'living together, on creating, maintaining and

enhancing positive relations - not on decision making in moments of high moral conflict, or on justification' (1998, p.45).

The strengths of such a position are that it recognises emotions as an intrinsic part of human life, that it places moral development within the context of the individual's situation, and that it identifies the fundamental importance of different kinds of human relationships. And Noddings does not discount the role that rationality has to play; she simply regards the idea of forming relationships in the present as the greater priority. But there are objections to the notion of care as a basis for moral education which stem from the very subjectivity that such an approach seeks to encourage. First Noddings describes caring as 'engrossment' in the other's perception of what she is feeling which is linked to a motivation to help (1998, p.41). While she uses the example of a stranger losing his way, we could imagine a scene between a teenager and her parent in which the former wants the latter to take her to a party that has been organised by her friends. The young person knows that the party will be fun; her friends will be there and the event has been much discussed between herself and others while at school. The parent, on the other hand, knows that there will be drink and possibly drugs provided during the course of the evening; she recognises the dangers that accompany such matters and is anxious to protect her child by preventing her from going. Both people, although equally engrossed with each other, could be conceived as uncaring; the teenager may argue that the parent who ignores her wishes and desires is therefore uncaring, while the parents may accuse the young person that she is equally so because she is unwilling to listen to reasonable advice and guidance. 'Caring', then, is not a straightforward question of empathy and the demonstration of understanding but may give rise to conflict and disagreement in which neither party comes to appreciate the other's position.

The second objection relates to the way that we care for people who are special to us. Noddings believes that the experience of mothering is spontaneous; that judgements do

not enter the relationship between mother and child. She argues that liberalism's insistence on examining and appraising emotions robs moral life of the spontaneity that is at the core of the way that we relate to one another (Noddings, 1984, p.84-5) and suggests that this maternal attachment should be the model for our moral life (ibid., p.120-130). One problem with this is that maternal relationships can, indeed, be judgmental; in the disagreement above, for instance, either party may bear a lasting grudge against the other, or the teenager may resort to deception, or the parent to an unyielding position that forbids parties under any circumstance. This is clearly a judgmental stance that can have an abiding effect on the relationship between parent and child. Secondly, if this notion of a non-judgmental maternal relationship is recognised as an ideal but remains nonetheless the foundation for moral life, it becomes difficult to discriminate between those whom we love deeply, those who are friends in varying degrees and those with whom we have a loose acquaintance. And in a world within which there are paedophiles, murderers and abductors, young people need to be able to discriminate between those whose intentions are benign and those whose are not; non-judgmental spontaneity may not always be an appropriate reaction.

It can be seen from the above discussion that threads from all three perspectives can be detected within the extracts included from the National Curriculum: there is an emphasis on the importance of stability within family life; attention is drawn to the responsibilities of parenting including care; young people should learn about the feelings of parents; they should be able to communicate their own thoughts and feelings; they should be developing critical thinking as part of decision-making and be aware of exploitation in relationships. So far so good; the guidelines could be interpreted as a positive amalgamation of the different perspectives in which children and young people should learn about the qualities within family life that can lead towards them becoming independent, responsible family members with a well-developed sense of empathy. It may

also be that this type of education is part of building community ties; Bottery (1999) argues that Labour's policies are not inspired by the vision of the rational egoist and market values but by a shift towards communitarian thinking, and Labour has certainly specified that its 'mission is to promote and reconcile the four values which are essential to a just society which maximises the freedom and potential of all our people - equal worth, opportunity for all, responsibility and community' (Blair, 1998, p.3). Communitarian thinkers such as MacIntyre (1985) and Etzioni (1993) are concerned to emphasise family both as an ideal of community and as a building block for the same; an ideal in the sense that family is where altruism is seen to be part of family life in which there are common goals and a sense of unity, and a building block because each family contributes to community well-being and cohesion through the values she has learned and practises at home. But, as we have seen with the example of justice in Chapter Five, there is no simple transference of values learned within the family context into a similar interpretation in wider society; Chapter Two suggested that altruism and cohesion are not necessarily part of family life; a community in a multicultural, pluralist society can include a number of families and individuals who have widely differing values, faiths and beliefs.

In addition the concepts of autonomy and caring, as we have seen, are far from uncomplicated yet at the same time are central to the type of family relationships that are envisaged within the guidelines; the degree to which children should be guided by parents or allowed to make up their own minds, the boundary between self and family, the nature of caring and its differing demonstrations and interpretations, the fostering of individuality and independence (or not) are clearly difficult, moral issues that are part of every family life. And if children and young people are to be taught about the 'qualities of good parenting', these issues are fundamental to an understanding of what this might be, requiring an agreement among teachers that is not, as yet, discernible among philosophers. Furthermore, while few could argue with any conviction against the notion that experience

with loving relationships as a child has a beneficial and lasting effect on personal development, less certain are the interpretations of values such as respect, communication and the ability to compromise as part and manifestation of that love; the nature of exploitation and how it might be recognised; the conflict that 'developing critical thinking' might have with the duties and responsibilities of family life; and the not-uncontested notion that marriage is the best environment in which to bring up children. Essentially what is lacking in these guidelines is a recognition that families are complex and diverse; that relationship values are open to a wealth of interpretation and experience; that teaching about 'family' is a delicate and controversial matter that can disturb children's loyalties and commitments as well as foster their family relationships. Instead it is implied that the 'truths' about loving, caring families are self-evident regardless of the personal and social conditions that pupils might be experiencing at any particular time.

Research shows that teachers find issues to do with values difficult; many feel uncertain about the nature of values, which values to teach and how to teach them, as publications such as Haydon's (1997) and Bigger and Brown's (1999) show. When the uncertainties to do with values education are linked to the particularly sensitive and personal subject of the family, there is scope for confusion for both teachers, who are likely to be concerned about what to teach and how to teach it, and their pupils, who may find that what is taught conflicts with their own beliefs and practices. In addition, for those young people in the middle of a difficult home environment, there is a danger that the topic may bring problems to the surface that cause both shame and embarrassment within the classroom. Finally, in presenting 'family' (which is undoubtedly heterosexual, given that Clause 28 is still in statutory force) as an unequivocal good - as the curriculum guidelines suggest - there is a danger that we narrow and restrict young people's perception of choice over the nature of the good life. This project aims to unpick some of these difficulties by finding out how teachers within six schools approach the subject, what they intend the

pupils to learn, and the pupils' response to this teaching. As yet there has been little research into the topic of 'family' within an educational setting; these guidelines make the task one of considerable urgency.

PART III: RESEARCH DESIGN

In this third part of the thesis, I present an analytical account of the research design. Included in this account are a brief consideration of the epistemology that underpins the research, a discussion on the effect that the researcher's values, attitudes and presence might have had on the project, the ethical considerations that needed to be addressed and a justification of the choices that were made during the course of the fieldwork. In order that the reader may be aware of the personal as well as the professional influences that went into the conception and the realisation of the project, I have placed the personal factors in italics and interwoven them with the academic. The whole provides an overview of the project that was to change considerably from its inception in the spring of 1998.

Chapter 6i: Early Beginnings

This thesis began as a comparative study of 'family' between Germany and Britain. Its genesis can be found in the year I spent as an Erasmus student when I took my then six year old daughter to Bielefeld, Germany to be with me while I studied at the local university. She attended the nearest priary school to our flat and, once the language problem began to be overcome, she and I both started to make friends with nearby families through the contacts that we made at the school. We became particularly friendly with two families and often spent sociable evenings discussing the differing perceptions of family that we held; as an unmarried single mother who had left her partner and subsequently gone to university, I was regarded as an exotic and rather wayward creature. And, in turn, although we seemed to have similar values and attitudes towards our children, I found the strong commitment to marriage and the sense of family duty among the widening circle of people we met rather different to my own values and ideas. My family background had been rather complicated and rather fraught, and I found my new friends' quiet confidence in the concept of 'family' intriguing and - in the face of some of the experiences they

recounted - somewhat perverse. My perception of difference was heightened one day by a telephone call from a local government officer who rang to question my statement that my daughter's surname was different to my own; she explained, slightly incredulously, that this was not 'usual' in Germany and she had to make sure I had not misunderstood the form. And this – along with the extraordinary hospitality from almost everyone we met – was one of my stronger memories of our time in Bielefeld.

Three years later, a doctoral thesis offered the chance to study 'family' in both countries in a more methodical manner. As the different chapters in Part One show, the background to the British part of the study was the increasingly political nature of the family during the 1990s that appeared to have been prompted by changes in family structures and lifestyles; there was little political agreement over how these changes should be interpreted or over the direction of policy. By contrast, Germany has had a Ministry for the Family since 1948 and the constitution pledges to support the family; this may indicate a more coherent and systematic approach to family policy than that of successive British governments. There was evidence, too, that Germany was experiencing a slower rate of change within family structure; divorce rates and the number of cohabiting couples and extramarital births was smaller than in Britain (Eurostat, 1991, p.23-26), which seemed to accord with my own experience during my time in Nordrhein-Westfalen. So, from these broad beginnings, the initial research proposal was to examine these differences through the medium of schools; to investigate the degree to which 'family' was incorporated in the formal curriculum, to explore how family matters were approached within schools in both countries and to observe to what extent children and young people were taught about 'family' within lessons. The comparative element was intended firstly to give some understanding of the relative influence of each government over the manner in which family matters were approached in schools; the second aim of the project was to shed some light on how school

may be able to affect children's developing family values within the two different social contexts.

While the first aim could be realised in part by an examination of the different curricula of Britain and the German Länder, the second was concerned with processes within the classroom which led me to believe that the project was better suited to qualitative data collection methods than quantitative. My plan was to observe lessons in which 'family' was a part and subsequently to interview both children and teachers on the processes that I had observed; this would enable me to examine the teachers' intentions, their presentation of the subject matter and how this corresponded (or not) to the children's reception of the lesson. Values, as we have seen, concern behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, and a combination of observation and interviews allows each of these to be explored in some detail in a way that would be impossible through quantitative methods such as questionnaires or surveys. Thus this type of data collection would allow insight into how parts of educational policy regarding 'family' worked out in practice; in addition the observations and interviews would give some indication of possible cultural differences in attitudes to the family between Britain and Germany that may be manifested within the lessons.

The problem with this type of research is the nature of the reality of the situation under observation. The philosophical question that this raises is epistemological; how we know what we think we know. The subject of epistemology, the associated methodologies and the issues of what constitutes 'good' research have been subject to intense academic debate in recent years (e.g. Scott and Usher, 2000; Tooley, 1998; Walford, 1991, 1998) and has reached no firm conclusion; Miles and Huberman (1994, p.5) speak of paradigms of research 'shifting beneath our feet'. Broadly, there is a spectrum of approaches in which there is a belief in objectivity at one end and in subjectivity at the other. The positivist tradition is concerned with an objective truth in which facts about objects and situations

can be gathered by the scientific method of observing, measuring and making testable hypotheses; it is assumed that the world exists independently of the people around it and that these methods will produce a truth that is both measurable and universal. In this tradition facts and values are separated and, while facts are objective and to do with the observable world, values are subjective and therefore should not be allowed to interfere with the data collection. The researcher is therefore seen as distant from the process; a detached observer who is able, through passive use of her senses, to record the facts of social life (Scott and Usher, 2000, p.12). This objective approach has been criticised by those who argue that reality is constructed; that there are different versions of the truth depending on context, personal beliefs, values and attitudes, and there is no one version ready to be harvested in a similar manner to wheat or oats. Kuhn (1970), for example, argued that knowledge is framed by cultural and historical conditions; that a consensus about what constitutes knowledge is essentially a philosophical position that is a product of Western society rather than an objective truth. Representation of the truth from this end of the spectrum is therefore more problematic than for positivism, for it is seen as subjective and open to interpretation; at the extreme end of this approach there is a 'radical relativism' which rests on the principle that truth is a personal matter and that all versions are equally valid (Scott, 2000, p.13). The result is that, rather than being distanced, researchers operating within this paradigm are active participants in the sense that their values are seen to influence both the research methods and the process of data collection; the subsequent data analysis can be seen as only one interpretation of the actions and processes that have been scrutinised during the course of the research.

Clearly there has to be some resolution to these difficulties if research is to be valid - if we are to produce reliable data and then to develop 'clear, verifiable, credible meanings' from it (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.3). If, as I believe, total objectivity is an impossibility in social science, then there has to be an identifiable epistemological

approach to the research that rests on more secure ground than radical relativism. In this respect, Woods (1996) provides a perspective that I have found both useful and informative. When describing his interactionist approach to ethnography, he argues that objectivity and subjectivity are complementary to one another; that there are some matters that can be relatively easily verified (such as a date of birth or the maths lesson last Friday) and others that are less so (such as exactly what happened in the lesson) (Woods, 1996, p.54-5). Observation can provide evidence of an event that actually took place, but there may be differing interpretations of the details; a teacher may be visibly angry or pleased, for example, and there could be various explanations of why this may be so. Observations may thus be complemented by interviews, in which Woods suggests that he would firstly, be concerned to know if the subject were telling the truth as she knows it and secondly, to know that the subject's account of a situation or event was accurate - although this would be less important than the subject's interpretation, for 'what is seen as real is real in its consequences' (Woods, 1996, p.60). Here the skills of the interviewer play an important part, for she must appear sympathetic to the interviewee and create a rapport in which both are able to engage in the 'reality construction' that is part of the conversation (Woods, 1996, p.53). According to Woods, if the researcher creates a judicious balance between creating a relationship with her subjects that includes trust and friendship, and maintaining a critical distance that is able to evaluate power relations and/or fabrications, she may have the 'best of both' worlds (Woods, 1996, p.62), which I take to mean of subjectivity and objectivity. This (realist) perspective will not provide one definitive truth on the matter, but allows instead for differing interpretations within a framework of a verifiable reality; it can capture some of the complexities and 'overlapping discourses' (Goodman, 1998, p.54) that make up the topic under investigation. The strength of the research is that the researcher seeks to understand the perspectives of actors within a particular social context (Hammersley, 1995, p.45). And as values are complicated, dynamic features of social and

individual life, I believe that such an approach may well be able to capture the nature of their complexity; it is on this perspective that I have based my research.

All the above, however, means that there is some considerable personal responsibility on the researcher; she must be aware of her own conduct, the impression that she creates and the influence that this may have over the subjects in the research. Another person in the classroom changes its dynamics, however imperceptibly; interviews are shaped by the nature of the interviewer's questions as much as their content. The fieldwork is influenced by choices, omissions and problems that are individual to each case (Ball, 1993, p.45-6); these choices are underpinned by the researcher's own values. Maintaining integrity is thus of critical importance to the reliability and credibility of the research, and it can be assisted by a reflexive approach to data collection in which decisions, ethical considerations and the nature of the relationship between researcher and subject(s) are constantly monitored and evaluated during fieldwork (Ball, 1993, p.46). This account of my project therefore endeavours to show the monitoring and evaluation that went on during the course of the research, both by myself and in conjunction with my Director of Studies; I hope thereby to have justified each of the decisions that I made at the time.

6ii: The Pilot Project

With the help of my Director of Studies' contacts, in the summer of 1998 I set up a pilot project in a inner-city multicultural primary school in the West Midlands. The aims of the project were twofold. The first was to find out how 'family' entered classroom life; how the teacher approached the subject in class, to explore the perceptions that the children in her class held of family, to determine if this image was challenged or reinforced by the work that went on in the classroom and to find out what reflection (if any) that had caused in each particular child. Because of the distance between the West Country and the West Midlands, the project was conducted in the beginning through email; over the course of the

second half of the summer term I asked the six children involved with the project questions about 'family' at certain times during the week and they responded and posed questions of their own. This early contact was followed by a day in which I visited the school and observed a morning's lessons; in the afternoon I interviewed the six children separately on the questions outlined above and finished with an interview with the teacher once the children had gone home.

The second aim of the pilot project was to be able to use this initial experience to guide the research design in the main project; the reaction of both the children and the teacher to my questions would help me clarify the focus of subsequent interviews, while the time spent observing the class would give an indication of the ethos of the classroom together with the number of times 'family' was mentioned either in passing or within the theme of the day's lessons. At that time, although there was plenty of advice to be found within personal accounts of research and within research textbooks on conducting interviews and observation techniques (e.g. Cohen and Manion, 1994; Hammersley, 1993; Walford, 1991; Woods, 1986), there was little that related specifically to research about children's values; it was difficult to find a model on which to base my own work. Ball's (1993, p.44) description of the first experience of fieldwork as a 'rite of passage' seemed particularly apposite at the time.

Setting up, running and then writing up the pilot project made an important contribution to the main research in several ways. In the first instance it made me consider the number of pupils that should be involved in the research and how they should be selected. The teacher and I made the first decision on a largely practical basis; we had agreed that I could communicate with the children through email but, within that particular school, the children had limited access to a small number of computers. The teacher felt six to be a number that was manageable given the resources available and other demands of the working day. I agreed to her suggestion; it was around one-quarter of the class and

therefore reasonably representative, the teacher knew the limits and possibilities of her own working day and so to ask for more might well have overburdened her and diminished her enthusiasm for the project. As Ball (1993, p.42) wryly comments, ethnographers try to be 'all things to all people' and this was an instance in which I was demonstrating my wish for a working relationship based on co-operation rather than on my demands and her compliance.

Selection of the children was, however, more difficult. I rejected the idea of a totally random sample from the class register as there was a religious and ethnic mix in the class that I wanted to be represented in the research; I also wanted an even number of boys and girls so that any possible gender differences could be noted and explored. As the teacher knew the children and I did not, I suggested that she should nominate three girls and three boys on that basis. But her question over whether she should consider family background - a reasonable query in the light of the research - prompted me to think two related issues through more carefully. This research was concerned with the potentially sensitive area of family; lessons with a family component and the subsequent discussion about them may possibly raise issues that were relevant to some children's own family experience and that could provoke distress through encouraging them to confront difficulties within their own lives; the research could also prompt disclosures about family behaviour that needed investigation and further attention from the school and possibly social services. The latter issue was addressed by the ethics protocol (Appendix I) in which I said that if any child should begin to reveal any serious problems such as sexual or other abuse, s/he would be told that this was a matter that could not be kept secret and that a member of staff must be informed; this was relatively straightforward.

I believed the issue of selection criteria to be more complex because I was potentially dealing with children's emotions; I did not want to be the catalyst for any distress either from the children's point of view or from that of the school, which would

understandably look unfavourably on any upset children emerging from their interviews with me. On the other hand, these were not counselling sessions; we would be talking about issues raised by the lesson rather than personal problems, although I suspected that there might be a fine distinction between the two for some children. There was no obvious way of knowing how different topics that concern 'family' would affect different children; to ask for certain types of family background to be omitted or included would cause problems of definition that I was not sure I could overcome, that may be unrelated to the children's reactions and that would in any case be open to the teacher's own opinion of the children's family life. I therefore asked her to choose three boys and three girls who represented the multicultural character of the school without regard to family structure or circumstances. This avoided the subjectivity of selecting children from 'good' or 'bad' families while encouraging the teacher to ask a diversity of pupils to take part in the research. At the same time I recognised that there was a risk in talking about a sensitive matter with the children and that I should be take precautions in the interviews to respect their privacy; this had to be balanced with the aim of encouraging them to talk as freely as possible about how they perceived the lessons. I deal with this matter in greater depth in the next section.

The findings of the pilot project were both encouraging and indicative of some of the problems I was later to encounter. They were encouraging because the teacher spoke freely and fluently about her opinions on 'family', and she gave specific examples of how she promoted values of family cohesion, gender equality and respect within the classroom. Although this was not consciously the intention, the email correspondence with the children had been successful in generating an atmosphere of co-operation between us; they had enjoyed using the computers, our exchanges had helped to reduce any sense of awkwardness or shyness when we met and they, too, spoke freely and confidently in our interviews. However the content of our conversations suggested that 'family' within

lessons was an elusive subject; while the children gave some idea of a tension between an ideal of family as a loving, caring unit and the reality of everyday life, they found it difficult to relate 'family' to any of their experiences in the classroom and could give me few specific examples of when it was mentioned or when it was part of a particular area of study. Bearing these points in mind, I wrote the pilot project up for publication in *Pastoral Care in Education* (Passy, 1999) and began to plan the main research.

6iii: The Main Research Project

I started to set up the main project during the late summer of 1998 with the intention of beginning the fieldwork as soon as possible in the Autumn term. My contribution to knowledge, required by the University of Plymouth Handbook, was that I would be exploring a topic that was, as yet, under-researched. As I was the only researcher, the project was necessarily small-scale and, in consultation with my Director of Studies, I decided that I would conduct the fieldwork in three primary and three secondary schools in each country. To gain access, to develop relationships within the schools and to set up the observations and interviews, as I was discovering, all takes time; the data generated by a total of six schools in each country would be sufficient to enable a comparative analysis while keeping the project within manageable bounds. In Britain the religious and ethnic diversity of the children in the pilot project had drawn attention to different characteristics of social life in that area, and I felt that to continue the research in the West Midlands would provide a contrast to the 'white highlands' of the south-west. I therefore planned to research in a primary and a secondary school in the West Midlands area and in two of each in the West Country. At the same time I was beginning to approach my contacts in Germany for possible research schools in the areas of Bielefeld and Lüneburg.

I was also refining the aims and methods of the project. My intention was to be in England during the academic year 1998-9, to go to Germany in August 1999 for the next

year and then to return to England in 2000 to complete the writing up process. To realise as complete a picture as possible of 'family' within schools, I planned four different types of data collection: to correspond with the pupils through email as I had in the pilot project; to observe lessons that concerned 'family'; to interview teachers on their approach to family within lessons, pupils to ascertain the image they felt was portrayed within lessons and parents/carers to gain a third perspective on family matters within the school. Finally I would examine school documentation (such as lesson plans or correspondence to parents) as well as read any literature that was used within the classroom. Guided by the number of pupils in the pilot project, I would ask the school to nominate three girls and three boys that were representative of the school's pupil intake; if asked about family background, I would say this was unimportant. The primary school children would be Year 5 and the secondary pupils from Year 8. Neither of these age groups had the pressure of SAT's or GCSE's, so the research would not be seen as a distraction from examinations; each of the pupils would have been within the school long enough to be familiar with the system and would probably not be suffering any of the anxieties of settling in.

In the meantime I formalised my ethics protocol (Appendix I), based on the guidelines provided by the University of Plymouth. This had three different parts, and I shall discuss the third (concerned with debriefing) in the next section of this chapter. The first part of the ethics protocol on informed consent showed that I would seek the head's agreement before undertaking any research within any school; that parents' permission would be sought before involving any children with the research and that I would explain the process and the aims of the research to all participants. The latter would have a right to ask for further clarification if they wanted, together with the right to withdraw from the research at any time. While the first and the latter two points are uncontroversial, that of involving children in the research is less so because their opinions and wishes may be by-passed through the focus on parental consent (Epstein, 1998, p.37). Denscombe and

Aubrook (1992) argue that power relations within the school can make it difficult for pupils to opt out of educational research and I wonder now if my strategy of asking the schools to nominate the children was ethically sound. Underlying the request was my concern about children participating whose family lives were not easy and whom I was anxious not to upset; I believed that asking the school to choose the children was a tacit recognition that families could be difficult and that teachers would 'know best' whom to ask. I now consider that this treated the children in an unacceptably paternalistic manner; if I had explained the project to the children personally, those who were unwilling for whatever reason to talk about family matters were unlikely to have volunteered. The extent to which such choices can be 'informed' is, again, controversial (David *et al*, 2001; Epstein, 1998, p.38), but a researcher's powers of persuasion may be more easily resisted than a teacher's; doing my own recruitment could have given the children more space in which to reflect on their possible involvement.

In agreement with Epstein (1998, p.38), I believe the issue of teacher's consent to be less difficult; although the heads' support and their generous offers to 'help myself' gave me considerable freedom within each school and made the project more acceptable to the staff, it did not guarantee access to the classroom. This accords with Hammersley's (1993, p.148) assertion that in gaining access, the ethnographer's position is relatively weak in relation to the people she studies. The primary teachers were asked to take part by the headteacher and the three who were recruited in the first instance gave every appearance of being enthusiastic about the project, although the teacher I have called Mrs. Parker was wary at the outset of the fieldwork. She was newly-qualified at the time and experiencing her own professional uncertainties, but her reservations seemed to dissipate as we progressed through the year. In the secondary schools, once I had met the children and discovered their timetables, I tended to make my own arrangements and could only observe lessons in the secondary schools when the teachers were willing to allow it. Several refused

permission and of those who permitted entry, there was a range of attitudes ranging from unqualified support to cautious consent.

In the second part of the ethics protocol, the issue of confidentiality concerns the anonymity of the school and the confidentiality of the participants' interviews. In the previous section of this chapter we encountered the possible tension between confidentiality and the children's welfare, with the resolution being that if any child should start to reveal serious problems at home, she would be told that this could not be kept secret and a member of staff would have to be informed. Fortunately the question never arose. The practical effects of this part of the ethics protocol have been for me to give both the schools and the people concerned names that have no relation to their own, and the records kept in my computer have also been made anonymous. I have stated that the schools come from the West Country and the West Midlands rather than divulge their exact location and, during the course of the research, I avoided naming the different schools to those involved with the project. A problem arises with the primary teachers who will be able to identify themselves and with those teachers who have given lessons that are immediately identifiable within the school, for there was no suitable way of disguising them without losing the content of the lessons. However as the schools themselves have been anonymised and two years have now passed since the fieldwork, I believe that the danger of identification has been minimised as much as possible. Thus, with the details of the project provisionally in place, I approached the schools in Britain and waited to begin the data collection as soon as possible.

The next eight months were to prove frustrating. While I gained entry into five schools by January, the sixth remained elusive. After much prevarication, the head finally refused my request and, although the seventh school I approached was happy to accommodate my research, the teacher with whom I was corresponding was difficult to pin

down; we only managed to arrange for me to visit the school to finalise the details near the end of the Easter term. With only one term left in which to make the necessary contacts and to carry out the observations and interviews, time was beginning to run out. I was also finding 'family' difficult to catch within the lessons; I spent a week in each primary school and found it mentioned only occasionally in passing rather than being the focus or forming the background to some of the lessons as I had expected. In the secondary schools, given the rather more disparate timetables for each of 'my' pupils and the number of teachers involved, I was discovering only slowly when 'family' topics were to be covered and sometimes just after they had finished. This obviously made observations impossible. And, as the pilot project had suggested, many of the teachers were happy to expound at length about family within the classroom but the pupils still seemed to find it difficult to talk about specific incidents and or topics; 'family' issues tended to remain buried under the main focus of the lessons. In addition the email correspondence with the pupils was generally proving to be unwelcome to teachers due to a shortage both of computers and time to access them. And then, to cap it all, my daughter (by then eleven years old and settling in to her secondary school) announced that she did not want to go to Germany, nor to stay with her father while I went alone. To go to Germany was looking as though it would be difficult; as my Director of Studies commented, it would be ironic if I were to dismantle my own family while pursuing research on exactly that topic.

While I was experiencing these setbacks, I was giving further consideration to the possibility of parenting or relationship education being included into the National Curriculum (Home Office, 1999, p.17). As far as I could tell, any inclusion of such matters would not have been based on research on how 'family' was approached in the classroom, for I was unable to find evidence of any project such as mine among the academic literature that I had read. In addition, the encouraging reception of a paper that I gave at Homerton

College, Cambridge in March 2000 further indicated the timeliness of the topic in Britain. I described a series of drama lessons based on a modern version of *Cinderella* in which one class of Year 8 pupils improvised issues of divorce, relationships with step-relations and running away from home; the resulting debate in the conference was lively and the feedback positive, suggesting the extent to which the paper had caught the delegates' imagination and highlighting the controversial nature of teaching about family matters in school. My experience with the teachers that I had met was also suggesting that many were highly sensitive to the diversity of family life and approached the subject with caution, although a few, such as the drama teacher in the Cinderella story, were prepared to tackle such issues with confidence. If family and relationship education were to be included into the National Curriculum, then it was important to find out 'what was going on' (Woods, 1986, p.18) in order that some research evidence could be brought to the public debate. Gradually I came to believe that a focus purely on British schools would be more productive than a comparative research project; although a small-scale project such as mine could not be representative of all schools, it may well raise questions that were unconsidered in the formation of a policy of relationship education and/or some of the practical or ethical difficulties that such education might engender. After further discussion with my Director of Studies during the summer term of 1999, we agreed that I should remain in England for the following academic year; although I would lose the wider perspective of an international comparison, we both believed that this would be compensated by the richer data generated by continuing to work within the relationships that I had already established in the six research schools.

6iv: Fieldwork 1999 - 2000 and Data Analysis

Given the decision to remain in England, I was able to review the aims of the project. During the course of the Autumn term, David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, announced that guidance on relationships and the value of marriage would be introduced into the national curriculum (Davies, 1999). Aware of this possibility, I had decided to narrow the focus of the research to the teaching of family matters rather than trying to gain an overall picture of 'family' in schools; the intention was to 'illuminate and inform' (Wallace *et al.*, 1998, p.76) by clarifying some of the issues that are likely to be raised by bringing education on family matters into the formal curriculum. Lest I should be accused either of naivety or of attempting to capture a value-free truth, I would add that implicit within this more focused approach was the possibility of a critique of this part of government policy; I hoped thereby to contribute to the debate on values education in schools and specifically to relationship education that was concerned with family. As the focus of the research was to be narrowed to the processes within the classroom, I believed that interviewing parents would no longer be appropriate and so discarded that particular aspect of my earlier plans.

Once I had obtained permission from the headteachers and parents to carry out a further year of research, I could restart the fieldwork. This time I asked each teacher in the primary schools to select one instance in each term during the academic year when she would give a lesson that had a family theme; this gave the teachers plenty of warning so that they could choose their subject and would keep the fieldwork spaced out reasonably evenly so that there was some continuity in my relationship with 'my' pupils. I asked to interview the children as soon as possible after the lesson(s) in order to capture their immediate response; this would give a clear focus to the interview and enable us to talk about the cognitive aspects of the lesson as well as their emotional reaction to it. Partly to keep my demands on the teacher's time to a minimum, I asked to interview each one at the

end of the year. This was firstly because I was aware of the pressures on time now that most of the children were in Year 6 and preparing for their SAT's; one teacher had already spoken of the demands that these examinations made, and I wanted to show an understanding of the pressures that were part of their job. Secondly I wanted time to familiarise myself with each teacher's methods and style of teaching before I interviewed her and for her to get used to me, for two of the teachers were new to the project.

I adopted a similar approach in the secondary schools by finding out three subject areas in which 'family' would be taught in the forthcoming year. Fortunately all three drama teachers had a relevant subject planned for that year; all the pupils except two were to study *Romeo and Juliet* as their set Shakespeare text for their Year 9 English SAT's, and the form tutors within all three schools said that there would be a suitable subject within Personal and Social Education (PSE) at some time within the three terms. In all cases, the teachers were willing to participate in the research and all gave me rough estimates of when their lessons would take place. Once again I asked to observe the lessons and to interview both the teachers and the pupils as soon as possible after the lesson or course of lessons had finished.

The schools, as I said earlier, came from the West Country and from the West Midlands. The school that I call Egremont was an inner-city, multicultural primary school in the West Midlands area in which around 25% of children had some kind of special educational needs (SEN). Lancaster was a West Country school situated within a market town that had a wide range of pupil ability but was described to me as 'bottom heavy' by one teacher within the school (field notes, 19.1.99); again, around 25% were SEN pupils. Montague, the third primary school, was located in a rural, more affluent area than either of the other two and had approximately 10% SEN children. Montague achieved the highest SAT's scores of all three schools, with over 80% of pupils scoring level four or above in all three subjects; neither of the other two schools scored above 60% in any subject and each

had at least one score of under 40%. The pupils were from Year 6 in the two West Country schools but from Year 5 in Egremont; their teacher was particularly interested in the project in the previous year and had volunteered to take part and, in the absence of a similar interest among the teachers from Year 5, it had seemed churlish to refuse on the grounds of the children's age. Twenty-one children took part in the primary research; while there were six from Egremont and Lancaster, there were nine Year 6 children from Montague. Both of the secondary schools in the West Country had similar ethnic profile to those of the primary, being almost exclusively white; Sylvester had an excellent reputation and above national average GCSE scores, while Trevelyan was regarded as an up-and-coming school after a period in the doldrums; the latest Ofsted report had commented favourably on the progress that the school had made over the past three years. Both schools were oversubscribed. The third school, Rochester, was from the West Midlands area and had a similar pupil profile to that of Egremont. Six Year 9 pupils from both Rochester and Trevelyan participated in the project, but seven from Sylvester; two girls wanted to take part together and, again, I was reluctant to refuse the offer from two volunteers. Forty pupils from six schools therefore took part in the research project. All the children from the West Country were white, while those from Egremont primary school were either Asian or mixed-race; from Rochester school, there were two white, two black and two Asian pupils. All six schools were non-denominational.

With the project finally set up, I could concentrate on data collection. By now I was familiar to all the pupils and most of the teachers in the project; they tended to be more relaxed so that in most cases I felt less of an obvious stranger in the classroom. Although the teachers' initial self-consciousness may have arisen partly through the human (and perhaps Ofsted-exacerbated) anxiety that I should pass judgement on the quality of their lessons, it also seemed to stem from their perception that family was a sensitive and somewhat unusual subject for research in schools. The teachers involved with the project

were willing in principle to participate in the project, but they were often nervous about the reality and several were rather defensive to begin with. Aware that first, second and third impressions 'all count' (Ball, 1993, p.33), I volunteered the information to each teacher that I was there purely to see how they approached the subject of the family and how the pupils reacted to their lessons; that my research was not a critical exercise in the Ofsted sense. I tried to assume a friendly and interested expression during the course of the lessons, and when either the teacher or pupils looked at me, either smiled or made some approving kind of gesture. Detached observation was impossible and I regularly found myself laughing with the class at the comments made by teachers and pupils alike; in drama lessons there was the occasional powerfully moving moment when the pupils produced work of great insight and depth. There were, too, moments of boredom. To the pupils I introduced myself by my first name to reduce any impression that I might give of being a teacher; I would chat with them if we met outside the classroom, and most responded positively. I 'hung out' (Dingwall, 1997, p.52) in the staffroom in the days that I was conducting fieldwork in any of the schools, not as a neutral observer but as someone who was interested in the everyday problems of teaching. In short, aware of Ball's (1993, p.33) 'studied presentation of self', I tried to create the impression that I was on everybody's 'side'. At times I felt this was easier because I was the same age and gender as many of the staff I met, simply because we could chat about our children and other related issues quite naturally; at the same time I was deeply appreciative of the support that I received from many of the teachers who seemed to be genuinely willing to help once they understood the nature of the research.

The purpose of the observations was to record the content and the delivery of the lesson, for two reasons. The first was to gain personal experience of the classroom interaction and the second to use this experience to act as a foundation for the interviews; I could ask both pupils and teachers to explain and interpret what went on. During the course

of the lessons I made the teacher my unit of analysis and wrote down all her comments or questions that were family-related together with the replies in order to capture the style of teaching and the atmosphere within the classroom. When the classes were broken into small groups, I would try to listen to those that contained one or more of 'my' pupils, although the noise level within some of the classes - particularly drama - meant that I could often hear very little. At the end of the lesson I would thank the teacher, exchange a few pleasantries and make the next date for observation or, at the end of the course of lessons, the interview. With the secondary teachers, these took place as soon as possible after the topic was completed; with the primary teachers, as I have indicated, these took place at the end of the year.

The interviews generally took place in a quiet room to avoid background noise. In all I spoke to sixteen teachers; six English, three drama, 3 PSE (as one teacher was assisting with the lessons), one history and three primary. All except one agreed that our conversation could be taped and, on that occasion, the teacher and I spoke in the staffroom during the course of the lunch hour. The interviews were semi-structured; after a warm-up period in which I would ask the teachers to tell me about their lesson(s), I focused on the possible message that each teacher might have wanted to convey to the children. With the secondary teachers, I asked those concerned with drama and PSE about the aims of the lessons; four out of five told me that they had a clear agenda while the remaining drama teacher was prepared to let the pupils take their story in any direction that they wanted. With the English teachers I asked about the image of the family that they thought *Romeo and Juliet* presented to the pupils, their opinions on how the family relationships worked out, and what they believed to be the message of the play. I asked the history teacher about his views on 'family' and on history to encourage an understanding of why he brought 'family' into his lessons in a way that appeared to be absent with the other history teachers in his school. Our interviews generally lasted about half an hour, although with the more

voluble this could be longer. I had explained at the beginning of the project the type of questions that I would be asking so that the teachers had time to organise their thoughts and so that the interview could take up as much or as little of their time as they wished. Some clearly thought very carefully about the aims and methods of their lessons while others gave interviews that were less considered; yet others felt passionately about family matters and used the interview to expound on them at length. Although such conversations were not strictly relevant to the main focus of the interview, they would often provide an insight to some of the problems that each school faced and how they were approached by the head and teachers.

With the primary teachers, I wanted to find out in more detail why they had found the research more difficult than the secondary teachers; my questions therefore included how they approached the subject of the family with their pupils, how they viewed the nature of home-school relations and the atmosphere that each tried to create within her classroom. Each interview took about three quarters of an hour. I spoke to the teacher from Lancaster school twice because she was involved with the project in both years and I used material from both interviews in the report of the data; at the beginning of the second interview she commented that she had very little to add from the first time - but then, nonetheless, found that she still had much to say. These, again, were semi-structured interviews in which I encouraged the teachers to talk about the 'family' matters that were important to them both within the classroom and without; they, too, provided further insight into the character of the school in which they were working and the nature of each teacher's professional life.

The interviews with the pupils were more complex. I was aspiring towards that which Woods (1986, p.71) calls 'a culture of middle ground' in which the relationship between researcher and pupils is characterised by 'openness and flexibility, by equality of treatment, by sincerity and by friendliness'. I did not want to be intrusive; to be so shows a

lack of respect for the pupils' feelings and in any case would be unlikely to foster such a relationship. At the same time I recognised that how the pupils received and interpreted the lessons would be strongly related to their own feelings and perceptions of family; the response would involve their emotions as well as their cognition and they needed to be able to trust me if they were to give an honest assessment of their reactions to the lessons.

During the previous year we had talked about 'family' in general and about the way 'family' was brought into school life; I had encouraged them to tell me exactly what they wanted and had never pushed for personal information beyond asking them about their family arrangements and what was considered important in their family life. This, along with my assurances that their names would be changed in the research report and that I would not repeat what they said to the teachers, provided the background to our interviews in the second year of the fieldwork. By then I believed that most of them knew me well enough to understand that I was interested in their interpretation of the lessons and, at the same time, would not try to push them into revealing something that they regarded as private.

The caution that I felt in speaking to the pupils about family was, as I show in the report on the research data, a common experience with many of the teachers; we were unwilling to cross an unseen and unformed boundary between school and home life. On reflection, this fear of what one teacher referred to as *'stirring things up'* may have inhibited my questioning; I allowed the talkative to say as much as they wanted but was unwilling to push the more silent, for I did not know the reasons for their reticence. With the wisdom of hindsight, I now recognise that such a situation as ours - where I met the pupils relatively infrequently in an academic setting - was unlikely to be conducive to the pupils disclosing something that they felt was private to them; being quiet in the interviews was not necessarily an indication that the pupils did not want to talk. They might have had ill-formed ideas, or they could have lacked the vocabulary to express their ideas, and I now

feel that I could have been slower to accept the *'Dunno'* or a shrug as an answer. Yet I did not want the pupils to feel that I had manipulated them into saying more than they were willing to, or, by persistent questioning, to encourage them to give any answer just to keep me quiet. Nor did I want the interview to develop into a quasi-counselling session, for I have no training or experience in that direction. It was a difficult balance and I am not sure I always managed it successfully. The result in the report of the research data is that some pupils figure more prominently than others because they had plenty to say.

As with the adults, the interviews were generally conducted in a quiet room. I asked if I could record our meetings and all agreed; some requested to listen to the tapes when we had finished. Although this request came from all ages, the primary children in particular seemed to take great delight in identifying their voices and listening to what had been said. If possible, I asked them if they wanted to talk to me singly or in groups; this allowed them to talk to me in the way that they felt most comfortable while showing my respect for their wishes. Most chose gender-based groups although one child elected initially to talk on her own. In Rochester school, where the six pupils concerned were in different tutor groups and therefore had widely different timetables, this was impossible and I interviewed them singly almost every time. Occasionally a pupil in any of the six schools was absent on the day planned for the interview, in which case I would ask about the lesson at a different time. And in Egremont school where, in the first interview, all the talkative children were in the one group and all the quiet ones in another, I asked to change the groups to encourage a more even participation from all pupils.

During the course of the interviews I asked the pupils - as I had the teachers - to tell me about the lesson(s); to describe the subject matter or, in the case of the drama lessons, to tell me the story that their group had made up. This led into asking what they might have learned about family and/or relationships, what the lesson had made them think and about the image that they thought had been portrayed. Sometimes the pupils had so much to say

that I was little more than an interested audience, asking the odd question that would generate an elaborate response from all parties, while at other times the topic neither caught their interest nor provoked much reflection; the result was that the length of our conversations could range anywhere from fifteen minutes to forty-five. Together they provided a wide variety of responses to the different lessons they had attended. In our final interview at the end of the year I asked all the pupils which topic had caused them to reflect most on 'family' within school and what they felt they had learned over the course of the year; to sum up what they remembered and to pinpoint an instance when, perhaps, they had thought something new or had reached a deeper understanding of what 'family' may mean.

After transcribing the interviews I had the problem of whether to return the transcripts to the interviewees; I felt that both adults and pupils should be treated in the same way and thus that both or neither should be given the opportunity to read what they had said. None of the teachers or pupils expressed a wish to see their transcripts, nor had anyone asked that anything we discussed should be kept 'off the record', although two of the pupils had made confidences that it would be inappropriate to repeat for the sake of their privacy. I had been open about using the tape recorder; I had asked for permission to use it, had placed it in a visible position between myself and the interviewee(s), and all participants had been informed that this research was to be the basis for a PhD. All knew that their names would be changed within the research report. The reason for returning the transcripts to the respondents would be to confirm that this was an accurate representation of their views so that the researcher can claim that the interview contains valid data. But implicit within the act of giving the transcripts to the interviewees is the idea that the information and views expressed on the tape are open to negotiation and that the interviewees can retract some or all parts of what was said; if I returned all the transcripts to all the participants, I may well end up with reduced or partial data in which either teacher or pupil views were inadequately represented. I believed that the combination of

the observations and the differing sets of interview data from teacher and pupils from each lesson theme provided a form of triangulation that made the research both plausible and credibile (Hammersley, 1993, p.70). For that reason I decided not to show any of the participants their transcripts during the process of writing up.

In making the data report, I first did a content analysis of the primary school teachers' interviews (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.57). As they were semi-structured, there was a wide range of information and opinion in all three; I therefore organised the contents into subjects that each teacher mentioned and, through collapsing similar subjects into categories, saw that four broad themes emerged. In reporting these themes, I have selected quotations from each teacher that express her view most succinctly and that represent both the agreement and disagreement between the their views. If a teacher felt particularly strongly about one particular issue (as the teacher I call Mrs. Smith did about behaviour management, for example), I have tried to give an adequate representation of these views while maintaining an equal balance between all three contributors.

Organising and collating the secondary teachers' interviews was less straightforward because of the different themes of the lessons and the different approaches of the teachers. This was less the case with the analysis of the course on *Romeo and Juliet*, where I was able, in a content analysis similar to that of the primary teachers, to organise their views into themes and to use quotations to represent the different opinions within those themes. For the drama, PSE and history lessons I have given a brief description of the lessons, drawn from my field notes, and then have written a summary of the interview with the teacher, in which I focus on his or her responses to my questions about the message that they wished to convey. When analysing the pupils' data, I have noted who was quiet and who was talkative; have reported the variety of responses to the lessons and have summarised these with quotations that either represent a number of pupils' views or, alternatively, indicate the disparity between them. In each case I have followed a

description of the teachers' views with those of the pupils so that there is continuity within the report.

According to the 'Debriefing' section of the ethics protocol, I have sent each school an outline of the context of the research together with - as stated - the draft findings of Part Five. I have spoken to each head before sending the findings and have suggested that I should come into the school to talk to any teacher who may want feedback on his or her part in the research. Should any teacher be interested, I will take in the necessary interview transcripts together with the relevant parts of the report on the research and then discuss any matters arising. All the pupils have now left the schools involved with the research and to contact them myself means that I have to find out their addresses from the school. I have therefore spoken to all the headteachers and asked if each pupil can be sent a letter stating that the research is now finished and if they would like to contact me to discuss the findings, we can set up a time and place to meet. Again, I should take the interview transcripts to any such meeting.

The whole is as full a picture of the lessons, the aims and the responses as I can fit in one thesis. I now believe that the research in either primary or secondary schools would have yielded sufficient data for a PhD; I have focused entirely on the research framework that I have described and have had to deal in a relatively cursory manner with concerns peripheral to this project but that were deeply interesting in their own right. These, however, may well open up further avenues for research. In my defence I would argue that I did not know 'what was going on' within the classroom; the research was exploratory and could have - as Cassandras were wont to point out - returned little. As it is, the data have revealed a rich and complex picture of 'family' as a topic within both primary and secondary schools and have shown some of the difficulties that teachers face when thinking and talking about 'family' within schools. Let us now turn to the research report itself.

PART IV: REPORTING THE THEMES

In Part Four, I report the findings of the research from both the primary and secondary schools. To clarify the nature of the lessons observed, I have listed in Appendix II the names (pseudonyms) of the teachers and pupils from each school together with the subject matter of the lessons that I attended. I have separated the teachers' and the children's data in the presentation of the primary school research because the themes of the interviews did not necessarily correspond, but have kept them together in the secondary school data. At the end of each chapter, I list the key points of the research that will be discussed more fully in Part Five. This Part begins with the data from the primary schools and then moves onto those from the secondary schools.

Chapter 7: The Primary Teachers' Data

In the school I call Egremont, Mrs. Jones' class consisted of twenty-eight children; the class had a reputation for being challenging and their last teacher had commented on their demanding behaviour in the course of the previous year. The situation had not improved and Mrs. Jones, too, found them difficult; her perfectionism in the classroom, where she had high expectations of both behaviour and capacity for work, led to a considerable amount of stress for her. As the year progressed the children became noticeably quieter and better able to sit still; although the pupils concerned with the project seemed to regard Mrs. Jones as 'strict', this may well have been a reference to her insistence on the children sitting still and listening when others were talking. In Montague school, Mrs. Smith's class consisted of thirty-two children from Years 5 and 6; Mrs. Smith worried about the demands that the project would make on her time, for she felt that it did not sit well with the National Curriculum, and we only managed two sessions. The atmosphere within the classroom was friendly and relaxed; the children were focused when working in groups and willing to join in class discussions. While there were six children (three boys and three

girls) from the other two schools, there were nine from this school; six boys and three girls. In Lancaster school, Mrs. Parker had not been teaching long and was nervous that she would not be able to contribute much to the research because 'family' was a subject she said she found difficult. In the event, as she got used to my visits to the classroom she began to relax and, of the three teachers, was the one who was the most committed to the project. Her style was different to that of the two older teachers; she was more informal and, although she insisted on the class being quiet at certain times, encouraged discussion both within the class and between the individual children. There were also thirty-two children in this class, again from years 5 and 6. During the course of the year's field work, I observed three lessons at Egremont school, three at Lancaster and two at Montague. At Lancaster I was also present for three other Religious Education lessons but, as I was intending to interview the children at the end of the course, did not speak to them after each lesson. The lessons observed were as follows:

Autumn term: On the (Meridian) Line: a comparison with Ghana (Egremont)

Hindu Holi festival (Lancaster)

Victorian Leisure (Montague)

Spring term: Home environment (Egremont)

RE topics: autobiography and rites of passage (Lancaster)

Summer term: Rich and poor in Tudor times (Egremont)

Victorian childhood (Lancaster)

Family responsibilities (Montague)

7i: The Difficulty of the Project

All three teachers commented on the difficulty of finding material for the project, making the point that 'family' did not come within the bounds of the National Curriculum. They argued that it is not a subject that is explicitly addressed in the way of literacy, numeracy or geography, and that it tends to crop up at unexpected moments or to be implicit in the discussion rather than the focus for a lesson. Even when we had agreed that I should observe one topic or lesson in each of the three terms of the academic year, all three teachers found difficulties in pinpointing lessons with a family component, and at Montague we were unable to find a suitable topic in the second term. When I spoke to Mrs. Jones at the end of the year, she summed up what all three had said in different ways:

> *Mrs. Jones: It was a bit tentative this afternoon because it's quite hard you know to cram it in. And it's not necessarily what we're doing in the National Curriculum anyway, if you see what I mean ... sometimes it's been a bit contrived to try and work family into a lesson ... for your benefit (interview, 13.6.00).*

This was a sentiment echoed by Mrs. Smith at Montague, who tried to amalgamate literacy hour and Personal and Social Education (PSE) for the purposes of the project:

> *Mrs. Smith: It doesn't actually crop up through the National Curriculum subjects ... you don't actually teach about family. So when I came to thinking about this lesson ... I set it up as literacy hour ... I looked in the PSE book that we've got to find anything to do with the family and then amalgamated the two ideas (interview, 26.6.00).*

Mrs. Jones went on to explain further how the topic of the family was difficult with the Year 5 children:

> *Mrs. Jones: I've done 'Ourselves' with much younger children, it's a good one to do with very young children because they're very egocentric and it starts with 'Me', you know, and your mum is very important when you're six years old. So I do think that that sort of topic is useful to be done when they're small, a topic that does talk about what's important to them and what happens within their family. As I say, as they get older ... there's so much that's implicit in everything you do ... the topic of 'Me and my family' wouldn't work because they're not that egocentric, they're a bit more self-conscious if you like ... they wouldn't want to discuss it ... it's [family] just implicit in such a lot of what we do (interview, 13.6.00).*

For Mrs. Parker from Lancaster school the biggest part of the problem of contributing to the research was the difficult nature of talking about the family:

> *Mrs. Parker: ... there's such a diverse range of what is at home really, there are a lot of them [pupils] who have your nuclear family and then there are those that ... I don't actually know ... if there's a dad at home. I think there are, but I've never met them or heard [the children] talk about them, so I don't know if they're there. So I find it very difficult ... because ... there are some here that have got really difficult situations at home and I don't want to make them feel that they're missing out on something ... cos I think it's hard to talk about it without making it sound as though this is how it should be ... so that's the main reason I avoid it. And also it's difficult, there's so much else that we've got to do, I mean it's easier not to do it (interview, 6.7.99).*

This feeling of danger was reinforced by Mrs. Smith, who argued that life was less complicated if the subject of the family were avoided:

> *Mrs. Smith: The difficulty of family is that it's the notion of family as we are talking about on the board is different for every child and sometimes it can be quite raw for some children. You know, one child in the class this term has actually, his parents have separated and sometimes it's easier just to, I say easier but [I feel] there's no need to talk about it (interview, 26.6.00).*

This feeling was compounded by what this teacher perceived to be the children's lack of ability to sustain a discussion for any length of time and the risky nature of introducing a topic that did not necessarily have a particular direction:

> *Mrs. Smith: ... it's hard because you can discuss something, say how do we remember when people die, but then what do you do with that? How do you actually manage that in the classroom? You can brainstorm, but then where does it go? (interview, 26.6.00).*

Thus the problems of taking part in the project for these three primary school teachers were the 'family' was outside the bounds of the National Curriculum and therefore that there were difficulties in finding a topic that was sufficiently relevant. Secondly, for two of the teachers there was a strong element of apprehension in tackling a subject that is potentially upsetting for some of the children who have unstable or difficult backgrounds. Thirdly, Mrs. Parker's comment that it is hard to talk about the family without it sounding as though this is *'how it should be'* is indicative of the uncertainty that arises from the complexity of

'family' in our contemporary multicultural society where diverse family forms, cultures and values abound.

7ii: Where 'Family' Does Come Into Lessons

Family did however come into lessons in an informal way, with all three teachers mentioning family anecdotes and classroom sharing of family experiences, particularly after the weekend. Mrs. Smith said that family is a good link to the work in hand for the children as they are *'interested and naturally curious'* about it; using family to introduce subjects provides an association with children's own experiences and helps to prevent topics from being *'rather abstract and objective'* . If, for example, a child made a comment about a book, she might respond:

> *Mrs. Smith: I might just say, 'When I'm reading this with [my son] Richard, when I'm reading this with [my daughter] Judith, we found the same'. Just a comment in that way (interview, 26.6.00).*

She also remarked on trying to keep *'on the children's wavelength'* by seeing the same kind of films and going to the same local attractions as the children in her class, thus enabling her to give children examples with which they are familiar and enabling them to see parallels between the teacher's family life and their own. Her comment:

> *Mrs. Smith: I mean, it's a friendly way of putting something across (interview, 26.6.00)*

gave an indication both of her own attitude to family and of her attempts to make things relevant and meaningful to the children in her class. And she was prepared to share the more difficult moments of her own family life with the school children; a relative had recently died, causing her to reflect on the importance of family in her own personal life:

> *Mrs. Smith: ... it just made you appreciate how important your family is. And I think I did say to the children, a propos of something else, how very important they are to you. You can always have friends but actually it's your blood relatives that ... well, they're always going to be there (interview, 26.6.00).*

Yet there was a strict limit to the extent that family was discussed:

Mrs. Smith: We do have anecdotes and children will share things in that way but I think we don't, we try I suppose to keep the parameters fairly clear about what we're covering within school (interview, 26.6.00).

This clearly did not include in-depth conversations about family:

Mrs. Smith: We are actually supposed to be keeping to either programmes of study or these numeracy objectives or the literacy objectives and I suppose that it's because we're trying to keep to those that we don't stress [family] ... Usually [in literacy hour] we're thinking about characterisation, how does the author portray this person, so you think about 'James and the Giant Peach'. You've got ... the two aunts there; how had Roald Dahl conveyed the impression that they're really nasty, unpleasant people. You look at it in that way and match up to the literacy objectives, so it's fairly tight ... in terms of matching up to the literacy objectives rather than just saying, 'Are they nice people?' (interview, 26.6.00).

Mrs. Parker was equally clear about the limits to which a discussion might go during literacy hour:

Mrs. Parker: ... things that we read have family situations in them and we talk about the family ... from there, like what's their family life and that sort of thing. But we don't go into the deep sort of thing ... 'Well, why do you think dad's not there', or whatever ... or 'How does this compare to your family', and stuff like that. I don't do any of that. So we might deal with the family in a book but it's in a book and we don't discuss it at any deep level and then reflect on it as far as [the children's] experiences go (interview, 13.7.00).

These limits to conversations concerning the family were drawn partly through these two West Country teachers' own reluctance to be seen to favour any one type of domestic life over another. In the context of increasing diversity of family life, their own experiences with different types of family and their awareness of differences in family culture and structure, they were anxious to be seen to be impartial and non-judgmental about other people's family lives:

Mrs. Smith: ... you have to be careful. I think you have to be sensitive to the different ways in which people live their lives, families operate. And if you, you might have an opinion mightn't you ... but it isn't actually wise to share that (interview, 26.6.00).

Similarly Mrs. Parker argued that:

Mrs. Parker: ... I don't want to make them [children] feel that what I've got isn't right or Miss is saying, you know, this is what families should be and that's not what I've got (interview, 13.7.00).

Yet for Mrs. Parker, part of the reason that she was not prepared to conduct in-depth and possibly revealing conversations about family was that:

> *Mrs. Parker: I think children [from stable backgrounds] should be protected a bit more ... I just think that they should be protected from all the horrors of what can happen at such a young age while they can be. It's really awful because you've got those who are clearly suffering (interview, 13.7.00).*

Thus, while family may enter classroom discussion, both teachers tried to keep it within manageable boundaries; they were trying not to divulge their own views on family and discouraged open discussion on family matters that may well upset or offend some members of the class. Mrs. Parker's concern to protect children from learning about the *'horrors'* of other children's families may well be a result of the area in which she worked; her interview transcripts have several examples of children whose family lives are anything but stable and supportive, and the difficulties that these children face is very clearly a significant issue for her. Mrs. Smith's school however is in a rural, more affluent area in which levels of social and economic deprivation are relatively low; for her the chief issue was children's behaviour, as we shall see in the following section. However this protective, slightly defensive attitude towards discussing the family in class can be contrasted with Mrs. Jones' openness to matters concerning the family and her willingness to use literacy texts to initiate discussion on what she considers to be important family values. She, too, is concerned not to present any particular structure of family as preferable, but brings in a cultural aspect that is - understandably - absent from the West Country teacher's accounts:

> *Mrs. Jones: If I were to suggest that our way of doing things is better than theirs ... then I think that would be very wrong. Because they are children from a different culture. Equally if I was teaching a class full of white children, two-thirds of whom were single parents or whatever, again you couldn't push one sort of family values on them without suggesting that there was something wrong with what they've got at home ... I would hate to try and present any sort of norm ... that was different from their own cos I think you can make them feel quite insecure (interview, 13.6.00).*

Yet she said she used family as a vehicle to:

> *Mrs. Jones: ... talk about values, talk about caring or to talk about relationships you know, it sort of crops up naturally in that sort of discussion (interview, 13.6.00)*

and her attitude to texts used in the literacy hour is in marked contrast to that of the other two teachers:

> *Mrs. Jones: ... this morning we've been reading a text from another culture in the text section and it's been about a child from India who's taking a letter home to his father ... because he'd misbehaved at school. And we talked a lot about how parents might react if they got a letter home saying that they'd been misbehaving and I asked them how your parents might feel. You know, it's not all about hiding things from your parents but about ... how your parents would react and why they'd reacted in a certain way. I thought of you ... And that's come up ... and it's been a matter of discussing really how people feel (interview, 13.6.00).*

Equally she recognised that there is much that is implicit in discussions concerning the family; she explained that she tries *'very often'* to relate the subject matter to personal experience with the result that family comes in as an aspect of *'all sorts of things'*. Family for her, then, is the backdrop to much of school life, recognised as centrally important to the children within the class and discussed without fear; for Mrs. Smith it is more peripheral to the task of academic work, a reflection perhaps of working in a school that is academically successful and reports above average SAT's results; for Mrs. Parker it is a difficult subject that is treated with circumspection.

7iii: Values Promoted Within the Classroom

We have seen that each teacher was at pains not to promote any one idea of family over another and that two of the teachers wanted to keep the family and family-related subjects within controllable bounds. This section is concerned with the values that each teacher wanted to promote within the classroom and the atmosphere that each tried to create within her working life. For Mrs. Smith:

> *Mrs. Smith: It's just mutual respect isn't it really, that the children respect that ... they are here to learn and you are here to teach. And that really is it in a nutshell (interview, 26.6.00).*

For her, behaviour within the school was an issue of great importance; in the past the school had had recognised behaviour problems and, although the new headteacher had effected great changes in the ethos of the school, she found:

> *Mrs. Smith: [The behaviour management system] actually seems to have worked but over time we just get bogged down with dealing with children playing up in the classroom or at playtime (interview, 26.6.00).*

Her solution to children's disputes and problems is:

> *Mrs. Smith: ... to get them to say their point of view ... you as an adult can actually hear what each is saying ... They just sort it out between them, they see that justice is done insofar as you've heard it out and ... been fair in listening to both sides. They say, 'Sorry', to each other and ... all it's done is take up some of your time (interview, 26.6.00).*

Her sense of frustration is evident in her frequent references to the time that it takes to sort these disputes out; on the one hand she wants to encourage the children to *'respect each other's views'*, to *'be tolerant of one another'* and to learn to negotiate and, as a *'figure of authority'*, wants the children to recognise that she espouses these values herself. But on the other hand she is *'here to teach'* and wants to get on with the job. If there is a serious problem in the class, she might stop and have an impromptu circle time to resolve the dispute, but has also sent children out of the room:

> *Mrs. Smith: I just said, 'Right, all go in there, all sort it out'. In a sense they just need to be able to do that and if you're trying to teach the rest of the class ... what more can you do? ... so long as they come back and say what they've discussed rather than it being unsatisfactory, it they come back and say that they've sorted it out, that's fine by me ... if they need somebody else to keep mediating then obviously you get involved again. Usually they can sort it out amongst themselves (interview, 26.6.00).*

These values of willingness to negotiate, respect and tolerance that she encourages are directly related to the values that she feels are learned within the family:

> *Mrs. Smith: [Family's] a good way of learning to react, interact ... with other individuals ... it teaches you to forgive and forget (interview, 26.6.00).*

And in relating a story about a close relative, she stressed the importance of respecting the former's choices even though she did not agree with the decision that was made at the time. Finally, while commenting on another relative's behaviour, she said:

Mrs. Smith: ... you might never let your children do that, but they just behave in a slightly different way to you. How could you expect anybody to do exactly what you do? (interview, 26.6.00).

In this sense, the values of respect, tolerance and the willingness to negotiate that she promotes are in line with her own family values. This is an approach that is echoed by Mrs. Parker, although in a different way. Mrs. Parker feels that families:

Mrs. Parker: ... are people who are always there ... and their role in life is - or more the parents' role in life - is to just protect you at a younger age and ... make you believe in yourself, have belief in you ... and to teach you to be nice to other people (interview, 13.7.00).

She feels that a minority of the children in her class lack the kind of security and constancy that she cites:

Mrs. Parker: ... some of them, you know there is security in the house in that they know who is going to be there but I'd say it's insecure in that - it's me being judgmental - they're not getting the proper attention that they should be ... the parents don't have a lot of time for them and it's the easiest option all the time. They're shouted at, they're told a lot ... that sort of thing (interview, 13.7.00).

She believes an important part of her job is to provide constancy in these children's lives:

Mrs. Parker: I try to be very constant ... they know the rules. They know that ... if they do something such-and-such will happen, then it happens and likewise the positive. So they do know the rules. And every now and again they forget and I'll say, 'You know how it works'. I do try cos I think they don't get a lot of it at home (interview, 13.7.00).

The constancy that she provides should be present in a family is something that she promotes in her own classroom, and, as we have seen in the previous section, she protects the children as much as possible from knowing about others' difficult home lives. She also tries to give the children the opportunity to express themselves, fostering respect and self-belief by taking the time to listen to their views and encouraging dialogue:

Mrs. Parker: I talk to them and let them talk ... I think that's the sort of thing that doesn't go on at home a lot of the time ... Just giving them a chance to tell you their opinion and not sort of stopping them straight away, giving them a chance to tell you things (interview, 6.7.99).

She is also willing to intervene when she feels that the children are being unpleasant about another member of their family; in one incident a child was telling the class how her sister's pet rabbit had died:

> *Mrs. Parker: ... and she couldn't tell us for laughing. But a couple of weeks earlier she'd been telling us that one of hers had been taken to the vet because there was something wrong with it ... and she was nearly in tears. So I did actually stop them and I said, 'Do you remember last week when you were telling us about yours, how different that was? You know, that's really not nice' (interview, 6.7.99).*

So Mrs. Parker promotes the values that she feels are important within a family; as with Mrs. Smith, respect and tolerance are there, but she also cites security, protection and the fostering of self-belief through encouraging the children to express their opinions. This is a pattern followed by Mrs. Jones, but again with different emphases. She has a succinct view of family values:

> *Mrs. Jones: Well, I'd say that family values are care within a home ... I think of family values as everybody in the same family sort of pulling in the same direction (interview, 13.6.00).*

Once again, there is a close correlation between what she regards as her own family values and the values that she promotes within the classroom:

> *Mrs. Jones: ... we'd encourage them perhaps to think about their parents' feelings or think about siblings' feelings ... I am positive about [caring values] all the time I think. You know one of the directions I come from ... is that, you know, we try and avoid conflict, we try and negotiate ... and that's the kind of ethos that I try and promote within the classroom. I have to say not always successfully (laughing) (interview, 13.6.00).*

While it would be something of an exaggeration to say that each teacher tried to create a family atmosphere within the class, they all nonetheless regarded their own family values as a basis for the values that they promoted within the classroom. While each expressed their intentions in a different way, values of tolerance and respect were fundamental to each teacher; Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith stressed willingness to negotiate; security, protection and self-belief were important to Mrs. Parker and caring values to Mrs. Jones.

7iv: Home Life and Home-School Relations

All three teachers agreed that knowing the child's home circumstances helped them to understand difficult or challenging behaviour. Mrs. Jones argued that the anecdotes that the children related during the course of the day were *'interesting and informative'* as they gave her a fuller picture of some children's family lives that she may not otherwise have gathered:

> *Mrs. Jones: ... you quite often learn a lot from the anecdotes you know, about what goes on at home .. it's interesting ... If they are children with behaviour problems, if you know why then you start from a different standpoint ... When children are unpleasant in some way or aggressive or catty then you wonder what's going on at home ... I think if children are unhappy they're unpleasant to each other and if they're basically happy, they're probably much nicer to each other. But I accept that's a generalisation (interview, 13.6.00).*

These anecdotes can be supplementary to the information supplied by the parents or social services:

> *Mrs. Jones: If you know first that a child has got these problems, whatever they are, or is at first identified as having difficulties of one sort or another, it you know that then you ... know slightly why they are behaving like that; it makes it much easier to cope with the behaviour rather than just having a child in your face immediately and not knowing why. So I do think it's important, not that we know every detail but that we know if there are problems at home or in a general way what's going on (interview, 13.6.00).*

Thus, while wanting to know something about the nature of the problems that a child might be having in her home life, Mrs. Jones wants to retain a certain distance between the family and herself. Any information would be welcome, but not to such a degree that it would be intrusive for either party. Mrs. Smith had similar views but was more specific, giving examples of how parents might give information on a child's home life and raising the issue of how a certain level of detachment can be difficult:

> *Mrs. Smith: The other day a child's cat had been run over and so mum comes in to see me and as soon as she starts to tell us she's in tears and then we have to be aware that the child might be upset during the day ... [or] a child comes in after a fallout with stepfather and you might see the child's upset ... those are the hardest situations, when there's been a fight or something at home and you have to not get embroiled in it, just listen to the child and say, 'Did you sort it out? (interview, 26.6.00).*

This level of detachment is echoed by Mrs. Parker who, when giving an example of a child under stress from developments at home, indicated that she wanted the child to recognise the teacher's concern for the former's welfare, but at the same time needed the child to understand that school was a place for academic work:

> *Mrs. Parker: ... and I say, 'Okay, well you've got to get on with your work but I do understand if you're a bit quiet and you haven't got as much done today as you normally do' (interview, 13.7.00).*

Part of the reason for Mrs. Smith's lack of involvement in the children's lives is that it is time-consuming and she considers it to be beyond the remit of a teacher's job:

> *Mrs. Smith: We actually do our job and we try not to get involved with what's going on in children's lives (interview, 26.6.00).*

It can also be explained by a reluctance to offer unwanted or unwarranted advice:

> *Mrs. Parker: I thought ... who am I to tell her to pay more attention or not to shout at him or not to speak to him in such a way ... So no, I don't tell parents what to do (interview, 6.7.99).*

Yet at the same time, Mrs. Smith was increasingly coming to the conclusion that the school should involve parents in cases of bad behaviour:

> *Mrs. Smith: The behaviour support people would argue that the children that behave badly do so in part because of lack of support from home. So by constantly telling them their child has been naughty actually breaks the relationship down ... We are beginning to rather dispute this ... And I think what we've decided is that there isn't actually any point in trying to resolve this in school. If the child plays up the parents ought to be told cos in a way it's actually time-wasting for us. And if both sides are singing from the same hymn-sheet then you can actually usually resolve it. And in fact that does work with lots, lots of children ... if the parents say, 'You've got to go to school and behave', then we can work together on it (interview, 26.6.00).*

This can be contrasted with Mrs Jones' more reciprocal approach when talking about the nature of the relationship between parents and the school:

> *Mrs. Jones: We don't need to know in fine detail [about what's going on at home] but I do think it's a partnership between parents and teachers. I don't think you can [teach] in isolation without knowing. I mean it cuts both ways; parents need to know what's going on in the classroom as well. So I think that sort of interchange is a good idea (interview, 13.6.00).*

Mrs. Parker's attitude is similar to Mrs. Jones' in that she feels that she has a constructive relationship with the majority of the children's parents:

> *Mrs. Parker: I'm very lucky that I get on with most of the parents. Most of the parents who come to parents' evening anyway ... For example there's mum I called out earlier for behaviour problems and obviously I saw her quite a lot to start with. And then things started to quieten down ... I made sure I told her that things were okay. I like to make sure that, if I've had to tell people that things aren't going so well I take the opportunity, the time, to go and tell them that things are going better (interview, 6.7.99).*

Finally, Mrs. Parker agreed with Mrs. Smith that schools cannot be seen to be totally responsible for children's behaviour, and she indicated that she felt that school sometimes take the blame for matters that are primarily to do with parents:

> *Mrs. Parker: Parents do still have some responsibility, it can't be all our fault (laughs). You know, there are still things they've still got to be responsible for teaching them [children], I think ... Morals, values, you know, the value of being nice to each other for a start, which not many do today. But the thing is, you see the children in here that give you a hard time ... that really struggle in school ... behaviourally, and then you meet the parents, or parent, or carer, and you just think, 'There you go'. It just sums it all up really (interview, 13.7.00).*

Mrs. Jones expressed much the same feelings when she argued that parents have the biggest responsibility for and the strongest influence on their children, although she was careful not to appear judgmental:

> *Mrs. Jones: ... it's huge generalisation but when you've taught for a few years, on the whole you see nice parents have nice kids ... I think parents have the biggest influence on children, even with education. I mean a good deal of your education is there by the time you're five isn't it? You know, you've learned to walk, talk and dress yourself and all the rest of it. It's a major part of your education. And you've probably laid down the bases of a lot of your behaviours by the time you're five as well (interview, 13.6.00).*

All three teachers therefore felt that knowing the big picture of children's family circumstances is helpful in understanding difficult behaviour in class and in creating a more tolerant atmosphere during lessons. All three were happy to share the responsibility of children's behaviour during the day, but felt that parents or carers have the major responsibility for imparting values and teaching the bounds of acceptable behaviour - which, in itself, is not a new or surprising observation. Nonetheless, while Mrs. Smith

seemed to see parents' responsibility as supporting the school, the other two - who worked in schools with a notably different socio-economic profile - appeared to believe that the relationship is more reciprocal. What is interesting from this thesis' perspective is the tension between appearing not to be judgmental about other family's lifestyles and cultures yet having very clear ideas about the values that should underpin family relationships.

Summary of Key Points:

1. The teachers were unanimous on the difficulty of the project from a practical point of view with the two West Country teachers arguing that it was easier to leave the topic alone because of the danger of upsetting or damaging children from unstable or difficult backgrounds. Mrs. Jones suggested that the subject was not suitable for her Year 5 children, for they are *'more self-conscious'* than smaller children and are less likely to be interested in sharing ideas about the family.

2. All three teachers talked informally about the family in the classroom, introducing anecdotes from their own families and/or encouraging the children to share their family experiences, and were happy to use the family as a *'friendly'* means of connecting the formal work of the National Curriculum with the children's own lives. For two of the teachers this was ostensibly the limit of the discussion.

3. Each teacher was clear about the ethos she tried to create within the classroom and the values that she tried to promote. These were closely linked to the teacher's own concept of family values.

4. While all agreed that it is helpful to know something of each child's background, there was a concern for family privacy. Mrs. Smith saw the home-school relationship as one of home backing school, while the other two teachers, who worked at schools with a different socio-economic intake, saw the relationship as more reciprocal.

5. There is some tension between the teachers' intention to appear non-judgmental about family relationships and their promotion of values that may not be in line with those of some of the children's family lives.

Chapter 8: The Primary Children's Data

This chapter examines the children's different responses to the lessons observed. I have divided the themes that emerged from the interviews into three broad topics; in the first section I report the positive responses to the content of the lessons and in the second I examine the children's own reflections on the teacher's attitude towards family and the ethos that each tried to create within the classroom. The third section looks at the negative responses that the lessons provoked.

8i: Positive Reflections

Positive reflections on the children's own family lives were apparent in the times in which the children were called upon to compare their lives with those of a past generation or with people living in different countries. In Egremont school there were two such lessons that I observed; one was based on the On The Line project which aimed to link schools from different countries on the meridian line over the year 2000, while the other was a history lesson that concerned Tudor life. In each of the two West Country schools I observed one lesson that focused on Victorian life.

An important consideration when reporting the children's reactions to lessons is how the teachers presented the idea or the concept of 'family' in that particular time or geographical location and the influence that this appeared to have. In Egremont school, Mrs. Jones showed a picture taken in Ghana of a seven year old black girl sitting on a wall, writing on a piece of paper that was resting on her knees. In the background was another girl who was carrying a large bowl on her head. Mrs. Jones asked the children how they knew the picture was not taken in England, and then asked them to consider differences between life in Ghana for that child and life in Britain. The class noticed that the girl was poor because she was writing on her lap rather than sitting at a table; they suggested that the bowl on the second girl's head was for water. They then speculated about the kind of

toys that the children would have. Mrs. Jones continued by telling them about the mud house that the family lived in and related how they all had to get up at 5.30 a.m. on school mornings to fetch water and to help prepare the breakfast before the children left for school. She briefly described the school, saying that there were ten children in the class of all ages, that they had homework and that the girl's favourite lesson was maths. During the course of the description of the family's life she made few comments on the information that she gave the children other than to draw factual comparisons with British life; that we have taps, for instance, and do not have to carry water to our houses. But, despite the lack of comment, these comparisons were favourable; our lives are clearly more comfortable than those of the family in Ghana and children's lives in this country are less bound up with the physical necessities of life. This was a theme that was picked up by the children; their chief concern was the girl's poverty and the problems that might present for her. During their interview after the lesson, the first group commented on the physical hardship of her life:

Johnny: She's poor ... it's hard to get food.
Rajinder: They might go down to the river and catch fish or whatever, cos they can't just go to the shops.
Johnny: There might not be any shops.
Rajinder: They might have to like rubs sticks and like build a fire.
Hari: Miss, they haven't got clothes ... (interview 10.11.99).

The second group (of girls) spoke of these difficulties but were also concerned with the wider implications of a busy lifestyle:

Gita: She must be tired ...
Asheed: [Her life] is not very exciting ...
Gita: And her life must be hard, like studying and that ...
Asheed: Miss I feel sorry for them, sort of, yeah, because we're lucky and they're not lucky. Because we've got lots of electrical things and they haven't.
Gita: Yes, and if we want something we can get it, but if they want some toys, they have to make it with clay ... (interview 10.11.99).

Although feeling *'lucky'* is not directly expressed in all these exchanges, there is a tacit agreement among these children that their own lives are more comfortable and offer a

greater potential for excitement. The favourable comparison was something seen again in the lesson about the rich and the poor in Tudor times. This time the focus was more explicitly on poverty; Mrs. Jones asked the children to consider what effect it might have on both contemporary and Tudor life, and wondered how people could survive without either a job or any form of social security. In the whole of the lesson, the family was mentioned once, when Mrs. Jones said:

> *If you were lucky enough to be born into a rich family [in Tudor times], you might have a tutor - only rich people had education. If you were poor, you'd have to help your parents; if they were beggars, you'd have to beg with them (field notes, 13.6.00).*

Mrs. Jones commented in her interview later that day that the lesson was *'a bit contrived'*, and the children certainly had trouble relating this lesson to the topic of the family; they were curious about the details of Tudor life and wanted to know how often babies' nappies were changed, what people had to eat, how they went shopping and they briefly considered what life would be like without a dentist. Their focus tended to be on the material, and their response to my question on what it made them think about Tudor families was limited.

When I asked them about the difference between Tudor family life and theirs, however, one boy was quick to say:

> *Johnny: That we're lucky, because we've got a mum and a dad and some of them like haven't got a mum and dad.*
> *Asheed: Miss I think the same. Because nowadays you don't have to pay for learning and you don't have to pay to see the doctor (interview, 14.6.00).*

This boy had considered that, due to early mortality, some children had only one parent which made him feel *'lucky'*, while the others were more concerned with aspects of life that did not involve personal relationships or family. Nonetheless once again there was a distinct feeling that their lives were fortunate through the advantages of modern medicine, education and the fact that teachers no longer hit children.

It was noticeable that during both these lessons Mrs. Jones presented her material with little emotion or comment and, although the contrasts with British contemporary life

were clearly favourable, she encouraged the children to draw their conclusions from the content of her questions rather than through comments or observations. In Lancaster school, Mrs. Parker provided a strong contrast during her lesson about the Victorians; she used a chapter entitled 'Vile Victorian Childhood' from the *Horrible History* series which is a light-hearted, slightly gruesome look at various aspects of different historical periods. Mrs. Parker divided the class into groups and told them to read the sheets with a view to each group making a presentation in ten minutes' time.

The first group talked about 'all the things that happened to children', using examples of children as chimney sweeps, a boy having his ear nailed to the bench as a punishment and the whole family sleeping in the same room, possibly with a corpse in it if one member had died. Others talked about hygiene, children working, children of four or five years old caring for their smaller siblings in the home, poverty in the Victorian home, hunger and paying £5 to offload a baby onto the baby farm. At this point, Mrs. Parker said:

> *Mrs. Parker: You've had a baby recently, just imagine if mum said 'I can't afford these babies, I'll pay this lady £5 to look after this baby and never see it again'. What do you think about that? (field notes, 3.7.00).*

One girl said immediately in reply:

> *Corinne: I think it's really cruel. They didn't care that much. My auntie's just had a baby and she wouldn't do that. It's like we've got better hearts now (field notes, 3.7.00).*

The conversation then turned to adoption, briefly to contraception, workers' rights to and expectations of regularly increased pay, disabilities and cot deaths. Once again Mrs. Parker evoked powerful feelings about family by saying:

> *Mrs. Parker: Think of a baby a day old, a month old and it dies. To the person who had that baby, they remember that day every year. I don't understand what that's like but some of you have lost little brothers and sisters, you would know (field notes, 3.7.00).*

Both boys and girls were quick to pick up this theme of 'better hearts' and caring in their subsequent interviews:

> *Kieran: Just in case your family was poor and someone else adopted you, I wouldn't like that.*

Richard: I think it's cruel because of all the people who died in it [the baby farm] ... I don't like it when they sold their children ...
Kieran: They'd got a bad heart then but we've got a good heart now ...
Richard: Cos we've grown to love [our children] and there's new things for them to do ...
Kieran: ... in them days they were just like, they didn't care about anything or anyone, they just cared about themselves ...
Richard: People have got better really, they've got kinder (interview, 3.7.00).

The girls drew equally favourable comparisons with contemporary family life:

Lucy: I wouldn't like it cos you had to work really hard when you were young and like some babies were given away for £5 ... I mean we should be worth more than that really (laughing) ...
Nancy: I don't see how they could be so mean. Even if they were little babies, they still had a life...
Emily: It's like their parents ... (indignant) they were a baby and they never got treated like that.
Nancy: They might've, they might've just left them to die.
Emily: That doesn't mean they have to treat theirs like it though ... (interview 3.7.00).

However, Nancy, as Johnny in Egremont, was more specific about what it had made her think:

Nancy: We're lucky to be in such good families ... one that cares about you, very caring (interview, 3.7.00)

Lucy made a similar comment:

Lucy: Um that I'm glad I've got a family and that someone cares for me, like my mum. And my nan cares for me as well ...(interview 3.7.00).

Both the content and the style of Mrs. Smith's lesson in Montague school were different to Mrs. Parker's; Mrs. Smith asked the class about their own understanding of leisure and then went on to describe leisure in Victorian times, saying that Victorian families relied on each other for entertainment and stressing the difference between rich and poor. She talked about music halls, explaining that they were a *'bit like going to the theatre. Working class men would drink, be noisy and rowdy'*. At one point she mentioned that her father had played football on Saturday and cricket on Sunday *'which must have driven my mother absolutely mad'*. She produced a picture of a rich home where a small concert was taking place, comparing the silence in which the audience listened to the

concert with the noise levels in the music hall. Finally she spoke about reading, using Dickens as an example of the *'Victorian soap opera'*, which would have been read aloud within the family and described such games as charades that would have been played in rich households. She then said that in wealthy families:

> *Mrs. Smith:... the children would be brought out to play with their parents for a while and when the parents were tired of them, they'd be sent back to the nursery (field notes, 1.12.99).*

The children in this class all noticed this highly evaluative remark about the relationship between rich children and their parents. Liam provides one example of the general reaction:

> *Liam: Well, when they [children] made something or something, they came out and showed it to their parents and their parents would play with them for however long they liked and when they were bored playing with them and didn't want to [any more], they'd send them back up to the nursery (interview 1.12.99).*

This concept of children and parents living almost separate lives had created a considerable degree of consternation, and the following exchange was typical of the children's response:

> *Robert: I wouldn't have liked it, just getting to see your parents for five minutes.*
> *Eleanor: No.*
> *Liam: I wouldn't have liked it, just being told, 'Oh, you can see your parents now', it's like you're at the vet's or something.*
> *Eleanor: If your parents weren't there you'd probably be quite bored, wouldn't you. Then you'd only get to see your parents for about fifteen minutes.*
> *Robert: Well, depending on how much your parents liked you (interview 1.12.99).*

The children did not dismiss the idea that family life might be better in Victorian times;

Robert, for example, thought that perhaps the physical proximity of crowded dwellings might lead to more emotional closeness. Later however he remembered that there were some advantages to having your own personal space:

> *Robert: ... their mum and dad would be able to annoy them or tell them off or whatever, but with your own room you can lock yourself, you can lock them out ... if your dad's yelling or something and he's really mad, then you just run up to your room and quickly lock the door so he can't get in (interview 1.12.99).*

Although Mrs. Smith had not mentioned the workhouse in this particular lesson, they considered family life in such an institution and, when I asked them what this topic had made them think about their own family, Keith summed up the general feeling about life in Victorian times:

> *Keith: [I'm] glad I'm not living in the Victorian times.*
> *Int: Why?*
> *Eric: When you're rich* ***and*** *when you're poor cos if you're really poor you had to go to the workhouse so you won't see your parents or your family ever (interview 1.12.99).*

And Liam, again:

> *Liam: [In the workhouse] you'd forget about your mum and your dad and your sister ... I mean you'd be thinking about them and crying about them for a long time but then you'd get used to it because you'd probably have to work in the workhouse all your life then (interview 1.12.99).*

Although there were differences both between individual children and between the children in the three schools, there was a general agreement that family life has improved over the centuries and, in the case of the lesson about the Ghanaian girl, that their lives are relatively fortunate in comparison to hers. The children at Egremont tended to focus on the material and physical, but those at Lancaster and Montague were more likely to consider the affective importance of family in their own lives and some of them reflected on the quality of life without love and support from their family.

8ii: Classroom Ethos and Family Values

We have seen that each of the teachers had her own idea of the values that underpinned family life and that they all tried to promote an atmosphere within the classroom that was consistent with these values. In order to find out how this ethos matched the children's idea of family and relationship values, I asked each group about any differences and similarities between home and school, and how they felt about any differences that they might have noticed. To have asked about the differences in values would have almost certainly produced a bemused silence; to focus on expectations of behaviour seemed to be a more

promising opening to talking about values as it could encourage reflection on why some aspects of behaviour were approved of while others were not. As usual, some children had little to tell, others were unable to think of an answer and yet others were fluent and confident in what they said. The accord that many of the children felt between the values of home and school was striking, particularly so in the case of Montague school in which all the children except one felt at ease with the teacher and the way she conducted classroom affairs. Eric was typical of those who saw little difference between home and school relationship values; he said that his teacher thinks they should all '*get along, all be friends, get on with each other'* and that was '*not much different'* from the expectations at home. He then went on to say:

> *Eric: I don't in particular fight with my sister or my mum would probably ground me or something like that, cos Mum doesn't like it when we fight. Mum acts very like our teacher actually... (interview, 26.6.00).*

The other children talked about expectations in school of *'being nice'* to one another, or '*being friendly'* and *'not being violent'*. One girl drew an unfavourable contrast with her own family life:

> *Yvonne: It's not different at all, really. At home we're meant to treat each other nicely, not that we do, but that's what we're meant to do (interview, 26.6.00).*

Robert however took this a little further and suggested that the underlying values were the same, but they were manifested in a different way at school:

> *Robert: ... if it was a family member, you'd have to be polite in a different way like. Say being polite at home is not shouting at someone, but being polite at school is sort of being kind to someone if they're upset or something (interview, 12.7.00).*

The one dissenting voice who said that expectations at school and home were different focused on the way that fights were sorted out:

> *Liam: ... a teacher gets like stressed out quickly and your mum just tolerates it, doesn't shout. She doesn't care for the first few minutes, then when it really gets going, she sorts it though. The teacher just gets stressy straight away (interview, 26.6.00).*

This suggests however that the values are not so very far apart; neither home nor school condones violence or arguments, both encourage respect for others and neither allows unacceptable behaviour to continue; 'Mum' might just wait a little longer to see if agreement can be reached without intervention.

While it could be argued that the children from Montague school come from a higher socio-economic level and that home-school values would therefore be likely to be in line, much agreement was also the case in the other two schools. In Lancaster, Nancy said that:

> *Nancy: We've kind of got a family thing around here, cos we're all really nice to each other (interview, 3.7.00).*

She also talked about the five 'Take Cares' that were the ground rules for the school, commenting that *'that would be the same in our house'*. The other two girls agreed with Nancy. The boys seemed to find this question more difficult than the girls; Kieran said that '*when you've got problems, you just ask the teacher and they help you'*, which he noted was the same as at home, while Richard said that the 'Take Cares' bore little relation to his life at home:

> *Richard: ...I'm allowed to do anything. I've not really got any rules cos I'm always out with my friends (interview, 3.7.00).*

The striking aspect with the children in this school was the gender difference; the girls appeared to be very comfortable with Mrs. Parker's values and classroom management, with Lucy commenting at the end of the year that *'she's my favourite teacher'*. The boys on the other hand were more diffident; they had little to say about the classroom ethos, although Richard said that they should be *'kind, not spiteful'* to one another and that they should not '*hit back because you'll get told off as well'*. This difference is highlighted in the next section when I discuss negative thoughts about the family.

In Egremont school, the children talked about respect:

> *Johnny: You have to behave at school because teachers are like part of your family and you have to respect them ...*

Asheed: [You have to treat other people] with the same respect as you do at home. Because Miss every time that we be silly, our teacher always says, 'Do you respect your mum like this', or something like that (interview, 14.6.00).

This last point was not agreed upon by the others; some felt that the family was occasionally evoked when children were misbehaving, but certainly not 'always'. Johnny offered an anecdote about one occasion when there had been friction between the children and the teacher:

Johnny: The other day at dinner time we couldn't go out to play, it was raining and most of the children were naughty. And some of the children wrote a letter to our teacher and said, 'Sorry', and she said, 'That's all right' (interview, 14.6.00).

He then drew a parallel with a time when he had written a similar letter to his mother; he felt that both his mother and his teacher had been pleased by the action because it showed that the children were being kind and thoughtful. But there was one child in this school who felt there was some considerable difference between home values and those of the school:

Gita: ... it's quite difficult. Cos when you come home and if you be naughty at school and if you get a letter home, your parents might smack you, like really hard. But at school, the people like the teachers don't smack you ...[It's] strange ... cos in the morning you be at home and then you come to school and then it's a bit different and then when you go home it's a bit different there as well.
Int: Is it different for you, too?
Hari: No, it's just like home ... cos you have to do work every day ... [like] Maths. I have these books (interview, 14.6.00).

A little later, Gita returned to the subject of her family:

Gita: My family's changed a bit but it's still having these arguments and that. And still not listening to each other, still lots of arguments.
Int: How do you feel about that?
Gita: I feel quite like, I feel stuck in a cage.
Int: When you come here [to school], do you still feel stuck in a cage?
Gita: No ... I feel free like. At school you be different, I'm really convinced of that (interview, 14.6.00).

This powerful image of family as cage and school as the place of freedom, possibly away from fear of violence or arguments, can be related to Bailey's (1984, p.22) ideal of a liberal education where the child can be freed from the 'incestuous ties of clan and soil'. However

it is not an easy process; this child has said that it is *'difficult'* moving from one arena to the other, and she cites a sense of displacement as she does so.

Closely related to the theme of the ethos of the classroom is the way the teacher portrays the family during the course of lessons. We have seen that each teacher tried to convey positive thoughts about the family rather than to highlight the difficulties that may be encountered within family life. This suggests that they are unwilling to discuss or bring up negative aspects of family life in the course of their lessons. There may be a variety of reasons for this; anxiety about upsetting children who are having a difficult time at home, fear of opening up a discussion that could lead to potentially disturbing revelations, disinclination to encourage disclosures that might breach a family's privacy, or a personal wish to maintain some kind of distance from the children in the class. Teachers, after all, are not social workers; to become intimately acquainted with the nuances of each child's family life may present an intolerable emotional burden when combined with the stresses and demands of teaching. The following conversation with two of the girls in Lancaster school therefore makes an important contribution to the project by expressing an idea that is constantly bubbling beneath the surface; that teachers are almost exclusively positive about the family. When we were discussing different aspects of home-school relations, both Nancy and Emily remarked on the support that their parents give them regarding their school work. Nancy speaks here for both of them:

> *Nancy: Your parents are always trying to make you do better [at school] and that proves that they care (interview, 3.7.00).*

If parents were supportive of the school, the obvious question to ask was the extent to which their teacher was supportive of their families:

> *Int: What do you think your teacher says about the family?*
> *Emily: I reckon that she thinks that*
> *Nancy (interrupting): She thinks it's really nice, nice to have. Whenever she says like, 'Who would you tell your problems to?' the whole class says, 'My mum or my dad, brothers and sisters', and go on like that. And um I always thought that teachers always tried to make you think that your mum would always be there for you.*
> *Emily: Or your dad.*

Int: ... What makes you think that?
Nancy: Cos um well whenever they talk about, like about Victorian childhood, whenever they talk about bad parents and those things, they always say, 'Compare that to your parents now and what they're like now', so it makes you think, 'Yeah, my parents are like that'. It's like teachers are trying to make you think that.
Int: Do you think your teachers are right?
Emily: Yeah, definitely.
Int: Is there anything your teacher has said that about the family that you disagree with?
Nancy: Not really. Cos we never say anything bad about family, it's always good things. It always reminds me of my family. All of my family are pretty close ...
Emily: My family's close as well ... (interview, 3.7.00).

This idea was articulated more forcefully by Robert from Montague school. Once again we were talking about home-school relations; Robert had mentioned that his teacher was *'very good friends'* with his parents and that the family was talked about *'quite a bit but not much really'* in the classroom. The implication is that the family is simply there, in the background rather than something explicitly discussed at regular intervals, and his comment substantiates his teacher's notion that family is *'a friendly way to introduce things'*. I asked him what kind of image he thought his teacher had of the family when they did talk about it:

> *Robert: Um positive, sort of. That all families can get along if they try. Mind you, that's what everyone's trying to give the impression of ... Like no-one wants you to hate your family (interview, 12.7.00).*

There are three particularly salient features about these children. The first is that they all appeared to come from stable and loving homes in which they felt happy and secure; they spoke approvingly about their relationships with their parents, and while not denying that there could sometimes be conflict within family life, were confident that their parents loved them. As Robert said, *'you can just sort of feel it [love] in some way'*. The second feature is that all three were intelligent children who were emotionally literate; they all spoke freely and with considerable understanding of their own feelings, expressing themselves confidently and with a high degree of self-assurance. The third is that they felt comfortable with their teachers' portrayal of the family, for it was close to their own image; Robert's

teacher was a close family friend, and Nancy and Emily commented that conversations about the family made them think of their own. Other children tended to shrug or ignore the question when I asked them what they believed the teacher was trying to teach them about 'family'; these three were able to understand the question (a difficult one to express unambiguously) and to offer a coherent explanation of the image that they felt was being presented.

Another, related point was one brought up by one of the children in Egremont school after a lesson in which Mrs. Jones asked the class to list the words that made up their family environment. I asked the children involved with the project to consider what the teacher thought about the words that were used; what they felt the teacher believed about the family and what she might want them to say:

> *Int: When you gave a word like politeness [to the teacher], what did she say?*
> *Johnny: You have to be polite to your family and help them.*
> *Int: Do you think that's what she thinks?*
> *Asheed: Yeah.*
> *Int: Why do you think that?*
> *Asheed: Because like she wouldn't of thought it up. If she thought that in her family they should fight and things like that, then she would of brought that up, but she brought up kindness and caring and things like that (interview 11.2.00).*

The teacher, then, believed that 'kindness and caring' were central to family life. To continue this train of thought, I asked the children if they thought that the teacher had anything in mind when she wanted them to write down ways in which they could improve their home environments. All shrugged or replied '*Dunno*' except Asheed:

> *Asheed: Yeah, like not silly things like I should fight and things like that. She wants good things written down, like what she said, 'When I was little I threw my coat down', and things like that. You can improve that but if you said by fighting, you can't improve it, so she's looking forward to the good things, not silly things (interview, 11.2.00).*

This little girl was bright and articulate, and it may be that the messages that she had picked up were unrepresentative of the class as a whole – but, as every child gave a similar example of how he or she was going to improve the family environment, it is more likely

that Asheed expressed something that the others had not consciously thought through. Asheed can see that her teacher believes family to be a good thing and that it revolves around positive emotions; that each family member has a responsibility to make the home environment as pleasant as possible. The implication is, in Robert's words, '*that all families can get along if they try'*.

8iii: Negative Thoughts on Family Life

Once again, I shall separate the field work from the three schools. As we have seen, both the content and the style of the lessons varied between the teachers, and I have highlighted the similarities between the children's reactions in the last section. In this section I shall concentrate on the negative thoughts that the lessons provoked in the children, both towards themselves as family members, as well as to their own and other families.

At Egremont school Johnny, Gita and Asheed were fluent and articulate in what they said while the other three were relatively silent about the impact of the lessons on their thought processes. It is possible that this could be linked to the fact that they were speaking to me in English - for most the second language - about something that was lived in their mother tongues. However as there were native English speakers who were just as reticent in other schools, it is equally possible that they were simply unwilling or unable to discuss their thoughts. Thus Mizan, Hari and Rajinder contributed relatively little to the interviews; they were content for the large part to listen to the three who were more voluble, making occasional comments but rarely volunteering their own thoughts without being asked first. Mizan was also absent for two out of the three sessions. There was evidence in the interviews after first lesson - about the Ghanaian child - that the two girls Gita and Asheed could step back from their family life and observe their own practices critically. After suggesting that the Ghanaian girl might go to school at weekends, they began to reflect on their own weekends:

Asheed: Sometimes if you get bored and you get sick with holidays and you stay at home, all you do is go out, stay at home ... and waste your money and things like that. But in that country you could do loads of things, you could work. But what if your mother's already done all the work, done everything, all you could do is watch TV ...
Gita: It would make [life] much more interesting cos television is not your life. I mean you could do much more interesting things than watch television ...
Asheed: You know like, they pass the time, they don't waste time ... and we just be lazy and we just watch TV.
Gita: And they've got a lot of work to do, it's like they pass their time. She's right, they pass their time. When we pass our time, the passing gets really stupid because all we're doing is watching television and television can get so boring (interview 10.11.99).

This process of critical appraisal was continued in the interview after the second lesson. This was strongly related to 'family'; having introduced the theme of the environment in an earlier lesson, Mrs. Jones continued the idea into the home environment and how it may be improved. She began the lesson with quiet reading and then asked the children to sit in a circle in front of her. She asked them to tell her what made up their family environment, writing the suggestions on the board as they were called out. With almost every idea that was offered, she made a comment; to 'love', she said *'That's a really good one'*; to 'hard work', she said *'Yeah, these are some great ones'*; to 'you', she commented:

> *Yes, you're right at the centre, so your family life radiates around you (field notes, 11.2.00).*

The next suggestions included kindness, helping, care and politeness, to which she replied:

> *I'm not sure we're always polite. Sometimes home is the place where we're not polite, isn't it? (field notes 11.2.00).*

When other words such as listening, justice, happiness, getting on and honesty had been made, she said:

> *We must have very nice homes, not even one slightly nasty thing. For all of you, home's perhaps the place where you can relax a bit. You don't have a home uniform, do you? You do take homework home, but no-one says, 'Right, it's playtime' (field notes 11.2.00).*

She then went on to consider that sometimes:

> *Despite having lovely mums and dads, things go wrong. Sometimes we fight, get cross with out brothers and sisters and our mums and dads. Think about your family environment and think about this (pointing to the board, on*

> *which she had written 'Ways I Can Improve'). Think about when things go wrong and think of one thing you could do to make things better (field notes 11.2.00).*

She then gave an example of her own childhood, in which she had dropped her coat on the floor instead of hanging it up, pointing out that hanging it up took just a second longer and prevented her mother from telling her off and getting her to pick it up. She then asked the five children who were present to talk to me while the others wrote down one way in which they could improve their home environment. This time I spoke first with Johnny, Rajinder and Asheed and then with Gita and Hari, as Mizan was absent.

In the first interview the children began to develop what they thought of as 'good' ideas, but Asheed brought the conversation round to other aspects of her family life:

> *Asheed: Like sometimes you get angry with your parents and like you slam the door or something like that .. And sometimes you swear at them ... You swear at your mum and then if you die one day, you get punished for it ... by God ... You have to do good things if you don't want to get punished (interview 11.2.00).*

Clearly this lesson had provoked some thought; she later commented that she would try to improve her own home environment by *'not slamming doors'*. Rajinder commented that *'sometimes you fight with your brothers and sisters'*; Gita that her room was a mess, while Hari suggested that:

> *Hari: You could do dusting and you could do it and give your mum a surprise. And then your mum will give you pocket money (11.2.00).*

As might be expected after such a lesson, the children's emphasis was on self-criticism; how they could behave in such a way as to reduce conflict or improve relationships within home life. As Gita remarked:

> *Gita: I'm going to behave differently because you know sometimes I just can't be bothered to do anything and this [lesson] reminded me of what I used to do at home instead. I used to ... play with my brother ... [this lesson was interesting] because it was about your own family and your own self, you get to know a lot about your family. You get some more information, how to behave with your family and that, it's quite interesting (11.2.00).*

This can be contrasted with her comment made later in the year but cited in the previous section that she feels *'free'* at school and *'caged'* at home; it may be that this lesson has helped her to think of ways in which she 'can improve' and has offered hope that family life could, indeed, get better. But there was one point when the discussion with Johnny, Asheed and Rajinder moved to families more generally and provided a less optimistic reaction to the lesson:

> *Asheed: Sometimes you know families turn out to be a disaster.*
> *Rajinder: Like the DiMarco family.*
> *Asheed: Like when the dad dies and in like EastEnders I watch and sometimes they cry ...*
> *Johnny: Some children, their mum and dad don't treat them right, start hitting them and like they don't care where they go or what they do ... And their mum and dad tell them to go out if they've been really naughty, go out it you want to be so. Go out and don't come back ... And she doesn't mean it really but that happens and it's really sad ... (interview 11.2.00).*

While it is not clear whether Johnny is talking about fictional or real families, all three of these children recognise that family life can be difficult. The lesson triggered other thoughts for Asheed, who, when the discussion moved to poor people, said:

> *Asheed: They've got no homes and sometimes I, you know, they don't get. Like, you know, if your mum, she has other children and she be hugging that other child and that other child, aah. My mum likes that other child more than me, she likes my sister more than me. That's what I think when my mum hugs my brother, I think she doesn't like me, she likes my brother more (11.2.00).*

This is clearly not a comfortable thought, indicated by her incoherence when introducing the subject. It is possible that the topic of 'improving your home environment' has caused her to reflect on difficulties within her home and brought unwelcome thoughts about her mother's relationship with her brother to the fore; perhaps Asheed's family life does not 'radiate' around her but rather her little brother. She returned to this thought later in the interview:

> *Asheed: I think differently about my mum, I don't like my mum ... I do like her but I don't like her much ...*
> *Int: Why?*
> *Johnny: (interrupting) I love my mum and dad.*
> *Asheed: Because she doesn't trust me. I don't like that ...*
> *Johnny: Do you lie?*

Asheed: A lot, yeah ... Miss, because my baby brother was born, that my mum lost interest in all of us.
Johnny: (incredulous) She looked after you and then she cared about him?
Asheed: Yeah, like that. She always ... if I fell down or something, she just used to say, 'Oh, there'll be a plaster in the cupboard, go get it'. But if my other brother fell down or something she'd go, 'Aah, are you all right?' and things like that.
Int: How did that make you feel?
Asheed: Upset.
Johnny: Angry
Asheed: Yeah.
Johnny: Cos your mum doesn't care about you ...
Asheed: She does care about me, but not as much (interview, 11.2.00).

This presents a picture of a home life that could not be tweaked by such things as Asheed hanging up her coat, and she seems to have a number of complaints; that her mother prefers her brother, that she is not trusted, that she is offered little comfort when she has hurt herself. She also offers the honest assessment of her own behaviour; that she lies *'a lot'*, although no further comment is offered. Yet at the same time, Asheed seemed to draw a measure of comfort from the solidarity shown by Johnny in his astonishment that she should be treated in such a way. These are issues that are beyond the reach of an hour's lesson in 'improving the home environment', and may well illustrate part of the cause of Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Smith's ambivalence to introducing family matters into lessons.

In Lancaster school, two of the lessons provoked negative thoughts about the family. In the first, the children were given a sheet about the Hindu festival of Holi, and asked to read from it in turn. It was an eleven year old boy's account of the Holi festival in London and described how children change into their oldest clothes and go into the back garden where they have a water fight with bottles of coloured water. It finished with a brief description of the religious significance and meaning of the festival to Hindu believers.

When the children had finished reading the extract, Mrs. Parker commented on how the festival allows people to spend time with their families. She then drew a parallel with the carnival time in the West Country and recounted how, when she was a child, her family

would gather together to watch the procession and then walk home to eat jacket potatoes in front of the fire. She finished by saying that, for her, carnival time gave her:

> *Mrs Parker: ... a lovely memory of me and my family sitting round in front of the fire, eating our jacket potatoes (field notes, 18.10.99).*

The children were invited to tell their stories of the local carnival that had taken place the previous weekend, with the teacher choosing one person in turn to talk. As the class became increasingly noisy, she stopped them and reminded them that they needed to listen, *'not just to adults, but to each other'*. After twenty minutes, she finished the conversation and asked first the girls and then the boys to come and talk to me. The girls, as their teacher, felt that carnival was a happy time and had no thoughts that were negative, either about the family or about such family occasions. The boys however started talking about the happy associations that their teacher had with the carnival, linked these ideas to Christmas and agreed that the teacher's image of this type of family occasion was positive. Yet they also felt that the happy image of the family that was being put forward made it difficult to talk about less happy times, or families that were unhappy:

> *Richard: You can tell about nice things [in the class discussions], but it's not good to talk about bad things.*
> *Kieran: No, not everyone has happy families in mind (interview 19.10.99).*

This comment triggered thoughts with all three boys about marriage and its meaning:

> *Andrew: It's bad to get married for money.*
> *Kieran: No, because if you marry for money then you can't really love them for true.*
> *Richard: Yeah like you've got to stay together because in a marriage [service] it says in matrimony you love each other for ever and ever.*
> *Kieran: My mum and dad's been married for eleven years now and that's good ...*
> *Andrew: When you marry, you can't just do it for money cos it's cheating. You should marry to be together and to have babies (interview 19.10.99).*

Andrew in particular felt very strongly about this, and repeated several times that marriage should not be based on money, that couples should stay together if they had children:

Andrew: Say they got married and they had babies, then they might divorce and the baby's about one but then the baby gets really scared, wouldn't it?
Int: Why?
Andrew: Cos if the dad lived away, then the baby'd have to drive a long way to see him (interview 19.10.99).

This theme returned in the next lesson I observed, which was a Religious Education lesson that centred on rites of passage. Mrs. Parker gave examples of christenings, weddings and funerals as the ones that are seen most often in the West Country, and asked the children to share their 'rites of passage' experiences. As they raised different points, Mrs. Parker wrote key words on the blackboard as an aid to writing a short piece of work later. Those that were mentioned included:

> Church, tears, love, pews, people, relatives, baptised, coffins, bridesmaids, flowers, dead people, registry office, crematorium, graveyard, vicar, family, friends, rings (when you get married), maid of honour, confetti, bouquet.

As usual, Mrs. Parker allowed each child to relate his or her experiences without interrupting or allowing others to interrupt their story. She made little comment other than to agree that these were 'family' times, to point out that you could shed tears of happiness of grief, that these were times of love, both for the living and the dead; a contrast with the emotive delivery of the previous lesson. Although more implicitly, the family was again portrayed as a unit that shared happy times; sadness was present when somebody died but the grief stemmed from the loss of a loved one rather than anything malign.

Andrew was away the following day when I returned to interview the children, but the other two boys repeated much the same sentiments as in the previous interview. I asked them what they thought the ceremonies might mean:

Richard: Special things like sad.
Kieran: Special.
Int: What's special?
Kieran: For the wedding cos you see how long you can last in a wedding, like, for a couple.
Richard: You can get divorced.
Int: When you say see how long you can last, what do you mean by that?
Richard: Cos you're with the one you like.
Kieran: Or love. Cos most of the time adults break up ...
Int: Do they always?
Richard: No, not always.

Kieran: Yeah. Like some couples break up, get back together, break up, get back together and then stay but ... some couples break up for ever ...
Int: What do you think of the ceremony of marriage?
Richard: Waste of time.
Kieran: Yeah. Like what's the point in spending all that money just on the marriage.
Richard: When it's likely that they'll break up anyway.
Kieran: Yeah. So what's the point of getting together.
Int: Why do you think people do?
Richard: Cos they like the people, or love them.
Kieran: They probably love them, but they have so many arguments or disagreements that it doesn't get sorted out (interview 19.6.00).

The boys, then, were not distracted from what they perceived as the realities of marriage, which - although love was mentioned - seemed to include arguments and divorce rather than the unity that was suggested by the teacher. This feeling of isolation rather than togetherness was seen again later in the interview; this particular lesson had been part of a series of Religious Education lessons that had focused on journeys, and at one stage Mrs. Parker had asked the children to write their autobiography as their own personal journey. She had asked the children to think of someone they could turn to whenever they had emotional or practical problems – to think of someone who was important to them. For Richard, this clearly provoked some uncomfortable thoughts:

> *Richard: I didn't write anyone ... I don't turn to my family cos they just wouldn't listen to me. And I won't talk to the teacher cos I'd be embarrassed. And I don't know anyone I would talk to, that I can ... I've never thought about even turning to someone so it would make me feel better ... [in the end] I thought of friends (interview 19.6.00).*

Andrew however provided an interesting response to these lessons in our final interview. He was rather unusually quiet, and as we talked further he told me about the difficult atmosphere at home caused by his parents' arguments; this was obviously weighing heavily on his mind and he wanted to talk about it. He stressed the importance of talking about problems:

> *Andrew: [I asked my parents] to calm down a bit and instead of fighting, just talk it over ... it's important to talk because like you get [to know people]. Talking makes you, helps you sort things out and all that ... it's like part of the whole marriage thing really, talking ... I don't want to be like that [my parents]. I just want a nice family and a nice house, somebody that doesn't like fighting or anything (interview 3.7.00).*

For all three of these boys, these lessons produced some tension between the teacher's presentation of family life and their own apparently less pleasurable experiences. While Andrew may be responding positively to this image in wanting a future life with *'somebody that doesn't like fighting'*, and regards *'talking'* as fundamentally important to *'the whole marriage thing'*, the other two in this instance seem to regard this rather romantic portrayal of family life as unrealistic. Yet it is worth remembering that they both responded positively to the lesson on Victorian childhood, and made a favourable comparison with contemporary family life. And the point that talking was an important part of family life was made independently by each of the children in this school during the course of the year; as Kieran said, it's important *'to get it out into the open instead of hiding your feelings'*. But the contrast between the boys and the girls was otherwise noticeable; the girls tended to think favourably about family issues at all times and were happy to accept the teacher's view without criticism. Although divorce was mentioned within the context of talking about marriage, Lucy gave a very matter-of-fact account of what was likely to happen:

> *Lucy: But sometimes you won't be happy [when you get married], cos my mum got married and then she got divorced because she was just fed up with it. Cos sometimes you fall out, don't you, and you just need a divorce (interview 19.6.00).*

While the first lesson on Victorian leisure in Montague school had captured the imagination of the pupils, this enthusiasm was markedly absent from the second lesson which was concerned with family responsibility. For this topic the children ordered a series of tasks into age-suitable categories and then wrote a letter to their parents asking permission to do something that had hitherto been denied them. It produced little critical thought and one of the boys seemed to think the exercise was a formality rather than something meaningful:

> *Eric: [I wrote] about staying up later ... I found it pretty hard though, cos I think I stay up late enough actually ... [I think] that if they (parents) don't let you out very late or they don't let you stay up late, it's just because they care about you and they want to do what's best for you (interview, 26.6.00).*

Robert however showed some frustration with what he considered to be overprotective parents; he had written about riding his bicycle to school instead of being driven:

> *Robert: ... they (parents) said, 'No, it's too dangerous, we'd have to cycle with you', and it's really annoying cos they don't trust me ... they're a bit too protective of me and too much protection gets annoying. Cos you know you can do something but they just don't listen to you (interview 12.7.00).*

But this was not a serious complaint and he later remarked that a family was there '*to keep you safe*'. This subject was not one that engaged the children's interest in the way that the Victorian leisure had, and their responses to my questions were brief to the point of being monosyllabic; when I asked the children what thoughts this letter may have triggered, one boy summed up seven of the children's replies when he said '*I dunno. I just did it*'. Negative thoughts about the family therefore seemed to be provoked when there were discussions about emotional issues in family life; Mrs. Jones' lesson on improving the family environment, Michelle's emotive presentation of Victorian childhood together with her lesson on rites of passage all encouraged the children to think about their feelings and emotions within the context of their own family lives. Other lessons, with a less affective content, did not appear to have the same effect.

<u>Summary of Key Points</u>:

1. The presentation of the subject matter can lead the children to make favourable contrasts between other family lives and their own. Two of the teachers used emotive or evaluative remarks within the course of their comparative or historical lessons to cause the children to reflect on the affective quality of their own lives, while the third teacher's focus on the material tended to lead her pupils to do the same.

2. Many of the children felt a strong accord between relationship values of home and school although one girl in particular felt that the two environments were different, adding that she felt 'free' at school.

3. A minority of children expressed the idea that their teachers were uniformly positive about family life; one remarked that teachers 'always tried to make you think that your mum would always be there for you'.

4. Negative reflections either generally or on individual pupils' own family life seemed to be prompted by discussions on emotional issues when the pupils were asked to consider how they felt about their own family relationships.

Chapter 9: Secondary Schools' Data

In the next three chapters I present the research data from the secondary schools. In each case I begin with a brief description of the theme of the lesson(s); I then present the teachers' own views of their intentions and their pupils' reactions. The final chapter of this part is concerned with the pupils' reflections on 'family' within their different lessons.

9i: *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet lent itself particularly well to this project because of the tempestuous nature of the relationship between Juliet and her father, the coldness of her mother and the romance of her relationship with Romeo; as most of the teachers remarked, Shakespeare addressed problems that have a contemporary resonance, suggesting that this was a contributory factor to the pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the play. *Romeo and Juliet* allowed the pupils to explore some family relationships in the past, but, unlike in the primary schools, they were encouraged to reflect on the quality of those relationships, the motives behind the characters' actions and the consequences of those actions.

During the course of the observations, I wrote down the form that the lesson took and the comments that each of the six teachers made during the course of the hour. As I observed one teacher taking two separate groups, this meant a total of seven different classes; seventeen pupils from the project were observed because two of the girls in Sylvester school were studying a different Shakespeare play. Each teacher had his or her own different style, personality, level of teaching experience, attitude towards and interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*; some had taught it innumerable times, while others were relatively new to teaching it to this particular year group. The two teachers in the West Midlands were tired of the play; one remarked that she had pulled it apart so many times that it had ceased to excite her, while the other commented that he had never really liked the play in the first place. None of their pupils seemed to be aware of this; most said

how much the teachers appeared to enjoy the play and - notably - one said how well her teacher had brought the play to life for her. Of the four other teachers, Mr. Willow was unenthusiastic about the play, saying it lacked the depth of other Shakespearean works while Mrs. Black, Mrs. Beech and Mrs. Green all enjoyed it. When this divergence between the teachers is combined with the difference in ability, interest in literature and family background of the pupils, there is scope for a wide range of lesson delivery and pupil interpretation of the play. What is interesting therefore is the convergence of opinion between the pupils on the family and relationship issues that they believed the play raises.

With his low-ability group, Mr. Holder would write notes on the board which the pupils would copy down; they read parts of the play out loud, and Mr. Holder's main preoccupation was to help pupils understand the meaning of the words and to grasp the main events of the scene. When I observed his lessons with another group, the pace was noticeably quicker and he spent more time interpreting the actions and commenting on the characters, sometimes humorously and sometimes more seriously. I also observed two 'top' sets, with Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Beech. Mrs. Bennett's class read the play, discussed and wrote notes on the characters and then read *It's My Life* (Robert Leeson) as a more modern contrast to *Romeo and Juliet*. Mrs. Bennett's interpretation was far from dry; she remarked that she *'liked to jazz it up a bit, make it more interesting for them'* (field notes, 27.1.00) and she did this through making amusing, slightly exaggerated comments on the characters and through her own laconic sense of humour, both of which were appreciated by the pupils. Mrs. Beech placed much emphasis on emotions and encouraged her class to explore the feelings of the characters in the scene. They acted it out, with one pupil saying the words of the text and another speaking what s/he felt were that person's underlying thoughts; they drew a graph of each characters' emotions as they progressed through the scene and Mrs. Beech frequently made comments on or asked about emotions during their general class discussions.

Of the remaining three classes, Mrs. Black's and Mr. Willow's read the scene and then acted it out in contemporary language, while Mrs. Green - who had been absent through illness for much of the middle part of the term, with the result that I was only able to observe one lesson - focused strongly on answering a question from the previous year's SAT's paper. Both Mrs. Black and Mrs. Green encouraged discussion about the characters by asking questions about their emotions and feelings and, at times, challenging the pupils' interpretation of events; at the end of each improvisation in Mrs. Black's class, there would be further discussion of motives and actions. In Mr. Willow's class there was less free discussion and a more structured approach to note-taking and written work; he focused less on the emotions than the two women teachers but still offered comments on characters' feelings and motives.

One of the striking aspects of these lessons in comparison to those in the primary schools was the extent to which all the teachers - to a greater or lesser degree - encouraged the pupils, as Mrs. Beech said, *'to get inside the heads'* (field notes, 27.2.99) of the characters; to understand their dilemmas and the motives behind their actions. Generally they aroused sympathy for the characters by using emotive language to make their points, as the each of the following examples show:

> *Mrs. Beech: He's [Capulet] come in, all puffed-up with his own importance, thinking she'll [Juliet] fall over with gratitude. When she doesn't, how does he feel? (field notes, 29.2.00).*

> *Mrs. Black: How would you feel if suddenly this loving, reasonable father - she's still very young - suddenly becomes this image of anger. Think of the words: carrion. That's vile. If she hasn't been disobedient, is this not extreme? (field notes, 27.3.00).*

> *Mr. Willow: Now we're going to play happy families (ironically). Think about the feelings of Juliet; how would you feel if your mother talked about bumping Romeo off and then marrying you off? (field notes, 20.3.00).*

> *Mrs. Green: Yes, Lord Capulet's prone to psychotic outbursts (field notes, 28.3.00).*

> *Mr. Holder: Lady Capulet I dislike more each time I read this play - she's a sour old thing. If you say her line, you can hear the sarcasm in her voice (field notes, 23.3.00).*

Mrs. Bennett: What kind of a son do you think he [Romeo] is? (field notes, 2.3.00).

However each of the teachers was careful to suggest that there is more than one point of view and can be summed up in this case by one example from Mrs. Beech:

Mrs. Beech: Are you going to analyse him [Capulet] as an overbearing pig of a man or are you going to give him more sympathy? (field notes, 1.3.00).

The prime concern of each of the teachers was thus to give the pupils an understanding of each characters' feelings, the better to understand the motives behind their behaviour and to add enjoyment to the pupils' reading. However it must not be forgotten that the pupils needed to be able to write a critical review of the play in their SAT's examinations, and both Mr. Holder and Mr. Willow mentioned that as being of primary importance to the lessons, particularly with the less able children who found the language difficult. But from the point of view of the project, these lessons were opening up complex and interesting issues to do with family relationships and the values that underpinned them while broadening the children's experience of 'family'. In the following section, I present an analytical account of the themes that were most frequently mentioned in the interviews with the children and the adults; there are occasional references to the observations if they exemplify a point. These themes are firstly, Juliet's family relationships, secondly Romeo and Juliet's relationship and thirdly, the message of the play; the moral of the story, if you like.

9ii: Family Relationships

During the lessons the teachers all pointed out that the relationships between Juliet, her parents and the Nurse were 'typical of their time'; the distance between Juliet and her mother, Lord Capulet's authoritarian behaviour and the closeness between the Nurse and Juliet were regarded as within the usual pattern of relationships in wealthy Elizabethan families. At the same time, both teachers and pupils recognised that many of the problems

experienced by Juliet had a contemporary feel; the teachers spoke of the children's ability to relate to Capulet's anger, to a parent 'pulling rank', to disagreements over adolescent relationships, and to Juliet's attitude. In her interview, Mrs. Black talked about the independence of Juliet and how it had a contemporary feel:

> *Mrs. Black: ... the way that she rears up against her parents and then the nurse, you know, in the end when she's had enough. It's you know, 'Sod all of you', isn't it? 'I'll sort this out myself' (interview 6.6.00).*

Another similarity suggested by both the male teachers was the tendency of fathers to make important decisions in contemporary family life:

> *Mr. Willow: ... isn't that what children do? Say, 'Mother, can you tell dad', so mum goes to dad and they try to work it out, to reconcile it (field notes, 22.3.00).*

Yet another, suggested by Mr. Willow, is feuding between families:

> *Mr. Willow: ... some of these kids are brought up in the same way, that some of the families that they live with, they can't talk to or they can't speak to or they've got to be nasty to because of something that happened with the parents or the grandparents, we still see it here (interview 6.4.00).*

The idea of an arranged marriage was more relevant to the children in the West Midlands than in the West Country and Mrs. Bennett suggested that this gave credibility to the rest of the play for many of the Asian pupils who had arranged marriages as part of the background to their lives. As we shall see, it prompted the two Asian girls in the project to talk about their own parents' arranged marriages and how they felt about the whole idea.

When we spoke about the quality of family relationships, the four women teachers all commented on Lady Capulet's lack of maternal feeling; Mrs. Bennett said that there was a *'sourness about the mother - there's something quite unpleasant about the way she speaks to Juliet'* (interview, 5.4.00), while Mrs. Black suggested that Juliet was *'yearning for that contact ... and that close mother-child relationship that one would expect her to have'* (interview, 6.6.00). And, while Capulet was seen as initially indulgent to Juliet, it was an indulgence based on obedience that was quickly dissipated when she refused to do his bidding; he was the patriarch who firstly wanted to show the world that he was in

control and secondly, could not bear to be crossed. All six of the teachers condemned the lack of compassion between parents and child but regarded the relationship between Juliet and the Nurse as more complicated; Mrs. Beech argued that there is great affection between them but the Nurse ultimately owes her living to Capulet and therefore has divided loyalties, while Mrs. Black suggested that the Nurse was destructive in the way she encouraged the relationship between Romeo and Juliet. However there was no unanimous opinion over the complexity of these relationships; Mr. Holder argued that it was *'fairly easy to see what's going on'* while Mr. Willow, at the opposite end of the spectrum, said that the point he wanted to get over to the children was that it was *'a complex play'* with a series of difficult relationships. Finally, three of the teachers spoke about the lack of communication being fundamental to the problems that the characters in the play experienced; of those three, Mrs. Black believed that it was the patriarchal structure of Elizabethan society that precluded intimate discussion rather than personal failings of the characters.

For the pupils however there was one centrally important issue within the family relationships: the general unfairness in the way Juliet's parents treated her. They, too, regarded the relationship between Juliet and her mother as unsatisfactory, one girl calling Lady Capulet *'a bit of a cow'* and another referring to her as *'like the car trader of the family'*, a phrase clearly not intended as a compliment. Several thought that Capulet was *'bossy'*, and one suggested that *'he just thought he owned her [Juliet] like a dog'*. But the real problem for the pupils was the lack of respect for Juliet's feelings and the consequent lack of freedom in how she lived her life as the following comments show:

> *Ryan: ... they don't really care about her, they just let the nurse sort her out. They just care about what people think about them most of the time ... I don't think it's right. I think they should look after her sometimes as well, just to show something (interview 11.4.00, Trevelyan).*

> *Zoe: I think they [Lord and Lady Capulet] want to get rid of her really to a husband so they can get on with their lives and stuff (interview 17.3.00, Trevelyan).*

Rebecca: I don't think it's fair like how parents choose their husbands (interview 10.4.00, Sylvester).

Natasha: That's really tight, it's like her life in the first place and then he tells her to do something and she doesn't want to do it, so he goes mental (interview 12.4.00, Sylvester).

Martha: You should be able to love someone for who they are and not what they are, what culture or whatever. You should have that freeness, that choice (interview 30.3.00, Rochester)

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> *Rochelle: I think Juliet was pushed in a certain direction. Her parents wanted her to be what they wanted; they didn't give her no choices, they just wanted her to be what they wanted. They should have wanted something completely different ... everybody should have their own peace of mind and everybody should be allowed to make their choices in life (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

Within this blanket feeling of outrage, three different strands of objection to the Capulets' treatment of Juliet can be detected. The pupils feel that firstly, parents should care both physically and emotionally for their children; secondly that parents should listen to their children's point of view, and thirdly, that children should be allowed the freedom to make their own choices, and, therefore, their own mistakes; as Laurence said *'You need to experience everything for yourself'*. Yet at the same time three pupils from Rochester school and one from Trevelyan showed a certain amount of compassion for Capulet, who was seen to be doing his best for Juliet. This time Martha sums up these pupils' opinions:

> *Martha: ... he's trying to do his best for her but because she's not accepting his best he thinks, 'Oh well, I'll make it as hard as I can for her'. I can understand him being like that (interview 30.3.00, Rochester).*

Some of the others however saw the lack of personal interest and restricted lifestyle as contributing in a significant way to, in Laurence's words, Juliet's *'wild side coming out'*:

> *Charlotte: I think she was quite lonely until she met Romeo, before she only had the nurse.*
> *Zoe: She didn't see her parents that much and she didn't have any brothers or sisters ...*
> *Charlotte: She didn't have a life did she? She was stuck in the house.*
> *Anna: Boring.*
> *Charlotte: And church. And I can see how she fell in love because she wanted some excitement in her life (interview 17.3.00, Trevelyan).*

The Capulets, then, had what was coming; they ignored Juliet and so she understandably sought love and excitement elsewhere. Rebecca from Sylvester saw this as *'just doing what felt right for her'* and Ryan thought that she married because her parents *'don't care about her much'*. But this did not mean that these pupils were unaware of the parents' point of view, for it was noticeable that nine of the pupils believed that Juliet should have talked to her parents about marrying Romeo before the ceremony took place, two thought they should have told their parents after the event and three others believed that they should have sought help - and by implication, mediation - from another adult. There was thus a strong sense of honesty and duty towards parents that overrode the feelings of passion and excitement that the romance generated. Laurence expressed this idea succinctly:

> *Laurence: They rushed into it, if they'd taken it slowly and Juliet had said, 'Mum, you know, I like Romeo', she would have like gone ballistic at first, but then eventually, like weeks, months, whatever it took for the families to resolve, you know, for them to live happily for ever ... But the way they done it was over the edge. I mean they rushed it, they went behind their parents' backs ... I do actually think that if they'd talked to their parents then it could have been resolved (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

These pupils bring in another value that has not yet been mentioned; trust. Trust is reciprocal, forged through openness and communication to generate understanding of both parties' actions and feelings; because your parents trust you, you can trust them to help you straighten things out once they understand and have got used to the situation. Rochelle sums up the general feeling:

> *Rochelle: [Talking is important] so you've both got an understanding, parents and children. You've got understandings of what you want and things like that ... as long as you've got understanding parents they'll help you through it (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

The issue of Juliet's marriage is therefore not clear cut; her action was understandable because she sought love which her parents were unable or unwilling to provide, yet she should not have acted in such a way without either discussing the matter with her parents beforehand or owning up to it after the marriage had taken place. Charlotte expressed how she thought Juliet must have felt:

> *Charlotte: I think it was very hard for her, her father was like very strong and I'd not want to argue with him. If that was my dad I'd just be like, 'Yes okay' ... [But] she must have felt so guilty when she like married Romeo and then she found out she had to marry Paris (interview 17.3.00, Sylvester).*

Others talked about her '*confusion*' because of the conflicting emotions arising from obligations to her parents, the prospect of being disinherited, the Nurse's betrayal, Romeo's banishment and the threat of a second marriage in a few days' time. Interestingly, although most of the pupils talked about the Nurse being 'more like a real mother' than Lady Capulet, they gave her little further attention in our conversations and preferred to focus on the relationships between mother, father and child. Rebecca however found a romantic yet pragmatic reason for the Nurse's behaviour:

> *Rebecca: I think the Nurse is trying to save her job and like to protect Juliet as well. Cos now Romeo's been banished, she wants Juliet to be happy and find another love like, to be happy. Cos there's no point in loving someone you're probably never going to see again (interview 10.4.00, Sylvester).*

We shall see more of the combination of a romantic outlook with a strong practical streak in the next section. For the moment we can see that *Romeo and Juliet* gave the pupils an opportunity to talk about some of the values that they felt are fundamental to family life; examination of the thoughts and feelings of the different characters in the play gave rise to consideration of the potential complexity and depth of parent-child relationships, and to issues surrounding management of those relationships. While the teachers attempted to present each character's side of the story, the pupils largely focused on the injustice of the Capulets' treatment of Juliet. This indignation was tempered by a feeling that honesty was indeed the best policy in family matters; Juliet had stepped beyond the bounds of acceptable behaviour by being seriously deceitful towards her parents. Let us now turn to their opinions on the relationship between Romeo and Juliet.

9iii: The Relationship Between Romeo and Juliet

The teachers had little to say about the relationship between Romeo and Juliet apart from to comment on Juliet's naivety at the beginning of the play which was followed by *'pushiness'* from the time of the balcony scene. Three argued that she *'craved love'*; Mrs. Beech said that she was *'driven by a passion she couldn't control'* yet roundly condemned her for her deceit in marrying behind her parents' backs:

> *Mrs. Beech: Well, she's been incredibly deceitful ... she's done everything they [parents] would have disapproved of and been disappointed with you know and as a parent oneself one could only ... condemn her for that really (interview 14.3.00).*

Mrs. Bennett argued that Romeo was fickle, a womaniser, and made her view known to the class at one point by commenting:

> *Mrs. Bennett: ... and then he kisses her, just like that. He's a bit of a fast mover, our Romeo, a pretty smooth operator (field notes, 27.1.00).*

Mrs. Bennett talked about the romance of the play and how the girls tended to enjoy that; she also commented that nowadays young people of Juliet's age would not place themselves in her position because they are *'more knowing'*. There is evidence of both of these outlooks in the interviews with the children, although not necessarily gender based; both boys and girls saw the romance in the situation and/or had romantic views of the type of relationship between Romeo and Juliet. Martha, for instance, called Juliet *'lucky'* and said she could understand *'how empty'* Juliet felt when Romeo was not *'there for her'*. Rochelle commented that she liked the part where:

> *Rochelle: ... they thought they'd got no way out unless they die and then I think they could be together like, in heaven (laughs) (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

Both boys and girls talked about the *'deep love'* between Romeo and Juliet, and David commented that:

> *David: They were truthful and they were always like talking to one another and not keeping any secrets from one another (interview 10.4.00, Sylvester).*

Truthful in this context presumably means to one another rather than to the adult characters in the play, but it is nonetheless an approving, romantic view of the relationship between the teenagers. Soraya was also taken by the idea of their love:

> *Soraya: ... the way they were tied together was really strong. They really loved each other (interview 5.4.00, Rochester).*

Yet this idea of romance was balanced in most cases by a rather prosaic attitude from both genders towards the lovers' conduct:

> *Laurence: It's just stupid in my opinion. Drunken. He could be really happy when he was drunk but when he was sober he was like the other way round. So she doesn't really know him, they don't know each other, so it was a bit of a risk (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*
>
> *Zoe: They meet one day and the next day they're married, they only spend one night together and stuff and I just don't think that's mature ... You can't fall in love in that time (interview 17.3.00, Trevelyan).*

Implicit within these statements is an awareness of the inherently risky nature of marriage (or its equivalent) and the pupils' assumption that a long-term relationship which has little foundation other than immediate sexual attraction is unlikely to last. When this outlook is combined with the majority view that the Capulets should have been told of Romeo and Juliet's impending marriage, it reinforces the point that Rochelle made earlier about the importance of communication. The ability to talk to parents and partner is central to developing an understanding of them and enhancing the capacity to build sustainable relationships; if you know your partner well, if you have the approval of your parents for your marriage and if all the lines of communication are open, then you are both reducing the risk of a long-term commitment and building a strong network of family relationships from which to draw support in times of trouble. The point is exemplified by Zoe, who thought that Juliet was *'a bit bossy'* and *'tarty'* - neither being appealing qualities - and that Juliet pushed the marriage to make the point that *'her parents couldn't rule her life'*. Juliet's action was thus a kind of point-scoring against her parents that had a destructive quality; she was marrying because of her negative feelings about her parents rather than her

positive love for Romeo. Zoe's rather flat statement that Romeo and Juliet were *'not mature'* is elaborated by Shamit who talks about the importance of self-awareness when embarking on a long-term relationship:

> *Shamit: She's fourteen and she's got married ... I'm fourteen now ... I want my life first and then I want to get settled down and get married ... I'm not saying that marriage will change me in any way, I mean I want to be myself first and then be with my partner (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

Shamit gives three reasons for not getting married at fourteen, all based around her immaturity; she wants to carry on her education which will enable her get a *'good job'* so she can support her child and her family, she wants to *'have fun and everything'* before she settles down and finally, she talks about commitment:

> *Shamit: ... your commitment, that could change ... It's not possible to commit myself to someone at fourteen (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

By having her 'life' first she feels that she will be sufficiently grown up to be able to commit herself to one person; by being herself first she will have developed her own identity before making that commitment. These comments are particularly interesting when it is considered that Shamit is expecting her parents to arrange a marriage for her in her early twenties; a meeting, perhaps, of western individualism with Asian notions of duty with strong undercurrents of romance and happy-ever-after.

Thus these pupils did not approve of the haste in which Romeo and Juliet were married. There are three fundamental points for their objection; that the couple have unresolved matters as regards their parents, they lack a well-founded knowledge of what makes the other tick, and they do not have sufficient maturity and self-knowledge to be able to cope with the emotional vicissitudes that marriage brings. On the other hand they recognise that the excitement of a passionate romance is in itself seductive, particularly in the absence of parental affection; they can see why she did it.

9iv: The Moral of the Story

Although most of the teachers believed that *Romeo and Juliet* was centrally about the dynamics of the relationships between and within families, there was a variety of interpretations concerning the deeper meaning of the play. Both the male teachers thought that the pupils could relate to the family ideas but not that the play had any significant message; both of them mentioned the SAT's as their primary objective rather than 'family', summed up by Mr. Willow:

> *Mr. Willow: We're looking at trying to get these kids through the SAT's. That is really important, that's more important in a way than the values that they're going to pick up about family life (interview, 6.4.00).*

For both Mrs. Black and Mrs. Beech the play showed the pupils about the difficulties that parents face:

> *Mrs. Black: I think it's interesting because it's one of the only texts ... where they actually see the parents' point of view in a situation very strongly. The difficulties of having teenagers as children ... I think it shows to young people concerns about children and the fact that it's complicated (interview, 6.6.00).*

As we have seen, the majority of the pupils would agree with this interpretation for they appeared to recognise that both Juliet and her parents had difficulties with the relationship and that each person played a part in its breakdown. For Mrs. Bennett the play was a *'direct reference'* to the *'problem of adolescence'* when contact could be difficult with parents, but the central issue was about facing up to big problems and to finding a solution, with the *'quick fix'* not necessarily being the right answer - again, something of which the pupils were conscious. For Mrs. Green it was about thinking carefully about decisions in the first place:

> *Mrs. Green: I think they learn from the play that they have to think carefully about decisions. Because if you like it's a kind of warning isn't it - if you don't think properly about what you're going to do, if you don't plan things ... this could happen to you (interview 12.6.00).*

This idea of a cautionary tale is similar to Mrs. Black's comment that the play was *'looking at people's roles and expectations within families'* and that the message was not to take these for granted:

> *Mrs. Black: Capulet took it for granted that Juliet would accept what he has declared she must do ... she expected her mother to support her and to stand by her and she didn't (interview 6.6.00).*

Finally, for Mrs. Beech the play was about the importance of communication:

> *Mrs. Beech: ... the feuding between the two families is what started the whole process off, the distance between Juliet and her parents led her to not being able to confide in them and therefore going behind their back. The anger that Lord Capulet expresses again results in a lost opportunity for Juliet to confide in them and it all ends in tragedy (interview 14.3.00).*

She did however comment that this was a *'glib'* interpretation, a point not shared by either Mrs. Bennett or Mrs. Black who both believed that talking was an important way of resolving problems.

The teachers said they were careful not to convey their own thoughts on the family relationships as they argued there was no right answer to how the characters' actions should be interpreted or to what kind of people they were. The pupils all said that this was so; they felt that they were given the opportunity to make their own minds up about the play and were not steered in any particular direction. What the teachers did try to convey however - apart from enjoyment of the play - was that their pupils should reflect on the actions, feelings and motives of the characters and on how each person was perceived by the others. Mrs. Bennett took this one stage further and thought that it might prompt some young people to reflect on their own image; Mrs. Green believed it might encourage children who spent relatively little time with their parents to think about the quality of their own family relationships. When this is combined with the resonance that all the teachers feel that the play has for young people, it is not unsurprising that in their interviews the pupils showed a lively interest in the family issues that they thought the play raised.

When the pupils considered the message that the play had for them, there was some appreciative reflection on their own family relationships in much the same style as the primary children:

> *Rochelle: ... I'm quite close to my mum and dad, they always let me have my own point of view (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

> *Michael: Be thankful that doesn't happen in my family (interview 10.4.00, Sylvester).*

All five of Mrs. Beech's pupils thought a little harder about this and agreed (in two separate interviews) that contemporary families were generally closer emotionally and that parents allowed their children more freedom. Alex thought this brought more responsibility:

> *Alex: ... because they [young people] weren't allowed out, they couldn't really do anything so it was very much a parent, adult-oriented world where all the decisions were mostly made by adults. Whereas now it's, young people quite often ... are helping in that they've got more responsibility now (interview 21.3.00, Trevelyan).*

While he was unable to develop this thought further, there are two directions in which it can be taken. One is the physical responsibility of the home; children and young people may have certain household tasks they have to perform at various intervals throughout the week. Another is the type of responsibility which comes with the more open and democratic relationships of these five young people's family lives; the responsibility of nourishing family ties through communication - of developing understanding through talking. Charlotte expressed it thus:

> *Charlotte: Lady Capulet just had a baby and gave it to the Nurse and she'd be like seeing her occasionally, like, 'Hello Juliet'. So she probably wouldn't know anything about her, what her favourite colour was (interview 17.3.00, Trevelyan).*

Zoe however argued that this was not always the case:

> *Zoe: I'm closer to my family but ... parents and children sometimes don't get involved and stuff, like it depends on their characters really, how they get on with each other (interview 17.3.00, Trevelyan)*

- a view that balances an ideal of close, loving family relationships with the reality that this is not always possible. While Ryan, the other Trevelyan pupil, thought that he had learned that *'it's better when families are closer'*, most of the other eleven pupils believed the message for them, too, was about personal freedom; the right to choose your partner and to live a life of your choice. Laurence, again:

> *Laurence: ... if my parents said like, 'You're getting married to her', I'd like, 'No way', and walk off (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

This idea was also noticeable in one of the Asian girls' statement that:

> *Soraya: I think the play was about, it there's someone who loves someone really, truly strongly and emotionally, it they really love that person except they have their differences, they should tell the parents to try and talk it out and then tell the other parents as well. And then come to some agreement about it. And when they tell them, they should really tell their parents what love is and, cos some Asian families have just arranged marriages. So that's why they should go up to the parents and tell them how strong their love is. But then some are quite scared in case their parents might get angry, force them to get married. But I don't think my family would do that to me ... because my family do really love me and sometimes what I want I get (laughs) (interview 5.4.00, Rochester).*

She went on to say that, although her parents had had an arranged marriage, they have come to disapprove of them; her parents *'truly do love each other now'* but feel that to arrange a marriage for their child would be *'quite bad because the son or daughter would have to live with that person that they don't strongly love'*. She had clearly given the play considerable thought and it seemed to confirm her ideas that romantic love is the best basis for marriage, that trust is an essential component in parent/child relationships and that talking can overcome major problems. Although Shamit, the other Asian girl involved in the project, shared the latter two beliefs, she retained a strong sense of family duty that was absent with Soraya, or indeed in any of the other young people:

> *Shamit: I can never betray my family in the way she [Juliet] did, I've just got to say that (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

Yet Shamit trusts her parents to find a husband of whom she will approve and the prospect of an arranged marriage holds few worries for her:

> *Shamit: We joke about it, my mum goes, 'Right, you watch me get you married at sixteen'. I go, 'What!' and she goes, 'No, I'm joking' ... they all want me to get my proper education first and then to settle down (interview 6.4.00, Rochester).*

This is in stark contrast to Soraya, who said that she'd be *'quite scared and furious with my family'* if her parents arranged a marriage for her.

These young people, then, were able to explore the values that underpinned the Capulet family, to discuss the perceived rights and wrongs of the characters' behaviour and to examine their motives and feelings. Although the teachers believed that one of the issues that makes the play relevant is adolescent conflict with parents, it was something that the pupils only occasionally mentioned in passing. Nor did they discuss family feuds or paternal decision-making. For the Asian girls, Juliet's prospective marriage to Paris held triggered thoughts on their own parents' marriages and, in Soraya's case, seemed to confirm her approval of a marriage based on romantic love. But for the main part, the pupils were concerned with the injustice of the Capulets towards Juliet, the latter's recklessness in embarking on marriage without considering the repercussions and the importance of communication to build trust and to resolve problems.

Summary of Key Points:

1. The teachers used emotive language to encourage the pupils to empathise with all the characters in the play but were careful not to present any one interpretation as correct. They felt that the play had resonance for the children because they could identify with the dynamics within family life, most particularly with issues concerning disagreements and conflict with parents.

2. The two male teachers argued that they were more concerned with enabling the pupils to pass their SAT's exams than with the family values expressed within the play.

3. The pupils focused on what they perceived as Capulet's unjust treatment of Juliet; they believed that she lacked love from her parents and could understand to a certain degree that

she sought love elsewhere. At the same time they condemned her for not telling her parents about the situation with Romeo in the first place; most believed that the families could have discussed the problem and eventually come to a compromise.

4. The majority of the pupils enjoyed the romance of the play but tempered this with disapproval of such a hasty marriage on the grounds that Romeo and Juliet did not know each other well enough to embark on such a commitment.

5. The pupils emphasised the importance of communication in all family relationships as a basis of forming understanding and trust; children should explain problems to parents in order that they might understand and assist if possible. However each person should be allowed to have choice over the way in which she lived her adult life.

Chapter 10: Drama Lessons

The format of the drama lessons was very different in each school to that of the English lessons; because there were no formal examinations or National Curriculum criteria to follow, each teacher had a considerable amount of freedom both in the choice of topic for each class and in the delivery of the lesson. And each school had different priorities as regards the subject itself; in the two West Country schools the pupils had one lesson a week, while those in Rochester school had a single block of ten drama lessons over the course of the academic year. Each school however had a separate drama room for the lessons; two of these were relatively isolated, but the third was situated near a music room which led, at times, to a certain amount of distraction and lapses in concentration on the part of the pupils.

The difficulty from the project's point of view is that, although each teacher selected a family-related topic during the course of the year, each had a different storyline, which precludes an analysis similar to that of *Romeo and Juliet* where each class is working with the same material. Two teachers chose the topic of a runaway child, but they had very different approaches to the subject and the pupils received different family messages from each course of lessons. The third teacher opted to base his drama on a subject that he privately called 'tart, slag, slut' but referred to in public as 'Gary and Nicky's story' in which a young girl was invited away for a weekend by an older boy; family members were brought into the drama at various stages, but they were peripheral characters rather than at the centre of the work. My intention for this section therefore is first, to present an analysis of the teachers' agendas for their chosen topic, gathered both from their interviews and from the lesson observations; two have very clear ideas of the message that they wish to impart while the third focuses more on the practical aspect of her story. Included within this section is a brief description of each of the teachers' storylines. I

then consider the pupils' responses. Finally I bring the common themes together in a summary of the key points at the end.

10i: The Teachers' Intentions

Two of the teachers were female; at Trevelyan, Mrs. Rowan had been working at the school for some considerable time, and at Rochester Mrs. Willis had had several years' teaching experience. Each had sole responsibility for drama in their respective schools. At Sylvester, Mr. Brown was the head of department; he too had been in post for some time although he has taught in different contexts and parts of the country during the course of his career. Mrs. Willis sometimes taught PSE and English, but both the others were concerned purely with drama lessons and school productions.

In Sylvester and Trevelyan schools, the pupils had one lesson a week of drama, and the entire tutor group had the lesson at the same time. All the pupils who were involved in the project were in the same tutor group, which meant that they all had drama at the same time and made the observations relatively uncomplicated. Such however was not the case with Rochester school; in this school there were several different blocks of drama lessons throughout the year, and the six pupils who took part in the project each happened to be in a different block. As it was impossible to be there for every lesson of every pupil, I observed as many as possible within the constraints of the three schools' different timetables and geographical locations; although Mrs. Willis changed the lesson slightly with each group, the theme of the runaway child remained the same, as did the message that she wanted to give the children.

10ii: Rochester School

Mrs. Willis' style as a drama teacher was relaxed but focused; the lessons were tightly organised in terms of the work set, but the pupils had considerable freedom to construct

their stories as they wished. The pupils were noisy and energetic but Mrs. Willis was calm; when the pupils were working in their groups, she gave her full and undivided attention to those whom she was helping and largely ignored the turmoil around her. In response, the pupils generally worked hard and produced creditable performances when requested. As Mrs. Willis taught the pupils for a total of ten lessons each academic year, she only had time for one theme for each year group; for Year 9, it was the runaway child. Although she introduced the lesson slightly differently each time, the fundamental idea was the same; a child of divorced/separated parents had run away from home and had become homeless. The pupils were to explore why she had found life at home unbearable, her life as a homeless person, how she coped with forming new relationships away from her family, and finally, whether she should go home or not. Sometimes the teenager was called Lulu, sometimes not; sometimes the emphasis of the story was on homeless people, at others on the runaway's experiences or on the feelings of those who were involved in her life. With every group the runaway went to live in a hostel before making the crucial decision whether to return home, and there was always an attempt at reconciliation with her parent(s) - although there was no guarantee that this would be successful. The pupils therefore explored issues surrounding family difficulties, homelessness and the possibility of reconstructing relationships that had - to all intents and purposes - gone terribly wrong. When she asked the pupils to create a scene within the story, Mrs. Willis only gave them the minimum of information; that this was the time that Lulu left home, for instance, or that it was her first meeting with her social worker. Mrs. Willis therefore allowed the pupils to take their story in any direction they wished, only giving suggestions when asked and in those cases trying to get the pupils to build on their own ideas rather than hers.

Nonetheless Mrs. Willis had strong views on her role as a drama teacher and on family life:

> *Mrs. Willis: ... I think families teach morals don't they, or ideally families teach morals to their children and sometimes with the children that I teach, those morals have not been taught. So I tend to think that I'm covering*

> *areas that maybe parents haven't covered but also it's their [the pupils'] lives, it's what they're about. I mean I could, you know, study Shakespeare with them and pick out family stuff from Shakespeare or family stuff from other plays, but it's not coming from within them, so I tend to try and do schemes of work that will relate to their lives, to the kids in this area. So that's why we have a lot of families in drama (interview, 5.4.00).*

This view can be contrasted with those of the primary school teachers working in a school with a similar socio-economic profile; while the latter were tentative in their expression of 'deficit parenting' within some children's families, Mrs. Willis is prepared to be open about the problems that some children face in terms of their home life. She is also prepared to encourage the pupils to draw on their own experiences, both positive and negative, to add depth to their drama and to give the lessons an immediate relevance to their own lives. In one sense her attitude was typical of the teachers whom I had met in the school; several offered anecdotes about the suffering and difficulties within some young people's lives, and more than one expressed concern that their role as teachers was to show pupils 'that somebody cares for them'. It is important to recognise these teachers' efforts to give a certain amount of stability to those children who have difficult home backgrounds, and Mrs. Willis' approach can perhaps be seen in that context. It was interesting that both in the lessons and in her subsequent interview she talked about the importance of rules within family life, an idea consistent with stability and security. In one particular lesson the pupils had decided that the runaway should go home because she had heard stories of life on the streets that had frightened her, and because she had come to realise that what she had perceived as her mum's nagging had been an expression of care; she now knew that she had a mum who wanted her to be safe. The scene that the pupils constructed concerned the moment of the girl's homecoming; some of the endings were happy, while others ended in acrimony and arguing. One pupil said that, in her group's interpretation, the girl and her mother had *'sorted it out with rules'*, prompting Mrs. Willis to comment:

> *Mrs. Willis: That's why rules are a good thing, having rules that everyone can agree to so everyone knows how to behave at home and in school and be happy. That's all Lulu's mum needed to do really (field notes, 3.2.00).*

In her interview later in the year, she reiterated the point:

> *Mrs. Willis: ... I think that parents need to have expectations like schools do and to make them very clear and use positive rewards rather than punishment ... to teach their children about what's right and what's wrong (interview, 5.4.00).*

There are several issues within this statement about rules; that parents should set parameters for their children's behaviour, they should communicate their expectations, they should be supportive rather than condemning towards their children and that they should be able to give them moral guidance during their formative years. Much of this depends on the quality of communication between parents and children, something that Mrs. Willis sees as fundamental to family life:

> *Mrs. Willis: ... I like to think, not of an ideal family as in you know two parents ... there always has to be a male to sort things out and there always has to be a female, I don't condone that. But I suppose that the ideal is, that I'm always trying to get to, is the idea that families do sort things out through talking ... so I suppose I put out this image of the family as being something that things should be sorted out within it ... if possible (interview, 5.4.00).*

We have already seen the idea that communication of hopes and fears within family life leads to a relationship of openness and trust, and it was an idea that Mrs. Willis fostered in the course of the lessons; in one particular example she was playing the role of the runaway and commented that *'I need to get her [my mum's] trust back ... I've got to sit down and talk instead of shouting'* (field notes, 3.2.00). But the key words in the preceding quotation are 'if possible' and in the following statement, Mrs. Willis expresses an idea that many of the pupils conveyed in their interviews about *Romeo and Juliet*; that ultimately the individual should not sacrifice herself to the notion of 'family':

> *Mrs. Willis: And I suppose with Year 9 ... the message is ... try and stay at home really, and sort things out with your parents instead of running away from it. Which is a hard thing to do. But it also informs them about other organisations as well if they didn't want to stay at home, it's teaching them that people don't always stay at home, they do run away, they go to hostels, they get help from Shelter organisation, it's giving them an alternative (interview, 5.4.00).*

Thus Lulu should try to the best of her capabilities to live with her parents, but on the other hand she has to survive - both physically and mentally - and living in a family environment may be destructive to her own well-being. This raises the question of the limits of what is bearable within the family unit and at what point life becomes so unendurable that the only option is to run away.

The reasons that the children gave the runaway for leaving home ranged from physical and sexual abuse, alcoholism and drug addiction, to lack of parental love and bullying at home. During the course of one lesson Mrs. Willis remarked that young people can be forced out of the family home in cases of abuse, and when I asked her reasons for saying this she said:

> *Mrs. Willis: I think because abuse is taboo isn't it still, therefore it could be that kids at home are going through abuse and they don't necessarily see it as abuse. So I'm sort of giving them, not putting words in their mouth but making them aware that something going on at home, or might be going on in their lives, is not acceptable and there are other people out there like them (interview, 5.4.00).*

She did not comment on abuse - of any kind - with every group, and my observation was that the children would raise the issue and she would respond; most of the pupils seemed to talk about abuse as conversationally as they would, say, the latest football scores. Yet this covert warning to the children is clearly intended to cause them to question the nature of their own family life, something she expands on when talking about the effect that this type of lesson might have:

> *Mrs. Willis: It enables them to see life from other people's point of view. It enables them to step back and think about their lives as well and where they are and what their life is like compared to ... other people's lives. And hopefully it's giving them a more rounded picture of life, it's preparing them to deal with situations later in life that may come up. And hopefully now ... it might make them stop and think ... 'Come on, I don't have to run way from home, I can talk to my parents about this' (interview, 5.4.00).*

As we have seen from some of the other teachers, there is a perception that opening up difficult topics can cause problems for a child who is suffering at home and that, on the whole, these things are better left alone in the context of the classroom. But the essence of

Mrs. Willis' teaching technique is to acknowledge that ugly situations can exist, and she argued that the reason that some of the pupils' work was moving was:

> *Mrs. Willis: ... because I think some of it is pretty close to home. If they themselves haven't been abused they sometimes know somebody that has. Or they've seen it on the TV, they're using their knowledge of it (interview, 5.4.00).*

On the other hand there was no doubt that she felt that Lulu's predicament could be sorted out if all parties were willing and the lines of communication were open - a big 'if', reflected in some of the pupils' stories in which some ended with Lulu returning home and others did not. We shall see later in the chapter what kind of message the pupils involved in the project received from these lessons; clearly none of them believed that running away and the prospect of living on the streets was an easy option, for in some of their portrayals of homeless people they showed a degree of antipathy that is, perhaps, common in broader society. And although Mrs. Willis' point in this context was that the pupils should understand that sometimes circumstances were beyond the individual's control and that hostility towards the homeless was wrong, she emphasised just how tough life on the streets could be. Going home was, all things considered, the preferable solution.

10iii: Sylvester School

Mr. Brown also had a very clear message that he wished to convey to the pupils, or, more particularly, the girls. His choice of subject was the complicated should-I, shouldn't-I nature of teenage sexual relationships which he argued was complementary to the sex education that the pupils were receiving during their time at secondary school. Mr. Brown's style of teaching was relaxed yet he focused strongly on the work in hand and allowed little to distract him. As was the case with Mrs. Willis, he asked the pupils to work in groups once he had set the scene, but, to a greater extent than the other drama teachers, his lessons included small groups of pupils improvising while the rest of the class watched; he sometimes asked other pupils to take a different angle on the questions or issues that the

first group brought up, again in front of the rest of the class. The impression he gives is one of having the lessons under fairly tight control; the pupils are allowed freedom to express themselves and to raise points that they feel are important - and these are never dismissed as trivial or irrelevant - but the lesson has clear boundaries and he controls the direction in which the drama is going.

This particular story focused on a fourteen year old girl called Nicky, who was *'in love'* with a lad named Gary who was two years older; they had had *'a kiss and a cuddle at a party'*, but *'that's it, nothing else has happened'* (Mr. Brown, field notes, 29.2.00). Gary subsequently invited Nicky for a camping weekend in Devon by sending her a note in which he promised that there would be separate tents for the boys and the girls. The pupils then acted out the quandaries that Nicky experienced in dealing with this situation; if she wanted to go away for a weekend with Gary, how she could persuade her parents to let her go away (or, as in the case of most of the pupils' scenes, how she could find a sufficiently plausible reason that she did not arouse parental suspicions), problems with an interfering brother or sister, how to deal with Gary's suggestion that she should go into his tent and finally their return to school where the whole escapade has become common knowledge. The course lasted for five lessons, with the last one being used to record on video the entire story of six different scenes. Mr. Brown was careful to emphasise that *'nothing nasty will happen to anyone, nor will anyone be made a fool of'* (field notes, 29.2.00) and he kept the atmosphere light and jokey; at one point he remarked to me that *'there's got to be comedy in this, it's got to be fun because it's so embarrassing'* (field notes, 29.2.00).

Mr. Brown was clear about this being a story for girls, citing its relevance to them as the reason behind this choice of topic:

> *Mr. Brown:... cos you do see - and this is me as an individual - you do see girls going round looking absolutely tarty ... all over the lads, and I don't think it dawns on them what they're doing. And I'm only talking about a very, very small minority but ... you just think If only you could see what you look like ... would you be doing this? (interview 10.4.00).*

While Mr. Brown was therefore concerned that the girls should maintain their dignity through their adolescence, the purpose of the story was to encourage them to think about the consequences of their actions and to warn them of the problems of acquiring a reputation for promiscuity:

> *Mr. Brown: I mean they do it in science, don't they, they do the plumbing, how the bits work. But where is the, and how is the, emotional side of things. I'm not too interested in the sex really, cos really what I think I'm doing is reputation ... Once she is known as the one what does, it's 'Why don't you with me cos you did with him, everybody knows that you do that' ... I guess I'm saying Before you do, really consider what you're doing here actually. Do you really know what you're doing? (interview 10.4.00).*

Part of Mr. Brown's strategy was to stereotype both boys and girls; in one lesson he referred to boys as people who specialise *'in the caveman approach'* (field notes, 29.2.00) and who lie and brag about their sexual adventures, while the girls were given more sympathy and were portrayed as people who turned to each other for support and to talk over their problems and dilemmas. In the final lesson he talked briefly about the emotional pressure that boys might put on girls to have sex because they had done so with another boy, then commenting that this was a *'cheap, horrible, nasty thing to say'*. When I asked him about this he said:

> *Mr. Brown: ... I think that's emphasising the point to the girls that that is actually what some lads might say. And I'm sure that some lads do use it as a weapon. I'm sure, if a lad isn't interested in a girl, if he's only interested in sex, then that's the sort of emotional blackmail [he might use]. They put a lot of investment, these girls, into getting the boyfriend of their choice and the biggest fear they've got is once they've got him is losing the boyfriend. And one of the ways they're going to lose him is if they don't fulfil his requirements (interview 10.4.00).*

While this too may be an exaggerated, stereotypical picture of girls' emotional fragility, the underlying point may be valid at the time when they are vulnerable teenagers and consider it important to be the same as the others in the peer group (who may or may not be sexually active). And, as Mr. Brown commented, there is considerable pressure from different sources - notably the media - to have sex. Another point that he regarded as important was the double standards that exist; that a boy's reputation tends to be enhanced if he is known

to be sexually active while girls are regarded as sluts. During one lesson, Mr. Brown asked the class to turn the roles around and for an older girl to be predatory towards a younger boy. The result was very funny, particularly as the girl who volunteered to take the part of the female dwarfed the boy by several inches:

> *Mr. Brown: And okay, it becomes funny, but there is actually a serious point being made: why do we treat lads differently? Why's he not got the reputation of being tart, slag, slut? Why are there no words for lads apart from ones that seem to do their reputation some good for the same activity? It's not fair (interview, 10.4.00).*

While he hoped, then, to encourage girls to reflect on their actions, he was not optimistic that the boys would consider the matter in the same way:

> *Mr. Brown: I don't think that the lads actually consider it ... [from these lessons] I would hope that some would stop and maybe think and realise that it's different for girls (interview, 10.4.00).*

We will see in the next section whether his pessimism was justified. He justified his choice of subject matter by arguing that that not talking about sex may be tantamount to pretending it didn't exist and that this is unhelpful at a time when the pupils' hormones are '*beginning to kick in*'; in addition pupils covered similar things in English lessons when they discussed characters' motives and actions. He also argued that drama lessons are a safe environment in which children can try out new roles and ideas, create elaborate stories similar to those they see on EastEnders and, importantly, can discuss these matters openly with people they trust. And his feeling was that the topic was '*interesting and useful*' to the pupils, something he judged by the way they responded to the lesson. My observation was that many were engaged by the topic and had made both useful and entertaining contributions to the lessons, although, as Mr. Brown pointed out, this may have been prompted by their freedom to talk about sex *'without being told off'* (field notes, 6.3.00). However drama is, as Mrs. Willis suggested, more immediate than a discussion of characters out of a book; the pupils can bring their own experiences, hopes and fears when they portray a personality of their own making, and they can explore values and attitudes

without the constraints of a literary text. And while Mr. Brown controlled the overall shape of the story, the pupils had the opportunity to experiment with negotiations with parents, brother/sister and Gary/Nicky; they could try different approaches and techniques and see how they worked, or how they fitted in with their own views. There was thus the potential for this sensitive topic to have a powerful resonance.

10iv: Trevelyan School

The third drama teacher, Mrs. Rowan, chose the subject of the runaway child, but from a very different angle to Mrs. Willis', and the course of lessons lasted for six weeks. Mrs. Rowan's style appeared to be more formal than that of Mrs. Willis and Mr. Brown, but the lesson took place in the last period on a Friday afternoon when some minds were more focused on the forthcoming weekend than the task in hand; maintaining concentration was not always easy. This difficulty was compounded firstly by the music lessons in the room next door which could be distracting, and secondly by a few of the pupils who had acquired the reputation of being difficult to manage. Generally however the pupils were good-natured and entered into the spirit of the lesson, and clearly some of them were enthused by the nature of the problem that they were set.

To introduce the story, Mrs. Rowan cast herself as a Chief Superintendent (CSI) and asked the class of *'bright young detectives'* to help solve the case of a sixteen year old girl called Ann Brown who had mysteriously disappeared. Ann had been to a disco on 14th May and was seen by her housekeeper returning to her room at 10.30 p.m.; when the latter took her a cup of tea the following morning, she had disappeared. None of her possessions had been stolen, and the 'clues' to her disappearance lay with an empty, unlabelled pill bottle on the dressing table, a clock that had stopped at 10.55 p.m. and the word 'boathouse' written on her mirror in red lipstick. She lived with her father, a scientist who had divorced her mother about six months ago, and the housekeeper who took care of the

domestic duties. She had now been missing for some time and the police were increasingly worried about her safety. After an initial question and answer session with the CSI, the 'detectives' were to arrange interviews with all those who had connections with the case and then to develop a theory about her disappearance. Following that, the pupils were divided into groups to make a *Crimewatch*-style programme in which they presented the facts of the case and appealed to the public for help; finally, having watched the videos of their work, there was an update on the case in which the story was brought to a conclusion. The storyline thus offered several opportunities for family issues to be explored, including how Ann was affected by the divorce, why she chose to live with her father, the feelings of both parents on discovering that their daughter had disappeared or to what extent this had been prompted by an unsettled home life.

In the event, there was little direct reference to the family during the lessons. When I asked why she had chosen that particular topic, Mrs. Rowan said:

> *Mrs. Rowan: Well to be actually honest I used it from a book I have for lessons for this year group, so I had all the information to hand ... I didn't choose it because it had a family component, it's just a good project to with Year 9 ... You give them the clues and it's up to them to solve it. There's no actual answer, it's up to them to provide it (interview 13.1.00).*

Clearly she did not have the same kind of agenda as the other two teachers, and consequently the drama was allowed to go in any direction the pupils wanted. Initially they were interested in Ann's home background and asked interview questions about the nature of the divorce and the effect it had had on her, but they did not pursue this train of thought. Of the seven different theories for her disappearance only two were tenuously linked to family problems; one was that she had run away to *'clear her head'* and the other suggested that it was to do with some boys who had information about her mother. Three more argued that she had been kidnapped, while the remaining two believed it was connected to drugs (field notes, 24.9.99). During this time Mrs. Rowan made very few comments on the nature of the pupils' family-related contributions; at one point she asked

what the 'detectives' felt about 'Professor Brown's' confession that he had said he had tried to stop Ann drinking without success - to which one pupil replied that he was irresponsible. On another, she suggested that the divorce *'seemed to have had a dramatic effect'* on Ann when her 'teacher' had said that she had become increasingly quiet after the divorce. Neither of these points were developed either by Mrs. Rowan or by any of the pupils, nor did they explicitly return to them when constructing Ann's story.

In the two *Crimewatch* presentations, the pupils gave little background information about Ann and the major focus was on the scene at the disco where she was given some pills just before a fight broke out. Although 'family' seemed to be at the root of the problems, the issues were not discussed overtly; in both productions she was drinking heavily, something she had started immediately after the divorce, but her disappearance appeared to be related more to the incident at the disco than to her home life. And in the final lesson where Mrs. Rowan - once more in role as the CSI - held a *Crimewatch* update, two out of the three groups said that she was alive and living in another part of the country, while the third said she had been reconciled with her parents. As Mrs. Rowan commented:

> *Mrs. Rowan: [Family] wasn't an area we concentrated on. We were looking more at a solution to what had happened to the young girl ... it was just a strand that they could have followed (interview 13.1.00).*

Nonetheless the family difficulties were in the background; they were the starting point of the story, and although there was not the same powerful message in this drama that was contained in the other two, it raised some interesting thoughts from the pupils when they spoke about it at the end of the course of lessons. Let us now examine what they said.

10v: The Pupils' Thoughts

In this section I shall follow a similar pattern to the last by dealing with each school in turn, but this time investigating the thoughts that the lesson triggered for each of the pupils. Inevitably some were able to express their thoughts more articulately than others and some

had stronger feelings about the lessons; it was noticeable that the girls spoke more freely and willingly than the boys about the emotional issues that their particular topics raised and that there was a greater degree of thoughtfulness in their interviews. This had not been a feature of the interviews concerning *Romeo and Juliet* in which both genders had been equally forthcoming, and may be a reflection of the greater personal input into the drama characterisations and the pupils' own perception that girls mature more quickly than boys. Most spoke in generalised terms about the lessons and the ideas that had been generated, while a few explored the ramifications of the characters' decisions or related the story to their own lives; in this case, the cultural differences between the two Asian girls and the other pupils was more pronounced than in the previous interviews. Once again the lessons proved to be thought-provoking for the pupils as some considered aspects of either intimate or family relations that they had previously ignored or disregarded. In Rochester school, I interviewed the pupils one at a time during the course of the year because of their differing timetables, but in both Sylvester and Trevelyan I interviewed them in groups. In both of these schools the pupils chose to have separate groups of boys and girls.

10vi: Rochester School

The most striking response to Mrs. Willis' lesson was the degree to which the girls responded to the messages that she intended to convey and the fluency with which they expressed their ideas. The boys were relatively quiet; Laurence, unusually, had very little to say about the lesson although the one significant comment he made was clearly from the heart. After he had described the tortuous progress of the runaway boy's life which had involved drugs, alcohol, murder and the police, he said:

> *Laurence: Miss, it's kind of similar to my family. We're always having arguments, especially with my stepdad ... I don't like him, never have (interview 17.11.99).*

This identification with the character can be compared to Nat's more objective stance towards the drama in which he seemed to have absorbed Sarah's messages almost to the letter:

> *Nat: [The runaway boy has] learned that ... you might as well stay at home cos ... you're not going to be better off anywhere else. And like you should try not to run away, not hide things, with arguments you should try to sort them out, not run away from them ... just by compromising, just by sitting down and talking about it (interview 6.4.00).*

In fact, Nat had commented before on the desirability of talking within the home to resolve problems; the only new component to what he was saying was that running away was not a solution which, given the strength of his feeling towards the family unit, was unsurprising. It also echoes his English teacher Mrs. Bennett's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* in which she suggested that problems should be dealt with, and that the 'quick fix' - in this case running away - is no solution. For Nat the lesson seemed to confirm his thoughts about the nature of family life and the responsibilities that are encompassed within it, while for Laurence it may have generated the kind of critical reflection for which Mrs. Willis had hoped. This however can be a painful process and difficult to talk about; it may help to explain his reticence, for he is known for his interest in drama and has on occasion taken the lead role in school productions.

For the Asian girls, Mrs. Willis' lesson prompted thoughts of family duty in different ways. In Shamit's group there was some role reversal where she played an Asian who was *'always out partying'* while her white friend Kim was *'not allowed out very much'*. This prompted some thought on the contrast between Asian and white families:

> *Shamit: ... in real life, my parents ... I'm not allowed to go out at all cos they say 'Do you have to do this and that' and I listen to them. Cos I'm not the type of person that wants to go out and stuff ... Sometimes ... I think I wish I could go out and this and that but I mean I can't ... because my parents don't want me to (interview 11.11.99).*

However her remarks on Juliet's behaviour (*'I can never betray my family in the way she did'*) and the tentative manner in which this questioning of family rules is expressed would

indicate an open, thoughtful reflection rather than the possibility of rebellion; broadly, the two family cultures are both seen to have advantages and disadvantages and for Shamit, who frequently referred with great pleasure to the closeness of her family, the balance would lie with her own culture and values. Shamit's sense of family loyalty and duty was expressed in a different way by Soraya, whose girl ran away because her recently-divorced father hit her regularly and, at the end of the story, decided to stay at the hostel rather than return home. Soraya disapproved of this, and spoke about how both parties should change:

> *Soraya: I think he shouldn't go out too much and she should spend like time [with him] even if he is or not in the house. She should still love him cos he was there when she was born and he raised her up ... And she should have been there for him cos she should know how he's feeling. She must be feeling sad as well about her mother but she should know how her dad's feeling as well. I think she should have just stayed with her father (interview 11.7.00).*

This places a high degree of responsibility for the family's emotional welfare on a teenager who has been hit by her father, the man that Soraya thinks she should effectively be caring for. It is also some distance from Mrs. Willis' viewpoint concerning abuse, as the following exchange illustrates, albeit when Soraya was not present:

> *Julie: What mistakes have you made in your life to be homeless?*
> *Harry: None.*
> *Mrs. Willis: Very good point - it's not always people's mistakes that make them homeless. If your dad beats you up it's not your fault, it's your dad's fault for beating you up (field notes, 27.1.00)*

In Soraya's case the onus is more on the female child to smooth things over than on the adult to stop his violent behaviour, yet the opposite is the case for Mrs. Willis. Soraya however did see this as one last chance for the father and suggested that if he carried on hitting his daughter then she should leave for good; nonetheless her belief that the teenager's feelings should be submerged under her father's is radically different from Mrs. Willis' slightly indignant, confrontational position in which the father should be the one to put things to rights.

But, as with *Romeo and Juliet,* the major theme that was mentioned by five of the six pupils was that of communication; of talking through problems, understanding the other person's point of view and coming to a compromise based on trust. In this context some of the girls expressed what is by now a familiar point; that they appreciated their own families more deeply through realising what others could suffer, and that good communication within the family was one of the attributes that they most valued. Once more they felt that talking was the *'best solution'* (Soraya) to family problems and that it *'gives you peace of mind'* (Rochelle) through your knowledge of others' point of view and the capacity to express your own. But, for Martha, the ability of Lulu and her mother to talk about problems had to be underpinned by both parties' wholehearted commitment to their attempts at reconciliation. When talking about the ground rules that they should work out, Martha said:

> *Martha: ... if she [Lulu] has anything to say, then say it instead of getting upset and running way and stuff. Talk things through with her [mother]. Start anew ... [It can work] if you both agree on doing it, if both of you have the same feelings about doing it. Cos if you're like half-hearted about something, you're not going to end up doing it in the end. You've got to be prepared to go the whole way (interview 3.2.00).*

This takes the issue of communication to a deeper level than has been mentioned before; while it is perhaps easy to pay lip-service to the notion that talking can solve problems, Martha has recognised that there has to be more than an ability to vocalise, to listen and to compromise, and that the will to succeed is the *sine qua non* of resolving family problems. That this may not be enough was acknowledged earlier by Mrs. Willis, who said that problems should be sorted out within the family 'if possible'. The message within the family theme is that, *in extremis,* self is more important than family.

10vii: Sylvester School

For the pupils of Sylvester school, the issues were more clear-cut. Mr. Brown had argued that his topic had been aimed at the girls, and the pupils' reactions would seem to confirm

this; the girls were happy to talk at length about the lessons, but the boys were less enthusiastic and referred to the subject as '*boring*'. Their first objection was that '*nothing happened*', which of course was perfectly reasonable - 'nothing' was exactly what Mr. Brown had intended to happen. They argued that the story should have been taken further and wanted:

> *Nathan: ... something [to] happen between the two, like the relationship carrying on.*
> *Michael: Yeah, and like they got back and then people started to find out about it ... And her friend couldn't keep a secret and it got spread around the school and then her parents could have found out. See what happens from there (interview, 11.4.00).*

In other words, to bring the opportunity for some conflict into the drama. As it was, they were not impressed by the stereotypical portrait of boys who lie and boast, saying:

> *Nathan: ... not all boys do that, some do, without naming names. They might, not really brag but*
> *Michael: Show off.*
> *Nathan: No, it's like things seem bigger than they really are (much laughter at this unintentional gaffe). They sort of play things up a bit (interview, 11.4.00).*

They also condemned Gary for wanting only sex and expressed sympathy for Nicky:

> *Nathan: ... it was like Gary's fault, he was like pressuring her into doing it. And seeing that he's a lot older than her, he's sort of like using her, taking advantage of her. Maybe I'd feel sorry for her ...*
> *Michael: She might not have wanted sex ... was pressured into it (interview. 11.4.00).*

For Nathan in particular, the whole story had moralising connotations that he found off-putting. He complained that a similar topic had recently been covered in English and that the opinions the pupils were meant to express in this sort of situation were *'common knowledge'* and *'it's stuff you already know'*. However there was agreement among the three boys that the basic advice that they received from the lesson was good, even if they objected to the way in which it was delivered; that they should not rush into a sexual relationship that would be regretted by both parties, and that they should not *'get drunk and*

things too quickly' - or, as David expressed it, they should *'take it slower'* than Gary and Nicky.

This rather lofty attitude belied perhaps some embarrassment and confusion over the topic; although they showed a maturity in their condemnation of Gary's behaviour, the boys admitted to the embarrassment of *'having to act with a girl'*. And despite their belief that Gary was *'using'* Nicky, they agreed that they had never thought about sex from the girl's perspective. They also found that the topic was *'a bit unusual'*, suggesting that the approach in these drama lessons was rather different to that of the English lessons which Nathan had mentioned. Their diffidence contrasted strongly with the girls' attitude of unanimous and consistent approval of the subject. They felt that the warning about double standards was both timely and appropriate:

> *Natasha: I hadn't really thought that if a girl sleeps with someone then she's slut and if the boy does then he's a lad, you know I'd never thought of it that way. But I do like see what he means, I think it does happen ... (interview 11.4.00).*

They also felt that it is easy for a girl to acquire a reputation for being promiscuous, but not simply through accepting an invitation to go camping; they argued that it was more because girls are *'bitchy'* and, although her friends would try to understand her actions, others who did not know the girl would be less understanding and would therefore be more inclined to gossip. However, there was universal censure from both boys and girls towards those who did sleep around, and the girls cited a specific example:

> *Natasha: When certain people at school are spreading loads of rumours about one particular person sleeping around and things like that, everyone does know that she's slut.*
> *Rebecca: It's like, the toilets ...*
> *Natasha: I mean she's a really nice person but I don't think she should be doing that (interview 11.4.00).*

There was also general agreement that the issue of reputation was different for boys and girls; they all believed that boys, although not necessarily as uncaring as they had been portrayed by their teacher, were less inclined to care what people thought of them. Girls on

the other hand *'wanted to tell everyone about it, talk about it'* (Natasha) and *'just like get really upset'* (Nathan), which suggests that Mr. Brown's stereotype in this case was more justified. But another gender difference was the interest in the subject itself; while the boys wanted more action, the girls felt, for example, that they had not had enough time devoted to the scene at the campsite where Gary was trying to persuade Nicky that she should come into his tent. They argued that the ten minutes which had been allotted to rehearsals was not enough, and then that the subsequent role-swapping made something quite serious and meaningful into a joke. In addition, they felt that some of the boys were *'being stupid'*:

> *Rebecca: The boys laughed at it.*
> *Tania: Girls are more mature than boys, cos loads of boys were just sort of sitting there going 'Oh', or they were pretending to be women.*
> *Lottie: They were either being really silly or they were just being really quiet, like not knowing what to do or anything ...*
> *Natasha: Really annoying (interview 11.4.00).*

The ease with which the girls spoke about this topic together with the contrast with the boys' comparatively brief contributions would substantiate this to a degree, and my own observation was indeed that a few of the boys found it difficult to join in with the spirit of the lessons. But the final thought in this section on this particular course of drama lessons comes from Tania, who summed up that which the other three girls had said in different ways:

> *Tania: Well, it's going to help us when it actually happens but even if it doesn't happen, it's good to know (interview, 11.4.00).*

Forewarned, then, is forearmed.

10viii: Trevelyan School

With the group of pupils from Trevelyan school we have seen that Mrs. Rowan was not inclined to promote any particular message, and that the background to the topic was Ann's family, or more specifically, her parent's divorce and the effect it seemed to have had on her. Sometimes messages are the more powerful for being unspoken; we have seen how

Nathan was turned off by what he thought was a teacher ramming the point home. What were the pupils who were given relatively little direction to make of the lesson?

The boys thought that the family aspect of the drama had given a certain credibility to the story:

> *Alex: I thought of it as a bit stereotypical but it just needed some legible (sic) story for why ... she'd want to run away, and this seemed to fit in with the divorce (interview 15.11.99).*

The girls were more approving, but in a general sense:

> *Charlotte: I think it was good because her mum and dad were divorced and usually you'd have a mum and dad ... that are together in drama.*
> *Zoe: Yeah and there are like two kids.*
> *Charlotte: Usually it's two parents and it's like the perfect family but it shows you can have different types of family (interview, 25.11.99).*

The girls were thus more concerned with another stereotype; not the unhappy child from divorced parents invoked by the boys, but the cereal-packet family that they felt was perpetrated within schools. This image was in direct contradiction with some of their own experiences of family life and during the course of the year of data collection they returned often to the theme of the nuclear family, noting with approval when '*different types*' of family were mentioned within lessons. Nonetheless they too felt that Ann's family situation made a more believable background to the story - even though the story itself was, perhaps, rather far-fetched.

As we have seen, the drama itself had little family content and during their interview the boys did not speculate on the details of Ann's family situation, preferring instead to concentrate on the course of her life after she left home. The girls however discussed the nature of her relationship with her father, the difficulties that heavy drinking can present to both the individual and her family, and the feelings that her parents might have had when they discovered that Ann had run away. They considered how the drama had prompted them to think about their own parents' point of view:

> *Zoe: ... like you just don't really think about them do you, they're always there and stuff. But like what would they do if I did run away or something.*

> *Charlotte: Yes, cos when you're in your parents' shoes ... you've got to act. Cos then you think Oh that must be what my mum thinks when I'm an hour late home ... once you've done that [the drama] you feel, like, the thoughts that must be running through their brain (interview 25.11.99).*

Zoe then reflected on one of the issues that can arise for children who have separated parents:

> *I can see now that they were both upset about it [Ann running away]. It makes you realise that, even though they're both separated, that they both care about you the same amount. It's just that they've got different ... tolerance. They have different ways of doing it (Zoe, interview 25.11.99).*

This juxtaposition between Ann's life and Zoe's own is not the same as the seemingly simplistic contrast between some pupils' (good) family life and the drama character's (bad) one; it has given Zoe a deeper understanding of how it is to be the separated parent of a child, and of the difficult nature of such a position. This may well be a critical moment for Zoe that has a profound influence on her own perception of parenting and her developing family values in a way that a direct comparison may not. She then turned to Ann's point of view and spoke of the unfairness of Ann's father who, in this case, had not allowed her to see her mother:

> *Zoe: ... if my mum said I couldn't see my dad, then I'd get really upset because you can't really choose between your parents unless one of them's done something really horrible ... but still you can't choose, cos they'd still be your parent (interview 25.11.99).*

This was a point reiterated by Charlotte who commented that, even in cases of divorce, *'you still have your mum and dad and they're the closest to you'*. Thus, even though the play had had little direct reference to family, for these three girls it had prompted thoughts and discussion about divorce, parenting and the depth of parental love.

This brings us to the boys, who had relatively little to say about issues surrounding parenting or the parents' point of view, and who talked about how they would cope in the case of divorce. This may be a reflection of their own experiences; two of the three girls came from separated homes but all the boys lived with both their natural parents. By their own admission the boys believed that their view of Ann was a stereotypical view of a child

with divorced parents; she was upset and unable to cope. Nigel took this stereotype even further:

> *Nigel: ... we made it so she was happy and poor but when her family split up that she was ... bad-tempered and had bad behaviour as well (interview, 15.11.99).*

The implications of this would not be lost on Charles Murray (1990) who, as we saw in Chapter 1, has written about what he believes are the characteristics of the underclass; that poverty-stricken, separated parents necessarily have a dramatic and irreversible effect on a child's emotional and behavioural welfare. Interestingly, Nigel was the only one who thought no further than the stereotype he described and this was the only evaluative comment he made during the interview; when asked for his final thoughts he replied *'Dunno, really'*. The other two worried how divorce would affect them:

> *Ryan: It sometimes made me think about what it would be like if my parents divorced ... I imagined if what was going to happen to me was what happened to Ann.*
> *Alex: I feel the same way, I wonder how strong I'd be ... I think that she [Ann] was a strong person but just in that situation she just sort of basically couldn't cope (interview, 15.11.99).*

This is the other side of the boundary between the individual and the family that we have seen with Mrs. Willis' lessons; these young people are accustomed to the idea of family support and much of their own identity is, so far, bound up with their families. Ann had a turbulent career following her parent's divorce, and as Alex suggested, she lacked the personal strength that would have enabled her to build a satisfactory new life; as the structure of her life collapsed, so did she. Given contemporary marriage statistics, these boys' slight concern is not unwarranted, although they all talked of having stable and happy family lives that had no imminent prospect of divorce. This drama lesson, which had no overt message, therefore raised some interesting angles on family values.

Summary of Key Points

1. Two of the teachers had very clear agendas on what message they wanted to give the pupils from the topic that they chose; the third was more concerned with the practicalities of her project which involved making a *Crimewatch*-style presentation on video.

2. There were more significant gender differences in levels of interpretation and enjoyment in the drama lessons than in *Romeo and Juliet.* Similarly the cultural differences in the concept of family and the values underpinning it were magnified.

3. For the pupils at Rochester, the issue of communication was once again the most important aspect of family relationships; one pupil recognised that talking was not enough and that there must be a wholehearted commitment to overcoming family problems.

4. The boys at Sylvester were less impressed with the topic of teenage sex than the girls, who felt that the warnings contained within were both timely and useful.

5. Despite the limited guidance given by the teacher at Trevelyan school (or possibly because of it) the pupils all made thoughtful contributions to our subsequent discussion on family values.

Chapter 11: Personal and Social Education and History

The third and final lesson that I intended to observe during the course of the year was Personal and Social Education (PSE). This is a subject area that is particularly relevant to family values because, as the name implies, it has the potential to cover relationships with family, friends and future sexual partners. During the course of the year I was able to observe two different PSE lessons; in Sylvester school, I was present for one lesson where the teacher considered different types of behaviours and the effects they have on other people. A considerable part of the lesson was concerned with role play in which the class was divided into groups of three or four and each acted out a variety of different scenarios that in the main part involved family members. At Trevelyan, I observed a programme of sex education that lasted for seven lessons, with one lesson per week. There were two teachers present for this and, although the course was led by the female Head of PSE, the male teacher took an active part in the lessons through helping with the discussions and presentations that the pupils had to make. In the third school, Rochester, there was a last minute change of plan; a course of lessons had been devised for PSE that concerned family relationships and was scheduled for the last few weeks of the summer term. At the last minute however this was jettisoned in favour of another topic that was felt to be of more immediate relevance to the pupils' behaviour within school. I therefore decided to include a series of history lessons in the research; although only three of 'my' pupils were present in the class taken by this particular teacher, the lessons made an important contribution to the project because of the emphasis he placed on family throughout his lessons. The difficulties that these disparate subjects present from the point of view of the analysis is that, once again, each group of children was working with different material in a different context and with different aims and objectives for each lesson. I have therefore followed a similar pattern to the preceding chapter and devote a separate section to each school, but in

this case have dealt with each lesson independently; again I draw the themes together in a summary of the key points at the end of the chapter.

11i: Sylvester School's PSE

The PSE lesson I was invited to join was part of the programme that all pupils in the school study; it covers such areas as drug and alcohol abuse as well as different aspects of personal behaviour and safety. In this instance, the lesson was concerned with 'the value of being assertive and how this can be used as an effective tool when dealing with stress'; it followed the previous lesson in which the pupils discussed stress and made a survey of those matters that they found most stressful in their lives. While the survey was not part of this particular lesson, it was interesting to note that problems with parents and siblings were top of the list, reflecting the centrality of family life for these teenagers and the importance that they placed on their family relationships. The teacher, Mr. White, was the form tutor for all of the pupils involved in the research project and was therefore responsible for their fortnightly sessions of PSE. His teaching style was quiet but authoritative; the pupils listened when he talked and were quick to respond when he made requests. During the course of the lesson he never raised his voice, and the pupils appeared generally interested and engaged in their work when they were required to take an active part.

Mr. White opened the lesson by reminding the class of the work they had done in the previous session about stress; he then talked about following the thread of coping with stress and said that the lesson would be based on four words: assertive, aggressive, passive and manipulative. There was some discussion on the meaning of the words and the posture that would be adopted in each case; 'manipulative' was dismissed as a troublesome concept by Mr. White, so the focus shifted to the emotions concerned within the other three words. He then asked for volunteers to act as though they were coming in late for a lesson

in either a passive, aggressive or assertive way and for the rest of the class to identify the way in which the volunteer was behaving. The boys who offered to play the roles found this difficult, and the class was unsure as to which behaviour was being demonstrated; Mr. White asked how the pupils felt that he was reacting to one particular boy's attempt at being assertive and two girls immediately said they thought he was aggressive. Mr. White then observed that he was trying to be assertive. The potential for misunderstanding that had been demonstrated in these few minutes was, however, not explored further; Mr. White merely commented that to cope with stress 'you need to stay in control' and moved on to the next part of the lesson. He asked the pupils to divide into groups of two or three and then gave them six role-play cards (Appendix III) which they were to act out according to the following instructions:

> *Mr. White: ... we're going to have conversations between two people ... The young person could be you - but you don't have to act the way you do normally - and the other is either a parent, brother or sister. How you respond is up to you but I want you to respond in a non-aggressive, non-passive but assertive way ... Think about how it might feel to be a parent and how you'd respond. Think about how the conversation might go ... theoretically I won't hear any shouting (field notes, 1.2.00).*

Each scene involved a teenager and an older member of the family and concerned matters such as drinking, smoking, staying out late, the teenager having to walk home alone in the dark after school and borrowing clothes from siblings. The groups began the different role plays and at various intervals Mr. White stopped the class and commented on work in progress or asked a group to show the rest of the class what they were doing:

> *Mr. White: Over here one girl is just denying that she's drunk anything. Well, the trouble with that is, denying that she's had a drink is not being very truthful and will end in confrontation and aggression (field notes, 1.2.00).*

To me he commented that they were not exploring what might happen if the child were truthful, giving reasons for why it happened. Three boys then presented their version of the 'smoking' card, in which one boy asked his 'parent' what he would do if he knew a young person smoked; the reply *'Hit him'* led the teenager to say *'Well, my brother smokes'*. At

this point, Mr. White intervened and said there was 'quite a lot of aggression, but not much conversation' in this scene and asked if anyone else had another version; the boys were not delivering the calm, rational discussion that was expected. Another boy however commented:

> *Henry: I think that was realistic as I think that parents would get aggressive in that situation.*
> *Mr. White: Yes, it's not just the child's job to keep control, it's the parent's job as well. I know, I'm a parent and I can be unreasonable (field notes, 1.2.00).*

These exchanges bring up three important aspects of family relationships that have been recurrent in the research project; honesty, the importance of communication, and the responsibilities that both child and parents share in a quasi-democratic relationship that is based on trust and openness. Prompted by the boy in the above quotation, Mr. White acknowledges that parents - as indeed all people - can be unreasonable; that certain situations can give rise to emotional, knee-jerk reactions which can escalate into open confrontation and aggression. This in turn leads to stress for both children and parents and, in the context of a lesson that concerns stress management through self-control, is a situation that both parties should try to avoid. But although Mr. White allows that emotions are not rational, he makes no allusion to the intensity of feelings that can be (temporarily) uncontrollable, or to the possibility that sensible and reasonable debate does not work for every family at all times, or that sometimes the 'truth' can be so unpalatable that it is better left unsaid; once again the emphasis is on talking, on communication in which each party can learn the other's point of view and then take it into consideration while plotting the next course of action. This is something about which he feels very strongly, as he emphasised in his interview:

> *Mr. White: Being able to talk, I think that's one of the most important things ... I think it's a very important feature of every family, that they get together and talk about whatever it is they want to talk about, that's important to them at some time (interview 3.7.00).*

Part of this was as a form of protection against allowing problems to become unmanageable, or preventing them from increasing to such an extent that a crisis ensues; it provides support for children who are finding things difficult at school and gives them a chance to air possible responses to situations that they are finding troublesome:

> *Mr. White: ... it's difficult to get to the bottom with kids how much [talking] they're doing at home ... I get the feeling ... there's not a lot of quality talking going on unless things get very serious. And very often you get parents coming in and saying, 'There's a big problem happened here' ... if they [pupils] were talking to their mums and dads, older brothers or sisters at home ... they would actually be sharing those ideas and working them through more and they wouldn't become so much of a problem ... I don't think they do enough [talking] to be honest with you (interview, 3.7.00).*

Talking within the family thus makes life easier at school both for pupils and teachers, a point of view that has some resonance with Mrs. Smith's views from Montague primary school. Mr. White said that he tried to promote the idea of talking within the family within his PSE lessons, and although it was *'not always the main angle of the lesson'*, in this particular lesson the emphasis was on talking calmly and assertively in order to put the pupils'/parents' point of view across. An illustration of this presented itself at one point when he asked one of the girls how she would respond to the 'walking home alone' scenario:

> *Jemima: [I'd] explain how it felt.*
> *Mr. White: And can you see how if you explain how it felt rather than slamming the door then they [parents] might understand? This gives us a chance to put the shoe on the other foot and gives us an insight into how it feels to be on the other side, how parents feel when you meet these things at home (field notes, 1.2.00).*

Talking thus fosters understanding between family members; this particular role play was aimed specifically at getting the pupils to consider their parents' point of view and to understand that they, too, have feelings that need to be respected if family life is to run smoothly, and on calm debate in which the individual puts her point across without resorting to shouting and histrionics. In his interview he commented that he was pleased with the general response to the lesson:

> *Mr. White: ... a lot of them actually began to think about and internalise what it must feel like as a parent and there was [sic] quite a lot of dilemmas going on there ... but I was pleased with the way in which they ... [began] to talk to each other about what they were thinking about, being the parent and ... to think that well, actually there is a viewpoint to be seen here and it was something they hadn't considered, so it was ... nice to see that happening (interview, 3.7.00).*

He also talked about his role as form tutor and the *'family'* atmosphere that was present within the class, which he suggested gave the pupils *'the ability to actually feel confident to talk to another individual'* and to offer support to one another. He argued that his job as a form tutor is to watch his pupils' progress - academic, behavioural and emotional - and to educate pupils to cope with future situations rather than to raise aspects of family life that may cause pain for a particular pupil. We talked about bringing in the darker side of the family to lessons:

> *Mr. White: ... when you bring in the darker side [of the family] very often, if you're not careful, you may be treading on something with somebody that has actually happened and you don't know. So it's easier to be positive than negative ... I think the natural inclination of a teacher is not to confront pupils with something that is very, very difficult to cope with and difficult to know where it's going to go ... Cos in the end ... what I mainly do is to teach, to educate but I'm also as a form tutor concerned about ... the progress of kids ... I think it's just, it's keeping a watch on that rather than sort of intervening a lot of the time and therefore possibly stirring things up that don't need to be stirred up. It's something to be avoided (interview, 3.7.00).*

This is a repetition of the primary school teachers' opinions, and may well be a reflection of the more sensitive and personal PSE lessons in which - unlike the case of *Romeo and Juliet* or the drama lessons - there is little distance between the subject matter and each pupil's own experience. If, as Mr. White suggests, the purpose of PSE is to provide pupils with a range of strategies to cope with future situations, then it also provides hope for those young people who are suffering within their family lives by suggesting that things can get better in the future if the techniques learned in school are followed. The implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, let us turn to the message that the pupils received from the lesson.

11ii: The Pupils' Reactions

The girls were, once again, reasonably receptive both to the lesson and to the idea of role play as a means of bringing the topic to life. They commented that they had liked the *'interaction'* of the lesson and preferred it to *'just sitting there and listening'*; they felt able to talk freely in their small groups and felt that was preferable to having to say their ideas in front of the whole class when *'others might think they're stupid'*. They believed that the message for them was:

> *Natasha: Be aware.*
> *Rebecca: There are different ways of handling things. You can't just shout at them [family] and you might be wrong. Or you need to think that you might be, you need to realise that ... so there's lots of different ways of coming about the problem ...*
> *Lottie: Different people have different ways of dealing with different situations. Cos someone, a shy nervous person, they're not really going to be aggressive or very assertive. Someone who's more outgoing is likely to be more assertive (interview, 8.2.00).*

During our discussion on the meaning of the three words that had been used in the lesson,

Natasha gave an interesting interpretation of the meaning of 'assertive':

> *Natasha: Doing what you want but not in a horrible way. Not just like doing whatever you want and not caring about anyone else [or] just doing it like you want to (interview, 8.2.00).*

Thus, although the theme of the lesson was ostensibly about the management of family relationships, the message could be construed as powerfully individualistic. *'Doing what you want'*, however nicely you may do it, is essentially about pleasing yourself rather than submitting to the needs/wants of others; being assertive in this case is getting your own way without trampling too much on the feelings of those who are nearest and dearest to you. Once again we return to the boundary between the individual and the family; to the profound difficulty of determining where that boundary should lie and to what extent personal identity should be determined by those with whom we live. Yet, these individualistic considerations notwithstanding, Natasha gave a thoughtful example of how the lesson may have helped her relationship with her mother:

Natasha: On Friday when we went to town, I had an argument with my mum in town and afterwards like I just told her like how I was feeling and what had started it. And then she could see it from my point of view and she apologised and said that she was sorry that she had made me feel that way ... Normally I just go off into my room and ignore my mum for the rest of the day.
Rebecca: Until she says sorry. That's what I do (laughs).
Natasha: But when I actually spoke to her about how I was feeling, she apologised, she was like different ... It meant that we were talking, we were putting the pieces back together again (interview, 8.2.00).

This is the other side of the lesson; that relationships can be rewarding if enough time is spent understanding the other's point of view, that communication between the different parties is the most effective way of developing that understanding and that there is therefore hope for the future if things are going badly at the moment. Natasha clearly has a sense of some of these issues and is prepared to experiment with different types of behaviour in order to make her family relationships more positive without losing her own sense of self. Rebecca however was more concerned with the fury that her brother awakens within her:

Rebecca: ... [my brother] gets me so worked up, really angry. I have to like shout at him or hurt him or something. So I can't really say 'That's really selfish' or 'Why are you doing that, it's stupid'. I can't just walk away ... he can just shout at me and I have to shout back, to get him back ... it's really hard ... I might be able to communicate, maybe. I'm not sure really. I dunno really (interview, 8.2.00).

As we have seen, there was no explicit reference in the lesson to ungovernable emotions, and Rebecca is struggling with the idea that she should be able to communicate calmly with her brother yet feels unable to do so because of the volatile nature of her relationship with him and the strength of her own feelings. This is in contrast to Tania, who argued that the scenario where a sibling borrows something without permission had helped her to see that discussion would improve her relationship with her sister:

Tania: It makes it calmer. Cos if she tries to argue back then you can just say, 'Well I'm not arguing back' and just say, 'You can't take that off me because', instead of just shouting at her. Like, 'Ask next time' (interview, 8.2.00).

Lottie, Tania and Rebecca each thought that the lesson had been useful; it had provoked thought about managing relationships, it had provided a secure environment in which to discuss potentially sensitive topics and they could see how calm, reasonable discussion can be an effective means of reducing stress within families. Natasha however was not so sure despite her earlier example of how she had managed her own relationship with her mother:

> *Natasha: ... at the beginning really he just explained what a certain type of person was, and that's different for everybody so I didn't feel it helped me very much. Just listening to what other people thought about it didn't help me with what I thought about it. And then we did those little role plays, well I couldn't really relate to much of it (interview 8.2.00).*

The boys had similar thoughts to Natasha, and were less than enthusiastic about the lesson. They were able to relate some of the role plays to their own family life - most particularly the one where the teenager comes home late after drinking with friends - but when I asked how they would transfer what they did in the lesson to their home lives, David and Michael merely said:

> *David: Dunno*
>
> *Michael: I didn't relate to any of them (interview 9.2.00).*

Nathan was more forthcoming and able to say why he thought the lesson bore little relevance to life outside school:

> *Nathan: ... I think that what we did in the classroom, what my group did anyway, wasn't as serious as what I do at home. It was a bit more jokey ... When I'm at home I don't like to joke about it, I want to stay out till ten or eleven o'clock at night (interview 9.2.00).*

This statement, together with these boys' enthusiasm for the drink-related scenario and the reaction to the smoking role play discussed earlier, suggests that they were more concerned with macho posturing than the stereotypically feminine concerns of conflict resolution, examination of personal feelings and the ability to empathise with others. While the girls all related the lesson to situations within their own family lives and talked fluently about their feelings, the boys discussed dealing with conflict with a *'bunch of hard nuts'* and argued that being assertive in that kind of situation could lead to getting *'your face beaten*

in'; they felt that all three types of behaviour under discussion were relevant at different times and within different contexts. The implication is that the narrow focus of the lesson on family lives lends itself to the same moralising undertones they had experienced in other lessons; the boys felt they had little to learn from this overt examination of how families could and should function. And it is quite clear that, for Mr. White, the question of talking is fundamentally important within family life; as he said, a crucial part of this lesson was to promote the idea of good understanding between parents and children through talking. Equally clearly, the boys have met this point of view before and their resentment at its repetition is noticeable; although Nathan said that he thought the lesson would perhaps make him more co-operative with his parents rather than *'just shouting at them'*, none of the boys believed the lesson to be useful:

> *Nathan: I didn't think it was useful at all really, it was sort of like nothing that I don't do at home. And any bits that I didn't do, I'd know how to deal with anyway.*
> *David: It's just recapping on things we already now. Doing it again.*
> *Int: What did you think about it?*
> *Michael: Not much really (interview, 9.2.00).*

And yet that does not mean that the boys do not take their family relationships seriously; as Nathan said, the atmosphere within the classroom is *'more jokey'* than that at home, and this may well mean that it is difficult to act out the role plays with any conviction. There is also the question of whether role plays are the best means to get the point across; although Mr. White told the pupils that how they responded was up to them, he also said that he wanted them to respond *'in a non-aggressive, non-passive but assertive way'* to the different situations on the role play cards, and reinforced this with his dismissal of those boys who used violence as the parental reaction to a child smoking. There was thus little room for manoeuvre within the scenes; the expectation was that the pupils would respond in a calm and rational way to each situation which left little opportunity for the dynamism and creativity that is usually associated with improvisation. My observation was that the pupils had generally enjoyed the lesson and had contributed actively to the group work; it is

however possible to participate at different levels and/or without taking it seriously, and this seems to be the case for the boys.

11iii: Trevelyan School's PSE

The PSE lessons that I observed at Trevelyan school consisted of a course of seven lessons on sex education, six of which I observed. Both the form tutor, Mr. Linden, and the Head of PSE, Mrs. Ash, were present, although it was Mrs. Ash who led the course. Mr. Linden was there, as he remarked later, partly out of curiosity and partly because he felt that he would then be in a position to deal with any issue that the pupils or parents might feel arose from the subject; as the form tutor, he felt it was likely that the pupils would come first to him with any problems and therefore wanted to know what had been covered in the lessons. He was also a practical source of support for Mrs. Ash, helping with the presentations that the pupils made about contraception and offering comments on their work on body image. Both teachers liked the class; Mrs. Ash commented that it was a '*cohesive group*', while Mr. Linden spoke affectionately of the relationship that he had developed with the pupils in the three years that they had been in his tutor group. In his interview he said that he tried to encourage a relaxed, secure atmosphere of *'purposeful work'*, and my observation was that to a large extent this was the case; most of the pupils got on with the task in hand, they were prepared to discuss the issues that arose without embarrassment and they were reasonably respectful of one another and the teachers. In addition the few pupils who had been disruptive in the drama lessons were more prepared to join in with the activities that were presented during this course; this could have been a result of Mr. Linden and Mrs. Ash's less formal approach that encouraged a certain amount of light-hearted banter between staff and pupils.

In her interview, Mrs. Ash said that the purpose of the first few lessons was to encourage the pupils to relax around the subject of sex education and to feel comfortable with discussing issues that were potentially embarrassing or difficult:

> *Mrs. Ash: ... the first two or three lessons are on relationships because that enables them to be talking together and focusing on that particular aspect of relationships, talking about how they change and how their body changes and how their emotions change ... and I hope ... it's a lead into feeling more confident in talking about particular specific issues about sex, sexual intercourse and contraception (interview 4.10.00).*

The first lesson concerned body image; the pupils were invited to think of their own image as twenty-one year olds and to write their thoughts down, to make a collage of body pictures taken from magazines that Mrs. Ash supplied and finally to reflect on the image of 'the perfect body' that is promoted in the media. In the second lesson, the pupils watched a video from the BBC series *The Human Body* which likened changes between the years of eleven and fourteen to riding on a roller coaster, and showed adolescents of both genders describing their feelings and perceptions as they went through puberty. In the third lesson the class was divided once again into groups to discuss the situations described by the cards that Mrs. Ash distributed (see Appendix IV); they also considered sources of help that were available for these types of situations/problems and answered a 'Getting pregnant myths quiz' (see Appendix V). They then moved on to contraception, which was the subject of the next two lessons. For these, the pupils used leaflets provided by Mrs. Ash to prepare a short talk on various different methods of contraception and the protection that each one offered against sexually transmitted infections (STI's). In the final lesson, the message was about safe sex; Mrs. Ash pointed out that as children, the class had been protected against childhood infections through immunisation but that there was *'no vaccination against pregnancy'*; that they had to take responsibility for their own sexual health and for the *'emotional issues'* to which sex gave rise - although there was no further discussion of what these issues might be. The pupils then had to imagine that they were part of a

marketing company that was promoting safe sex to young people and to design a poster that was both eye-catching and memorable for the targeted group.

During the lessons, both teachers answered questions and offered comments on the pupil's practical work, but there was little discussion on the emotional side of relationships with family, future sexual partners or friends through these potentially difficult times of puberty. In the early lessons, the focus was on the self, on the adolescent who was undergoing those changes; what happens, how s/he might feel, how to find help with problems, the times in which a woman could become pregnant. The 'situation cards' that Mrs. Ash introduced in the third lesson were used as a springboard to develop the pupils' ability to chair a discussion as much as to talk about the issues involved; Mrs. Ash outlined the qualities of an effective chairperson and suggested how the discussions should be conducted, but offered no comment on their content nor did she explore the issues with the whole class. The subsequent discussion on sources of help centred around professionals such doctors, nurses and Childline, and although Mrs. Ash commented that *'very few'* pupils seemed to regard their parents as the *'best source of help'*, the point was not pursued (field notes, 9.6.00). During the work on contraception, the focus was exclusively on the different methods and their efficacy in protection against pregnancy and STI's; in the final lesson, Mrs. Ash commented that she wanted to see *'evidence of the information'* that the pupils has assimilated over the previous few weeks. There was thus little scope for exploration of the 'relationships' to which Mrs. Ash referred in her opening comments.

When I asked her about the message that she was trying to get across to the pupils, Mrs. Ash replied that there were several points that she believed were important:

> *Mrs. Ash: ... obviously the information, but I think more than anything ... I want them to be able to feel comfortable that they can talk about issues around sexual relationships and relationships generally ... And I think that's the main [thing]. And feeling assertive, being able to take decisions based on the facts that they've learned and therefore being able to take, you know, sensible decisions and that their well-being is going to be safeguarded. And that they can be assertive in a relationship and saying, 'Yes, this is right for me now', or, 'No, this is not right for me now', and having that, feeling that self-respect but also being respected by other*

> *people that that decision's right for them. And that's an enormous undertaking, I suppose it's the crux to all sexual education, sex and relationship education (interview, 4.10.00).*

First and foremost, then, comes the information concerning contraception and sexual health, which is unsurprising when Mrs. Ash considers one of the government's expressed aims for sex education:

> *Mrs. Ash: ... the message nationally is to try and reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and you've got to do that by them feeling that they can take those decisions that are right (interview 4.10.00).*

Reducing the number of pregnancies is then linked to '*the crux*' of sex and relationship education; the confidence to resist unwelcome sexual advances until the *'right'* moment presents itself. If this is the heart of the matter, it seems curious that decision-making was not considered during the course; there seems to be an assumption that the factual information on STI's and contraception would be enough to ensure that *'sensible decisions'* would be taken. But taking sensible decisions is not necessarily the same as waiting for the *'right'* moment to have sex for the first time; different religions, for example, have different values regarding sexual activity and, for those without religion, perceptions can be altered by alcohol, drugs, or desire. Although Mrs. Ash mentioned the Catholic religion's opposition to inter-uterine devices (IUD's) in passing, the reasons for this were not mentioned (field notes, 23.6.00). In his interview, Mr. Linden elaborated these points:

> *Mr. Linden: I didn't think from what I saw there was quite enough on the decision-making ... I think the emotional aspect, the responsibility aspect, the considering of what you're doing and the fact that you can see it's a big step to take ... should be dealt with. And perhaps considering different values inasmuch as some people say sex before marriage is wrong ... And some will say it's okay if you love the person ... [or] if you're above a certain age ... [or] when you get to this state, stage of maturity (interview, 7.7.00).*

He also reiterated the concerns raised by Mr. Brown of Sylvester school; that boys may pressure girls to have sex by threatening to go elsewhere should the latter be unwilling:

> *Mr. Linden: ... When is the right time? Well, there's no hard and fast rule but perhaps it's not just because someone says they'll leave you if you*

don't. That might be a position a girl might find herself in. You know, how do you deal with that? (interview, 7.7.00).

Thus the 'talking' that the pupils did during the course of the lessons mainly concerned body image, the mood swings that accompany puberty and the mechanics of contraception: the emphasis was on the practical rather than the emotional issues. Part of this was a deliberate attempt - as we saw with Mr. Brown's drama lessons - to maintain a light-hearted approach in order to avoid embarrassment; when talking briefly about the first experience of sex, Mrs. Ash argued that *'it's very important that everyone keeps a sense of humour otherwise it can get very embarrassing'* (field notes, 16.6.00). She noted with approval that the video's amusing approach gave the pupils *'permission to laugh'* (field notes, 26.5.00), and commented in her interview that *'you've got to have a sense of humour when you're teaching it. And actively practising it, I suppose'*. And although she said that she wanted the pupils to be *'empowered'* to make the *'right decision'*; *'to make their decisions responsibly and look after themselves'* (interview, 4.10.00), her approach that laced humour with practical information failed to take into account that, for young people of that age, these matters are indeed momentous and therefore worthy of serious discussion.

11iv: The Pupils' Responses

The girls had several objections to the course of lessons that they had found unsatisfactory in the extreme. First they argued that it was too little, too late:

Anna: It was just like basic stuff, wasn't it.
Charlotte: Yeah, that you'd learn at primary school ...
Zoe: We knew most of it, didn't we.
Charlotte: And I reckon they should have given it to us the year before.
Zoe: Yeah, Year 9 is way too late ... like this stuff everyone knows about already, it's like people want to go on like, to know more really, don't they (interview 7.7.00).

They wanted more information about STI's such as HIV and AIDS; they wanted to know how to use contraceptive devices, including how to put a condom on; they wanted to discuss and/or experience the hard work involved in having babies:

> *Charlotte: And in America there are things like baby things that people have to look after and I reckon that would have been good. Because I know it would make people realise how hard work it is and if you do get pregnant and why you should protect yourself (interview 7.7.00).*

But, from their point of view, the most significant problem was that the emotional side of relationships was not discussed or taken seriously enough:

> *Zoe: Well she didn't actually mention like at one time like having sex with someone cos you like them ... When we were leading up to it, she'd be [talking] about getting a condom and stuff, not actually realising that you do like the person enough to have sex with them. It's like having a condom in your pocket's more important than loving them ...*
> *Charlotte: I reckon we'd learn more about relationships watching an episode of 'Dawsons' Creek' ... not being mean, she's just made it out that you go out with someone for a date and have sex ...*
> *Anna: She didn't like make it out that it had to be a serious thing.*
> *Int: She talked quite a lot about humour, didn't she. And the importance of humour.*
> *Zoe: No but you've got to be serious about like some of it.*
> *Anna: You want to make sure you love each other and stuff and she didn't talk about that ... contraception's important but love's as important (interview 7.7.00).*

These girls showed considerable contempt for what they regarded as prudish attitudes about sex; they argued that adults in general are unable to talk openly about issues surrounding sexual relationships and that this contributed to the relatively high teenage pregnancy rates in this country:

> *Zoe: ... when you look at other countries, they're more open and stuff ... And I reckon that's why, cos no-one talks about it. Until you're too old and then you get like this sex education (interview, 7.7.00).*

Clearly these young girls did not feel the embarrassment that Mrs. Ash had feared, and their willingness to discuss the more difficult, emotional issues displays both a maturity that was underestimated in the lessons and a wish for some guidance as they entered the infinitely complex world of sexual relationships. Their maturity was also demonstrated in

their recognition that sex could be a spur-of-the-moment thing; an act that could be regretted the next day when, perhaps, the parties involved had sobered up:

> *Zoe: Like there's a lot of people will regret it won't they, like losing their virginity to someone they didn't really like (interview, 7.7.00).*

But finally they repeated Mr. Linden's point about the lack of discussion on decision-making or the idea that sex is not compulsory:

> *Charlotte: She never said, 'You don't have' ... I can't get this out right, but she never used to say like you don't have to have sex. She never said that ... Even if you do go out with a person for a long time, you don't have to have sex with them. She never said that once.*
> *Zoe: And she never said like that it was our decision, she didn't go into the like being like pressurised stuff, did she. Cos there is a lot of pressure, isn't there (interview, 7.7.00).*

Thus the lessons were regarded as unhelpful; these girls believed that the information that they received was not detailed enough, the emotional side of relationships was ignored and the decision-making process was left undiscussed. This means that Mrs. Ash's aim that the pupils should feel *'empowered'* by their sex education is wide of the mark for these girls; they felt that it raised rather more questions than it answered.

The boys were equally critical, although Alex began by saying that it had been an improvement on previous sex education. His initial interpretation could possibly provide ammunition for those right-wing groups which believe that sex education encourages promiscuous behaviour:

> *Alex: ... rather than pushing it away and seeing it as a bad thing, you encourage [sex] but in the right way ...*
> *Int: Do you think they're encouraging sex?*
> *Alex: In a way yeah ... they're sort of telling you to, just to take care really (interview, 7.7.00).*

Further questioning made it evident that encouraging sex *'in the right way'* meant that the pupils learned to *'take responsibility'* for what they do, which mirrors precisely one of Mrs. Ash's lesson objectives; that the pupils should use the information available to take *'sensible decisions'* and therefore *'to safeguard their own well-being'*. The other two boys however felt that they had learned little:

Ryan: ... I didn't like it that much, it was like primary school stuff.
Nigel: Yeah, we did like all that stuff in primary school.
Ryan: It wasn't new, was it ... It was tedious, a bit tedious (interview 7.7.00).

This, in turn, prompted Alex to suggest that:

Alex: ... it needs to go further ... um more, a lot more sort of relationships, I think, maybe. It needs to be more on that (interview 7.7.00).

His reluctance to commit himself to a definite course of action contrasts strongly with the girls' fluent and fierce criticism of the lessons and gives an indication of the boys' disinclination to discuss this topic at any length, something we saw earlier with the boys' reaction to the drama lessons in Sylvester school. However Nigel, in response to Alex's suggestion, raised a valuable point:

Nigel: I dunno, cos she might stereotype and you know, if she says, 'Go about a relationship in this way', it might not suit you. We're all different and go about things in different ways (interview 7.7.00).

Thus, in a short sentence, Nigel points to the profound difficulty that teachers face when they are giving sex and relationship education to a class of thirty pupils all from different backgrounds, values and beliefs.

11v: History in Rochester School

As I mentioned earlier, the family-related PSE lessons that I had hoped to observe during my time at Rochester school were substituted for a different course. This placed me in something of a difficult position; it was near the end of the school year which is a busy period for most teachers and not, therefore, a propitious moment to place extra demands on their time. However at different intervals throughout the year I had observed history lessons with one particular teacher who had expressed an interest in the project and invited me to join him for three lessons in which family was part of the topic. Clearly family was an important subject for him and, in contrast to many other teachers whom I had met, he appeared to welcome it into the theme of his lessons. I had begun these observations as an

enrichment to my knowledge of Rochester because I had originally envisaged a uniformity to the project that centred around the three same subject areas in the three schools. However, as the plans to include PSE from all three schools collapsed, the history lessons could then be included to make a useful contribution to the project.

The teacher, Mr. Shankar, had been employed at Rochester since he had qualified two years earlier. His presence and his dynamic style of delivery made for compulsive listening; he was clearly enthused by his subject which had a motivating effect on his pupils who worked reasonably diligently most of the time. I observed one lesson on each of the topics of the slave trade, the workhouse, and the Holocaust. He used an extract from a video in all three lessons to encourage the pupils to empathise with the situations that the various groups of society were placed in at that particular time, arguing that this empathy with others has kept alive his own interest in history, and that he wanted to do the same for his pupils:

> *Mr. Shankar: ... as a student ... I used to think ... what it would have been like if I was ... in a Jewish family, if that was happening to me at that time. How would I have felt? And that's how I've retained interest in history and I think that's how pupils retain an interest in history, you know, just to make them think at that extra level. Just trying to make them think what it would have been like for a Jewish family living in Germany during Hitler's rise to power ... the fears they would have had, you know, what they would have felt (interview 30.6.00).*

It was no coincidence, then, that he chose extracts from three highly emotive films to illustrate the topics; *Amistrad* for the slave trade, Charlie Chaplin's life for the workhouse and *Schindler's List* for the Holocaust. Each of these portrays scenes of families being split up, of violence and brutality towards those who have been separated and the subsequent emotional trauma of those to whom this had happened. He returned to these people's feelings in his comments after each video had been shown; in the lesson about the slave trade, he asked the pupils to consider the impact of the slave trade on humanity, drew attention to the slave woman who had deliberately thrown herself overboard with her newborn baby during the Middle Passage, and urged them to *'imagine being kidnapped.*

being taken from your family' (field notes, 22.10.99). Before he showed the video on Charlie Chaplin's life, he suggested that the pupils should picture life as a child in the workhouse and write an extract from their diary as a homework exercise:

> *Mr. Shankar: ... put some feelings and emotions in this piece of work; imagine that you belong in this period when the workhouse was introduced .. When I read this work, it's got to be believable. You've got to empathise with how it was ... You went in as a family of five, six, how does it feel to be separated? You've got the correct historical facts, how did it feel? (field notes, 19.11.99).*

In the lesson on the Holocaust, he wrote on the board that it was 'The worst crime in history'; as part of his explanation, he spoke of families being split up, of marriages between Jews and Germans being outlawed and how some people were shot in front of their families. After he had shown the clip from *Schindler's List,* he read extracts from a text book on the death of one family in an open grave, on children being separated from their mothers, shot and being thrown immediately on a fire, and on babies being smashed by guards until they were a 'bloody mess'. Understandably the pupils were quiet; the combination of a powerfully moving film and the gruesome descriptions had the desired effect of shocking them (field notes, 30.6.00).

In his interview, Mr. Shankar talked about his own family values:

> *Mr. Shankar: ... I know from my own family values that I've got responsibilities that I'm expected to carry out, I've always been brought up like that ... I've got ... sisters ... I know that I will contribute towards their marriage when they get married, help them settle down, that's my responsibility to them.*
> *Int: Financial contribution?*
> *Mr. Shankar: Yeah, not just financial ... being there for them as well. I mean that's how I've been brought up, that you know, they're your responsibility. So I know I'll be contributing towards that, which I don't mind in any sense. Our parents are prepared to do a lot for us, so it's my turn to you know, sort of give back (interview 30.6.00).*

Although he argued that he saw little difference between British and Asian family values - because all parents *'look out for the best for their children'* - the above quotation demonstrates the type of family loyalty and commitment that we have seen with the two

Asian girls Soraya and Shamit. This Asian tradition of close family relationships was also contrasted with what he described as the British freedom of a more individualistic lifestyle:

> *Mr. Shankar: ... you know, what I see nowadays is very little emphasis on family as a unit. More emphasis on the individual, I think, than on the family as a unit (interview, 30.6.00).*

This is exactly the case that we have seen with the research project so far; that family is important, but, if push comes to shove, the individual must look after herself. Despite this belief, Mr. Shankar argued that, during the course of lessons, he tried not to promote his own idea of family values:

> *Mr. Shankar: I've got to keep a very unbiased opinion ... I very rarely try to express my opinions through history because you have to teach them the facts ... you've got to teach them the facts of history (interview, 30.6.00).*

One of the problems with this trust in the *'facts of history'* is that it does not take into account the reality that some 'facts' are necessarily given prominence over others, or that their presentation can be biased, or that they can be manipulated to prove a case. Even within a tightly prescribed curriculum, the values of the teacher govern the emphasis and the delivery of the lesson content; in the case of this particular teacher, who drew attention to the impact these events or institutions had on families by using dramatic and powerful material to illustrate his points, the importance of the family unit was stressed to some considerable degree. This was reinforced by the way that references to individual suffering - as in the case of writing the workhouse diary - were in the context of the divided family and the consequent misery of isolation. Mr. Shankar went on to say that one of his aims was to encourage the young people to think about what they are taught:

> *Mr. Shankar: ... I like ... to give them you know, all the facts. And then I like them to think about it, you know, why it was like that. They've got to be able to think about it rather than be taught this is what happened, that is what happened, right copy down, take the notes (interview, 30.6.00).*

In the case of family, he is inviting reflection on personal family life; the brutality is implicitly contrasted with the more peaceable life in contemporary Britain, and the agony of separation with the (possible) closeness of the family unit. Three of the pupils involved

in the project attended these classes, and for each of them there was a powerful message contained within the lessons. For Laurence:

> *Laurence: [in the workhouse] they were taken off and then separated, kids, mothers ... I think they'd just get lonely ... [It made me think] well, family is something that that isn't supposed to happen to. You're supposed to be there for one another (interview, 30.6.00).*

The word *'supposed'* is significant from a young person who has a difficult and fractured family life, and can be compared with the reaction of the two other pupils, both of whom had reported secure and loving backgrounds during the course of the project:

> *Nat: Um, well it was kind of like unsettling for the kids and that ... cos they were separated like ... and that's like they didn't even see their parents or anything. And that's the point, they didn't know them or anything ... I couldn't imagine being without my father. Sometimes like you think, 'Ah I can't be stuck in there', but when you see things like that then you like think that you always like loved them and that. They're always there (interview, 11.7.00).*

This confident assertion is rather different to Laurence's pensive comment that family life should be about emotional and physical togetherness. It also carries the same sentiment as Shamit's response when she talked about a mother and child in a Nazi concentration camp:

> *Shamit: The mother was just, it must have just broken her heart, seeing her child just being smacked against the wall.*
> *Int: And being separated too.*
> *Shamit: Yeah, the women and the men, yeah. That was sad, very sad ... [it made me think that] Family's the most precious thing in the world. Some people hate their families but I don't know how (interview, 30.6.00).*

We are familiar with girls talking more fluently and easily about their emotions than the boys, and while Laurence and Nat moved on to talk about other aspects of 'family' in school, Shamit returned later to the point that she made above. Clearly these lessons had had a considerable impact on her thinking, and we can regard them as a significant moment in the development of her family values:

> *Shamit: ... if I didn't know about the Holocaust thing ... I mean that would just make me a different person to what I am now.*
> *Int: In what way?*
> *Shamit: Like. Like about, I dunno how to say it ... Or about the slave trade, if I didn't know anything about that I'd think that the family wasn't as important to me. I'd think that um ... there is obviously love in the family,*

> *but not as much. But now I think that love is important, that your family is the best thing that ever happened to you (interview, 30.6.00).*

Since I had first known her, Shamit had always talked about the centrality of her family to her life, but these lessons seem to have deepened her understanding of its importance, perhaps signified by her recognition that this information has made her a *'different person'*. These three pupils' reaction to their history lessons can be contrasted with that of with the three other girls', each of whom had covered essentially the same ground with the slave trade, the workhouse and the Holocaust. I asked them how much 'family' was brought into their lessons, and Soraya's reply is representative of all three:

> *Soraya: I don't think we really did that, we mostly do about the government ... we have been told that the Jewish family, they couldn't get out and they only had an hour to go shopping ... It wasn't really about how the family was feeling or what was going on in the house ... I don't think we did that much (interview, 11.7.00).*

Martha said her teacher concentrated on *'just Hitler and things like that'*, while Rochelle said they had learned how the Germans kept *'the fittest'* alive and used them as slaves; they studied *'a bit'* on the workhouse and how *'little children used to work'*. None felt that the family theme had been an important part of their studies, and their reactions tended to concentrate on the individual rather than the family unit. For instance, Martha said that if she had a son, she *'wouldn't send him off'* to war because *'you might never see him again'*, while Rochelle said the topic of the workhouse *'made her feel vulnerable'* because she was unable to contemplate being separated from her family. Both she and Soraya said that they were glad that they did not live in those times, by now a common reaction to a simplistic comparison between old and new and one that Mr. Shankar's pupils did not mention. Thus, while Mr. Shankar argued that he tried not to express his opinions, the importance that he placed on the family unit was apparent to his pupils through his choice of material, his interpretation of that material and the way he encouraged his pupils to empathise with the families that were separated. All three pupils had been provoked into thinking seriously

about family separation and loss, and had been encouraged to identify with those to whom it had happened. It appeared that they had done so.

Summary of Key Points:

1. In the PSE lesson in Sylvester, Mr. White was anxious that the pupils should talk calmly and rationally in the family scenarios. While three of the girls were reasonably content to do this, the remaining girl and the three boys found that they were unable to relate to the lesson. The boys felt that important aspects of behaviour were overlooked.

2. In the sex education in Trevelyan school, both boys and girls felt that the lessons had not covered enough; they all wanted further discussion on relationships and the girls wanted more information about STI's.

3. In the history lesson in Rochester school, the teacher Mr. Shankar places a comparatively strong emphasis on family life and encouraged the pupils to empathise with the victims of the Holocaust, families in the workhouse and families split up by the slave trade. None of the other teachers seemed to place such an emphasis on family life. One of Mr. Shankar's pupils felt that the knowledge gained from these lessons had made her into a *'different person'*.

Chapter 12: Secondary Pupils' Final Interviews

In the final interviews with each secondary pupil or group of pupils at the end of the year, we discussed the instances in which 'family' had been either the explicit focus of the lesson or where it had been part of the foundation upon which the lesson had been based. My aim was to ask them which topic or area of study they thought the most significant in causing reflection on 'family' and how they felt that this had influenced their views and perceptions on the nature of family life.

Of the nineteen pupils who took part in the project, seven were unable to say which subject had caused most reflection on family life, five cited PSE, four mentioned English, two thought history and one said that discussion about family problems with her friends in school. Of the first seven, the three boys from Trevelyan school found this question difficult to answer and their diffidence suggested that the 'family' aspect of lessons had sparked little lasting interest. While the other two shrugged in response to my question about which topic had been the most significant for them in making them think about family issues, Nigel said:

> *Nigel: Dunno really. None of the families that ... we've learned about, they're not really anything like my family. They always seem to argue and everything, always trouble and everything. I never see it like that ... (interview 7.7.00, Trevelyan).*

The response of both Nat (Rochester) and Rebecca (Sylvester) was similar; they both said *'Dunno, I can't think of anything'*. The remaining two in this category came from Rochester school; Soraya felt that there was '*nothing particularly'* that had made her think about family as *'family and school and you know home is just the same. Except at school you've got people your own age...'*. Laurence however argued that the project had sensitised him to the topic of the family within school and that he had noticed it in several different topics:

> *Laurence: ... the first time you spoke to me I didn't really notice about when they mentioned about families ... you've opened my mind a bit ... When you came and started interviewing about families and asked about how they talked about families in school, I said I didn't really know because I'd never*

really noticed. And now I have. And that was the same with 'Schindler's List', that was powerful and um, 'The Barricades' – have you read that? It's about family, the two sides Catholic and Protestant and that adds another level to it ...
Int: What have all these different things taught you about the family?
Laurence: ... that there isn't any stereotype, any typical family, every one is different and you might get a family that gets on well which is close to stereotypical family, you know ... what have they based it on? Because even if they based it on the best family in the world, the best family in the world would have their ups and downs ... (Laurence, interview 30.6.00, Rochester).

The three girls from Trevelyan school had similar views and also commented on the sensitising effect of discussing family with me, but they were more specific about the subject that caused the most reflection for them:

Anna: I reckon English when we did Anne Frank.
Int: What did it make you think?
Zoe: It wasn't written by like a writer, like from their point of view, it was real, it actually happened. And that made it real to you and it made you think about what was happening like in your house and how you could cope if that happened and stuff.
Anna: It shows like that the family's quite important doesn't it.
Charlotte: I read another book though, I read 'Goodnight Mister Tom'. And that's good because it
Anna: (interrupting) It shows you
Charlotte: It shows you that you can make good relationships with people who aren't your parents and you can be as close to them as you could be to your parents. It does show you how relationships are created cos at the beginning they were both really quiet and then they get really close and like, well not mum and dad but son and father. It's really good how it works after everything (interview 7.7.00, Trevelyan).

The other pupil who mentioned English was David from Sylvester school, although he brought in PSE as well:

David: I'd say Romeo and Juliet ... Well, cos like your parents are strict and if you do like the wrong thing you're either severely punished or thrown out on the streets. So it's really cruel ... [School's] influenced me quite, er, good, cos it makes you think about what you should do in the family ... Like if you come home drunk you should be told off. Like when we did that in PSE and it tells you to like think instead of doing it so quickly (interview 12.7.00, Sylvester).

All of the other five pupils in Sylvester school believed PSE to be the subject that caused most reflection. The girls saw this in a positive light:

Natasha: ... When we were doing that thing in PSE about what kind of person you are, um it just made me think about your like reactions, like they

mean so much, especially to other people. Just like the things you say can affect like other people so much. It's tough ...(interview 11.7.00, Sylvester).

Lottie and Tania also believed that PSE was a positive aspect of school life because they felt that they learned:

Tania: ...we're quite lucky in some ways aren't we, to do with our family. Some people get it really hard, don't they ... like all the people with split families and stuff ...
Int: Why was it the most significant?
Lottie: I suppose because whatever you do seems to relate back to the family. If we do about alcohol or drugs they always talk about the effect on your family and what your parents would do and things like that. So it's just family-based but it's different subjects ... [it] makes you think about the parents you've got, even though you think sometimes I wish they weren't my parents cos they're so embarrassing and stuff like that. And then you think how lucky you are that you have actually got your parents and that you live in the same house as them and so on ... you learn that [families] are not all the same. It's like you grow up with a stereotypical family which is like mum and dad, brother and sister or something like that and you sort of learn that it's not really like that. A lot of families have split up and there are lots of stepmothers and fathers, stepbrothers and sisters ...
Tania: They're all different really (interview 12.7.00, Sylvester).

Nathan and Michael however were less than enthusiastic; they had not changed their minds from the time of their post-observation interview, and, although PSE made them appreciate the type of family they had, they felt that the lessons had little immediate impact on the way they thought or behaved within family life:

Nathan: PSE lessons ... When you talk about family relationships and things, it makes you think about family ... how lucky you are to have two parents rather than a split family, or mother died, father died, divorced, whatever.
Int: What have you learned from PSE?
Michael: Nothing really
Nathan: Nothing you don't do it in any ordinary life ... I mean it might help you to try to sort yourself out
Michael: Get you to look at your problems
Nathan: But it doesn't really help knowing that you're aggressive. You probably already know that (interview 12.7.00, Sylvester).

Of the three remaining pupils from Rochester, two believed history to be the most significant subject:

Martha: Probably the workhouse ... just the fact that they were not allowed to see their kids. I'd hate that. And they'd get beaten up and stuff and they can't help any more or anything. Horrible that is, knowing that you can't

help your kids when they're crying and they're upset (interview 11.7.00, Rochester).

Shamit: ...You know, going through the holocaust and going through WW2, I've you know, I haven't experienced it but I don't know, it feels more important to you than you think.
Int: What?
Shamit: Your family is more important than you think. You know, you don't know how much love there is ... You know, they do love you, more than you think, I think (interview 30.6.00, Rochester).

Finally, Rochelle talked about the family relationships that some of her friends were experiencing as the most important part of her learning about 'family' within school:

Rochelle: You know, my friends. I think that they make me think about my family more. Cos I always try to help them and support them and some of the stuff that happens to them I just think that's just never happened to me or I'd never like it to happen to me and it just makes me think how lucky I am and how much I appreciate what I've got (interview 11.7.00, Rochester).

There was, then, no consensus on which lessons were the most significant in causing reflection on 'family', although the pupils from Sylvester school all agreed that PSE was more immediately relevant to family life. But, as Lottie said, that may be partly explained through their teacher relating each topic back to their own families and therefore making it more immediately and obviously relevant to family life. And, while several of the pupils had said that they had learned that there was no such thing as a stereotypical family, this was flatly contradicted by the three girls from Trevelyan school, who argued that the image of the family within school was:

Zoe: It's all like two parents and two kids and all happy.
Anna: And a dog ...
Zoe: Everyone knows it isn't ... but people still think of it like that, don't they? It's like no-one wants to like shatter the, the perfect image, isn't it really? ... it's cos it's so jammed into you when you're little ... [but] everyone's family life is like different because people are different in them. Cos no two people are the same so I think everyone's experience is going to be different (interview 7.7.00, Trevelyan).

This is clearly very different to Nigel's impression that 'family' in school is *'always trouble and everything'*, and interesting in view of the fact that these pupils were in the same class for most of their lessons. The girls' opinion was echoed to a degree by two of

the boys in Sylvester, who believed that their school tried to impress upon them that families should be *'happy'* and members should be respectful of one another:

> *Nathan: ... it's mum, dad, brothers, sisters not down each others' throats and hitting each other all the time*
> *Michael: Respect for everybody in the family, especially your parents (interview 11.7.00, Sylvester).*

But Laurence, I think, sums up the general feeling in which each of these young people seemed to hold on to the idea of 'family' being of central importance in their lives while acknowledging - sometimes painfully and through personal experience - that it may not always be easy:

> *Laurence: I used to think ... that a family was a brother, sister, a mum, a dad, you know. But it's a lot more than that, it's a lot more complicated than that ... I've learned that there isn't a stereotype, any typical family, every one is different ... You're always going to love your family ... I don't ever want to hear anything of my dad again but if he died, I'd be upset ... you can be the mentalist hardest nutcase in the world but your family's obviously going to be important to you (interview 30.6.00, Rochester).*

PART V: INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH DATA

In Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen I examine the different threads that run into 'family' within primary and secondary schools and explore some of the complexities that are involved in such a delicate and sensitive subject. In both these chapters the focus is more strongly on the teachers' position than that of their pupils; teachers provide the content of the lesson and direct the course of the lessons, while the reactions of their pupils can serve to illustrate some of the problems that may arise from this content and direction. In Chapter Fifteen I discuss the implications for policy-makers and practitioners and bring the project to a conclusion.

Chapter 13: The Primary Teachers and the Children's Families

In primary schools parents tend to be more involved in the school life of their children than in later years; some parents take the opportunity for an informal chat with the teacher at either end of the school day, others help within the classroom or on school trips and many become engaged in fund-raising efforts through organising or attending the various functions that take place during the year. Yet others are content to remain distant from the school and any activities within. From the school's point of view, as Mrs. Jones commented, a degree of openness in this relationship can be useful because it helps teachers to understand what is going on in a child's life, which in turn promotes a certain understanding of the reasons behind children's behaviour. She made another important observation when she said that much education has been achieved by the time that children begin to attend school, that the bases of behaviour are already formed and that parents have the major influence over children's learning.

This brief comment covers the fact that there are many different facets of learning that can overlap in different ways that are relevant to the teachers. First ethnic, religious, cultural and lifestyle differences within and between families lead to different relationship

values and modes of behaviour. Each of these contributes to the group dynamics within the classroom and may help or hinder the teacher to establish what she considers to be a satisfactory working relationship between herself and the different members of her class. Secondly the nature of family life has a direct bearing on how important school is to the child; parents who are struggling with problems of poverty and/or unemployment may not have the stamina to support their children's learning, and those who have English as a second language may find that they are at a disadvantage when it comes to helping with the intricacies of grammar and spelling. A disruptive home life may sap the child's energy and leave little for the demands of the school day, yet the security of school may provide for some children a welcome contrast to the hardships of family life and offer a potential escape from emotional or financial difficulties. Equally, some children may find that home and school are complementary to one another. Thirdly, parents have their own ideas about formal education that may well have an influence on the attitude of their children; at one end of the spectrum some may have had an unhappy school career and regard schools and teachers with dislike and suspicion, while others at the opposite end may be enthusiastically and uncritically supportive. 'Family' and school are thus interwoven in complex ways that are immediately relevant to the nature of classroom life and the ability of the teacher to comply with the demands of the National Curriculum.

In their interviews all three teachers showed awareness of the diversity among families in contemporary British society together with respect for each family's privacy. In addition they all showed compassion towards those children who they believed to be *'suffering'* in their family lives. This concern for the children as individuals featured particularly in Mrs. Parker's interview, although both of the other teachers showed themselves to be equally sympathetic during the course of the research. In addition, each was careful to stress that the differences between families should be respected; this can be seen in Mrs. Smith's comment that it is unwise to share her opinions about family

difficulties, in Mrs. Parker's apologetic demeanour when she talked about being *'judgmental'* and in Mrs. Jones' reference to the children in her class being *'from a different culture'* and how wrong it would be to suggest that *'our way of doing things'* was *'better than theirs'*. Tolerance, too, was cited by each teacher as a fundamental value and one that each promoted within the course of the working day. Nonetheless each teacher expressed frustration with the families of children who were disruptive or who seemed to be unwilling to learn; Mrs. Smith's interview gives a clear sense of her expectations that families should reinforce the school's behaviour policy, Mrs. Parker commented on the values of the parents and/or carers of the children who were giving her a '*hard time'* in the telling phrase *'... you just think "There you go". It just sums it all up really'*, while Mrs. Jones was more oblique in her observation that *'When children are unpleasant in some way or aggressive or catty then you wonder what is going on at home'*. There appears to be some tension, then, between the values of tolerance and respect that each teacher cited as fundamentally important and the underlying notion of deficit parenting that was most clearly expressed by Mrs. Parker when she said that *'parents do have some responsibility ... they've got to be responsible for teaching them [children] ... morals, values, you know, the value of being nice to each other for a start, which not many do today'*.

This latter comment needs to be balanced with Mrs. Parker's earlier comment that she *'gets on well'* with most of the parents in her class; at the time of the interview she was at the end of a difficult year in which a few major family problems had surfaced that had, perhaps, contributed to an off-the-cuff remark that she may well have regretted later on. Nonetheless the point about deficit parenting was made by all three teachers and is therefore important. Yet it is equally important to recognise that children may behave badly for a host of reasons; because they are bored, or because they feel some kind of personal animosity from the teacher. They may have been brought up to question authority and to argue if they felt that something was wrong or unjustified; they may want to show off

before their friends. Behaviour problems may therefore not be family-related but a reaction to the school environment, to being bullied in school or, more particularly, to the teacher herself. My decision not to interview parents was justified at the time by the research focus on the processes within the classroom, but I now recognise that talking to parents may have produced a different picture of home-school relations altogether as parents may well feel equal measures of frustration with the teachers as the teachers appear to feel with some of them.

The data from this project suggest that the tension between the teachers' concern with values of tolerance and respect and the underlying belief in deficit parenting may arise from the different threads running through 'family' within primary schools. First, the frustration that these teachers feel at the disruptive or non-cooperative behaviour within the classroom lends some support to the notion that the language of home-school partnership is part of an increasingly 'hard-edged' attempt by the government to regulate family life (Edwards, 2002a, p.4). As we saw in Chapter Two, the current Labour government has promised to raise standards of literacy and numeracy, expressly and visibly through improved SAT's results. This has placed intense pressure on teachers, something clearly felt by Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Parker who both had Year 6 children in their classes; neither was prepared to continue with the project in the time that they were preparing those children for the examinations in early summer. Mrs. Jones had only Year 5 children in her class and escaped the intensity of this particular pressure, but she nonetheless referred to the SAT's in much the same way as the other two; as a time in the year that was acutely stressful. Life can be made easier, however, if parents support the school, and Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Parker both gave examples of how they try to encourage parents to understand the school's academic and behavioural policy so both parties are, indeed, '*singing from the same hymn sheet'*. Similarly Mrs. Jones' comment that *'nice parents have nice kids'* suggests that conformist parents who back the school's efforts by encouraging their

children to learn, by supporting their academic efforts and by fostering the required behaviour within the classroom are the most welcome; they take up little extra time and energy. On the other hand, those who would or could not be brought on board with the school's educational and behavioural project were dismissed with Mrs. Parker's observation of *'There you go'*; her frustration with those families is palpable. If teachers are feeling the pressure to encourage certain types of behaviour from parents and their children - and this project data would suggest that they do - then it is, perhaps, human to take refuge in the notion of deficit parenting rather than waste more energy in trying to convert those who would not be converted. This feeling may also be supplemented and fortified by the genuine belief that those parents are causing their children harm rather than providing them with a home life that provides enough security for happiness and personal development.

Running into and alongside this consideration are the expectations that each teacher has from herself in her professional capacity. Nias (1999, p.70) argues that most teachers judge their success by and draw their main satisfaction from knowing that they have helped individual pupils to learn and develop, and the three teachers who took part in the project appeared to do exactly that. Mrs. Jones, for example, had a reputation at her school for being highly conscientious, while both Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Parker made it very clear that they were *'here to teach'* and wanted to do this to the best of their ability. The pressure to perform from SAT's results and league tables may therefore be intensified by the standards that each imposes on herself as an educator; parents who appear to obstruct this process, or who have failed to teach their children *'values, morals, the value of being nice to each other'*, can make the teachers feel as though they are banging their heads against the proverbial brick wall. In the face of these perceived parental deficiencies, and given the pressure that all three feel from their duty as educators and from central government to

produce the best possible academic results, the tolerance and respect towards family diversity that the teachers cite in their interviews can be difficult to maintain.

There is another important consideration in these matters that is more personal and affective. Teachers are dealing with young children who are dependent and vulnerable, who rely on their families for material, emotional and practical support and who are in the early stages of moving towards independence and autonomy. Children may be intensely loyal to their families and any specific critique - implied or overt - may therefore be taken personally by the children and cause them some distress. It could have the effect of driving a wedge between parent and child, or open up a feeling of loneliness in those children who live in foster care or in residential homes rather than with their biological or adoptive parents. In a less complicated way, it could upset the child and erode her confidence in the teacher as a person who can be trusted. Briefly put, it could open up a whole range of emotions that may be very difficult to deal with in the context of the classroom, that may cause the child personal anguish and thus irreparably damage the relationship between child and teacher.

These primary teachers seemed to feel this responsibility particularly acutely, with all three drawing attention to their consideration of children's feelings when discussing family matters in class; Mrs. Parker talked about not wanting children with difficult backgrounds to *'feel that they're missing out on something'*, Mrs. Smith commented on how family can be *'quite raw'* for some and Mrs. Jones remarked that presenting *'a norm ... that was different from their own'* may make the children *'feel quite insecure'*. This may stem from the continuous and relatively intense relationship that primary school teachers have with the children in their class. In several respects this relationship parallels that of the family, for the teacher and children spend the majority of their working day with each other and the teacher is primarily responsible for the children's education and welfare during that time. During the course of each year the children accustom themselves to the

structure of the school day and the rhythm of their teacher's lessons, and they learn what is expected from them in terms of attitude to work and behaviour in the classroom. In turn, the teacher finds out what it is possible to achieve with the children in the time that they spend together, both behaviourally and academically. Thus, although it may not be a conscious process, teacher and children become aware of each other's values, attitudes and behaviours in much the same way as within the family; through continuous, daily, small-scale interactions between teacher and individual child, through group activities and through times when the whole class is engaged in the same task. Each of these interactions can foster an affective relationship that is important to both teacher and child and may, for some children, provide the only time in which they are treated with the respect and concern that is lacking at home.

Nias (1999, p.67) suggests that most primary school teachers are 'fond of children' and my own observation would suggest that this was indeed the case with these three teachers; they all demonstrated varying degrees of affection with the children and seemed to take pleasure in the shared moments of laughter and fun that arose during the lessons. In their interviews the teachers spoke variously of providing the children with a sense of security, of promoting caring values and of encouraging them to express their own opinions. In return some of the children spoke of the affection that they held for their teacher'; witness Lucy's remark that Mrs. Parker was *'her favourite teacher'* and Eric's observation that his teacher acts *'very much'* like his mother, who, judging by the way he spoke of her, was very important in his life. At times this relationship seemed to take on a quasi-familial quality. Gita's complaint about her teacher asking *'Do you respect your mum like this?'* when the children were being *'silly'* is an example of Mrs. Jones deliberately drawing on a model of family for the basis of relationships within the classroom; she is effectively asking the child to treat her teacher as she would her mother. Similarly Nancy's reference to there being a *'kind of family thing around here, cos we're all really nice to*

each other' is testimony to the security and warmth that she sees as part of family life and that she believes is recreated within the classroom. In the context of this affective relationship, there are few teachers who would want to cause the children unnecessary and potentially harmful distress by referring in a negative way to their families.

An equally important thread running into 'family' for these teachers is their own aversion to telling the children how family life should be led. As people brought up in the liberal tradition, these teachers are aware of the values of tolerance and respect and their fundamental importance in a pluralist society such as that of contemporary Britain; they are the values that each mentioned specifically during the course of her interview. More particularly, the teachers are aware of the right of individuals and families to pursue their own version of the good life and that a substantial part of this consists in choices pertaining to personal and family life. It follows that people should be left in peace to live their lives in agreement with their own values and beliefs; difference and diversity within family life should be respected and tolerated as manifestations of a pluralist society in which there are a wide range of values, lifestyles and cultures. Thus, while each of these teachers may have her own idea of the values that underpin family life, she feels that she should not try to impose her own view on the children or families with whom she comes into contact during the course of her working life. Therefore, while she may strongly disapprove of the nature of some children's upbringing, she believes that she should not indicate this disapproval partly because of her own relationship with the children and partly because, as a teacher within the liberal tradition, she feels that she should not promote her own view of family; it is a personal interpretation of the good life that should not be visited upon others.

These different threads running into 'family' within the primary schools, with affection for the children together with the values of tolerance and respect being counterbalanced by the pressures of the job and the reality of the diversity of children's backgrounds, can go some way to explaining these teachers' diffidence towards the subject

of 'family' within lessons. While Mrs. Jones was relatively confident about tackling family issues, both Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Smith said that they regarded it as a troublesome and sensitive subject for both teachers and children and that they avoided it as much as possible. However there were times when 'family' came up during the course of the lessons, either as a topic in itself or as a part of a particular subject, and in such cases could not be avoided. The solution for each teacher was to present a picture of the family that was both vague and specific. It was vague in the sense that there was little or no mention made of family structure, the division of labour within families or of gender relations. Although the family consisted of adult(s) and children, it was sufficiently flexible that pets could be included and there were few explicit references to the idea that the adults should be blood relations; it was an amorphous concept rather than a definite picture of, say, the nuclear family of two biological parents and their children. In fact, that was the one family structure that all three were careful to avoid mentioning, something that can be regarded as showing sensitivity towards the diversity of family backgrounds of the children in her class. 'Family', then, was left to be interpreted by each child on her own terms.

The specific nature of 'family' within the classroom concerned the affective qualities of family life; the teachers were careful to present it as an almost exclusively positive experience for all members, particularly for children. The favourable comparisons of family life with other ages or countries, Mrs. Parker's 'rites of passage' lessons, Mrs. Jones' treatment of improving the home environment and Mrs. Smith's evaluative remark on rich Victorian families all focused on positive aspects of contemporary family life - if by default - and encouraged the children to think in terms of present-day families as caring, harmonious units in which all should be *'pulling in the same direction'* and in which love and care were freely given by both adults and children. The total of these two aspects of family life - the vagueness and the specificity - was to evoke a nice, warm feeling of

security reminiscent of Shirley Hughes' *Alfie* books in which a young boy, who is by turns naughty, loving, exasperating and thoughtful, is surrounded by adults who love him deeply.

There is however another, possibly contradictory, aspect to 'family' within the classroom. The professed difficulty with 'family' was, in a sense, offset by each teacher's clear ideas on the values that she believed should underpin family life and the way in which she based her classroom ethos on those particular relationship values. Mrs. Parker was, again, the most explicit in her condemnation of families who have been deficient in teaching their children *'morals'* and *values'*, and of the three, she talked the most openly about compensating for what she sees as some of the weaknesses in children's upbringing; she says she is constant, adheres to rules and encourages the children to believe in themselves through expressing their ideas in front of the class because they *'don't get a lot of it at home'*. The other two spoke less in terms of compensating but focused more on specific values that they wished to encourage; Mrs. Jones on caring and Mrs. Smith on negotiation - although this may be in part reaction to the problems that they see with that particular group of children and may thus amount to the same thing. If that is so, we might ask the aim of fostering these particular values and be justified in questioning whether these teachers are, indeed, providing a form of family education despite their protestations to the contrary.

The data suggest that the answer is twofold. First, by offering no overt criticism of the children's families, these teachers are remaining faithful to the letter of their intentions; they are careful not to insult the children or to trample on their feelings by being negative towards any families either generally or specifically. Mrs. Jones welcomes the family as a vehicle to *'talk about values, talk about caring'* but the emphasis is on *'discussing really how people feel'* rather than on particular family structures or cultures, and she is encouraging the children to develop a sense of empathy through utilising their sense of duty, affection or loyalty to their parents. Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Smith's caution over such

matters encourages them to set strict boundaries on their class discussions to prevent any (potentially dangerous) straying into critical territory, and their claim to *'avoid'* discussions on family matters may well be warranted. In this sense none of the three teachers makes a serious attempt at solving specific family problems within the classroom, neither is she publicly critical of the way the children's family lives are organised, nor does she undertake protracted entanglements with the parents of the children in her class that might be interpreted as some kind of social work.

They are, however, less faithful to the spirit of their intentions, although - once again - the purpose is positive. The data suggest that each of these teachers is trying to create an ideal of family within the classroom. We have seen how they all have a clear idea of how a family should operate, and that they have a distinct understanding of the responsibilities that parents have towards their children. This picture may stem to a large degree from their experience as teachers and from the fact that in the course of their working lives they come into regular and sustained contact with a host of children from a variety of backgrounds, each of which has a profound effect upon the way the teachers can do their job; their ideas of 'family' may well be coloured by their expectations as teachers as well as by their own personal family life. Within the classroom their concern to avoid negative images of the family can be linked with their emphasis on the values of stability, caring, protection, respect, tolerance and negotiation to suggest that they believe that these are uncontroversial values that are common to a 'good' family; a family in which children learn about being *'nice to each other'*, in which they have enough support and encouragement that they have *'belief'* in themselves and which therefore provide them with the means of coping with the rigours and demands of the school day. Through the ethos of the classroom and their own positive portrayal of family, these teachers can be seen to provide an alternative, parallel model to the children's; one in which conflict is avoided as much as possible, in which people are tolerant and respectful to one another and in which

there is an undercurrent of deep affection. This may be in part a (corrective) reaction to the families that they regard as deficient, in part a model for children to draw on as a source of hope and in part a genuine attempt to create an ethos in which the children can feel secure and that provides the most favourable environment for learning.

In the first instance it provides a context in which all children are given a chance to learn the *'morals, values'* that the teachers believe should be learned at home but equally believe is not always the case. For those children who have experience of such values, it may be a process of reinforcement which can increase a sense of stability and security. For others the portrayal of family as loving and caring, the emphasis on particular values that the teacher associates with the family and the use of family anecdotes to lighten the atmosphere or to illustrate a point can give the children substantive examples of relationships that are generous, loving and tolerant. Mrs. Smith's comment on her father's weekend sporting activities which *'must have driven my mother mad'* was conveyed in such a way that we knew that, nonetheless, her mother cared deeply about her father, while Mrs. Parker's anecdote about the carnival implied a large, close family that had traditions and rituals that bound the members together. Similarly Mrs. Jones' story about dropping her coat suggested a patient mother who loved her daughter despite her (at times) thoughtless behaviour. These tales have a strong moral content not only because of the kind of relationship that they illustrate, but also because the teacher is sharing a part of her self with the children and therefore deepening and strengthening her own relationship with them. The sense of belonging (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1995) that this may arouse in a child may also have the effect of making the values message all the more powerful.

Secondly, the alternative model that the teachers offer can provide a sense of hope for those children who have difficulties at home; they learn that their own family problems are not part of everybody's experience and that there is another way of doing things.

Demonstrations of love and care, either through personal example or through stories or by using family as a *'friendly'* way of linking academic work to personal experience, can help to persuade a child that her future can be different to present circumstances. And this can be linked to the third aspect of the intentions behind the alternative model; to provide a context within which the children can feel secure and valued as members of a group and where they have practical experience of being treated with respect and tolerance. Mrs. Parker's concern that children should be *'nice to each other'*, Mrs. Smith's preoccupation with disruptive behaviour and Mrs. Jones' emphasis on *'caring'* all suggest that harmonious relations within the classroom are of considerable importance not only in terms of the children's moral development but also in terms of creating a pleasant working atmosphere in which the teachers are able to get on with the job. Thus, as Liam suggested, the teacher is liable *'to get stressy straight away'* when faced with conflict and aggression; the ideal model on which classroom relationships are based does not permit such behaviour.

These teachers' catch-all, cure-all solution to the complexities of family life may, however, bring as many problems as solutions. While they seem to believe that they are presenting an uncontroversial picture of 'family' to the children, it is nonetheless an ideal of family life with a specific interpretation of affective relationships; conflict is avoided to the greatest degree possible, adults tend to be patient and loving, and children are well-behaved and thoughtful. Mrs. Smith's throwaway remarks about reading certain books with her own children suggests a model of a parent who is supportive in a particular, academic way that privileges those who are able and willing to read with their children. Mrs. Jones' classroom discussions on *'how people feel'* may increase the children's ability to empathise, but may also encourage a kind of reflection that precludes spontaneity and impulsiveness. Mrs. Parker's picture of her own family as an active, participating group suggests the desirability of family outings which not all can afford and which some people

may actively dislike. While these points may be specific to the individual teachers, all three talk about the ability to negotiate in order to avoid conflict; this places a high premium on the ability to communicate feelings, hopes and expectations which, in turn, tends to privilege those who are good with words and concepts. Similarly the concept of care, although left fuzzy, suggests an indulgence that is entirely positive; there is no question of controversial decisions within the family to which such 'care' might give rise. Taken together, the different aspects of family life that are portrayed within the classroom give a strong picture of harmony, stability, security and love.

The data from the primary school children show that that most of them accepted the ideal of the family that was promoted; when asked what a family 'was', almost all spoke in varying degrees about the emotional and material care that families provided for their children and were happy to believe that this is how it should be, despite, in some cases, evidence that seemed to suggest that their own experience was otherwise. There was one lone voice, however, who pointed to the difference between the ideal of family relationships and the reality of her own. Within this broad acceptance, a range of individual reactions could be discerned among the children. There was a suggestion that the pupils could be led towards making favourable contrasts between their own lives and families from different times and/or cultures, but also that in some cases talking and thinking about emotional issues provoked critical reflection about their own family situation. Occasionally this caused distress. There were gender differences, with evidence that the thinking of the girls was more in line with the teachers' than that of the boys, particularly in Lancaster school. Here the boys' anger at the suppression of *'bad things'* about family in class discussions after the first lesson seemed to slide into subversion of the teacher's positive message when they talked about the pointlessness of marriage and the almost inevitability of divorce after the second. Finally, although most of the children found that the values of home and school were loosely in agreement, there was one who found moving between the

two environments difficult because of conflicting values and the problems of adjusting to different systems at either end of the school day. Thus the image of the family presented by the teachers, which they seemed to believe was as sensitive and uncontroversial as possible, provoked a range of responses ranging from anger, distress and a degree of cynicism to willing acceptance.

Bearing in mind the issues which arise from the primary school data, I shall now move on to a similar examination of the different threads running into the presentation of 'family' in secondary schools. In the final chapter of this Part, I shall then consider the implications for future practice.

Chapter 14: The Secondary Schools

We have seen how 'family' was regarded as a difficult and sensitive subject in primary schools and how the teachers were subject to various pressures that led them to present 'family' in a favourable light; that families were seen as harmonious, caring units and there was little or no overt reference to conflict within domestic life. By contrast, the most immediately noticeable feature of the lessons in the secondary schools was the theme of family conflict that was either in the background of or served as the focus for almost every lesson that I observed. The exceptions to this were the course of sex education lessons in Trevelyan and the history lessons in Rochester - although conflict of a different kind was at the centre of much of the work in the latter subject. The difference in attitude seemed to be the result of fewer pressures on the teachers and new expectations of the pupils, who were beginning to become more independent from their immediate families and who seemed to be recognising some of the responsibilities that came with age and maturity. This chapter examines these factors that lead to a radically different portrayal of family in the secondary schools concerned with this project.

The first consideration is the more distant relationship between the secondary school teachers, their pupils and their families. The undercurrent of affection was still there; several teachers with whom I had contact in Rochester school talked informally about their wish to show the pupils in their school *'that somebody cares for them'* and many of them liked the students in their class. In the West Country schools the maintenance of the same tutor group for the entire five years of secondary schooling lent continuity to the relationship between tutor and pupils; Mr. White described his tutor group as having a *'family'* atmosphere and Mr. Linden's tutor group in Sylvester had an evident attachment to him. But the number of pupils that each teacher teaches, the relative infrequency with which most of the teachers met each pupil when combined with the number of pupils in each class meant that neither party had the same opportunity to

develop the rather more intense relationship that was possible in the primary schools. In addition, the chance encounters between teacher and parent in the primary school, in which much can be learned about the child's background and family circumstances, were also missing; secondary school teachers are unlikely to bump into parents at the end of the school day as many of the pupils walk home or, in the case of those who live in rural areas, are transported on a bus to the nearest village or drop-off point to their house. This means that either teacher or parent has to make a special effort to communicate with the other which, in turn, suggests that contact is more likely to be of a sporadic nature and to be made in cases of some particular difficulty at home or at school. Similarly, although each of the three schools was proud of its open relationship with the parents, the individual teachers concerned with this research project did not talk about the need to bring parents on board with the child's education in the same way as, for example, Mrs. Smith in Montague school; since the teachers and pupils met for a few hours a week at most, this, perhaps, was part of the background to the teacher's task rather than being something that was immediate and pressing. Thus, although secondary teachers are faced with the same diversity of pupil background and family structure as primary teachers, they are less likely to be aware of individual circumstances, they tend to have a more distant relationship with their pupils and they lack the opportunity for the type of continuous, informal contact with parents that is possible in the primary schools.

In many ways this increased distance between pupil and teacher could be interpreted as a reflection of the change of relationship between the pupils and their families; by Year 9 the pupils are generally growing in maturity and independence, and they are less bound up with the life of their parents and/or siblings. Most of the pupils concerned with this research project had started to develop interests that took them beyond the immediate family; many went out with their friends in the evenings to youth clubs, for example, or took part in sporting or leisure activities that involved going away for the

weekend without other family members. Most, too, were prepared to be critical of their families in a manner that we had begun to see with Asheed and Gita, and they tended to talk more candidly than the primary school pupils about the difficulties that they could experience within family life. At the same time they all seemed to maintain a strong sense of 'family' as a unit that had significance in a way that can be summed up by Laurence's heartfelt comment that *'I don't ever want to hear anything of my dad again but if he died, I'd be upset ... So you know, you can be the mentalist, hardest nutcase in the world but your family's obviously going to be important to you*'. But this loyalty was also balanced by a recognition that the future would bring independence from their parents; the pupils spoke about freedom of choice in how to live their lives, Shamit talked about getting a *'good job'* before marriage and implicit within the conversations about the sex education that some had received was the assumption that each would develop adult, intimate relationships in the future that may - or may not - lead to, in Shamit's words, *'settling down'*.

These changing relationships between parent, secondary teacher and pupil may encourage a view within schools that the pupils are emotionally stronger and therefore more able to cope with the knowledge that family life can be difficult. The emphasis for the teachers involved in this project seemed to be less on protecting their pupils than introducing them to a number of different ideas, concepts and lifestyles within the safety of the classroom that would broaden their perspective and help prepare them for adult life. It may also encourage pupils to believe that the teachers can identify with the turmoils of adolescence and possible conflict with parents and families. The history syllabus for Year 9, in which the pupils learned some of the horrors that humans can inflict upon each other, was evidently shocking for some; Mrs. Willis' drama lessons in which she tackled issues of homelessness, abuse and institutionalised care for young people was explicitly recognising that these things exist, just as *Romeo and Juliet* dealt with passion, hatred and feuding. In

the face of the pupils' knowledge of such topics, it would be difficult to continue with the message that 'family' is always peaceable and loving. Awareness of this knowledge, in turn, may encourage a more objective stance towards the subject in which problems - particularly of families in fiction and drama - can be discussed in a general way without awakening the suspicion that the conversation is aimed personally at any one of the pupils. In addition, with the absence of curriculum constraints in drama, both Mr. Brown and Mrs. Willis felt that controversial matters could be tackled in a way that allow the pupils a degree of freedom to explore the issues that were raised. And, without immediate examination pressures for history, drama or PSE, there was possibly a little more time in which to explore some issues for their own sake.

There is, too, another aspect to preparing these young people for adult life; that of helping them to learn a degree of self-preservation. While in the primary schools the teachers were concerned to emphasise stability and caring, and by implication the collective life, much of the content of the lessons I observed in the secondary schools had a strongly individualistic nature. In both the PSE lessons the central idea was to look after yourself; the pupil Anna commented after the lesson on family conflict in Sylvester school that she had learned about *'doing what you want but not in a horrible way'*. Mrs. Ash said the aim of her sex education lessons in Trevelyan was to help the pupils to *'be assertive in a relationship'* and to make them feel *'empowered'* to *'make the right decision'* about having sex for the first time. Similarly the dilemma for Lulu in Mrs. Willis' drama lessons and for Nicky in Mr. Brown's concerned the degree to which the young girl concerned would allow herself to be influenced by others and the point at which she should stand up for her own beliefs and requirements. The message was about moving away towards independence and autonomy; about the ability to recognise what is the best decision in a (potentially) difficult situation for the individual concerned. In each case the pupils were encouraged to take other people's feelings into account but nonetheless to do or say what

they believed was *'right'* for them in that particular instance. Implicit within this type of thinking is a recognition of the potential for discord within personal relationships as young people find their feet and start to make their own decisions about things that matter to them, and it may help to explain why there seemed to be an assumption among many of the teachers that there would be conflict between these adolescents and their parents. This was seen most clearly in the interviews with the English teachers and in Mr. White's PSE lesson on managing stress and disagreement within the home. But there was also the largely unspoken - except by Mrs. Willis in Rochester - concern that children can be abused in different ways by members or close friends of the family and that they need to be able to recognise such behaviour if they are to have a chance of escaping it; Mrs. Willis talked explicitly about encouraging pupils in her classes to *'step back and think about their lives'* and that the series of lessons might help prepare them *'to deal with situations later in life that may come up'.* And while abuse did not seem to be part of Mr. Brown's agenda in his drama lessons, the message might well be similar; that it is possible - and in some cases necessary - to fend off unwanted sexual advances. Thus it seemed that, while the primary lessons seemed to focus on the things that are 'right' with the family and personal relationships, the secondary placed a much greater emphasis on those that can go 'wrong'. Exploration of how different situations could be dealt with in such cases was a part of all three drama courses, PSE in Trevelyan and, although more implicitly, the English lessons concerning *Romeo and Juliet.*

At the same time, many secondary teachers seemed to feel the same concerns about family privacy and the possibility of upsetting any of the young people in their classes as those in the primary schools. Chatting informally to a variety of teachers in the staffroom of each of the three schools, I learned that many were nervous of the subject of 'family' *per se*; Mr. Brown was regarded as 'brave' within his school precisely because he was willing to look into issues such as the aftermath of divorce with Year 8 pupils and sex education

with those from Year 9. In his interview, PSE tutor Mr. White argued that it is *'easier to be positive than negative'* about the family for a similar reason to that of Mrs. Smith in Montague; that it is difficult to know where any such discussion could lead and that there is a danger of *'stirring things up that don't need to be stirred up'*. And in a similar manner to those in the primary schools, some of the secondary teachers were reluctant to be seen as presenting any particular concept of family as 'good'; Mr. Shankar, for example, was insistent that he *'very rarely'* tried to express his opinions and concentrated on teaching his pupils *'the facts of history'* rather than getting bound up with subjective views on people's personal lives within the historical narratives that he was introducing. How successful he was in this aim, however, is a moot point, for all three of this project's pupils received a strong family message from his lessons that was not necessarily found in the others' in his school. Finally there was a similarity in the way that all teachers talked about the structure of the family; as was the case with the primary teachers, the secondary teachers avoided the assumption that the pupils in their classes were living in a traditional, nuclear family of biological parents and children. This point was noted by those young people who came from homes with separated parents and they appreciated the respect shown for the variety and diversity contained within contemporary family life. But at the same time it would be scarcely tenable - although not beyond the bounds of possibility - that the teachers should talk about family problems and diversity within their lessons while maintaining an expectation that their pupils should come from one particular model.

Nonetheless, despite these general trends there were considerable differences in attitudes and approaches to 'family' and relationships among the teachers concerned with this project. Within the same concerns for privacy, toleration of different lifestyles and genuine affection for the young people found in the primary schools, some teachers seemed to perceive a greater freedom in their ability to raise difficult moral and family issues while others ostensibly maintained a distance. Mr. Brown and Mrs. Willis, for example, had clear

agendas that they could pursue within their own particular subject while Mrs. Rowan did not; Mrs. Willis referred explicitly to deficit parenting in her interview and felt that her task was to *'cover areas that maybe parents haven't covered'* in the moral domain. Similarly Mr. Brown felt strongly that someone should point out to the girls the dangers of acquiring a reputation as a *'slag'* and to warn of the double standards that can operate concerning men's and women's sexuality. Some, such as the English teachers Mr. Willow and Mr. Holder, tried to stay relatively removed from the moral and emotional content of their subject and argued that their principal task was *'trying to get these kids through the SAT's. That is really important'* and *'more important in a way than the values that they're going to pick up about family life'.* At the other end of the scale, Mrs. Beech seemed to focus to a large extent on the emotions that each of the characters might be feeling; she spent some considerable time in encouraging her pupils to explore the dynamics of the relationships depicted within the play and to empathise with the characters that were studied, aspects that she evidently regarded as centrally important to the play in the way that the two male teachers did not. The other English teachers fell somewhere between these two extremes. Mr. Shankar, the history teacher, encouraged empathy with those he viewed as victims of historical processes, while the PSE teachers gave a rather drier account of managing personal relationships in sensitive and potentially difficult situations. The pupils were thus faced with a variety of messages, some explicit and some implicit, that concerned the difficult nature of 'family', the ubiquity of moral conflict, the role of emotions in moral life, the importance of communication within personal and intimate relationships and the need for a measure of self-preservation. Similarly they had a variety of teachers who stressed different aspects of family life, some of whom might knowingly try to lead them in a certain direction and therefore to come to specific conclusions. On the other hand there were those who argued that these young people should come to their own conclusions.

This portrait of conflicting emotions and responsibilities within the family and the variety of approaches to family issues are both far removed from the positive, simplistic image of family that came from the teachers within the primary schools. It is particularly noteworthy therefore that the one common feature to which all these young people held fast was that 'family', despite all, was the most centrally important thing in their lives. This may, again, be a response to the ideal of family that was part of primary school life and that they seem to have carried into the secondary years. It may also be strengthened in response to the idea promoted in some lessons that conflict can be managed and that, whatever the circumstances, it is possible to resolve family problems provided all members are prepared to negotiate. It was curious, in the face of the overwhelming passion depicted in *Romeo and Juliet*, that the pupils seemed to believe the tragedy could have been averted by the various parties sitting down and talking through their problems in a rational and well-behaved way. But they also seemed to believe that Romeo and Juliet should not have landed themselves in that position; the pupils were almost universal in their condemnation of the lovers' behaviour and they could therefore have been drawing on negative role models to confirm that trust, openness and communication are values that should underpin family life. That the families in the play failed so spectacularly in this respect could provide these young people with a salutary lesson that avoids the overt moralising that some felt was present in other lessons. And it may also be that this type of text that is distanced from contemporary life can offer the opportunity to think about family matters without bringing in a personal element; it was noticeable that both genders spoke freely about the issues that the play raised while there was some considerable disparity in their reactions both in terms of enthusiasm and fluency to the PSE and drama lessons.

But this was the only subject in which there appeared to be unanimity in the pupils' responses, and their reactions to the different lessons encompassed the same range of emotions as those seen with the primary school children. There was anger at the

unhelpfulness of the sex education in Trevelyan school, indignation at attempts to moralise, satisfaction over their own life in comparison with other families and sorrow over the suffering of others. Some, such as Zoe, were prompted by the subject matter to reflect deeply on their own situation and were brought to an understanding that appeared to be new to them. The one emotion shown by the primary school children that was missing among the secondary however was that of distress; none showed the anguish of Asheed or Gita when we reflected on the message of the lesson, nor did any speak about any difficulty in moving from home to school.

The data from the secondary schools thus show some continuities with the data from the primary schools. The strong belief in family as a source of emotional support continues, although there is less emphasis on the material aspect of family life. The gender differences remain in much the same form, with the boys being highly critical of what they regard as attempts at moralising or formulaic teaching and the girls more prepared to reflect on and discuss the emotional issues of family life. Two themes that were emergent in the primary school children's thinking were given a greater emphasis; all the secondary pupils emphasised the importance of communication, negotiation and trust within family relationships and they were more prepared to be openly critical about their own family life, even though they returned to the belief that family was fundamentally important to their lives. And although the two Asian girls seemed to have a stronger sense of family duty than the others, all the pupils felt that they should be allowed some freedom in how they chose to live their lives as adults. Let us now consider the implications of these findings for policy.

Chapter 15: Implications for Policy and Practice

In this final chapter, I bring the project to a conclusion. The chapter is divided into three parts, with the first outlining the theoretical contribution the research has made to an understanding of 'family' in schools. The second part examines the practical implications of the research and suggests some directions in which education in family relationships may be taken. The third part proposes further avenues for research.

15i: The theoretical contribution of the research

In the first part of this thesis I established that there were three aspects to the context for this research, with the first being political concern with family matters, the second the diversity apparent within postwar family life and third the development of home-school relations since the Conservative reforms from the 1980s. Within this context we saw that one interpretation of policy direction suggests that there is an increased government attempt to regulate family life through the benefit system (Field, 1996; Mandelson, 2002; Smithers, 2002; Wintour and Ward, 2002), through new legislation that emphasises parental responsibility (Jones and Novak, 1999) and through the medium of schools (ACE, 1998; David, 1999; DfEE, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Edwards and Warin, 1999). The inclusion of education in family relationships within the 1999 National Curriculum (DfEE/QCA, 1999a and b) can be seen as a controversial matter that merges the complexities of the state-family-school relationship with equally difficult issues of values education within a liberal society. The aim of the research was therefore to investigate the portrayal of 'family' within six schools in England with the intentions of establishing the problems that may be raised by such an inclusion and of contributing to the ongoing debate on values education.

If we return to the government's consultation document *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1999), there is a suggestion of two main aims in including education on family relationships within the Curriculum:

> How to be a parent is one of the most important skills a child can learn, and we cannot rely on children picking up this skill from their parents, or from other sources such as friends or television. Schools also have a role to play. Education on parenthood not only promotes good parenting, but also ensures that children understand the implications of becoming pregnant or fathering a child. This should contribute to discouraging under-age and ill-prepared pregnancies ... Education about parental and personal responsibility can help prepare children for entering adult relationships. It works best as part of wider personal, social and health education (PSHE) to give pupils the knowledge, skills and attitudes to become confident, caring and responsible citizens, prepared for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life (Home Office, 1999, p.17).

The first aim thus appears to be to educate children to become 'good' parents, preferably within marriage (ibid, p.4), while the second seems to be to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. As Chapter 5 of this thesis shows, the more detailed guidelines for the National Curriculum (DfEE/QCA, 1999a and b) and for Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) (DfEE, 2000) suggest that stability, consideration of others' feelings, care, communication, a sense of responsibility and critical thinking are all values and skills that are immediately relevant to adult relationships and family life and that should be fostered within lessons. Together the three documents appear to present an agreement both over the values on which family life should be based and over their interpretation, while the guidelines for the National Curriculum present family as an uncontroversial, positive experience.

In contrast to this uncomplicated portrait, the teachers concerned with this project seemed to regard 'family' as a complex, sensitive subject. They felt there were many different types of family within Britain and that to present any one particular image of family as 'right' could cause distress to those whose family lives did not fit that image. It would also demonstrate a form of intolerance and disrespect towards others' values, beliefs and lifestyles. Most, however, had definite ideas about the values that should underpin family life and some believed that it was difficult to talk about family without passing on their own views. While all the secondary teachers showed sensitivity and some a degree of diffidence towards including family matters within their lessons, these concerns were

particularly apparent with the three primary school teachers. The conflicting pressures arising from the vulnerability of the children within their class, from the necessity to encourage positive home-school relations so that parents will support the school's efforts, from the obligation to produce a high level of academic results and from the wish to create a positive working atmosphere resulted in a reluctance on the part of two of the three teachers to approach the subject of family directly. While all three were clear about their own family values and based the ethos of the classroom upon these values, two were reluctant to discuss family matters in any depth and preferred to leave 'family' in the background to lessons for fear of seeming to be overtly judgmental. And yet, while they all spoke of tolerance and respect, each showed a degree of intolerance towards families who did not conform to their own particular image of supportive, loving parents.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis is thus to show that education on family relationships is far from simple. It is acknowledged that the research is small-scale and care should be taken when generalising from this size of sample, but valuable points have been raised. First, the data may offer some support to the argument that family life is being steered through schools. The different pressures on the primary teachers may encourage them to favour those families who show wholehearted support for the school in matters of behaviour and learning; for those 'yes-people who dispatch well-fed, properly rested and homeworked children into school each day' cited by the Advisory Centre of Education (ACE, 1998, p.3). In this respect my decision not to interview parents is a significant omission from the project, for their views could have another dimension to this particular view. However the data that have been gathered suggest that the political framework within which teachers work encourages them to marginalise those parents who were not *'singing from the same hymn sheet'* as the school. There are echoes here of Bottery's (1999, p.117-118) suggestion that the communitarian agenda (on which he believes current policy to be

based) may in practice become 'majoritarian, authoritarian and illiberal' as attempts are made to create and celebrate a values consensus within society.

Secondly these different pressures appeared to place the three primary teachers in a difficult position, for they regard the children in their classes as vulnerable and are unwilling to disturb the loyalties and affiliations that provide the children with security and protection in their most dependent years. On the other hand they believe that parenting can be deficient and they try to provide the children with the security and respect that they believe is critical to moral and intellectual development. In the light of these findings, the seemingly innocuous requirements of the guidelines to Key Stages 1 and 2 in the National Curriculum - that children should learn that 'family and friends should care for each other' and that they should 'develop those skills to be effective in relationships' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p.139-40) - appear simplistic in their conception and complex in their execution. They are simplistic because they rest on the assumption that family is 'good' and because they draw on an ideal of family with little appearance of recognising the double-edged quality that such an image might have. While some children may indeed draw hope and inspiration from such a picture, the research findings suggest that there were others who found comparison with the reality of their own family lives uncomfortable or distressing and yet others who found the picture to be dishonest; some of the boys were angry at what they believed to be a misrepresentation and began to subvert rather than accept the message. The complexity rests therefore in balancing various factors in the delivery of such lessons; there is the question of switching some pupils off through what they see as a standardised and unrealistic image of family life, the danger of upsetting others in the course of the lessons that compare their family lives with the ideal, and the potential for driving a wedge between children and their own families as they learn about how family life 'should' be led. Two related points that are relevant to both primary and secondary schools arise from this; one is that the new PSHE syllabus may oblige teachers to open

issues that they feel poorly equipped to manage within the classroom, for family matters are emotive and it is possible that children will want to talk about problems that they have within family life once the subject has been broached. The second is the degree of responsibility that the school should assume for those children who find that home and school relationship values are not in line. Once children and young people have been provoked into confronting painful issues to do with their own family lives, should schools provide support for such children? If so, how can it be reconciled with issues of family privacy and parental rights?

In the secondary schools, there appears to be less pressure to present 'family' as a positive experience. The relative maturity of the young people and the more distant relationship between teacher and pupil seem to afford a more impersonal attitude to family matters, to allow more freedom in interpretation of family life and to encourage the pupils to reflect on difficulties that may arise within family life. Yet within this research project all of these matters were considered within the bounds of heterosexuality; although there was no evidence that marriage was presented as preferable to cohabitation within the lessons I observed, equally there was no mention of homosexual couples with children. The next point therefore is to raise the question over how such relationships are to be treated within the classroom, an issue that has become particularly relevant now that gay couples are legally allowed to adopt. The SRE Guidance (DfEE, 2000, p.13) says that teachers 'should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support'. At the same time there is an oblique reference to Clause 28 through the statement that '[t]here should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation' (ibid, p.13). This leaves teachers in a difficult position in which the boundaries between 'promotion' and 'dealing honestly' with the subject of homosexuality are unclear. Is it dishonest not to talk about gay relationships; only to 'answer appropriate questions' rather than purposely raise the subject? Does avoiding issues to do homosexuality amount to tacit

disapproval of such relationships? While differing religious beliefs on the acceptability and interpretation of homosexuality make the subject contentious (Halstead, 1997; Halstead and Lewicka, 1998), the legal acceptance of same-sex families shifts the nature of the debate. It may further intensify if Britain follows the lead from such European countries such as Germany and Holland in accepting gay marriages.

In sum, the data suggest that education on family relationships is a weighty matter that touches on the political framework within which teachers work, the broad aims of a liberal education, the diversity of family life within contemporary Britain, the right of parents to bring their children up in the way that they wish and the differing values on which family life is based. It concerns emotive and sensitive issues to do with the quality of personal relationships, sexual orientation and personal values and beliefs, and some teachers are reluctant to introduce them into the classroom for a variety of reasons. Let us now turn to the practical implications of the research.

15ii: Practical Implications of the Research

On the level of practice, one notable feature of the research data was that all of the pupils concerned with this project showed that they were serious about 'family' and relationship issues, that they had a strong sense of loyalty towards their families and that they believed that communication was an essential part of developing understanding and trust within family and intimate relationships. The difference lay within the individual responses to the lessons, with three particular patterns emerging. First, in line with other research (e.g. Francis, 1999; Halstead and Waite, 2001; Warrington *et al.,* 2000), this project indicated that the boys were less inclined than the girls to discuss their emotions at any length. It also showed that they were more easily bored by lessons that they considered had prolonged discussions about emotional issues; in Sylvester school, for instance, the boys wanted some more action in their drama course and were not content to explore their feelings and/or

reactions within the lessons in the same way as the girls. Secondly, the boys seemed to be switched off by any suspicion of preaching, notably (again) after the drama course in Sylvester school which Nathan argued was repetition of *'stuff you already know'* that was *'common knowledge'*. Thirdly, they were unimpressed by what they perceived to be misrepresentation by the teacher. This was seen first in Lancaster school, where the boys were angry at the happy-ever-after picture of family life that they felt passed over the reality of their own experience, and again in the PSE lesson in Sylvester when they felt that the teacher had ignored important aspects of behaviour in his anxiety to emphasise the need for calm, rational discussion in conflict management.

At the same time it was equally notable that *Romeo and Juliet* seemed to spark all the secondary pupils' interest in family matters to a greater extent than any other of the lessons that I observed; there was some considerable contrast between the boys' relatively uninhibited response to *Romeo and Juliet* and their reticence following the drama or PSE lessons. This would suggest, in line with Cox's argument that literature enables young people to engage in a 'safe' way with real issues (Cox, 1997, p.73), that the distance between the play and their own lives gave the boys the confidence to talk about family matters in a way that was not too personal. It could possibly be seen as a similar reaction to the primary school comparisons on family life in which both genders spoke relatively freely about 'family' both during the lessons and later in their interviews. Another possibility is that the combination of the fierce and fast-moving action within *Romeo and Juliet* and an absence of moralising or overt leading by the teacher was sufficient to maintain the older boys' interest in a way that some lessons with a particular message or that were more slow-paced did not.

The girls, on the other hand, generally seemed to accept or agree with what the teachers were offering, indicating that their thinking was more in line with both the style and the content of the teaching. The exception to this was the Trevelyan girls' reaction to

the PSE lesson in which both genders felt that not enough attention was paid either to the emotions involved or the process of decision-making in sexual relationships. But within their individual reactions the girls seemed to be more receptive to the lessons than the boys and subsequently to reflect at greater length on the issues that were raised; in Sylvester school, for example, the girls were prepared to consider that the message of the calm, rational approach might be helpful in solving family conflict and seemed either to ignore or not to notice the moralising to which the boys had objected. In Lancaster school the girls were completely at ease with Mrs. Parker's portrayal of 'family' and they did not exhibit the anger of the boys who felt that important aspects of family life were swept under the carpet. If education about 'family' is to be treated seriously by the pupils, then it is important that the subject matter taps into the apparent seriousness with which both genders treat their own family relationships and that the material is presented in such a way that both boys and girls are able to identify with the issues involved. It also seems to be critical that they feel that the teacher's approach is honest rather than preaching. In the light of the Sylvester school pupils' final interview in which they all cited PSE as the subject that was the most significant 'family' experience during the year, there is a clearly a potential for this subject to be an effective forum for discussion on family issues - which is possibly what lies behind the current National Curriculum guidelines. But at the same time, the research would suggest that careful thought needs to be given to both the content and the delivery of the lessons if they are to fulfil this potential.

Within the framework of these considerations there are, however, a number of complexities that arise in the delivery of lessons with a 'family' theme. The first concerns the place of emotions in such matters. In recent years Kantian perspectives on education that emphasise the rational and cognitive have been challenged by a recognition of the importance of the emotions in the process of learning (Noddings, 1998; Nussbaum, 1998; Winch, 1998; Winston 1999). It seems logical that, if values have emotional, cognitive and

behavioural components, any values education should recognise the importance of these three components. Education on 'family', which carries the implication of the desirability of forming and developing young people's family values, would therefore need to employ young people's emotions if it is to be successful. But the problem, as the research data show, is that there is a danger of *'stirring things up'* and upsetting the pupils in the process, for teachers cannot predict the effect that any lesson might have. Asheed's experience with Mrs. Jones' 'improving the home environment' lesson, for instance, gives a clear example of how difficult family issues can be unwittingly opened up that cannot be resolved within the context of the classroom. Mrs. Jones' lesson seemed to conform entirely to the Key Stage (KS) Two requirement that children should 'develop those skills to be effective in [family] relationships' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p.139); she was asking the children in her class to take responsibility for their own behaviour within the family through consideration of other members' feelings and expectations. Her own intention was positive, for the lesson was on '*improving* the home environment'. Yet Asheed felt guilt that she had sworn at her mother, she was worried that she would be *'punished'* by God, she felt betrayed by her mother's preference for her brother and she was unhappy that her mother did not trust her. These are powerful and conflicting emotions that could be summed up by her initial comment that *'I don't like my mum ... I do like her, but I don't like her much'*; a potentially painful recognition of the difficulties between her mother and herself. The research therefore raises the question of the extent to which the pupils' emotions should be recognised and explored within such lessons and, when introducing sensitive subjects, whether the risk of upsetting some children in the class could or even should be balanced by the possible benefits to others; Gita - another child with a difficult background in Mrs. Jones' class - seemed to derive both strength and comfort from the same lesson that Asheed found difficult and disturbing.

These matters are closely connected to the question of if and how the darker side of family life can be approached within the classroom. The boys in particular required that *'bad things'* are not ignored or glossed over and they seemed to believe that any picture of 'family' that concentrated exclusively on the positive was incomplete. This belief would also fit in with the KS Three and Four requirements that pupils should be taught about 'the changing nature of, and pressure on, relationships with friends and family, and when and how to seek help' and 'to be aware of exploitation in relationships' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p.190, 193). If pupils are to learn about such things, then they need to be able to discuss how and when they might occur; they need to be able to draw on substantive examples of 'pressures on' and 'exploitation in' relationships so that they can recognise 'when and how to seek help'. In that case, teachers need to be able to acknowledge the actions and feelings that family life encompasses that range from love, protection and tenderness to hatred, murder and abuse, and they need to be able to examine these issues within the classroom. On the other hand the previous paragraph illustrates just how sensitive 'family' can be for some pupils, and it lends some considerable justification to the reluctance shown by most of the teachers concerned with this project to introduce such delicate matters deliberately.

This point links to the timing of discussions about such issues. The 'changing nature of ... relationships with friends and family', 'the role and feelings of parents and carers', the ability to 'talk about relationships and feelings' and 'the nature and importance of family life' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p.190, 193) were all, within different interpretations, mentioned within the course of the research. But it is important to recognise that these things were mentioned by both primary and secondary pupils, and that this suggests the arbitrary nature of any kind of 'family' education. Different topics will resonate with different young people at various intervals in their lives; why learn about the 'qualities of good parenting' in KS Four, for instance, when some girls become pregnant at the age of twelve? And why should learning about 'the impact of separation, divorce and

bereavement on families' be particularly appropriate at KS4? To suggest, as the syllabus does, that young people move seamlessly through different stages in their appreciation of family life and that the development of their family values is progressive and linear is to misunderstand both the texture of family life and the uneven and uncertain nature of individual moral growth within the context of (the presence or absence of) a family. If the subject is to be meaningful to the pupils, therefore, it needs to be delivered in such a way that recognises difference between young people's backgrounds and lifestyles while avoiding simplistic generalisations, formulaic answers and preaching.

The final point concerns the two drama teachers Mrs. Willis and Mr. Brown, who seemed to be unafraid to embrace the difficulties of family life as part of their work. While Mr. Brown's lessons in this case can be seen as complementary to the sex education received in Year 9 PSE, Mrs. Willis' course of lessons on the runaway child appears to fit the KS3 and 4 bill perfectly; the pupils were able to explore issues around family change and exploitation, they were given suggestions about seeking help, and, within their small groups, they could arrive at their own solution to the rather intractable problems that the young girl in the story faced. That many did not come to the (perhaps predictable) happy ending suggests that they found the topic engaging and that they were willing to reflect on the girl's prospects both within and without the family. This then leaves us with the question of whether drama is a better forum for broaching such issues than PSE; the pupils were able to distance themselves from the main character and thus were not forced to reflect on their own lives in the way of Asheed, and the rather superficial approach of Mr. White's PSE lesson together with his formulaic answer were avoided. But not all drama teachers would have the courage or the inclination to tackle such matters, and we cannot be certain how successful different approaches from PSE teachers would be in managing the delicate balance between a meaningful lesson on sensitive areas and upsetting one or more members of the class. Nor can we be sure that overt treatment of such issues is the right

way of going about such matters; consider Mrs. Rowan's approach that left family difficulties largely unspoken but provoked profound insights for Zoe's understanding of the difficulties of being a divorced or separated parent. And these considerations, when placed with the pupils' enthusiasm for *Romeo and Juliet*, suggest that it might be better to leave these matters within the confines of literature rather than studying them explicitly and risking emotional damage to the pupils.

These difficulties, however, do not mean that education on family and relationships should not be attempted within PSHE lessons. One suggestion is that children have access to counsellors within the school who can help to talk through troubling issues raised within lessons, although questions of time and expense would no doubt be factors that schools would want to consider. Within the lessons specifically devoted to family matters, encouraging young people to reflect on key issues of family life may help to spark the interest of both boys and girls and to provoke a discussion that may help some pupils form the '*coping strategies*' of which Mr. White speaks. Issues discussed may include the role of conflict (can arguing be a positive thing?), the degree to which families should be democratic, the nature and meaning of love in a family context or what factors can be important in successful family life; presenting them as controversial means that the danger of advancing an ideal of family life may be avoided. It also includes the possibility of including emotions, behaviour and thought-processes within the discussions and therefore avoids the sterility of the purely abstract or of preordained conclusions. In addition a focus on the future, in which young people can express their own ideas on future family life, may help to balance the difficulties of the here-and-now with the prospect of hope for those with difficult family backgrounds.

One problem with such a strategy may be fostering the confidence of teachers who, as we have seen in this project, possibly feel ill-equipped to raise such matters without some form of formal training or support from those more experienced in dealing with

personal relationships in a professional capacity. In addition, generating meaningful discussions is a skill that requires both practice and careful thought on the part of the teachers; this, in turn, means that teachers should be aware of their own value-stance on such matters. Again, formal training may be useful, this time to assist with clarifying their thoughts and ideas. At the moment, PSHE is often regarded as peripheral to the main academic considerations of the curriculum and its delivery is patchy in terms of quality (Halstead and Taylor, 2000, p.171-2). The new guidelines suggest that PSHE is to have greater status in the curriculum; if such education is to be effective, serious consideration needs to be given to the question of teacher training and support. Without such assistance, the danger is that family and relationship education may become an unsatisfactory formality from which pupils gain little or nothing. The second problem with such a strategy may be the funding of such training.

This research project has therefore raised both theoretical and practical issues to do with family relationship education and with SRE. The nature of such a project, however, is to be focused on one particular aspect of the subject under scrutiny and necessarily leaves out other aspects that are interesting and may inform future policy and practice. In the next section I examine three avenues for research that have been raised but not pursued within this thesis.

15iii: Further Avenues for Research

My first suggestion is that there should be further research into whole-family perceptions of the image of 'family' projected in schools. This would build on the earlier focus on the role of parents (e.g. Munn, 1993; Vincent, 1996), more recent work on the nature and direction of home-school relations (e.g. David, 1999; Edwards and Warin, 1999; Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997) and the data from this project. At the same time this type of research would be complementary to recent work on children's perceptions of negotiating the

different locations of home and school (e.g. Edwards, 2002b). As Edwards (2002a, p.1) comments, much work on home-school relations has been on parents' or teachers' views, and her volume is expressly addressed at bringing children and young people into the research focus. I would suggest that research into both parental and pupil views on the image of 'family' promoted within school would offer further insights into the nature of the links between home and school. It may also shed some light on how each family member copes with the (possibly conflicting) ideas about 'family' that emanate from the school and how family life accommodates any such conflicts.

The second suggestion is to investigate the attitudes of faith schools to families and home-school relations. In this project all the schools were deliberately chosen to be non-denominational, and it may be that faith schools foster home-school relations in different ways, that they present a different picture of 'family' within the classroom or that they include more family-based topics within the primary school. This could be linked to any possible emphasis on 'family' within religious education. Comparisons and evaluations in this case could be made across faith schools of all different religions rather than focusing on those of a Christian persuasion; this would reflect the pluralist, multicultural nature of British society and possibly open up issues of (multiple?) identity.

A third area for research could be further investigation into the delivery of the new PSHE curriculum and how it chimes with other aspects of 'family' within different lessons. One small project on 'family' within schools has not exhausted the possibilities for research in this area and there is more work to be done on the image of family projected within lessons on English literature and language, drama and religious education as well as history and modern languages. A wider view on 'family' through case studies within one school or in a number of schools may enable a more comprehensive idea of the messages the pupils receive and how they link in with PSHE and SRE. This would enable us to see how 'family' issues are received within a certain period and whether they are cumulative or

repetitive; do different aspects of 'family' feed into one particular message, for instance, or are the same things said over and over again? In such a project, greater attention could be paid to the moral dimension of family life and to issues of moral development, for questions of morality have been in the background rather than at the centre of my research project.

Now, at the end of this thesis, I believe that my decision to abandon the idea of interviewing parents was probably the most significant omission. There was, however, the question of time and subsequently of space; I am not sure that any more data could have been incorporated into this thesis without a loss of important points that illustrated the complexity of teaching about 'family' in schools. I also believe that I could have pushed the reticent children a little harder in their interviews, but recognise the dangers of losing the children's interest in so doing. I have learned about the practical difficulties of setting up a project as well as the ongoing nature of ethical problems; that their solution needs constant, careful vigilance and thought if human beings are to retain their dignity and if data are to be reliable and valid. I have learned about the virtue of being well-organised, for it saves so much time in the long run. Finally I have learned about the enormous personal and professional rewards to be gained from such an endeavour, for all participants in this project were generous with their time and most showed an enthusiastic involvement once they understood the nature of the project. It is to them that I offer my heartfelt thanks - nothing would have been possible without them.

Appendix I

Ethics protocol

Children and family values: a critical appraisal of 'family' in schools

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The following is based upon information on guidelines provided in *Ethical Principles for Research Involving Human Participants* (University of Plymouth)

Informed consent

1 The permission of the headteacher will be sought before research is undertaken in any school; a letter will be circulated to parents of the children involved, informing them of the research purposes and asking permission for their children's participation

2 Each stage of the research process will be clearly explained to participants who will have the right to seek further clarification at any time during the process and/or to withdraw from the study

Confidentiality

1 No participants or schools will be named in the documentation resulting from the research

2 The interviewees will be assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that their identity or school will be anonymous. If however any child should begin to reveal any serious problems such as sexual or other abuse, s/he will be told that this is a matter that cannot be kept secret and that a member of staff must be informed.

3 Transcriptions of the interviews will be encoded so that no record of the participant's name and data exist side by side.

4 Interview tapes will be destroyed on completion of the study

Debriefing

1 Each school will be given the opportunity to read the draft findings of the research

R. A. Passy
September 1998

Appendix II

Primary schools
Egremont (West Midlands)
Lancaster (West Country)
Montague (West Country)

Primary lessons observed:
Autumn term: On the (Meridian) Line: a comparison with Ghana (Egremont)
Hindu Holi festival (Lancaster)
Victorian Leisure (Montague)

Spring term: Home environment (Egremont)
RE topics: autobiography and rites of passage (Lancaster)

Summer term: Rich and poor in Tudor times (Egremont)
Victorian childhood (Lancaster)
Family responsibilities (Montague)

Primary teachers and children:

School	*Egremont*	*Lancaster*	*Montague*
Teacher	Mrs. Jones	Mrs. Parker	Mrs. Smith
Boys	Johnny	Kieran	Nigel
	Rajinder	Richard	Keith
	Hari	Andrew	Eric
			Roger
			Liam
			Robert
Girls	Gita	Lucy	Nicola
	Asheed	Nancy	Bryony
	Mizan	Emily	Eleanor

Secondary schools
Rochester (West Midlands)
Sylvester (West Country)
Trevelyan (West Country)

Secondary school lessons observed and teachers concerned:

Lesson	*School*	*Topic*
English	Rochester	*Romeo and Juliet*
	Mr. Holder	
	Mrs. Bennett	
	Sylvester	*Romeo and Juliet*
	Mrs. Black	
	Mrs. Green	
	Trevelyan	*Romeo and Juliet*
	Mr. Willow	
	Mrs. Beech	
Drama	Rochester	'The runaway adolescent'
	Mrs. Willis	
	Sylvester	'Gary and Nicky's story'
	Mr. Brown	
	Trevelyan	'The runaway girl'
	Mrs. Rowan	
History	Rochester	Slave trade, workhouse, holocaust
	Mr. Shankar	
PSE	Sylvester	Stress and conflict management
	Mr. White	
	Trevelyan	Sex education
	Mrs. Ash	
	Mr. Linden	

Secondary school pupils:

School	*Rochester*	*Sylvester*	*Trevelyan*
Boys	Laurence	David	Alex
	Nat	Michael	Nigel
		Nathan	Ryan
Girls	Martha	Lottie	Anna
	Rochelle	Natasha	Charlotte
	Shamit	Rebecca	Zoe
	Soraya	Tania	

Appendix III

Role-play scenarios used by Mr. White in his PSE lesson (Sylvester school)

1. Situation:
Your brother (or sister) has borrowed a favourite piece of clothing of yours without asking. They have spilled something down it that won't come out. You are not pleased!!
Roles: Young person (your age); brother (or sister)

2. Situation:
You have just discovered that your younger brother (or sister) smokes cigarettes, and you know that your parents will 'go ballistic' when they find out. You feel that they ought to know all the same. Either persuade the brother/sister to give up OR find a way to tell mum and dad what is happening.
Roles: Parent(s) OR brother/sister; young person (your age)

3. Situation:
You have just got back from a friend's house after an evening out. During the evening you had one or two drinks (alcoholic!), and one of your parents smells it on your breath.
Roles: Parents; young person (your age)

4. Situation:
You have just got home from school, after a long walk in the dark. Your parents usually pick you up by car, but today they were both too busy and left you to make your own way home. You felt unsafe and at one point were sure that someone was following you.
Roles: Parent(s); young person (your age)

5. Situation:
You are about to go out for the evening to a friend's house. You want to stay longer than your parents usually allow. They have just asked you what time you will be getting back.
Roles: Parent(s); young person (your age)

5. Situation:
Your teacher has just asked for this week's homework to be handed in and for anyone who has not done it to see them immediately. You forgot to write down the homework in your organiser and have not done it.
Roles: Teacher; Young person (your age)

6. Situation:
Your best friend has just told another friend something that you had asked them to keep a secret. You don't want to break friends with them but you find it annoying.
Roles: Young person; best friend

Appendix IV

Situation cards used by Mrs. Ash and Mr. Linden in their PSE lesson (Trevelyan school)

1. You've tried all the spot creams but you skin just seems to get worse

2. In the changing rooms after a football match, some of the other boys are bragging about penis size and erections. You feel uncomfortable.

3. There's a rumour going round that someone at your school has a relative who has AIDS.

4. A group of you is doing a quiz about contraception in a teenage magazine. You realise you don't know very much.

5. You haven't started your periods yet and you hear a story about someone who started in the middle of a PE lesson.

6. A good friend tells you that they are being pestered by a friend of the family when they come to babysit.

7. Your friend's breasts are quite developed but yours are still fairly flat. You'd like to get a bra but you think your mum would laugh.

8. You're having so many arguments with your parents that sometimes you feel like leaving home.

Appendix V

'Getting pregnant myths quiz' used by Mrs. Ash and Mr. Linden in their PSE lesson (Trevelyan school)

Which of these statements are TRUE and which are FALSE?

1. A woman can get pregnant if she has sex during her period
TRUE FALSE

2. You can only get a pregnancy test from the doctor's
TRUE FALSE

3. A woman can't get pregnant the first time she has intercourse
TRUE FALSE

4. A woman can get pregnant if she swallows a man's semen
TRUE FALSE

5. If a woman does not reach orgasm, she cannot get pregnant
TRUE FALSE

6. If a man withdraws his penis from a woman's vagina before he ejaculates (comes) she can still get pregnant
TRUE FALSE

7. A woman will not get pregnant if she has a bath immediately after intercourse
TRUE FALSE

8. A woman is very unlikely to get pregnant if she has intercourse standing up
TRUE FALSE

9. A man's sperm can remain alive in a woman's vagina for up to five days
TRUE FALSE

10. A woman can get pregnant without actually having intercourse
TRUE FALSE

11. There are only two days in a woman's monthly cycle when she can get pregnant
TRUE FALSE

12. A woman can't get pregnant if she has intercourse with a man who has masturbated an hour before
TRUE FALSE

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PUBLICATION

Family Values and Schools

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Sociological research into the changing nature of the family provided the context for a pilot project on the family values of Year 4 children in an inner-city school in Birmingham. An innovatory aspect of the research was that the researcher communicated with the pupils mainly through the means of email. The project's findings indicate that the family values that the children bring to school may not coincide with those of their teacher. This raises the question of how far the school and its teachers have the right to challenge values that are learned in the home and that underpin family life.

Background

Sociological evidence has pointed to the changing nature of the family through an increase in cohabitation, higher rates of divorce, greater numbers of single-parent families, fewer children per family unit and an increase in female paid labour (Bernardes, 1997). These changes are open to different interpretations; on the one hand, there are those who regret the weakening of the family as a moral and educational unit, linking the changes to an increase in criminal behaviour, suicide and low educational attainment (Carlson, 1993). Others stress continuities, arguing that the family is evolving in response to different social and economic pressures, and that the majority of parents are generally contented with their lives (Hardyment, 1998). Yet one of the problems in discussions of 'the family' is definition, for the term can cover almost all contingencies from a single parent, gay couples, serial monogamists with children from different relationships and widowed step-parents to a three- or four-generation family living in the same house. And this is no exhaustive list, nor does it cover the diversity of lifestyles within each variation of 'family'.

One of the interesting questions raised by this diversity concerns family values: those values that are associated with and underpin family life and that guide our understanding as to what constitutes a good family. While most children learn about family from their own experiences in early life, others are brought up in care and there is no guarantee that the values of one generation will be those of the next, as the statistics in the first sentence demonstrate. In their analysis of the 1990 European Values Study, Ashford and Timms (1992) show that there is a 'growing preoccupation with individual concerns and satisfactions' together with strong support for marriage and the family, and they argue that this tension will lead to 'interesting new interpretations' of family life. But how do we develop our understanding of family values, and what influences this development?

As a general rule, the school provides a child's first experience of large groups of people, all of whom have varied experiences of family life. It is also where children are taught by people with no family connection, and where they have access to different ideas about the family in a formal situation. A school, therefore, can be a useful place in which to begin an investigation into some of the influences that come to bear upon a child's understanding of family values. To that end, a pilot project was set up with an inner-city primary school in Birmingham; the intention was to find out what family values each child had, how they were challenged or reinforced at school and what (if any) reflection this had caused in each particular child.

Methodology

Six children were chosen from Year 4 to take part in the project; we used email correspondence as the principle means of communication, and I followed this up with an interview with each of the children as well as the teacher at the end of the term.

From a researcher's point of view, email has several advantages over travelling each day to the school to interview. First, there is a question of distance, which in this case would have made the whole project difficult, as the school is around 150 miles away from where I live. Although this problem could possibly have been solved by telephone interviews, email gave the children time to think about their answers, thus overcoming the prospect of long silences while on the telephone – and keeping costs down. Second, there is no transcription, which has the twofold advantage of

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saving time and the print-outs being an accurate representation of what the children had said. Third, there was the tremendous enthusiasm that the project generated in the school; the children love the thought of communicating via email, and appeared to take part both willingly and thoughtfully. This helped to overcome one of the biggest problems that researchers have, i.e. what does the school get out of it? In this case, the children's literacy and IT skills were enhanced, and, as the teacher said later, the question of 'the family' provoked thought and generated some 'good work' when it was related to the entire class. The final advantage to these early email interviews was the effect they had in building a relationship between interviewer and the children; we experimented with 'conversation' through email at specific times in which the children would write instant replies to my questions and pose some of their own. Although these latter exchanges were of dubious value to the project *per se*, the children enjoyed them enormously and they played a significant part in creating a relaxed atmosphere in our interviews at the end of the term.

The Children

The school is in inner-city Birmingham. It is multicultural, with a large majority of Asian children, many of whom are Muslim, although other faiths are represented. The six Year 4 children who took part in the project came from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds, although the majority were Muslim, a reflection of the school itself. Our initial exchanges concerned descriptions of their families; I then asked what they thought a family was. This brought some interesting replies:

- A family is a chart of people who love you from lots of generations.
- I think a family is a kind of big tribe that we love. The main relatives of a family is the parents, because they love us, help us, feed us and teach us. A family is a team, that helps each other.
- A family is a group of people who live and care about each other and are related. In my opinion a family is very important and I wish that everyone could have a loving, caring family.

A particularly striking comment in the subsequent interview from the last child was:

- When you have a family, you do seem more happy.

While not surprising, given the dependence of 8- and 9-year-old children on their parents, these answers convey the strength of feeling that each child had about both 'family' as a concept and their own particular experiences of family life. It is possible that this closeness can be connected to the Muslim religion, yet it was noticeable that both Muslim and non-Muslim children had the same strength of feeling. For all the children, the values of loving and caring were clearly fundamental; families provided both materially and emotionally for their children while guarding against the child's possible loneliness. For several of them, this brought a sense of obligation to their parents:

- I've decided one thing, when I get older ... I'm just going to stay in the same house and look after [my parents].

Another child talked of 'paying them back' for their care, while others said that they wanted to 'look in' on their parents when they got older. For each child, there was a feeling of continuity through the generations of which they were a part and to which they wanted to contribute.

But there was evidently a certain amount of tension between the rather idealized picture of family life and, in particular, the reality of getting along with siblings. One boy reported that he and his little brother 'really fight a lot' and

- You know, when [he] gets the blame, I get really happy that he got the blame and I didn't.

Most reported fights with siblings, together with jealousy when a new baby was born:

- When [my little brother] was born, I felt that ... they were pushing me out of the way and they were just playing with [him].

In most families, the expectation was that the family members should be loving and caring, and that members should share:

- But we're not always, sometimes nobody talks to each other.
- S: My parents say, don't fight, share.
  Interviewer: Do you?
  S: No.

One child talked of a family fight which made it feel 'like the house was going to fall down' and the lasting repercussions of this fight, in that those family members who were involved no longer talk to each other. There was also an uncle in the family 'who nobody talks to'. Another child said she'd never met one of her half-sisters because she lived a long way away; a third said that 'your family doesn't always understand you'. One boy talked about the practical difficulties of caring for two sets of grandparents who lived in different countries and the problems that distance caused. Yet the 'official' version of a loving, caring family was confirmed at regular intervals throughout each interview by each child, with each child almost unshakeable in the belief that his or her family was the only acceptable type there was.

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The Teacher

Although the teacher and I had communicated through email, it largely concerned the practical problems surrounding the project – when the computers were free, when I should visit the school. Despite that, we both found email to be a curiously intimate medium and felt reasonably well acquainted when we met. I interviewed the teacher after the children, and had learned relatively little of her family values through talking with them, although they admitted to a certain amount of speculation on her family circumstances. The teacher's initial remark was interesting and (from the project's point of view) illuminating:

- The family values I have now are more ones that I've picked up along the way ... but there's still that sort of base that came from my upbringing.

She went on to explain that:

- I do like what I see of the families here ... They've all got lovely parents, they're really nice people ... I would like the parents to be proud of [the children].

Possibly she felt like this because of her own wish for a large, close family:

- There were just the two of us growing up, just me and my brother ... Something of me wishes ... that I was part of a big extended family like the kids here. [And yet] I can see it would be maddening as well ... that's getting less in me, that sort of longing for a big extended family.

She saw the main disadvantage as a lack of privacy, but clearly had a great deal of respect for the children's families and felt that both she and the parents were working towards the same ends; to encourage the children to 'do well'. A different aspect of this attitude was her use of family values to gain control and to make the children think about the consequences of their behaviour:

- Using family values can give me five minutes' control ... The children fight and are horrible to girls ... I don't think their families would like it. I'm just saying, 'Do you think your parents would think this was okay?' Or 'Would you like somebody to talk to your sister like that? Just think about that.'

She said that she only endorsed those family values of which she approved, and made it clear to the children that she did not support others such as smacking as a punishment. But as the interview progressed it became apparent that there were other ways in which the family entered into classroom life. In particular, the choice of literature was used to suggest that women do not have to accept subordinate roles in the home; the teacher used fairy stories to show how 'the male characters have all the excitement' and to introduce the idea that gender roles do not have to follow the family pattern. She said she deliberately uses stories with different types of families, especially black families and those in which the women are very strong:

- Women can do just about anything that men can do. I do like to make [the girls] think they can do anything.

Discussion

It would have been interesting to return to the children and to have interviewed them again in the light of these remarks. A teacher with such clear values, who deliberately promoted gender equality, respectful behaviour towards others and a feeling of family cohesion, and who was not afraid to challenge values of which she disapproved, offers strong leadership. At the same time, she makes assumptions about the children's family life which could make some feel excluded or isolated; not all came from 'big, extended families'. But from what the children had said to me, I felt that little conscious notice was taken of her values unless they coincided with their own. One child said:

- I don't think my teacher has the same idea of family as me ... I think her family is unlucky.

This remark reveals an unquestioning acceptance that other people have different types of family with different concerns and modes of behaviour while seeming to be relatively untouched by them. The teacher said that she felt that exposure to different types of family did 'not make much impression' on the children, a point confirmed by one Muslim boy:

- I don't talk about [the family], it's their life and not mine, I don't really care because they can do whatever they want.

It is possible that this is a general experience for Muslim children in non-Muslim schools, where they have to move between two worlds of language and behaviour. Yet values do not have to be consciously assimilated, for as Powney *et al.* (1995) argue, values may engage emotions and behaviour as well as cognition. The behaviour that these children learn under the guidance of this particular teacher may or may not be reflected on later; if girls and boys are given the same jobs in the classroom, they might begin to believe that 'girls can do anything', particularly if the teacher reinforces this through other media such as literature. If a child has come from a family with very strong gender roles, there will therefore be a tension between the family values of home (whether

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official or experiential) and those of the teacher at school. This in turn raises fundamental questions over the extent to which a teacher has the right to challenge the values of the home, or to provoke children into thinking through ideas that may be in conflict with their religion. It also has implications for a child's emotional, social and moral education. In the light of renewed government initiatives to strengthen the family as well as the possibility of schools giving parenting advice (Sweetman, 1998), we need to be clear about the philosophical and practical problems that these policies may engender.

Further research is needed to help clarify how the family is portrayed in schools and how children react to this portrayal which will allow a greater understanding of the flow of ideas between teacher and pupils. In particular, subjects such as Drama and English, as well as subject areas such as PSE and sex education, can be seen in secondary schools as opportunities to transmit certain perceptions and values about the family; foreign language textbooks can also contain implicit family values in their use of 'the family' as a topic. In primary schools, the literacy hour presents new openings to reinforce or challenge gender roles and family behaviour.

At the same time, we need to consider where the boundaries lie between general discussion on family values, transmission of teachers' own values and intrusion into individual family culture. Is it damaging for a young child to have her family values challenged when she is emotionally vulnerable? Or does the challenge generate reflection and an openness to new ideas? If the ideas promoted at school are acted upon at home, what kind of effect does it have on family life? Clearly there are no simple answers, but opening these issues to public scrutiny and debate can bring us a step nearer to understanding how schools influence children's family values, with implications both for parents and those involved in education.

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